FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Hermeneutics (PHIL 3850)
Christopher R. Myers (cmyers18@fordham.edu)
Fordham University, Spring 2026
[HERE]: Mon. & Thurs. 4:00pm-5:15pm
Office Hours (Collins Rm. 121): Mon. & Thurs. [HERE]

In this course we will examine major texts and ideas within the history of philosophical thinking about understanding and interpretation. The term "hermeneutics" is used to refer to the study of textual interpretation, however since the 18th century it has also been used to refer to philosophical reflection *on* the practice of interpretation, and in this respect has taken on a wider scope. The terms "hermeneutic philosophy" and "philosophical hermeneutics" are generally associated with Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur, however philosophical inquiry about interpretive practice can be traced far beyond the common usage of these terms.

Course objectives:

In this course we will examine major texts and ideas within the history of philosophical thinking about understanding and interpretation, i.e., *hermeneutics*. The aims of this course include the following:

- To acquire an understanding of some of the basic questions and problems of hermeneutic philosophy
- To trace the history of philosophical thinking about hermeneutics from the 18th century to the present moment
- To cultivate the skills required to interpret, critique, and construct hermeneutic philosophical arguments
- To develop original hermeneutic philosophical arguments and positions through writing

Required texts:

- John D. Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information* (Penguin Books, 2008.
- Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 1989)
- Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).
- Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Course requirements:

[1] Attendance/participation	10%
[2] Class presentations	20%
[3] Paper One (4-5 pages)	20%
[4] Paper Two (6-7 pages)	23%
[5] Paper Three (7-10 pages)	27%

[1] Attendance/participation

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You are allowed two unexcused absences before I must start taking points away from your overall attendance/participation grade. I will excuse an absence for a religious holiday, a serious illness, a death in your immediate family, or your participation in a university-sponsored holiday. To get an absence excused, you must send me a formal, written explanation *before* the class in question.

Your attendance grade is also dependent on (a) your active participation during class time, and (b) your bringing all required reading materials to class (either by physical copy or computer access). Concerning class participation: I expect that you will follow along during lectures, give others your full attention when it is their time to speak, and contribute your own thoughts during discussion. Philosophy has everything to do with discussion – it is not by accident that this course includes ample time for group discussion. Listen attentively, keep an open mind, and contribute what you think.

[2] Class presentation

This semester each of you is required to do three in-class presentations. Your presentations will take place at the beginning of class, and should run for at least 15 minutes (not including the time for discussion afterward).

The purpose of these class presentations is to *summarize* our author's argument in the text and provide an *exegesis* of a 1-2 sentence passage from the reading that you think gets to the heart of this argument. You should start with a brief summary of the assigned reading, and then turn to analyze your selected passage (which you will have written on the board). Please consult our class' 'Guide to Class Presentations' handout for more detailed information and requirements.

You will be graded on the accuracy of your presentation, the quality of your delivery, and your ability to answer questions from the class. I have assigned the presentations randomly across the semester (see our class' 'Presentation Schedule'). You may exchange the date of your assigned presentation with another student in the class, provided both parties agree and you let me know at least a week in advance.

[3] Paper One (4-5 pages) + [4] Paper Two (6-7 pages) + [5] Paper Three (7-10 pages)
Over the course of the semester you are required to write three papers in response to prompts which will be announced at least three weeks in advance. The purpose of these papers is to improve your ability to write about hermeneutic-philosophy as well develop arguments about hermeneutic-philosophy. These papers are opportunities for you to practice reconstructing philosophical arguments from the text, and developing your own evaluations of these arguments.

Course policies:

Late penalty policy:
For every day (weekend days included) that a paper is late, that paper will be penalized. If you suspect that you will not be able to turn a paper in on time, reach out to me *at least 24 hours in advance* and we can talk about extending the deadline. I am considerably generous about extending paper deadlines - but I will not extend deadlines *immediately before the deadline*. (Unfortunately coursework paragraphs cannot be submitted late.)

Technology policy:
During class time you are permitted to use a computer, laptop, or tablet. Your use of these devices is restricted to class use, however, and I expect that you will not allow these devices to divert your attention or the attention of others away from discussion. Remember: this course revolves around active discussion and participation. If your use of electronic devices inhibits class discussion, I reserve the right to adjust our technology policy accordingly.

Academic integrity:
All students are expected to abide by the rules of academic integrity as laid out in the Fordham Handbook. This especially includes plagiarism. Any assignment that is found to have involved plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade. Furthermore, your professors (including me) are obliged to automatically report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. With this in mind, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with what qualifies as plagiarism.

The Fordham Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate." In a nutshell, plagiarism involves taking credit for someone else's work in one's own writing –

intentionally *or* unintentionally. Plagiarism might mean copying an idea or quotation exactly as it is written elsewhere (in a book, online article, Chat GPT, a newspaper, etc.), paraphrasing an idea or quotation without properly including a citation, or using an idea that is not your own without citing the author(s) of this idea. To avoid plagiarism make sure you properly cite the sources you use. If you're unsure of whether you are properly citing something, come and ask me before you submit the assignment. Stay on the safe side.

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ChatGPT and GenerativeAI policy::
ChatGPT is capable of many things, but ChatGPT is not you. Having a bot answer questions or generate essays is not the same as working out your own thoughts. This semester our class will adhere to three guidelines concerning AI technology: (1) If you use ChatGPT/GenAI in any way, you *must* cite it—that is to say, you must cite the AI technology you used, indicate what prompt you gave it, and indicate how you revised it. (2) Uses of ChatGPT/GenAI without citation will be penalized. Submitting ChatGPT/GenAI products without citation is a violation of Fordham's academic integrity policies—specifically, it is a form of plagiarism and outsourcing. (3) ChatGPT/GenAI are tools and they are here to stay—so we will keep our channels of communication open about their advantages and the best frameworks in which to deploy them. Additionally, we will use the reading skills we develop in this class to reflect critically *on* information that ChatGPT/GenAI provide about the history of philosophy. We will do this during class time, but you might consider doing this also in your coursework paragraphs.

Students with special needs and/or disabilities:
Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, classwork, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule a meeting to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Phone number: 718-817- 0655). (Locations: Lincoln Center – Lowenstein, Room 207; Rose Hill - O'Hare Hall, Lower Level).

Reading Schedule:

Any readings that are not in the required texts will be available on Blackboard. They are marked below with an asterisk (*)

Week:	*Reading:*	*Notes:*
Week One	(Introduction: What is Hermeneutics? & Historical Background)	
Week Two	Aristotle: *On Interpretation* + *De Anima,* Selections	
Week Three	Schleiermacher: *Hermeneutics and Criticism*	
Week Four	Dilthey: *Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, Selections + Nietzsche: *Joyful Science*, Selections	
Week Five	Heidegger: *Being and Time*, Selections	
Week Six	Heidegger: *Being and Time*, Selections	
Week Seven	Heidegger: *Being and Time*, Selections	
TBD		**Paper one due**
Week Eight	Gadamer: *Truth and Method,* Selections	
Week Nine	Gadamer: *Truth and Method,* Selections	
Week Ten	Gadamer: *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Selections	
TBD		**Paper two due**
Week Eleven	Ricoeur: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, chapter 11	
Week Twelve	Ricoeur: *Time and Narrative* I, Ch. 3, "Life in Quest of Narrative"	
Week Thirteen	Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*, Selections	
Week Fourteen	Kearney: "What is Diacritical Hermeneutics?"	
TBD		**Paper three due**