



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Hermeneutics (PHIL 3850)

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Fordham University, Spring 2026

Keating Hall Rm. 214: Mon. & Thurs. 4:00pm-5:15pm

Office Hours (Collins Rm. 121): Mon. & Thurs. 5:30pm-7:00pm & by appt.



In this course we will examine major texts and ideas within the modern history of *hermeneutics*: the philosophical study of interpretation and understanding. Since antiquity, the term “hermeneutics” has been used to refer to the study of textual and scriptural interpretation. Since the 18th century, however, it has come to refer to philosophical reflection on the very nature of interpreting and deciphering meaning, and in this respect has taken on a much wider scope. The terms “hermeneutic philosophy” and “philosophical hermeneutics” are today most closely associated with Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur. But philosophical inquiry about interpretation can be traced beyond these authors and into the very heart of contemporary philosophy.

Course objectives:

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

- To acquire an understanding of some of the basic questions and problems of modern 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 philosophical positions on questions of interpretation and meaning
- To develop a practiced understanding of the import of hermeneutics for research within distinct humanities and social sciences
- To conduct original research on the questions of modern hermeneutics and its applications

Required texts:

- Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)
- Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Recommended texts:

- John D. Caputo, *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information* (London: Penguin Books, 2018).
- Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)
- Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).
- Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

Course requirements:

[1] Attendance/Participation	10%
[2] Coursework (on Perusall)	22.5%
[3] Short Paper Assignment #1	12.5%
[4] Short Paper Assignment #2	12.5%
[5] Research Paper Proposal	5%
[6] Research Paper Presentation	7.5%
[7] Research Paper Assignment	30%

[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] Coursework (on Perusall)

For all of our assigned readings this semester, you must complete an online Perusall assignment (via the course Blackboard page). Perusall allows students to collaboratively make annotations and comments on a reading. Everyone in the class is required to post at least *three* comments on our reading(s) in advance of every class meeting, and these comments can be posted directly onto the reading itself or in response to one of your classmates' previous comments. Your grade on these assignments will be based on completion. At the same time, I reserve the right to take off points for inaccuracy or irrelevance.

The deadline for all coursework on Perusall is 3:00pm on the day of the class in question. No late coursework will be accepted as the purpose of these assignments is to create conversation about the readings in advance of our discussions in class.

[3] Short Paper Assignment #1 + [4] Short Paper Assignment #2

We will have two short paper assignments this semester: the first is due on February 26th and the second is due on March 30th. The purpose of these short paper assignments is to analyze prominent themes within our assigned readings and reflect on these themes in a way that demonstrates your understanding. I will provide the prompt for these assignments at least one week in advance.

[5] Research Paper Proposal + [6] Research Paper Presentation + [7] Research Paper Assignment:

We will have one large writing assignment this semester: a research paper that is due on May 11th. The purpose of this paper assignment is to draw forward the main concepts, claims, and questions of modern hermeneutics and provide an original contribution of your own. In particular, I want to see that you're capable of applying the philosophical claims of hermeneutics to questions of methodology within the humanities and social sciences.

Before the research paper itself is due, you will have two additional deadlines. First, you will be required to submit a proposal for your research paper on April 9th ([5]). Second, you will be required to deliver a 3-minute thesis presentation of your research paper during our final exam period on May 11th ([6]). The first of these deadlines is meant to get you thinking about possible areas for further reflection and inquiry that might be worth pursuing with respect to modern hermeneutics. The second of these deadlines is meant to facilitate a class-wide discussion of our research papers, as well as to improve your rhetorical skills in presenting and defending a thesis of your own.

I will announce further details for each of these requirements (including the research paper prompt itself) once we are closer to the respective deadlines. The required length of the research paper assignment ([7]), however, will be 8-12 pages (12 font, double-spaced). Additionally, this paper assignment need to be written in line with the requirements laid out in the prompt.

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*.

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 ()*

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
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What is hermeneutics?

Mon. Jan. 12 th	(Introduction to hermeneutics)
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Thurs. Jan. 15 th	Caputo’s <i>Hermeneutics</i> (2018), “Introduction”* + Palmer’s <i>Hermeneutics</i> (1969), p. 33-45 & 66-71*
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Mon. Jan. 19 th	-- No Class Meeting --
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19th century romantic hermeneutics v. 20th century hermeneutic ontology

Thurs. Jan. 22 nd	Schleiermacher’s <i>Hermeneutics and Criticism</i> (1838), p. 3-11* + Dilthey’s <i>Selected Works</i> (1867/1908), V 229-234 & III 101-109*
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Mon. Jan. 26 th	Heidegger’s <i>Being and Time</i> (1927), §1, §4, & §9
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Date: Reading: Notes:

Thurs. Jan. 29th Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), §28-31

Mon. Feb. 2nd Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), §32-34

Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960)

Thurs. Feb. 5th Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960), Introduction
& Forward to Second Edition

Mon. Feb. 9th Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960),
Chapter Two, p. 106-135

Thurs. Feb. 12th Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960),
Chapter Two, p. 135-168

Tues. Feb. 17th Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960),
Chapter Four, p. 278-296

Thurs. Feb. 19th Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960),
Chapter Four, p. 302-318

Mon. Feb. 23rd Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960),
Chapter Four, p. 355-370

Thurs. Feb. 26th Gadamer's "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" (1972)* **Short paper assignment #1 DUE**

Mon. March 2nd Habermas' *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1967), p. 163-189*

Thurs. March 5th Habermas' "Modernity: An Incomplete Project" (1980)

Mon. March 9th -- No Class Meeting --

Thurs. March 12th -- No Class Meeting --

Ricœur on hermeneutics within the human sciences (1981)

Mon. March 16th Ricœur's *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981), Chapter One

Thurs. March 19th Ricœur's *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981), Chapter Two

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Mon. March 23 rd	Ricœur's <i>Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences</i> (1981), Chapter Four-Five	
Thurs. March 26 th	Ricœur's <i>Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences</i> (1981), Chapter Six-Seven	
Mon. March 30 th	Ricœur's <i>Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences</i> (1981), Chapter Eleven	Short paper assignment #2 DUE
Thurs. April 2 nd		-- No Class Meeting --
Mon. April 6 th		-- No Class Meeting --

Critical reflections on hermeneutics

Thurs. April 9 th	Derrida's "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer" (1981) + Dallmayr's "Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue" (1985)	Research paper proposal DUE
Mon. April 13 th	Derrida's "Différance" (1968)	
Thurs. April 16 th		-- No Class Meeting --
Mon. April 20 th	(OPEN)	
Thurs. April 23 rd	(OPEN)	
Mon. April 27 th	(OPEN)	
Mon. May 11 th 1:30pm-3:30pm	(Research paper presentations)	Research paper assignment DUE