

**McGill University - Department of Philosophy - Fall 2019 - Professor Gaëlle Fiasse**

**PHIL 475: Topics in Contemporary European Philosophy  
Paul Ricœur: Ethics and Morality, Identity and Politics,  
Forgiveness (Ricœur, Jaspers, Jankélévitch, Arendt, Derrida)**

PHIL 475: Mondays and Wednesdays, 04:05 PM to 05:25 PM  
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Professor Gaëlle Fiasse <https://www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/gaelle-fiasse>

Contacting me

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Office hours (Leacock 940): Wed. from 2:40 to 3:50PM or by appointment at scheduled times of mutual convenience

Conferences on the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) have been held in all the humanities disciplines and on all the continents. This course will focus on Ricœur's ethical thought. We will pay special attention to his "little ethics" in his book on the self *Oneself as Another*. We will discuss Ricœur's three-pronged ethics "aiming at a good life, with and for another, in just institutions". We will pay attention to his distinction between ethics and morality, which leads him to dialogue with Aristotle, Levinas, Kant, Arendt and Rawls, to his insistence on practical wisdom where he focuses on Hegel, and to his reflections on the tragedies that can affect action by re-reading Sophocles' *Antigone*. We will also question the relationship between ethics and politics, and the notion of justice in democracies. Questions will be: why does "morality" requires "ethics" according to Ricœur? What is the relationship between our desires and the norms? Why to insist on the mediation of the "good" in ethics? What role the other person, be it the significant other or anyone, can play for the meaning of our actions? Why practical wisdom is crucial when we deal with different particular situations and sometimes tragic ones? What are the main features of just institutions by contrast to totalitarian institutions? What are the threats of democracy?

At the end of the semester, we will analyze Ricœur's fictitious dialogue with H. Arendt, V. Jankélévitch, and J. Derrida on forgiveness and the question of guilt with K. Jaspers. The debate around the phenomenon of forgiveness will include questions such as: are some acts, and actors, "unforgivable"? Does forgiving entail forgetting or, on the contrary, does it involve the duty to remember? What is the role of memory? What are the differences between forgiveness, prescription and amnesty? 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? Between promising and forgiving? Is it possible to forgive oneself?

Class Participation	10%	
Take-home	20%	Oct. 1
One seven-page research paper (double-spaced)	30%	Nov. 5
Oral Exam	40%	Dec. 16

**Language of Submission**

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. The oral exam can be in English or in French.

**Prerequisites**

This course is an advanced course 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. Ricœur is not a post-modern philosopher, but he is well-known for his complex dialogue with the history of philosophy, humanities, and the history of religions. 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. The section on forgiveness with Ricœur, Derrida, Jankélévitch and Arendt will also include some references to Christianity and Judaism since the four authors refer to these traditions. No specific background in philosophy of religion will be required for this section.

**Electronic equipments are not permitted in lectures**

All computers, mobile phones, web-accessible electronic devices (IPads, etc.) must be turned off during the class period and stored. Exceptions will only be made with an official note from the student disabilities office.

**Required textbooks** (Available at McGill Bookstore and on Mycourses)

All of them will be put on reserve at the library, but students are highly encouraged to buy them and they must have them in class for class discussions)