

Winter 2018

Prof. Gaëlle Fiasse

PHIL 675 Seminar: Contemporary European Philosophy

**Forgiveness: the debate between Jankélévitch, Arendt, Derrida and Ricœur
Continental Ethics: Ricœur's ethical thought**

Monday, 09:35-11:25 (Leacock 927)

Professor Gaëlle Fiasse

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

Contact

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

Office hours: Leacock 940, on Monday 2 PM- 3 PM or by appointment

Themes

Conferences on the French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) have been held in all the humanities disciplines and on all the continents. We will analyze Ricœur's dialogue with Hannah Arendt, Vladimir Jankélévitch and Jacques Derrida on forgiveness, as well as Karl Jaspers's famous essay on *The German Guilt*. The debate about forgiveness started twenty years after the Second World War with a focus on "prescription" (the statute of limitations) and the question of the "imprescriptibility" of crimes against humanity. We will discuss questions such as: What are the differences between forgiveness, prescription, and amnesty? Is forgiveness possible or impossible, conditional or unconditional? Does forgiving entail forgetting or, on the contrary, does it require remembering? What, exactly, is the role of memory? What is the link between forgiveness and justice? Does it make sense to speak of 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?

After the question of forgiveness, the seminar will turn to Ricœur's ethical thought as developed in *Oneself as Another*, as well as other articles and book chapters. We will pay close attention to his notion of the self, narrative identity and selfhood/ipseity. We will analyze the ethical aim of the good life in relation to another person and to just institutions. While our main focus will remain on Ricœur's texts, we will also cover his dialogue with others (Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, John Rawls, the Czech dissident and statesman Václav Havel, and Emmanuel Levinas). We will also look at Arendt's controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which contains her account of the trial of one of the major organizers of the Holocaust.

Evaluation

Participation	20 %	Attendance, in-class participation, quality of discussion
Assignments	30 %	3 short papers and their oral presentation
Final Paper	50 %	15 pages

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, 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.

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: *Éthique et infini*, Paris, Le livre de Poche (biblio essais, 4018), [1982]. ISBN 2-253-03426-6
- 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 (see below)

The PDF's are on *Mycourses*

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.

Details about the evaluation

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