

**PHST-4400: Philosophical Hermeneutics**  
Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology

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Fall 2020

Fr. Justin Gable, O.P., Ph.D.

Tuesdays, 12:40-3:30 PM

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Office Hours: By Appointment

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**Course Description and Objectives:**

Hermeneutics is the systematic study of the nature of understanding and interpretation. While methods and theories of interpretation can be found as early as the ancient Greeks (from which the term, *hermeneutike*, is taken) and were applied to various fields of study (legal, political, and literary), hermeneutics conceived as a systematic and universal philosophical discipline only appears on the scene relatively late in the western tradition, the result of an Enlightenment conception of reason and the attempt to address problems of interpretation that arose with the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century interest in historical texts, both biblical and classical (Roman and Greek).

This course, an advanced graduate seminar, will closely examine the historical development and systematic articulation of hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline. While the antecedents of hermeneutics in ancient, patristic, medieval, and Enlightenment sources will be surveyed, the main focus of the course will be on the five key figures of modern and contemporary hermeneutics: Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur. The course will also take a brief look at the ongoing dialogue between hermeneutics and two other competing but related contemporary philosophies of language and communication: Critical Theory (Habermas) and Deconstruction (Derrida). While a certain familiarity with the history of philosophy is recommended, no prior coursework in philosophy is presumed.

While this course will inevitably include examples from theology and theological applications, its focus will be primarily philosophical, highlighting the nature and significance of interpretive

act, its relationship to communication, language, meaning, and human rationality. The course will focus on addressing fundamental questions for understanding and human experience: What is interpretation, and how does it occur? How is it related to ordinary, everyday understanding? Is interpretation “objective,” and if not, how can we distinguish “bad” interpretations from “good” ones? Is understanding across significant temporal, geographical, and cultural distances possible? To what extent is translation from one language to another possible? By the end of the semester, students will have gained a deeper understanding of the relationships between human rationality, the act of interpretation, reception, traditions, texts, and language. They will also have a grasp of key features of contemporary hermeneutic theory and its significance for theological, legal, political, and literary contexts.

### **Course Format:**

Due to current restrictions and precautions necessitated by the continuing dangers of COVID-19, this course will be held remotely, i.e., virtually through Zoom and Moodle. Please see below for details regarding course access, technology requirements, and remote GTU library services. Students enrolled in the course are expected to attend each class session and be present for class both audially and visually.

A 3-unit course requires, on average, a commitment of nine hours from students each week. Since this is a graduate level seminar, 100% of the course’s scheduled class time (12:40—3:30 PM), will be in the form of Zoom meetings. The remaining six hours per week will be spent completing class readings and course assignments (see below). Students are invited to participate in an optional (asynchronous) discussion forum, available through the course Moodle page.

### **Course Requirements:**

As an advanced seminar course, this class will focus primarily on the discussion of assigned texts, although the instructor will provide background material briefly in lecture form from time to time. Students will be expected to carefully prepare assigned readings in order to actively participate in the conversation and raise thoughtful questions in class. Each week a

student will be asked to give a short presentation on the assigned reading (15-20 minutes) and lead the class discussion by raising several substantive questions for discussion. Because this class is structured as a seminar, attendance and participation in the discussion is essential. Students are expected to be at every class meeting, and absences will *significantly* affect a student's final grade. Students with disabilities or whose first language is not English are encouraged to speak with the instructor about any special needs they might have.

Students will be evaluated according to the quality of their class participation, short class presentations and leadership of class discussions, and a final research paper of 15-20 pages. These assignments are designed to help students develop their own critical thinking regarding the philosophical accounts and contemporary issues of human embodiment, and articulate their understanding of these topics both orally and in writing. They also offer students the opportunity to show their growth in the DSPT's institutional goals of integrative thinking, self-direction, collaborative learning, and leadership (Institutional Goals A1-3 and B1). All sources in the final research paper should be cited using proper "Turabian" format (see Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Eighth Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Students should conscientiously avoid plagiarism, and are asked to consult the *DSPT Student Handbook* for the DSPT's policies regarding academic honesty. A **paper proposal** consisting of a short paragraph describing a student's chosen topic, along with a preliminary bibliography of a minimum of 10 sources, should be submitted by **November 3**. The **final research paper** is due by **December 15, 2020**. Late papers will be accepted, but may be subject to a 1/3 letter grade reduction for each day late (e.g., an "A" paper turned in one day late would receive an "A-.")

Grading: Weekly Class Participation: 25%

Class Presentations and Discussion Leadership: 25%

Final Research Paper: 50%

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## Assigned Texts:

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-0520256408. Paperback. \$33.99.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976. ISBN-13: 978-0912646596. Paperback. \$17.95.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*. Edited by Andrew Bowie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. ISBN-13: 978-0521598484. Paperback. \$46.51 [used/rental/e-book versions available at amazon.com]

Weekly reading assignments will be taken from these assigned texts, as well as from readings posted on Moodle (<http://moodle.gtu.edu>).

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## E-Mail Protocol and Office Hours:

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns via e-mail. While I will do my best to answer your e-mail quickly, please do not expect an immediate response. I typically respond to e-mails within 24 hours. If you send an e-mail over the weekend (Friday-Sunday), my response time may be a bit longer (24-72 hours).

Due to COVID-19, office hours will be available by appointment only, via Zoom. Should you wish to meet, please send me an e-mail to arrange a mutually convenient time and day for a virtual meeting.

## **Course Access and Technology Requirements:**

### ***Moodle and Zoom***

- Much of the material for the course, including links for class sessions via Zoom, will be available through Moodle. Once registered, students automatically have access to the course Moodle page by logging into moodle.gtu.edu using their school e-mail and password. In Moodle, the course will appear in your *Dashboard* under *Courses*.
- If you are new to Moodle, please check out the instructional videos and documentation on the Moodle home page. It is recommended that you use either Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox to access Moodle (Safari is not recommended).
- Students can use their smartphone to access Moodle. When accessing Moodle from a phone, it is recommended that you use an internet browser rather than the mobile app.

### ***Technology Requirements and Support***

- Students will need the following technology on hand to actively engage in the course and complete course requirements:
  - Computer, laptop, or tablet with an up-to-date operating system (Windows, Mac, Linux) and up-to-date internet browser (Chrome, Firefox)
  - High speed internet bandwidth (preferably 10 mbps or higher, but at least 3 mbps)
  - A webcam
  - A microphone
- If students experience any difficulties with Moodle or Zoom, they can contact Moodle support at [moodle@gtu.edu](mailto:moodle@gtu.edu), and will receive a response within 24 hours.

## **GTU Library Services:**

As the library remains closed due to state and local Shelter-in-Place orders, the GTU library offers the following services for the Fall Semester in order to provide students with access to important research materials.

### ***Librarian Assistance***

- **Ask-a-Librarian Chat:** Available from the library webpages and moodle, the reference librarians are online weekday from 10 AM—4 PM (hours subject to change).
- **E-mail:** Send all questions (about anything) to [library@gtu.edu](mailto:library@gtu.edu)
- **Zoom One-on-One Help:** By appointment only (via [library@gtu.edu](mailto:library@gtu.edu)).
- **Getting Started with Library Research Guide:** <https://libguides.gtu.edu/getstarted>

### ***Instruction***

- **In-Class Instruction:** The GTU Library can arrange live instruction sessions in zoom, to demonstrate how to search the library's resources online. This can be tailored to a particular assignment, or to demonstrate particular resources, search strategies, and online tools. Pre-recorded videos are also available.
- **Online Workshops:** <https://www.gtu.edu/library/get-help/library-workshops>
- **Orientation Options:** <https://www.gtu.edu/library/get-help/orientation-options>

### ***Materials & Access***

- **Curbside Pickup:** Available in Berkeley or San Anselmo: <https://www.gtu.edu/library/remote-materials-pick>
- **Scanning Requests:** Library staff are able to assist with scanning items that are in the library, such as periodicals, reference items, language exams, archival materials, or book chapters. <https://www.gtu.edu/library/get-help/library-scanning-services>
- **Suggest a Purchase:** <https://forms.gle/qVfc5pyjSnHCH2vCA>
- **Extended Due Dates:** The GTU library has extended due dates for books, but the book drops at both libraries are also open if you would like to return materials. Please login to your library account to see these changes in due dates.
- **Full access for special students:** Some categories of people (like auditors) only had in-library access to some materials (like e-books). The GTU Library has now extended access to anyone sitting in on classes. For assistance logging in to obtain materials, please e-mail the GTU librarians at [library@gtu.edu](mailto:library@gtu.edu)
- **New Resources for Fall:** These include ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global Database, Project Muse Premier Collection, Sage Premier All Access eJournals, Oxford

Reference Collections, Oxford Bibliography of Biblical Studies, LGBTQ+ Source, Digitalia Hispanica, ArtStor, and more.

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## Course Schedule:

9/8: Introduction to the Course

*Hermeneia* and Hermeneutics in the Ancient World

Aristotle's Semantic Triangle

Aristotle, selections from *Categories*, *De Interpretatione* and *De Anima*

Aquinas, selections from *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* and  
*Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*

Optional: O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*, Chapter 1-2

9/15: Patristic and Medieval Hermeneutics

Origen, *On First Principles*, Book IV

Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Book III

Optional: C.S. Lewis, "Dante's Similes"

9/22: Enlightenment Hermeneutics

Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Chapters 7-9

Vico, selections from *The New Science*, Book I

9/29: Friedrich Schleiermacher I

selections from *Hermeneutics and Criticism*

10/6: Friedrich Schleiermacher II

selections from *Hermeneutics and Criticism*

10/13: Wilhelm Dilthey I

Dilthey, "The Rise of Hermeneutics"

Dilthey, selections from *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*

10/20: Wilhelm Dilthey II

Dilthey, selections from *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*

10/27: No Class (Reading Week)

11/3: Phenomenological Hermeneutics in Husserl

Husserl, *Logical Investigations I*

11/10: Heidegger: Hermeneutics and Existence

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §§31-36

Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology"

11/17: Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Gadamer, Introduction and Foreword to *Truth and Method*

Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 1, 3-6

11/24: Hermeneutics and Critical Theory

Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality"

Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 2

Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology"

Optional: Giurlanda, "Habermas' Critique of Gadamer: Does It Stand Up?"

12/1: Gadamer and Derrida: Hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism

Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation"

Derrida, "Three Questions for Hans-Georg Gadamer"

Gadamer, "Reply to Jacques Derrida" and "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction"

Optional: Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique"

12/8: Ricoeur

Ricoeur, selections from *Interpretation Theory*

Optional: Mei, "Constructing Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory of Truth"

12/15: Final Research Paper Due by 5 PM

N.B.: The instructor reserves the right to revise the course syllabus as the need arises.

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### General Criteria for Grading of Papers

**A:** The student's essay not only reflects a correct understanding of the subject matter, but also a depth of comprehension which sees the wider implications of ethical principles and theories. The writing is fluent, well-organized, without grammatical or syntactical errors, following the standards articulated in Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (Eighth Edition).

**A-:** For work which, although still excellent, falls short of the above.

**B+:** The student has produced a paper demonstrating a correct grasp of the subject matter, and has expressed this articulately. The paper itself is free of grammatical and syntactical errors.

**B:** The student has correctly grasped the essence of the subject matter, although with a few errors, and has presented his or her understanding in an organized, articulate way.

**B-:** Although the work shows a fair understanding of the subject matter, there are multiple errors in content, or the student's understanding has not been well expressed.

**C+:** Although the student's work shows evidence of effort and some genuine understanding of the topic, there are more significant errors or omissions, or the expression results in difficulty determining the extent of the student's understanding.

**C:** Serious errors or omissions show that the student has failed to grasp important aspects of the subject matter or make a fully coherent argument, or has expressed their argument in such a way as to leave serious difficulties in determining the paper's position and the student's understanding.

**C-:** The student's paper exhibits very little understanding of the topic and is poorly expressed.

**D:** The work exhibits a lack of understanding of the topic and is poorly expressed.

**F:** The work fails to meet even the minimum standards of understanding and expression, or has not been turned in.

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