

**34-583 • Philosophy and Language: Gadamer and Hermeneutics**

**26-585 • Literary Genres: Criticism and Cultural Studies**

Winter 2017 • Thursdays 1pm to 4pm

Seminar conducted by Drs. Jeff Noonan and Stephen Pender

**LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, AND INTERPRETATION**

“Hermes ... is an interpreter [*hermēneus*] and a messenger, wily and deceptive in speech and in oratory,” says Plato in the *Cratylus*. This false etymology — “hermeneutics” derived from Hermes — organises the history of interpretation from antiquity to the twentieth century. This course explores the history of interpretation in the human sciences and in humanistic scholarship with a focus on the work of the influential German scholar Hans-Georg Gadamer. Through a close reading of his *Truth and Method* (1960), we will examine the historical development of hermeneutics from antiquity on, attending to modes and methods of literary and philosophical interpretation as they were conditioned and influenced by twentieth-century philosophy. As Gadamer argues, to ‘understand’ is not only to grasp meaning, but to apprehend claims, to engage in amorphous ‘self-understanding’: that is why Gadamer calls for a “radical openness,” for “skepticism in action,” as interpretation is a form of “exposure” in which one’s conceptual resources are impugned, scattered, or emancipated. Does his argument that “understanding is always interpretation,” that language is at the centre of all thought, offer new ways to imagine the history of the human sciences, to embrace such ‘openness,’ to throw off the tyranny of quantitative, empirical metrics? what are the ethics and politics of literary and philosophical interpretation? must an hermeneutics which insists on a disciplined fidelity to the text as a condition of understanding be conservative, as some of Habermas’ critics have charged? do we agree with Heidegger that this first ‘postman,’ Hermes, is the only “god that save us now”?

**TEXTS**

Has Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, second edition (New York: Continuum, 1997).

*The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

In addition to diligent and engaged class participation, students are responsible for five pieces of work during the seminar:

[1] two response papers [maximum three, double-spaced pages] to questions and issues related to the readings;

[2] a brief analysis of a recent article on our topic [maximum two, double-spaced pages], in which you summarise and situate its main arguments;

[3] an oral presentation [approximately thirty minutes in length], and a brief critique of a peer’s oral presentation;

[4] a conference paper presentation at a colloquium organised by the instructors; and

[5] a fifteen to twenty page research paper of publishable quality, which may be developed and refined from the oral report and / or the conference paper.

**The final grade will be calculated as follows:**

class participation	15%
response papers	10%
article analysis	10%
presentation / critique	20%
colloquium paper	15%
final research paper	30%

**Note:** both instructors will evaluate all work, and final grades will be determined by their deliberations. **Please submit two copies of all written assignments.**

**SCHEDULE**

Below is the schedule of readings for the term. ‘TM’ designates *Truth and Method*, with parts, sections, and chapters noted [e.g., ‘3.1.1-2’ is part 3, section 1, chapters 1 to 2], followed by page numbers; ‘[CC]’ indicates *The Cambridge Companion*; and ‘[h]’ is an handout, either physical or electronic.

**5 January • introductions**

TM: “Introduction” and “Forward to the Second Edition,” pp. xxi-xxxviii  
Dostal, “Introduction” and “Gadamer, the Man and His Work” [CC]

**12 January • ‘the play of mental powers’**

Outhwaite, “Hans-Georg Gadamer,” from *The Return of Grand Theory ...* [h]  
TM: “The question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art,” 1.1.1-3, pp. 3-100

**19 January • ‘beings intellectually preserved’**

TM: “The ontology of the work of art and its hermeneutic significance,” 1.2.1-2, pp. 101-169

**26 January • ‘elements of tradition ... and life itself’**

TM: “The extension of the question of truth ...: historical preparation,” 2.1.1, pp. 173-218  
Taylor, “Gadamer on the Human Sciences” [CC]

**2 February • ‘prejudice’**

TM: “The ... question of truth ...: historical preparation [continued],” 2.1.2-3, pp. 218-264

**9 February • ‘histories of effect’**

TM: “The ... question of truth ...: ... a theory of hermeneutic interpretation,” 2.2.1, pp. 265-307  
Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding” [CC]

### **16 February • ‘historical hermeneutics’**

TM: “The ... question of truth ...: hermeneutic interpretation [continued],” 2.2.2-3, pp. 307-379

Baker, Jr., “Lyric as Paradigm ...” [CC]

Rilke, *Duino Elegies* [h]; Strand, “Keeping Things Whole” [h]; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, 1 [h]  
[we will keep to hand these literary texts for the remainder of term]

### **23 February • reading week [no class]**

### **2 March • ‘the sphere of the logos’**

TM: “The ontological shift ...: ... language as the medium ...,” 3.1.1-2, pp. 383-438

Figal, “The Doing of the Thing Itself ...” [CC]

### **9 March • ‘the incomplete human world’**

TM: “The ontological shift ...: ... language as the medium ...,” 3.1.3, pp. 438-491

TM: Supplements I and II, pp. 505-549

Gadamer, “Man and Language,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Linge [h]

### **16 March • responses**

Habermas, “On Hermeneutics’ Claim to Universality,” in *The Hermeneutics Reader* [h]

Bernstein, “The Constellation of Hermeneutics ...” [CC]

Dallmayr, “Borders on Horizons: Gadamer and Habermas Revisited” [h]

### **23 March • implications**

from Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Lawrence [h]

“What is Practise? the Conditions of Social Reason”

“Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy”

“Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task”

### **30 March • literature, philosophy, and interpretation**

A colloquium, organised by the instructors, sponsored in part by the Humanities Research Group, University of Windsor, at which each student presents a scholarly paper; precise time and location to be announced.