

**STMA 500: HERMENEUTICS****Spring 2008****Michael Raschko****Hunthausen Hall 213, 296-5311****mraschko@seattleu.edu****Office Hours: by appointment****COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A study of the major historical and contemporary theories of interpretation and the issues around which they differ. Practical exercises in interpretation that will uncover our own approach to the matter. The pastoral implications and uses of the various approaches to texts. Ministry as interpretation.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

- to obtain a working knowledge of the major schools of thought in interpretation theory;
- to have a basic knowledge of the historical contexts out of which the basic theories of interpretation emerged;
- to practice interpretation so that we might discover our own practical ways of dealing with texts;
- to look at the pastoral implications of interpretation theory.

**METHODOLOGIES**

lecture, seminar discussion, term paper

**TEXTS, in the order in which we will read them:**

David Tracy. Plurality and Ambiguity, Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.

Richard E. Palmer. Hermeneutics. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Paul Ricoeur. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, edited and translated by John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Sandra Schneiders. The Revelatory Text, Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.

**Course Outline**

Session 1: April 2

Introduction to Hermeneutics

Session 2: April 9

Tracy, Plurality and Ambiguity

We will begin discussion of the first three chapters of Tracy's text. The trick in reading Tracy is not to drown in all the examples he throws your way, but to try and get to the central point.

Among the key topics he raises are the following:

- ❖ What is a classic and why are they important?
- ❖ What does he mean by pre-understanding?
- ❖ Why does he turn to game theory? What does that have to do with his notion of conversation, and why is conversation so important to him?
- ❖ What does it mean to talk about truth in terms of relative adequacy and not certainty?
- ❖ How does argument differ from conversation, when is it necessary?
- ❖ What are the roles of theory, method and explanation? How do these differ from conversation? What is distanciation and why is it an issue?
- ❖ Why talk about truth as manifestation? How does that differ from notions of truth as correspondence?

- ❖ What does it mean to say that we belong to language and history?
- ❖ What is the difference between “langue” and “parole” and why is the difference important in Tracy’s mind? Why is it important to him to move past words to sentences and texts?

### Session 3: April 16

We shall continue our discussion of Tracy.

If we have time we will begin our discussion of Palmer’s book, Hermeneutics. Some guiding questions:

- ❖ What is realism’s approach to the interpretation of a text? How does phenomenology critique that approach? What is hermeneutics trying to do that realism does not do with a text?
- ❖ You might contemplate the 6 definitions of Hermeneutics in chapter 3.
- ❖ What are the basic issues in the argument between Betti and Gadamer in chapter 4? Betti is the realist, the Enlightenment thinker? What does Gadamer think he is missing and vice versa?
- ❖ Schleiermacher:
  - What is Schleiermacher after with his notion of understanding? Why is it an art rather than an objective science? Why does it entail intuition?
  - What does Schleiermacher mean by the hermeneutical circle?
  - What is the difference between grammatical and psychological interpretation? Why is Schleiermacher interested in psychological interpretation?
- ❖ Dilthey:
  - How is Dilthey building on Schleiermacher’s insights? What is he doing that moves beyond Schleiermacher?
  - Dilthey wants to distinguish the human sciences (liberal arts) from hard science-why? Yet he wants to see the human sciences as sciences of a different kind-why?
  - What does Dilthey mean by history and life philosophy?
  - What is the distinction between understanding and explanation?
  - What does Dilthey mean by experience and life expressions?
- ❖ Heidegger:
  - What is meant by phenomenology? How do we come to know reality according to Heidegger?
  - What does Heidegger mean by DaSein?
  - What does Heidegger mean when he talks about potentialities are disclosed?
  - What does Heidegger mean by the world and how are objects manifest within a world?
  - Why is a presuppositionless interpretation impossible?
  - Why must any assertion involves a shared world?
  - What is meant by objectification? What is it able to do? Why does Heidegger think there are problems in thinking this way? What does Heidegger propose in the place of objectification?
  - What is the human role in reality as the enunciator of being?
  - Why is being linguistic?
  - What does it mean to be at the crucial border of concealment and disclosure?
  - Why suddenly does art take the center stage?
- ❖ Gadamer:
  - Why does Gadamer see method as problematic? How does dialectic replace method in Gadamer’s thought?

- How does something new come into being with art? How does Gadamer think we should approach art?
- Why game theory?
- What is meant by prejudice and what role does it play in interpretation? Why are they risked in interpretation?
- Why is Gadamer trying to rehabilitate tradition and authority? Why would anyone from an Enlightenment point of view have trouble with this rehabilitation?
- Why understand the text and not the author? Who is going to be upset at this notion?
- What does it mean to apply the text?
- In the encounter with the text who/what is asking the questions?
- How does Gadamer understand the nature of language? What role does language play in the disclosure of the world?

Sessions 4 and 5: April 23 and April 30

We will continue our discussion of Palmer.

Sessions 6 and 7: May 7 and 14

Discussion of chapters 1-2 and 4-7 of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences:

- ❖ What does it mean to say that words are polysemous and why is that a problem?
- ❖ What does Ricoeur mean when he talks about the first locus of hermeneutics as epistemological? Whom does he have in mind and why?
- ❖ What does Ricoeur mean by the later, ontological locus of hermeneutics? Whom is he talking about and why?
- ❖ According to Ricoeur what are the key critiques Habermas has of Gadamer? How does Ricoeur explain what Gadamer and Habermas are each trying to do? The key issue seems to be distanciation: how does Ricoeur begin to position himself on this question in the second chapter?
- ❖ How does Ricoeur develop his ideas on the necessary role of distanciation in chapter 4? How is distanciation productive? What is a work and how does it involve distanciation? How is the work distanced from the author? What role does distanciation play in the reading of the text?
- ❖ What is a text according to Ricoeur? Why does he set aside the issue of the referent of a text? Why would he claim the text interprets the reader?
- ❖ Why does Ricoeur turn to metaphor in chapter 6? What do metaphors do to the meaning of words? Why would he then consider the metaphor a work? What do metaphors teach us that can be applied to texts?
- ❖ And finally appropriation----why is distanciation important in appropriation of the world of a text? Why does he turn to play like Gadamer and Tracy? How do we come to know through the encounter with a text?

Sessions 8 and 10: May 21 and June 4

We give the last word to Sandra Schneiders. We will discuss her The Revelatory Text in the last 2 classes.

In some ways this is the easiest read of our texts, but there is a lot going on below the surface. She is taking her stand firmly in the Tracy, Ricoeur line of thought. So it would be worth our while to watch the themes we have discussed in the previous weeks emerge again, this time in dealing with questions of handling the scripture and the tradition. Beneath it all lies the question: what does it mean to be a minister, one who interprets and hands on the tradition?

Please note: there is no session 9 on May 28. We will take class off that week because of a conference I must attend in Pittsburgh. No it is not a baseball game!!

## STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

- Reading of texts and preparation for class
- Class participation
- 6 papers
  - Paper 1, due at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class session. What does Tracy mean by his notion of classic? Why does he think classics are important? What are some of the classics of your tradition. This paper should be no more than 2 or 3 pages.
  - Paper 2, due at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> class session. How do the notions of truth as manifestation and truth as correspondence differ? Why is the difference important? Why does Tracy distinguish truth as relatively adequate and as certitude? Why is the difference important? This paper should be no more than 2 or 3 pages.
  - Paper 3, due at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> class session. Compare the Enlightenment and the Romantic notions of interpretation on the basis of the following 3 questions: what is the object I am interpreting, what is my goal in interpreting it, and what kind of world does this interaction take place in? No more than 4 pages.
  - Paper 4, due at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> class session. What is the Enlightenment notion of the autonomous self? How do Heidegger and Gadamer challenge that notion? What fundamental difference does this make in the project of hermeneutics? No more than 3 pages.
  - Paper 5, due at the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> class session. What is the role of distanciation in Ricoeur's interpretation theory? What does it entail and why is it productive? Why is it not the final step? No more than 2 pages.
  - Paper 6, due at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> class session. Take Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and interpret it from one school's theory of interpretation using the following questions: what do I have in my hand, who am I as an interpreter, what kind of world does this interaction take place in? No more than 5 pages.

## REGARDING STYLE

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, on standard 8 1/2"x 11" paper. Use 1 inch margins all round. Use 12 pt. type. Do not use right-hand justification as it leads to oddly spaced words. **Staple the paper in the top left-hand corner.** Do not use plastic covers or binders. Keep a copy other than the one you submit.

## LATE PAPERS

Papers are due at the beginning of the listed class session. Papers will lose ½ a grade for each 24 hours after that. ½ grade would move a paper from A to A- or from A- to B+.

## GRADING

Grading will be based for the most part on the papers. Class participation and the teacher's sense of the student's mastery of the material will also be taken into consideration.

### **SOME OTHER BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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SU: BD241/B58

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Hirsch, E.D. Validity in Interpretation. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

Jeanrond, Werner, Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance, New York: Crossroad, 1991.

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Ricoeur, Paul. Interpretation Theory, Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning. Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

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Wachterhauser, Brice R. Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.  
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Wilson, Paul Scott. Imagination of the Heart, New Understandings in Preaching. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.