

PHIL 201: Introduction to Philosophy

Winter 2012

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Office hours: W 11:30-1pm

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The aim of this course is not to present a body of knowledge called ‘philosophy’, but to introduce students to philosophical ways of thinking. We will do this by reflecting on a wide range of concepts and beliefs that we tend to take for granted in their ordinary use. We will begin with the related concepts of freedom, moral responsibility, and punishment. We will move on to questions about the nature of the mind and our knowledge of the world. Finally, we will reflect on the nature of beauty, science and mathematics.

Assessment

The work for the course includes (a) an electronic journal (20% of the final grade); (b) a short paper (500 words) expanding on one entry in the journal (20% of the final grade); (c) a short paper (500 words) on an assigned topic (30% of the final grade); and (d) a final exam (30% of the final grade).

(a) *Electronic journal*: The journal is made up of ten weekly entries of approximately 250 words each, addressing the class readings from weeks 3 through 12 (see the schedule below). The goal of each entry is to say what the central view of the reading is: what idea is the author defending, and what reason or evidence does the author adduce in support of that view? Each entry is to be submitted by email to a class gmail address (TBA) by 9am on the Monday of the lecture dealing with the reading. The first entry is due on 23 January. If the entry is submitted *on time*, is roughly the right length, and discusses the appropriate reading coherently, you get 2% of the final grade.

(b) *First paper*: You will write a 500-word paper expanding on the journal entry from week 2, 3 or 4. The paper will be due on February 6.

(c) *Second paper*: You will write a paper of about 500 words in stages during the semester. The task will include a peer-review process involving a web-based system called SWORD (Scaffolded Writing and Reviewing in the Disciplines) developed at the University of Pittsburgh. Further details about the paper will be provided later in the semester via WebCT. The first draft will be due on March 1.

(d) *Final exam*: There will be a formal final exam during the exam period.

Extensions: Special arrangements will be made *only* in the event of illness (with a doctor’s note), death in the family, or something of equal seriousness. **Note: only the lecturer can grant an extension; please do not ask the TAs.**

Tentative schedule of readings

Readings will be made available on WebCT.

Week 1: 9,11 January **Introduction**

Week 2: 16,18 January **Free will**: Strawson “Freedom and resentment”

Week 3: 23,25 January **Moral responsibility**: Nagel “Moral luck”

Week 4: 30 January, 1 February **Punishment**: Rawls “Two concepts of punishment”

First short paper due February 6.

Week 5: 6,8 February **Mind and body**: Ryle “Descartes’ myth”

Week 6: 13,15 February **Consciousness** Nagel “What is it like to be a bat?”

Week 7: 20,22 February **Study break**

First draft of second paper due March 1.

Week 8: 27, 29 February **Minds and machines**: Turing “Computing machinery and intelligence”

Week 9: 5,7 March **Scepticism**: Chalmers “The Matrix as metaphysics”

Week 10: 12,14 March **The self**: Parfit “Personal identity”

Week 11: 19,21 March **Beauty**: Hume “Of the standards of taste”

Week 12: 26,28 March **Science**: Goodman “The new riddle of induction”

Final draft of second paper due April 5.

Week 13: 2,4 April **Mathematics**: Shapiro *Thinking about mathematics* (excerpt)

Week 14: 11,16 April **TBA**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/students/ for more information).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.