

PHIL 200: Introduction to Philosophy

Fall 2017

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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 free will and moral responsibility. 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, mathematics and the meaning of life!

Lectures will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays; you must also sign up for a weekly conference. You are expected to have read the week’s reading *before* the class meets, and to be prepared to discuss it. The class is large, but lively discussion is possible and encouraged.

Upon completion of this course students should be able to (i) find the argument of a text and restate it clearly in their own words; (ii) explain clearly viewpoints other than their own; (iii) think critically about the philosophical issues discussed in this course; (iv) write concise papers presenting well-formulated arguments and providing supporting evidence for their claims.

Assessment

The work for the course includes

- (a) participation in a discussion on MyCourses (15% of the final grade);
- (b) a 750-word (maximum) paper (20% of the final grade);
- (c) a 1500-word (maximum) paper (35% of the final grade); and
- (d) a final exam (30% of the final grade).

(a) *Discussion*: Each week, discussion questions will be set on MyCourses on the topic of the following week’s reading. You will be divided randomly into groups of 10 to discuss the question. You are expected to participate in the discussion BEFORE the lectures dealing with the reading. Although you should participate in the discussion each week, you will receive 3 marks for participating in any given week, to a maximum of 15. In other words, to receive full participation marks, you should participate substantively in at least 5 weekly discussions.

(b) *First paper*: You will write a paper of no more than 750 words in which you will be expected to explain clearly the main argument of one of the readings. The paper must be submitted through MyCourses by 11pm on October 2.

(c) *Second paper:* You will write a paper of no more than 1500 words in stages during the semester using the Peerceptiv platform on MyCourses. You will be expected to explain clearly *and* critically assess a philosophical argument on an assigned topic. The first draft will be due by 11pm on October 27. You will then review three papers by other students; your reviews are due by 11pm on November 10. The second and final version of the paper will be due by 11pm on November 24. The final round of reviews will be due by 11pm on December 6. The two drafts will be equally weighted.

(d) *Final exam:* There will be a formal final exam consisting of several short essay questions.

Extensions: Extensions to deadlines set will be granted only in **exceptional** circumstances, appropriately documented. Late work will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

Note: only the lecturer can grant an extension; please do not ask the TAs.

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.

Tentative schedule of primary readings

Readings will be made available on MyCourses. Further background readings will be recommended.

Week 1: 6 September **Introduction**

Week 2: 11, 13 September **Free will and responsibility**: Strawson “The impossibility of moral responsibility”

Week 3: 18, 20 September **Moral responsibility**: Nagel “Moral luck”

Week 4: 25, 27 September **Punishment**: Rawls “Two concepts of rules”

Week 5: 2,4 October **Mind and body**: Ryle “Descartes’ myth”

First paper due: October 2

Week 6: 11 October **Consciousness** Nagel “What is it like to be a bat?”

Week 7: 16,18 October **Minds and machines**: Turing “Computing machinery and intelligence”

Week 8: 23,25 October **Scepticism**: Chalmers “The Matrix as metaphysics”

Week 9: 30 October, 1 November **The self**: Parfit “Personal identity”

First draft of second paper due October 27

Week 10: 6,8 November **Beauty**: Hume “Of the standards of taste”

Reviews of first draft of second paper due November 10

Week 11: 13,15 November **Science**: Goodman “The new riddle of induction”

Week 12: 20,22 November **Time**: Sider “Time”

Final draft of second paper due November 24

Week 13: 27,29 November **Mathematics**: Shapiro *Thinking about mathematics* excerpt

Week 14: 4,6 December **The meaning of life**: Wolf: ‘The meanings of lives’

Reviews of final draft of second paper due December 6