

Oran Magal

Lectures: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 12:35-13:25, McMed 522

Office hours: Fridays 10:00-12:00, Leacock 941

What is this course about?

What is philosophy? There is no better way to answer this question than to engage in philosophy together. We begin with Socrates: on trial for his life, he explains what philosophy is and why it is valuable both for a person's own life and for society at large. From there, we go on to discuss a range of other topics, drawing both on 'classical' and contemporary readings. Each topic is discussed briefly; the idea is to introduce a few of the main questions and arguments concerning each topic, as an invitation to further reading and study.

Topics:

1. The Trial of Socrates: what is the value of philosophy?
2. Philosophy as the key to a good life: Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics
3. On the possibility of knowledge: Plato, Descartes, Wittgenstein
4. The social contract, harm principle, and justice as fairness: Hobbes, Rousseau, Mill, and Rawls
5. The crisis of modernity and the 'death of god': Nietzsche
6. Existentialism: Kierkegaard and Camus
7. Artificial Intelligence: Searle's "Chinese Room"
8. Paradoxes: student's choice between (i) Zeno's paradoxes (ii) the 'grandfather paradox' of time-travel (iii) the Liar Paradox and Gödel's Incompleteness

Required background:

No previous background required, all students welcome.

Required reading material:

Our textbook is: Nigel Warburton, *A Little History of Philosophy*, Yale University Press 2012. Copies will be available at The Word bookstore, 469 Milton Street (a short walk from the Milton Gate). Please bring cash, the store does not accept cards. You should also have access to an electronic version of the book through McGill Library. All additional reading materials will be provided on the course website; a full list of readings by week is provided below.

Marking and Assessment:

The final mark is composed of the following:

1. Weekly reading assignments (approx. 50 words each) – 20%
2. In-class assignments (during tutorial conferences) – 10%
3. Essay (developed in two stages) – 20% x2, total 40%
Due dates: October 17th, November 21st
4. Final exam – 30%
Date of the final exam to be determined by McGill

Details:

1. Essay: essay topics and detailed instructions will be given 2 weeks prior to the due date. The expected length is between 2000-2500 words. After submitting your essay for the first time (Stage 1), your work will be graded and you will be given detailed feedback from your TA. You will then revise and improve your work based on these comments, and submit the revised essay (Stage 2). Part of the grade for the revised essay is for addressing the comments you had been given after Stage 1, therefore even excellent essays that received an 'A' in Stage 1 will still need to be revised and improved for Stage 2.

2. Final exam: this will be a formal 3-hour exam during exam period. It will consist of short open questions (no multiple-choice) about material covered during the lectures. A study guide clarifying what is required for the exam will be distributed to students by the end of classes.
3. Weekly reading assignments: starting from the 2nd week of classes, each week you will be given a short reading assignment (expected length of answers: 50-75 words). These are questions about the required reading for that week, worth 2% each. These are graded on a scale of 1-10 such that, for example, 10 is 'excellent', 7.5 is 'good', 5 is 'unfortunately wrong, but you get points for effort' and 0 is for not submitting work at all. A total of 12 such assignments will be given, out of which students must submit 10. If more than 10 are submitted, we will use the best 10 for the final grade.
4. In-class activities: during each of the 11 conferences, there will be some in-class activity designed by the TA. Only students who attend their conference will get credit for this activity: 1% each, for a total of 10% points. You can miss one of your conferences without consequences for your final mark. Students who have a medical (or similarly serious) reason for missing their conference will be able to get credit for the activity by submitting equivalent work to their TA.

Important note on submitting work:

All work is to be submitted online through *MyCourses* – **not by email**. Submit file in PDF or DOCX file only. In other words: if you are using a word-processor other than Microsoft Word, please use the 'save as' or 'export' function to save your work as a PDF before uploading it. We may not be able to read files submitted in other formats and you would get no credit for that work.

Readings for each week:

Reminder: starting from the 2nd week of classes until the 12th week (inclusive), *all Friday lectures are replaced by conferences*. The first and last Friday classes (September 2nd & December 2nd) are lectures in our usual classroom. Note: due to days off for Labour Day (Sept. 5th) & Thanksgiving (Monday, Oct. 10th), you should pay attention to the specific days in each 'week' unit below.

1. Week 1 (Sept. 2nd, 7th, 9th): **What is Philosophy? – Socrates and Plato**
 - Textbook, pp. 1-8
 - Plato, *Apology* (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Plato, *Crito* and *Phaedo*
2. Week 2 (Sept. 12th, 14th, 16th): **Aristotle on the Good Life**
 - Textbook, pp. 9-14 & 28-33
 - Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, excerpts (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Stanford Encyclopedea of Philosophy, entries: "Aristotle's Ethics", "Ancient Ethics"
 - Optional: Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, Chapter 11 (*MyCourses*)
3. Week 3 (Sept. 19nd, 21st, 23rd): **Knowledge I: Plato's Foundations**
 - Textbook pp. 15-21
 - Plato, excerpts from *Meno* (on *MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Plato, *The Republic* Books V-VII and *Theaetetus*
 - Optional: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry: "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology", sections 10-13
 - Optional: Julia Annas, *Plato: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003)
4. Week 4 (Sept. 26th, 28th, 30th): **Knowledge II: Descartes's Foundations**
 - Textbook, pp. 62-68
 - Descartes, excerpts from *Meditations on First Philosophy* (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
 - Optional: Stanford Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "Descartes' Epistemology"
5. Week 5 (Oct. 3rd, 5th, 7th): **Knowledge III: Nietzsche & Wittgenstein against Foundations**
 - Textbook, pp. 202-207
 - Nietzsche, excerpts from *Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense* (*MyCourses*)
 - Wittgenstein, excerpts from *On Certainty* (*MyCourses*)

- Optional: Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein*, Ch. 11: "On Scepticism and Certainty"
 - Optional: Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1979)
6. Week 6 (Oct. 12th, 14th, 17th): **Political Philosophy: the Social Contract**
- Textbook, pp. 57-61 & 105-109
 - Optional: Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, entry: "Social Contract Theory"
 - Optional: David Miller, *Political Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003)
7. Week 7 (Oct. 19th, 21st, 24th): **Political Philosophy: Liberalism and the Harm Principle**
- Textbook, pp. 138-144
 - J. S. Mill, excerpts from *On Liberty* (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Textbook, 228-233
 - Optional: Stanford Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "John Rawls", section 4
8. Week 8 (Oct. 26th, 28th, 31st): **Nietzsche and the Crisis of Modernity**
- Textbook, pp. 171-175
 - Nietzsche, excerpts from *The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*
 - Optional: Stanford Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "Friedrich Nietzsche", sections 3-4
 - Optional: Michael Tanner, *Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)
9. Week 9 (Nov. 2nd, 4th, 7th): **Religious Existentialism: Kierkegaard**
- Textbook, pp. 152-157
 - Søren Kierkegaard, excerpts from *Fear and Trembling* (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Stanford Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "Existentialism", section 1
 - Optional: Internet Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "Søren Kierkegaard", section 2
 - Optional: Patrick Gardiner, *Kierkegaard: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2002)
10. Week 10 (Nov. 9th, 11th, 14th): **Existentialism: Absurdity & the Anguish of Freedom**
- Textbook, pp. 196-201
 - Albert Camus, excerpts from *The Myth of Sisyphus* (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Stanford Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "Existentialism", sections 2-3
 - Optional: Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (English transl.: *Existentialism is a Humanism*)
 - Optional: Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006)
11. Week 11 (Nov. 16th, 18th, 21st): **Is Artificial Intelligence Possible?**
- John Searle, "Can Computers Think?" (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Terry Bison's short story, "They're Made out of Meat" (*MyCourses*)
 - Optional: Stanford Enc. of Philosophy, entry: "The Chinese Room"
 - Optional: Margaret Boden, "Artificial Creativity" (*MyCourses*)
12. Week 12 (Nov. 23rd, 25th, 28th): **Paradoxes**
- To be determined, based on student choice of topic: Zeno's paradoxes of motion, The Liar Paradox & Gödel's Incompleteness, or the paradoxes of time-travel
13. Week 13 (Nov. 30th, Dec. 2nd, Dec. 5th):
- To be determined (this list will be updated on *MyCourses*)

Policy for Late Work: Extensions to deadlines set will be granted only in **exceptional** circumstances, usually only for medical reasons and with a medical note or other, similar emergencies, appropriately documented. Late work will be penalized at the rate of 3 percentage points per day overdue.

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/integrity).