



Intro to Philosophy II

Oran Magal / Winter 2020

Philosophy: The Love of Wisdom

Philosophy, at its roots, can be seen as a search for wisdom: a quest for better understanding of ourselves, the world, and how to live guided by this understanding – in other words, how to live “philosophically”. In this course, we will examine how this idea is carried out in three of the world’s major philosophical traditions: in classical Greece, China, and India.

However, these ideas are not merely historical curiosities: they are alive and meaningful in our world today. To show this, we will read works by recent and contemporary philosophers who are responding to these ancient ideas and are in a dialogue with them.

Details on the topics we will cover and the readings for each one are provided below.



Readings and textbook

Most readings will be provided as PDFs on *MyCourses*; one book will need to be purchased: *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, 3rd ed., translated by Grube and revised by Cooper, Hackett Publishing, 2001. The book will be available for purchase (cost: about 10\$) from *The Word* bookstore at 469 Milton Street (a short walk from campus).

Part 1: Classical Greek and Hellenistic Philosophy

We start with Socrates in ancient Athens, on trial for his life largely because of the way he pursued philosophy. Socrates accepts his death sentence and execution with philosophical resignation; we will aim to understand how and why, and contrast this with an important 20th century movement of resisting injustice rather than accepting it with resignation: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and the appeal to civil disobedience. We shall then consider two other schools of 'philosophical living' during this period: Stoicism and Epicureanism. Finally, we will discuss his great rivals, the Sophists, whom the contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that we still encounter today under different names. Along the way, we will grapple with central themes that run through the entire history of philosophy in the west: self-examination and self-deception, irony, authenticity, and the challenge of relativism.

Required:

1. Plato, *Euthyphro*
2. Plato, *The Apology*
3. Plato, *Crito*
4. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail", *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1963, Volume 212 No. 2, pp. 78-88. (on *MyCourses*)
5. Plato, *Phaedo* (only the scene of Socrates' death)
6. Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2015, pp. 3-16, 31-44, 73-79 (available as e-book through McGill's library)
7. Martha Nussbaum (1994), "Skepticism about Practical Reason in Literature and the Law" (on *MyCourses*)

Optional:

1. Emily Wilson, *The Death of Socrates*, Chapter 1: "Socrates' Philosophy". Harvard University Press, 2007.
2. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Chapter 1: "Platonic Irony – Author and Audience". University of California Press, 2000.
3. Stoicism and Epicureanism: selections from B. Inwood and L. P. Gerson (transl. & eds.), *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, 2nd ed., Hackett, 1997 (on *MyCourses*)
4. Martha Nussbaum, "Sophistry about Conventions" (1985)
5. Karuna Mantena, "Showdown for Nonviolence: The Theory and Practice of Nonviolent Politics", in Tommie Shelby & Brandon M. Terry (eds.), *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Harvard University Press, 2018. (E-book available through McGill Library)

Part 2: Classical China

The idea of humans as ‘social animals’ is central to many traditions of thought. “It is not good that man should be alone”, we read in *Genesis* 2:18. The great philosopher Aristotle, in ancient Greece, defined humans as a **social animal**. Our focus in this unit, however, will be on the classical Chinese tradition of philosophy, and how the conflict between individualism and the demands of society plays out in it. Relatedly, we will consider the debate, within this tradition, about **human nature**: again, a central question to all traditions of philosophy. Are people by nature good or bad? Or perhaps the very categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are the problem? The way we answer these questions will have direct consequences for the way we ought to live our lives.

Required

1. Selections from Kongzi (Confucius), Edward Slingerland (transl.), *Analects*, Hackett, 2003 (excerpts on *MyCourses*)
2. Selections from Mengzi (Mencius), Irene Bloom (transl.), *Mencius*, Columbia Univ. Press, 2009 (on *MyCourses*)
3. Selections from Xunzi, in P. J. Ivanhoe (ed.), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Hackett, 2006, pp. 269-271, 277-278 (on *MyCourses*)
4. Selections from Laozi, *Daodejing*, in Wing-Tsit Chan (transl. & ed.), *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 1963
5. Selections from Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), Burton Watson (transl. & ed.), *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. Columbia University Press, 1968 (on *MyCourses*)

Part 3: Ancient and Classical India

A number of philosophical schools hold that the key to life as it should be lived is to discover your **true self**. In contrast, **Buddhism** argues that the very idea of a self is a harmful delusion: only by liberating ourselves from the **illusion of self** can we free ourselves from suffering. In this unit we will consider first the Hinduist background from which Buddhism arose: the Vedic religion and the fundamental ideas of Vedanta philosophy. We will then contrast these with the radical philosophical precepts of early Buddhism: the absence of self, the ‘dependent-arising’ of all things, and how we can live philosophically by liberating ourselves from such false beliefs.

Required:

1. Olivelle, P. (1998). *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press. Available as e-book through McGill library. Pages 273-287 (odd pages only, it is a bilingual edition.)

2. Embree, A. T. (1992). *Sources of Indian tradition: 1*. New Delhi: Penguin Books. Pages 100-113. (On MyCourses)

Optional:

1. Ganeri, J. (2007). *The concealed art of the soul: Theories of self and practices of truth in Indian ethics and epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch. 1: "Hidden in a Cave: The Upaniṣadic Self". Available as e-book through McGill Library.
2. Coseru, Christian, "Mind in Indian Buddhist Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/mind-indian-buddhism/>

Part 4: A Selection from Modern Philosophy

In this final part of our course, we will consider texts from 20th century and current day philosophers, all of which deal with the connections between philosophy and various aspects of life, and which do so while building on and responding to some of the ideas we examined earlier in the course.

Required:

1. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", in *Social Research* Vol. 38 No. 3 (Autumn 1971), pp. 417-446.
2. Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger", in *The Journal of Political Philosophy* Vol. 26 No. 2 (June 2018), pp. 123-144.
3. Jan Zwicky, *Alkibiades' Love: Essays in Philosophy*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. Chapter 4: "Dream Logic and the Politics of Interpretation", pp. 87-105.

Means of Evaluation

The final grade in the course comprises the following (explanation below):

Assignment	Due date	% of final grade
Final essay: 1 st version	March 16 th	30
Final essay: 2 nd version	April 14 th	10
Reading assignments (best 4 out of 5)	Throughout	40 (4x 10% each)
In-class assignments (during conferences)	Throughout	20 (10x 2% each)

Final Essay

You will be provided instructions for the final essay at least 2 weeks before the due-date. Advice on how to write a philosophy essay will be provided during the tutorial conferences close to the

due-date. In the first stage (30%) you will write a full, edited, and polished essay – in other words, *not a sketch or a first draft* but a proper essay. This will receive a grade as well as detailed comments from one of the teaching assistants (TAs).

The second stage (10%): based on the feedback you received, you will *revise and resubmit your work*. To receive the full points, it is expected that you demonstrate an ability to both understand and implement feedback, an important writing skill in both academic and non-academic professional contexts. (Note: even if you receive an excellent mark on the first draft, there is *always* much to improve; this is true at all stages of training, from beginner to expert.) The second draft will only receive a grade, no further comments.

Reading assignments

You will need to complete **4 out of 5** of the reading assignments that will be distributed on MyCourses throughout the term. (You are welcome to complete all five, in which case the best four will be used to calculate your final mark.)

Each reading assignment will be available at least one week before it is due. Please note that, because the answer to the reading assignment will be given in class after the due-date, **late reading assignments will not be accepted**. If there are special circumstances (e.g., being sick for more than one day, etc.), the instructor will assign an alternative reading assignment.

In-Class Assignments

As noted above, starting from the third week of classes, the Friday lecture is replaced by tutorial conferences (there will be an announcement on *MyCourses* to remind you). In each such conference there will be a short in-class assignment to do and to submit. You are expected to complete **10 out of the 11** in-class assignments, and to do so you need to attend your conference. These assignments will **not** be distributed on *MyCourses*. You can miss one conference without consequences; if you have a valid reason for missing more than one, please contact the instructor and we will find alternative work for the same credit. (Students with accessibility or disability issues related to writing in class: please contact me, we will of course accommodate and resolve any such issues.)

Policy on extensions and late work

If you have a valid reason to ask for an extension, please **write to me** (oran.magal@mcgill.ca), not your TAs, or come see me during office hours, **before the relevant work is due**. As a

general rule, extensions will be given only for medical reasons or serious personal/family circumstances.

Late reading assignments will not be accepted at all. Late essays (stage 1 or 2) will be penalized 3 percent-points for each day (or part of a day) late, and will not be accepted later than 2 weeks after the due-date.

In-class assignments are meant to be done *in class*, during the tutorial conferences. Students with a valid reason for missing a conference may contact their TA to complete equivalent work for the same points.

How to Submit Your Work

Submitting work through *MyCourses*: reading assignments and essay instructions will be distributed through *MyCourses* (in the ‘assignments’ tab of the course page), and you will submit your work through the same part of the course page on *MyCourses*.

Please do not submit printed work in class or under my office door, only through *MyCourses*.

Important: submit all work in PDF or DOCX (Microsoft Word) file formats. Microsoft Word (for PC or Mac) is provided to you for free through McGill. If you are using any other software, simply use *export* or *save as* to save your work as a PDF prior to submitting it. **Files submitted in other formats will not be graded, and will not count as work submitted.**

McGill Policies and Statements

Language of Submission

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. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).

Academic Integrity

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/ for more information)

Varia

Mobile computing and communications devices are permitted in class insofar as their use does not disrupt the teaching and learning process. Please do not record the lectures without instructor's permission.

Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009.

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.