This is a course in Aristotle's biology and the metaphysical questions associated with the biology. The biological works include: the History of Animals, the Parts of Animals, the Generation of Animals, and On the Soul. We will read large sections from these in conjunction with parts of Aristotle's Physics, Generation and Corruption, Meteorology and Metaphysics. The course considers what is usually called Aristotle's hylomorphic theory: the view that familiar objects in the world are made up of matter and form. We will be focusing on animals, and the relation between body and soul.

The course begins with a fundamental question that bridges Aristotle's natural philosophy and metaphysics: Is there unqualified change, and if so, how does it differ from qualified change? So, when a new animal is produced how do the form and the matter that together make up that animal come to form a unified being? We will continue by considering a series of issues and questions that together build the account of the ensouled being -- what it is and how it comes into being. What underlies change and how is it characterized? How is matter constituted? How does matter function as a cause? What is the difference between matter and body? How does an animal acquire a soul in the course of conception? How is the soul organized, and how does it use the body?

For Aristotle answering these questions requires technical discussions of, for example, blood, semen, and the processes of conception as well as more abstract arguments.

Prerequisites:

Students should have taken PHIL 355 Aristotle before enrolling in this course.

Note on pedagogy: Students should expect to interact, with the instructor and with one another, during class time. This will require preparation in advance, and active participation during classes.

Texts: Readings will be made available on MyCourses. Students may wish to purchase The Complete Works of Aristotle (ed. Jonathan Barnes), or, in French, Aristote: Oeuvres Complètes (ed. Pierre Pellegrin), but these will be expensive.

Course Requirements: weekly short writing assignments over 10 weeks (2% each = 20%); one assignment (30%); one term paper (50%). All work must be submitted through the MyCourses portal on the date and at the time indicated in order to avoid penalties. Students are advised to save electronic versions of all their work. You are expected to have read the assigned material before each class (consult the syllabus for weekly readings). THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS COURSE MAY BE CHANGED, DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN THE COURSE. IF THEY CHANGE, I WILL INFORM THE CLASS AND POST A NEW COURSE OUTLINE.

Be advised that written work for this course may be submitted to text-matching software.
Grading criteria: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate what Aristotle says (or seems to say), or what was said in class. An “A” indicates that you not only understand the material, but that you have also thought critically about it, grasping at least some of its subtleties and implications. A “B” reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; “B” work does not capture the complexity of the issues. A “C” suggests a struggle with the material that results in basic comprehension but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A “D” indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An “F” indicates no understanding either of the assignment or of the material.

Policy on the use of technology in the classroom:

The use of electronic devices (computers, iPads, cell phones, etc.) is not permitted during class without special permission from the instructor.

All electronic devices must be turned off and stored during the class period. If you wish to be exempted for medical or academic reasons, please send me an e-mail setting out your reasons. The recording of lectures is not permitted and is illegal without the consent of the instructor. Please consider these policies before enrolling for this course.

Policy on extensions:

No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of a third of a grade per calendar day past the due date. For example, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a grade of B-; the same paper, if two days late, would receive a C+.

Required syllabus statements:

McGill University values academic integrity. All students must, therefore, 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).

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.

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