Philosophy 200: Introduction to Philosophy

(Tentative Course Outline, subject to change)

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Course Location and time: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The aim of this course is to introduce students to philosophical ways of thinking. We will do this by reflecting on a wide range of topics in theoretical analytic philosophy, analyzing philosophical puzzles and paradoxes, and challenging views and beliefs that we take for granted in everyday life. We will begin the course with a general overview of the area of theoretical philosophy and consider practical issues on how to write and read philosophical texts and interpret philosophical arguments in the area. We then consider classical philosophical questions and problems in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology (the theory of knowledge), the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of language. In particular, we shall discuss the following topics:

- **Introduction:**
  - What is philosophy?
  - Guidelines on Reading and Writing Philosophy
  - What is a philosophical argument?

- **Metaphysics & Philosophy of Mind:**
  - Do we have free will?
  - What is a person?
  - What is the nature of our minds?
  - Is time travel possible?
  - Can properties be features of more than one thing?

- **Epistemology:**
  - Do you really know that you have hands?
  - What is knowledge?

- **Philosophy of Language:**
  - What is truth?
  - What is meaning?
  - Meaning vs. saying
  - The analytic and the synthetic

FORMAT
This course will be taught through a combination of pre-recorded lectures, ‘live’ review/Q&A sessions on Zoom with the instructor, and in-person conferences with the Teaching Assistants (‘TAs’).
Lectures: lectures will be pre-recorded and posted on MyCourses by 11:35 on Mondays. They replace the Monday meetings on our schedule. For the best results, students should read the assigned materials before watching the lecture. The only exception is the very first lecture, which will be delivered live at class time on Wednesday, Sept. 1st, 12:35-13:25. In this lecture we will have a chance to meet each other and to go over this course outline.

Instructor Live Sessions: Instructor live sessions complementing the pre-recorded lectures will take place on Wednesdays, during the time of the course (12:35-13:25). Instructor live sessions will take place on Zoom and will consist of a review of the main points of the material discussed during the week, followed by a Q&A session. These live sessions will be available for interactive discussion and will not be recorded.

Tutorial Conferences with TAs: starting in the third week of lectures and until the 12th week of the course, inclusive, the Friday lecture is replaced by in-person tutorial conferences with a TA. These are discussion sessions in a smaller group, of up to 30 students. Their purpose is to provide further opportunity to ask questions, discuss with fellow students, and to deepen your understanding of the readings, as well as to provide general guidance for paper submissions. You must register for a conference as part of this course.

Office hours: I will hold office hours on Mondays from 09:00-11:00 on Zoom. A link will be provided on MyCourses.

TAs’ office hours: TAs will also hold office hours. Details will be provided separately.

ASSESSMENT

1. Weekly reactions to readings: 10%
   Beginning in Week 3 up to Week 12, students will submit, via MyCourses, a reaction to the week’s readings. The submissions deadline is Tuesdays, 9:00 am. These reactions should be short (~60 words) ideas or questions relating to the material from the readings and the Monday lecture. These will be assessed for credit only (pass/fail). Students will receive 1.5 points for each completed exercise, up to a maximum of 10 points possible. (This builds in leeway for up to three missed exercises in the term.) Students should complete this assignment even if they need to miss our Zoom class that week. No late or make-up assignments are available for this component.

2. Short written exercise 1: 20%
   You will write a 500-word paper on an exam question posted on MyCourses. The paper must be submitted electronically (as MS Word document) on MyCourses. Due date: October 8th, 22:00.

3. Short written exercise 2: 30%
   You will write a 1,000-word paper on an exam question posted on MyCourses. The topic must differ from the topic of your first essay. The paper must be submitted electronically (as MS Word document) on MyCourses. Due date: November 5th, 22:00.

4. Short written exercise 3: 40%
   You will write a 1,500-word paper on an exam question posted on MyCourses. The topic must differ from the topic of your first and second essay. The paper must be
submitted electronically (as MS Word document) on MyCourses. **Due date: December 3rd, 22:00.**

All work is to be submitted through MyCourses. Weekly reactions to readings will be submitted as plain text (there will be a box where you can either type in or copy/paste your questions and comments). Written essays must be submitted as DOCX (MS-Word) files to allow for reviewing and commenting.

Students are asked to read Jim Pryor’s guidelines on how to read and write philosophy: http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html and http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html

**EXTENSIONS**  
Late submissions will be downgraded at a rate of 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g., from A- to B+, C to C-), including weekend days/holidays. Late submissions will not be accepted 10 days after the deadline and the paper will count as 0%. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) only when requested at least 24 hours before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor’s note documenting illness. Accommodations for special circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic will be considered. Extensions will not be more than seven days. No extensions will be granted for Weekly Reactions to Readings.

**MYCOURSES**  
The webpage for this course is located at [www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/](http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/). It will be used to post the syllabus, readings, and periodic announcements. There is also a discussion function, and you are encouraged to post questions there. You must check the course webpage regularly.

**IMPORTANT:** papers must be submitted (as MS Word documents) on MyCourses. If you have technical problems with MyCourses, contact ICT customer support at: [http://www.mcgill.ca/it/](http://www.mcgill.ca/it/).

**TEXTBOOKS**  
This course does not use a textbook, but many of the articles we shall read can be found in:


**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**  
Readings in [square brackets] are optional. Schedule is subject to change.

- **Week 1:** Introduction: What is philosophy?  
  - No readings.
- **Week 2:** a. Guidelines on reading and writing philosophy  
  - Pryor: *Guidelines.*
b. What is a philosophical argument?
   - Blackburn: *The Elements of Logic*.

Week 3:  Do we have free will?
   - Sider: *Free Will and Determinism*.
   - [Ayer: *Freedom and Necessity*].

*Conferences begin.*

Week 4:  What is a person?
   - Parfit: *Personal Identity*.
   - [Olson: *Personal Identity*].

Week 5:  What is the nature of our minds?
   - Ravenscroft: *Dualism*.
   - [Descartes: *Meditations 2 & 6 (excerpts)*.]
   - [Ravenscroft: *Behaviorism*].

Week 6:  Is time travel possible?
   - Sider: *Time*.
   - [Lewis: *The Paradoxes of Time Travel*].

*First Paper due: October 8th, 22:00.*

Week 7:  Can properties be features of more than one thing?
   - MacDonald: *Universals and the Realism/Nominalism Dispute*
   - Conee: *Universals*.
   - [Russell: *The World of Universals*].

Week 8:  Do you know that you have hands?
   - [Descartes: *Meditations 1-2*].
   - [Moore: *Proof of an External World (excerpts)*].

Week 9:  What is knowledge?
   - [Plato: *Meno (excerpts)*].
   - [Gettier: *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*]

Week 10:  What is truth?
   - Russell: *Truth and Falsehood*.
   - [Horwich: *The minimalist conception of truth*].

*Second Paper due: November 5th, 22:00.*

Week 11:  What is meaning?
   - Lycan: *The Philosophy of Language*, Ch. 9.
   - [Davidson: *Truth and Meaning*].

Week 12:  Meaning vs. saying
   - Blome-Tillmann: *Conversational Implicatures*.
   - [Grice: *Logic and Conversation*].
Week 13: The analytic and the synthetic
  - Quine: *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*.
  - [Grice/Strawson: *In Defense of a Dogma*].

Week 14: TBA

*Third Paper due: December 3rd, 22:00.*

**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” (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See McGill’s guide to academic honesty for more information).

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within MyCourses.

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*No audio or video recording of any kind, including photography, is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor. The instructor reserves the right to take legal action against any unauthorized use of copyrighted contents.*

**FURTHER 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. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.” (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

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