



Intro to Philosophy

Course information:

Course #:	PHIL 200
Term:	Fall 2022
Course pre-requisites:	None
Course schedule:	Mon/Wed/Fri 10:35-11:25
Course location:	Adams Auditorium

Instructor information:

Name:	Dr. Oran Magal
Email:	oran.magal@mcgill.ca
Office hours:	Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30-13:30
Office location:	TBA



“Blown Away”, by Penny Hardy

What to expect when you’re expecting philosophy

Philosophy, at its roots, can be seen as a search for wisdom: a quest for better understanding of ourselves and the world. 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, as well as in a selection from contemporary philosophers.

Although the history of ideas across the globe is worth studying for its own sake, one of the goals of this course is to show that they are not merely historical curiosities: they are “alive” and meaningful in our lives today.

The emphasis in this course will be on questions of metaphysics (reality, the nature of things, etc.) and the theory of knowledge. This is to avoid overlap with the other introductory philosophy course to be offered in Winter 2023 – *The Good Life* (PHIL 202), which is expected to focus on ethical and political philosophy.

Required Course Materials:

All of the readings will be provided through *MyCourses*, either as PDFs or as links to papers and e-books accessible via McGill’s library.

Instructional Method:

For the first two weeks, lectures will take place Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Starting from the third week of lectures, the Friday lecture will be replaced by a tutorial conference (see below).

The lectures will be recorded and posted on *MyCourses*. Nevertheless, students are strongly encouraged to attend in person, especially since in-person studying has proved to be more pedagogically effective than watching a recorded lecture. **For the best results, students should read the assigned materials before attending the relevant lectures.**

Tutorial conferences with the TAs: starting on the *third* week of lectures and until the 12th week of the course, inclusive, the Friday lecture is replaced by tutorial conferences with a TA. During the very last week of classes, we will once again have lectures on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (see detailed schedule below).

Attendance in these conferences is required, and there will be assignments linked with the conferences (see below). Students who cannot attend some or all conferences due to a serious reason outside their control should contact the instructor as soon as possible to work out alternative work for the same credit. Please note that these classes with the TAs will not be recorded.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Part 1: The Love of Wisdom – Is Real Knowledge Possible?

Although there are historically earlier philosophers, the ‘Western’ tradition of philosophy is often said to start with Socrates and Plato, and so we shall begin there, too. Socrates, the founding figure, was an enigmatic figure to his contemporaries and remains so for us; what was his “love of wisdom”? From there, we shall move on to discuss Plato’s famous parable of the cave, discuss a surprising connection between knowledge and love, and consider the limitations of possible knowledge for beings such as ourselves.

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings + assignments
0	W Aug 31 st	Introduction	Please read the syllabus
1	F Sept. 2 nd M Sept. 5th W Sept. 7 th F Sept. 9 th	Plato: Background, how to read his works	Required text(s): Plato, <i>The Apology</i> (for Friday, Sept. 2 nd) Gail Fine, “Does Socrates Claim to Know that He Knows Nothing?” (for Wed., Sept. 7 th) NB: Monday, Sept. 5 th is Labour Day
2	M Sept. 12 th W Sept. 14 th F Sept. 16 th	Appearance and reality, mere belief and genuine knowledge: Plato’s Cave and the Divided Line	Required: Excerpts from Plato’s <i>Republic</i> (471c-502c, then 502c-521b, via McGill Library) Optional, strongly recommended: Julia Annas, <i>An Introduction to Plato’s Republic</i> , Ch. 10, “Understanding the Good: Sun, Line, and Cave” Optional: Nickolas Pappas, <i>The Routledge Guidebook to Plato’s Republic</i> , Ch. 7: Metaphysics and Epistemology (via McGill Library)

3	M Sept. 19 th W Sept. 21 st F Sept. 23 rd	Diotima on how love is the key to knowledge	Required: Excerpts from Plato's <i>Symposium</i> (Diotima's speech, 198a-212c) Optional: Jan Zwicky, "Why is Diotima a Woman?", in <i>Alkibiades' Love: Essays in Philosophy</i> NB: Conferences start this week!
4	M Sept. 26 th W Sept. 28 th F Sept. 30 th	The limits of possible knowledge	Required: Rae Langton, "Ignorance of Things in Themselves" Optional: N. Warburton, "Kant", in <i>A Little History of Philosophy</i> + N. Stang, "Kant's Transcendental Idealism" (SEP entry)

Part 2: If I have not myself, whom have I?

There can be nothing closer to us than our very selves, and yet, how well do we understand the nature of this 'self'? In this part of the course, we will consider several different ways of thinking about this question, starting with two conceptions that emphasize the connection between 'self' and moral responsibility (in classical India and in one strand of modern thought on this topic), moving on to consider two alternative views: the Buddhist view that there is in fact *no* self, as well as an African view of the nature of self.

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings + assignments
5	M Oct. 3 rd W Oct. 5 th F Oct. 7 th	The self, <i>Dharma</i> , and <i>Karma</i> in classical Indian philosophy	Required: Excerpts from the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , translated by Barbara Stoler Miller Optional: Johannes Bronkhorst, <i>Karma</i> (excerpts)
6	M Oct. 10th W Oct. 12th Th Oct. 13 th F Oct. 14th	The self and responsibility in modern philosophy NB 1: Monday, Oct. 10 th is a holiday and Wednesday, Oct. 12 th is part of the reading break NB 2: Thursday, Oct. 13 th follows a Monday schedule. Friday, Oct. 14 th follows a Tuesday schedule.	Required: Marya Schechtman, "The Same and the Same: Two Views of Psychological Continuity" NB: There will be no conferences this week .
7	M Oct. 17 th W Oct. 19 th F Oct. 21 st	The self and responsibility in modern philosophy, continued	Required: Marya Schechtman, "The Same and the Same: Two Views of Psychological Continuity" Optional: Eric T. Olson, "Personal Identity" (SEP entry)
8	M Oct. 24 th W Oct. 26 th F Oct. 28 th	"No self": the Buddhist denial of selfhood	Required: Excerpts from the writings of Fazang (in Tiwald & van Norden, editors, <i>Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy</i>) Optional: Mark Siderits, <i>How Things Are</i> , Ch. 2-3 (available through McGill Library)
9	M Oct. 31 st W Nov. 2 nd F Nov. 4 th	An analysis of the self in African philosophy	Required: Kwame Gyekye, "The Akan Concept of a Person" Optional: Ajume Wingo, "Akan Philosophy of the Person" (SEP entry)

Part 3: Is there any hope of meaning in an indifferent cosmos?

One of the greatest philosophical challenges of modern times is to make sense of our existence in a natural world: in the scientific worldview, it seems that the world is thought of as no more than the sum of interactions of its basic building-blocks, guided by physical laws that have no consciousness, and in which there is no plan for us. Does this view of the world leave room for a *meaningful* existence? We will consider several ways of answering ‘yes’ to this question.

10	M Nov. 7 th W Nov. 9 th F Nov. 11 th	Can we trust what we evolved to think and believe?	Required: Sharon Street, “Does anything really matter or did we just evolve to think so?” Optional: William J. Talbott, “How could a ‘blind’ evolutionary process have made human moral beliefs sensitive to strongly universal, objective moral standards?” (link on <i>MyCourses</i>)
11	M Nov. 14 th W Nov. 16 th F Nov. 18 th	What could an answer to the question of “the meaning of life” look like?	Required: Susan Wolf, “Meaning in life and why it matters” Optional: Hannah Kim, “Camus and Sartre on the Absurd” (link on <i>MyCourses</i>)
12	M Nov. 21 st W Nov. 23 rd F Nov. 25 th	A “secular faith”: how the inevitable end of life gives it meaning	Required: Martin Hägglund, excerpt from <i>This Life</i> , Ch. 2: “Love” Optional: Sharon Krishek, “The Existential Dimension of Faith”, in D. Conway (ed.), <i>Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling: A Critical Guide</i> NB: this is the last week of tutorial conferences.
13	M Nov. 28 th W Nov. 30 th F Dec. 2 nd	Optional bonus topic (will not be included in the final exam, details to be announced)	Readings: optional, to be announced NB: no conferences, only lectures this week
13½	M Dec. 5 th	Exam review + time for student questions	

Means of Evaluation

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

Assignment	Due date	% of final grade
Reading assignments (Best 5 out of 6)	Weeks 4 (Sept 26 th), 6 (Oct 13 th), 8 (Oct 24 th), 10 (Nov 7 th), 11 (Nov 14 th), 12 (Nov 21 st)	50 (5x 10% each)
Conference-related assignments (Required: 6 out of 9)	Weekly (once conferences begin)	10 (6x 1.66% each)
Final exam (Take-home, open book & notes)	Exam period (date to be set by McGill)	40

Reading assignments

You will need to complete **5 out of 6** of the reading assignments that will be distributed on MyCourses throughout the term. (You are welcome to complete all six, in which case the best five 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 discussed in class after the due-date, **late reading assignments will not be accepted unless you have written permission from the instructor**. If there are special circumstances (e.g., being sick for more than one day, etc.), the instructor may assign an alternative reading assignment.

Conference-related assignments

Starting from the third week of classes, the Thursday lecture is replaced by tutorial conferences. In each such conference there will be a short in-class assignment to do and to submit. You are expected to complete **6 out of 9** such assignments, and to do so you *must* attend your conference. These assignments will *not* be distributed on *MyCourses*. You can miss up to three conferences for any reason. If you have a valid reason for missing more than three conferences, please contact the instructor and we will find alternative work for the same credit.

Final exam

The due date for the exam is the date that will appear in the exam schedule determined by McGill, and this is when the exam needs to be handed in. The exam will be posted in the assignments tab in *MyCourses* at least 72 hours before the due date, but I will do my best to post it earlier than that, giving more time in which to write it.

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 to your TA, **before the relevant work is due**. As a rule, extensions will be given only for medical reasons or serious personal/family issues.

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 students should submit their work through the same part of the course page on *MyCourses*. Do not send your work by email to the instructor or the TAs unless you are specifically asked to do so.

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.