

# Philosophy 200: Introduction to Philosophy

## *Course Instructor:*

Professor Michael Blome-Tillmann

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Course Location and time: MCMED 522, 8:35-9:25

## *Teaching Assistants:*

Don Beith

Tim Juvshik

Eric Murphy

N.N.

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## **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 philosophical concepts and problems, 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 academic discipline of philosophy and consider practical issues on how to write and read philosophical texts and interpret philosophical arguments. We then consider classical philosophical questions and problems in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology (the theory of knowledge), the philosophy of mind, ethics, 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?
- *Ethics:*
  - Is morality objective or subjective?
- *Epistemology:*
  - Do you really know that you have hands?
  - What is knowledge?
- *Philosophy of Language:*
  - What is truth?
  - Is there truth in fiction?

## **ASSESSMENT**

10% Conference attendance and participation

20% First paper (500 words maximum; deadline: **October 2, 2013, 22:00**)

30% Second paper (1,000 words maximum, deadline: **November 6, 2012, 22:00**)

40% Final exam

*Conference attendance and participation:* The attendance grade is disproportional so that four or more unexcused absences result in 0%.

*First paper:* You will write a 500-word paper on one of the topics dealt with in the lectures. The paper will be due on October 2, 22:00 and must be submitted electronically (as MS Word document) on MyCourses.

*Second paper:* You will write a 1,000-word paper on one of the topics dealt with in the lectures. The topic must differ from the topic of your first essay. The paper will be due on November 6, 22:00 and must be submitted electronically (as MS Word document) on MyCourses.

*Final Exam:* There will be a formal final exam during the exam period.

## **EXTENSIONS**

Late papers will be downgraded at a rate of 5% per day (e.g. from 72% to 67%, 90% to 85%, etc.), 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. Extensions will not be more than seven days.

## **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/>.

## **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

Readings in [square brackets] are optional.

- Week 1: Introduction: What is philosophy?
- 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*].
- Week 4: What is a person?  
▪ Olson: *Personal Identity*.  
▪ [Parfit: *Personal Identity*].  
***1<sup>st</sup> paper due October 2, 2013, 22:00***
- Week 5: What is the nature of our minds?

- Ravenscroft: *Dualism*.
  - [Descartes: *Meditations 2 & 6 (excerpts)*.]
  - [Ravenscroft: *Behaviorism*].
  - [Ryle: *Descartes' Myth*].
- Week 6: Is time travel possible?
- Sider: *Time*.
  - [Lewis: *The Paradoxes of Time Travel*].
- Week 7: Can properties be features of more than one thing?
- Conee: *Universals*.
  - [Russell: *The World of Universals*].
  - [Armstrong: *Universals as Attributes*].
- Week 8: Is morality objective or subjective?
- Rachels: *The Challenge of Cultural Relativism*.
  - Rachels: *Egoism and Moral Scepticism*.
- Week 9: Do you know that you have hands?
- Descartes: *Meditations 1-2*.
  - Moore: *Proof of an External World (excerpts)*.
- Week 10: What is knowledge?
- Plato: *Meno (excerpts)*.
  - Gettier: *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*
  - Goldman: *A Causal Theory of Knowing*, esp. pp. 357-66, 369-72.
  - [Nozick: *Philosophical Explanations (excerpts)*].
- 2<sup>nd</sup> paper due November 6, 2013, 22:00**
- Week 11: What is truth?
- Russell: *Truth and Falsehood*.
  - [Horwich: *The minimalist conception of truth*].
- Week 12: Is there truth in fiction?
- Jubien: *Is There Truth in Fiction?*
  - [Lewis: *Truth in Fiction*].
- Week 13: TBA

### **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/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

Submissions to this course will be automatically checked for plagiarism by means of *Turnitin* or equivalent software.

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#### **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.

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