The aim of this course is not to present a body of knowledge called ‘philosophy’, but to introduce students to philosophical ways of thinking. We will do this by reflecting on a wide range of concepts and beliefs that we tend to take for granted in their ordinary use. We will begin with the related concepts of free will and moral responsibility. We will move on to questions about the nature of the mind and our knowledge of the world. Finally, we will reflect on questions about beauty, science, mathematics and the meaning of life!

You are expected to have read the week’s reading before the class meets, and to be prepared to discuss it. This is the purpose of the conference activities. The class is large, but lively discussion is possible and encouraged. Upon completion of this course students should be able to (i) find the argument of a text and restate it clearly in their own words; (ii) explain charitably viewpoints other than their own; (iii) think critically about the philosophical issues discussed in this course; (iv) write concise papers presenting well-formulated arguments and providing supporting evidence for their claims.

**Assessment**

The work for the course includes

(a) conference activities (15% of the final grade);
(b) a 500-word critical response (15%);
(c) a 1250-word paper (35% of the final grade) with peer-review component; and
(d) a final exam (35% of the final grade).

(a) **Conference activities**: Each week beginning with Week 3, you must submit an argument analysis. This will involve (i) extracting from the assigned reading an argument, which you will reconstruct in premise/conclusion form, and (ii) a very brief criticism of the argument. These will be used to initiate discussion in the conferences. To receive the full conference activity mark, you must submit 10 analyses (10 points) and present at least one of them to a small group in conference (5 points).

(b) **Critical response**: You will write a 500-word critical response to one of the readings. This will require isolating an important but problematic claim from the reading and explaining clearly why you think it’s problematic, and what implications that might have for the argument of the paper.

(c) **Paper**: You will write a 1250-word paper on an assigned topic in which you’ll explain clearly and critically assess a philosophical argument. There will be a mandatory peer-review component: a penalty of 10 points (out of 100) will be imposed for failure to complete the peer-review component properly and on time.
(d) **Final exam**: There will be a formal final exam during the exam period, consisting of argument analysis and/or short answer and/or short essay questions.

**Extensions**: Special arrangements will be made only in the event of illness (with a doctor’s note) or something of equal seriousness. **Note: only the lecturer can grant an extension; please do not ask the TAs.**

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

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

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.

**Tentative schedule of primary readings**
Readings will be made available on MyCourses. Further background readings will be recommended.

Week 1: 4, 6 September **Introduction, Free will and responsibility**: G. Strawson: “The impossibility of moral responsibility”
Week 2: 9, 11 September **Free will and responsibility continued**: Wolf: “Asymmetrical freedom”
Week 3: 16, 18 September **Moral responsibility**: Nagel “Moral luck”
  **Conference activities begin**
Week 4: 23, 25 September **Moral obligation**: Singer “Famine, Affluence and Morality”
Week 5: 30 September, 2 October **Mind and body**: Ryle “Descartes’ myth”
  **Critical response due on MyCourses October 4, 11pm.**
Week 6: 7 October **Consciousness** Nagel “What is it like to be a bat?” and Churchland “Are mental states irreducible to neurobiological states?”
Week 7: 16 October **Consciousness** continued
Week 8: 21, 23 October **Minds and machines**: Turing “Computing machinery and intelligence”
  **First draft of paper due on Peergrade MyCourses, October 25, 11pm.**
Week 9: 28, 30 October **Scepticism**: Chalmers “The Matrix as metaphysics”
Week 10: 4, 6 November **The self**: Parfit “Personal identity”
  **Reviews of first drafts due on Peergrade November 4.**
Week 11: 11,13 November **Beauty**: Hume “Of the standards of taste”
  **Final version of paper due on November 18**
Week 12: 18, 20 November **Science**: Goodman “The new riddle of induction” and Siegel “The visual experience of causation”
Week 13: 25, 27 November **Metaphysics**: Rosen “Numbers and other immaterial objects” and Sider “Time”
Week 14: 2, 3 December **The meaning of life**: Wolf: “The meanings of lives”