

PHIL 201: Introduction to Philosophy

Winter 2017

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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 the nature of 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. 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 clearly 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) an electronic journal (15% of the final grade); (b) a 1000-word paper (20% of the final grade); (c) a 1500-word paper (30% of the final grade); and (d) a final exam (35% of the final grade).

(a) *Electronic journal*: The journal is made up of twelve weekly entries of approximately 250 words each, addressing the class readings from weeks 2 through 14. The goal of each entry is to state the central argument of the week’s reading: what claim is the author defending, and what reason or evidence does the author adduce in support of that claim? Each entry is to be submitted through MyCourses by 11pm on the Tuesday preceding the week of lectures dealing with the reading—NB: the deadline is strict. The first entry is due by 11pm on January 10. Three of the journal entries will be randomly selected for assessment, each worth 5%.

(b) *First paper*: You will write a 1000-word paper expanding on the journal entry from week 2 or 3. You are expected to explain clearly the main argument of the paper. The paper must be submitted through MyCourses by 11pm on February 3.

(c) *Second paper*: You will write a paper of about 1500 words in stages during the semester. The task will include a peer-review process, details of which will be provided later in the semester. You will be expected to explain clearly *and* critically assess a philosophical argument on an assigned topic. The first draft will be due by 11pm on February 24, and the reviews by 11pm on March 10. The final version will be due by

11pm on April 7.

(d) *Final exam*: There will be a formal final exam during the exam period, consisting of argument analysis, short answer, and short essay questions.

Extensions: Special arrangements will be made *only* in the event of illness (with a doctor's note), death in the family, 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/ 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 January **Introduction**,

Week 2: 9, 11, 13 January **Free will and responsibility**: Strawson "The impossibility of moral responsibility"

Week 3: 18, 20 January **Moral responsibility**: Nagel "Moral luck"

Week 4: 25, 27 January **Punishment**: Rawls "Two concepts of rules"

First short paper due February 3.

Week 5: 1, 3 February **Mind and body**: Ryle "Descartes' myth"

Week 6: 8, 10 February **Consciousness** Nagel "What is it like to be a bat?"

Week 7: 15, 17 February **Minds and machines**: Turing "Computing machinery and intelligence"

Week 8: 22, 24 February **Scepticism**: Chalmers "The Matrix as metaphysics"

First draft of second paper due February 24.

Week 9: 1, 3 March **Reading break**

Week 10: 8, 10 March **The self**: Parfit "Personal identity"

Reviews of first drafts due March 10

Week 11: 15, 17 March **Beauty**: Hume "Of the standards of taste"

Week 12: 22, 24 March **Science**: Goodman "The new riddle of induction"

Week 13: 29, 31 March **Mathematics**: Shapiro *Thinking about mathematics* (excerpt)

Week 14: 5, 7 April **The meaning of life**: Wolf: 'The meanings of lives'

Final version of second paper due April 7.