

Philosophy of Language

Course information:

Course #:	PHIL 415
Term:	Winter 2024
Course pre-requisites:	Any previous philosophy course
Course schedule:	Tue/Thu 13:05-14:25
Course location:	Burnside Hall 1205

Instructor information:

Name:	Dr. Oran Magal
Email:	oran.magal@mcgill.ca
Office hours:	Mon 10:00-11:00, Thu 14:30-15:30
Office location:	LEA 940



Description:

This course is an entry-point into philosophy of language, which is a core area of analytic philosophy, both historically and at present. Moreover, the tools it has developed are widely used in other fields of 20th century and contemporary philosophy. It is structured as a survey of some of the main topics in analytic philosophy of language, with a special focus on Wittgenstein (both early and late).

Required Background:

There are no specific prerequisites. However, since this is a 400-level course, students need to have taken a philosophy course before.

Required Course Materials:

All required readings for the course will be available as e-books through McGill's library or as PDF files on *MyCourses*. Optional readings will be provided on *MyCourses* for students who wish to explore further. We will not be using a textbook, but for students who wish to consult secondary literature, the following are recommended:

1. A. P. Martinich and D. Sosa (eds.), *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th ed. (older editions are fine)
2. W. G. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A contemporary Introduction*, 2nd ed. (the 1st ed. is fine)
3. David Morris, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the Tractatus* (e-book available through McGill Library)
4. Marie McGinn, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (e-book available through McGill Library)

Instructional Method:

The course will be based on lectures and there will be no tutorial conferences. To succeed in the course, students should read the assigned readings for each week *before* coming to class. Some topics will also have optional readings; these are recommended for deeper understanding, but not required for success in the course.

The classroom for this course does not include the possibility of lecture recording through McGill's system. Please make an effort to attend all classes. I will try to record lectures for students who are unable to attend due to health reasons, but I cannot guarantee it.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

The required readings for each week are listed below. Optional readings will be posted on *MyCourses* for some topics for students who are interested in learning more. The two books mentioned below as Wittgenstein's Tractatus and PI are *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*, both of which are available electronically through the library.

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings + assignments
0	Thu Jan 4 th	Introducing the course	Syllabus Optional: T. Baldwin, "Philosophy of Language in the 20 th Century"
1	Tue Jan 9 th Thu Jan 11 th	Early days, part I: Gottlob Frege's pioneering work	G. Frege, "On Sense and Reference" Optional: Frege, "Concept and Object", "Thought" Optional: Joan Weiner, "Frege's Project", in Potter & Ricketts (eds.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Gottlob Frege</i>
2	Tue Jan 16 th Thu Jan 18 th	Early days, Part II: Russell takes over	B. Russell, "On Denoting" Optional: Peter Hylton, "Russell's Theory of Descriptions", in N. Griffin (ed.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell</i>
3	Tue Jan 23 rd W Jan 25 th	The heir-apparent: Early Wittgenstein, part I	L. Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus</i> , preface + §§1.0 to 2.225 ('§§' means numbered sections) <u>Optional:</u> Hans Sluga, "Introduction: Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man, the Life, and the Work" in H. Sluga & D. Stern (eds.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein</i> , 2 nd ed. (2018)
4	Tue Jan 30 th Thu Feb 1 st	Early Wittgenstein, Part II: The Picture Theory of Meaning	Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus</i> , §§3-5.442 Anthony Kenny, <i>Wittgenstein</i> , 2 nd ed., Ch.4: "The Picture Theory of the Proposition"
5	Tue Feb 6 th Thu Feb 8 th	Early Wittgenstein, Part III: (dis)solving all philosophical problems	Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus</i> , §§5.45-5.641, §§6-7 Optional: Marie McGinn, <i>Elucidating the Tractatus</i> , Chapter 11: "Logic and Solipsism"

			Optional: David Morris, <i>Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Tractatus</i> , Ch. 7: “Metaphysics, ethics, and the limits of philosophy”
6	Tue Feb 13 th Thu Feb 15 th	‘Ontological Commitment’, analyticity, and the apriori	W. v. O. Quine, “On What There Is” and “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” Optional: Richard Creath, “Quine on the Intelligibility and Relevance of Analyticity”, in Roger F. Gibson, Jr. (ed.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Quine</i> ; D. Davidson, “The Method of Truth in Metaphysics”
7	Tue Feb 20 th Thu Feb 22 nd	Theories of Truth	A. Tarski, “The Semantic Conception of Truth” Optional: Ralph C. S. Walker, “Theories of Truth”; A. Burgess & J. Burgess, <i>Truth</i> , Ch. 2: Tarski; D. Davidson, “The Folly of Trying to Define Truth”
8	Tue Feb 27 th Thu Feb 29 th	Semantic Externalism	H. Putnam, “The Meaning of Meaning” S. Kripke, excerpts from <i>Naming and Necessity</i>
9	Tue Mar 12 th Thu Mar 14 th	The Later Wittgenstein, Part I: bringing down “castles in the sky”	Wittgenstein, <i>PI</i> , preface & sections 1-133 Optional: Marie McGinn, <i>Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations</i> , Chapters 1 & 2 Optional: P. M. S. Hacker, “The Achievement of the <i>Investigations</i> ”
10	Tue Mar 19 th Thu Mar 21 st	The Later Wittgenstein, Part II: Rule-following	Wittgenstein, <i>PI</i> , sections 138-242 Optional: McGinn, <i>Guidebook</i> , Ch. 3 Optional: S. Kripke, excerpts from <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i>
11	Tue Mar 26 th Thu Mar 28 th	The Later Wittgenstein, Part III: Private Language	Wittgenstein, <i>PI</i> , sections 243-275 Optional: McGinn, <i>Guidebook</i> , Ch. 4 Optional: D. Stern, “Private Language”, in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein</i> , Ch. 15
12	Tue April 2 nd Thu April 4 th	Pragmatic Implicature and Speech Acts	P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation”, in <i>Studies in the Way of Words</i> , Ch. 2 Optional: P. Grice, “Meaning”; J. Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context”; SEP entries “Implicature”, “Speech Acts”, “J. L. Austin”
13	Tue April 9 th Th April 11th	Concluding Remarks	No additional readings. Note: Thursday, April 11 th follows a Monday schedule.

Means of Evaluation

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

Assignment	Due date	% of final grade
Reading assignments	Best 4 out of 6: Jan. 30 th , Feb 13 th , Feb 27 th , March 12 th , March 26 th , April 2 nd	40
Research Essay:	March 21 st , end of day	40
Discussion of essay	By appointment	Pass/Fail
Revised essay	April 12 th (final day of classes), end of day	Pass/Fail
Take-home exam (open book and notes)	During the exam period (date set by McGill)	20

- **Reading assignments:** You will need to complete 4 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 four 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 immediately after the due-date, late reading assignments will not be accepted. If there are special circumstances (health reasons or something equally serious), the instructor will assign an alternative reading assignment.
- **Essay, discussion, and revision:** Since this is an upper-level undergraduate course, students will develop their own essay topics and list of readings. Instructions and suggestions will be made available, and students are also welcome to ask for my assistance if needed. After each essay is returned to you with feedback, there will be a sign-up sheet to meet with the instructor to discuss your essay (5–10-minute meeting) via Zoom, or in person if meeting online is not possible. This meeting is mandatory. It will be a chance for you to ask questions about the feedback you received, and you may be asked to explain some of what you wrote. After this meeting, you will be asked to submit a revised version of your essay, reflecting the feedback you received. Full instructions for this will be posted on MyCourses. Note: you must meet the instructor and submit a revised version to get credit for the essay.
- **Take home exam:** the exam questions will be posted on *MyCourses* at least 72 hours before the due date, and I will do my best to post them sooner than that. Please note that since this is an exam and not an assignment, I will not be able to give an extension for this due date; students unable to submit their exam on time will need to ask for a deferred exam following McGill's procedures for doing so (contact Service Point for details).

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) **before the relevant work is due**. As a rule, extensions will be given only for medical reasons or serious personal/family issues. Since the public health system is already overloaded, I will not ask you to provide a medical note, but I do require that you take responsibility to communicate with me in a timely manner.

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 only through *MyCourses*. Do not send your work by email to the instructor unless you are specifically asked to do so.

Important: Reading assignments will be submitted through MyCourses as plain text (there will be an input box for you to copy/paste your work from a word processor). Essays and revised essays can only be submitted through MyCourses as a PDF file. It may help to know that Microsoft Word (for PC or Mac) is provided to you for free through McGill and can generate PDF files (an option under 'save as'). If you are using any other software (Google Docs, Pages, etc.), simply use *export* or *save as* to save your work as a PDF to submit it.

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.