



Epistemology

Course information:

Course #: PHIL 419
Term: Winter 2024
Course pre-requisites: A previous course in philosophy
Course schedule: Tue/Thu 10:05-11:25
Course location: LEA 109

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



"Introspection", Artist: Bayo Iribhogbe

Description:

"Know thyself", "Be yourself"
(Inscriptions at the court of the Oracle of Delphi)

"If I have not myself, whom have I? And as I am for myself, what am I?"
(Rabbi Hillel, *Pirkei Avot*)

"Granted that we want the truth: Why not rather untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?"
(F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*)

What could we possibly know better than we know ourselves? And yet: how well *do* we know ourselves? Indeed: *how* do we know ourselves? And how could we lie to ourselves, or hide anything from ourselves, if "lying" presupposes being aware of the truth? These are the kinds of questions we will discuss, with the help of 20th-century and contemporary philosophers working from a range of different approaches. A full list of readings appears below.

Required Background:

There are no specific prerequisites. However, since this is a 400-level course, students need to have taken a philosophy course before and be comfortable developing their own essay topic (with instructor's assistance and supervision).

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.

Instructional Method:

The course will be based on lecture 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 TLP 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
1	Tue Jan 9 th Thu Jan 11 th	What is self-knowledge good for?	Jordan Mackenzie, "Knowing Yourself and Being Worth Knowing"
2	Tue Jan 16 th Thu Jan 18 th	1 st - and 3 rd -person understanding of self	Marcia Cavell, "Self-Knowledge and Self-Understanding"
3	Tue Jan 23 rd W Jan 25 th	The asymmetry between 1 st - and 3 rd -person knowledge	Donald Davidson, "First Person Authority" Louise Röska-Hardy, "Davidson and the Source of Self-Knowledge"
4	Tue Jan 30 th Thu Feb 1 st	Davidson's account of self-knowledge and self-deception	Louise Röska-Hardy, "Davidson and the Source of Self-Knowledge" (continued) Donald Davidson, "Deception and Division"
5	Tue Feb 6 th Thu Feb 8 th	Self-Interpretation	Charles Taylor (1985), "Self-Interpreting Animals"
6	Tue Feb 13 th Thu Feb 15 th	Self-Interpretation, continued	Kenneth Baynes (2010), "Self-narrative and self-constitution"
7	Tue Feb 20 th Thu Feb 22 nd	Different conceptions of the self to be deceived	Robert Solomon, "Self, Deception, and Self-Deception in Philosophy"

8	Tue Feb 27 th Thu Feb 29 th	Self-deception in existentialist and social contexts	Jean-Paul Sartre, “Bad Faith” (<i>mauvaise foi</i>) Simone Neuber, “Self-Awareness and Self-Deception: A Sartrean Perspective
9	Tue Mar 12 th Thu Mar 14 th	Self-deception and being a <i>self</i> in light of neuroscientific findings	Neil Levy, “Choices Without Choosers: Towards a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism”, in Caruso & Flanagan (eds.), <i>Neuroexistentialism</i>
10	Tue Mar 19 th Thu Mar 21 st	Can we harmonize the conscious and non-conscious?	Jonathan Lear, “Integrating the Non-Rational Soul”, in <i>Wisdom Won from Illness</i>
11	Tue Mar 26 th Thu Mar 28 th	Is self-deception necessarily bad?	Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, “User-Friendly Self-Deception”
12	Tue April 2 nd Thu April 4 th	Self-deception from the perspective of classical Chinese philosophy	Roger T. Ames, “The Classical Chinese Self and Hypocrisy”, in Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), <i>Self and Deception</i>
13	Tue April 9 th Th April 11 th	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
Short Essay:	Feb. 12 th , end of day	20
Discussion of essay	By appointment	Pass/Fail
Revised essay	March 3 rd , end of day	Pass/Fail
Longer 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

- **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 (e.g., being sick for more than one day, etc.), the instructor will assign an alternative reading assignment.
- **Essays, discussion, and revision:** the prompt for each essay will be given at least one week before it is due. 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 will 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 of the first two essays to get credit for those essays.

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.