

PHILOSOPHY

About Philosophy

Broadly speaking, the principal aim of philosophy is to increase our understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place in it. Philosophy differs from the empirical and social sciences in important respects. Different areas of philosophy are characterized by the questions they address. For example:

- Epistemology inquires into the nature of knowledge;
- Metaphysics is concerned with the fundamental nature of the world and of the types of things that it contains;
- Ethics investigates the nature of moral judgment and moral reasoning;
- Political Philosophy examines such matters as justice, freedom, rights, democracy, and power;
- Logic is broadly the analysis of the structure of correct reasoning.

In addition, there are the various “Philosophies of...” e.g., Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, and Philosophy of Religion.

Some of the courses in the Department are explicitly devoted to these specific areas of philosophy, each exploring one or several ways of construing and answering the questions it poses. Other courses explore some period or individual figure in the history of philosophy, approaching philosophical questions through the work of past thinkers, and often exploring connections between the different areas of philosophy.

The discipline of Philosophy, as a particular way of thinking, emphasizes clarity in expression, both written and oral, and rigour in argument. Philosophical questions are intriguing and complex, and so philosophical method stresses thoroughness and intellectual generosity—the willingness and ability to grasp another’s arguments and respond to them.

The Department requires that all students in the Honours and Joint Honours programs take a special 3-credit course (PHIL 301 Philosophical Fundamentals.), the principal aim of which is to equip students with the distinctively philosophical skills required for advanced work in the field. The course is not available to students in the Major or Minor programs.

The B.A. in Philosophy is not a professional qualification. It prepares students for graduate work in philosophy and for study in other disciplines, e.g., Law. As the interdisciplinary discipline par excellence, philosophy also maintains and encourages ties with other fields, so many students will find that certain classes in philosophy are directly relevant to their major area of study. The Department has a strong commitment to providing an intensive yet broad-based philosophical education. The research interests of members of the Department are wide-ranging.

Available Programs

- History and Philosophy of Science Minor Concentration (B.A.) (18 credits)
- Philosophy Honours (B.A.) (60 credits)
- Philosophy Joint Honours Component (B.A.) (36 credits)

- Philosophy Major Concentration (B.A.) (36 credits)
- Philosophy Minor Concentration (B.A.) (18 credits)

About History and Philosophy of Science (HPSC)

History and Philosophy of Science at McGill is an interdisciplinary program that aims to provide students with an understanding of science through the study of both its historical development and of some of the fundamental philosophical principles upon which it rests. In addition to attending lecture courses, students can also count independent research courses towards the program.

Philosophy (PHIL) Related Programs

Minor in Cognitive Science

Students following Major or Honours programs in Philosophy with an interest in cognition may consider the Minor in Cognitive Science. For more information, refer to the Faculty of Science’s Cognitive Science section.

Location

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Department of Philosophy
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