

**Department of Philosophy**  
**Nineteenth Century Philosophy/367A2019**  
**Professor Alison Laywine**  
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**Office Hours: Fridays 10:30-12:00**

**Please note: the use of laptops in class will not be allowed.**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to philosophy in the nineteenth century. To that end, we will be working through a program of representative readings whose point of departure will be a polemical attack mounted by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) against what we might call 'intuitionism': the view that we have some kind of direct grasp or insight into certain fundamental truths. The view has the advantage of explaining how we have knowledge of things we do not seem able to prove: for example, the existence of the mind, the existence of the external world outside the mind and hence some kind of distinction between mind and body, the reality of space and time, the truth of the so-called parallel postulate in Euclidean geometry, among other things. The problem with the view is that intuition can be invoked in defense of any claim a person or society may be deeply wedded to. 'By the aid of this theory,' Mill observed in his autobiography, 'every inveterate belief and every intense feeling, of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its own all-sufficient voucher and justification.' As a philosopher, Mill recognised that it would not be enough just to make rhetorically punchy remarks like this. The challenge would be to develop in depth and detail an alternative to intuitionism that could adequately explain the origin of all the deep-seated beliefs people have. Mill rose to the challenge and developed an empirical account of belief, inspired by Locke, Hume, Bentham and his father James Mill, founded on an associationist psychology: our beliefs come from our experience and the way we have learned to associate our ideas. That was a provocative claim, not just politically, but philosophically. A lot of nineteenth-century philosophy can be understood as efforts to show the inadequacies of Mill's associationist philosophy – witness Frege's famous and merciless skewering, in the *Foundations of Arithmetic* of 1884, of Mill's attempt to account for number and arithmetic and Coleridge's dissatisfaction with associationist accounts of the imagination – and to offer non-intuitionistic alternatives to it – witness the efforts of the American pragmatist, C. S. Peirce, to show that what Mill took to be the result of psychological associations is better understood as the result of reasoning. We will organise our readings and discussions around the different alternatives to, criticisms of, and push-back against Mill's reform program in philosophy.

Accordingly, this course will be broken down into the following five units of roughly equal duration (two to four weeks each). **Please note:** I am unwilling to give a week-by-week timetable for the course, because how long we spend on any given reading will depend on the pace of class-room discussion, which will be determined by you. The readings will be available as PDF documents on our Mycourses page.

**Unit One:** the battle-lines are drawn between intuitionism and Mill's empirical, associationist psychology. We will read selections from the lectures on metaphysics of William Hamilton (for a robust defense of the intuitionistic point of view) and selections from Mill's *Examination of the Philosophy of Sir William Hamilton*.

**Unit Two:** an alternative, equally spirited and imaginative attack against intuitions by C. S. Peirce. Our reading will be his 1868 published essay, 'Questions concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man'

**Unit Three:** Coleridge and the German alternative to associationism. Our readings will be from *Hegel's Difference between the Philosophy and Fichte and Schelling* and Book One of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. If we have time, we will discuss Mill's take on Coleridge. The thing to read will be his twin essays: 'Bentham' and 'Coleridge'

**Unit Four:** How well equipped is Mill's logic for handling the concept of number and the science of arithmetic? Our reading will be from Book Three of Mill's *System of Logic* (chapter 24) and Frege's critique on Part One of the *Foundations of Arithmetic*.

**Unit Five:** the American Pragmatist alternative – our readings will be from C. S. Peirce's attempt to show what follows from the dismantling of intuitionist philosophy. We will read selections from his writings on pragmatism: 'How to Make our Ideas Clear' and 'What Pragmatism Is'.

The **pedagogical aim** of this course – its **desired outcome** – is to enable students who find that they are still interested in philosophy of the nineteenth century to continue exploring it on their own in an informed and fruitful way after the term is over **and** to help all students enrolled in the course develop fundamental philosophical skills, i.e. reading and analysing difficult texts, discussing those texts in a constructive way, and writing up their reflections on those texts clearly, concisely and effectively. For the course to achieve those outcomes, **all of us** must commit to work through the readings in a **disciplined way**. Philosophy is like any worthwhile human activity: you need to develop a routine so that you regularly engage with it throughout the week. You **must** therefore **keep up with the readings and come to class prepared to discuss your questions about them**. You **must also have hardcopy of the texts with you in class** so that we can look at problem passages together.

**Method of Evaluation:** there will be one short paper on an assigned topic of no more than five pages in length, due in early October. It will be worth 25% of the final grade. There will be a final paper of no more than 10 pages, on a topic you will pick (in consultation

with me), due on the last meeting of this class at the end of the term. It will be worth 40% of the final grade. 10% of the final grade will be for constructive classroom participation in our discussion of the readings. Regular attendance is a necessary (but insufficient) condition for getting any credit for participation. Regular attendance is a necessary condition for getting credit for this course (this means attendance will be taken at the beginning of every session so that we can have a record.) Finally, 10% of the final grade will be for a final, closed-book exam strictly on the readings: it will take place during the exam session at the end of the term.

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À noter finalement que les étudiant(e)s de l'Université McGill ont le droit de soumettre leurs travaux en français s'ils/elles le désirent: <http://www.mcgill.ca/firstyear/undergraduate/your-first-year/first-year-programs/francophone>