

# The Mind and the World (preliminary syllabus)

Philosophy 111, Spring 2018

Class #10463

MWF 12:35-1:30 in LC-19

Course Web Page: [profron.net/phi111](http://profron.net/phi111)

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Hum 314; OHs To Be Announced

TA: To Be Announced

## Requirements & Grades:

The course grade comes 80% from exams and 20% from in-class polls and quizzes. To pass the course, students taking the course for a letter grade must average at least a **D-** and have at least two passing grades (i.e., **D-** or better) on exams.

**EXAMS:** There will be 5 non-comprehensive 55-minute in-class closed-book tests, spaced relatively evenly throughout the term. Tests will consist of combinations of questions for short (2-3 sentence), shorter (1-sentence), and multiple choice answers. Your lowest grade of the 5 is discarded; the other four will each count for 20% of your course grade.

**POP QUIZZES/POLLS:** Short pop quizzes and polls will be given and scored in class by the iClicker system. Your participation in polls and scores on quizzes all together will count for 20% of your total grade. (The same rules apply for makeups here as in the case of exams above.)

## Materials/Equipment:

**READINGS:** All readings for this course are available as PDF's from the Blackboard EReserves page for the course; there is no physical textbook. All notes and other materials will be available on the main course web page.

**EQUIPMENT:** This class uses the iClicker system for in-class quizzing and poll-taking. You can buy or rent one in the Campus Bookstore. You **must** have and register an iClicker to get credit for the polls and quizzes. Any iClicker brand device (iClicker, iClicker+, or iClicker2) is fine.

## Course Outline: (subject to change before we start and as we go)

### I. Knowledge, Appearance, and Reality

- **Presumptions of Language**  
Devitt, "Reference, Theories of"
- **Radical Skepticism**  
Descartes, *Meditations I and II*  
Bouwsma, "Descartes' Evil Genius"  
Grau, "Brains in Vats and the Evil Demon"  
Putnam, "Brains in a Vat"
- **Appearance and Reality**  
Plato, from *The Republic*  
Churchland, "The Problem of Self-Consciousness"
- **Probable Generalizations**  
Sober, "Lecture 15: Justified Belief and Hume's Problem of Induction" and "Lecture 16: Can Hume's Skepticism Be Refuted?"  
Magnus, from *Scientific Inference*

### II. Minds, Brains, and Actions

- **The Mind-Body Problem**  
Churchland, "The Ontological Problem (the Mind-Body Problem)"  
Warburton, "Mind: The Basics"

### • Freedom, Choice, & Responsibility

- Nagel, "Free Will"
- Nichols, "Is Free Will an Illusion?"
- Sober, "Lecture 23: Freedom, Determinism, and Causality" and "Lecture 24: A Menu of Positions on Free Will"
- Dennett, from *Elbow Room: On the Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*

### III. God, Meaning, and Value

- **The Existence of God**  
Paley, "The Design Argument"  
Shubin, from "Your Inner Fish"  
Teichman & Evans, "The Existence of Evil"  
Yahweh, from the book of *Job*  
Pigliucci, "God and the Source of Morality"  
Paul, "Societal Health and Religiosity"  
Pascal, "The Wager"
- **Nihilism, Value, & Significance**  
Nagel, "Death", and "The Meaning of Life"  
Sartre, "The Wall"  
Nozick, "Value and Meaning"

# PHI 111 Spring 2018 Syllabus Addenda

## Detailed Grade Calculation Rules:

1. Every exam is given a letter grade. These letter grades range from **A+** (the best) to **F** (the worst).
2. Each of these letter grades has a numerical equivalent. Here are the possible letter grades and numerical equivalents.

A+ = 15	B = 11	C- = 7	E+ = 3
A = 14	B- = 10	D+ = 6	E = 2
A- = 13	C+ = 9	D = 5	E- = 1
B+ = 12	C = 8	D- = 4	F = 0

3. Once this assignment of letter grades is made for a given exam, that letter grade (i.e. its 15-point scale equivalent) is all that matters from that exam for calculating your final course grade.
4. I use the numerical equivalents of the letter grades to calculate a composite numerical grade: In this class, your 4 best exams each count for 20% of your final grade. A composite grade from your pop quizzes and other in-class clicker-based participation is assigned on the 15-point scale as well; that counts for 20% of your overall grade.
5. I round the composite numerical grade to the nearest integer (.5 and above go up, below go down). I convert back to letter grades using the chart above. You get the letter grade determined by the chart, except if (i) you got an **A+**, in which case your official grade is an **A** (the University doesn't use **A+**); (ii) you got lower than a **D-**, in which case your official grade is **E**; or (iii) you didn't get at least a **D-** on at least 2 of the exams, in which case your official grade is an automatic **E**.
6. I reserve the right to reduce grades for the course based on failure to follow course rules – e.g., for being disruptive in class, etc.

## Cheating:

Any student caught cheating in the course will be failed for the entire course and will be turned in for further disciplinary action by the Dean's office. Instances of cheating include but are not limited to copying from others during exams or quizzes, bringing an iClicker for someone else and using it to take quizzes or polls for them, and using notes during exams.

## iClicker use and grading:

One of the course requirements is that you get and use an iClicker for in-class quizzes and polls. Scores from iClicker-given quizzes and polls will constitute 15% of your final course grade. You are responsible for getting the iClicker, bringing it to class each day, registering it at iclicker.com, and using it. Not doing so means you'll get no credit for any quizzes or polls on days when you're without it.

## Makeup exams and quizzes:

Makeup exams (and clicker quizzes/polls or presentations) are given only when extreme circumstances make it *impossible* for you to take the test when given; e.g., when you are hospitalized on that day. To be given a makeup exam/quiz, you must do all of the following:

1. Obtain a letter of excuse from the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education; all inquiries about such letters and the documentation required for them should be directed to them. This request (with documentation) is to be made to the Vice Provost's office (LC 30) no more than two weekdays after the end of the period for which you are asking to be excused.
2. Give me a **written** (e-mail is best, paper is OK) request for a makeup exam/quiz. This request must be given to me no more than two weekdays after the end of the period for which your absence has been excused.
3. Talk to me in person at the end of the first class after your excused absence in order to schedule a makeup.

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## Further course information:

More information about the items below may be found at <http://profron.net/phi111/additional-syllabus-information/>.

## Disabilities and accommodation:

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, medical, cognitive, learning and mental health (psychiatric) disabilities. Contact the Disability Resource Center (518- 442-5490; [drc@albany.edu](mailto:drc@albany.edu)) for more information

## General Education Information

This course is a Humanities General Education course. Please see <http://www.albany.edu/generaleducation> for information on General Education courses and requirements, and <http://profron.net/phi111/additional-syllabus-information/> for more on this course, Philosophy, and the Humanities General Education requirement.