

# The Mind and the World (online-only course)

Philosophy 111, Spring 2021  
profron.net/phi111  
Materials on Blackboard page

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Teaching Assistant: To be announced

**This course is an asynchronous but instructor-paced online course. All materials, lectures, and discussion for this course will be done online only.**

## Requirements & Grades:

The course grade comes 80% from exams and 20% from 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.

**All exams and quizzes will be given as timed tests on Blackboard:**

**EXAMS:** There will be 5 non-comprehensive short tests, spaced fairly evenly throughout the term, and each lasting about an hour. Tests will consist include questions for both short 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 quizzes will be given after every online lecture. Your quizzes will count for 20% of your total grade.

## Materials:

**LECTURES:** Lectures will be made available as videos (narrated PowerPoints) via links on the Blackboard page. There will normally be three 45-50 minute lectures each week, and they are required viewing.

**READINGS:** Readings for this course are available as PDF's from the Blackboard EReserves page; there is no physical textbook.

## Course Outline: (possibly 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 2021 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 short quizzes 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, working with others during exams or quizzes, or in general presenting the work of others as your own or helping others to do so.

## Makeup exams and quizzes:

Makeup exams (and clicker quizzes/polls) are given only under conditions the conditions specified by UAlbany: see the medical excuse rules (at [https://www.albany.edu/health\\_center/medicaexcuse.shtml](https://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicaexcuse.shtml)) and religious practice excuse rules at <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EDN/224-A>) for details. In addition, to be given a makeup exam/quiz in this course, you must normally 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** (by e-mail) 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.**

Your lowest 7 quizzes (about 1/5 of the total) will be dropped; so if you happen to miss one here and there, you needn't get an excused makeup.

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## Further course information:

More information about the items below may be found at <https://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 <https://www.albany.edu/generaleducation> for information on General Education courses and requirements, and <https://profron.net/phi111/additional-syllabus-information/> for more on this course, Philosophy, and the Humanities General Education requirement.