

# The Mind and the World (Full syllabus)

Philosophy 111, Fall 2025 (#3451), 3 credits

MWF 9:30-10:25 am in LC-05

Prof. Ron McClamrock [rmccclamrock@albany.edu](mailto:rmccclamrock@albany.edu), Office hours Mon 10:40-11:30 & Wed 2:40-3:30, and by appointment (in HUM 314 or [albany.zoom.us/my/rmccclamrock](https://albany.zoom.us/j/rmccclamrock) by request)

Graduate TA: Ling Zhang [lzhang29@albany.edu](mailto:lzhang29@albany.edu) Office Hours: Mon 2:40-3:30, Thu 1:30-2:30, and by appointment (in HUM 255)

## Requirements & Grades:

**OVERALL:** The course grade comes 80% from exams and 20% from polls and quizzes. To pass, 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 exam grade of the five is discarded; the other four will each count for 20% of your course grade.

**POP QUIZZES/POLLS:** Pop quizzes and polls will be given and scored in class by the iClicker system. Participation in polls & scores on quizzes all together will count for 20% of your total grade.

## Materials/Equipment:

**NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Notes, announcements, reviews sheets, etc. will be on Brightspace.

**READINGS:** Readings for this course are available as PDFs via Electronic Reserves on Brightspace; there is no physical textbook. Overhead notes from each class and exam review sheets will also be online.

**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 need a registered **hardware** iClicker to get credit for the polls and quizzes; no phone apps. The "Join Code" for this course is **XLRY**; enroll at <https://join.iClicker.com>, using your albany.edu email and that code; follow the **iClicker Cloud** instructions at <https://mhe.my.site.com/iclicker/s/article/How-to-Register-an-iClicker-Remote>.

## Course Outline: (subject to change 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* (Allegory of the Cave)  
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"

# APHI 111 Fall 2025 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, listed here:

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: Your 4 best exams each count for 20% of your final grade, and a composite grade from your quizzes (assigned on the 15-point scale as well) counts for the other 20% of your overall grade.
5. The composite numerical grade is rounded to the nearest integer (.5 and above go up, below go down, then converted 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, using tech, etc.

## Makeup exams and quizzes:

Makeup exams & quizzes are given only under the conditions specified by UAlbany: see the rules for medical excuse and religious practice excuse rules at [https://www.albany.edu/health\\_center/medicaexcuse.shtml](https://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicaexcuse.shtml) and <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EDN/224-A> for details. To be given a makeup exam/quiz in this course, you must give me a written (e-mail) request for a makeup exam along with copies of documentation showing it was impossible for you to take the scheduled exam. This request must be given to me no more than 24 hours after the end of the period for which your absence is to be excused. Be forewarned that even if you do, I reserve the right to judge that the excuse is inadequate, in which case I may decline to give the makeup, and you'll just need to count the other four exams. Your lowest 7 quizzes (about 1/5 of the total) will be dropped before calculating your quiz grade; so if you happen to miss one here and there, you needn't get an excused makeup.

## 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 Access and Inclusion Student Services* (DAISS) at [daiss@albany.edu](mailto:daiss@albany.edu) or <https://www.albany.edu/dean-students/disability> for more information.

## General Education Information

This course is a Humanities General Education course. Humanities General Education courses aim to enable students to demonstrate knowledge of the assumptions, methods of study, and theories of at least one of the disciplines within the humanities. Humanities general education courses in Philosophy like this one aim to enable students to demonstrate understanding of some central ideas in the discipline of Philosophy, as well as their creation and relevance to the present and to the world outside the university. This course aims to teach students to analyze and evaluate philosophical ideas and systems of reasoning and the values, traditions, and beliefs that they reflect; to employ the terms and understand the conventions particular to Philosophy; and especially to analyze and assess the strengths and weaknesses of ideas and positions along with the reasons or arguments that can be given for and against them.

Please see <https://www.albany.edu/generaleducation> for information on General Education courses and requirements.

## In-class technology use ban:

Use of laptops, phones, tablets, and other such technology during class is not allowed. Repeated violation of this rule will result in a grade reduction.

## Health-related protocols:

Vaccinations are strongly encouraged, and masks are still recommended for those who may have been exposed to a contagious disease or are in higher-risk groups. And please don't come to class if you're sick.

## 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, using iClickers for others or having your iClicker used for you by someone else, or using notes during exams.