

**Introduction to Philosophy**  
**Albright College**  
**PHI 101**

Instructor: Dr. Yuval Abrams  
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Office: Chapel Philosophy Department

Class Meets: T, Th 2:30-3:50  
Classroom: Chapel (MPK) 103  
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:50-4:30, Th 12-1  
(or by appointment)

## **SYLLABUS**

### **Introduction**

This course engages some of the broader questions that we ask ourselves. What is the nature of reality? What can I know? Is there a divine being? Is there a distinction between my mind and body? What is the basis of a good life? What is the right thing to do? These classical questions have been central questions addressed by philosophers for millennia. This course attempts to lay the foundations for thinking about these types of questions in a *philosophical* manner: a distinctive method and tradition of rigorous and analytical thought. We will be exploring some of the deepest, most difficult, and historically influential questions, whilst developing a mode of thinking that can be applied to almost any inquiry or question at all. The course aims to provide both a foundation for future philosophical study at the university level and critical thinking skills that will remain useful in quite disparate future academic and professional endeavors. This introductory class counts as a GENERAL EDUCATION - HUMANITIES - FOUNDATIONS requirement.

### **Learning Objectives**

- 1) Students will improve critical thinking by developing skills of explaining, critically examining, and responding to philosophical theories, issues, and claims in the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
- 2) Students will improve writing skills by explaining, exploring, and critically examining philosophical theories, issues, concepts, and arguments relating to the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics clearly in writing.
- 3) Students will improve communication skills by explaining orally philosophical theories, issues, claims, concepts, and arguments relating to the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
- 4) Students will improve skills of interpreting and evaluating philosophical writings.
- 5) Students will develop an openness to having their beliefs challenged, will learn to hear and comprehend the views of others, and to entertain objections to their own views.
- 6) Students will be able to explain several classic ethical theories, to compare and contrast ethical theories, and to apply these to justify conclusions relating to concrete moral issues.
- 7) Students will acquire a familiarity with and an understanding of some classic and contemporary philosophical literature and some fundamental philosophical issues, and will be able to explain important contributions to the history of philosophy and their relation to present viewpoints.
- 8) Students will be able to explain several classic epistemological theories, and to compare and contrast theories of what knowledge is and how it is acquired.
- 9) Students will be able to show that issues may be regarded from multiple viewpoints, and will be able to present reasons in support of each viewpoint.

- 10) Students will improve reasoning skills and ethical decision making skills by acquiring an understanding of ethical theories and philosophical concepts that will enable them to develop their own opinions on conceptions and practices of moral interaction and democracy.
- 11) Students will develop a conceptual foundation for future learning by exploring philosophical theories and arguments and will acquire related critical thinking and communication skills.

**Required Text:**

**There is no textbook in this course. All readings will be made available to you on Canvas.**

**Optional Texts:**

*The following two books are recommended (but not required) as supplementary reading; both are short, accessible, cheap, and easily available. Some sections of the Nagel book will be included in the course material. I will be posting excerpts of these books online on the Course Canvas site:*

Blackburn, Simon, *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford (1999), ISBN: 0192100246

Nagel, Thomas, *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford (1987), ISBN: 9780195052169

**Canvas Usage**

A Canvas site has been created for our course. The site can be accessed at <https://albright.instructure.com/> or through the link on the Albright College website (<http://www.albright.edu>). You are responsible for ensuring that your user information is correct and updating it when necessary. You are also expected to check the site regularly for announcements and supplemental course materials. If you experience any problems using Canvas, please see me or contact the library reference desk.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

1. Class participation: 10% , based on attendance (taken each class) and discussions.
2. Exams 60% (3 exams 20% each)
3. Papers/4<sup>th</sup> Hour: 30% (3 papers 10% each)

**The final grade will be curved.**

\*There will be at least one Experience Event that I will be organizing this semester. Attendance at these is for extra credit.

***Note on the Requirements***

**Class Participation** (10%).

- I will take attendance at the beginning of every class.
- Students will need to participate constructively in discussions, in order to get a full grade for attendance
- Cell phones should be on silent mode.
- **You are allowed 3 unexcused absences without your grade being affected.**
- Lateness should be avoided, but better that you attend late than not at all. If you must enter late, please make an effort not to disturb the class as you get to your seat.

**Fourth Hour of Quality**

- Albright, like a number of other liberal arts colleges and universities, uses a course unit system to support a greater depth of learning. Because each course unit is the equivalent of four credits, compared to the usual three credit course at schools using the credit system, classes that meet only three hours per week must also require 1 extra hour of learning over the 15-week term, totaling 15 hours of work outside the classroom that are

above and beyond the usual course readings, homework, and examinations. These learning activities must result in something the faculty member can evaluate (paper, presentation, journal, reflection paper, problem set, etc.). Note also that federal guidelines expect approximately two hours of work outside class for each instructional hour of class.

- The three paper assignments will involve watching a film that relates to class material, followed by essay questions. The films are *The Matrix*, *Minority Report*, and *The Prestige*. I will supply you with links to watch these films through the library.
- If you need more time, you may request an extension. Please do NOT miss class in order to complete an assignment. If you do, your absence will be unexcused and your paper will be marked one day late.
- Late papers are penalized with one letter grade (i.e. A becomes A-) per late day.

**Exams** (20+20+20 = 60%)

- The three **online** exams will consist of several multiple choice and short answer/essay questions.
- The final exam will be during Finals Week.

**Miscellaneous**

- Absence from classes does not affect the due dates for the assignments or your exam dates. If you miss an exam your grade will be zero for that exam, unless you contact me beforehand in an attempt to work out an alternative.

**Grade Distribution:**

92.5-100 = A	79.5-82.4 = B-	66.5-69.4 = D+
89.5-92.4 = A-	76.5-79.4 = C+	62.5-66.4 = D
86.5-89.4 = B+	72.5-76.4 = C	60-62.4 = D-
82.5-86.4 = B	69.5-72.4 = C-	Below 60 = F

**COVID-19 Policies**

**COVID-19 Absence policy:**

Students are encouraged to work directly with their instructors regarding any absences. For absences related to COVID-19, please adhere to the following:

- **Do not come to class if you are sick.** Please protect your health and the health of others by staying home. Contact your healthcare provider or the [Gable Health Center](#) if you believe you are ill. In particular, if you have any [symptoms of COVID-19](#), please do not come to class.
- If you are absent from class as a result of a COVID-19 diagnosis or quarantine, you must email me to notify me of the absence and I will either an assignment for you, or send you a zoom link to attend class remotely. The final decision for approval of all absences and missed work is determined by the instructor.
- If your psychological health is compromised due to the pandemic and how it may affect other family members and other close associates, you are encouraged to contact the [counseling services](#) on campus and to discuss options for a modified assignment schedule similar to that outlined above.

**Social distancing statement:**

In class as well as on and off campus, maintain social distance of at least three feet; replace shaking hands, hugs and physical touching with verbal appreciation. Please be aware of social distancing with waiting for, entering, and exiting classes.

**Statement on masks/face shields:**

Wearing a mask/shield is **required** for the first two weeks of class, regardless of vaccination status. This will be subject to review at the end of the first two weeks.

**Course format and changes:**

This course is officially listed as hybrid. I did this in order to give us options if social distancing prevented us from meeting as a full class in a standard classroom. With current social distancing, this is not a problem, and thus **this course will be meeting as a fully in person class** until further notice. Please note that if we move online, there may be adjustments to the nature of our scheduled class meetings.

**Academic Support**

Students have academic support resources available to them at no charge. The Academic Learning Center offers course-specific tutoring, academic skills workshops, hands on learning strategies instruction, and academic counseling to supplement faculty advisement. The Writing Center offers tutoring to assist with writing and reading support for any class. The Student Accessibility and Advocacy office is the source for impairment-related accommodations consistent with the ADA and its amendments. Students who receive accommodations from the SAA office should meet with course instructors privately and in a timely manner to discuss the Academic Accommodation Letter (AAL) provided by that office. *Please note that IEPs and 504 plans do not apply to college level courses.* All three offices are in the administration building. For help or further information, contact the ALC at [academiclearningcenter@albright.edu](mailto:academiclearningcenter@albright.edu) or 610-921-7662; the WC at [writingcenter@albright.edu](mailto:writingcenter@albright.edu) or 610-921-7540; and the Student Accessibility and Advocacy office at [SAA@albright.edu](mailto:SAA@albright.edu) or 610-929-6639.

**Academic Learning Center**

The Academic Learning Center (ALC) offers various resources to assist Albright students with their academic success at no charge. The ALC offers course-specific peer tutoring for many general education classes at the 100-200 level. You can schedule to meet with a tutor in person or online by selecting the 'ALC Subject Tutor Schedule' at this link: <https://alb.mywconline.com/>. For upperclass students, the ALC offers one-on-one academic coaching on study skills, time management, note-taking, and learning strategies. (The Office of Student Success offers academic coaching for first-year students.) To schedule a meeting with a staff member in the ALC, contact by phone at #610-921-7662 or email: [academiclearningcenter@albright.edu](mailto:academiclearningcenter@albright.edu). Visit the ALC main office in Teel Hall 309A.

**Writing Center**

You are encouraged to work with the Writing Center early and often to help build a strong foundation for writing in this course and in all of your courses. The center's peer tutors and director will work with you at any stage of the writing process, from developing and organizing ideas to revising and editing drafts. Tutors are also available to discuss and practice approaches to managing the college reading workload and reading more effectively. The center is located in the student Campus Center on the lower level near Jake's Place and can be reached at 610-921-7540 (phone) or [writingcenter@albright.edu](mailto:writingcenter@albright.edu). (Note: For Fall 2021, the Writing Center will be in Teel 309-B until the Campus Center construction is completed). For the current schedule or to make an appointment for an in-person or online session, use our appointment system at <http://alb.mywconline.com>.

**Services, Concerns, Student Services:** Albright College welcomes students with disabilities into the College's educational programs. If you have an impairment-related need for reasonable

academic adjustments in this course, please contact Sherry Young, the Director of Student Accessibility and Advocacy, by phone at 610-929-6639, via email at [syoung@albright.edu](mailto:syoung@albright.edu) or [SAA@albright.edu](mailto:SAA@albright.edu), or in person on the first floor of the Administration Building on the Reading campus. For further information regarding services for students with disabilities, please visit the website at: <https://www.albright.edu/student-life/student-accessibility-advocacy/>. Students who use accommodations should meet with the course instructors privately and in a timely manner to discuss their Academic Accommodation Letter (AAL). *Please note that K-12 IEPs and 504 plans do not apply to college level courses.*

**Academic Integrity:** The policies of the College regarding academic dishonesty can be found on the College's website at <https://www.albright.edu/policies/academic-integrity-policy-acad/>. Please read these policies as it applies to all facets of this course. Please become aware as to what constitutes academic dishonesty.

### **OFFICE HOURS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the course in general or about any of the course materials or assignments, please do not hesitate to speak with me. My office is located in the basement of the Chapel building in the Philosophy department. This semester I will have scheduled office hours on Tuesdays 3:50-4:30 and Thursdays from 12 to 1. You are welcome to drop by at any time, but I recommend that you make an appointment first to be certain that I am available. If my scheduled office hours are inconvenient or if I am occupied with another student when you drop by, please feel free to schedule an appointment to meet at an alternate time. You are also welcome to contact me via email ([yabrams@albright.edu](mailto:yabrams@albright.edu)).

### **Important Dates:**

- Tuesday 9/7: No Class Meeting (Rosh Hashanah).
- Friday 9/10 First Paper Due at 11:59 PM (10%)
- Thursday 9/16 No Class Meeting (Yom Kippur).
- Friday 9/17: First Exam due online at 11:59 PM (20%)
- Friday 10/1: Midterm
- Tuesday 10/5: No Class (Fall Break)
- Monday 11/1: Second Exam due online at 11:59 PM (20%)
- Tuesday 11/9: Last Day to Drop Course without Penalty
- Thursday 11/11: No Class (Instructor is away)
- Friday 11/12: Second Paper due at 11:59 PM
- Tuesday 11/23: Last Class. Third Paper Due (10%)
- Finals Week / Date of exam (20%) TBD (after Thanksgiving)

**Reading Schedule** (Note: **Schedule subject to revision. Please keep track via Canvas**)

**Readings in Bold are required.** Others are optional.

#### **Week 1 Introduction to the Class; What is Philosophy?; Socrates and the Socratic Method**

*Tuesday 8/17, Thursday 8/19*

READINGS:

- (1) **Video, "What is Philosophy?"**
- (2) **Plato, "Apology"**
- (3) Lawhead "Brief Tour Guide to Philosophy"

- Week 2**      **Logic and Reasoning**  
*Tuesday 8/24, Thursday 8/25*  
 READINGS:  
     (4) Sober "Deductive Reasoning"  
     (5) Slide Show/Handout
- Week 3**      **Knowledge and Skepticism**  
*Tuesday 8/31, Thursday 9/2*  
 READINGS:  
     (1) Descartes: Meditation I, II, III, and VI  
     (2) Nagel, "How Do We Know Anything?"  
     (3) Blackburn Chapter 1
- Week 4**      **Knowledge of the External World: Empiricism**  
*Thursday 9/9*  
 READINGS:  
     (1) Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpt)  
     (2) Warburton, Locke  
**Note: No Class Tuesday 9/7**  
**Paper 1 (Matrix) Due Friday 9/10 at 11:59 PM**
- Week 5**      **Knowledge of the External World: Empiricism (continued)**  
*Tuesday 9/14*  
 READINGS:  
     (1) Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*  
     (2) Nagel, "Other Minds"  
**Note: No Class Thursday 9/16**  
**First Exam Due Friday 9/17 at 11:59 PM**
- Week 6**      **Knowledge of the External World: Induction and Causality**  
*Tuesday 9/21, Thursday 9/23*  
 READINGS:  
     (1) Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*  
     (2) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*  
     (3) Russell, "The Problem of Induction"  
     (4) Blackburn, Chapter 7
- Week 7:**      **Knowledge (Kant [continued]) / Arguments for the Existence of God**  
*Tuesday 9/28, Thursday 9/30*  
 READINGS:  
     (1) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (continued)  
     (2) Anselm and Ganilo: "The Ontological Argument"  
     (3) Aquinas: "The Five Ways" (from *Summa Theologiae*)  
**Midterm (Friday October 1<sup>st</sup>)**

- Week 8: Arguments for (and against) the Existence of God (continued)**  
*Thursday 10/7*  
 READINGS:  
 (1) Paley: "Natural Theology"  
 (2) Pascal: "The Wager"  
 (3) Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*  
**No Class Tuesday 10/5 (Fall Break)**
- Week 9 Mind and Body / Ethics and Moral Philosophy**  
*Tuesday 10/12, Thursday 10/14.*  
 READINGS:  
 (1) Descartes: *Meditations* (Meditation VI)  
 (2) Nagel Chapter 4  
 (3) Blackburn, "Can Machines Think?"  
 (4) Plato, "Euthyphro"
- Week 10 Ethics and Moral Philosophy**  
*Tuesday 10/19, Thursday 10/21*  
 READINGS:  
 (1) Rachels, "The Challenges of Cultural Relativism"  
 (2) Plato, "Ring of Gyges"  
 (3) Regan, "How Not to Answer Moral Questions"  
 (4) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*  
 (5) Vaughn, "Virtue Ethics"
- Week 11 Ethics and Moral Philosophy: Free Will**  
*Tuesday 10/26, Thursday 10/28*  
 READINGS:  
 (1) Nagel, "Free Will"  
 (2) Insanity Defense  
 (3) Blackburn Chapter 3
- Week 12 Ethics and Moral Philosophy: Deontology v. Consequentialism**  
**Second Exam due 11:59 Monday 11/1**  
*Tuesday 11/2, Thursday 11/4*  
 READINGS:  
 (1) Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*  
 (2) Vaughn, "Deontology"  
 (3) Nagel, "Right and Wrong"  
 (4) Mill, *Utilitarianism*  
 (5) Vaughn, "Consequentialism"  
 (6) Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"
- Week 13 Politics, Justice, and the Social Contract**  
*Tuesday 11/9*  
 READINGS: TBD  
**Note: No Class on Thursday 11/11**  
**Second 4<sup>th</sup> Hour Paper Due Friday 11/12 at 11:59 PM**

**Week 14**      **Identity, Personal Identity / Human Nature and the Meaning of Life**  
*Tuesday 11/16, Thursday 11/18*

READINGS:

- (1) Blackburn, Chapter 4
- (2) Lucretius (excerpts)
- (3) Epictetus (excerpts)
- (4) Nagel, Chapters 9-10
- (5) Nozick, The Experience Machine

**Week 15**      **TBD**  
*Tuesday 11/23*

**Note: Tuesday 11/23 is the final class.**

**Third 4<sup>th</sup> Hour Paper due by class on Tuesday 11/23**

**Final Exam is online during Finals Week, after Thanksgiving Break**