

# PHIL 100: *Philosophy and Film*

Tuesdays and Thursdays: §5: 8–9:22 AM, §6: 9:30–10:52 AM | 137 Dana  
Moodle Site: <http://moodle.bucknell.edu/course/view.php?id=4945>

**Professor Matthew H. Slater**

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Thursdays 11–noon, & by appointment

## *Description of Subject Matter & Methods of Instruction*

This course is an introduction to a sampling of related philosophical questions. Specifically, we will be concerned with questions about the nature and sources of knowledge, what makes someone the same person over time, whether free will is compatible with a materialist worldview, and what makes action right or wrong. Such questions have a deep and abiding interest, not just because they are difficult to answer (don't expect any certain answers from this course), but because they are important to our conceptions of ourselves as agents in the world — no wonder they have also seeped into popular fiction and film! We will use these outlets as a source of thought experiments — “would-be case studies,” if you like — to investigate with the tools of philosophical analysis. Though we won't (probably) *answer* all of the questions we raise, you will gain the tools to ask better questions and tackle them in your own way. In other words, you'll learn about philosophy by *doing* philosophy.

## *Learning Goals*

In successfully completing this course, you should:

- Gain an understanding of some of the key problems in contemporary metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics;
- Gain skill in developing and evaluating interpretations of philosophical texts;
- Learn how to construct and evaluate arguments;
- Develop an appreciation of the fundamental ambiguities and complexities involved in the human attempt to answer questions about knowing, valuing, and living.

## *Instructional Materials and Sources*

The textbook is currently being written by your instructor; drafts of this book and other articles will be posted in PDF format on the Moodle site. Please print these off (double-sided if you can) and bring them to class. Laptops/tablets will be allowed only by permission (typically only in special circumstances).

## *Methods of Evaluation*

Your final grade will be based the various weighted components described below. Please note that about half of your grade will be determined by your regular, everyday effort. It will thus be quite important to stay current with the reading and be present in class. Note as well what the different letter grades represent. According to the Course Catalog (<http://www.bucknell.edu/catalog.xml>), an 'A' means 'Superior achievement,' a 'B' means 'High pass,' a 'C' means 'Pass,' a 'D' means 'Low pass,' and an 'F,' of course, stands for 'Failing work.' Unless you're some kind of savant, it's highly unlikely that you can produce 'superior work' (or even B-level, *good*, but uninspired work) without putting time and effort into your studies.

**Attendance, Participation, and Preparation (30%).** Your consistent attendance (both to our class meetings and to the Tuesday evening film screenings) is required to earn full credit in this portion of the course. Further, since much of our time in class will be spent discussing some conceptually difficult and occasionally abstract questions and issues, it is crucial that you come *prepared*. What does “coming prepared” mean? It means not only passing your eyes over the reading assigned for that day, but (*at minimum*) making a serious attempt to *critically engage with it* and coming to class ready to share the fruits of your labors (questions, reactions, remaining confusions, &c.). During class, I expect you to be a willing participant. Break the ice. Ask questions. Respond to your peers. Offer your considered opinions. Own up to your confusion/puzzlement. In short: *be ready to do some philosophy!*

**Discussion Board (20%).** I will assign you to separate online discussion groups in Moodle (it's too unwieldy to have everyone in one, I've found) where you will be asked to be a regular contributor. Some weeks I will give you a topic; other times I will leave your discussion up to you. I will occasionally drop in to you group discussion, but mostly I'll observe. What I'm looking for is not *perfect understanding*, but evidence of a serious attempt to critically and analytically engage with the issues we encounter in class, in the films, and in the readings. The discussion board should be a safe context for you to try out ideas, ask questions, practice constructing arguments, and help others do the same. Your weekly contributions will be evaluated on a simple “✓–, ✓, ✓+” basis. At the end of the term, I will drop you lowest two weeks' scores and average your scores: an average of ✓s will correspond to a B/B+.

**Hour Exam(s) (20%).** There will be two hour-long exams held at approximately the thirds of the term. More details about the format of these exams will be provided during the term. Only your best of the two exams will be counted toward your final grade.

**Final Exam (30%).** A final, comprehensive exam will be scheduled by the Registrar (date/time TBA). The format will be similar to the midterms.

### *Other Course Policies & Information* ☞ **READ THIS, PLEASE!**

**Office Hours.** You are invited and encouraged to supplement your in-class learning by visiting me in my allotted office hours or at some other time that suits us both. You do not need to have any specific mission to accomplish. Feel free to drop by or make an appointment.

**Civility.** We only have three-or-so hours a week to spend with one other. Class time is *special* time. Please do not distract yourself — or others, or *me* — with electronic marvels such as smartphones, laptops, beepers, ham radios, &c. Don't fall asleep right in front of me. Failing to keep your impulses in check will have serious consequences for your participation grade (moreover, I reserve the right to summarily *fail* seriously delinquent students from the course).

**Sources and Academic Honesty.** I expect you to abide by Bucknell's Honor Code (<http://www.bucknell.edu/x1324.xml>). In particular, unless otherwise instructed, your written work must correctly cite all materials used (including primary sources, textbooks, materials from the internet, and lectures). I will not hesitate to refer students who plagiarize or commit any other form of academic dishonesty to the University Board of Review (<http://www.bucknell.edu/x1337.xml>).

**Accommodations for the Disabled.** If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, please talk to me (either by email or in person) at your earliest convenience and I will make every effort to accommodate your needs. If you have not yet spoken with the appropriate Associate Dean about your disability (<http://www.bucknell.edu/x7759.xml>), please do so as soon as possible. Accommodations will need to be sanctioned by their office.

### *Schedule Topics & Highlights*

Please stay current with the Moodle site for the updated and detailed reading/assignment information.

#### **Weeks 1–4 (August 23rd–September 18th): Epistemology**

- Sources of Belief film screening: "The Matrix" (1999): 9/4 at 7PM, Campus Theatre (on Market Street)
- Logic and Argument film screening: "The Truman Show" (1998): Tuesday 9/11 at 7PM, Gallery Theater
- Belief, Knowledge, Certainty first hour exam: Tuesday 9/18 (normal classroom/time)
- Knowledge vs. Skepticism

#### **Weeks 5–7 (September 20th–October 4th): The Philosophy of Mind**

- The Mind–Body Problem film screening: "Being John Malkovich" (1999): Tuesday 9/25 at 7PM, Campus Theatre
- Consciousness film screening: "Blade Runner" (1982): Tuesday 10/2 at 7PM, Gallery Theater
- Artificial Intelligence

*Fall Break: No Class on October 9th*

#### **Weeks 8–10 (October 11th–30th): Personal Identity**

- Psychological Accounts film screening: "Suture" (1993): Tuesday 10/16 at 7PM, Gallery Theater
- Bodily Accounts film screening: "The Prestige" (2006): Tuesday 10/23 at 7PM, Campus Theatre
- Fission / Fusion second hour exam: Tuesday 10/30 (normal classroom/time)
- Objectivity

#### **Weeks 11–13 (November 1st–15th): Time & Free Will**

- Our Experience of Time film screening (double-feature!): "La Jetée" (1962) & "12 Monkeys" (1995): Tuesday 11/6 at 7PM, Campus Theatre
- The Possibility of Time Travel
- Free Will

#### **Weeks 14–16 (November 20th–December 4th): Good & Evil**

- The Sources of Morality film screening: "Crimes & Misdemeanors" (1989): Tuesday 11/20 at 7PM, Gallery Theater
- Moral Luck film screening: "The Seventh Seal" (1957): Tuesday 11/27 at 7PM, Gallery Theater
- The Problem of Evil Final Exam: to be scheduled by the Registrar