

PHI 107: THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY

SPRING 2026

TIME: MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, & FRIDAY 12:45 – 1:40PM

LOCATION: SCHAFFER ART BUILDING 221D

Instructor: Roger Rosena

Email: rdrosena@syr.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description: In this course we will be introducing some of the main issues, theories, and arguments in areas concerned with knowledge (epistemology) and reality (metaphysics). Questions include: What is knowledge? What is the relationship between the mind and the body? Does God exist? What does it mean to be free and do we have free will?

In the process of investigating these questions, you will learn how to think and write philosophically. By the end of this course, you will be able to articulate your philosophical beliefs clearly and concisely, construct and defend positions, and reason persuasively.

This course is a writing intensive course. This means that writing is an extensive part of the grade and your grades will be linked to the quality and content of your written work.

Course Material: All readings will be made available electronically and posted on Blackboard. It is your responsibility to make sure that you read the material and ask questions if necessary.

Technology: The use of technology is permitted and encouraged. However, this use is intended for the purpose of enriching the classroom experience. What this means is that non-classroom related activities (ex. texting, social media, buying clothes, etc.) is not tolerated. These activities are disrespectful to me and a distraction to the students around you. If you have an emergency and use your phone or other items, please step out of the room first.

Attendance and Class Participation: I expect that you will attend every class and arrive on time. You will not do well in this class unless you show up to this class. In this course, attendance also means that you are not only *physically* present, but you are also *actively engaging* with the course material. Your participation grade will be based primarily on the quality and quantity of your engagement in the class. If you are sick or have a legitimate reason for missing class, let me know as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity: As a pre-eminent and inclusive student-focused research institution, Syracuse University considers academic integrity at the forefront of learning, serving as a core value and guiding pillar of education. Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy provides students with the necessary guidelines to complete academic work with integrity throughout their studies. Students are required to uphold both course-specific and university-wide academic integrity expectations such as crediting your sources, doing your own work, communicating honestly, and supporting academic integrity. The full Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy can be found by visiting class.syr.edu, selecting, "Academic Integrity," and "Expectations and Policy."

Upholding Academic Integrity includes the protection of faculty's intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or share instructors' course materials, including presentations, assignments, exams, or other evaluative materials without permission. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others, which are then presented as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation. All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person assignments, quizzes, and exams also apply online.

Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered. Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person quizzes and exams also apply to online quizzes and exams. In this course, all work submitted for quizzes and exams must be yours alone. Discussing quiz or exam questions with anyone during the quiz or exam period violates academic integrity expectations for this course.

All generative-AI tools are prohibited in this course because their use inhibits achievement of the course learning objectives. This policy applies to all stages of project and writing processes including researching, brainstorming, outlining, organizing, and polishing. Do not use Generative-AI tools to create any content (i.e., images and video, audio, text, code, etc.). If you have any questions about a feature and whether it is considered Generative-AI, ask your instructor.

This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system Turnitin. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will also submit all papers you write for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at Syracuse University and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.”

Accommodations: Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations should register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Please provide me with a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS so I am aware of your accommodations. Planning for accommodations as early as possible is best. I'd be happy to meet with you to discuss how I can help.

Religious Observations: The university recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under this policy, students have an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify the instructor no later than the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes and by the submission deadline for flexibility classes.

Guidelines for Classroom Behavior: I intend to have a civil and inclusive classroom throughout the semester. A positive learning environment relies upon creating an atmosphere where diverse perspectives can be expressed, especially in a course that focuses on a variety of controversial issues. Each student is encouraged to take an active part in class discussions and activities. Honest and respected dialogue is expected. Disagreement and challenging of ideas in a supportive and sensitive manner is encouraged. Hostility and disrespectful behavior is not tolerated.

Just as we expect others to listen attentively to our views, we must reciprocate and listen to others when they speak, especially when we disagree with them. However, in this class, our emphasis will be on engaging in the mutual exploration of issues as presented in the course readings as scholars rather than in defending points of view we have formed outside of the classroom.

Grading and Evaluation:

I expect all assignments to be turned in on time. If you have any issues, let me know in advance

10% Attendance and Participation

40% Unit Assessments/Quizzes: 4 in total [worth 10% each]

50% Short Papers: 4 in total [worth 12.5% each]

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
100-93	92-90	89-87	86-83	82-80	79-77	76-72	72-70	69-60	59-0

Course Schedule:

This schedule may change and all changes will be communicated through Blackboard and email

1/12: Introduction
No Reading

UNIT 1: EPISTEMOLOGY AND SKEPTICISM

1/14: Knowledge, True Belief, and Justification
Edmund Gettier – “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”

1/16: Humean Skepticism
David Hume – Selections from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

NO CLASS MODAY 1/19/2026

1/21: Cartesian Skepticism
Rene Descartes – *Meditation on First Philosophy* (1st Meditation)

1/23: Class Activity

UNIT 2: PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

1/26: The Problem of Demarcation and Falsifiability
Karl Popper – Selections from *Conjectures and Refutations*

1/28: Observation and Theory-Ladenness

Norwood Russell Hanson – Selections from *Patterns of Discovery* (pgs. 4-7 & 19-24)

1/30: Are There Values in Science?

Helen Longino – “Gender, Politics, and Theoretical Virtues”

QUIZ 1 DUE 1/30

2/2: What is a Philosophy of Social Science?

Emile Durkheim – “What is a Social Fact?”

2/4: How to Write Papers in Philosophy

No Reading

2/6: TBD

PAPER 1 DUE 2/6

2/9: Social Constructivism I: Social Ontology

Sally Haslanger – Social Construction: Who? What? Where? How?

2/11: Social Constructivism II: Problems in Philosophy of Science

Selections from *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.)

Ian Hacking – “Making Up People”

2/13: TBD

UNIT 3: PHILOSOPHY OF MIND (THE MIND BODY PROBLEM)

2/16: Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind

No Reading

2/18: Dualism

Rene Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (2nd Meditation)

Elisabeth of Bohemia – Letters to Descartes of May 6th, 1643 (pgs. 61-62)

2/20: Identity Theory

J.J.C Smart – “Sensations and Brain Processes” (pgs. 144-147, 150-153, 155-156)

QUIZ 2 DUE 2/20

2/23: Functionalism

Hilary Putnam – “The Nature of Mental States” (Sections I, II, IV, V)

2/25: Panpsychism

Philip Goff – “There Is More to Matter Than What It Does: How Panpsychism Solves the Hard Problem of Consciousness”

2/27: TBD

3/2: The New Dualists

Frank Jackson – “What Mary Didn’t Know”

3/4: Can Computers Think?

Alan Turing – Computing, Machinery, and Intelligence (pgs. 433-435 & pgs. 450-451)

3/6: TBD

NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK 3/8/26 – 3/15/26

UNIT 4: PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION (GOD, RELIGION, AND FAITH)

3/16: The Existence of God and the Problem of Evil

Andrea Weisberger – “The Argument from Evil”

3/18: Evidence and Religious Belief

William James – “The Will to Believe”

3/20: TBD

PAPER 2 DUE 3/20

3/23: Confirmation Biases and Religious Belief

Francis Bacon – Selections from *Novum Organum*

3/25: Faith, Religion, and Rationality

Soren Kierkegaard – Selections from *Fear and Trembling*

3/27: Is Religion Good for Humanity?

Bertrand Russell – Why I am not a Christian

QUIZ 3 DUE 3/27

UNIT 5: FREE WILL AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

3/30: Making Sense of Free Will

Adina Roskies – “Neuroscientific Challenges to Free Will and Moral Responsibility”

4/1: Fatalism and Free Will

Richard Taylor – “Fatalism” (pgs. 58-64)

4/3: Class Movie – TBD

4/6: Moral Luck

Dana Nelkin “Moral Luck” (Sections 1 and 2)

4/8: Libertarianism and Free Will

Robert Kane – “Libertarianism” (Sections 1 and 2)

4/10: Hard Incompatibilism, Determinism, and the Possibility of Free Will

Derk Pereboom – “Hard Incompatibilism” (Sections 1, 4, 10-11)

PAPER 3 DUE 4/10

4/13: Hierarchical Accounts of Free Will

Harry Frankfurt – “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”

4/15: Reactive Attitudes and Free Will

Gary Watson – “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme”
(pgs. 127-130)

4/17: Class Movie – The Good Place “The Worst Possible Use of Free Will”

4/20: Challenges to Compatibilist Accounts of Free Will

Gary Watson – “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme”
(pgs. 130-132)

4/22: Moral Responsibility Without Blame?

Hanna Pickard – Responsibility Without Blame: Philosophical Reflections on Clinical Practices

4/24: TBD

4/27: No Class

QUIZ 4 DUE 4/27

PAPER 4 DUE 5/1