

Spring 2022

## **PHI 107 - THEORIES of KNOWLEDGE and REALITY**

Tuesdays and Thursdays - 11:00am - 12:20pm - Marshall Sq. Mall 202B

### **Instructor:**

Kellan Head - [kdhead@syr.edu](mailto:kdhead@syr.edu)

### **Office Hours:**

Thursdays, 1:00-2:00

Bird Library room 426

*also by appointment*

### **Important Dates:**

Midterm Exam (in-class): Thursday, March 31st Last

day of class: Tuesday, May 3rd

Final Exam: Monday, May 9th, 5:15-7:15 pm (location TBD)

### **Course Content and Description:**

This course will look at some of the core topics in epistemology (study of knowledge, belief, rationality) and metaphysics (study of the fundamental nature of reality). The questions that will shape our inquiry include: what is knowledge? what is the mind and what is its relation to the body? do we have free will? does God exist?

Since this is a philosophy course, one of our primary goals will be to develop reasoning and argumentative skills. By reading a selection of canonical philosophy texts, we will be concentrating on identifying, analyzing, and evaluating arguments which address the questions above.

### **Suggestions for Success:**

**Focus on critical thinking and writing skills - ~~not~~ memorization!** To do good philosophy you must be able to critically think about the arguments examined, and you must be able to write *clearly* and *succinctly*. Ideally, your philosophical writing skills will improve as we progress through the semester. On exams, you will not be tested on whether you've memorized trivial details about the texts and arguments we've discussed - rather, you will be asked to critically engage with the topics covered.

**Attend Lectures:** Not only will poor attendance affect your grade (you're allowed 2 unexcused absences before it affects your grade), it's highly unlikely you will end up with a successful grade if you do not regularly attend and pay attention to the class discussions.

## **Readings/texts:**

You are not required to purchase any texts. All required texts will be made available on blackboard (usually in the form of .pdfs). I highly suggest printing out a hard copy - it's far easier to highlight/make notes.

## **Personal Technology Policy**

For the most part, laptops and smartphones act as distractions that prevent you from fully engaging with the topics being discussed in the class. Moreover, multiple studies have confirmed that hand-written notes enable students to comprehend material better than typed ones. Use of electronics can also often be a distraction to other students in the room. For these reasons, I ask that you refrain from laptop or smartphone use during class time.

## **Assignments + Grading:**

This - PHI 109 - is a writing-intensive course. This means that the bulk of your graded assignments will be essay-type assignments. Your assignments will be turned in on blackboard (through Turnitin).

Shorter papers will be ~300 words, longer papers will be ~1,200 words. The midterm exam will be in-class.

Attendance is required: you are allowed 2 unexcused absences from class. After that, **your attendance grade will drop 1 letter grade for each class missed beyond 2.**

Each assignment will be graded out of 100 points. Your final grade for the course will be calculated by your accumulated points out of 1,000 total possible points. Points earned on assignments that count for more than 10% of your final grade will be factored into your final grade proportionally. So, if you score 90/100 points on your Long paper 2 (which counts as 20% toward your final grade), you will earn 180 points from your Long paper 2 assignment. The weight of each assignment is seen below:

Attendance/participation: 10%

Shorter paper 1: 10%

Shorter paper 2: 10%

Longer paper 1: 10%

Longer paper 2: 20%

Midterm exam: 15%

Final exam: 25%

**Late assignments will lose 1 letter grade for each day past the due date they're turned in.** If you anticipate needing extra time for an assignment, please contact me **2 days before the assignment is due.** We can discuss the possibility of an extension.

**No extra-credit opportunities will be given.**

### **Grading Policy:**

Percentages of points out of 1,000 (for final course grade) will be converted as follows:

93-100: A

90-92.9: A-

87-89.9: B+

83-86.9: B

80-82.9: B-

-etc.-

0-59.9: F

### **Attendance Policy**

I will take attendance each day before class. You are allowed **2** unexcused absences throughout the semester - after your 2nd unexcused absence, your 'attendance/participation' grade will drop a letter grade for each class missed. Be sure to provide documentation for any legitimate medical absence - these, of course, will be excused and not counted against you.

### **Tentative Schedule:**

(subject to revisions)

Unit 1: Epistemology

*Readings:*

- Basics of Argument

  - no reading*

- Standard view of knowledge

  - selections from R Feldman *Epistemology*

- Traditional analysis of knowledge

  - selections from R Feldman *Epistemology*

- Epistemic justification

  - selections from R Feldman *Epistemology*

- Problems for the traditional analysis of knowledge

  - selections from R Feldman *Epistemology*

- Skepticism

  - R Descartes "*Meditation I*"

  - D Chalmers "The Matrix as Metaphysics"

*Suggested Reading:*

  - J Feinberg "A Logic Lesson"

  - L Zagzebski "What is Knowledge?"

[SHORT PAPER 1 DUE: 2/17]

## Unit 2: Mind and Body

### *Readings:*

- Intro to Philosophy of Mind
  - selections from* Norton Introduction to Philosophy
- Dualism
  - R Descartes, “*Meditation II, IV*”
  - Elizabeth of Bohemia - “*Correspondence with Descartes*”
- Physicalism
  - P Carruthers - “The Mind is the Brain”
- Dualism Revisited
  - B Gertler - In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism
- Functionalism
  - D Anderson - “Intro to Functionalism”
- Consciousness and Qualia
  - F Jackson - “What Mary Didn’t Know”

### *Suggested readings:*

- P Churchland - *selections from* Matter and Consciousness T
- Nagel - “What is it like to be a bat?”

[SHORT PAPER 2 DUE: 3/10]

## Unit 3: Free Will and Determinism

### *Readings:*

- Intro to Free Will
  - selections from* Norton Introduction to Philosophy
- Libertarianism
  - R Kane - “Libertarianism”
- Compatibilism
  - H Frankfurt - “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”
- Hard Incompatibilism
  - D Pereboom - “Hard Incompatibilism”
- Moral Responsibility Reexamined
  - S Wolf - “Asymmetrical Freedom”

### *Suggested readings:*

- van Inwagen - “The Powers of Rational Beings”
- H Frankfurt - “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”

Renninger's summary of Frankfurt's "Alternate Possibilities"

[MIDTERM EXAM (in-class): 3/31]

Unit 4: God

*Readings:*

-Intro to God

*selections from* Norton Introduction to Philosophy

-The Ontological Argument

Anselm - (*excerpts*)

-The Teleological Argument

R Collins - "The Teleological Argument"

-The Cosmological Argument

W Craig - "The Kalam Cosmological Argument"

[-The Problem of Evil

E Stump - "Knowledge, Freedom, and the Problem of Evil"]

*Suggested readings:*

T Metcalf "The Fine-tuning Argument" L

Garcia "The Ontological Argument"

[Longer Paper 1 due: 4/21]

Short Unit 5: TBD, *if schedule allows*

*possible topics:*

-Hermeneutical Injustice

M Fricker "Powerlessness and Social Interpretation"

-Moral Encroachment

R Basu "The Spectre of Normative Conflict"

-Ontology

A Thomasson "The Controversy Over the Existence of Ordinary Objects" [Longer

Paper 2 due: 5/13]

### **Academic Integrity:**

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class

activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see the Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures on the University's website at <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

You will submit all papers for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted papers to other papers and online sources to detect matches in content. The minimum penalty for an academic integrity violation in this class is a zero on the given assignment; any established violation in this course may result in course failure, regardless of violation level. I will report violations to the University without exception. If you have any concerns or questions about these expectations, please contact me.

### **Disability-Related Accommodations:**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) located at 804 University Avenue, Suite 303 or go to the CDR website at <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/>. You may also call 315.443.4498 to speak to someone regarding specific access needs. CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue 'Accommodation Letters' to students as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible.

### **Diversity and Disability:**

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal as your instructor is to create a learning environment that is usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement, I invite you to contact me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success.

### **Tutoring:**

Syracuse University is committed to your success. To that end, there are several tutoring centers on campus, including the Tutoring & Study Center (TSC), the Writing Center, and the Athletics Academic Services Center. I encourage you to use these services. All schedules and locations are posted on the TSC website: <http://tutoring.syr.edu>.

### **Mental Health**

Mental health and overall well-being are significant predictors of academic success. As such it is essential that during your college experience you develop the skills and resources effectively to navigate stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides (<https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/>) and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at

315-443-8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through the Wellness Leadership Institute, <https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/wellness-leadership-institute/>

**Religious Observation:**

SU's religious observances policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. SU does not have non-instructional days for any religious holidays; however, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes.