

**PHI 107: Theories of Knowledge and Reality (Writing Intensive)
Spring 2025**

Lectures: TuTh 3:30PM-4:50PM in Link Hall 200
Instructor: Shiyu (Shi-Yu) Chen
E-mail: schen17@syr.edu
Office Hours: TuTh 5:00PM-5:40PM (on the first floor at the Barnes Center, next to Otto's Juice Box). Please note that I might leave 10 minutes earlier if no one arrives by then. If this time doesn't work for you, feel free to email me to schedule an appointment at another time.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to some of the main issues, theories, and arguments in the areas of philosophy concerned with knowledge (epistemology) and with reality (metaphysics). Topics to be covered include:

- 1) Knowledge: What does it take to know something? Under what conditions is a belief justified (or reasonable or rational)? How do we tend to respond to evidence that seems to tell against our beliefs, and are we rational in doing so? Can moral considerations change how we epistemically should respond to the evidence?
- 2) God: Does God exist? Can God allow evil? Is it reasonable to believe in God without evidence or arguments? Is it reasonable to believe in God for practical reasons?
- 3) Free will: Is the world deterministic? If so, do we have free will? Does moral responsibility require free will?
- 4) Personal Identity: Can we survive with a different body (or no body at all)? What constitutes our personal identity – body, memory, or soul? Should we honor people's past wishes if they conflict with their current wishes? What is gender identity?

TEXTS

All required readings will be made available on Blackboard.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

You must be able to access Blackboard to get crucial information for the course, including the syllabus (which will be updated throughout the semester), readings, assignments, and your grades.

Weekly Quizzes	20%	From Week 3 to Week 14, there will be a quiz during every class. Quizzes must be completed and submitted in class. Each quiz will be brief and straightforward, designed solely to reflect your effort in reading and understanding the assigned materials. Only your 20 highest quiz grades will count toward your final grade. Please note that weekly quizzes cannot be made up under any circumstances. Sample quizzes will be given in Week 1 and 2, and they will not be counted toward your final grades.
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Attendance	10%	I'll track your attendance based on your submissions of weekly quizzes in class. - For example, if you submit 20 quizzes, you'll get 10 points for attendance, regardless of quiz quality; if you submit 19 quizzes, you'll get 9.5 points for attendance, regardless of quiz quality; and so on. Every student is allowed two excused absences. However, you will not receive credit for the quiz on that day unless you complete it and answering it correctly. Please email me by every Friday if you would like to receive quiz credit for that week. - For example, if you submit 19 quizzes and have one excused absence: (i) If you complete the quiz for that day and answer it correctly, you'll get 19 points for weekly quizzes and 10 for attendance. (ii) If you fail to complete the quiz or fail to answer it correctly, you'll get 19 points for weekly quizzes and 10 points for attendance.
Two Short Essays	10% each, 20% in total	You must write on selected topics. Each essay should be double-spaced, 12-point font, 750-1000 words. Essays less than 3 pages won't be accepted. Topics, rubrics, and further instructions will be provided throughout the semester. The first essay is due in Week 5 and the second essay is due in Week 8. No AI tools are allowed. Late Submission will be subject to a deduction of 1/3 letter grade on the first day (e.g. from B+ to B), and an additional 1/3 letter grade on each subsequent day. Essay submitted later than one week usually will not be accepted.
One Revised Essay	10%	You will revise your second short essay based on my comments, and its evaluation will primarily focus on how well you address them. The revised essay should be double-spaced, 12-point font, 750-1000 words. Essays less than 3 pages won't be accepted. Further instructions will be provided later.

		You may submit the revised essay at any time, but no later than April 25th. Only one submission is allowed. No AI tools are allowed. Late Submission will be subject to a deduction of 1/3 letter grade on the first day (e.g. from B+ to B), and an additional 1/3 letter grade on each subsequent day. Essay submitted later than one week usually will not be accepted.
One Longer Essay	20%	You will either (i) expand one of your short essays into a longer one or (ii) write a new paper on a different selected topic. The longer essay should be double-spaced, 12-point font, around 1200 words. Essays less than 6 pages won't be accepted. Topics, rubrics, and further instructions will be provided throughout the semester. The longer essay is due in Week 15. No AI tools are allowed. Late Submission will be subject to a deduction of 1/3 letter grade on the first day (e.g. from B+ to B), and an additional 1/3 letter grade on each subsequent day. Essay submitted later than one week usually will not be accepted.
Final Exam	20%	Final exam will be in-class, open book/note. There will be 10 multiple choice questions and 2 short essay questions (550 words in total).
Participation Bonus	Up to 2 points	You will receive a 0.5 bonus each time you: • Attend my office hours and engage in a course-related discussion with me. You may come with friends or classmates, but everyone must participate in the discussion to receive credit. • Raise a topic-relevant question, objection, thought experiment, etc., during class. You could focus on something you want to discuss further, don't fully understand, or disagree with in the article. • Pay attention to and comment on your classmates' questions, objection, thought experiment, etc., during a class meeting.

		Visit the writing center specifically to discuss your writing assignments. To claim the bonus, you must provide proof of your visit. Please note that there are no other extra credits available. All credits must be earned before the semester officially ends (<i>April 28th</i>).
	100%	Word Count: At least 4000 words.

Class behavior: You are expected to be awake, sober, and paying attention. Use of cell/mobile phones, laptops, and tablets is not permitted during class; they should be muted and put away, except for CDR accommodations.

Grades: The final course grade will be rounded up or down to the nearest tenth. All grades on assignments as well as the course grade are final and not subject to revision, except in cases of computational errors. The following grading scale will be used for the course:

A = 94.0 or higher	C+ = 79.9-77.0	
	C = 76.9-74.0	
A- = 93.9-90.0	C- = 73.9-70.0	
B+ = 89.9-87.0	D+ = 69.9-67.0	
B = 86.9-84.0	D = 66.9-60.0	F = 59.9 or lower
B- = 83.9-80.0		

COURSE SCHEDULE

This following schedule is tentative and is subject to revision. Please consult this course's Backboard page for the most up-to-date version.

Week 1

Tue, Jan 14	Class 0: Course Introduction & Knowledge. Introduction. No readings.
Thu, Jan 16	Class 1: Knowledge. Feldman, "The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge"

Week 2 (*Add deadline: Jan 21*)

Tue, Jan 21	Class 2: Knowledge. Feldman, "Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification"
Thu, Jan 23	Class 3: Knowledge. Feldman, "Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification"

Week 3 *First Essay Posted*

Tue, Jan 28	Class 4: Knowledge. Kelly, "Disagreement, Dogmatism, and Belief Polarization"
Thu, Jan 30	Class 5: Knowledge. Basu, "The Specter of Normative Conflict"

Week 4 (*Religious Observance Notification Deadline: Mon, Feb 3*)

Tue, Feb 4	Class 6: God. Clark, "Without Evidence or Argument"
Thu, Feb 6	Class 7: God. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

Week 5 *First Essay Due*

Tue, Feb 11	Class 8: God. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"
Thu, Feb 13	Class 9: God. van Inwagen, "The Argument from Evil"

Week 6 *Second Paper Posted*

Tue, Feb 18 Class 10: God. Metcalf, "The Fine-Tuning Argument for the Existence of God" (*Video*)
Thu, Feb 20 Class 11: God. Pascal, "The Wager"; Blackburn, "Infini—Rien"

Week 7

Tue, Feb 25 Class 12: Free will. Introduction & Liberalism. Chisholm "Human Freedom and the Self"
Thu, Feb 27 Class 13: Free will. James Rachels "Hard Determinism: The Case for Determinism and its Incompatibility with any Important Sense of Free Will"

Week 8 *Second Paper Due (Mid-Term Mar 3)*

Tue, Mar 4 Class 14: Free will. Pereboom, "Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It"
Thu, Mar 6 Class 15: Free will. Helen Beebe, "Compatibilism and the ability to do otherwise"

Week 9

Tue, Mar 11 *No Class (Spring Break: Mar 9-16)*
Thu, Mar 13 *No Class (Spring Break: Mar 9-16)*

Week 10

Tue, Mar 18 Class 16: Free will. Brain In A Vat. "Determinism, Free will, and the Meaning of Life." (*Video*)
Thu, Mar 20 Class 17: Free will. Harry Frankfurt "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"

Week 11 *Third Paper Posted*

Tue, Mar 25 Class 18: Free will. Harry Frankfurt "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (*continued*)
Thu, Mar 27 Class 19: Free will. Thomas Nagel "Moral Luck"

Week 12

Tue, Apr 1 Class 20: Personal Identity. Introduction & The Boby View. Perry, "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality"
Thu, Apr 3 Class 21: Personal Identity. The Soul View. Perry, "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality"

Week 13

Tue, Apr 8 Class 22: Personal Identity. The Psychological Continuity View. Parfit. "Personal Identity"
Thu, Apr 10 Class 23: Personal Identity. Past wishes. Agnieszka Jaworska, "Respecting the Margins of Agency"

Week 14 (*Withdrawal deadline Friday, Apr 15*)

Tue, Apr 15 Class 24: The Metaphysics of Gender. TBD.
Thu, Apr 17 Class 25: The Metaphysics of Gender. TBD.

Week 15 *Third Paper Due/Revised Paper Due*

Tue, Apr 22 Class 26: Buffer Day/Review
Thu, Apr 24 Class 27: Final Exam 3

Last day of classes Monday, April 28
Final grades due from faculty Monday, May 12

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Academic integrity and Artificial Intelligence: 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.

Based on the specific learning outcomes and assignments in this course, all AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Grammarly, Google translators, etc.) are prohibited in this course. 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.

Blackboard: This class will use the Blackboard Learning Management to house the syllabus, course content, links to external course materials, assignments, quizzes, exams, feedback, and grades. Note when submitting materials that the University's Blackboard Learning Management System is on Eastern Time. Information about Blackboard is available on Answers Blackboard; alternatively, you can contact Information Technology Services by sending an email to help@syr.edu, calling 315.443.2677, or in-person at the ITS Service Center, located at 1-227 CST in the Life Sciences Complex. Business hours for the Service Center can be found on the ITS Website at http://its.syr.edu/its_service_center/

Center for Disability Resources (CDR): Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information. The CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Discrimination or Harassment: The University does not discriminate and prohibits harassment or discrimination related to any protected category including creed, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, national origin, sex, gender, pregnancy, disability, marital status, age, race, color, veteran status, military

status, religion, sexual orientation, domestic violence status, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender.

Any complaint of discrimination or harassment related to any of these protected bases should be reported to Sheila Johnson-Willis, the University's Chief Equal Opportunity & Title IX Officer. She is responsible for coordinating compliance efforts under various laws including Titles VI, VII, IX and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. She can be contacted at Equal Opportunity, Inclusion, and Resolution Services, 005 Steele Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1120; by email: titleix@syr.edu; or by telephone: 315-443-0211.

Email Policy: An official email address is established and assigned by Information Technology Services (ITS) for each registered student, as well as for all active faculty and staff members. All University communications sent via email will be sent to this address. Faculty and staff members must use the officially established University email address to communicate with students registered in their classes.

Faith Tradition Observances: Syracuse University's Religious Observances Policy recognizes the diversity of faiths represented in the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their traditions. Under the policy, students are given 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 no later than the academic drop deadline. For observances occurring before the drop deadline, notification is required at least two academic days in advance. Students may enter their observances in MySlice under Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances/Add a Notification.

Health and Wellness Considerations: 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/>

Turnitin: 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 reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

Tutoring: Syracuse University and I are 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.