

COURSE SYLLABUS

PHI 107 Theories of Knowledge and Reality

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:30 am or by appointment. Please email instructor.

Course Description

An introduction to some major questions about knowledge and reality, such as the existence of God, the mind-body problem, free will and the nature and limits of knowledge. Historical and contemporary readings.

Additional Course Description

This is an introduction to two central areas of philosophy: epistemology is the study of knowledge and ontology (a branch of metaphysics) is the study of what there is.

We will examine four key issues from the history of philosophy: God, knowledge, mind, and personal identity. We will read primary sources from the Western philosophical tradition, including Descartes, Alan Turing, Bertrand Russell, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, and others. We will also read some recent philosophical writings about super intelligent A.I. and uploading your mind into a robot.

Some questions and themes we will explore include the following:

- What is philosophy, and what is its purpose?
- Does God exist, and can we rationally prove this?
- Is the existence of God rationally consistent with the existence of the evil we find in the world?
- Why would God allow innocent people to suffer?
- What can we truly know? How do we know?
- What is knowledge (as opposed to mere belief e.g.)?
- What is the mind made of?
- How do our minds interact with our bodies?
- How do I know other people have minds, given that I can never access another mind directly?
- Can a purely physical brain account for consciousness?
- Can we create a mind, e.g., in a computer program or in a robot?
- Could we download our minds into a computer or robot? If we did, would it still be us, or merely a copy?
- Will artificial intelligence one day rival human intelligence? If it did, what would happen to human beings?

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Prerequisite / Co-requisite

N/A

Audience

Undergraduate students

Credits

3

Course Fees and/or Costs

Tuition

Textbook

Required Texts / Supplies:

The following text is required for the course. It can be found in the University Bookstore or through various online sources (such as Amazon). A few other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, 7th edition edited by Perry, Bratman and Fischer (Oxford University Press)*

****Please note that there is a newer (more expensive) 8th edition out, but we will be using the 7th edition. All of our readings are also in the newer edition, but page numbers will not be the same as those listed on the schedule below. Online versions of the textbook are currently only available for the newer 8th edition.***

Course Learning Objectives (CLO)

After taking this course, students will be able to:

1. CLO #1 Practice the skill of evaluating arguments.
2. CLO #2 Compare and contrast a variety of philosophical arguments.
3. CLO #3 Discuss the criticisms and objections to a variety of philosophical arguments.
4. CLO #4 Develop and defend their own position on a philosophical issue.

Course Requirements and Expectations:

Activities

1. Activity Title: Live Session Questions
 - a. Activity Type: Discussion
 - b. Associated CLOs: #1, #2, #3,

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- c. Short Description: Post at least one question about the reading, lesson, movie, or review questions. Read through your classmates' posts and comment on ALL the questions that you are also curious about.
- d. Points: 100
- 2. Activity Title: Readings
 - a. Activity Type: Readings
 - b. Associated CLOs: #1, #2, #3
 - c. Short Description: Assigned readings each week.
 - d. Points: not graded
- 3. Activity Title: Class Participation
 - a. Activity Type: Class Participation
 - b. Associated CLOs: #1, #2, #3, #4
 - c. Short Description: Attend live sessions, ask questions and add to class discussions.
 - d. Points: 100
- 4. Activity Title: Written Papers
 - a. Activity Type: Papers (*two*)
 - b. Associated CLOs: #1, #2, #3, #4
 - c. Short Description: Three-page papers that reflect and defend the student's opinion of the assigned topic.
 - d. Points: 100
- 5. Activity Title: Unit Exams
 - a. Activity Type: Exams (*four*)
 - b. Associated CLOs: #1, #2, #3
 - c. Short Description: Two essay questions in each exam
 - d. Points: 100

Grading:

Grades will be determined on the following weighted allocation of points:

Activity	Percent value
Live Session Participation	15%
Four Essay Exams, 10% each	40%
Two papers, 20% each	40%
Live Session Question submissions	5%
Total Possible	100

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Grading Table

Grades	Grade Points/Credit	Percentage Range
A	4.00	94 – 100%
A-	3.667	90 – 93%
B+	3.333	87 – 89%
B	3.000	83 – 86%
B-	2.667	80 – 82%
C+	2.333	77 – 79%
C	2.000	73 – 76%
C-	1.667	70 – 72%
D	1.000	60 – 69%
F	0	0 – 59%

* source: <http://www.syr.edu/registrar/students/grades/faq.html>

University Attendance Policy

Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at Syracuse University. Students are expected to arrive on campus in time to attend the first meeting of all classes for which they are registered. Students who do not attend classes starting with the first scheduled meeting may be academically withdrawn as not making progress toward degree by failure to attend. Instructors set course-specific policies for absences from scheduled class meetings in their syllabi.

It is a federal requirement that students who do not attend or cease to attend a class to be reported at the time of determination by the faculty. Faculty should use “ESPR” and “MSPR” in Orange Success to alert the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Financial Aid. A grade of NA is posted to any student for whom the Never Attended flag is raised in Orange SUccess. More information regarding Orange Success. More information regarding Orange Success can be found [on the Orange Success Website, \(http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/.\)](http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/)

Students should also review the University’s religious observance policy and make the required arrangements at the beginning of each semester.

Syracuse University Policies

Syracuse University has a variety of other policies designed to guarantee that students live and study in a community respectful of their needs and those of fellow students. Some of the most important of these concern:

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Diversity and Disability

Ensuring that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities in a diverse, inclusive, accessible, bias-free campus community can be found [on the Diversity website](https://www.syracuse.edu/life/accessibilitydiversity/), (<https://www.syracuse.edu/life/accessibilitydiversity/>)

Religious Observances Notification and Policy

Steps to follow to request accommodations for the observance of religious holidays can be found [on the SU policies website](http://supolicies.syr.edu/studs/religious_observance.htm), (http://supolicies.syr.edu/studs/religious_observance.htm)

Orange Success (tools to access a variety of SU resources, including ways to communicate with advisors and faculty members) can be found [on the Orange Success website](http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/), (<http://orangesuccess.syr.edu/getting-started-2/>)

Disability-Related Accommodations

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 meet with 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.

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. <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/>

Academic Integrity Policy

Syracuse University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit and for upholding course-specific, as well as university-wide, academic integrity expectations. The policy governs citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and truthfulness in all academic matters, including course attendance and participation. The policy also prohibits students from: 1) submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving advance written authorization from both instructors and, 2) using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course materials to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others and present the work as their own. Under the policy, instructors who seek to penalize a student for a suspected violation must first report the violation to the Center for Learning and Student Success (CLASS). Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a

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suspected violation. Instructors must wait to assign a final course grade until a suspected violation is reviewed and upheld or overturned. Upholding Academic Integrity includes abiding by instructors' individual course expectations, which may include the protection of their intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or otherwise share instructors' course materials without permission. 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, as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Required Activities
Week 1 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 7 hours to complete this week's coursework.	Theories of Knowledge (Part 1)	Lecture video Readings <i>-required</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes "Meditation I", Textbook pages 157-159 • Descartes "Meditation II" and "Meditation III", Textbook pages 159-168 <i>-optional</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato "Apology", Textbook pages 21-36 Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Yourself • Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review questions
Week 2 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 7 hours to complete this week's coursework.	Theories of Knowledge (Part 2)	Lecture Video Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes "Meditation IV", "Meditation V", and "Meditation VI", Textbook pages 168-181 Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit 1 Exam – Theories of Knowledge

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Week	Topic	Required Activities
Week 3 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 8 hours to complete this week's coursework.	The Big Three, Pascal's Wager, and the Problem of Evil	Lecture Video Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paley: Natural Theology, Textbook pages 45-49 ● Pascal: The Wager, Textbook pages 50-53 ● Dostoyevsky: <i>The Brothers Karamazov, Rebellion</i> Part II, Book V, Chapter IV: pages 459-476, SU Library: https://bit.ly/BrosKaram Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paper 1
Week 4 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 7 hours to complete this week's coursework.	Faith, Reason, and the Problem of Evil	Lecture Video Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perry: The First Morning and The First Afternoon, Textbook pages 91-103 ● Antony, Textbook pages 139-151 Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Movie: <i>A Serious Man</i> ● Unit 2 Exam – God and the Problem of Evil
Week 5 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 6 hours to complete this week's coursework.	Philosophy of Mind – Two Classic Problems	Lecture Video Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Russell, Textbook pages 269-271 ● Armstrong, Textbook pages 279-286 ● Jackson, Textbook pages 291-294 Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review Questions

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Week	Topic	Required Activities
Week 6 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 8 hours to complete this week's coursework.	Philosophy of Mind – Artificial Intelligence	Lecture Video Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turing, Textbook pages 295-307 • Searle, Textbook pages 308-321 Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movie: <i>Ex Machina</i> • Unit 3 Exam – Minds, Brains, and Machines
Week 7 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 8 hours to complete this week's coursework.	The Singularity and Personal Identity (Part 1)	Lecture Video Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chalmers: The Singularity https://consc.net/papers/singularity.pdf Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 2 • Review Questions
Week 8 Time Allocation: It is anticipated that you will need a minimum of 5 hours to complete this week's coursework.	The Singularity and Personal Identity (Part 2)	Lecture Video Discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Session Questions Assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movie: <i>Transcendence</i> • Unit Exam 4 – The Singularity and Personal Identity

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Live (synchronous) Session Participation Policy:

Participation for live sessions is mandatory. Students must request approval to miss a live session due to an unavoidable conflict. Students that receive approval to miss a live session will be expected to complete an assignment in place of the live session. The assignment should be completed before the next live session.

Any sessions missed without approval will result in the student receiving a “0” for that week’s live session grade.

Any student that enrolls in the class after the start of the first live session will be able to submit an alternate assignment for the first session only as provided by the faculty.

Please note: For online courses, holidays are not observed. If your live session is scheduled on a holiday, the session will be held, or an alternate date will be chosen that is mutually agreeable to the instructor and a majority of class members.

This course will be conducted online with eight (8) synchronous, 90-minute sessions.

Excusable Absence Policy

If a student misses a live (synchronous) session due to a conflict that is out of the student’s control, the student must:

- Provide proof of conflict to the instructor and request approval.
- If approved, instructor must provide an alternative assignment.
- The alternative assignment should be completed by the next live (synchronous) session.

Each live session will be recorded and your registration and continued enrollment in this course indicates your consent.

Please note: *Last day of classes: Thursday October 19, 2023

Week #	Start	Close	Live Session
Week 1	08/26/24	09/01/24	08/27/24
Week 2	09/02/24	09/08/24	09/03/24
Week 3	09/09/24	09/15/24	09/10/24
Week 4	09/16/24	09/22/24	09/17/24
Week 5	09/23/24	09/29/24	09/24/24

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Week #	Start	Close	Live Session
Week 6	09/30/24	10/06/24	10/01/24
Week 7	10/07/24	10/13/24	10/08/24
Week 8	10/14/24	*10/17/24	10/13/24

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 SU 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://turnitin.com) reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

PHI 107 Structure

This course fulfills a writing requirement, so most of the assessments involve writing. Students will be graded on 4 essay exams given at the end of each topic section, and 2 short essay writing assignments (3 typed pages). These will all be in the form of an argumentative essay—you must take a stand on something related to the readings and then provide evidence for it. The exams are each worth 10% of the final course grade, and the essay assignments are each worth 20%. Due dates and times can be found in the [Class Schedule](#). The purpose of the exams and papers differs; the exam is designed to test your understanding of the material, while the papers are designed for you to do some philosophical thinking of your own. We'll talk more about this as the due dates approach.

Needless to say (I hope), doing the assigned readings is crucial for performing well in this class. This will allow us to devote class time to *discussion*, as opposed to traditional (but less interesting) class structures where a large amount of time is spent on lectures which basically rehash the readings which should have already been studied prior to the class meeting. 15% of the final grade will be based upon Class Participation. Please recognize that this is a large portion of your grade; participation can be the difference between an F and a B! A large part of the participation grade is based upon student comments on the readings. In order to receive credit for participation, students will need to make a contribution to class discussion which makes it clear that they have read the material for that day. If you didn't understand something in the reading, just ask in class! The readings are short but sometimes difficult.

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Class discussion is also very important for other reasons. Plato wrote in dialogue form, and analytic philosophy has progressed through dialectic ever since. Discussion of arguments and ideas is a crucial part of this process. Remember, 15% of the final grade will be based on class participation. All you need to do in order to receive credit for this is to say something in class each week. Being a good critical thinker means (in part) being open to any point of view, so feel free to say anything. You won't be graded on what you say, as long as you're able to demonstrate that you're doing the readings and paying attention during class. Don't worry about saying something wrong or sounding foolish—in philosophy we're open to all ideas, and we encourage taking risks and unique thinking. We will critically evaluate all the ideas together as a group, so the more ideas we have to think about, the better. Many students are initially uncomfortable talking in class. This is understandable but needs to be overcome in order to receive a good grade for class participation. Now is a good time to overcome your fear, with a friendly audience and low stakes. The only way to receive a poor grade is to not say anything.

Writing Philosophy

PHI 107 counts as a writing intensive course, and one of the goals of this course to improve students' academic writing. Writing for philosophy differs a little from writing for other disciplines. We will talk more about the specifics in class, but in a nutshell analytic philosophy emphasizes content over aesthetics. Try to avoid flowery language or long introductions—jump right in and get straight to the point. Philosophy also emphasizes clarity. To this end, try to be as clear and precise as possible using the simplest language that you can. Be specific and explain exactly what you mean.

Use of Class Materials and Recordings

Original class materials (handouts, assignments, tests, etc.) and recordings of class sessions are the intellectual property of the course instructor. You may download these materials for your use in this class. *However, you may not provide these materials to other parties (e.g., web sites, social media, other students) without permission.* Doing so is a violation of intellectual property law and of the student code of conduct.

Reading Philosophy

Reading in Philosophy courses tends to differ from that for other disciplines. We tend to read less in our classes, but also to read much more carefully. You may want to read assignments more than once in order to get a fuller understanding. This is a skill which requires practice. If you are having difficulty with the reading or want to talk about it more outside of class, come see me during office hours.