PHI 107: Theories of Knowledge and Reality

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Tues & Thurs 11:00 am—12:20 pm

Section M001

HB Crouse 213A

Course Description

This course is Theories of Knowledge and Reality. 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 Plato, Descartes, Alan Turing, Bertrand Russell, David Hume, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, and others.

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. on 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? Are we truly free to do whatever we choose, or are we preprogrammed based on our genes and our upbringing? Will artificial intelligence one day rival human intelligence? If it did, what would happen to human beings?

Textbook

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.

Contacting the Instructor

Email: jhedger@syr.edu (Please include "PHI 107" and your section or meeting time in the subject line.)

Office hours: 9:30 —10:30 am Tuesday and Thursday, or by appointment. Hall of Languages 528.

Assessment

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 below, 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. 20% 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.

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, 20% 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.

Class Schedule and Assignments

Unit One: What is Philosophy?; Theories of Knowledge

Unit Two: The Existence of God and The Problem of Evil

Unit Three: Minds, Brains, and Machines

Unit Four: The Singularity and Personal Identity

Please note that three of the readings are not in the textbook. These are available on Blackboard to read and print out.

Due dates for readings, exams, and essays:

8/29	Course Introduction and Syllabus	**8/31**	Plato "Apology" pp. 21-36
9/5	Descartes, "Meditation I" pp. 157-159	**9/7**	Descartes, "Meditation II" and "Meditation III" pp. 159-168

9/12	Descartes, "Meditation IV", "Meditation V" and "Meditation VI" pp. 168-181	**9/14**	Finish discussion of Descartes; Review for Exam 1
9/19	**Exam 1 in class**	**9/21**	Pascal pp. 50-53;
9/26	Dostoyevsky (Blackboard); Perry: The First Morning & The First Afternoon, pp. 91-103	**9/28**	Antony, pp. 139-151 **Paper 1 due**
10/3	*A Serious Man* (film in class)	**10/5**	*A Serious Man* (film in class)
10/10	*Fall Break (No class)*	**10/12**	Finish discussion of the readings; Review for Exam 2
10/17	**Exam 2 in class**	**10/19**	Russell, pp. 269-271; Armstrong, pp. 279-286
10/24	Jackson, pp. 291-294 (& finish discussing Armstrong)	**10/26**	Turing, pp. 295-307
10/31	Searle, pp. 308-321	**11/2**	Churchland, pp. 287-291, Fodor (Blackboard)
11/7	*Ex Machina* (film in class)	**11/9**	*Ex Machina* (film in class)
11/14	Finish discussion of the readings; Review for Exam 3	**11/16**	**Exam 3 in class**
11/21	*Thanksgiving Break (No class)*	**11/23**	*Thanksgiving Break (No class)*
11/28	Chalmers: The Singularity (Blackboard)	**11/30**	Chalmers: The Singularity (Blackboard)
12/5	Chalmers: The Singularity (Blackboard) **Paper 2 due**	**12/7**	Finish discussing Chalmers; Review for Exam 4
12/12	**Exam 4 in class**		

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.

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.

Religious Observances

SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, 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. Under the policy, 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. For this semester, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

Disabilities

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 and Harassment

Federal and state law, and University policy prohibit discrimination and harassment based on sex or gender (including sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and retaliation). If a student has been harassed or assaulted, they can obtain confidential counseling support, 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, from the Sexual and Relationship Violence Response Team at the Counseling Center (315-443-8000, Barnes Center at The Arch, 150 Sims Drive, Syracuse, New York 13244). Incidents of sexual violence or harassment can be reported non-confidentially to the University's Title IX Officer (Sheila Johnson Willis, 315-443-0211, titleix@syr.edu, 005 Steele Hall). Reports to law enforcement can be made to the University's Department of Public Safety (315-443-2224, 005 Sims Hall), the Syracuse Police Department (511 South State Street, Syracuse, New York, 911 in case of emergency or 315-435-3016 to speak with the Abused Persons Unit), or the State Police (844-845-7269).

I will seek to keep information you share with me private to the greatest extent possible, but as a professor I have mandatory reporting responsibilities to share information regarding sexual misconduct, harassment, and crimes I learn about with the University's Title IX Officer to help make our campus a safer place for all.

Academic Integrity

Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same

work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation 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. Syracuse University 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.

Plagiarism is a very serious offense. If you are unsure of whether or how you should cite something, be sure to contact the Writing Center or myself. Any plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment, an F in the course, and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office. Don't do it. If you're stuck on a writing assignment or worried about it or some emergency comes up, email me or come talk to me; don't resort to presenting someone else's work as your own.