

PHI 107: Theories of Knowledge and Reality (Spring 2024)

Instructor: Sanggu Lee

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Class: TuTh 12:30 – 1:50 in Smith Hall 227

Office Hours: TBD

Course Description:

This course will serve as an introduction to some of the main issues, theories, and arguments in the areas of philosophy concerned with knowledge (epistemology) and reality (metaphysics). We will be concerned with the following questions:

1. What do we know?
2. Can God allow suffering?
3. Do we have free will?
4. What is race?
5. When death is bad for the one who dies?

Goals:

The primary goal of this course is to improve your ability to think carefully about abstract topics, while subjecting your most deeply held beliefs to philosophical scrutiny. By the end of this course, you will have developed the following skills:

- The ability to identify the structure of arguments—identifying their premises, conclusion, and logical form—and to present them in premise-conclusion form.
- The ability to provide focused objections to arguments, which concentrate either on a particular premise or on a particular inference in the argument's structure and suggest reasons to doubt that premise or inference.
- The ability to analyze the strength of different objections to an argument, thinking about how an objection works, how central to the argument the point being challenged by the objection is, and how easy it would be to modify the argument so as to avoid the objection.

- The ability to rationally defend a philosophical position, by explaining and then presenting valid arguments in favor of each of its central tenets, and identifying and responding to potential objections to it.

Readings:

All readings are posted on Blackboard. Some of them are from the following books:

- Chalmers, David (2022). *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*.
- Korman, Daniel Z. (2022). *Learning from Arguments: An Introduction to Philosophy*.
- Ney, Alyssa (2023). *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Requirements:

There will be two short papers (2-3 pages), one revised paper based on one of your two short papers (6-8 pages), and ten reading questions. There will be an in-class final exam. You should actively participate in class discussions to get in-class participation points. Below is a breakdown of your grades:

· Reading Questions 10*2	20pts
· Short Papers 2*10	20pts
· Revised Paper	15pts
· Final Exam	25pts
· In-class Participation/Attendance	20pts

We will use the usual grading scale of 100-94%=A, 93-90%=A-, 89-87%=B+, 86-84%=B, 83-80%=B-, 79-77%=C+, 76-74%=C, etc. For example, if you end up with 94pts, your final grade will be an A. If you end up with 89pts, your final grade will be a B+, and so on.

Attendance and Participation:

You're expected to attend the meetings regularly and participate. More than **three unexcused absences** will negatively affect your participation grade. For example, your maximum participation points will be 19pts if you have four unexcused absences. One point will be taken off your grade *for each unexcused absence after the third unexcused absence*.

How can you get an in-class participation point? If you bring up your reading question during a class meeting, you will have 1 point for that. If you pay attention to and answer your friends' questions during a class meeting, you will have 1 point for that. If you raise a topic-relevant question, objection, thought experiment, etc., you will have 1 point for that. And so on.

You can have **a maximum of 3 points per meeting** for an in-class participation grade. For example, if you ask four questions in one meeting, you will have only 3 points. You can't have more points once you achieve 20 points for the in-class participation grade. But, of course, you're encouraged to speak up about your questions even then. I will always be interested in hearing your questions and discussing them.

Reading Questions:

For each reading, you'll submit a question. Since our readings are more than 10, only your best 10 reading questions will be included in the grade calculation. You should submit your questions on Blackboard **before the class on Tuesday (by 11:59 pm on Mondays)**.

What kind of questions? **(1)** They should be *directed at the reading* and be of a *main concern* in the article. **(2)** You could focus on something you want to *discuss further*, you *don't understand*, or *object to* in the article. **(3)** Don't go for easy questions! If it's about something you don't understand, make sure the article doesn't clarify it. **(4)** Last but not least, write *clearly*! Aim that your friend who knows nothing of the subject can understand your question.

Reading questions will be graded based on the requirements listed above.

Short Papers:

You'll write *two* short papers, each 2-3 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font). Further instructions on short papers will be given to you.

Revised Paper:

You'll write one revised paper of 6-8 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font) excluding a reference page. Your revised paper will be based on one of your two short papers. Further instructions on the revised paper will be given to you.

Course Policies:

Accommodations for Students with 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. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact the CDR as soon as possible. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu or visit <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/> for more detailed information.

Students in Distress:

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 Observances:

If you expect to be absent from class for a religious observation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester.

Emails and Meetings:

I will try to reply to emails about brief class-related questions within a day or two. Please see me during office hours or schedule an appointment for substantive inquiries. Do not hesitate to reach out to me! I'm sincerely happy to help you.

Late Assignment Policy:

One point will be taken off your grade *for each late day*. If you need an extension of your assignment, please send me an email at least a few hours before the deadline.

Electronic Devices:

Please do not use electronic devices during lectures. Phones, tablets, laptops, etc. should be put away and the volume muted. If you think you need to use an electronic device during lectures in order to succeed in this course, please come speak to me individually.

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 the instructor and general academic expectations about 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.

- You must cite all sources apart from your own lecture notes. Feel free to use any acceptable citation format.
- Your reading questions and papers must be your own work.
- No repetitive questions: the same reading question can't be submitted twice by you at two different times or by you and a friend of yours at the same time.

Tentative Schedule: (*= optional reading)

Introduction

Tu Jan 16 Introduction & Logic

Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Introduction (pp. 1-18) & Appendix A: Logic (pp. 202-213)

Th Jan 28 Logic (cont.)

Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Introduction (pp. 1-18) & Appendix A: Logic (pp. 202-213)

*Alyssa Ney (2023), *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*, Background (pp. 1-13)

Unit I: Knowledge

What do we know?

- Tu Jan 23 Introduction: skepticism about the external world
David Chalmers (2022), *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 3
(pp. 1-10)
- Th Jan 25 The master argument for skepticism
David Chalmers (2022), *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 3
(pp. 10-17)
- Tu Jan 30 Responses to the master argument for skepticism
David Chalmers (2022), *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 4
(pp. 1-11)
- Th Feb 1 Responses to the master argument for skepticism (cont.)
David Chalmers (2022), *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 4
(pp. 11-19)

Unit II: God

Can God allow suffering?

- Tu Feb 6 Introduction: the problem of evil
Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Chapter 1: Can God Allow Suffering?
(pp. 19-23)
- Th Feb 8 Responses to the argument from suffering
Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Chapter 1: Can God Allow Suffering?
(pp. 23-31)
- Tu Feb 13 Responses to the argument from suffering (cont.)
Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Chapter 1: Can God Allow Suffering?
(pp. 23-31)

Unit III: Free Will

Do we have free will?

- Th Feb 15 Introduction: free will and determinism
Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Chapter 5: No Freedom (pp. 86-88,
96-101)

Short Paper 1 Due by Thursday, February 15, 11:59 pm EST

- Tu Feb 20 Against free will: the consequence argument
 Dan Korman (2022), *Learning from Arguments*, Chapter 5: No Freedom (pp. 101-106)
- Th Feb 22 No Class
- Tu Feb 27 Libertarianism
 Roderick Chisholm (1966), “Freedom and Action (exerpt)” (pp. 11-25)
- Th Feb 29 Against Libertarianism
 Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Chapter 4, pp. 36-39)
- Tu Mar 5 Compatibilism
 Susan Wolf (1987), “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” (pp. 46-62)
- Th Mar 7 Against Compatibilism
 Denis Villeneuve (2016), <Arrival>
- Tu Mar 12 No Class: Spring Break
- Th Mar 14 No Class: Spring Break

Unit IV: Race

What is race?

- Tu Mar 19 Biological realism about race
 Alyssa Ney (2023), *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*, Chapter 6: The Metaphysics of Race and Gender (pp. 158–163)
- Th Mar 21 TBD
- Tu Mar 26 TBD
- Th Mar 28 Eliminativism about race
 Alyssa Ney (2023), *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*, Chapter 6: The Metaphysics of Race and Gender (pp. 163–166)

Short Paper 2 Due by Thursday, March 28, 11:59 pm EST

- Tu Apr 2 Social constructivism about race
 Alyssa Ney (2023), *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*, Chapter 6: The Metaphysics of Race and Gender (pp. 166–169)

Th Apr 4 Social constructivism about race (cont.)
Alyssa Ney (2023), *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*, Chapter 6: The Metaphysics of Race and Gender (pp. 166–169)

Unit V: Death and Time

When death is bad for the one who dies?

Tu Apr 9 Introduction: The Epicurean timing argument
Ben Bradley (2004), “When death is bad for the one who dies?” (pp. 1-7)
*Steven Luper (2021), “Death,” Stanford Encyclopedia, Section 4. The Timing Puzzle

Th Apr 11 Subsequentialism
Ben Bradley (2004), “When death is bad for the one who dies?” (pp. 7-24)
*Alyssa Ney (2023), *Metaphysics: An Introduction (2nd)*, Chapter 8: Time (pp. 219-224)

Tu Apr 16 Dissolving the timing problem
Travis Timmerman (2022), “Dissolving Death’s Time-of-Harm Problem” (pp. 405-410)

Th Apr 18 Dissolving the timing problem (cont.)
Travis Timmerman (2022), “Dissolving Death’s Time-of-Harm Problem” (pp. 410-416)

Tu Apr 23 TBD

Th Apr 25 **In-class final exam**

Revised Paper Due by Monday, May 6, 11:59 pm EST