PHI 107 (M006): Theories of Knowledge and Reality
Fall 2021

Instructor: Byron Simmons
Email: bsimmons@syr.edu
Class: MWF 11:40 AM - 12:35 PM in Life Science Building 300
Office hours: TBA or by appointment

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 is knowledge?
2. What is the relation between the mind and the body?
3. Do we have free will?
4. Does God exist?

COURSE 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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: There will two exams, two papers, and several short homework assignments. Note that this course is designated by the University as **writing-intensive**. This means that the University imposes requirements as to how many written assignments are to be given in this course. There are 500 total points available in this course, which break down as follows:

First Paper = 10%
Second Paper = 20%
Midterm Exam = 20%
Final Exam = 20%
Short Writing Assignments = 20%
Attendance & Participation = 10%

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR: You are expected to come prepared to each class, to be on time, and to stay for the duration of the class period. If you must enter late or leave early, please do so unobtrusively.

Please silence your cell phones. **Laptops are permitted,** but must only be used for relevant class purposes (no gaming, shopping, social-media, web-surfing, etc.). **Do not use any other electronic devices (such as cell phones, headphones, earbuds, ipads, etc.) during class.** Doing so will negatively affect your participation grade.

TEXTS: You are not required to buy a textbook for this course. All the required readings will be made available electronically. You are expected to print out them out promptly, study them carefully, and mark them up extensively.

Note that this course will be **reading-intensive**. The absence of a textbook should *not* be interpreted to imply that the reading is optional. The readings provide context that will be necessary for success on the exams and the papers; you may be tested on content from the readings which is not discussed in class.

I will post various reading questions on Blackboard along with each of the readings. These questions are simply intended to help guide you through the readings, they are not homework assignments. I strongly encourage you to do the readings both before and after the class period for which they are assigned, but if you find it more helpful to do them after we talk about them in class, that is also acceptable. Note, however, that some of the short writing assignments might require you to do some of the readings before we talk about them in class.

EXAMS: There will be two exams: a mid-term and a final. I will distribute a bunch of sample exam questions before each exam. Both exams will contain twelve questions drawn from the list of sample questions. You will be asked to answer 10 of these 12 questions. You should be able to answer each question in a paragraph or two. Your answers must be clear and to the point.

HELP: Philosophy is hard, but help is available. You might find some of the readings difficult and some of the material confusing. If you find yourself struggling with something you do not understand or if you just want to discuss something further, please do not hesitate to let me know. I will be more than happy to help you. Don't wait for a bad grade on a paper or an exam. If you seek help, you will get it.

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: https://class.syr.edu/academic-support/.

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. For more information and the complete policy, see the Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures on the University's website at https://class.syr.edu/academic-integrity/policy/.

The **minimum** penalty for an academic integrity violation in this course is a zero on the exam, assignment, or quiz in question. A report will then be sent to the Academic Integrity Office.

Don't cheat. Seriously, don't do it. I have a zero-tolerance policy for violations of academic integrity, and will report violations to the University without exception.

However, I am generally quite understanding of the various problems that can make it difficult to turn in an assignment on time. If you find yourself having difficulty meeting an assignment deadline, then **contact me and let me know about the problem instead of plagiarizing to meet the deadline.** It is much better to turn in an assignment late than to plagiarize in order to get it in on time.

TURNITIN: This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system Turnitin for your papers and homeworks. Turnitin will compare everything you submit 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.

ACCOMMODATION FOR DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS: 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.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES: If you need to miss a class due to a religious observance, you will be entitled to makeup opportunities if (but only if) you provide notice by Monday, September 20th. For more information on this policy, see: http://hendricks.syr.edu/spiritual-life/observances.html.

TENATIVE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO REVISION): All the readings will be made available in the "Readings" section of the Blackboard website: http://bbgroupa.syr.edu/. (* = optional reading)

Introduction

Mon, 8/30 Course Introduction

Wed, 9/1 Truth and Falsehood
Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Chapter 12

Unit I: Knowledge

Fri, 9/3 Introduction: Knowledge and Justification

[Mon, 9/6 No Class – Labor Day]

Wed, 9/8 Justification Requires Certainty
René Descartes, *Meditation* I

Fri, 9/10 Justified True Belief is Not Sufficient for Knowledge
Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
Linda Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"
First Short Assignment Due (20 points)

Unit II: Mind-Body

Mon, 9/13 Introduction to Philosophy of Mind
* Peter van Inwagen, "The Nature of Rational Beings: Dualism and Physicalism"

Wed, 9/15 Dualism: Substances and Properties
Descartes, *Meditation* II

Fri, 9/17 Dualism: The Separability Argument
Descartes, *Meditation* VI

Mon, 9/20 Problems for Dualism: The Problem of Other Minds
Second Short Assignment Due (20 points)

Wed, 9/22 Problems for Dualism: The Causal Interaction Problem
Princes Elizabeth of Bohemia, *Correspondence with Descartes* [selections]

Fri, 9/24 Identity Theory
J. J. C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes"

Mon, 9/27 Identity Theory (continued)
Third Short Writing Assignment Due (10 points)

Wed, 9/29 Interlude: Can Machines Think?
Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"
"The Measure of a Man" (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Season 2, Episode 9)

Fri, 10/1 Problems for the Identity Theory
Hilary Putnam, "The Nature of Mental States"

Mon, 10/4 Functionalism

Wed, 10/6 Dualism Strikes Back
Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know"

Unit III: Free Will

Fri, 10/8 Introduction to Free Will and Determinism
* van Inwagen, "The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will"

Mon, 10/11 The Consequence Argument

Wed, 10/13 Standard Libertarianism
Robert Kane, "Libertarianism", sections 1 and 2

Fri, 10/15 Problems for Standard Libertarianism: The Libet Experiment
First Paper Due (50 points)

Mon, 10/18 Problems for Standard Libertarianism: The Randomness Objection
Kane, "Libertarianism", section 6

Wed, 10/20 Compatibilism
Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"

Fri, 10/22 Compatibilism (continued)

Mon, 10/25 **Midterm Exam (100 points)**

Wed, 10/27 Problems for Compatibilism & Non-Standard Libertarianism
Susan Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility", pp. 459-463
Kane, "Libertarianism", section 7

Fri, 10/29 Semi-Compatibilism
Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility", pp. 464-468
Fourth Short Writing Assignment Due (10 points)

Mon, 11/1 Hard Incompatibilism
Derk Pereboom, "Hard Incompatibilism", sections 1, 4, 10-11

Unit IV: God

Wed, 11/3 Introduction to Philosophy of Religion
* van Inwagen, "The Idea of God"

Fri, 11/5 The Cosmological Argument
William Lane Craig, "The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument"
* G. W. Leibniz, *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* & *Monadology* [selections]
Fifth Short Writing Assignment Due (10 points)

Mon, 11/8 The Teleological Argument
* William Paley, *Natural Theology* [selections]
Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument", pp. 98-105

Wed, 11/10 The Teleological Argument: The Anthropic Response

Fri, 11/12 The Teleological Argument: Three More Responses
Collins, "The Teleological Argument", pp. 105-109
Sixth Short Writing Assignment Due (10 points)

Mon, 11/15 The Ontological Argument
Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion* 2
* Gary Matthews, "The Ontological Argument", pp. 81-95
* Gaunilo, *Reply on Behalf of the Fool*

Wed, 11/17 Pascal's Wager
Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* [selections]
* Alan Hájek, "Pascal's Wager"
Seventh Short Writing Assignment Due (10 points)

Fri, 11/19 Catch up

[Mon 11/22 – Fri, 11/26 – No Class: THANKSGIVING BREAK]

Mon, 11/29 The Problem of Evil: A Tour of Evil
* David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Parts 10 & 11
Louise M. Antony, "For the Love of Reason"

Wed, 12/1 The Problem of Evil: The Necessary Means Strategy
Andrea Weisberger, "The Argument from Evil"

Fri, 12/3 The Problem of Evil: The Necessary Means Strategy (continued)

Mon, 12/6 The Problem of Evil: The Free Will Defense
* David Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?", pp. 149-155
Eighth Short Writing Assignment Due (10 points)

Wed, 12/8 The Problem of Evil: The Free Will Defense (continued)

Fri, 12/10 The Problem of Hell
* Lewis, "Divine Evil"

TBA **Final Exam (100 points)**
Second Paper Due (100 points)