

Phi 107 – Theories of Knowledge & Reality

Time:	TuTh 2:00pm – 3:20pm	Location:	School of Management 306
Instructor:	Thiago Xavier de Melo	Office hours:	TuTh 3:30pm–4:30pm or by appointment
Email:	txdemelo@syr.edu	Office:	Bowne Hall 103

Course Description

This course is an introduction to two areas of philosophy: epistemology and metaphysics. Students will be introduced to some specific topics in these areas—Skepticism and Knowledge, Minds and Machines, Personal Identity and Death, Free will and Responsibility, Cosmos and God—and to well-known positions and arguments philosophers have developed on these topics. Along the way, students will be introduced to concepts and methods that help develop writing and critical thinking skills.

Learning objectives

- Ability to describe various foundational problems and explain how theories propose to solve them;
- ability to reconstruct arguments in favor and against those theories;
- ability to create further potential objections to, and arguments for, those theories.

Course Materials

- The readings will be available on [Blackboard](#). See reading schedule below for details.

Course Requirements

Components of the grade and its distribution are listed below:

- 20% — Paper 1
- 20% — Midterm exam
- 20% — Paper 2
- 20% — Final exam

10% — Take-home assignments

5% — In-class assignments

5% — Attendance and participation

Letter grade: A 93 - 100; A- 90 - 92.99; B+ 87 - 89.99; B 83 - 86.99; B- 80 - 82.99; C+ 77 - 79.99; C 73 - 76.99; C- 70 - 72.99; D+ 67 - 69.99; D 63 - 66.99; D- 60 - 62.99; F 0 - 59.99.

Papers: Each paper must have at least 1200 words. Specific instructions for each of the papers will be provided during the semester. Please see schedule for deadlines.

Assignments: Take-home and in-class assignments ask you to explain concepts and/or reconstruct and evaluate arguments found in the readings. Specific instructions will be provided.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and participation is expected. Two unexcused absences are allowed. Proper documentation is required to have absences excused.

Note on Reading and Writing: It's important to notice that this is a writing and reading intensive course. By the end of this course students are expected to have written four thousand words. Doing the readings diligently is conducive to writing well and necessary for understanding philosophy. See reading schedule below.

Slides and Handouts: These will be posted to Blackboard. But note that slides and handouts do not contain all information needed to succeed. Students are advised to take handwritten notes during lecture and read the assigned texts.

Office Hours: The readings are often hard. Please come to office hours specially if you feel you struggling with them and/or with the content. I'm happy to schedule another time if you can't make it at the hours indicated above.

Policies

Technology: Please do *not* use electronic devices in class. Phones, laptops, earphones etc. should be out of sight and muted.

Missed exams: Proper documentation is required to have a makeup exam scheduled.

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. SU 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.

Please see more in the folder 'Academic Integrity' on Blackboard.

Papers will be submitted through *Turnitin*, which has a plagiarism detection and prevention system. Please 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.

Accommodations: Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations should register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), disabilityservices.syr.edu, 804 University Avenue, Room 309, [315.443.4498](tel:315.443.4498). Please provide me with a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS so I am aware of your accommodations. Planning for accommodations as early as possible is best. I'd be happy to meet with you to discuss how I can help.

Schedule

This is a *tentative* schedule. Changes will be announced in lectures and updated to the Syllabus on Blackboard. Readings are required to be done beforehand (unless noted otherwise).

Day 1: **Jan 14** — Introduction: course and some philosophical topics

- Required reading: this syllabus!
- (Optional: Russell. "The Value of Philosophy")

Day 2: **Jan 16** — Critical thinking: basics

- 'Arguments and How to Evaluate Them' (on Blackboard)

Day 3: **Jan 21** — Epistemology: skepticism

- Descartes. First and Second Meditations in *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

Day 4: **Jan 23** — Epistemology: skepticism

- Russell. "Appearance and Reality and the Existence of Matter" (Excerpt from *Problems of Philosophy*.)
- (Optional:) Descartes. Third Meditation in *Meditations on First Philosophy*. [We will talk about it in class, but it's an optional reading.]

Day 5: **Jan 28** — Epistemology: what is knowledge?

- Plato. "Knowledge as Justified True Belief" (excerpt from *Theaetetus*)

- Gettier. “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”

Day 6: **Jan 30** — Epistemology: what is knowledge?

- Zagzebski. What is knowledge?
- Cornman, Lehrer, Pappas. “An Analysis of Knowledge”

Day 7: **Feb 4** — Intro to Philosophy of Mind

- Nagel. “The Mind-Body Problem” (Chapter 4 of *What does it all mean?*)

Day 8: **Feb 6** — Mind: Introduction and Dualism

- Descartes. Excerpts from the Sixth Meditation (Three paragraphs)

- - - First Paper Assigned - - -

Extra, recommended reading: J. Pryor. “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”

Day 9: **Feb 11** — Mind: Against Dualism

- Elizabeth of Bohemia. Letter to Descartes
- Ryle. “Descartes’s Myth”

Day 10: **Feb 13** — Mind: Materialism

- Papineau. “The Case for Materialism”

Day 11: **Feb 18** — Mind: functionalism

- Churchland. “Functionalism and Eliminative Materialism”

Day 12: **Feb 20** — Mind: Dualism again

- Gertler. “In Defense of Mind-Body Dualism”
- Jackson. “The Qualia Problem” (excerpt)

Day 13: **Feb 25** — Mind: Can computers think? Turing and Searle

- Searle. “Minds, Brains and Programs”

Day 14: **Feb 27** — Artificial Intelligence

- Turing. “Computing Machinery and Intelligence”

- - - Feb 28: First Paper Due - - -

Day 15: **Mar 3** — Mind: Conceivability

- Chalmers. The Hard Problem of Consciousness

Day 16: - - - **Mar 5 Midterm** - - -

Day 17: **Mar 10** — Personal Identity: Intro

- Perry. “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality”

Day 18: **Mar 12** — Personal Identity: Fission cases

- Parfit. “Personal Identity” (excerpt of *Reasons and Persons*)

- - - Spring Break - - -

Day 19: **Mar 24** — Personal Identity: methods and conclusions

- Gendler. “Personal Identity and Thought-Experiments”

Day 20: **Mar 26** — Free Will: Introduction

- Nay: “Free Will” (Chapter 7 of *Metaphysics*: an introduction)
- (Optional: van Inwagen. “The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will”)

Day 21: **Mar 31** — Free Will: Determinism, Indeterminism and a Dilemma

- Churchland. ‘Is Determinism Self-refuting?’

Day 22: **Apr 2** — Free Will: Compatibilism

- Frankfurt. “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”
- (Optional: Beebe. “Compatibilism and the Ability to Do Otherwise” (excerpt))

- - - **Second Paper Assigned** - - -

Day 23: **Apr 7** — Free Will: Incompatibilism

- Pereboom. “Why We have No Free Will and Can Live Without It”

Day 24: **Apr 9** — Free Will: and Responsibility

- Wolf. “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”

Day 25: **Apr 14** — God: the teleological argument

- M. Ruse. The Argument from design
- Optional: W. Paley. The Argument from Design. (Excerpt from *Natural Theology*)

Day 26: **Apr 16** — God: the fine tuning argument

- White. The Argument from Cosmological Fine-Tuning

--- Apr 21: Second Paper due ---

Day 27: **Apr 21** — God: the problem of evil

- J. L Mackie. Evil and Omnipotence.
- optional: Stump. The Problem of Evil

Day 28: **Apr 23** — God: believing without evidence?

- Pascal. “The Wager” (Excerpt from *Pensées*)

Day 29: **Apr 28** — Review

Day 30: **Apr 30** — **Final Exam** — 12:45pm