

## **Syllabus: Theories of Knowledge & Reality (PHI107) (Intro to Metaphysics and Epistemology)**

**Instructor: Preston J. Werner**

[Pjwerner1@gmail.com](mailto:Pjwerner1@gmail.com)

Office Hours: XXXX

Class: XXXX

### **Course Description:**

Fundamentally, philosophy is about asking difficult questions and thinking critically about those questions. Philosophers have been asking and attempting to answer these difficult questions since at least the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC (Confucius c. 551-479BC, Thales c. 624-546). Because the questions philosophers ask revolve around some of the deepest problems known to humanity, there is often no easy answer to be given. **The purpose of this class is to get you critically thinking about some of these questions**, as well as providing you with some of the ways that philosophers, both historically and today, have attempted to answer these questions.

**Though we will be focusing our energies on profound philosophical problems, the critical thinking skills you develop in this class can be applied across a very wide range of contexts, both philosophical and non-philosophical.** It is hoped that, even if you do not pursue philosophical questions beyond what you learn in this course, you will be able to critically think about other real world problems using the same methods we applied to the philosophical problems we discuss in the coming weeks.

We will focus on four issues:

- The existence of God
- The nature and limits of knowledge and the scientific method
- Personal Identity
- The problem of free will

### **Course Objectives:**

- To develop critical, independent thinking skills.
- To be able to analytically read and decipher difficult texts and understand the arguments in those texts.
- To develop your ability to communicate abstract and complex ideas clearly and effectively in writing.
- To learn about some traditional philosophical problems and what some of the great philosophical thinkers thought about those problems.

### **Course Requirements:**

The bulk of your grade will be determined by a series of smaller assignments each of which contribute, directly or indirectly, to a final paper. The point distribution is as follows:

300 Word Historical Excerpt Wiki Summary (15 points) (Due XXXX)

First Paper (25 points) (Due XXXX)

300 Word Contemporary Article Wiki Summary (15 points) (Due XXXX)

Second Paper: First Draft & Peer Review Assignment (15 + 15 points) (Due XXXX + XXXX)

Second Paper (40 points) (Due XXXX)

Participation and Short Reading Exercises (10 points)

Two Exams (25 points each)

Total Points Available: 185 points

Each of these assignments will have a separate assignment sheet with detailed instructions and grading criteria.

**Readings:** You are required to prepare by doing the required reading **before** class. If you miss a reading, that's ok—it is still important that you come to class! However, if you are frequently missing required readings—as evidenced by your lack of participation in class—you will be deducted participation points. One requirement of your final paper will be to incorporate in-class material into your arguments, so it is also important that you are keeping up with course material. **There is no textbook for the course.** Readings will be available on Blackboard. See the “Schedule of Readings” document on Blackboard.

**Technology Policy:** Cell phone use is not allowed in class. You will be docked 1 participation point for each time you use your cell phone in class.

Laptops are allowed in class **under the following conditions:** Having your laptop out signals your willingness to be called on to research any questions that may come up in the course of lecture or discussion. (For example, if the question of being “not guilty by reason of insanity” came up in discussion, I may select someone with their laptop out to research the New York state policy while discussion continues.) Furthermore, if you are caught doing anything that is not class-related on your laptop, you will lose the privilege of using your laptop in class.

**Statement about Accessibility:** I value diversity and inclusion, and I want to create an environment which is as equitable, inclusive, and welcoming to learning as possible. Please talk to me as soon as possible if you find any aspect of this course creates barriers to your inclusion, ability to learn, or proper assessment of that learning.

Here is the official statement regarding disability-related accommodations from SU:

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), visit the ODS website- <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 or TDD: (315) 443-1371 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

### **Schedule of Readings (Subject to Change):**

Helena de Bres, *The Pink Guide to Philosophy*, Sections: "General Tips" and "How to read". Available at: <https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

Linda Zagzebski, *Philosophy of Religion: A Historical Introduction*, pp.41-48.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Thinking it Through*, pp.324-334.

Andrea M. Weisberger, "The Argument from Evil"

No new reading, **Historical Wiki Summary Due**

Roy Perrett, "Karma and the problem of suffering"

Helena de Bres, *The Pink Guide to Philosophy*, "Writing do's and don't's":  
<https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/writing-do-s-and-don-ts>

Sextus Empiricus, No new reading

Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1. Available at:  
[http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1641\\_1.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1641_1.pdf)

G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World"

*Motel of the Mysteries*, excerpt

**First Exam** (No new reading)

John Perry “Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality”, The First Night (part 1),  
<http://www.humanscience.org/docs/Perry%20%281978%29%20A%20Dialogue%20on%20Personal%20Identity%20and%20Immortality.pdf>

John Perry, “Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality”, The Second Night (part 2),  
<http://www.humanscience.org/docs/Perry%20%281978%29%20A%20Dialogue%20on%20Personal%20Identity%20and%20Immortality.pdf>

John Perry, “Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality”, The Third Night (part 3),  
<http://www.humanscience.org/docs/Perry%20%281978%29%20A%20Dialogue%20on%20Personal%20Identity%20and%20Immortality.pdf>

James Giles, “The No-Self Theory: Hume, Buddhism, and Personal Identity”, Available at: [http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/images/0/02/The\\_No-Self\\_Theory\\_-\\_Hume,\\_Buddhism,\\_and\\_Personal\\_Identity\\_-\\_James\\_Giles.pdf](http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/images/0/02/The_No-Self_Theory_-_Hume,_Buddhism,_and_Personal_Identity_-_James_Giles.pdf)

L.A. Paul, “What You Can’t Expect When You’re Expecting”, Available at:  
[http://www.pdcnet.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ResPhil\\_92-2\\_1.pdf](http://www.pdcnet.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ResPhil_92-2_1.pdf)

Vanessa Carbonell, “Sacrifices of Self”

Laura Ekstrom, *Free Will: A Philosophical Study*, Chapter 1.

Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, Chapter 3: Incompatibilism

Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, Chapter 7: Is Free Will Possible?

Helena de Bres, *The Pink Guide to Philosophy*, “How to Revise”:  
<https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/how-to-revise>

Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”, available at:  
<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5033029a84ae7fae2e6a0a98/t/5366a7a6e4b0c0f09ccda517/1399236518041/Frankfurt.pdf>

Susan Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”, available at:  
<http://www.rationalites-contemporaines.paris-sorbonne.fr/IMG/pdf/Wolf2.pdf>

## **Second Exam**