

Philosophy 124: Knowledge and Reality (Spring 2022)
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30am – 11:45am

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Philosophy basically has three parts: Logic, Value Theory, and Metaphysics/Epistemology. This course is an intro to M&E. *Metaphysics* asks questions about what *exists* and the *nature of reality*, especially concerning oddities like God, freewill, the self, etc. *Epistemology* asks questions about *knowledge* and related matters. What's the difference between *believing* and *knowing*? What do we really *know*, if anything? How do we *justify* our beliefs?

Texts:

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd ed., trans. Cress, Hackett 1993.

Williams, Clifford. *Free Will and Determinism, A Dialogue*, Hackett 1980.

Additional materials posted on Moodle [marked below with '*'].

Course Assignments:

(1) **Participation** is worth 10% of the final grade. (Good attendance is *assumed*, meaning that it does NOT count toward your participation grade. However, poor attendance will hurt your participation grade: Obviously, you can't participate if you don't attend!) How much should you participate? Well, if you don't participate *at all*, don't expect to get a passing grade for participation! Yet you can earn an 'A' here without talking at every chance. Indeed, *quality matters much more than quantity*, and you certainly should avoid dominating the discussion.

NOTE WELL: There are other ways to participate, including:

- Posting on the discussion board on Moodle or replying to someone else's post.
- Emailing me or visiting our office hours with questions/comments
- Sharing videos, websites, other content that are relevant to the course
- Teaching one of the readings during a live session. (Email me first to arrange this.)
- Summarizing a reading in a handout for your classmates. (Email me first.)

(2) **In-class exam** on Mar. 1st, worth 30% of the final grade.

(3) **Paper** (max length 5 pages) due. Apr. 12th, worth 30% of the final grade

(4) **Final exam** during finals week, worth 30% of your final grade.

Course Policies:

- *No late assignments accepted*, unless you can provide hard evidence of a legit emergency.
- **NO LAPTOPS/PHONES DURING CLASS!** Logic often requires a LOT of concentration, and personal devices provide too much opportunity for distraction. Relatedly, *please do not be late and remember to mute your phone.*
- If you have special needs because of a disability (psychological or physical), I am very happy to arrange accommodations. But please contact me about such arrangements ASAP.
- Discussions *must* proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. This course can be difficult, and no one should be made to feel stupid. Relatedly, taking an aggressive tone is inappropriate. It usually signals that the goal is to "win" a dispute, rather than to co-operate

in the mutual pursuit of understanding. I reserve the right to remove you from the classroom if you violate these basic norms of courtesy.

- Be forewarned that the majority of the feedback on your work will be critical. But *please* do not take any of these criticisms personally! Loads of critical feedback is simply how academic philosophy operates. And our intent is *certainly* not to belittle or discourage you, but to sharpen your writing/thinking skills.
- The NU Student Code of Conduct is in effect for this class. See <https://nu.edu.kz/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NU-Student-Code-of-Conduct.pdf>. Plagiarism is sometimes unintentional—visit the following tutorial from Cornell University to learn how to recognize plagiarism: <https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/exercises.cfm>. You will be held responsible for plagiarism regardless of whether it was intentional—so it is in your interest to learn how to recognize it!
 **This is very important information. I take plagiarism very seriously.
- The grading scale at Nazarbayev University (as set by the Registrar) is as follows:

Percentage	Letter Grade	G.P.A. scale
95-100	A	4.0
90-94.9	A-	3.67
85-89.9	B+	3.33
80-84.9	B	3.0
75-79.9	B-	2.67

70-74.9	C+	2.33
65-69.9	C	2.0
60-64.9	C-	1.67
55-59.9	D+	1.33
50-54.9	D	1.0
49.9 and below	F	0.0

For helpful descriptions of an ‘A’ paper, a ‘B’ paper, a ‘C’ paper, etc., see the relevant links on the left-hand side of this webpage: <https://library.guilford.edu/c.php?g=111810&p=723881>.

Reading Advice:

Be sure to PRINT OUT the reading materials. Studies show that we learn better by reading hard copies versus reading a computer screen.¹

Reading philosophy is hard. That’s why I recommend reading the weekly material *twice*. BUT: As a first reading, it is sufficient to skim the texts, just to get a sense of the main ideas. *This takes less than 5 min*. After that, read the material again *carefully*. Your earlier skimming should provide a basic “framework” that allows you to process better what you read.

During your second reading, it’s best to *read with a pen and note the points of interest*. (This requires hard copies of the readings!) I do NOT recommend mere underlining or highlighting. Rather, it’s best to read as if you were *engaged in a conversation* with the author: Raise questions, ask for clarification, and levy criticisms in the margins. This practice effectively prepares you for class discussion and the assignments.

¹ See, e.g., Clinton, V. (2019). Reading from paper compared to screens: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Research on Reading* 42(2): 288-325.

Tentative Schedule

[*indicates a text on Moodle]

WEEK ONE

Jan. 25, 27

Intro to the Course. 4 Handouts: *Why Philosophy is Important, *Pessimism about Argument, *Intro to Deduction, *Argument Fallacies

WEEK TWO

Feb. 1, 3

Free Will & Determinism. Williams, pp. 1–17; *Handout: Two Passages from Hindu Scriptures.

WEEK THREE

Feb. 7, 10

Williams, pp. 21–32; *Lycan, “Desire considered as a Propositional Attitude” (excerpt)

WEEK FOUR

Feb. 15, 17

Williams, pp. 33–41; *Thich Nhat Hanh, excerpt from Understanding Our Mind

WEEK FIVE

Feb. 22, 24

Williams, pp. 42–58 (cont’) [*Optional*: Williams, “God, Evil, and the Meaning of Life”]

WEEK SIX

Mar. 1

Mar. 3

In-class exam on Free Will: Mar. 1st

Cartesian Philosophy. Descartes, Meditation One

WEEK SEVEN

Mar. 8, 10

Descartes, Meditation Two

WEEK EIGHT

Mar. 15, 17

Descartes, Meditation Three and Meditation Four; *Teresa of Ávila, selection from her Autobiography

WEEK NINE

Mar. 22, 24

SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

WEEK TEN

Mar. 29, 31

Descartes, Meditation Four (continued)

WEEK ELEVEN

Apr. 5, 7

Descartes, Meditation Six [*Optional*: *Parent, ch. 1 of Self-Reflection for the Opaque Mind (excerpt)]

WEEK TWELVE

Apr. 12, 14

Topics in Applied Philosophy. *Haslanger, “(What) Are Gender & Race? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?”

Descartes paper due Apr. 12th

WEEK THIRTEEN

Apr. 19, 21

Haslanger (cont') [*Mills, "But What Are You Really? The Metaphysics of Race"]

WEEK FOURTEEN

Apr. 26, 28

L.A. Paul, "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting"

WEEK FIFTEEN

May 3

Paul (cont'). [Video: Ruth Chang, "Hard Choices"]

Final exam held during finals week. (Exact date/time TBA.)