

Philosophy 124: Knowledge and Reality (Spring 2021)

Online live sessions: Thursdays, 9:15am – 10:15am

Instructor: Ted Parent, Ph.D.	Email: ted.parent@nu.edu.kz
Zoom Office Hours: Thursdays 10:15am – 12:15pm, and by appointment.	Cell: +7 (776) 828 9725

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 ideas. 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.

Thich Nhat Hanh. *Essential Writings*, Orbis, 2001.

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

Additional materials posted on Moodle.

Course Assignments:

- (1) Participation is worth 15% of the final grade. How much should you participate? Well, if you don't participate *at all*, don't expect to get a passing grade for participation! Yet it is possible to earn an 'A' here without talking at every chance. Indeed, *quality matters much more than quantity* and you certainly should avoid dominating the discussion. Also, note that there are a variety of ways to participate, including:
 - Successfully answering spot checks
 - Emailing me or visiting office hours with questions/comments
 - Sharing videos, websites, other content that are relevant to the course
 - Teaching one of the readings to your classmates during a live session. (Email me first to arrange this.)
 - Summarizing a reading in a handout for your classmates. (Email me first.)
- (2) Exam on **Feb. 22nd**, worth 30% of the final grade.
- (3) Paper (max length 5 pages) due. **Mar. 29th**, worth 30% of the final grade
- (4) Final assignment due during **finals week**, worth 25% of your final grade.

Course Policies:

- *No late assignments accepted*, unless you can provide hard evidence of a legitimate emergency.
- 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.
- For the live sessions, *please do not be late* and *remember to mute your microphone* when you are not speaking. I would also encourage unmuting your video, although this is not required.
- Discussions *must* proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. Philosophy 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 a mutual endeavor to seek the truth. I reserve the right to remove you from the live session if you violate these basic norms of courtesy.

- Be forewarned that the majority of my feedback on your work will be critical. But *please* do not take any of my criticisms personally! Loads of critical feedback is simply how academic philosophy operates. And in this class, the purpose of this is *certainly* not to belittle or discourage you, but to hone your writing/thinking skills.
- The 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>
- 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

Grade Descriptions

A	Excellent; exceeds the highest standards in the assignment or course.	A-class work will be distinguished in some or all of the following ways: originality of thought or interpretation; independence of judgement; wide-ranging reading, often beyond that required; historical awareness; intelligent use of arguments in the readings; clarity and rigor of argument and structure; clarity and elegance of style; unusual and apt examples; comparison with themes and topics covered in other modules.
A-	Excellent; meets the highest standards for the assignment or course.	
B+	Very good; meets high standards for the assignment or course.	B-class work will be distinguished in some or all of the following ways: clarity and rigor of argument and structure, well directed at the title; thorough coverage of recommended reading; historical awareness; intelligent use of arguments in the readings; well-chosen examples; comparison with themes and topics covered in other modules; clarity of style.
B	Good; meets most of the standards for the assignment or course.	
B-	More than adequate; shows some reasonable command of the material.	
C+	Acceptable; meets basic standards for the assignment or course.	C-class work will have some of the following features: some evidence of knowledge and understanding, but limitations in clarity and rigor of argument and structure; restricted coverage of reading; restricted use of arguments in the readings;
C	Acceptable; meets some of the basic standards for the assignment or course.	

C-	Acceptable, while falling short of meeting basic standards in several ways.	weaknesses of style; failure to address the question fully.
D+	Minimally acceptable. Short of meeting basic standards in most ways.	D-class work will have some of the following features: very limited knowledge and understanding; confusion in argument or structure; insufficient reading; confused style; failure to address the question fully.
D	Lowest passing grade.	
F	Did not satisfy the basic requirements of the course.	Work with very serious deficiencies that falls below the required standard, failing to address the literature with the seriousness required and with an inadequate grasp of the subject matter and analysis.

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.

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.

Tentative Schedule

WEEK ONE

Jan. 11-15 Preliminaries 4 Handouts: Why Philosophy is Important, Pessimism about Argument, Intro to Deduction, and Argument Fallacies

WEEK TWO

Jan. 18-23 Free Will & Determinism Williams, pp. 1–17; Handout: Two Passages from Hindu Scriptures.

WEEK THREE

Jan. 25-29 Williams, pp. 21–30; Lycan, "Desire considered as a Propositional Attitude" (excerpt)

WEEK FOUR

Feb. 1-5 Williams, pp. 30–41.

WEEK FIVE

Feb. 8-13

Williams, pp. 41–49; Gibran, excerpt from *The Prophet*; Thich Nhat Hanh, excerpt from *Understanding Our Mind*

WEEK SIX

Feb. 15-19

Williams, pp. 49–58 (cont') [*Optional*: Williams, “Determinism, God, Evil, and the Meaning of Life”]

WEEK SEVEN

Feb. 22-26

Cartesian Philosophy Descartes, *Meditation One* and *Meditation Two*
Free Will exam due Feb. 22 at 8am

WEEK EIGHT

Mar. 1-5

Descartes, *Meditation Two* (continued) and *Meditation Three*; Teresa of Ávila, selection from her Autobiography.

WEEK NINE

Mar. 8-12

Descartes, *Meditation Four*

WEEK TEN

Mar. 15-19

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

WEEK ELEVEN

Mar. 22-26

NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

WEEK TWELVE

Mar. 29-Apr. 2

Philosophical Buddhism Handout: Buddhism as Non-Dogmatic; Wright, “Note to Readers;” Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Buddha’s Heart,” “The Three Jewels,” “The Raft is Not the Shore,” “Our True Home,” “Happy Continuation,” and “The Flower is Still Blooming;” [*Optional*: Wright, ch. 16 of *Why Buddhism is True*]
Descartes paper due Mar. 29th at 8am

WEEK THIRTEEN

Apr. 5-9

Handout: Well-Being in the *Sutta Piṭaka*; Thich Nhat Hanh, “Sunshine and Green Leaves,” “The Sun of Awareness,” “Mental Formations,” “Transforming Anger,” and “Mind of Compassion;” Gunaratana, ch. 1 of *Mindfulness in Plain English* (excerpt) [*Optional Videos*: Kavita Maharaj, “Simple Meditation” and “Vipassana Meditation;” *Optional*: Duron, “19 Science-Backed Reasons to Meditate”]

WEEK FOURTEEN

Apr. 12-16

Handout: Further selections from the *Sutta Piṭaka*; The Heart Sūtra; Video: The Ship of Theseus; Thich Nhat Hanh, “Interbeing,” “Roses and Garbage,” and “Interpenetration” [*Optional*: Wright, chs. 1 and 5 of *Why Buddhism is True*]

WEEK FIFTEEN

Apr. 19-23

Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing,” “The Five Mindfulness Trainings,” and “The Path of Transformation;” Handout: Buddhist Political Philosophy

Final assignment due during finals week. (Exact date/time TBA.)