

Philosophy 1204: Knowledge and Reality

CRN: 16645; TORG 1080

Spring 2017: TR 2pm–3:15pm

Instructor: Ted Parent, Ph.D.

Office: Major Williams 221 (in the stairwell)

Office Hours: MW, 2:30–3:30pm, and by appointment.

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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 ideas. What's the difference between believing and *knowing*? What do we really know, if anything? When, if ever, is a belief *justified*?

Texts:

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

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

-Additional documents available on the course website: <http://tparent.net/phil1204.html>

Course Assignments:

(1) Exam on **Feb. 23rd** worth 25% of the final grade.

(2) Paper (max length 5 pages) due **Apr. 11th** worth 30% of the final grade.

(3) Paper (max length 5 pages) due **May 10th** worth 30% of the final grade.

(4) 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. Regardless, my guess is that an 'A' for participation requires that, more often than not, you talk at least once during a session. Though note that *visiting office hours also counts as participation*.

No late assignments accepted, unless you can give hard evidence of a legitimate emergency.

NO LAPTOPS! Philosophy requires lots of concentration, and laptops create too much distraction. (A single laptop on the web will distract most everyone sitting around you.)

Relatedly, please **do not be late** and remember to **turn off your cell phone**.

Despite the policies in boldface, if you have special needs because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), we can certainly make different arrangements. But please talk to me as soon as possible.

The grading scale for the course is as follows (raw scores will be rounded):

Percentage	Letter Grade	G.P.A. scale
93-100	A	4.0
90-92	A-	3.75
88-89	B+	3.5
83-87	B	3.0
80-82	B-	2.75
78-79	C+	2.5

73-77	C	2.0
70-72	C-	1.75
68-69	D+	1.5
63-67	D	1.0
60-62	D-	0.75
59 and below	F	0.0

The office of Academic Integrity has asked that all syllabi include the following statement:

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states: **“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”**

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: www.honorsystem.vt.edu.

I heartily endorse this statement. Thank you.

General Remarks 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. 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*. I do NOT recommend mere underlining/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.

Be forewarned that the clear majority of my feedback on your work will be critical. Of course I strive to be courteous nonetheless. Yet *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.

Speaking of courtesy, I *insist* that discussions proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. *Philosophy is 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 cooperate in a mutual endeavor to seek the truth. I reserve the right to tell you *to leave the session* if you violate these basic norms of courtesy.

Tentative Schedule

[* indicates a text available on the course website]

WEEK ONE

Jan. 17, 19 Intro session. **“Validity”* handout and **“Informal Fallacies”* handout

WEEK TWO

Jan. 24, 26 Williams, pp. 1–20

WEEK THREE

Jan. 31; Feb. 2 Williams, pp. 21–30

WEEK FOUR

Feb. 7 Williams, pp. 21–30 (cont’)
Feb. 9 Williams, pp. 31–48

WEEK FIVE

Feb. 14, 16 Williams, pp. 31–48 (cont’)

WEEK SIX

Feb. 21 Williams, pp. 49–59.
Feb. 23 **Freewill Exam on Feb. 23**

WEEK SEVEN

Feb. 28 Descartes, *Meditation One*
Mar. 2 Descartes, *Meditation Two*

WEEK EIGHT

Mar. 7, 9 NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

WEEK NINE

Mar. 14 Descartes, *Meditation Two* (cont’)
Mar. 16 Descartes, *Meditation Three*

WEEK TEN

Mar. 21, 23 Descartes, *Meditation Four*

WEEK ELEVEN

Mar. 28 Descartes, *Meditation Five*
Mar. 30 Descartes, *Meditation Six*

WEEK TWELVE

Apr. 4, 6 Descartes, *Meditation Six* (cont’)

WEEK THIRTEEN

Apr. 11, 13 *Haslanger, “(What) Are Gender & Race? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?” **Descartes paper due Apr. 11th**

WEEK FOURTEEN

Apr. 18, 20 Haslanger (cont’)

WEEK FIFTEEN

Apr. 25, 27 L.A. Paul, “What You Can’t Expect When You’re Expecting”

WEEK SIXTEEN

May 2 Paul (cont’)

Final paper due at 3:05pm on May 10th in Major Williams Hall 221.