

PHIL 1204: Knowledge & Reality, Fall 2023

Class times: 1.25–2.15pm Mon./Wed. + recitation

Lecture room: Hahn Hall 140

Main instructor: Dr. Daniel Hoek, dhoek@vt.edu

Website: danielhoek.com/teaching/#k&r

Office hours: Wednesdays 2.30-3.30

Office: 217 Major Williams Hall



Course Description

Are your thoughts inside of your brain? Can you ever be completely certain of anything? Is it possible to travel back in time? Why is there evil in the world? Are values always subjective? Can anything be bigger than infinity? What is it like to be a bat? Do you have free will? Can God brew a cup of tea too hot for Him to drink? In this course, you will explore these and other questions, and learn how to debate them in a philosophically rigorous way.

Class Preparation. This course is centred around class discussion — primarily in recitations. That’s where you will get and develop your own ideas about the questions we’re talking about. So it is very important that you come to your recitation each week ready to participate in those discussions. The most important preparation is carefully doing the assigned reading before each lecture, or watch the assigned video. Most weeks, you also have a small exercise to hand in that helps you think about the material. Some of the readings and videos contain difficult, abstract ideas. So go slowly and *take notes* as you read or watch. Write down the two main points of each reading and video. Also write down anything you found difficult to understand — this enables you to figure out what to ask, and it makes for a great starting point for your contributions in recitation!

Recitations. Each Friday, you must attend a recitation to discuss the week’s readings and homework, led by one of the three TAs for this course. You are in one of six groups:

<i>Recitation #</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Recitation leader</i>
88686	10.10-11.00	Pamplin Hall 3010	} Aisling O’Leary (afoleary@vt.edu)
88689	12.20-1.10	Pamplin Hall 3010	
88690	11.15-12.05	Major Williams Hall 434	} Luis Cantu (luc47@vt.edu)
88684	12.20-1.10	Major Williams Hall 434	
88683	1.25-2.15	Major Williams Hall 434	} Dexin Li (dl22@vt.edu)
88688	3.30-4.20	Pamplin Hall 3010	

If you are unsure which of these recitation times you are registered for, please look up your recitation number on **Hokie Spa!** (Canvas can be misleading.)

Assessment (provisional)

Participation (10%). Showing up to class prepared, staying focused, participating in class discussions, paying attention to and responding to what other students say.

Exercises (20%). Completing the small recitation exercises each week, and handing them in on time. You can miss one exercise and still get an A for this part.

Small Graded Assignments (45%). There first three graded assignments are The God, Time Travel and Zeno assignment. They each count for 15% of your final grade.

Mind-Body Assignment (25%). The final graded assignment for the course counts for 25% of your final grade, and is completed in two stages.

Attendance. Research shows that student learning and well-being benefit greatly from a regular schedule. That is why this class has a strictly enforced attendance policy. **If you have more than eight unexcused absences from lecture, or more than three unexcused absences from recitation, you automatically fail the course.** After the first one, every unexcused absence negatively impacts your participation grade. The good news is that it's easy to be excused: all you have to do is to e-mail me with a reason **the day before** a missed lecture, or e-mail your TA the day before a missed recitation session. Within reason, I always grant excused absences if you ask the day before or sooner — your reason does not have to be academic. To show you that you went to class, you must sign in at the start of each lecture and recitation using the **free iClicker app** on your phone or your laptop. I will also make a physical sign-up sheet available for those who cannot use iClicker for whatever reason.

Devices. Studies have found that students who take notes by hand perform better in class because they are more actively engaged with the material than students taking notes on their laptop. They also perform better because they are not on YouTube or social media. So unless you have special disability-related dispensation, you may not use your phone, tablet or laptop in class, except for signing into iClicker at the beginning.

Homework Submission. All assignments and exercises must be submitted through *Canvas*. For the weekly recitation exercises, always bring a hardcopy to your recitation.

Academic Integrity. Hokies must meet the academic integrity standards and Honor Code of Virginia Tech at all times. This means any writing you submit must be entirely your own, and all quotations must be clearly marked and properly attributed. The normal sanction for a violation of the Honor Code is an F* as your final course grade, where the * indicates an integrity violation.

ChatGPT. One of the core aims of this class is to practice thinking and writing more clearly. This is one of the main criteria on which your work will be evaluated. For that reason, the use of AI Writing tools like ChatGPT is not permitted for any assignments in this class. If you do use these tools, it would be considered dishonest, and result in an F* course grade.

Late Assignments. All homework assignments should be handed in by 8pm on the due date. Late recitation exercises always get an *incomplete*. For graded assignments, late submission can incur a D or F grade. If you foresee that you will not be able to hand in your assignment on time, I will probably grant you an extension if you ask *well in advance* — no later than two days before the due date. Even if an extension is granted, there could still be a grade penalty. Don't be a perfectionist.

Office Hours. You are always welcome to come see me or your TA during office hours with any questions you have about the course, or about philosophy. **If you are struggling to keep up with the course for any reason, do come and see me.** My office hours are on Wednesdays 2.30-3.30 (right after class), and you can find me in office 217 in Major Williams Hall. Your TA will let you know their office hours in recitation. If you would like to speak to me outside office hours, e-mail dhoek@vt.edu.

Reading & Homework Schedule

Homeworks in [blue](#)

Good Thinking, Bad Thinking

August 21. Introduction

August 23. Tim Williamson, *Tetralogue*, Ch. 1: The Perils of Peacemaking + [Justification Exercise](#)

I. Does God Exist? (key concepts: premise and conclusion, objection and counterargument)

The Argument from Evil

August 28. Sally Haslanger, [The Argument from Evil](#)

August 30. [Responses to the Problem of Evil](#) + [Objection #1](#)

The Argument from Design

September 4. Labor Day: no class.

September 6. William Paley, *Natural Theology*. + [Objection #2](#)

Doubt

September 11. Revision & Preview.

September 13. Tim Williamson, *Tetralogue*, Ch. 2: The Terrors of Truth

September 15. [God Assignment Due](#)

II. Is Time Travel Possible? (key concepts: consistency & contradiction, deductive argument)

Logical Possibility

September 18. Heather Dyke, "Is time travel logically possible?", p. 43-4.

September 20. Agustín Rayo, *On the Brink of Paradox*, §4.1 + [Consistency Exercise](#)

Space & Time

September 25. Rayo, *On the Brink of Paradox*, §4.2

September 27. Watching *Doctor Who* in class. + [Timeline Exercise](#)

Knowledge & Deduction

October 2. Geoff Pynn, [Deductive Arguments](#)

October 4. Tim Williamson, *Tetralogue*, Ch. 3: The Advantages of Arrogance.

October 5. [Time Travel Assignment Due](#)

October 6. Fall Break: no recitation.

III. Is the World Infinite? (key concepts: paradox, conceptual analysis)

Zeno's Paradoxes

October 9. Colm Kelleher, What is Zeno's Dichotomy Paradox?

October 11. Mark Sainsbury, *Paradoxes*, 1-21 + **Deduction Exercise**

Infinity and Beyond!

October 16. Jeff DeKofsky, Hilbert's Hotel; Agustín Rayo, *On the Brink of Paradox*, §1.1

October 18. Agustín Rayo, *On the Brink of Paradox*, §1.2-3 + **Arrow Exercise**

Skepticism

October 23. Revision & Preview.

October 25. René Descartes, First Meditation.

October 27. **Paradox Assignment Due**

IV. Is the Mind Part of the Brain? (key concepts: objection and reply; thought experiments)

Dualism

October 30. Mind-Body Crashcourse

November 1. Descartes' Sixth Meditation + **Objection #3**

The Mind-Body Problem

November 6. **No Class!**

November 8. Letter Elizabeth from Bohemia *and* Jeff Kaplan on Elisabeth + **Objection #4**

The Mary Argument

November 13. TedEd video: Mary's Room.

November 15. Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia." + **Mind-Body Partial Draft**

Thanksgiving break (November 18-26)

Zombies & Bats

November 27. Amy Kind, "The Zombie Argument."

November 29. Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat"

December 1. **Mind-Body Assignment Due**

V. Is Morality Objective?

The Vices of Value

December 4. Tim Williamson, *Tetralogue*, Ch. 4: The Vices of Value

December 6. Epilogue

December 14. Final grades posted