

National Tsing Hua University

Term: Spring 2024

Knowledge and Reality

Instructors: Dr. Chi-Chun Chiu and Dr. Chon Ip Ng

Class time/location: Thursday 15:30-18:30; Education Building Room 114

Email: ccchiu@mx.nthu.edu.tw; cing@mx.nthu.edu.tw

Course Description

The primary objective of this course is to acquaint students with philosophical issues related to the nature of reality and our understanding of it. While we all possess an implicit and rudimentary understanding of what constitutes knowledge and reality, as well as the relationship between the two, this course will embark on a journey alongside classical and modern thinkers such as Descartes, Locke, Hume, Ryle, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre to delve deeper into these ideas.

The course will explore fundamental questions in the realms of epistemology and metaphysics, including: What defines reality? What distinguishes the real world from illusion? Are there fundamentally distinct types of reality, such as the mind and the body? Can we know reality definitely, and if we can, by what means?

Descartes is widely recognized as the beginning of modern philosophical exploration into these issues. In the first half of this course, led by Dr Chiu, we will start with Descartes and examine his key ideas and arguments presented in *Meditations on the first philosophy*. Topics covered will include the Cartesian method, structure of knowledge, the justification of “*cogito ergo sum*”, the proof of the existence of God, the origin of errors, the nature of the mind and the material world, the real distinction between the mind and the body and, finally, the Cartesian image of human being.

In the second half of the course taught by Dr. Ng, we will build upon the reflections initiated by the Cartesian meditations, and introduce some contemporary challenges that question the Cartesian framework. It will compass topics such as human corporeality, intersubjectivity, personal identity, freedom, the critique of the concept of causality and the rationality of religion.

Readings

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy with selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated by John Cottingham, revised edition, Cambridge University Press, 1996. (MFP)

John Cottingham (ed.), *Western Philosophy. An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Malden: Blackwell,

2008. (WPA)

Kim Atkins (ed.), *Self and Subjectivity*. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. (SS)

We recommend you to purchase your own copy of Descartes' *Meditations* as we will thoroughly study it in the first part of the course. If you are unable to obtain Cottingham's translation, you may use an alternative version. A compendium of class readings for the second part of the course will be available on the "elearn" online platform for the course.

Medium of Instruction

- Lectures and PPT slides will be in English.
- Please use English during class discussion and group presentation.
- Examinations could be written in English or Chinese.

Schedule (tentative)

Week	Date	Topic	Text
1	2/22	Philosophical issues concerning knowledge and reality, Descartes' historical status, Synopsis of the six Meditations.	MFP vii-xvii, 3-1
2	2/29	The nature and structure of knowledge, Descartes' method of doubt, the significance of philosophical skepticism.	MFP 12-15, 63-67
3	3/7	The proof of "I exist", the nature of human mind and how it is better known than the body.	MFP 16-23, 68-77
4	3/14	Innate ideas, the idea of God, the distinction between formal reality and objective reality, the first proof of the existence of God, the role of God in human knowledge.	MFP 24-36, 78-89
5	3/21	The concept of truth, the nature and the origin of human errors, will and judgement, the problem of free will.	MFP 37-43, 90-94
6	3/28	The essence of material things, the second proof of the existence of God, clarity and distinctness and the so called "Cartesian Circle".	MFP 44-49, 95-106
7	4/4	Tomb Sweeping Festival/ Children's Day (no class)	
8	4/11	The proof of the existence of the material world, the real distinction between mind and body, animal and	MFP 50-62, 107-115

		machine, human being as substantial union of soul and body, the legacy of Descartes' philosophy.	
9	4/18	Midterm Examination	
10	4/25	What is real? – Problem of skepticism after Descartes.	T.B.A.
11	5/2	Is there a reason to believe? – Alternative arguments for the existence of God and contemporary philosophical reflections on religion.	WPA 356-359, 365-370, 376-382.
12	5/9	“Hell is the other people”? Epistemological and phenomenological problems concerning the Otherness of the <i>alter ego</i> .	WPA 240-244, SS 92-100
13	5/16	Who am I? – Personal identity constituted by association, memory and narration. From Locke and Hume to Ricoeur.	WPA 275-280, 285-290, SS 225-230
14	5/23	What is body? Historical survey and contemporary theories on the mind-body duality problem.	WPA 251-257
15	5/30	Man and his freedom: From free will to existential freedom.	WPA 320-325, 332-339
16	6/6	Final Examination	

Evaluation

Grading will be based on the following criteria:

Class Attendance: 10%

Participation: 10%

Two Examinations: 40% each

Class Attendance and Participation

Students are supposed to participate actively in the class discussion. Absences are permitted only with prior notice and sound reason. Excused absences will not impact a student's course grade.

Technology

Please ensure that your phones are silenced and put away during class. Laptops and tablets should be used solely for class-related purposes. Please be considerate of those around you and minimize distractions. All use of Generative-AI must be declared and explained and must not violate the plagiarism policies for campus or this course.