

Knowledge, Reality and Values

Spring 2013

CORC 1210

MW2B (1501) & MW3 (0112)

Professor: Adam See Office: 3316 Boylan Office hours: Mondays 5:00-5:30 Email: asee@gc.cuny.edu	Meeting time: 2:15-3:30 / 3:40-4:55 Classroom: 4141 Boylan / 3405 Boylan Credits: 3.0
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Introduction

This course aims to provide students an opportunity to engage with a variety of philosophical issues whilst fostering skills in critical thinking, argumentation and persuasive writing. Through a close reading of several classic and contemporary works of philosophy students will explore the nature of knowledge, morality, and the mind.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Students will improve critical thinking by developing skills of explaining, critically examining, and responding to philosophical theories, issues, and claims in the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
- 2) Students will improve writing skills by explaining, exploring, and critically examining philosophical theories, issues, concepts, and arguments relating to the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics clearly in writing.
- 3) Students will improve communication skills by explaining orally philosophical theories, issues, claims, concepts, and arguments relating to the philosophical areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
- 4) Students will improve skills of interpreting and evaluating philosophical writings.
- 5) Students will develop an openness to having their beliefs challenged, will learn to hear and comprehend the views of others, and to entertain objections to their own views.
- 6) Students will be able to explain several classic ethical theories, to compare and contrast ethical theories, and to apply these to justify conclusions relating to concrete moral issues.
- 7) Students will acquire a familiarity with and an understanding of some classic and contemporary philosophical literature and some fundamental philosophical issues, and will be able to explain important contributions to the history of philosophy and their relation to present viewpoints.
- 8) Students will be able to explain several classic epistemological theories, and to compare and contrast theories of what knowledge is and how it is acquired.
- 9) Students will be able to show that issues may be regarded from multiple viewpoints, and will be able to present reasons in support of each viewpoint.
- 10) Students will improve reasoning skills and ethical decision making skills by

acquiring an understanding of ethical theories and philosophical concepts that will enable them to develop their own opinions on conceptions and practices of moral interaction and democracy.

11) Students will develop a conceptual foundation for future learning by exploring philosophical theories and arguments and will acquire related critical thinking and communication skills.

Required Text

This course has **two** required texts.

- 1) Hume's *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. I strongly recommend the Hackett edition. It is the most inexpensive edition and it will be the version that I will be using. If, however, you already own another edition, that's fine.
- 2) Steven Cahn's *Exploring Philosophy: An Introductory Anthology* will be our **primary text**. Make sure that you have the **fourth edition**. Many of our readings are not present in previous editions of the book.

Course Requirements and Grading

This course consists of three major assignments: one short paper (25%), one midterm exam (25%), and a final exam (25%). There will also be occasional pop quizzes to ensure that you're keeping up with the readings (10%). You will also be graded on your participation and contributions to class discussions (15%). Skipping class will result in a 10% penalty in your final participation grade and repeat absences and disobedience will most certainly be reflected in your final overall grade.

The appearance of a mobile phone during class will result in a lower participation grade. NO EXCEPTIONS (*including checking the time*).

I will not be grading the class on a bell curve.

Written assignment: You will be writing one short essay (2-3 pages) for this class. The main goal of this paper is to assess your ability to (1) think critically about topics in the philosophy of religion from a variety of perspectives and (2) clearly and succinctly construct arguments for a position of your choice. More specific expectations will be provided when the times comes.

Midterm and Final Exams: All exams will be in-class. They will consist of multiple-choice and one or two short essay questions.

Participation: Students who are never absent or disruptive and who contribute comments frequently will receive a perfect participation grade. I would like to stress that a perfect participation grade will *not* be difficult to achieve. Actions

that will result in a lower participation grade include: texting in class, being late for class, skipping class, being disruptive or rude, not contributing to discussions.

Pop Quizzes: There will occasionally be pop quizzes at the beginning of class. Their length will be no longer than five minutes and will be composed of one or two very easy questions about the reading. These quizzes are used to gauge whether you are keeping up with the readings. No trick questions. Very straightforward.

Course Expectations

Students are expected to attend all lectures, complete all assigned readings, and be active participants in class discussions. As this is a philosophy class, a great deal of our time together will be interactive. Students who contribute frequently will receive a perfect participation score. Just as regular absences will weigh heavily on a student's final grade, regular and/or provocative contributions to discussion will also be strongly considered as I tally grades at the end of the semester.

Extra Credit: Assignments for extra credit will be granted at my discretion. Typically, students who contribute frequently to class discussions but who bomb an essay or exam are more likely to be given the opportunity to boost their grades.

Late Policy: Unless accompanied by a doctor's note, late work will be deducted a half letter grade each day, *e.g.*, an A- will become a B+. The single writing assignment in this class will be relatively short and you will have plenty of time to complete it.

Missed Exams / Missed Assignment Policy: Students who fail to hand in an essay at all or who skip an exam will receive a zero on the assignment. If you will have to miss an exam it is *imperative* that you speak with me as soon as possible.

Night-before or day-of excuses are almost never acceptable. The **only** excuses that I will accept are those accompanied by a doctor's note. I do not assign take-home exams for missed exams.

Eating in class Policy: No smelly food or crinkly wrappers.

CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site:

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits that violation, the faculty member **MUST** report the violation.

CUNY Policy on Disability Services

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services, please provide me with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with me immediately.

Please be aware of the NY State Education Law, which provides that:

1. Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of their religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements.
2. It shall be the responsibility of the faculty to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which they may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days
3. Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative officials to comply in good faith shall be entitled to maintain an action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of their rights

Schedule of Readings

All page numbers refer to Cahn's *Exploring Philosophy* (4th Edition) unless otherwise noted. Specific dates are not listed to accommodate a more flexible atmosphere. The readings are, however, numbered in the order in which they will be assigned.

Note: This schedule (including midterm/essay due-dates) is subject to change.

UNIT ONE:

1. Plato's *Defense of Socrates (The Apology)* **13-34**
2. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* **494-501**
3. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* **565-566**
4. Peter Singer's *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* **465-472**

UNIT TWO:

1. Descartes' *First Meditation* (selection) **87-90**
2. Descartes' *Second Meditation* (selection) **151-156**
3. Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* **Chs. 1-5**

MIDTERM: MARCH 6th

UNIT THREE:

1. Hume's *On Miracles* (**Ch. 10 of *Enquiry Concerning...***)
2. Clifford's *The Ethics of Belief* **296-302**
3. James' *The Will to Believe* **302-313**

SHORT ESSAY: APRIL 3rd

UNIT FIVE:

1. Rachels' *The Challenge of Cultural Relativism* **371-381**
2. Cahn's *A Supreme Moral Principle?* **395-400**
3. Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* **410-415**

FINAL EXAM: TBA