

## Knowledge, Reality and Values CORC 1210

Prof. Rachel McKinney  
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Course: Knowledge, Reality and Values, CORC 1210  
Meeting time: Mon/Wed 5:05-6:20 PM

Semester: Fall 2012  
Classroom: 4145 Boylan  
Section: MW5  
Credits: 3.0

Office: Boylan Hall cafe (basement level)  
Office hours: Mondays 3:30-4:30 pm

### Introduction

This course will study philosophy's distinctive ways of understanding and thinking about perennial human questions: "What can I know?"; "What is real?" "What is the basis of moral judgments?" In this course we will cover contemporary and traditional examples of philosophical analysis and criticism. The course covers three main sections: epistemology (knowledge), metaphysics (reality), and ethics (values), with an emphasis on both classic topics of inquiry (e.g., the existence of God) and more timely issues (e.g., the moral permissibility of solitary confinement).

### 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 argument.

### Required Text

The text for this course will be a coursepack that includes all of the readings for the semester. This will be provided to you online. You are expected to come to class each day with the text to refer to during discussion.

### **Website**

All of the readings and other information for the course will be available at the following URL. Please make sure to bookmark this page:

<https://sites.google.com/site/rachelannmckinney/corc-1210>

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

Grades are determined as follows:

Short Quizzes/Attendance: 10%

Participation: 10%

Response Papers (2): 20% each, 40% total

Midterm: 20%

Final: 20%

The grade distribution is as follows:

A+, A, A- = 90 – 100%

B+, B, B- = 80 – 89%

C+, C, C- = 70– 79%

D+, D, D- = 60 – 69%

F = 0 – 59%

#### *Short Quizzes*

Every day I will begin class with a short question about readings or the previous meeting's discussion. If you answer the question at least partially correctly, you will receive 0.5 points for the quiz. If you score badly, or if you are absent or late for class, you'll get no points. At the end of the semester, I'll add up all of the points you received for all the quizzes, and the total, to a maximum of 10, will be factored into your final grade percentage. The maximum number of points is 10 because I know that everyone may be late, absent, or unprepared from time to time. But if you are absent, late, or unprepared often enough, it will be reflected in your grade.

#### *Participation*

This class is a mix of lecture and discussion, and -- as such -- I expect you to come to class ready and willing to ask questions, raise objections, offer responses, and in general to discuss the readings assigned. Participation is 10% of your grade.

#### *Response Papers*

There are 2 response papers due during the semester. The first paper is due October 1 and the second is due November 14. I will provide a few different essay prompt options for each of these. They should be 2-3 pages, and each one is 20% of your grade (40% total).

#### *Midterm/Final*

There are both a midterm (October 31) and a final exam (December 21). These are each 20% of your grade. They will be blue book-style, and include vocabulary, multiple choice, short answer and one or two short essay questions. The final is NOT cumulative.

#### *Attendance*

Attendance and timeliness are MANDATORY. If you are going to be absent from class, you

must email me beforehand (rachelannmckinney@gmail.com) and let me know. In-class quizzes and response papers are collected at the beginning of class.

### *Extra Credit*

Periodically I will announce extra credit opportunities. These usually come in the form of attendance at NYC-area philosophy events (e.g. public lectures, colloquia, conferences) and a short (1-2 page) summary/response about what you've learned there. Extra Credit will count toward your participation, attendance or response paper grades, at my discretion.

## **Course Expectations**

### *Classroom Behavior*

I expect you to come to class having read the material and prepared to discuss it. Further, I expect you to help me maintain a respectful and professional learning environment. To this end, I will not tolerate cellphone use (set them on "silent" during class, no texting) or lateness. Other behavior that is a distraction to both your fellow students and your professor include: doing work from other classes, sleeping in class, listening to iPods, playing on Facebook on laptops, etc.

Many of the topics discussed in this class are controversial, taboo and "button-pushing." Please remember that we are all engaged in a process of mutual inquiry, and as such we ought to respect each other. This means that in discussion I will expect all of us to regard each other's statements as open to critique, but not personal attack or name-calling. Comments such as "that is just stupid" and "only a moron would believe that," etc., are not appropriate responses. In philosophy we engage in a dialectic: that is, a process of giving and accepting reasons, not of personal attack or aggression.

### *Missed Exams/Late Work*

In-class quizzes are only given in class. If you miss them (even by being late), there are no make-ups. I will accept late response papers via email, but you will be knocked down a letter grade for each day it is late (e.g., if a B grade response paper is due on a Tuesday and you turn it in via email on Wednesday, you will receive a C on it).

### *Online Communication*

Since I will be announcing events and sharing resources online, it is VERY IMPORTANT that I have a working email address for you. If you do not receive any email from me after the first week of class, YOU MUST EMAIL ME TO ADD YOURSELF TO THE LIST-SERV. Please be pro-active about this.

### *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.

## READING SCHEDULE

### August 27: What is philosophy? What is an argument?

How to Read a Philosophy Paper - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

How to Write a Philosophy Paper - <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

## SECTION I: KNOWLEDGE

### August 29: What is Knowledge?

Plato, *Theatetus* and *Meno*, selections

Ed Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

### September 3: NO CLASS

### September 5: Rationalism and Skepticism

Rene Descartes - *Meditations on First Philosophy*, selections

### September 10: Empiricism

John Locke - *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, selection

### September 12: Self Knowledge

Sigmund Freud - *The Unconscious*, selection

Daniel Kahneman - *Thinking Fast and Slow*, selection

### Sept 17: no class

### Sept 19: Self Knowledge, cont.

W.E.B. DuBois - *Souls of Black Folk*, selection

### Sept 24: Practices of Inquiry

Matthew Crawford – *Shopclass as Soulcraft*, selection

### Sept 27: Practices of Inquiry, cont.

Emily Martin - "The Egg and the Sperm"

## SECTION II: REALITY

### October 1: Dualism/Monism

**\*\*FIRST RESPONSE PAPER DUE\*\***

Thomas Nagel - "What Is It Like To Be a Bat?"

### October 3: (conversion day) Dualism/Monism, cont

Patricia Churchland on eliminative materialism

available here: <http://philosophybites.com/2010/06/pat-churchland-on-eliminative-materialism.html>

### October 8: NO CLASS

### October 10: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God

William Paley - *Natural Theology*, selection

### October 15: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God, cont.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky - *The Brothers Karamazov*, selection

### October 17: Free Will/Determinism

Paul-Henri Thiry (Baron) d'Holbach - *System of Nature*, selection

**October 22: Free Will/Determinism, cont.**

Stace – *Religion and the Modern Mind*, selection

**October 24: Identity and Society**

John Locke – “Of Identity and Diversity”

**October 29: Identity and Society, cont.**

Karl Marx – *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, selection

**October 31: MIDTERM EXAM****November 5: Identity and Society, cont.**

Iris Marion Young – “5 Faces of Oppression”

**November 7: Meta-Ethics**

James Rachels – *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, selection

**SECTION III: VALUES****November 12: Meta-Ethics, cont.**

Plato - *Euthyphro*

**November 14: Utilitarianism**

**\*\*SECOND RESPONSE PAPER DUE\*\***

John Stuart Mill – *What Utilitarianism Is*, selection

**November 19: NO CLASS****November 21: NO CLASS****November 26: Deontology**

Immanuel Kant – “Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals”

**November 28: Virtue**

Aristotle - *Nicomachean Ethics*, selections

**December 3 Global Poverty**

Peter Singer – “The Singer Solution to World Poverty”

**December 5: Abortion**

Judith Jarvis Thompson – “A Defense of Abortion”

**December 10: Punishment**

Atul Gawande - “Is Solitary Confinement Torture?”

**December 12: Animals and Moral Considerability**

David Foster Wallace - “Consider the Lobster”

**Friday Dec 21: Final Exam**

**8 - 10 am**