

**Brooklyn College**  
Department of Philosophy  
**Self and Society**

**CORC 3109 TR 11**

**Fall 2012, Tues. & Thurs, 2:15-3:30pm**  
Ingersoll Hall Extension 431

**Instructor: Alexei Procyshyn**

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**Office Hours: B3316 T&Th 12:30-1:30**

**Course Description:** What does it mean to be a person, and how do we become individuals? Is this process one of independent self-growth, or does it involve – perhaps crucially – others and a shared social space? Are there ways in which our efforts to become unique selves can misfire? We will pursue these questions in this course by focusing on the basic connection between ‘self’ and ‘society’: the nature, meaning, and preconditions of action. We will explore these themes in philosophy and literature, often using literary works as touchstones for philosophical theories. Topics include nature of the self and personal integrity, justice and responsibility, alienation.

**Required Texts**

- Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Jens Timmermann, ed. Mary Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, a new translation based on the restored text, trans. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken Publishing, 1999)
- George Orwell, *1984* (any edition)

All books are available online at Amazon.com, abebooks.com, or Powells.com. They can also be found at Brooklyn College’s university bookstore, or at the Strand in Manhattan. Further material will be made available via Blackboard.

**Course Work & Requirements**

- Two papers (ca. 6 pages double-spaced, each): **each worth 20% of final grade**
- Four (of six possible) Reading Responses (500 words each): **conjointly worth 20% of final grade. First Response is mandatory.**
- Final Exam: **worth 25% of final grade**
- Class attendance, preparation, and participation in discussion: **15% of final grade.**

**Class participation, participation, and attendance:** Because philosophy involves discussion and the lively exchange of reasons, students should make every effort to regularly attend class, read and think through the assigned texts, and be prepared to ask – or answer – questions. Generally,

students learn more and receive substantially better grades when they come to class. As an incentive, attendance, preparation, and participation comprise 15% of every student's final grade.

**Final Exam:** This will be a traditional final exam that will test how well you have understood the basic concepts, arguments, and theoretical commitments of the philosophers and problems we have studied. The final exam will consist of three parts. The short first section will ask students to place philosophical concepts in the right contexts; it will have the structure of a fill-in-the-blank. Sections II and III will be more substantive: section II will evaluate your understanding of the key concepts we have discussed in class (it will consist of short answer responses, where you will be asked to define a concept or theoretical position), while section III will consist of one long essay, where you will be asked to select a topic from a list of options (all pertaining to the novels we have read), and then explain and evaluate the topic using the methods we have been developing in class. **The final exam will be cumulative.**

**Reading Responses:** These are short expository pieces intended to help students make the transition from passively following a line of reasoning or reading a narrative to thinking about the key concepts, *mechanics of a given argument*, or the significance of a sequence of events within a narrative. A good analysis should identify and explain the major concepts, premises, arguments and conclusions involved in a particular line of thought. However, it should not simply summarize a stretch of text. A good reading response aims to highlight something in a text that you have found illuminating or, on the contrary, incomprehensible, explain why you think that is the case, and support your claims by making explicit the relationships and interactions among concepts, or adducing textual evidence with respect to the characters' behavior, narrative structure, etc. A reading response seeks to clarify your particular response to the readings in light of the philosophical tools you have available. Students may use a reading response as a springboard for their papers, but they **may not cut and paste their responses into their papers**. When you hand in your papers, you will also hand back in your original reading responses, with my comments on them.

**Papers:** The papers for this course will involve interpreting a particular piece of literature in relation to the philosophical theories we have been discussing. The goal of the paper is to show how a given kind of social interaction depicted in the literary text/film can be explained by a philosophical theory, or how – on the contrary – it problematizes a philosophical theory. Students should conclude their papers by precisely formulating what they find convincing (or unconvincing) about the line of thought they have analyzed or a particular problem that arises in the literary representation of social action; they should explain *why* this line of argument appeals to them, why they think it does (or does not) work, make sense, etc. Students are also given one **rewrite opportunity**. The best two of the three possible submissions will count towards their final grade.

**Word length of assignments:** The average length for each reading response should be about 2 pages double-spaced (ca. 500 words). The longer papers should be about 6 pages double-spaced (ca. 2,000-2,500 words). These limits are meant to help students choose an appropriate topic and develop it in sufficient depth. This said, students can choose to write something longer if they so desire. But be warned: short responses or papers risk being uninformative and trivial, while longer ones can run out of hand. Finally, for all their written assignments, students should use a standard page layout and format. If you are unsure what that means, come talk to me.

## Evaluation, Late Policy, & Stance on Plagiarism

All written work will be graded in accordance with the following three criteria:

- 1) Cogency
- 2) Accuracy
- 3) Insightfulness

1. ‘**Cogency**’ is the overall quality of a clear, well-structured, well-written, and compelling presentation and analysis of an explicit argument. Typos, ungrammatical sentences, unclear or vague statements, or a fuzzy presentation an argument will detract from your overall point. Summarizing an argument instead of analyzing it will also result in a less cogent paper.
2. An accurate analysis makes claims that are factually correct or consistent with its object of investigation. As an evaluative criterion, then, ‘**accuracy**’ pertains to how a paper makes use of textual evidence, and how its arguments, claims, and reconstructions are anchored in the texts under consideration. It also requires that students correctly identify their object of analysis, and apply the appropriate analytical techniques. A claim not factually grounded in, or supported by the text is inaccurate. If, for example, a presentation distorts what a philosopher actually says, or misrepresents his thought, it is not accurate.
3. Finally, ‘**insightfulness**’ refers to the specifics of the paper’s content: those papers are insightful that develop a unique account through a careful consideration and analysis of a topic from a novel perspective, while remaining at all times grounded in the text. In other words, insightful papers do not merely repeat the material of a class lecture, or rehearse someone else’s argument; they focus on something that is important to the author and that may not be evident to others.

**Late policy:** All due dates for coursework are listed below. Reading Responses that are not handed in on, or before the due dates indicated on the course outline will not be accepted. Papers handed in after the due date specified will be assessed a late penalty of 3% per day for 7 days (i.e. until next week’s class), after which they are no longer admissible, and will be assigned a grade of **0 (zero)**. **I will not accept work submitted via email.** I will give extensions to students who contact me at least two days prior to the due date and present documentation showing that an extraordinary circumstance makes completing the essay by the designated deadline impossible.

**Academic Integrity & Plagiarism:** CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity, adopted by the Board of Trustees 6/28/2004, states that “Academic Dishonesty is prohibited in the City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion, as provided herein.” Please go to <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies/> for further information about: CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity; BC Procedures for Implementing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity; Flow Chart of the BC Procedures for Implementing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity. **Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty.** It is the unacknowledged use of another person’s words or ideas in any academic work (this could be using books, journals, internet postings, or other students’ work). For further information on avoiding plagiarism through proper acknowledgements, including expectations for paraphrasing source material and forms of citation in research and writing, students should consult the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly*

*Publishing* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), Chapter 6, on documentation. Or ask me! **Cases of plagiarism will be handled according to the university policies on academic integrity.**

**Center for Student 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 that 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 your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him or her.

## Objectives of Core Course

1. Students will become acquainted with literatures of the past and present, and with significant ideas and real life issues presented in these literary works. (3)
2. Students will understand philosophical literature, past and present, and will acquire a critical appreciation of their contribution to the life of the individual and society. (4)
3. Students will develop skills of conceptual analysis and argumentation. (9)
4. Students will be able to express ideas clearly in writing. (10)
5. Students will be able to communicate thought orally. (12)
6. Students will be able to develop a basis for evaluating texts. (13)
7. Students will become acquainted with ethical theories presumed and moral issues presented in literary works. (1)
8. Students will acquire an understanding of their own identity and of personal integrity. (20)
9. Students will confront ethical issues that arise in real life situations in the context of interpreting literary works and will develop skills of using reasoning to construct possible solutions to ethical problems and to construct personal standards of responsibility. (26)

## Course Outline

**Week 1:** 8/28 & 30    Class Overview: Self, Society, Action

**Handout:** Literary Experiments and Philosophical Theories

**Week 2:** 9/4 & 6    Virtue of Action, Virtues of Character

**Week's Readings:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Selections)

**Week 3:** 9/11 & 13    Excellence and Justice

**Week's Readings:** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Selections)

**Week 4:** 9/18 & 20    Exemplifying the Tensions of Virtue

**Week's Readings:** Sophocles, *Antigone*

**READING RESPONSE DUE!**

**NO CLASSES ON 9/18!**

**Week 5:** 9/25 & 27 From Personal Excellence to Human Dignity: Reason & Law

**NO CLASSES ON 9/25!**

**Week's Readings:** Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Selections)

**Week 6:** 10/2 & 4 The Rationality of Law and the Inner Source of the Good

**Week's Readings:** Kant's *Groundwork* (Selections) cont'd

**Week 7:** 10/9 & 11 The Law, Guilt, and Moral Failure

**Week's Readings:** Kant's *Groundwork* (Selections) cont'd

**Week 8:** 10/16 & 18 Exemplifying the Tensions of Law

**Week's Readings:** Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

**FIRST PAPER DUE!**

**Week 9:** 10/23 & 25 The Ambiguity of the Law, the Inevitability of Failure

**Week's Readings:** Franz Kafka, *The Trial* cont'd

**READING RESPONSE DUE!**

**Week 10:** 10/30 & 11/1 What Do We Want? Broaching the 'I' and the 'We'

**Week's Readings:** Franz Kafka, *The Trial* cont'd

**READING RESPONSE DUE!**

**Week 11:** 11/6 & 8 Neither Law Nor Virtue: 'Recognition'

**Handout:** Perspectives on Recognition

**Week's Viewing** Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (director's cut)

**VIEWING RESPONSE DUE!**

**Week 12:** 11/13 & 15 Politics As Misrecognition

**Week's Readings:** Karl Marx, "Commodity Fetishism"

Week 13: 11/20 Totalitarianism: Institutionalized Misrecognition

**Week's Readings:** George Orwell, *1984*

**READING RESPONSE DUE!**

**THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY, NOVEMBER 22-25!**

Week 14: 11/27 & 29 Thinking about the Subject

**Week's Readings:** George Orwell, *1984* cont'd

**READING RESPONSE DUE!**

Week 15: 12/4 & 6 The Call of Ideology

**Week's Readings:** George Orwell, *1984* cont'd

**SECOND PAPER DUE!**

Final Class: 12/11 Wrapping Up

**FINAL EXAM SCHEDULED DURING EXAM PERIOD**