

Knowledge, Reality and Values CORC 1210

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Section: MW9A
Code: 0128
Office: 3316 Boylan
Office hours: Wednesday 11am-12pm

Semester: Fall 2012
Classroom: 3407 Boylan
Meeting time: M/W 9:30-10:45am
Credits: 3.0

SYLLABUS

Introduction

Philosophy is part of a rational attempt to understand the world. In this class, we'll be attacking some of the major questions throughout the past 2,500 years of Western philosophy in order to understand both the history of Western thought—important in its own right—as well as how to think honestly about things, how to be rational agents, and how to consider evidence and reject bad arguments. Those fundamental questions are, "What do we know?", "What is reality like?", and "What makes our actions good or bad?"

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.

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.

Required Text

You don't have to buy any books for this class. But you do have to print out the reading before you come to class. We're using the free, readable translations on www.earlymoderntexts.com

I may assign readings that are not on that website; I will print those out for you and give them to you before you have to read them, and will email the files or URLs.

I reserve the right to alter the syllabus as we progress through the course if I think it's necessary. I will often tell you which pages and sections to skip, both in class and email.

Course Requirements and Grading

- Your final grade will be a mix of a midterm exam, a final exam, two short (two to three pages in 12 point Times New Roman) papers, attendance/participation, and a weekly quiz at the beginning of class that will count as part of your participation grade (so don't be late!).
- Quizzes/Participation=15%
- First Short Paper=15%
- Second Short Paper=20%
- Midterm Exam=20%
- Final Exam=30%

Course Expectations

- The quizzes will be a brief written response to a question I put on the board pertaining to reading or previous discussion, and will take the first 10-15

minutes of class once a week. They will be graded pass/fail. Two quiz failures will be wiped from your record.

- Attendance, participation in class discussion, and demonstrating that you seriously read the readings, will also inform your participation grade.
- There won't be any extra credit, except for extreme extenuating circumstances that make it difficult or impossible for you to complete your normal course work.
- Nonetheless, the grading is structured to give you a chance to improve even if you don't do very well in the beginning of the course. The second paper is worth more than the first paper, and the final exam is worth more than the midterm.
- Excellent participation can also go a long way if you struggle early on.
- Don't sweat it if you don't do so well on the first paper. It's only 15% of your grade. Even if you don't do well on the midterm either, you'll still have more than 50% of the grade left to make up for it, and I am here to help you do better.
- If you come in late to class, you will miss the quiz, and this will hurt your grade. So don't be late.
- Since the bottom two quiz grades are wiped from your grade, this effectively allows two unexcused absences/latenesses.
- On days when there is no quiz (Wednesdays), there will be an attendance sheet. You may have a total of four unexcused absences without a penalty to your grade. After that, you will lose 2.5 points out of 100 from your final grade per absence.
- Of course, if you need to be late or miss class for a serious reason, simply let me know as early as possible, and your grade will not be penalized.
- If you know you are going to have to miss an exam, let me know before the exam.
- Every day a paper is late, it loses two-thirds of a grade (from an A being the top to a B-plus, to a B-minus, to a C, and so on)

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.

Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introduction, Knowledge and Skepticism

Reading: Descartes, Meditation I [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/dm1.pdf]

Week 2: Knowledge and Skepticism, cont.

Reading: Descartes, Meditation II [URL: Same as above]

Week 3: God, pt. 1

Reading: Descartes, Meditation III {*page numbers TBD*} [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/dm2.pdf]

Week 4: God pt. 1, and Knowledge, cont.

Reading: Descartes, Meditation VI {*page numbers TBD*} [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/dm3.pdf]

Week 5: Knowledge, cont. *****FIRST PAPER DUE 10/3*****

Reading: Hume, Enquiry, Section 2 ("Of the Origin of Ideas") & Section 3 ("Of the Association of Ideas") [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/he1.pdf]

Week 6: God, pt.2

Reading: William Paley, selections from Natural Theology, and Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion {*page numbers TBD*} [Paley will be given out and emailed; Hume URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/humedial.pdf]

Week 7: God, pt. 2

Reading: Hume, Enquiry, Section 10 ("On Miracles") {*page numbers TBD*} [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/he3.pdf]

Week 8: Review for Midterm *****MIDTERM 10/24*****

Reading: (none)

Week 9: Free Will and Necessity

Reading: Hume, Enquiry, Section 8 ("Of Liberty and Necessity") {*page numbers TBD*} [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/he2.pdf]

Week 10: Ethics

Reading: Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns" [Given out in class, emailed]

Week 11: Ethics *****SECOND PAPER DUE 11/14*****

Reading: Kant, Groundwork, Section 2 {*page numbers TBD*} [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/kgw2.pdf]

Week 12: Ethics

Reading: Mill, Utilitarianism, Ch. 2 {*page numbers TBD*} [URL: www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfbits/miu1.pdf]

Week 13: Ethics

Reading: Mill, Utilitarianism, Ch. 2 [URL: Same as above]

Week 14: Review for Final

Reading: (none)

Day of final exam to be decided