

Prof. Justin Steinberg
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Office Hours: T 3:45 - 4:30 pm, Th. 11:00 am - 12:00 pm
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Core 1210 Knowledge, Reality, and Values

Fall 2012
T, Th 2:15 – 3:30 pm
Boylan Hall 4141

Course Description

This course will be an introduction to philosophy and its distinctive way of approaching such questions as: “What can I know?”; “What is real?”; “What is the basis of moral judgments?” We will be looking at contemporary and traditional examples of philosophical analysis and criticism.

Course 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.

Texts:

There will be two texts that you will need to purchase for this course:

1. Plato, *The Republic*, edited G. Ferrari, trans. T. Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). ISBN 052148443
2. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). ISBN 052143971X

The Republic is available at *Shakespeare and Co.*, 150 Campus Road. The second edition of *Practical Ethics* can be purchased very inexpensively on the internet (e.g., at Abebooks.com, Alibris.com, or Amazon Marketplace). To search for the correct edition, type in the ISBN number listed above. There is a more recent edition, which you are welcome to purchase; but it is quite a bit more expensive.

All other readings are available as PDFs on the course's Blackboard page. It is imperative that you know how to access these articles. If you have trouble, let me know *immediately*.

Assignments and Methods of Assessment

Three Short Papers	30 %
Midterm	25 %
Final	30 %
Homework and In-Class Writing	10 %
Participation and Attendance	5 %

You must take the midterm on the scheduled date. Also, deadlines for papers are absolute. If there is a *very* compelling reason why you cannot complete an assignment on the scheduled date, you must let me know at least two full days in advance so that we can work out other arrangements. All late papers will be reduced by *at least* a full letter grade (perhaps more, subject to my discretion).

As you might infer from the participation and attendance grade, a failure to attend class on a regular basis will severely hurt your grade. Attendance will be taken at every class; if you arrive in class more than 10 minutes late, this will count as an absence. If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered and what the reading assignment will be for the subsequent class. We might be amending the reading schedule from time to time and you must be aware of the changes that are made.

Expectations and Policies in the Classroom

A classroom is a form of community. As members of this community we all have a number of formal and informal responsibilities.

Here are some **expectations that we can all have for one another**:

- We will treat one another honestly and fairly and will generally carry ourselves in a professional way (without taking ourselves *too* seriously).
- We will show up for class! I have an attendance policy not to satisfy my punitive urges, but because in order for us to have a successful learning community we must, minimally, be present. We owe it to one another.
- We will assume a charitable, respectful posture when reading/listening to the views of others. In other words, we will try to interpret the views of others in the best possible light.

Some other things that **I expect from you**:

- You will come to class having read and thought about the material, and you will participate constructively in classroom discussion.
- You will seek to be stimulated intellectually. How much one learns depends to a significant degree on how much one *cares* to learn. So you will do your best to stay engaged and interested.
- You will ask me to clarify points if you are confused. It is often hard for an instructor to know what is clear and what is not without feedback from students. I will be relying on your feedback throughout the semester.
- You will turn your cell phones off before class and will not carry on side conversations, send text messages, or participate in any other non-class-related form of communication.

Some other things that **you can expect from me**:

- I will do my best to challenge and stimulate you, to make sure that your efforts in the classroom are rewarded.
- I will do my best to ensure that anyone who puts in the effort can understand the material, no matter how difficult.
- I will make myself available to you outside of class by holding office hours, answering email as promptly as possible, and scheduling additional meetings if necessary.
- I will treat you with respect both inside and outside of the classroom and will do my best to create an environment in which you can feel comfortable and confident.

- I will try to articulate my expectations for assignments as clearly as possible, and I will assess these assignments as fairly and impartially as I can.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

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 the violation, the faculty member **MUST** report the violation.

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 your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.

Provisional Reading Schedule:

Tues., Aug. 28	Introduction to Course
Thurs., Aug. 30	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book I
Tues., Sept. 4	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book II
Thurs., Sept. 6	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book III-IV (<i>Selections</i>)
Tues., Sept. 11	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book V (<i>Selections</i>)
	Short Paper #1
Thurs., Sept. 13	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book VI
Tues., Sept. 18	<i>No Class</i>
Thurs., Sept. 20	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book VI - VII (<i>Selections</i>)
Tues., Sept. 25	<i>No Class</i>
Thurs., Sept. 27	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book VIII
Tues., Oct. 2	Fishkin, "Democratic Aspirations"
Thurs., Oct. 4	Fishkin, "Democratic Aspirations" (cont.)
Tues., Oct. 9	Pascal, "The Wager"
	Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"
Thurs., Oct. 11	Hardwig, "Epistemic Dependence"

Tues., Oct. 16	Climate Change and Experts
Thurs., Oct. 18	Short Paper #2 Midterm Review
Tues., Oct. 23	Midterm
Thurs., Oct. 25	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>, Book III
Tues., Oct. 30	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>, Book III
Thurs., Nov. 1	Montaigne, “That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die” Nagel, “Death”
Tues., Nov. 6	Williams, “The Makropulos Case”
Thurs., Nov. 8	Short Paper #3
Tues., Nov. 13	Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chapter 1
Thurs., Nov. 15	Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chapter 2 Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chapter 2
Tues., Nov. 20	Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chapter 3
Thurs., Nov. 22	<i>No Class</i>
Tues., Nov. 27	Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chapter 8
Thurs., Nov. 29	Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” Singer, <i>Practical Ethics</i>, Chapter 12
Tues., Dec. 4	Plato, <i>The Republic</i>, Book IX
Thurs., Dec. 6	Wolf, “The Meaning of Lives”
Tues., Dec. 11	Final Review
Final Exam: Thursday, December 20, 1 pm - 3 pm	