

Knowledge, Reality and Value

CORC 1210

Prof. Kate Tullmann
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Section: MW9F
Credits: 3.0

Semester: Fall 2012
Classroom: 3411 Boylan
Meeting time: MW, 9:30-10:45 a.m.

Office: 3113 Boylan Hall
Office hours: T 5:30-6:30 pm and by appointment

SYLLABUS

Introduction

The basic questions of philosophy concern the nature of our existence and our world. Philosophy exhibits distinctive ways of understanding and thinking about these perennial human questions: "What can I know?"; "What is real?" "How should I act?" Great thinkers from the Ancient Greeks to contemporary times have attempted to answer these questions and many others. This class will focus on these three questions and other related ones. We will examine and question readings from Plato to Nietzsche, and lots in between. This class is also designed to help students develop their critical thinking skills in order advance in any academic field.

Course readings

There is no required text for this course. All readings will be made available on Blackboard. *Please make sure that you have access to Blackboard and have registered a working email address that you check often in order to receive announcements about the course!* Students are responsible for downloading and reading all of the assigned articles.

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.

Grading breakdown:

- Writing assignments (4)... 45 pts., 15% each
- Weekly quizzes... approx. 30 pts., 10% total
- Midterm... 30 pts., 10%
- Final exam... 30 pts., 10%
- Participation and classroom etiquette... 30 pts., 10%

Total: approx. 300 pts.

Assignments

Writing assignments

The writing assignments will count for approximately 60% of your final grade. The due dates are indicated by * on the schedule below. Each writing assignment is to be typed, double-spaced, and should consist of clear, concise, well thought-out arguments.

There will be 4 writing assignments for the semester. I will provide a brief assignment sheet outlining the criteria and expectations for each paper the week before it is due. The papers should each be 1 to 2 pages, double-spaced, covering a topic discussed in class and in the course readings.

A hard copy of each writing assignment must be submitted at the beginning of the class at which it is due. **Late submissions (including submission in the middle or at the end of class) will not be accepted unless previously approved by me!** Hand-written copies will also not be accepted.

If you choose, you may submit **either** an outline or introductory paragraph for your papers ahead of time to me to review. This must be done at least three days before the due date.

Quizzes and Exams

Reading quizzes

Each week we will take a brief, one question quiz covering the assigned readings for the day. These quizzes will amount to 10% of your final grade, so it's important that you take them seriously.

Midterm and final

There will be an in-class midterm and final exam, each worth 10% of your final grade. The midterm will consist of several short essays based on the logic and epistemology units. The final will not be cumulative and will consist in one, three-part essay based on the ethics unit.

Participation & classroom etiquette

You will be graded on your in-class participation, based on the quantity and quality of questions you raise and comments you make, in-class writing assignments, and group work. No question is too basic, or comment unwelcome! You should feel comfortable raising any issues about the topic at all! Participation counts towards 10% of your grade.

It is important that we create a classroom environment that is conducive to doing philosophy. To that end:

Please get to class on time and keep absences to a minimum. **More than 3 unexcused absences (anything not previously approved by me) will result in a**

lowered overall semester grade. All questions and comments should be made with respect for me and your fellow students. Hurtful or disparaging comments or behavior will not be tolerated. Speaking informally but respectfully about potentially sensitive subjects is one of the important skills this course aims to develop.

The use of cell phones, tablets, and lap tops is not permitted. Cell phones should not be seen or heard in class. If you must take a call, please exit the room quickly and quietly.

Eating and drinking in class is permitted so long as it is not disruptive to others. Please avoid foods with strong odors or that cannot be eaten neatly and quietly. Please make sure that all beverages have lids. If you make a mess, it is your responsibility to clean it up. If you leave trash in the classroom, eating/drinking privileges will be revoked.

Please feel free to ask for help, ask for clarification, ask me to repeat something—don't hesitate to ask! Ask questions in class, stop by my office hours (feel free to bring a friend!), or drop me an email.

Other information

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

- i. 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.
- ii. 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.
- iii. 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. If you cannot attend a class, quiz, or exam due to religious beliefs, please make alternate arrangements with me well in advance.

- **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.

Tentative reading schedule, Fall 2012

**All readings are subject to change!*

All readings are posted on Blackboard under the "Course Documents" tab.

I. Critical Thinking & Epistemology

M Aug. 27th: Syllabus; Intro to philosophy

W Aug 29th: Logic

M Sept. 3rd: Labor Day, no class

W Sept. 5th: Logic, cont'd

- ****Writing assignment #1 assigned**

M Sept. 10th: Socrates & Plato

- Plato's *Apology*, full text

W Sept 12th: Socrates & Plato

- Plato's *Apology*, cont'd.
- ****Writing assignment #1 due.**

M Sept. 17th: No class

W Sept. 19th: Rationalism

- Descartes' Meditation I

M Sept. 24th: Rationalism

- Descartes' Meditation II

W Sept. 26th: No class

M Oct. 1st: Rationalism, cont'd

- Descartes Meditation III

W Oct. 3rd: Rationalism, cont'd

- Descartes Meditation VI

M Oct. 8th: Columbus Day, no class

W Oct. 10th (note: Monday schedule): Empiricism

- Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, excerpt

M Oct. 15th: Empiricism, cont'd

- Hume: "Of Personal Identity"
- **Writing assignment #2 assigned

II. Metaphysics and related issues

W Oct. 17th: Free Will

- Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity"

M Oct. 22nd: The problem of evil

- Swinburne, "Why God Allows Evil"
- **Writing assignment #2 due

W Oct. 24th: No class

M Oct. 29th: Midterm exam

W Oct. 31st: Philosophy of Art

- Carroll: "Horror and Humor"

M Nov. 5th: Philosophy of Art, cont'd

- Hume: "Of the Standard of Taste," sections TBD
- **Writing assignment #3 assigned

W Nov. 7th: Justice

- Plato, Book I of *The Republic*

- Optional reading: MLK, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

III. Ethics

M Nov. 12th: Intro to ethics

- ****Writing assignment #3 due**

W Nov. 14th: Cultural Relativism

- Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism”
- Prinz, “Morality is a Culturally Conditioned Response”

M Nov. 19th: Consequentialism

- Mill, “Utilitarianism” excerpt

W Nov. 21st: Consequentialism, cont’d

- Nozick, “The Experience Machine”

M Nov. 26th: Deontology

- Kant, “Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals” excerpt

W Nov. 28th: Deontology, cont’d

- ****Writing assignment #4 assigned**

M Dec. 3rd: Virtue theory

- Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, excerpt

W Dec. 5th: Ethics of Care

- Held, “The Ethics of Care” excerpt
- ****Writing assignment #4 due**

M Dec. 10th: Applied ethics

- Singer, “Rich and Poor”

W Dec. 12th: Last day of class

- Catch up & review for final exam

Final exam: TBD