**Intro to Problems of Philosophy**

**PHIL 2101**

Prof. Kate Tullmann Semester: Spring 2013

Email: ktullmann@gc.cuny.edu Classroom: 4145 Boylan

Section: ET6 Meeting time: T 6:30-9:00 p.m.

Credits: 3.0

Office: 3316 Boylan Hall

Office hours: 5:30-6:30 T & R 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. Please bring the readings to every class!

**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 portfolio…55%

Midterm exam… 15%

Final exam… 15%

Participation & classroom etiquette… 15%

**Writing portfolio**

The writing portfolio will count for 55% of your final grade. The purpose of this portfolio project is to provide you with opportunities to learn, practice, and improve critical reading, writing, and thinking skills by doing philosophy. The project consists of a series of weekly writing assignments designed so that the skills being learned and practiced build upon one another as the semester progresses. **Be sure to bring either a hard or electronic copy of your portfolio to each class meeting.** You should be prepared to share what you’ve written with the class, but don’t worry: these aren’t meant to be high-pressure assignments. We are learning how to do philosophy together!

The portfolio assignments will be given in class each day and are expected in class the following week. You will turn in a hard copy of your portfolio for a grade 3 times during the semester.

**Late policy and emailed assignments:**

Any late portfolio submission not turned in on the day it is due will have 10% off for each day it is late.

I will not accept emailed portfolios except in very special circumstances that are approved by me **before it is due.**

**Exams**

Midterm and final

There will be an in-class midterm and final exam, each worth 15% of your final grade. The midterm will be based on the logic, epistemology, and metaphysics units. The final will cover the art and ethics units. Both the final and the midterm will be essay exams. I will give you the potential essay topics two weeks before each exam. You may complete the study guides for each exam for extra credit.

**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 15% 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. Absences will be taken note of for your overall participation grade. Keep in mind that students who frequently miss class generally do not do well in my courses.

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 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 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.

**Spring 2014 tentative reading schedule**

\**all readings are subject to change!*

All readings are on Blackboard (BB) either posted under the “Course documents”/”Course readings” folder as individual pdfs or in *the Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf.

Please check the syllabus for weekly readings and assignments before emailing me!

1/28—First class, intro to major questions in philosophy; logic

2/4—logic, cont’d; Why philosophy?

Reading: Plato’s *Apology*, posted on BB

2/11—What is knowledge?

Reading: select passages of Plato’s *Meno* & “The Allegory of the Cave”, posted on BB

2/18—What is real?

Reading: Descartes *Meditations* 1 & 2, found at www.earlymoderntexts.com

2/25—Does God exist? & What does it mean to be human?

Reading: Descartes *Meditations* 3 & 6, found at www.earlymoderntexts.com

**\*\*First portfolio submission due in class**

3/4— Who am I?

Reading: Locke, selections from *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, found in *Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf on BB

**AND** Hume “Of Personal Identity”, posted on BB

3/11— Do we have free will?

Reading: Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity” found in *Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf on BB; review for midterm.

**3/18—Midterm exam**

3/25—Questions in philosophy of art

Reading: Hume “Of the Standard of Taste” & Carroll, “Why Horror?” both posted on BB

4/1— Where do moral values come from?

Reading: Rachels, “The Challenge of Cultural Relativism,” found in *Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf on BB **AND**

Prinz “Morality is a Culturally Conditioned Response” posted on BB.

**\*\*Second portfolio submission due in class**

4/8**—**How should I act?: utilitarianism

Reading: Mill “Utilitarianism” found in *Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf on BB

**4/14 & 4/22—No class, Spring break**

4/29—How should I act?: deontology

Reading: Kant, “Foundations for a Metaphysics of Morality” **AND**

O’Neill: A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics, both found in *Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf on BB

5/6— What kind of person should I be?

Reading: Aristotle, selections from *Nichmachean Ethics*, found in *Philosophy for the 21st Century* pdf on BB.

**\*\*Peer review day**

5/13— The Walking Dead & moral philosophy

**\*\*Final portfolio submission due in class**

**Final exam: Tuesday, May 20th, 6:00-8:00 p.m.**