

MENSCH/Syllabus: Kant's Practical Philosophy

Course Description

This course will be devoted to a comprehensive review of Kant's practical philosophy. As an introduction to Kant's technical understanding of the roles assigned to "Providence" and "Reason," the course will open with some shorter essays meant to establish the relationship between reason and history. From that point we will concentrate on each of the major ethical and social and political works written by Kant in the 1780s and '90s. Special attention will be paid to Kant's developing understanding of the relationship between freedom and law, and the consequences this will have when connecting reason and nature both from Kant's own perspective, and from those of his German Idealist successors.

Course Texts to Buy

Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, translated by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987). [I did not order this book through the bookstore since probably half of you will already own it; if you do need a copy you can get one cheaply online via Amazon's 'used and new' link or via Abe.com].

Course Texts on Reserve

All of the required course books will be available to you on two-hour reserve in the library. Additional primary material on reserve:

Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, translated by Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, edited by Robert Louden and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

German editions

For those of you looking to have the texts in German, I recommend buying the Felix Meiner edition of the second *Critique* (*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. by Karl Vorländer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), via Amazon.de. There is a nice German-English translation of the *Groundwork* that has come out (*Immanuel Kant. Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). All the other works will have to be found in the Academy edition—though all in the blue *Werke* (e.g. vols. I-IX)—the second *Critique* is in vol. 5, *Religion within*

the bounds of mere reason and the *Metaphysic of Morals* are both in vol. 6, and *Conflict of the Faculties* is in vol. 7. You can get these for about \$25 each directly from de Gruyter. (All of these are also available in HTML through the library via Past Masters; Past Masters has two options under Kant, note that the *Gesammelte Schriften* also contains the (identical) first nine volumes that make up the *Werke*).

Course Requirements

Eight short essays (2-3 pages single-spaced); the essays will always work in response to a question concerning either text exposition or problems. **No late essays.**

And one longer paper (12-15 pages double-spaced) on a problem of your own choosing; textual exegesis is also fine for this paper.

Participation; “participation” means a demonstrated familiarity with the readings when directly called upon during class, active participation during class discussions and, of course, perfect attendance. **No unexcused absences.**

Course Schedule

- 8/23 “Essays on the Philanthropinum” [1776-77] on ANGEL, “What is Enlightenment” [1784] in *Practical Philosophy*, “Idea for a Universal History” [1784] on ANGEL.
- 8/30 “Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals” [1785] in *Practical Philosophy*, 4:387-4:446.
- 9/6 “Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals” [1785] in *Practical Philosophy*, 4:446-4:463, “What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?” [1786] in *Religion*. **Essay 1**
- 9/13 “Critique of Practical Reason” [1788] in *Practical Philosophy*, 5:3-5:89.
- 9/20 “Critique of Practical Reason” [1788] in *Practical Philosophy*, 5:89-5:163. **Essay 2**
- 9/27 “Of the different races of human beings” [1775] on ANGEL, “Determination of the concept of a human race” [1785] on ANGEL, “Review of J.G. Herder’s *Ideas for the philosophy of the history of humanity*” [1785] on ANGEL, “Speculative Beginning of Human History [1786] on ANGEL. **Essay 3**
- 10/4 “On the use of teleological principles in philosophy” [1788] on ANGEL, *Critique of Judgment* [1790], §§82-end. **Essay 4**
- 10/11 “On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials in theodicy” [1791], in *Religion*, “On the common saying: That may be right in theory, but it is of no use in practice” [1793], in *Practical Philosophy*. **Kant Worksheet (in class)**
- 10/18 “Religion within the boundaries of mere reason,” parts 1 and 2 [1793], in *Religion*.

- 10/25 “Religion within the boundaries of mere reason,” parts 3 and 4 [1793], in *Religion*. **Essay 5**
- 11/1 “The end of all things” [1794], in *Religion*, “The conflict of the philosophy faculty with the theological faculty [written 1794, published 1798], in “Conflict of the Faculties, First Part,” in *Religion*. **Essay 6**
- 11/8 “Toward perpetual peace” [1795], in *Practical Philosophy*, “An old question raised again: Is the human race constantly improving?” [written 1795, published 1798], in “Conflict of the Faculties, Second Part,” in *Religion*. **Essay 7**
- 11/15 “Part I, Metaphysical first principles of the doctrine of right,” in “The metaphysics of morals” [1797], in *Practical Philosophy*.
- 11/29 “Part II, Public right,” “Part II, Metaphysical first principles of the doctrine of virtue,” in *Practical Philosophy*. **Essay 8**
- 12/6 “Doctrine of the elements of ethics”—end, in *Practical Philosophy*.
- 12/19 Final essays due per email: jam782@psu.edu. Undergraduates must have essays emailed to me by December 19th—graduating seniors see me; Graduate students must have essays emailed to me by the first day of classes, Spring semester.**

Academic Integrity

Your work is expected to adhere to the University’s standards of academic integrity. Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others. See Policies and Rules for Students, Section 49-20 for Penn State's complete policy on Academic Integrity.

Disability

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site at: www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

Kant Essay Questions 1-8:

1). For Kant, “Beyond all doubt, the question ‘how is the imperative of *morality* possible?’ is the only one in need of a solution” (4:419-Paton’s tr.). Why is this the main problem and how is this problem compounded by the fact that the moral law (aka “Categorical Imperative”) advances a “synthetic *a priori* practical proposition” (4:420)—that is, advances a proposition that is thus fundamentally distinct from the precepts arrived at via moral empiricism? What is Kant’s solution in terms of the connection between the origin of the moral law and its necessity (4:425-427; 4:454).

2). In the closing pages of the *Groundwork* Kant concludes that “the question: how a categorical imperative is possible, can indeed be answered to the extent that one can state the one presupposition on which alone it is possible, namely the idea of freedom ... but how this presupposition itself is possible can never be understood by any human reason” (4:461; cf. 4:459). In the second *Critique* Kant appears to have adopted a different approach to the problem, explaining that in place of a “vainly sought deduction of the moral principle,” he has discovered that “something entirely different and unexpected appears: the moral principle itself serves as a principle of the deduction of an inscrutable faculty ... This is the faculty of freedom, which the moral law, itself needing no justifying grounds, shows to be not only possible but actual in beings who acknowledge the law as binding upon them” (5:47).

Please write a short essay comparing Kant’s work revolving around a “Deduction” in the *Groundwork* (4:452-455) and the second *Critique* (5:42-51) including, in your discussion, an account of Kant’s use and understanding of the moral law as a “fact of reason.”

3). Kant’s insistence on universality in his moral writings is considered to be entirely at odds with his work to describe and arrange the races hierarchically in his anthropological writings. There are resources, however, within Kant’s history essays—the *Idea for a Universal History* (1784), the *Speculative Beginning* (1786), and the *Use of Teleological Principles* (1788) in particular—for discovering the role played by inequality, on Kant’s view, with respect to a teleological approach to the history of freedom and morals. These resources allow for some theoretical consistency within Kant’s project even if they fail to exonerate Kant from the charges of both racism and irresponsibility regarding the manner by which his philosophy of history was taken to lend tacit support to the slave trade.

Please write an essay first identifying the specific tension between Kant’s moral philosophy and his work in natural history, and then locating those resources within his teleological view of history which might make sense of this tension.

4). “Moral teleology,” Kant explains, “whose basis is no less firm than that of physical teleology, even deserves to be preferred to it, because it rests a priori on principles inseparable from our reason and leads us to what is required to make a theology possible: a determinate *concept* of the supreme cause as cause of the world according to moral laws, and hence as a cause that satisfies our moral final purpose” (5:481).

Please write an essay describing both the individual advantages afforded by both physical and moral teleology, and the connection that holds between them. In your assessment of moral teleology—and in your reflection, in particular, upon the quotation above—please refer to specific passages in the second *Critique* in order to flesh out the roles played by the “Highest Good” and the postulates of practical reason in order to demonstrate Kant’s argument for the priority placed by reason on moral teleology with respect to the vocation of man.

5). Write an essay describing not only the difference between “historical faith” (also referred to as “Ecclesiastical Faith,” religion of “divine service,” and the “visible church”) and “moral religion,” but the relationship holding between them, including the possibility of the eventual overcoming of historical faith on the part of rational faith.

6). Describe Kant’s moral psychology in terms of humankind’s innate “disposition to good” and “propensity to evil.” Terms to be included in your discussion are: ‘the germ of good,’ the role of inclination, the ‘revolution’/‘change of heart,’ God’s ability ‘to take the disposition for the deed,’ and the role of freedom.

7). Write an essay reflecting on the different kinds of descriptions given by Kant regarding the relationship between duty and inclination. What is the path taken in Kant’s texts between the kind of examples found in the *Groundwork* and the comment made in the *End of All Things* that “love, as a free assumption of the will of another into one’s maxims, is an indispensable complement to the imperfection of human nature” (8:338). How are we to fit into this narrative Kant’s passing remarks regarding “nonpathological love,” “intellectual feeling,” and mental “satisfaction”?

8). “Now we come to the question concerning what is essential to the purpose of perpetual peace,” Kant tells us, it is the question concerning the manner in which nature works unfailingly toward the achievement of perpetual peace so far as it “affords the guarantee that what man *ought* to do in accordance with laws of freedom but does not do, it is assured he *will* do, without prejudice to this freedom” (8:365).

Write an essay describing nature’s task here in a manner that 1) tracks Kant’s various references to nature/providence/reason in the history essays as a whole—with the aim of ending up at the taxonomical division he provides regarding nature and providence at 8:361—and 2) explains in particular how nature is able to accomplish this coercive task “without prejudice to freedom.” (Hint: the answer to 2) is more readily found in the *Religion* text than in *PP*).

In-Class Kant Worksheet (short answers only)

- 1). Kant's early essays endorsing the Philanthropinum schools anticipate notions made explicit in the 1784 essay, "What is Enlightenment." Briefly explain the connection between these two pieces and the manner in which they set up language that will become important in Kant's views on history and morality.
- 2). In Kant's "Idea for a Universal History," he lays out what he takes to be the essential mechanism of nature with respect to the vocation of mankind. Explain.
- 3). What does it mean to say that one of the chief aims of the *Groundwork* is to offer a response to the kind of moral empiricism advanced by moral theorists such as Shaftsbury or Hume?
- 4). How can we say that Kant offers an a priori account of morality; what is the chief advantage of this approach according to Kant?
- 5). In contemporary parlance Kantian ethics are said to advance a "deontological" account. What does this mean; is this right; does it get the whole picture as Kant sees it?
- 6). What is the relationship between the first *Critique* and the second *Critique* in a) a superficial sense, b) an architectonic sense, and c) a specific sense with respect to the category of causality.
- 7). What is the relationship between *Wille* and *willkür* in terms of a) moral agency, b) the ontology of reason, c) our consciousness of the moral law, and d) our consciousness of freedom?
- 8). What is a "postulate of reason"; what does it mean to say that it is "constitutive" for practical reason and "regulative" for speculative reason?
- 9). Why does Kant demote "physicotheology" to "physical teleology"?
- 10). Once we recognize the virtues of moral teleology are we free to dispense with physical teleology altogether—why/why not?
- 11). Kant only wrote five course announcements during his career, the first three to drum up attendance, the fourth one to announce his new diagnosis of metaphysics. What was the discovery worth announcing in 1775?
- 12). What was Kant's main complaint regarding Herder's approach to history? What was Kant's main complaint regarding Forster's approach to natural history?

Notable Interpretations of Kant's Practical Philosophy (there are many!)

Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). [I like everything by Allison, this work covers all the main features of Kant's practical philosophy; great chapter on the *Wille-Willkür* distinction].

Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). [A classic, well worth a second look].

Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993). [Very clear, recommended for an overview/introduction to the major points in Kant's ethics].

Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Robert Louden, *Kant's Impure Ethics. From Rational Beings to Human Beings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Julian Wuerth, *Kant on Mind, Action, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). [Very interesting book—winner of the 2014 Kant book prize].

Arthur Ripstein, *Force and Freedom. Kant's Legal and Political Philosophy* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Susan Meld Shell, *Kant and the Limits of Autonomy* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009). [Very clear; look also for Shell's separate essays on Job re. Kant's 1791 essay].

Kristi E. Sweet, *Kant on Practical Life. From Duty to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). [A very clear introduction/overview of Kant's theory; highly recommended].

Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Pablo Muchnik, *Kant's Theory of Evil* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2009).