

Phil 490, Senior Seminar: Kant's Moral Philosophy

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University of South Carolina, Fall 2023
2:20 to 3:35 pm, HAMLTN 140

Office: Close-Hipp 514
Office Hours: Tu, 1:00-2:50,
& by appointment

This course is a study of Kant's moral philosophy. We will examine the structure of this philosophy as it is expounded in three central texts: *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and the Doctrine of Virtue (which is the second part of the *Metaphysics of Morals*). Through this examination students will gain an appreciation for Kant's approach to morality, freedom, practical knowledge, and practical reason.

As the "Seminar in Philosophy" course, this is an advanced undergrad course intended only for senior majors. Students are trained to offer a close and careful interpretation and analysis of a philosophical text to be i) presented and discussed in class and ii) captured in a long, written assignment. Participation and in class discussion of topics is a major part of this seminar style class. It is intended to give students some sense of what a graduate seminar is like.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND REQUIREMENTS:

Reading Comprehension: Students will learn to identify claims and arguments in a text, i.e. to identify the conclusions that Kant is arguing for and the considerations he is offering in support of those conclusions. Students are expected to carefully complete all the required reading before class. Readings should also be brought to class so that they may be consulted during discussion. The focus of the in-class discussion will be on Kant's texts, and students should be absolutely sure to have read the assigned Kant texts for each meeting. The essays by Kant's interpreters are intended to help clarify Kant's texts, as well as make salient the fundamental distinctions and difficulties that the texts raise. While these may be discussed in passing in class, these will not be the focus of in class discussion.

Assessment: Students should take notes while they are preparing for class. This is critical for reading the texts in this class properly. These should include points that you were especially interested in, questions that you have, things you think it would be fruitful for us to discuss as a class, key terms that need definition or investigation, attempts to summarize key arguments, critical claims that the author has made, outlines of the overall argument the author is making, etc. This should be anything that you find useful in your own struggle to understand the texts, in preparing for class discussion, and in taking notes to prepare you to write your essays.

Your notes can be about the non-Kant readings, but they need not be. For many of the meetings, the primary Kant texts that we are reading will remain the same. It is critical that you are re-reading the texts, preferably for each meeting. They are difficult and if you are reading them correctly, you should get more out of them on a second, third, or fourth, etc., reading. You might hand in notes on the same text multiple times, but there should be development between the notes. If it is your second, third, etc. time handing in notes on a text please indicate this.

If you have already handed in notes about a Kant reading, because the major assignment for the course is a research paper, it might also be the case that you take notes on material that is not directly related to the readings for that week, especially in the second half of the class. Part of the role of the notes this semester is to keep you moving on what will be a major writing assignment that you will need to spend more than a month actively working on. *If you choose to hand in notes that are not on the reading for that meeting, please spend 15-30 minutes reflecting on our prior class discussions and the text we will be discussing, and first write down a question or two or three about them prior to your notes proper.*

Bring your notes to class. You will want to keep the main copy, so bringing a Xerox or print out is acceptable, even encouraged. The notes should exhibit a substantive engagement with the text and will be graded on a pass/unsatisfactory/fail basis. These notes are worth 10% of the final grade. Grading works as follows. You begin the semester with a score of 100. If you fail to turn in one set of notes, your score is penalized one point. For each additional set of notes you miss, the penalty doubles. No late notes are accepted. Notes are collected in class. The following table is for illustration:

100	All notes turned in, A+.
$100 - 1 - 2 - 4 = 93$	All notes turned in but 3, A-.
$100 - 1 - 2 - 4 - 8 - 16 = 69$	All notes turned in but 5, D+!

The unsatisfactory grade is for those times when you only have time to jot down a few sentences. I expect these cases to be rare. They will let me keep track of your attendance and participation. They will count as half of a turned in set of notes. (So if you turn in all but three notes, and two unsatisfactory sets, then that will count as not having turned in four sets.)

In case of a prolonged illness or other extreme extenuating circumstance, you will need to contact me as soon as possible.

Conversational Competence: Students will learn to discuss arguments with each other. This involves (1) asking questions, (2) answering questions, (3) making suggestions, and (4) listening to others. Emphasis is placed on treating one another respectfully while engaging in these activities.

Assessment: With respect to these four activities, students will be assessed for (A) attendance, (B) respect for others, and (C) participation. Achieving a decent participation score (85+) requires you to be continually present, attentive, and respectful in class, while participating in a serious and engaged way. (Usually, this is around one or two quality contributions per class.) Achieving a good score (93+) requires in addition that you make helpful contributions to open-forum class discussion in the majority of class meetings. (Usually this is around four to six quality contributions per class.) **Respectful participation** is worth **10%** of the final grade. Missing a large number of classes will severely negatively effect this portion of your grade. **When you hand in your reading questions at the end of class, I ask that you write down the number of times you participated that day at the top.**

Presentational and Writing competence: Students will become familiar with the claims and arguments discussed each week. This involves understanding Kant's main (1) concepts, (2) claims,

and (3) arguments. This understanding will be assessed through a **short paper** and tutorial, a **peer review assignment**, a **presentation**, as well as a major **writing project**. If you fail to complete one of these, then you **automatically fail the course**.

Assessment—Short Paper & Tutorial The short paper will be **four to six** pages in length. This length is a rough guide. Within reason, say no more than you have to, but take longer if you think the subject requires it. This paper will be due on a Friday. I will grade the papers over the weekend, and we will have the Tutorials on the following Monday.

What Happens at the Tutorial. The two students each come with *two copies* of their essay: one for you, one for your partner. One student will begin reading their essay aloud. I will interrupt them to talk about what they are saying. After around twenty minutes we will shift to the second paper. I hope that in the final ten minutes we'll be able to have a conversation that integrates the themes of the two essays.

If for any reason you have to cancel at the last minute, be sure you let me know right away. If possible, e-mail me the day before your tutorial is scheduled. Failure to contact me **before** your tutorial will result in a grade no higher than a C on the writing assignment, as will missing the tutorial entirely. Obviously, you will need a serious and unforeseeable reason to cancel if your partner and I are going to be expected to reschedule.

Grading: The grade on each essay will be based on the written anonymous version that you hand in to blackboard. What happens during the tutorial is not graded. The point of the tutorial is purely educational. Active participation will be reflected in your participation grade, and failure to show up will negatively affect your paper grade, but the content of the discussion is not graded. Do not regard the grade as some sort of final judgment on your intelligence, the amount of work you put into a subject, or your potential. It is only a judgment on what you wrote, and even then, I am trying to balance different factors (care, clarity, well-structuredness, originality, depth of engagement, and so forth).

Because of the nature of the tutorial, and because I will be attempting to grade all of the essays before the tutorial, written comments will tend to be at a minimum. *I advise you to arrange to take some time after the tutorial to make notes on what happened in the tutorial.* These will constitute a substantive portion of your written comments.

When you come to your tutorial: if you have a class or other appointment immediately following your scheduled tutorial, please tell me that this is so at the beginning of the tutorial. It is difficult to stop tutorials from running over a bit. In general, it is a good idea, where possible, to schedule yourself at a time when you do not have a class immediately afterwards.

Assessment—Presentation: The seminar aims to give students the opportunity to prepare a semi-professional presentation. This is intended to help students learn to convey orally their understanding of a stretch of Kant's text. The final two class meetings will be devoted to presentations. For these presentations, you must make a corresponding handout, which will help the listener to follow the main points. After each presentation there will be a brief discussion. These discussions are both meant to be philosophically interesting for their own sake, and

fruitful for helping the author see where the argument needs more development. This is because they will be presenting the argument of their final paper and will be finalizing that paper in the following week.

Assessment—Long Paper: Students will write one 10 to 15 page final paper. (No more than 20 pages.) In this they will show that they know how to (1) articulate the arguments from Kant’s text in their own words, cogently reconstructing the reasoning involved. And (2) they will engage critically with at least one position in the secondary literature. (I’d also like to do a tutorial session on these papers at the end of the class, but because they are due during finals week, scheduling is going to be difficult, so we will need to play it by ear.)

Assessment—Drafting and comments: This portion of the essay assignment is to help you improve the final draft of your essay. We will discuss the assessment of these when the assignment is given.

Blind Grading: To facilitate fair and responsible grading, when you hand in the final version of your papers, they must not include your name or other identification. **Failure** to do so will result in a **penalty of one letter grade**.

Format: All page guidelines for papers are based on a standard **12-point** font such as Times New Roman and a **double-spaced** page layout. Please (a) **number your pages**. And with (b) the hard-copy print versions that you bring to the tutorial session, please **have your name** on the top. (Also number these pages.) I expect papers to be in this format.

RESOURCES:

There are a number of useful online guides on how to go about writing a philosophy paper. See:

-- Pryor guide: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

-- Monash guide: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/arts/philosophy/index.xml>

Please read Pryor’s essay and/or spend a few hours working through the Monash guide.

There also helpful books on writing philosophy essays. Two are:

-- Martinich, A.P. *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, Blackwell. 2005/2015.

-- Vaughn, Lewis. *Writing Philosophy: A Student’s Guide to Writing Philosophical Essays*, Oxford, 2006.

GRADING:

In class participation: 10%

Notes: 10%

Peer-review exercise: 7.5%

Short Essay: 12.5%

Presentation: 20%

Final Paper: 40%

FINAL GRADE ASSESSMENT TABLE

I use ‘+’ and ‘-’ grades on individual assignments. Because USC has clipped off ‘-’ for final grades, I assign final grades according to the following table:

A = 92–100%,

B+ = 87–91%,

C = 72–76%,

D+ = 67–71%,

B = 82–86%,
C+ = 77–81%,

D = 62–66%,
F = 0-61%

LATE POLICY: If for reasons beyond your control you are unable to submit your written work by the assigned deadline, you should request an extension *before* the deadline. Late papers or exams without an extension may be penalized by a fraction of a grade point per day (e.g., a B+ paper one day overdue may receive a B; two days overdue, a B–; etc.). Please hand in the short paper on-time, as I need to grade these immediately so that I am ready for the tutorial the following Monday. **If notes are late for any reason, they will not be accepted.**

READINGS: Please bring the book version to class. Although I always read everything on an electronic device because I have a print disability, I will endeavor to do the same.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES Please do not use cell phones in this class. I would really prefer if you did not use any electronic devices at all. (I am most tolerant of tablets for the readings, but please see the last heading.) If you do use a laptop during class, please only use it to take notes and have your notifications turned off. Finally, if you are using a laptop, please sit in the back of the class. **Texting:** As you can see, I am a person with eyes, and I can tell when you are texting behind your leg or under your desk. If there is an emergency, please let me know. Otherwise, do not attend to your phone in my class.

PLAGARISM: Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of work that is not one’s own as though it were, in all forms of academic endeavor (such as essays, theses, examinations, research data, creative projects, etc.), intentional or unintentional. Plagiarized material may be derived from a variety of sources, such as books, journals, internet postings, student or faculty papers, AI text generators etc. This includes the purchase or “outsourcing” of written assignments for a course. A detailed definition of plagiarism in research and writing can be found in the fourth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, pages 26-29. The penalty for plagiarism is failure for the course. Suspicions of use of artificial intelligence aids will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity as alleged violations of Cheating, defined as “unauthorized assistance in connection with any academic work” and/or Falsification, which includes “misrepresenting or misleading others with respect to academic work or misrepresenting facts for an academic advantage.” Students are also required to familiarize themselves with the University’s Honor Code: <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf625.pdf>

DISABILITY NOTICE: The University of South Carolina is committed to providing accommodations and/or services to students with documented disabilities. Students who are seeking support for a disability or a suspected disability should contact Disability Resource Center at 803-777-6142. The Disability Resource Center is responsible for approving all disability-related accommodations for U of SC students, and students are responsible for providing faculty members with formal documentation of their approved accommodations at least two weeks prior to using those accommodations. I will accept Disability Resources forms by email and personal delivery. If you have already been approved for accommodations, I request that you provide me with a copy of your forms within the first two weeks of the semester.

STUDENT WELL BEING: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the [Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support](#). If you are comfortable doing so, please notify me as the professor so that we can find resources that may be helpful. Students may experience situations or challenges that can interfere with learning and interpersonal functioning including stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, concern for a family/friend, or feelings of hopelessness. Pay attention to what is happening in the classroom and in the lives of your fellow students. There are numerous campus resources available to students including University Counseling & Psychiatry Service and University Student Health Services. Help is available 24/7. Students who need immediate help should call 803-777-5223. An outside resource is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255).

TEXTS:

Required: Kant, Immanuel. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy* (trans. & ed. Mary Gregor), Cambridge, 1999.

Recommended: Korsgaard, Christine M. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge, 1996.

Some recent studies, collections and commentaries:

Allison, Henry. *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. Cambridge, 1990.

------. *Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*. Oxford, 2011.

Baron, Marcia. *Kantian Ethics Almost without Apology*, Cornell, 1995.

Engstrom, Stephen. *The Form of Practical Knowledge*. Harvard, 2009.

Herman, Barbara. *The Practice of Moral Judgment*. Harvard, 1993.

Hill, Thomas E. *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory*. Cornell, 1992.

------. *Respect, Pluralism and Justice: Kantian Perspectives*. Oxford, 2000.

------. *Human Welfare and Moral Worth: Kantian Perspectives*. Oxford, 2002.

O'Neill, Onora. *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge, 1989.

Rawls, John. *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Harvard, 2000.

Sedgwick, Sally. *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: an Introduction*. Cambridge, 2008.

Timmermann, Jens. *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals – A Commentary*. Cambridge, 2007.

Reath, Andrews. *Agency and Autonomy in Kant's Moral Theory*. Oxford, 2006.

Wood, Allen W. *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge, 1999.

------. *Kantian Ethics*. Cambridge, 2008.

Reputable on-line sources:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Philpapers.org

Kant in the Classroom - <https://users.manchester.edu/FacStaff/SSNaragon/Kant/Home/index.htm>

SCHEDULE:

This schedule is aspirational. We will move at a natural pace, and if we fall behind that is okay.

Dates	Readings	Assignment Due
8/28	Introduction	
	<i>GROUNDWORK FOR THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS</i>	
8/30	Aim, method Preface; <i>The Meno</i> , 87c-89a Engstrom, “Constructivism and Practical Knowledge” Optional: Hume “ <i>An Enquiry Concerning The Principles Of Morals</i> ” Section 1 (On BB)	
9/4	NO CLASS	
9/6	NO CLASS	
9/11	The Good Will Section I Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness”	
9/13	The concept of duty Section I cont. Korsgaard, “Kant’s Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of Groundwork I”	
9/18	Why moral philosophy is necessary Section I cont. Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty”	
9/20	Wrap up Section I Section I cont.	
9/25	Practical Reason Section II, (esp. 4:406–419), O’Neill, “Consistency in Action”	
9/27	Imperatives, begin the formula of universal law Section II cont., (esp. 4:420–427) Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Universal Law”	
10/2	The formula of universal law Section II cont., (esp. 4:420–427)	
10/4	The formula of universal law, cont. Section II cont., (esp. 4:420–427) Engstrom, “Universal Legislation as the Form of Practical Knowledge”	
10/9	The formulas of humanity & autonomy Section II cont., (esp. 4:427–432)	Short essay assigned Date may shift later, if behind
10/11	The formulas of humanity & autonomy cont. Section II cont. Korsgaard, “Kant’s Formula of Humanity”	

- 10/16 The relations between the formulas, begin to wrap up section II
Section II cont.,
- 10/18 Finish section II
- 10/20 **SHORT ESSAY DUE at 4:00pm, to Blackboard** Date may shift, if behind
- 10/23 **TUTORIALS on the short essay**

CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON

- 10/25 Preface and introduction (5:3-16)
- 10/30 The principles of pure practical reason Final project assigned
Part I, Book I, Ch. I §1-4 (5:19-28)
- 11/1 The fundamental law of pure practical reason
Part I, Book I, Ch. I §5-7 (5:28-33)
Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason”
- 11/6 The fundamental law cont.; Autonomy
Part I, Book I, Ch. I §7-8 (5:30-41)
- 11/8 Autonomy cont., Freedom
Part I, Book I, Ch. I §8 (5:33-41) cont;
Groundwork, Section II (4:431-445) & Section III (4:446-447)
Wood, “Kant’s Compatibilism”
- 11/11 **Draft introduction and outlines due at 4:00pm to Blackboard for peer review**
- 11/13 The deduction of the moral law
Part I, Book I, Ch. I (5:42-57)
- 11/15 The concept of the good
Part I, Book I, Ch. II (5:57-71)
Korsgaard, “Aristotle and Kant on the Sources of Value”
Optional: Engstrom, “The Complete Object of Practical Knowledge”
- 11/18 **Peer comments on drafts due at 4:00pm to Blackboard**
- 11/20 The concept of the good cont.; the highest good
Part I, Book I, Ch. II (5:57-71) cont.;
Book II (5:107-119)
- 11/22 NO CLASS
- 11/27 Moral motives
Part I, Book I, Ch. III (5:71-89)
Engstrom, “The *Triebfeder* of Practical Reason”
- 11/29 Moral motives, cont.
Part I, Book I, Ch. III (5:71-89)

(No matter where we have gotten to, this is the last day of content for the course.)

12/4 Presentations and Discussion (15min / student – attendance required)

12/6 Presentations and Discussion (15min / student – attendance required)

METAPHYSICS OF MORALS (DOCTRINE OF VIRTUE)

I would love to get to this material, and encourage you to read it, but we are probably not going to get here. I'm going to be thinking about ways to maybe work it in on other days.)

??/? Virtue

Preface & Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:205-228)

Preface & Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue (6:375-413)

??/? Virtue cont.

Preface & Introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6:205-228)

Preface & Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue (6:375-413)

12/11 **LONG ESSAY DUE at 4:00pm, to Blackboard**

12/13 & 12/14 - **Long essay tutorials**