

The philosophy of Kant

Course syllabus

PD Dr. Tobias Henschen

Winter Semester 2019/2020

Times and rooms:

Mondays 14:15-16h, Ph HS3

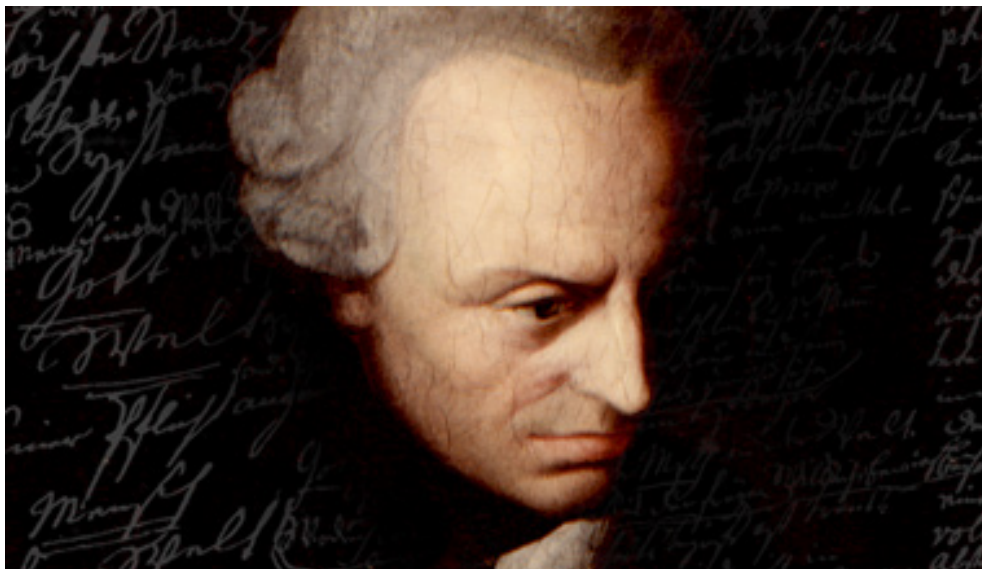
Tuesdays 18:15-20h, Ph HS2

Contact: tobias.henschen@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

Tutor: Leon Martini (leon.martini@gmx.de)

Office hours: Mondays 16-17h, AU 01071

Course website: ILIAS (password: pax eterna)



Overview and goals

This course aims to introduce and explain the most important positions and arguments that make up Kant's system of thought. Readings will include selections from all areas of his mature work, especially from his writings on theoretical philosophy (*Critique of Pure Reason*, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*), ethics (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, *Critique of Practical Reason*), political philosophy (*What Is Enlightenment?*, *Perpetual Peace*, *Ideas For a Universal History With A Cosmopolitan Purpose*), philosophy of religion (*Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason*), and aesthetics (*Critique of Judgment*). No prior knowledge of Kant is required. The course is well suited both for students who are interested in learning more about Kant's system, and for students who are interested more generally in the relationship between philosophy, science, ethics, politics, aesthetics, religion, and history.

Learning goals:

- Become acquainted with a substantial body of the work of one of the most important philosopher of the Western tradition.
- Develop the vocabulary and analytical skills to understand, evaluate and debate the main arguments and positions of Kant's critical philosophy.
- Acquire the ability to understand some of the conceptual relations between philosophy, science, ethics, politics, aesthetics, religion, and history.
- Understand to what extent Kant's philosophy is relevant to us today.

Requirements

To complete the **pass/fail** requirements (*Studienleistung*) in this course you need to attend class and actively participate in the discussion, which is key component of this course. You may miss up to two sessions without explanation and without being sanctioned, excluding the session in which you are scheduled to present. In the case of sickness, further sessions may be missed if you demonstrate progress and engagement with the course material and are demonstrably not falling behind. Absences need to be announced prior to the session. Compensatory work for missed sessions may be requested.

The **examination** (*Prüfungsleistung*) in the course consists of 22 very brief response papers, 1 presentation, and 1 short essay.

Response papers (20% of the grade): Response papers represent very brief one-sentence responses to teasing questions that are meant to test your reading of the literature that will be discussed in each session. The teasing questions will be distributed at the beginning of each session and can be dealt with in less than five minutes. The response papers are also meant to record your regular attendance, which means that you have to work on at least 20 of them. In case you pass at least 18 (17, 16 ... 9, 8 ...), your overall achievement will be graded by 1.0 (1.3, 1.7 ... 4.0, 5.0 ...).

Presentation (30% of the final grade): The primary purpose of the presentation is to introduce a text from one of Kant's major works. It should (1) capture the main thesis (or theses) of the text and reconstruct its main argument(s), (2) point to passages that seem difficult to understand (don't sweep these passages under the rug, assuming e.g. that you are the only one failing to understand them), (3) evaluate the text as much as possible, i.e. critically assess the validity of its argument(s) and the truth of its main thesis (or theses), and (4) formulate questions that seem to remain open or appear most suitable for discussion among the course participants. When giving your presentation, you should use a handout or slides (but not both). Handouts and slides should be well-structured, readable, and easy to understand. Your presentation shouldn't take longer than 20 to 25 minutes. But as the participants are allowed to ask questions, it might take a lot longer. In order to enhance an atmosphere of intellectual equality, the student giving the presentation will remain seated in the front during the whole session. In each session, there will be exactly one slot for a presentation. Check the description of the general and specific topics below to find out which topic interests you most and which slot is, accordingly, most suitable for you. You might also want to consult the text that will be discussed in each session before making your choice. In order to get a slot for your presentation, you need to register through ILIAS in the wiki called "presentations". Note that slots are assigned on a first come, first served basis. Don't be disappointed if someone else takes the slot that you are most interested in. All participants are expected to be able to present any of the specific topics of the course. Also note that you might no longer be able to get a slot if you register too late, i.e. if you haven't registered and all remaining slots are taken. If you register too late, you will have to do the re-sit (see below). You won't be allowed to do a co-presentation with someone else.

Short essay (50% of the final grade): The short essay is an essay of 1500 to 2000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography) that responds to an assignment that asks you to consider a thesis or argument contained in any of the texts that we will be studying. Given this thesis or argument, the assignment will ask you, more precisely, to argue for or against it, to explain it, to offer an objection to it, to defend it against an objection, to discuss its possible consequences, to determine whether another thesis can be held consistently with it and so forth. When responding to such an assignment, your essay should begin by (1) stating your precise thesis (get to the point quickly and without digression, a florid preface or reference to a grand historical narrative is not required), (2) defining technical or ambiguous terms that are relevant to your thesis or argument, and (3) briefly explaining how you will argue for your thesis. In case the assignment asks you to evaluate someone else's argument, you should also (4) briefly explain that argument. The main body of your essay is supposed to (5) make an argument to support your thesis. Make the strongest possible argument instead of offering several weak arguments. Do not skip any steps, and do not rest your arguments on premises that the reader might find doubtful. If you use claims that the reader might find doubtful, you must try to give convincing reasons for accepting them. Say precisely what you mean and elaborate only if necessary.

Make sure that your argument is valid, and that you make adequate use of logical indicators (“either ... or”, “consequently”, “therefore”, “all”, “not all”, “some”, “because” and so on). The main body of your essay should also (6) anticipate and answer possible objections to your argument or thesis. Refrain from making up unconvincing objections that you can reply to easily. Instead, always raise and answer the strongest objections that you can think of. Your very short essay will need to be submitted by 2/23/2020, 12h (noon), through ILIAS. Late submissions will **not** be accepted. The assignments for your short essay will be announced in class and through ILIAS on 2/4/2020.

Individual research: The assignment of the short essay is an essay question that you select from a pool of questions formulated by the instructor **or** an essay question that you formulate yourself. You are encouraged to think early on about course topics that you find particularly interesting and worth investigating, and to work on this topic when composing your essay. If you formulate your own essay question, you will need to notify your instructor per email no later than 2/11/2020 and await his approval.

The re-sit in this course will be a long essay of 5.000 words on a topic assigned by the instructor.

Important formalia

Cell phones and social media must not be used during classes.

You are welcome to send me an email if you have questions or want to make suggestions. If your email is of interest to all course participants, I will respond to them in class or in an email to all course participants.

The UCF policy on plagiarism and cheating applies to the exercise sheets, response papers, presentations and essays. Failing to indicate sources and correctly reference all ideas and quotes from other authors or your work in other assignments will result in failing the course component and possibly the course as a whole. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Examination Board.

SCHEDULE

General topic	Date	Specific topic	Mandatory readings
Introduction	Mon 11/4	Information, requirements, policies, schedule	
Theoretical philosophy I	Tue 11/5	A Copernican revolution in philosophy	<i>CpuR</i> , Prefaces
	Mon 11/11	Pure and empirical knowledge	<i>CpuR</i> , Introduction as in the second edition
	Tue 11/12	Space, time, and categories	<i>CpuR</i> , Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic of Concepts (excerpts)
	Mon 11/18	Transcendental principles	<i>CpuR</i> , Analytic of Principles (excerpts)
	Tue 11/19	Antinomies of reason	<i>CpuR</i> , The Antinomy of Pure Reason (excerpts)
Political philosophy I	Mon 11/25	Moral autonomy versus self-interest	<i>Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose</i>
	Tue 11/26	<i>Sapere aude!</i>	<i>Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?</i>
Ethics	Mon 12/2	Good will and moral duty	<i>GMM</i> , Preface and First Section
	Tue 12/3	The categorical imperative	<i>GMM</i> , Second Section (pp. 22-42)
	Mon 12/9	Autonomy and the kingdom of ends	<i>GMM</i> , Second Section (pp. 42-62)
	Tue 12/10	Freedom and the two worlds	<i>GMM</i> , Third Section
	Mon 12/16	Principles of pure practical reason	<i>CprR</i> , Chapter I (pp. 29-60)
	Tue 12/17	Objects and incentives of pure practical reason	<i>CprR</i> , Chapters II+III (pp. 88-114)
Theoretical philosophy II	Tue 1/7	Pleasure and purposiveness	<i>CJ</i> , Introduction (I, III-VI, IX)
	Mon 1/13	The beautiful and the sublime	<i>CJ</i> , Part I (§§ 1-6, 10-12, 23, 55-57)
	Tue 1/14	Nature as a system of purposes	<i>CJ</i> , Part II (§§ 61, 64-67, 69-71, 74)
	Mon 1/20	Purpose, explanation, and creation	<i>CJ</i> , Part II (§§ 80-84, 91)
Philosophy of religion	Tue 1/21	The radical evil in human nature	<i>RBR</i> , Book One
	Mon 1/27	The good principle shall rule over man	<i>RBR</i> , Books Two and Three
Political philosophy II	Tue 1/28	Political rights versus pragmatic governance	<i>On the Common Saying: This May Be True in Theory ...</i> (excerpts)
	Mon 2/3	Perpetual peace between states	<i>PP</i> , Sections One and Two, Additions One and Two
	Tue 2/4	Disagreement between morals and politics	<i>PP</i> , Appendix
	Sun 2/16	<i>Essay due</i>	

Bibliography (titles appear in the order in which they will be studied in class; excerpts are all available for download through ILIAS):

Kant, I. (1781/1787). *Critique of Pure Reason*, Ed. and transl. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood. Cambridge: CUP, 1998 (cited as *CpuR*).

Kant, I. (1784). "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose." In *Kant, Political Writings*, ed. by H. S. Reiss and transl. by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: CUP, 2019, pp. 41-53.

Kant, I. (1784). "Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" In *Kant, Political Writings*, ed. by H. S. Reiss and transl. by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: CUP, 2019, 54-60.

Kant, I. (1785) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. and transl. A. W. Wood. Yale: YUP, 2002 (cited as *GMM*).

Kant, I. (1788). *Critique of Practical Reason*. Transl. by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002 (cited as *CprR*).

Kant, I. (1793). *Critique of Judgment*. Transl. by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987 (cited as *CJ*).

Kant, I. (1793-4). *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Ed. and transl. by A. Wood and G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: CUP, 2019 (cited as *RBR*).

Kant, I. (1793). "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, But it Does Not Apply in Practice'." In *Kant, Political Writings*, ed. by H. S. Reiss and transl. by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: CUP, 2019, 61-92.

Kant, I. (1795). "Perpetual Peace: a Philosophical Sketch." In *Kant, Political Writings*, ed. by H. S. Reiss and transl. by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: CUP, 2019, 93-130 (cited as *PP*).

The **secondary literature** on Kant is vast. The best way to find out about the latest research on his work is to go to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<https://plato.stanford.edu>) and to check out the various articles on Kant and the bibliographies at the end of these articles.