

## Kant's Practical Philosophy



In 1781 Kant published the *Critique of Pure Reason*, probably the most important and influential book of philosophy of the modern period. The central idea of the first *Critique* was that human knowledge is best understood in light of the fact that humans are *legislators*, issuers of laws. Kant argues there that the most basic features of the world of our experience derive from laws we issue to nature. The companion idea on the side of the practical philosophy is that human agency is best understood in light of the fact that humans issue laws to themselves. Kant's practical theory centers on the idea of *autonomy*—free, principled, rational self-governance. In this course, we'll consider his prolonged attempt in the 1780s and 90s to work this novel and powerful idea out. The resulting view of human practical life continues to exert a profound influence today.

## Requirements

### Reading

Kant's work is difficult to read and understand. Reading the text multiple times always repays the effort. I have offered a suggestion for a helpful piece of secondary literature below, but this should be treated as such, i.e., as secondary. Students should focus their attention primarily on Kant's text.

## **Lectures**

Lectures are online this quarter due to the unusual circumstances surrounding COVID-19. Students are expected to regularly attend these lectures on time, and participation is encouraged. Attendance will count for 5% of your grade.

We will meet via Zoom. The Zoom ID for lectures is ###. You can access it by clicking this link: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/###>. The password for the classroom is ###. It is case-sensitive.

If you anticipate logistical difficulties being able to regularly attend these meetings, let me know and we will work something out.

## **Office hours**

I will hold office hours in Zoom as well. Their Zoom ID is ###. You can access it by clicking this link: <https://ucla.zoom.us/j/###>. There's no password.

## **Midterm essay**

A short writing exercise (roughly 1500-2000 words in length) will be due around midterm. It will be primarily expository in character. It will account for 40% your final grade. I'll be handing out possible essay topics in advance.

## **Exam**

We'll have a final exam during the end-quarter exam period. This will be the online course equivalent of a take-home exam, rather than an in class one. In other words, you'll have a few days during finals week to write it. It will account for 55% of your final grade.

## **Late Assignments**

Late writing assignments will be penalized one third of one letter grade (i.e., A- becomes B+) every 24 hours, starting ten minutes after the deadline. Exceptions to the lateness policy will be made only in cases I deem exceptional.

## **Accessible Education Information**

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations should submit their request for accommodations to the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) as soon as possible, as it may take up to two weeks for the CAE to review the request. If you are already registered with the CAE, you can request a letter of accommodation on the Student Portal, otherwise please submit your request via the CAE website. Please note that the CAE does not send letters to instructors--you must request that I view the letter in the online Faculty Portal. Once you have requested your accommodations via the Student Portal, please notify me immediately so I can view your letter.

# Texts

## Required Book

Kant, I., *Practical Philosophy* [KPP], trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge).

## Optional Books

Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason* [CPR], trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood (Cambridge).

Wood, A., 1999, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge).

## Schedule of Topics<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction: Kant's life and work and the project of a critical philosophy

### 2. Background: Law in ethics

- Grotius, Prolegomena to *On the Law of War and Peace*, CCLE
- Hobbes, *De Cive*, Epistle Dedicatory & ch. 1, CCLE

### 3. Background: The general will

- Diderot, "Natural Right", from *Encyclopedia*, CCLE
- Rousseau, excerpts from the *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men* and *The Social Contract*, CCLE

### 4. The good will and its law

- CPR A-edition Preface (Avii-Axxii), CCLE
- *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [GMM] Preface (4:387-92), KPP pp. 43-48; and Section I (4:393-405), KPP pp. 49-60

### 5. The Formula of Natural Law

- GMM Section II (4:406-26), KPP pp. 61-77
- *Metaphysics of Morals* [MM] (6:211-14), KPP pp. 373-76

### 6. The Formula of Humanity

- GMM II (4:426-30), KPP, pp. 77-81

### 7. Heteronomy, autonomy, and the Kingdom of Ends

- Rousseau, from *The Social Contract* (Book I), CCLE (Review)
- GMM II (4:430-45), KPP pp. 81-93

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<sup>1</sup> Subject to change

## 8. Humean skepticism about necessitation

- Hume, Skeptical doubts & Skeptical solution of these doubts, in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, CCLE
- *GMM* II (4:417-4:20) (Review)

## 9. Explaining necessitation: 1785

- *GMM* Section III (4:446-55), *KPP*, pp. 94-101

## 10. The moral motive

- Kant, from the Collins notes on the 1784 lectures on ethics
- *GMM* Section III, “On the extreme boundary” (4:455-63), *KPP*, pp. 101-108
- Locke, from *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, CCLE
- Hutcheson, from *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, CCLE

## 11. Explaining necessitation: 1788

- *Critique of Practical Reason* [*CPrR*] Introduction (5:15-16), *KPP*, pp. 148-49; On the principles of pure practical reason §§5-7 (5:28-33), *KPP*, pp. 162-66; On the incentives of pure practical reason, *KPP*, pp. 198-210 (5:71-89)

## 12. The moral law & freedom

- *CPR*, Transcendental Aesthetic (A26-30/B42-45), CCLE; Third antinomy (A444-51/B472-9), CCLE; Transcendental idealism as the key (A491-7/B519-25), CCLE; Resolution of the third antinomy (A532-58/B560-86), CCLE
- *CPrR*, Theorem III (5:22-27), *KPP*, pp. 155-160; On the principles of pure practical reason §§5-7 (5:28-33), *KPP*, pp. 162-66 (Review)

## 13. A moral world

- *CPR*, Canon of Pure Reason, Second Section (A804-19/B832-47), CCLE
- *CPrR*, Dialectic Chapters 1 & 2.I-VI (5:107-134), *KPP*, pp. 226-47
- *GMM* II (4:438-40), *KPP*, pp. 87-89 (Review)

## 14. Our moral vocation

- Descartes, selections on moral philosophy (from *Discourse on Method*, *Principles of Philosophy*, *Correspondence with Princess Elizabeth and Queen Christina*, and *Sixth Replies*), CCLE
- *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Of radical evil (6:26-32); Concerning the battle of the good against evil (6:60-78)

## 15. A system of duties

- *Metaphysics of Morals*, Introduction to the Doctrine of Right (6:229-242), *KPP*, pp. 386-97; Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue (6:379-413), *KPP*, pp. 512-540.

## 16. Puzzles and problems

- Schopenhauer, “On the Imperative Form of the Kantian Ethics”, from *The Basis of Morality* (1840), CCLE
- Anscombe, from “Modern Moral Philosophy”, CCLE
- Williams, from *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, CCLE