2013

375-01 Seminar on KANT

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PHILOSOPHY 375: Seminar on KANT
Fall Semester, 2013

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Office Hours: TR 11:15-12:45, W 9:00 a.m. -- Noon (Hinkle 222)
Class room: Schott 1010
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Required Texts


Course Description

There is perhaps no more pivotal figure in the history of modern western philosophy than Immanuel Kant. It is difficult to locate a subsequent corner of the philosophical enterprise not touched by the hand of this Prussian professor. German Idealism, Romanticism, Phenomenology and Existentialism, Analytic Philosophy and Logical Positivism, and Postmodernism all build upon or react to Kant’s thought in one way or another. Kant’s influence appears as a major force in debates to this day concerning science, religion, art, ethics, and jurisprudence.

In order to comprehend the full magnitude of Kant’s importance, it is necessary to come to grips with what is usually called his mature or “critical” philosophy. (Kant called his system
“transcendental” philosophy.) This philosophical system is manifested in Kant’s 1781 masterpiece, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, a work of great subtlety and extreme difficulty. The *Critique of Pure Reason* inaugurates a new course in philosophy by claiming that philosophical issues can be explored properly only through a critical examination of the faculty of reason itself. In the *Critique*, Kant explores traditional metaphysical issues in an entirely new light, in the process rehabilitating and recasting notions such as substance, causality, the self, and even God, by answering David Hume’s skeptical demolitions of them. At the root of this enterprise lies Kant’s insistence that we can speak about such things cogently only by attending to the possibility that our thought itself contributes in necessary and universal ways to the experience provided by the senses. Kant’s argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (the “1st critique”) is a through exploration of this insight; the *Critique* forms the basis of his entire philosophical system, and is in addition one of the great works in epistemology. Accordingly, the First *Critique* will occupy our efforts for most of the course.

Kant is known just as significantly as a philosopher of ethics, and particularly, as the thinker who most systematically dealt with the concept of freedom. Kant believed these topics necessitated a second *Critique*, treating reason in its practical, as opposed to its theoretical, operation. The 1788 *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* followed closely on the heels of a second edition of the first critique, and dealt systematically with many of the same issues found in the earlier *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Here Kant develops his view of the a priori character of duty and its connection to the autonomy of the will. We will spend the final weeks of the term on the second *Critique*, considering its implications for ethics, religion, and politics.

### Attendance, Participation, Assessment, and Readings

There will be two exams during the semester -- a mid-term and a final -- each of which will consist of a few short essay questions. Each exam will count for 25% of the total grade. There will be two essays written outside of class. The first will be a short 5-page paper, worth 15% of your grade. The second will be a 10-12-page term paper, worth 25% of your grade. The remaining 10% will be determined by class attendance and participation. Each student will be permitted a maximum of two unexcused absences without penalty.

In the introduction to the Pluhar edition to the first *Critique*, Patricia Kitcher suggests “No introduction and no teacher can turn Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* into easy reading.” It is good to remember this warning as we proceed through the term. A serious study of Kant can be one of the most rewarding intellectual experiences of one’s life, but it requires close attention, dedication, and willingness quite frequently to address one’s frustration openly. Please read the assigned sections before the class in which they are to be discussed. As this is a seminar class, discussion of the reading is crucial, and will help your instructor better to navigate your inquiries through the rough seas of, say, the “transcendental deduction”.

It is the student’s responsibility to keep up with readings and class assignments (what follows is a rough outline of the topics to be covered on certain days – this may change slightly with class discussion and other factors). In the event of a missed class, please be sure to contact the instructor, or at the very least, another student, to keep informed. All exams taken late will involve grade penalties, unless a very serious circumstance is involved.
Students will be expected to follow the lectures by reading the required texts. I may occasionally pass along a piece of secondary literature when I think it may help clarify some issues in the Critiques, but this material will not be tested.

**Course Schedule and Outline**

8/27: General course introduction; some brief biographical discussion of Kant; Just what is *reason* and why does it stand in need of a “critique”? What is “transcendental” philosophy, and how does it relate to skepticism?; Begin discussion of first and second edition *prefaces* (Pluhar pp. 5-40)

8/29-9/3: Continue with discussion of prefaces; Kant’s view of the predicament of reason in traditional epistemology and metaphysics; a preliminary reading of the *Antinomies* (458-481 – read only the “conflicts”, not the “comments”): the infinity of time and space, the existence of perfectly simple substances, the freedom of the will, the existence of an absolutely necessary being as a “first cause”.

9/5: Kant’s (Second Edition) *Introduction*: the meaning and philosophical significance of some central terms: *a priori, analytic, synthetic, empirical, transcendental* (43-68)

9/10-12: The *Transcendental Aesthetic*: Kant on the meaning of Time and Space as forms of intuition (71-104)

9/17: Kant on the meaning of logic: what is *transcendental logic*?; The *Metaphysical Deduction* of the categories. (105-140)

9/19-26: The *Transcendental Deduction*, A and B versions (141-203) – Kant deduces the *synthetic unity of apperception*.

10/1: The *Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding*: a Kantian doctrine of Form? (209-19)


10/17: MID TERM EXAM

10/22: The “*Refutation of Idealism*”: Kant against Descartes and Berkeley (288-98)

10/24: *Phenomena and Noumena* (303-22)

10/29: *Transcendental Dialectic*: the illusions of Reason and the use of pure Ideas (346-67)
10/31-11/5:  **Paralogisms of Pure Reason**: Kant’s attack on “rational psychology” (382-441).

11/7:  A Re-visitation of the **Antinomies**

11/12-14:  **The Ideal of Reason**: Kant on Proofs of God and the critique of “rational theology” (572-616)

11/19-21:  The “**Regulative Use of the Ideas of Pure Reason**” (617-64): The “**Canon of Pure Reason**”: the purpose of reason, the highest good, and faith (730-55)

11/26:  Introduction to the **Critique of Practical Reason** (Preface and Introduction)

11/28:  **THANKSGIVING**

12/3-5:  Second **Critique** Book I, Chapter I (Ak 19-57); “Of the typic of the pure practical faculty of judgment (Ak 68-72)

12/10-12:  Second Critique Book II, Chapter I, Chapter II through sub-heading V (Ak 107-132)