

**COURSE #**  
**KANT'S MORAL THEORY**

**INSTRUCTOR**

Alexander Englert  
aengler1@jhu.edu  
Time: TBA  
Location: TBA  
Office Hours: TBA

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Kant's theory continues to influence how we think about ethics. He argues for the freedom of the will, for a duty that binds us no matter who we are, and for a rational faith in God. We will be exploring two of his major works on ethics in which Kant works out his arguments for these positions. The first is his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. The second is his *Critique of Practical Reason*. While a course on Kant's theoretical philosophy is a helpful precursor, it is not an absolute requirement for participation in the course.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

By the successful completion of this course, you should be familiar with key elements of Kant's moral theory. Furthermore, this course will offer ample opportunity to improve your ability to write philosophical papers and think critically about very difficult texts. Finally, you should become better able to understand contemporary normative ethical discussions, which often engage with Kant's theory as the main historical basis for deontological ethics.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Please buy, rent, or borrow the following:

1. Kant, *Groundwork to Metaphysics of Morals* (trans. Gregor)
2. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (trans. Gregor)
3. All other texts will be distributed electronically.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

To successfully pass this course, you will need to complete all of the following requirements:

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| 1. First Short Essay (4-5 pages)        | 20% |
| 2. Second Short Essay (4-5 pages)       | 20% |
| 3. Term Paper, Proposal (1 page)        | 5%  |
| 4. Term Paper, Bibliography (1 page)    | 5%  |
| 5. Term Paper, First Draft (8-10 pages) | 10% |
| 6. Term Paper, Final Draft (8-10 pages) | 25% |
| 7. Attendance/Reading Questions         | 10% |
| 8. Participation                        | 5%  |

All assignments must be turned in by their due dates. If they are turned in late, they will lose ½ letter grade for each day that they are tardy. In extenuating circumstances, I will grant extensions – but the reasons must be good and they must be discussed with me well in advance (or as soon as possible before the deadline).

SHORT PAPERS: There will be two short essays (4-5 pages). Topics will be submitted in advance. See schedule for due dates.

TERM PAPER: The most important assignment in the course will be an 8-10 page term paper. Students will choose their own topic (which must be approved by the instructor). Term papers must engage with both primary and secondary literature. Later in the term, we'll spend some time discussing how to find appropriate and relevant secondary literature for the term papers.

ATTENDANCE/READING QUESTIONS: Daily attendance is required for success in this course. The first two unexcused absences will be forgiven, but each subsequent unexcused absence will affect your grade. See course policies for further details. Every class, each student will submit (at least) one written question about the reading on a note card or piece of paper at the beginning of class. The question(s) should be thoughtful enough to demonstrate that the student has done the reading and has already put some thought into it. I will typically begin class by discussing some of the submitted questions. (Note: I will use these note cards to take attendance. So submit a blank one with your name on it, even if you didn't complete the reading.)

PARTICIPATION: This course is a seminar. Accordingly, all students are expected to contribute to class discussions consistently.

## SCHEDULE

*GMM* = *Groundwork*

*CPR* = *Critique of Practical Reason*

### UNIT I – THE GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

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WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A *GROUNDWORK* AND WHAT IS A *CRITIQUE*?

Day 1            Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction + 3<sup>rd</sup> Antinomy + Canon (online)

Day 2            Allison, “The Third Antinomy” (pp. 11-28)  
Beck, “Kant,” in *Early German Philosophy*

WEEK 2 – SETTING UP THE *GROUNDWORK*

Day 3            *GMM*, Preface (pp. 4: 387-392)

Day 4            Wolf, *The Autonomy of Reason*, “The Structure of the Argument of the Groundwork”

WEEK 3 – GROUNDWORK: SECTION I

Day 5            *GMM*, Section I (pp. 4: 393-396)  
**First Paper Prompts Distributed**

Day 6            *GMM*, Section I (pp. 4: 397-401)

WEEK 4 – GROUNDWORK: SECTION I (CONT.)

DAY 7            *GMM*, Section I (pp. 4: 401-406)

Day 8            Paton, *The Categorical Imperative* (pp. 34-45)  
**First Short Paper Due!**

WEEK 5 – GROUNDWORK: SECTION II

Day 9            *GMM*, Section II (pp. 4: 406-412)

Day 10           *GMM*, Section II (pp. 4: 412-416)

WEEK 6 – GROUNDWORK: SECTION II (CONT.)

Day 11           *GMM*, Section II (pp. 4: 417-430)

Day 12           *GMM*, Section II (pp. 4: 431-436)

WEEK 7 – GROUNDWORK: SECTION III

Day 13           *GMM*, Section II (pp. 4: 437-445)  
**Second Paper Prompts Distributed**

Day 14           *GMM*, Section III (pp. 4: 446-454)  
Allison, “The deduction in the *Groundwork* III” (pp. 214-226)

WEEK 8 – GROUNDWORK: SECTION III (CONT.)

Day 15           *GMM*, Section III (pp. 4: 455-463)

Day 16           Ludwig, “Why Groundwork III Failed” (full article)  
Allison, “The deduction in the *Groundwork* III” (pp. 227-229)  
**Second Paper Due!**

**UNIT II – THE CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON**

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WEEK 9 – A SECOND CRITIQUE

Day 17           *CPR*, Preface and Introduction

Day 18           Beck, “The Decision to Write the second *Critique*” (pp. 13-18)

Förster, “Critique and Morals” (pp. 41-56)

WEEK 10 – THE ANALYTIC

Day 19      *CPR*, §§1-3

Day 20      *CPR*, §§4-6

**TERM PAPER PROPOSALS DUE!**

WEEK 11 – THE FACT OF REASON

Day 21      *CPR*, §§7-8

Day 22      Henrich, “The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant’s Doctrine of the Fact of Reason” (pp. 55-88)

**Bibliographies Due!**

WEEK 12 – THE OBJECT AND INCENTIVES OF PRACTICAL REASON

Day 23      *CPR*, Chapter II, On the Object of Pure Practical Reason (pp. 5: 58-71)

Day 24      *CPR*, Chapter III, On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason (pp. 5: 72-106)

WEEK 13 – THE DIALECTIC AND GOD (**CONFERENCE WEEK!**)

Day 25      *CPR*, The Dialectic (pp. 5: 107-119)

Day 26      *CPR*, The Postulates (pp. 5: 120-132)

WEEK 14 – THE POSTULATES & DOCTRINE OF METHOD

Day 27      *CPR*, On the Postulates (pp. 5: 132-148)

Day 28      *CPR*, Doctrine of Method (pp. 5: 151-163)

WEEK 15 – FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

**FINAL PAPER DUE (TBA)!**

**HELPFUL SECONDARY LITERATURE**

Here are some good books about Kant's ethics.

#### Kant's Ethics in General & the Systematic Place of his Moral Thought

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- Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*
- Anne Margaret Baxley, *Kant's Theory of Virtue*
- Stephen Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*
- Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy* (especially Chapters 1-3, pp. 17-74)
- Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law, and Happiness*
- Barbara Herman, *Moral Literacy*
- Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*
- Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*
- Onora O'Neill, *Acting on Principle: An Essay on Kantian Ethics*
- H.J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*
- Philip Stratton-Lake, *Kant, Duty, and Moral Worth*
- Allen Wood, *Kantian Ethics*

#### On the *Groundwork*

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- Paul Guyer, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Lawrence Pasternack (ed.), *Immanuel Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals in Focus*
- Jens Timmermann, *Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary*
- Robert Paul Wolff, *The Autonomy of Reason*
- Allen Wood, *Formulas of the Moral Law*

#### On the second *Critique*

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- Karl Ameriks, *Interpreting Kant's Critiques* (Part II, Chapters 6-11)
- Karl Ameriks, "Pure Reason of Itself Alone Suffices to Determine the Will"
- Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*
- G. Felicitas Munzel, "'Doctrine of Method' and 'Closing'"
- Onora O'Neill, "Autonomy and the Fact of Reason in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*"
- Adam Westra, *The Typic in Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*

### **COURSE POLICIES**

**ELECTRONICS:** No electronics may be used in class unless otherwise noted. This includes laptops, tablets, phones, etc.

**OFFICE HOURS:** I encourage you to come and meet with me during my office hour. Philosophy requires much reflection and dialogue. Should my office hour be inconvenient for you, please get in touch with me and we will be able to find a time that works for us both. Also, please come by and discuss your papers as you plan them.

**CONDUCT:** It is always important to show respect to your fellow human beings, especially those with whom you disagree. Do not interrupt each other; do not make others feel small; etc. Be a mensch!

**ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Attendance is mandatory. The first two unexcused absences will not count against the attendance portion of the grade, but each subsequent absence will lead to a

-.5% decrease. Students more than a couple minutes late to class will be marked late. (If you arrive after attendance has been taken, it is your responsibility to let me know at the end of class that you are present, otherwise it will count as an absence.) Three late attendances will count as one absence.

EXCUSED ABSENCES: Absences will be excused only for documented medical emergencies, or extreme documented family emergencies. Here are some examples of things that will not count as excused absences: “Traffic was bad and I had trouble finding a parking spot”; “I had to work”; “I had a dentist appointment”; “I was out of town with my family.”

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: There is a zero tolerance policy regarding violations of the university’s academic integrity policy. Violations will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. It is the responsibility of the student to be familiar with the academic integrity policy. Please turn in your own work – everyone will be happier in the end. If you have questions or are concerned that something you are doing constitutes plagiarism, please contact me and we will work it out.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS: If you require special accommodations because of a disability, please get in touch with JHU’s Student Disability Services: [studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu).

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