

Phil 359h: Kant's Critical Philosophy

Fall 2009 Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Beavers

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Hours: M & F 1:00-1:50; Tu 5:00-5:50

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W 12:00-1:50 & 3:00-4:50

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Course Info: T 6:00-8:45 LI 209

Course Description

This course will be dedicated to a close reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Without a doubt, this text stands as one of the most important texts in the history of philosophy, earning an easy place in the top five of every list I have ever seen. It is commonly said that anyone doing philosophy after Kant must be familiar with this book, and that, with it, Kant single-handedly redirected the history of philosophy, and consequently, the fields of inquiry that are touched by it, including both those involved with theology and science. Kant is also credited with providing the theory of perception that inaugurated the impressionistic period in painting and provided impetus to the romantic movement in music and literature.

As one might suspect, any book that could have such an impact is likely to be exceptionally difficult, and this one is. Anyone approaching it must do so carefully and slowly. Indeed, it is one of the works in the history of philosophy that must be read the first time with some guidance. (If you don't believe me, pick up the text and try reading the Introduction.) But the careful reader will be well paid for her efforts.

The difficult nature of the text means that we will be greatly assisted by having plenty of students in the class who have taken a number of philosophy classes. Modern Philosophy, Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Science, and Dr. Connolly's Hume seminar last year will prove particularly helpful. The reading will be approximately 50 pages per week. Every other week, a five page exegetical paper will be due that shows some attempt to come to terms with the text. No one, it seems, has a precise understanding of the text, and even scholars disagree over some of the basics. So, nothing like comprehension of the details of the text will be required. What will be required is a committed attempt to making sense of it.

Required Texts

Altman, Matthew C. *A Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Assignments

Each student will be required to come to class prepared, where "prepared" means having read the reading assignment for the day and attempted to achieve a genuine understanding of it. Additionally, each student will be required to write five of seven possible papers, according to the guidelines below, and present at least one of the them orally in class at some point during the semester.

Grading

75% - Papers (15% each)
25% - Course Participation

Seminar Format

This class meets one night a week for three hours. Each session will be divided into two parts with a short break in the middle. During the first part, I will make preliminary comments on the reading in light of student observations. In some cases, I may present a formal exposition of segments of the material that may be particularly difficult. During the second part, a student will read a paper to set the tone for a discussion to follow.

To facilitate student presentations, each student will be assigned to one of two groups, labeled for convenience as A and B. Every other week, each member of the A group will be writing a paper. On the alternating weeks, the B group will be writing. Each student will have the opportunity to write seven papers, of which you are required to write five. (In other words, you get to “opt out” of two.) You are welcome to write six or seven if you wish. In this case, your paper grade will be based on the average of all the papers you write. To ensure that we always have a student available for a presentation, it is imperative that not all students in a group opt out of a paper during the same week. Consequently, anyone wishing to opt out of a particular assignment must specify this no later than the class session before the assignment is due.

Group Assignments

Group A

Anthony
Heddon
Kereki
Reuter
Purcell
Taylor (optional)

Group B

Arias
Kinsey
Miller
Slinker
Wallace
Weger

Paper Requirements and Evaluation

The topic for your papers must be targeted at the reading assignment for the day. Your paper should be longer than four pages and no longer than five. It must be in Times New Roman, 12 point font and formatted according to the MLA style as indicated in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th Edition. (Copies are available in the library, bookstore and at Barnes & Noble.) Be sure to include a title. Staple the paper in the top, left corner. Late papers will not be accepted!

Your papers will be evaluated according to the following qualities, though they will not be graded according to an average based on an individual assessment of each area. (In other words, I will consider the paper as a whole looking at the following for guidance.)

- *Focus* – Does the paper stick to its topic, addressing necessary details while avoiding extraneous ones?
- *Organization* – Is the paper well-organized with respect to the order and presentation of ideas? Are ideas properly subordinated throughout the paper?
- *Clarity* – Is the paper generally clear and the prose readable? Is the thesis and argument explicit?

- *Argument* – Is the paper well-reasoned on the basis of sound and cogent argument? Is evidence interpreted adequately?
- *Factuality* – Are the factual assertions advanced in the paper true? Are they adequately supported by documentation as needed?
- *Documentation* – Is the selection and use of sources appropriate for the topic? Is the paper properly documented with citations to your sources?
- *Format* – Does the paper adhere to the formatting guidelines of the 6th edition of the MLA style manual?
- *Grammar* – Is language used according to the rules of grammar? Is it properly academic?

When it comes to help with academic writing, I have found no book better than Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990. This book is not a writing manual for beginning students, but a carefully prepared handbook for those who already know how to write in general and wish to address academic audiences. If you wish to work in academia, regardless of field, this book is a must read.

Resources Relating to Course Content

1) *Noesis: Philosophical Research Online* indexes a fair amount of philosophy relating to the many issues surrounding the text. See <http://noesis.evansville.edu>.

2) For detailed background of key philosophical concepts relating to the course, see the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be prepared by the student expressly for this course. A student who submits work that is plagiarized, bought, borrowed from the archives of a fraternity, copied from another student, etc., *will fail the course*. (If you don't believe me, ask around.) I fully support the University's Academic Honor Code. To avoid confusion, students should keep in mind that plagiarism occurs not only when someone copies an author word for word, but also when someone uses another's ideas without giving credit, even if the ideas are paraphrased. Always document your sources!

Attendance

For a seminar such as this, my attendance policy differs from my regular lecture courses. It is quite simple: don't miss!

Course Participation

Course participation grades are not automatic. They are based on oral contributions to the collective learning experience of the class as a whole in terms of asking pertinent questions, answering questions correctly or, at least, provocatively, making insightful observations, and offering other meaningful expressions of interest in the material that help encourage learning. I begin by assuming a C for each student's course participation grade and move from there. Students should realize that *it is possible to talk a lot in class and receive a low grade for course participation*. Absences are also grounds for a low participation grade.

Electronic Technology in the Classroom (Cell Phones, Laptops, Etc.)

The use of laptops, cell phones, gaming devices and other electronic contraptions is not permitted in class. Students caught using them will be asked to leave. (You can wear a watch, if you must, but please don't sit staring at it during my lectures.)

Email

I do not read my UE email at home and, as a consequence, I will only answer email from that account during my scheduled office hours. Even then, I am not apt to sustain long, academic dialogues in this forum. For extended discussion, please come visit me in person. Office hours are posted above.

Food in the Classroom

No eating in class.

Course Calendar

- 9/1 - Kant, 99-124; Altman, Chapters 1 & 2**
- 9/8 - Kant, 136-152 & 172-192 (36 pages); Altman as appropriate throughout**
Group A Papers Due
- 9/15 - Kant, 193-226 (33 pages)**
Group B Papers Due
- 9/22 - Kant, 226-266 (40 pages)**
Group A Papers Due
- 9/29 - Kant, 267-298 (31 pages)**
Group B Papers Due
- 10/6 - Kant, 299-337 (38 pages)**
Group A Papers Due
- 10/20 - Kant, 338-383 (45 pages)**
Group B Papers Due
- 10/27 - Kant, 384-422 (38 pages)**
Group A Papers Due
- 11/3 - Kant, 422-458 (36 pages)**
Group B Papers Due
- 11/10 - Kant, 459-503 (44 pages)**
Group A Papers Due
- 11/17 - Kant, 503-550 (47 pages)**
Group B Papers Due
- 11/24 - Kant, 551-589 (38 pages)**
Group A Papers Due

12/1 **Kant, 590-623 (33 pages)**
Group B Papers Due

12/8 **Kant, 627-671 (44 pages)**
Group A Papers Due

12/15 **Kant, 672-704 (32 pages)**
Group B Papers Due