

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT  
FALL 2011-12  
PHIL 260E SPECIAL TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY:  
KANT'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY  
TUES. & THURS. 17:00 – 18:15 NICELY 105

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**Course Description:**

“It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without qualification except a *good will*.”

The opening sentence from *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) has to be one of the boldest claims in the history of philosophy. Let’s find out what it means and whether it is true. But our interest in Kant is not merely historical, since Kant’s practical philosophy (moral/ethical/political philosophy) remains one of the most influential. Examples of such contemporary influence are found in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (1948, which, incidentally, was drafted in part by Charles Malik, founder of the philosophy department at AUB), as well as more recently in the cries of “dignity” and “autonomy” demanded by various Arab revolutionaries. Kant’s works, however, are notoriously difficult and misunderstood. My aim in this course is to avoid these problems, by reading Kant’s major practical works slowly, carefully, and selectively. Along the way, we will learn a great deal about practical philosophy generally, as well as how to read, write, and think reflectively.

We will begin by examining key sections of Kant’s *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, which will give us a good overview of the basic concepts (categorical vs. hypothetical imperatives, the moral law, acting *from* duty vs. *according to* duty, heteronomy vs. autonomy, and the Kingdom of Ends). Then, we will turn to the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) for Kant’s accounts of freedom of the will, happiness vs. moral virtue (as worthiness to be happy), and the “postulates of practical reason,” i.e., immortality and God’s existence. These postulates must be understood as unprovable presuppositions, which, do not provide the *grounds* of morality, but rather its completion. We will then devote the rest of the semester to Kant’s last major work, the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1787). This work, perilously neglected, contains Kant’s mature formulations of the basic concepts. Most importantly, it establishes an essential distinction between obligations of *right* and those of *ethics* (or virtue), a distinction without which Kant’s practical philosophy cannot be properly understood. It also contains Kant’s views on various *applied* ethical issues, such as drinking, lust, and marriage (not in that order. Btw, we will not be reading most of this rather big book.) We will also have a few secondary source articles and handouts to aid us along the way. Throughout, we will of course ask ourselves “*but is this true?*” and while the answers will remain less than definitive, I hope we may at least gain an appreciation of the comprehensiveness and coherence of Kant’s practical philosophy, in order to better assess its problems, as well as to improve our means of assessing our own practical matters.

The class will be discussion, rather than lecture driven (though, I will sometimes lecture). Discussions will focus on questions we have about the text. Asking questions like, “what the heck is Kant talking about” is a good place to start. But students are expected to read intensively and to endure the occasional headache. It is expected that you have had at least one (hopefully more) course in philosophy. If not, please speak to me.

Requirements: Two medium length papers, a longer final paper, four one-page response papers, and aspirin. Texts are available at the AUB bookstore. Total price \$63.00!

Essential: Read this syllabus carefully. By taking this class, you agree to understand and comply with this syllabus. By ‘syllabus’ I mean the following documents, available on Moodle: (1) this document (2) Calculating and Estimating Your Course Grade; (3) Documenting, Citing, Rules & Mechanics; (4) any other document I have placed in the syllabus section of Moodle. To maintain organization and

fairness, I must maintain the policies stated herein. If I make any changes to the syllabus, I will inform you. If you do not understand or agree with the policies, feel free to discuss them with me. I am always happy to talk about anything. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say you didn't know.

### **Required Texts:**

- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. (First published Trans. & Ed., Mary McGregor, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*. Cambridge UP, 1998 ISBN: 978-0-521-62695-8
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Trans. & Ed., Mary McGregor, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*. Cambridge UP, 1997. ISBN: 978-0-521-59962-7
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. & Ed., Mary McGregor, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*. Cambridge UP, 1996. ISBN: 978-0-521-56673-5
- The introduction to each of these volumes is highly recommended.
- Hume, *Principles of Morals*, appendix (Moodle)
- O'Neal, Onora. "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics." (handout)
- Schneewind, Jerome. "Autonomy, obligation, and virtue: An overview of Kant's moral philosophy." *Cambridge Companion to Kant*. Cambridge, 1992. (Moodle)
- Handouts, articles, as needed.

### **Graded requirements:**

- Two papers, each worth 25% of course grade
- Four one-page "Response" papers, 400 words each, for 15% of course grade (3.75% each).
- Final paper, 35% of course grade

**Papers:** The assignment for the first paper (approx. 1000 words) will be to evaluate one of the "duty scenarios" that Kant describes in the *Groundwork*, or to analyze a given passage or problem. Details provided later. For paper two (approximately 1500 words) you may be asked to analyze a passage from what you have read in the *Critique*. The final paper (2000 words) will (likely) involve a passage from the *Metaphysics of Morals*, except that your analysis and argument will incorporate two secondary sources (journal articles or chapters). Another option may be offered.

No hard copies of papers are needed. Papers must be turned in to Turnitin via Moodle. I will make comments and return them to you electronically. Grading criteria may be indicated when I post the assignment; but my general grading criteria is available on Moodle (Grading Criteria for Written Assignments).

**Responses:** These are short, 400 word responses to a question I will pose to you. Concise, accurate expression and close analysis are of prime importance. Grade scale for Response: 90, 85, 75, 68, 60, 0, or possibly in between. For my grading criteria, see Moodle.

**Attendance:** Class attendance and participation are vital components of this course and will affect your grade both directly and indirectly. If you do not arrive by the time I take attendance, or if you leave the classroom for more than five minutes, you will be marked absent. 3 late markings = 1 absence. If you are late, you must tell me after class so that I can mark you "present". For every unexcused absence over three, your course points will be reduced by 3. If you accumulate more than eight unexcused absences, you automatically fail the course. I accept excuses *only for extreme circumstances that you must discuss with me in person and provide documentation*—no exceptions. Also, do not ask me if you missed anything in class on your absence—of course you did! Any important notices will be posted on Moodle.

**Bonus for good attendance:** if you have no unexcused absences throughout the semester, 4 points will be added to your course grade; only one absence, 3 points; two absences, 2 points.

**Note:** You will not be excused for missing class due to special sessions, make-ups, or scheduling conflicts in other classes. If a teacher in another class schedules you for anything that conflicts with this class time, you must tell that teacher that by order of the Dean of FAS he/she must schedule you at a time you can make it. In other words, no scheduling conflicts are allowed. But it is your

responsibility to attend class and to inform your professors of this policy. If your other professor objects, give me his contact information and I will set him/her straight.

**Participation and class conduct:** Participation is strongly encouraged. In order to participate well, you must do the assigned readings before class, and *always bring the assigned text to class*. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off-base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions you do. Occasionally, I may call on you unexpectedly.

A philosophy class is one of the very few places where you have the opportunity to express and examine opinions. BUT, note the following:

- (1) you should expect to have your opinions challenged.
- (2) you are expected to listen to and to think about the opinions of your classmates. Be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves. In sum, **ONLY ONE PERSON MAY SPEAK AT A TIME, AND NO ONE MAY TALK IN THE BACKGROUND.**
- (3) **ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES MUST BE TURNED OFF and PUT AWAY COMPLETELY OUT OF SIGHT.** You may not text-message in class. I reserve the right to take your “Crackberry” until class is over. If you take notes on a computer, the internet connection must be turned off.

**Repeat offenders of these rules will be told to leave the room, be marked absent, and points will be taken off your final grade.** You will also be penalized for the following behaviors I consider disrespectful: Leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class.

Also, as a courtesy to me, *do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over*. If I seem unaware that class time has expired, kindly alert me, thank you.

**Grades: Criteria and Calculation:** I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. There are two main parts to the grading process: Criteria and Calculation. See the “Grading Criteria for Written Assignments” posted on Moodle; specific criteria will be given with the specific assignment. For Calculation, see “Calculating and Estimating Your Grades” on Moodle.” This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. Here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Gradebook,” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up. To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts (see “Calculating and Estimating. . .”). Be sure to drop the lowest score on your quizzes. **NOTE:** Never tell me that you “need” a certain course grade in the class and expect or request me to give it to you. The request is completely inappropriate, and if made, I will *reduce* your grade. The best way to get the grade you need is to do the required work as best you can; although I offer no guarantees that you will get it.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. It is equivalent to stealing, lying, and cheating, and no amount of it will be tolerated in my class. Plagiarism is wrong for another reason: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, learner, and person. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms, not only you, but all students, professors, the university, and society in general. If you plagiarize, you fail to learn how to write and think. You represent yourself as having skills and knowledge that you in fact do not have. It also ruins the reputation of the school, and thus harms your own job prospects. *Also, I despise plagiarism and plagiarists.* I take your work and my work seriously. If you plagiarize, then my work becomes a pointless waste of time. I hate wasting time, because I wish to fill my life with meaning and accomplishments. Nor do I wish to have false relationships. When I read and respond to your work, I consider myself as engaged in a mutual relationship of trust, respect, truth, care, and progress. If I am reading your plagiarized work, then I am having a false relationship with you. I despise false relationships because they destroy the substance of life. **Therefore, if you plagiarize anything in this class, you will automatically fail the course and be reported to the Dean. It will go on your record and you could be dismissed from the university.** This includes

any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, using dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). You must also discourage plagiarism by not giving your paper to someone else to copy. Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment, because the text has an “internet feel,” or because it uses awkward wording in an attempt to disguise the source. I also use Google and other resources.

You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, see “**Documenting Sources: Rules & Mechanics**” posted on Moodle. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, or with your English, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

Turnitin. Unfortunately, due to a few people’s insidious attempts to plagiarize, I must force everyone to submit all assignments to Turnitin.com. Failure to submit your work to Turnitin results in an automatic 0 for the assignment.

Here is how it works: As their website says, “Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals” ([http://www.plagiarism.org/plag\\_solutions.html](http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html)). NOTE that Turnitin only submits a “similarity” report, not a plagiarism report. The similarity report shows the percentage of your text that is similar or identical to another text, and therefore helps me determine whether you have plagiarized. Some similarity is fine and to be expected. But identical similarity or paraphrased similarity is plagiarism. NOTE: Writing papers does *not* consist of using a source and changing a few words here and there. Nor does paraphrasing a source consist of changing a few words here and there. It means making a compact summary of the main point of a paragraph, for purposes of clarification for the reader. All paraphrasing must be cited.

To submit your paper to Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on “Turnitin submission” for the current assignment.

**More information on Plagiarism is posted on Moodle.**

### **The Writing Center:**

If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: [writing@aub.edu.lb](mailto:writing@aub.edu.lb)

**Moodle:** Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and such. Class notices and announcements will be sent to you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, **check your AUB e-mail** regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

**E-mail:** So that we may better communicate, you must use your AUB e-mail and “authenticate” it so that I can see your name and know who you are.

See Course Schedule, next page--

**Course Schedule:** This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well. But bear in mind that the page ranges are *estimates* of what will be covered. Sometimes we will miss the mark, other times we will go beyond.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1 Sept.	27 Introduction to Course, syllabus and <i>Groundwork</i>	29 <i>Groundwork</i> , Sec. 1, pp. 7-10
2 Oct	4 <i>Groundwork</i> 11-18	6 <i>Groundwork</i> cont.
3	11 <i>Groundwork</i> 19-23 Hume's "Sentiments"	13 <i>Groundwork</i> , 23-33 <b>Response 1 Due</b>
4	18 <i>Groundwork</i> 33-41 O'Neal, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics."	20 <i>Groundwork</i> , 41-51.
5	25 <i>Critique</i> Book one part one chapter one. <b>Paper 1 due</b>	27 <i>Critique</i>
6 Nov	1 <i>Critique</i> , Keep reading, and let's see how far we can get. But stop at page 37.	3 <i>Critique</i>
7	8 Al Adha NO CLASS (6-8) Read Schneewind	10 <i>Critique</i> , Chapter III on the incentives of pure practical reason (62-75)
8	15 <i>Critique</i> , Book II, Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, 90-102	17 <i>Critique</i> <b>Response 2 due</b>
9	22 Independence Day NO CLASS	24 <i>Critique</i> , The postulates of pure practical reason -111.
10 Dec	29 <i>Critique</i>	1 <i>Critique</i> , Conclusion, 133-5
11	6 <del><i>Metaphysics</i>, Intro, 9-22-</del> NO CLASS, Ashoura <b>Paper 2 due</b>	8 <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Introduction I. On the Idea of and Necessity for a MM (9-11); II. On the Relation of the Faculties...(11-14) On Stupefying Oneself (p. 180-1)
12	13 <i>MM</i> , IV. On the Division of a MM (20-22) On the Right of Domestic Society, Marriage Right (pp. 61-64).	15 <i>MM</i> , Doctrine of Right, 23-6; 30-1; 37-8 Parental Right (64-65) <b>Paper 2 Due</b>
13	20 <i>MM</i> , Intro to Doctrine of Virtue, 145-152. On Duties to Oneself (including suicide, defiling oneself) 173-180.	22 NO CLASS 8 <i>MM</i> , 152-7 and read notes on Moodle <b>Response 3 Due "Online"</b>
14	27 Christmas Break (NO CLASS)	29 NO CLASS
15 Jan	3 NO CLASS <i>But read anyway:</i> Concepts of What is Presupposed on the Part of Feeling ... (Moral feeling, Conscience, Love of Human Beings, Respect) 159-162 + Moodle notes	5 <i>MM</i> Virtue in general, 164-9 (remark on 'casuistry') On Lying 182-4; On Avarice 184-6; On Servility, 186-8 Know yourself, 191 On Natural Perfection, 194-5 On Moral Perfection, 196-7
16	10 <i>MM</i> , Duties of virtue to others: Love: 198-203; 204-6. Respect: 209-13	12 LAST CLASS <i>Metaphysics</i> , Conclusion on the Elements: On the Most Intimate Union of Love with Respect in Friendship (215-17) <b>Response 4 due</b>
17	17 (Reading period) Make-up class?	19 (Exam period begins)
18	24	26 <b>Final paper due</b>
Feb	31 (End of semester, Feb 1)	