

Kant

“Human reason has the particular fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.”
– Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A vii

COURSE OUTLINE

This course is an introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781, 1787], Immanuel Kant’s magnum opus – and probably one of the most influential works in the history of philosophy. It is an inquiry into the great possibilities and limits of human reason, focused on the central question “What can I know?” Through a close reading of significant portions of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we will investigate the motivations behind Kant’s project, in particular with respect to his famous question, “How is metaphysics possible as science?” Some of the topics we will cover are: the duality between sources of cognition; the respective roles of sensibility and understanding in cognition; the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments; the distinction between appearances and things in themselves; the role of time in schematism; the status of the ideas of pure reason; and, finally, a few problems introduced in the Transcendental Dialectic.

OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- (i) Summarize and explain the main concepts studied throughout the course
- (ii) Provide a critical analysis of a philosophical argument
- (iii) Understand the importance and the role of secondary literature in the humanities
- (iv) Write a mid-length philosophical essay

EVALUATION

- (15%) A 1200-word critical analysis

This assignment works toward objectives (i) and (ii).

You will be required to summarize and carefully explain one of Kant’s arguments. You will also have to provide a criticism of the argument.

- (25%) A mid-term exam

This assignment works toward objectives (i), (ii) and (iv).

The in-class exam will consist of short open questions about material covered during the lectures and of one short essay. Possible essay questions will be distributed two weeks before the exam.

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Sample syllabus: advanced course

- (20%) Oral presentation of a scholarly article

This assignment works toward objectives (i), (ii) and (iii).

The presentation must be completed in teams of two or three. You will be required to present the main thesis and arguments of an article on Kant to your classmates. The instructor will provide a list of suggested articles.

- (30%) A final 3500-word essay

This assignment works toward objectives (i), (ii) and (iv).

You will be required to write a philosophical essay on an issue raised in the readings. You will be given a choice between three topics one month before the due date. You will have the possibility to submit an outline or a draft for feedback up to one week before the due date.

- (10%) Participation

This assignment works toward objective (i).

You are required to come to class having read the reading assigned for that day, and prepared to discuss it. You will also be expected to turn in written responses to weekly questions on the readings.

READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction: the publishing context of the *Critique of Pure Reason*

- Letter to Marcus Herz, February 1772

Week 2: The critical project and the legal metaphor

- Preface to the first edition: A vii – xxii

- Preface to the second edition: B vii – xlv

Week 3: The Transcendental Aesthetic (I)

- Introduction: A1/B6 - A16/B30

- The Transcendental Aesthetic: A19/B33 - A22/B36

Week 4: The Transcendental Aesthetic (II)

- The Transcendental Aesthetic: A22/B37 - A49/B37

Week 5: The aim of the Transcendental Logic

- Introduction to the Transcendental Logic: A50/B74 - A64/B88

- The Transcendental Analytic: A64/B89 - A83/B109 ; B109 - B116

Week 6: The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding (I)

- Deduction, 1787 (B) edition: B129 - B169

Week 7: The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding (II)

- *optional reading*: Deduction, 1781 edition: A95 - A130

Week 8: The Schematism of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding

- Introduction & ch. I-II of the Analytic of Principles : A131/B169 - A158/B197

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Sample syllabus: advanced course

Week 9: The Principles of Pure Understanding: the Mathematical Principles

- Table of principles, Axioms of intuition and Anticipations of perception: A159/B198 - A176/B218

Week 10: The Principles of Pure Understanding: the Dynamical Principles

- Analogies of experience and Postulates of empirical thinking: A176/B218 - A235/B287; B288 - B294

Week 11: The Transcendental Dialectic

- Introduction: A293/B249 - A309/B366

Week 12: On the Regulative Role of the Ideas of Pure Reason

- Transcendental Dialectic, book I: A310/B366 - A340/B398

Week 13: The Third Antimony

- The Antinomy of Pure Reason : A405/B432 - A408/B435
- The Third Antinomy: A444/B472 - A460/B488

Week 14: The Ideal of Pure Reason. Refutation of the proofs for the existence of God.

- The Ideal of Pure Reason, sections 3, 4, 5: A583/B661 - A620/B648