

## Kant – Critique of Pure Reason

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### Course Description

How much can you learn about the world by using reason alone? How much of your knowledge relies solely on the experiences you get from your five senses and how much of it relies on your ability to make logical and conceptual connections? Can you know that God exists even if you cannot perceive God? Can you know that you have free will even though your actions would be totally predictable if you had enough empirical information? Can you know that you are the same person reading this part of this sentence as the person that started it? What can you know about reality outside of your limited experience of it?

Questions like these fascinated Immanuel Kant, whose thought we will study in this course. Our main focus will be on Kant's masterwork the *Critique of Pure Reason*, often referred to as the "First Critique." Over the course of the semester, we will read most of the Critique, focusing on Kant's most notable doctrines on the nature and limits of human knowledge. Though the main project of this course is to understand Kant, we will discuss how Kant's thought interacts with contemporary thought on metaphysics and epistemology. Students are encouraged to have had a class in Early Modern Philosophy before taking this course, though I am happy to make arrangements for especially dedicated students.

### Course Reading

- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited by Paul Guyer, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-521-35402-8

### Course Goals

- To introduce students to Kant's core ideas on metaphysics and epistemology, while providing historical context and encouraging contemporary applications. The course readings and discussion will emphasize the importance of clear and convincing argumentation as well as learning to communicate ideas about difficult topics in a way that anyone can appreciate.
- To practice slowly reading and analyzing the main arguments of a difficult philosophical text. Success in this course depends on being able to carefully reconstruct the positions of Kant and his opponents and the arguments given for them. Ideally, students will learn to express and explain Kant's thought to someone unfamiliar with his work as well as to engage with his work as a live philosophical text.
- To develop your ability to productively discuss philosophical issues with your peers. The main goal of discussions will be to collaborate on understanding Kant's text and philosophy and then to come up criticisms and applications of them. Ideal discussions will be focused and friendly, but also fun.

### Achieving these Goals

- Students are expected to read assigned texts carefully before class and take notes of questions and comments you have about the text. If you would like supplemental reading material to read alongside the text, I am happy to provide it. In each case, I will note which parts of the text deserve the bulk of your attention.
- Kant's text is very difficult, so I will give lectures to help explain the more complex material. However, a significant portion of class time will consist in my asking pointed questions about the text to help you guide your own thoughts. Often, I will act as an advocate for Kant so that we can gain an appreciation of the depth and systematic nature of his thought.
- I will aim to make this course as discussion-based as possible: we will spend one day a week in small discussion groups. I encourage students to share their views without fear of incrimination or intimidation. If a student would like to explore a view they disagree with or want to keep their own view anonymous, I encourage them to present hypothetical arguments for hypothetical positions. We can also discuss your thoughts during office hours, if you would prefer.
- Exams are deliberately constructed to test your ability to understand Kant's core concepts by asking you (1) how to reconstruct his arguments from a selected bit of text and (2) how he might respond to criticism of and questions about his work.

### Assignments and Grading

#### **Discussion Leadership (15 pts.)**

After the add-drop period has concluded, I will assign each student three days on which they are one of the "discussion leaders." Discussion leaders are expected to come to class prepared to answer questions about the reading for that day's class. They should also prepare a few questions about the material that can be discussed in class if time permits. Five points will be awarded if a discussion leader offers thoughtful replies to my questions about the material and/or contributes to class discussion in some meaningful way. No points will be awarded if a discussion leader is absent without an approved excuse. Fewer than five points will be awarded if they are underprepared for class. Discussion leaders are welcome to discuss their readings with me before their class period.

#### **Two Written Exams (25 pts. each)**

There will be two take-home essay exams, each covering a third of the course material. Each exam will require approximately 4 pages of writing and will be submitted electronically. These exams test your comprehension of the material prepared for and discussed in class. Essay questions will be announced one week before the due date.

## Take Home Final Exam (35 pts.)

There will be no in-class final exam. Instead, you will be given a third essay exam similar in style to the previous written exams. However, the final will require approximately 6 pages of writing and will cover the content of the entire course, while focusing on the latter third. The final essay questions will be announced one week before the date of the final exam.

## Course Grade Guide

A: 94-100 B+: 87-89 B-: 80-83 C: 74-76 D+: 67-69 F: 0-59

A-: 90-93 B: 84-86 C+: 77-79 C-: 70-73 D: 60-69

Please see UNC's official grade guide for an explanation of what it takes to make an A, B, and so on.

## Course Policies

- Our classroom will be technology-free. I will count any student that uses an electronic device during lecture and group discussion absent for that day.
- Attendance is mandatory and expected.
- Discussions will be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities. All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service Office. In the first instance please visit their website <http://accessibility.unc.edu>, call 919-962-8300 or email [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu).
- Collaboration of any kind on exams is strictly prohibited. For more information about the Honor Code, please visit [studentconduct.unc.edu](http://studentconduct.unc.edu).

## Course Schedule

### **Introductory Material - Kant's critical project, the mystery of the "synthetic a priori"**

1. Preface to both editions, Table of Contents, Introduction to both editions (99-152)

### **Space and Time, Mathematical Knowledge**

2. Transcendental Aesthetic (A) (153-171)
3. Transcendental Aesthetic (B) (172-192)

### **The Basic Forms of Human Thought and Judgement, the Limits and Form of Experience**

4. Introduction to Transcendental Logic (193-200) (skim), Metaphysical Deduction (201-218)
5. Transcendental Deduction A (219-244),
6. Transcendental Deduction B (245-266)

### **Causation, Change, and Persistence**

7. Analogies of Experience (295-320)

### **Transcendental Idealism**

8. Refutation of Idealism (321-333), Distinction into Noumena and Phenomena (338-365)

### **The Soul and the Afterlife**

9. Paralogisms, A(409-444) (focus on 415-31)
10. Paralogisms, A(409-444) continued; Paralogisms, B (445-458)

### **Cosmology, Constitution, Free Will**

11. Antinomy of Pure Reason (459-502) (focus on 467-495)
12. Antinomies, resolved via Transcendental Idealism (503-550)

### **Why we cannot prove the Existence of God, the Role of Faith**

13. Ideal of Pure Reason, Impossibility of Proofs of God's Existence (551-574)
14. Ideal of Pure Reason, continued (575-589)

### **The Limits of Knowledge, the Critical Role of Philosophy, the Regulative Role of Reason**

15. Canon of Pure Reason (672-690)