

Political Science 702: Selected Political Theorist

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF IMMANUEL KANT

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DESCRIPTION

Although he is not primarily known as a political philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1802) remains a continuous — and continually revived — influence on Western political thought. He was one of the key figures in the German (and general European) Enlightenment, the legacy of which continues to be debated in the 21st century. He stands at a crucial nexus — maybe even the origin — of a German theoretical lineage whose later figures include Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. His liberalism closely informs two of the most important liberal theories of the late 20th century, those of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls. Contemporary debates about deliberative democracy or the democratic peace can be quickly traced to Kant. And so on.

The purpose of this seminar is to offer a systematic introduction to the ideas behind that influence and to explore different approaches to Kant through secondary literature. We will first focus on Kant's political works and the theoretical and historical context in which they emerge, after which we will explore a variety of other theorists' interpretive approaches to Kant. The exploration of the secondary literature addresses the *pedagogical* goal of this seminar, *viz.* to introduce the participants to some of the styles and methods of research in political theory. Seminar assignments will also be geared to that end; assignments will incorporate the formats scholars practice in the *profession* of political theory: presentations, reviews, research proposals, etc. This isn't about form over substance, though; in this business, the two are inextricably connected.

SEMINAR MECHANICS

Overview

Kant is difficult. We will spend quite a bit of time collectively scratching our heads and trying to make sense of the texts. I will provide guidance and background as much as possible, but participants will be responsible for reading the material carefully and for engaging in the interpretive efforts. Particularly in the early parts of the semester, it is more important for people to *practice* their interpretive skills than get things “right.” This will make dealing with the secondary material in the latter part of the semester significantly easier and more productive.

There are many things we will not be able to cover. Although Kant’s “theoretical”¹ philosophy informs his political thought, we will not be able to spend significant time on it — going through the main parts of *Critique of Pure Reason* alone would take an entire semester. We will begin with some readings in the first *Critique*, and we’ll encounter bits and pieces from the theoretical philosophy, but, for the most part, don’t expect us to do justice to the philosophy Kant is most famous for.

This limitation also affects the secondary literature we will be able to read. Although continental post-structuralist thought and its theoretical predecessors — particularly Hegelian Western Marxism — play an important role in contemporary political theory, their use of Kant is almost always through his theoretical philosophy. Martin Heidegger’s Kant commentary, for example, is explicitly metaphysical. The same is true for Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, and Gilles Deleuze, to name a few post-structuralists who have written on Kant. This is also the case with the no-longer-fashionable Marxists like Georg Lukács, Lucien Goldmann or Alexandre Kojève. Their absence from the syllabus should not be construed as a rejection of those approaches.

Expectations

- The seminar presupposes no prior exposure to Kant, but familiarity with Kant’s “theoretical” and/or moral philosophy will be helpful. (At the same time, Kant “experts” should be respectful of the diversity of participant backgrounds.)

¹ The old division of philosophy into “theoretical” and “practical” branches translates, roughly, into a division in which logic, metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of the sciences belong to the theoretical branch, and ethics and political philosophy to the practical.

- Participants should have some familiarity with modern political thought (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, et al.), and they must know the basics of the French Revolution.
- All the readings will be in translation, although those who can may naturally use the original texts.² (Kant's "*Hauptwerke*" are available online through Past Masters, accessible through the UM Library website.)
- All required readings must be read by the meeting for which they have been assigned. Each participant will also have to read some of the assigned secondary literature *well before* it is discussed in class. (See below on "Critical Essay.") "Recommended" readings are entirely optional, and I will not expect people to have time for them in general. One will need to read at least some of them for one's written work, however. "Helpful" readings are also optional; they are offered as additional guidance on some of the most difficult texts.
- All references to Kant's work in the written assignments *must* follow the conventional citation system: they must refer to the volume and page of the Royal Prussian Academy edition of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*. This is the edition usually referred to as the "*Akademie Ausgabe*." The *Critique of Pure Reason* is the one exception; in that case, one must refer to page in the first, or "A," (1781) and/or second, or "B," (1787) edition (e.g., "see A287/B344"). The translations we use contain this information.
- I have designed the seminar assignments in a way that makes completing them during this semester quite feasible. *No incompletes will be given except in cases of documented medical or other serious emergency*. Grades will be assigned on the basis of work turned in by the final deadline.

Requirements

READINGS

The following books have been ordered through Shaman Drum Book Shop. I very strongly recommend you get the editions listed below.

Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

² Anyone who plans to make Kant his or her primary dissertation focus, however, will need to be able to read the work in German.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

———, *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Other readings will be made available either as photocopies or online.

Helpful further texts (not ordered, but on reserve at the University Reserves):

Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987)

Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

Paul Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992)

Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001)

Hans Reiss, "Introduction" in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: CUP, 1991). (*This volume is badly translated and does not include the Akademie pagination, which is why we are not using it as a text. Reiss's introduction is competent, however.*)

ASSIGNMENTS

There will be three types of assignments in the seminar, all focusing (a) on the kind of writing academics need to do and (b) on writing as a process.

A. Argument Review

The purpose of the argument review is to hone one's skills in identifying an argument and characterizing it *briefly* but intelligibly. This models something scholars have to do in book reviews, survey articles and, of course, in articles and books, although in the latter the reviews don't always have to be brief.

During week 2–8, each seminar participant has to write two argument reviews. The assignment remains the same:

Identify one important argument in the reading for this week and summarize it in one page (250 words). You can imagine that your summary is a part of a book review, encyclopedia entry or something similar aimed at a scholarly audience. Your review is due in class (but it can be sent electronically in advance).

During the first few weeks, I will provide guidance on where and what the main arguments might be. After that, people are on their own. It doesn't matter which weeks one chooses; the only requirement is that two get written. One cannot write on a reading from previous weeks.

Seminar participants may be asked to circulate their summaries and/or present them briefly in the seminar.

The two reviews together count for 15% of the final course grade.

B. Concept Analysis

The purpose of the concept analysis is similar to the argument review, but the assignment is broader. It can incorporate more than one source, it will be longer (3–4 pages or 750–1,000 words), and it may involve a brief evaluative component.

Each seminar participant will have to write one concept analysis during weeks 2–8. Again, during the first weeks, I will make suggestions on possible candidates; after that, people are on their own.

The concept analysis paper will count for 15% of the final course grade.

C. Critical Essay

Embarking on an independent research contribution on Kant during one semester is difficult, but it is possible to write a successful critical treatment of someone else's take on him. This is the purpose of the critical essay. It will also emphasize the *process* of developing one, including presenting the work and using feedback. It models, in a somewhat compressed fashion, the way a conference paper winds its way toward a publication in political science.

The critical essay will discuss and evaluate one or two interpretive pieces on Kant's political thought. The objects of the critical analysis come from the readings for weeks 9-12. This means that each participant will have to read at least one of the late-semester texts early, well enough to be able to say something about it at...

Stage 1: Abstract

One-paragraph abstract of the proposed paper is due on October 21. The abstract should briefly outline the proposed topic and the paper's main thesis. I will provide examples of them. It is important to realize it is virtually impossible to know exactly what one will argue or how the argument will go — *and that's the way it works in the business*. The abstract must be interesting and manageable enough to get accepted, but it is not a contract. No one will ever demand that the final product be exactly what was described in the initial proposal. It almost never is.

Stage 2: Presentation

Each participant will have to present his or her project on the day the text he or she is analyzing is discussed in the seminar. The allotted time for the presentation will depend on the number of people presenting on the same day, but under no circumstances will it be more than 20 minutes. This offers both constraints and opportunities.

The constraint: Even if one has the paper written, there won't be time to read the whole thing. The person will have to decide what and how he or she wants to conduct the presentation.

The opportunity: The paper doesn't have to be finished. The *presentation* will have to be complete as such, but it doesn't mean the paper is.

We will spend some time discussing different presentation strategies, but the best bet might be to have a complete *first draft* of the paper done by the time of the presentation, to present its key points, and then revise the paper on the basis of the discussion it generates. This will then become...

Stage 3: "Finished" draft

Few things are ever finished — even after they are published — but for the purposes of this seminar, the final draft is what people must submit to me on the last day of the final exams, December 20. It need not be perfect nor publishable, but it needs to be the author's most complete good-faith effort at that point.

The paper should be within 12–20 pages (3,000–5,000 words), although it may be longer. The final draft will count for 50% of the final course grade, with the presentation counting for 20%.

CALENDAR

Texts marked with an asterisk (*) are in *Practical Philosophy*. Texts marked with a cross (†) will be made available as photocopies. Texts available online are identified as such.

Part I: Kant

9-SEPTEMBER: INTRODUCTION

No reading.

16-SEPTEMBER: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Required:

- *Critique of Pure Reason* (KrV): Kant's Prefaces to the first and second editions
- KrV: "The Transcendental Doctrine of Method," chs. I–III (A705/B733–A851/B879)

Helpful:

- Onora O'Neill, "Reason and Politics in the Kantian Enterprise" in *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989)
- ———, "Vindicating Reason." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Guyer

23-SEPTEMBER: KANT'S ETHICS

Required:

- *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals**

Recommended:

- *Critique of Practical Reason**
- "The Doctrine of Virtue" (Part II of *The Metaphysics of Morals*)*

Helpful:

- J.B. Schneewind, "Autonomy, Obligation and Virtue" in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Guyer

30-SEPTEMBER: ENLIGHTENMENT

Required:

- J.K.W. Möhsen, "What Is to Be Done toward the Enlightenment of the Citizenry?" In *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, edited by James Schmidt, 49–52. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.) †
- Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?"*
- Kant, "What is Orientation in Thinking?" †
- Kant, "The Conjectural Beginning of Human History" †

Recommended:

- Moses Mendelssohn, "On the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" In *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, edited by James Schmidt, 53–57. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996. †

Helpful:

- James Schmidt, "The Question of Enlightenment: Kant, Mendelssohn, and the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (1989): 269-91. (Online on JSTOR)

7-OCTOBER: PROGRESS, PEACE & VIOLENCE

Required:

- *Toward Perpetual Peace**
- "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" †
- *Critique of Judgment*, selections: §§ 39, 83, 84 †

Recommended:

- *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [*Anthropologie in pragmatischen Hinsicht*] (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977)

21-OCTOBER: PROGRESS, PEACE & VIOLENCE CONTINUED

Required:

- "On the Common Saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice"*

- “An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing?” (Part II, “The Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty with the Faculty of Law” in *The Conflict of the Faculties*) †

Recommended:

- The entire *Conflict of the Faculties* [*Der Streit der Fakultäten*] (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992)

28-OCTOBER: THE RECHTSLEHRE I: PROPERTY

Required:

- “The Doctrine of Right” (Part I of *The Metaphysics of Morals*), Part I: pp. 6: 203–308 *

4-NOVEMBER: THE RECHTSLEHRE II: THE STATE

Required:

- “The Doctrine of Right,” Part II: pp. 6: 311–372 *

Part II: Interpretations & Themes

11-NOVEMBER: ARENDT’S KANT

Required:

- Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, pp. 7–77

Recommended:

- Read the sections in the *Critique of Judgment* Arendt discusses and we haven’t read. (The recommended edition is Hackett’s 1987 edition, translated by Werner Pluhar.)

18-NOVEMBER: PUBLIC REASON

Required:

- John Christian Laursen, “The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of ‘Public’ and ‘Publicity’.” In *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, edited by James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 253–269. †
- Onora O’Neill, “The Public Use of Reason.” In *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) †

- Jürgen Habermas, “Publicity as the Bridging Principle between Politics and Morality.” In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), pp. 102–117. †

Recommended:

- Richard van Dülmen, *The Society of Enlightenment: The Rise of the Middle Class and Enlightenment Culture in Germany*, translated by Anthony Williams (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992)
- Alexander Altmann, "Prinzipien Politischer Theorie Bei Mendelssohn Und Kant." In *Die Trostvolle Aufklärung: Studien Zur Metaphysik Und Politischen Theorie Moses Mendelssohns* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1982), pp. 192–216.

25-NOVEMBER: CONTRACT, PROPERTY & AUTHORITY

Required:

- Patrick Riley, “On Kant as the Most Adequate of Social Contract Theorists.” *Political Theory* 1:4 (1973), pp. 450–471. (Online on JSTOR)
- Susan Meld Shell, “Kant’s Theory of Property.” *Political Theory* 6:1 (1978), pp. 75–90. (Online on JSTOR)
- Herbert Marcuse, ch. II, “Kant,” in “A Study on Authority.” In *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (London: NLB, 1972), pp. 79–94. †

Recommended:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1971, 1999), particularly §§ 3 and 24.

2-DECEMBER: REVISITING AUTHORITY: RESISTANCE & REVOLUTION

Required:

- H.S. Reiss, “Kant and the Right of Rebellion.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17:2 (1956), pp. 179–192. (Online on JSTOR)
- Dieter Henrich, “On the Meaning of Rational Action in the State” in *Kant & Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, edited by Ronald Beiner and William James Booth (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), pp. 97–116. †
- Christine Korsgaard, "Taking the Law into Our Own Hands: Kant on the Right to Revolution." In *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, edited by Andrews

Reath, Barbara Herman and Christine M. Korsgaard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 297–328. †

Recommended:

- Werner Haensel, *Kants Lehre vom Widerstandsrecht*. Vol. 60, *Kant-Studien Ergänzungshefte*. Berlin: Pan-Verlag, 1926.

9-DECEMBER: COSMOPOLITANISM

Required:

- William Connolly, “The New Cult of Civilizational Superiority,” *Theory & Event* 2:4 (1999). (Online journal, access via Project Muse.)
- Barbara Herman, “A Cosmopolitan Kingdom of Ends” in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, edited by Andrews Reath, Barbara Herman and Christine M. Korsgaard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 187–213. †
- Sidney Axinn, “World Community and Its Government.” In *Autonomy and Community: Readings in Contemporary Kantian Social Philosophy*, edited by Jane Kneller and Sidney Axinn (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 119–128. †