

# Kantian Normativity

University of Houston, Fall 2024  
ILAS 4350-01 (15403), Interdisciplinary Problem Solving  
Tuesday 230-4pm in Farish Hall, FH 211

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## Course Description

This capstone course helps students to achieve a meaningful synthesis of their three distinct minors. It is centered on substantive socio-ethical "problem-solving" methodologies as applied through the particular minors completed by each student. Students will thus work on a research project that comprehensively integrates their chosen minors. This senior seminar is individually customized around each student's specific program of study.

A problem-solving enterprise is effective only if it is also righteous. Morality must ground the adopted solutions. For this purpose, we will discuss normative ethics as it appears in Kant (1785, 1788). His practical philosophy, likely the most influential, has been analyzed by readers such as Paton (1947) and Wood (1999) and developed primarily (but not exclusively) by Rawls (1971, 1980), O'Neill (1989), and Korsgaard (1966). Accordingly, our central issues will be *moral judgments, good will, duty and obligation, categorical imperative, autonomy and freedom, and the kingdom of ends*.

## Class, Assignments, Assessments

In Spring 2024, this course is offered as a hybrid class with face-to-face and asynchronous components. The face-to-face part will occur on Tuesday, 230-4 pm in Cougar Village, N 113. The online platform for the asynchronous part of the class is *Canvas*. There, you can also find all the relevant information about the course, including the syllabus, readings, and links for paper submissions.

Part of the course consists of attending and discussing the class materials. The readings will provide the moral knowledge required for your final research papers, representing the course's real purpose. Links for submissions are available on *Canvas*. Below is the breakdown of your final grade. The grading scale is standard (i.e., A = 95-9%, A- = 90-4, etc.).

*20% Class Attendance and Participation* - On Tuesdays (230-4pm), students must attend class and discuss the assigned readings.

*10% Weekly Class Reviews* - On Thursdays (11:59 pm), students must submit a brief paper (500 words) on the topics covered in Tuesday's class.

*40% Two Papers on Kantian Normativity* - Students must write two papers (2000 words) on the class subjects. See the guidelines below.

*30% Problem-Solving Paper* - Students must write a research paper (2000 words) addressing an ethical problem to solve. The solution must significantly involve the chosen minors of the *Liberal Studies* degree, focusing on their methodology. See the guidelines below.

## Writing and Policies

In writing your papers, you can rely on the assistance of the teaching fellow (Dr. Tierney). He organizes weekly office hours (by appointment) to clarify the class subjects. In addition, the UH Writing Center can provide further help with your writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS's students: [UH-Writing-Center](#).

You must comply with the university's policies regarding ethics and academic honesty. See the following links and read their documents thoroughly: [Student-Conduct-Policy](#) and [Academic-Honesty](#). For counseling and psychological services, visit [CAPS](#). Finally, you can request special accommodations here: [Adjustments/Auxiliary-Aids](#). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Houston has issued extraordinary policies listed at the end of the syllabus. Finally, the use of any ChatGTP-like software is forbidden.

## Schedule

Jan 23	Class Introduction
Jan 30	Elements of Moral Cognition (Kant <sup>1</sup> vii-xi, 1-10)
Feb 6	Will and Moral Maxim (Kant <sup>1</sup> xi-xv, 10-8; Paton 34-45; Wood 21-40, 76-81)
Feb 13	Duty and Categorical Imperative (Kant <sup>1</sup> xv-xxi, 19-31; Paton 46-57, 129-64)
Feb 20	Humanity and Universal Law (Kant <sup>1</sup> 32-40; Paton 69-73; Wood 111-7)
Feb 27	Autonomy vs Heteronomy   Freedom (Kant <sup>1</sup> xxi-xxv, 40-51   xxv-xxx, 52-9)
Mar 5	The Kingdom of Ends (Kant <sup>1</sup> 59-66; Paton 185-97)
Mar 7	First Kant Paper Due (11:59 pm)
Mar 19	Moral Constructivism (Rawls <sup>2</sup> )
Mar 26	Justice as Fairness (Rawls <sup>1</sup> 221-8)
Apr 2	Value and Obligation (Korsgaard 131-66)
Apr 9	Moral Theorems (Kant <sup>2</sup> 153-62; Wood 50-75)
Apr 16	Universal Laws and Ends-In-Themselves (O'Neill 126-45)
Apr 23	Fairness and Justice (Shaffer-Landau 154-68)
Apr 30	Second Kant Paper Due (11:59 pm)
May 7	Problem-Solving Paper Due (11:59 pm)

## Bibliography

- Kant<sup>1</sup>, Immanuel (1785), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge University Press (1997).  
Kant<sup>2</sup>, Immanuel (1788), *The Critique of Practical Reason*. In *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press (1996).  
Korsgaard, Christine M. (1996), *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge University Press.  
O'Neill, Onora (1989), *Constructions of Reason. Explorations of Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.  
Paton, Herbert James (1947), *The Categorical Imperative*. London: Hutchinson.  
Rawls<sup>1</sup>, John (1971), *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
Rawls<sup>2</sup>, John (1980), Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory. *The Journal of Philosophy* 77/9, 515-72.  
Shafer-Landau, Russ (2010), *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford University Press.  
Wood, Allen W. (1999), *Kant's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge University Press.

## Guidelines for the Kant Papers

The paper must show the ability to *argue* about the class subjects. Present a question entirely by analyzing its arguments and counterarguments. Structure and write your paper following the steps below. Make sure to implement each of them. If anything needs to be clarified, don't guess, but ask the teacher. As for the format, your papers must have around 2000 words (but no fewer than that), including a bibliography not contained in the counted words. Write single-spaced, 9pt (Montserrat or Garamond font) and submit the work in a pdf file to Canvas.

<b>Introduction</b>	Introduce the <i>question</i> by identifying the problem you want to discuss. Describe it with simple words and motivate your choice by telling why the chosen issue matters. (ca. 300 words)
<b>Thesis</b>	Make your claim; namely, state your <i>thesis</i> that answers the chosen question. Be simple. You can, for example, defend one of the many arguments the readings present. You don't need to be creative (ca. 100 words).
<b>Arguments</b>	Defend the <i>supporting reasons</i> for your thesis. Ideally, you should present them analytically, namely isolate the central claims structuring the argument. (ca. 1000 words)
<b>Objections</b>	Consider at least two <i>counterarguments</i> . Present them properly and show their truth. Then, reject them in ca. 300 words.
<b>Conclusion</b>	Derive a <i>consequence</i> from the arguments and counterarguments you have previously discussed (ca. 300 words).

The bibliography must solely consider the readings. If you want to introduce a reading not covered in the lectures, ask your teacher for permission before proceeding. Quotations are required but can be at most 25% of your paper.

### Guidelines for the Problem-Solving Paper

Necessary steps must lead your writing. Make sure to implement each of them. If anything needs clarification, ask the teacher, instead of guessing. Expect suggestions and corrections from your teacher and/or his teaching fellow. *First*, the research paper must have ca. 2000 words and include a bibliography (not contained in those words). Write single-spaced, 9pt (Montserrat or Garamond font), and turn in a pdf file. Second, choose a controversial topic of applied ethics below. Each of them represents a problem to solve.

- (a) Free Speech and Censorship
- (b) Poverty and Shared Prosperity
- (c) Rights and Obligations
- (d) Abortion and the Right to Life
- (e) Just War and Pacifism

About the paper structure, implement each of the following steps.

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>Introduction</b> | Identify the problem you intend to discuss and explain why it matters (ca. 300 words).   |
| <b>Thesis</b>       | Make your claim; namely, state your thesis by answering the introductory question. Clarify how you'll solve the problem (ca. 100 words). |
| <b>Arguments</b>    | Solve the problem by applying methodologies and cognitions learned from your minors (ca. 1000 words).                                    |
| <b>Objections</b>   | Identify at least two major counterarguments and refute them shortly (ca. 300 words).  |
| <b>Conclusion</b>   | Present your solution to the chosen problem. Derive it smoothly from your arguments (ca. 300 words).                                     |
| <b>References</b>   | List two books (or four articles) for each minor and the entire class bibliography.  |