Course Description

Immanuel Kant’s philosophy set off a revolution that reverberated throughout 19th-century Europe. For Kant, it is our own reason, not God or nature, which is the original source of all moral principles, freedom, and even goodness itself. Human beings are autonomous in that we determine what is morally right.

We will trace the effects of the Kantian revolution and several influential responses to it. We begin with Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), which grounds ethical obligations in the idea of autonomy. We then consider Hegel’s radicalization of this project in his *Philosophy of Right* (1820), which seeks to demonstrate that freedom requires a certain form of social and political life. We conclude with an examination of two critics of the Kantian/Hegelian project in ethical theory: Karl Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) and Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855).

Our aim in this course will be to understand and evaluate these four difficult texts, and to write about them in clear and analytical prose.

Required Texts


Additional readings will be made available via the Course Moodle.

Assignments/Grading:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Words/ Pages</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Essay 1200-1400 Words</td>
<td>(~5-6 pages)</td>
<td>(4/2)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Essay 1200-1400 Words</td>
<td>(~5-6 pages)</td>
<td>(5/7)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Response Final (6 of your best 10 reading responses)</td>
<td>(~5-6 pages)</td>
<td>(5/28)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance/Class participation</td>
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Course Structure (beginning week 2):

Each week I will post a 10 minute mini-lecture and reading response questions to Moodle by Sunday @ 9pm (EST). This lecture will guide you in how to approach the reading. You are expected to have watched the video and completed the reading response before class on Tuesday.
Each week you will meet with 5-6 other students to discuss the readings (instructions forthcoming). I will assign you to a group which will remain consistent all semester. Your meeting will last 30 minutes. Groups will find a consistent meeting time. It is mandatory that you come to the meeting prepared, since this is official class time. Whatever time you end up picking, twice this semester your group will meet with me on Tuesday 11:10-11:30am.

Our class meetings will be 60 minutes each (Tu/Th 10:10-11:10am).

**Policies/Requirements:**

1. **Academic Honesty**

   Upon entering Amherst College, you each signed a pledge to uphold the honor code. According to the Honor Code’s Statement of Intellectual Responsibility, “the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one’s own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.” I expect you will all honor the pledge you signed. Therefore, everything you turn in should be your own work and in your own words. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even especially Wikipedia and anything from your Googling bounty.


   If questions remain about what constitutes academic honesty or dishonesty, please ask me.

   **The penalty for plagiarism in my course is failure, absolutely no exceptions**

2. **Deadlines**

   Late policy. Three principles guide my late policy:

   1. Work should be assessed on its quality and on whether it demonstrates learning.
   2. Each assignment has a purpose; that purpose can only be fulfilled within a certain timeframe.
   3. Deadlines allow us to organize our time and learning and to meet our goals.

   Reading Response Policy: In light of these, late reading responses will not be accepted for credit. The goals of these assignments are for you to practice working through and understanding the readings on your own and prepare for class discussion. These goals are defeated if you do not complete the assignment on time. Your reading response must be posted to Moodle before the beginning of Tuesday’s (sometimes Thursday’s) class. If you have an excused absence, the reading assignment must be emailed to me by the start of the following class.

   Essay Final Version Policy: If you find that you are unable to complete the essay by the deadline because of a crisis or emergency, you must contact me no less than 2 days before the due date. I MAY be able to grant a slight extension. Papers that are submitted late and without an extension will be marked down .3 down (see #9 for grading scale) for every day of lateness. This means that even one day of lateness turns a B+ into a B.

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1 Some of what follows is borrowed from syllabi from two friends and colleagues, Katia Vavova (Mt. Holyoke) and James Wilson (University of Chicago).

2 [https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir](https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/dean_faculty/fph/policies/sir)
Essays received late may not receive full comments. This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It’s about enabling me to schedule my time.

Finally, keep in mind first, that I am here to help. Get in touch if you’re worried about anything.

Second, when it comes to assignments, late > never > plagiarized.

3. Communication

Important announcements and assignments will sometimes be communicated to you via email, usually through Moodle. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. Get in the habit of checking your email at least once daily and don’t miss class. If you do miss class, check with your classmates.

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind that there are a lot more of you than there are of me and modern email demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:

- I do not answer emails in the evening (after 5pm Eastern) or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.
- I can’t guarantee a response to emails about assignments that are due within 24 hours of the email.

These rules are here so that I can manage to respond promptly to questions that do need to be answered via email.

4. Attendance

You should attend class regularly, on time, and well-rested. If you need to miss a class because of illness or family emergency, or some other pressing matter, please let me know ahead of time by email.

I couldn’t make it to class the other day. Did I miss anything important? Of course you did. To learn what you missed, contact your classmates, check Moodle for handouts, and make sure you get caught up. After you’ve done all that, feel free to schedule an office hours appointment with questions and comments on the readings.

Of course, things happen. But you are expected to attend every class.

5. Participation

In order to get full credit for attendance/participation, you must also regularly participate in class. Be ready to explore ideas critically, boldly, and creatively with others, both in your small groups and in our collective meetings.

Your participation grade turns on the quality, not the quantity of your contributions, and the extent to which you exhibit the respect and care necessary to promote good discussion. Contributions do not have to be in the form of “answers” or completed “theories” about a text or position—thoughtful questions are highly encouraged, and you will certainly not be penalized for a spirit of humility. While good contributions obviously vary immensely, I especially value comments and questions that pay close attention to the relevant text and those that build on, and reflect attention to, others’ contributions.

Why do I have to participate in class? Philosophy is a communal activity, and you’ve chosen to join our community this semester. Don’t talk just for the sake of talking, but also don’t wait for brilliance or insight to hit you before raising your hand. Shy? Nervous? Me too. Participation is more difficult for some of us than others, but writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than
others. And all of these are skills we must work on. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together—just as we would on any other aspect of the class that you find difficult.

Attendance/participation will count for 25% of your grade. There will be a .2 reduction in your overall participation grade for each day missed without a medical excuse.

Office hours: I will hold regular office hours from 3:00-5:00pm on Wednesdays and 9:00-11:00 am on Fridays (EST). You can schedule an appointment with me at rhasan1.youcanbook.me. I have it set up so that you can schedule up to 2 weeks in advance. Please do not schedule more than one meeting with per week unless we’ve made prior arrangements.

Everyone is required to meet with me at least once this term. Though I do hope you schedule an office hours appointment with me more often! Just a few minutes of one-on-one discussion can often help clarify a lot of issues. Please don’t feel as if you have to have something brilliant to say (or, alternatively, some burning problem or question) to come and talk to me; feel free to come without any real agenda at all. You are not intruding by coming by.

Can we meet outside office hours? If you can’t make my office hours because of a class or work conflict, or if all the spots are full, then by all means send me an email with a list of regular times when you are free to meet during the week, and we will try to find an alternative.

6. Reading
This is a course about making, analyzing, and evaluating arguments. All of the readings are extremely dense and written in outdated language. Leave yourself ample time to complete the readings.

Take the reading process seriously: read actively, doing your best to think about, and respond to, the works you are reading. Active annotation (e.g., underlining, tabbing, note-taking) will help you track down important passages when you come back to them later, such as in class or when writing a paper.

Although philosophy is not best read from a computer screen, this may be your only option. You will have a very hard time comprehending the readings if you are also checking email, reading the news, chatting with friends, etc.

Some reading advice: 1. When I give you reading response questions, use these to help focus your attention on what is most important. 2. If you encounter a passage that you don’t understand, re-read it a few times. If you still don’t understand it, pass over it! Try to get a sense of the whole instead of getting lost in the part. 3. Jot down any questions or confusions you have about any particular passage or argument and raise them in class. (Note: if you’re nervous about speaking up in class, having a prewritten question on hand can help.) 4. Skim over the reading again after class discussion. It should be much easier to understand at this point. 5. If you’re still unclear about something, get help: ask other classmates, schedule office hours, etc.

7. Weekly Reading Responses
10 times this semester you will be given a short response assignment on the week’s readings. The assignment will be posted to Moodle no later than Sunday @ 9pm. Your 200-250 word response (~1 page, double-spaced, 12 pt. font) should be organized like a mini-essay. In other words, there should be a central claim, distinct paragraphs with topic sentences, etc. You must post the completed response before Tuesday’s class (sometimes Thursday’s, as noted in the reading schedule).

At the beginning of the semester, I will provide written comments on your first three responses and let you know what grade they would receive. However, these are only provisional grades. At the end of the semester you will pick your 6 best responses, revise them with respect both to content and writing, and turn them in as your Weekly Response Final. Since you will not receive written comments past the first three assignments, if
you want to know how you are doing you should schedule an office hours meeting with me. There, we will work through your writing together. However, I will always briefly look over your responses. If you are not putting forth your best effort, this will adversely affect your class participation grade. Putting forth your best effort does not mean providing the “right” answer. Rather, it involves your: 1. engaging with the text; 2. explaining rather than merely summarizing, and 3. organizing your response in a clear manner (e.g., paragraphs, topic sentences, etc.)!

8. Essays

When will my paper be graded? I aim to return papers within two weeks of the date they were submitted. I realize it’s hard to wait, but it’s also hard to grade. I want to give your work the care and attention it deserves.

Can I send you a draft to read? I’m happy to help you on your paper, but I don’t read drafts. Feel free to schedule office hours with questions, an outline, an argument you’re considering, etc. We can talk through your ideas and questions. Don’t forget also that you can visit the Writing Center with drafts. This is a great resource. To schedule an appointment, visit https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/support/writingcenter/makeappointment

What sources should I use for writing my paper? You do not need to read any additional material beyond the readings on the syllabus—and I don’t encourage it. However, if you do consult outside sources, you must remember to always cite your sources.

As for my expectations on writing, David Foster Wallace put it well in his own syllabus:

“If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you’re used to whipping off papers the night before they’re due, running them quickly through the computer’s Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them “because the ideas are good” or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one’s ideas and the quality of those ideas’ verbal expression, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won’t or can’t devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.”

9. Grading

You will be given both a number grade and a letter grade for each assignment. Only the numerical grade is taken into account in determining your final grade. Numerical grades correspond to letter grades as follows: A 10-9.5; A- 9.4-9.0; B+ 8.9-8.7; B 8.6-8.3; B- 8.2-8.0; C 7.9 or below

10. Online Etiquette

Zoom etiquette: While in class, you should not be consulting any other electronic device or any other software on your computer. Make sure that your camera is turned on and that your microphone is turned off until you are called on. Stay focused. Stay engaged. Make sure you are well lit (not backlit). Avoid distracting backgrounds, eating, etc.

You’ll be expected to join in the discussion, not keep a written record of everything that is said. I’ll often provide handouts that summarize the main points. So you don’t need to take excessive notes.

11. Accommodations
This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should make an appointment to speak with an Accessibility Services Staff Member. In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the Office of Accessibility Services at Amherst College (even if you are a 5-College student) ([https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services](https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services)). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss how to accommodate you.

12. Summary of Requirements

1. Don’t plagiarize.
2. Do all required readings.
3. Do 10 reading responses. Post them by Tuesday’s (sometimes Thursday’s) class.
4. Don’t miss class without a legitimate excuse.
5. Participate in class discussion and weekly group meetings (be alert and responsive).
6. Write 2 1200-1400 word essays.
7. Turn in the Weekly Response Final at the end of the semester.

Reading Schedule

*Note: This schedule is not a contract. It is entirely provisional. We may speed up, slow down, skip readings, or add readings, depending on where our discussion leads and the interests of members of the class.*

Kant: Morality as Freedom

**Week 1:** Reason and Duty

Tu 2/16 Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784)

Th 2/18 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), 4:393-4:398 (pp. 9-13)

*Optional: Christine Korsgaard, “Introduction” (pp. ix-xxxvi)*

**Week 2:** Humanity and Autonomy

Tu 2/23 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:398-4:405 (pp. 13-20); RR#1 Due

Th 2/25 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:406-4:431 (pp. 21-43); 4:387-4:392 (pp. 3-8)

*Optional: David Velleman, “A Brief Introduction to Kantian Ethics”*

**Week 3:** The Metaphysics of Freedom

Tu 3/2 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:446-4:453 (pp. 56-62); RR#2 Due

Th 3/4 Kant, *Groundwork*, 4:453-4:463 (pp. 62-72)

*Optional: Korsgaard, “Morality as Freedom”

Hegel: The Social Conditions of Freedom
Week 4:  Social Freedom
Tu 3/9  Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), Preface (pp. 9-23); RR#3 Due
Meeting group #1
Th 3/11  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Introduction, §§1-33 (pp. 25-64)
*Optional: Frederick Neuhauser, “Hegel’s Social Philosophy” and Michael Hardimon, “The
Project of Reconciliation: Hegel’s Social Philosophy”

Week 5:  Social Freedom (continued) & Critique of Kant
T 3/16  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Introduction, §§1-33 (pp. 25-64) (continued); RR#4 Due
Meeting group #2
Th 3/18  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§106-114; 133-135 (pp. 135-142, 161-163)
First Essay assigned
*Optional: Sally Sedgwick, “Hegel on the Empty Formalism of Kant’s Categorical
Imperative”

Week 6:  Abstract Right & Ethical Life: Property and the Family
T 3/23  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§34-53, 90-104 (pp. 67-84, 119-132); RR #5 Due
Meeting group #3
Th 3/25  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§142-163 (pp. 189-203)
*Optional: Allen Patten, *Hegel’s Idea of Freedom* (ch. 5)

Week 7:  Ethical Life: Economy and Civil Society
T 3/30  No class: work on your essay!
Th 4/1  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§182-208 (pp, 220-239)
*Optional: Michael Hardimon, “Role Obligations”
F 4/2  First Essay Due @ 5pm Eastern

Marx: The Material Conditions of Freedom

Week 8:  State & Revolution
T 4/6  Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§257-271 (pp. 275-304); RR#6 Due
Meeting Group #1
Th 4/8  Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) (pp. 157-186)
*Optional: John Rawls, “Lectures on Marx” I
**Week 9:**  
**Critique of Liberalism**  
Tu 4/13 Ludwig Feuerbach, “The Essence of Christianity” (1841) (excerpts); Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (1843) (pp. 1-26); **RR #7 Due**  
Meeting Group #2  

Th 4/15 Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (continued)  
*Optional: John Rawls, “Lectures on Marx” II & III*

**Week 10:**  
**Alienation**  
T 4/20 **No class: but if you want to read more Marx:** “Toward a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: An Introduction” (1843) (pp. 27-39)  

Th 4/22 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) (pp. 54-68)  
**Second Essay Assigned**  
*Optional: Allen Wood, Karl Marx (ch. 1-2)*

**Week 11:**  
**Alienation & Ideology**  
T 4/27 Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (pp. 68-79)  
Meeting Group #3  

Th 4/29 Marx, *The German Ideology* (1845) (pp. 102-129); **RR#8 Due**  
*Optional: Allen Wood, Karl Marx (ch. 3-4)*

**Douglass: Freedom as Emancipation**

**Week 12:**  
**The Sense of Freedom**  
T 5/4 Marx, *The German Ideology* (pp. 130-150); **RR #9 Due**  

Th 5/6 Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), pp. 9-80  

F 5/7 **Second Essay Due @ 5pm Eastern**  
*Optional: Allen Wood, Karl Marx (ch. 5)*

**Week 13:**  
**The Struggle for Recognition**  
T 5/11 Douglass, *My Bondage*, pp. 81-162 (pp. 150-162 are especially important)  

Th 5/13 Douglass, *My Bondage*, pp. 163-233; **RR #10 Due**  
*Optional: Bernard Boxill, “The Fight with Covey”*
**Week 14:** Rights

T 5/18  

*Optional: Philip Yaure, “Declaration in Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*”

**Finals Week**

F 5/28  
**Reading Response Final Due @ 5pm Eastern (no exceptions)**