

Critical Philosophy: Idealism from Kant to Hegel

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Course description

This course covers the critical philosophy of Kant and his successors, part of a movement in German philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that would come to be called German idealism. As with many other philosophical traditions, these thinkers were motivated by the problem of how to reconcile the nature of things as they are with our conscious experience of them. In attempting to solve this problem, they developed important theories of the structure of our experience, the understanding of which is essential to understanding later nineteenth century thought. We will mainly focus on the writings of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, although we will also engage with works by Hegel, Jacobi, Schulze, and Reinhold, as well as some contemporary secondary texts. Students taking this course should expect to gain a thorough background in late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth German philosophy, and should expect to improve their writing and critical thinking skills.

Required texts

- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. Paul Guyer and Alan Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Johann Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Hackett Publishing, 1987).
- F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (State University of New York Press, 2004).
- G. W. F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philos-*

ophy, eds. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (State University of New York, 1977).

Secondary texts, as well as selections from Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, will be provide online through the course website.

Assignments

You will be expected to complete the following assignments:

- One diagnostic 2-3 page writing assignment, due at the end of week three. You will be required to focus on a single passage, summarize it, and briefly raise a challenge to the point being made. The purpose of this assignment is to assess what skills you already have writing about philosophy and to determine how best to help you improve.
- Paragraph summaries: Starting on week four, you will be required to turn in one paragraph summary once per week. You'll need to focus on a single paragraph of one of the primary texts we read and summarize as clearly as you can. Don't focus on arguing with the text. Though this is a low-stakes assignment, you will be graded on the clarity of your writing and I will sometimes give feedback on your understanding of the texts.
- An in-class presentation. You'll be responsible for presenting a section of the texts to the class and providing discussion questions. You'll sign up for presentations in the second week of the class. Your presentations are expected to be between 20-30 minutes.
- Two papers, due at the mid-point and end of the course. Both papers may be no more than 3,000 words.

Grade breakdown

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|---------------------|-----|
| Diagnostic writing | 10% |
| Paragraph summaries | 20% |
| Presentation | 15% |
| Midterm paper | 25% |
| Final paper | 30% |

Email policy

I will make course announcements primarily via email. If you need to contact me, please email me from your university account. Do not try to message me on Canvas [or any other online learning platform], as I may not see it.

I will aim to reply to student emails within 48 hours of receiving them. If you email me and do not receive a reply within that period, please resend the email.

Extension policy

I may, at my discretion, grant extensions for assignments to students who ask for them, consistent with any relevant university policies. If you need an extension, email me at least 48 hours before the assignment is due. I may not respond to extension requests after that point. If I don't respond to your extension request, you're responsible for turning the assignment in on time.

Norms of respectful discourse

Since classroom discussion is a significant part of this class, you are expected to observe norms of respectful discussion. Your participation grade in class will be partially based on the extent to which you are a constructive and respectful participant.

Please read David Chalmers' summary of respectful discourse norms, available here: <http://consc.net/guidelines/>. Chalmers' list is intended for talks at academic conferences, where a speaker gives a prepared talk, followed by a moderated question and answer session. Since we won't normally have designated speakers or Q&A periods, some of Chalmers' guidelines won't be applicable to our class. But most will be.

Here are some norms I'd like to emphasize:

- Don't interrupt others.
- Don't use disrespectful body language (e.g.: don't roll your eyes or sigh loudly when people bring up points).
- Don't dominate conversation. If you've made several points, let others talk. If you're focused on an issue and the rest of the class seems ready to move on, consider dropping it or bringing it up in private with me or your fellow students.

- Don't be dismissive toward the comments of others. Instead of saying things like "that's crazy" or "your argument is logically absurd," consider saying things like: "But isn't this point a problem for that view?"
- Don't single people out on the basis of their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, or linguistic community.
- Avoid potentially offensive examples unless necessary to make cogent, on-topic points. Even in the course of making cogent, on-topic points, use discretion about sensitive matters that may reasonably offend someone. If you have a question about what this means, ask me.
- Listen to others and acknowledge what they have to say. If you make a point that's similar to what someone else has said, give them credit. (It's fine to point out if you think your point is slightly different, too.)
- If someone breaches a norm of respect, be polite about pointing it out to them. If it's still a problem, let me know. If someone tells you that you've behaved disrespectfully, don't dismiss what they say. At least consider the possibility that they may be right.

Academic honesty

If you *copy* text from another source, you must indicate that it is a quotation (by using quotation marks or by offsetting it as a block quote) and provide a citation for the source.

If you *paraphrase* text from another source (i.e, you summarize a passage or argument in your own words), you must provide a citation for the source.

If you *use an idea that someone else came up with*, you must provide a citation to credit them. This includes ideas others mention to you in personal conversation. For instance, if your friend Betty reads a draft of your paper and makes an objection you decide to respond to in the final version, you should write something like "I am indebted to Betty Jenkins for pressing me on this point" in a footnote.

If you fail to comply with the three above requirements, or if you're caught cheating on an in-class assignment, I may refer the incident to the university's disciplinary body. This could result in the university sanctioning you. (Consult relevant university policy regarding what constitutes cheating.)

You should also cite controversial or not-widely-known claims in your paper if you make them. Most claims based on recent academic research are either controversial, not widely known, or both. You don't need to cite uncontroversial, widely-known claims.

University policies

[Paste university-wide policies here.]

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to the course and historical antecedents; rousing you from your dogmatic slumber

- Appearance and reality: foundational problems in metaphysics and epistemology
- The analytic/synthetic distinction
- Hume's theory of ideas
- Our non-acquaintance with the hidden causal powers of objects
- General metaphysics (ontology) and special metaphysics (psychology, cosmology, and rational theology)
- *Readings:*
 - Christian Wolff, selections from *Preliminary Discourse on Philosophy in General* (course website)
 - David Hume, selections from *A Treatise of Human Nature* (course website)

Week 2: Introducing Kant's critical project

- Three questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for?
- The synthetic *a priori*
- Pure and empirical cognition
- The structure of the *Critique*
- *Readings:*
 - Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, introductions to both editions

Week 3: The Transcendental Aesthetic: Kant's doctrine of space and time

- Sensations and intuitions
- The ideality of space and time
- Intensive versus extensive magnitudes
- The relationship between the Transcendental Aesthetic and Newtonian physics/metaphysics

- *Readings:*

- Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Aesthetic (both editions)

Week 4: The Transcendental Analytic: The core of Kant's system

- Concepts and categories
- Kant's idea of judgment
- The list of the categories (where do they come from?)
- Apperception, the conditions of experience and judgment, and Kant's epigenesis of pure reason

- *Readings:*

- Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Analytic of Concepts (All three sections of chapter I, plus the B deduction)

Week 5: Kant on cosmology in the Transcendental Dialectic

- The antinomies of pure reason
- On the interest of reason
- Regulative principles of reason
- The search for the unconditioned
- *Readings:*
 - Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Antimony of Pure Reason," sect. 1-3 & 9.

Week 6: Jacobi and Schulze as critics of Kant

- The problem of the thing-in-itself
- Can we read Kant as having vindicated skepticism?
- *Readings:*
 - selections from Jacobi, appendix to *Hume on Faith* (course website)
 - Schulze, selections from *Aenesidemus*

Week 7: Introducing post-Kantian philosophy, and Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*

- The “Spinozism of Freedom”
- Fichte’s idealist interpretation of Kant
- The structure and textual history of the *Wissenschaftslehre*
- *Readings:*
 - selections from Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel* (online)
 - Fichte, introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* (online)

Week 8: Fichte’s *The Vocation of Man* (1)

- The literary genre of the *Vocation*
- Fichte’s response to skepticism
- The Absolute *I*
- Fichte and Kant
- *Readings:*
 - Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, books I & II (“Doubt” and “Knowledge”)

Week 9: Fichte’s *Vocation* (2)

- Is faith the basis of knowledge?
- Fichte and Jacobi
- *Readings:*
 - Fichte, *Vocation*, book III (“Faith”)

Week 10: Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* (1)

- What is the philosophy of nature?
- Schelling and the unconditioned
- Schelling’s relationship to Spinozism
- The correspondence of nature to our ways of categorizing it
- Schelling’s concept of “organism”
- *Readings:*

- Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, Div. 1-2 (selections)

Week 11: Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* (2)

- Schelling and chemistry
- Appraisal: 19th century science and speculative philosophy
- *Readings:*
 - Schelling, *First Outline*, div. 3 (selections)

Week 12: Hegel on philosophy in general, and on Fichte

- The continuity between philosophy and culture
- Identity and predication
- Hegel's deployment of his identity argument against Fichte
 - Hegel, *Differenzschrift*, chs. 1 & 2

Week 13: Hegel on Schelling

- Freedom and nature
- Summing up the course
- *Readings:*
 - Hegel, *Differenzschrift*, ch. 3.