Kant and His Legacy

**Code and section:** PHIL\*3100\*01

**Term:** Winter 2024

# **Method of Delivery:**

This course will meet in-person, twice per week.

# **Course Synopsis:**

Notice what a remarkable kind of thing the human being is: we have developed the study of nature to the point that we now harness its intrinsic powers to re-design the world around us into heated houses, airplanes, hand-held computers and atomic bombs; we grapple with interpersonal issues of morality and with cultural issues of global justice; and we struggle with difficult personal questions of how to make life meaningful. In all of these ways, we appear to be quite different from any other kind of being with which we are familiar. Kant’s philosophy is based on the idea that it is these distinctive features of human being that need to be understood, and, through his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he developed a revolutionary science of the distinctive world of human experience. We will begin the first half of our class with a study of Hume’s profound insight into this same domain from his *Treatise of Human Nature*, that the meanings we encounter *in our experience* cannot be explained by the causal forces that explain the things that happen *in the natural world*. From there, we will turn to a technical study of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* to analyze carefully *the unique fabric of human experience*, learning thereby what kinds of meanings are available to us and what kinds of issues we necessarily grapple with in our lives. Kant’s work put philosophy—and our general understanding of our own existence—on a new footing, and in the second half of the course, we will read Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Genealogy of Morals* to introduce the Existentialist movement that demonstrated the profound implications of this new understanding of human existence for life.

This is an advanced course in philosophy, not an introduction, so you should come with some background already in the discipline. This is because Kant is basically answering some deep questions and you cannot meaningfully engage with his answers if you have not already spent time appreciating and digesting the questions. This course requires you to do demanding reading, *to which you must devote significant time outside of class*, (which means, among other things, that you need to get all the books assigned), and it requires you to come to the class meetings prepared to talk though specific passages in the texts, (so you need to be there, with your books). It will also require you to make formal, in-class presentations and to complete written assignments that require you to explain fully and accurately both the technical details and the implications of the readings, and also to express your own, considered assessment of those arguments. You should not take this course if you are not prepared to do those things.

# **Required Textbooks:**

Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, (Broadview)

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (Cambridge)

Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (Broadview)

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (Vintage/Random House)

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, (Vintage/Random House)

# **Disclaimer:**

*\* Please note: This is a preliminary web course outline only. The Philosophy Department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.*