

Hume, Kant, & Nietzsche

Wednesday, January 18 **OVERVIEW**

This class is about the moral philosophies of David Hume (1711-1776), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Today's session will introduce the major themes for the course.

David Hume

Monday, January 23 **HUME ON RELIGIOUS ETHICS**

Here is a common thought: morality must be based on divine commands because without the fear of eternal punishment, there would be no reason to behave morally. Hume argues that we know very little about divine justice and that morality can be sustained without fear of God.¹

Wednesday, January 25 **HUME ON FREE WILL**

Hume is a compatibilist, meaning that he holds that freedom is compatible with determinism or, to put it another way, we can be held responsible for our actions even if they are caused by factors out of our control. One of his arguments that we will pay special attention to is his claim that we hold people responsible for their actions only when they are in character; the suggestion is that the psychological elements that make up our character cause us to behave in the ways that we do. This will be important for his moral theory.²

¹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *The Complete Works and Correspondence of David Hume: Electronic Edition*, ed. Mark C. Rooks (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1995), sect. 11, "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State."

² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in *The Complete Works and Correspondence of David Hume: Electronic Edition*, ed. Mark C. Rooks (1740; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1995), 2.3.1-2.

Monday, January 30

HUME ON REASON AND THE WILL

One of Hume's arguments for his compatibilist position on free will is that human behavior is largely uniform; that suggests it is caused since it would be quite a coincidence if everyone made similar decisions by chance. There is a hole in the argument: maybe people behave in similar ways because it is rational for them to do so. In this section, Hume famously maintains that reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions. Does that mean that your actions cannot be irrational? Read *Treatise*, 2.3.3.

Wednesday, February 1

HUME ON REASON AND MORALITY

Hume argues that morality is based on feelings (which he calls "sentiments," "moral sense," or "passions") rather than reason. Read *Treatise*, 3.3.1-2.

Monday, February 6

THE ARTIFICIAL VIRTUES

Hume divides morality into what he calls artificial virtues and natural virtues. He believes that morality is concerned with motivation. But some motivations are morally valuable only because of their role in human conventions while others are valuable naturally, that is, apart from conventions. In this section, he lays out his understanding of morality and the problem that the theory of the artificial virtues is supposed to solve. Read *Treatise*, 3.2.1.

Wednesday, February 8

HUME ON CONVENTIONS

Hume's theory of conventions is meant to explain the artificial virtue of justice. In this section Hume describes the conventional origins of rules governing property, which he takes to be central to justice. A convention is established when different people coordinate their behavior for self-interested reasons. Pay special attention to the examples of the rowboat and language in paragraph 10: everyone's self-interest will lead them to use the same words and follow the same grammatical rules without any outside intervention. Because conventions are valuable, the self-interested motivations for complying with them count as morally virtuous behavior. Read *Treatise*, 3.2.2.

Monday, February 13

HUME ON PROMISES

Hume's discussion of property was directed at social contract theorists, such as Thomas Hobbes, who believed that property is established by a social contract. Here, Hume argues that promises have a conventional basis too. If he is right, he will have identified the fundamental source of two aspects of justice: property and promises. Read *Treatise*, 3.2.5.

Wednesday, February 15

CRITICISM OF HUME ON PROMISES

Thomas Scanlon criticizes Hume's conventionalist theory of promises. He believes that the obligation to obey a promise only makes sense if it is derived from moral principles that are independent of human conventions. Read Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, chap. 7. You can stop reading on page 309; we will not discuss the whole chapter.³

Monday, February 20

DEFENSE OF HUME ON PROMISES

John Deigh disputes Scanlon's criticisms of Hume. Deigh is particularly concerned with rules governing promises and dishonesty in war. He thinks that Hume has the correct understanding of these while Scanlon does not. Read Deigh, "Promises Under Fire," beginning on page 490; we will not discuss the whole essay.⁴

Wednesday, February 22

HUME ON THE NATURAL VIRTUES

The natural virtues make up the other half of Hume's moral theory. These are motivations that are good without any human conventions. Hume maintains that the natural virtues fall into four categories. They are traits that are either (a) immediately agreeable or (b) useful to either (i) the person who has them or (ii) others. He gives an abstract account of the natural virtues in *Treatise* 3.3.1 and illustrates it with discussions of different examples in the subsequent three sections. Everyone will read 3.3.1 and we will split up the remaining sections, with one-third of the class taking each of the examples. Read *Treatise*, 3.3.1 and one of 3.3.2-3.3.4.

³ Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 7.

⁴ John Deigh, "Promises Under Fire," *Ethics* 112 (2002): 483-506.

Monday, February 27

HUME ON RELATIVISM

Hume uses his theory of the natural virtues to analyze cultural relativism. The reading was published at the end of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* as “A Dialogue.”⁵

Wednesday, March 1

HUME AND UTILITARIANISM

Hume emphasizes the importance of utility in moral evaluations. While he influenced utilitarianism, he was not a utilitarian himself. To bring this out, we will look at how a real utilitarian, Peter Singer, discusses a moral problem. What would Hume say about Singer’s arguments?⁶

Immanuel Kant

Monday, March 6

KANT’S PROJECT

Kant explains the starting point of his moral philosophy: the good will. Read the Preface and Section 1 of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 43-60, Ak 4:387-405.⁷

Wednesday, March 8

WHAT IS THE MOTIVE OF DUTY?

The good will is one that is governed by what Kant calls the motive of duty. Barbara Herman explains what Kant means by that.⁸

Monday, March 20

KANT ON REASON

Kant means something different than Hume did by terms like “reason” and “the will.” So we had better figure out what that is! Read the beginning of Section II of the *Groundwork*, 61-72, Ak 4:406-419.

⁵ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, in *The Complete Works and Correspondence of David Hume: Electronic Edition*, ed. Mark C. Rooks (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 1995).

⁶ Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1 (1972): 229-43.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (1785; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The Ak numbers refer to the volume and pages in the Akademie edition of Kant’s work. This is a standard pagination that should be shared by any edition, not just the particular one I chose. You will typically see these numbers in the margins of an edition.

⁸ Barbara Herman, “On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty,” *Philosophical Review* 90 (1981): 359-82.

Wednesday, March 22

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Kant offers three formulations of what he calls the categorical imperative or “law of morality.” The first is called the formula of the universal law or formula of a law of nature. The idea is that your motive (or “maxim”) is morally acceptable only if you could “will that it become a universal law.” He gives several examples to illustrate what he means. Roughly, it is that you could still achieve your aims even if everyone else’s maxims of action were similar to yours. For example, if everyone thinks it is OK to lie, then my telling a lie will be ineffective because no one will believe what I say. Read *Groundwork*, 71-76, Ak 4:419-425.

Monday, March 27

DISCUSSION OF KANT’S CASES

Kant’s examples have drawn quite a lot of criticism: many people do not see that immoral actions would have to involve a contradiction, for instance. Allison reviews some of the most prominent objections made against the examples.⁹

Wednesday, March 29

THE CATEGORIAL IMPERATIVE AGAIN

Kant give three formulations of the Categorical Imperative. Despite appearances, he claims they all amount to the same thing. Today, we will talk about the second and third formulations. Read the rest of Section II, *Groundwork*, 76-93, Ak 4:425-4:445.

Monday, April 3

KANT ON FREE WILL

Kant maintains that we are only free when we do what morality requires. In addition to sounding at least mildly paradoxical, this raises a problem. Can anyone be responsible for immoral behavior? Read *Groundwork*, Section III, 94-108, Ak 4:446-4:463.

Wednesday, April 5

A KANTIAN APPROACH TO FAMINE

Earlier, we asked what Hume would say about famine relief. Today, we will look at what a Kantian moral theory would say. Read Onora

⁹ Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 7.

O'Neill, "The Moral Perplexities of Famine Relief," 285-94; we will only discuss sections 22-29.¹⁰

Monday, April 10

KANT ON RELIGION AND MORALITY

Kant had a complex view of the relationship between religion and morality. On the one hand, he thought that morality was independent of the will of God. Rational beings can determine their duty on their own, without consulting a higher being. On the other hand, he thought that there were some respects in which morality depends on God. Reading will be announced later.

Wednesday, April 12

CRITICISM OF KANT

Bernard Williams criticizes Kant's treatment of religious ethics and also his emphasis on the motive of duty. Read Williams, "God, Morality, and Prudence."¹¹

Friedrich Nietzsche

Monday, April 17

NIETZSCHE ON GOOD AND BAD

Nietzsche has a distinctive way of doing moral philosophy that he calls genealogy. It is closer to Hume's method than Kant's, but it relies more on history than psychology. In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche applies this method to three topics. The first is what makes a person virtuous or good. Read *On the Genealogy of Morals*, preface and treatise, pp. 1-33.¹²

Wednesday, April 19

NIETZSCHE ON DUTY

Nietzsche uses his genealogical method on a second set of moral concepts surrounding duty. Read the Second Treatise; *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 35-66.

¹⁰ Onora O'Neill, "The Moral Perplexities of Famine Relief," in *Matters of Life and Death*, ed. Tom Regan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 260-98.

¹¹ Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Maudmarie Clark and Alan J. Swenson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998).

Monday, April 24

NIETZSCHE ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

In the third leg of his study of morality, Nietzsche gives a genealogy of our understanding of what gives meaning and value to our lives. Read the Third Treatise; *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 67-118.

Wednesday, April 26

CRITICISM OF NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche is not just an analyst of morality; he is also a critic. Philippa Foot argues that his criticisms of morality fall flat. Read Foot, "On Nietzsche's Immoralism."¹³

Monday, May 1

A DEFENSE OF NIETZSCHE

Maudmarie Clark replies to Foot, maintaining that Nietzsche offers significant criticisms of morality. Read Clark, "Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality."¹⁴

Wednesday, May 3

WRAP UP

We will take the last day to compare and contrast our authors and take a class picture.

MATERIALS

Readings will be available in the resources section of the Sakai site for this class. You will also find notes on each class session there.

GOALS

We will discuss the moral philosophies of David Hume (1711-1776), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). These thinkers agree that

¹³ Philippa Foot, "On Nietzsche's Immoralism," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's on the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 3-14.

¹⁴ Maudmarie Clark, "Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality," in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche's on the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 15-34.

our motives are the primary focus of morality but they disagree about what those motives are. The fundamental moral motivation according to Hume is sympathy for others while Kant maintains it is respect for the law. Nietzsche accepts some parts of each of the other thinker's views but takes a much darker view of morality. These are some of the questions that these philosophers address. Is a good person someone who cares about others or someone who does the right thing regardless of how he or she feels? Does morality require free will? Is morality conventional? Can we make sense of morality without God? Is morality valuable?

The materials make heavy demands on their readers' analytical and interpretive skills. Our discussions and writing assignments will focus on the arguments in these works. That is where your analytical skills will come into play. Since we are reading works from different periods in history, we will also have to work hard at interpreting material that is written in ways that are unfamiliar and that reflects the concerns of different kinds of societies.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on three 5-7 page papers.

INSTRUCTOR

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are TBA; any changes will be posted on the Sakai site. My office phone number is 607-0906 and my email address is available through the Sakai site.

GRADING POLICIES

I am committed to seeing that my students are able to do very high quality work and that high quality work will be recognized. I do not employ a curve and there is nothing competitive about grading in my courses.

Grades apply to papers, not to people. They have no bearing on whether I like or respect you. Nor do they measure improvement or hard work: one may put a lot of

effort into trying to make a bad idea work or produce a very good paper with ease. Grades communicate where written work stands on as objective a scale as we can devise. That is all that they involve, so do not make too much of them.

GRADE CALCULATIONS

Table 1 gives Pomona College's four point scale. Table 2 shows how numerical averages will be converted to final letter grades. In a nutshell, the average has to be greater than halfway between two grades in order to get the higher grade.

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Number Grade</i>	<i>Lowest Number</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Highest Number</i>
A	4.00	3.835 <	A	≤ 4.000
A-	3.67	3.500 <	A-	≤ 3.835
B+	3.33	3.165 <	B+	≤ 3.500
B	3.00	2.835 <	B	≤ 3.165
B-	2.67	2.500 <	B-	≤ 2.835
C+	2.33	2.165 <	C+	≤ 2.500
C	2.00	1.835 <	C	≤ 2.165
C-	1.67	1.500 <	C-	≤ 1.835
D+	1.33	1.165 <	D+	≤ 1.500
D	1.00	0.835 <	D	≤ 1.165
D-	0.67	0.335 <	D-	≤ 0.835
F	0.00	0.000 ≤	F	≤ 0.335

Table 1 Point Scale

Table 2 Numerical Thresholds

WHAT THE GRADES MEAN

The grade of A is given to work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. A papers are exceptional.

The grade of B is given to work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. B papers are very good and there is less of a difference between A and B work than you might think. Generally speaking, B papers are less innovative than A papers. This may be because the paper is less ambitious or because it is not fully successful.

The grade of C is given to work that has problems with accuracy, reasoning, or quality of writing. The grade of C means that the paper has significant problems but is otherwise acceptable.

The grade of D is given to work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. Note that a paper that is fine on its own may nonetheless be irrelevant. A paper is not relevant to my evaluation of work for this particular course if it does not address the question asked or if it does not display knowledge of our discussions. This sometimes trips up those taking a course pass/no credit.

The grade of F is given to work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

WRITING HELP

I should be your primary resource for help with your papers. That is my job! That said, talking about academics with your peers is an extremely valuable part of the college experience. So I highly recommend discussing your papers with other members of the class.

In addition, there are some very good options outside the class. To begin with, the Philosophy Department has arranged for experienced philosophy student to work as what it calls writing mentors. There will be an announcement about this program early in the term. In addition, the College's Writing Center offers free one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process. You can make appointments through the Portal (look for "Writing Center" under "Academics") or by email (writing.center@pomona.edu).

LATE PAPERS AND ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Late papers will be accepted without question. They will be penalized at the rate of 0.083 points per day, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual is genuinely extremely unusual.

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please speak with me and the associate dean in charge of disability in the Dean of Students office. This is never a problem, but it is best taken care of in advance.

