



OPGDI – BNU Philosophy Tutorial Programme 2021

Kant's Moral Philosophy

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Dear Bowen He and Jiaming Lu,

Welcome to the OPGDI – BNU Philosophy Tutorial Programme. Please find below some background information in preparation for your upcoming tutorials.

The structure of the programme is as follows:

Length: 9 weeks

Format: Week 0: Introduction to the Programme, Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Oxford Tutorials and a Session on Academic Writing.

Afterwards eight one-hour tutorials occurring online on a weekly basis.

Extra: 2 compulsory academic assistance sessions and 2 non-compulsory academic assistance sessions throughout the course to provide extra help and guidance on your learning journey.

Syllabus Overview:

These tutorials introduce the students to the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. The focus will be on the philosophical structure and merits of Kant's arguments and concepts, including the concepts of a free will, autonomy, freedom, duty, the moral law and the motive of duty. Attention will also be given to the question about the extent to which Kant's moral philosophy is still relevant in the 21st century, and particularly in relation to Kant's conception of human dignity and how it bears on certain practical issues such as biomedical developments. Texts studied will include selections from his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, as well as other work including his *Metaphysics of Morals*. For each week, in addition to the Kant text, there will be at least one paper or chapter by Kant's contemporaries that expound Kant's ideas. The tutor will also be committed to providing any required support to students in their learning of this topics, including feedback on their essays.



Course Assignments:

Evaluations will consist equally of:

- 1) Two essays (approximately 1500-2000 words each).
- 2) Weekly assignments, answers to which will be shared in the tutorial (set in advance).
- 3) Participation in tutorial discussions.

Your course will start on Tuesday 2nd March

17:00 China Time: Introduction to the Programme

17:45 China Time: Introduction to Philosophy

19:00 China Time: Introduction to Oxford Tutorials

20:15 China Time: Academic Writing

Please follow this link for all the session of the day:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8356740108>

Course Topics:

Week 1: Introduction to Kant's Deontological Approach to Ethics – Thursday 11th March

Brief description: The aim of this tutorial is to introduce the students to Kant's key concepts including the concepts of a good will, the right and the good, freedom, the moral law and moral motivation.

Essential Reading:

It will focus on

- Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Ch. 1, Ch. 2),
- will also include a contemporary reading: *Kant, Duty and Moral Worth*, by Philip Stratton-Lake (Routledge 2000).

Suggested essay topic/question: What is a good will according to Kant?

Week 2: Kant's Categorical Imperatives, Rationality, and Morality – Thursday 18th March

Brief description: This tutorial will examine Kant's Categorical Imperatives and his understanding of morality and rationality.

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Essential Reading:

- In addition to Groundwork (Ch 2) the tutorial will make references to selected passages from *The Critique of Practical Reason*, and *The Metaphysics of Morals*, engaging also with the secondary sources: Philippa Foot, 'Morality As a System of Hypothetical Imperatives,' *Philosophical Review* v. 84 (1972), pp. 305-316

Suggested essay topic/question: Kant argued that we are free when we are not influenced by anything sensual (feelings, desires, opinion of others, etc.) and when we act upon the categorical imperative out of (for the sake of) duty. Discuss.

Week 3: Kant's Conception of 'the Dignity of Humanity' (*Menscheit*) – Thursday 25th March

Brief description: This tutorial will focus on Kant's conception of human dignity which according to Kant originates within the moral law, and which requires a recognition of our absolute, intrinsic worth as rational agents.

Essential Reading:

- In addition to Kant's core texts, the tutorial will engage with the secondary reading: *Kant on Human Dignity* by Susan Shell (This is a chapter within the book *In Defense of Human Dignity: Essays for our Times* by Kraynak, Robert P., and Tinder, Glenn E. University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

Suggested essay topic/question: How do you understand Kant's conception of human dignity?

Week 4: Moral Motivation in Kant – Thursday 1st April

Brief description: The aim of this tutorial is bring together the ideas of freedom, dignity, moral law, good will and autonomy in the context of Kantian ethics by examining Kant's account of moral motive, which, according to Kant is a moral feeling, or the feeling of respect for human dignity. Page | 4

Essential Reading:

- In addition to the Kant's original work, we will also discuss a contemporary text: Herman, B. (1981). *On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty*. *The Philosophical Review*, 90 (3).

Suggested essay topic/question: What is a moral feeling according to Kant?

Week 5: Kant's Moral Egalitarianism (Roger Sullivan) – Thursday 8th April

Brief description: According to Roger Sullivan, Kant's account of human dignity, while embedded in freedom, expresses a protest against distinctions – whether religious, political, economic or social. Hence Kant's ethics is an ethics of the people, of moral egalitarianism. This tutorial will focus on Sullivan's interpretation of Kant's account of dignity. We will ask whether this particular perspective can help us shed light on Kant's conceptual landscape and his ethics in particular.

Essential Reading:

- In addition to Kant's original work the reading for this week will be selected sections from Sullivan, Roger J., *Immanuel Kant's moral theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Suggested essay topic/question: Why does Sullivan think that Kant's ethics is a kind of moral egalitarianism?

Week 6: Kant and Hume on Action and Moral Motivation – Thursday 15th April

Brief description: This tutorial will engage the students with a comparative critical analysis by considering the differences between Kant's and Hume's conceptions of action and moral motivation.

Essential Reading:

- In addition to Kant's Groundwork, the required reading is a selected section from Hume, D. (1978). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. (original work published 1739-40), as well as Korsgaard, C. (2009). *Natural Motives and the Motive of Duty: Hume and Kant on Our Duties to Others*. *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 1(2): 9-36.

Suggested essay topic/question: Suggested essay topic/question: Kant and Hume operated with radically different conceptions of action and moral motivation. How do you understand the differences between their views?

Week 7: Virtue, Duty, and Happiness – Thursday 22nd April

Brief description: This tutorial will cover Kant's Doctrine of Virtue and how it differs from a typically Aristotelian ideas about virtue, duty, freedom and happiness.

Essential Reading:

- The set text for this week will be *The Metaphysics of Morals*, focusing on (6:211-214 and 6:379-394). The secondary reading will include selected sections from Stephen Engstrom's *Aristotle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty* (Cambridge University Press 1998).

Suggested essay topic/question: Kant describes virtue as 'the moral strength of a human being's will in fulfilling his duty' (MM 6:405). Do you agree with Kant?

Week 8: Contemporary Issues – Thursday 29th April

Brief description: This tutorial will cover a Kantian approach to bioethics, animal rights and climate change.

Essential Reading:

- The required reading is *The Metaphysics of Morals and Groundwork* (4: 428-430). We will also further engage with contemporary interpretations and related issues, and in particular with Susan Shell's 'Kant's Concept of Human Dignity as a Resource for Bioethics', in Adam Schulman (ed.) *Human Dignity and Bioethics* (President's Council on Bioethics 2008).

Suggested essay topic/question: Kant claims that animals have value only insofar as they serve human purposes. Discuss.



Tutorial schedule:

Date	Time	China Time	Zoom Link
Thurs 11 th Mar	8:30-9:30	16:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 18 th Mar	8:30-9:30	16:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 25 th Mar	8:30-9:30	16:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 1 st Apr	8:30-9:30	15:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 8 th Apr	8:30-9:30	15:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 15 th Apr	8:30-9:30	15:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 22 nd Apr	8:30-9:30	15:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515
Thurs 29 th Apr	8:30-9:30	15:30	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83786581515

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Please make sure that your internet connection is of adequate speed. Be on time, in a place where you can listen and talk freely.

Also, please have your **video camera and microphone on** as you will need to actively participate and discuss in the tutorial sessions.

If you have any queries please contact the OPGDI via WeChat or Ms Georgina Thomas at opp@regents.oxa.ac.uk.

We wish you every success! Enjoy the Tutorial Programme!

OPGDI Team
Regent's Park College, Oxford