

KANT II: KANT'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 4182/6182 | GRMN 5520

Fall 2023

I. Seminar Description

Immanuel Kant's political works, most notably his *Doctrine of Right* (1797), promise us a powerful and systematic normative political theory. From the foundational claim that each individual has an innate right to freedom, Kant sets out to answer most if not all of the questions that have long busied social and political philosophers: When is political authority legitimate? Is private property justified? Is criminal punishment justified? Is inequality ever consistent with justice, and if so, under what conditions? Does the state have the authority to tax its citizens? Do principles of justice hold only intranationally, or do they hold internationally and transnationally as well? Is revolution ever permissible?

For many years, however, the potential of Kant's political works remained largely untapped. It is true that one of the most fruitful research projects in the social sciences—Democratic Peace Theory—owed its inception to what was hitherto Kant's best-known work in political theory, *Towards Perpetual Peace* (1795). But his most complete statement of his political philosophy in the *Doctrine of Right* remained largely ignored. Theorists looking to Kant for guidance on normative political questions sought it elsewhere. Some found inspiration in Kant's moral philosophy, with its conception of autonomy and its idea of humanity as an end in itself. Others looked to less obvious sources for answers, such as Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

Starting sometime in the 1980s, the fate of Kant's political thought began to change. Careful exegetical work brought to light the likelihood that the published text of the *Doctrine of Right* was corrupt, and thus in need of interpretive reconstruction. Simultaneously, scholars inspired by John Rawls's Kantian approach in political philosophy began returning to the source itself. Since then, Kant's political philosophy has been experiencing a revival. In a series of ever more numerous articles and books, a new generation of interpreters has sought to understand, reconstruct, and defend Kant's political thinking on the basis of the *Doctrine of Right*. Among these, Arthur Ripstein's *Force and Freedom* is widely regarded as among the most authoritative interpretations.

Our aim in this seminar will be to try to understand what all the recent excitement has been about. We will work through Kant's texts by the guiding light of Ripstein's reconstruction (with help here and there from other interpreters as well) in order to develop an appreciation of Kant's distinctive approach to normative political questions. Our effort will be exegetical, but we also endeavor, with Ripstein's help, to gauge the plausibility of Kant's views by bringing them to bear on contemporary debates in political philosophy.

II. Seminar Objectives

Participants in this seminar will develop (1) the ability to work independently with Kant's texts; (2) a working knowledge of Kant's political philosophy and an understanding of some of the central debates among its interpreters; and (3) an appreciation for Kant's distinctive approach to normative political questions, and a sense of the contributions it could make to contemporary political thinking. Participants taking the seminar for credit will, in addition, (4) develop their critical and expository skills by carrying to fruition a significant writing project.

III. Teaching Method

In-person seminar activities, presentations, and structured discussion.

IV. Evaluation Method (*tentative*)

1. *Assignments* – Your grade will consist of the following components. *No extra credit will be offered in this seminar.*

Assignment		Value	Tentative length	Description/Comments
Attendance and participation		25%	-	Based on the frequency of your attendance, and on the quality and frequency of your participation during seminar.
Response papers		15%	400-500 words	A short, (almost) weekly paper responding to some significant interpretive or substantive issue raised by the assigned readings.
Discussion paper presentation and seminar leadership		15%	5 pages (~1250 words)	A discussion paper consists of a critical examination of views or arguments in the day's readings that is intended to spur our discussion of those readings. You will be tasked with both presenting your discussion paper and leading our discussion of the relevant readings during a portion of the seminar meeting.
Term paper	First draft	5%	At least 8 pages (~2000 words)	A paper on a political question that deals substantially with Kant's position on that question, or a scholarly paper on some disputed interpretive issue concerning Kant's political philosophy.
	Final draft	40%	12 to 15 pages (~3000-3750 words)	

V. Seminar Materials (*tentative*)

The required books for this seminar are:

Author	Title	Publisher and year	ISBN
Immanuel Kant (edited by Mary Gregor)	<i>Practical Philosophy</i>	Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999	978-0521654081
Arthur Ripstein	<i>Force and Freedom: Kant's Legal and Political Philosophy</i>	Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009	978-0674035065

They are available for purchase online and should be available at the Penn Bookstore. *An electronic version of Ripstein's book is available for free through the Penn Library.* Additional readings will be posted on Canvas, under Files>Readings.