**Syllabus for Phil 4198\***

**Proseminar: Kant and the Philosophy of History**

**R 6:10-8:00pm**

**\* lots of required boilerplate, but the important info is frontloaded**

# General Course Description

# It surprises us when we learn that Kant has a philosophy of history. The most well-known features of his

# thought – his emphasis on the a priori conditions of cognition, and his derivation of a moral law that holds

# with the strictest universality – seem to leave little room for a philosophical treatment of history. Doesn’t it

# exceed the limits of reason to speculate about the mechanisms governing historical change? If moral

# reason is the same everywhere and at all times, why is Kant confident we will put our reason to increasingly

# better use to create a future that avoids the evils of the past? Kant’s theory of history also sketches his

# natural history of the human species and the human races, and this we again struggle to reconcile with his

# broader corpus: How can Kant affirm a universal dignity in humanity and yet see all persons other than

# whites as lesser? Crucially, what do we make of the fact that Kant – arguably the most studied, influential

# moral thinker in Anglo-American and continental philosophy – developed a concept of race widely credited

# with underwriting contemporary racism, particularly as it relies on a pseudo-scientific theory of race to bolster white supremacy? We confront these questions in our seminar.

**About me**

My name is Laura Papish and you should feel very free to call me Laura. I’m an Associate Professor in the Philosophy Department and have been teaching at GW since 2013. My email is [LauraPapish@gwu.edu](mailto:LauraPapish@gwu.edu)) and my preferred pronouns are she, her, hers. My personal cell is 509-995-5074 and my office line is 202-994-4168.

Office Hours are Wednesdays, 4:00-5:00pm EST in Zoom. A link will be inserted each week in our Blackboard calendar. These office hours are reserved for our class. Since these are office hours for the entire class, please do not hesitate to contact me if you prefer a private appointment.

My goal this semester is to be as present and helpful to you as I can. Make an appointment with my whenever you need help—whether philosophical, academic, or personal. Email is often better for setting up appointments, but text or call me in any difficult situation or emergency. My person cell number is above and due to my own work-home-from situation being extremely difficult, I have been granted access to my office and you can sometimes reach me there as well.

**Rough overview of how this class works**

* Most weeks there are a bunch of short video lectures, and they are posted at least a couple weeks in advance so that you can work at your own pace. Other weeks we will have presentations.
* There are readings that you can complete either before or after viewing the video lectures. **All readings are already posted and free.**
* During our scheduled class time, we will meet to talk about the material in Zoom. Ideally, it’d be great to see you through video. But I understand that you may not always be able to turn your camera on.
* Meeting links for these synchronous sessions in Zoom will be inserted into our weekly Blackboard calendar for easy access. **Everything you ever need will be linked in Blackboard.**
* All class meetings will be recorded and made available on Blackboard.
* In general, my goal is to turn this class into something like a tutorial system. We meet chiefly in very small groups or one-on-one, and we spend all synchronous time in discussion as opposed to lecture.

**Evaluation**

**Participation:** Try to be as present and engaged as possible during our weekly discussion sections. Make appointments to chat one-on-one or in small groups. **10% of your grade, graded on a pass/no pass basis with a pass being the equivalent of an A.**

**Two presentations:** You will do two presentations for this class: one on a secondary source on our reading schedule and one on your final paper topic. I’ll leave it up to you whether you want to do your presentation synchronously or if you’d like to record yourself in advance. If you prefer, we can easily find a way for people to submit any questions in asynchronously and in advance, so as to relieve the pressure of responding on the spot or worrying about an internet connection. Each student gets to decide what is best. Each presentation is worth **15% of your final grade.**

**Final paper prospectus/bibliography:**  You’ll write a brief prospectus, about 1 double-spaced page, with an additional bibliography listing the primary and secondary sources you think you’ll be relying on for the final paper. The main object of this prospectus is to get some feedback about your paper topic while there is still some room to make rather dramatic adjustments, if wanted/needed. This is due Tuesday November 24 at 11:59pm and worth **5% of your grade, graded on a pass/no pass basis with a pass being the equivalent of an A.**

**Outline/five-ish page draft/optional meeting:** You’ll submit a full outline of your paper, along with about 5 pages of written material. You’re strongly encouraged to make sure those 5 pages include the introduction of the paper and – most importantly – your thesis. I’ll send you video comments and am happy to meet either to go over those comments or to review the revisions you’re thinking of making. This is due Saturday December 5 at 11:59pm, and while I will let you know, unofficially, the letter grade your writing would receive, **your official grade will be a on a pass/no pass basis with a pass being the equivalent of an A. Worth 15% of your final grade.**

**Final paper:** You will write a 15 (or so) page final paper engaging material from the class. The deadline for submission is December 19 at 11:59pm. **Worth 40% of your final grade.**

**Grades:** GW uses the following grading scale: A, 4.0; A−, 3.67; B+, 3.33; B, 3.0; B−, 2.67; C+, 2.33; C, 2.0; C−, 1.67;D+, 1.33; D, 1.0; D−, .67; F, 0. I use the 4.0 system for entering all grades on Blackboard. So if you get a pass on your final paper proposal, that’s equivalent to an A and so will be entered as a 4.0. If your article critique gets a B+. that will be entered as a 3.33. Please note that on papers I sometimes give “slash” grades, like a B/B+ (which would be entered as a 3.135). I do this when, e.g., the work isn’t strong enough to warrant a B+ but is still better than B work.

**Course schedule (all readings required unless noted with \*)**

Week 1: Introductions

Week 2: Kant’s theoretical philosophy

Readings:

*Critique of Pure Reason* (selections)

Week 3: Kant’s moral philosophy

Readings:

*What is Enlightenment?*

*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (selections)

Week 4: Kant on history and progress

Readings:

*Idea for a Universal History*

*Conjectural Beginning of Human History*

Kant’s review of Herder’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (selections with an editor’s introduction)

*Critique of Judgment* (selections)

Week 5: Kant on history and progress, cont’d

Readings:

*On the common saying: That may be correct in theory but it is of no use in practice* (selections)

*Toward Perpetual Peace* (selections)

*An old question raised again: Is the human race constantly progressing?*

*Metaphysics of Morals* (selections)

Week 6: Secondary scholarship on Kant’s theory of history

Readings:

R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (selections)

Presenter 1:

Arthur C. Danto, “Substantive and Analytical Philosophy of History”

Presenter 2:

Adam Cureton, “Reasonable Hope in Kant’s Ethics”

Presenter 3:

Steven Pinker video

\*John Gray, “Steven Pinker is wrong about violence and war” (Optional but good if you want to know more about Pinker)

Week 7: Rousseau against Kant

Readings:

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (selections); Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (selections)

\*Renata Mautner Wasserman, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Discourse of the Exotic”

(Optional but I’ll make reference to her in lecture a bit. She’s the only source I could find on the exoticist overtones of Rousseau’s the term “savage” in his political theory)

Week 8: Kant’s natural history, with an emphasis on his theory of race

Readings:

“Of the Different Human Races”. Please read the very helpful editor’s introduction.

“On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy.” Please read the very helpful editor’s introduction.

[**Content warning** starting this week until the end of the class: These next readings feature Kant’s racist remarks and/or attempts to explore how pervasively his racism infects his work. It can be disturbing material]

Week 9: Kant’s contemporaries as critics

Readings:

Georg Forster, “Something More About the Human Races” (please read the editor’s intro as well)

Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (selections)

Kant’s review of Herder’s *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (selections)

Week 10: Kant’s racism, part 1

Readings: David McCabe, “Kant was a racist. Now what?”

Presenter 4:

Thomas Hill and Bernard Boxill, “Kant on Race”

Presenter 5:

Week 11: Kant’s racism, part 2

Readings: Charles Mills, “Kant’s *Untermenschen*”

Presenter 6:

RobertBernasconi, “Will the real Kant please stand up”

Presenter 7:

Week 12: Kant’s racism

Lucy Allais: “Kant’s Racism”

Presenter: Presenter: 8

Mark Larrimore, “Antinomies of Race: Diversity and Destiny in Kant”

Presenter 9:

“Sublime Waste: Kant on the Destiny of the ‘Races’”

Presenter (10, if needed):

Week 13 (Thanksgiving week): No class!

Week 14: Paper presentations

Week 15: Paper presentations

**Some important course policies**

**Grades/feedback:** You can expect grades and comprehensive feedback on all assignments within two weeks of the assignment deadline.

**Missing work:** Please note that in order to receive a passing grade in this course (i.e., a D or higher), you must submit the final paper for this class.

**Late work:** Late work receives a letter grade deduction for each day it is late.

**Extensions:** Please try to request any extensions as far in advance as possible.

**Course Prerequisites:** Instructor permission or junior/senior philosophy major status.

**Navigating our course online:**

1. To get started, please view the sample of the daily/weekly calendar.
2. Minimum technology requirements for participation in the course: reliable internet, video camera, microphone, word processing software, Adobe.
3. This link will take you to different forms of student support (e.g., technical requirements and support, student services, obtaining a GWorld card, and state contact information): [online.gwu.edu/student-support](https://online.gwu.edu/student-support)
4. Please reach out if you would benefit from captioned videos or any other alternate form of media.

**Goals and Learning Outcomes:** By the end of this course, students will:

1. Be able to analyze, evaluate, and construct philosophical arguments.

2. Do independent research.

3. Gain facility with core debates in Kant’s philosophy of history.

**Some GW Policies**

**Average minimum amount of independent, out-of-class, learning expected per week:**

In a 15 week semester, including exam week, students are expected to spend a minimum of 100 minutes of out-of-class work for every credit hour. Our 3-credit course will include 2.5 hours of direct instruction and a *minimum* of 5 hours of independent learning or 7 hours of overall course commitment per week.

**University Policy on Religious Holidays:** Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.

**Academic Integrity:** I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html

**Support for Students Outside the Classroom:**

*Disability Support Services (DSS)* ***202-994-8250***

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/

*University Counseling Center (UCC)* ***202-994-5300***

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- Crisis and emergency mental health consultations

- Confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals

- Visit: htt[p://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices](http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel/CounselingServices/AcademicSupportServices/)

**Security:** In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.