

**Ethical Theory**  
Phil 330-01 – Spring 2009  
MWF 1:10-2:00 – Hendrix College

**J. Aaron Simmons, Ph.D.**

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**Course Description:**

This course will be a general introduction to the major writings in Western moral philosophy. We will consider both normative and metaethical questions by following a broadly historical trajectory of primary texts as follows: Aristotle, Epictetus, Mill, Kant, Nietzsche, MacIntyre. These texts will allow us to consider such ethical perspectives as deontology, virtue theory, stoicism, consequentialism, and existentialism. Throughout the semester we will also be reading supplementary essays in contemporary ethical theory by leading figures in analytic ethics: Shaw, Vallentyne, Norcross, Hursthouse, Driver, Kerstein, Blackburn, Audi, Lance and Little.

**Required Texts:**

- (1) Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*. Ed. Keith-Ansell Pearson. Cambridge, 2006.
- (2) Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Trans. Terrence Irwin. Hackett.
- (3) Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Ed. George Sher. Hackett, 2002.
- (4) Epictetus. *The Handbook*. Hackett, 1983.
- (5) MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*. Notre Dame, 1991.
- (6) Kant, Immanuel. *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge, 1997.
- (7) Dreier, James. *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*. Blackwell, 2006.

**Course Learning Objectives**

At the end of the course, the student will be able to . . .

- Be comfortable with selected major works in the history of moral philosophy
- Understand key debates in contemporary ethical theory
- Write clear and analytic essays in philosophy
- Appreciate the history of ethics as a subdiscipline of philosophical analysis

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

This class will be based on a 1000 point total. The breakdown is as follows:

**Exams** (250 points each = 500 total) – You will have both a midterm and a final. They will be entire essay format and the questions will be given out ahead of time. The midterm will be a take home and due on the date specified. The final will be taken during the scheduled final exam time.

**Papers** (250 points for the paper and 100 points for the defense = 350 total) – The papers will have two components. First, you will be split up into groups (of 2 or 3) and you will be responsible for producing a 1,500 word paper articulating (a) what the most promising aspect of a particular moral theory is, (b) what the most pressing objection to that moral theory is, and (c) possible ways in which the philosopher might overcome the objection. Second, you will have to orally defend the paper in front of the class. The paper will be due the class period prior to the scheduled defense.

**Participation** (150 points) – This class will be conducted in a seminar format and so coming to class having done the reading and ready to engage in conversation is essential.

**Attendance** – You are given 3 absences without penalty. After the 3<sup>rd</sup>, your grade will be reduced by 25 points for every absence.

**Statement on Students with Disabilities:**

It is the policy of Hendrix College to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Any student who needs accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the

instructor at the beginning of the course. In order to receive accommodations, students with disabilities are required to contact Julie Brown in Academic Support Services at 501-505-2954.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### January

- 14 – Course introduction
- 16 – Aristotle – Book I - II
- 19 – **No Class - MLK**
- 21 – Aristotle – Book III-IV
- 23 – Aristotle – Book V-VI
- 26 – Aristotle – Book VII-VIII
- 28 – Aristotle – Book IX-X
- 30 – Aristotle – cont.

#### February

- 2 – Rosalind Hursthouse, “Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point for Morality?” (*MT*); Julia Driver, “Virtue Theory” (*MT*)
- 4 – **Aristotle Student Presentations**
- 6 – Epictetus, entire book
- 9 – Epictetus, cont.
- 11 – Mill – Chapters I-II
- 13 – Mill – Chapters III-V
- 16 – Mill, cont.
- 18 – William Shaw, “The Consequentialist Perspective” (*MT*)
- 20 – Peter Vallentyne, “Against Maximizing Act Consequentialism” (*MT*); Alastair Norcross, “Reasons Without Demands: Rethinking Rightness” (*MT*).
- 23 – **Epictetus and Mill Student Presentations**
- 25 – Kant, “Introduction” by Christine Korsgaard
- 27 – Kant, Section I

#### March

- 2 – Kant, Section II
- 4 – Kant, Section III
- 6 – Kant, cont. **Midterm Exam Due**

#### **Spring Break**

- 16 – Samuel J. Kerstein, “Reason, Sentiment, and Categorical Imperatives” (*MT*)
- 18 – Simon Blackburn, “Must We Weep For Sentimentalism?” (*MT*)
- 20 – Nietzsche – pp. 1-37
- 23 – Nietzsche – pp. 38-71
- 25 – Nietzsche – pp. 72-100
- 27 – Nietzsche – pp. 100-128
- 30 – Nietzsche, cont.

#### April

- 1 – Sartre, “Existentialism and Humanism” (handout)
- 3 – **Nietzsche Student Presentations**
- 6 – MacIntyre – Chapter II
- 8 – MacIntyre – Chapter II, cont.
- 10 – MacIntyre – Chapter III
- 13 – MacIntyre – Chapter III, cont.
- 15 – MacIntyre – Chapter VIII
- 17 – MacIntyre – Chapter IX
- 20 – Robert Audi, “Ethical Generality and Moral Judgment” (*MT*)
- 22 – Mark Norris Lance and Margaret Olivia Little, “Defending Moral Particularism” (*MT*)
- 24 – **MacIntyre Student Presentations**
- 27 – Exam Review

**Final Exam – Tuesday, May 5, 2:00pm**