

**ON VOCATIONAL IRONY:
AN INTERVIEW WITH PEG FALLS-CORBITT**

***Interview Conducted by Daniel Partain Spring 2009

Daniel Partain (DP): *What is your current position at Hendrix?*

Dr. Peg Falls-Corbitt (PFC): Professor of Philosophy
Director of the Miller Center for Vocation, Ethics, and Calling
Associate Provost for Engaged Learning

DP: *How long have you been with the college?*

PFC: 23 years

DP: *What classes do you regularly teach?*

PFC: With my present administrative responsibilities, I teach only two courses a year. Because I am philosophically committed to a required, common, interdisciplinary course, I typically devote one of these to Journeys, leaving one spot per year for a Philosophy Department offering.

DP: *What has been your favorite class to teach?*

PFC: For over half of my career at Hendrix, and for six years before that at another college, I had the opportunity to teach “Plato and Aristotle” every year. I always loved it. Rivaling that course, however, would be the occasional times that I have been able to teach a topics course on just Kant or just Kierkegaard.

DP: *Who is your favorite philosopher?*

PFC: Three philosophers weave together to make up my primary philosophical identity: Plato, Kant, and Kierkegaard

DP: *Could you give a synopsis of their philosophies in a sentence?*

PFC: Impossible. How about a sentence or two on the idea or ideas that are central to my love of each philosopher named?

DP: *That sounds great.*

PFC: From Plato I take the idea that reason is not merely a calculating faculty but has an inherent end; human reason is a faculty that seeks the discernment of good reasoning and good action. I value Plato’s commitment to the objectivity of goodness and the epistemological primacy of moral knowledge (something I take him to be affirming in the so-called Sun and Cave Analogies). With Kant I share a hope and a drive to make sense of and affirm the intrinsic value of persons and to understand the obligations that fall upon me if I am to respect each

person as an end in himself or herself. I take from Kant a belief that the limits of theoretical reasoning justify the employment of practical reasoning for deciding what it is rational to believe about such issues as faith and free will. And Kierkegaard? I find his analyses of the self, the self's despair, and its search for meaning, truth, faith and love profound, truthful, and compelling.

DP: *Let me ask you a non-philosophical question. Well, at least not a directly philosophical question. If you had an extra million dollars, how would you spend it?*

PFC: I would love to be able to set up an endowment for grants and scholarships that would support multifarious ways for non-profits, churches and educational institutions to respond to the needs of those lacking shelter, food, healthcare and educational resources.

DP: *How would your colleagues describe your teaching methods?*

PFC: As some version of the Socratic method, I suppose. I think I am known for being able to elicit students' comments and questions, then using these to help the student push more deeply into both the texts being studied and his or her own philosophy. My aim, at any rate, is to use class discussion for both purposes: to help students achieve a penetrating understanding of the materials studied and to come away from the class more fully aware of their own ideas, more capable of defending those ideas, than they were before coming into the class.

DP: *Could you briefly state the goal of the Miller Center?*

PFC: The goal of the Miller Center is to offer programs created for the purpose of helping students and other members of the Hendrix community explore their vocation or calling. The Miller Center is a locus on campus for student involvement in service to community and also, for many students, a place that supports their spiritual searching and faith exploration. This is because being in service to others is a powerful pathway to vocational self-discovery for almost everyone and because finding one's vocation can be for some a very spiritual quest; for people of faith, the exploration of call must always be situated in a context open to divine calling.

DP: *Ok, another non-philosophical question. If you were in the Lord of the Rings, which character would you be?*

PFC: Sam

DP: *What is your favorite Hendrix memory?*

PFC: When the grant proposal for what would later become the Miller Center was taking shape, I could see that the program was going to need a director--probably someone on the faculty--and all I could think at the time was "Not me, Lord, not me." But when I was asked to serve, it suddenly seemed the right thing to do—right for me, right for my family, and right, I hoped, for the College. There is vocational irony in that story.