

Introduction to Philosophical Questioning

PHIL 110:02 – Spring 2009

MWF 11:10-12:00; Hendrix College

J. Aaron Simmons, Ph.D.

Office: Raney Building

Office Hours: MWF 2:10-3:30 and by appointment;

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Course Description:

This class will be devoted to asking the big questions and participating in the philosophical conversation that runs from Socrates to Derrida and beyond. We will be wrestling with the following four issues: “What Ought I To Believe?” “What is the Nature of Reality?” “Is There a God?” and “Is There Meaning and Morality After the Death of God?” These questions will allow us to consider issues in all of the major areas of philosophical inquiry: metaphysics, epistemology, value-theory (ethics and aesthetics), philosophy of religion, and logic. We will be exclusively reading primary texts which will allow us to follow debates as they progress through the history of philosophy.

Required Texts:

Louis Pojman, ed. *Classics of Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Oxford U.P., 2002).

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, the student will be able to

- 1) Understand the basic debates of the philosophical subdisciplines
- 2) Construct analytical essays
- 3) Participate in philosophical dialogue
- 4) Provide general accounts of the major figures in the history of philosophy

Course Assignments and Grading:

This course is based on a 1000 point total. There will be five grades as follows:

Cumulative Final Exam (300 points) – There will be one exam that will consist of some objective sections as well as essay questions

Papers (150 points each = 600 points total) – There will be four short papers of 500 words and each and they will respond to prompts that I will give in class. These papers must be argument driven and are due on each “Discussion Day.” ** Late Papers will not be accepted!

Participation (100 points) – Philosophy requires engagement and, as such, I expect that you attend class every day having read the material and ready to participate in discussion.

Attendance – You will be allowed three absences and then after that each absence will result in a 25 point reduction in your final grade. I also reserve the right to have a few unannounced quizzes over the course of the semester.

** Cheating and Plagiarism are unacceptable and any student caught participating in such activities will be prosecuted according to Hendrix policy.

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

Topic I – What Ought I To Believe?

16 – Charles Sanders Peirce: *Fixation of Belief*
19 – **No Class - MLK**
21 – W.K. Clifford – *The Ethics of Belief*
23 – William James – *The Will to Believe*
26 – Scott F. Aikin – “Evidentialism For Everyone” (Handout)
28 – A Primer on Logic – (Handout)
30 – Plato – *Meno*

February

2 – Plato – *Meno*, cont.
4 – Sextus Empiricus – *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*
6 – Sextus Empiricus – *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, cont.
9 – Rene Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* – Books I and II
11 – **Discussion Day** – “The Stakes of Belief”

Topic II – What is The Nature of Reality?

13 – The Pre-Socratics (pp. 3-19)
16 – Plato – *The Republic* 502c-521b (pp. 186-197)
18 – Plato – *The Republic*, cont.
20 – Aristotle – *On the Soul*
23 – Aristotle – *Metaphysics* 980a-993b
25 – Aristotle, cont.
27 – Kant – *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* 822-833

March

2 – Kant – cont.
4 – Kant, cont.
6 – **Discussion day** – “The Stakes of the Real”

Spring Break 7-15

Topic III – Is There a God?

16 – Anselm and Gaunilo – entire section, pp. 458-61
18 – Anselm and Gaunilo, cont.
20 – Thomas Aquinas – *Summa Theologica*, pp. 462-67
23 – Aquinas, cont.
25 – Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Book III
27 – Descartes, cont.
30 – Blaise Pascal - *Pensees* AND William Paley – *Natural Theology*

April

1 – David Hume – *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
3 – Hume, cont.
6 – **Discussion Day** – “The Stakes of God”

Topic IV: Is There Meaning After The Death of God?

8 – Friedrich Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*
10 – Søren Kierkegaard, entire section, pp. 922-941
13 – Kierkegaard, cont.
15 – Bertrand Russell, *A Free Man’s Worship*
17 – Russell, cont.
20 – Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*
22 – Sartre, cont.
24 – **Discussion Day** – “The Stakes of Meaning and Morality”
27 – Exam Review

Cumulative Final Exam – Monday, May 4, 8:30-11:30am