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;
Phone: 450-1434; Email: simmons@hendrix.edu

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:

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 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