The Well-Trained Mind Academy Introduction to Ethics and Moral Philosophy

Course Blackboard site: wtma.blackboard.com

Course texts:

Nota Bene: This class uses online versions of texts available for free to all students. Please use the edition linked here.

Aristotle—<u>The Nicomachean Ethics (Selections)</u> Aquinas, Thomas—<u>Selections from the Summa Theolgiae</u>, specifically the Treatise on Virtues Augustine—<u>Retractions (Selection)</u> Kant, Immanuel—<u>What is Enlightenment?</u> Plato—<u>Crito, Meno</u> Le Guin, Ursula—<u>The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas</u> Melville, Herman—<u>Billy Budd</u> Twain, Mark—<u>The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival Crime in Connecticut</u>

Course Description:

Introduction to Ethics and Moral Philosophy challenges the high school student to learn and acquire the skills necessary to think about, analyze, and discuss ethical dilemmas. This course will center around a three-fold theme of questions regarding the meaning of the word "Good."—"What is the Good?", "How can we know what is the Good?", and "Can we live the Good in our lives?" The course will examine foundational texts from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant, among others, and will continue to examine contemporary ethical issues through the lens provided by these classic authors. Because this will be the first introduction for many students to these key thinkers, the passages selected will be abbreviated and students' work will focus on learning how to read these key thinkers and consider the questions they ask.

Work in the course will consist of the following: 1) a weekly reading assignment in a key text from the philosophical tradition; 2) a set of reading questions to assist the student in comprehension of the text; 3) in-class discussion of that week's text or passage; 4) a weekly ethical "case-study" discussion forum which will be relevant to the student's life, where the student will be asked to articulate their position on right and wrong; 5) two extended papers (approximately three pages each) on a text discussed in class; 6) a take-home midterm test; and 7) a take home final exam.

Students are not expected to have any background in the material. The reading passages selected will be appropriate for a high school student with a good ability to read and to comprehend texts on their own. The course will challenge the student to examine their own personal answers and beliefs to the questions listed above. While the course will not necessarily push a particular ethical theory, the course is not an open-ended questioning of all ethical thought. The goal of the course is to help the student understand that a "good" life is possible, and that the examination of

life's moral dilemmas requires careful discernment, as informed by the ethical tradition of Western thought.

Reading: Comprehension, Reaction, and Discussion

Reaction (15%)—Each Tuesday, students must turn in a reaction to a question or series of questions connected to that week's upcoming reading.

Class Discussion (15%)—Each Friday, in class, students will be given a grade based on their active participation in the class discussion. Active participation shows both interest in the topic and thoughtfulness in response. Delayed students and those unable to participate may receive credit by emailing Mr. Caro their thoughts/reaction to the material discussed in class.

Writing Assignments:

Discussion Boards (30%)—Most Fridays, in addition to reading, there will be a discussion board. The discussion board topics will focus on ethical dilemmas relevant to the student's life as well as ethical situations that are common for students to encounter in the next few years of their life. The discussion will require the students to choose and explain how they would act in that situation. Students are expected both to respond to the prompt and comment on (challenge!) their fellow classmates' responses.

Extended Reaction Papers (15%)—Students will write two short papers extending a theme discussed in class, in a text, or on a discussion board.

Examinations:

Mid-Semester Test (10%)—Students will be required to complete a mid-semester test which will cover the texts read in the first eight weeks of class.

Semester Test (15%)—Students will complete a semester ending test which will feature questions on texts read throughout the semester.

Example Schedule:

Week 1 What is Ethics and Philosophy? Friday—Ethics Situation Reaction #1 (Discussion Board)

Week 2

Is there a path of Virtue?

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—<u>The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas</u> **Friday**—Ethics Situation Reaction #2 (Discussion Board)

Week 3

The Ancient Greeks: Plato I

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—Plato—<u>Crito</u> **Friday**— Ethics Situation Reaction #3 (Discussion Board)

Week 4

The Ancient Greeks: Plato II

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction— Plato—<u>Meno</u> **Friday**— Ethics Situation Reaction #4 (Discussion Board)

Week 5 Aristotle: On Virtue

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—**Nicomachean Ethics:** <u>Book II</u> and <u>Book III</u> **Friday**— Ethics Situation Reaction #5 (Discussion Board)

Week 6 Aristotle:

Aristotle: On Friendship

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—**Nicomachean Ethics:** <u>Book VIII</u> Friday— Ethics Situation Reaction #6 (Discussion Board)

Week 7

Augustine: On Lying I

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—**Saint Augustine**, <u>Retractions</u> **Friday**—Topic Selection paper #1

Week 8

Augustine: On Lying II

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—**Saint Augustine**, <u>Retractions</u> **Friday**—Mid-semester Test (Take Home)

Week 9

Week 10

Week 11

Evaluation Moral Actions

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction— Mark Twain—<u>The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival</u> <u>Crime in Connecticut</u>

Friday— Paper #1 Due

Aquinas: The Key Moral Virtues I

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—**Thomas Aquinas**, <u>**Treatise on Virtue</u></u> Friday**— Ethics Situation Reaction #7 (Discussion Board)</u>

Aquinas: The Key Moral Virtues II

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—Thomas Aquinas, <u>Treatise on Virtue</u> Friday— Ethics Situation Reaction #8 (Discussion Board)

Week 12 On Enlightenment I

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction— Immanuel Kant—<u>What is Enlightenment?</u> **Friday**— Ethics Situation Reaction #9 (Discussion Board)

Week 13

On Enlightenment II

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—Immanuel Kant—<u>What is Enlightenment?</u> **Friday**— Topic Selection paper #2

Week 14

On a Return to Virtue

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction— Thomas Aquinas—<u>Selections from the Summa</u> <u>Theolgiae</u>, specifically the Treatise on Virtues Friday— Ethics Situation Reaction #10 (Discussion Board)

Week 15

Is the Good Life Possible?

Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—Herman Melville—<u>Billy Budd</u> **Friday**—Ethics Situation Reaction #11 (Discussion Board)

Week 16 Is the Good Life Desirable? Tuesday—Reading and Reaction—Herman Melville—<u>Billy Budd</u> Friday—Paper #2 Due

Week 17

Exam Week Only, no class