Fourth Paper Assignment

General Guidelines

1. The fourth paper is **due on Thursday, December 6**. Late papers will be penalized.
2. All papers must be double spaced, three to five pages in a reasonable font (12 point Times, for
        example). This means approximately 750 to 1500 words. Print on only one side of each page.
3. Do not right-justify your paper.
4. Paginate your papers.
5. Observe basic rules of grammar and spelling. Proofread your paper. Ask a good writer to read and
        comment on your paper. I encourage use of the writing center. Avoid jargon. Write simply,
        and clearly.
6. Avoid history and bibliography. Focus on the arguments, rather than particular authors' explications of those
        arguments.
7. You may use quotes from the readings in our books by merely noting the author and page number.
        For example: "'Being' is obviously not a real predicate" (Kant 28). You may quote your class
        notes, though if you wish to quote one of the philosophers we are studying, quote him or her
        directly. You may use my versions of the arguments we have studied, but you need not do so.
        Cite class notes: "Blah blah blah" (Marcus, class notes, 8/28/07). There is no need to use other
        sources. If you do use another source, you must include a proper bibliographical reference,
        including author, title, and publishing information, or current URL. I must be able to trace the
        source.
8. Violations of academic integrity, like plagiarism, can and will lead to failing grades. The Hamilton
        College Honor Code will be enforced. I am interested in what you have to say, but I do not
        expect you to generate 1500 words of original scholarship. Your main task here is to be clear
        about what others have said, and to present it in your own way. Sometimes, for brief passages,
        some one else will just say it better than you can. Quote it. Cite any ideas that are not your
        own. (E.g. "Aquinas argues that..."; "According to Kant,...".) Remember to acknowledge any
        assistance you have had on your paper, including assistance from the writing center.

How to Write Your Paper

1. Pick a topic from the list below.
2. Introduce your paper by briefly stating your thesis, the conclusion you will defend. Be specific.
        Your paper should be an extended argument supporting your thesis. Often, it is easiest to write
        the introduction after you have finished writing the body of the paper. Make sure to include a
        thesis statement.
3. Argue for your thesis. Each paragraph, each sentence, should directly relate to your specific thesis.
4. Consider possible objections. Do not blindly accept what any philosopher says. Argue your own
        point of view, but through the writings of the philosophers.
5. Conclude your essay by summarizing what you intended to say in the paper.
6. Make sure to cover each point in the topic you choose.

Paper Topics*

1. Is utilitarianism the right moral theory? Explain the theory, and how it is used. Provide examples. Why should one accept this moral theory? Describe a problem with the theory. How can a utilitarian defend against this problem?

2. Is Kantian deontology the correct moral theory? Explain the theory, and how it is used. Provide examples. Why should one accept this moral theory? Describe a problem with the theory. How might a Kantian defend against this problem?

3. Are any moral claims objectively true? Consider Mackie's error theory, and his arguments for it, especially the argument from relativity and the relationship between people's preferences and their moral codes. How does Bambrough respond to the argument from relativity? Use examples. Does Bambrough provide a positive argument for moral objectivism? Explain. (You might wish to appeal to either utilitarianism or Kantian deontology to illustrate an objectivist theory.)

4. The following is a paraphrase of a tape-recorded conversation between serial murderer Ted Bundy and one of his victims.

    "Then I learned that all moral judgments are 'value judgments', that all value judgments are subjective, and that none can be proved to be either 'right' or 'wrong'. I even read somewhere that the Chief Justice of the United States had written that the American Constitution expressed nothing more than collective value judgments. Believe it or not, I figured out for myself - what apparently the Chief Justice couldn't figure out for himself - that if the rationality of one value judgment was zero, multiplying it by millions would not make it one whit more rational. Nor is there any 'reason' to obey the law for anyone, like myself, who has the boldness and daring - the strength of character to throw off its shackles.
    "I discovered that to become truly free, truly unfettered, I had to become truly uninhibited. And I quickly discovered that the greatest obstacle to my freedom, the greatest block and limitation to it, consisted in the insupportable 'value judgment' that I was bound to respect the rights of others. I asked myself, who were these 'others'? Other human beings, with human rights? ... Surely, you would not, in this age of scientific enlightenment, declare that God or nature has marked some pleasures as 'moral' or good' and others as 'immoral' or 'bad'. In any case, let me assure you, my dear young lady, that there is absolutely no comparison between the pleasure I might take in eating ham, and the pleasure I anticipate in raping and murdering you. That is the honest conclusion to which my education has led me - after the most conscientious examination of my spontaneous and uninhibited self."

    Analyze, and criticize or defend Bundy's statement. There are may ways to approach this essay. You might discuss the plausibility of moral skepticism. You might apply utilitarianism or Kant's moral theory to defend or criticize Bundy's statement. Use material we have studied. A good essay will argue for or against a position, using defended reasons; a poor essay will merely assert.

* Any topics other than the ones listed here must be cleared with me *in advance*.