Study Course Programme

<u>Title.</u> A non-ideological approach to moral and ethical development

<u>Duration.</u> 24 hours (one semester)
        18 hours - lectures
        6 hours - seminars.

<u>Goal and purpose.</u> To examine universal ethical questions from the standpoint of a comprehensive view of human nature. The course seeks actively to facilitate the ethical and spiritual autonomy of the individual moral actor rather than to inculcate a specific set of moral behaviours. This spiritual autonomy is accomplished by furnishing the student with a scientific understanding of the dynamics by which all human beings generate value choices and preferences. In particular, the student should achieve a substantial increase in his ability for conscious, deliberate, self-directed moral action.

<u>Tasks.</u> Through a systematic examination of the fundamental interactions between the self and different categories of the social, physical and intellectual environment, the student will acquire a knowledge and understanding of the principles upon which these interactions are based. Both concrete moral dilemmas and general principles will be considered.

<u>The programme</u>

<u>Introduction.</u> Traditional approaches to morality and ethics tend to stress the importance of certain ethical ideas or norm which are considered worthy of implementation. One then proceeds to examine how to induce human subjects to implement these norms. The present approach is "non-ideolgical" because it accords the greatest importance to the quality of human interactions rather than to the ethical norms themselves.

      Of course, the importance of appropriate ethical norms is indisputable, but our approach sees them primarily as means of achieving the desired quality of human interactions rather than as ends in themselves. It is human well-being and autonomy that are to be optimized, rather than the quality of human life compromised or sacrificed for the preservation of some ethical ideology.

      The focus of the course is therefore on the the process by which ethical norms are generated in the pursuit of true human well-being at all levels of society (individuals, the family, groups, communities, society at large). The dynamical character of human nature itself dictates that standards of human well-being will evolve and thus so will moral and ethical norms. Such a dynamic morality can never be encompassed by a fixed and unchanging system of ethical rules, established once and for all.

      Thus, from our point of view, certain ethical norms may be viewed as relative, but the goal and purpose they serve — the optimization of human autonomy and well-being — is undeviating and unchanging.

Section I. Fundamental aspects of human nature.
  A. Universal (transcultural) and particular (culturally specific) aspects of human nature.
    1. The primary capacities of the human being.
      a. Knowledge, love and will.
  B. Life as a transformational/developmental process of increasing our
      well-being and autonomy and optimizing our capacities and
      abilities.
    1. Well-being vs. temporary pleasure and immediate gratification.
    2. Autonomy vs. unnatural dependencies and self-limitations.
    3. Dynamism and stasis, progression and stability.

Section II. The basic interactions of the self.
  A. The primacy of consciousness (self-awareness) in defining the self.
    1. The boundaries of the self, internal vs. external.
  B . Categories of interactions.
    1. Self with self, self with the Divine, the self with another self, the
       self with social groups, the self with objects (Ideas, values and
       abstract objects, the physical environment and concrete objects).
  C. An examination of the main value principles relating to each
      category of interaction.

Section III. The process of value generation and value choice.
  A. Instantiation — the basic unit of interaction.
    1. Discrete (material) vs. continuous (spiritual).
    2. Abilities, the actualization of capacities.
      a. Knowledge; perceptions and conceptions.
      b. Affections; desires and preferences.
      c. Will; choices, intentionality and action.
  B. Integrating knowledge, affections, choices and values into a
      coherent process of ethical development.
    1. The primacy of true self-knowledge.
    2. Hindrances to this process.
      a. Vanity (false self-conceit).
        i. The origin, generation and nature of individual and collective
           self-concept.
      b. Power-seeking.
    3. Intrinsic vs. extrinsic values.

Section IV. Reality and the objectivity principle.
  A. The structure of objective reality and its relationship to the internal structure of the self.
    1. The law of causality.
  B. The objectivity principle.
  C. The reality principle.
    1. The law of cause and effect in the realm of values.
      a. Feedback and evaluation; confronting the law of causality.

Section V. Universality and convergence.
  A. How can there be a universal (transcultural) morality?
    1. Convergence towards universal norms.
    2. Unity in diversity vs. uniformity.
    3. The social and collective dimension of individual ethical action.

Conclusion. This course sees ethics not as a rigid set of predefined behaviours but as a dynamic and creative process of interaction between the self-reflecting moral agent and various categories of existence. We exmine both the principles underlying these interactions and the mechansim by which a coherent process of ongoing moral and spiritual development is generated.

Perspective for the student: increase in self-understanding. moral autonomy and effective living (moral well-being).

Scientifically: a new and deeper understanding of ethics as a dynamical system rather than a static set of predetermined behaviours.

The key words: Spiritual, moral, ethical, development, transformation, process, dynamics, interactions, principles, causality, capacity, ability, well-being, autonomy, consciousness, self-awareness.

Explanatory note.
        Current approaches to ethical questions seek to inculcate a worthy ideal of moral behaviour. However, by focussing on the implementation of a given moral ideology rather than on the process by which free value choices are made, these traditional approaches tend to deprive the moral actor of his autonomy and creativity. Moreover, they lack the flexibility necessary to accomodate a social reality that is in constant evolution. Another limitation of traditional approaches is that they are often culture-laden rather than transcultural.
        This course attempts to overcome these limitations by focussing on the goal of optimizing well-being and autonomy, an undertanding of the process of value-generation, and the fundamentals of universal human nature. This course will alternate between lectures (75%) and seminar-discussions (25%). The materials are mostly generated by the author of the course.

WILLIAM S. HATCHER

        William S. Hatcher is a mathematician, philosopher and educator. He holds a Doctorate in Mathematics from the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, as well as Master's and Bachelor's degrees from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennesse. A specialist in the philosophical interpenetration of science and religion, he has, for over thirty years, held university positions and lectured widely in North America, Europe and Russia, where he how resides and works.
        He is the author or co-author of over fifty professional articles, books and monographs in the mathematical sciences, logic and philosophy. Among his works are *The Logical Foundations of Mathematics;* Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1982; *The*

Bahá'í Faith (co-authored with J. Douglas Martin), Harper & Row (now Harper-Collins), San Franciso, 1985 (designated as a 'book of the year' in religion by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1986); *Logic and Logos,* George Ronald, Oxford, 1990. A résumé of this latter work is included in the *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), where Professor Hatcher is listed as one of eight Platonist philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century.