INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
PHIL 100, Spring 2021
Wed 4-6:45

Prof. Steven Levine
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Class Location: Zoom. Repeating Link: https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/96366956389
Office Hours: On Zoom, Wed. 3-4. Repeating Link: https://umassboston.zoom.us/j/97197012775
Also by appointment

Learning Modality
This course will use both non-synchronous and synchronous learning modalities.

• **Non-synchronous**: On Monday I will post 1 or 2 Power-point lectures about the assigned course material. They will be posted on the class website. It is vital that you watch these lectures and use them to grasp the course material. Class website: http://faculty.www.umb.edu/steven.levine/Courses/Introduction%20to%20Phil.html

• **Synchronous**: On Wednesday we will discuss the course material together on Zoom. For the semester, the class will be broken up into two groups, the first of which will meet from 4-5, the second of which will meet from 5-6. I will assign you to a group after the add-drop period. This group will be your group for the whole semester. Since we will be meeting in somewhat small groups on Zoom, class participation is a significant part of your grade.

Course Description
In this introductory class we shall read works by philosophers such as Plato, Descartes, James, Sartre, de Beauvoir, amongst others. In doing so we will examine philosophical questions like: What role does reflection play in living a good life? Is morality relative or not? Can we have knowledge of the external world? How are mind and body related? Is faith in God rational or not? In what condition ought we to believe something? What is it to be a free person? What is the nature of political freedom? A final question that we will consider is whether philosophy—as opposed to science, history, or theology—is a discipline that is well placed to answer these questions at all. The goal of the course is for you 1) to acquire a sense of what philosophy is, what kinds of questions it addresses, and 2) to learn how to think rationally and critically about the positions and arguments presented in the readings and in class.

Required Texts (available at the bookstore)
• Plato, *Five Dialogues*, tr. G. M. A. Grube Hackett Publishing
• Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. Cress, Hackett Publishing
• Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Yale Press.
• All other readings are available at the class Website: http://faculty.www.umb.edu/steven.levine/Courses/Introduction%20to%20Phil.html
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Theme and Activities</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Jan 27</td>
<td>Review of Syllabus and Introduction to Philosophy</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Feb 3</td>
<td>Plato: The Break with Authority</td>
<td>Plato, ‘The Euthyphro’, in the <em>Five Dialogues</em></td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Feb 10</td>
<td>Moral Relativism</td>
<td>Harman, ‘Moral Relativism Explained’, <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td>Boghossian, ‘The Maze of Moral Relativism’ <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Feb 17</td>
<td>Plato: The Possibility of Philosophical Knowledge</td>
<td>Plato, from the ‘Meno’ (70-86d), in the <em>Five Dialogues</em></td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Feb 24</td>
<td>Plato, Reality and the Forms</td>
<td>Plato, ‘The Parable of the Cave’, <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td><em>February 24th</em>: First Assignment Due</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>March 3</td>
<td>Descartes: Skepticism and Knowledge</td>
<td>Descartes, <em>Meditations on First Philosophy</em>, Meditation 1</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>Descartes: Mind, Body, and World</td>
<td>Descartes, <em>Meditations on First Philosophy</em>, Meditation 2</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>Faith, Reason, and Belief</td>
<td>W. K. Clifford, ‘The Ethics of Belief’, <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td>W. James, ‘The Will to Believe’, <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Faith, Reason, and Belief</td>
<td>W. James, ‘The Will to Believe’, <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>Freedom and Personhood</td>
<td>H. Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’ <em>On my Website</em></td>
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<td><em>April 7th</em>: Second Assignment Due</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td>Freedom and Responsibility</td>
<td>Sartre, <em>Existentialism is a Humanism</em></td>
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Week 12
April 21
Freedom, Responsibility, and Gender
April 22nd: Course Withdrawal Deadline
S. de Beauvoir, Excerpt from The Second Sex, On my Website

Week 13
April 28
Freedom and the Market
F. A. Hayek, ‘Freedom and Coercion’, On my Website

Week 14
May 5
Real Freedom
Cohen, ‘Illusions about Private Property and Freedom’, On my Website
Van Parijs, from Real Freedom for All, On my Website

Week 15
May 12
Discussion of Final Paper
May 20th: Paper Due

Assessable Tasks
This class has three main assignments. The first two assignments are comprised of several short essays on the course material. In these short essays you will analyze and critique arguments selected from our readings. The third assignment is a 4 to 5 page paper. In it you will not only analyze and critique an argument from our readings, but will make an argument yourself. To get a passing grade in this class you must complete all 3 major assignments.

Final Grade Calculation
• First assignment: 25%, Due February 24th
• Second assignment: 25%, Due April 7th
• Paper: 35%, Due May 20th
• Class preparation and participation: 15%

Attendance Policy
Attendance at the once a week Zoom class is mandatory. I will take attendance every class. Absences will be noted and factored into your final grade, as follows:

3rd absence: final grade lowered by a full grade (e.g. from B- to C-)
4th absence: failure; no credit given

In general, the distinction between an “excused” and “unexcused” absence is not recognized. Repeated lateness in arriving to class will eventually count as an absence.

Other Important Information:
1. Class Website: This course does not have a blackboard shell. Unless otherwise noted readings, assignments, and power-point slides will be posted on my website, which can be reached at this address: http://faculty.umb.edu/steven.levine/Courses/Introduction%20to%20Phil.html
2. **Zoom Camera:** Your Zoom camera must be on for our Wednesday class meetings. If it is not possible for you to have your camera on, for one class or for more than one class, you must contact me about this. If you keep your camera off without contacting me I will automatically count you as absent.

3. **Homework:** The readings for this class are listed above by the week. If homework is not explicitly assigned in class, these readings are your homework. The reading schedule may change due to events. If it does I will notify you and update the schedule.

4. **Late Policy for Papers:** The paper will be penalized a whole grade if it is up to one week late. Thereafter, it will be penalized a whole grade each additional week that it is late.

5. **Rewrites:** I will consider rewrites for the first two assignments. To get a better grade a rewrite must significantly improve the original. A rewritten paper can go up one and half grades at most, for example, from a D to a C+, or a C to a B+.

6. **Class Preparation and Reading Philosophy:** You main task in this class is to understand the class readings. But reading philosophy is hard. It is therefore essential that you acquire and read the texts carefully before each class. It is an extremely good idea to take notes on whatever you read, and to re-read the material at least once. Philosophy articles and texts tend to be fairly short but dense, and cannot be read in the same way as literature, news, or history. Come to class familiar with the material and be prepared to ask questions about things that you did not understand or things you understood but found strange or not plausible.

7. **Office Hours and Writing Papers:** If you have difficulty writing papers contact the CAS center at 287-6560 or 6550. But an even better thing to do is to make use of my Zoom office hours. Come and talk to me about things you do not understand in class, and for help with your papers. I am happy to help you plan your papers.

**Policy on Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism involves presenting someone else’s work as your own. You need to be careful to avoid even the appearance of plagiarism. This means that if you ever use a phrase, a sentence, or an idea from a text, you must provide a citation. If it is something we read for the class, it is acceptable to give the source and page number. E.g.: (Rawls, “The Justification of Civil Disobedience, p. 100). When utilizing other material, you must provide full bibliographic information of that text. If you don’t provide appropriate citations, this will affect your grade. If you have gone so far as to misrepresent another person’s work as your own by copying from another’s paper, using a paper writing service, copying something off the web or out of a book or in any other way I will assume you intend to commit plagiarism and will give you an ‘F’ for the class. The current Code of Student Conduct which includes information about academic dishonesty is available online at: [http://www.umb.edu/academics/undergraduate/office/students/CodeofStudentConduct.html](http://www.umb.edu/academics/undergraduate/office/students/CodeofStudentConduct.html)

**Students with Disabilities**

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services. You can contact them by calling: 617-287-7430 or sending an email to: ross.center@umb.edu. Once you have received your accommodation letter, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as soon as possible.