

George Mason University
INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 100

Synchronous Sessions: 3:00 – 4:15 T/Th Zoom

Virtual Office Hours: 4:30-5:30pm Tuesdays or email to schedule appointment

Professor Jordan Daniels

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The Death of Socrates, Jacques Louis David, 1787

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to different perspectives and important issues within philosophy, focusing on questions of ethics, morality, the good life, and freedom.

We will start in unit 1 by posing these key questions: What is the good? What is the nature of human beings? How might we reach for the good both as individuals and as political communities? We will discuss Plato's answers to these questions via three dialogues, the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*, and we will conclude the unit by interrogating how these ancient discussions bear on the contemporary world with Martin Luther King Jr., who from his jail cell invokes Plato's Socrates.

Next, in unit 2, we will follow the issue of morality to Prussia, where Immanuel Kant attempts to locate moral value in our rational nature and our ability to act out of duty *against* our particular

inclinations. If things don't turn out, can we still be moral? What makes someone moral? We will conclude unit 2 with Rae Langton's exploration of the lived limitations of such an account.

In unit 3, we will compare Kant's account of morality, which focuses on the rightness or wrongness of each individual act and not on the consequences of the act, with Nietzsche's critical account of the values animating morality, paying particular attention to how he connects these values to particular historical moments. Have we been taking what "the good" means for granted this whole time? Does "the good" have a history?

As we will have seen by this point, freedom has been a near constant theme in our searching for the good, and in unit 4 we will more explicitly take stock of questions about *freedom*. What does freedom mean? What is freedom's relation to the good, and to reason? Where is freedom found? We will analyze these issues through Simone de Beauvoir's discussion in *Ethics of Ambiguity*, and then conclude the course with Angela Davis' interrogation of freedom and imprisonment.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the class, I hope students will be able to understand knowledge creation, engage multiple perspectives, and investigate meaningful questions in the domain of philosophy. Through course discussions, group work, a weekly blog, two exegetical papers, and one argumentative paper, we will discover what it means to read, write, and think philosophically. This class should function as an introduction to philosophical questions and methods more broadly.

COURSE MATERIALS

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
ISBN: 978-1316602591

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (Open Road Media, 2018). ISBN: 978-1504054225

Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Open Media Series, 2003).
ISBN: 9781583225813

You can purchase these books in the Mason bookstore, but I strongly recommend you search online for a second-hand copy. While I recommend you get these versions so that we can reference the same page numbers easily, other editions are acceptable.



AN EXPLANATORY NOTE: THE ONLINE ASPECT

This course will be 100% online. We will normally have two weekly synchronous sessions, which will be further supplemented by asynchronous blog posting and online discussions. Both these synchronous and asynchronous components are important for developing this learning community, in addition to valuable philosophical skills.

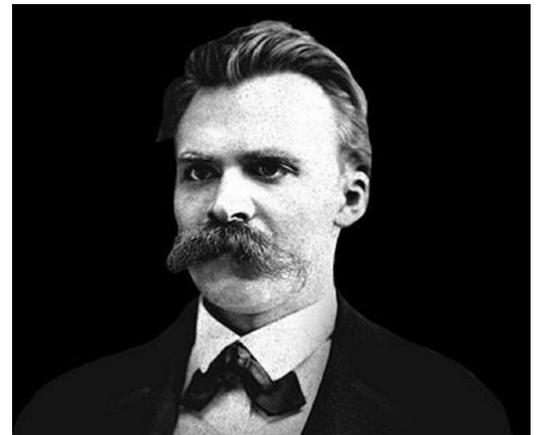
Software and Technical Requirements: Please note that access to Blackboard and Zoom are essential to this class. For help with Blackboard, please visit: <https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/> or sign up for an individual consultation here: <https://its.gmu.edu/help-support/its-support-center/>

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation

Regular attendance is expected at synchronous sessions. You are allowed two unexcused absence from a synchronous session without penalty. **Following those two allowed absences, you will receive a deduction of 1 point from your participation grade for every unexcused absence from the synchronous sessions.** I also reserve the right to add short quizzes prior to the online sessions if students do not seem prepared. These quizzes will count towards your participation grade. Please note that if I take roll during a synchronous session and you do not respond promptly, you will be counted as “absent.”

NOTE ON VIDEO IN ZOOM: I request that you keep your camera on during our synchronous sessions—as do your fellow students—but I also understand that learning from home during the pandemic may present difficulties. Therefore, turning your video on throughout the semester will function as EXTRA CREDIT. That is, you will not be penalized for keeping your video off, but keeping it on will give you bonus participation points. You are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED for the sake of our learning community to keep your camera on if possible. Also, if you do not keep your video on, I request that you have a profile picture rather than just your name.



Daily Quotes

For the most part, every week you will be required to post a “Daily Quote” on Canvas. For this assignment, you submit a 1-2 sentence quote from the reading that captures the author’s main argument (or an important part of the main argument). Please make sure to include the page number and citation for the quote. In past classes, the Daily Quote requirement has enabled students to focus on the readings more closely. There are 11 Daily Quotes due; you only need to submit 10 (i.e., you may miss one with no demerit).

Friday Blog

These are chances for you to engage with your peers and synthesize the material we have been covering in the readings and in course meetings. The blog will be continuous throughout the semester, and you are required to post a comment of 3-5 sentences once a week, by Friday, 11:59pm (see syllabus and Blackboard for weeks when no blog is required), though you are encouraged to engage beyond that and to comment on fellow students' posts. Your participation will be graded equivalent to \surd , $\surd+$, $\surd-$. To get \surd on all your posts will amount to full credit (15/15, with each post amounting to 1.5 points), and if you get series of $\surd+$, then your blog grade could raise your final grade by up to two points.

Exegetical Papers

You will complete two short papers that focus on interpreting the text. The assignment will be distributed in class, and each short exegetical paper can be **no longer than one single page**, single-spaced, in size 12 Times New Roman or Garamond font.

Final Paper

By the end of the semester, you will turn in paper of 5-7 pages, double-spaced, in size 12 Times New Roman or Garamond font with normal margins. You will receive more information about this assignment in class.



*For both papers, I suggest you use the Chicago Manual of Style for citations, though APA and MLA are also acceptable as long as you are consistent. Here is a helpful guide: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html

ACTIVITY	SOFTWARE	POINTS
Participation in online sessions	Zoom	10
Daily Quotes	Blackboard	10
Friday Blog	Blackboard	15
Exegetical Papers	Word, Blackboard	30
Final Paper	Word, Blackboard	35
TOTAL POINTS		100

POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Late Assignment Policy

The window for “late” depends upon the assignment. Blog Posts and Daily Quotes are considered “late” if they are submitted after the time that they are due (the software automatically gives your post a time and date stamp). You will lose 50% of the possible points for any assignment that you submit late. I AM VERY HAPPY TO GRANT EXTENSIONS IF YOU WRITE/SPEAK WITH ME. Please communicate with me at least 48 hours before an assignment is due if you feel you need an extension.

Academic Integrity

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the Office for Academic Integrity for a full description of the code and the honor committee process: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

Disability Accommodations

Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu; Phone: (703) 993-2474

Diversity and Inclusion

In our classroom, we seek to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and ability.

Non-Sexist Use of Language

We academics no longer use “man” or “mankind” to refer to the entirety of humanity or a hypothetical person. This extends to written work as well as discussions, and it will serve you well throughout the rest of your professional lives.

CONTACT

I prefer if you contact me via email at jdanie9@gmu.edu rather than through Blackboard.

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

UNIT 1

Week 1

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

- Introduction

Assignment due: Introductions Blog Post, 11:59pm, Wednesday, January 27, 2021

Thursday, January 28, 2021

- Reading due: Plato, *Apology*
- Daily Quote #1 due: on Plato, *Apology*

Week 2

Tuesday, February 2, 2021

- Discussion of *Apology* continued

Thursday, February 4, 2021

- Reading due: Plato, *Crito*
- Daily Quote #2 due: on Plato, *Crito*

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, February 5, 2021

Week 3

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

- Reading due: Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
- Daily Quote #3 due: on Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Thursday, February 11, 2021

- Reading due: Plato, *Phaedo*

Assignment due: Exegetical Paper #1, 11:59pm, Friday, February 12, 2021

UNIT 2

Week 4

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

- Reading due: Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section I
- Daily Quote #4 due: on Kant, *Groundwork*

- Student Meetings!

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, February 19, 2021

Week 5

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

- Reading due: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section II
- Daily Quote #5 due: on Kant, *Groundwork*, Section II

Thursday, February 25, 2021

- Discussion cont'd

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, February 26, 2021

Week 6

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

- Reading due: Langton, "Duty and Desolation"
- Daily Quote #6 due: on Langton, "Duty and Desolation"

Thursday, March 4, 2021

- Watch by class: *High Noon*

Assignment due: Exegetical Paper #2, 11:59pm, Friday, March 5, 2021

UNIT 3

Week 7

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

- Reading due: Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Preface and First Essay
- Daily Quote #7 due: on Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface and First Essay

Thursday, March 11, 2021

- Discussion cont'd

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, March 12, 2021

Week 8

Tuesday, March 16, 2021

- Reading due: Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay
- Daily Quote #8 due: on Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Second Essay

Thursday, March 18, 2021

- Discussion cont'd

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, March 19, 2021

Week 9

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

- Reading due: Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay
- Daily Quote #9 due: on Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Third Essay

Thursday, March 25, 2021

- Discussion cont'd

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, March 26, 2021

UNIT 4

Week 10

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

- Reading due: de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "Ambiguity and Freedom," pgs. 5-36
- Daily Quote #10 due: on de Beauvoir, "Ambiguity and Freedom"

Thursday, April 1, 2021

- Reading due: de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "Personal Freedom and Others," pgs. 37-78

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, April 2, 2021

Week 11

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

- Watch by class: *Into the Wild*

Thursday, April 8, 2021

- Reading due: de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, "The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity: The Aesthetic Attitude & Freedom and Liberation," pgs. 79-102
- Daily Quote #11 due: on de Beauvoir, "The Aesthetic Attitude & Freedom and Liberation"

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, April 9, 2021

Week 12

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

- Reading due: de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity: The Antinomies of Action & The Present and the Future,” pgs. 103-138
- Daily Quote #12 due: on de Beauvoir, “The Antinomies of Action & The Present and the Future”

Thursday, April 15, 2021

- Reading due: de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “The Positive Aspect of Ambiguity: Ambiguity,” Conclusion, pgs. 139-173

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, April 16, 2021

Week 13

Tuesday, April 20, 2021

- Reading due: Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
- Daily Quote #13 due: Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*
- *Writing forum: How to Write a Philosophy Paper and Craft a Thesis*

Thursday, April 22, 2021

- Reading due: Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Assignment due: Blog Post, 11:59pm, Friday, April 23, 2020

Week 14

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

- Reading due: Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*

Thursday, April 29, 2021

- Conclusions; evaluations