<u>The Levels System</u>

PHIL 5: Science and Human Understanding
Spring 2020

This is based Dustin Locke's Level System, modified for my purposes—see Dustin's webpage at <u>www.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/dlocke</u>. Many thanks to Dustin for his help in constructing this part of the course.

<u>1/ What is the levels system?</u>

The "levels system" has three levels. Each level consists of an assignment (described below). You start at Level 1. Once you complete one level, you progress to the next.

Each time you attempt a level you will receive one of three evaluations:
- Complete
- Almost
- Not much progress

You only progress to the next level when you receive a "Complete" (there's one exception; see "The Small Print" below). If you receive one of the other evaluations you can try again. In total, you have a maximum of *five* attempts at the levels system through the semester.

Your grade for the levels system is determined by how far you progress through the levels by the end of the semester, as follows:

Level 3. Complete = A, Almost = A-, Not much progress = B+
Level 2. Complete = B, Almost = B-, Not much progress = C+
Level 1. Complete = C, Almost = C-, Not much progress = D

For example, if by the end of the semester you completed levels 1 and 2 and got an "Almost" for level 3, your grade for the levels system would be an A-.

Here are the three levels:

Level 1: Argument map. Choose an argument from the readings and represent it as an argument map.

Level 2: Argument map + description (max 450 words). Just like Level 1, except that you must also write a 2-paragraph paper to accompany your map:
- One paragraph should describe the argument in your map. The description should state what the conclusion of the argument is and what reasons support it. It should also define any technical terms used in the argument. The description should be based on your map but it should not make reference to the map; the description should be a self-contained piece of prose.

- The other paragraph should be the introduction. It should introduce the argument and explain how it fits into the broader issues we are discussing. For example, if the argument purports to be an objection to Prof Jones' thesis, explain what Jones' thesis is and why the argument, if successful, would be an objection to it. Or if the argument purports to solve a philosophical problem, state what the problem is and why the argument, if successful, would solve it.

Level 3: Argument map + description + contribution (max 700 words). Just like Level 2, except that your paper must contain a third paragraph that engages with the argument. This might involve adding further support to the argument. Or it might involve arguing that one of the premises is false. Or it might involve arguing that the premises do not support the conclusion. Your contribution here should be your own, not drawn from the readings. You should represent your contribution on your argument map.

Each attempt at the levels system must be based on a different argument. So, if you attempt a level and do not complete it, your next attempt at that level cannot be a re-write of the previous attempt.

2/ Schedule

You have a maximum of five attempts at the levels system. You can submit an assignment on any *Wednesday* of the semester, but your assignment must be based on material covered during the previous week. For example, if you want to submit an assignment based on material from the week ending Jan 31st, you must submit it by Wednesday Feb 5th.

Each week on Friday I will distribute a prompt based on that week's material. You can use those prompts as a basis for a levels system assignment, though there is no requirement that you do so. If you use one of the prompts, then as stated above you must submit your assignment *by Wednesday of the following week*. After that, I will upload an answer map for the prompt.

3/ The Small Print

- If you attempt Level 1 two times without completing it, you can move onto Level 2 on your next attempt. This is the only circumstance in which you can advance a level without completing the one before it.
- Your final grade is calculated on the basis of your *best* attempt, which may not be your last. For example, suppose you had two attempts at level 3: your first attempt got an "Almost", and your second got a "Not Much Progress". Then your final grade would be based on your "Almost", i.e. an A-.
- Given the flexibility of the levels system, *no late work is accepted*. If you can't submit an assignment one week, just submit another assignment the next week (or the one after…).

4/ Why use the levels system?

There are three main advantages of the levels system.

First, it means that you can work through the course at your own pace. The system ensures that you're always working on something challenging enough to be interesting, but not so challenging as to be frustrating or daunting.

Second, the levels system prepares you to write a philosophy paper. Philosophy papers are notoriously difficult to write well, in part because what's expected of you in a philosophy paper differs from papers in other subjects. The levels system is designed to train your philosophical writing skills in a step-by-step fashion. By the time you're doing Level 3, you are writing a basic philosophy paper.

Third, the levels system is a fairer method of evaluation than more typical systems that involve a mid-term paper. Suppose student A has little background in philosophy but student B does. Then A is likely to do worse on a mid-term paper than B. So even if A and B end up performing similarly by the end of the semester, A will get a worse overall grade than B. That doesn't strike me as a fair method of evaluation, since it partly evaluates how prepared you were before the course started! By contrast, the levels system evaluates you on the basis of your performance at the end of the course. Sure, B might breeze through the levels quicker than A. But with hard work and application, students with no experience in philosophy can complete all the levels.