

PHIL 5004: Proseminar, Fall 2022

Times: 2.30–3.45pm Mondays, 4–5.15pm Wednesdays

Classroom: Major Williams Hall 225

Instructor: Daniel Hoek, dhoek@vt.edu

Website: danielhoek.com/teaching

Zoom: zoom.us/my/dhoek

Office hours: Wednesday, 2.30-3.30pm

Office: Major Williams Hall 217

Course Description

In this course, we will work on developing all the basic research and professional skills you need to succeed as an academic philosopher. You will learn how to orient yourself on a philosophical question or topic, how to formulate questions and thoughts about new topics, and how to develop and structure those thoughts. You will also reflect on methods for philosophical argumentation, and practice techniques for effective philosophical writing.



Course Structure

Over the course of the semester, you will pursue three miniature philosophical research projects, each of them lasting between three and four weeks. The research question for each project is as follows:

1. *Is Sherlock Holmes a famous detective?* — (This question touches on issues about the existence and nature of fictional characters, and also relates to puzzles about “truth in fiction”.)
2. *Is it wrong to be wealthy, and to hold on to your wealth, when others are poor?* — (This question touches on ethical issues around inequality, altruism and charity.)
3. *How can the thoughts in your mind affect actions and motions of your physical body?* — (This is a classic question in the philosophy of mind, which is closely linked to questions about the nature of mind and body, to questions about the nature of causation, and to the discussion about epiphenomenalism)

During your investigation of these questions, you will practice (i) exploring a new body of philosophical literature and mapping out the “logical space”; (ii) constructively discussing a philosophical question with your peers (iii) closely reading philosophical texts; (iv) articulating your own stance in response to a given text; (v) developing your response into a paper project.

In the gaps between these research projects, this course will give you the opportunity to learn more about philosophy as a profession. These classes will be devoted to the “hidden curriculum” and to all the concrete, practical questions that you will face if you want to become a member of the profession.

Coursework

This is a writing-intensive course. You will be asked to produce at least a small piece of philosophical writing (half a page) every week. At the end of each of the three research projects, you will write an *introduction* that gives the outline of a paper idea on the topic at hand (1-2 pages). Finally, you will develop one of these paper ideas into a short conference paper (5-6 pages), and a short presentation in the final week.

Assessment

Your grade for the course will be primarily based on your participation in the classes and your response to feedback. In addition, I will take into account the quality of the three introductions you produced, and of the final paper and presentation. What matters here is that you respond well to feedback, and that I can see you develop your skills over the course of the semester: you're not at all expected to be perfect from the get-go!

Provisional Schedule

(There are no readings listed for the first and second research projects: that's because these will be determined *after* you have done your literature orientations.)

August 22 and 24. **No class!**

Week 1. **What does a philosopher do?** (August 29 & 31)

[Elizabeth Barnes interview](#) at *Five Questions* (podcast)

[Stephen Yablo interview](#) at *What is it like to be a philosopher*

Week 2. **What is philosophy?** (September 7)

Mary Midgley, "[Philosophical Plumbing](#)"

Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Introduction.

September 9. *First lit. orientation due: Is Sherlock Holmes a famous detective?*

Week 3. **Is Sherlock Holmes a famous detective? : Literature** (September 12 & 14)

Week 4. **Is Sherlock Holmes a famous detective? : Close Reads** (September 19 & 21)

Week 5. **Philosophical Argumentation, Paper Structure & Signposting** (September 26 & 28)

Eileen Nutting, "[Philosophical Writing](#)" (handout)

Jim Pryor, "[Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#)"

Week 6. **The Art of the Introduction** (October 3 & 5)

Write Introduction #1

Daniel Muñoz, "[Writing Philosophy for Publication](#)" + sample introductions

October 7. *Second lit. orientation due: Is it wrong to be wealthy, and hold on to your wealth, when others are poor?*

Week 7. **Is it wrong to be wealthy when others are poor? : Literature** (October 10 & 12)

Week 8. **Is it wrong to be wealthy when others are poor? : Close Reads** (October 17 & 19)

Week 9. **Writing Habits and Procrastination** (October 24 & 26)

Write Introduction #2

Tim Urban, "[Why Procrastinators Procrastinate](#)"

John Perry, *The Art of Procrastination*.

Week 10. **How can the mind affect the body?: Deep Dives** (October 31 & November 2)

Jaegwon Kim, "Supervenience and Supervenient Causation"

Stephen Yablo, "Mental Causation"

Week 11. **How can the mind affect the body?: Idea Development** (November 7 & 9)

November 7: Write Introduction #3

Week 12. **PhD Applications** (November 14 & 16)

Sample CVs and Personal Statements

Alex Guerrero, "[Advice for applying to PhD programs in Philosophy](#)"

Write a CV and a Personal Statement

Thanksgiving Break (November 19-27)

Week 13. **Conference Paper Workshop** (November 28 & 30)

Dave Chalmers, [Guidelines for Respectful, Constructive and Inclusive Philosophical Discussion](#)

Mathew Slater, [Philosophy Presentation Advice](#)

Week 14. **Presentations** (December 5 & 7)