

# PHIL 5004: Proseminar, Spring 2024

**Times:** 2.30–3.45pm Mondays and Wednesdays

**Classroom:** Major Williams Hall 225

**Instructor:** Daniel Hoek, [dhoek@vt.edu](mailto:dhoek@vt.edu)

**Website:** [danielhoek.com/teaching](http://danielhoek.com/teaching)

**Zoom:** [zoom.us/my/dhoek](https://zoom.us/my/dhoek)

**Office hours:** TBD

**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. *If the universe is deterministic, are we free to act as we please?* — (This question touches on issues about laws of nature and the nature of freedom.)
2. *What is so great about being free?* — (This question touches on issues about moral responsibility and the value of freedom.)
3. *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. You will not be given separate grades for individual assignments, just feedback on the content. What matters here is that you respond well to that feedback, and that I can see you develop your skills over the course of the semester: you're not 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.)

January 17. **No class!**

Week 1. **What does a philosopher do?** (January 22 & 24)

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

Two interviews of your choice.

*Writing*: First Lit Review (due January 29)

Week 2. **Are we free to act as we please? : Literature** (January 29 & 31)

*Writing*: First Close Read (due February 7)

Week 3. **Are we free to act as we please? : Close Reads** (February 5 & 7)

*Writing*. First introduction (optional draft February 12; due February 16)

Week 4. **Writing & The Art of the Introduction** (February 12 & 14)

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

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

Week 5. **Writing habits and Procrastination** (February 19; no class on February 21)

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

John Perry, "[Structured Procrastination](#)"

*Writing*: Second Lit Review (due February 26)

Week 6. **What is so great about being free? : Literature** (February 26 & 28)

*Writing:* Second Close Read (due March 1)

*Thanksgiving Break (March 2-10)*

Week 7. **What is so great about being free? : Close Reads** (March 11 & 13)

*Writing:* Second Introduction (due March 22)

Week 8. **What is philosophy?** (March 18 & 20)

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

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

Week 9. **The History of Philosophy with Lots of Gaps** (March 25 & 27)

Peter Adamson, *The History of Philosophy Without any Gaps*, [Episode 1](#)

*Writing:* Deep Dive Kim (due April 1)

Week 10. **How can the mind affect the body?: Deep Dives** (April 1 & 3)

Jaegwon Kim, "Supervenience and Supervenient Causation"

Stephen Yablo, "Mental Causation"

*Writing:* Deep Dive Yablo (due April 8)

Week 11. **How can the mind affect the body?: Idea Development** (April 8 & 10)

*Writing:* Third Introduction (due April 19)

Week 12. **PhD Applications** (April 15 & 17)

Sample CVs and Personal Statements

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

*Writing:* CV or Personal Statement (due April 22)

Week 13. **Conference Paper Workshop** (April 22 & 24)

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

Mathew Slater, [Philosophy Presentation Advice](#)

*Writing:* Handouts

Week 14. **Presentations** (April 29 & May 1)

*Writing:* Conference paper (due May 6)