

Syllabus for PHIL 251.501-509: Introduction to Philosophy

Monday & Wednesday: 3:00-3:50 (ZACH 102); Friday: various times & places
Fall 2008; Dr. Stephen H. Daniel

In **Introduction to Philosophy** you will develop the critical-thinking skills needed to write and speak effectively about the nature of human existence, freedom, knowledge, reality, religious belief, ethics, and social justice. This means being able to identify issues, explain the reasoning behind philosophical positions and arguments, evaluate objections raised against those arguments, formulate replies to those objections, and indicate how the problem-solving strategies developed in various areas of philosophy relate to one another.

Course Structure: The course is aimed at enhancing your ability to write and speak about philosophical issues. The best way to achieve these ends is through practice. Accordingly, in Monday and Wednesday sessions you will be expected to have read assignments before class and to have written answers to questions about the reading that are posted on the [course website](#). [You can send drafts of your answers to your TA (teaching assistant) for feedback before class.] In class Dr. Daniel will outline the issues at hand and you will share your written answers with others in small groups. After the group discussions, the class as a whole will address still unresolved questions raised in the groups.

Friday sessions are different. They focus on a question posted on the [website](#) that combines elements from the Monday and Wednesday classes. Your TA will identify the issues to be addressed in answering the question, and you will discuss (first in a small group, then with the whole class) what a good essay response to the question should contain. In the last 20 minutes of class, you will write a short essay (without relying on your notes) that answers the question. If you miss a Friday class with a university-approved excuse, you must come write your essay during the office hours held by Dr. Daniel or one of the TAs before the following Friday.

During the semester you will have three brief (less than 10 minute) individual oral quizzes to demonstrate your verbal ability to discuss material recently covered in the course. You can take your quizzes with Dr. Daniel or any of the TAs during their office hours. **The first quiz must be completed no later than Oct. 2, the second no later than Oct. 30, and the third no later than Dec. 1.** Time slots fill up quickly, so schedule your quizzes early.

All laptop computers and cell phones must be turned off and out of sight during class time.

Grades: The semester grade is based on 12 Friday short essays (total 60 pts), three oral quizzes (total 45 pts), the mid-semester essay exam (30 pts), and the final essay exam (40 pts). To get an A for the course, you need a total of 155 points, a B 137 pts, a C 119 pts, and a D 101 pts.

- **Friday short essays:** in Friday classes, you write a short essay (without relying on notes) about that week's material. Beginning Sept. 5, each essay will be worth 5 points and will be graded according to how well you:
 1. identify precisely what the philosophical issue is and different positions or strategies adopted to address it
 2. explain the reasoning and arguments given to support those positions
 3. raise objections to each of those arguments
 4. formulate replies to those objections, indicating how defenders of the positions can reply to the objections
 5. relate the various topics of the essay to one another and other topics raised in the course
- **Oral Quizzes:** your oral quizzes are evaluated based on the same five criteria used in the Friday short essays. You can get up to 3 points for your performance regarding each of the five criteria, which means that you can get up to 15 points per quiz. Dr. Daniel and the TAs encourage you to schedule practice oral quizzes.
- **Essay exams:**
 - The **mid-semester exam** has three essay questions, each worth 10 pts. The exam will not be given in class. Instead, you will submit answers (no more than 300 words for each question) as an attachment emailed to your TA **no later than 5 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 10**. Questions for the exam will be available on Oct. 6.
 - The **final exam** will be administered in our regular classroom on **Dec. 9**. It will have four essay questions (each worth 10 pts). The questions will be available on Nov. 24.

If you miss the deadline for submitting answers to the mid-semester exam, or miss the final exam for a university excuse, contact Dr. Daniel *immediately*.

If on a rare occasion you miss your regularly scheduled Friday class, you can take part in another discussion led by any of the TAs. In such circumstances, notify the TA before the session begins about your attendance so that you can be added temporarily to a group. The times and locations of Friday sessions are as follows:

9:10, sec. 501, Michael Deem, Zachry 105D
 9:10, sec. 504, David Wright, Zachry 128A
 9:10, sec. 507, Marzena Plizga, Zachry 104A
 10:20, sec. 502, Michael Deem, Zachry 128D
 10:20, sec. 505, Marzena Plizga, Zachry 119A
 10:20, sec. 508, David Wright, Zachry 105C
 11:30, sec. 503, Michael Deem, Zachry 105A
 11:30, sec. 506, David Wright, Engineering-Physics 215
 12:40, sec. 509, Marzena Plizga, Zachry 227A

Students with disabilities are guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, [Disability Services](#), Cain Hall B118, or call 845-1637.

Students are bound by the Aggie honor code not to lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do. If you violate the code (e.g., by plagiarizing something from the Internet), you will fail the course; no second chances. For information on cheating and plagiarism, go to <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/>.

Graduate Teaching Assistants:

Michael Deem—secs. 501, 502, 503
 Bolton 311; 845-0489
 m-deem@philosophy.tamu.edu
 Office hrs: Mon & Wed 10-11:30

David Wright—secs. 504, 506, 508
 Bolton 303; 845-7780
 d-wright@philosophy.tamu.edu
 Office hrs: Tues 8:30-9:30, Thurs
 8:30-10:30

Marzena Plizga—secs. 505, 507, 509
 Bolton 311; 845-0489
 m-plizga@philosophy.tamu.edu
 Office hrs: Wednesday 12:30-2:30,
 4:00-5:00

Textbook: *The Philosopher’s Way* by John Chaffee, 2nd edition (Prentice Hall, 2009): Prentice Hall has made our textbook available for a reduced cost of about \$73 by bundling the book with “My Philosophy Kit” in a shrink-wrapped package with a special ISBN: 0-205-62964-4. You don’t need the Philosophy Kit for the course. Make sure you get the second edition of *The Philosopher’s Way* (cover: rocks balancing), not the first edition (cover: big head carvings). You can also buy the book as an e-textbook for \$47.20 at <http://www.coursesmart.com/9780136032168>, but you won’t have the book to refer to again when your subscription expires after 180 days.

Pages listed should be read before class.

<p><u>Aug.</u> 25 Introduction 27 Thinking philosophically, 4-17 29 <i>Friday discussion</i></p> <p><u>Sept</u> 1 Socrates: method 44-63 3 Socrates: trial/legacy 63-87 5 <i>Friday discussion</i> 8 Self: Plato/Descartes 94-115 10 Self: Locke-Kant, matter 115-31, 141-46 12 <i>Friday discussion</i> (class cancelled) 15 Determinism/compatibilism 158-82 17 Libertarianism/James 182-95 19 <i>Friday discussion</i> 22 Sartre/Feminism/freedom 195-218 24 Reality: Plato/Aristotle 222-42 26 <i>Friday discussion</i> 29 Knowing reality: Descartes 242-61</p> <p><u>Oct.</u> 1 Knowing reality: Locke 268-88 3 <i>Friday discussion</i> 6 Knowing reality: Berkeley/Hume 288-304 8 Kant’s constructivism 305-26 10 <i>Friday discussion/mid-sem exam due</i> 13 Why be religious? 344-60 15 Rational arguments for God 378-90 17 <i>Friday discussion</i></p>	<p><u>Oct.</u> 20 Evil & Faith 391-401 22 Ethical values/relativism 412-30 24 <i>Friday discussion</i> 27 Ethical absolutism/egoism 430-47 29 Against egoism, religious ethics 447-67 31 <i>Friday discussion</i></p> <p><u>Nov.</u> 3 Virtue ethics 474-86 5 Duty ethics 486-500 7 <i>Friday discussion</i> 10 Utilitarianism 500-513 12 Existential ethics 518-36 14 <i>Friday discussion</i> 17 Justice: Plato/Hobbes 554-74 19 Justice: Locke & Rawls 574-88 21 <i>Friday discussion</i> 24 Justice: Mill 599-608 (26) (Travel day) (28) (Thanksgiving holiday)</p> <p><u>Dec.</u> 1 (redefined <i>Friday discussion</i>) 9 (Tuesday): final exam 10:30-12:30</p>
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Office (Bolton 302-B): Mon 4:15-6:15; Wed 5:30-6:30
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