PHI 205: Introduction to Philosophy

Syllabus

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:00 - 1:00 PM or by appointment, ending on the last day of classes, December 4, 2009
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Course TA: Nick Palmer
E-mail: nfpalmer@ncsu.edu
TA’s “virtual office hours”: Mondays and Wednesdays 7:00-8:00 PM

Course Description

Philosophers tend to ask the most basic questions that could be asked, both about things that seem perfectly obvious, such as: Does anyone have any knowledge of the world? Are we free to do what we want or what we should? Philosophers also ask about things that may seem perfectly unanswerable, such as: What is the relation between our minds and our bodies? What are our moral obligations? In this course we will attempt to understand how such questions arise, why we ought to try to answer them, and most importantly, how we can attempt to answer them. We will approach these general questions by reading excerpts from classic philosophical texts, which attempt to pose and resolve one or another of these questions. Our emphasis will be on achieving both an appreciation, and a critical evaluation, of the questions asked and the answers offered by the philosophers we read.

Our course is divided into five somewhat unequal sections. (1) We will begin by reflecting on and practicing critical thinking and some elementary logic. (2) We will then turn to Philosophy of Religion. We will discuss different kinds of arguments about the existence of God. (3) We will then consider the main philosophical question about knowledge. We should discuss the differences between belief/true belief and knowledge. We will examine the different philosophical positions about knowledge and our possession of knowledge of the world (philosophical skepticism, the Reliability Theory of Knowledge etc.). (4) Next we will turn to Philosophy of Mind. We will discuss arguments to show that the mind and body are distinct kinds of things (Dualism) and opposing arguments to show that they are one and the same thing (Identity Theory). We will then consider one of the most important contemporary views, that what the mind is, concerns how it works, not what it is made of (Functionalism). We will also consider issues about Freedom of the Will. We will discuss arguments to show there is no such thing as freedom (Behaviorism), opposing arguments to show that there is freedom (Libertarianism—not in its political sense), and we will consider some arguments to show that freedom and determinism do not conflict (Compatibilism). (5) Our final unit is on Ethics. We will discuss Emotivism and Ethical Relativism and their accounts of human virtue and moral behavior. Finally we will consider two basic principles (or criteria) of right action (Utilitarianism and Kantianism) as well as ethics of virtues (Aristotle).

Our topics are unified by the theme of critical thinking. First we shall examine what critical thinking is. Critical thinking involves understanding and evaluating reasons that are offered to believe various things. This concerns assessment; it is not inherently negative. Sometimes the reasons, offered to believe something, are indeed adequate, and it is important to be able to recognize when that is so. Then we shall examine the crucial importance of critical thinking in knowledge, in freedom, and in right action. While studying critical thinking in each of these connections our course will provide you frequent opportunities to develop your own skill at critical thinking. Developing your skill at critical thinking is intrinsically important and it will enable you to better appreciate its role in these different areas. I hope you will discover that critical thinking is interesting and adds a unique vantage to life. Moreover, I even hope you will discover that it is fun.

The course will be taught with the assistance of the philosophy major, Nick Palmer. His main responsibility will be administrating and moderating the course discussion and message boards. He will also help grading the homework
assignments given in the essay format as well as provide consultations on course materials. He will offer ‘virtual’ office hours to consult on course materials and answer your questions.

Objectives and outcomes guiding the work in this course

This course has several important learning outcomes that have structured its design and shall guide the work over the semester. By the end of the semester, you will:

1. Become familiar with the central philosophical issues (such as questions about the free will and determinism, existence of God, relation between the mind and body, etc.) and the answers and solutions to these issues offered by philosophers.
2. Know the main theoretical concepts developed by some of the great philosophers and be able to recognize their significance for philosophy and our own lives.
3. Be able to read and respond to philosophical writings, critically evaluate basic philosophical ideas and arguments.
4. Develop skills in analyzing primary philosophical texts in a variety of ways, including the following abilities:
   - To discuss course readings in basic terms;
   - To identify major positions and concepts;
   - To demonstrate overall comprehension of course texts;
   - To explain material clearly, accurately, precisely;
   - To draw insightful connections between issues and ideas;
   - To present alternative perspectives; and
   - To defend rationally a wide range of views.
5. Be able to express a reasoned philosophical position both orally and in writing.
6. Write and speak with greater confidence about the nature of philosophical inquiry.
7. Develop skills in writing philosophical essays.

Course Format

The course is offered at a distance: "online" via the internet. Although course information is provided through an internet connection to your computer, the course structure incorporates regular interactions between the instructor/TA and students and among students. Those interactions are an important part of the course design. You will benefit from participation in the on-line discussions, contacts with other students (email or other communications), and regular communications with the instructor (email, telephone, fax, and, if you desire, on the face-to-face basis).

Course Organization

The course site is located in WebCT Vista. The Vista Classroom provides access to the entire course content, including the syllabus, lecture notes on all five topics, and all writing assignments. The Vista Classroom offers links to the communication tools that are used in the course, such as the Message Board and Calendar, as well as provides active links to quizzes, exam, and homework assignments. Please note that all written assignments will be completed and submitted in WebCT Vista. Your comfort with using the site and the tools it offers is essential to you performing successfully in the course. Be sure to explore all course areas thoroughly during the Course Orientation Lesson. Read the Help Handbook posted on the Vista site.

Required Text

Additional References (optional)

Course requirements and policies

Course requirements include participation in on-line discussions, reading assignments (both on-line lecture notes as well as the textbook), and writing assignments, including exercises, homeworks, quizzes, and the cumulative final exam. The due dates of all assignments are noted on the Course Schedule below; all essential dates are also posted on the Calendar in WebCT Vista. Notice that for each topic, all assigned activities including both reading and writing assignments must be completed before the start date of the subsequent topic. Please respect the start dates for each topic, as provided on the course schedule. The Help Handbook provides all necessary information on how to take quizzes, exam, and/or submit homework assignments on-line. This information is crucial for your success in the course, and I encourage you to thoroughly study the document to avoid frustration.

Course Grading Policy: Feedback for acknowledgment and improvement from you, classmates, TA, and me will be a regular part of the course. Each course requirement will be evaluated individually according to appropriate rubrics and assigned points within a given point range. A final grade will be assigned based on total points for all course activities and calculated on the basis of the following percentage scheme:

- Quizzes on the course materials (total) 40%
- Introductory Quiz 5%
- Homework Assignments (total) 30%
- On-line discussion participation 5%
- Final Exam 20%
- TOTAL 100%

At the end of the semester your total score will be linked with letter grades. I will use +/- grades with the following scheme:

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<th>Grade</th>
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Participation: It is my belief that we learn best with a positive model and plenty of opportunities for practice with feedback. As undergraduate students you should be able to lead class discussions and present new material in ways that promote learning. You are expected to initiate and participate in on-line discussions on the course materials on the Course Discussion/Message Board in Vista. It is assumed that you will:

- raise relevant questions and observations appropriate to the topic
- give voice to different points of view
- participate through a reflection of your relevant experiences, as well as your completion of the reading assignments
- complete all required assignments in timely manner including the sets of mandatory exercises on each of the five topics to be discussed in the course
- learn and have fun with the course

Writing assignments: You will be asked to complete and/or submit all your writing assignments on-line, except the exercises that will not be submitted for grading (see below). Most of your homework assignments, quizzes, and the final exam will consist of multiple choice, false-true, and/or matching questions. They will be graded
automatically. Only two of your homework assignments (HW3 and HW5) will be given in form of essay. In this case, your work will be graded manually. The detailed instruction on how to submit your essay entries is given below. Please read it carefully.

(a) **Homework assignments**: There are 5 (five) homework assignments, one for each topic discussed in the course, but only **4 (four) will be counted toward your final grade**. That means you can skip 1 (one) of the HWs without any penalty or excuse. If you submit all five homework assignments, I will count the four with the highest scores toward this portion of your final grade.

The homework assignments are **NOT time-limited** and will be accessible on-line at least two weeks prior to their due dates. This should allow you the maximum time to work on homework problems. All homework questions will be delivered at once. You might want to download, print out the assignments and work on them (**on your own**) when and where you wish. Once you are done you should submit your answers on-line. Note that **all** homework assignments must be submitted by their due dates, which are listed on the course schedule. The homework assignments are divided into two groups according to the format they will be given in.

(1) **The homework assignments #1, 2, and 4 (HW1, HW2, and HW4) will be given in form of true/false and/or multiple choice questions**. To access these homework assignments log into WebCT Vista and click on the folder titled ‘Assessments’. On HW1, HW2, and HW4 assignments, you will have **two (2) attempts**, and your final score for each of these assignments will be your **average** score for those two attempts. Correct answers (along with feedback) will be supplied to students within 24 hours after the assignment deadline expires.

(2) **The other two homework assignments (HW3 and HW5) are given in form of essay and/or short answer questions**. These assignments must be also submitted (posted) on-line. You will be given a set of questions or topics and asked to write a short (4-6 paragraphs) essay addressing these questions/topics. The explanations I want to see in your entries are ones that you would give your roommate or friend if she or he asks you what, say, philosophy is dealing with, or why the inference to the best explanation is an inductive, and not deductive, reasoning. In other words, I do not want to see explanations which are full of the same jargon which the philosophers use, but ones intended to convey the information to someone who does not know it already. These explanations need not to be long: what you shall do is to answer the set of questions or explain the given concept as concisely and as briefly as possible. Also, you should be critical, in the sense that you evaluate the concept you are discussing. The sorts of questions you should keep in mind are ones such as: Are these claims right? What objections might someone raise in response? Are there any counter-objections the argument in question might have? Everybody is expected to read essays posted by his/her classmates and provide some helpful comments as well as responses. My TA or I may occasionally require students to reply to someone’s posting on the Message Board.

Notice that all essay assignments must be also completed in accordance to the course schedule, by their due dates. Your essays as well as your responses and comments on your classmates’ essays and answers will be graded manually according to appropriate rubrics. My TA and I will try to provide you with a reasonable feedback so you can improve your writing and discussion skill as well as its effectiveness in subsequent assignments. All essays as well as responses to others must be posted on the class Message Board (to the ‘Discussion Forum’ part) for all class members to read and response. (The ‘Discussion Forum’ is structured according to the topics under consideration; HW3 and HW5 have specially assigned columns. Please consult the Help Handbook Technical Information page on how to use the Discussion/Message Board.)

(b) **Exercises**: In addition to homework assignments, there are **five sets of exercises** that you must complete for each of the course topics. Please notice that the exercises are given as one of the course assignments, and it is **mandatory** (not optional!) to do them. Also, remember to do as many exercises from the text book as you can. The exercises will **not** be turned in and/or graded, but you should be prepared to go over any of them by the due dates. Answers to each topic exercises will be provided before the start date of the subsequent topic.

(c). **Tests (quizzes and the final exam)**: There will be given 4 (four) quizzes total: 3 (three) quizzes on the course materials and 1 (one) introductory quiz on the material covered in the Help Handbook and the course syllabus.

Out of 3 (three) quizzes on the course materials, only **2 (two) will be counted toward your final grade**. That means you can skip 1 (one) of the three quizzes without any penalty or excuse. If, however, you take all three quizzes, I will count the two with the highest scores toward the quiz portion of your final grade. That rule, however, does not
apply to the introductory quiz. The intro quiz is mandatory; it will be graded like all other quizzes and counted toward your final grade (5% of the final grade!) without any substitution.

The final exam is REQUIRED. It is a comprehensive exam that will consist of questions on materials covered in this course.

All four quizzes and exam are on-line, time-limited tests. The quizzes and final exam questions will be released the night before they are due and available online for a full 24 hours period. However, the actual time for you to work on each test will be limited to one-and-half hours (90 minutes) for each of four quizzes and three hours (180 minutes) for the final exam. It should give you plenty of time to carefully read and answer all questions. You should, however, keep in mind that once you started taking a quiz/exam (that is, once you clicked on the ‘Begin the test’ button) you will not be able to stop a timer and will have to finish the test at once. So, please plan your time wisely and allow an appropriate time to take each test. Also, you will have only one attempt on the quizzes and the final exam.

All quizzes and the final exam will be graded within 24 hours after the test availability time expires. The correct answers to the quiz and exam questions will be supplied to students after all students completed the test. After receiving test answers do not rush with your questions, review all the relevant notes and readings to see if you can figure out on your own why an answer was incorrect. If you are still puzzling about the answers, post your substantive questions on the Message Board and let us clarify them together. Everybody’s input is highly encouraged.

Use of E-mail and on-line communication: In this course students may be required to disclose personally identifiable information to other students in the course, via electronic tools like email or web-postings, where relevant to the course. Examples include online discussions of class topics, and posting of student coursework. All students are expected to respect the privacy of each other by not sharing or using such information outside the course.

To allow a successful communication there has been created a Message Board, which is located in WebCT Vista. The on-line Message Board consists of two parts: the so called ‘Discussion Forum’ and the Message Board itself. While the ‘Discussion Forum’ will be used for submitting essay assignments (HW3 and HW5) as well as possible responses to posted works, the other part of the Board to be used in this course will serve as a real Message Board to post your course questions and comments. Note that the Message Board has been created to allow a successful communication between students and the instructor and TA.

Please use your best judgment to determine which correspondence you should send privately, and which messages can be posted to the Class Message Board in WebCT Vista. General course questions/comments should be placed on the Message Board, where students have the opportunity to assist their classmates and benefit from my response. Your fellow classmates are an excellent resource, so take advantage of the wealth of expertise we have in class. Please write ‘Help’ in the subject line of your message to post technical problems or questions about course material. You are expected to check the course Message Board as well as your e-mail frequently; at least daily is advisable. Since the WebCT Vista uses the official class list for e-mailing to the entire class, be sure that the Registration Office lists the (one and only!) e-mail address that you want to use. So, for example, if the university has assigned you the unity e-mail address but you want instead to receive messages at your private e-mail address, you should modify your listing accordingly through the Registration Office.

If you contact me or TA via e-mail about any matter pertaining to the course, please begin your subject line with PHI 205 and DON’T FORGET (!) to put the section number (you might be enrolled in section 601 or 602). In addition, please give a good hint about the message’s topic in the remainder of the subject line. Otherwise, responses to your message may be delayed.

Policy on Late Work: No late work will be accepted, and no extensions will be granted, without sufficient, legitimate, documented excuse. If you have a dire emergency, illness, important business trip or significant lingering technical problem you should request special permission for an extension prior to the day the assignment is due. Informing me after the assignment due date is unacceptable unless you have an extremely serious situation, like an emergency hospitalization.
**Policy on Credit Only:** In order to receive a grade of S, students are required to take all exams and quizzes, complete all assignments, and earn a grade of C- or better. Conversion from letter grading to credit only (S/U) grading is subject to university deadlines. Refer to the Registration and Records calendar for deadlines related to grading. For more details refer to [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.15.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.15.php).

**Policy on Incomplete:** As stated by the university grading policy, "An IN must not be used...as a substitute for an F when the student's performance in the course is deserving of failing. An IN is only appropriate when the student's record in the course is such that the successful completion of particular assignments, projects, or tests missed as a result of a documented serious event would enable that student to pass the course." In this class, a grade of "IN" will only be given (1) in response to a written student request [e-mail is fine] submitted to me before 4:00 on the last day of classes; (2) at my discretion; and (3) because of a serious interruption a student's work not caused by his/her own negligence. The university's policy on incompletes can be found at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/pols_regs/REG205.00.13.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/pols_regs/REG205.00.13.php).

**Student Conduct:** The instructor acknowledges the existence of the University policy on academic integrity found in the [Code of Student Conduct Policy (POL11.35.1)](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_discipline/POL11.35.1.php) and expects students to adhere to it. The Code of Student Conduct Policy is available at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_discipline/POL11.35.1.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/student_services/student_discipline/POL11.35.1.php)

You should feel free to study and work with other students outside class. But academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Homework and test assignments, as well as all other writing products, submitted for grading must be the product of the student submitting the work. The Honor Pledge ("I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this test or assignment.") must be signed on each test or assignment. All students have to practice academic integrity throughout the course. Any evidence of academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) will be pursued diligently.

**Disability Policy:** Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with Disability Services Office [http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/](http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/) located at 1900 Student Health Center, Campus Box 7509. 515-7653. For more information on NC State's policy on working with students with disabilities, please see the Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Regulation at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/academic_affairs/courses_undergrad/REG02.20.1.php).

**Course Equity:** NC State University provides equality of opportunity in education and employment for all students and employees. Accordingly, NC State affirms its commitment to maintain a work environment for all employees and an academic environment for all students that is free from all forms of discrimination. Discrimination based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation is a violation of state and federal law and/or NC State University policy and will not be tolerated. Harassment of any person (either in the form of quid pro quo or creation of a hostile environment) based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation also is a violation of state and federal law and/or NC State University policy and will not be tolerated. Retaliation against any person who complains about discrimination is also prohibited. NC State's policies and regulations covering discrimination, harassment, and retaliation may be accessed at [http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/campus_environment](http://www.ncsu.edu/policies/campus_environment) or [http://www.ncsu.edu/equal_op](http://www.ncsu.edu/equal_op). Any person who feels that he or she has been the subject of prohibited discrimination, harassment, or retaliation should contact the Office for Equal Opportunity (OEO) at 515-3148.
Projected Course Schedule

The schedule below shows the reading schedule, quizzes and exam dates, as well as homework due dates. Assigned reading from the textbook is specified by naming the chapter number in the textbook or the name of the author of the "Reading" in the textbook (in some cases along with page numbers of portions of the reading). So, for example, Ch2 refers to Chapter 2 in the textbook, which is titled "Deductive Arguments" and starts on page 7. And, "Paley" refers to the material from the textbook "The Design Argument" by William Paley, starting on page 120. (See the table of contents in the course textbook.) In case if readings are not available in the textbook, they are provided as PDF-files and noted on the syllabus as such (see, for example, Plato (PDF)). On-line lecture notes are abbreviated as LN.

Each written assignment is due no later than 11:55 PM (as indicated by the time it is SENT or POSTED) on the day it is due. The quizzes and final exam dates are fixed and will not change. The reading schedule is approximate and may be adjusted, though the start dates for the subsequent topics and subtopics are fixed. Homework due dates should not change either. This information is also available in more updated form in the Course Calendar in Vista.

WEEK 1: August 19 – August 21, 2009
Course Orientation and Introductory Lecture Notes. What is Philosophy?

Readings:
- Help Handbook
- Course Syllabus
- Sober, Preface and Ch1

WEEK 2: August 24 – August 28, 2009
TOPIC 1: Basics of Logic

Readings:
- Topic 1 Lecture Notes
  1. What is an Argument? Deductive Arguments
  2. Deductive vs. Non-Deductive Arguments
- Sober, Ch2

Written Assignments:
- Exercises 1 (start)
- Introductory Discussion (due Tue, 8/25/09)
- Introductory Quiz (due Thu, 8/27/09)

WEEK 3: August 31 – September 4, 2009
TOPIC 1 continues

Readings:
- Topic 1 Lecture Notes
  3. Inductive Arguments
  4. Abductive Arguments and Its Evaluation
- Sober, Ch3

Written Assignments:
- Exercises 1 (finish)

WEEK 4: September 7 – September 11, 2009
(Mon, 9/7/09 – Univ. Holiday)
TOPIC 2: Philosophy of Religion

Readings:
- Topic 2 Lecture Notes
  1. Main Issues, Positions, and Terminology
  2. The Ontological Argument. Anselm’s Proof
- Sober, Ch8, Ch4, Anselm, Gaunilo, Aquinas

Written Assignments:
- Exercises 2 (start)
- Homework 1 (due Tue, 9/8/09)

WEEK 5: September 14 – September 18, 2009
TOPIC 2 continues

Readings:
- Topic 2 Lecture Notes
  4. The Teleological Argument. Paley's Design Argument
  5. Hume's objections to Design Argument
**WEEK 6:** September 21 – September 25, 2009

**TOPIC 2 continues**

**Readings:**
- Topic 2 Lecture Notes
- Philosophical Atheism. The Argument from Evil.
- Theodicy. Nagel’s Atheism
- Topic 1 and 2 Review for Quiz 1

**Written Assignments:** Exercises 2

**Sober**, Ch5, Ch6, Ch7, Paley, Hume (p.123ff)

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**WEEK 7:** September 28 – October 2, 2009

Review for Quiz 1

**TOPIC 3: Epistemology**

**Readings:**
- Topic 1 and 2 Review for Quiz 1
- Topic 3 Lecture Notes
- Epistemology: Main Positions and Terminology
- What is Knowledge? Argument for Skepticism.
- Nagel, Ch12, Plato (PDF)

**Written Assignments:** Exercises 3 (start)

**Quiz 1** (due Tue, 9/29/09)

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**WEEK 8:** October 5 – October 9, 2009

**TOPIC 3 continues**

**Readings:**
- Topic 3 Lecture Notes
- Descartes’ Foundationalism (Descartes’ Meditations)
- Sober, Ch13, Descartes

**Written Assignments:** Exercises 3 (finish)

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**Thru, 10/8/09 – Fr, 10/9/09** FALL BREAK

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**WEEK 9:** October 12 – October 16, 2009

**TOPIC 3 Review for Quiz 2**

**Readings:**
- Topic 3 Lecture Notes
- Reliability Theory of Knowledge
- Sober, Ch14, Ch15, Hume, Ch16, Ch17, Ch18

**Written Assignments:** Exercises 3 (finish)

**Homework 3** (due Thu, 10/15/09)

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**WEEK 10:** October 19 – October 23, 2009

**TOPIC 4: Philosophy of Mind**

**Readings:**
- Topic 4 Lecture Notes
- Philosophy of Mind: Main Issues and Theories
- Descartes' Dualism
- Sober, Ch19, Ch20, Ch21, Russel

**Written Assignments:** Exercises 4 (start)

**Quiz 2** (due Tue, 10/20/09)

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**WEEK 11:** October 26 – October 30, 2009

**TOPIC 4 continues**

**Readings:**
- Topic 4 Lecture Notes
WEEK 12: November 2 – November 6, 2009

TOPIC 4 continues

Readings:
- Topic 4 Lecture Notes
- 6. Indeterminism; Compatibilism

Written Assignments:
- Exercises 4

WEEK 13: November 9 – November 13, 2009

TOPIC 5: Ethics

Readings:
- Topic 5 Lecture Notes
- 1. Ethics: Main Issues, Structure, and Terminology
- 2. Emotivism and Ethical Relativism

Written Assignments:
- Exercises 5 (start)

WEEK 14: November 16 – November 20, 2009

TOPIC 5 continues

Readings:
- Topic 5 Lecture Notes
- 3. Mill’s Utilitarianism
- 4. Kant’s Deontological Ethics
- 5. Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics

Written Assignments:
- Exercises 5 (finish)

WEEK 15: November 23 – November 27, 2009
(Wed, 11/25/09 – Fr. 11/27/09 - Univ. Holiday)

Review for Quiz 3

Readings:
- Topic 4 and 5 Review for Quiz 3

Written Assignments: Quiz 3 (due Tue, 11/24/09)

WEEK 16: November 30 – December 4, 2009

Catch-up and Review for the Final Exam

Tue, 12/8/09 – Final Exam