

Philosophy 109: Introduction to Philosophy (Sections 001C & 002C)  
Spring 2009 - Syllabus

**Professor:** Dr. Larry A. Herzberg

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**Class times/Location:** Section 001C: MWF 10:20; Section 002C: MWF 11:30; N. Halsey 57.

**Office hours:** MW 4:30-5:30; F 1:00-2:00.

**Office Location:** Polk 69; **Phone:** 424-7313.

**Text:** "The Experience of Philosophy" (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> edition), by D. Kolak and R. Martin.

**Class content-** This class will focus on questions that have puzzled human beings for thousands of years. What principles should guide us when we try to decide what to believe? Can anything be known with absolute certainty? Should we be troubled by *uncertain* beliefs? What can arguments for believing in the existence of an all-perfect god teach us about logical argumentation more generally? Are we really *free* to choose what to believe or what to do? Finally, if we are free enough to be held responsible for our actions, how can we know which actions are right and which are wrong? We will discuss these and other intriguing questions from the perspectives of some of such notable philosophers as Socrates, Anselm, Aquinas, Blaise Pascal, René Descartes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and William James. In the process, we will illustrate various methods of philosophical analysis and critical reasoning.

A more general goal of this class is to contribute to your education in the "liberal arts". This sort of education gives you a broad background in the events and ideas that have shaped our modern lives (for better or worse). It increases your awareness of the complexity of human life and thought – quite literally, it "expands your mind", and your ability to learn. For this reason, while a liberal arts education does not teach students how to do a *particular* sort of job, it develops skills that are important in *any* job. These include the ability to understand difficult readings on unfamiliar subjects, to express your thoughts clearly and persuasively, and to reason critically, creatively, and independently.

**Exams-** There will be three in-class exams, each worth 25% of your final grade. These will be given throughout the semester at four or five week intervals. Letter grades will be assigned after each exam according to a curve that will never be "tougher" than the standard scale:  $\geq 94\%$  correct = 'A',  $\geq 88\%$  = 'AB',  $\geq 82\%$  = 'B',  $\geq 76\%$  = 'BC',  $\geq 70\%$  = 'C',  $\geq 64\%$  = 'CD',  $\geq 58\%$  = 'D'. The effect of any "curving" of grades will always be to *lower* these percentages (in order to compensate for the difficulty of a given test). **To make up a missed exam, you must have written documentation of a good excuse from a doctor or school official. Make-ups cannot be given after the exam has been discussed in class, except in extraordinary situations.**

**Quizzes-** There will be five or six **open-book/open-notes** quizzes, worth a total of 25% of your final grade. These will be taken online (on D2L), and subsequently discussed in class. The lowest quiz score will be discarded and the remaining scores summed up before a letter grade for all quizzes is computed. **Make-up quizzes will not be allowed after each quiz has been discussed in class.**

**Optional writing assignment-** If you wish, you may opt for an alternative to the grading system outlined above. Instead of the exams and the totality of quizzes each counting for 25% of your grade, each will count for 22.5%, and the final 10% will be based on a short (2-3 page) writing assignment, which I will make available to you a few weeks before the end of the semester.

**Challenging the incorrectness of an answer-** The answers to all of the questions asked in quizzes and exams will be discussed in class. At that time, you will have an opportunity to challenge my determination of a given answer as wrong. If you selected a wrong answer *for a good reason* (for example, because of ambiguity or vagueness in the question or answer choice), I will usually give credit for that answer in addition to the one previously designated as correct. However, be aware that simply *not understanding* a question is not a good reason for getting it wrong. Also, the fact that a question might be a bit "tricky" – that is, require a few steps of reasoning to answer correctly – does not constitute an adequate reason for having given a wrong answer.

**Lecture outlines and handouts-** Outlines of upcoming lectures and more specific handouts will be placed on the D2L website for download. The lecture outlines are not complete lecture notes, but rather helpful organizers for your own notes. They often include relevant passages from the text, and are always closely synchronized with lecture presentations, allowing you to focus on the most central points. I *strongly* recommend that you print out these outlines, bring them to class, and use them as study guides for the quizzes and exams.

**Text-** The textbook, "The Experience of Philosophy" (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> edition), by D. Kolak and R. Martin, is not a complete, self-contained course. Rather, it is a collection of readings that we will be discussing in class. Do not be overly concerned if you find them difficult to understand the first time you read them. The lectures should clarify their main points. However, you will understand the lectures much better if you do the readings *first*. Then, if you review the readings shortly before an exam, you should find them much easier to understand.

**Asking questions-** While this is primarily a class in which I'll be lecturing and you'll (hopefully) be taking notes, you are *strongly encouraged* to ask questions during and after class. You may even receive extra credit for asking thoughtful questions, or for making cogent comments. The old platitude is true: there are no stupid questions! If you are puzzled, probably many others in the class are as well, and your asking a question during lecture is performing a public service.

**Office hours-** Some of you might feel shy about asking a question during class, or a question might arise for you after class. If so, come see me during office hours. A key to success in college (and elsewhere) is to seek help when you need it, and I'm here to help!

**Note on the use of computers and cell phones in class-** Technology is a wonderful thing, when used appropriately. However, using it in class can be distracting, both to your professor and to those around you. For this reason, **use of personal computers in class for anything other than note-taking is prohibited. Use of cell phones during class for any purpose is prohibited.** Please mute your phone before class begins. If you receive a call *or a text message* during class, you may check your phone to see who is contacting you, but you must leave the room to answer it.