

## Introduction To This Course

This course website contains the general instructions and lessons for Philosophy 350, *Philosophy of Culture*. The course lessons provide more than just an outline of the text; they contain suggestions, questions, problems and approaches to Philosophy of Culture which are not within the text itself. In this sense the web material is an aid to orient you through the text and an expansion of the text. Please study it as carefully as you study the text.

### ***TEXTBOOK***

Langer, Susanne K., **Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art**, 3rd ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957. (Paperbound 12th printing, 1982)

Although there are other books on philosophy of culture, Langer's book is most pertinent because it discusses symbolism, rite, art and other topics which are central to the understanding of culture. This work will be the main source for the understanding of the subject matter of the course. At appropriate places the course guide will suggest relevant materials for your information, although you will not be held responsible for such materials.

### ***STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE***

This web course follows the regular structure of the Ohio University classroom course. It has ten regular lessons, each corresponding to a week of classroom discussion and to one chapter of reading in the textbook. Since this is an upper-level course in philosophy, the reading is more difficult and complex and yet more interesting and inclusive. It covers questions in "philosophical anthropology," or the nature of human beings as symbol users, and is concerned with the distinction between humans and other species. Although at first glance you may wonder why philosophy of culture is interested in such questions, as you read along it will become clear that much of our understanding of culture depends on the culture's understanding of what constitutes a human being and his/her place in the scheme of things. This suggests that humans not only relate to the material environment, but also raise questions concerning the nature of their own being, their relationship to the environment and to the entire universe, and that they express such questions and discovered answers in systems of more or less interrelated symbols. While engaged in practical affairs, the human being is not satisfied merely to live from day to day in order to eat, to sleep and to wait for death. Humans tend to raise questions about the meaning of their lives, the purpose of the world, the value of their actions, the destiny of their being after death, and even about the ultimate source of all existence. Culture provides various answers to such questions, answers which are beyond any practical importance, yet which attempt to make sense of the whole, including our lives. In this sense culture includes arts, rituals, religions, philosophies and fundamental scientific conceptions about the "nature" of our world.

A philosophy of culture must accept the fact that there are extremely distinct cultures with distinct languages, rituals, religions, philosophical conceptions and modes of behavior. This fact has led many scholars to proclaim that cultures are relative to their own environments, histories, languages and beliefs,

and that persons of a given culture are bound to that culture. This means that *our* conception of a philosophy of culture may not be valid for all cultures, since it is a product of Western American culture, and other cultures may have a philosophy of culture which would be radically distinct from ours. This observation should warn us against hasty conclusions about the correctness of our views concerning *all* cultures. After all, our view might turn out to be a cultural prejudice on our part among numerous other cultural prejudices maintained by other peoples. Our discussions will include such questions as cultural relativity, the basis of comparison of cultures, and the possibility of "universal" structures of cultures—or at least some universal human characteristics which would explain the variety of cultures and yet give us some basis for talking about something common in all cultures.

As you read along, you will notice that various disciplines such as psychology, linguistics and some behavioral sciences attempt to explain cultures exclusively in terms of their own specific discipline: for example, some schools of psychiatry claim that cultural phenomena such as rituals, arts and even sciences are expressions of thwarted sexual drives; some other schools claim that cultures are expressions of fundamental patterns of our consciousness. Economists would want to explain culture by economic factors, such as that all cultural phenomena are attempts to gain economic advantage or utility. Indeed, such numerous explanations should warn us against any hasty explanation. After all, if each discipline wants to get the credit for explaining the entire culture, then no discipline can demonstrate its ability to perform such a task. It is possible to offer the following reasons for this inability: (1) all disciplines are parts of a total cultural development; they are parts of a complex system and no part is adequate to either explain the whole or be a foundation of the whole; (2) for a discipline to be able to explain a culture, it must be able to explain all other disciplines within the culture. For example, if psychology were to claim that it can provide an explanation of cultural phenomena, then such a psychology would have to explain languages, economy, social structures, arts, rituals, logical and mathematical systems and the vast cultural transformations throughout history. Moreover, it would have to explain the diversity of cultures and their inner complexities.

The above discussion should suggest that an approach to culture may need more than a specific discipline or a summation of various disciplines. This is to say the understanding of culture requires philosophy, since any attempt to explain culture by a sum of various disciplines means that such disciplines must be interrelated. Their interrelationship cannot be based on any one of the specific disciplines and resultantly must have its ground in a philosophy which surpasses any specific discipline. The task of this course is to discuss such a philosophy. Although the task will not be an easy one, the venture nonetheless will be exciting, and for most students unique.

### ***DIRECTIONS FOR STUDY***

The purpose of this course is twofold: (1) it will help you organize the subject matter of the text and clarify the basic concepts, and (2) it will add discussions of materials in the philosophy of culture not found within the text. The reason for the added discussions is the inadequacy of any specific text to provide a complete coverage of a philosophical topic containing more than one approach and subject to various controversies. Philosophy of culture is a process of philosophizing about a vast subject matter and not a survey of different historical philosophical positions. To orient yourself in the course, follow these suggested steps for each lesson in this course guide:

- Read the "Lesson Objectives" which will help you focus your reading.
- Read the "Introduction" each lesson gives for the textbook chapter being studied.
- Read the textbook chapter itself, paying close attention to the main concepts suggested in the course guide.
- Read the "Discussion and Supplement" section of your lesson for an extension and critical review of the subject matter in the textbook chapter.
- Complete and submit answers to the "Writing Assignment" which asks you to treat the "Lesson Objectives" as essay questions. Check your text and course guide to make certain that your answers are appropriate and to the point. (In many cases you will need to think beyond what is given in the text and course guide in answering the questions. You will first have to draw your own conclusions and then design your answers.) Do not submit more than one lesson at a time.

Philosophy, and specifically an upper-level course in philosophy, is usually an unaccustomed field to most persons. Do not be discouraged by your first reading if you fail to grasp the subject matter completely. Reread the web material and the text and do your best to concentrate, since the text has a logical progression. Underline important statements and concepts in your text. Such statements and concepts will be suggested in your lessons. This procedure will aid in your return to the text for answers to the lesson questions.

Above all, involve yourself in the issues being discussed and follow the controversies by engaging yourself in them. See where you would stand on a given issue and what reasons you would give to support your position. Do not take the text to be THE TRUTH. There is no such text; hence you may engage in a controversy with the text and with the positions presented in the course guide. Do not be afraid to think and to question critically any view; critical thinking is at the heart of philosophy.

### ***EXAMINATIONS AND GRADING***

The course has ten regular lessons and two supervised examinations (Lessons Six and Twelve). Each lesson will be given a letter grade (A, B, C, D, or F). The ten lessons will constitute 30% of the course grade; the midcourse examination will count 30%; and the final examination will constitute the remaining 40% of your total grade. Each lesson assignment will consist of five questions, each worth a maximum of 20 points (maximum points per lesson will be 100). The point distribution will have the following correlation to letter grades:

95 - 100 = A	75 - 79 = B-	55 - 59 = D+
90 - 94 = A-	70 - 74 = C+	50 - 54 = D
85 - 89 = B+	65 - 69 = C	45 - 49 = D-
80 - 84 = B	60 - 64 = C-	40 and below = F

The examinations will contain essay questions similar to those you will find in the lesson assignments.