

PHILOSOPHY & CULTURE Syllabus

PHIL 1050 SPRING 2011

MWF 11:00-11:50 ADM 204

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Course summary:

This course is an introduction to the discipline of philosophy for non-majors and minors. Majors are required to take PHIL 2050, Principles of Philosophy. Our course examines the nature of philosophy both explicitly and through the study of some important philosophical problems.

Our questions include these: What is philosophy and how does it arise? Is philosophy important or even inevitable? What is the relationship between philosophy and the culture? Does one need to know about philosophy and need to be able to think philosophically? What are philosophical problems, and what are some examples?

Class format will be mostly lecture, Socratic questioning, and some guided discussion.

<u>Expected learning outcome</u> <i>Successful students will demonstrate:</i>	<u>Means of Assessment</u> <i>By successful work on:</i>
understanding of the discipline of philosophy	Short essays, midterm, final exam, paper
awareness that the culture has philosophical assumptions and beliefs	Short essays, midterm and final exam
awareness that we pick up the philosophical commitments of our culture	Short essays, midterm and final exam
understanding that philosophical issues and problems arise from our ordinary beliefs	Short essays, midterm and final exam
understanding that disciplined philosophical thought is essential to cultural health	Midterm and final exam
awareness that everyone needs to know how to think philosophically	Midterm and final exam
understanding of some examples of philosophical issues in prior historical periods and of the relevance of that history to our own civilization	Short essays, exams, and paper
understanding of some examples of philosophical problems affecting modern Western thought	Short essays, exams, and paper

Requirements and grading:

1) Attendance is required; you cannot learn the course on your own. In class I will sometimes elicit your grasp of the readings, lecture, and course. Your participation through questions and discussion is important, too. You need to be present, mentally active and prepared. Class participation can raise your final grade by up to 1/3 of a grade.

2) Occasional assignments, usually short ½ page or 1 page essays on the readings. These help you wrestle with the readings, typically before we cover those readings, and help me gauge your understanding. You may work on readings with classmates; but for written assignments, separate and come to your own thoughts before doing any writing. I will drop your lowest essay grade. Late essays are not accepted; a missed one counts as "F". Together, they will count **15% of your grade**.

3) A take-home midterm exam, tentatively assigned Monday, Mar. 14th and due Friday, Mar. 18th, testing your grasp of the course readings, issues and problems. If you miss the exam, you must contact me immediately. If you know you'll miss it, contact me beforehand ASAP. I do not guarantee you a make-up exam. **25% of your grade**.

4) A 4-page paper, on a topic relevant to the course. I suggest you develop it from one or more short essays. Due Mon., May 2nd. Late papers receive a lower grade. **25% of your grade**.

5) The mostly essay final exam will test your overall grasp of the course, not your memory of specific facts. I might pass out a list of study questions a week or two in advance. Blue book required; write in pen. Date: *Monday, May 9th, 11:30am--2:30pm*. **35% of your grade**.

Criteria employed in evaluating written work:

Responsiveness to the Assignment: Writing should meet the assignment's purpose directly & fully.

Content: Writing should reflect an understanding of the subject. It should make good use of the relevant concepts, distinctions, positions, and reasons included in course readings or brought out in lecture or discussion. It should be organized so ideas are arranged logically and clearly. Main points should be backed by substantial and relevant details. Your work should be backed by good reasons. Your claims and reasons should be consistent with each other. Anticipate and respond to any reasonable objections.

Execution: Writing should use precise words and well-constructed sentences that clearly represent the writer's reasoning. It should adhere to conventions of grammar, capitalization, spelling, and usage. Writing style should be appropriate to the academy. Your work should be clearly written, its claims precise, its structure clear, with an explicit overall direction. It should be intelligible to an interested student.

Citations and Documentation: Writers must clearly differentiate their own material from source material. When writers use material that is not their own or not common knowledge, they must document the source of the information using a standardized (i.e., either MLA or APA) method.

Other requirements: on time, typed, paginated, tidy (stapled or bound), standard margins & fonts, and dark print. Failure to meet these will hurt your grade. Your paper (not the short essays) should have a cover page with your name, course name and number, date, my name, and a title.

The Catawba College Writing Center offers free, one-on-one consultations to all Catawba students. Tutors have been intensely trained; and while they won't rewrite students' papers for them, they will give students feedback and encouragement at all stages of the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, polishing). You should be prepared to discuss your assignment and to begin making revisions, with the tutor's guidance, during your session. **All** students are encouraged to use the Writing Center which is open afternoons (in ADM 211) and evenings (in the Library, Study Room #5). Walk-ins are welcome, but we honor appointments first. For more information or to make an appointment, call 704-645-4819 or stop by ADM 211.

"A" Superior mastery	A+ 97-100	A 93-96	A- 90-92
"B" Good mastery	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
"C" Satisfactory achievement	C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72
"D" Less than satisfactory achievement	D+ 67-69	D 63-66	D- 60-62
"F" Unsatisfactory achievement			

A+ is not a possible final course grade. Grades can and should measure achievement only.

Text:

There is a coursepack at the bookstore, which I will supplement with some handouts.

Reading and taking notes:

I expect you to do all readings; to do well in the course, you will need to. Some of the material is easy and accessible on your first attempt. Other assignments are quite taxing and will probably require multiple readings. I suggest the following strategy for any difficult reading: read it once quickly simply to get the gist; then read it carefully for details, not worrying about the overall picture; then read it normally, fitting the details into the overall picture.

Lectures sometimes track the readings but also range far afield. Come to class having done the readings. You are responsible for all of them; the final exam will be frightening if you have not grasped them. Since lectures cover material not in the readings, this is another reason to attend each class.

Most students take very sketchy notes. Perhaps they think that they cannot both take notes and listen; perhaps they do not know the value of taking notes. Learn to write while you listen; it not only can be done, it enhances your grasp of what is being said. Take as many notes as you can, without losing too much of what is said. You cannot get by with writing down only key terms and definitions. Your notes are an invaluable resource for understanding the course and for the final exam.

Absences and violations:

To keep attendance--and to learn names--I will start a seating chart in the 2nd or 3rd classes. Choose a permanent seat; see me to change it. I will use the chart to take attendance promptly at the start of class. If late, you might be counted absent; if late enough, you do count as absent. Avoid tardiness; if you are often late (without good reason), I will choose to count you as absent. Sleeping in class and other forms of mental absence count as an absence. When absent, you are responsible for assignments and notes. Get notes from a classmate. If you still have questions, contact me.

No absences are excused. After 3 penalty-free absences, which you needn't explain to me, further absences lower your final grade: for 4-5 total absences, minus 1/3 grade; for 6-8, minus 2/3 grade; for 9-10, minus 1 grade. Missing the class immediately before or after a vacation counts double. Over 10 absences for other than an emergency is automatic grounds for an "F" (or an "I" in some cases), regardless of your grades.

Respect the people and ideas in our class. I don't care if you bring a drink or sport a hat or wear rags. I care that you pay attention to me and to others (so, no cell phones or activated pagers/beepers/watches), that you are on time and ready to work, that you bring a positive attitude to class even if you are struggling, and that you contribute positively to class.

Cheating, working with others to complete individual assignments (unless this is allowed), and falsifying an emergency to skip class or an assignment, all violate the Honor Code. So does plagiarism, employing a writer's ideas (and words) without giving the writer due credit. See me for help about borrowing someone's ideas or words for your use. No electronic devices are allowed during an exam, except for simple watches, computers (if specifically allowed), and any needed medical devices. Specifically, cell phones and any devices that allow for texting are prohibited. Violation of this policy can result in an "F" for that exam.

Schedule of Topics :

I. Culture

- 1) Why we had best not start off as intro courses usually do
 - cultural ignorance and devaluing of philosophy
- 2) Humans vs. animals
 - New powers → new kind of awareness and new kind of self
 - Can't help but ask questions, can't help but rationally examine one's beliefs, etc
- 3) Development of culture (versus instinct) and with it a world view
 - Tradition
 - Identity through culture; we are cultural beings
 - Threats to culture are threats to identity
 - internal threats
 - Better and worse cultures: symbol systems, values, customs, grasp of world
- 4) Problems within culture
 - kinds of problems: "practical" and intellectual
 - logical problems of various degrees of complexity
 - a) simple contradiction
 - b) apparent inconsistency resolved at higher level
 - c) serious logical paradoxes: index card; sniper case
 - i. philosophical problems
- 5) Cultural freedom and liberal education

II. Philosophy

- 1) More than one kind of truth-claim: contingent versus necessary, empirical vs. rational
 - an a posteriori case: the white swan
 - an a priori case: mathematics
 - possibility versus necessity/impossibility
- 2) Philosophy is concerned with necessary truth-claims
 - kinds of necessary truth-claims: a priori but about the world
- 3) The importance of philosophical commitments
 - what is *in* the world versus the structure *of* the world
 - metaphysics, epistemology, and meaningfulness
 - Necessary relationship between philosophical commitments
 - the Long Island house case
 - the sponion case
 - the philosophical concept of a property
- 4) Ad hominem method: appeal to necessary commitments
 - Ultimately: undeniable fundamental commitments in the form of nece presupps
- 5) Cultural criticism and cultural therapy: need to grasp and assess phil commits
 - philosophical commitments in any culture
 - incompatible commitments across cultures
 - deep logical problems in a culture
 - Philosophy as an essential part of liberal education

III. Philosophical problems in our culture

- 1) Pre-modern versus modern Western world views: humanistic versus scientific
- 2) Are physical objects even possible?
- 3) Is it possible for something to cause something else?
- 4) Do humans have free will, or is freedom impossible?
- 5) Are there actions or only events?
- 6) Must we think of values as objective or only subjective?