



**Universiteit  
Leiden**  
Institute for Philosophy

# Philosophy of Culture

## Syllabus

2024-2025

Fall Semester

*Last edited: September 10, 2024*

Credits: 5 ECTS  
Level: 100 (Introductory, no prior knowledge required)  
Time: Tuesday, 13:15-15:00 hrs, LIPSIUS 0.05  
Course code: 5011VPCY  
Prospectus: <https://studiegids.universiteitleiden.nl/courses/126659/philosophy-of-culture>  
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## 1. Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the philosophy of culture. It is comprised of four parts. In the first two parts of the course, we study classical conceptions of culture. We trace the development of the meaning of culture, from Greek *paideia* (part I) to modern *Bildung* (part II), studying texts by Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, Schiller, Schlegel, Hegel and Comte. In part three, we study how the ideals of the *Bildung*-tradition are criticized by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud and how culture itself appears as a problem (respectively: as ideology, as sign of a weak or decadent form of life, and as repression of drives). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of culture becomes significantly more encompassing. It no longer expresses the highest capabilities of human development but different cultures (now in the plural) can co-exist as independent realms of meaning, and everything can be studied as potentially culturally significant. This pluralization of the concept of culture enables a large variety of new approaches to culture (anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, etc.). We end our course with some distinctly philosophical questions concerning the relation between culture and technology: through Heidegger's work on technology we study what distinguishes culture from a merely contingent *Weltanschauung* or world-view; through the work of Arendt and Adorno we study the possibility of vertical hierarchy in culture ('higher' and 'lower' culture, mass culture and entertainment); and we study the power-relations at play in the 'normalization' of culture according to Foucault. Although the course touches on the subjects often, this is not primarily a course on culture in the sense of art and aesthetics, nor a course on the normative philosophical problems involved in culture as it shapes identity (such as problems of cultural difference and cultural relativism). The course rather aims to prepare students for such debates in further studies, by studying a number of classical conceptions of the meaning of the concept of culture as such.

## 2. Course Objectives

This course aims to introduce students to the philosophy of culture. This course does not focus on culture in the narrower senses of art and aesthetics, nor on normative discussions about cultural differences and cultural relativism as they relate to identity, but does aim to prepare students for such debates.

Students who successfully complete the course will have a good understanding of:

- the development of philosophical conceptions of culture;
- important ways in which culture has been conceived as a problem (repression, crisis, alienation, exclusion) and how culture can be criticized.

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

- reconstruct, interpret, compare and critically evaluate different conceptions of culture;
- propose and defend both in writing and orally, basic arguments pertaining to any section of the course.

## 3. Schedule

- Lectures are **Tuesdays, 13:15-15:00 hrs, at LIPSIUS 0.05.**
- Attendance is strongly advised. For those unable to attend, lectures will be streamed live as well as recorded. The streams can be accessed through Brightspace.

Schedules can be found online at <https://rooster.universiteitleiden.nl/schedule>.

#### 4. Literature

*Primary:*

Lectures are based on a number of primary texts that are published on *Brightspace*.

*Secondary:*

There is no single satisfactory handbook on philosophy of culture. General introductory chapters on authors we read in this course can be found at reputable online encyclopedias such as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<https://plato.stanford.edu/>) or the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([www.iep.utm.edu](http://www.iep.utm.edu)).

#### 5. Program

*Part I: What is culture? Classical conceptions I: paideia*

- 1 Tue 10/09 Introduction. Culture as *paideia* I: Plato, Protagoras
- 2 Tue 17/09 Culture as *paideia* II: from Plato to Aristotle

*Part II: What is culture? Classical conceptions II: Bildung*

- 3 Tue 24/09 Culture, civilisation and society: Hobbes and Rousseau
- 4 Tue 01/10 Culture as *Bildung* I: Kant
- 5 Tue 08/10 Culture as *Bildung* II: romanticism and Hegel
- 6 Tue 15/10 Culture and science: positivism (Comte)

*Part III: The critique of Bildung and culture as problem – ideology, regression, repression*

- 7 Tue 22/11 Culture and ideology: Marx

**Mo 28/10 Midterm exam (13:00-15:00)**

Tue 05/10 *No class*

- 8 Tue 12/11 Culture and regression: Nietzsche
- 9 Tue 19/11 Culture and repression: Freud

*Part IV: Culture and technology*

- 10 Tue 26/11 Culture or *Weltanschauung*: Heidegger and technology
- 11 Tue 03/12 High and low culture: entertainment (Arendt and Adorno)
- 12 Tue 10/12 Everyday culture, normalization and power: Foucault.

**Mo 09/01 Final exam (09:00-11:00)**

## 6. Course Load

Total course load: 5 EC x 28 hours = 140 hours

- Attending classes: 12 x 2 = 24 hours
- Exams: 2 x 3 = 6 hours
- Studying literature: 60 hours
- Preparing classes: 12 hours
- Preparing exams: 38 hours

## 7. Examination

*Assessment methods:*

- On-site midterm examination (on university laptops) with open questions (50%)
- On-site final examination (on university laptops) with open questions (50%)

The material covered by the exams comprises of the texts and the lectures. The midterm covers the material from the first 7 weeks of classes (up to and including Marx). The final exam covers lectures 8-12. In the exams, no questions will be asked that cannot be answered on the basis of the lectures and scheduled primary texts. The exams consist of open questions. The exams assess quality of formulation and argumentation, the ability to productively use the relevant course material, and understanding and insight.

Prior to the midterm, sample questions will be made available and an explanation will be given about what is expected from the exams.

*Weighting:*

The final grade for the course is established by determining the average of the two subtests. There is no minimum grade per test. The average course grade needs to be >5,5 to pass the course.

*Resit*

The resit consists of an on-site written examination with open essay questions, covering all course content. No separate resits will be offered for subtests. The mark for the resit will replace all previously earned marks for subtests. **Nota bene: the resit is held in the summer of 2025.**

*Inspection and feedback*

After each of the exams a document containing frequently made mistakes and/or answer-descriptions is posted on *Brightspace*. Along with the grades, as well as the individual grades for individual questions, this should suffice to provide insight into the rationale behind the grade. For individual questions about grades an appointment can be requested by e-mail.