

PHIL 308: Analytic & Linguistic Philosophy

Whitman College – Spring 2003

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or by appointment or drop in!

Course Description

Roughly speaking...

What is now called 'analytic philosophy' originated around the turn of the last century with the work of Gottlob Frege, G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. One of the central ideas shared by those thinkers is that philosophical problems can be resolved (or dissolved) through careful attention to the nature of language and meaning.

Not all subsequent analytic philosophers have accepted the centrality of language and meaning for philosophical inquiry; surely only a small minority today would wholeheartedly accept that approach. In fact, there is no doctrine that all contemporary analytic philosophers share. And while there are certain typical styles, approaches, and issues (not to mention academic conferences and journals), what truly unifies analytic philosophy is simply participation in a philosophical dialog that began with Frege, Moore, Russell, and Wittgenstein, and has continued to the present.

In this class, we will investigate the origins of analytic philosophy, and then trace their development through some seminal work in the middle of the century and ultimately into current thinking. We will focus primarily on issues in the philosophy of language and metaphysics. More specific issues will be determined in part based on student interest.

This course is a seminar for advanced and motivated intermediate students of philosophy. Although no particular background will be presupposed, students will be expected to engage difficult works in recent and contemporary philosophy, and to carry on a certain amount of self-determined inquiry. Students will also be expected to take significant responsibility for planning and leading our class meetings.

Texts to Be Used

Required:

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
2. —, *Philosophical Investigations*

Other readings will be on reserve in the library for you to photocopy.

Recommended:

3. Michael Beaney, ed., *The Frege Reader* (Blackwell, 1997)
4. Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1984)

We will read at least several essays from each. Both of these are well worth owning, especially for those continuing in philosophy.

Outline of the Course

Here is an outline of the major authors and issues that we are likely to examine. Specific reading assignments will be determined as we go along, based on class needs and interests.

Part I: Ideal Language Philosophy (Or: the Primacy of Semantics)

- The origins of analytic philosophy in Frege's philosophy of language
- Russell: ontological commitment and the theory of descriptions
- Wittgenstein's Tractatus: the picture theory of meaning
- Logical positivism: verificationism and the rejection of metaphysics
- Quine's rejection of positivism: holism and indeterminacy
- Davidson's extension of Quine and truth-conditional semantics
- Dummett's anti-realism and the revival of verificationism

< SPRING BREAK >

Part II: Ordinary Language Philosophy (Or: the Primacy of Pragmatics)

- Forerunner: Moore's rejection of idealism
- Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: language as a tool; meaning as use
- Sellars' systemization of Wittgensteinian language-games
- Brandom's inferentialist extension of Wittgenstein and Sellars
- Rorty's neo-pragmatism and the primacy of ethics

Requirements

Class Discussion (35% of your total grade)

Our class meetings will primarily focus on conversation about the readings and the larger issues that they address. You are expected to be an active and productive participant in our conversations. To do this, you must carefully read (and often re-read) the assigned texts before class, and come to our meetings with questions, issues, and ideas to discuss.

There will also sometimes be more specific assignments for you to complete. For example, you may be asked to bring notes on one of the assigned readings, or to prepare a handout and brief oral presentation summarizing an outside reading.

In addition, students will frequently plan and lead our class discussion. Each student will lead discussion (with a partner) twice during the semester, once before and once after spring break. The pair will be responsible for about half of our meeting time (i.e. about 40 minutes).

Brief Essays (40% of your total grade; 8% each)

As we are examining the different views, it is important for you to reflect on the ideas presented and to develop your own thoughts. During the course of the semester, you will submit at least *five* brief essays (1000 words *maximum*) in which you articulate your views on the course material.

- You must submit at least *two* essays before spring break (i.e. by 4:00 on March 14).
- Essays will be accepted until our last class meeting.
- You may submit more than five essays, in which case your five best grades will count toward your overall grade, and the other(s) will be dropped.
- Each essay must focus substantially on a different reading.
- You may write about any of the readings at any point in the semester.
- Each essay will be evaluated based on what we have and haven't done as a class at the time you submit it.
- You may consult and discuss outside sources (primary or secondary), as long as your essay also connects to one of the assigned readings.
- I encourage you to use these essays to explore issues and ideas that you may want to develop at greater length in your term paper.
- Above all else, your essays should be *clear, thoughtful, and focused*.

Term Paper (25% of your total grade)

At the end of the semester you will submit a full-length essay addressing a topic of your choosing related to the course material. Your essay may focus on historical issues of interpretation or on defending your own resolution to a particular philosophical question (or some combination of those). You will be expected to engage views on your topic beyond the assigned reading. I encourage you to talk with me about your ideas throughout the semester, and to develop them in your brief essays.

You will submit a **detailed proposal and outline** by 4:00 on **Friday, May 2**.

Your **completed paper** is due by 4:00 on **Monday, May 19**.

Course Evaluation

At the end of the semester, you will be required to complete an on-line evaluation of the course. Please note that your evaluations will still be completely anonymous: it is impossible for anyone to know which evaluation is yours, and I won't see any of the evaluations until after grades have been submitted.

**** NOTE ****

You cannot receive a passing grade for the course if:

- You miss 6 or more classes, *for any reason*.
- You don't submit at least five brief essays.
- You miss or fail the term paper.

Academic Honesty

All of the work that you submit in this course must be entirely your own. Of course, you can seek help in a variety of ways to prepare yourself for the writing assignments and the exam. So it is **permitted** (and even recommended!) for you to: consult additional readings, search for material on the internet, discuss your ideas with other students, exchange notes with other students, and read and discuss drafts of each other's papers. If you do use someone else's words or specific ideas in your written work, you *must* provide a proper citation to the source.

Plagiarism will *not* be tolerated in any form. You have signed a statement indicating that you understand and will abide by the College's policy on plagiarism. **Any student caught plagiarizing will automatically fail the course**, and may face more severe penalties from the College. (For more details, see the Student Handbook)