PHILOSOPHY 6D03: 20th Century Analytic Philosophy

METAPHILOSOPHY IN THE ANALYTIC TRADITION

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Course Meetings: BSB 105
M 11:30 – 2:20pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophy…has made greater claims, and achieved fewer results, than any other branch of learning. Russell (OKEW, 3)

Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Wittgenstein (TLP 4.003)

Is there such a thing as philosophical knowledge? If so, how might we acquire it? If not, then what are we doing when we practice philosophical inquiry? In response to these questions, this course considers three meta-philosophical theses as they emerge during the early 20th Century analytic turn and evolve into their subsequent contemporary manifestations. We will take special interest in the analytic roots of certain methodological approaches to philosophical inquiry as related to scientific methodology, conceptual analysis, and intuitions.

The first thesis we will consider has a pessimistic outlook towards philosophy. On this view, often described as *quietism* or *Pyrrhonism*, philosophy is not in the business of discovery or presenting these. Rather, philosophy serves no purpose beyond dissolving so-called philosophical problems into nothing more than language problems. For the quietist, philosophical propositions are not knowable and there is no distinctive method by which philosophy is practiced.

A second meta-philosophical thesis, which we will describe as *hyper-naturalism*, shares in the quietist’s Pyrrhonian skepticism. Unlike quietism, however, hyper-naturalism accepts that a number of philosophical problems are legitimate problems and not merely word puzzles. Nevertheless, we should not think of these problems as strictly speaking philosophical, as any genuine problem reduces to a scientific problem. We thus cannot hope to achieve any uniquely philosophical, or intuition-based, knowledge. Our best and last hope, rather, is found in scientific empirical knowledge. Philosophy on this view, then, is at best a theoretical supplement to science or at worst an archaic armchair exercise with no real-world import.

A more moderate naturalist approach we will consider might be dubbed *quasi-empiricism*, from which philosophical problems are both genuine problems and legitimately philosophical. On this view, intuitions and armchair analysis can serve important functions under the right parameters. Furthermore, these intuitions can serve to motivate philosophical hypotheses that can be assessed employing a science-like methodology while not simply reducing to science. The method that best captures this approach to philosophical inquiry is popularly referred to as reflective equilibrium. Our approach to these topics will have a slight historical component, but will be predominantly philosophical. That is, our goal will be to consider and assess the merits and demerits of each of the considered views dialectically in both their historical and contemporary contexts. Our assessments will consider works that make specific reference to philosophy itself on behalf of different methodologies and also consider these methods *en acte* via their treatment of philosophical problems.

COURSE TEXTS

Weekly readings will include journal articles, book chapters, and periodical entries that will be provided online. There is no required text book for this course.
METHOD OF ASSESSMENT

Your final grade will be out of 100 and broken down as follows:

- **Reading Responses (10)** 25 (2.5 points each)
  Each week you will submit a short (1 – 2 pages) critical reflection engaging with some aspect of that week’s reading or topic. These are to be emailed to me by 11:59 pm the night before class and will often serve as discussion topics/points we will address in class.

- **Term Paper** 75
  Topics for the term paper are to be chosen by the students in consultation with me. These papers should aim to be between 7000 – 8000 words (20 – 25 pages) and are due in my office mailbox 2:00 pm Friday, April 20th.

LATE POLICY

If you turn in your assignment late, you will lose 5 marks for every 24 hour period after it’s due.

I am very open to negotiating extensions in advance—not the night before. If you have a family or medical emergency, please notify me as soon as possible to discuss the situation, which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

TECHNOLOGY

Laptops will only be allowed in designated areas in class. **Cellular phones are to be shut off and out of sight.**

CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

We are here to become better at thinking. This goal is facilitated by respectful discourse. Respect does not require that you respect others’ ideas; it does require that you respect everyone’s right to communicate their ideas. Disagreement is not a bad thing as it helps us advance knowledge and learn. If you disagree, do so respectfully and constructively. No ideas are off limits here. But each will be expected to be supported with evidence and the rigors of argument.

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING POLICIES AND STATEMENTS:

Academic Dishonesty

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Email correspondence policy
It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from each student’s own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.

**Modification of course outlines**

The University reserves the right to change dates and/or deadlines etc. for any or all courses in the case of an emergency situation or labour disruption or civil unrest/disobedience, etc. If a modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with an explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. Any significant changes should be made in consultation with the Department Chair.

**McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)**

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work. Please note these regulations have changed beginning Fall 2015. You can find information at mcmaster.ca/msaf/. If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean's office.

**Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

**Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religion and spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the Course Calendar or by their respective Faculty. In most cases, the student should contact his or her professor or academic advisor as soon as possible to arrange accommodations for classes, assignments, tests and examinations that might be affected by a religious holiday or spiritual observance.
TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE
Subject to change depending on class needs.

Important Dates:
- Apr 02 – Term paper topics should be confirmed by this time
- Apr 20 – Term Paper Due

Breakdown of Classes by Date and Topic:

Week 1
Jan 08: Motivations, historical background, and foreshadowing the meta-epistemic and meta-philosophical issues in Early Analytic philosophy.

Week 2
Jan 15: Wittgensteinian Quietism

Week 3
Jan 22: Quietism in Wittgenstein’s wake

Week 4
Jan 29: Quietism in practice

Week 5
Feb 05: Russell’s naturalistic turn and the beginning of naturalism

Week 6
Feb 12: Hyper-naturalist anti-philosophy

Week 7
Feb 19: Quine’s naturalized philosophy

Week 8 – No Class

Week 9
Mar 05: Intuition and conceptual analysis after 1950

Week 10
Mar 12: Reflective equilibrium I: Inquiry in Logic and Mathematics

Week 11
Mar 19: Reflective equilibrium II: Moral-Political Inquiry

Week 12
Mar 26: Against intuition: the bourgeoning experimental philosophy movement

Week 13
Apr 02: Contemporary manifestations of Quietism and Pyrrhonian skepticism

Week 14
Apr 09: Can there be epistemic progress in philosophy?