

# Philosophy 391

## Twentieth-century Anglo-American Philosophy

**Professor:** William Sweet

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday, 9.15–11.15 am, Wednesday and Thursday 3.00-5.00 pm, and by arrangement.

This class is scheduled to meet in the 'N6/N8' time block (Tuesday and Thursday at 7.00-8.15 pm). Information on assignments and examinations, as well as course readings and recommended readings, will be placed on the course moodle page

**Course Description:** Presents some of the major currents of philosophy in the English-speaking world in the 20th century. The course includes a brief account of 19th-century empiricism, pragmatism, and idealism, before turning to 'common sense analysis' (e.g., G.E. Moore), and early discussions of logical positivism and the implications for metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics (e.g., Bertrand Russell, A.J. Ayer, and Karl Popper). The course concludes with a discussion of some major themes in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and key texts in 'ordinary language philosophy' (e.g., Gilbert Ryle, P.F. Strawson, J.L. Austin) and reactions to it (e.g., W.V.O. Quine).

**Prerequisites:** Philosophy 100. This course is normally taken by students in their third or fourth year.

**Course format:** The format will be a combination of lecture, discussion, and seminar presentation.

### Course Outline:

1. Introduction: Empiricism, Pragmatism, and Idealism
  - a. General Introduction
  - b. William James, from *Pragmatism* (1907) ["What Pragmatism Means"; "Pragmatism's Notion of Truth."]
  - c. F.H. Bradley, from *Appearance and Reality* (1892)
2. G.E. Moore and the Origins of "Common Sense Analysis"
  - a. "The Refutation of Idealism" (1903)
  - b. \*"The Subject-matter of Ethics" from *Principia Ethica* (1903)
3. Bertrand Russell  
    "On Denoting" (1905)
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein - I  
    *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922)
  - propositions
  - the picture theory
  - mathematics and science
  - the limits of language
5. A.J. Ayer and "logical positivism"  
    *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), chs. 1 and 6 "Critique of Ethics and Theology."

6. Ludwig Wittgenstein – II

*Philosophical Investigations* (1953)

- ‘responses’ to the Tractatus
- language as a “form of life” and language games
- (anti) private language argument
- ‘Wittgenstein’s full stop’

7. Oxford Philosophy [“Ordinary Language” Philosophy]

- a. Gilbert Ryle, “Descartes’ Myth” (1949)
- b. J.L. Austin, “Other Minds” (1946)

8. Reactions to Ordinary Language Philosophy

- a. W.V.O. Quine, “On What there Is” (1948)
- b. W.V.O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1950)

9. Questions of Knowledge and Justification

- a. Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (1963)
- b. Alvin Plantinga, selections from *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993)

10. Contemporary Pragmatism

Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality” (1994)

11. Contemporary Metaphysics

Charles Taylor, from *Sources of the Self* (1989)

**Texts:**

- *All readings will be placed on StFX’s Moodle platform*

**Method of Evaluation:**

- 1 page commentaries (weekly) 20 %
- 2 short essays (8 pages) 40 % (one of these may be presented as a class seminar paper)
- Final (take home) examination 30 %
- Class notes 10%

**Laptops and other technologies**

Laptops, smartphones, and similar technologies are **not permitted** unless you have my prior, explicit permission. Unauthorized use or related activities will result in being asked to leave the classroom.

**Students with disabilities**

Students who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Centre for Accessible Learning [Bloomfield Centre room 421; (902) 867-5349] as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

**Email and office policy**

I can respond to short messages through email, and I try to check e-mail once a day. **I do not, however, provide grades or answers about course content by email.** Students should make use of my office hours and ask questions in class. Urgent requests (e.g., to meet) are best made by telephone. If I am not in when you call, please call later or drop by.

Writing to a course instructor is not the same as writing to a friend. For example, if you send me an e-mail message, please mention the specific topic of your message in the "subject" line. Use proper English. Begin

the communication with an appropriate salutation, e.g., "Dear Professor Sweet" (A poorly written and misspelled message reflects badly on the author.) Sign the communication with your name and the course in which you are enrolled.

**Policy on plagiarism and academic dishonesty**

St. Francis Xavier University values academic integrity. **All forms of academic dishonesty (including plagiarism) are unacceptable and will be sanctioned.** For the university policy on plagiarism, please visit [http://www.sites.stfx.ca/registrar\\_office/academic\\_integrity](http://www.sites.stfx.ca/registrar_office/academic_integrity)

**Writing Centre**

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the resources of the Writing Centre, particularly with regard to organizing study time, writing papers, preparing for examinations, etc. For more information, please see <http://sites.stfx.ca/writingcentre/>