Contemporary Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition

Course Objectives:

Course Description:
This course will examine the development of the analytic philosophy in the 20th century, from logical atomism at the beginning of the century, to logical positivism and postmodernist analytic philosophy, and finally to the most recent naturalized epistemology. The course will focus on analytic philosophers’ effort in analyzing the meaning of language. We will review a variety of techniques provided by analytic philosophers for clarifying meanings of linguistic expressions. We will examine analytic philosophers’ effort to solve the problems of logical positivism by focusing upon the relationship between language and its contexts. We will also examine how, by treating language as a cognitive activity, cognitive scientists in the last two decades offered answers to many questions raised by analytic philosophers.

Course Content:
This course will introduce students to a significant body of philosophical literature from the analytic tradition, will introduce students to the questions, methods and approaches in the discipline of philosophy, and will emphasize balanced argument, and critical and reflective thought.

Student Outcomes:
Students will acquire knowledge of a significant body of philosophical literature from the analytic tradition, will gain practice in exploring the questions, methods and approaches in the discipline of philosophy, and will acquire skill in emphasize balanced argument, and critical and reflective thought.

Required Texts:

Grades and Assignments:
Students will be graded on the basis of in-class assignments (15%), one class presentation (10%), two take-home tests (20% each), one final take-home exam (25%), and class participation (10%).
Student presentation: Every student in this course will be asked to prepare a presentation of a reading. In these presentations, the students are expected to summarize the main
points of the assigned readings, and to offer comments, reflections, and criticisms for further discussion.

**In-class assignments:** In most classes, students will be asked to write a short response to a question based on one of the topics for that day. Each of these in-class assignments earns one point of course credit (1%).

**Class participation:** Students are expected to read all the assigned materials prior to class, to attend class regularly (no more than two unexcused absences), and to participate class discussion actively.

**Outline:**

**Part I: Language and Logic**

In this part we will examine the earlier development of analytic philosophy, from logical atomism to logical positivism. We will focus on analytic philosophers’ attempts to solve philosophical problems by logical analysis.

1.1 Introduction: Language, mind and the world

2.1 Holiday; no class

2.2 Russell and his criticism of idealism
   - **In-class assignment:** Translating categorical statements.
   - **Readings:**
     - Russell, (1912), *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. I-IV.

3.1 Logical atomism
   - **In-class assignment:** Translating predicate statements.
   - **Readings:**
     - Russell, (1912), *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. V-IX.

3.2 Russell’s theory of description
   - **In-class assignment:** Solving a puzzle.
   - **Readings:**
     - Russell, (1912), *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. X-XIII.

4.1 Russell’s theory of type
   - **Readings:**
     - Russell, (1912), *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. XIV-XV.

4.2 Earlier Wittgenstein
   - **Readings:**

5.1 Logical positivism and the principle of verification
   - **In-class assignment:** Verifying statements.
   - **Readings:**

5.2 Logical positivism and the unity of science
   - **In-class assignment:** Calculating probabilities.
Readings:
Ayer, (1952), Language, Truth and Logic, Ch. III, IV.

6.1 Confirmation and inductive logic
In-class assignment: Determining the degree of confirmation.
Readings:
Ayer, (1952), Language, Truth and Logic, Ch. V.

6.2 Application: Artificial intelligence
Readings:

7.1 The swan song of logical positivism
In-class assignment: Measuring room temperature.
Readings:
Hempel, (1950), “Problems and changes in the empiricist criterion of meaning” (xerox).

7.2 Take Home Test 1 (10/12)

Part II: Language and Its Contexts
In this part we will examine the postmodernist analytic philosophy exemplified by Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions. We will focus on Kuhn’s effort to solve the problems of logical positivism by focusing upon the relationship between language and its contexts.

8.1 Paradigm and Normal Science
In-class assignment: Clarifying the definition of “paradigm.”
Readings:
Kuhn, (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Ch.3-4; Ch. 5-6.

8.2 Crisis and Scientific Revolution
Readings:
Kuhn, (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Ch.7-8, 9.

9.1 Incommensurability
In-class assignment: Spanish and English-speaking monolinguals.
Readings:
Kuhn, (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Ch.10.

9.2 Theory Choice
In-class assignment: Evaluating hypotheses.
Readings:
Kuhn, (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Ch.11-12.

10.1 The Progress of Science
Readings:
Kuhn, (1970), The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Ch.13, Postscript.
10.2 Academic conference; no class

11.1 Taxonomic change
Readings:
Kuhn, (1992), “The road since Structure” (xerox),

11.2 Take Home Test 2 (11/8)

Part III: Language and Human Cognition
We will discuss the recent development of naturalized epistemology, which originally arose from later Wittgenstein’s works on ordinary language analysis. We will further examine how, by treating language as a cognitive activity, cognitive scientists in the last two decades offered answers to many questions raised by analytic philosophers.

12.1 Wittgenstein on language game
In-class assignment: Basic level concepts.
Readings:

12.2 Wittgenstein on family resemblance
In-class assignment: Defining “game.”
Readings:

13.1 Cognitive psychology: Theory of categorization
In-class assignment: Determining prototypes.
Readings:

13.2 Thanksgiving break; no class

14.1 Wittgenstein on rule following and practice
In-class assignment: Rule following.
Readings:

14.2 Cognitive psychology: Procedural vs. declarative knowledge
In-class assignment: Tying shoelaces.
Readings:
Smith, (1988), “Knowing how vs. knowing that” (xerox).

15.1 Cognitive psychology: The nature of concepts
Readings:

15.2 Conclusion: A revolution on the horizon