

Philosophy 418/518  
Topics in Twentieth Philosophy  
Alan Richardson

Special Topic:

**Synthesizing Analytic Philosophy: The Rise of Analytic Philosophy in North America in the Middle of the Twentieth Century**

“The old logic put thought in fetters, while the new logic gives it wings. It has, in my opinion, introduced the same kind of advance into philosophy as Galileo introduced into physics, making it possible at last to see what kinds of problems may be capable of solution, and what kinds must be abandoned as beyond human powers. And where a solution appears possible, the new logic provides a method which enables us to obtain results that do not merely embody personal idiosyncrasies, but must command the assent of all those who are competent to form an opinion.”—Bertrand Russell, 1914

“By adopting scientific method, philosophers are to learn from scientists and mathematicians how to agree; and steady calculation, guaranteed to produce an acceptable answer, is to replace philosophical disputation. If some such hope as this inspired Russell (as it certainly did the Logical Positivists, who learned so much from him) his project was a failure.”—Max Black, 1950

This course tackles an open question in my current research program: Why did American philosophers start employing the term “analytic philosophy” in characterizing their own research programs round about 1948 and what larger significance did that framing of their projects have? Of particular interest to me is the way “analytic philosophy” came to replace “scientific philosophy” in the characterization of logical empiricism and the relations that change had to the decline of American pragmatism and the disappearance from historical consciousness of a variety of other American projects in philosophy (New Realism, Critical Realism, Edgar Singer’s experimentalist philosophy of science)—since all of these projects were much more closely allied to scientific than to analytic philosophy—and to a perceived decrease in the more outward-looking and socially-progressive aspects of the logical empiricist project during the Cold War era in America.

The course is an exercise in contextual history of philosophy—or, as Francesca Bordogna would have it “Philosophy Studies.” That is, it specifically deploys methods and topics from science and technology studies to investigate the shape of the discipline of academic philosophy in the context of post-second-world-war North America. In addition to learning something about the

history of our own projects (since we are, all of us, descendants of the analytic tradition), the course aims to teach transferable skills in contextualist history of philosophy.

Primary literature will be drawn from philosophers such as J.L. Austin, A.J. Ayer, Max Black, C.D. Broad, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl, Antony Flew, Philipp Frank, G.E. Moore, Charles Morris, Ernest Nagel, Arthur Pap, W.V. Quine, Hans Reichenbach, Bertrand Russell, Wilfrid Sellars, Edgar Singer, Susan Stebbing, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Secondary literature includes work by Thomas Baldwin, Deborah Coen, Francesca Bordogna, Cristina Chimisso, Don Howard, Joel Isaacs, Martin Kusch, Andrew Jewett, John McCumber, George Reisch, Sarah Richardson, Thomas Uebel.

Coursework will consist of four very short writing assignments on specific issues in the readings, a final research paper proposal, a twenty-minute oral version of the final paper, and a final research paper of no more than 7500 words.

The course is background for a conference on the same theme being organized by Sandra LaPointe at McMaster and me, which will be held at McMaster in 2014.