

# STUDY MATERIALS: Analytic Philosophy

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## Introduction

### Course Summary:

The ideas prevalent in our own time are influenced heavily, for better or worse, by the development in England and America of a methodology that came to be known as analytic philosophy or (sometimes) linguistic analysis. Its development is best told as a narrative, since there were great differences of style and substance among those thinkers who are grouped in the 'analytic' category. One common element might be a serious and sustained attention to language as the place where philosophical problems surface and where they might either be resolved, dissolved, or their originators absolved.

We begin our study with G. E. Moore at Cambridge University at the turn of the twentieth century and his efforts to save realism from the hands of the Hegelians who dominated British philosophy at that time. Turning next to Moore's classmate and colleague, Bertrand Russell, we observe the effort of logical atomism to develop a perfect language for the empirical sciences. Russell was joined by Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian who studied at Cambridge and met Moore and Russell there.

Logical atomism generated excitement among some scholars in Austria who hoped to make use of it to show the superiority of scientific methodology and the poverty and irrationality of metaphysical thinking. They named their group the Vienna Circle and developed the Verification Criterion of Meaning as the weapon of choice for dispatching meaningless strings of words posing as truth claims. Difficulties within and without the camp of the Logical Positivists (as they were later known) led to serious depletion of the ranks, though not to total abandonment of the project.

Some who sympathized with the emphasis on language but not with the restrictions of verificationism turned instead to a close analysis of language as it is used in everyday life. These 'ordinary language' philosophers (most of whom disliked that label) made fewer claims about what is or isn't the case and focused instead on what our language seems to commit us to. Common commitments or relations among concepts might thus be exposed to view, even if there is no further attempt to defend these as true or applicable to real things. Wittgenstein provided the major impetus to this movement, just as he had earlier provided inspiration to the Vienna Circle, and a related ordinary language approach was piloted by J. L. Austin at Oxford.

After the 1960's, philosophy could be said to be in a post-positivist phase, more pluralistic, less confident in scientific rationality, less likely to label alternative approaches as "nonsense." The course does not treat of the later decades of the twentieth century in detail, but briefly considers three paths taken by many analytic philosophers in recent years: a revival of a (moderately chastened) positivism, a revival of a (likewise chastened) realism, and a spirited defense of anti-realism (which shows

few signs to date of much chastening). Comments on the reactions of Catholic and other Christian philosophers to analytic philosophy are included, along with a concluding assessment of some of the implications of the method of analysis for moral and religious beliefs.

### Texts:

- A. P. Martinich and David Sosa, eds. *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001). This collection contains selections from most of the philosophers whose work is covered in the course and includes some of the more influential criticisms of logical positivism.
- A. P. Martinich and David Sosa, eds. *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001). The editors gather an impressive array of contemporary philosophers to comment on the legacy of 39 major figures of 20th century analytic philosophy, including post-positivists such as John Rawls, Thomas Kuhn and Richard Rorty.
- Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1955). Reflections on the prospects for the rationality of religious faith given the dominance (at that time) of the assumptions of logical positivism. Includes a famous discussion among Oxford philosophers Flew, R. M. Hare, and Basil Mitchell. Out of print, but available through [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com) and at most college libraries.

### Other Resources

Erich Reck, *From Frege to Wittgenstein: Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

*Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. There is a hardback version and an online version (REP Online) that can be accessed in most university libraries. Helpful and up-to-date brief articles on both individuals and topics in philosophy.

There are excellent bibliographies at the end of each article in the assigned textbooks.

## Lesson 1: Roots: Overview

### Reading Assignment

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 1-5 Martinich; pp. 45-56 Sosa on Moore

### **Suggested Assignment**

In his essay on G. E. Moore, Ernest Sosa asks: "If perceptual knowledge is thus mediate and inferential, what knowledge can qualify as immediate and foundational?" According to Sosa, Moore's answer to this question might be along the lines of the argument on p. 52 (of *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*). Why does Sosa say that any proof of the reliability of the senses should not rely on an *inference*, even an implicit one? What is the significance of Sosa's distinction (on p. 49) between knowing *that* one is not dreaming and knowing *how one knows* that one is not dreaming?

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## **Lesson 2: Start Making Sense: Common Sense Realism**

### **Reading Assignment**

*Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, pp. 155-170 Moore; pp. 345-354 Moore

### **Suggested Assignment**

Summarize G. E. Moore's argument against Bertrand Russell's skepticism about perception and memory (see the conclusion of "Four Forms of Skepticism" on p. 170 of *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*).

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## **Lesson 3: The Cat is on the Mat: Logical Atomism**

### **Reading Assignment**

*Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, pp. 185-189 Russell; pp. 112-121 Wittgenstein

### **Suggested Assignment**

Read Bertrand Russell's essay on "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*). Explain the difference between these kinds of knowledge and give two examples of each (not the same as those used by Russell). Why does Russell place so much emphasis on this distinction? Suggest one criticism of Russell's claims about knowledge in this essay.

## Lesson 4: Salvation Through Science: Logical Positivism

### Reading Assignment

*Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, pp. 418-424 Ayer;

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 205-217 Sprigge (on Ayer)

### Suggested Assignment

In the selection from A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* included in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology* (pp. 418-424), what is Ayer's initial statement of the "criterion of verifiability"? As the essay progresses, Ayer makes several revisions to the initially succinct statement of the criterion -- verification becomes (a) either verification or falsification, then (b) possible verification or falsification, then (c) possible weak verification or falsification. Explain why each of these revisions is required.

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## Lesson 5: Seeking Rock Bottom: Verification Criterion of Meaning

### Reading Assignment

*Analytic Philosophy*: pp. 425-435 Carnap

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*: pp. 94-109 Sarkar (on Carnap)

### Suggested Assignment

Explain how Carnap's commitment to science led him to endorse a Principle of Tolerance. Unlike some of his positivist colleagues, Carnap believes that questions about what is real (independently of language) are meaningless. How might this claim be criticized?

## **Lesson 6: Feeling Groovy: Noncognitivism in Metaethics**

### **Reading Assignment**

*Analytic Philosophy*: pp. 355-364 Stevenson; pp. 365-380 Anscombe

### **Suggested Assignment**

In his essay on "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," C. L. Stevenson concludes that moral statements are "social instruments." What are his main criticisms of what he calls the 'interest theory' of moral judgments (i.e. various forms of moral relativism)? What are some implications of Stevenson's claim that moral disagreements cannot be resolved by any rational method?

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## **Lesson 7: Testing God: Accommodationist Philosophy of Religion**

### **Reading Assignment**

*New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, pp. 96-108 (sec. VI) Flew, Hare, Mitchell, Flew (reply)

### **Suggested Assignment**

In his reply to Basil Mitchell, Flew argues that the kinds of evidence Mitchell appeals to as confirming or disconfirming theism do not in fact do so, given theistic claims about the divine attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, and so on). Explain Flew's objection, and suggest how Mitchell might respond to it.

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## **Lesson 8: Foundation Cracks: Demise of Positivism**

### **Reading Assignment**

*Analytic Philosophy*: pp. 450-462 Quine; pp. 225-233 Quine

### **Suggested Assignment**

In Quine's "Two Dogmas" essay, explain why he thinks the two dogmas (a sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, and reductionism with respect to synthetic statements) are really one and the same. Briefly explain Quine's own pragmatic or instrumentalist theory of science and suggest one possible criticism of it.

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## **Lesson 9: Gamesmanship: Language Games**

### **Reading Assignment**

*Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 497-510 Wittgenstein;

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 82-93 Hacker on Wittgenstein

### **Suggested Assignment**

Summarize Wittgenstein's arguments against the common sense view that understanding meaning is an activity of the mind.

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## **Lesson 10: A Modest Proposal: Ordinary Language Philosophy**

### **Reading Assignment**

*Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 436-449 Austin;

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 218-230 Searle on Austin

### **Suggested Assignment**

On pp. 439-440 of "A Plea for Excuses" (in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*), J. L. Austin offers attempts to justify the method of linguistic analysis and to respond to some common criticisms of it. Do you find his case persuasive? Why or why not?

## Lesson 11: Black Holes: Anti-Realism

### Reading Assignment

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 378-392 Miller on Dummett; pp. 428-433 Williams on Rorty

### Suggested Assignment

Explain Michael Dummett's theory of truth as warranted assertability (discussed by A. Miller on p. 387f of *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*). Why does this thesis force Dummett to deny the Law of the Excluded Middle? How is Wittgenstein's dictum that meaning is use important to Dummett's theory of truth?

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## Lesson 12: Realism with Attitude: Neo-Realism

### Reading Assignment

*Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, pp. 190-198 Chisholm;

*A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 281-287 Foley on Chisholm

### Suggested Assignment

Explain Chisholm's method of *particularism* in arriving at a theory of knowledge. Describe the alternative approach of *methodism*. Is the choice between these simply arbitrary?