

PHILOSOPHY 597: PROSEMINAR (FALL 2026)

Professor Eric Swanson

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:45–12:45 in 2259 Angell Hall, and by appointment.

In this course, we'll discuss a wide range of important themes in contemporary analytic philosophy, organized around the theme of common and 'uncommon' sense. Some of the work we'll read treats common sense as a tribunal, some as a scheme open to revision under pressure, some as a source and sustainer of injustice, and some as an authority to be overturned or overthrown in favor of an 'uncommon,' revisionary perspective on the world.

As we explore this dialectic we'll consider questions in epistemology, philosophy of language, metaphysics, ethics, and social and political philosophy. Studying these areas independently can make them seem like a scattering of isolated islands. My hope is that we can come to see them—perhaps in tension with philosophical common sense—as a dense archipelago, affording many opportunities for communication, cooperation, and collaboration.

CLASS

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1–2:20, in 2401 Mason Hall. With your consent, I plan to record our seminars, in case one of us gets sick. In such cases, please feel free to watch on [Lecture Capture \(https://umich.instructure.com/courses/857152/external_tools/1262\)](https://umich.instructure.com/courses/857152/external_tools/1262).

One student will present for each of numbers 1–28 on the schedule of readings, below. Four meetings have two presentation slots, one per reading: Rawls and Anderson; Williamson and Edgington; Anscombe and Foot; Moore and Williamson. Each presentation should raise one question about the reading or readings it covers, and provide just enough background so that someone who didn't quite understand the relevant parts of the reading could follow the question and (much of) the subsequent conversation. Feel free to use a handout but keep it to a maximum of one page. Do not use slides.

To help me distribute presentation topics equitably, I'd like to know your preferences for topics. So, by September 1, please email me your preferences over 1–7. By September 10, please email me your preferences over 8–14, 15–21, and 22–28. You should convey your preferences for each group with a preorder. That is, if you prefer 1 to 2, which for you is tied with 3, and you prefer all of those to 4, one part of your preferences for the first group could be specified like this: ' $1 > 2 \sim 3 > 4$ '. I'll hold 29 and 30 in reserve, in case someone misses a presentation date; don't rank them.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

[Discussions](https://umich.instructure.com/courses/857152/discussion_topics) (on the Canvas site: https://umich.instructure.com/courses/857152/discussion_topics) is the online place to ask course-related questions and to start course-related chats. If you have a question that isn't specific to you, please post there!

Email me (ericsw@umich.edu) with 'Phil 597' in the subject line for questions that are specific to you.

My office hours are 11:45–12:45 on Mondays and Wednesdays, in 2259 Angell Hall. You don't need to make an appointment to drop by at these times!

READINGS

Readings (and supplementary readings, as things come up) will be available in the Files section on Canvas (<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/857152/files>).

Please feel free to discuss the readings with me and with each other. However, focus on the assigned readings.

GRADING

30%: Active participation in seminar.

30%: Your four presentations, described above.

40%: one roughly 10–14 page paper, developing one of your questions in more depth, and considering at least two potential responses on behalf of your interlocutor, due by December 16. (This is the default arrangement, but if some other arrangement would work better for you, please talk to me about what you'd like to do in advance.) I'm very happy to brainstorm, discuss, read drafts, etc.!

Your distribution unit for the course will be a function of your final paper's topic. If you'd like this course to satisfy a particular distribution unit, bear that in mind when you think about your preferences for presentation topics.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Mon, Aug 31	Introductory meeting
Wed, Sep 2	1. G. E. Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense" G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World" (excerpt)
Wed, Sep 9	2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>On Certainty</i> , §§1–65, §§90–192, §§341–343
Mon, Sep 14	3. Friedrich Waismann, "Verifiability," pp. 119–127 H. L. A. Hart, <i>The Concept of Law</i> , ch. VII, §1
Wed, Sep 16	4. C. S. Peirce, "Issues of Pragmatism" Cheryl Misak, <i>The American Pragmatists</i> , §§3.3–3.5
Mon, Sep 21	5. W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" Gillian Russell, "Quine on the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction"
Wed, Sep 23	6. H. P. Grice and P. F. Strawson, "In Defense of a Dogma" P. F. Strawson, <i>Individuals</i> , pp. 9–11
Mon, Sep 28	7. J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses"
Wed, Sep 30	8. Nelson Goodman, <i>Fact, Fiction, and Forecast</i> , ch. 3 Catherine Elgin, "The Legacy of Nelson Goodman"
Mon, Oct 5	9. John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> , Chapter 1, §4 and §9 10. Elizabeth Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices: A Pragmatist Perspective"
Wed, Oct 7	11. Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture I
Mon, Oct 12	12. Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture II
Wed, Oct 14	13. Robert Stalnaker, "Reference and Necessity"
Wed, Oct 21	14. David Lewis, "New Work for a Theory of Universals"

Mon, Oct 26	15. Timothy Williamson, “Hyperintensionalist Metaphysics as a Case Study in Overfitting” 16. Dorothy Edgington, review of <i>Overfitting and Heuristics in Philosophy</i>
Wed, Oct 28	17. Elizabeth Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy” 18. Philippa Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect”
Mon, Nov 2	19. Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion”
Wed, Nov 4	20. P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”
Mon, Nov 9	21. Nomy Arpaly, “Moral Worth” Antonio Gramsci, “The Study of Philosophy”
Wed, Nov 11	22. Miranda Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> , ch. 1 and ch. 7, §7.1
Mon, Nov 16	23. Kristie Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression”
Wed, Nov 18	24. C. Thi Nguyen, “Trust as an Unquestioning Attitude”
Mon, Nov 23	25. Nāgārjuna, <i>Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way</i> , ch. XXIV Jay L. Garfield and Graham Priest, “Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought” David Lewis, “Letters to Beall and Priest”
Mon, Nov 30	26. Thomas Kelly, “Common Sense as Evidence: Against Revisionary Ontology and Skepticism” Aristotle, <i>De Interpretatione</i> , ch. 9
Wed, Dec 2	27. Susanna Rinard, “Why Philosophy Can Overturn Common Sense”
Mon, Dec 7	28. G. E. Moore, <i>Principia Ethica</i> , ch. 1, §§1–13 29. Timothy Williamson, “Moral Anti-Exceptionalism”
Wed, Dec 9	30. Amia Srinivasan, “Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking”