

PHILOSOPHY 597: PROSEMINAR
WINTER 2021

Professor Eric Swanson, <ericsw@umich.edu>

Office hours: Wednesdays 10–12 and by appointment at <https://zoom.us/my/e.swanson>

The areas of contemporary analytic philosophy sometimes seem like a far flung scattering of isolated islands. But these islands can also look like a dense archipelago, affording great—if not always obvious—opportunities for communication, cooperation, and collaboration. This course takes one possible voyage through the archipelago. Of the many possible routes, the one we will take touches on a wide range of interrelated ‘question generators’: reliable ways of coming up with helpful philosophical questions. Our primary goals will be to get better at drawing fruitful connections between philosophical literatures that might look distant from each other, and to improve our skills at asking philosophically interesting questions of ourselves and of others.

COURSE WEB SITE

<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/434537>

COURSE MEETINGS

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/93859411025>; Tuesdays 1–3:20. With your consent, I plan to record our seminars, in case one of us gets sick or needs to care for someone who is sick.

Each substantive meeting will be divided into three parts: (a), (b), and (c) in the schedule below. One student will present in each part, with ten minute screen breaks between the parts. Each presentation should raise two questions about the reading or readings in that part, and provide just enough background so that someone who didn’t quite understand the relevant parts of the reading could follow the question and (at least much of the) subsequent conversation.

To help me distribute presentation topics equitably, I’d like to know your preferences for topics. So, by January 19, please email me your preferences over 1a–3a, below, over 3b–5b, over 5c–7c, over 8a–10a, and over 10b–12c. You should convey your preferences for each group with a preorder. That is, if you prefer 1a to 1b, which for you is tied with 1c, and you prefer all of those to 2a, one part of your preferences for the first group could be specified like this:

∴
1a
1b, 1c
2a
∴

Your distribution unit for the course will be a function of your final paper’s topic. If you are aiming to use this course to satisfy a particular distribution unit, bear that in mind when you think about your preferences for presentation topics. Please check with me if you want any guidance!

Please feel free to discuss the readings with me and with each other. However, focus your attention on the assigned readings, as opposed to secondary sources. Readings (and the occasional supplementary reading, as things come up) will be available through the Files section on Canvas.

GRADING

- 20%: Short (one page or less) reading responses, due over email to me every Monday night, raising one question each about two of the readings we'll discuss the next day. You can miss one of these without excuse and without penalty.
- 20%: *Active* participation in seminar.
- 30%: Your five presentations, described above.
- 30%: 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 April 30. (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.)

1/19	Organizational meeting; presentation preferences due
1/26	Should you go pragmatist? In what sense are you a pragmatist?
	1a. W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", Malte presenting 1b. Hilary Putnam, "Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity", Mica presenting 1c. W. E. B. Du Bois, preface and chapters 5 and 6 of <i>Dusk of Dawn</i> , Julian presenting
2/2	Should you go pluralist? In what sense are you a pluralist?
	2a. Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology", Paul presenting 2b. Nelson Goodman, "The Way the World Is" and "Seven Strictures on Similarity", Elizabeth presenting 2c. Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Right and the Good", Sean presenting
2/9	Why not let a thousand flowers bloom?
	3a. Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within", Sarah presenting 3b. Helen Longino, "Values and Objectivity" (chapter 4 of <i>Science as Social Knowledge</i>), Elizabeth presenting 3c. Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy", Julian presenting
2/16	Are you building a model? Should you be? Why or why not?
	4a. Laurie Paul, "Metaphysics as Modeling: The Handmaiden's Tale", Sarah presenting 4b. Timothy Williamson, "Model-Building in Philosophy", Paul presenting 4c. Bernard Williams, "Knowledge, Science, Convergence" (chapter 8 of <i>Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy</i>), Malte presenting
2/23	What are you leaving out? What are you putting in? Why?
	5a. Nancy Cartwright, "The Truth Doesn't Explain Much" and "Do the Laws of Physics State the Facts?" (essays 3 and 4 of <i>How the Laws of Physics Lie</i>), Sean presenting 5b. Catherine Elgin, "True Enough", Mica presenting 5c. Michael Weisberg, "Idealization" and "Modeling without a Specific Target" (chapters 6 and 7 of <i>Simulation and Similarity</i>), Elizabeth presenting

3/2	What are you <i>aiming</i> for—in the long run?
	6a. Cheryl Misak, “Truth, Inquiry, and Experience: A Pragmatist Epistemology” (chapter 2 of <i>Truth, Politics, Morality</i>), Sean presenting 6b. Anthony Appiah, “Political Ideals” (chapter 3 of <i>As If: Idealization and Ideals</i>), Mica presenting 6c. Sally Haslanger, “Methods of Social Critique”, Sarah presenting
3/9	Are you speaking figuratively? In what way?
	7a. Donald Davidson, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs”, Julian presenting 7b. Stephen Yablo, “Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?”, Paul presenting 7c. Elisabeth Camp, “Imaginative Frames for Scientific Inquiry: Metaphors, Telling Facts, and Just-So Stories”, Malte presenting
3/16	Is there ambiguity? Vagueness? Context-sensitivity?
	8a. Chris Kennedy, “Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Overview”, Sean presenting 8b. Angelika Kratzer, “Modality”, Eric presenting 8c. Inga Bones and Diana Raffman, “Contextualism and the Sorites Paradox”, Mica presenting
3/23	Well-being break
3/30	What’s the force of the generalization? Why?
	9a. Frank Ramsey, “Universals of Law and of Fact” and “General Propositions and Causality” (a.k.a. “Law and Causality”), Sarah presenting 9b. Mark Johnston and Sarah-Jane Leslie, “Concepts, Analysis, Generics and the Canberra Plan”, Paul presenting 9c. Sarah Moss, “On the Pragmatics of Counterfactuals”, Malte presenting
4/6	Is this a merely verbal dispute?
	10a. David Chalmers, “Verbal Disputes”, Elizabeth presenting 10b. Ted Sider, “Ontological Realism”, Sean presenting 10c. Amie Thomasson, “What Can We Do, When We Do Metaphysics?”, Paul presenting
4/13	What and where are the joints you’re trying to carve?
	11a. Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race”, Sarah presenting 11b. Quayshawn Spencer, “How to Be a Biological Racial Realist”, Malte presenting 11c. Elizabeth Barnes, “Realism and Social Structure”, Julian presenting
4/20	What if you go externalist?
	12a. Robert Stalnaker, “Reference and Necessity”, Julian presenting 12b. Timothy Williamson, “A State of Mind” and “Broadness” (chapters 1 and 2 of <i>Knowledge and Its Limits</i>), Elizabeth presenting 12c. Amia Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism”, Mica presenting
4/30	Paper due over email