

Epistemology:
Anti-Foundationalism and the Critique of Empiricism

Dr. Carl Sachs, csachs@unt.edu
WH 315
MWF 10:00 – 10:50

ENV 320-F
940-565-2256
MW 1-2



Wittgenstein, 1889–1951



Quine, 1908-2000



Sellars, 1912-1989

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course we will carefully read and critically evaluate the work of three major philosophers in the so-called “analytic” tradition of 20th-century philosophy: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Willard V. O. Quine, and Wilfrid Sellars. The first two-thirds of the course will be devoted to a reading of their work; the last third will be devoted to examination of how their work sheds light on recent debates about the role of concepts such as “experience”, “objectivity,” and “justification”. Here we will use the debate between John McDowell and Richard Rorty as our guide.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: The course has two objectives:

- a) to provide students with the opportunity to become fluent in one of the major philosophical issues of the 20th-century;
- b) to provide students with the opportunity to improve their capacities for philosophical conversation, for rigorous scholarship, and for clearly written analysis and argumentation.

Caveat lector: This course is designed to meet the needs of philosophy majors and minors. It will require the careful reading of exceedingly difficult texts, extensive independent research on your part, and nearly constant writing. If you do not have the time to make this course one of your top priorities, do not take it.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe.

Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*. Trans. Anscombe and Paul
Quine, *Quintessence: Basic Readings*, ed. Gibson
Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*.
McDowell, *Mind and World*

Additional readings, both required *and* recommended, will be available on the Philosophy Department website.

COURSE POLICIES:

1) *Attendance*: There is no formal attendance policy in this class. However, there is a class participation component of the grade, and you will find that participation without attendance is exceedingly difficult. I also like to think that my lectures are helpful in your understanding of the material. You will not be able to get a B or higher in the class without regular attendance.

2) *Plagiarism/Cheating*: No form will be tolerated. This includes copying in part or in whole the work of another, copying anything off the Internet without proper citation, or any instance of using the ideas of others without proper acknowledgement. If you are found guilty of plagiarism, you will receive an "F" for the course and be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities. Furthermore, you are responsible for asking me if something counts as plagiarism or not. If you end up plagiarizing unintentionally, I will be as harsh with you as if you had plagiarized intentionally.

3) *Classroom Behavior*: I prohibit the use of cell phones, i-pods, and all other electronic devices, with the exception of those that have an exclusively educational function (e.g. recorders, lap-tops for notes). These are wholly disruptive to the class. Additionally, perpetual tardiness, talking, sleeping or any other behavior I or others deem disruptive will not be tolerated. Punishments will be swift and creative.

4) *Conversational Etiquette*: In this class we will be discussing complicated issues that may arouse strong passions, as they should. Contributions to class discussions should be aimed at increasing your own understanding and at assisting the collective understanding of the class as whole. Talking simply in order to show off your knowledge or eloquence is thereby strongly discouraged. A level of minimal basic respect must be maintained towards your fellow classmates at all times.

5) *Late Policy*: All work turned in after the due date, (if there is no legitimate excuse), or if no arrangements have been made with me beforehand, will be subject to the following late policy: *up to one week* after due-date: the essay will be marked down one-third of a grade, to reflect the fact that you had more time to work on it and will be therefore be graded more severely than your classmates; *later than one week* after the due-date: the essay will not be accepted and you will receive a zero on the assignment.

6) *Disability Accommodation*: Anyone requiring special accommodations should contact me at

their discretion during the first week of class. Any special accommodations approved by the ODA will be fully granted to the extent specified by the policies of the ODA and UNT.

ASSESSMENT:

Your grade will be determined by your class participation and by the quality of three papers, as follows:

- a) The first two papers are short (1500-2000 words) and are devoted to close reading and textual analysis with a minimum of outside research.
- b) The third paper is longer (3500-4000 words) and is “synoptic” – it will examine broad themes which range over several texts and will also require significant independent research on your part.

Breakdown of grades as follows:

1 st Paper:	15%
2 nd Paper:	25%
3 rd Paper:	45%
Class Participation:	15%

Essay prompts for each assignment will be distributed in class two weeks before the paper is due for the first two papers, and three weeks before the final paper is due.

What is Class Participation?

- (1) A substantial part of your intellectual development requires taking on the risks and rewards of speaking up in class, with respect to both asking questions about what you don't understand, and with respect to challenging the text, the professor, or another student, as appropriate.
- (2) Should there be sufficient interest, I will set up an on-line discussion group using WebCT. However, participation in that group will not substitute *entirely* for participation in class.
- (3) In a class this large, it will not be possible for everyone to speak in class. Therefore, each of you is required to email me *once* a week with a question or comment on that week's reading or lecture. Failure to do so will result in points deducted from the class participation component of your grade. This shows me that you are engaged, paying attention, and thinking hard about the material. I will do my level best to respond to your email either in lecture or through an emailed response. In some cases I will ask you to come to office hours to further discuss the issues raised in your email.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

Week 1: Empiricism as Foundationalism

Readings: Descartes, *Meditation 1&2*; Hume, *Enquiry* Chapter 2; Carnap, “The Overcoming of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language” (PDF)

Week 2: Wittgenstein’s critique of logic

Readings: *PI* 1-35, 52-80, 92-110

Recommended: Cavell, “On the Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy” (PDF)

Week 3: Wittgenstein’s critique of empiricism

Readings: *PI* 194-242, 258-265, 284-289, 560-570, and Part II, xii

Week 4: Wittgenstein’s diagnosis of epistemology

Readings: *OC* OC 1-20, 95-105, 117-125, 141-147, 160-169, 183-192, 204, 206, 208-210, 231-233, 336-344, 449-450, 594-620

Week 5: Quine

Readings: “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” “Two Dogmas in Retrospect,” “Speaking of Objects”

“On Simple Theories of a Complex World”, “Things and Their Place in Theories”

1st Paper due on Wittgenstein

Week 6: Quine

Readings: above, continued, and “Epistemology Naturalized,” “Naturalism; or, Living Within One’s Means”, “Five Milestones of Empiricism”

Week 7: Sellars

Readings: *EPM* § 1-7, 10-20, 26-29
and Brandom’s commentary

Week 8: Sellars

Readings: *EPM* 32-44, 51-52, 60-63
and Brandom’s commentary

Week 9: Davidson and Rorty

Readings: Davidson, “On The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”; Rorty, “Objectivity and Solidarity,” “Representation, Social Practices, and Truth”

2nd Paper due on Quine and Sellars

Week 10: McDowell

Readings: *MW* Preface, Introduction, Lectures I-II, Afterword Part 1

Week 11: McDowell

Readings: *MW* IV-V, Postscript to V

Week 12: McDowell

Readings: *M&W* VI, Postscript to VI

Week 13: Rorty vs. McDowell

Readings: Rorty, "McDowell, Davidson, and Spontaneity," "On the Very Idea of Answerability to the World" (Rorty); McDowell, "Scheme-Content and Empiricism" and/or "The Constitutive Ideal of Rationality"

Week 14: Rorty vs McDowell

Readings: "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity" (McDowell); "Response" (Rorty)

Week 15: Discussion/Wrap-Up/Catch-Up

The Final Paper is Due on the Last Day of Class! There is no final exam in this class.