

Four Topics From 20th Century Philosophers

OLLI Summer 2025

Wednesdays: 4 Sessions 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Start: Wed 5/14/25 End: Wed 6/4/25

This course will **not** be recorded.

The Team

Tech Host:

Allen Dart

Class leader

Robert Yanal

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Class Schedule

5/14 After Warhol: What is Art?

Required: "The Artworld" by Arthur Danto

Optional: Plato, Republic, Bk. X

5/21 What is Consciousness?

Required: "What is it Like to be a Bat?" by Thomas Nagel

Optional: Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2

5/28 AI: Can machines think?

Required: "The Chinese Room" by John Searle

Optional: Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"

6/4 The Trolley Problem

Required: "The Trolley Problem" by Judith Jarvis Thomson

Readings are in on my blog site: http://bobyanal.com/?page_id=108

Outside resources

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). You can look up "The Definition of Art" or "Chinese Room" or ...

Class format

First hour: lecture with Keynote slides. Put questions, comments in "chat".

Last half hour: Questions, comments addressed.

General Introduction

Anglo-American analytic philosophy began in England with Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, who taught and wrote in the first half of the 20th century. These philosophers, along with others, tried to solve certain problems and wrote in a clear, crisp style. Russell first wrote about reference in language, Moore about what “the good” could be. These influences begat a kind of philosophy practiced in England, and then in America.

Philosophy in France and Germany was heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger, especially in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. Continental philosophy addressed different issues from analytic philosophy.

The purpose of the course is to give students a sense of some important developments in American analytic philosophy in the second half of the 20th century.

Please do the required reading before class. Philosophy done right is hard, but so is mathematics, physics, and economics. Get what you can out of the reading; my lectures should fill in the gaps.

Reading Guides

“The Artworld” by Arthur Danto.

Beginning	A brief discussion of Socrates’s (Plato’s) theory on art as imitation
Sec I	Challenges to the imitation theory of art (IT); the emergence of the real theory (RT) of art
Sec II	We won’t discuss this.
Sec III	Warhol’s <i>Brillo Boxes</i> ; the stockroom and the artworld.
Sec IV	We won’t discuss this.

“What is it like to be a bat” by Thomas Nagel.

The essay is complicated. Here is one important section:

You can start with “Conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon” (p. 436) and read to “... the crudest form of cognitive dissonance.” (p. 441)

“The Chinese Room” by John Searle.

Read most of this essay. We won’t discuss the “Replies” except for the first, “The Systems Reply”

“The Trolley Problem” by Judith Jarvis Thomson.

Read sections I, II, and III (about the first four pages). Of course you can read the rest, but be warned, it gets really complicated.