

# Analytic Philosophy: *Phil 419/519*

## DESCRIPTION

Analytic philosophers have often sought to make philosophy more scientific. Indeed, they are sometimes accused of slipping into *scientism*—that is, into an uncritical deference to the natural sciences. One of analytic philosophy’s marquee sub-movements in particular—logical positivism—has come in for perhaps the most widespread ridicule on this score. Across the humanities, one now finds “logical positivism” used as shorthand for a dogmatic faith that science delivers absolute truths about the world. In this class, we will try to gain a more charitable understanding of logical positivism by placing this important movement into historical context. During the first stage of the course, we will take a brief look at Kant’s philosophy of mind, and then at developments in 19<sup>th</sup>-century science (especially in geometry and physics) that challenged some Kantian orthodoxies of the day. During the course’s second stage, we will turn to some or all of logical positivism’s most important founders—Rudolph Carnap, Moritz Schlick, Hans Reichenbach, and Otto Neurath. These figures thought then-recent developments in science demanded that philosophy be thoroughly redesigned—and so to this extent they did show substantial deference to the sciences. But when we place these figures in an appropriate intellectual context, we find that their suggestions for *how* to remake philosophy were far more nuanced and less dogmatic than many now think. In the final stage of the course, we will turn to two figures often regarded as critics of logical positivism: Thomas Kuhn and Willard Quine. Our more charitable reading of the positivists will suggest a surprisingly close affinity with Kuhn’s form of pragmatism. But our reading will also bring out stark differences with Quine’s *naturalism*—the view that philosophy should be a purely empirical enterprise, and should therefore become a part of empirical psychology.