

Professor Joshua Eisenthal

Hum 75 (3-0-6) Selected Topics in Humanities: Early 20th Century Analytic Philosophy (NOTE: Enrolled students should receive frosh hum credits).

Course description:

In the beginning of the twentieth century, a small group of intellectuals - the members of the "Vienna Circle" - founded a movement that became known as logical empiricism. Some of these figures saw themselves as at the vanguard of a new enlightenment, aspiring to shape the world according to rational principles. Perhaps inevitably, they also found themselves targeted, and nearly annihilated, by the rising tide of fascism sweeping through Europe. This course will begin with an introduction to the foundational shifts in logic, geometry, and physics that inspired logical empiricism. We will then study leading figures of the movement, such as Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, and Otto Neurath, considering their novel approach to the philosophy of language and their attacks on traditional forms of metaphysics. Finally, we will turn to the internal and external pressures that led to the unravelling of the Vienna Circle, including the murder of Schlick and the flight of the remaining logical empiricists across the globe.