

Philosophy 112: American Philosophy

Instructor: Professor Rasmus Grønfeldt Winther
Classroom: Cowell 134
Course Meeting Times: MWF 3:30 – 4:40 pm
Office: Cowell A-104
Phone: 459-5648
Office Hours: WF 2-3 pm, and by appointment
Email: rgw@ucsc.edu (the class will also be on eCommons)

COURSE INTRODUCTION

(1) Content

American Pragmatism attempts to undo—through critique, synthesis, and occasional silence—entrenched philosophical distinctions such as: (1) rationalism vs. empiricism, (2) theory vs. practice, (3) fact vs. value, (4) abstract vs. concrete, (5) mind vs. body, etc. Moreover, pragmatism critiques (a) relying on the a priori, (b) separating philosophical, scientific, and everyday reasoning, and (c) reifying abstract philosophical systems. Pragmatic philosophical analysis focuses on concrete consequences, as well as on social and ethical context. Relevance and consequences, dialogue and democracy, and continuity and anti-essentialism are the order of the day. Above all else, this class examines how philosophy is relevant to your own lived experience.

Philosophy 112 explores pragmatic themes in the work of classic and contemporary American philosophers. You will read influential papers and book chapters by (1) three classic pragmatists, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey and (2) two neo-pragmatists, Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, and (3) critics, old and new, of pragmatism, including Bertrand Russell and Paul Boghossian. The context of pragmatism is described in a lively book by Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, which you will also read. (We will also discuss the imperfect overlap between "American Philosophy" and "Pragmatism." Although it seems natural that pragmatic thought arose in an American context, most contemporary American philosophy is non-pragmatic, and pragmatic philosophers can be found in other cultures.)

(2) Goals

This course invites you to reflect on various matters:

- (1) Understand the basic themes, questions, and methods of American Pragmatism
- (2) Appreciate the intellectual and historical context in which American Pragmatism developed
- (3) Evaluate strengths and weaknesses of American Pragmatism, particularly in light of the teachings of alternative philosophical traditions such as Analytic Philosophy and German Idealism, etc.

(3) Methods

Please note that the reading load is minimal. One method we will practice in this course is *slow reading*. The slow-reading movement consists of "academics and intellectuals who want us to take our time while reading, and re-reading." (Kingsley P., "The art of slow reading", 2010,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading>) Why insist on slow-reading? Here is one reason: "Like cooking a good meal or nurturing a relationship, and unlike fast food or too much television, reading is one of those cardinal pleasures that requires effort upfront but leaves the reader feeling more energized afterward." Indeed, reading "speaks to inner faculties not always easily processed with the frame of our daily routine. It makes us think. Reading and slowness go hand in hand." (Miedema J., *Slow Reading*, 2009, Litwin Books, <http://litwinbooks.com/slowreading-ch2.php>)

Please also note the class set-up: Monday lectures, Wednesday class discussions, and Friday student presentations. This format is meant to encourage a committed and focused engagement with the texts and ideas, and with your peers. Hopefully, returning to the same texts over the course of a week, using different discursive media and pedagogical methods, will also invite you to slow-read.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Two short papers (approx. 1000 words each) (20%)
2. Take-home midterm. (20%)
3. Final paper (approx. 2000 words) (40%)
4. One class presentation (20%)

Due dates to be decided on the first day of class.

- You must satisfy each requirement in order to pass the course.

- One third of a letter grade will be deducted per day for any late papers and midterm (e.g., a B+ becomes a B, etc.).

WARNING

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Please consult:
http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academic_integrity/index.html

BOOKS

All books available at *The Literary Guillotine* (204 Locust St, Santa Cruz, CA 95060)

Haack S. (ed.) 2006. *Pragmatism, Old and New. Selected Writings*. Prometheus Books.

McDermott JJ. (ed.) 1981. *The Philosophy of John Dewey*. University of Chicago Press.

Rorty R. 2009. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton University Press. (30th Anniv Ed)

Menand L. 2001. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

READINGS

Week 1. Peirce & Origins of Pragmatism

- Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" (Chapter 2 of Haack S. (ed)).

- John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism" (Chapter 5 of McDermott J. (ed.)).

Week 2. Peirce

- Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (Chapter 3 of Haack S. (ed.)).
- Menand (TBD*).

Week 3. James

- William James, "The Will to Believe" (Chapter 10 of Haack S. (ed.)).
- Menand (TBD).

Week 4. James

- William James, "What Pragmatism Means" (Chapter 13 of Haack S. (ed.)).
- William James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth" (Chapter 14 of Haack S. (ed.)).

Week 5. Dewey

- John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy" (Chapter 4 of McDermott J. (ed.)).
- Menand (TBD)

Week 6. Dewey & Russell (critic)

- John Dewey, "The Pattern of Inquiry" (Chapter 15 of McDermott J. (ed.)).
- Russell, B. 1939(1989). "Dewey's New *Logic*", in Schilpp, PA and Hahn LE (eds.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey. The Library of Living Philosophers*, Chapter 4, pp. 137-156. Open Court. (To be distributed electronically)

Week 7. Putnam & Boghossian (critic)

- Hilary Putnam, "Is There Still Anything to Say about Reality and Truth?" (Chapter 31 of Haack S. (ed.)).
- Paul Boghossian (2001), "The Gospel of Relaxation" in *The New Republic*, September 2001, critical review of Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*; download here: <http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1153/Menand.doc>

Week 8. Rorty

- Richard Rorty, "Introduction" and "The Invention of Mind" (Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*).

Week 9. Rorty & Putnam (critic?)

- Richard Rorty, "The Idea of a "Theory of Knowledge"" (Chapter 3 of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*).
- Hilary Putnam (2000). "Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification," in *Rorty and His Critics* (Robert Brandom, ed.) Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 81-87. (To be distributed electronically)

Week 10. Rorty

- Richard Rorty, "Philosophy Without Mirrors" (Chapter 8 of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*).

** Menand chapters "to be decided", communally.