

Pragmatism

Philosophy 112: American Philosophy

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Fall 2014; UC Santa Cruz; <http://www.rgwinther.com/>

Classroom: Crown 208

Course Meeting Times: TTh 2:00 – 3:45 pm

Office: Cowell A-104

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 4 – 5:30 pm and by appointment (N.b., meeting sign-up required).

Email: rgw@ucsc.edu (the class will also be on eCommons)

I. COURSE INTRODUCTION

(1) Content

Pragmatism attempts to undo—through critique, synthesis, and occasional silence—entrenched philosophical dichotomies 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 three classic pragmatists, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey as well as by contemporary pragmatic thinkers, including Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, and Ian Hacking. (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) Communication

Please ask all questions about the content or format of the course *during classtime*. If you’re wondering about X, almost certainly some of your peers also will be. A non-asked question is a lost teaching opportunity and potentially a question never answered! We’ll have “open questions” session for a few minutes during every class. Please consult my webpage (teaching) for my policy regarding student emails.

II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(1) A weekly 1 page maximum think piece. It will be due on Tuesday and Thursday. Bring it on Tuesday and talk about it. Revise and resubmit for Thursday’s class. Five of these will be graded. (50%

of your grade)

It is possible to cluster 2 (or max. 3) of these think pieces into a single, rewritten longer think piece. However, you must come speak to me during office hours if that is an option you wish to choose.

You have the option of redoing any think piece. In that case, turn in the old think piece with my comments and grade on it together with your revised work. Do not expect further comments.

N.b. All think pieces must be turned in on paper. **Do not email think pieces to the Professor.**

(2) Group Project (30% of your grade; see below)

(3) In-class participation, via small group discussions, cold-calls, and volunteer presentations (approx. 10 students per class hour). (20% of your grade)

+ **All assignments are mandatory.** You will fail the course if you miss even a single think piece [if you are absent (see below), you have no more than two weekdays to turn in your think piece].

+ **Attendance is mandatory.** Attendance will be taken at every class. Although I do NOT recommend that you do so, you may miss up to two classes, no questions asked. The third class missed requires a serious medical reason, or your final grade will drop a full letter grade. Missing more than three classes results in failing the course.

III. GROUP PROJECT

For the group projects, you will work on a specific course-relevant theme of your choosing. Use the class readings, but also do your own research (e.g., at McHenry, on the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, etc.). You will be divided into a group of 3-5 people. These are your peers for the entire quarter. You will also evaluate one another. For the projects you have four options (which do not exclude one another):

- i. a poster of your theme, which can be made directly physically or through PowerPoint
- ii. a well-organized skit or dialogue of your theme
- iii. a board game or card game showing extensive knowledge and analysis of your theme. What would the objective of the game be? What would the rules be?
- iv. A video. Here is an example from another class Prof. Winther taught: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3OrcjXi1mw>

Timeline

Week 8: show preparatory materials, including a bibliography, to the Professor during class.

Week 9: mini dry-run in class on March 7.

Week 10: in-class presentations

Each of the three milestones will be part of your group project grade! You will also evaluate your group peers as part of your grade

IV. WRITING ADVICE

Writing is essential to our craft as philosophers. Your writing can always improve. Here are some relevant online resources. Read and enjoy!

1. Guidelines for philosophical writing:

<http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/tips.pdf>

<http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/research/wp.html>

2. Guidelines for essay writing, in general:
<http://www.westmont.edu/~work/material/writing.html>
3. Oxford English Dictionary. You have access to this extraordinary resource at:
<http://www.oed.com.oca.ucsc.edu/>
4. "Politics and the English Language." Please read this funny and useful essay by George Orwell (author of *1984*) here:
<http://www.resort.com/~prime8/Orwell/patee.html>
5. From the inimitable Kurt Vonnegut
6. <http://knh-lanl.hansonhub.com/pc-24-66-vonnegut.pdf>

V. GENERAL COURSE MOTTOS

+ *Prøv igen, spørg en ven, spørg en voksen.*

+ "Back to the Academy" – absolute minimal electronic communication.

+ Consult *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>

VI. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me, after class or in office hours, **as soon as possible**, preferably within the first week of the Quarter. Contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu for more information.

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)

Houser, N., Kloesel, C. (eds.) 1992. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings. Volume 1*. Bloomington, IN: Bloomington University Press.

James, W. 1978. *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth*. Introduction by A.J. Ayer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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)

READINGS

Week 1. (October 7 and 9) **Context & Origins of Pragmatism**

- Ian Hacking "Is the End in Sight for Epistemology?" (In Course Packet)
- Hilary Putnam "Reason and History" (In Course Packet)
- John Dewey "The Development of American Pragmatism" (Chapter 5 of McDermott J. (ed.)).

Week 2. (October 14 and 16) **William James**

- William James, "What Pragmatism Means" (Lecture II of James, *Pragmatism...*, pp. 27-44)

- William James, “The One and the Many” (Lecture IV of James, *Pragmatism...*, pp. 63-79)
- William James, “The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstanders” (Lecture VIII of James, ... *The Meaning of Truth* pp. 265-282)

Recommended:

- William James, “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” (Lecture VI of James, *Pragmatism...*, pp. 95-113)
- William James, “The Function of Cognition” (Lecture I of James, ... *The Meaning of Truth* pp. 179-198)
- William James, “A Dialogue” (Lecture XV of James, ... *The Meaning of Truth* pp. 320-325)

Week 3. (October 21 and 23) **Charles Sanders Peirce**

- C.S. Peirce, “Fraser’s *The Works of George Berkeley*” (Chapter 5 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))
- C.S. Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” (Chapter 7 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))
- C.S. Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (Chapter 8 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))

Recommended:

- C.S. Peirce, “Deduction, Induction, and Hypothesis” (Chapter 12 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))
- C.S. Peirce, “The Architecture of Theories” (Chapter 21 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))
- C.S. Peirce, “Evolutionary Love” (Chapter 25 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))

Week 4. (October 28 and 30) **John Dewey**

- John Dewey, “The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy” (Chapter 4 of McDermott J. (ed.))
- John Dewey, “The Pattern of Inquiry” (Chapter 15 of McDermott J. (ed.))
- John Dewey, “Experience, Nature and Art” (Chapter 19 of McDermott J. (ed.))

Recommended:

- John Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” (Chapter 9 of McDermott J. (ed.))
- John Dewey, “The Practical Character of Reality” (Chapter 14 of McDermott J. (ed.))
- John Dewey, “The Child and the Curriculum” (Chapter 28 of McDermott J. (ed.))

Week 5. (November 4 and 6) **Contemporary Applications**

- Nelson Goodman, “Words, Works, Worlds” (In Course Packet)
- Ian Hacking, “On Not Being a Pragmatist: Eight Reasons and a Cause” (In Course Packet)
- Rasmus Grønfeldt Winther “James and Dewey on Abstraction” (In Course Packet)

Week 6. (November 11 and 13) **Richard Rorty**

- Richard Rorty, “Preface,” “Introduction [by Richard Rorty],” “The Invention of Mind,” and “The Philosopher as Expert” (Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. xxxi-xxxiii; 3-13; 17-69; 395-421).

Week 7. (November 18 and 20; Guest Lecture by Lucas McGranahan on Nov. 20) **Steps to a Pragmatic Theory of Knowledge: Rortyan Anti-Foundationalism & Jamesian Darwinism**

- Richard Rorty, “The Idea of a “Theory of Knowledge”” (Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 131-164)
- Lucas McGranahan, Book Proposal for *Darwinism and Pragmatism: William James on Evolution and Self-Transformation* and Chapter 1 “William James's Double-Barreled Darwinian Psychology” (eCommons)

Week 8. (November 25; November 27 = Thanksgiving) **Touch Base & Dialogue**

- Volunteer Presentations

Week 9. (December 2 and 4) **Richard Rorty**

- Richard Rorty, “Philosophy Without Mirrors” (Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 357-394)

Week 10. (December 9 and 11) **Group Presentations**