

Philosophy 678S: Pragmatism Spring 2018

Administrative Details

Instructor: Professor K.D. Hoover
Class Meeting: TBA
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Course website: TBA
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Prerequisites

Graduate status or, for undergraduates, permission of instructor.

Course Description

The most distinctively American school of philosophy, Pragmatism, from its beginnings in the 1870s to today has influenced not only philosophy itself but a wide variety of areas, including natural science, political and social thought, law, psychology, education, and economics. For Pragmatists generally, philosophy starts with the human being in the midst of ordinary life, and stresses the roles of belief, action, will, and experience in human inquiry and human behavior. This seminar will involve a close study of the work of the essential pragmatist philosophers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, including Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, as well as more recent pragmatists, such as Sidney Hook, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty. The course is a writing course and will involve regular written work and extensive critical feedback both on writing and philosophical content with the aim of improving general writing skills and mastering the specific forms of philosophical writing.

Required Work and Grading

There are *four required graded parts to the course*:

1. *Discussion leadership:* 15 percent. Students will take turns presenting a brief introduction and conversation starter for each week's discussion.
2. *Weekly short papers:* 25 percent. Students will write a short reaction paper to each week's readings due before class. These are intended to make sure that students are up to speed on, and engaged in, the primary readings, and to provide an opportunity for creative philosophical analysis.
3. *Class participation:* 30 percent. Students are expected to be prepared for class and actively engaged in discussion.
4. *Term Paper:* 30 percent. Each student will submit a final, longer paper on topic relevant to the course of the each students choosing (with the approval of the instructor).

Academic Ethics

I will hold you to strict standards of academic ethics. I encourage students to discuss philosophy and the class material together, to help each other in coming to understand the material. Nevertheless, work submitted for a grade must ultimately be the work of the individual student – not copied from another student or from any other source. The weekly assignments are not research papers and, generally, do not rely on secondary sources. However, any direct quotation should be clearly attributed to its source. The final papers should meet the highest standards of scholarly ethics. All such references to sources other than your own thoughts require *scholarly documentation* (i.e. footnotes, bibliography, or other citation forms); *quotations must be properly indicated* (e.g., by quotation marks) *and sources of information and ideas that are beyond the commonplace properly documented*. Plagiarism is a serious matter and is totally unacceptable. If you have any doubts about what is appropriate and acceptable, please contact me.

Readings

Recommended Background Reading: Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*.

Required Texts: The readings for this class are available on the course website either by direct links to the library or publicly-available websites or through Sakai. The main texts will be:

- selected writings of Charles Peirce
- William James, *The Will to Believe* and *Pragmatism*
- selected writings of John Dewey
- selected writings of more recent pragmatists, including Sidney Hook, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty

Weekly Program

This is a tentative program, subject to change as the class develops:

A. Peirce

WEEK 1. PEIRCE ON BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

Reading: Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief.”
Peirce, “The Scientific Attitude and Fallibilism.”

WEEK 2. PEIRCE AND THE PRAGMATISM

Reading: Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear.”
Peirce, “Pragmatism and Pragmaticism,” and “The Essentials of Pragmatism.”

WEEK 3. PEIRCE'S METAPHYSICS

Reading: Peirce, "The Backward State of Metaphysics."
Peirce "The Categories"
Peirce, "Evolutionary Love."

B. James

WEEK 4. JAMES ON FREEDOM AND THE WILL

Reading: James, "The Will to Believe," (in *The Will to Believe*, pp. 1-31).
James, "The Sentiment of Rationality," (in *The Will to Believe*, pp. 63-110).
James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," (in *The Will to Believe*, pp. 145-183).

WEEK 5: JAMES'S PRAGMATISM - 1

Reading: James, *Pragmatism*, chapters 1 and 2.
Recommended: James, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results."

WEEK 6: JAMES'S PRAGMATISM – 2

Reading: James, *Pragmatism*, chapters 3 and 4.

WEEK 7: JAMES ON TRUTH

Reading: James, *Pragmatism*, chapter 6 (chapter 7 recommended);
James, "Humanism and Truth.

C. Dewey

WEEK 8: INTRODUCING DEWEY

Reading: Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy."
Dewey, "Truth and Consequences."

WEEK 9: DEWEY ON INQUIRY

Reading: Dewey, "The Quest for Certainty."
Dewey, "Common Sense and Scientific Inquiry."
Recommended: Godfrey-Smith, "Dewey on Naturalism, Realism, and Science."

WEEK 10: DEWEY ON THE NORMATIVE

Reading: Dewey, "The Construction of the Good."
Dewey, "Philosophy and Democracy."

D. More Recent Work

WEEK 11: PRAGMATIST METHODOLOGY

Reading: Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles."
Rorty, "Method, Social Science and Social Hope,"
(*Consequences of Pragmatism*, ch. 11).

WEEK 12: REPRESENTATION AND TRUTH

Reading: Putnam, "Is There Still Anything to Say about Reality and Truth?"
Price, "Truth as a Convenient Fiction."

WEEK 14: RORTY'S PRAGMATISM

Reading: Rorty, "Pragmatism and Philosophy" (*Consequences of Pragmatism*, Introduction).

Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism,"
(*Consequences of Pragmatism*, ch. 9)

Recommended: "Dewey's Metaphysics." (*Consequences of Pragmatism*, ch. 5).