

American Pragmatism

HUHI 6314: Thought, Culture, and Society in the United States

Syllabus - Draft

Updated version of this document is available at

<http://thehangedman.com/teaching/2012/american-pragmatism/>

Post-modernist skeptics and their few neopragmatist admirers turn to the old pragmatists because they (correctly) see them as potential partners in a struggle against 'strong', that is, absolutist and 'totalizing', conceptions of truth. But what they neglect is the old pragmatists' conviction... that once they had overcome absolutism, they could then resume traveling down the road of inquiry in a more fuel-efficient vehicle than Reason toward a more modest destination than Truth.

— Robert Westbrook

Course Information

Fall 2012 M 4:00pm–6:45pm

Contact Information

Professor Matthew J. Brown

Email Address mattbrown@utdallas.edu

Office Phone 972-883-2536

Office Location JO 4.120

Office Hours TBA

Course Description

This course will focus on America's only original philosophical tradition: Pragmatism. American pragmatism is a diverse tradition, united by a common interest in a robust account of human experience, the fallibility of our knowledge, truth as a human phenomenon, and the relation of theory to practice. We will focus on several of the classical pragmatists and neo-pragmatists, including Charles S. Peirce, William James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., John Dewey, Jane Addams, Alain Locke, Richard Rorty, and Cornel West.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of several major figures in the American philosophical tradition of Pragmatism, their lives, relationships to one another, and their major philosophical ideas.
- Students will analyze and interpret a significant body of primary works in the American pragmatist tradition.

- Students will engage with a variety of secondary sources on the period and figures of study.
- Students will develop their skills of critical analysis and philosophical argumentation.

Required Texts

Abbreviations in [brackets] are used to give page numbers for readings in the course schedule below.

- *Pragmatism: A Reader* - ed. Louis Menand [PR]
- *The Metaphysical Club* - Louis Menand [MC]
- *Democracy and Social Ethics* - Jane Addams [DS]
- *Companion to Pragmatism* - ed. Shook + Margolis [CP]
- *Reading Dewey* - ed. Larry Hickman [RD]

All texts are on order at Off Campus Books (561 West Campbell Road near Fuzzy's).

Pragmatism Resources

- The most systematic repository of research, information, and links is the *Pragmatism Cybrary* at [<http://www.pragmatism.org/>]
- UTD has the PastMasters digital collection, which includes the complete works and correspondence of John Dewey, the collected papers and published works of Peirce, and the works of Santayana.

Course Schedule

1. Introduction and Background (8/27)

- Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, Preface + Part One [MC ix–70]
- Menand, “An Introduction to Pragmatism,” [PR xi–xxxv]
- Margolis, “Introduction: Pragmatism, Retrospective, and Prospective,” [CP 1–10]

2. *Labor Day Holiday* (9/3)

3. Charles S Peirce – *Meaning, Truth, and Inquiry* (9/10)

- “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” [PR 3–6]
- “The Fixation of Belief” [PR 7–25]
- “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” [PR 26–48]
- “A Definition of Pragmatism” [PR 56–58]
- Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, Part Two [MC 71–148]
- Colapietro, “C.S. Peirce” [CP 13–29]; Anderson, “Peirce and Cartesian Rationalism” [CP 154–165]

4. Charles S Peirce – *Continuity, Chance, and Evolution* (9/17)

- from “A Guess at the Riddle” [PR 49–51]
- “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined” [online]
- from “Evolutionary Love” [PR 52–55]

- Haack, “Not Cynicism, but Synechism” [CP 141–53]
 - *Metaphysical Club* Part Three [MC 149–232]
5. William James (9/24)
- from *The Principles of Psychology* [PR 59–68]
 - “The Will to Believe” [PR 69–92]
 - “What Pragmatism Means” [PR 93–111]
 - “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” [PR 112–131]
 - Suckiel, “William James” [CP 30–43]
6. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. – *Pragmatism and the Law* (10/1)
- from “Lecture I: Early Forms of Liability,” in *The Common Law* (1881) [PR 137–138]
 - from “Lecture III: Torts - Trespass and Negligence,” in *The Common Law* (1881) [PR 139–141]
 - “The Path of the Law” (1897) [PR 145–159]
 - from “Ideals and Doubts” (1915) [PR 170–172]
 - “Natural Law” (1918) [PR 173–177]
 - from *Abrams v. United States* (1919) [PR 178–181]
 - Posner, “Introduction” to *The Essential Holmes* [online]
 - Morton White, “Rule, Ruling, and Prediction in the Law: Hart v. Holmes” [online]
7. John Dewey – *The Reconstruction of Philosophy* (10/8)
- “The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy” [online]
 - from “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy” [PR 219–232]
 - “Philosophy and Democracy” [online]
 - “Theories of Knowledge” [PR 205–218]
 - “Philosophy’s Search for the Immutable” [online]
 - Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, Part Four [MC 233–334]
 - Jackson, “John Dewey” [CP 54–66]
 - Hickman, “Introduction” [RD]
8. John Dewey – *Inquiry, Science, and Art* (10/15)
- from *How We Think* (1933) [online]
 - from *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* [online]
 - “Experience, Nature, and Art” [PR 233–264]
 - from *Art as Experience* [online]
 - Hickman, “Dewey’s Theory of Inquiry” [RD Ch. 9]
 - Alexander, “The Art of Life: Dewey’s Aesthetics” [RD Ch. 1]
9. John Dewey – *Moral and Political Philosophy* (10/22)
- “The Ethics of Democracy” [PR 181–204]
 - “Evolution and Ethics” [online]
 - “Three Independent Factors in Morals” [online]
 - “Moral Judgment and Knowledge” [online]
 - from *The Public and Its Problems* [online]

- Pappas, “Dewey’s Ethics: Morality as Experience” [RD Ch. 6]
- Stuhr, “Dewey’s Social and Political Philosophy” [RD Ch. 5]
- Campbell, “Dewey’s Conception of Community” [RD Ch. 2]
- Mancias, “John Dewey and American Social Science” [RD Ch. 3]

10. Jane Addams – Radical Pragmatism (10/29)

- from “A Function of the Social Settlement” [PR 272–286]
- Haddock Seigfried, “Introduction” [DS ix-xxxviii]
- “Introduction” [DS 5–10]
- “Charitable Effort” [DS 11–34]
- “Filial Relations” [DS 35–47]
- “Political Reform” [DS 98–120]
- “Problems of Poverty” [online]
- Fischer, “Jane Addams” [CP 79–86]
- Hamington, “Jane Addams” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/addams-jane/>

11. Alain LeRoy Locke (11/5)

- “Values and Imperatives” [online]
- “Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy” [online]
- “Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace” [online]
- “A Functional View of Value Ultimates” [online]
- Harris, “Alain L. Locke” [CP 87-93]

12. The Middle Period – Pragmatism and the Rise of Analytic Philosophy (11/12)

- C.I. Lewis, “A Pragmatic Conception of the *A Priori*”
- C.I. Lewis, “Logical Positivism and Pragmatism”
- W.V.O. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”
- Morton White, “Normative Ethics, Normative Epistemology, and Quine’s Holism”
- Sidney Hook, “Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life”
- Alan W. Richardson, “Engineering Philosophy of Science: American Pragmatism and Logical Empiricism in the 1930s” [all online]

13. *Thanksgiving Holiday* (11/19)

14. Richard Rorty (11/26)

- “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing” [PR 303–328]
- “Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism” [PR 329–336]
- “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy” [online]
- “Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism” [CP 257–266]
- “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism” [online]
- Ramberg, “Richard Rorty” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rorty/>
- Nielson, “Richard Rorty” [CP 127–138]
- Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, Part Five [MC 335–442]

15. Cornel West – *Prophetic Pragmatism* (12/3)

- “The Making of an American Radical Democrat of African Descent” [online]

- from “Prophetic Pragmatism,” in *The American Evasion of Philosophy* [PR 403-17]
- “Why Pragmatism?” [online]
- “Pragmatism and the Sense of the Tragic” [online]
- Richard Rorty, “The Professor and the Prophet” [online]

16. *Feminist Pragmatism* (12/10)

- Sullivan, “Feminism” [CP 232–238]
- Judy Whipps, “Pragmatist Feminism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/femapproach-pragmatism/>
- Seigfried, “Where are All the Pragmatist Feminists?” [online]
- Rooney, “Feminist-Pragmatist Revisionings of Reason, Knowledge, and Philosophy” [online]
- Lynn Hankinson Nelson, “A Question of Evidence” [online]

Grading

Graded Assignments

1. *Questions on the readings* — Email the professor 2-3 questions about the primary texts *at least 24 hours* prior to class. Students are responsible for submitting questions at least 10 of the 13 weeks of substantive class meetings (not counting the introductory class). These questions will form the basis of in-class discussion. Questions can be of the following types:
 - a. *Interpretive questions* – Questions about how to interpret particular concepts or arguments from the text. *Must* include reference to a specific passage or passages for close reading and proposed options or strategies of interpretation.
 - b. *Critical questions* – Questions which critically analyze or challenge certain key ideas in the primary text. You must clearly explain the concept or argument being challenged.
 - c. *Historical questions* – Questions that explore the larger historical context of the thinker being discussed. These questions should be *specific* and make reference to the content of a certain idea. You need to give us enough to have something to discuss: e.g., a question of influence between philosophers should point to passages of text and biographical details that at least give some reason to raise the question of influence.
 - d. *Application questions* – As pragmatism is deeply concerned with the relation of theory and practice, it is apropos to ask how certain pragmatist ideas can be applied. A clear explanation of the concept or argument being questioned, along with the context of application to be explored. The application should raise some interesting philosophical point, such as providing a potential counter-example or illuminating some unappreciated feature of the idea.

Do not skimp on explaining and elaborating the question.

2. *Participation in class discussion* — A necessary part of developing ones scholarly skills, especially in philosophy. Based on class attendance, frequency and quality of contributions.

3. *Term paper* — details TBA.

Evaluation Standards

The following is a clarification for the purposes of this course of UTD's official policy with respect to grading standards.

- An **A** grade indicates *excellent* work. **A** work has something to say and says it well. It displays a subtle and nuanced understanding of the texts, develops arguments clearly and effectively, and reflects insightfully on the course material. It often rises above other work in terms of creativity and sophistication, or it may add something valuable to the discussion that goes beyond merely fulfilling the letter of the requirements. Only few, minor mistakes are present.
- A **B** grade indicates *good* work, but with room for improvement. Such work displays a clear understanding of the text, develops arguments consistently with a clear aim, and is thoughtful and careful. The presence of serious errors must not impair the clarity of an argument or the overall understanding of a text. **B** work is in many ways successful, but lacks the sophistication or originality of **A** work.
- A **C** grade indicates *marginal* work. It shows a basically adequate understanding of the key parts of the text. Arguments aim at a central claim, though they may rely on unsupported or insufficiently developed ideas. More serious errors may be present, so long as the central claims and basic understandings are not undermined.
- Work which deserves a grade less than **C** is considered *poor* and will display some of the following problems: it fails to show adequate understanding of the text; it fails to understand the assignment; it fails to articulate a coherent or adequate argument; it fails to reflect on the content of the course; it displays such pervasive grammatical errors as to be highly obscure in meaning.

+/- grades *will* be assigned, indicating work that goes a bit beyond or falls only somewhat short of the standards stated above.

Course & Instructor Policies

Late Work / Make-up Exams

No late work or make-up exams will be allowed without consent of the professor *prior* to the due/exam date, except in situations where University policy requires it.

Class Attendance

While reading and writing are crucial parts of the course, the central philosophical activity is live discussion. While class will occasionally involve bits of lecture, this is merely an instrument to a more well-informed discussion. Attendance is thus considered **mandatory**.

Classroom expectations

You are expected to have read the assignments *before* class, and it would be to your benefit to also read them again after class. You are expected to bring *all* of the texts assigned for each day's class, and have them available to refer to. You are expected to listen

respectfully to the professor and your fellow students, and participate in class discussions and activities.

Further standard University policies can be found at
<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.