

American Pragmatism

50:730:452

“We only think when confronted with a problem.”

(John Dewey)

Spring 2013

Location: 429 Cooper Street, 1st Floor Seminar Room

TTh 11:00 – 12:20 pm

Instructor: Melissa Yates

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Office Hours: TTh 1:00-2:30 pm, or by appointment

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I. Rationale:

An advanced seminar in which we examine the distinctive American approach to philosophical questions about truth, cognition, knowledge, freedom, and action, developed in the 19th and 20th century by Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, including a consideration of the historical roots of pragmatism, and the impact of pragmatism on contemporary approaches in education and politics.

II. Course Aims and Objectives:

Aims

In general, the course aims to teach students how to analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments, to promote the development of thoughtful class discussions about the reading materials, and to encourage critical reflection on our beliefs and values.

Specific Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will:

- Be able to *define* key terms deployed by authors assigned in the course.
 - Key terms include principles and concepts developed by a unique author (e.g. the “pragmatism” is a unique key term), and also general terms defined in a special way by different authors (e.g. “truth” or “knowledge” will be a key term that changes under different authors).
 - Students will be expected to recall the definitions of key terms during in class tests, and to explain key terms on take home writing assignments.
- Be able to *summarize* the main thesis of each essay assigned in the course.
 - The main thesis of an essay is the general or overarching conclusion advanced by an author. In order to summarize the thesis, students will need to be able to discriminate between different arguments advanced within an essay and evaluate which is the most general.

- Students will be expected to propose essay thesis statements in class discussion and during tests and take home assignments.
- Be able to *reconstruct* the key arguments and reasons used by the authors in support of their thesis.
 - A reconstruction of an essay is similar to an outline of an essay. In a reconstruction, students take the content of an essay and organize it in terms of a thesis statement and a series of claims or reasons offered by the author in support of the thesis.
 - To reconstruct an argument, students will need to identify and discriminate among a series of different reasons offered by an author to determine which ones would be most helpful in supporting an argument.
 - Students will be expected to participate orally in class collective reconstructions initially, but then will be expected to be able to reconstruct an essay in writing.
- Be able to *apply* previously learned philosophical terms and principles to concrete examples.
 - The application of philosophical concepts to real world examples is an important way to test the plausibility of an author's argument. Students will practice creating counter-examples during class discussions, and will creatively apply an author's arguments to those counter-examples. Students will also be able to apply principles from one author to examples developed by another author.
 - Students will be expected to apply key principles, terms, and concepts to examples during in class tests and on take home assignments.
- Be able to *evaluate* the appropriateness and plausibility of the conclusions reached in the assigned materials, and *compare* two competing arguments about a topic, giving reasons for their positive evaluation of one over the other.
 - The evaluation of philosophical arguments involves an appreciation for a charitably interpreted version of the argument, and the development of a critical dialogue between the proponent of the view and plausible objectors. Sometimes this requires the application of objections from the perspective of other assigned authors, but other times this requires the creative development of objections from one's own perspective.
 - Students will be expected to weigh reasons for and against arguments on essay assignments.

III. Format and Procedures:

This course will proceed as a combination of lecture and discussion. An outline of each class will be presented at the start of the class, and we will generally follow closely the content of the reading materials assigned. Students will be expected to read all assigned material before class, and to come prepared to ask and answer questions about the terms and arguments developed in the essays. Students are always encouraged to slow down lecture material for the purpose of improving comprehension and clarity.

IV. Tentative Course Schedule: ***This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.*

Date	Main Topic(s)	Work to do at home Readings – to be completed <u>before</u> class	Evaluation
1/22	Introduction: Meet Instructor, and your classmates/ syllabus; Explanation of reading presentations		
1/24	Preliminary: Roots of American Pragmatism, Foundationalism, Anti-Foundationalism, Romanticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Pragmatism, <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> • Rene Descartes, Meditations, 1-3 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
1/29	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rene Descartes, Meditations, 1-3 continued • David Hume, Skeptical Solution of these Doubts, from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> 	
1/31	Discuss readings; introduction to transcendentalism and romanticism in American philosophy and literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immanuel Kant, Of Opinion, Knowledge, and Belief, from <i>The Critique of Pure Reason</i> 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm

2/5	Classic American Pragmatist: Peirce Class Video: " American Philosopher "	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charles S. Peirce, Some Consequences of Four Incapacities 	
2/7	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charles S. Peirce, The Fixation of Belief 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
2/12	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charles S. Peirce, How to Make Our Ideas Clear 	
2/14	Discuss readings; student in class first paper drafts, and peer feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charles S. Peirce, Evolutionary Love 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
2/19	Classic American Pragmatist: James Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gideon Rosen, Introduction to The Will to Believe William James, The Will to Believe 	
2/21	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> William James, The Will to Believe continued 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
2/26	Discuss readings; first paper topics distributed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> William James, Lecture I: The Present Dilemma in Philosophy from <i>Pragmatism</i> 	
2/28	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> William James, Lecture II: What Pragmatism Means from <i>Pragmatism</i> 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
3/5	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> William James, Lecture VI: Pragmatism's Conception of Truth from <i>Pragmatism</i> . 	
3/7	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> William James, The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life 	First paper due online by midnight on the 7 th
3/12	Classic American Pragmatist: Dewey Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tad Beckman's Introduction to Reconstruction in Philosophy John Dewey, Chapter 1: Changing Conception of Philosophy, from <i>Reconstruction in Philosophy</i> 	
3/14	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Dewey, Chapter 3: The Scientific Factor in Reconstruction of Philosophy, from <i>Reconstruction in Philosophy</i> 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
3/16-3/24	<u>Spring Recess</u>		
3/26	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Dewey, Chapter 7: Reconstruction in Moral Conceptions, from <i>Reconstruction in Philosophy</i> 	
3/28	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Dewey, Chapter 8: Reconstruction as Affecting Social Philosophy, from <i>Reconstruction in Philosophy</i> 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
4/2	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Dewey, Education as Growth, from <i>Democracy and Education</i> John Dewey, Creative Democracy – The 	

		Task Before Us	
4/4	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> George Herbert Mead, The Social Self 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
4/9	Contemporary American Pragmatism: Rorty & Putnam Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NYTimes Obituary for Richard Rorty Richard Rorty, Trotsky and the Wild Orchids, from <i>Philosophy and Social Hope</i> 	
4/11	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richard Rorty, Ethics without Principles, from <i>Philosophy and Social Hope</i> 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
4/16	Discuss readings;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class Rescheduled 	
4/18	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richard Rorty, The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy Hilary Putnam, A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy (see Sakai) 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
4/23 Class meets 1:30-3:20	Contemporary Applications Discuss readings and paper topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheryl Misak, Making Disagreement Matter: Pragmatism and Deliberative Democracy 	
4/25 Class meets 11:00-12:50	Discuss readings and paper draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richard Bernstein, Pragmatism, Pluralism, and the Healing of Wounds Robert Talisse, Saving Pragmatist Democratic Theory (from Itself) 	Bring rough draft and outline of second paper to class for peer review
4/30 Class meets 1:30-2:50	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional: Cornel West, The Making of an American Radical Democrat of African Descent Cornel West, Why Pragmatism? Cornel West, The Limits of Neopragmatism 	
5/2 Class meets during regular period	Discuss readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlene Haddock Deigfried, Where Are All the Pragmatist Feminists? 	Response Paper Due 10:00pm
5/3			Second paper due online by midnight on the 3rd

V. Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance and participation policy:

- You are expected to attend all classes on time. If you expect to miss any class please use the [University's absence reporting](#) website to indicate the date and reason for your absence, which will automatically generate an email to me.
- You are expected to obtain class notes from fellow students and class handouts from me in the event that you are absent when assignments are distributed.
- You are expected to provide at least fourteen days notice in the event that you must be absent for an event connected with your studies or athletics at Rutgers, or for reasons of observance of a religious holy day.
- You are expected to attend and take the mid-term exam on March 14th during our regularly scheduled class. Make-up exams will only be permitted in documentable emergency cases, and must be completed before the corrected tests are handed back on March 26th.

2. Course Readings/Materials: these texts are optional, as they are also available online.

- William James**, [The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, and Human Immortality](#) (Digireads.com, 2010). **ISBN-10:** 142093824X.

- (b) **John Dewey**, [Reconstruction in Philosophy](#), (University of California Libraries, 1920). **ASIN:** B006R0UL9M.
 (c) **Richard Rorty**, [Philosophy and Social Hope](#) (Penguin, 2000). **ISBN-10:** 0140262881.

3. Assignments, Assessment, and Evaluation

30%	Response Papers
	<p>Students will write 10 weekly response papers over the course of the fourteen-week class. That means that each response paper is worth 3% of the course grade, and that students may skip four weekly response papers without penalty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each response paper should be roughly one page, double-spaced, in length. The response should be written in paragraph style, and should follow basic editing standards for clarity and coherence. ○ Response papers must be submitted online prior to the class in which the target assigned material will be discussed. The task is to reflect on one’s initial, independent reaction to the assigned material. No more than one response paper per week will count toward the 10 required. ○ Suitable topics for response papers include: suggested interpretations of particularly challenging quotes or passages; question prompted by the reading, with a consideration of possible answers; evaluations of competing views prompted by the new reading in comparison with previous course materials; proposed application to other philosophically interesting topics; your own evaluation of the plausibility of some important claim; a reconstruction of the steps that lead to one of the central claims.
30%	First Paper
	The first paper will be due on March 7 th , and will be roughly 5-7 pages in length. Students will be provided assigned topic choices.
40%	Second Paper
	The second paper will be due on May 3 rd , and will be roughly 9-10 pages in length. Students will choose their own topic for this paper, but will be required to propose a paper topic and guiding question in advance, which will be subject to approval. Papers may reflect on the application of core course material to broader research interests, if approved.

- (a) **Late assignment policy:** All deadlines are listed on the course schedule and are firm. For every 24 hours an assignment is late the grade will be subject to dropping one third of a letter grade (from a B+ to a B, for instance). Students should make every effort to alert me in advance if a take-home exam will be late. Assignments will not be accepted more than six days after the deadline.
- (b) **Critical dates for registration changes:** Please check with the [academic calendar](#) to view last day to drop without penalty.
- (c) **Course Grades and Symbols:** Please see the [Rutgers registrar’s website](#) for an explanation of the grade codes and their numerical equivalents in terms of GPA.

4. Use of *Sakai* in class

In this class I use *Sakai*—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal> -- to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, and to submit assignments. You can find [support](#) in using Sakai at the Help Desk at 848-445-8721, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or sakai@rutgers.edu.

VI. Tutoring and Resources

Rutgers Learning Center

Free academic tutoring is available through the Rutgers Learning Center. For more information regarding subjects being tutored and scheduling appointments please see the [RLC website](#).

Rutgers Student Affairs

The Division of Student Affairs works to improve the quality of student life on and off campus, and is a very good resource if you are struggling with concerns that are wider than comprehension of the material in this class. This resource can help students find help for issues concerning new, transfer, or international student questions or problems, academic advising, health concerns, and can help you address stress management. For more information regarding their resources see the [Division of Student Affairs website](#), or contact them at (856) 225-6050.

VII. Academic Integrity

Rutgers University Student Code of Conduct

Students are required to properly cite all materials, to only submit their own, individually produced work, and to adhere to the requirements of each assignment regarding the use of internet or print resources. Take home assignments must be submitted through the course Sakai site, which will check all assignments against the Turnitin.com database, an electronic plagiarism detection software program. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and strictly enforced, and can be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action. Please review the University's [academic honesty policy and disciplinary procedures](#), or speak with me if you have any questions.

VIII. Other University Notices and Policies

Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence to Students

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are [available here](#).

Documented Disability Statement

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) for Students at (848) 445-6800 (voice) or dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu. Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from ODS. Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, handouts are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).

Audio-Visual Recording, Transmission, or Distribution

Students in this class are prohibited from recording and/or transmitting classroom lectures and discussions unless written permission from the class instructor has been obtained and all students in the class as well as guest speakers have been informed that audio/video recording may occur. Recording of lectures or class presentations is solely authorized for the purposes of individual or group study with other students enrolled in the same class. Permission to allow the recording is not a transfer of any copyrights in the recording. The recording may not be reproduced or uploaded to publicly accessible web environments.

Recordings, course materials, and lecture notes may not be exchanged or distributed for commercial purposes, for compensation, or for any other purpose other than study by students enrolled in the class. Public distribution of such materials may constitute copyright infringement in violation of federal or state law, or University policy. Violation of this policy may subject a student to disciplinary action under the University's Standards of Conduct.

The policy aims to prohibit or limit recording of classroom lectures or re-distribution of classroom materials in order to:

- respect the integrity and effectiveness of the classroom experience;
- protect students and faculty dignity and privacy;
- respect faculty and University rights in instructional materials; and

- comply with copyright law.