

J.F.K.-Institute for North American Studies  
G.S.N.A.S. Summer Semester 2012  
32-611, Interdisciplinary Module A

# History and Philosophy of American Pragmatism

Mondays, 14:00-16:00, Lansstraße 7-9, Rm 201

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## **Description**

Pragmatism is by one description an “idea about ideas” or about how we ought to approach ideas in our collective social and political lives. As a school of thought, it is often considered to be the United States’ main contribution to philosophy, one that has been influential around the world as well as criticized. This course will explore the origins, development, and impact of the pragmatist tradition in philosophy and social theory, starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing up to the present day. We will inquire after the historical circumstances in which the early Pragmatists expressed their ideas and how they took shape against the background of the riotous transformations of the late nineteenth century. In addition to examining the historical contexts of Pragmatism, we will also explore and consider various Pragmatists’ philosophical contributions to the theory of truth, the philosophy of social science, our understanding of how individuals relate to society, and modern democratic theory. We will read a variety of key thinkers—including Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Richard Rorty—as well as key texts grapple with the legacy, diversity, and historical meaning of Pragmatism through to the present day.

## **Course Structure**

This course will meet once a week on Mondays from 14:00 to 16:00. Class periods will in most cases involve a mixture of lecture and discussion, but great emphasis will be placed on generating as lively an exchange of ideas as possible. It is therefore important that you do your best to complete the readings *prior* to class and that you arrive in class with some questions or reactions to the texts in mind. We hope that you will read these texts with as lively an imagination as possible and that you will seek to understand them as viscerally as possible.

## **Assignments and Grading**

Students are responsible for attending all classes and keeping up with the weekly readings. All required readings will be made available electronically on Blackboard. We will also provide a number of recommended readings that are not officially assigned, but which you may find helpful in understanding and situating the material. In addition to the online

readings, students are encouraged (but not required) to read Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*, which gives some background into the social and academic world that the early pragmatists inhabited (The book received the Pulitzer Prize and a number of other awards when it came out in 2001).

There will be several written assignments in the course:

- **“Reflection papers”:** Periodically throughout the semester, you will be required to write a “reflection paper” of 700-1000 words (about 2½ to 3 pages). For each of these you are asked to reflect on some aspect of our ongoing discussions and readings from the previous weeks. You are free in these short writings—you are even encouraged—to let loose, explore, and experiment. The only requirement is that you structure your reflections around the texts. That is, you must in some way *interpret the texts*. The reflection papers will be evaluated rather informally, as “✓+,” “✓,” or “✓-.”
- **Final paper:** The bulk of your grade will be based on a term paper of at least 4500 words (15 pages), which will be due **no later than October 1**. You are free to write the paper on any topic you wish, so long as your topic is based on the central themes of the course. *You are strongly encouraged to meet with one of us at least once to discuss your paper.* When writing, you should approach your final paper as a serious piece of scholarly research: you should develop a clear central thesis; you should demonstrate knowledge of your topic; you should engage the material in a critical and thoughtful manner; you should be able to back up your arguments with reasons, evidence, and examples; and you should strive to show readers what conclusions they can draw from your efforts.

Students taking this course for full credit are expected to complete *all* of the written assignments. Students taking the course for a “participation” grade only will be required to write the three reflection papers but are not required to do a final paper. Unfortunately, we will not be able to accept assignments not written in English. All written assignments must also be double-spaced, in 12-point type, with one-inch margins, using a normal-sized font.

For all papers, you will be expected to adhere to proper conventions of scholarly attribution. Any work quoted or otherwise referenced must be appropriately and fully cited. Any idea, argument, information, or quotation that you might employ from an external source must likewise be accompanied by full citation. You are free to use any bibliographic citation style you wish, but you should apply it consistently.

In addition, students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the J.F.K.-Institute's standards of academic honesty. Please consult the J.F.K.-Institute's website for details(<http://www.jfki.fu-berlin.de/academics/Plagiarismus/index.html>).

### **Weekly Readings and Meetings**

- All readings accompanied with the label “[.pdf]” will be made available on Blackboard ••

#### **Week 1 (April 16) / Introduction: Enlightenment Rationalism**

Readings

- No “required” reading this week, though everyone is encouraged to read the selections from Toulmin and Descartes

## Recommended reading

- Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 45-89 [.pdf]
- René Descartes, “I Think, therefore I Am” from *Discourse on Method* in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, edited by Isaac Kramnick (Penguin Books, 1995) [.pdf]
- David Hume, “A Treatise on Human Nature” from *Abstract of a Book Lately Published* in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, edited by Isaac Kramnick (Penguin Books, 1995) [.pdf]
- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 532-46 [.pdf]
- Marquis de Condorcet, “The Perfectibility of Man” from *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Human Mind* in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, edited by Isaac Kramnick (Penguin Books, 1995) [.pdf]
- G.W.F. Hegel and Alexandre Kojève, “In Place of an Introduction” (translation and commentary of “Autonomy and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Mastery and Slavery” from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*) from *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom, and translated by James H. Nichols, Jr. (Cornell University Press, 1980) [.pdf]

**Week 2 (April 23) / The Problem of Uncertainty and the Domain of Experience**

## Readings

- Bruce Kucklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 59-110. [.pdf]
- James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 15-26, 46-73 [.pdf]
- Chauncey Wright, *The Winds and the Weather*, *Atlantic Monthly*, I (1858): 272-9. [.pdf]

## Recommended reading

- Bruce Kucklick, *A History of Philosophy in America, 1720-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2001), all of Part I (Read to get a better idea of antebellum philosophy in America).
- Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 1-69 (A strong argument for the centrality of the Civil War vis-à-vis the rise of Pragmatism).

**Week 3 (April 30) / Charles Sanders Peirce I**

## Readings

- Peirce, “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man” in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, edited by Philip P. Wiener (Dover Publications, 1958) [.pdf]
- Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, edited by Philip P. Wiener (Dover Publications, 1958), 39-41 and 68-69 only [.pdf]
- Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” in *Pragmatism, Old & New: Selected Writings*, edited by Susan Haack and Robert Lane (Prometheus Books, 2006) [.pdf]

## Recommended reading

- Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, edited by Philip P. Wiener (Dover Publications, 1958), remainder [.pdf]
- Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), Part III, 151-232

**Week 4 (May 7) / Charles Sanders Peirce II**

## Readings

- Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” in *Pragmatism, Old & New: Selected Writings*, edited by Susan Haack and Robert Lane (Prometheus Books, 2006) [.pdf]
- Peirce, “The Categories” in *Pragmatism, Old & New: Selected Writings*, edited by Susan Haack and Robert Lane (Prometheus Books, 2006) [.pdf]

## Recommended reading

- Peirce, “What Pragmatism Is” in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, edited by Philip P. Wiener (Dover Publications, 1958) [.pdf]

Friday, May 11 at 12 noon: First Reflection Paper Due

**Week 5 (May 14) / William James I: The Will to Reconcile Science and Religion**

## Readings

- James, “Habit” from *The Principles of Psychology* in *Pragmatism: A Reader*, edited by Louis Menand (Vintage Books, 1997) [.pdf]
- James, “The Will To Believe” in *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook Volume II: 1865 to the Present*, second edition, edited by David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper (Oxford University Press, 1993) [.pdf]
- Selections from James, *Pragmatism* in *William James: Writings 1902-1910*, edited by Bruce Kuklick (The Library of America, 1987):
  - “The Present Dilemma in Philosophy” [.pdf]
  - “What Pragmatism Means” [.pdf]
  - “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” [.pdf]

## Recommended reading

- William K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” in the *Contemporary Review* (1877) [.pdf]
- Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), Part II, 73-148.

**Week 6 (May 21) / William James II: Radical Empiricism and “Pure Experience”**

## Readings

- Selections from *Essays in Radical Empiricism* in *William James: The Essential Writings*, edited by Bruce W. Wilshire (State University of New York Press, 1984) [.pdf]
- Selections from *A Pluralistic Universe* in *William James: The Essential Writings*, edited by Bruce W. Wilshire (State University of New York Press, 1984) [.pdf]

## Recommended reading

- “The Stream of Thought” from *The Principles of Psychology* (available online here: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/prin9.htm>)

### **Week 7 (May 28) / NO CLASS: WHITMONDAY**

### **Week 8 (June 4) / George Herbert Mead**

#### Readings

- Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*, edited by Charles W. Morris (Chicago University Press, 1934), Part III [.pdf]

#### Recommended reading

- Mitchell Aboulaflia, "Mead and the Social Self" in *The Cosmopolitan Self: George Herbert Mead and Continental Philosophy* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 7-27.
- Hans Joas, *G.H. Mead: A Contemporary Re-examination of His Thought*, translated by Raymond Meyer (MIT Press, 1985)
- Harald Wenzel, *George Herbert Mead zur Einführung* (Junius Verlag, 1990)

Friday, June 8 at 12 noon: Second Reflection Paper Due

### **Week 9 (June 11) / John Dewey I**

#### Readings

- Dewey, “The Ethics of Democracy” in *The Early Works, 1882-1898*, Volume 1: 1882-1888, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Fredson Bowers (Southern Illinois University Press, 1969) [.pdf]
- Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology” in *The Early Works, 1882-1898*, Volume 5: 1895-1898, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Fredson Bowers (Southern Illinois University Press, 1972) [.pdf]
- Dewey, “Philosophy and Democracy” in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, Volume 11: 1918-1919, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Harriet Furst Simon (Southern Illinois University Press, 1982) [.pdf]

#### Recommended reading

- Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Cornell University Press, 1991), chapters 2, 3, and 5 [.pdf]
- Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), Part IV, 235-331 [.pdf]

### **Week 10 (June 18) / John Dewey II**

#### Readings

- Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action in The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Volume 4: 1929, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Harriet Furst Simon (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), chapter 1 (“Escape from Peril”) [.pdf]
- Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems in The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Volume 2: 1925-1927, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Bridget A. Walsh (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), chapters 4-5 (“Eclipse of the Public” and “Search for the Great Community”) [.pdf]

- Dewey, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us” in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Volume 2: 1939-1941, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Anne Sharpe (Southern Illinois University Press, 1988) [.pdf]

#### Recommended

- Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* in *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, Volume 2: 1925-1927, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Bridget A. Walsh (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), remainder of the book [.pdf]
- Richard J. Bernstein, “Dewey’s Vision of Radical Democracy” in Cochran, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dewey*, edited by Molly Cochran (Cambridge University Press, 2010) [.pdf]
- Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Cornell University Press, 1991), chapters 9 and 10 [.pdf]

### **Week 11 (June 25) / Jürgen Habermas**

#### Readings

- Habermas, “A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality” in *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, edited by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (MIT Press, 1998) [.pdf]
- Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy” in *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, edited by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (MIT Press, 1998) [.pdf]

#### Recommended

- Habermas, “Actions, Speech Acts, Linguistically Mediated Interactions, and the Lifeworld” in *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, edited by Maeve Cooke (MIT Press, 1998) [.pdf]

Friday, June 29 at 12 noon: Third Reflection Paper Due

### **Week 12 (July 2) / Richard Rorty**

#### Readings

- Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, & Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), part I [.pdf]

### **Week 13 (July 9) / TBD**

#### Readings

- TBD

#### Recommended

- TBD

Monday, October 1: Final Paper Due