

# Pragmatism

## Philosophy 112: American Philosophy

Associate Professor Rasmus Grønfeldt Winther  
Fall 2017; UC Santa Cruz; <http://www.rgwinther.com/>

Classroom: Cowell 134

Course Meeting Times: TTh 5:20 – 6:55 pm

Office: Cowell A-104

Office Hours: Tuesdays 4:15 – 5:00 pm; Thursdays 2 – 3:00 pm and by appointment.

Email: [rgw@ucsc.edu](mailto:rgw@ucsc.edu) (the class will also be on Canvas)

### 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 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.

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 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.

### 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 or the class break 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.

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

(2) Final Paper (30% of your grade; 3-5 pages; prompt driven; due Finals Week)

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

+ **All assignments are mandatory.** Assignments are lowered by a full letter grade for every day late; a missed think piece is averaged in as an “F” in your final grade [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. 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. The two best books on writing!

<https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Your-Dissertation-Fifteen-Minutes/dp/080504891X/>

<http://www.amazon.com/Stein-Writing-Successful-Techniques-Strategies/dp/0312254210/>

2. Guidelines for philosophical writing:

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

<http://www.anthoniflood.com/blanshardphilostyle.htm>

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

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

3. Guidelines for essay writing, in general:

<http://www.westmont.edu/~work/material/writing.html>

4. Oxford English Dictionary. You have online access to this extraordinary resource at:

<http://www.oed.com.oca.ucsc.edu/>

5. “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>

6. From the inimitable Kurt Vonnegut:

<http://kmh-lanl.hansonhub.com/pc-24-66-vonnegut.pdf>

7. “10 tools for improving your writing” by RG Winther:

[http://www.rgwinther.com/10\\_tools\\_for\\_improving\\_your\\_academic\\_writing\\_Winther\\_et\\_al\\_26\\_7\\_16.pdf](http://www.rgwinther.com/10_tools_for_improving_your_academic_writing_Winther_et_al_26_7_16.pdf)

Reading carefully is also critical. Here is a great guide for learning and practicing this skill:

<http://www.amazon.com/How-Read-Book-Intelligent-Touchstone/dp/0671212095/>

#### IV. GENERAL COURSE MOTTOS

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

+ “Back to the Academy” – minimal electronic communication.

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

#### V. 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](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu) for more information.

#### WARNING

**For proper citation practices in your writing. Please consult:**

<http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/citesources>

**Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Please consult:**

[https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic\\_misconduct](https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct)

#### BOOKS

**All books available at BayTree Bookstore, on campus.**

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.

Talisse, Robert B. and Scott F. Aikin. 2011. *The Pragmatism Reader. From Peirce through the Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

#### READINGS

Week 1. (October 3 and 5) **Context & Origins of Pragmatism**

- John Dewey “The Development of American Pragmatism” (Chapter 5 of McDermott J. (ed.)).
- Ian Hacking, “On Not Being a Pragmatist: Eight Reasons and a Cause” (on eCommons)
- Talisse and Aikin 2011, Introduction, pp. 1-11.

Week 2. (October 10 and 12) **William James I**

- William James, “What Pragmatism Means” (Lecture II of James, *Pragmatism...*, pp. 27-44)
- William James, “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” (Lecture VI of James, *Pragmatism...*, pp. 95-113)
- William James, “The Will to Believe” (in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp.92-108)

Week 3. (October 17 and 19) **Charles Sanders Peirce I**

- 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.))
- C.S. Peirce, “Deduction, Induction, and Hypothesis” (Chapter 12 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))

Week 4. (October 24 and 26) **John Dewey I**

- 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.))

Week 5. (October 31 and November 2) **Contemporary Applications: Democracy**

- Hilary Putnam, “A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 331-352.
- Richard Rorty, “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 381-402.
- Sidney Hook, “The Democratic Way of Life” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 155-165.

Week 6. (November 7 and 9) **Contemporary Applications: Worlds and Frameworks**

- Nelson Goodman, “Words, Works, Worlds” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 174-187.
- WVO Quine, “On What There Is” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 221-233.
- Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 286-298.

Week 7. (November 14 and 16) **John Dewey II**

- 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 8. (November 21; November 23 = Thanksgiving) **Dialogue / In-Class Assignment**

- Volunteer Presentations & Open Questions? (Stay tuned)
- CI Lewis “A Pragmatic Conception of the *A Priori*” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 155-165.
- WVO Quine “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” in Talisse and Aikin 2011, pp. 202-220.

Week 9. (November 28 and 30) **Charles Sanders Peirce II**

- Nathaniel Houser, “Introduction” (Houser and Kloesel (eds.)), xix-xli, especially xxxiii-xli.
- C.S. Peirce, “Fraser’s *The Works of George Berkeley*” (Chapter 5 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))
- C.S. Peirce, “The Architecture of Theories” (Chapter 21 of Houser and Kloesel (eds.))

Week 10. (December 5 and 7) **William James II**

- William James, “The Function of Cognition” (Lecture I of James, ...*The Meaning of Truth* pp. 179-198)
- William James, “The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstanders” (Lecture VIII of James, ...*The Meaning of Truth* pp. 265-282)
- William James, “A Dialogue” (Lecture XV of James, ...*The Meaning of Truth* pp. 320-325)