

# Pragmatism

441/556 Pragmatism

Spring 2020

Tu 5:45–8:35

BB 213? HU 258!

Pragmatists challenge the neat division between the theoretical and the practical. Belief involves a commitment to act in a certain way and so too, they argue, does knowledge. Belief involves commitment to act, so the theoretical and the practical cannot be kept apart. This course will address pragmatism from its origin in the 19th-century through to the present day. We will read works by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and others.

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Office hours: M noon–1:00, Tu 1:15–2:15, and by appointment

**Texts:** Course readings will be available via Blackboard.

**Response papers:** Students are required to write a 300–500 word critical response to the assigned readings each week. These should be turned in via Blackboard by midnight on Sunday before the class meeting for which the reading is assigned.

- A critical response might just be a critical summary of one of the readings. State the *central thesis* of the reading and explain briefly what the author is trying to do, what reasons that the author gives for believing their thesis, or why it matters.
- Alternately, you may pick one issue in the readings to discuss.
- You may pose a criticism, but you still need to concisely state what you're objecting to.
- A reading response paper should *not* be an outline. You should not mention everything from the reading.

**Presentations:** All students will make a presentation on the content of one of the course readings. The presentation should offer a summary of the central claim and argument of a reading and offer points which open class discussion. It should not be a point-by-point repetition of the reading! It may evaluate how successful the article is or connect issues raised by the article to earlier readings in the course.

Students registered for 556 will also make a presentation on their final paper.

**Final papers:** Students registered for 441 will write an 8–10 page final paper which may be on an assigned topic. Students registered for 556 will write a longer paper on a topic of their own choosing.

**Grading:** 15% Participation  
40% Response papers  
10% Presentation(s)  
35% Final paper

## Schedule of topics

This is a (very!) tentative schedule. Specific readings may take more or less time than indicated, we may drop or add some readings as we go.

**Week 1** 28 jan

Introduction

**Week 2** 4 feb

Transcendentalism

Ralph Waldo Emerson: 'Self reliance', 'The oversoul'

Theodore Parker: 'Transcendentalism'

**Week 3** 11 feb

Charles Sanders Peirce: 'The Fixation of Belief', 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'

**Week 4** 18 feb

William Clifford: 'The Ethics of Belief'

William James: 'The Will to Believe'

**Week 5** 25 feb

James: chapters 1–3 of *Pragmatism*

'Pragmatism' from the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*

**Week 6** 3 mar

A.O. Lovejoy: 'The Thirteen Pragmatisms'

John Dewey: 'What pragmatism means by the practical', 'An added note as to the "practical" '

C.I. Lewis: 'Pragmatism and current thought'

**Week 7** 10 mar

John Dewey: 'Philosophy's search for the immutable', 'Context and thought'

**Spring break!**

**Week 8** 24 mar

Jane Addams: selections from *Democracy and Social Ethics*

**Week 9** 31 mar

G.H. Mead: [readings to be announced]

**Week 10** 7 apr

C.I. Lewis: 'The pragmatic element in knowledge'

W.V.O Quine: 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'

Morton White: 'Normative Ethics, Normative Epistemology, and Quine's Holism'

**Week 11** 14 apr

Nelson Goodman: 'The New Riddle of Induction', 'Words, Works, Worlds'

**Week 12** 21 apr

Richard Rorty: 'A World Without Substances or Essences', 'Ethics Without Principles'

Cornel West: 'The limits of neopragmatism'

**Week 13** 28 apr

Feminist approaches

Lynn Hankinson Nelson: 'A question of evidence'

Sharyn Clough: 'Feminist science studies from a pragmatist perspective'

**Week 14** 5 may

Conclusion

Paper presentations