

Pragmatism

441/556 Pragmatism

Spring 2023

W 3:00–5:50

HU 019

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: Tu 11:00–noon, F 1:30–2:30, 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 (end of day) on **Monday** before the class meeting for which the reading is assigned.

There are two possible approaches to a critical response.

1. Provide 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. Ask yourself: What *reasons* does the author give for believing their thesis? Why do they think it matters?
2. Pick one issue which occurs in multiple readings. Explain how it arises and is addressed in different readings.

Reading response papers should *not* outline the whole reading. You should not try mention everything. Decide which parts you think are important.

You may pose an objection, but you still need to concisely state what you're objecting to.

If parts were confusing or hard to follow, then you can say so! You are not expected to understand the reading fully before we meet to discuss it. The goal is to engage with the reading, struggle with it, and form an opinion of how things fit together.

Presentations: Students registered for 556 will make two short presentations.

One will be during a regular class meeting, offering a summary of the central claim and argument of a reading and raising 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.

The other will be at the last class meeting, pitching the topic of their final paper.

Final papers: Students registered for 441 will write a 5–8 page (about 2000 word) final paper which may be on an assigned topic. Students registered for 556 will write a 10–12 page (about 3000 word) paper on a topic of their own choosing.

Grading: Undergraduates (441)

15% Participation

50% Response papers

35% Final paper

Graduates (556)

10% Participation

45% Response papers

10% Presentations

35% Final paper

Electronic devices in the classroom: This policy will be discussed and settled upon at the first class meeting.

Academic honesty: You are encouraged to discuss issues from the course with each other and with others outside of class, but you are responsible for their own ideas and your own words.

Response papers do not need to include a full citation for the assigned reading. Final papers should give full citations for works that are cited or consulted, and they may include acknowledgments of helpful interactions.

Schedule of topics

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

Week 1 18 jan

Introduction

Week 2 25 jan - Transcendentalism

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

Theodore Parker: 'Transcendentalism'

Week 3 1 feb - Peirce's pragmatism

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

Week 4 8 feb - the Clifford/James debate

William Clifford: 'The Ethics of Belief'

William James: 'The Will to Believe'

Week 5 15 feb - James' pragmatism

James: chapters 1–3 of *Pragmatism*

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

Week 6 22 feb - reactions to James

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 1 mar - Dewey's pragmatism

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

Week 8 8 mar - Addams and pragmatism at work

Jane Addams: selections from *Democracy and Social Ethics*

Spring break!

Week 9 22 mar - Lewis, Quine, White

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 10 29 mar - Carnap, Rorty, Davidson

Rudolf Carnap: 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology'

Richard Rorty: 'The World Well Lost'

Donald Davidson: 'On The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'

Week 11 5 apr - Goodman

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

Week 12 12 apr - pragmatism and democracy

Hilary Putnam: 'A Reconsideration of Deweyan Democracy'

Cheryl Misak: 'Making Disagreement Matter: Pragmatism and Deliberative Democracy'

Elizabeth Anderson: 'How to be a Pragmatist'

Week 13 19 apr - wildcard topic

Students will decide — science? education? art? religion?

Readings to be announced

Week 14 26 may

Conclusion

Paper presentations