**PHIL 421 / 521: American Philosophy**

Fall 2013

Gonzaga University

Instructor: Dr. Charles A. Hobbs

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\*Office Hours – Tuesdays/Thursdays, 2:45-4:45pm

\*or by appointment if needed

(& please note that I do not maintain my regular office hours during final exams week)

**Course Description**

This course introduces and examines America’s unique contribution to philosophy, namely pragmatism. We shall engage with a variety of figures—from classical to contemporary American pragmatists, including: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Jane Addams, Richard Rorty, John J. McDermott, and Judith Green. With the help of the foregoing philosophers, we shall together consider such questions as: to what extent is pragmatism a break with previous philosophical traditions? What should be the role of experience for philosophy? What is a belief? What is the relationship between culture and nature? What is the meaning of our mortality?—and is life worth living? To what extent can we improve our human condition?What is and ought democracy to be? Join our community of inquiry for the opportunity of a lifetime as we explore the story and ongoing conversation of this vibrant philosophical movement. Course activities will include: lecture & discussion, exams and other writing assignments, and presentations.

**Course Objectives**

For students to develop:

-A critical understanding of the development of American philosophy–in this case, of pragmatism–as it has developed historically and thematically;

-An appreciation of what remains at stake in ongoing advancements/applications of pragmatism.

**Undergraduate Course Requirements**

(1) Three Examinations: **60%**

(2) Two Reflective Essays: **30%** (Please note that I do *not* accept essays by e-mail.)

(3) Presentations: **10%**

All students should note: Excessive absences will harm borderline grades, whereas regular attendance (and participation) will help borderline grades.

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\*All work shall be graded on a scale of 1-100. Numerical and letter grades correlate in the following way:

94–100: A 84–86: B 74–76: C 60–66: D

90–93: A- 80–83: B- 70–73: C- 59-or-below: F

87–89: B+ 77–79: C+ 67–69: D+

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My Academic Honesty Policy:

*Plagiarism* is a form of academic dishonesty in which one represents the words and/or ideas of someone else as if they are her own. Thus plagiarism is a form of *theft*. Please be aware that if you engage in this illegal practice with regard to any writing assignment *or* if you engage in some other form of academic dishonesty – such as cheating on an exam – then you should expect to automatically fail the course. Bottom line: be honest by doing *your own* work.

**Required Text:**

*Pragmatism, Old & New*, ed. Susan Haack. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006. ISBN: 1591023599

-Throughout the rest of this syllabus, I shall refer to this text as “PON”

\*Note: A significant amount of our readings will be found on “Blackboard”

-See the course Outline and Schedule:

**Outline and Schedule**

(This outline/schedule is subject to change – be alert for any announced changes.)

NOTE: You are expected to have done all scheduled reading for any class meeting

*prior to that meeting*.

**Week 1 – Introduction to Course**

Sept. 3: Introductions -Overview of the course (syllabus) -Student information sheets

-Presentation schedule

Sept. 5: “Introduction: Pragmatism, Old and New”

Reading: PON, pp. 15–58

**Week 2 – Charles Sanders Peirce: the beginnings of pragmatism**

Sept. 10:“Some Consequences of Four Incapacities”

Reading: PON, pp. 70–103

Sept. 12: -“The Fixation of Belief”

-“How to Make Our Ideas Clear”

Readings: PON, pp. 108–126 ; pp. 128–150

**Week 3 – Introducing William James**

Sept. 17: “Is Life Worth Living?”

Reading on ‘blackboard’

Sept. 19: “The Will to Believe”

Reading: PON, pp. 222–246

**Week 4 – James, from his 1907 *Pragmatism***

Sept. 24: “The Present Dilemma in Philosophy”

Reading: PON, pp. 273–287

Sept. 26: “What Pragmatism Means”

Reading: PON, pp. 289–307

**Week 5 – Jamesian Ethics**

Oct. 1: “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life”

Reading: PON, pp. 248–272

Oct. 3: -“On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings”

-“The Moral Equivalent of War”

Readings on ‘blackboard’

-& see William James obituary by Dewey

**Week 6 –** Oct. 8: FIRST ESSAY DUE (at class meeting) / PEIRCE & JAMES REVIEW

DISCUSSION

**Oct. 10: *EXAM***

**Week 7 – Introducing John Dewey**

Oct. 15: In-class documentary film–“John Dewey: His Life and Work”

Oct. 17: “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy”

Reading on ‘blackboard’

**Week 8 – Dewey, from *Experience and Nature***

Oct. 22: -“Nature, Life and Body-Mind”

-“Nature, Communication and Meaning”

Readings on ‘blackboard’

Oct. 24: Dewey, “Philosophy and Democracy”

Reading: PON, pp. 363–378

**Week 9 – Dewey & Jane Addams on Democracy**

Oct. 29: -Dewey, “Creative Democracy–The Task Before Us”

-Addams, Introduction to *Democracy and Social Ethics*

Readings on ‘blackboard’

Oct. 31: NO CLASS – Dr. Hobbs @conference in Indianapolis

**Week 10 –** Nov. 5: DEWEY & ADDAMS REVIEW DISCUSSION

**Nov. 7: *EXAM***

**Week 11 – Richard Rorty’s Neo-Pragmatism**

Nov. 12: -“Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism”

Readings: PON, pp. 635–654

Nov. 14: selections from *Philosophy and Social Hope*

Reading on ‘blackboard’

**Week 12 –** Nov. 19: In-class film—Rorty interview on beauty & consolation

\*SECOND ESSAY DUE (at class meeting)\*

Nov. 21: NO CLASS – Dr. Hobbs giving presentation @conference in Chicago

**Week 13 – John J. McDermott**

Nov. 26: McDermott - “Why Bother: Is Life Worth Living? Experience as Pedagogical”

McDermott - “The Inevitability of Our Own Death:

The Celebration of Time as a Prelude to Disaster”

Readings on ‘blackboard’

Nov. 28: NO CLASS—*THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY*

**Week 14 – Judith Green: a contemporary advancement of classical pragmatism**

(readings on ‘blackboard’)

Dec. 3: selections from *Deep Democracy:*

*Community, Diversity, and Transformation*

Reading on ‘blackboard’

Dec. 5: selections from *Pragmatism and Social Hope:*

*Deepening Democracy in Global Contexts*

Reading on ‘blackboard’

**Week 15 –** Dec. 10: In-class film–“American Philosopher”

Dec. 12: RORTY / MCDERMOTT / GREEN REVIEW DISCUSSION

\*FINAL EXAMINATION DATE/TIME TBA

(& graduate student research papers due *no later* than end of final exams week)

**Advice about Reading Well**

-Do not be surprised by how long philosophy can take to read. I recommend allowing yourself at least twice as long as you would need to read the same amount of pages in most other subjects.

-You’ve only *really* read a work of philosophy when you’ve read it all *at least* twice.

-I recommend this procedure: first read the assigned pages somewhat quickly to get a sense of the main point/s and structure. Then – *and this is crucial* – go back and *read it again*, more *slowly* and *carefully*, trying to identify the details of the author’s discussion. Then…read again.

-Take notes about your reading. Write down whatever seems to be an important concept, term, example, etc. This will help you remember and better understand the reading. Don’t hesitate to look up words with which you are unfamiliar: keep a college-level dictionary at hand.

-When reading, ask yourself: what seems to be the author’s thesis or main point? *What* is he/she arguing for and/or against? *How* does he/she go about making the argument? Make notes about this. Also, what are possible objections to the author’s argument?

**Guidelines for Essay Writing**

**(1) Start your work early.** Do not put an essay off until one or even two days before it is due; that would make it more likely that you will turn in poor work. Instead, be smart by beginning work as soon as it is assigned! This point applies to *all* of your university work.

**(2) Summarize instead of using *long* quotations.** Explaining a text in your very own words demonstrates a far better understanding than if you just copy a lot of words down. That being said, if/when you *do* quote from the text/s, please note that no quotation may exceed three full lines, and each must, of course, be properly cited (see next point). Thus, when writing your essay, there is never a need to use “block quotations.” (And avoid stand-alone quotations—incorporate any you decide to use into your own writing.)

**(3) Provide proper citations.** I require that you use either the MLA or Chicago styles of citation. If you require information on these styles, see me and/or a reference librarian in Foley Library (and there is no need to cite your class notes).

**(4) Pay special attention to your grammar, punctuation, and spelling.** You are a university student, and I therefore expect you to write like one. In order for your writing to clearly express meaning, you must make correct and precise use of language. Use a college-level dictionary. Write in clear and complete sentences. ***Do not use contractions*** or slang in your writing (unless by chance you are quoting someone using them). Do not begin sentences with conjunctions (such as “And” or “But”). Also, avoid long-winded sentences that require excessive commas, avoid needless repetition, and *italicize* foreign words.

**(5) Avoid writing about how a philosopher “feels” – for example, instead of writing “Socrates *feels* that *x* is true”, write that Socrates says/believes/argues (whatever term is most appropriate) that *x* is true.** (We do not know much about his feelings, do we? Focus on what is actually *said* rather than on what you think/speculate some philosopher *feels*.)

**(6) Revise. Revise. Revise.** I normally accept only final drafts of essays (with no “re-writes”). In any case, I highly recommend that you get an honest, intelligent, and literate friend, roommate, or relative to proof-read your essay, because it is easier than you may realize for you as author to overlook various errors. Also, please note that any good essay has probably gone through *at least* two significant revisions (*before* you turn it in to me).

**(7) Essays must be typed (in “Times New Roman” style with 12-point font size & ONE-INCH MARGINS), double-spaced, numbered, and stapled on the upper left corner.**

**(8) Do not use plastic covers or folders of any kind.** These just get in the way and are thus annoying. Just the (stapled) essays itself will be fine! Thank you.

**(9)** **Do not use the internet in any way during the process of thinking about, preparing, and writing your essays.** I expect you to use nothing but your intellect, the text itself, and your class notes; you do not need anything else. So do *not* in any way consult internet web-sites or other books or articles – if you need help, consult me.

**Graduate Student Course Requirements**

\*NOTE: In addition to the regularly scheduled reading (listed above in the course “Outline and Schedule”), graduate students are expected to show an understanding of philosophical texts, arguments, and concepts at an advanced level—to be shown by clarity of writing and speaking. With this in mind, graduate student course requirements include the following:

(1) Three Exams: **60%**

(2) Research Paper (minimum of 12 pages) that makes an argument and includes significant scholarly use (with appropriate citation) of both primary texts *and* secondary sources: **25%**

\*Your paper should be, at minimum, of conference presentation quality.

-& please note that I do *not* accept papers by e-mail.

(3) A Critical (not merely exegetical / expository) Presentation to Class: **15%**

\*Graduate students are also required to meet with me–outside of regular class meetings–for discussions of assigned advanced reading (to happen *at least* 3 times during the span of the semester). We shall do our best to determine meeting days/time that are acceptable for all of us.

-Regarding these readings, **see below**

**Additional Primary Source Reading Assignments** (REQUIRED OF ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS) **Will Include**:

\*Peirce: “What Pragmatism Is” (1905) –See *The Essential Peirce*, Vol. 2  
  
\*James: “Some Metaphysical Problems Pragmatically Considered” (from *Pragmatism*, 1907)  
  
\*Dewey: “Search for the Public” and “Search for the Great Community” (from *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927)

\*McDermott: “Ill-at-Ease: The Natural Travail of Ontological Disconnectedness” (from *The Drama of Possibility: Experience as Philosophy of Culture*, 2007)  
  
\*Green: “Pluralism and Deliberative Democracy: A Pragmatist Approach” in *A Companion to Pragmatism* (2006)

-Graduate students are also expected to regularly consult academic journals (both current and back issues) in which top-tier work on pragmatism tends to appear. These include: *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society*, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *The Pluralist*, and *Contemporary Pragmatism*. Also, occasional articles dealing with pragmatism still appear in other journals such as *International Philosophical Quarterly*. \*Regular consultation of such journals is not only crucial for your research paper, but essential for your own ongoing development as a philosopher and scholar. It is a part of your being members of the community of inquiry.

-Further Additional Primary Source Reading Assignments may include:

Peirce: “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined” (1892)  
  
James: “The Dilemma of Determinism” (1884)  
  
Dewey: “My Pedagogic Creed” (1897), “Evolution and Ethics” (1898), “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism” (1905), “The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy” (1909), *Individualism Old and New* (1930), “From Absolutism to Experimentalism” (1930), *A Common Faith* (1934), “Antinaturalism in Extremis” (1944), *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* (2012)  
  
Addams: *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), *The Long Road of Woman's Memory* (1916)   
  
Rorty: “Philosophy Without Mirrors” (from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 1979)

McDermott: “Experience as Freedom” in *A Companion to Pragmatism* (2006)