

IDPT 101 - 20: Philosophy Americana: The Insane Angels of American Culture

Fall 2007, The College of Wooster

Professor: Lee A. McBride III

TAs: Adelaide Cary & Peterson Kuyk-White

Class Meets: T, TH 9:30-10:50AM, Scovel 100

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Office Hours: MWF: 9:00-10:30AM & by appt.

Course Description

Emerson writes, “Every man is a divinity in disguise, a god playing the fool. It seems as if heaven had sent its insane angels into our world as to an asylum, and here they will break out into their native music and utter at intervals the words they have heard in heaven; then the mad fit returns, and they mope and wallow like dogs.” Taking its cue from this passage and Douglas Anderson’s recent book, *Philosophy Americana*, this writing-intensive First-Year Seminar (FYS) sets out to investigate several themes that run through American thought and culture; such as, wildness, transience, rugged individualism, social justice, meliorism, and mysticism. To this end, we will make use of the philosophy, literature, poetry, and music of the “insane angels” of American culture. Material for discussion may include: Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Self-Reliance,” Henry David Thoreau’s “Walking,” Margaret Fuller’s “The Great Lawsuit,” Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road,” William James’s “The Will to Believe,” John Dewey’s *A Common Faith*, Hank Williams’s “Lost Highway,” Gram Parsons’s “Return of the Grievous Angel,” and Bruce Springsteen’s “Born to Run.”

Course Goals & Learning Objectives

1) Students will demonstrate working knowledge of various fundamental intellectual skills.

Success in achieving this goal will be assessed by your ability to:

- Read a variety of texts with understanding and critical judgment.
- Understand the validity and uses of different kinds of evidence.
- Perceive, analyze, and value the perspectives of other thinkers, while recognizing and critiquing their own.
- Formulate meaningful questions and pose significant problems within the topic.
- Synthesize material from several sources to construct an argument and express ideas.
- Move, both in writing and in discussion, from the expression of opinion to the formulation and grounding of an argument.
- Write clearly, logically, and persuasively.

2) Students will be able to analyze and evaluate particular aspects of American culture from the perspective of different philosophical theories.

Success in achieving this goal will be assessed by your ability to:

- Identify and critically evaluate the presuppositions of particular aspects of American culture.
- Formulate and evaluate arguments for and against self-reliance and rugged individualism.
- Provide an analysis of particular aspects of American mysticism in light of transcendentalist and pragmatist theories.
- Formulate a solution to a social problem (e.g., male chauvinism) and construct an argument for that solution.

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Course Requirements and Methods of Assessment

Class Participation consists of *attendance* and *active presence*. In this course, we will make use of a dialectical method, where students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions. Thus, attendance is very important, for if you aren't in class, you can neither contribute to nor benefit from the class discussion. Each student will be afforded two absences (no questions asked). Unexcused absences beyond that will negatively affect your participation grade. Lastly, students will be required to attend one of the four lectures offered during this year's Wooster Forum. You are strongly encouraged to attend all of the Wooster Forum events.

Various **Short Writing Assignments** will be assigned throughout the semester. These assignments will deal with the relevant reading material, and are meant to prepare the student for class discussion and sharpen his/her writing skills. Your responses are expected to be approximately one page in length, typed and double-spaced. Short writing assignments will be collected at the beginning of the next class. Late work will not be accepted. There will be no make-up assignments, unless written verification of serious emergency is produced by a physician, police officer, etc. Note: all students are required to write one one-page reaction piece to one of this year's Wooster Forum speakers.

Students will be required to write **Three Papers** (approximately 3-5 pages typed). The papers will be on a specific assigned topic, which will be handed out in class and subsequently posted on Woodle. Each paper must be typed and follow the format designated by the instructor. Late papers will not be accepted, unless written verification of serious emergency is produced by The Dean of Students Office.

Grade Distribution

Class Participation (10%), Short Writing (25%), Paper #1 (20%), Paper #2 (20%), Paper #3 (25%)

Required Materials

Anderson, Douglas, *Philosophy Americana*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.
(ISBN: 0-8232-2551-8, list price: \$24)

Dewey, John, *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934.
(ISBN: 0-300-00069-3, list price: \$14)

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Nature and Selected Essays*, Reissue Edition, ed. Larzer Ziff. New York: Penguin Classics, 2003. (ISBN: 0-14-243762-X, list price: \$13)

Hacker, Diana, *A Pocket Style Manual*, Fourth Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.
(ISBN: 0-312-40684-3, list price: \$22)

James, William, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. New York: Dover Publications, 1956. (ISBN: 0486202917, list price: \$13)

Thoreau, Henry D., *Walden and Other Writings*, ed. Brooks Atkinson. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. (ISBN: 0-679-78334-2, list price: \$12)

The texts are available at the Wilson Bookstore. Readings preceded by an asterisk (*) will be available via Woodle (<https://woodle.wooster.edu/>).

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Academic Honesty and the Code of Academic Integrity

While you are a student at Wooster, you are expected to know and abide by the rules of the institution as described in *The Scot's Key* and The Handbook of Selected College Policies (<http://www.wooster.edu/policies>). The Code of Academic Integrity will be strictly enforced. Academic dishonesty in any of your academic work is a serious breach of the Code of Academic Integrity and is grounds for an "F" for the entire course. Such violations include turning in another person's work as your own, copying from any source without proper citation, and fabricating excuses and lying in connection with your academic work. If you are unsure as to what is permissible, please consult your instructor.

Academic Resources

The Learning Center (ext. 2595) offers services designed to help students improve their overall academic performance. Sessions are structured to promote principles of effective learning and academic management. Any student on campus may schedule sessions at the Learning Center.

The Writing Center (ext. 2205) exists to help students develop their reading and writing skills. Staffed by experienced professionals and trained peer tutors, the Center is a free resource for all Wooster students who seek assistance planning, writing, and revising their academic texts.

Learning Disabilities and Academic Accommodations

Any student with a documented learning disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with Pam Rose, Director of the Learning Center (prose@wooster.edu), and the instructor, as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Conflicts with Academic Responsibilities

The College of Wooster is an academic institution and its fundamental purpose is to stimulate its students to reach the highest standard of intellectual achievement. The College expects students to give the highest priority to their academic responsibilities. When conflicts arise between academic commitments and complementary programs (including athletic, cultural, educational, and volunteer activities), students, faculty, staff, and administrators all share the responsibility of minimizing and resolving them. As a student you have the responsibility to inform the faculty member of potential conflicts as soon as you are aware of them, and work with the faculty member to identify alternative ways to fulfill your academic commitments without sacrificing the academic integrity and rigor of the course.

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TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

WEEK #1	
T (08/28)	Introductions & Orientation
TH (08/30)	Hacker, <i>A Pocket Style Manual</i> , pp. 113-154 [pp. 1-99 (skim)]
WEEK #2	
T (09/04)	Anderson, "Introduction: Inheritance, Teaching, and the Insane Angels of American Culture"
TH (09/06)	Emerson, "The American Scholar"
WEEK #3	
M (09/10)	<<<Wooster Forum: Tyrone Hayes, "From Silent Spring to Silent Night">>>
T (09/11)	Emerson, "Self-Reliance"
TH (09/13)	Emerson, "The Over-Soul"
WEEK #4	
T (09/18)	Emerson, "The Poet"
TH (09/20)	*Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit" <<< PAPER #1 DUE >>>
WEEK #5	
T (09/25)	*Fuller, "The Great Lawsuit"
TH (09/27)	Thoreau, "Walking"
	<<<Wooster Forum: Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., "Our Environmental Destiny">>>
WEEK #6	
T (10/02)	Thoreau, "Walking"
	<<<Wooster Forum: Ed Begley, Jr., "Live Simply So That Others May Simply Live">>>
TH (10/04)	Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"
WEEK #7	
T (10/09)	Anderson, "Wildness as Political Act"
	<<<Wooster Forum: Sandra Steingraber, "From Raindrops to Amniotic Fluid">>>
TH (10/11)	Anderson, "After All, He's Just a Man: The Wild Side of Life in Country Music"
WEEK #8	
T (10/16)	<<< FALL RECESS – NO CLASSES >>>
TH (10/18)	Discussion <<< PAPER #2 DUE >>>
WEEK #9	
T (10/23)	*Whitman, "To You," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," & "Song of the Open Road"
TH (10/25)	Anderson, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Origins of Pragmatism" & *Stuhr, "William James's Pragmatism"
WEEK #10	
T (10/30)	James, "The Will to Believe"
TH (11/01)	James, "The Sentiment of Rationality"
WEEK #11	
T (11/06)	*James, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings"
TH (11/08)	Anderson, "William James and the Wild Beasts of the Philosophical Desert"
WEEK #12	
T (11/13)	Anderson, "Working Certainty and Deweyan Wisdom"
TH (11/15)	Dewey, "Religion Versus the Religious"
WEEK #13	
T (11/20)	Dewey, "Faith and Its Object"
TH (11/22)	<<<THANKSGIVING RECESS – NO CLASSES>>>
WEEK #14	
T (11/27)	Dewey, "The Human Abode of the Religious Function"
TH (11/29)	Anderson, "John Dewey's Sensible Mysticism"
WEEK #15	
T (12/04)	Anderson, "Born to Run: Male Mysticism on the Road"
TH (12/06)	Discussion & Conclusions
WEEK #16	
T (12/11)	<<< PAPER #3 DUE (10AM) >>>

*Available on Woodle