

PHIL 310: Pragmatism
Spring 2009, The College of Wooster

Professor: Lee A. McBride III
Class Meets: MWF 11-11:50AM, Scovel 004
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Course Description

This course examines various historical and contemporary permutations of American pragmatism. We will critically engage: (i) the influence of chance, continuity, and evolutionary theory in pragmatic cosmology, (ii) epistemological commitments to fallibilism and experimental inquiry, (iii) naturalistic accounts of values and principles, and (iv) melioristic faith in pluralism and democracy. We will become acquainted with the works of several challenging and provocative philosophers, such as: Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Alain Locke, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, Susan Haack, and Richard Rorty. This will entail the careful reading, interpretation, and discussion of difficult texts as well as the exposition, critique, and construction of arguments.

Course Goals & Learning Objectives

1) Students will be able to effectively identify, formulate, and evaluate arguments.

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

- Identify the difference between a position and an argument for a position.
- Extract an argument from a piece of text.
- Formulate an effective and well-reasoned argument for and against a position.

2) Students will be able to understand the fundamental methods and purposes of pragmatic philosophy and recognize how pragmatist philosophy differs from mainstream analytic and continental philosophy.

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

- Recognize the central tenets of pragmatist philosophy.
- Identify and critically evaluate the presuppositions of various pragmatist philosophies (e.g., Peirce's pragmatism, James' radical empiricism, Dewey's instrumentalism, and Locke's critical pragmatism).
- Explain the relationship between the methodology of pragmatist philosophy and other disciplines.

3) Students will be able to analyze current social conditions and potential responses to political issues in light of major pragmatist theories.

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

- Identify and critically evaluate the basic techniques of pragmatic philosophical analysis and critique.
- Compare and contrast pragmatist methods of inquiry and critique by applying them to a current socio-political problem.
- Formulate a solution to a concrete, practical problem and construct an argument for that solution.

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Course Requirements and Methods of Assessment

Class Participation consists of both *active presence* and *classroom citizenship*. In this course, we will make use of a dialectical method, where students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions. You will be graded on the quality as well as the quantity of your contribution to the class.

Attendance is, thus, 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). Each unexcused absence beyond two will knock two percentage points off your total course grade.

Students will be required to write an undisclosed number of **Study Questions Responses**. Study Questions will be assigned at the end of class. These questions will deal with the relevant reading material, and are meant to prepare the student for class discussion. Your answers are expected to be approximately one page in length, typed and double-spaced. This work 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.

Students will be required to **Attend This Year's Honors Society Lecture** (February 9th, 7:30PM).

Students will be required to write **Two Papers**. The first paper, *Paper #1* (approx. 3-4 pages typed), will prompt all students to write about an assigned topic. The second paper, the *Term Paper* (approx. 9-10 pages typed), will be a research paper, which will allow each student to choose his/her own general topic from an approved list of options. Each paper must be typed and follow the format outlined on the paper guidelines. Late papers will not be accepted, unless written verification of serious emergency is produced by The Dean of Students Office.

Students will also be required to submit a **3-Page Term Paper Prospectus**, which will outline: (i) the topic and leading question of the project, (ii) the principal philosopher(s) involved, and (iii) cite and briefly describe at least three relevant articles or book chapters you have discerned during your extensive library research.

Grade Distribution

Participation (5%), Study Questions (25%), Paper #1 (20%), 3-Page Prospectus (10%), Term Paper (40%)

Required Materials

James, William, *Pragmatism and Other Writings*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2000. (ISBN: 0-14-043735-5, list price: \$16) [P]

Locke, Alain, *The Philosophy of Alain Locke*, ed. Leonard Harris. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. (ISBN: 0-87722-829-9, list price: \$32) [PAL]

Peirce, Charles Sanders, *The Essential Writings*, ed. Edward Moore. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998. (ISBN: 1-57392-256-0, list price: \$15) [EW]

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	
M (01/12)	Introductions & Orientation
W (01/14)	Peirce, "Preface to an Unwritten Book, 1897-98" [EW] & Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" (1868) [EW]
F (01/16)	Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" (1877) [EW]
WEEK #2	
M (01/19)	Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" (1878) [EW]
W (01/21)	Peirce, "The Doctrine of Necessity Examined" (1892) [EW]
F (01/23)	Peirce, "The Law of Mind" (1892) [EW]; cf. Peirce, "Synechism" (1902) [EW]
WEEK #3	
M (01/26)	Peirce, "Evolutionary Love" (1893) [EW]
W (01/28)	James, "Stream of Consciousness" (1892)
F (01/30)	James, "Preface [to <i>The Will to Believe...</i>]" & "The Will to Believe" (1897) [P]
WEEK #4	
M (02/02)	James, "A World of Pure Experience," pp. 314-325 (1904) [P]
W (02/04)	James, "A World of Pure Experience," pp. 326-336 (1904) [P]
F (02/06)	*Perry, "Friendly Disputes with Charles Peirce"
WEEK #5	
M (02/09)	*Talisce, "Towards a Peircean Politics of Inquiry" <<< Honors Society Lecture: Robert Talisce >>>
W (02/11)	Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is" (1905) [EW] <<< PAPER #1 DUE >>>
F (02/13)	James, "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy" (1907) [P]
WEEK #6	
M (02/16)	James, "What Pragmatism Means" (1907) [P]
W (02/18)	James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth" (1907) [P]
F (02/20)	James, "Preface [to <i>The Meaning of Truth</i>]," pp. 135-141 (1909) [P]
WEEK #7	
M (02/23)	*Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy" (1909)
W (02/25)	*Dewey, "Does Reality Possess Practical Character?" (1908)
F (02/27)	*Dewey, "Education as Growth" (1916)
WEEK #8	
M (03/02)	*Dewey, "The Live Creature" (1934)
W (03/04)	*Dewey, "The Problem of Logical Subject-Matter" (1938)
F (03/06)	*Dewey, "The Pattern of Inquiry" (1938)
03/07-03/22 <<<SPRING VACATION – NO CLASSES>>>	
WEEK #9	
M (03/23)	*Dewey, "Moral Judgment and Knowledge" (1932)
W (03/25)	*Dewey, "Reconstruction in Moral Conceptions" (1920)
F (03/27)	*Dewey, "Reconstruction as Affecting Social Philosophy" (1920)
WEEK #10	
M (03/30)	*Dewey, "Creative Democracy – The Task Before Us" (1939)
W (04/01)	Locke, "Values and Imperatives" (1935) [PAL]
F (04/03)	Locke, "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy" (1942) [PAL]
WEEK #11	
M (04/06)	Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace" (1944) [PAL]
W (04/08)	Locke, "The Ethics of Culture" (1923) [PAL]
F (04/10)	Locke, "The Contribution of Race to Culture" (1930) [PAL]
WEEK #12	
M (04/13)	Class Discussion <<< 3-PAGE TERM PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE >>>
W (04/15)	*Rorty, "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope" (1982)
F (04/17)	*Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" (1985)
WEEK #13	
M (04/20)	*Haack, "Vulgar Pragmatism" & *Rorty, "Response to Susan Haack"
W (04/22)	*Seigfried, "Weaving Chaos into Order" & *Seigfried, "What's Wrong with Instrumental Reasoning?," pp. 174-182
F (04/24)	<<< INDEPENDENT STUDY SHOWCASE – NO CLASSES >>>
WEEK #14	
M (04/27)	*Seigfried, "What's Wrong with Instrumental Reasoning?," pp. 183-201
W (04/29)	*Kuehn, "Dining on Fido: Death, Identity, and the Aesthetic Dilemma of Eating Animals"
F (05/01)	Class Discussion & Conclusions
WEEK #15	
Th (05/07)	<<< TERM PAPERS DUE (11AM) >>>