

Prof. N. McAfee
Phil 391 12552 Pragmatism
Class meets TR 12:00 to 1:15
Spring 2008 Robinson B103
Office Hours TR 1:30-2:30 Rob B453

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course on pragmatism and American philosophy, developed by the classical American philosophers (namely Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead) and as relevant now as then on matters of knowledge, politics, art, democracy, and ethics. Pragmatism shares with continental philosophy a Hegelian lineage and repudiation of foundations. It still unsettles the philosophical establishment with its seeming relativism and dismissal of correspondence theories of truth. More than an era in the history of philosophy, classical American philosophy offered tools for thinking and for creating just societies in a post-metaphysical world. In addition to helping students become thoroughly conversant in American philosophy proper, the course will consider the intersections and relationships among American philosophy and the history of philosophy, and the connection between philosophy, intellectual life, and culture. We will conclude the course a look at the resurgence of pragmatist thought and its new innovations in addressing the problems of the early 21st century.

TEXTS

Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy, 2d Edition, edited by John Stuhr (PCAP)

Democracy Matters by Cornel West (DM)

Other readings will be available on e-reserve

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. In order to pass the class, students must attend and participate in all classes with texts in hand and having read the material. This is a requirement for passing the course.
2. Response papers: about 12-15 times during the semester, a set of study questions will be distributed for the next class meeting's readings. Students should write a short response paper (300 to 450 words long) demonstrating their understanding of the readings. These must be submitted prior to the beginning of the following class either in person or in the body of an email sent prior to class. Late papers will not be accepted. The professor will return these by the following class session with one of the following marks: + for excellent understanding of the material, a check mark for adequate understanding, or a minus sign for inadequate understanding. If a student does not turn in a response paper, he/she receives a zero for that assignment. More than three zeroes will lead to failing the class. These papers are worth 60 percent of the grade.
3. Final project: By March 20 students should submit a proposal for a final project, which should cover a range of material in the course. This project could be a work of scholarship, a web site, or a creative work. The proposal and final project should be accompanied by a bibliography of materials used in the course and drawn from elsewhere as well. During the last week of class, students will give a 10-15 minute presentation on their final project and distribute a full-page

overview of the aim and scope of the project. The final project is due the last day of class and worth 40 percent of the course grade.

ALSO NOTE...

All work must conform with the University's Honor Code:

<http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#Anchor12>

Last Day to Add February 5, 2008

Last Day to Drop February 22, 2008

Elective Withdrawal Period February 23-March 21, 2008

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me toward the beginning of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

SCHEDULE

1/22 Introduction to American Philosophy (drawing on PCAP pp. 1-7)

Emerson

1. 1/24 PCAP: pp. 1-7, 13-26; if interested, visit <http://www.rwe.org/comm/> ("The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson") (20pp)

Charles Peirce

2. 1/29 PCAP: pp. 43-56 (first column) & 67-76; if interested, see "The Pragmatism Cybrary" (<http://www.pragmatism.org/>) (24pp)

3. 1/31 PCAP: pp. 77-88, 105-115 (21pp)

William James (and Walt Whitman)

4. 2/5 PCAP: pp. 140-161 (21pp)

5. 2/7 PCAP: pp. 193-202, 215-229 (23pp)

2/12 NO CLASS

6. 2/14 PCAP: pp. 181-193;, and Emerson's "Experience" (at rwe.org site) (39pp)

7. 2/19 PCAP: pp. 203-215; and, at "The Walt Whitman Archive"

<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/>, read from *Leaves of Grass* (1856) a good portion of "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American" [1] (25pp)

8. 2/21 PCAP, pp. 230-241; and, at "The Walt Whitman Archive," *Leaves of Grass (1856) a significant portion of "Burial Poem" [32]* (25pp)

John Dewey (and G.H. Mead)

9. 2/26 PCAP: pp. 431-455 (24pp) and, if interested, see Center for Dewey Studies:
<http://www.siu.edu/~deweyctr/>

10. 2/28 PCAP 460-482; (22 pp)

11. 3/4 PCAP: pp. 491-504 (12pp)

12. 3/6 PCAP: pp. 504-518 (14pp)

13. 3/18 PCAP: pp. 545-549, 581-591 (15pp)

14. 3/20 PCAP: pp. 518-538 (20pp)

African-American Writers and Pragmatism

15. 3/25 W.E.B. DuBois TBA

16. 3/27 W.E.B. DuBois TBA

17. 4/1 Alain Locke PCAP pp. 667-686 (19pp)

4/3 NO CLASS

Feminism and Pragmatism

18. 4/8 PCAP pp. 625-644 (19pp)

19. 4/10 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, bio & last chapter of "Our Androcentric Culture, or the Man-Made World," at <http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/gilman.html>

4/15 NO CLASS

The Resurgence of Pragmatism

20. 4/17 Richard Rorty,

21. 4/22 DM ch. 1 and skim 2

22. 4/24 DM chs. 3 & 7

23. 4/30 Presentations, no readings

24. 5/1 Presentations, no readings