PHILOSOPHY 614: Issues in Ethics: Dewey’s Moral Philosophy

Spring 2015

Course Syllabus

Prof. Mark Johnson
Email: markj@uoregon.edu
Phone: 346-5548
Office hours: MW 8-10, and by appt. (SCH 240)

Course Description: This seminar will examine Dewey’s moral theory as an exploration of the nature and possibility of an ethics that views humans as natural organisms whose values and ends arise through their interactions with their complex physical, social, and historical environments. Our topic, then, is “ethics naturalized,” not in a reductive sense, but from a perspective that appreciates the depth, richness, and broad scope of recent empirical approaches to morality. We will place some of Dewey’s most influential writings on moral experience and cognition into dialogue with the work of selected contemporary writers whose theories are either influenced by, or relevant to, Dewey’s views.

Texts/Readings

There is one book for this course, plus a reading packet of articles and book chapters. The book is:
The packet of articles and book chapters is on reserve at The Copy Shop.

Topics/Readings: Below is a list of reading assignments for each seminar discussion.

Wk. I
Mar. 31 Introduction: The problem of a naturalized ethics
Apr. 2 Habit

Wk. II
Apr. 7 Habit, Character, Custom
Dewey, *HNC*, Chs. 3-6
Pappas, *John Dewey’s Ethics*, Chs. 6-7, 121-145
Apr. 9 Habits and Plasticity
Dewey, *HNC*, Chs. 7-10
Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination*, Ch. 1, 9-26

Wk. III
Apr. 14 Instincts
Wk. IV
Apr. 16 There is No Moral Faculty
   Dewey, *HNC*, Chs.11-13
   Johnson, *Morality for Humans*, Ch. 6, 137-162

Apr. 21 Deliberation
   Dewey, *HNC*, Chs. 14-17

Apr. 23 Intuitive Appraisal and Reason
   Haidt *The Righteous Mind*, Chs. 2-3, 27-71

Wk. V
Apr. 28 Valuing, Valuation
   Dewey & Tufts (1932), 262-284
   Johnson, *Morality for Humans*, Chs. 3-4, 73-111

Apr. 30 Deliberation
   Fesmire, *John Dewey and Moral Imagination*, 55-91

Wk. VI
May 5 “Reasonable” Deliberation
   Johnson, *Morality for Humans*, Ch. 5, 112-136

May 7 The Good, Ends, and Principles
   Dewey, *HNC*, Chs. 18-21

Wk. VII
May 12 Present Meaning and Moral Progress
   Dewey, *HNC*, Chs. 22-23
   Pappas, *John Dewey’s Ethics*, Ch. 8, 146-155

May 14 The Moral Self
   Dewey, *HNC*, Chs. 24-26

Wk. VIII
May 19 Dewey & Tufts (1932), Ch. 15, 285-310
May 21 The Ideal Moral Self
   Pappas, *John Dewey’s Ethics*, Ch. 11, 185-216

Wk. IX
May 26 No Class
May 29 No Class

Wk. X
June 2 Flanagan, “Normative Mind Science?”
June 4 Making a Moral Self
   Johnson, *Morality for Humans*, Ch. 8., 192-221

Wk. XI
June 8 Term Paper due
Assignments/Grading

Grades will be based on:

1. **A seminar presentation** (25% of the grade): Each student will be responsible for presenting material and leading discussion in one of our meetings. You are expected to summarize central claims and arguments of the texts and then to focus our discussion by identifying key issues and taking a stand relative to the author’s claims. This is not a book report format! Instead, you are expected to grapple with the philosophical claims and perhaps to bring other relevant texts into the discussion in support of your interpretation of the issues.

2. **Mid-term Essay** (25% of the grade): Compare and/or contrast any chapter of Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct* with the view of any other person of your choosing who has written on the same topic. The essay should be roughly 5-7 pages in length, and it is due Friday, April 24, by 5:00 p.m.

3. **A Final (Term) Paper** (50% of the grade): This will be a 15-20 page paper on a topic of your choosing, but subject to approval by me. No later than the first class of the eighth week of the course you should submit a written abstract (1-2 pages, including a list of sources) to me for approval and comment.