

PHIL 420
American Philosophy: Philosophy of Resistance
T/R 12:15-1:45

Dr. McKenna
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Winter 2021

Office Hours:

T/R 11:00-12:00
and by appointment.

All students are encouraged to come to my office hours whenever they would like.

Course Description:

This course is an historical survey of American philosophy from the 1890s through the present. The course begins with the hypothesis that a significant strand of the American tradition developed as a philosophy of resistance against ideas inherited from Europe and against a social, political, and economic system whose practices led to oppression through assimilation or exclusion. As a consequence these philosophies share a common interest in the nature of pluralism, agency, and liberation. While the various strands of this tradition of resistance share some concerns and methods, they also differ. John McDermott writes: "Historically considered [the American] tradition was faced with an ever-shifting scene, characterized by widespread geographical, political, and social upheavals. These crises were built into the very continuity of the culture, and it was thereby fitting that basic . . . categories of understanding were transformed. The meaning of the reflective experience is to point precisely to the fact that such a transformation had its basis in the willingness of the culture, over a sustained period of time, to listen to the informing character of experience."

This tradition, while critical of established views and practices, is more focused on reconstruction than deconstruction. Rooted in a desire to understand particular experiences, and imagine ways those experiences could be transformed to make future experiences better or more fulfilling in any number of ways, this is a tradition that holds the problems of the world front and center. We will explore a variety of voices in this tradition, but this course will introduce only a very small portion of the tradition.

Learning Outcomes:

Goals for the course include:

- developing critical reading skills
- developing writing skills
- developing oral presentation and discussion skills
- gaining familiarity with the tradition of American philosophy and pragmatism in particular

Texts:

Leonard Harris, Scott L. Pratt, Anne S. Water, *American Philosophies* (Blackwell, 2002).
Erin McKenna and Scott L. Pratt, *American Philosophy: From Wounded Knee to the Present*
(Bloomsbury, 2015)

Other readings on Canvas.

Assignments and workload:

Readings: You are responsible for all of the required readings each week. In addition to these readings, you are expected to pursue secondary readings on the course material in support of your own interests, the précis, and the final paper. Reading times will vary, but you should expect to spend 4 hours a week on reading.

Discussion Leadership and Précis: Each student will work in a pair to take special responsibility for leading discussion on one day. On that day, you will be especially well-prepared to answer questions about the readings and introduce topics for class discussion. You will also select one of the primary text readings for the day and write a short précis on the reading. Each précis should summarize the argument of the work and discuss it in relation to an organizing interest (e.g. one of the larger themes of the course such as the idea of pluralism, the social individual, freedom, or your paper topic). The précis should be 600-800 words in length. The précis will be worth 10% of your grade and your time as discussion leader will be worth 10%. This assignment should require approximately 6 hours.

Reading Paper: Each student will write **two** Reading Papers. You may choose when to write these, but you may not write one the same day you are scheduled to be discussion leader and you cannot write them both on the same author. They are due to me on Canvas at least 12 hours **before** the class meeting in which we will be discussing that reading. These are one to two-page (single spaced) papers in which you provide a sympathetic reading of the assigned material and then develop a point further, connect an idea to some other philosopher, or apply an idea to an issue. Each is worth 10% of your grade. These should each require about 2 hours each.

Paper Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography: On **February 18** you will submit a prospectus of your final paper with two components: (1) a 2-3 page detailed description of the topic and outline of your proposed argument; and (2) an annotated bibliography of at least three primary or peer-reviewed secondary texts that you intend to consult (in addition to texts assigned for the course). Some journals for this tradition include *The Pluralist*, *The Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, *William James Studies*, *Dewey Studies*, and the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Each annotation should be about 200 words and include a summary of the book or article as well as an indication of its relevance for your project. Your prospectus must receive my approval in order for your final term paper to be accepted. The prospectus will be worth 10% of your final course grade. This should require about 10 hours of work.

Term Paper: Your term paper may be on a topic of your choice and should be 2,500-3,000 words. In general, papers should focus on materials read for class. In addition to the required readings, your papers must make use of secondary sources beyond the course readings as well. Your paper will be worth 50% of your grade. **Final papers are due on Thursday, March 18th at 8 am on Canvas.** This should require about 20 hours.

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is required. For every unexcused absence after one, you will lose 1/3 of a grade. Class will focus on guided discussions of the material so students

need to be on time and prepared to participate. At a minimum this means having completed the reading, thought about the reading, having questions ready, and listening actively (rather than just waiting one's turn to speak or dominating the conversation).

Grading:

Précis	10%
Discussion Leader	10%
Reading papers	10% each (20%)
Paper Prospectus/bibliography	10%
Final paper	40%
Participation	10%

PLEASE NOTE: Failure to complete any assignment results in automatic failure of the class.

- **Academic Misconduct** – (See <https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct> for more information)

“The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at <https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism>.”

Tentative Schedule:

Note that the schedule of readings is subject to change during the quarter. All changes will be announced in advance during class. If you have questions about the assignments, requirements, or subject matter, please let me know. If you have special needs due to a disability, please talk with me as soon as possible so that your needs can be addressed.

Inclement Weather

“It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Canvas and by email. Updates on inclement weather and closure are also communicated in other ways described here: <https://hr.uoregon.edu/about-hr/campus-notifications/inclement-weather/inclement-weather-immediate-updates>”

Academic Disruption due to Campus Emergency

"In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in this course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should immediately log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. Students are also encouraged to continue the readings and other assignments as outlined in this syllabus or subsequent syllabi."

The Spirit of American Philosophy

January:

(T) 5 *American Philosophy: From Wounded Knee to the Present* (AP:WKP), Preface and ch.1 (xiv, 1-7); *American Philosophies* (AP), Introduction and Prolegomenon to a Tradition (1-6)

Pluralism and Democracy

(R) 7 AP:WKP, Part I and chs. 2-5 (11-44)—"Defining Pluralism"(Pokagon, Wells-Barnett, and Fortune); "Evolution and American Indian Philosophy;" "Feminist Resistance" (Fuller, Cooper, Addams, Gilman), "Transcendental Origins" (Emerson, Thoreau)

(T) 12 AP:WKP, ch. 6 (45-53)—"Labor, Empire, and the Social Gospel" (Gladden, Rauschenbusch, Addams); AP, ch 32-33 (374-404)—Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," Addams, "Newer Ideals of Peace"

(R) 14 AP:WKP, chs. 7-8 (55-68)—"A New Name for an Old Way of Thinking" (James); "Making Ideas Clear" (Peirce); AP, ch. 9 (88-107)—James, "Principles of Psychology;"

(T) 19 AP:WKP, chs. 10-12 (79-110)—"War, Anarchism and Sex" (Goldman, Sanger); "Democracy and Social Ethics: John Dewey;" "Naturalism and Idealism, Fear and Conventionality" (Calkins, Parsons)

(R) 21 AP, chs. 16, 17, 34 (188-210, 405-411)—Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is," Dewey, "The Supremacy of Methods," Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For"

Race, Pluralism, and Insurrection

(T) 26 AP:WKP, chs. 13, 14, 16 (111-127 and 137-145)—"Race Riots and the Color Line" (Du Bois); "Philosophy Reacts" (Alexander, Davidson, Cohen); "Cultural Pluralism" (Locke); AP, chs. 12&38 (134-148 and 433-445)—Du Bois, "Race" and Locke, "Cultural Pluralism"

(R) 28 AP:WKP, chs. 24-25 (233-260)—"Civil Rights: Martin Luther King Jr., Richard Wright, and James Baldwin;" "Black Power: Malcom X, James Cone, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Cornel West"

February:

(T) 2 AP, chs. 26-28 (298-335)—Walker, "Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, Child, "Prejudices Against People of Color," Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

(R) 4 AP 29-30 (337-358)—Douglass, “Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall,” Cooper, “Woman versus the Indian”

(T) 9 Leonard Harris, “What, Then, Is ‘Philosophy Born of Struggle?’” “Necro-Being: An Actuarial Account of Racism;” and “Insurrectionist Ethics: Advocacy, Moral Psychology, and Pragmatism” (PG#*) On Canvas

Philosophy as Change

(R) 11 AP, chs. 1-3, 7, and 36-37 (9-21, 65-72, and 420-432)—King Ferdinand, “Letter to the Taino,” Sa-Go-Ye-Wat-ha, “Speeches,” Parker, “How the World Began,” Zit Kala Sa, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” Standing Bear, “What the Indian Means to America,” Kellogg, “Our Democracy and the American Indian”

(T) 16 AP:WKP chs. 26-27 (261-296)—“Latin American Philosophy;” “Red Power, Indigenous Philosophy: Vine Deloria Jr. and Contemporary American Indian Thought”

(R) 18 Prospectus and annotated bibliography due.

(T) 23 AP:WKP Chs. 28-29 (297-323)—“Feminist Philosophy and Practice;” “Engaged Philosophy and the Environment”

(R) 25 AP, chs. 6 & 11 (43-61 & 122-133)—Emerson, “Nature,” Gilman, “Our Brains and What Ails Them”

March:

(T) 2 AP:WKP, pp. 327-334—“Recovering . . . the American Tradition” (Rorty); and Rorty, “Dewey and Posner on Pragmatism and Moral Progress” (13 pages)

(R) 4 AP:WKP, ch. 31-32 (349-380)—“American Philosophy Revitalized (Smith, Bernstein, McDermott, West)

(T) 9 workshop papers in assigned groups

(R) 11 SAAP—attend a session and send me a short paragraph

Final papers due on Thursday, March 18 by 8 am—on Canvas.

- **Accessible Education** – (see <https://aec.uoregon.edu/best-practices-faculty> for more information)

“The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.”