Course Syllabus

**Instructor:**
Colin Koopman, Dept. of Philosophy

**Instructor Contact:**
koopman@uoregon.edu

**Office Hours:**
Wednesdays 9.00a-10.50a (in SCH 250A) & by appointment

**Course Meetings and Location:**
PLC Room 627, on Tuesdays & Thursdays, from 2.00p to 3.50p
**Course Description (PHIL 420):**

Pragmatism is widely described as an attempt to focus philosophy on the differences that it can make in the social contexts in which it operates. This course will therefore focus on pragmatism's central idea that philosophy can and should be a practice of social, cultural, and political critique. Over the course of the term, we will adopt a variety of methods in an attempt to understand how philosophy can assume this role. Our readings will focus on the work of pragmatist philosophers, both classical and contemporary, with an eye toward how pragmatist arguments, themes, and orientations lend themselves to historical understanding, social inquiry, political critique, and cultural criticism. Our primary philosophical guide through these issues in classical pragmatism will be William James, though we will also draw amply on John Dewey. If the class desires, we will also have opportunity to draw on other canonical pragmatists (including Richard Rorty, W.E.B. Du Bois, G.H. Mead, C.S. Peirce, and others).

**Conference Note:**

This course has been designed to accompany the *Making Social Science Pragmatic* conference that will be taking place on the University of Oregon campus in late May (Fri the 22\textsuperscript{nd} and Sat the 23\textsuperscript{rd}). This conference is being co-organized by Gerald Berk (Poli. Sci.), Dennis Galvan (Poli. Sci., Int’l Studies, and Int’l Affairs Office), and your humble instructor Colin Koopman (Philosophy).

Additionally, a conference titled *Embodying Philosophy: Embodied Mind, Meaning, and Values* will also draw amply on philosophical pragmatism. This event has been scheduled for late April (Fri the 24\textsuperscript{th} and Sat the 25\textsuperscript{th}). This conference is being organized by Mark Johnson (Philosophy).

Both of these events are highly recommended for students participating in this class.
# Reading & Work Schedule (subject to change, but with notice, of course):

All readings not included in our main class text (WWJ) will be made available on our class website. All readings listed for each session are required. Read these texts *before* coming to class.

WWJ=James, *The Writings of William James* (University of Chicago Press)

PP=James, *The Principles of Psychology* (as reprinted in WWJ)


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I: Pragmatism as an Analytic (or Method) for Inquiry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3/31</strong> Method (a metaphilosophical orientation for pragmatist inquiry):</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4/2</strong> Habit/Inheritance/Structure (an analytical background for inquiry):</td>
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<tr>
<td>James, <em>PP</em>, chapter on “Habit” (WWJ 9-21)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4/7</strong> Conduct/Action/Will in James (an analytical category giving inquiry a focus):</td>
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<tr>
<td>James, “Reflex Action and Theism”</td>
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<tr>
<td>James, <em>PP</em>, chapter on “Will” (WWJ 684-717, focus on pages 684-698, 705-716)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4/9</strong> Conduct/Action/Will in Dewey (an analytical category giving inquiry a focus):</td>
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<td><strong>4/14</strong> Problematics/Indeterminacy/Doubt (the precipitants of conduct):</td>
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<td>James, <em>PP</em>, selections on doubt from “The Perception of Reality”</td>
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<td><strong>4/16</strong> Contestation/Disagreement/Plurality (politicizing of problematizations):</td>
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<tr>
<td>James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” (WWJ 610-629)</td>
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<td>Dewey, <em>HNC</em>, §IV.IV “Morality is Social” (216-227)</td>
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<td><strong>4/21</strong> Identity/Sociality/Selfhood (politicized plurality swaddles the self):</td>
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<td>James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (WWJ 629-645)</td>
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<td>Du Bois, <em>SBF</em>, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (3-12)</td>
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<td><strong>4/23</strong> Probability/Uncertainty/Chance (self-(trans)formation midst):</td>
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<td>James, “The Will to Believe” (WWJ 717-735)</td>
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<tr>
<td>James, “Faith and the Right to Believe” (WWJ 735-740)</td>
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**Embodying Philosophy Conference, April 24-25 – attendance recommended**

| 4/28 **Neopragmatism and the Revival of Pragmatism:** |
| Richard Rorty, “Method, Social Science, & Social Hope” (1980) |
| **4/30** Note: No class today due to instructor travel for a conference—work on your research paper. |
| **5/4** Research Paper for Part I of course due by Monday 5/4 at 12:00. See Assignment #3. |
## Part II: Pragmatist Inquiries

### 5/5

**Developing a Pragmatist Analytics for Inquiry**

**Readings TBD** by Instructor

Our meetings for the second half of the course will be set based upon student interests. To prepare for this, we will spend our two sessions this week formulating pragmatist analytics for inquiry (based on our work in Part I of the course), and beginning to think about how (in Part II of the course) we can either: a) apply our analytics to research domains or problems that are of interest, or b) extend those analytics with the consideration of additional pragmatist thinkers not so far covered in our readings.

We are a small group in this class so we have the freedom to decide on our own which of the following path or paths we want to pursue for the remaining weeks:

- Further readings by classical pragmatists (Mead, Peirce, Du Bois, &c.) – featuring group or individual presentations on these authors by students.
- Further readings by contemporary figures using pragmatism in political inquiry – featuring group or individual presentations on these authors by students.
- Student projects (collaborative or individual) on topics of interest, with readings determined according to chosen topics – featuring group or individual presentations on projects centered on these topics.

### 5/7

**Project Proposals for Part II due to me by email by 12:00 today. See Assignment #4.**

**Readings TBD** by Instructor (see notes on 5/5 session)

### 5/12

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________ (see Assignment #5).

### 5/14

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________

### 5/19

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________

*Note: This class meeting may be canceled or rescheduled due to possible instructor travel.*

### 5/21

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________

### 5/26

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________

### 5/28

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________

### 6/2

**Author or Topic TBD** by Student(s):

Featuring student presentation by: ____________________________

### 6/4

**Final Class Meeting – plan for session to be determined**

### 6/8

**Final Class Work due by (date might be modifiable) Monday 6/8 at 12:00 (see Assignment #6).**
Student Work & Assessment:

To pass this course, you must achieve a passing grade in all of the following five areas (meaning that if you entirely neglect one of these assignments, you will fail the course):

1) **Seminar Participation** - 10%
   a. You are expected to attend class and contribute to discussions. All our meetings will provide ample time for discussion. Students in this course should not expect to be able to passively attend our meetings and ‘soak up information’. Participation in this course means active involvement and engagement. This means that you need to come prepared to each meeting with questions, ideas, and provocations. That is the only way we will be able to successfully *do philosophy* in this course.

2) **Reading Questions Posted to Course Website** - 10%
   a. You must come to every class session with evidence of preparation for our meeting. By every Tuesday and Thursday at 1pm (this is a firm deadline) you will post a question or comment to our course website pertaining to that session’s primary reading by our primary author. If you fail to post by 1pm you will not receive credit for posting for that day. Your posts should be concise (one paragraph maximum—two sentences is ideal). Please start a new discussion thread if necessary (i.e., if by the time you post nobody else has started a new thread). I will on occasion ask you to share these with the class, so please bring to class a record of your question.

3) **Research Paper for Part I of class** - 30%
   a. You will write a short argumentative essay due to me in my office (or another location to be announced in class) on Monday of Week 6 by noon. You must both turn in a hardcopy and email me a copy of your paper.
   b. This will be a finalized and polished paper with no grammatical or spelling errors.
   c. You are expected to develop your own essay topic, with the sole constraint being that the essay must address the subject matter and readings of the course.
   d. This version should be about 7-8 pages (see me if you want to write more).
   e. Your essay (see (4) above) should include references to assigned primary readings, as well as to selected secondary literature not assigned as part of the above schedule.

4) **Project Proposals** - 10%
   a. You will write a short (1-2 page, and just 1 page is fine) proposal indicating how you would like to continue to pursue our topics in the second half of course. This need not be a finalized idea, but can just be a sketch of an idea you are interested in pursuing. Despite the informal nature of what I am requesting, I urge you to please take this assignment seriously. This is your class and accordingly I am giving you autonomy to participate in a decision as to how we proceed—this will work only if you take your own participation in this decision seriously.

5) **Leading a Class (Individually or Collaboratively) during Part II of class** - 10%
   a. As per the schedule above, Part II of our course will be arranged according to student interests and preferences. See the schedule for a set of suggestions about what we might do. Whatever your preference ends up being, you are expected to take charge of at least one class session as per the schedule above and present (either individually or collaboratively) work related to your final project. Your presentation will not, however, be your final project (for that see (6) below)

6) **Project (Individually or Collaboratively) for Part II of class** - 30%
   a. You must develop a research project of some form during Part II of the course. This project can take any number of forms.
- An individual or collaborative research paper applying our pragmatist analytics to some domain or topic of interest to you
- A research report in some other form, such as a video or website representing the efforts of your research, applying our pragmatist analytics to some domain or topic of interest to you
- An extension or revision of your first paper in which you show how pragmatism might benefit from the integration of other theorists or traditions not covered in the first part of the course (or an entirely new paper developing this)
- Another option to be proposed by you (and approved by me)

**Learning Outcomes (PHIL 420):**

- Demonstrate critical thinking, reading, and writing skills through use of a broad range of research methods, possibly including collaborative projects and scholarly essays that deal with primary and secondary sources in the literature and are written in an academic format.

- Compare, contrast, and critique representative authors from various philosophical traditions and historical periods.

- Engage in philosophical inquiry that examines key topics in human nature, human experience, morality and politics. Engage in metathinosophical questions concerning how we might conduct such philosophical inquiries.

- Detailed engagement with the philosophical sub-disciplines of: the philosophy of social science, social theory, and/or political theory.