Pragmatist Social Science:
Methodologies for Critical Inquiry from Pragmatist Perspectives

Spring 2015, University of Oregon

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:
Tuesdays & Thursdays 10.00a-11.45a (in SCH 250C)
**PHIL 620, Spring 2015, Course Description:**

The focus of this course will be pragmatism as a philosophical approach to social science inquiry. We 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. Themes under consideration will include: method, action and conduct, habit and structure, doubt and problematicity, contestation and power, identity and selfhood, and probability and chance.

Our primary philosophical guide through these issues in classical pragmatism will be William James, but we will also draw on others (including John Dewey, G. H. Mead, W.E.B. Du Bois, and C.S. Peirce). In turning to more contemporary pragmatists, we will focus on the work of three thinkers who have put pragmatism into motion with prominent vectors of Continental thought: these are the French sociologist-cum-philosopher Bruno Latour, the Berkeley anthropologist Paul Rabinow who was also one of Foucault’s steadiest American interlocutors, and lastly the single-most important neopragmatist philosopher of recent years, namely Richard Rorty. With these classical and contemporary pragmatists as our basis, we will then turn to even more recent exemplars of contemporary pragmatist inquiry (all of which feature a political focus and a critical intent). We will read from contemporary pragmatists working in the context of political science, African-American studies, science and technology studies, geography, education, and history.

**‘Making Social Science Pragmatic’ 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 22nd and Sat the 23rd). 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).

A number of the authors from whom we will draw in the final unit of the class will be participating in and presenting at this conference. Accordingly, the conference is considered to be a part of the class and will afford ample opportunity for observing contemporary pragmatist social science inquiry in action.

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 24th and Sat the 25th). This conference is being organized by Mark Johnson (Philosophy). This event is also highly recommended, but not required, for students 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.

WWJ=James, *The Writings of William James* (University of Chicago) [post.]
PP=James, *The Principles of Psychology* (as reprinted in WWJ) [1890]
MTNC=Mead, *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Chicago) [post.]

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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James, “Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results” (WWJ 345-362) |
| **4/2** | Habit/Inheritance/Structure (an analytical background for inquiry): | James, “Habit” (from *Psychology: the Briefer Course*, abbreviation of PP) (WWJ 9-21)  
| **4/7** | Conduct/Action/Will (an analytical category giving inquiry a focus): | James, “Reflex Action and Theism”  
James, *PP*, chapter on “Will” (WWJ 684-717, focus on 684-698, 705-716) |
Mead, *MTNC*, “Pragmatism” (344-359) |
| **4/14** | Problematics/Indeterminacy/Doubt (the precipitants of conduct): | James, *PP*, selections on doubt from “The Perception of Reality”  
Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” |
| **4/16** | Contestation/Disagreement/Plurality (politicizing of problematizations): | James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life” (WWJ 610-629) (cf. “Moral Equiv. of War”)  
| **4/21** | Identity/Sociality/Selfhood (politicized plurality swaddles the self): | James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings” (WWJ 629-645)  
James “What Makes a Life Significant” (WWJ 645-660)  
Du Bois, *SBF*, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (3-12) |
| **4/23** | Probability/Uncertainty/Chance (self-(trans)formation midst a culture of chance): | James, “The Will to Believe” (WWJ 717-735)  
James, “Faith and the Right to Believe” (WWJ 735-740)  
Du Bois, “Sociology Hesitant” |

**Embodying Philosophy Conference, April 24-25 – attendance recommended**
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>4/28</td>
<td>Philosophy (yes, ‘philosophy’ but not quite in its received sense)</td>
<td>Richard Rorty, “Method, Social Science, &amp; Social Hope” (1980)</td>
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<td>4/30</td>
<td>Note: Instructor traveling for a visiting talk today—class will decide whether to meet on own.</td>
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<td>+ Pandora's Hope, TBD, maybe Ch 2., “Circulating Reference” (pp. 24-80) (1999)</td>
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<td>+ Reassembling the Social, TBD, Part I, Intro, 1st &amp; 4th (pp. 1-20, 21-26, 27-42, 87-120) (2005)</td>
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<td>+ Dewey and Foucault: What's the Problem? (2011)</td>
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<td>+ “How to Submit to Inquiry: Dewey and Foucault” (2012)</td>
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<td>5/12</td>
<td>Contemporary Pragmatist Inquiries (4 disciplines; 7 fields; 10 interlocutors)</td>
<td>Other fields one could also explore: anthropology &amp; sociology (in more detail), law, literary crit.</td>
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<td>+ Material Participation, “Material Publics: ... Returns To American Pragmatism” (2012)</td>
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<td>5/19</td>
<td>Political Science (via Political Theory &amp; Critical Race Theory):</td>
<td>Alexander Livingston, draft ms. on William James, Ch. 4, “Faith &amp; Political Conviction” (forth)</td>
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<td>Chris Ansell, “What is a ‘Democratic Experiment’?” (2012)</td>
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<td>5/26</td>
<td>Making Social Science Pragmatic Conference, May 22-23 – attendance required</td>
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<td>5/28</td>
<td>Politics and Education:</td>
<td>Jerry Rosiek, “Pragmatism and Post-Qualitative Futures” (2013)</td>
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<td>+ “Beyond the Autoethnography vs. Ironist Debates: ... an Alternative Inquiry Practice” (forth)</td>
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<td>5/29</td>
<td>Politics and Geography:</td>
<td>Katie Meehan, TBD (on the topic of John Dewey and the politics of water) (forth)</td>
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<td>6/2</td>
<td>First version of final paper due as hardcopy by Friday 5/29 at 12:00</td>
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<td>6/8</td>
<td>Final Class Meeting – Readings and plan to be determined</td>
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<td>Final paper (and all class work) due by (date might be modifiable) Monday 6/8 at 12:00</td>
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Student Work & Assessment:

1) Participation, 10% of final grade (these requirements also apply to auditors).

This course will be a seminar. It requires *active participation in a series of discussions that will extend throughout the quarter.* I will expect that everyone (including auditors) to be very well-prepared at the beginning of every class session.

- 5% of grade – I expect active participation in the class by all students. I will strive to facilitate the seminar in such a way that we have excellent conditions for excellent conversations. While I will do what I can to make the class a welcoming environment for all, please let me know what I can do further.
- 5% of grade - On any given day, I may ask a small group of you (selected at random) to initiate a discussion by starting us off with this question. Please always be prepared to do that.

2) Online Discussion Contributions, 10% of final grade (this requirement also applies to auditors).

I expect all participants to come to class prepared, that is, you must be prepared with questions about and debates with the assigned readings for that session. Accordingly, I will ask everyone to post a single question or comment about the reading to our course website (via Canvas at canvas.uoregon.edu). Everyone must post by the following time: one hour prior to the beginning of each class session. Please keep your posts short so that it is manageable for everyone to review all comments in the thirty minutes or so prior to class. The first post will be due prior to the second meeting of class.

- 10% of grade – These posts will cumulatively amount to 10% of your final grade (they will be graded pass/fail rather than for quality).

3) Final Research Paper (in two stages), 80% of final grade (does not apply to auditors)

You will write a final research paper, which will be developed and due to me in two stages.

First Version of Final Paper (40% of final grade)

- 35% of grade – You will write a short argumentative essay, due (as a hardcopy and via email) as per the schedule above.
  - You are expected to develop your own essay topic, with the sole constraint being that the essay must address the subject matter of the course.
  - The first shorter version of your paper should be about 8-10 pages (or about 2500 words exclusive of notes and references). Your essay should discussed assigned primary readings as well as secondary readings (which I can help you locate, so visit my office hour).
  - You will revise this essay and expand it into a longer final research essay due at the end of the term. But this version of the essay should be polished and well-argued. *You are expected to turn in a finalized piece of writing, and not a draft.* You will revise this finalized piece of writing once more, but that just shows that revision is an extensive process. Think of it this way: my written feedback on your paper will be more useful to you if you turn in to me a piece of work that you think is perfect; if you turn in something that you know to have shortcomings, then my written feedback will likely only reflect what you already know.
  - 5% of grade – You will append to your paper a bibliography that includes three short (100-word) abstracts of secondary literature relevant to your chosen topic. It is important that you craft your paper around a topic for which some secondary literature is available. Find three sources and summarize, or abstract, them in your own words.

Final Version of Final Paper (40% of final grade)

- 30% of grade – You will then take the first version of your research essay, along with my comments, and other peer comments (if you swap with a peer, which you should), and write a final research essay. This will be due (as a hardcopy and via email) early in exam week as per the schedule above.
• This will be a revision of and improvement upon the first version of the paper you turned in late in the term. This essay should engage with one both the assigned primary literature and relevant secondary literature.

• The final essay should be about 12 pages in length (aim for 3000-3500 words exclusive of notes and references, i.e. a conference-length paper). Note that 3500 words is a hard limit. I want you to do everything you can to stay within this limit because this is a typical conference-length paper limit.

• 5% of grade – In addition, you must turn into me a one-page (single-space) set of revisions notes (of the kind you will be expected to submit to a journal if you get a ‘revise and resubmit’). This will explain all major revisions you made in your paper. It will also explain any decision you have made to not institute revisions in light of reviewer (i.e., instructor, i.e., me!) comments. You should write this as a letter.

• 5% of grade – You will include at the front of your paper two short abstracts (of your paper) of different length, according to customary conference-submission and journal-publishing standards. The first abstract should be a 100-word summary describing the core argument of the paper. The second abstract should be a longer 250-word version of that. If you need to see a sample abstract please ask me for one.

Learning Outcomes

• Engage central contemporary philosophical debates, through reading both recent philosophical works and works drawn from the history of philosophy.

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

• Develop and improve basic professional skills including preparing papers for conference submission and preparing article abstracts.