



**Department of Philosophy**

**PHIL 4270**

**“Current Philosophical Issues: Pragmatism”**

**Winter 2006**

**Weds 2:30–5:20, MACK 310**

*COURSE OUTLINE*

*Please read this outline carefully and retain it for future reference.*

Instructor: Andrew Bailey

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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 3:30–4:30, or by appointment.

Course prerequisites: 2.50 credits in philosophy.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

William James' *Pragmatism* is probably the most famous single work of American philosophy. The intellectual movement that it encapsulated is both a key strand in the history of twentieth-century thought and, it is often said, the first uniquely 'new world' school of philosophy. Nor is it of interest merely to the historian of ideas: pragmatism is as important today as ever, seeing new life in the work of such leading philosophers as Robert Brandom, Donald Davidson, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty. The debate surrounding *Pragmatism* is also particularly interesting as it provides a snapshot of an unusual stage in American thought when three major, historically significant schools of thought were on the stage at the same time, jockeying for pre-eminence. At the end of the nineteenth century rationalist idealism dominated the academy in Britain and America, but it was increasingly beleaguered by a resurgence of materialist realism and positivism, represented by such Young Turks as Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore. When pragmatism burst onto the scene in the United States it was attacked simultaneously by both the grand old idealist metaphysicians such as F.H. Bradley, and by the new realists.

This course will be an examination of American pragmatism: its origin in the seminal writings of William James; its contemporary reception; and its present-day descendents.

## REQUIRED TEXT:

- William James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth* (Harvard University Press, ISBN: 0-674-69737-5).

As we are working our way through this book, I will distribute articles as Acrobat files via the class websites. We will start with pieces by contemporaries of James, and then read some recent articles showing how pragmatism has developed as a philosophical position.

The articles by James' contemporaries will be taken from the following list:

## A: Pragmatic Precursors, 1898–1907:

- William James, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," *The University Chronicle (University of California)*, 1 (1898), 287–310. [Reprinted as "The Pragmatic Method" in *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 1 (1904), 673–687.]
- John Dewey, "Beliefs and Realities," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (Mar., 1906), pp. 113–129.
- F.C.S. Schiller, "The Definition of Pragmatism and Humanism," Chapter 1 of *Studies in Humanism*, second edition, Macmillan 1912, 1–21. This book chapter first appeared in 1907, and is a reworked version of a 1905 article ("The Definition of 'Pragmatism' and 'Humanism,'" *Mind* 14, 235–240.)
- Edwin Bjorkman, "Pragmatism—What It Is—By Prof. William James," *New York Times*, Nov 3, 1907.

B: Critics 1907–1908: Three Spurs for *The Meaning of Truth*

- James Bissett Pratt, "Truth and Its Verification," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 4, No. 12. (Jun. 6, 1907), pp. 320–324.
- Bertrand Russell, "Transatlantic 'Truth'" *Albany Review* 2 (Jan 1908), 393–410. [Reprinted as "William James' Conception of Truth" in his *Philosophical Essays*, Longmans, Green, 1910.]
- Ralph George Hawtreys, "Pragmatism," *New Quarterly* 1 (1908), 197–210.

## C: Idealist Responses to Pragmatism

- J. Ellis McTaggart, "Review of Pragmatism," *Mind* 17 (1908), 104–109.
- F.H. Bradley, "On the Ambiguity of Pragmatism," *Mind* 17 (1908), 226–237.

## D: Realist Responses to Pragmatism

- Russell, John E., and W. James, "Controversy About Truth," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 4 (1907) 289–296.
- Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Thirteen Pragmatisms," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 5, No. 1. (Jan. 2, 1908), pp. 5–12 and Vol. 5, No. 2. (Jan. 16, 1908), pp. 29–39.

- G.E. Moore, “Professor James’ ‘Pragmatism.’” *Proc. Aristot. Soc.*, N.S. 8, 1908, pp. 33–77 [Reprinted in his *Philosophical Studies*, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1922].

The articles by pragmatists of today will be announced and distributed later in the semester.

#### EVALUATION:

The evaluation for this course will consist of two short critical responses, and a final essay. Each critical response will be worth 15% of the grade, and the final essay will be worth 70%.

The first critical response will be due in-class on **February 15<sup>th</sup>** and the second will be due in-class on **March 22<sup>nd</sup>**. Each of these should be about five to six pages long, and will consist of an exegesis and assessment, in the context of James’ pragmatism, of one of the shorter articles we will be reading. Topics will be assigned closer to the time.

The final essay will be due by 4:30 pm on Friday, **April 7<sup>th</sup>**. It should be about twelve to fifteen pages long. Closer to the time I’ll give you a choice of topics. You may write on a different topic, of your choice, *but only in consultation with me*: that is, you should come to see me with a topic in mind—or preferably sketched out on paper—and get my approval for it. Papers written on an unapproved subject will be considered ‘off-topic’ and graded accordingly.

In grading the essays, I will take into consideration your ability to use correctly and effectively the language appropriate to the assignment: in particular, you should strive to write grammatically, accurately, clearly, precisely and concisely. The assignments will be graded using standards described in Section VIII of the Undergraduate Calendar ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/index.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/index.shtml)). Information on Academic Consideration and Appeals appears in the same section.

Please note that essays cannot be submitted or returned via the department administrative office or through the campus mail system. Papers can be submitted by e-mail only in an emergency. Assistance with writing essays is also available from the Learning Commons ([www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/](http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/)) and from Writing Services ([www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/WritingServices/](http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/WritingServices/)).

#### ROUGH TIMELINE

- January 11<sup>th</sup>: Introductory class
- January 18<sup>th</sup>: *Pragmatism*
- January 25<sup>th</sup>: *Pragmatism*
- February 1<sup>st</sup>: *Pragmatism*
- February 8<sup>th</sup>: Critics 1907–1908
- February 15<sup>th</sup>: *The Meaning of Truth* [First critical response due.]
- March 1<sup>st</sup>: *The Meaning of Truth*
- March 8<sup>th</sup>: Idealist responses to pragmatism
- March 15<sup>th</sup>: Realist responses to pragmatism
- March 22<sup>nd</sup>: Pragmatism today [Second critical response due.]

March 29<sup>th</sup>: Pragmatism today

April 5<sup>th</sup>: Pragmatism today

April 17<sup>th</sup>: [Final essay due.]

#### E-MAIL COMMUNICATION:

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the university and its students.

#### WHEN YOU CANNOT MEET A COURSE REQUIREMENT:

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise me in writing, with your name, ID number, and e-mail contact information. Where possible, this should be done in advance of the missed work or event, but otherwise, just as soon as possible after the due date, and certainly no longer than one week later. Note: if appropriate documentation of your inability to meet that in-course requirement is necessary, I will request it of you. Such documentation will rarely be required for course components representing less than 10% of the course grade. Such documentation will be required, however, for Academic Consideration for missed end-of-term work and/or missed final examinations. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml)). Also see the BA Counselling Office website (<http://www.uoguelph.ca/baco>).

My policy for late assignments in this course is the following: Unless I have granted an extension, late assignments will be penalized 5% for every day they are late. If students come and see me *before* the assignment is late, and if they have a good reason for their lateness, I will often grant deadline extensions of two or three days—but only a couple of times a term per student. Assignments handed in late without an adequate excuse will usually be given a grade of 0.

#### DROP DATE

The last date to drop one-semester Winter 2006 courses without academic penalty is Friday March 10<sup>th</sup>. For regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses, see the Undergraduate Calendar ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-drop.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-drop.shtml)).

#### COPIES OF OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

#### ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and enjoins all members of the University community—faculty, staff, and students—to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. The University of Guelph takes a serious view of academic misconduct, and it is your responsibility as a student to be aware of and to abide by the University's policy. Included in the definition of academic misconduct are such activities as cheating on examinations, plagiarism,

misrepresentation, and submitting the same material in two different courses without written permission from the relevant instructors. To better understand your responsibilities, read the Undergraduate Calendar ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c01/index.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c01/index.shtml)) for a statement of Students' Academic Responsibilities; also read the full Academic Misconduct Policy ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml)). You are also advised to make use of the resources available through the Learning Commons ([www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/](http://www.learningcommons.uoguelph.ca/)) and to discuss any questions you may have with your course instructor, TA, or academic counsellor.

Instructors have the right to use software to aid in the detection of plagiarism or copying and to examine students orally on submitted work. For students found guilty of academic misconduct, serious penalties, up to and including suspension or expulsion, can be imposed. Hurried or careless submission of work does not exonerate students of responsibility for ensuring the academic integrity of their work. Similarly, students who find themselves unable to meet course requirements by the deadlines or criteria expected because of medical, psychological or compassionate circumstances should review the university's regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration in the calendar ([http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad\\_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/undergrad_calendar/c08/c08-ac.shtml)) and discuss their situation with the instructor and/or the program counsellor or other academic counsellor as appropriate.

#### STUDENTS REQUIRING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

Resources are available to you if you require additional support in the course (e.g. if you have a learning disability or are dealing with other issues that are impacting on your ability to meet the course requirements). I encourage you to come and discuss this with me, and to contact the appropriate university resource. The Centre for Students with Disabilities (which includes learning disabilities) is on Level 3 of the University Centre (<http://www.slcs.uoguelph.ca/csd/>), as is Counselling Services (<http://www.slcs.uoguelph.ca/counselling/>).

#### OTHER INFORMATION:

The best resource for general academic counselling (e.g. about degree requirements, or for approval to add/drop a course) is your program counsellor: these are listed at [http://www.uoguelph.ca/uaic/students\\_faculty.shtml](http://www.uoguelph.ca/uaic/students_faculty.shtml). The Philosophy Department's undergraduate coordinator is Prof. Peter Eardley, extension 53211, [peardley@uoguelph.ca](mailto:peardley@uoguelph.ca).