

# Classical Pragmatism

PHIL 448/548  
Call nos. 05502/05511, Winter 2005  
Mon & Wed 5–7 pm  
Class in Ellis Hall 215

Prof. Nathaniel Goldberg  
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Mon & Wed 4–5 & by appointment  
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*Grant an idea or belief to be true ... what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? How will the truth be realized? What experiences will be different from those which would obtain if the belief were false? What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms? – William James*

## Course Description

This course focuses on Classical Pragmatist views in epistemology and allied disciplines, including philosophies of language, logic, and psychology. By ‘Classical Pragmatist’ I mean specifically the work of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), John Dewey (1859–1952), George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), and Clarence Irving Lewis (1883–1964), whose views were the mainstay of American philosophy until analytic philosophy took hold in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. When appropriate we will consider how some later views (“Neo-Pragmatism”) might—or might not—have evolved out of these earlier ones.

## Course Texts

**Required.** Thayer, H.S. 1982. *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett.  
(This is our reader. It contains primary sources as well as brief introductions to each pragmatist.)

**Recommended.** Thayer, H.S. 1981. *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*. Indianapolis: Hackett, second edition. (ISBN 0-915144-73-5) (This is the companion to our reader. I have posted the recommended parts on Blackboard; the book itself is in Alden.)

**Of possible interest.** French, Peter A. and Howard K. Wettstein. 2004. *The American Philosophers*. Midwest Studies in Philosophy 28. (This contains high-quality articles on different American philosophers.)

**Of possible interest.** Kuklick, Bruce. 2001. *A History of Philosophy in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Written for a more general audience, this provides interesting background material.)

## Course Objectives

1. To understand and evaluate the views of Peirce, James, Dewey, Mead, and Lewis in epistemology and related areas
2. To gain perspective on whether these five constitute a coherent tradition
3. To think through issues in epistemology and related areas in their own right
4. To become smarter (yes, really)

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

1. Midterm
  - The midterm will consist of questions based on the readings.
  - The midterm will be take home as per the schedule below.
  - It will contribute *roughly* 35% to the course grade.
2. Presentation
  - The presentation will be on one of the readings below, and should be responsive to questions from fellow classmates and the instructor.
  - You will have a chance to sign up for topics.
  - It will contribute *roughly* 15% to the course grade.
3. Research paper
  - The paper will be 8–10 pp for undergraduates, 12–14 pp for graduate students.
  - You will come up with a paper topic—and run it by me—as per the schedule below, and you are encouraged to write on your presentation topic.
  - The paper will engage both primary and some secondary literature.
  - The paper will be due at the time when we are scheduled for a final exam.
  - The paper will contribute *roughly* 50% to the course grade.
4. Read each assignment before we discuss it in class, attend class regularly, and participate in class discussion
  - “Recommended” readings are *only* recommended; though they are quite insightful, it’s monumentally more important to read and digest the primary literature and save what is recommended only for clarification or commentary, background information generally, or ideas for research papers or presentations.
  - I may use a student’s participation grade to round the course grade up or down as appropriate; that is why the percentages above are given *only roughly*.

## **Getting in Touch with Me**

Please feel free to come to my office hours, schedule a time to meet outside my office hours, or email or call me. If you email me, then please do so from your OU account (so that my email client won’t confuse your message with spam).

## **Academic Dishonesty**

The Ohio University Student Code of Conduct prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty. These include cheating; plagiarism; forgery; furnishing false information to the University; and alteration or misuse of University documents, records, or identification. If a student is caught engaging in course-related academic dishonesty, that student will be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible. Ignorance of the Student Code or my enforcement of it is no excuse for academic dishonesty, so please talk to me should you have any questions.

## ***Tentative Schedule***

### **INTRODUCTION**

(recommended:  
Wed 4 Jan Thayer, Part One; on Blackboard as “Background”) Orientation

### **PEIRCE**

(recommended:  
Mon 9 Jan Thayer, Part Two, Ch. One; on Blackboard as “Peirce”) “Definition and Description of Pragmatism” (II)  
Wed 11 Jan “The Fixation of Belief” (III)  
Wed 18 Jan “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (IV)  
Mon 23 Jan “What Pragmatism Is” (V)

### **JAMES**

(recommended:  
Wed 25 Jan Thayer, Part Two, Ch. Two; on Blackboard as “James”) “An Interview: Pragmatism—What Is it” and “Selections from *The Principles of Psychology*” (VI – VII)  
Mon 30 Jan (*continued*)  
Wed 1 Feb “What Pragmatism Means” (IX)  
Mon 6 Feb “Pragmatism’s Conception of Truth” and “The Meaning of the Word Truth” (X, XII)

### **DEWEY**

(recommended:  
Wed 8 Feb Thayer, Part Two, Ch. Three; on Blackboard as “Dewey”) “The Unit of Behavior” (XIII) & **Midterm Assigned**  
Mon 13 Feb “The Practical Character of Reality” (XIV)  
Wed 15 Feb “The Construction of the Good” (XV)  
Mon 20 Feb “The Pattern of Inquiry” (XVI) & **Midterm Due**

### **MEAD**

(recommended:  
Wed 22 Feb Thayer, Part Two, Ch. Five; on Blackboard as “Mead”) “Social Consciousness and the Consciousness of Meaning” (XVII)  
Mon 27 Feb “The Social Self” (XVIII)

### **LEWIS**

(recommended:  
Wed 1 Mar Thayer, Part Two, Ch. Four; on Blackboard as “Lewis”) “A Pragmatic Conception of the *A Priori*” (XIX)  
Mon 6 Mar (*continued*)

### **CONCLUSION**

Wed 8 Mar Neo-Pragmatism? (*no reading*)  
Fri 17 Mar at 12:20 pm **Research paper due during final-exam time**

*Philosophy can be more critical than science and more imaginative than art. It therefore can also be more difficult than either is. Consequently, please feel free to approach me with any questions or concerns as the course progresses.*