

Pragmatism and Idealism

Dr Jeremy Dunham

1. Course Overview

During the 1870s a group of scientifically minded philosophers, including William James (1842-1910) and C.S. Peirce (1839-1914), started a reading group that they referred to as ‘The Metaphysical Club’. During these meetings America’s most important and controversial philosophical movement was born: *Pragmatism*. Influenced both by the methods they learned as practicing scientists and by the revolution caused by Darwin’s theory of natural selection, the pragmatists developed a new philosophical method that attempted to naturalize and ‘bring down to earth’ concepts like ‘Truth’, ‘Beauty’, and ‘Goodness’, which have often been seen to transcend human inquiry and the natural world. For the pragmatists, philosophy should be concerned with understanding how its disputes make a real practical difference to our conduct in the world. Our philosophical (and non-philosophical) beliefs are really ‘rules for action’. The significance of philosophical debates can be cashed out in terms what difference the alternative conclusions would make to our practical conduct. If it would make no effect at all, then the debate, they claim, is meaningless. In the first part of this course, we will focus on pragmatism as a distinctive philosophical method and particularly on how it is influenced by scientific methodology. We shall also examine how pragmatism affects our understanding of ‘Truth’ and ‘Belief’ and ask whether a naturalised philosophy of the pragmatist stripe can do justice to objective facts and values. In the final part of the course, we shall place special focus on the influence of developments in evolutionary biology and psychology on pragmatism, especially its approach to ethics.

The pragmatist tradition developed in response and in dialogue to another prominent nineteenth-century philosophical tradition, but, in this case, one whose roots lead all the way back to Plato: *idealism*. For the idealists, the pragmatists attempt to naturalize ‘Absolute Truth’ and ‘Goodness’ ultimately leads to a scepticism that ultimately abandons objectivity and rationality. We can only do justice to such concepts through a metaphysical understanding of reality that regards ‘Reason’ as foundational. In the second part of the course, we will examine the idealist critiques of the pragmatist tradition and the pragmatist responses. In doing so we will cover metaphysical issues such as the relationship of mind to nature, intentionality, and monist and pluralist fundamentality. Both idealism and pragmatism are ‘living’ philosophies that continue to be defended today. We shall conclude the course by asking whether one should continue to be either a pragmatist or an idealist (or both) today.

2. Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Gain a sophisticated understanding of two of the most important traditions in the history of philosophy.
- Come to appreciate the complex relationship between idealism and pragmatism and the significance of this relationship for the development of nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophy.
- Develop the critical skills required to assess the various theories proposed and to evaluate the contemporary responses.

3. Assessment

This course will be assessed by a single essay of 3,500 words and an exam.

There is compulsory reading for each week that you must read. Each week that there is a seminar, you will be expected to bring 3 questions or discussion points from this reading.

4. Course Outline

Week 1

Lecture 1. Introduction to Pragmatism

Lecture 2. William James and the Will to Believe

Compulsory Reading

James, W. 'The Will to Believe'. In: *The Works of William James*. Vol 6. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, pp. 14-33 [Available online via the Past Masters database] <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/ebook/pastmasters>

Optional Reading

Cheryl Misak, *The American Pragmatists*, Chapter 4 William James
Clifford, W.K. (1877) 'The Ethics of Belief'. In: Clifford, W.K. (1879) *Lectures and Essays*. London: Macmillan
Dunham, J. (2015) 'Idealism, Pragmatism, and the Will to Believe'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. 23(4): 756-778
Jackman, H. (1999) 'Prudential Arguments, Naturalized Epistemology, and the Will to Believe'. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. 35(1): 1-37
Klein, A. (2015) 'Science, Religion, and the Will to Believe'. *HOPOS: The Journal of the International Society of the History and Philosophy of Science Society* 5(1): 72-117 – also see the response from Cheryl Misak
Hollinger, D. James, Clifford, and the Scientific Conscience." In *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam, pp. 69-83. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 2

Lecture 3: William James and Pragmatism

Lecture 4: Pragmatism and Truth

Compulsory Reading

James, W. 'What Pragmatism Means', 'Pragmatism and Common Sense', and 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth'. In: *The Works of William James*. Vol. 1: *Pragmatism*. Edited by Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Introduction by H. S. Thayer. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 27-44, & 81-114
[Available online via the Past Masters database]

Optional Reading

Jackman, H. (2008) 'William James'. In: Misak, C. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 60-86
James, William *The Meaning of Truth* (on Past Masters) The introduction by H.S. Thayer is good too.
Lamberth, D. (2009) 'What to Make of James's Genetic Theory of Truth'. *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society*
Russell, B. 'Pragmatism' and 'William James's Theory of Truth' in his 1910 *Philosophical Essays* (download at archive.org)
Schwartz, R. (2012) *Rethinking Pragmatism: From William James to Contemporary Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
Sprigge, T. (1997) 'James, Aboutness and his British Critics'. In Ruth Anna Putnam, *Cambridge Companion to William James*.
Sprigge, T. (1993) 'Pragmatic Conception of Truth'. In: *James and Bradley*. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 9-66

Week 3

Lecture 5: Peirce's Inquiry Pragmatism

Lecture 6: Peirce's Meaning Pragmatism

Compulsory Reading

C.S Peirce (1877) 'The Fixation of Belief'. In: *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 1, pp.109-123
[Available on Past Masters]

Peirce, C.S. 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear'. In: *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 1, pp. 109-141

Optional Reading

Chris Hookway, *Peirce*, Chapter 2 'Truth and the Aims of Inquiry', especially pp.43-58

Chris Hookway. 'The Principle of Peirce and the Origins of Pragmatism'. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*

Chris Hookway 'Logical Principles and Philosophical Attitudes: Peirce's Response to James's Pragmatism'. In *The Cambridge Companion to William James*.

Kasser (2011) 'How Settled are Settled Beliefs in "The Fixation of Belief"? *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*

Cheryl Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry*, Chapter 2

Peirce, 'The Fixation of Belief'

T.L. Short (2000) 'Peirce on the Aim of Inquiry: Another Reading of Fixation'. *Transactions of the Charles S Peirce Society*

Robert Talisse (2001) 'On the Supposed Tension in Peirce's 'Fixation of Belief' *Journal of Philosophical Research*.

Wiggins, 'Reflections on Inquiry and Truth'. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Peirce*

Week 4

Lecture 7: An Introduction to Idealism

Lecture 8: Josiah Royce: Idealism, Intentionality, and the Argument from Error

Compulsory Reading

Royce, J. (1885) 'The Possibility of Error'. In: *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy. A Critique of the Bases of Conduct and of Faith*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913 [1885]. pp. 384-435

Optional Reading

Mander, W.J. (1998) 'Royce's Argument for the Absolute'. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 36: 443-457

Parker, K.A (2008) 'Josiah Royce: Idealism, Transcendentalism, Pragmatism'. In: Misak, C. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 110-124

Winkler, K. (2012) 'A New World: Lecture V' [online] available at:
http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/25289/Lecture_V_for_posting.pdf

Week 5

Lecture 9: Peirce's Response to the Argument from Error

Lecture 10: Peirce and Perception

Compulsory Reading

Peirce, C.S. 'An American Plato: Review of Royce's *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*'. In. *The Essential Peirce*, Volume 1, pp. 229-241

Optional Reading

- Hookway, C. (1985) 'Perception and the Outward Clash'. In: *Peirce*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 151-180
- Hookway, C. (2000) 'Truth and Reference: Peirce versus Royce'. In: *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism: Themes from Peirce*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 108-134
- Legg, C. (2014) 'Charles Peirce's Limit Concept of Truth'. In: *Philosophy Compass*. 9(3): 204-213
- Misak, C. (2013) 'Josiah Royce: Harvard Idealism vs Harvard Pragmatism'. In: *The American Pragmatists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 81-91
- Otto-Appel, K. (1981) 'The Defense of Meaning-Critical Realism against Royce's Absolute Idealism and Peirce's Program of a Metaphysics of Evolution'. In: *From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism*. New York: Humanity Books, pp. 134-142

Week 6

Lecture 11: Radical Empiricism, Intentionality, and Truth

Lecture 12: A World of Pure Experience

Compulsory Reading

- James, W. 'Does Consciousness Exist?' and 'A World of Pure Experience'. In: *The Works of William James*. Vol. 3: *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Edited by Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskelis. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1976. pp. 3-44

Optional Reading

- Conant, J. (1997) 'The James/Royce Dispute and the Development of James's "Solution"'. In: Putnam, R.A. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 186-213
- Jackman, H. (1998) 'James's Pragmatic Account of Intentionality and Truth'. *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society*. 34(1). 155-181
- Sprigge, T. (1993) 'The Metaphysics of Radical Empiricism'. In: *James and Bradley*. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 103-172
- Taylor, E., and Wozniak, R.H. (eds.) (1996) *Pure Experience: The Response to William James*. St. Augustine's Press

Week 7

Lecture 13: Peirce on Truth and Reality

Lecture 14: Peirce on Truth and Reality

Compulsory Reading

- Legg, C. (2014) 'Charles Peirce's Limit Concept of Truth'. In: *Philosophy Compass*. 9(3): 204-213

Optional Reading

- Atkin, A. (2015) *Peirce*. Routledge, Chapter 3.
- Hookway, C. (2002) 'Truth and Convergence'. In: *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism*

Misak, C. (1991) *Truth and the End of Inquiry*, Chapter 4

Week 8

Lecture 15: An Introduction to the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley

Lecture 16: Bradley's Critique of Pragmatism

Compulsory Reading

Bradley, F.H. (1914) 'On Truth and Copying'. In: *Essays on Truth and Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 107-158

Optional Reading

Candlish, S. (2007) 'Truth'. In: *The Russell/Bradley Dispute*. Hampshire: Palgrave, pp. 78-105

Sprigge, T. (1993) 'Bradley on Judgment and Truth' In: *James and Bradley*. Chicago: Open Court, pp. 293-370

Stern, R. (2012) 'James and Bradley on the Limits of Human Understanding'. In: *Hegelian Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 327-344

Week 9

Lecture 17: Habit and Action

Lecture 18: William James, Habit, and Ethics

Compulsory Reading

James, W. 'Habit'. In: *The Works of William James*. Vol 8. *The Principles of Psychology*, pp. 109-131 [available on Past Masters]

Optional Reading

James, W. 'The Moral Philosopher and Moral Life'. In: *The Works of William James*. Vol 6. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 1979, pp. 14-33 [Available online via the Past Masters database]

Bird, G. (1997) 'Moral Philosophy and the Development of Morality' In: Putnam, R.A. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. Cambridge: CUP

Jackman, H. (2004) 'Pragmatism, Normativity, and Naturalism'. In Ghiraldelli, P. (ed.) *What is Pragmatism?* Londrina: South America Theology Institute [online: <http://www.yorku.ca/hjackman/papers/whatispragmatism.pdf>]

Week 10

Lecture 19: Dewey and Habit

Lecture 20: Dewey, Habit, and Ethics

Compulsory Reading

Dewey, J. (1922) 'Morality is Social'. In: *Human Nature and Social Conduct*, pp. 216-228

Dewey, J. (1929) 'The Construction of the Good'. In: *The Quest for Certainty*, pp. 203-229

[both available on Past Masters]

Optional Reading

Dewey, J. (1902) 'The Evolutionary Method as Applied to Morality'. In *John Dewey. The Middle Works*, Volume 2, pp. 4-39

Dewey, J. (1908) 'Intelligence and Morals'. In: *John Dewey. The Middle Works*, Volume 4, pp. 31-50

Fesmire, S. (2015) 'Ethics Reconstructed'. In *Dewey*. London: Routledge, pp. 118-151

Kitcher, P. (2012) 'The Importance of Dewey for Philosophy (and for much else besides)'. In: *Preludes to Pragmatism*. Oxford: OUP, chapter 1

6. Readings

The compulsory readings will be made available on the course website. Suggestions for further reading can be found below:

Primary texts

Bradley, F.H. (1893) *Appearance and Reality*. New York: Macmillan & Co

Bradley, F.H. (1914) *Essays on Truth and Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

James, W. *The Works of William James*. 19 Vols. Edited by Fredson Bowers and Ignas K. Skrupskeles. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press

Peirce, C.S. (1992 & 1998). *The Essential Peirce*. 2 Vols. Volume 1 edited by N. Houser and C. Kloesel, volume 2 edited by the Peirce Edition Project. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Royce, J. (1982) *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce*. Edited by J. Roth. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company

Talisso, R. and S. Aikin (eds.) (2011) *The Pragmatism Reader: From Peirce through the Present*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Secondary Texts (not exhaustive)

Allard, J.W. (2005) *The Logical Foundations of Bradley's Metaphysics: Judgment, Inference, and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bacon, M. (2012) *Pragmatism: An Introduction*. Polity

Basile, P. (1999) *Experience and Relations: An Examination of F.H. Bradley's Conception of Reality*. Berne: Paul Haupt

Bird, G. (1986) *William James*. London: Routledge

Boucher, D., and Vincent, A. (2011) *British Idealism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum

Brandt, R. (2011) *Perspectives on Pragmatism: Classical, Recent, and Contemporary*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buranelli, V. (1964) *Josiah Royce*. New Haven: College and University Press

Candlish, S. (2007) *The Russell/Bradley Dispute*. Hampshire: Palgrave

Clendinning, J. (1999) *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press

Dunham, J., Grant, I.H., and Watson, S. (2011) *Idealism: The History of a Philosophy*. Durham: Acumen

Driscoll, T. (1915) *Pragmatism and the Problem of the Idea*. New York: Longman's and Co

Ferreira, P. (1999) *Bradley and the Structure of Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York Press

Goodman, R. (ed.) (1995) *Pragmatism*, London: Routledge.

Goodman, R. (ed.) (2005) *Pragmatism: Critical Concepts in Philosophy*. London: Routledge. 4 Vols

Goodman, R. (2002) *Wittgenstein and William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hookway, C. (1985) *Peirce*. Abingdon: Routledge

Hookway, C. (2012) *The Pragmatic Maxim: Essays on Peirce and Pragmatism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hylton, P. (1990) *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Kuklick, B. (1977) *The Rise of American Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press

Mander, W. (1984) *An Introduction to Bradley's Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Mander, W. (2011) *British Idealism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Menand, L. (2001) *The Metaphysical Club*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Misak, C. (1991) *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Misak, C. (1999) *Pragmatism*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press

- Misak, C. (2013) *The American Pragmatists*. Oxford; Oxford University Press
- Murphey, M (1961) *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Perry, R. (1935). *The Thought and Character of William James*, Boston: Little, Brown. 2 vols
- Putnam, R.A. (ed.)(1997) *The Cambridge Companion to William James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Rescher, N. (1973) *The Coherence Theory of Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Schwartz, R. (2012) *Rethinking Pragmatism: From William James to Contemporary Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
- Seigfried, C.H. (1990) *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sprigge, T. (1993) *James and Bradley: American Truth and British Reality*. Chicago: Open Court
- Sprigge, T. (2006) *The God of Metaphysics: Being a Study of the Metaphysics and Religious Doctrines of Spinoza, Hegel, Kierkegaard, T.H. Green, Bernard Bosanquet, Josiah Royce, A.N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and Concluding with a Defence of Pantheistic Idealism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Stern, R. (2012) *Hegelian Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Talisie, R. and S. Aikin (eds.) (2008) *Pragmatism: a Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum
- Weiner, P. (1971) *Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism*. University of Pennsylvania Press