Overview

Pragmatism is one of the most fruitful intellectual traditions contributing to the study of communication, as it has been since the late nineteenth century. This seminar will map key topics, texts, and thinkers in U.S. pragmatism and put them in conversation with rival approaches emanating from European traditions of thought. We will focus on shorter but theoretically central selections from classic and contemporary texts, supplemented by occasional interpretive accounts of major theorists. The aim is both to expose students to major thinkers and debates, and to help them engage with ongoing questions and competing contemporary approaches to them.

We will address seven substantive topics over the course of the semester, considering pragmatist and alternative approaches to meaning and signs, communication, Others, bureaucracy, democracy, art, and postmodernity. Each topic, and indeed each class period, could provide the basis for an entire seminar, so our attention is necessarily highly selective, and our treatment each week limited. Important topics about which pragmatism has had much to say (e.g. rhetoric, community, and publics) have had to be excluded, or are represented only in passing. Choices have been made. At the same time, we will cover a good deal of ground and explore variable approaches to key concepts and practices. In addition, students will be given the opportunity to engage in greater depth with readings, topics, and individual figures through weekly semi-formal writing, a report, a review, and an oral examination at the end of the semester. Reports and reviews will be shared with other members of the class, and perhaps posted online for other students and scholars interested in pragmatism, its rivals, and their significance to contemporary inquiry.

Readings


All other readings available as PDFs on CULearn course website.
Assignments and Grading

Graduate school is the time to read and build your intellectual base. This course gives you the chance to read a lot of rich and influential 20th-century social and cultural theory and some contemporary extensions of it. To keep things manageable and maximize both individual and collective output, I want to organize requirements for the class around a time-budget model. Budget and plan to spend 12 to 15 hours every week outside our meetings. One of these hours will be devoted to writing, the others to reading. Full weeks generally have 125-175 pages of reading, which means that you need to read 10-15 pages/hour to get it done in the time frame. (The last two regular class meetings have about half that much reading, as you’ll be working on your reviews and final exam studying then).

I have high ambitions for the class, and want you to read and learn a lot about pragmatism and rival social theories and their understandings of key topics for us today. Each week, everyone does their part by reading and writing ahead of time, while one person will have the specialized role of presenting a report on a figure and helping to organize class. Instead of a seminar paper, I ask you to do a review and an oral examination at the end of the semester. I hope to post student work on suitable web location to be of aid to other students and researchers elsewhere.

More specifically, to achieve the desired ends, I have designed the following four kinds of assignments for our course:

1. **Weekly Reading and One-Hour Writings** (ongoing). Primary texts and occasional interpretive readings are assigned each week, and students should expect to spend 12-14 hours to work through them. I will distribute brief Reading Questions to go along with each week’s assignment, which direct you to key topics for our discussions and pose one or two writing questions that I want you to spend sixty minutes writing about. Those writings are due to me by e-mail by 6:00 p.m. the Wednesday before class (30% of final grade)

2. **Help Lead a Class/Write and Present a Report on a Figure** (one class period). Choose a class period and an author in it you are interested in. Help Simonson organize materials for and run class that day, and also conduct research for and present a report on the figure you have choses. Talk with Simonson well ahead of time about themes and questions in the assigned readings, and help lead discussion that day. Your researched report should include a 500-word intellectual biography, a lightly-annotated bibliography of the author’s central works (a sentence or two on what they cover and why they are important), and a bibliography of select contemporary work that extends, uses, or comments upon their work. Focus on work in communication and interdisciplinary social, cultural, and political thought. Give a 7-10 minute presentation on your figure in class, and distribute copies of your report to everyone. (20% of final grade)

3. **Write a Book Review or a Review of a Cluster of 6-8 Articles and Present an Oral Version of It to the Class** (Thursday, April 29). Select a recent book on pragmatism or a cluster of 6-8 articles on a particular topic or debate or written by a single author. Write an elegant, intelligent, and publishable quality, 1500-word review for your classmates and possibly other, distant audiences. Submit it for publication in a journal or on-line. On
the 29th, give a chatty, engaging 8-10 minute presentation of your review to the group. (20% of final grade)

4. **Oral Examination** (45-60 minutes, during finals week). On or around April 8, Simonson will distribute eight or so possible oral examination questions. No later than April 22, students will notify him by e-mail which two questions they would like to be examined on. In scheduled, one-hour sessions with Simonson from Monday 5/3 through Wednesday 5/5, students will present polished 8-12 minute answers to each of the two questions they chose, and then respond to questions for another 30-40 minutes (30% of final grade)

**Course Schedule**

**Introducing Pragmatism**

**Meeting One (1/21)  Reviving Pragmatism**
Robert T. Craig, “Pragmatism in the Field of Communication Theory,” 17 (2007), 125-45 (and, if you have not read it, you might want to take a look at his “Communication Theory as a Field,” *Communication Theory* 9 [1999], 119-161) [20 pp, plus 40 to scan]

**Signs, Meaning, and Pragmatism**

**Meeting Two (1/28)  Science, Signs, and Pragmatism in Charles Sanders Peirce**
Peirce, “The Categories” (1893 revision of 1867 ms), available on the PEIRCE website Arisbe, and as a Word document on CULearn. See also Peirce’s gloss on the categories in section 5 of his 1902 grant application to the Carnegie Institute, available on Arisbe, and also CULearn.
Peirce, “What is a Sign” (1894), pp. 4-10 in TEP II [7pp]
Meeting Three (2/4) Signs on the Continent


Meeting Four (2/11) Jamesian Pragmatism

For an overview of James’ remarkable life, read through the Biography/Chronology page of Emory University’s outstanding William James website http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/jphotos.html


William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), See annotated Table of Contents from Hackett edition of the book; then in POW: concentrate on pp. 1-40, 58-104, 119-32 [100pp] (Preface, Lectures I, II, IV-VI, VIII); also available free on-line at the Emory website (http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/james.html#essays)

James, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” (1899), in POW, 267-85 [19pp] (also available on Emory (http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/jcertain.html)

Meeting Five (2/18): Some Classic Pragmatist Statements

For an overview/refresher, review Simonson, “Varieties of Pragmatism and Communication,” 1-15


Meeting Six (2/25): Continental Alternatives: Tarde, Freud, Gramsci


Freud, “Psychoanalysis” (1922), in Character and Culture (New York: Collier, 1963), 230-51 (22pp)


Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents (1930), trans. Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), ch. 3 (pp. 33-45) [total Freud: 60pp]


Race, Gender, Others

Meeting Seven (3/4): Classic Pragmatism and Race: Dubois and Locke

Ross Posnock, “Going Astray, Going Forward: Du Boisian Pragmatism and Its Lineage,” in Dickstein, Revival of Pragmatism, 176-89 (14pp)


Cornel West, “The Making of an American Radical Democrat of African Descent,” and “Conversation with bell hooks,” both in *The Cornel West Reader* (3-18, 541-550) [26pp]

**Meeting Eight (3/11): Pragmatist Feminisms**


Jane Addams, “Women’s Conscience and Social Amelioration” (1908), and “If Men Were Seeking the Franchise” (1913), in JAR, 252-63, 229-34 [dropped “The Settlement as a Factor in the Labor Movement” (1895), now 17pp]


Charlene Haddock Siegfried, “The Theory of Practice” and Table of Contents to *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* (U Chicago P, 1999), 3-16 [14pp]

Nancy Fraser, Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History (2008), available at http://www.newschool.edu/uploadedFiles/Faculty/NSSR/Fraser_NLR.pdf?n=4644

**Meeting Nine (3/18): French Alterities: De Beauvoir and Levinas**

Shannon Mussett, “Simone de Beauvoir,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://www.iep.utm.edu/beauvoir/)


**Spring Break (3/25): Read and take notes for Book/Article Cluster Reviews**

**Administration, Bureaucracy, Organization**

**Meeting Ten (4/1): Pragmatist, Weberian, and Critical Approaches**

Randolph Bourne, short selection on scientific management

Mary Parker Follett, “Constructive Conflict” and “Power” (both published 1926), in *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*, ed. Henry C. Metcalf and L. Urwick (New York: Harper, 1942), 30-49, 90-116. See also the editors Introduction to the volume (9-29), and the poor Wikipedia article: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Parker_Follett](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Parker_Follett) (77pp) [On Follett, see the brief biography in a Harvard management school volume of her work, *Mary Parker Follett, Prophet of Management* (http://books.google.com/books?id=tZ4Z29T1GgIC&printsec=frontcover&q=follett+mary+parker&cd=1#v=onepage&q=&f=false); as well as the Mary Parker Follett Network site (http://mpfollett.ning.com/)]


**Democracy**

**Meeting Eleven (4/8): Democracy and Pragmatism in Recent Thought**


Cornel West, “Prophetic Pragmatism,” from The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism (1989), and rpt. in The Cornel West Reader, 149-73 (25pp) [might substitute different West article]


Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere” (2005), available at http://www.republicart.net/disc/publicum/fraser01_en.htm (and CULearn PDF)


Roberto Unger, selections from The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound (2008), TBA

Report: Jürgen Habermas.

Simonson distributes final examination questions during this class meeting

Art and Aesthetics

Meeting Ten (4/15): Pragmatist Aesthetics and Ideas of Art

Alain Locke, “Negro Youth Speaks,” introductory essay to fiction/poetry/drama/music section of The New Negro (1925), 47-56 (10pp)


Jane Addams, “The Play Instinct and Arts,” from The Second Twenty Years at Hull House (1930), and rpt. in Jane Addams Reader, 416-31 (15pp)


Postmodernity

Meeting Thirteen (4/22): Lyotard and Rorty on Postmodernity

Jean-François Lyotard, Introduction and first five chapters to The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1979), xxiii-27; and “Note on the Meaning of Post,” “Ticket for a New Stage,” and “Gloss on Resistance,” in The Postmodern Explained (1988; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 75-98 (52pp total)

Students announce no later than class today which two questions they will be examined on during Finals Week.

Final Assignments and Exams
Meeting Fourteen (4/29): Reviews Due and Presented in Class
Bring a copy of your book or article cluster review, and give a 10-minute presentation of it to the class, to be followed by question and answer.

One-on-One Final Meeting (Finals Week): Oral Examinations
Choose two of the distributed questions to be examined on. Set a time to meet with Simonson for one hour, Monday 5/3-Wed 5/5. Present 8-12 minute answers to each of the two questions, then answer questions and dialogue with Simonson about it for another 20 minutes.

Topics for Reports and Reviews (besides those explicit on the syllabus)

Pragmatism and…
Rhetoric
Community
Science
Groups
Law
Publics
Sociology
Technology

Individual and/or Collective Identities
The Environment/Environmentalism
Marxism (…Critical Theory, British Cultural Studies, French Marxism/Radicalism, Italian Marxism, etc…)
Globalization
Religion
Its international diffusion, reception, and extension
And many more…