Approach:

The pragmatist tradition is part of, and a reaction against, the larger tradition of western philosophy,* and is best understood in that context. No prior study in philosophy is required, therefore background will be provided in lectures.

This is primarily a course in political philosophy, although experimental applications of that philosophy will be featured in the second half of the course. As philosophy: (a) it is part of the tradition of political thought from Plato and Aristotle, through Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc.; (b) it is deeply related to other issues in philosophy, such as ethics and philosophy of knowledge, and these will be addressed in the course; (c) it is concerned with what human social organization might be and should be as well as what it is; (d) it generalizes from actual political experience and deals in abstractions - in order to understand and guide future action, (e) hence it identifies universal themes which are as relevant today as in Dewey’s time; but, (f) it also tends to be removed from the details of elections, legislation, policy, etc. - it won’t satisfy the desire for a course in practical politics.

(*Many reactions against the western philosophy tradition arose in the late 19th and early and mid twentieth century: pragmatism, structuralism, phenomenolgy, Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis, postmodernism.)

Requirements

Attendance is required. In case of unavoidable absence: (a) provide written explanation. (b) Obtain lecture/discussion notes from a classmate. Attendance is required in order (1) obtain background and interpretations of readings from lecture and discussion; (2) maintain continuity and solidarity of seminar group for productive discussion: (3) be aware of any changes in planned topics and readings.
The content of this course necessitates lectures as well as discussions – for background and interpretation. Knowledge of lecture material as well as material from the texts is expected of students. Detailed note-taking is recommended.

Standards of evaluation will be rigorous (no grade inflation here). Grades of A are for academic excellence only: interpretive insight, accuracy, writing skill, originality. Serious effort and competent work earns B grades. Grade will be based on class participation and two papers.

Students should be aware of the Gallatin policy on Academic Integrity. See: http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html

Written Work

(Further specification will be provided in class and on Blackboard on each paper topic.)

A. Response Papers: weekly one page response to texts, due in class on the day that text is discussed, directed to questions designated on Blackboard. (First paper: Reading and Interpretation exercise, on Emerson’s “The American Scholar.”)

B. Midterm paper of approximately 2,500 words (ten pages). Select some further reading in John Dewey (from a bibliography on Blackboard) on a topic of concern to you, and interpret and discuss. Paper proposal, 1-2 pages, due Oct. 19 – paper proposals are an occasion for supportive dialogue between us on forming and developing your topic, finding sources, etc., Paper due, Nov 2.

C. Final: Three options:
   (a) “Mini-Colloquium. (An opportunity for continued dialogue and feedback, and practice for the Senior colloquium.)” Booklist: the course syllabus; Rationale: Your distillation of your learnings from the course; Colloquium: ½ hour oral exam/discussion with Professor Caspary.
   (b) Philosophical paper (2,500 words): Further reading in Dewey on a topic of concern. May develop out of first paper or take up a new topic.
   (c) Political paper (2,500 words): write on some experiment in participatory democracy, and its relation to Pragmatism.
      No proposal required but you are encouraged to discuss options and topics with the professor.
      Paper or colloquium to be completed by Dec. 14.

Brief Introduction

“Pragmatism” and “Creative Democracy”
“Pragmatism” as an approach to philosophy was initiated by Charles Saunders Peirce in the mid-19th century. [Peirce is pronounced like purse, and is spelled with the e before the i.] Peirce began with the insight that the meaning of our ideas (words, concepts, sentences, beliefs, etc.) lies in their implications for action. The validity of these ideas, therefore, depends on carrying out the intended actions and finding out if they have the expected results. Hence pragmatism is a philosophy about action in the world, and about the relation of theory to action – “the relationship of theory and practice.” In the hands of William James (brother of the better-known novelist, Henry James), these ideas were developed particularly in the fields of psychology and religion. John Dewey – the third and youngest of the founding pragmatists, who wrote mostly in the 20th century – applied this approach to political life, and saw pragmatism as intrinsically a philosophy of democracy. The pragmatists were influenced by their predecessors in American and European philosophy. The early 19th century essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson was particularly influential. The pragmatists also responded strongly to developments in science, especially Darwin’s theory of evolution. The democratic social experimentation of Jane Addams, through her work at Hull House, was a major influence on the thought of John Dewey.

There has been an intense revival of interest in pragmatism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. “James and Dewey were not only waiting at the end of the dialectical road which analytical philosophy traveled, but are waiting at the end of the road which, for example, [the postmodernists] Foucault and Deleuze are currently traveling” (Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism).

“Creative Democracy” is the title of a 1939 essay by Dewey (when he was 80 years old). It was Dewey’s response to the rising threat of fascism, but also an expression of the democratic philosophy he had been working out throughout his life. “Democracy is a way of personal life controlled . . . by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished . . . [conditions] of [free inquiry] of consultation, of conference, of persuasion, of discussion, in formation of public opinion, which in the long run is self-corrective.” (1) The essay sounds the Emersonian theme of creativity as openness to learning and change. For Dewey, this requires political dialogue among citizens, founded on mutual respect. Therefore, Dewey emphasizes a democratic “way of life,” not just democratic institutions. (2) Democracy is creative also in the sense of innovation, invention, experimentation, imagination, and discovery – which Dewey sees as implications of pragmatist philosophy and of the requirements of a changing world - and also as essential to democracy. Following this theme of experimentation, the latter part of this course will explore such “social inventions/experiments” as conflict-resolution, civic-journalism, progressive education, and workers’ cooperatives (worker owned and democratically managed businesses).

Schedule
(Readings for each date to be discussed on that date, hence read during the preceding week.)

Sep.  7.  Introduction. Knowledge and democratic politics; The “hermeneutic circle.”

Sep. 14.  Emersonian roots of Pragmatism

  Emerson, “The American Scholar.” From “Addresses, in Nature:
  Schiller (excerpt on fragmentation). Esthetic Education of Man
  Seigfried, Pragmatism and Feminism  pp. 73-74.
  Optional:

Sep. 21.  C. S. Peirce: The First Pragmatist, Science, Historical Context of Pragmatism,
Louis Menand. The Metaphysical Club. Preface, & ch. 9
Peirce: Selected Quotations
West: pp. 42-54
  Optional:
  Seigfried: ch. 1.

Sep. 28.  William James: Ethical and Political Thought of a Founder of Pragmatism
Wm. James. “Moral Equivalent of War,” “Moral Philosopher and Moral
Life” “A Certain Blindness” in James, The Writings (on Blackboar
West: pp. 54-68.

Oct.  5.   Pragmatism; The Public; The State. How to Conduct Social Inquiry.
  John Dewey. The Public and Its Problems, ch. 1, 2. 3.
  Jane Addams. Selection on democratic dialogue from Twenty Years at
  Hull House

Oct. 12.  The Inadequacy of Public Participation in Democratic States
  Walter Lippmann. Public Opinion  pp. 18-20 (ch.1 sec 7) pp. 46-49 (ch. 5,
  sec 5-6), ch. 6, ch. 7, pp. 78-79 (from ch. 9), ch. 12 (pp. 112-121), pp. 254-
  257 (ch. 17 Sec 4-5)

  Dewey. Art as Experience, ch. 1, 2.

Oct. 26. Civic Journalism. Forming the Public is Prior to Informing the Public
  Jay Rosen. What are Journalists For.
Nov. 2. Participatory Democracy: Participatory Budgeting
Leonard Avritzer. In Santos, ed. Democratizing Democracy

Nov. 9. Dialogical Democracy
Dewey. “Creative Democracy,”
Paulo Freire. Selection from Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
Tom Atlee. Selection from The Tao of Democracy.
Roger Fisher & William Ury. Selection from Getting to Yes.
Albie Davis. “An Interview with Mary Parker Follett.”

Dewey. “the Economic Basis of the New Society.”

Nov. 30. Progressive Education
Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed.” Selection from Schools of Tomorrow. Experience and Education
James Comer. Selection from School Power.

Dec. 7. Feminism & Pragmatism; Dewey’s Experimentalism
Charlene Seigfried. Pragmatism & Feminism. Ch. 2-3
Dewey, in McDermott, ed. Section I, ch. 1, 4, 5.

Dec. 14. Prophetic Pragmatism
Cornel West. Ch. 6, “Prophetic Pragmatism” in American Evasion of Philosophy.
Dewey in McDermott, ed. Section I, ch. 6. Section V. ch. 23.

Supplementary Topic: Participatory Action Research.
Davydd J. Greenwood & Morten Levin. Introduction to Action Research.