SYLLABUS
(Revised: Sept. 03, 2014)
(subject to revision in details, check NYU-CLASSES)

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 (15%), response papers (15%), and midterm and final papers (35%, 35%).

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 NYU-Classes 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 NYU-Classes. Ungraded, leaving you freedom to explore. (First paper is longer – three to five pages: Reading and Interpretation exercise, on Emerson’s “The American Scholar.”)

B. **Midterm paper** of approximately 1,500 words (six pages). Select some further reading in John Dewey (from a bibliography on NYU-Classes) on a topic of concern to you, and interpret and discuss. **Conference:** one to one meeting with Professor Caspary to assist you in identifying your topic and suggest sources and approaches – to be arranged, during Oct. 6-10. **Paper due, Oct 29.**

C. **Final:** Three options:
   
   (a) “Mini-Colloquium.” Strongly recommended. 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; Meeting: ½ hour oral exam/discussion with Professor Caspary.

   (b) Philosophical paper (1,500 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 (1,500 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. 13.**

Learning Objective

A working grasp of Pragmatist theory and experimental method that you can put to work in your learning and your life.
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), around the turn of the century, these ideas were developed particularly in the fields of psychology and religion. John Dewey – the third and youngest of the founding pragmatists, writing from about 1900-1950 – 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, a “settlement house” aiding European immigrants in Chicago, 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 the pragmatist understanding of the natural sciences, 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, participatory budgeting, 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. 3. Introduction. Knowledge, meaning, and democratic politics; The “hermeneutic circle.”

Sep. 10. Emersonian roots of Pragmatism
   Emerson, “The American Scholar.” From “Addresses, in Nature:
   Schiller. *Esthetic Education of Man.* (This passage is strikingly similar in
   thought to Emerson's ideas on fragmentation in the early pages of “The
   American Scholar.”)
   Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism* pp. 73-74. (Brief critique of
   Emerson and the degree of influence of Emerson on Dewey.)
   **Optional** (biographical and critical essay on Emerson):

Sep. 17. C. S. Peirce, the first Pragmatist. Pragmatist Theory of Science,
   a. Peirce: Selected quotations on science.
   (n.b.: Peirce is spelled with the e before the i, and is pronounced, *purse*)
   b. James and Dewey: Selected quotations on science.
   c. Dewey on Francis Bacon, experiment, and discovery: “ch 2,* pp. 28-39
   in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (2nd. Edn. 1948). (*Ch. 2 will be up on
   NYU-Classes in a few days, in the meantime, find it on the Bobst Library website under:
   Data Bases > Past Masters > Dewey > Middle Works.)
   d. Dewey on scientific revolutions, theory and practice, and the lessons
   from science for social inquiry and ethics: “Introduction” (added to the
   **Optional.** (biography, historical setting and introduction to

Sep. 24. William James: Ethical and Political Thought of a Founder of Pragmatism
   Wm. James. “A Certain Blindness,” “Moral Equivalent of War,” “Moral
   Philosopher and Moral Life” (on NYU-Classes)
   **Optional:** West: pp. 54-68.
   **Optional:** Dewey, last chapter of *Art as Experience.*

   John Dewey. *The Public and Its Problems.* ch. 1, 2, 3, 4 (Not on NYU-
   Classes. Download from: Bobst Library website > Data Bases > Past Masters > Dewey
   > Middle Works.)
   Jane Addams. Selection on democratic dialogue from *Twenty Years at*
Hull House

Dewey. *Public & Its Problems*, ch. 5, 6. (Download from: Bobst Library website
> Data Bases > Past Masters > Dewey > Middle Works.)
Dewey. *Art as Experience*, ch. 1, 2, 14. ((Download from: Bobst Library
website > Data Bases > Past Masters > Dewey > Middle Works.)

Oct. 15. Walter Lippmann. *Public Opinion* The Inadequacy of Public Participation in
Democratic States. 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), pp. 112-121 (from ch. 12 ),
pp. 254-257 (ch. 17 Sec 4-5)
Civic Journalism. *Forming* the Public is Prior to *Informing* the Public
Jay Rosen, *What are Journalists For*. (selections on NYU-Classes)
Daniel Yankelovich. *Coming to Public Judgment*. (selections on
NYU-Classes)

Oct. 22. Progressive Education
Dewey, “My Pedagogic Creed.” Selection from *Schools of Tomorrow*.

Oct. 29. Participatory Action Research.
Davydd J. Greenwood & Morten Levin. *Introduction to Action Research*,
(selections)

Nov. 5. Participatory Democracy: Participatory Budgeting
SDS. “Port Huron Statement,” (founding program statement of students
for a Democratic Society) in Landau, Saul, and Paul Jacobs, eds. *The New
Radicals*. 1966
Leonard Avritzer. In Santos, ed. *Democratizing Democracy*
Giovanni Baiocchi. In Archon Fung & Erik Wright, eds. *Deepening
Democracy*

Nov. 12. Dialogical Democracy
Dewey. “Creative Democracy,”
Carl Rogers. *On Becoming a Person*, Ch. 1.
Paulo Freire. Selection from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
Albie Davis. “An Interview with Mary Parker Follett.”
Optional:
Roger Fisher & William Ury. Selection from *Getting to Yes*.
Tom Atlee. Selection from *The Tao of Democracy*.

Dewey. “the Economic Basis of the New Society.”
William R. Caspary. “Prospects and Limits of a Democratic Economy,”
Nov. 27. Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec. 3. Feminism & Pragmatism; Dewey’s Experimentalism
   Charlene Seigfried. Pragmatism & Feminism, Ch. 2-3
   Dewey selections on NYU-Classes (in McDermott, ed. Sec. I, ch. 1, 4, 5.)

Dec. 10. (Meeting at Professor Caspary's apartment). Review and Integration

Dec. 15. Final Paper due.