

Philosophy 233: American Philosophy

READ ME!! You are responsible for the information I contain.

Staying in this class means agreeing to meet the goals and objectives that are described here.

Professor Contact Information

Lisa Heldke
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Office Hours

M 10:30-11:30, W 3-4:30, F 9:00-10:30; other times by appointment

I encourage you to come talk to me at any point, about the issues the class is discussing, or for consultation on papers or help with understanding a reading assignment. Feel free to schedule an appointment if none of these times works for you.

Texts

Harris, Pratt and Waters, *American Philosophies: An Anthology*
Stuhr, *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy*

Bring your text to class every day; we will be doing a lot of textual work in class.

Time Commitment

Plan that you will spend a **minimum** of two hours outside of class for every hour in class. (If you're preparing for class in less time than this, you're not well prepared.) You'll need more time than that in weeks in which you have a paper due. So, figure that this is, at the very least, a nine to twelve hour per week commitment. I am not kidding about this, so if this seems too demanding given your other commitments, you should rethink your decision to take this class. It's one of the most important courses for the philosophy major and, as such, it demands a serious investment. (Non-majors are very welcome in this class; but you do need to realize that this is a demanding course.)

About Me

- I'm a philosopher; my favorite word is "why?" When you tell me something, and I ask you why, I'm inviting you to develop your ideas further. I *don't* do it to intimidate you or to call you out; I do it to give you practice in thinking in a particular way. That's one of the most important things I believe I can give you as a teacher.
- I make mistakes. I'm happy to have them pointed out to me—if you do it respectfully. I'll do my best to return the favor to you.
- I work best with honesty. If you're having trouble with the class or with me, come and give me the real deal. Even if it's messy in the short run, the long-run results will be better.
- I think teaching works best when learners are actively engaged in deciding what goes on in the classroom. I will be working pretty hard to persuade you that you need to take an active leadership role in your learning in this class—and in all your education. This is not a spectator sport.

Course Goals

This course fills the requirements for both a writing credit and an Area C (Meaning, Value and the Historical Perspective, a.k.a. “Human”) credit. In order to meet these requirements, it has two rather ambitious and not always compatible goals, one focussed on content, the other on skills:

1. To acquaint you with at least some of the most important thinkers of American philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
2. To give you practice in doing philosophy and philosophical scholarship, in both oral and written form. Your writing assignments and class discussion will require you to do such things as formulate a philosophical question, explicate a passage, summarize a paragraph, formulate a philosophical argument, and research a philosopher's work in order to discover its main emphases.

I urge you to inform me if you think either aspect of the course is suffering at the expense of the other (content over skills development, or vice versa). The following components of the course are designed to help you meet the goals.

This course also continues the history sequence in the Philosophy major—a sequence that begins with Ancient Philosophy and continues with Modern Philosophy. This course is designed to give you some familiarity with some of the philosophical work being done in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, specifically in the United States.

Course Components

1. Weekly essays (40% of your grade): Frequent short essays will be the primary writing tool we use in the class. Here are the details of my expectations:

- a. How Long?** You must write two typed, double-spaced pages for each assignment.
- b. When are they due?** I will collect your essays once per week IN CLASS, unless I notify you otherwise.
- c. How are they graded?** Each essay will get a check, check-plus or check-minus. At the end of the term, I'll give you one overall grade on your essays, which will be calculated on the basis of the percentage of assignments you turn in and the marks you receive on them. If you turn in all the work and get a check on all of it, that would be a B; check pluses will raise that grade. Check minuses, or missed assignments will lower it. (Think of a check as being two points, check plus as three, check minus as one, and a missed assignment as zero.)
- d. About What?** Assignments will give you practice in different kinds of philosophical writing, and will also focus your attention on particular aspects of the texts we are reading. Here are some of the kinds of assignments you can expect:
 1. Summarize a reading, or a section of a reading
 2. Explain the significance of a particular passage in a text
 3. Ask a clear philosophical question about a text
 4. Compare or contrast two philosophers' views on an issue
 5. State your agreement or disagreement with a philosopher clearly, and explain your reasons.
- e. To What End?** To provide you with opportunities to hone your philosophical skills. An essay is a place for you to *do* philosophy, to experiment with various aspects of the activity of philosophizing. In order for the essays to be of value as a tool for developing philosophical ability, perhaps the most important thing you must do is to work at

explanation. Imagine that, after every sentence you write, someone responds, "But why?" Try to answer that "why" question as often as you can. Merely stating a view, or stating that you agree or disagree with it, is not sufficient in philosophy. Simply saying how something makes you feel is also not enough. As a philosopher, your job is to try to explain, more clearly than the original thinker, what they are saying, and to evaluate the merits of their ideas, using criteria others would recognize as important.

- f. **What Else?** Short essays are a place for you to do *informal* writing, but this must not be misinterpreted as *casual* or thoughtless writing—indeed, I invite you to disregard writing mechanics precisely so that you can invest all your energy in thinking harder about the ideas you're trying to convey. Essays needn't be perfectly neat, or use perfect grammar and spelling. (But DO run a spell check and correct serious grammatical errors before you hand them in, please. And if you know you are having problems with writing mechanics, please DO ask me to read your essays with these matters in mind.) Represent others' views as accurately as possible. And think! Give yourself time to ponder.
 - g. **Format:** Your essays must be typed, double-spaced, on standard-sized paper. HEAD EACH ASSIGNMENT WITH THE DATE ON WHICH IT WAS ASSIGNED, AND THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS. (This is all for my convenience; I can read much better when I am reading typescript, I can carry a stack of essays much better when they are all the same size and shape, and it is important for me to know which assignment you are addressing, in the event that I read several days' worth of essays at once.)
 - h. Do not whine overmuch about doing these. Year after year,, students report at the end of the term that writing these essays improved their comprehension, their writing ability, and their metabolism. Do them; they're good for you.
2. **Formal papers (40%):** You will also write three polished papers, five to six pages in length, using your short essays as your starting point. **You** select the essays you wish to expand into papers—in consultation with me, if you wish. Stipulations:
- a. Each paper must be about a different philosopher or philosophers. (You can include Dewey in more than one paper, but you can't write three papers on Dewey.)
 - b. Papers are due (in class unless otherwise specified) on: October 15, November 17, December 17. Dates are subject to change, but not without a week's notice!
 - c. You will write your papers in drafts, and will submit preliminary drafts along with your final paper. During the term, each of you will have one of your papers discussed in a draft evaluation workshop, during which everyone else will read and discuss your paper with you. During the term, you will also read, write comments on, and discuss one paper by everyone else in the class. Both giving and receiving critiques are part of your grade.
3. **Participation (20% of your grade).** Formal and informal participation are central to this class.
- a. **Informal participation (10%):** Your well-prepared presence is essential. We will do as much in-class discussion as is feasible--both in large and in small groups. The better prepared you are, the more of this we can do. Come with questions, comments, challenges for the class. We'll sometimes use the daily essays as the starting point for class. Participation is figured into your grade: you will assign yourself a participation grade at the end of the term, based on how often you've come, how well you've been prepared, and how well you've listened to others and contributed to the discussion.

b. Formal participation (10%): At least two times during the semester, you will be responsible for leading a discussion during class, based on a question designed by you in advance. At the beginning of class, you'll turn in a one-page discussion plan, which will include: 1) the question you want to ask, and 2) the motivation or origin of your question. (Make two copies of your proposal, so you have one to follow during discussion.)

- 4. Attendance:** I regard all absences as "excused"; that is, I assume that, as busy, responsible adults, you will occasionally find yourself unable to attend class, whether it is because of illness, transportation problems, special events, family crises, etc. I do not differentiate among these reasons, and expect you to be responsible for your attendance. This is a discussion class; missing discussion is like missing a writing assignment. Unlike a writing assignment, however, it is work that cannot be made up. Therefore, absences affect your course grade as follows:
- 1-4 absences: no effect
 - 5-7 absences: grade will be lowered one full letter
 - 8-11 absences: grade will be lowered two full letters
 - 12 or more absences: subject to my discretion, you will fail the course.

A note on plagiarism

If you pass off someone else's words or ideas as your own, you have plagiarized--*whether you do so intentionally or by accident*, and whether you do so in a formal paper or an informal writing. That is true whether you quote directly, or paraphrase someone else's ideas. That includes ideas in books, exchanged in conversation, or on the web. Please consult a style manual, me, the Writing Center, or *someone* if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism in your written work. (I have a handy sourcebook called *Writing With Sources* that I'd be happy to show you.) Suffice it to say, plagiarism is a violation of college policy, and is also a violation of the policies of this class. If you plagiarize, you will receive a zero on that assignment, and I will report the incident to the dean. If you plagiarize a second time, I will give you an F for the class, and inform the dean of the reason for the grade.

Honor Code

As a community of scholars, the faculty and students of Gustavus Adolphus College have formulated an academic honesty policy and honor code system, which is printed in the Academic Bulletin and the Gustavus Guide. As a student at Gustavus Adolphus College, you are asked to agree to uphold the honor code. This means that you will abide by the academic honesty policy, and abide by decisions of the joint student/faculty Honor Board.

Access to education

Every student has a right to be able to learn in this class. If you have learning disabilities, please see me NOW about ways we can work to make the class work for you. Bring any documentation you have about your learning disability.

Reading Schedule

- This schedule is subject to change, but not without notice
- Your texts are abbreviated “Stuhr” (*Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy*) and “HPW” (*American Philosophies: An Anthology*)

Dates to Note

September

3 Classes begin

October

7-8 Nobel

10, 13 Draft workshop days

15 Paper #1 due in class

17-20 Fall Break

November

27-30 Thanksgiving

December

12 Last day of classes

Schedule

September

3 Classes begin

A. Ralph Waldo Emerson

5 Emerson, “Self Reliance” (in Stuhr)

8 Emerson, “Nature” (in HPW)

10 Emerson wrapup

B. Philosophical Responses to Slavery

12 John Wannaucon Quincy, “Fourth of July Address” (in HPW), and David Walker, “Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World” (in HPW)

15 Lydia Maria Child, “Prejudices Against People of Color” (in HPW)

17 Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (in HPW. There’s also an annotated text to be found at <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transweb/civil/>)

19 Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (in HPW. There’s also an annotated text to be found at <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transweb/civil/>)

22 Frederick Douglass, “Oration” (in HPW)

24 Anna J. Cooper, “Woman Versus the Indian” (in HPW)

26 Summing up: Philosophical Responses to Slavery

C. Community, Democracy, Utopia

[Try to insert DuBois on race in here somewhere?]

29 John Humphrey Noyes, “Male Continence” (in HPW)

October

1 Jane Addams, *The Newer Ideals of Peace*,

3 Josiah Royce, [TBA: Either “The Body and the Members,” “Loyalty to Loyalty, Truth and Reality,” or “Provincialism”] (in Stuhr)

- 6 Emma Goldman, "Anarchism" (in HPW)
- 7-8 Nobel Conference: no class Wednesday
- 10 Draft workshop #1, day 1

- 13 Draft workshop #1, day 2
- 15 George Washington Woodbey, "What to Do and How to Do It" (in HPW)
- Paper #1 due in class**
- 17-20 Reading Period

- 22 Luther Standing Bear, "What the Indian Means to America" and Laura Kellogg, "Our Democracy and the American Indian" (in HPW)
- 24 Alain Locke, "Cultural Pluralism" (in HPW)

- 27 John Dewey, "Search for the Great Community" (in Stuhr)
- 29 Summing up: Community, Democracy and Utopia

D. Minds and Knowledge

- 31 Frances Wright, "Knowledge" (in HPW)

November

- 3 C.S. Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" (in Stuhr)
- 5 C.S. Peirce, "What Pragmatism Is" (in Stuhr)
- 7 William James, "Principles of Psychology" (in HPW)

- 10 William James, "A World of Pure Experience" (in Stuhr)
- 12 Draft workshop #2, day 1
- 14 Draft workshop #2, day 2

- 17 William James, "What Pragmatism Means" (in Stuhr)
- Paper #2 due in class**
- 19 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Our Brains and What Ails Them" (in HPW)
- 21 John Dewey, "The Supremacy of Method" (in HPW)

- 24 John Dewey, "The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism" (in Stuhr)
- 26 No class; DRIVE SAFELY OR ELSE!!!
- 27-30 Thanksgiving break

December

- 1 John Dewey, "The Pattern of Inquiry" (in Stuhr)
- 3 George Herbert Mead, TBA
- 5 George Herbert Mead, TBA

- 8 Summing up day: Minds and Knowledge
- 10 Flex day
- 12 Last day of classes: flex day

- ?? Scheduled final time: our last day of class
- 17 Papers due 5 p.m. in my office

Critical Incident Questionnaire
(Adapted from Stephen Brookfield)

Take 5 minutes to respond to the questions below about this week's sessions of School/Society. ***Don't put your name on the form.*** What you write will help me to make the class more responsive to your interests and your learning styles. I'll share at least some of the info with the whole class.

Part A

At what moment in the week's classes did you feel most engaged with what was happening?

At what moment in the week's classes did you feel most distanced from what was happening?

What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class did you find most helpful or positive?

What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class did you find most puzzling or confusing?

What about the week's classes surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reaction to what went on, or something that someone did, or, or, or....)

Part B

Describe, as explicitly as possible, your preparations for class on a routine day, including an estimate of how much time each activity takes

What is one thing you could do to make yourself better prepared for class? What prevents you from doing this thing?

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