

William James

Philosophy 620 · Spring 2010

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FURLOUGH STATEMENT

As you probably know, the State of California has dramatically and suddenly cut funding for all 23 of the California State Universities, including the Long Beach campus. In response, and out of severe necessity, CSU has raised student rates and cut classes, admissions, and faculty positions. In addition, the remaining faculty has voted to accept salary reductions in the form of 18 furlough days for this academic year in hopes of avoiding further cuts. A *furlough* is an unpaid leave of absence from work. This means that faculty must stay home on about 10% of usual work days this academic year. On three specific dates this semester, all faculty and staff will furlough together, so the entire campus will be shut down (except for essential services). In addition, all faculty must choose another six days to be on furlough. Here are my designated furlough dates this semester (these will vary from instructor to instructor), along with the campus-wide closure dates (which will not vary):

Jan 27 *faculty furlough day*
Feb 19 *faculty furlough day*
Feb 24 *faculty furlough day*
Mar 2 *faculty furlough day*
Mar 26 *campus closure*
Apr 21 *campus closure*
Apr 29 *faculty furlough day*
May 6 *campus closure*
May 13 *faculty furlough day*

Please note: I am *not* permitted to be available for teaching, advising, email, office hours, or any other work duties on these dates.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an in-depth investigation of William James's empirical psychology and philosophy. Although many now remember James as the man who established the philosophical movement of *pragmatism*, he first achieved intellectual fame as a pioneer of empirical psychology. In fact, we will find that his empirical research informed his philosophy in far-reaching ways. So during the first half of the

semester we will try to understand James's work in psychology—both the details of his most important theories as well as the intellectual background against which those theories are set. During the second half of the semester we will explore the philosophical implications of James's psychology. Our main focus will be James's twin doctrines of pragmatism and radical empiricism. But we will also look at some figures from early analytic philosophy (like Bertrand Russell) who reacted to James in both positive and negative ways.

COURSE GOALS

Upon completion of this course, diligent students should find that they

- can demonstrate a detailed comprehension of William James's overall projects in psychology and philosophy;
- can show an improved ability to comprehend and critically analyze philosophical texts;
- can show an improved ability to write essays in the history of philosophy.

REQUIRED TEXT

1. James, William. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. New York: Dover, 1912/2003. ISBN: 0486430944
2. James, William. *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1907/1978. ISBN: 0674697375.
3. James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*, Volumes I and 2. New York: Dover, 1890/1950. ISBN: 0486203816 and 0486203824.

NOTE: you must bring each week's reading with you to class.

GRADING

Grades will be based on 1 paper abstract (10%) + 1 short paper (25%) + 1 longer paper (35%) + your top 8 think pieces (20%) + class participation (10%) + plagiarism quiz (0%).

TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments must be turned in digitally, on Beachboard. Beachboard will send all your writing assignments to Turnitin.com to help prevent plagiarism. More on plagiarism in the "Policies" section, below.

Essays and Abstract

One goal of this class is that by the end of the semester, you'll have produced a polished piece of writing about William James. The abstract and short essay assignments are designed to walk you towards that goal in short steps. Your abstract should offer a detailed outline of the final paper you'd like to write; and the short paper should offer a first stab, so to speak, at developing your ideas in essay form.

You may revise your abstract twice during the semester, if you wish—once after you receive my first round of comments, and once again after you receive my comments on your short paper. I will only count the highest grade you score on these abstract rewrites. The papers, though, cannot be rewritten.

Now, what kind of essay should you aim to write?

This is a class in the history of philosophy. On one hand, essays in the history of philosophy have to be good *history*. Historical scholarship has a serious empirical component; we are trying to understand, on the basis of their literary remains, the intellectual intentions of real people who lived a long time ago.

But on the other hand, essays in the history of philosophy have to be good *philosophy*. It is not enough simply to say true things about the dead people we're studying. The true things we're trying to say must also contain some original philosophical analysis of your own. We don't just want to know what William James *said*—we want to know how his arguments really work, whether those arguments actually succeed, and what kinds of objections the arguments might be subject to.

Striking an appropriate balance between these two concerns—historical accuracy and philosophical interest—can be a delicate matter. So one goal of this class is to help you cultivate your skills at the two-pronged task of writing the history of philosophy.

Think Pieces

Your think pieces should be about two paragraphs long. They should weigh in at 1 double-spaced page. In no case should your think piece approach 2 pages.

There are no set prompts for these writing assignments. In each think piece, develop one critical idea of your own about the week's reading assignment. If you find something in the week's reading puzzling, you may explain what, exactly, you find puzzling; if you find some argument in the reading underdeveloped, or open to some objection, you may choose to try to fill in the gaps in that argument; and so on.

Avoid writing a general reaction to the reading. Instead, write about some *particular passage* you find interesting or problematic. Be sure to make clear which passage, exactly, you are writing about.

Please **submit your think pieces on Beachboard by 1:45 PM on the day of class**. I will not accept late think pieces for any reason. This is because you are only

required to write 8 of these over the course of the semester, so you may miss a week or two with no negative impact on your grade.

I will not comment on these assignments at length; I will simply give them a check, check minus, or check plus grade.

Participation

This class is designed as a seminar, which means we will be spending most of our time discussing the readings together. I will ask each of you to lead class discussions during two classes this semester. The participation portion of your grade will reflect the thoughtfulness with which you lead these discussions.

On the day you are to lead class, please be prepared to speak for about five minutes summarizing the main points from the week's reading. Also, come prepared with some points you'd like the group to discuss. The best way to do this is to pick a few passages you think are especially interesting. You might want to make some provocative claim about what you think James is up to in one or more of those passages. Or you might want to point out some phrase or sentence that is difficult to interpret. Or you might want to try to reconstruct some argument you find in the text, and see if the rest of class reads the text the way you read it. Please be ready with enough material to keep the discussion moving for about an hour.

Plagiarism Quiz

I will hand out a mandatory plagiarism quiz early in the semester. You can take the online quiz as many times as you'd like—the website will correct your answers immediately. **You must hand in a signed answer sheet with 100% correct answers in order to pass this class.** The quiz will be due before the third class meeting.

POLICIES

Plagiarism

My penalty for any and all plagiarism is an F for the final course grade. I give no second chances. I will not permit you to rewrite the paper or assignment. I will simply fail you.

To be sure that everybody knows what constitutes plagiarism, you are required to complete a plagiarism quiz before the first written paper is due. See above for details.

Why do I care so much about plagiarism? The grades you have when you graduate, the honors or distinctions that may go along with those grades, and the letters you get from your professors on the basis of your performance in their courses, are all you will have to show prospective employers or graduate schools that

you are qualified to be employed or admitted. Plagiarism is a way of cheating in this process, pure and simple.

The founding idea of the modern university system is precisely that opportunity should be correlated with performance. In fact, the idea that social opportunities like jobs and education should be commensurate with actual performance, not with one's family or fraternity connections, money, or whatever, is also among the founding ideals of our entire American democracy. Since plagiarism is an affront to this idea of a meritocracy, and thus to founding ideals of our nation, I simply will not tolerate it.

Unfortunately the rise of the internet has ushered in a new era of plagiarism. Perhaps plagiarism seems less serious these days because it is so easy to cut, paste, and paraphrase. Whatever its source, the new wave of plagiarism has forced many professors to institute no-tolerance policies, and I am certainly part of that trend. So please—do not get mixed up in a plagiarism case. You will fail the course with no second chance.

Beachboard

This class requires the use of Beachboard. I will distribute the syllabus and many assignments simply by posting them online. I will also post your grades to Beachboard, and send the occasional group email to all enrolled students.

Withdrawal

I follow the University's current withdrawal policy, which can be found at: http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/catalog/2009-2010/academic_information/withdrawal_policy.html

How to Submit Assignments in Case of an Excused Absence

With the exception of the plagiarism quiz, all written assignments are to be submitted digitally, outside of class. So even in the event of an excused absence, you should still be able to submit your written work with everybody else. In the case of an excused absence in the class where the plagiarism quiz is due, you may submit your answers to me by email, provided you later hand in a signed hard copy.

Disability

I am more than happy to accommodate any special requirements you may have in connection with a University-documented disability. Please notify me in advance if you need any such accommodation. I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible.

EMAIL POLICY

Because of the state budget cuts, I currently have no phone in my office. So if you need to contact me, please use email. I try to respond to student email within **I work day** (M-Sa) of receiving a message. If you do not hear back from me within that period, feel free to give me a gentle e-nudge. Please do use your university email account for all communication.

I'll probably suggest that we meet during office hours if you raise a substantive question over email. If you email and ask for information that is readily available online, please do not be offended if I respond with a very brief message. That helps free me up to deal with more pressing issues related to the class.

Finally, please do not send me email attachments unless we have arranged something in advance.

I am a new faculty member here, so this course is a work in progress. As such, I reserve the right to change any regulations during the semester, though I will try to reach a consensus with the class should the need arise to make any significant alterations.