

Philosophy 4I6/5I6: Pragmatism

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Pragmatism is a *philosophical doctrine* associated with a particular group of *historical figures*. As a doctrine, Pragmatism comprises a theory of meaning and a theory of truth. Pragmatists hold that the meaning of a hypothesis amounts to the practical consequences one would expect should the hypothesis turn out to be true. And Pragmatists believe that *true* hypotheses are those that have consequences that are (all things considered) *favorable*.

As a historical matter, we usually think of Pragmatism as America's chief contribution to philosophic thought. Pragmatism's influence is supposed to have waned after about World War II, though, when European Analytic Philosophers—fleeing Hitler—took refuge here. Analytic philosophers are supposed to have dealt devastating blows to the core doctrines mentioned above, and America's homegrown movement is supposed to have gone into intellectual hibernation.

This course seeks to provide students with a more nuanced grasp of Pragmatist philosophy by placing that philosophy in its actual historical context. We will emphasize an important continuity between Pragmatists and early Analytic Philosophers: both groups saw *science* as an antidote to traditional philosophy's (in their view) excessive reliance on speculative, armchair theorizing. But while Analytic Philosophers on the Continent tried to link philosophy with the exact sciences (especially physics and mathematics), Pragmatists more often emphasized the importance of the human sciences—particularly evolutionary biology and empirical psychology.

As such, this course introduces students to classic figures in American Pragmatism. We will set those figures against the background of 19th century revolutions in human sciences through which they lived. Our focus will be on key philosophers in this tradition like C. S. Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, and G. H. Mead. But we will also read works by 19th century scientists like Darwin, Francis Galton, Ernst Mach, and Herbert Spencer, as well as some critics of Pragmatism like G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and A. O. Lovejoy.