

Philosophy 290: Pragmatism

Spring 2021

Shamik Dasgupta

shamikd@berkeley.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 12-2pm

Seminars: Thursdays 2-4pm on Zoom.

- <https://berkeley.zoom.us/j/91481264162?pwd=RWVmL0QyVCtDajBqRUpmLzJYd0ZOQT09>
- Meeting ID: 914 8126 4162, Passcode: 352219

Course overview:

This seminar will develop a pragmatist approach to a number of topics including truth, meaning, justification, moral progress, the aim of science, and metaphysics. The first half of the seminar will lay the foundations. We'll discuss the idea of "normative joints"—that is, objectively distinguished standards for the evaluation of belief and action—and then examine an argument that there are no normative joints. Readings for this part of the seminar will be drawn largely from metaphysics and metaethics. The second half of the seminar will then flesh out consequences of the no-joint view and argue that it leads to pragmatist accounts of the topics listed above. The seminar is not primarily exegetical but we will discuss how the pragmatist views developed here relate to the writings of pragmatists such as Charles Peirce, Richard Rorty, Cheryl Misak, and others. Given the broad range of topics discussed in this seminar, I will try not to presuppose much familiarity with any of them.

Assessment: 6000-8000 word paper on a topic related to the theme of the class OR 3000-4000 word paper + class presentation during the last three weeks. Papers are due May 14th. You may work at your own pace but here is a suggested timeline:

- By March 19th: meet with me to discuss preliminary ideas
- By April 9th: submit a paper plan for comments
- By April 30th: submit a first draft for comments

Readings:

- All readings will be available through the bCourses site.
- Readings marked ** are optional.
- Each week, please post a question/comment on the non-optional readings in bCourses by Wednesday evening.

Syllabus (subject to change)

Jan 21st
Seminar 1

Descriptive joints

- Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* chapter 1
- Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* chapter 4 section 5

Jan 28th
Seminar 2

Alethic joints

- Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals”, pp. 370-377
- Dasgupta, “Undoing the Truth Fetish”, pp. 1-12

Feb 4th
Seminar 3

Practical joints

- Eklund, *Choosing normative concepts*, pp. 1-10
- Dasgupta, “The Meta-Ethics of AI”, pp. 1-15
- **Dunaway and McPherson, “Reference Magnetism As A Solution to the Moral Twin Earth Problem”, pp. 657-663
- **Sepielli, “Quietism and Counter-Normativity”

Feb 11th
Seminar 4

Realism and anti-realism about joints

- Street, “Constructivism about Reasons”, pp. 207-209 and pp. 220-231
- Enoch, “Agency, Shmagency: Why Normativity Won’t Come from What Is Constitutive of Action”, pp. 169-180

Feb 18th
Seminar 5

The normative question

- Dreier, “Can Reasons Fundamentalism Answer the Normative Question?”

Feb 25th
Seminar 6

Against joints

- Dasgupta, “The Meta-ethics of AI”, pp. 18-23

March 4th

Class cancelled, to be made up on May 6th (see below)

March 11th
Seminar 7

In favor of joints

- Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, Chapter 2, sections 1 and 2
- Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, Chapter 3, section 7
- Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, Chapter 5 section 2

March 18th
Seminar 8

Pragmatism I: Truth and meaning

- Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality* pp. 48-64, 73-78

- Dasgupta, “Undoing the Truth Fetish”, pp. 16-22

March 25th

Spring break

April 1st

Seminar 9

Pragmatism II: Justification

- Misak, *Truth, Politics, and Morality*, pp. 78-101
- Dasgupta, “Undoing the Truth Fetish”, pp. 22-24
- **Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”, pp. 59-66
- **Strawson, “The ‘Justification’ of Induction”
- **Boghossian, “How Are Objective Epistemic Reasons Possible?”, pp. 1-15

April 8th

Seminar 10

Pragmatism III: Moral progress

- Kitcher, *Moral Progress*, chapters 1, 2, and 3 (the whole thing)
- **Misak, *Truth, Politics, Morality*, pp. 102-154

April 15th

Seminar 11

Quietism – with special guest Andrew Sepielli!

- Sepielli, *Significance Without Substance*
 - Chapter 1, "Introduction"
 - Chapter 2, "Raw Materials"
 - Chapter 4, "Objectivist Quietism about Ethics"
 - Chapter 8, "Quietism and Counter-Normativity", pp. 262-276
- Dworkin, “Objectivity and Truth: You’d Better Believe It”, pp. 87-101

April 22th

Seminar 12

Pragmatists I: William James and John Dewey

- James, “Humanism and Truth” (presented by Anhui)
- Dewey, “Propositions, Warranted Assertibility, and Truth” (presented by Hannah)

April 29nd

Seminar 13

Pragmatists II: Nelson Goodman

- Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (presented by Milan)
 - pp. 1-21 (chapter 1, sections 1-6)
 - pp. 91-102 (chapter 6, sections 1-4)
 - pp. 109-140 (whole of chapter 7)

May 6th

Seminar 14

Pragmatists III: Richard Rorty

- Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, chapter 8 (presented by Teague)

- Rorty, “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality” (presented by Shamik)