



The University of New Mexico

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Dear Colleague,

Thank you very much for your interest in the NEH Summer Seminar on “Pragmatism: A Living Tradition,” to take place from June 17th to July 20th, 2007 at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. I am excited by the opportunity to assemble a lively and collegial group of scholars and teachers this summer, for discussions of the surprisingly resilient philosophical tradition known as pragmatism. We are fortunate to have as visiting faculty Cheryl Misak, Maria Baghramian, William Blattner, and Charles Guignon, whose work shows, in a variety of ways, that pragmatism is very much a living tradition.

The Seminar will meet in the Hubert Alexander Memorial Library in the Philosophy Department at the University of New Mexico. We have secured affordable housing in apartments on the UNM campus, adjacent to an area of restaurants and shops. Albuquerque offers many recreational and cultural opportunities, including hiking in the nearby mountains, the June Music Festival and Old Town, which dates from the 17th century. The historic city of Santa Fe and the pueblos of Acoma, Santo Domingo, and Jemez are nearby.

In the rest of this letter I’d like to give you as much information about the program and setting as I can. Please don’t hesitate to contact me via e-mail (pragma@unm.edu) or telephone (505-277-2405) with any questions about the seminar that are not covered in what follows.

We look forward to considering your application.

Yours sincerely,

Russell B. Goodman
Director, NEH Pragmatism Seminar
Regents Professor

Intellectual Rationale

In his book *Pragmatism* (1907) William James (1842-1910) writes that pragmatism is “a new name for some old ways of thinking,” and cites philosophers from Aristotle to John Stuart Mill as predecessors. James was not wrong to see these writers as forerunners of pragmatism, but he was too modest in treating “pragmatism” simply as a new name. For it is a genuinely new movement or tradition in philosophy, with its founding members (Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and James himself), its canonical texts to which all later pragmatists refer, and its diverging lines of interpretation and influence. It is a tradition that is very much alive today, not only in the surprising “neopragmatist” revival of the last two decades of the twentieth century, but in more recent responses to and refinements of that work by philosophers in America and abroad. The purpose of this seminar, one hundred years after James published *Pragmatism*, is to examine pragmatism as a living tradition — to assess pragmatism’s original appeal, and to understand why it continues to find powerful proponents (and powerful critics) today.

I have been publishing on American philosophy for the past 15 years, both on its “transcendentalist” side (Emerson & Thoreau) and on its pragmatist side. My *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge, 1990) traces the romantic roots of James’s and Dewey’s philosophies back through Emerson to English romanticism; and in *Wittgenstein and William James* (Cambridge, 2005) I consider the complex relationship between a founder of pragmatism and a great analytic philosopher. I directed an institute and a seminar for the NEH in 2003 and 2005, both on Ralph Waldo Emerson, and in proposing this seminar to the NEH I wanted to build both on my experience with these programs and on recent work I have done in editing *Pragmatism: Critical Concepts in Philosophy* (four volumes, Routledge, 2005). These new pragmatism volumes, as well as my earlier *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader* (Routledge, 1995), contain substantial criticisms of pragmatism, early and late, as well as statements by pragmatism’s proponents and defenders. This is the approach I wish to take in the seminar: a sympathetic but critical look at the tradition.

Each of the seminar’s five weeks will have a distinct focus: the developing pragmatism of William James; Peirce and Cheryl Misak’s “new pragmatism”; pragmatic pluralism; Wittgenstein, Heidegger and pragmatism; and the philosophy of Richard Rorty. We are fortunate to have as visitors some of the world’s foremost proponents and students of pragmatism: Cheryl Misak, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto, a leading defender of Peirce’s theory of truth; Maria Baghramian, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at University College, Dublin, a writer on pluralism, relativism, and the philosophy of Hilary Putnam; William Blattner, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University, a scholar of Heidegger who has been writing about Heidegger’s relation to John Dewey; and Charles Guignon of the University of South Florida, author of *On Being Authentic* (Routledge, 2004) and co-editor of *Richard Rorty* (Cambridge, 2003).

The seminar will be collaborative and will take some of its specific directions from the participants, who will be drawn from departments of philosophy and related disciplines.

Schedule

We will meet three mornings a week, followed by lunch on our own or in small groups. Other sessions, to discuss participant papers or projects, or for more specialized discussions, will be arranged with the group. The project director will conduct the sessions in the first week and the first session of subsequent weeks, with the seminar’s visitors leading two sessions each in weeks two through five. There will be ample time for research, and participants will be able to take advantage of the many recreational and cultural opportunities offered by Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Week 1 (June 17-22) William James’s Pragmatism

In the first week we will consider the origins of pragmatism in the philosophy of William

James. James was a medical doctor, painter, psychologist and philosopher before he officially became a pragmatist, and in our first session on Monday morning we will consider “Some Remarks on Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence” (1878), where James writes:

the knower is not simply a mirror floating with no foot-hold anywhere, and passively reflecting an order that he comes upon The knower is an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on one side, while on the other he registers the truth which he helps to create.

This extraordinary statement contains several of the pragmatist themes we will be examining in the seminar: the role of action in constituting the order that we find in nature, the creation as well as the registration of truth, the rejection of the mirror as the proper model of the human knower (a criticism that appears a hundred years later in Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)). We shall also consider some early statements of James’s pluralism—in his letters, his essay “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” and in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, where he writes that the universe is “a more many-sided affair than any sect, even the scientific sect, allows for.”

In our second session on Tuesday we will look at two chapters from James’s *Pragmatism*. “What Pragmatism Means” illustrates the variety of things that pragmatism is said to be, and “Pragmatism and Humanism” sets out James’s humanistic epistemology, according to which “the trail of the human serpent is over everything.” This is a phrase becomes a mantra in Hilary Putnam’s *The Many Faces of Realism* (1987).

In our third session, we consider some criticisms and defenses of James’s pragmatism by Bertrand Russell, J. B. Pratt, William James, and Hilary Putnam. Russell respected James as a philosopher but he objected to pragmatism, which he saw as replacing a conception of objective truth with a Nietzschean appeal to force. Pratt accuses James of confusing a psychological with a relational view of truth. James’s reply in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909) affirms his belief in truth as a relation between an idea and a “reality outside of the idea,” but argues that Pratt, and by implication Russell and other critics, are fixated on “abstract trueness,” and ignore “concrete” forms of “verifiability.” Finally we will consider the attempt of a major neopragmatist, Hilary Putnam, to sort out what is right and what is wrong in James’s theory of truth.

I will meet with all participants in the first week to discuss their projects and obtain some early feedback on our discussions. On Saturday I will lead an expedition to the nearby Sandia Mountains, where we will hike two and a half miles to the 9500-foot high ridgeline for lunch and the view out over the New Mexico mesa-land.

Readings: William James, “On Spencer’s Definition of Mind as Correspondence,” “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” selections from *Pragmatism*, *The Letters of William James*, and *The Principles of Psychology*, “Professor Pratt on Truth”; Bertrand Russell, “Pragmatism”; J. B. Pratt, “The Pragmatic View of the Truth Relation;” Hilary Putnam, “James’s Theory of Truth,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*.

Week 2 (June 25-29) Peirce and Misak’s “New Pragmatism”

If James represents a humanist and pluralist line in pragmatism, Charles Peirce represents a scientifically and objectively oriented line that runs through the work of such contemporary pragmatists as Susan Haack and Cheryl Misak. Peirce wrote that truth is the idea “fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate,” a formulation that says both that truth is constructed by the community of investigators, and that it is a response to “an external permanency.” In the first session of the week we will consider Peirce’s classic papers, “The Fixation of Belief (1877),” “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” (1878), and “Pragmatism” (1905), and then the Peircean defense of science by the contemporary pragmatist Susan Haack. In the second and third sessions of the week, we will be joined by Cheryl Misak of the University of Toronto, author of *Truth and the End of Inquiry*

(Oxford, 2004), *Truth, Politics, Morality: A Pragmatist Account of Deliberation* (Routledge, 2000) and the forthcoming collection, *The New Pragmatism* (Oxford). We will discuss some of the papers from her collection, by Arthur Fine, Huw Price, Jeffrey Stout and Ian Hacking, who stake out pragmatist positions while criticizing Richard Rorty for denigrating the concept of truth.

Readings: Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief" and "How to Make Our Ideas Clear"; Susan Haack, "'We Pragmatists...': Peirce and Rorty in Conversation" and "As for that Phrase, 'studying in a literary spirit' ...," both in *Confessions of a Passionate Moderate*; Cheryl Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry* (selections); Arthur Fine, "Relativism, Pragmatism, and the Practice of Science"; Jeffrey Stout, "On Our Interest in Getting Things Right: Pragmatism without Narcissism"; Huw Price, "Truth as Convenient Fiction"; Ian Hacking, "On Not Being a Pragmatist: Eight Reasons and a Cause."

Week 3 (July 2-6) Pragmatic Pluralism

Although pragmatists mostly reject relativism, they are often accused of it, not least because of their avowed "pluralism," a position that originates in James's *A Pluralistic Universe*, *Varieties of Religious Experience* and *Pragmatism*. Pluralism runs through the work of contemporary neopragmatism, for example in Nelson Goodman's "The Way the World Is" (1960), where he states that "the world is many ways." Goodman does not embrace an indiscriminate relativism: there are many ways the world *is not*. But he denies that there is just *one* way (for example that of some "completed" science) that the world *is*.

We will begin the week by discussing Goodman's paper, a section of Putnam's *The Many Faces of Realism*, and Isaiah Berlin's "Herder and the Enlightenment." Berlin contrasts the Enlightenment view that all genuine questions have one true answer and that these answers form a unified system of "timeless truths" with a contrary pluralistic tradition in Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried von Herder, according to which there is a multiplicity of "equally valid" but incompatible ideals. On Thursday and Friday, Maria Baghramian, of University College, Dublin, will join us. She is the author of *Relativism* (Routledge, 2004) and *Hilary Putnam: Language, Mind and the World*, (Blackwell, 2007), and the editor of *Pluralism: The Philosophy and Politics of Diversity* (Routledge, 2000). On Thursday, she will lead us in considering some of the main types of pluralism: conceptual, epistemological, and normative. On Friday, we will focus on the tensions between pluralistic views of knowledge, values, and conceptual frameworks, and the perceived need for a univocal account of truth, paying particular attention to John McDowell's critique of Richard Rorty.

Readings: selections from Maria Baghramian and Attracta Ingram, eds., *Pluralism: The Philosophy and Politics of Diversity*; Isaiah Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *Vico and Herder*, and "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*; William James, selections from *A Pluralistic Universe*, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and *Pragmatism*; John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," in Robert Brandom, ed., *Rorty and His Critics*.

Week 4 (July 9-13) Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Pragmatism

The seminar's fourth week is devoted to pragmatism's relation to other philosophical traditions. We begin with James's humanistic epistemology, and its resemblance to the language-based epistemology of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*—where Wittgenstein states that he is "saying something that sounds like pragmatism," but also that he is being "thwarted by a kind of *weltanschauung*." We will consider ways in which the similarities and differences between Wittgenstein and James help us to understand the uses made of both writers by Rorty and Putnam. William Blattner of Georgetown University, author of *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge, 1999) and a forthcoming study of Dewey and Heidegger, will join the seminar to discuss the proximity of Heidegger's phenomenology of engaged action in the late 1920's to Dewey's descriptions of action in "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology" (1896) and "Does Reality Possess Practical Character?" (1908). Blattner will ask the seminar to consider the degree to which Heidegger and Dewey disagree

about the ontology of engaged action, even as they agree about its phenomenology,

Readings: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*; Russell B. Goodman, *Wittgenstein and William James*, Chapter 1; Stanley Cavell, "What's the Use of Calling Emerson a Pragmatist?"; Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (selections); John Dewey, "The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology," "Does Reality Possess Practical Character?", *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (selections); Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*; William Blattner, "The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth: Dewey and Heidegger."

Week 5 (July 16-20) Richard Rorty's Pragmatism

Rorty is the lightning rod of contemporary pragmatism: both its most energetic proponent and its most controversial figure. His influence will have been felt in previous weeks of the seminar: Cheryl Misak and Maria Baghramian confront Rorty's work as they seek to develop less relativistic versions of pragmatism than Rorty appears to set out, and William Blattner takes up a suggestion of Rorty's in studying the affinities between Dewey and Heidegger. Our visitor on Wednesday and Thursday will be Charles Guignon of the University of South Florida, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (2nd ed. 2006), and co-editor of *Richard Rorty* (Cambridge, 2003). He will consider Rorty's questioning of traditional epistemology and metaphysics in his first session, and Rorty's recommendation that we replace truth with "social hope" in his second session, and he will lead us in discussing papers by Michael Williams, Charles Taylor, Richard Bernstein and Jean Bethke Elshtain. Rorty's philosophy is notable for its rich mix of "continental," romantic, and analytic approaches, for example in utilizing Harold Bloom's concept of the "strong poet" as a model for scientific advance, Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of truth as "a mobile army of metaphors," and Ludwig Wittgenstein's writings about linguistic meaning in support of his claims about "the contingency of language." In our final session on Friday we will consider some connections between what Shelley and Emerson say about the imagination and Nietzsche's and Rorty's accounts of truth, and we will take some time for review and assessment. On Friday evening I will host a farewell dinner at my home.

Readings: selections from Guignon, ed., *Richard Rorty*; selections from Percy Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*; Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism, in Morris Dickstein, ed. *The Revival of Pragmatism*; John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (selections); Russell Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition*, Chapter 3; Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles" and "The Poet."

Institutional Context

The seminar will take place in the Philosophy Department Library at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque. UNM is a major research university, with a student population of 25,000, a medical and law school, and graduate programs in the arts and sciences, engineering, and education. Zimmerman Library has extensive collections in philosophy and related disciplines, and seminar participants will have the status of visiting scholars for purposes of borrowing books and using the library's research resources, including computers. The library's summer hours are 8 a. m. till 6 p. m. Monday through Friday, and on Saturdays from 10 a. m. till 6 p. m. The library is closed on Sunday.

The University of New Mexico was founded in 1889 and is constructed in a unique southwestern style. The campus lies a mile above sea level on historic Route 66, near theatres, clubs, and restaurants, and not far from downtown Albuquerque, museums, art galleries, shops and larger malls. Visitors to Albuquerque can enjoy the Rio Grande Zoo, Botanical Gardens, Aquarium, Sandia Peak Tramway, and hiking trails in the nearby Sandia Mountains, which rise to over 10,000 feet. New Mexico is home to Acoma Pueblo, Chaco Canyon and Bandelier National Monuments, Taos, Abiquiu, and the historic city of Santa Fe, which is 60 miles north of Albuquerque at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The seminar overlaps with the Santa Fe Opera's productions of *La Bohème*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Daphne*.

Housing

Participants will be housed in air-conditioned four-bedroom apartments in Redondo Village on the UNM campus. Each apartment has four private bedrooms, a bathroom, shower, and kitchen equipped with refrigerator, stove, sink, and microwave. Towels and bed linen are supplied, but no dishes or cooking equipment. Local phone calls are free and there are ethernet ports and wireless internet in each room. Rooms will cost \$28 per night. Meals are available in the dormitory cafeteria, at the UNM student union, and at nearby restaurants. Parking is available for \$18.90 per week. There is no smoking in UNM housing. We will assist those who would rather live off campus in finding alternative housing. UNM has a limited number of handicapped accessible housing units.

Financial Support and Stipend Distribution

The NEH provides participants with a stipend of \$3600.00 This stipend is meant to help cover the costs of travel, housing, and meals. (Participants are encouraged to apply for travel funds from their home institutions.) Those who take advantage of the housing provided by UNM will (with written permission) have the sum of \$952 deducted and submitted to the University of New Mexico on their behalf. One-half of the remaining stipend will be distributed to participants at the first meeting. The second half will be distributed at the beginning of the third week. Participants will need to make their own travel arrangements.

Application Procedures

A copy of the application is on our website and available as a pdf file. Click on the following link for a copy of the application: http://www.unm.edu/~pragma/NEH_Application.pdf.

A complete application includes an on-line cover sheet (which you should then print out), and 3 copies of each of the following, which should be sent to the address below: the cover sheet, a detailed curriculum vita, an application essay, and two letters of reference. (Please ask each of your referees to sign their name across the back of the sealed envelope containing their letter.)

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the essay, which should include any personal and academic information that is relevant, reasons for applying to this particular seminar; your interest, both intellectual and personal, in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation, including your individual project; and the relation of the study to your teaching. Your completed application should be postmarked no later than 1 March, 2007 and addressed to Professor Russell B. Goodman, Department of Philosophy, MSC 03 2140, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.