

John Dewey and American Philosophy

HUHI 6314: Thought, Culture, and Society in the United States

Syllabus (DRAFT)

Course Information

Fall 2010 M 12:30–3:15pm

Contact Information

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Office Hours Wednesday 1:30-3:30pm

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, etc.

This course will be tailored to the interests of the students, and is therefore suitable for anyone interested in philosophical reflections on science, the arts, education, mind and psychology, language, communication, metaphysics, ethics and values, politics and democracy, logic, etc. A background in the history of philosophy, especially classical American philosophy, as well as in progressive-era American history, would be valuable but is not prerequisite. As a masters-level course in the humanities, it presupposes basic skills of reading and analyzing difficult texts, and writing at an appropriate academic level.

Course Description

This will be a research intensive course where students are expected to make significant contributions to the content of the seminar and to produce a well-polished work of scholarship by the conclusion of the course, with hopes that that product would make a contribution to some contribution to your further graduate work (e.g., Master's portfolio, dissertation chapter, publication, etc.) The content of the course will be focused on the work of John Dewey, but we will also put a major emphasis on *method* (philosophical, humanistic, and scientific).

Dewey was America's preeminent philosopher, with a career spanning seven decades, and a life extending from before the Civil War to after World War II. Dewey wrote in nearly every area of philosophy, from ethics and political

philosophy to logic, philosophy of science, and metaphysics, as well as making major contributions to scientific psychology, to education theory, and to practical politics. Throughout, Dewey relied on a particular vision of the nature of inquiry in general and philosophy in particular.

This course will be highly tailored to the students in the course. After spending some time looking at Dewey's influences and early work, we will turn to an examination of his writings on the nature of philosophy and his general theory of the methods of inquiry. Then we will turn to more specific areas of research, depending upon the interests of the seminar participants. In each case, part of our interest will lie on investigating how Dewey applied his methodological and metaphilosophical ideas to the specific area in question.

Student Learning Objectives

- Students will demonstrate a significant depth of understanding of John Dewey's methodological and metaphilosophical views.
- Students will attain a broad familiarity with Dewey's work.
- Students will demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of some area of Dewey's work and the secondary literature in that area.
- Students will develop their academic presentation skills.
- Students will develop their skills of critical analysis and argumentation.
- Students will produce polished piece of scholarship.

Required Texts

Abbreviations in [brackets] are used to give page numbers for readings in the course schedule below.

- *The Essential Dewey*, volumes 1 & 2, ed. Hickman & Alexander [ED1/2]
- *Reading Dewey*, ed. Hickman [RD]
- Martin, *The Education of John Dewey* [EJD]
- Hildebrand, *Dewey: A Beginner's Guide* (NEW) [DBG]

Recommended Texts

A smattering of recommended texts have been ordered at the bookstore(s). The Library also provides online access to the *Collected Works of John Dewey* as well as the three volumes of his correspondence via their PastMasters database.

Selections from the *Collected Works* are cited as *Early Works* [EW], *Middle Works* [MW], and *Later Works* [LW].

An extensive bibliography of writings by and about Dewey, as well as links to various online resources, can be found at <http://dewey.pragmatism.org/>.

Course Schedule

Note: *The Education of John Dewey* by Jay Martin is a delightful and extensive biography. While specific sections will not be assigned for individual class sessions beyond the first, I strongly recommend that you make your way through the book during the semester. It will provide a context of Dewey's life and thought that will be helpful for your paper and for class discussion.

Schedule of Classes

1. (8/23) - Introduction; Administrivia; Dewey in Historical Context
 - **Read:** Introductions, [ED1: ix—xiii], [ED2: ix—xii], [DBG: 1—7], [RD: ix—xxi], Dewey's Early Life, &c, [EJD: 1—111, 124—122, 258—263], "The Metaphysical Assumptions of Materialism" (1882) [EW1: 3—8]
2. (8/30) - Dewey on His Historical Context
 - **Read:** "The Development of American Pragmatism" (1925) [ED1: 3—13], "From Absolutism to Experimentalism" (1930) [ED1: 14—21], "Peirce's Theory of Quality" (1935) [ED2: 371—376], "What Pragmatism Means by 'Practical'" (1907) [ED2: 377—386]
 - **Do:** settle on Presentation Schedule & Topics
3. (9/6) *Labor Day* - no class
4. (9/13) - Dewey on the Nature of Philosophy
 - **Read:** "Experience" [DBG: Ch 1], "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy" (1909) [ED1: 39—45], "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (1917) [ED1: 46—70], "Existence, Value, and Criticism" (1925) [ED1: 84—101], "Philosophy's Search for the Immutable" (1929) [ED1: 102—112]
 - **Do:** Library tutorial.
5. (9/20) - Dewey on the Nature of Inquiry
 - **Read:** "Analysis of Reflective Thinking" (1933) [ED2: 137—144], "The Place of Judgment in Reflective Activity" (1933) [ED2: 145—150], "The Pattern of Inquiry" (1938) [ED2: 169—179], "Inquiry" [DBG: Ch 2], "Dewey's Theory of Inquiry," [RD: Ch 9]
- 6–10. Schedule to be determined according to presenters' interests
6. (9/27) **Due:** Term Paper Prospectus
10. (10/25) **Due:** Term Paper Draft (8+ pg)
11. (11/1) Writing Workshop
- 12–16. Schedule to be determined according to presenters' interests

Assignments

1. Participation in class discussions, workshops, etc.
2. In-class presentation
3. Term paper

Evaluation Standards

The following is a clarification for the purposes of this course of UTD's official policy with respect to grading standards.

- An **A** grade indicates *excellent* work. **A** work has something to say and says it well. It displays a subtle and nuanced understanding of the texts, develops arguments clearly and effectively, and reflects insightfully on the course material. It often rises above other work in terms of creativity and sophistication, or it may add something valuable to the discussion that goes beyond merely fulfilling the letter of the requirements. Only few, minor mistakes are present.
- A **B** grade indicates *good* work, but with room for improvement. Such work displays a clear understanding of the text, develops arguments consistently with a clear aim, and is thoughtful and careful. The presence of serious errors must not impair the clarity of an argument or the overall understanding of a text. **B** work is in many ways successful, but lacks the sophistication or originality of **A** work.
- A **C** grade indicates *marginal* work. It shows a basically adequate understanding of the key parts of the text. Arguments aim at a central claim, though they may rely on unsupported or insufficiently developed ideas. More serious errors may be present, so long as the central claims and basic understandings are not undermined.
- Work which deserves a grade less than **C** is considered *poor* and will display some of the following problems: it fails to show adequate understanding of the text; it fails to understand the assignment; it fails to articulate a coherent or adequate argument; it fails to reflect on the content of the course; it displays such pervasive grammatical errors as to be highly obscure in meaning.

+/- grades *will* be assigned, indicating work that goes a bit beyond or falls only somewhat short of the standards stated above.

Course & Instructor Policies

Late Work / Make-up Exams

No late work or make-up exams will be allowed without consent of the professor *prior* to the due/exam date, except in situations where University policy requires it.

Class Attendance

While reading and writing are crucial parts of the course, the central philosophical activity is live discussion. While class will occasionally involve bits of lecture, this is merely an instrument to a more well-informed discussion and other structured activities. *Attendance is thus considered **mandatory**.* Missed classes will count against your participation grade, and egregious absenteeism will be grounds for an **F** in the course at the professor's discretion. In-class assignments and activities likewise cannot be made up unless the professor agrees to it before the class is missed. Disruptive late arrivals or early departures are poor classroom citizenship and will also negatively impact your participation.

Classroom expectations

You are expected to have read the assignments *before* class, and it would be to your benefit to also read them again after class. You are expected to bring *all* of the texts assigned for each day's class, and have them available to refer to. You are expected to listen respectfully to the professor and your fellow students, and participate in class discussions and activities.

Further standard University policies can be found at <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.