

PHILOSOPHY 3356

American Philosophy: Encounter with the Native Perspective

Taos 2019 Steve Hiltz shiltz@smu.edu

Description:

The course examines how the European colonists' encounters with Native American thought and culture influenced important early American thinkers, and thus established the background for understanding Pragmatism. Moreover, it involves our own encounter with the Native American perspective, both through reading the philosophy of a contemporary Native American PhD and a novel/fictionalized memoir of a Native American author, and by way of a field trip to the Taos Pueblo, where we'll learn first hand about aspects of the Pueblo Indian culture. On a second field trip we will visit Earth Ships, an ecological habitat project embodying the Native view of living with, rather than simply on, the land. We will also watch a video, *Flashing the Sixties: A Tribal Document* set in part in the Taos area. These readings and activities will spur philosophical reflections on important concepts: space, time and history; religiosity and the cosmos; individuality, community and governance; nature and the land; tolerance and respect for both those within and those outside of our social groupings; and our ethical obligations to the environment and our fellow creatures.

The course will satisfy the following curriculum requirements: Depth/Humanities and Fine Arts, Depth/History, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Human Diversity Proficiency, and Informational Literacy Proficiency.

Required Texts:

Viola Cordova, *How it Is*

Irvin Morris, *From the Glittering World: A Navajo Story*

Further Required Readings: (posted on Canvas)

John Dewey, 'The Need for Recovery in Philosophy'; selections from *Individualism Old and New*

William James, 'What Pragmatism Means'; 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth'

Charles Sanders Peirce, 'The Fixation of Belief'; 'How to Make our Ideas Clear'

Scott L. Pratt, selections from *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy*

Steve Hiltz, Notes on the readings, other handouts

Student Learning Objectives:

Depth/Humanities and Fine Arts:

- Students will demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on or apply methods, theories, or principles from philosophy or religious studies via a focus on a specific area or set of issues.
 - In particular, students will learn to analyze and articulate the background commitments and basic theses of the American Pragmatists, and to appreciate the relevance of Native culture to philosophical issues concerning religion, history, social organization and the environment.

Depth/History, Social and Behavioral Sciences:

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of specific disciplinary or professional subject matter(s) by applying research outcomes or theory about how individuals, institutions, and/or cultures shape economic, political and social experiences.
 - In particular, students will critically assess claims about likely Native influences on the thinking of early American colonists and the later Pragmatists; and they will learn how the tribal and personal histories of Native Americans, in their interaction with a dominating and often hostile culture, affect the socio-economic lives and personal experiences of those individuals.

Human Diversity Proficiency:

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the historical, cultural, social, or political conditions of identity formation and function in human society, including the ways in which these conditions influence individual or group status, treatment, or accomplishments.
 - In particular, students will be able to demonstrate the ability to differentiate and understand values different from their own, especially those of Native Americans.

Information Literacy Proficiency:

- Students will select and use the appropriate research methods and search tools for needed information.

- Students will evaluate sources for quality of information for a given information need.

Outline of Topics and Readings: (the amount of class time given to these sections will vary)

I. Introduction: elements of the philosophical tradition against which Pragmatism is generally held to react; a sketch of broad commonalities in approach and substance among the Pragmatists; and an overview of the thesis of *Native Pragmatism*.

Readings: Stuhr, 'Classical American Philosophy' (Canvas)

Dewey on Philosophy: 'The Need for Recovery in Philosophy' — recommending a focus on problems arising in time rather than on eternal truths. (Canvas)

Platt, Introduction to *Native Pragmatism* (Canvas)

II. Classical Pragmatism: noteworthy methods, interests, theses and attitudes.

Readings (all on Canvas): Peirce on Inquiry: 'The Fixation of Belief' — on the advantages of experimentalism over tenacity, authority, and disengaged reasoning.

Peirce on Meaning and Truth: 'How to Make our Ideas Clear' — how clear concepts of things involve the practical bearings of our interactions with them; truth as the consensus fated to resulting from interactive inquiry.

James on Pragmatic Method and Pluralism: 'What Pragmatism Means' and 'The Pragmatist Conception of Truth' — on the real value of ideas, truth as good guidance, and the multiplicity of virtuous theories.

II. The Euro-American mind set and the idea of progress.

Reading: selections from Platt, Chapters 1 – 4

Cordova, pp. 1-60

III. The indigenous culture: A view from the inside

Reading: Cordova, pp. 61-130

Morris, 'Into the Glittering World'

Field trip to Taos Pueblo

IV. Frontier as wilderness vs. frontier as site of encounter with an alien culture; philosophical ideas gleaned from the culture encountered.

Reading: selections from Platt, Chapters 5-9

Cordova, pp. 133-153

Morris, 'Child of the Glittering World'

VI. Implications of the Native perspective and Pragmatism for land, culture and community.

Reading: Dewey, selections from *Individualism, Old and New* — society's role in nurturing social individuals. (Canvas)

Cordova, pp. 154-179

Morris, 'Travels in the Glittering World'

Field Trip to Earthship Biotope habitat; Meditation on land and time at the Rio Grande Gorge.

Video: *Flashing the Sixties: A Tribal Document*

VII. Assessment of the argument of *Native Pragmatism*, and windup of *How It Is* and *From the Glittering World*

Reading: Platt, Conclusion

Cordova, pp. 181- 227

Morris, 'From the Glittering World'

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

Grades will be based on the following mix of factors: There will be **4 short quizzes**, primarily T-F or multiple-choice, to ensure that students are keeping up with and properly understanding the assigned readings. The average of these will count for 20% of your grade. There will be **two tests**, each worth 25% of your grade. The format of these tests will be described in advance at an appropriate time. The first will be given about halfway through the term, with the second falling on the last day of class. Finally, you will be required to write an **8-10 page argumentative paper** supporting and defending a thesis of your choice. This assignment requires the use of at least *two outside sources* and an annotated bibliography, and will count for 25% of your grade. (Detailed written guidelines for the paper will be provided later.). The remaining 5% will be determined by **class participation**. Daily class attendance is required.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Violation of SMU's honor code will not be tolerated. Every piece of work you turn in must be entirely your own. The penalty for violating the honor code will be an F for the course.

