

Course Summary for “The Philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce”

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Tuesdays, 12:00–14:00 *C.T.* ONLINE
(eventually perhaps at Ludwigstr. 31, 021)

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1 Course Description

In its modern incarnation, Pragmatism as a philosophical school of thought traces its lineage back to Charles Sanders Peirce. Following after him, the philosophers in the Twentieth Century who explicitly thought of themselves as pragmatists, such as William James, John Dewey, and Hilary Putnam, have been some of the most influential thinkers of their periods, not only in philosophy but with a scope that ramified into virtually every intellectual discipline. Many other major philosophers, such as Russell, Wittgenstein and Carnap, were deeply influenced by the pragmatists. In this course, I will trace this intellectual history starting with Peirce, and thence work my way up to the contemporary era, focusing on the pragmatists’ approaches to the problems of semantic meaning and truth, the epistemology of science, and the debate over realism and anti-realism. We will read Peirce, James, Dewey, Carnap, Quine, Putnam, Howard Stein, Robert Brandom and Huw Price. Although I will make some pretense of giving fair and balanced coverage, the subtext will be that pragmatism offers the most philosophically consistent, satisfying and fruitful ways to reconceive of and make progress on seemingly intractable philosophical questions.

Charles Sanders Peirce, a 19th Century polymath, among many other profound intellectual achievements (including the development of modern predicate logic contemporaneous with and independent of Frege), founded Pragmatism as a philosophical school of thought in its modern incarnation. Peirce, a practicing physicist and mathematician as well as philosopher, applied his philosophical vision across the entire range of philosophical disciplines and problems. In this course, I will survey Peirce's work on semiotic, epistemology, and the philosophy of science. The subtext will be that Pragmatism, in a form deriving from Peirce's original thought, offers the most philosophically consistent, satisfying and fruitful ways to reconceive of and make progress on seemingly intractable philosophical problems.

Previous knowledge of some philosophy of science and philosophy of language would be useful, but is not required.

2 Structure and Evaluation

The class period will consist of lectures by Dr. Curiel, based on the assigned reading, with at least one third of the class time dedicated to open discussion. There will also be opportunities for students to give presentations (20–30 minutes) on topics they are particularly interested in. The schedule of lectures and assigned and suggested readings can be found here:

<http://strangebeautiful.com/lmu/lectures-lmu-peirce.pdf>.

The course is worth 9 ECTS, and 3 SWS. The grade for the course will be determined by a term paper of approximately 6000 words for MA students (not counting bibliography), and of approximately 3000 words for BA students (not counting bibliography), due some time in September 2020, the exact date still to be determined. The paper will be on a subject of the student's choice, though I will provide suggested paper topics. I strongly urge students to consult with me before choosing a topic. I will be happy to read and comment on rough drafts of the final paper, so long as they are given to me at least three weeks before the due date. Please send me the paper by email, with your name and Matrikelnummer clearly given at the beginning. Please do not use a separate title page, as that is only a waste of paper.

For a grade in the range 1,0–1,3, you need to have a clearly articulated question and main claim, both of which have to be presented in the introduction. You have to develop an independent and original argument supporting your main claim; merely reconstructing arguments is not enough. Your argument has to take up more than 50% of the term paper. The argumentative structure of the term paper has to be made explicit (*e.g.*, by an overview in the introduction, by guiding the reader in each section, and so on). You have to anticipate and discuss possible objections to your own arguments. You must show that you are able to reconstruct arguments from the relevant literature in a concise and accurate way. You must show that you are familiar with the relevant literature, so you should refer to and at least briefly discuss at least 3 publications that are not part of the required reading in the schedule of lectures and readings, though they may be part of the suggested reading. Finally, the paper should be clearly written. Grades lower in the scale will be given in proportion to how many of these criteria the paper does and does not satisfy. My

expectations are spelled out more thoroughly in my essay “Notes on Learning Philosophy” ([Curiel 2011](#)).

3 Readings

Almost all the primary (required) readings can be found in the following two books:

1. Peirce (1992a), *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*
2. Peirce (1992b), *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893–1913)*

Some of the required and suggested readings are available online at the course’s website, though they may not be listed as such in the bibliography:

<http://strangebeautiful.com/lmu/2020-summer-peirce.html>

Most of the required and suggested readings are available online in the course’s shared Dropbox folder. Contact Dr. Curiel to get access to the folder.

Journal articles that are available through the online LMU library system do not appear in either place. Many of the books are available through LMU’s electronic resources, especially those made available to us during the coronavirus pandemic, such as [ProQuest Ebook Central](#) and [Cambridge University Press](#). As many of these latter won’t be available for long, make sure to try to find all the relevant readings on them sooner rather than later.

4 Schedule

The following is the projected schedule, as planned before the course begins. To see what is actually happening as we go (because of changes of plan, or because I end up spending more time on a topic than originally planned, *etc.*) see the [Schedule of Lectures](#), which always contains the most up-to-date information, and most nearly reflects the facts on the ground at any given time.

LECTURES 1–3 Introduction; Early Views on Cognition (21. Apr – 5. May)

LECTURES 4–6: Semiotic (12. May – 26. May)

LECTURES 7–11: Illustrations of the Logic of Science (2. Jun – 30. Jun)

LECTURES 12–13: Middle Period Metaphysics (7. Jul – 14. Jun)

LECTURES 14–16: Mature Pragmatism (21. Jul – 4. Aug)

FINAL PAPER DUE: 30. Sep 2020

FINAL COURSE GRADES SUBMITTED: 16. Oct 2020

References

- Curiel, E. (2011). Notes on learning philosophy. Unpublished manuscript, latest version available at <http://strangebeautiful.com/papers/curiel-learning-philosophy.pdf>.
- Peirce, C. S. (1992a). *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Volume 1 (1867–1893). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Edited by N. Houser and C. Kloesel.
- Peirce, C. S. (1992b). *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Volume 2 (1893–1913). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. Edited by The Peirce Edition Project.