

## Pragmatism and Semiotics

### Course overview:

One might be confident in saying that the worthiest contribution of American philosophy is the doctrine of *Pragmatism*. Therefore, the focus of this course will be on Pragmatism, and the ideas of its founder, Charles S. Peirce. The American polymath and prolific scientist, considered by many as the greatest American philosopher, Peirce invented pragmatism as a concept in 1870. He is also the founder of American semiotics, which is simply a terminological portmanteau wrap for its philosophy. The European tradition, which goes back to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure flourished in the 1960s, alongside the names of Roland Barthes, Paul Ricoeur, Julia Kristeva. It is a more linguistically oriented branch, which originally bloomed under the banner of semiology. We will have a glimpse at this aspect as well as at some other historically well-formed schools with great achievements such as: M. M. Bakhtin and the Moscow-Tartu School with its famous notion of the “Semiosphere” and its recent exertions to widen its scope with natural sign-phenomena; Italian semiotics with Umberto Eco; some Scandinavian schools have featured too. Most of all, we will try to apply some avant-garde methods of modern semiotics for conceptualizing the world of ideas.

### Course requirements:

The course is a combination of discussion and lecture. Discussion will held, based on primary source readings and written focus questions. Each student is responsible for 5 minutes oral presentation on selected items based on the current topic. Grading will be calculated mostly on the basis of attendance and participation. Mid-term paper and final paper are demanded, they should not exceed 5 pages.

### Learning outcomes:

The students will receive a glimpse at the latest trends in theory and methodology of pragmatism and semiotics. They will develop their own competence on what is substantial in humanities in general. This will increase their abilities to orient themselves in the realm of ideas, thus improving their skills in creating concepts. The later will strengthen their positions in decision making in any area of their interests.

### General structure of the course:

#### Part I. Limits of Thought and Borders of Knowledge

The origin and rise of pragmatism by means of Charles Peirce’s philosophy; why it is worthwhile to study a century-old philosophical system? Peirce’s famous “pragmatic maxim”: its development, distortion and contemporary status. Undertaking reality from the pragmatic perspective. The followers of pragmatism and Peirce’s attitude towards them. Humanism, Instrumentalism and Conceptualism. From pragmatism to pragmaticism. The consequences of the “maxim” for belief, meaning and truth.

## **Part II. Charles Peirce's pragmatism and the shift to his "semiotic". Categories and sign system.**

The three-category thinking of Charles Peirce and his division of signs. What was innovative in Peirce's three categories in comparison to the philosophers before him? Explanation of the categories and relating them to his sign-system. Examples of some basic operations with his 10-fold division of signs. (Based on his first essay from "The Essential Peirce", "On a New List of Categories").

The four denials of our faculties, in what sense is Peirce an anti-Intuitivist? How do we see and how do we understand: what fills out by the work of intellect? What follows from the proposition that every thought is a sign? (Based on his second essay from "The Essential Peirce" "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man").

## **Part III. Embedding thought. A pragmatic perspective**

Unlike the empiricists, Peirce did not limit meaning to words alone, neither to sentences as was common to the Port Royal school or to the Frege-Russell tradition, but claimed that any sign can have meaning. To the question, 'is there anything in the universe that is not a sign?' the answer in Peirce's spirit would: 'there might be, but there is nothing in the universe that cannot become a sign.' Thus Peirce avoids one of the biggest problems of modern philosophy namely, what is the meaning embedded in: ideas, words, sentences beliefs, doctrines etc. Like Aristotle's categories, they are 'dresses of all things'; the sign character for Peirce is a universal tool for stripping off meaning from all things. For Peirce, thoughts are signs, but such could be a single letter, or an entire culture.

### **Assigned readings:**

**Basic Readings:** We will generally read the following books, which will be available to the students:

Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel eds. (1992) *The Essential Peirce* vol.1, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

De Waal, Cornelis, *On Pragmatism*, Wadsworth Philosophical Topics, 2005.

### **Additional Bibliography (not obligatory):**

Brent, Joseph (1993) *Charles Sanders Peirce. A Life*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

*Charles S. Peirce's Letters to Lady Welby* (1953) Ed. by Irwin C. Lieb, Whitlock's, Inc. New Haven, Connecticut.

Colapietro, Vincent (1989) *Peirce's Approach to the Self. A Semiotic Perspective on Human Subjectivity*, State University of New York Press, Albany

De Waal, Cornelis, *On Peirce*, Wadsworth Philosophical Topics, 2001.

Hookway, Christopher (1985) *Peirce* Routledge and Kegan Paul: London.

Mounce, H.O. (1997) *The Two Pragmatisms, From Peirce to Rorty*, Routledge: London and New York.

Murphey Murray G. (1961) *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Peirce, Charles S. (1931-1966) *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Vols. 1-6 edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931-1935. Vols. 7-8 edited by Arthur W. Burks. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Savan, David (1976) *An Introduction to C. S. Peirce's Semiotics. Part I*. Toronto Semiotic Circle; Toronto: Victoria University.

Short, Thomas L. (2007) *Peirce's Theory of signs*, Cambridge University Press.

Scheffler, Izrael, *Four Pragmatists*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

*The Essential Peirce* vol.2. (1998) ed. by Peirce Edition Project, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis (general look).

#### **Readers and Dictionaries:**

*Against Theory, Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. by W.J. Mitchell, The U-ty of Chicago Press, 1982.

*Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, ed. Stuart Sim, Routledge, New York, 1999

*Pragmatism, A Reader*, ed. by Louis Menand, Vintage Books, 1997.

*A Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. A.R. Lacey, Routledge & Kegan Paul Lmt. first edition 1976.

Vincent M. Colapietro, *Glossary of Semiotics*, Paragon House, New York, 1993

Nathan Houser, *Peirce on Semiotics*, Semiotics Studies Series, Indian