Pragmatism’s Founders: Peirce, James, and Dewey

Any consideration of pragmatism should begin with Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. Peirce laid out the basic pragmatist tenet that the meaning of a statement lies in its consequences, and he gave his views the name “pragmatism.” William James then took over the term and attached it to his own ideas just over one hundred years ago. James moved from work on psychology in the 1890s into more philosophical and religious writings. His key works include The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, The Varieties of Religious Experience, and Pragmatism. Dewey’s work is so vast that it is hard to know where to begin. His writings make up a multi-volume collection divided into his early, middle and late works, but the two volumes of The Essential Dewey offer readers a helpful selection of his writings. A few secondary sources have been included here for those who wish to study further these founders of pragmatism. For an interesting history of Peirce, James, Dewey, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, see Louis Menand’s recent book The Metaphysical Club (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

Charles Sanders Peirce


A SHORT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


**William James**

**John Dewey**

**Beyond the Founders**

Though interest in pragmatism properly begins with Peirce, James, and Dewey, to stop there would be to miss the great and varied riches in this tradition of thought, which includes the philosophical, aesthetic,
and literary works of such writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sidney Hook, Alain Locke, G. H. Mead, Josiah Royce, and George Santayana.


The following collections of essays give a broad view of the pragmatist tradition and are useful resources for both the newcomer to pragmatism or for someone whose knowledge of pragmatism is limited to a specific area of specialization:


**Contemporary Revival of Pragmatism**

One of the aims of this volume of *The Hedgehog Review* is to demonstrate that there is a far wider interaction with, appropriation of, and development of ideas from the classical pragmatists than many realize. This revival of pragmatism is happening on both sides of the Atlantic and fruitful interaction is occurring between American and European scholars. Contemporary pragmatist discourse ranges across a wide spectrum of topics from poetry, law, and business to feminism, race, and democracy.


**Rorty and Putnam**

The literature that has grown up around these two figures alone would require a separate bibliography. Putnam’s own work has developed along the lines of reason, realism, and pragmatism. One could start with *Reason, Truth, and History*, continue by way of his several volumes...
of essays on these subjects, and move to his more recent work *Pragmatism: An Open Question* and his Dewey Lectures, published under the title *The Threefold Cord*. Rorty’s *Consequences of Pragmatism* is a good place to start, and his book *Philosophy and Social Hope* gives the most recent formulations of his thoughts. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is probably his most read and most cited book. More recently he has generated a series of interactions with critics that looks likely to continue for some time to come.

Hilary Putnam


Richard Rorty


See also:

Pragmatism, Aesthetics, and Literature

A rich connection exists between pragmatism, aesthetics, and literature. From showing the intersections between the genealogies of American literature and philosophy, to elucidating the ways that pragmatism and the arts intersect, to suggesting that pragmatism involves living one’s life as an aesthetic creation, scholars up to the present continue to find new ways in which the aesthetic and the pragmatic are intertwined.


Pragmatism and Feminism

That there is a long history of connections between feminism and pragmatism should not surprise anyone. And yet, interest in the connections between them has not always been evident, and the recent books published on pragmatism and feminism suggest a renewed interest after a period of hibernation. The influence of Jane Addams in the development of pragmatism has proved to be a springboard for writers interested in the connections between pragmatism and feminism. Philosopher Charlotte Haddock Seigfried has done a great deal to develop this renewed interest, as evidenced by her two volumes included here.
Pragmatic Women and Body Politics


Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey


Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric


Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism


Pragmatism, Democracy, and Global Politics

At least since Dewey, pragmatism has been associated with democracy. More recently pragmatists have been making the case for the connection between pragmatism and respect for difference. Indeed, some scholars suggest that pragmatism provides a useful procedure for navigating the differences that increasingly confront us in our global world.

The Promise of Pragmatism: Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority


Beyond Solidarity: Pragmatism and Difference in a Globalized World


The Genesis of Values


Truth, Politics, Morality: Pragmatism and Deliberation


Policy and Pragmatism in the Conflict of Laws