

DVPR 44700:
American Religious Naturalism Following James

Fall term, 2012
Swift Hall 208
Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00-4:20

Instructor: Dan Arnold

Office hours: Swift 401A, **Thursdays**, 3:00-5:00 (or by arrangement with instructor); for appointments during regular office hours, sign up on the sheet kept by Susie McGee (773-702-7049) in the Martin Marty Center

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Objectives of the Course:

This course will take several soundings in a trajectory of American religious thought that can be said to center on William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, perhaps especially insofar as that is read in light of the late-career philosophical project that James referred to as "radical empiricism." This tradition of thought might just as well be referred to as "American religious *empiricism*," or *~ pragmatism*, or *~ process philosophy*; in styling this a tradition of religious "naturalism," though, I mean not only to make contact particularly with the work of John Dewey, but also (and more importantly) to advance the project of recovering an understanding of "naturalism" that is antithetical to what John McDowell has referred to as "bald naturalism" – where the latter seems, these days, often to be what philosophers suppose we must be talking about in referring to "naturalism."

Course Requirements:

In addition to exhibiting regular attendance and spirited participation in discussion, students will be required to submit a paper of modest length (12-15 pages), **due Friday, December 14**. N.b.: *Late papers will not be accepted without prior notice*.

Required Readings:

A small number of our readings are short selections available electronically through Chalk; the following books are all on reserve at Regenstein Library, and (with one exception) are also available for purchase at the Seminary Coop Bookstore:

- **Cornel West**, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*
- **William James**, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*
- **Nancy Frankenberry**, *Religion and Radical Empiricism*
- **Delwin Brown**, *Boundaries of Our Habitations*
- **John Dewey**, *Art as Experience*
- **Charles Hartshorne**, *The Divine Relativity*
- **Schubert Ogden**, *Christ without Myth* (not available at the Coop; you'll need to find this online)
- **Mark Johnston**, *Saving God*

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Week 1 (Monday, October 1; Wednesday, October 3)

Course introduction: On the various senses of “naturalism,” and the idea of a distinctively American tradition thereof. **Reading** (for Wed.): Charles S. Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear”; “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God” (both available on Chalk)

Week 2 (Monday, October 8; Wednesday, October 10)

One reading of this trajectory of thought: Cornel West’s “prophetic pragmatism.”
Reading: Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*

Week 3 (NO CLASS ON MON., OCT. 15!; Wednesday, October 17)

(Wed., Oct.17): A seminal text for religious studies, and also for American religious naturalism. **Reading:** William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

Week 4 (Monday, October 22; NO CLASS ON WED., OCT. 24!)

(Mon., Oct. 22): James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, continued; **further reading:** William James, “A World of Pure Experience” (Chalk)

Week 5 (Monday, October 29; Wednesday, October 31):

Notwithstanding James’s protests, the significance of his “radical empiricism” for understanding James’s pragmatism. **Reading:** Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism*

Week 6 (Monday, November 5; Wednesday, November 7)

Thinking theologically with (and critically of) radical empiricism. **Reading:** Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of our Habitations*

Week 7 (Monday, November 12; Wednesday, November 14)

The significance of speaking of “an experience”: John Dewey on aesthetics.
Reading: John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, pp.1-59, 255-338

Week 8 (NO CLASS ON MONDAY, NOV. 19!; Wednesday, November 21)

On whether this stream of thought rules out *metaphysics*. **Reading:** Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*

Week 9 (Monday, November 26; Wednesday, November 28)

Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity* (continued); then, Adding the existentialism of Rudolf Bultmann to process philosophy. **Reading:** Schubert Ogden, *Christ without Myth*

Week 10 (Monday, December 3; Wednesday, December 5)

A Princeton philosopher’s critique of recently flourishing “undergraduate atheism.”
Reading: Mark Johnston, *Saving God*