

News item. Retrieved from <http://www.commens.org/news/item/wittgenstein-and-pragmatism>, 18.05.2026.

Category: Academic Meeting

Title: Wittgenstein and Pragmatism

Description: A symposium arranged by HCAS, Nordic Wittgenstein Society (NWS) and Nordic Pragmatism Network (NPN).

It is well known that Ludwig Wittgenstein is sparse with references to other philosophers, and when he does mention other philosophers it is hardly in praise. There are a few exceptions – and one of the exceptions that stands out is his continuously warm regard for pragmatist philosopher William James. “Whenever I have time now,” Wittgenstein wrote to Bertrand Russell, “I read James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*. This book does me a lot good.” And James’s work was also one of the few philosophical works that Wittgenstein is reported to have recommended his students to read.

It is no accident that James’s pragmatism was one of the philosophical approaches that Wittgenstein found inspiring and rewarding, yet challenging. For there are a number of affinities between pragmatism and Wittgenstein-inspired ways of doing philosophy – which is vindicated by the fact that most contemporary pragmatists and neo-pragmatists think about their own work as, at least partly, inspired by Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

Wittgensteinian philosophy and pragmatism are two traditions of thought in which several interesting parallels can be discerned, regarding the problems they focus on and how, but also regarding what they are opposing.

Both traditions engage in the perennial issues of knowledge, truth and the good from the perspective of *human practices*. Both eschew metaphysical system building as well as the naturalist reductionism of much analytic philosophy. Philosophy, according to both traditions, is not in need of foundations, but rather of a more sensitive attention to the varieties of human activity and meaning making: in ordinary language, science, morals, religion. Certain general tenets of 20th-century and present philosophy, like the sharp fact-value dichotomy and the (varieties of a) correspondence theory of truth, are questioned by both traditions for reasons relating to the attention to practice.

This conference investigates the common ground and intersections between the legacy of Wittgenstein and Pragmatist philosophy.

Keynote speakers:

1. Daniele Moyal-Sharrock (University of Hertfordshire, UK)
2. Cora Diamond (University of Virginia, USA)

3. Russell B. Goodman (University of New Mexico, USA)
4. James Conant (University of Chicago, USA)
5. Logi Gunnarsson (University of Potsdam, Germany)

Open call for papers

In addition to the key note speakers we have 10-12 slots for speakers selected through an open call for papers. We also welcome papers from scholars in fields other than philosophy: comparative literature, educational science, cultural studies, sociology, etc.

Abstracts should be:

- submitted no later than February 12, 2016
- have a maximum length of 500 words
- submitted to nora.hamalainen [at] helsinki.fi.

Notifications will be sent out in the first week of March 2016.

Place: Helsinki Collegium of Advanced Studies, Helsinki University, Helsinki, Finland

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Pragmatism