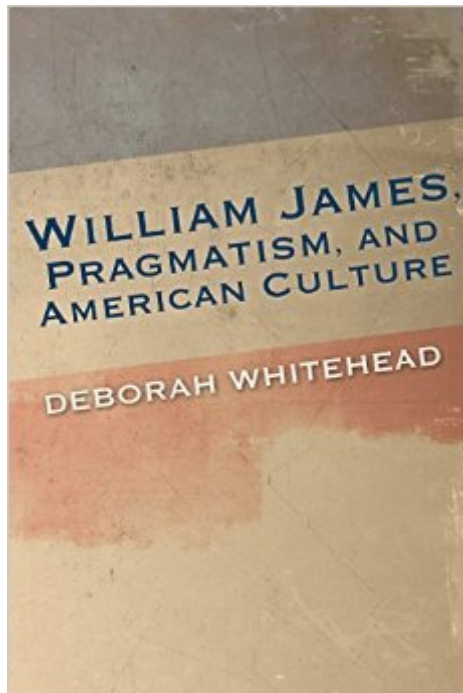


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William James, Pragmatism, And American Culture (American Philosophy)



Synopsis

William James, Pragmatism, and American Culture focuses on the work of William James and the relationship between the development of pragmatism and its historical, cultural, and political roots in 19th-century America. Deborah Whitehead reads pragmatism through the intersecting themes of narrative, gender, nation, politics, and religion. As she considers how pragmatism helps to explain the United States to itself, Whitehead articulates a contemporary pragmatism and shows how it has become a powerful and influential discourse in American intellectual and popular culture.

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Customer Reviews

Whitehead's first three chapters are a reasonable examination of James, Dewey and Pierce and the development of pragmatism as an expression of American values. What differentiates pragmatism from other philosophies is that that it elevates particular processes as its ideal, that of problem solving and ameliorating differences. Pragmatists such as James see the world as majestic, not so much to be conquered, but to be cheerfully adapted and adapted to, what James refers to as *the middle way*. And while nature is big, James opposes big in human affairs, be it big government, big business or big religion. An interesting aspect of this covered by the book is James opposition to President McKinley's acquisition from Spain of American custodianship of the Philippines in 1898. While McKinley sees this as a benevolent mandate to educate, and uplift the Filipinos and extend the democratic ideals of America, quite consciously modelled on the British

Raj, only better, James is appalled at the rank imperialism. Chapter 4 is a feminist critique of feminist critiques of James. When reading James and his contemporaries I always considered such matters not to be integral to their philosophy but more an expression of the times in which they lived.

Whitehead reexamines the texts and concludes that James' is rather fluid in his ascribing gender to human attributes, and is generally positive when referring to either sex. His elevation of the American frontier and self-sufficiency is closely tied to masculine nobility but is tempered by the feminine, and Whitehead concludes is that James is suitably progressive. The final chapter tackles the neopragmatism of Richard Rorty. Which presented a new line of reading for me, and for that I am grateful.

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