American Philosophy: Final Essay

Instructions: Choose one of the following topics and write a reflective, analytical essay of approximately 5 pages. In your essay, you should develop a main theme or focus--take a stand on the issue and support it with evidence and reasoning -- do not just summarize Dewey’s position. The crucial element is to offer an insightful analysis; try to persuade your reader of your claims. It is by the strength of your arguments and analysis, as well as your comprehension of the philosophical ideas, that you will be graded.

Due Date/Time: Friday, December 12 (9am) (Boyle 421)

Hardcopy required (electronic copies not accepted without special permission).

Topics:

1) Carefully analyze Dewey's conception of experience. Contrast his conception with the traditional (empiricist) view of experience on one or two points. Why does Dewey reject the view that rationality and intelligence are distinct from experience? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Dewey's view?

2) How is Dewey's naturalistic conception of thinking and mind a significant departure from the traditional conceptions of these functions/substances? Is Dewey correct in his assessment of thinking (inquiry) as developing out of noncognitive phases of experience? How has Darwinism affected Dewey's conception of the mind and its processes?

3) Dewey's metaphysics is termed “naturalistic emergentism.” How does this naturalism differ from more traditional metaphysics (e.g., Platonism)? (Optional: focus on how communication is handled as an emergent feature of natural events.) Is Dewey on the right track? (Why or why not?)

4) Present and analyze Dewey's view of "community" as an ideal. Be sure to refer to his conception of "association" and "participation."

5) Dewey offers a naturalistic account of aesthetic and religious meanings. Compare his views with traditional positions and argue for or against Dewey's position.

6) What does Dewey's theory of education have to offer the contemporary educator? Be sure to ground your essay in Dewey's philosophical ideas.