

Phil 176/276G: Historical Philosophers—American Philosophy

Professor: Aaron Zimmerman

Office Hours: M 12:30-1:30PM, W 3:30-4:30 and by appointment on Fridays

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Overview: American Philosophy begins with an examination of John Locke's theory of natural rights, which posits entitlements to life, liberty and property, and an assessment of the role Locke's ideas played in the American Revolution and the construction of its founding documents. The course then turns to the growing popularity of Darwin's theory of natural selection in the subsequent century and its consequences for the idea of God-given rights referenced in the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution. Our readings will focus on the responses to the clash of these ideas that were formulated by those American philosophers who founded Pragmatism: Charles Sanders Peirce and (to an even greater extent) William James. If time permits it, the course will go on to evaluate the further development of Pragmatism by John Dewey, who saw it as a response to both Idealism and Social Darwinism.

Requirements: (1) Two 5-6-page papers worth 33% of your grade each. (2) One final exam worth 33% of your grade. Points may also be awarded for attendance and participation or deducted for the absence of such. Graduate students must also attend an additional section (to be scheduled) and e-mail comments on assigned readings to all the members of the section prior to each meeting.

Do not plagiarize. If you use something from the web and do not cite it, you are guilty of plagiarism. And if you plagiarize, you **will fail** the class and you may also be expelled from the university.

Resources: There are two required textbooks and one recommended text. **All handouts and many additional sources can be found on the course website at www.aaron-zimmerman.com.**

1. America's Founding Ideology: Natural Rights

(1) Locke, J., *Two Treatises of Government*, 3rd Edition, P. Laslett (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1689/1988).

(2) Thomas Jefferson: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/jefferson/>

Rough Draft of the Declaration

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/declara/ruffdrft.html>

Declaration of Independence

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1776-1785/the-final-text-of-the-declaration-of-independence-july-4-1776.php>

Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Statute_for_Religious_Freedom

<https://blog.oup.com/2014/03/thomas-jeffersons-statute-for-religious-freedom/>

Paper 1 Assigned: 1/23/19

2. The Epistemology of America's Founding Ideology: The Self-Evidence of God-Given Rights.

(3) Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution*, New York: Oxford UP (1978), chapters 1-3. Note: This source is located on the class website: aaron-zimmerman.com

Recommended: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-epistemology-a-priori/>

Paper 1 Due: 2/6/19

3. The Role of Natural Rights Ideology in Abolitionism

(4) Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (July 5, 1852) This source is located on the class website

(5) Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address, This source is located on the class website

(6) Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail, This source is located on the class website

(7) Daniel S. Malachuk, "Antebellum Natural Rights Liberalism," in Levine, Merrill and Stoner (eds.), *The Political Thought of the Civil War*, University Press of Kansas (2018), pp. 74-97. Note: This source is located on the class website

4. Darwinian Skepticism about Natural Rights

(8) John Greene, "Darwin as a Social Evolutionist," *Journal of the History of Biology*, 10, 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 1-27.

(9) J. Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," *Popular Science Monthly* (July 1909). Note: this reading is located on the class website.

Paper 2 Assigned: 2/20/19

5. Charles Sander Peirce

(10) C.S. Peirce: “The Fixation of Belief,” and “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” Haack, pp. 107-50.

6. William James

(11) William James: “The Will to Believe,” “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life,” “The Present Dilemma in Philosophy,” and “What Pragmatism Means,” Haack, pp. 221-308.

Paper 2 Due: 2/6/19

7. John Dewey

(12) John Dewey, “Philosophy and Democracy,” Haack, pp. 363-78, and “The Construction of Good,” Haack, pp. 395-422.

FINAL EXAM: Monday, March 18, 4-7PM