

**Phil 176/276G: Historical Philosophers—American Philosophy
Spring 2020**

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Office Hours: Zoom meetings by Appointment
Office: South Hall 5707

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, the construction of its founding documents and the struggle to abolish slavery and racial segregation. The course turns to the growing popularity of Darwin's theory of natural selection in the century that followed the revolution 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 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, each worth 25% of your grade; (2) two quizzes, each worth 10% of your grade, and (3) a final exam worth 30% of your grade. Points may also be awarded for attendance in on-line discussions and participation in forums (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 If you use something from the web and do not cite it, you are guilty of plagiarism.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: 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>

(3) Thomas Paine, *Agrarian Justice*. Note: This source is located on the class website: [aaron-zimmerman.com](http://www.aaron-zimmerman.com)

Paper 1 Assigned: April 8, 2020.

2. The Epistemology of America's Ideology: The Self-Evidence of Natural Rights

(4) 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: April 22, 2020.

1st On-line Quiz: April 28-29, 2020

3. The Role of Natural Rights Ideology in Abolitionism

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

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

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

(8) 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

Paper 2 Assigned: May 6, 2020

4. Darwinian Skepticism about Natural Rights Ideology

(9) A. Zimmerman, "Veneer Theory," in D. Machuca (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Moral Skepticism*, (2018), pp. 199-212. Note: this reading is located on the class website.

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

5. Charles Sander Peirce: Science v. Tradition

(10) C.S. Peirce: "The Fixation of Belief," this reading is located on the class website.

Paper 2 Due: May 20, 2020

6. William James: Belief for Effect

(11) William James: "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," this reading is located on the class website.

2nd On-line Quiz: June 4-5, 2020

The Take-Home Final must be Submitted to Prof Zimmerman by 5PM on June 11, 2020