

American Philosophical and Intellectual Thought

The Deists

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American Philosophical and Intellectual Thought: A Survey and History

1. The Colonial Period (1620 - 1776):

"A continuing challenge to the American intellectual scene has been provided by the successive waves of immigration, and the resulting infusions of divergent ideas. No sooner did one wave begin to be assimilated than a new force appeared. Thus America constantly added the experience and thought of older traditions to its shore; yet at the same time these traditions were themselves profoundly altered by the new habitat." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 17)

European settlements in America: the Puritans of Plymouth, the Anglicans of Jamestown and Charleston, the Dutch of NY, the Quakers and Germans of Pennsylvania, the French of New Orleans, and the Scotch-Irish of the advancing frontier communities.

A. The Puritans (1620 - 1700):

The Puritans wished to purge the Church of England of its "Popish practices", dissatisfied with the reforms of the Anglican Church, they left to form a New Zion. "The Puritans were thoroughly British in culture and conventions; they differed from their contemporaries primarily in the degree of their religious dissent." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 18) Principle beliefs were Calvinistic, although they did not claim to be literal disciples of John Calvin. These beliefs were:

1. Absolute sovereignty of God and utter dependence of man on God.
2. God is all powerful & arbitrary whose ways are inscrutable to man.
3. Adam's descendants inherited the curse of "original sin" and were irresistible given over to evil.
4. First covenant with Adam (which man was to receive immortal life), second covenant through Jesus (which man can receive salvation).
5. Salvation is not earned through good works or moral excellence.
6. God's will has been predetermined (i.e., foreordained) and the elect (i.e., a Society of Saints) are totally dependent upon God's grace.
7. Man must offer God faith and obedience.

For the Puritans, life was a moral process originating in sin, dedicated to faith, and culminating in the hope that salvation might be achieved. Moral virtues were emphasized: discipline, devotion, honesty, moderation, temperance, frugality, industry, and simplicity. The philosophical predestination did not lead to passive inaction because, "the dynamic activism of the American Puritan might better be explained, not by his religion or his philosophy, . . . but by the new geographical and economic necessities; here was a frontier to claim, a wilderness to conquer, a future to forge." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 19)

New England Puritanism was intolerant of dissent and heresy - in particular was the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was organized along theocratic lines. The covenant with God was more of a corporate arrangement between the whole community and God rather than a private affair. Initially there was no idea of "separation of church and state", but as new sects began arriving and as the covenant became more secularized, freer communities began to be formed. Toleration seemed to be the only way to deal with the growing number of different denominations popping up in the new America.

B. Colonial Materialism and Immaterialism (1700 - 1776):

For the most part, practical pursuits and religious interests dominated seventeenth-century America and little time was devoted to theoretical philosophy - it was not till the eighteenth-century that intellectual philosophic and scientific interests were more directly nourished.

Primary Figures: Jonathan Edwards (1703 - 1758), Samuel Johnson (1696 - 1772), Cadwallader Colden (1688 - 1776), and Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790).

Edwards represents the most thoroughgoing use of philosophical idealism in an attempt to provide a rational philosophical vindication of the Calvinistic system against its critics. Johnson used philosophical immaterialism to combat materialism - however, neither Edwards nor Johnson could stem the tide of the new forces, especially the development of modern science and modern philosophy, which was emerging in Europe.

Edwards most important philosophical work was, *Freedom of the Will* (1754), in which he puts forth a defense of Calvinistic determinism against the arguments for free will. Every event has a cause, but divine omnipotence, foreknowledge, and efficacious grace (all of which are Calvinistic doctrines) are consistent with moral freedom and moral responsibility. Freedom, according to Edwards, is having the power, opportunity, or advantage, to do as one pleases to do - without considering how one's pleasure comes to be as it is. Even though one's pleasure (sometimes called - will) is the product of causal principles. Edwards attempts to resolve the alleged paradox by careful linguistic definitions of key terms.

In *The Nature of True Virtue* (written in 1755, published in 1765), Edwards argued that man is naturally incapable of true virtue, being sinful and corrupt. Yet there is the grace of God that has elected some for salvation, and one sign of this is the individual's religious affection and sense of beauty.

In *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), Edwards maintains that belief in God has its source in the religious affections, love and joy, and that these are transmitted from supernatural source and are not to be comprehended by the natural senses (e.g., Deism - which Edwards considered to be the greatest abomination to Christianity). And in his, *Notes on Natural Science*, Edwards provides a metaphysical defense of philosophical idealism, holding that mind and spirit are fundamental to the universe.

Johnson preferred the quiet conservatism of the Church of England to the evangelical enthusiasm then sweeping through the Puritan churches of New England. Johnson was a follower of the ideas of George Berkeley, who was a critic of the materialism of Newton and Locke, which he thought would lead to skepticism, freethinking, and atheism. *Spiritual, not material substances, were real, the human mind receiving what the Divine Mind impressed upon it.* However, the immaterialism of Berkeley and Johnson had little effect on late eighteenth-century American thought, possibly because of its Anglican association, though their ideas would reemerge in nineteenth-century America through transcendentalism and idealism.

Colden carried on an extensive correspondence with Johnson on the topic of idealism versus materialism. Colden was not a pure materialist - he did seem to advocate a kind of dualistic theory, which allows for the existence of *intelligent being*. "Like body, intelligent being is active and known by its effects, but it differs from material being in its essential nature." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 102) Colden was sympathetic to Deism: God as First Cause gave direction to the action of matter, but did not intervene in its operations.

In *First Principles of Morality* (1746), Colden presents a materialistic hedonism: the body is a machine and pleasure is the end cause of the virtues. Throughout Colden's works one finds a modern mind, critical of "mere authority," directing the individual to think for himself, unencumbered by prejudice and received tradition, and basing its inquiries on the methods of science. Although conservative in his political beliefs and opposed the American Revolution, he was devoted to reason and sympathetic to the Enlightenment.

Franklin applied Newton's physical principles and illustrated Newtonian natural philosophy and the possibility of a completely mechanical explanation of the universe. Franklin also owed his philosophical reputation to the fact that he was broadly educated and interested in many fields of human endeavor - he displayed wisdom for life, both intellectual and practical. In his, *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion* (1730), Franklin espouses his deistic rationalistic philosophy of religion. Franklin's philosophy can be summarized as follows:

1. Secularized typical Puritan virtues in ethics, thrift, temperance, punctuality, and industry.
2. Virtue and Reason are combined as revealing the true source of happiness.
3. Staunch defender of republicanism and revolution.

Franklin was a highly civilized man - fair-minded, humane, charitable, and a source of worldly wisdom - qualities which were unique in early America.

2. The Revolutionary Period (1776 - 1800):

"With the outbreak of the War for Independence in 1776, interest in the ideals of the Age of Reason became pre-eminent. The Enlightenment had a correlative impact in America. Many of the colonists were inspired by the English Deists such as Blount, Clarke, Bolingbroke, Collins, Shaftesbury, and Wollaston, and by French writers such as Condillac, Diderot, Condorcet, Holbach, Volney, La Mettrie, and Voltaire. However, it was the empiricism and liberalism of the British philosopher John Locke that had the most important and direct influence on American thought - though once again his major impact was practical." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 20)

The Age of Reason in America assumed three forms:

1. it contributed to the development of materialism and deism in metaphysics and religion
2. it helped to emphasize the values of a secular and naturalistic morality
3. it made meaningful the ideals of republicanism and revolution

Primary Figures: Benjamin Rush (1745 - 1813), Thomas Paine (1737 - 1809), Ethan Allen (1737 - 1789), Elihu Palmer (1764 - 1806), and Thomas Jefferson (1743 - 1826).

Materialism: The Newtonian materialism of the colonial period came to full maturity in the latter part of the eighteenth-century. The materialists had strong interests in science and they attempted to extend what they considered to be the legitimate aims of science to other areas of the cosmos, including man. Thus, they consistently attempted to apply physical and mechanistic explanations to mind and morality.

Deism: Deism as a religious philosophy was widely espoused by many of the advanced leaders of the new republic, such as Jefferson and Washington. The deists affirmed the supremacy of reason, and denied the claims of revelation, prophecies, and miracles - defending the principles of religious freedom, toleration, and the separation of church and state.

1. all events in nature were determined by natural causes
2. God, as first cause, designed the natural order
3. nature and man, were products of the goodness of God
4. mankind is basically good, Calvinism is fundamentally flawed (with its beliefs in original sin and human depravity)
5. man as a rational creature, is capable of achieving the good life on earth
6. morality was humanistic, happiness and pleasure, not faith and humility, were the standards of choice
7. science, reason, and education are the instruments of human progress
8. Lockean empiricism - all knowledge is based on sense experience
9. man is a product of conditioning forces of his environment - therefore, improved social environment means improved human behavior

Republicanism and Revolution: The ideas which inspired the Revolution had their origins in the writings of Locke and Montesquieu, but their experimental application in a new context was a significant innovation. The American thinkers maintained that justice is related to the doctrine of *natural rights* and not to the divine right of kings, hereditary rights, or the conserving of established institutions. Governments are artificial contracts made by men, to be overthrown and changed by men if they do not fulfill their original purposes or if they violate inalienable human rights.

This does not mean that there was unanimity among the colonists. And indeed, after the Revolutionary cause was gained, there was need to reason out and build a new system of government. *The Federalist Papers* (1787 - 88) were written by Alexander Hamilton (1757 - 1804) the conservative, James Madison (1751 - 1836) the liberal, and John Jay (1745 - 1829) in order to explain and justify the Federal Constitution. Some American thinkers, such as Jefferson, considered agrarian society as the ideal, but others, such as Hamilton, favored a commercial or industrial society. The problem of how to safeguard human liberties against the encroachments of a tyrannical government was dealt with by the development of a system of checks and balances among the three branches of government.

3. The Counter-Revolution in America (1800 - 1850):

"No sooner had America reached its apogee in brilliance than a conservative reaction set in - political, religious, moral, and philosophic. The liberal stream of the Enlightenment was overwhelmed by a conservative undercurrent, which now rose to the surface." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 22)

A. Southern Racial Aristocracy (1800 - 1860):

An immediate reaction against the Declaration of Independence was stimulated by a fear of "the mob" inspired to some extent by the Jacobin excesses of the French Revolution. The south was unable to reconcile itself to Jeffersonian democracy. Is the principle *all men are created equal* defensible, or does it rest on untenable metaphysical grounds? There rose a group of men, dedicated to defending the status quo of the Southern way of life - which included the institution of slavery and the economic interests that it supported. Attacked were the notions of liberty, equality, natural rights, democracy, and strong federal government. John C. Calhoun (1782 - 1850) was the most serious southern philosophical writer of this period, denied that there were natural rights prior to society - such rights were metaphysical abstractions - and he attempted to defend a hierarchical and organic conception of society. Order and security, rather than scientific reason or democratic reform, were to be valued and preserved.

B. Academic Philosophy - Scottish Realism (1800 - 1850):

A similar conservatism was evident in religion in the early nineteenth-century. The radical deistic spirit of the Age of Reason was lost in the general subservience of science to religion. The earlier confidence in the powers of human intelligence was replaced by a failure of courage and a sense of human dependence. Remarkable during this period were the numerous scholarly attempts to rationalize received traditions and values.

Colleges played a big role in promoting these ideas - the purpose of many colleges was to provide moral discipline and an ordered conception of the universe. The college thus had the conservative function of preserving a cultural tradition and, in effect, of justifying the status quo.

Two dominant philosophical influences in this period:

1. Scottish Realism
2. Philosophical Idealism - popular during the end of the 19th century

The Scottish philosophers, Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, Adam Ferguson, and others, seemed to many in America to offer a powerful answer to Hume's skepticism. Scottish realism was first introduced at Princeton before 1800 by John Witherspoon and Samuel Stanhope Smith. It was popularized by James McCosh (1811 - 1894), a late arrival to the American shores.

Realism was based on the doctrine that "real objects" existed independently of man and were perceivable as such. *Real objects were neither unknowable nor reducible to phenomena or ideas*. All of this seemed self-evident and give to inductive intuition. The realists believed that such intuition might establish moral, political and religious truths - indeed, all fundamental truths could be known in the same way. There were self-evident certitudes of right and wrong, standards of justice and injustice, truth of God's existence and of immortality of the soul, mathematical objects, and basic scientific universals. This method could be extended indefinitely and was conveniently used to instate a whole set of orthodox ideas and values, giving them sanction of philosophical necessity. Realism became a means of rationalizing the unquestioning acceptance of traditional values which appealed to "common sense."

4. Transcendentalism (1820 - 1860):

"The movement was rather conservative in its metaphysics and epistemology, but it was decidedly liberal in its morals and politics. It was fairly inchoate movement - literary, religious, political, and philosophical - distinguishable more perhaps by what it opposed than by what it supported." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 26)

Primary Figures: William Ellery Channing (1780 - 1842), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882), Theodore Parker (1810 - 1860), Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862), Amos Bronson Alcott (1799 - 1888), James Freeman Clarke (1810 - 1888), James Marsh (1794 - 1842), Frederick Henry Hedge (1805 - 1890), Margret Fuller (1810 - 1850), Orestes A. Brownson (1803 - 1876), and many others.

Initially the transcendentalists were Unitarians, who liberal in sentiment, transformed Calvinistic pessimism to optimism; God was loving and just, not arbitrary or vindictive; man was not necessarily sinful but capable of moral virtue and goodness. The Unitarians also reacted against the mechanistic universe and rational religion of the deists. Nature manifested divine purpose, and man might know and appreciate its full beauty. But man must transcend ordinary understanding or experience, and his soul must have direct contact with divinity; this might be done largely without benefit of clergy. The Unitarians, like the Deists, wished to use reason to interpret the Bible but, unlike the Deists, many accepted revelation.

1. reacting against the limitations of Lockean conception of experience
2. there is a transcendental realm over and beyond the phenomenal appearances, and ultimate reality which only reason and intuition could penetrate
3. criticized the dependence of knowledge based on empirical and scientific facts - such evidence was only probable, and ended in skepticism
4. poets and seers who proclaimed truth as they saw it and were not interested in rational proofs
5. there are two worlds - (a.) the unreal world of sensations, which are the objects of physical science, and (b.) the unseen world, a religious, moral, and aesthetic universe, which only poetry and philosophy could discover
6. movement stimulated by moral idealism
7. goal is to liberate the individual and to free him from the blind hold of custom and convention

The transcendentalists were humanitarians deeply concerned with moral progress, with political and social justice and equality. Each individual possessed an implicit dignity, which was also a claim to equality, for each person had both the ability and the right to consult his private intuition. They fought against acquiescence to injustice and defended liberalism in social action.

5. Speculative and Absolute Idealism (1860 - 1900):

"Transcendentalism was sympathetic to philosophical idealism, but it seemed primarily to offer a literary and romantic rather than a technical approach to philosophy. European philosophical idealism had taken root in American thought, and it reappeared after the Civil War as the dominant academic tradition. . . . A group known as the St. Louis Hegelians was especially influential in the development of this kind of speculative idealism."

Primary Figures: William T. Harris (1835 - 1919), Laurens Perseus Hickok (1798 - 1888), Henry C. Brokmeyer, Thomas Davidson, George H. Howison, Denton J. Snider, J.E. Woerner, Joseph Pulitzer, Carl Schurz, and Josiah Royce (1855 - 1916).

St. Louis Hegelians published two major journals:

1. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, first of its kind in America
2. *The Western*, a review of education, science, literature, and art

The movement was initiated (about 1858) by the "Kant Club" through the serious study of German absolute idealism: Hegel, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. The transcendentalists had received their idealism from secondary sources; the speculative idealists went to primary sources, translating and studying directly the works of absolute idealists, especially Hegel's *Logic*.

The speculative idealists argued single-mindedly for the speculative method: they attacked the positivism, empiricism, and agnosticism of Comte, Mill and Spencer, and defended "abstract philosophy." Through reason, they (i.e., Mill and crew) believed, one could achieve knowledge of "ultimate reality."

In a symposium in 1895, George H. Howison summed up the dominant temper of American academic idealism when he said: "We are all agreed in one great tenet, which is the entire foundation of philosophy itself: that explanation of the world which maintains that the only thing absolutely real is mind; that all material and all temporal existences take their being from consciousness that thinks and experiences; that out of consciousness they all issue, to consciousness they are presented, and that presence to consciousness constitutes their entire reality." (Adams, *Contemporary American Philosophy - Personal Statements*, Volume II, pp. 85)

The kind of idealism that generally prevailed, however, was neo-Hegelian absolute or objective idealism. This kind of idealism, unlike mentalistic or subjective idealism (e.g., Berkeley and Johnson), did not simply reduce reality to ideas. Mind was held to be central to the universe; but the universe was thought to be a systematic or organic whole, encompassing the experience of individual men, social mind, and culminating in an objective intelligible order. The order of the universe was not only a logical or causal order, but value and purpose were also said to have an ontological basis in reality.

Josiah Royce is usually considered to be the greatest defender of Absolute Idealism in America. In *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (1885), his first book in philosophy, he asked the following question - Is there any real thing in the universe of infinite worth? An individual's life, his ends and purposes, are purely partial and fragmentary, unless they are related to an inclusive and higher purpose. This Absolute Purpose is a standard of value, in terms of which all our partial moral ideals, indeed the problem of evil, find ultimate resolution. Royce was a pragmatist and voluntarist in the sense that truth was related to human needs and purposes. But he was an absolutist in the sense that needs were universal and that there was a timeless or eternal basis to truth.

6. Evolution and Darwinism (1859 - 1900):

"The impact of the scientific revolution on the modern world took on significant proportions with the introduction of Darwin's theory of evolution. This theory stimulated new and bold philosophical discussion, and led to deep conflict, in both Europe and the United States, between science and traditional religion, metaphysics, and ethics." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 30)

Primary Figures: John Fiske (1842 - 1901), Francis Ellingwood Abbot (1836 - 1903), and Chauncey Wright (1830 - 1875).

Evolutionary ideas featured prominently in philosophy: Hegelianism took historical development seriously; and Auguste Comte's positivism predicated three stages of social evolution. But it was with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) that evolution, for the first time, seemed to be taken out of the range of speculation and to be given fairly definite factual confirmation.

Behind much of the determined opposition to Darwin lay the strong religious, metaphysical and moral antipathies his theory provoked. The basic problem was whether and to what extent divine design could be reconciled with evolution. Critics of traditional theology held that natural selection undermined purpose, that chance replaced fixed laws, and that scientific law did not imply design. Darwinism challenged many traditional concepts: the notion of a teleological universe, of fixed species, and of man as separate from nature and the product of a special act of divine creation. All of this led to drastic attempts to adjust philosophy to scientific discovery by the construction of new metaphysical and moral theories.

Fiske propounded, in his *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874), a cosmic theism, and attempted to explain through evolution the origin of all human capacities, including moral sympathy and intellectual ability. "Fiske related the development of moral sympathy to the prolonged period of human infancy and dependency. His theory was able, he thought, to reconcile both utilitarianism and Kantianism in ethics." (Kurtz, *American Thought Before 1900*, pp. 379) Wright accepted Darwin's explanations within biology and used them to account for self-consciousness and the growth of language, but he resisted the attempt to extend the evolutionary process into a cosmic metaphysic. The major effect of Darwin on metaphysics in America, however, was that nature was now seen as a state of dynamic flux or change, not fixed system of eternal reality. The classical category of substance or essence thus was transformed into the category of process or event.

7. The Golden-Age of American Thought (1880 - 1940):

"An American philosophical renaissance occurred at the end of the nineteenth-century, and it continues in full force down to the present." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 17)

Several reasons for this growth in American philosophical thought:

1. sharp rise in the publication of new philosophical journals and books, *The International Journal of Ethics* (1890), *The Philosophical Review* (1892), and *The Journal of Philosophy* (1904)
2. during this century numerous philosophical societies have been established: especially, the American Philosophical Association (1901)
3. serious introduction of philosophy as a subject into liberal arts colleges and graduate schools and the steady expansion of higher education
4. growth in interest in philosophy coincided with the emergence of a remarkable number of original thinkers and fresh movements

Most of these thinkers were rebelling from the idealism that had dominated American thought during the second half of the nineteenth-century and was still very influential during the opening years of the twentieth-century. Although it is unquestionably true that idealists have generally been on the defensive since the beginning of the century and that their numbers have been constantly diminishing, it must also be pointed out that philosophers of considerable standing have continued until the present day to advocate one or another of the basic theories associated with idealism.

These basic principles of idealism are: (a.) mind is in some sense the fundamental reality - everything that exists can on analysis be seen to be mental or, if not itself mental, at any rate dependent on mind; (b.) reality is an organic whole in which everything is logically or internally connected with everything else; and (c.) value and purpose are not merely features of the human scene, but are of cosmic significance. Most, though not all, idealists were defenders of some form of traditional religion, and even those who were not nevertheless had obvious affinities with the outlook of rationalistic theology.

A. Pragmatism:

"The ideas subsequently associated with the school of pragmatism were first discussed by the members of the *Metaphysical Society* in Cambridge in the 1870's. . . . pragmatism was primarily a method of clarifying ideas and concepts by clearing away metaphysical and other confusions." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 18 - 19)

Primary Figures: Charles Peirce (1839 - 1914), William James (1842 - 1910), John Dewey (1859 - 1952), and George Herbert Mead (1863 - 1931).

In *The Fixation of Belief* (1877), Peirce argued that beliefs guide actions, and they arise in response to dissatisfaction and doubt from which we struggle to free ourselves by means of inquiry. But how are we to fix our beliefs? Not by tenacity or authority, nor by *a priori* methods (à la Descartes), but by the method of science. Science is the most effective way of resolving doubt, largely because it is the method most in accord with "real objects." Peirce's most famous article, *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* (1878), he suggests pragmatism as a principle or method of clarification: the meaning of an idea is to be discovered by reference to its conceivable practical bearings.

Peirce's published ideas lay virtually dormant until James popularized them in a lecture entitled "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," which he delivered in 1898 at the University of California. When James spoke of pragmatism, he meant both the pragmatic method as advocated by Peirce and a new theory about the nature of truth that he thought to be implicit in the pragmatic method. James modified Peirce's rigorous definition of "pragmatism" by extending it to a theory of truth, which allowed for particular individual and subjective consequences as the test of an idea, thus making room for religious and moral ideas. For James, "truth" (or sometimes what was called "useful") could also apply to what was emotionally satisfying. "On pragmatic principles, we cannot reject any hypothesis if concepts useful to life flow from it. . . . If the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily

in the widest sense of the word, it is true." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 20) None of the other leaders of American pragmatism could bring themselves to accept this theory of truth.

Peirce was naturally hostile to the subjectivity of this theory, which he maintained was not implied by the pragmatic method. This does not mean that Peirce was not interested in a theory of truth - he defended the "method of science" as the most effective way of resolving doubt and fixing belief. But he insisted there were limitations to the use of the pragmatic criterion. Dewey wished to extend the pragmatic criterion to the broader aspects of life. For Dewey, the term "pragmatic" meant only "the rule of referring all thinking, all reflective consideration, to consequences for final meaning and test."

Pragmatism tended to contribute to the destruction of traditional conceptions of metaphysics and to the reconstruction of philosophy. Peirce, James, and Dewey were not hostile to metaphysics, but they thought that, like the sciences, any defensible metaphysics would have to be empirical and tentative in character. Accordingly, all notions of Absolute Being or ultimate certainty such as the idealists espoused were rejected. "Peirce was ingenious in his formulation of metaphysical ideas - phenomenological, realistic, and evolutionary - though at times these seem hardly to conform with the pragmatic criterion. James outlined several novel ideas, such as a metaphysics of pure experience, and radical empiricism, and Dewey advanced a naturalistic metaphysics allegedly descriptive of the generic traits of nature and based upon human experience." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 22)

B. Realism:

"Although the realists differed on many matters of importance, they agreed on certain basic epistemological issues. They all denied the idealistic premise that physical objects are reducible to 'ideas' and denied equally that the objects of experience exist when we experience them. The fact that we know something makes no difference to the object known. In more technical language: the relation between knowing and the object known is an 'external' and not an 'internal' relation." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 22 - 23)

Major Movements: "New Realism" and "Critical Realism"

Primary Figures: New Realists - Ralph B. Perry (1876 - 1957), William P. Montague (1873 - 1953), Edwin B. Holt (1875 - 1946), Edward G. Spaulding (1873 - 1939), Walter T. Marvin (1872 - 1944), and Walter B. Pitkin (1878 - 1953). Critical Realists - George Santayana (1863 - 1952), James B. Pratt (1875 - 1944), Durant Drake (1878 - 1933), Charles A. Strong (1862 - 1940), and Arthur K. Rogers (1868 - 1936).

Primary principles (i.e., those in agreement) of the New Realists:

1. Maintained the independence of things known.
2. Maintained epistemological monism - particulars and universals that are real are apprehended directly rather than indirectly through copies or mental images.
3. Attacked speculative system building and mystical philosophy.
4. Advocated the use of logic and the method of analysis as the model for doing philosophy.

Critical Realism, as opposed to the New Realism, drew a distinction between the datum (i.e., the mental interpretation) and the object - therefore they advocated a kind of epistemological dualism. "The critical realists, in brief, maintained that the world contained at least two sets of entities: (a.) material things and (b.) mental states, ideas or essences, and that it is only the latter which are given or presented directly to consciousness. The given is not the same as the existent object. Moreover, our sense qualities exist at a time later than that of the events in the object that cause them. This theory, it was thought, had the advantage of enabling us to explain error by attributing it to the psychological state of the knower." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 24)

C. Naturalism:

"In a broad sense of the term 'naturalism,' any philosophy may be regarded as naturalistic if it maintains that all phenomena can in principle be explained in terms of natural causes or principles. In this sense, a number of philosophies of past centuries are also 'naturalistic.' This is undoubtedly true of most materialistic systems." (Kurtz, *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 26)

8. Modern America (1940 - present):

Other movements in the history of American Philosophy:

- a. **Idealism** (Brand Blanshard, James E. Creighton, William E. Hocking, and Wilbur Urban)
- b. **Rationalism** (Morris R. Cohen and Alfred North Whitehead) - belief that reason is the key to understanding nature.
- c. **Marxism** (Sidney Hook and Erich Fromm) - many intellectuals were attracted to Marxism during the depression of the 1930's.
- d. **Neo-Thomism** (Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson) - not many philosophers outside the Catholic universities have found anything in neo-Thomism that is new or inspiring.
- e. **Logical Positivism** (C. I. Lewis and C. L. Stevenson)
- f. **Existentialism** (Paul Tillich, John Wilde, William Barrett, George Schrader, James Edie, Maurice Natanson, and Robert G. Olson) - has appealed to individuals who believed that philosophy should concern itself with basic human problems and who accuse positivists and linguistic analysts (and rightly so - IMHO) of reducing philosophy to trivial games of words. Favorite topics of Existentialists are the alienation of humanity and their anxieties and the "inauthentic" mode of life.

- g. Phenomenology - deals abstractly and intuitively with the experiences in which certain kinds of objects are set before us - it seeks to analyze that experience and discover their relationships to their objects and other experiences.
- h. East-West (W. T. Stace, F. S. C. Northrop, J. B. Pratt, A. E. Burtt, Charles A. Moore, and Van Meter Ames)

Major Philosophers: American History

Early American Philosophers:

Jonathan Edwards
 Samuel Johnson
 Cadwallader Colden
 Ethan Allen
 Elihu Palmer
 Thomas Paine
 Philip Freneau
 Benjamin Franklin
 Thomas Jefferson
 James Madison
 Alexander Hamilton
 William Hamilton
 John Adams
 Samuel Adams
 Nathaniel Emmons
 Samuel Hopkins
 Benjamin Rush

Modern American Philosophers:

James McCosh
 Daniel Webster
 Robert Y. Hayne
 John C. Calhoun
 Abraham Lincoln
 William Ellery Channing
 Henry David Thoreau
 Ralph Waldo Emerson
 Edward Bellamy
 John Dewey
 Laurens Perseus Hickok
 John Fiske
 Chauncey Wright
 Thomas Kuhn
 Paul Grice
 William T. Harris
 Carl Hempel
 Ernest Nagel
 Charles Hodge
 Edwin Holt
 William James
 George Herbert Mead
 Sidney Hook
 Charles Peirce
 Ralph Perry
 Josiah Royce
 C. I. Lewis
 William Graham Sumner
 Orestes A. Brownson
 Henry George
 George Fitzhugh
 Henry Adams

American Deism: Selections

On Superstition

Philip Freneau

Implanted in the human breast, | Religion means to make us blest; | On reason built, she lends her aid | To help us through life's sickening shade.

But man, to endless error prone | And fearing most what's most unknown, | To phantoms bows that round him rise, | To angry gods, and vengeful skies.

Mistaken race, in error lost, | And foes to them who love you most, | No more fictitious gods revere, | Nor worship what engenders fear.

O Superstition! To thy sway | If man has bow'd and will obey, | Misfortune still must be his doom | And sorrow through the days to come.

Hence, ills on ills successive grow | To cloud our day of bliss below; | Hence wars and feuds, and deadly hate, | And all the woes that on them wait.

Here moral virtue finds its bane, | Hence, ignorance with her slavish train. | Hence, half the vigor of the mind | Relax'd, or lost in human kind.

The social tie by this is broke | When we some tyrant god invoke: | The bitter curse from man to man | From this infernal fiend began.

The reasoning power, celestial guest, | The stamp upon the soul impress'd; | When Superstition's awe degrades, | Its beauty fails, its splendor fades.

O! Turn from her detested ways, | Unhappy man! Her fatal maze; | The reason which he gave, improve, | And venerate the power above.

On the Abuse of Human Power, As Exercised over Opinion

Philip Freneau

What human power shall dare to bind | The mere opinions of the mind! | Must man at that tribunal bow | Which will no range to thought allow, | But his best powers would sway or sink, | And idly tells him what to think.

Yes! There are such, and such are taught | To fetter every power of thought; | To chain the mind, or bend it down | To some mean system of their own, | And make religion's sacred cause | Amenable to human laws.

Has human power the simplest claim | Our hearts to sway, our thoughts to tame; | Shall she the rights of heaven assert, | Can she to falsehood truth convert, | Or truth again to falsehood turn, | And at the test of reason spurn?

All human sense, all craft must fail | And all its strength will nought avail, | When it attempts with efforts blind | To sway the independent mind, | Its spring to break, its pride to awe, | Or give to private judgment, law.

Oh impotent! And vile as vain, | They, who would native thought restrain! | As soon might they arrest the storm | Or take from fire the power to warm, | As man compel, by dint of might, | Old darkness to prefer to light.

No! Leave the mind unchain'd and free, | And what they ought, mankind will be, | No hypocrite, no lurking fiend, | No artist to some evil end, | But good and great, benign and just, | As God and nature made them first.

On the Uniformity and Perfection of Nature

Philip Freneau

On one fix'd point all nature moves, | Nor deviates from the track she loves; | Her system, drawn from reason's source, | She scorns to change her wonted course.

Could she descend from that great plan | To work unusual things for man, | To suit the insect of an hour, | This would betray a want of power.

Unsettled in its first design | And erring, when it did combine | The parts that form the vast machine, | The figures sketch'd on nature's scene.

Perfections of the great first cause | Submit to no contracted laws, | But all-sufficient, all-supreme, | Include no trivial views in them.

Who looks through nature with an eye | That would the scheme of heaven descry | Observes her constant, still the same, | In all her laws, through all her fame.

No imperfection can be found | In all that is, above, around, | All, nature made, in reason's sight | Is order all, and all is right.

On the Religion of Nature

Philip Freneau

The power, that gives with liberal hand | The blessings man enjoys, while here, | And scatters through a smiling land | The abundant products of the year; | That power of nature, ever bless'd, | Bestow'd religion with the rest.

Born with ourselves, her early sway | Inclines the tender mind to take | The path of right, fair virtue's way | Its own felicity to make. | This universally extends | And leads to no mysterious ends.

Religion, such as nature taught, | With all divine perfection suits; | Had all mankind this system sought | Sophists would cease their vain disputes, | And from this source would nations know | All that can make their heaven below.

This deals not curses to mankind, | Or dooms them to perpetual grief, | If from its aid no joys they find, | It damns them not for unbelief; | Upon a more exalted plan | Creation's nature dealt with man.

Joy to the day, when all agree | On such grand systems to proceed, | From fraud, design, and error free, | And which to truth and goodness lead: | Then persecution will retreat | And man's religion be complete.

Doctrine to Be Preached (1731)

Benjamin Franklin

- ❖ That there is one God Father of the Universe.
- ❖ That he [is] infinitely good, Powerful and wise.
- ❖ That he is omnipresent.
- ❖ That he ought to be worshipped, by Adoration Prayer and Thanksgiving both in public and private.
- ❖ That he loves such of his Creatures as love and do good to others: and will reward them either in this World or hereafter.
- ❖ That Men's Minds do not die with their Bodies, but are made more happy or miserable after this Life according to their Actions.
- ❖ That Virtuous Men ought to league together to strengthen the Interest of Virtue, in the World: and so strengthen themselves in Virtue.
- ❖ That Knowledge and Learning is to be cultivated, and Ignorance dissipated.
- ❖ That none but the Virtuous are wise.
- ❖ That Man's Perfection is in Virtue.

American Declaration of Independence (1776)

Thomas Jefferson

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence indeed will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

Letter to Peter Carr (1787)

Thomas Jefferson

Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. . . . Read the bible then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy or Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature does not weigh against them. But those facts in the bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care. . . . Here you must recur to the pretension of the writer. . . . Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change of the laws of nature in the case he relates.

The Age of Reason (1794)

Thomas Paine

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy. . . . I do not believe in the creed [of] . . . any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

Socratic Class Discussion Questions

- ❖ What is a paradigm shift? Do you think Deist thought and ideas represented a paradigm shift in American thinking - why or why not?
- ❖ What were the main characteristics of Deism - as found through the selections (please reference the selections)?
- ❖ What is the difference between science and religion? Is Deism more of a science or a religion - why?
- ❖ How did the ideas of the new philosophical movement of Deism differ from the old Calvinistic ideas?
- ❖ Should the American Declaration of Independence be included in a selection of Deist writings - why or why not?
- ❖ What do you find most appealing about the ideas of Deism? What do you find the most disturbing about the ideas of Deism?
- ❖ Why do you think it declined as we moved into the nineteenth century?
- ❖ Should we care if any of the Founding Fathers were Deist or not - are there any ramifications for us today?

In Practice - How It's Used in Class

THE HOOK: get students to talk in the beginning of class; studies have shown that students are more likely to speak if they have already talked (even if it is not about history).

When I use this strategy in class, I **ALWAYS** open the class by asking the students if there are any questions on the chapter. If there are, then I answer them immediately before we go on to our class discussion questions. I do this in case there are questions or concerns from the chapter, which might not get covered in the class discussion questions; I obviously want to make sure all of those get addressed before we move on.

The questions that I use for our class discussion come from the *Guidebook: A Manual for Students to The American Pageant*. Here is a sample list of the questions from Chapter Seven:

- ❖ Why did the American colonies move from loyalty to protest to rebellion in the twelve years following the end of the French and Indian War?
- ❖ How and why did the Americans and the British differ in their views of taxation and of the relationship of colonies to the empire?
- ❖ What was the theory and practice of mercantilism? What were its actual effects on the colonies, and why did the colonists resent it so much?
- ❖ What methods did the colonists use in their struggle with British authorities, and how did the British try to counteract them?
- ❖ What advantages and disadvantages did the American rebels and the British each possess as the war began? What did each side do to mobilize its resources most effectively?
- ❖ Given the history of the colonies' founding and British "benign neglect" until the period just before the Revolution, was the American Revolution inevitable? Or could the thirteen colonies have remained peacefully attached to Britain for many years, as Canada did?

As students answer these I am constantly asking follow-up and clarifying questions to maintain the Socratic dialogue in class. I also encourage students to do the same. This usually results in a quality class period - not always, but most of the time students leave my class having participated in a meaningful and quality discussion.

We don't always get to all of the questions; at times, students will get bogged down with one question. Part of my job is to keep the discussion moving along in a timely manner. If we do not get to all of the questions (and this does not happen very often) - we do not come back to them, we simply move on to the new material. This is why it is so important to ask students if they have questions from the chapter, you don't want to not cover something in class that students don't understand. I always tell my classes, if you are not asking me questions, I assume you understand the material.

Selected Bibliography - American Philosophy

A. Histories of American Philosophical Thought:

1. Schneider, Herbert W. *A History of American Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1946; 2nd Edition, 1963. The textbook to consult on the topic of American philosophy - has become a classic and a standard reference.
2. Kuklick, Bruce. *A History of Philosophy in America: 1720 - 2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. A good history, from a very well known current philosopher.
3. Flower, Elizabeth and Murphey, Murray G. *A History of Philosophy in America*. (2 volumes) New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977.
4. Kurtz, Paul. "American Philosophy." *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (8 volumes), Volume 1. New York: Macmillan, 1967. Excellent source for studying the history of American philosophy - focuses only on thinkers that are traditional philosophers.

B. Primary Source Anthologies:

1. Anderson, P. R. and Fisch, M. H. (Editors) *Philosophy in America From the Puritans to James*. New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1939. Excellent source for primary sources in the history of American philosophy. The selections are very well chosen.
2. Adams, George P. (Editor) *Contemporary American Philosophy - Personal Statements*. (2 volumes) New York: Russell & Russell, 1962. Decent volumes, however, the selections are only from contemporary philosophers.
3. Blau, Joseph. (Editor) *American Philosophical Addresses, 1700 - 1900*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1946. Excellent source of complete philosophical addresses - dealing with philosophical issues, but this is good because it also contains addresses dealing with intellectual thought as well.
4. Fisch, M. H. (Editor) *Classic American Philosophers: Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, Whitehead*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1951. Great source for the biggies of American Philosophy. However, it is limited in its scope - only those mentioned are included in the volume.
5. Frankel, Charles. (Editor) *The Golden Age of American Philosophy*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1960. Great source of works from the "Golden Age" of American Philosophy - the Gilded Age to WWI.
6. Grob, Gerald N. and Beck, Robert N. (Editors) *American Ideas: Source Readings in the Intellectual History of the United States; Volume I - Foundations (1629 - 1865), Volume II - Dilemmas of Maturity (1865 - 1962)*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963. Excellent volumes, very good selections; however, it is out of print.
7. Harris, Leonard, et. al. (Editor) *American Philosophies: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001. A not-so-useful volume of primary sources - it is arranged topically (which I hate), the bad news is that this is one of the few that are still in print.
8. Hollinger, David A. and Capper, Charles (Editors) *The American Intellectual Tradition*. (2 volumes) New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Great selections, still in print, has a tendency to be to polemical (which I am not a fan of) - however, it is ridiculously expensive.
9. Irish, John P. (Editor) *American Philosophical and Intellectual Thought*. (2 volumes) (in progress). Primary source documents in the history of American philosophical and intellectual thought - with critical thinking discussion questions.
10. Kurtz, Paul. (Editor) *The American Philosophers*. (2 volumes) New York: Macmillan, 1965. Volume 1: *American Thought Before 1900*. Volume 2: *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. Excellent source for primary sources in the history of American philosophy. **This handout drew heavily from the introduction to these volumes.** The best two volumes of American Philosophy that you can get - get these two if you are interested in this topic. The down side - they are out of print, but there are scores of them on the Internet through used book bookstores. Try www.abebooks.com - I use this Internet search engine all the time for finding out of print and really old books.
11. Miller, Perry. (Editor) *American Thought: Civil War to WWI*. San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1954. Good volume, which focuses on the "Golden Age" philosophers.
12. Muellder, W. G., Sears, Laurence, and Schlabach, A. V. (Editors) *The Development of American Philosophy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1940. Excellent volume, another outstanding volume - worth getting, again, you will have to search the Internet for this title.
13. Myers, Gerald. (Editor) *The Spirit of American Philosophy*. New York: Capricorn Books, 1971. Not so useful volume, selections are ok, but arranged topically (you know how I feel about that).
14. Smith, James L. *Ideas That Shape a Nation*. Las Cruces, New Mexico: Suncrest Publications, 2000. Very useful and affordable volume.

15. Stanlick, Nancy A. and Silver, Bruce S. (Editors) *Philosophy in America*. (2 volumes) Prentice Hall, 2004. Good selections, still in print, again - ridiculously expensive.
16. White, Morton. (Editor) *Documents in the History of American Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. Decent, however it has too much European philosophy as background reading (not that that is a bad thing in itself, but I don't want all that in a sourcebook of American philosophy).

C. American Deism:

1. Walters, Kerry S. (Editor and Introduction) *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic*. University Press of Kansas, 1992.
2. Walters, Kerry S. (Editor and Introduction) *Elihu Palmer's: Principles of Nature*. Wolfeboro, N.H.: Longwood Academic, 1990.

Interested persons are encouraged to consult the works of individual philosophers mentioned in the outline - or anthologies of particular movements.