

American Philosophy

Phil 3130

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American society is in political, social, economic, and intellectual turmoil. Do American philosophical traditions afford ways to understand, diagnose, and possibly ameliorate all these conflicts? We will seek pluralist answers that are relevant to current events.

We will examine a diversity of American approaches to classical philosophical topics, including (a) the origin and purpose of the natural world, (b) the nature and place of human beings within it, (c) the sources and types of human knowledge, (d) the nature of community, and (e) the origin, purpose, and legitimacy of social relations and institutions such as freedom, slavery, and democracy.

We will study a plurality of views, both of those figures who are usually considered “classical American philosophers” and of others from the Native-, African-, and Hispanic-American traditions.

By the end of the course, students should be able to reflect on the distinctive characters and mutual influences of these views and to articulate personal philosophical positions on questions related to knowledge, democracy, freedom, equality, social justice, civil disobedience, and immigration.