The American Intellectual Tradition

Volume II

1865 to the Present

Edited by

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A Sourcebook

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For
Henry F. May

Preface

If a tradition is a family of disagreements, the American intellectual tradition is a very extended family. Its members include arguments inspired by the interests and ideals of a variety of communities within the United States as well as arguments concerned with the national community itself. The family also embraces arguments responsive to Western, if not universal, issues in philosophy, science, religion, politics, literature, and the arts. Some of the most influential members of this family are highly conscious of their European ancestry, whereas others have married into European families and still others remain always preoccupied with the family's Americanness. The family is currently quite content with its extended state; it is happy to count among its many arguments those voiced against the Unitarians by Ralph Waldo Emerson, against Booker T. Washington by W.E.B. Du Bois, and against John Stuart Mill by B. F. Skinner. But the family is vague on just what makes it a family to begin with. And the family is divided, if not confused, over exactly which of its members ought to supervise the education of its young. What disagreements are primary? How should the tradition be structured for the purposes of its continuation and critical revision? What specific artifacts of discourse have played the greatest role historically in developing the American intellectual tradition?

Answers to these questions are necessarily implied by any sourcebook for the study of American intellectual history. In deciding what to include in this collection, we have been aware of the dynamism and diversity of our subject as well as highly conscious of the differing constructions of it offered by various scholars. We have sought the advice of numerous colleagues and have designed *The American Intellectual Tradition* to make easily available to students many of the documents now routinely assigned—often through photocopies of uncertain legality—by teachers of this subject in American colleges and universities. Hence these volumes are chiefly practical devices, not outlines of a systematic, comprehensive interpretation of American intellectual history. Yet certain priorities have shaped these volumes, and it is appropriate to make them explicit.

The American Intellectual Tradition is frankly intellectual in orientation. Most of the documents collected herein are the result of someone's effort to perform an analysis and to persuade others of the correctness of that analysis. Although these documents express "attitudes" and embody "ideas," we have been more sensitive to their status as *arguments.* Hence most of our selections are of the genres classically associated with purposive discourse: sermon, address, letter, treatise, and essay. We have sought to identify pieces of argumentation that became prominent points of reference for contemporaries or for Americans of later generations. In so doing, we have necessarily been drawn again and again to the work of men and women normally regarded as intellectual leaders: people who were relatively effective at making arguments.

Arguments can be addressed to an infinite number of issues, but the writings collected herein respond to issues that have persistently generated extensive intellectual discussion. The bulk of our selections concern the theoretical basis for religious, scientific, artistic, political, social, and economic practice. Because the United States is above all a polity, the American family of disagreements includes a high proportion of arguments about the basis of politics. Because the public culture of America has often been caught up in the distinctive ethos of Protestant Christianity, many of our selections—especially in volume I—are directed at religious issues. Because modern America has been a peculiarly science-preoccupied civilization, many of the selections in volume II address the character of the scientific enterprise and debate the implications of scientific knowledge.

In order to give these issues historical shape, we have organized the documents around general themes or movements, which we address briefly in introductions preceding each main section. Were this a textbook rather than a sourcebook, we would have sought more consistently to indicate the entire structure of discourse surrounding the texts we discuss; here we can do no more than hint at this, leaving it to the instructor to fill in the missing arguments and counterarguments. In framing our selections, we have also sought to avoid what seems to us a failing in many previous anthologies: the packaging of each source as an example of a particular doctrine or movement. Throughout we have tried to promote the recognition that most intellectual works are dynamic and multifaceted and therefore have meaning in more than one frame of reference. With this in mind, we have written headnotes that emphasize the dense interiority of each document as well as the setting in which it was produced.

Wherever possible we have sought to include countervailing voices in this anthology, along with newer voices just beginning to be heard—or heard again—by historians. Yet one could easily list a fair number of creative American intellectuals whose names do not appear in our contents. The obvious solution would have been to expand our list. We have resisted this temptation for two reasons. First, not all formulations and figures were equally original or influential in the American intellectual tradition. Second, to have included a large number of individuals would have required reproducing only snippets. But reducing these texts to snippets would have all but eliminated their complexity and integrity, or the very qualities that define their character as intellectual sources. Also, because their complexity opens them to varying interpretations, reducing them to brief excerpts would have diminished their value as practical teaching devices. Hence, whenever we have been obliged to choose between reflecting the social and cultural diversity of American intellectual life and giving students an opportunity to confront a substantial piece of argumentation by a major thinker, we have most often chosen the second of these alternatives. Occasionally we have selected sections from a book or a letter, but most of the documents in these volumes are complete or nearly complete essays, addresses, or chapters.

The American Intellectual Tradition appears at a time when the study of intellectual history in American colleges and universities has recently been enlivened by vigorous methodological debate and conceptual innovation. We want to call attention to three especially cogent discussions of the state of the art: John E. Toews, "Intellectual History After the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *American Historical Review,* 92 (October 1987), 879–907; Donald R. Kelley, "Horizons of Intellectual History: Retrospect, Circumspect, Prospect," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 48 (January–March 1987), 143–69; and Michael

Ermarth, "Mindful Matters: The Empire's New Codes and the Plight of Modern European Intellectual History," *Journal of Modern History,* 57 (1985), 506–27. Students interested in the ongoing discussions of intellectual historians can consult the *Intellectual History Newsletter,* published at Boston University under the editorship of David D. Hall.

For advice in relation to this sourcebook, we wish to thank the following individuals: Robert C. Bannister of Swarthmore College; Thomas Bender of New York University; Ruth H. Bloch of the University of California, Los Angeles; Paul Boyer of the University of Wisconsin–Madison; Charles Lloyd Cohen of the University of Wisconsin–Madison; George Cotkin of California State Polytechnic University at San Luis Obispo; David Brion Davis of Yale University; John P. Diggins of the University of California, Irvine; Richard Wightman Fox of Reed College; George M. Fredrickson of Stanford University; James B. Gilbert of the University of Maryland; Samuel Haber of the University of California, Berkeley; Thomas L. Haskell of Rice University; Hugh Hawkins of Amherst College; E. Brooks Holifield of Emory University; James Hoopes of Babson College; Daniel Walker Howe of the University of California, Los Angeles; David Johnson of Portland State University; John F. Kasson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Linda K. Kerber of the University of Iowa; James T. Kloppenberg of Brandeis University; Bruce Kuklick of the University of Pennsylvania; Henry F. May of the University of California, Berkeley; Donald B. Meyer of Wesleyan University; Robert Moates Miller of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Lewis Perry of Vanderbilt University; Daniel T. Rodgers of Princeton University; Dorothy Ross of the University of Virginia; Joan Shelly Rubin of the State University College of New York at Brockport; Barbara Sicherman of Trinity University; Daniel Singal of Hobart and William Smith Colleges; Wilson Smith of the University of California, Davis; James Turner of the University of Michigan; and Daniel Wilson of Muhlenberg College. Some of these colleagues would have preferred a somewhat different contents ("An anthology for American intellectual history without Henry Adams? . . . a contradiction in terms!"), but without their counsel *The American Intellectual Tradition* would be less representative than it is of current teaching practice.

For assistance in the preparation of this sourcebook we wish to thank Thomas Baker, Martin Burke, James Jennings, and Brian Lloyd. The project was supported by grants from the University Research Council and the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We also wish to express our appreciation for the advice and assistance of Nancy Lane of Oxford University Press.

The editors have worked closely at every stage of the preparation of *The American Intellectual Tradition,* but responsibility for volume I belongs to Charles Capper and for volume II to David Hollinger.

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Part One

Toward a Secular Culture

Introduction

William James recognized that the life of the mind during his own time was becoming increasingly secular. The Bible, which had for so long been uniquely privileged as a foundation for knowledge and morals, came to be approached more critically, especially in the light of modern science. James did not lament this historic transformation; on the contrary, he welcomed it. Yet he was concerned that the scientific spirit of the age would intimidate people into giving up cherished beliefs about God which might, after all, remain plausible even in the wake of such discoveries as evolution, thermodynamics, and the multiple authorship of various books of the Bible. When James wrote "The Will to Believe" in 1897, he sought to vindicate the individual soul's right to retain aspects of the Protestant heritage not actually proven false by the advancement of secular learning. James himself was an eminent man of science; his defense of religious belief can remind us that many late-nineteenth-century American intellectuals were extremely conscious of a tension between religious tradition and scientific innovation.

Not all the documents in Part One manifest this tension as vividly as does James's "The Will to Believe," but these documents do display a tendency, if not a determination, to ground argument in naturalistic and humanistic premises. Even Josiah Royce's overtly biblical "The Problem of Job" did not suggest that scriptural authority enhances an idea's claim to truth. Rather, it was to logical analysis and humane instincts that Royce appealed in arguing for the justness of God's decision to permit the suffering of innocent persons.

Although the persistence of religious concern amid secular initiatives is a vital theme in the intellectual history of the United States during the late nineteenth century, these secular initiatives themselves are properly central to Part One of this collection. The most general of these initiatives was the effort to install "scientific method" as the chief agency by which culture was to be constituted. In recognition of the vigor and enthusiasm with which contemporaries of James and Royce advanced this program, Part One begins with Charles Peirce's argument for the supreme utility of scientific method. Because realism in literature and the arts was allied with the movement for a more scientific culture, Peirce is followed in these pages by William Dean Howells's plea for a literature that would tell the truth about people's actual lives rather than idealize them to suit a parochial moral agenda.

Gilded Age thinkers often hoped that social science might provide a new, solid foundation for organizing and governing their society, but they disagreed radically about just what principles were "scientific." The selections from William Graham Sumner and Lester Frank Ward—both of whom were adamant critics of inherited religious ideas—encapsule the debate between conservative and liberal assessments of the political implications of Darwinian science. Sumner and Ward also partook of the period's interest in explaining social phenomena historically, often with reference to the operation of putative natural laws. This interest is more fully represented in the

selection from Charlotte Perkins Gilman that follows Ward's essay. Gilman tried to explain in terms of evolutionary history the subordinate social position of women.

Gilman's contribution is a convenient stepping-stone to the initiatives on behalf of blacks and women represented here by W.E.B. Du Bois and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Du Bois attacked what he saw as the mistakenly passive and accommodationist program for black progress developed by Booker T. Washington; Stanton indicted an entire social order for its patent violation of the rights of human beings who happened to be women. Although some advocates of the rights of women and of blacks spoke within the old Protestant cultural consensus, Du Bois and Stanton drew more deeply—sometimes defiantly—from the Enlightenment tradition of universal natural rights.

The intellectual initiatives for which historians remember the several decades immediately following the Civil War are thus largely secular, but Part One closes with Royce and James in order that we remember the intensity with which Protestant Christianity could still be defended at the turn of the twentieth century even by the most sophisticated of American intellectuals.

Recommendations for Further Reading

Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965); Howard Mumford Jones, *The Age of Energy: Varieties of American Experience, 1865–1915* (New York, 1973); and *The Incorporation of America: Culture & Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, 1981); William R. Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, 1985); Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven, Conn., 1985); R. Jackson Wilson, *In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860–1920* (New York, 1968); Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York, 1987); Alexandra Oleson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in America, 1860–1920* (Baltimore, 1979); Larzer Ziff, *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (New York, 1966); Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America* (Philadelphia, 1976); Lewis Perry, *Intellectual Life in America: A History* (New York, 1984), 261–316.

CHARLES PEIRCE

"The Fixation of Belief"
1877

With this essay of 1877, Charles Peirce (1839–1914) began a series of articles on which much of his fame as a philosopher came to be based. Here he only introduced the topic of this series—"the logic of science"—but in so doing managed to (a) articulate a largely *social* vision of the scientific enterprise, according to which the community rather than the individual knower is the primary agent of cognitive progress; (b) direct the method of science against not only beliefs about nature, but against the entire panorama of inherited beliefs, especially and explicitly *religious* beliefs; (c) assert that open, honest inquiry is decidedly superior *morally* to pious loyalty to an inherited faith; and (d) argue, in what would eventually be recognized as a "pragmatic" mode, that true belief is simply a *habit* that can remain stable, a "fixed opinion." Peirce's life and work are discussed cogently by R. Jackson Wilson, "Charles Sanders Peirce: The Community of Inquiry," in Wilson's *In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860–1920* (New York, 1968), 32–59. For a more technical, philosophically rigorous study, see Murray G. Murphey, *The Development of Peirce's Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961). For a lucid account of Peirce's work in relation to his contemporaries in the Harvard milieu, see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960–1930* (New Haven, 1977), esp. 104–26.

Few persons care to study logic, because everybody conceives himself to be proficient enough in the art of reasoning already. But I observe that this satisfaction is limited to one's own ratiocination, and does not extend to that of other men.

We come to the full possession of our power of drawing inferences the last of all our faculties, for it is not so much a natural gift as a long and difficult art. The history of its practice would make a grand subject for a book. The medieval schoolman, following the Romans, made logic the earliest of a boy's studies after grammar, as being very easy. So it was as they understood it. Its fundamental principle, according to them, was, that all knowledge rests on either authority or reason; but that whatever is deduced by reason depends ultimately on a premise derived from authority. Accordingly, as soon as a boy was perfect in the syllogistic procedure, his intellectual kit of tools was held to be complete.

To Roger Bacon, that remarkable mind who in the middle of the thirteenth century was almost a scientific man, the schoolmen's conception of reasoning appeared only an obstacle to truth. He saw that experience alone teaches anything—a proposition which to us seems easy to understand, because a distinct conception of experience has been handed down to us from former generations; which to him also seemed perfectly clear, because its difficulties had not yet unfolded themselves. Of all kinds of experience, the best, he thought, was interior illumination, which teaches many things about Nature which the external senses could never discover such as the transubstantiation of bread.

Four centuries later, the more celebrated Bacon, in the first book of his "Novum Organum," gave his clear account of experience as something which must be open to verification and re-examination. But, superior as Lord Bacon's conception is to earlier notions, a modern reader who is not in awe of his grandiloquence is chiefly struck by the inadequacy of his view of scientific procedure. That we have only to make some crude experiments, to draw up briefs of the results in certain blank forms, to go through these by rule, checking off everything disproved and setting down the alternatives, and that thus in a few years physical science would be finished up—what an idea! "He wrote on science like a Lord Chancellor," indeed.

The early scientists, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, and Gilbert, had methods more like those of their modern brethren. Kepler undertook to draw a curve through the places of Mars; and his greatest service to science was in impressing on men's minds that this was the thing to be done if they wished to improve astronomy; that they were not to content themselves with inquiring whether one system of epicycles was better than another but that they were to sit down by the figures and find out what the curve, in truth, was. He accomplished this by his incomparable energy and courage, blundering along in the most inconceivable way (to us), from one irrational hypothesis to another, until, after trying twenty-two of these, he fell, by the mere exhaustion of his invention, upon the orbit which a mind well furnished with the weapons of modern logic would have tried almost at the outset.

In the same way, every work of science great enough to be remembered for a few generations affords some exemplification of the defective state of the art of reasoning of the time when it was written; and each chief step in science has been a lesson in logic. It was so when Lavoisier and his contemporaries took up the study of Chemistry. The old chemist's maxim had been, "Lege, lege, lege, labora, ora, et relege." Lavo-

Source: Popular Science Monthly, 12 (November 1877), 1–15.

isier's method was not to read and pray, not to dream that some long and complicated chemical process would have a certain effect, to put it into practice with dull patience, after its inevitable failure to dream that with some modification it would have another result, and to end by publishing the last dream as a fact: his way was to carry his mind into his laboratory, and to make of his alembics and cucurbits instruments of thought, giving a new conception of reasoning as something which was to be done with one's eyes open, by manipulating real things instead of words and fancies.

The Darwinian controversy is, in large part, a question of logic. Mr. Darwin proposed to apply the statistical method to biology. The same thing has been done in a widely different branch of science, the theory of gases. Though unable to say what the movement of any particular molecule of gas would be on a certain hypothesis regarding the constitution of this class of bodies, Clausius and Maxwell were yet able, by the application of the doctrine of probabilities, to predict that in the long run such and such a proportion of the molecules would, under given circumstances, acquire such and such velocities; that there would take place, every second, such and such a number of collisions, etc.; and from these propositions they were able to deduce certain properties of gases, especially in regard to their heat-relations. In like manner, Darwin, while unable to say what the operation of variation and natural selection in every individual case will be, demonstrates that in the long run they will adapt animals to their circumstances. Whether or not existing animal forms are due to such action, or what position the theory ought to take, forms the subject of a discussion in which questions of fact and questions of logic are curiously interlaced.

The object of reasoning is to find out, from the consideration of what we already know, something else which we do not know. Consequently, reasoning is good if it be such as to give a true conclusion from true premises, and not otherwise. Thus, the question of validity is purely one of fact and not of thinking. A being the premises and B being the conclusion, the question is, whether these facts are really so related that if A is B is. If so, the inference is valid; if not, not. It is not in the least the question whether, when the premises are accepted by the mind, we feel an impulse to accept the conclusion also. It is true that we do generally reason correctly by nature. But that is an accident; the true conclusion would remain true if we had no impulse to accept it; and the false one would remain false, though we could not resist the tendency to believe in it.

We are, doubtless, in the main logical animals, but we are not perfectly so. Most of us, for example, are naturally more sanguine and hopeful than logic would justify. We seem to be so constituted that in the absence of any facts to go upon we are happy and self-satisfied; so that the effect of experience is continually to counteract our hopes and aspirations. Yet a lifetime of the application of this corrective does not usually eradicate our sanguine disposition. Where hope is unchecked by any experience, it is likely that our optimism is extravagant. Logicality in regard to practical matters is the most useful quality an animal can possess, and might, therefore, result from the action of natural selection; but outside of these it is probably of more advantage to the animal to have his mind filled with pleasing and encouraging visions, independently of their truth; and thus, upon unpractical subjects, natural selection might occasion a fallacious tendency of thought.

That which determines us, from given premises, to draw one inference rather than another, is some habit of mind, whether it be constitutional or acquired. The habit is

good or otherwise, according as it produces true conclusions from true premises or not; and an inference is regarded as valid or not, without reference to the truth or falsity of its conclusion specially, but according as the habit which determines it is such as to produce true conclusions in general or not. The particular habit of mind which governs this or that inference may be formulated in a proposition whose truth depends on the validity of the inferences which the habit determines; and such a formula is called a *guiding principle* of inference. Suppose, for example, that we observe that a rotating disk of copper quickly comes to rest when placed between the poles of a magnet, and we infer that this will happen with every disk of copper. The guiding principle is, that what is true of one piece of copper is true of another. Such a guiding principle with regard to copper would be much safer than with regard to many other substances—brass, for example.

A book might be written to signalize all the most important of these guiding principles of reasoning. It would probably be, we must confess, of no service to a person whose thought is directed wholly to practical subjects, and whose activity moves along thoroughly beaten paths. The problems which present themselves to such a mind are matters of routine which he has learned once for all to handle in learning his business. But let a man venture into an unfamiliar field, or where his results are not continually checked by experience, and all history shows that the most masculine intellect will ofttimes lose his orientation and waste his efforts in directions which bring him no nearer to his goal, or even carry him entirely astray. He is like a ship on the open sea, with no one on board who understands the rules of navigation. And in such a case some general study of the guiding principles of reasoning would be sure to be found useful.

The subject could hardly be treated, however, without being first limited; since almost any fact may serve as a guiding principle. But it so happens that there exists a division among facts, such that in one class are all those which are absolutely essential as guiding principles, while in the other are all those which have any other interests as object of research. This division is between those which are necessarily taken for granted in asking whether a certain conclusion follows from certain premises, and those which are not implied in that question. A moment's thought will show that a variety of facts are already assumed when the logical question is first asked. It is implied, for instance, that there are such states of mind as doubt and belief—that a passage from one to the other is possible, the object of thought remaining the same, and that this transition is subject to some rules which all minds are alike bound by. As these are facts which we must already know before we can have any clear conception of reasoning at all, it cannot be supposed to be any longer of much interest to inquire into their truth or falsity. On the other hand, it is easy to believe that those rules of reasoning which are deduced from the very idea of the process are the ones which are the most essential; and, indeed, that so long as it conforms to these it will, at least, not lead to false conclusions from true premises. In point of fact, the importance of what may be deduced from the assumptions involved in the logical question turns out to be greater than might be supposed, and this for reasons which it is difficult to exhibit at the outset. The only one which I shall here mention is, that conceptions which are really products of logical reflections, without being readily seen to be so, mingle with our ordinary thoughts, and are frequently the causes of great confusion. This is the case, for example, with the conception of quality. A quality as such is never an object of observation. We can see that a thing is blue or green, but the quality of