

“I AM AN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER”
—An Interview Series with John Capps—



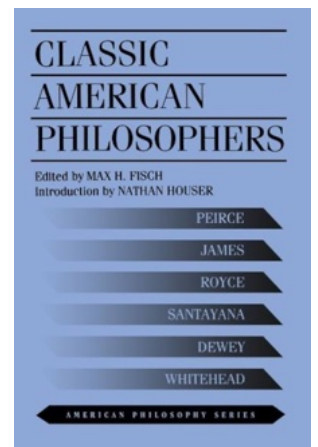
[Roger Ward](#) is Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown College. He is the author of [Conversion in American Philosophy: Exploring the Practice of Transformation](#) (2004) and [Peirce and Religion: Knowledge, Transformation, and the Reality of God](#) (2018) as well as many articles on the connections between philosophy, theology, and community. He serves on SAAP’s Board of Directors and has been editor-in-chief of its official journal [The Pluralist](#) since 2013.

What does American philosophy mean to you?

For me, American philosophy is an open door into a rich and inviting landscape of thought. As a graduate student trying to find my footing in the challenges of the tradition, the American philosophers stood out as companion thinkers who explored questions of experience, truth and meaning, and who engaged meaningfully with these ideas—both through their texts but also in the live versions I met in classrooms and at conferences.

How did you become an American philosopher?

By accident I suppose. It was a required class in my Master’s program at Baylor and we read through Fisch’s *Classic American Philosophers*. Bill Cooper never lectured or gave a lot of direction but he encouraged the five of us to read and understand each figure. We took the responsibility of leading the discussions and providing reading notes. I was hooked. The hook went deeper when I got to Penn State and worked with Doug Anderson and somewhere along that path it became the way I identify myself and my philosophical interests.



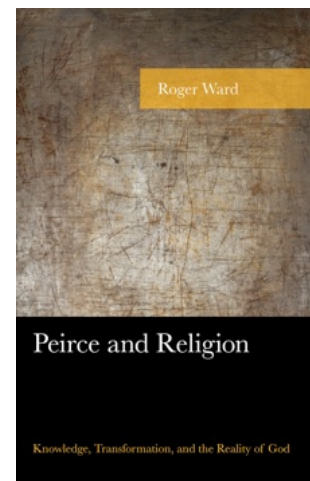
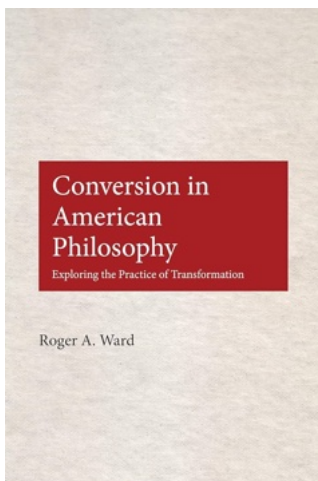
How would you describe your current research?

Fascinating, especially as I find new-to-me scholarship and texts that deepen my questions about community. Entering into the world of Jane Addams and W.E.B. Du Bois and Black social gospel (thanks to Gary Dorrien’s awesome work) is compelling in terms of the matching of ideological goals with existential challenges. The image of Du Bois guarding his house with a shotgun during an uprising of anti-Black violence in Atlanta really sticks

with me, as does Jane Addams having a confrontation of sorts with Leo Tolstoy at his farm in Russia. She was some kind of tough!

What do you do when you're not doing American philosophy?

I ride my bike a lot. Central Kentucky is just beautiful for that and my wife and I enjoy cycle touring and traveling. We have a delightful church community that keeps us involved with leadership and community engagement. And we welcomed a granddaughter last year so family trips and FaceTime calls are really cool.



What's your favorite work in American philosophy? What should we all be reading?

I am going to cheat a bit on this one. First, my long-term fascination with Peirce is pretty clear, and is probably equal or nearly so to my attraction to Jonathan Edwards.

But what I think people should read is *The Pluralist*! As the editor I have the joy of regularly reading truly excellent work and thinking by so many people. It's the strength of this communal project—of understanding and expanding the lines of thought from our forebears to our present experiences and challenges—that really makes me proud and satisfied to claim myself as an American philosopher.

(July 2024)