

SCIENCE THE FAULTS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

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SEMINAR SYLLABUS

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DESCRIPTION

The age of modern philosophy—erupting in the seventeenth and crumbling in the twenty-first—may be justly characterized as an age of crude ruptures: dividing mind from body, nature from culture, truth from meaning, and the self from the other. To look around the world today, one sees polarized divides throughout culture. But these divides begin not in mere practical disagreement, but from a speculative fragmentation wrought by the faults which run throughout modern philosophical thought.

This seminar will trace the course of these faults, beginning with René Descartes (1596–1650) and John Locke (1632–1704), running through David Hume (1711–1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and concluding with Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Willard Quine (1908–2000), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980).

They are a group of thinkers diverse and manifestly opposed, often, to one another, if not on the whole then at least in important parts. Yet despite their apparent diversity, each is united by a strain of thought that circumscribes the intelligibility of the human experience to an extent lesser than is real. In following the consequences of each thinker, therefore, one finds some part of the universe irretrievably cut off from others.

In critically appraising the merits of any philosopher or philosophical approach, one may either evaluate the whole system of thought or the principles upon which it is founded. The first is a process as long and arduous as the writings one must scrutinize. But it relies upon the latter, the examination of principles, which—if such examination is performed carefully—suffices to discern swiftly the errors of systems, approaches, and conclusions alike. We need not carefully deconstruct the edifice of modern philosophical thinking to understand how it has all gone so awry, so long as we may—and indeed, we here will—discern carefully the faults in its foundations.

METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from a modern philosopher. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor. Careful reading of the material is required to engage fully from week to week. Moreover, *continual discussion*—not just via the scheduled sessions but by making use of the



integrated message board—will foster that participation and engagement throughout the week. Participants will be expected to partake in these discussions on a regular basis and will be challenged to do so directly.

READING

The primary texts for this seminar include Descartes' *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method*, John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Immanuel Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, selections from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Willard Quine, and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*. All primary and supplemental readings will be made available by PDF. As a preparatory bibliography—works that may be profitably read before the beginning of the seminar, in part or in whole, some or all—we include these works, which are not endorsed as such for the ideas they promote, but which are recommended nonetheless as germane to understanding our situation:

- Rene Guenon 1927, *The Crisis of the Modern World*.
- Richard M. Weaver 1946, *Ideas Have Consequences*.
- Romano Guardini 1956, *The End of the Modern World*.
- Leo Strauss 1960, "Three Waves of Modernity".
- Charles Taylor 1989, *Sources of the Self*.
- Latour 1991, *We Have Never Been Modern*.
- Louis Dupré 1993, *Passage to Modernity*.
- Augusto Del Noce 2015, *The Crisis of Modernity*.

LECTURE

Each week there will also be a 20-40+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There *may* be accompanying visual aids (not necessarily) in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, going for a run, etc.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 2:00pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week's material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

AUDITS OR COMPLETES

Beginning in 2022, all Lyceum Institute seminar participants will be able to either audit the seminar or complete the seminar. To complete the seminar, the participant must attend at least six of the eight discussion sessions live, actively contribute throughout the course, and submit an essay of 2000+ words pertaining to the subject. This essay may be evaluated for publication in *Reality* and will be included in each Lyceum Institute member's profile, along with the mark of auditing or completing. Due date for a submission is 14 December 2022.

SESSION SCHEDULE

September 24	<p>Week 1: The Modern Context</p> <p>Lecture 1: From the Break with Scholasticism to the Incoherence of Today</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from preparatory bibliography.
October 1	<p>Week 2: The False Ground of Modern Philosophy</p> <p>Lecture 2: The πρώτον ψεῦδος [first falsehood] of Modern Philosophy: Descartes' Method</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> (I-II).
October 8	<p>Week 3: Common Idealism</p> <p>Lecture 3: The Lonely Way of Ideas</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> (selections). • Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> (III). • Locke, <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections).
October 15	<p>Week 4: A Broken "Empiricism"</p> <p>Lecture 4: David Hume's "Empirical" Method: The Tale of Naïve Cartesian</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections). • Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> (selections).
October 22	BREAK
October 29	<p>Week 5: Immanuel Kant and the Unknowable</p> <p>Lecture 5: Kant's <i>A Priori</i> Prison</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant, <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> (selections).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gilson, <i>Unity of Philosophical Experience</i> (selections).
November 5	<p>Week 6: Pointing Games</p> <p>Lecture 6: Wittgenstein's Language</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (selections).
November 12	<p>Week 7: Avoiding Reality</p> <p>Lecture 7: Choose Your Own Ontology</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quine, "On What There Is". • Geach, "Symposium: On What There Is"
November 19	<p>Week 8: Jean-Paul Sartre and the Nadir of Modernity</p> <p>Lecture 8: Antagonism of Person and Nature</p> <p>Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jean-Paul Sartre, <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>.