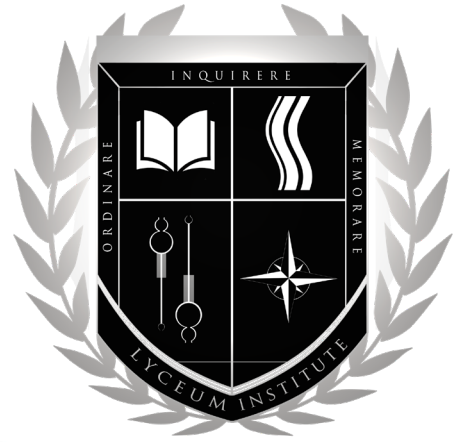


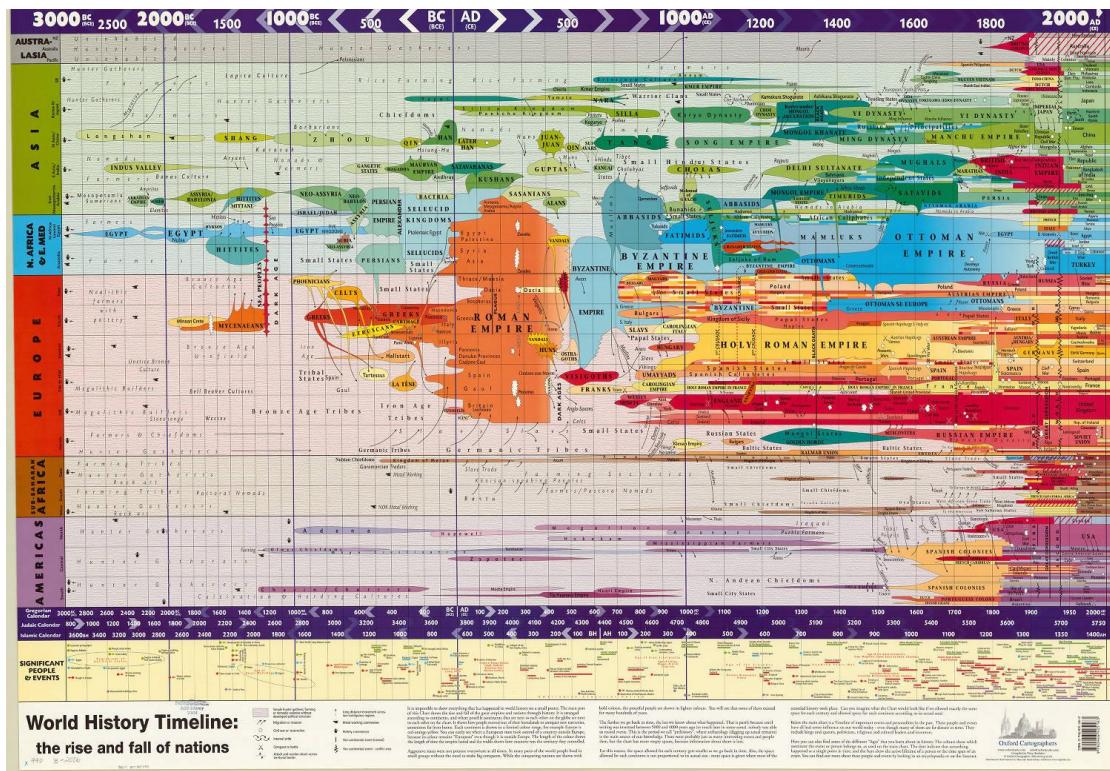
PHILOSOPHERS AND HISTORY

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

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[SPRING 2024]



DESCRIPTION

Etienne Gilson claimed that the History of Philosophy serves the philosopher as laboratory experiments serve the chemist and biologist. Ideas are tested in time as reactions are tested in tubes. If this is true for philosophers, might we broaden the question and ask about the protagonists and events of history in general? Is not history somehow an unavoidable vector of human reality from the moment we hear – to put it figuratively – the creative word “go”? The past, it turns out, is not only massively behind us chronologically, but also spatially around us in the vault of the sky, for that splendid spread of stars is only able to display itself by singing the astrophysical

ould lang syne of the cosmos. It's all stellar history. The stars are in themselves witness to the fact that for any anteriority to be real, it must also in some sense be very present; otherwise its narration would be no more than a morgue or museum of bygone curiosities. Historical memory, when made genuinely contemporaneous, unveils the extent of the pervasive mystery of human temporality, and how both past and future inhabit – and at times haunt – our every present moment. True insight appears to be wedded both to foresight and to hindsight.

While wary of the dangers of historicism (which would reduce reality to the trajectory of its development), the question of history must nonetheless be deeply pondered if philosophy is to gain realistic access to the full array of its native topics. This seminar will attempt to cultivate a robust philosophical approach to the understanding of human time and history. We will not only attempt to fathom the mystery of why chronology is woven into our very humanity, but also to engage theological notions of salvation history, and, more polemically, to evaluate modern projects that tend to overreach themselves when dealing with the past. Included among these last are Hegelianism, evolutionism, Marxism and the current enthusiasm for post-this and post-thatisms. We will examine why such ideologies are so preoccupied with trying to “put the past behind them,” or with being “on the right side of history.”

Although Aristotle famously denied that there can be a “science” of history, still, just as we discern a *logos* that penetrates the cosmos synchronically (making philosophy and science possible), many, such as St. Augustine, hold that there is also a meaning to be found in the diachronic course of the centuries. But if such a meaning exists, it will be available only under certain constraints. Misguided ambitions of exhaustive historical “explanation” usually founder before the multiplicity and complexity of human events, and the co-existence of comparably plausible, but ultimately conflicting interpretations. We must dig deeper if we are to gain a more three-dimensional view of our past. This study will invite us to summon up the courage to face a more informed and connected present, and to live knowingly and willingly within it.

In its first two weeks, the seminar will begin with a reflection on the presuppositions that lie at the foundation of any discussion of history, namely: first, at a very basic level, the nature of motion and change and, most importantly, that fugitive gauge which is their measure – time (as contrasted with perpetuity, eternity and aeviternity) and what we will call the Three Migrations of tradition, transmission and translation. Then we will face the vexing question of human freedom over against notions of fate and determinism, and our own pivotal role in shaping events and ourselves. We will ask what are, in the final analysis, these agents, these protagonists, these *persons* that we are, who, unlike our fellow-animals, *have a history* to begin with; and we will peek briefly into the far deeper question as to what the metaphysical notion of creation has to say about the very existence of human historicity.

We will then turn our attention to the human faculty that most directly engages with time and history – the memory. Here we will consult especially St. Augustine, but also a few Indian and Far Eastern sources, with the hope of better understanding what it means to remember and also the central role that our faculty of hearing plays in recollection.

Next, we will examine some contrasting paradigms for tracing temporal changes: for instance, the narrative and linear over against the cyclical model, on the one hand, and the Great Protagonists contrasted with the *longue durée* model, on the other.

Afterwards, we shall ask what the relation is between history and myth, and why they tend to travel together in our bids to gain cognitive purchase on our convoluted past.

We shall also take a look at the major attempts of modern thought to get a handle on history, either theoretically, as in Hegel, biologically, as in Darwin, or through schemes of causality (Spengler, Toynbee, McNeil). We will

turn to what seem more fruitful approaches in Vico, Hamann and Rosenstock-Huessy, and also discuss what is meant by “virtual history” as an especially revealing approach (as in Ferguson).

As a species of knowledge, we shall situate history as standing foursquare within the Humanities and thereby offering above all *cenoscopic* insight. Nonetheless, we shall briefly review what, in more recent times, prominent social scientists have offered by way of idioscopic approaches regarding our distant past (especially in so-called Big History in astrophysics and Deep History in our prehistoric heritage in paleogenetics, genomics and linguistics), and review the provocative claims made by the proponents of these perspectives.

In the last meeting we shall turn in a special way to the Abrahamic traditions, and ask why they alone among the world’s great religions are inseparable from a long and dramatic narrative in which their teachings are not only articulated but also, and necessarily embodied.

METHOD

The seminar is eight weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. 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.

LECTURE

Each week there will be a 30-50+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also venture into related topics, perhaps using the reading as a launching point for addressing some tangential 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 readings, 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 10 am 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

All Lyceum Institute seminar participants will be able to either *audit* the seminar or *complete* the seminar. To complete the seminar, the participant **must** submit an essay of 2000–5000 words pertaining to topics discussed. 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.

SESSION SCHEDULE

(subject to additions and modifications)

<p>Discussion on:</p> <p>April 6</p>	<p>1. Time: the Measure of Motion and the Motor of History in the Three Migrations of Tradition, Transmission and Translation</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] John M. Quinn. <i>The Doctrine of Time in St. Thomas</i>, Literary Licensing, 2013 [1959] 17-43; A.K. Coomaraswamy. <i>Time and Eternity</i>, "Introduction," <i>Artibus Asiae</i>, 1947, 1-7. • [Secondary] Quinn, <i>ibidem</i>, 1-16; Coomaraswamy, <i>Time and Eternity</i>, V. "Christian and Modern," 105-140.
<p>April 13</p>	<p>2. Freedom, Personhood and Creation in History</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Vernon Bourke. <i>Will in Western Thought</i>, Sheed & Ward, "What Does Will Mean?", 1964, 5-27. Jacques Maritain. <i>The Thomist Idea of Freedom</i>, PDF. • [Secondary] Norris Clarke. <i>Being and Person</i>, Marquette, 1958; P-M Emonet. <i>The Greatest Marvel of Nature</i>, Crossroads, 2000, 14-23. S.R. Paine. "Scholia on an Implicit Person," parts 1 and 2: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oqMNOO--mKk3ADaDh1OSHOWlcR6cV8Hj/view
<p>April 20</p>	<p>3. Memory: the "Great Harbor" (Aug.) – on Hearing and Remembering</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] St. Augustine. <i>Confessions</i>, bk. X • [Secondary] Todd Breyfogle. "Memory and Imagination in Augustine's <i>Confessions</i>", PDF.
<p>April 27</p>	<p>4. History: Cycles or Stories? Protagonists or Currents?</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary]. Mircea Eliade. <i>Cosmos and History</i>, U. of Chicago, 1949, 147-162. • [Secondary] Huston Smith. "Hope, Yes; Progress, No," from <i>Forgotten Truth</i>, Harper, 1992 [1976] 118-145.
<p>May 4</p>	<p>BREAK</p>
<p>May 11</p>	<p>5. History and Myth</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, <i>Out of Revolution</i>. "Articulating Periods and Coordinating Memories," Berg, 1969, 689-707. • [Secondary] Norman Fiering. "Heritage vs. History: ERH as a "Physician of Memory," from <i>Understanding Rosenstock-Huussy</i>, 60-93.

May 18	<p>6. <i>Vis-à-vis the Sciences – History and the Irreducible</i></p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[Primary]</i> Gianbattista Vico; Georg Hegel; Karl Marx • <i>[Secondary]</i> Spengler, Toynbee, McNeil, Hayden White
May 25	<p>7. <i>Big History, Deep History and Other Idioscopic Ventures</i></p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[Primary]</i> • <i>[Secondary]</i>
June 1	<p>8. <i>The Only Scripture That Tells a Story</i></p> <p><i>Readings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>[Primary]</i>. From St. Augustine. <i>City of God</i>, • <i>[Secondary]</i>

In the “Files” folder of TEAMS, you will find digitized copies of the primary and secondary readings, together with the audio of the lecture.