



LYCEUM INSTITUTE SEMINAR CATALOG 2025

The Lyceum Institute's philosophy seminars, provided four times per year—Winter (Q1), Spring (Q2), Summer (Q3), and Fall (Q4)—offer small groups (8-20 people) the opportunity to engage with a topic, written work, or individual thinker from the history or topics of philosophy under the guidance of a PhD. Seminars are offered to both enrolled and outside participants in a modular format: that is, Lyceum Institute members choose their own course of study, selecting each seminar individually when offered, with advice from the Executive Director. These seminars range from introductory to advanced studies across a wide range of philosophical topics.

Additionally, these seminars are priced on a model of **financial subsidiarity**: pay what you can. Those who can pay more should, so that those who cannot pay as much need not. Public participants may pay from \$60–\$200, while members can pay between \$40–90. Advanced memberships include credits for 3 seminars annually, and Premium memberships include 8 seminars to be divided between two accounts. These financial contributions allow us to pay a stipend to our Faculty in recompense for their wisdom, guidance, and dedication to the life of the mind.

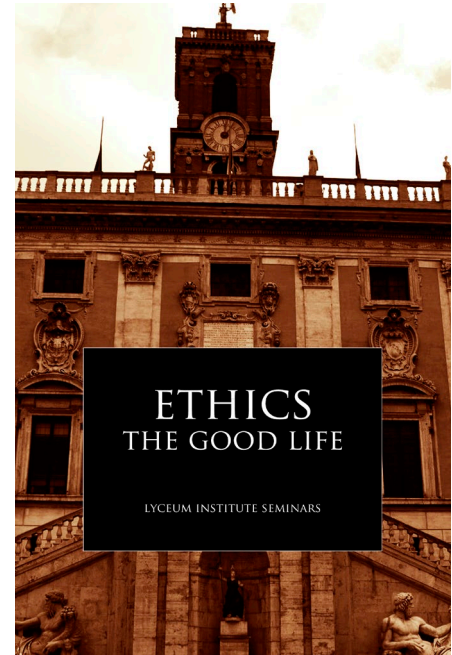
WINTER SEMINARS (Q1)

ETHICS: THE GOOD LIFE

BRIAN KEMPLE

Can we be happy? Looking around in our twenty-first century world, it may seem that “happiness” is a contingent, fleeting and difficult matter more of luck than of choice or action. Such a view stems from an implicitly nihilistic worldview, unconsciously imbibed by many today, in which meaning is imposed upon the realities extrinsic to us. The result of this worldview—which burdens us with creating meaning for all the universe—causes a gnawing grief at the inevitable failure and ever-more-extreme attempts at improving anesthetics to dull this pain. On the contrary, this seminar looks at the philosophical treatments of the ancients and medievals, who construe happiness as an inward possession whereby the human person acts for the sake of attaining goods meaningful in themselves.

Finding a meaningful life requires effort: it is not something which happens to us, most especially when the world in which we live denies that the universe is itself meaningful. Thus, by reading sources ancient, medieval, and modern, we will look at how the good of life has been emptied, how it can be restored, and how it can be oriented.



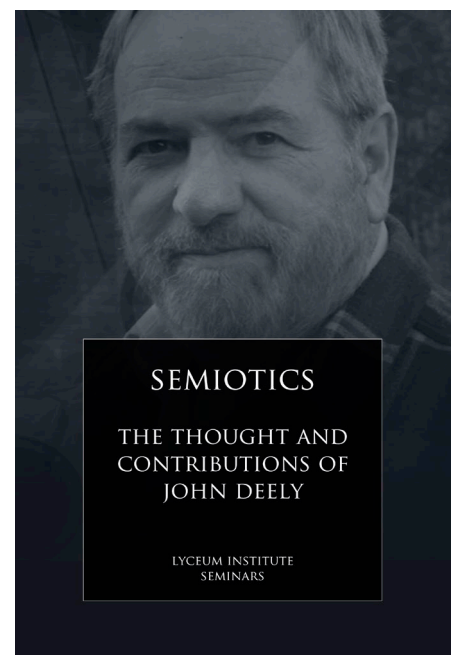
SEMIOTICS: THOUGHT AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF JOHN DEELY

BRIAN KEMPLE

In the 2010 Routledge Companion to Semiotics, the entry for John Deely begins:

While Peirce is acknowledged as the greatest American Philosopher, John Deely (b. 1942), in his wake, is arguably the most important living American philosopher and is the leading philosophers in semiotics. An authority on the work of Peirce and a major figure in both contemporary semiotics, Scholastic realism, Thomism and, more broadly, Catholic philosophy, Deely’s thinking has demonstrated how awareness of signs has heralded a new, genuinely ‘postmodern’ epoch in the history of human thought.

This “postmodernism”, which will be a theme throughout the seminar, is not the post-structuralist movement of the 20th century, but rather a moving-past modernity which is affected principally by a retrieval of scholasticism, and especially the late scholastic work of John Poinsett, also known as John of St. Thomas.



Crucial to this retrieval, and crucial to the understanding of semiotics, is the notion of relation. Too long ignored or mistaken as to its nature, a successful retrieval and advance of our knowledge of relation is necessary to understanding the action of signs. For, by relation, the action of signs scales across the whole universe and unites nature and culture—or, at least, shows the possibility of such coherence. Thus, the major contributions to semiotics given by Deely, which will be covered in this seminar, are the **proto-semiotic history**, an expanded doctrine of **causality**, the retrieved and clarified notion of **relation**, the concept of **physiosemosis**, the continuity of **culture** and **nature**, the notion of **purely objective reality**, and the **real interdisciplinarity** which semiotics fosters.

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SPRING SEMINARS (Q2)

LANGUAGE AND PHILOSOPHY

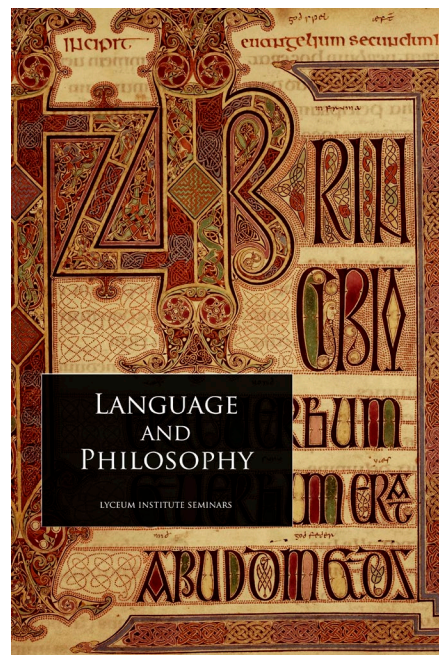
SCOTT RANDALL PAINE

Modernity's advances have reshaped how we perceive ourselves, first emphasizing the vast expanse of space. With developments like global exploration, the Copernican revolution, and dreams of interplanetary colonies, humanity embraced the concept of an "infinite universe" of space, echoing the title of Alexander Koyré's *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. By the mid-19th century, time and history also came into focus as defining dimensions of human existence. Philosophers like Hegel, Marx, and Bergson, along with scientists like Darwin and Einstein, framed humanity as caught in the relentless current of time, a theme epitomized in Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

These spatial-temporal frameworks, bolstered by the rise of science and technology, seemed to encompass human reality. Yet, the complexity of existence introduced a third dimension: language. Emerging as an irreducible reality, language reshaped philosophical inquiry, prompting what came to be known as the "linguistic turn." Thinkers like Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt anticipated this shift, emphasizing language's centrality to human understanding.

In the 20th century, linguistics and philosophy converged to explore language's profound role. So-called Analytic Philosophy, rooted in Frege's innovations, delved into logic, meaning, and speech acts. Simultaneously, Continental Philosophy engaged with structuralism, post-structuralism, and semiotics, with figures like Saussure and Peirce advancing divergent approaches. Across these traditions, language emerged as a fundamental concern, rivaling space and time.

As we navigate the 21st century, language joins consciousness, personhood, religion, and culture among the core questions defining human existence—phenomena both enigmatic and essential to understanding ourselves. Focusing on this central role of language, we will, in this seminar, explore the questions of the relationship between thought and language; the commonality of our vocal instruments but thousands of languages; the nature and possibility of translation; the differences of spoken and written languages; the classification of languages; the relationship of language to the trivium and to the quadrivium; the place of language in the "prophetic" Semitic languages; and the significance of the Word made flesh.

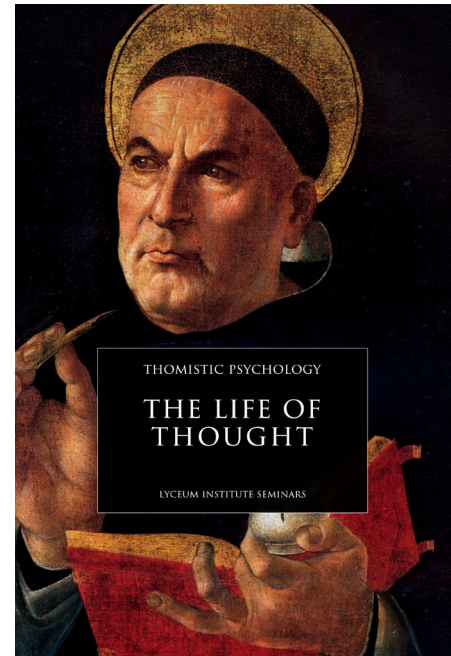


THOMISTIC PSYCHOLOGY: LIFE OF THOUGHT

BRIAN KEMPLE

In his 1854 *Institutes of Metaphysic*, James F. Ferrier introduced the term “epistemology” to describe the study of knowledge, and opposed it to “ontology” (a term introduced in 1606 and popularized in the 18th century by Christian Wolff) as the two main branches of philosophy. Of these two, Ferrier gave a chronological priority to the study of epistemology. As he writes: “we are scarcely in a position to say what is, unless we have at least attempted to know what is; and we are certainly not in a position to know what is, until we have thoroughly examined and resolved the question—What is the meaning of to know?”

This prioritizing of knowing what it means to know follows upon the severance of knowledge from being. This unnatural segregation undermines the philosophical project. In this seminar, we will take up an opposed standpoint in studying the nature of philosophical knowledge, a standpoint indicated by the title: *life of thought*. There is no living apart from being, and, as we will show, no thinking apart from living. We cannot understand human thinking apart from the context of human life, and we cannot understand human life apart from its immersion in being—an immersion not only of its substantial existence, but also its cognitive living. Therefore, this seminar will cover the topics of the specifically intellectual nature of the human soul, the operations of intellectual discovery, the formation and development of concepts, and the integral union of intellectual and perceptual faculties in the human person.



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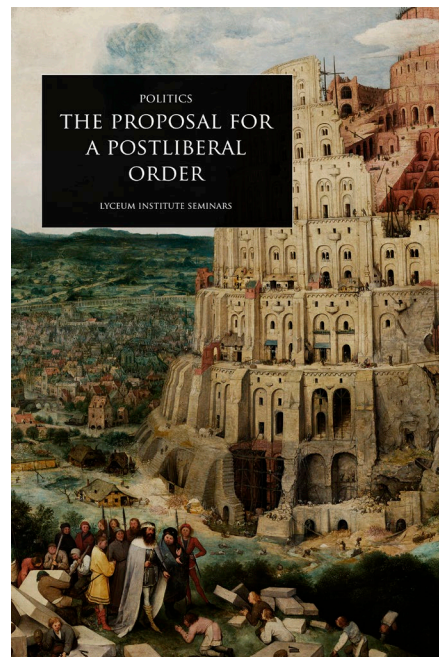
SUMMER SEMINARS (Q3)

POLITICS: THE PROPOSAL FOR A POSTLIBERAL FUTURE

FRANCISCO PLAZA

In this course, we will examine contemporary political and cultural critiques that look ahead toward a post-liberal society. We will analyze more recent works by Adrian Vermeule, Patrick Deneen, and D.C. Schindler to understand both their criticisms of the status quo and proposals for the future.

Our study will begin by analyzing the critiques these thinkers level against liberalism as a governing ideology, examining its perceived shortcomings in fostering human flourishing, communal solidarity, and moral coherence. Adrian Vermeule's arguments for a renewed emphasis on common good constitutionalism will be juxtaposed with Patrick Deneen's critique of liberalism as an unsustainable political project rooted in individualism and technocratic governance. D.C. Schindler's philosophical approach will further broaden our inquiry, particularly his exploration of the metaphysical underpinnings of liberalism and his call for a return to a more integrative understanding of human and societal development.

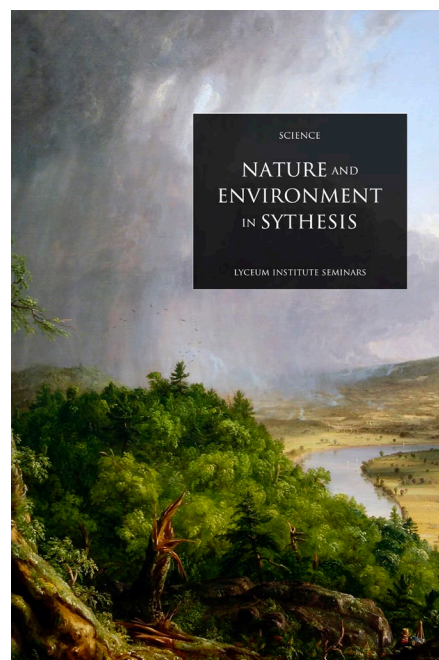


SCIENCE: NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN SYNTHESIS

DANIEL WAGNER

Philosophy of Nature & Environmental Philosophy in Synthesis: A Thomistic-Aristotelian Model. This Lyceum Institute Seminar is to be taught Dr. Daniel C. Wagner. The subject of the Seminar is the Philosophy of nature and the human person in synthesis with Environmental philosophy. The Seminar will disclose a *Thomistic-Aristotelian model* of environmental philosophy centering on the principles of *nature*, the human *person*, the *human good and dignity*, the *ethical community and justice*, *creation*, and *stewardship*. Following the *disputatio* model of dialogue and inquiry, alternative approaches will be compared and contrasted to the Thomistic-Aristotelian model of environmental philosophy, including the North American tradition commenced by John Muir and Aldo Leopold, Deep Ecology, and Eco-Feminism.

In contrast to popular biocentric and ecocentric models, the Thomistic model of environmental philosophy is anthropocentric and theocentric, while maintaining that humanity has a moral responsibility and vocation to care for and perfect both inorganic and



organic natural being. The course will examine questions pertaining to the environment and human flourishing, sustainability, the value of nature and creation, conservation and preservation, pollution, and climate change.

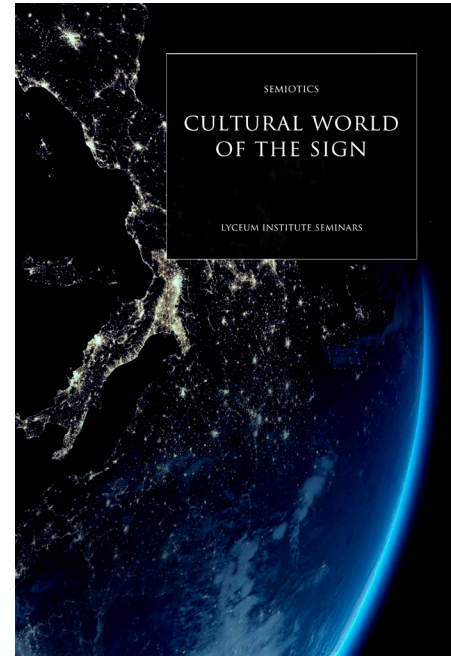
SEMIOTICS: CULTURAL WORLD OF THE SIGN

BRIAN KEMPLE

What is reality? As a noun and as its adjectival derivative, we recognize its importance—we say that something is not real, and thereby lessen it, or say that something is real, and thereby magnify it. But do we know what it means? We may say the tree outside is real, as is the dog sniffing it; the houses in which we live are real; we say our emotions are real. But is that emotional reality the same as that had by the tree, the dog, or the house?

We see this struggle exhibited most profoundly, though perhaps least conscientiously, at the level of culture: in the existence of institutions, laws, communities, in the questions concerning words and ideas. Where does the work of art exist? Is a tradition a mere patterned performance of actions, or does it consist in something more? In this seminar, we will undertake to understand the nature of these cultural realities: for although they are existentially relative and cognition-dependent, cultural beings nonetheless are real, and have an importance—psychological, moral, even spiritual—founded upon but irreducible to natural and existentially substantial cognition-independent entities.

This study will therefore focus on the contributions of semioticians—such as Yuri Lotman, Umberto Eco, and John Deely, among others—in establishing and understanding the importance of cultural reality. We will therefore undertake to understand the Umwelt and Lebenswelt, the Bildendwelt, the influence of the future on the past, diachrony and synchrony, textuality, codes, and the relation between self and culture.



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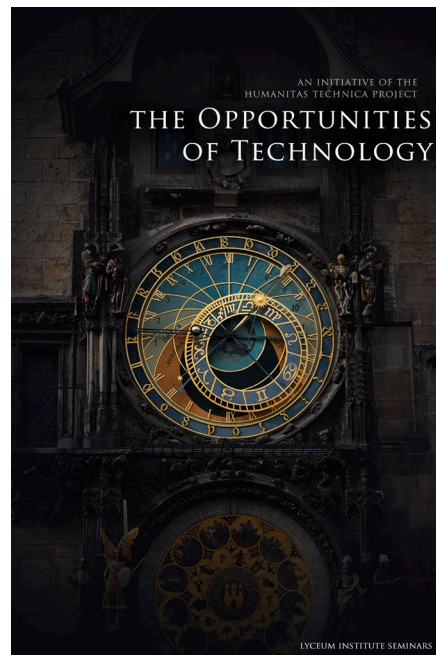
FALL SEMINARS (Q4)

SEMIOTICS: THE OPPORTUNITIES OF TECHNOLOGY

GROUP SEMINAR

It is common, and deserved, today to offer critiques of technology. But all too often, these critiques offer no fruitful alternative to the fact that technology is embedded in our lives—that it touches us from very early in our individual existence, and that it arises in response to our natural dwelling in the world as human beings. Opposed to the critical tendency, one finds optimists who promote technological acceleration with abandon, trusting the process to work out for the best in the end. Between those who see in technology naught but doom and those accelerations who see it as the means to ultimate control over life, there seem no alternatives.

This seminar—building upon the “Difficulties of Technology” study undertaken in 2024—aims instead to reconceptualize technology in a way which may *resolve* to our human nature, rather than understood as opposed to it. Key to this resolution is the re-introduction of *ποείσις τεχνή*—that is, of proper human participation in the poetic to the development and practice of human art. Additionally, we will seek to discover the proper ordering of technological effects through deepening our understanding of their causes, and to think-through the appropriate manner of integrating technology into the environment of our daily living.



THOMISTIC PSYCHOLOGY: THE MEANING OF EVIL

KIRK KANZELBERGER

Every human being has some notion of evil as that which is opposed to a good: the good that one desires, the good that one honors—or, perhaps, the good that one wishes one honored or desired more than one does. Even persons who might consider themselves at quite home with the official or trendy relativisms of the day frequently find themselves possessed with anger at states of affairs, ideas, and other persons they clearly judge to be evil. Might not the frenzy of the anger, as well as the lack of humility it evinces, suggest a deeper questioning? For if we are honest, we must admit that, despite every good intention, we ourselves have some share in the mysterious reality of evil in the world.

This seminar aims to deepen our questioning concerning the meaning of evil, beginning with the nature of the goods to which various evils are opposed. This introduction will lead us to the seminar’s main concern, which is with moral evil as a kind of primary rupture in the world of free beings, and the questions that evil poses



for moral psychology: If moral goodness represents nothing other than the excellence of the human way of acting, what then does it mean willingly to oppose the norm of that excellence? In the end, this will lead us to a consideration of how we might move beyond an account of moral evil merely as privation, and the possibility of addressing the shortcomings of the traditional account from a semiotic point of view. The hope is that the seminar as a whole will be of some real assistance for the examination of our own consciences and the better fulfillment of our vocations as human persons.

SCIENCE: DIALECTICAL LOGIC IN THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION

MATTHEW K. MINERD

When one bothers even to speak about “material logic,” the focus is almost exclusively on the scientific material logic presented in the tradition coming down from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. However, much of human knowledge unfolds within the domain of probable certainty and dialectical exploration. Therefore, a robust material logic must present an account that develops in the line of Aristotle's *Topics*. In this seminar, we will read texts from Aristotle and others in this tradition of inquiry in order to work toward a contemporary recovery of a true “dialectical” material logic.

