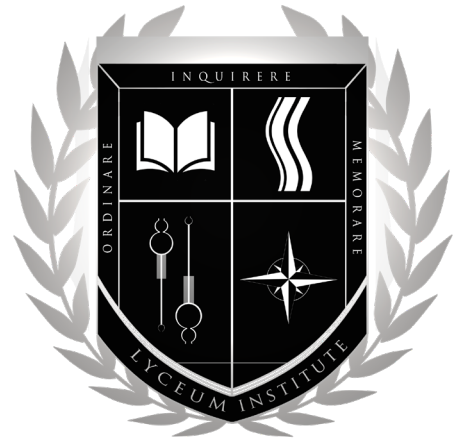


CONTROVERSIES: FAITH AND REASON

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

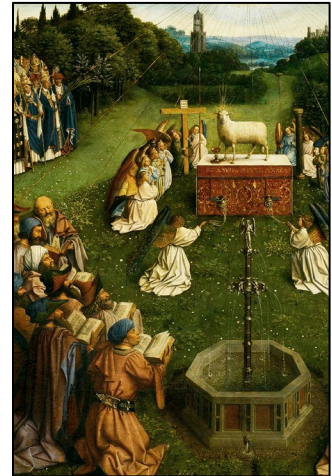
[Q2 2026]



DESCRIPTION

To be human is to seek the good—and thus, to live well. But how do we know what the good is? A quick glance through not only the world today but the historical records of human belief and practice shows many efforts to identify the good and, amongst those efforts, many conflicts concerning the *right* and the *true way*. Among the most important and difficult conflicts are those that emerge out of two sources of claimed knowledge: namely, faith and reason—or, we might say, revelation and philosophy.

To many a contemporary mind, brought up in the ambit of presupposed materialism and secularism, the two seem separate, if not outright opposed. That is, even if one grows up practicing a faith, the ordering of life provided by that faith is often portrayed as distinct in kind from the ordering given by reason—especially when and where “reason” is understood principally in terms of modern scientific calculation. But even if that reason is broader in scope to include traditional philosophical modes of inquiry, it may seem that the nature of reason itself poses insurmountable obstacles to any proposed synthesis with the traditions of faith. Are the claims of revelation, given its supposed sources and the nature of *faith*, incompatible with either the conclusions or the methods of natural human reasoning—or both? Can natural human reasoning accept the claims of revelation if it cannot, of itself, demonstrate those claims as reasonable? Or, perhaps, to put this differently: do revelation and faith *change* something in the activities of reason itself—and does this change contradict the roots of reasoning?



Do these traditions stand forever at an impasse with each other? Must we choose one or the other—or divide ourselves? Or can they, in fact, belong to and reveal a *coherent whole*?

To answer these questions, we will in this seminar explore a range of texts from thinkers who have both posed and tried to answer them: beginning with the challenges outlined by Leo Strauss in a lecture from 1948, we will subsequently look at the approaches brought by Averroës, Moses Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas, before turning to contemporary figures—Gilson and Sokolowski—in the final week. The intent of these readings, the lectures, and the conversations we have surrounding them, is not to propose any assertoric solution to these difficulties, but rather to guide students through the course of questioning—an inquiry that every person **thoughtfully** seeking the right way to live must pursue.

To help orient us, let us consider this series of challenges: is the act of faith or belief in revelation distinct in *kind* from the operations of reason? Can reason prove faith? Can reason *disprove* faith? Can reason show faith as *compatible* with reason? | How is the faith to be made known? Sacred texts, whether the Bible, Qur'an, or Torah, have many passages that are confusing, obscure, and difficult truly to understand. Must they be taught differently to different people? How does the exercise of that teaching change given different environments and contexts, politically and socially? Do these difficult passages demand a non-liberalized, non-democratic polity that they be taught to the many? | Do we really understand the *nature* of faith? What differentiates it from reason as a source of knowledge? Is it “knowledge” in the same way, or are we equivocating? | Can there be such a thing as a “Christian philosophy”? How is it distinct from theology? What is the role of theology in the architecture of human knowledge?

We may not ask all these questions explicitly; but they shape the questions we will ask nonetheless.

METHOD

Seminars are structured to take 8 weeks of study but may be followed according to the student's own schedule, with one recorded lecture and a series of assigned readings, ordinarily with one primary text and additional supplements or secondary readings. 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. As this is an advanced seminar, one cannot participate well without a deep engagement with the assigned reading. Moreover, continual discussion 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.

Full participation in this seminar will require a minimum of 8-10+ hours per week of reading, listening, discussing, and reviewing material; you ought to be able to dedicate a **minimum** of 75 minutes per day to this seminar.

READING

The primary texts for this seminar will be provided in PDF, including texts from St. Augustine, Moses Maimonides, Averroës, St. Thomas Aquinas, Etienne Gilson, Leo Strauss, Anton Pegis, and Robert Sokolowski. Additional required and many supplemental readings will be provided via Teams as well. All texts will be compiled into a master PDF for ease of study. **Readings are subject to change.**

LECTURE

Lectures for this seminar will be provided by Dr. Brian Kemple and will be between approximately 40 and 80 minutes in length. Having audio lectures allows for great flexibility in study: one can listen while exercising, driving, taking public transit, or while doing any number of other activities. Close study, however, requires the ability to pause, reflect, and perhaps for some students to take notes also. These lectures investigate particularly abstruse topics and employ a complex vocabulary—great attention, therefore, is demanded for true understanding, while the flexibility proves primarily useful for review.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (Saturdays 11:15am-12:15pm ET, officially: many sessions run longer): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going textual 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 something encountered in the controversial relations between faith and reason. 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

Week I 03/15–03/21	<p>The Challenges of Reason to Faith</p> <p>Lecture 1: The Split</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strauss 1948: “Reason and Revelation”.
Week II 03/22–03/28	<p>The Limits of Reason</p> <p>Lecture 2: The Negative View</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maimonides i.1185-90: <i>Guide to the Perplexed</i>, Introduction; I.50-60.
Week III 03/29–04/04	<p>The Methods of Reason with Respect to Faith</p> <p>Lecture 3: Teaching and Faith</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Averroës c.1198: <i>The Decisive Treatise</i>.
Week IV 04/05–04/11	<p>The Ends of Faith and Reason</p> <p>Lecture 4: One or Many</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Augustine c.430: <i>De civitate Dei</i>, Book XIX. • Recommended: Dante c.1312-13: <i>De monarchia</i>, II.v-vi, III.xvi
Week V 04/19–04/25	<p>The Science of Faith</p> <p>Lecture 5: Principles and Conclusions</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST Ia</i>, q.1. • Recommended: Anton Pegis 1962: <i>The Middle Ages and Philosophy</i>, c.1-3
Week VI 04/26–05/02	<p>Faith as Belief</p> <p>Lecture 6: The Nature of Belief and Faith</p>

	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Aquinas 1256-59: <i>De veritate</i>, q.14. • Recommended: Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange 1936: “On the Relationship Between Philosophy and Religion” in <i>Philosophizing in Faith</i>.
<p>Week VII</p> <p>05/03–05/09</p>	<p>Faith as a Reasonable Science</p> <p>Lecture 7: Infinitely Traversing</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Aquinas 1259/65: <i>SCG I</i>, c.1-12. • Recommended: Pegis 1962: <i>The Middle Ages and Philosophy</i>, c.4-6.
<p>Week VIII</p> <p>05/10–05/16</p>	<p>The Fruits of Struggle</p> <p>Lecture 8: Reason of the Believer</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Étienne Gilson 1931-32: “The Problem of Christian Philosophy” and “The Concept of Christian Philosophy” in <i>The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy</i>. • Robert Sokolowski 2002: “The Autonomy of Philosophy in <i>Fides et Ratio</i>” and 1994: “Philosophy and the Christian act of Faith” in <i>Christian Faith & Human Understanding</i>.