



A History of Western Thought Why We Think the Way We Do

Summer 2016

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**Videos of lectures available at:
www.litchapala.org**

under “8-Week Lectures” tab



A History of Western Thought

Lecture Schedule

- ◆ August 12 – **Intro/Faith** (Plato, Aristotle; Augustine; Aquinas)
- ◆ August 19 – **Reason** (Descartes, Locke, Hume)
- ◆ August 26 – **Experience** (Kant, Schleiermacher)
- ◆ September 2 – **Process** (Hegel, Marx, Darwin, Whitehead)
- ◆ September 9 – NO LECTURE
- ◆ September 16 – **Will** (Machiavelli, James, Nietzsche)
- ◆ September 23 – **Meaning & Meaninglessness**
(Wittgenstein; Logical Positivists; Derrida)
- ◆ September 30 – **Where Do We Go From Here?**



Progression of Philosophical Thinking

Idealism - We know reality with our minds

Plato (c.427-347 BC)



St. Augustine (354-430)
(faith precedes reason)



Rene Descartes (1596-1650)
(rationalism, subjectivism)



Materialism - We know reality with our senses

Aristotle (c.384-322 BC)



Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)
(reason precedes faith)



John Locke (1632-1704)
(Empiricism)



David Hume (1711-1776)
(radical skepticism)





Plato – Idealism – the “ideal” of the abstract and internal is more real than the material world.

Aristotle – Materialism – the only way reality can be known is through experience of the material world.

Augustine – Idealism – “I believe that I might understand.” (start with the internal faith, applied to material world)

Aquinas – Materialism – “I understand that I might believe.” (start w/ reasoning about material experiences)

Descarte – Idealism – “I think, therefore I am” – radical subjectivism based on skepticism; reality is mental.

Locke – Materialism/Empiricism – people are blank tablets (*tabula rasa*) until experience of material world.

Hume – Materialism/Radical skepticism; no evidence for cause and effect; reality is where material experiences and reflection on those experiences collide.

Immanuel Kant (German, 1724-1804)

- Perhaps most influential philosopher in the history of Western philosophy.

◆ Key thoughts

- ***“What can I know?” (metaphysics)***
- ***“How can I know?” (epistemology)***
- The mind active in knowing (rationalism+ empiricism); Phenomenal vs. noumenal
- Reason is absolute (“pure”) (a priori structure)
- ***“What should I do?” (ethics)***
- ***“What is goodness/beauty?” (aesthetics)***
- “Ought implies can.” Morality as “practical reason” and the point of religion (without faith or miracles).

◆ Long-term impact

- Kant changed virtually every branch of philosophy by insisting on the mind as origin of the world as we know it, and our inability to know reality apart from our mind’s perceptions of it. (*rationalism; subjectivism*) Prepared way for existentialism; THE philosopher of the Enlightenment (“man’s emergence from self-incurred immaturity”).





Enlightenment is man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. Sapere Aude! [Dare to know!] Have the courage to use your own intelligence! is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.

Through laziness and cowardice a large part of mankind, even after nature has freed them from alien guidance, gladly remain immature. It is because of laziness and cowardice that it is so easy for others to usurp the role of guardians. It is so comfortable to be a minor! If I have a book which provides meaning for me, a pastor who has conscience for me, a doctor who will judge my diet for me and so on, then I do not need to exert myself. I do not have any need to think; if I can pay, others will take over the tedious job for me.

Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?"

Friedrich Schleiermacher

(German, 1768-1834)

- “He did not found a school, but an era.” Karl Barth

Key thoughts

- Rejected Aquinas’ “natural theology” (reason seeking God), and dogma as authoritative.
- Bible not as divine revelation, but as record of “religious experience;” “the sense & taste for the infinite.”
- Sin not violation of divine law, but Man wanting to be free.
- Redemption means regaining our sense of divine dependence.
- Jesus not divine, but a model – one who walked so close to God you could say “God dwelled in him.”

Long-term impact

- Made plausible the idea that religion is about ME rather than about God; subjective religious experience as focus; Bible as record of other people’s religious experience; and sin as limitation rather than violation... Making him the father of Modern Liberal Theology.



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with our minds

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(faith precedes reason)

Rene Descartes (1596-1650)
(rationalism, subjectivism)

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
(rationalism; subjectivism; relativism)

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)
(radical subjectivism; relativism)

Materialism — We know
reality from our senses

Aristotle (c.384-322 BC)

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How do we know?

- How do we know what is real?
- How do we know what is true?
- How do we know what is good?



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Kant – Modified Idealism/subjectivism; reality is dependent on the mind and how it structures input from material experiences.

Schleiermacher – Idealism/radical subjectivism; all truth, even religious truth, is a matter of individual experience

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