



# **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](http://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)

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

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

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

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

↓  
**Georg W.F. Hegel** (1770-1831)  
(dialectical idealism)

↓  
**Alfred North Whitehead** (1861-1947)  
(process philosophy)

↓  
**Machiavelli** (1469-1527)  
(will to power)

↓  
**William James** (1842-1910)  
(pragmatism; subjectivism)

↓  
**Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844-1900)  
(will to power; nihilism, radical pragmatism)

↓  
**Ludwig Wittgenstein** (1889-1951)  
(language is all; rest is nonsense)

**Materialism--** We know reality  
from 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)

↓  
**Charles Darwin** (1809-1882)  
(scientific materialism)

↓  
**Karl Marx** (1818-1883)  
(dialectical materialism)

↓  
**Logical Positivists** (early 20<sup>th</sup> century)  
(scientific verifiability)

↓  
**Jacques Derrida and Deconstructionists** (1930-2004)  
(meaninglessness; loss of transcendence)



# Progression of Philosophical Thinking

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**Rationalism** – “Rationality is the only way to know truth and reality; if anything is not rationally explicable, it cannot be true or real.”

**Scientism** – “Similarly, science and empirical observation are the only sources of truth; therefore, anything not subject to scientific investigation cannot be true or real.”

**Subjectivism** – “It’s all about me; what I think, experience or prefer. If it seems true to me, then it *is* true.”

**Skepticism** – “Nothing can be proven, so everything must be doubted. How do you KNOW anything? How can you be SURE of anything?”

**Relativism** – “No truth can be absolute; truth is entirely relative and varies with different circumstances and different experiences.”

**Pragmatism** – “If it works, it must be right and true. The end always justifies the means.”

**Humanism** – “Truth is found in humans and science rather than revelation from a supernatural source; therefore there is no God or supernatural – nothing beyond the physical world.”

**Nihilism** – “Nothing has meaning; strength rules; pessimism and hopelessness reigns; God is dead.”



# What Did Modernism Believe?

- ◆ **Humanity is the measure of all things. It is our reason, our experience and our will that creates reality. We do not need a transcendent God or transcendent anything.**
- ◆ **Humanity is perfectible, and we're constantly progressing.**
  - Rationality, science and technology are our gods, and they grow ever stronger.
  - A primary human function is to satisfy our appetites.
  - Power and the achievement of power are good – including all that represents it (especially \$).
- ◆ **Truth, goodness and reality are entirely subjective and relative. No absolutes.**
  - My mind decides what is real and true. (Reason)
  - My motivations decide what is good. (Will & Experience)



# What Does *Postmodernism* Believe?

- ◆ Humanity is the measure of all things. It is our reason, our experience and our will that creates reality. We do not need a transcendent God or transcendent anything.
- ◆ Humanity is perfectible, and we're constantly progressing.
- ◆ Truth, goodness and reality are entirely subjective and relative. No absolutes.

**\*These Modernist principles have not proved satisfying in any way, and faced with a knowledge of my true self and nowhere outside myself to turn, I have nothing left but meaninglessness and despair.**

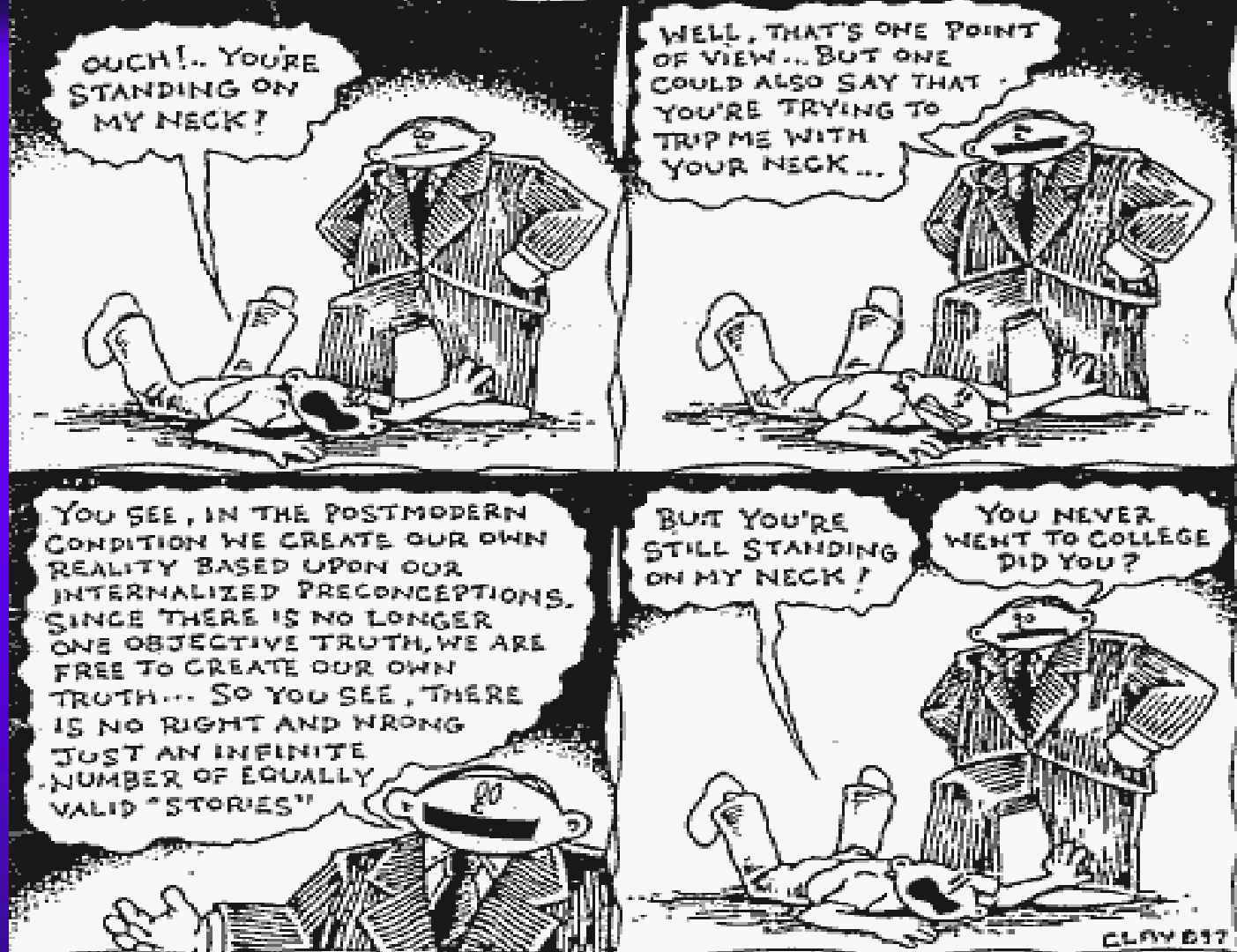


# Our Response

1. **Be aware.** Know what our culture is thinking and saying, and from where people are getting their ideas.
2. **Think about** the terrible consequences of accepting that there is no meaning and nothing beyond ourselves.
3. **Recognize** when something doesn't make sense or doesn't work, and say so.
4. **Reclaim your foundation.** Some things are true and others are not; some things are right and others are not; some things are good and others are not.







“There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.”  
— [Harold Pinter](#)

# Our Response

1. **Be aware.** Know what our culture is thinking and saying, and from where people are getting their ideas.
2. **Think about** the terrible consequences of accepting that there is no meaning and nothing beyond ourselves.
3. **Recognize** when something doesn't make sense or doesn't work, and say so.
4. **Reclaim your foundation.** Some things are true and others are not; some things are right and others are not; some things are good and others are not.
5. **Decide for yourself** if science is the only source of truth (really?). Decide for yourself if there is a God (really).



# Our Response

6. **Choose hope** and not hopelessness; **choose meaning** and not meaninglessness. No fear.
7. **Speak out** for the need to regain a belief in objective reality, meaning and transcendence.
8. **Be intentional but gentle in not giving in** to the negative attitudes and activities that mark postmodernism – rampant materialism and consumerism, cynicism, nihilism, isolation and depersonalization, and the blind worship of science and technology. Be willing to not be seen as “cool.”
9. **Reclaim and encourage the authentic** – family, friends, conversation, worship, working with your hands, making things.
10. **Have some humility**, and look for it in others.





“We are living in a time when sensitivities are at the surface, often vented with cutting words. Philosophically, you can believe anything so as you do not claim it a better way. Religiously, you can hold to anything, so long as you do not bring Jesus Christ into it. If a spiritual idea is eastern, it is granted critical immunity; if western, it is thoroughly criticized. Thus, a journalist can walk into a church and mock its carryings on, but he or she dare not do the same if the ceremony is from eastern fold. Such is the mood at the end of the twentieth century. A mood can be a dangerous state of mind, because it can crush reason under the weight of feeling. But that is precisely what I believe postmodernism best represents - a mood.”

— Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*

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