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## ODYSSEY OF THE WEST V

*A Classic Education  
through the Great Books*

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ENLIGHTENMENT,  
REVOLUTION, AND RENEWAL

**COURSE GUIDE**



Professor Timothy B. Shutt,  
KENYON COLLEGE, *Series Editor*  
Featuring Professors Fred E. Baumann,  
Joel F. Richeimer, and  
Donald M.G. Sutherland

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## About Your Professors



Photo courtesy of Timothy B. Shutt

**TIMOTHY B. SHUTT** has taught for more than twenty years at Kenyon College, famed for splendid teaching, literary tradition, and unwavering commitment to the liberal arts. No teacher at Kenyon has ever been more often honored, both by the college and by students, for exceptional skills in the classroom and as a lecturer. Professor Shutt is the director of Kenyon's interdisciplinary Integrated Program in Humane Studies. His courses have always been heavily oversubscribed, and he lectures on Homer, Plato, Aristotle, the Bible, the Greek historians, Virgil, and Dante every year to a packed house.



Photo courtesy of Fred E. Baumann

**FRED E. BAUMANN** is the Harry M. Clor Professor of Political Science at Kenyon College. He teaches courses in the history of political philosophy, politics and literature, diplomatic history, and statesmanship. Baumann is the author of *Fraternity and Politics: Choosing One's Brothers*, and an associate editor of the journal *Interpretation*. Baumann received the Senior Faculty Trustee Teaching Award and was invited to give the Founders Day talk.



Photo courtesy of Joel F. Richeimer

**JOEL F. RICHEIMER** is an associate professor of philosophy at Kenyon College. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and has published and presented philosophical articles in the areas of perception, law, Aristotle, and science.



Photo courtesy of Donald M.G. Sutherland

**DONALD M.G. SUTHERLAND** is a professor of history at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland. His first book, *The Chouans: A Social History of Popular Counterrevolution in Upper Brittany, 1780–1795* (1982), received honorable mention from the Canadian Historical Association. He also shared the Koren Prize awarded by the Society for French Historical Studies for the best article in a given year. He has received a number of other awards and fellowships, such as the Guggenheim Fellowship for 2001–2002.

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## Introduction

The Odyssey of the West series continues its grand exploration of the literature, revolutionary theories, and feats of intellectual progress that have shaped—and continue to shape—the modern world. In *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Renewal*, Professor Timothy B. Shutt of Kenyon College is joined by Professors Fred E. Baumann (Kenyon College), Joel F. Richeimer (Kenyon College), and Donald M.G. Sutherland (University of Maryland) for a remarkable distillation of human development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the pace of change in the West during this time period seemingly increases as countless new pressures—among them social and cultural transformation wrought by the scientific revolution and the emergence of new kinds of industry—begin to exert their influence.

This installment of the Odyssey of the West series offers concise, pertinent summations of such notable and fascinating historical figures as Louis XIV, a man who in many ways was the apotheosis of an absolute monarch; Voltaire, a writer at the center of some of the most important issues of public policy in the eighteenth century; David Hume, the eminent eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher and economist who was also a professional historian; and Charles Darwin, the legendary scientist whose theory of evolution changed the way people understood the development of life on Earth. In addition to these great thinkers, this course introduces Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Karl Marx.

Ultimately—in weaving together the varied and interrelated strands of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse and events—this course focuses on the contributions to Western history that bear the most responsibility for shaping the world of today. Among these contributions are such vital, yet markedly different documents as the *Federalist Papers* and the *Communist Manifesto*. New styles of art and literature are also given a stunning treatment, as the professors delve into discussions on Romantic trends in both art and literature. But perhaps most important of all is the single most influential event in the last five hundred years—the scientific revolution—which serves as the engine of progress driving much of the social, political, and cultural change seen in this dramatic period.

**Lecture 1:  
Louis XIV  
(Professor Donald M.G. Sutherland)**

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is William Beik's *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents*.

Louis XIV is the apotheosis of an absolute monarch. In many respects, however, he was a traditional king, enormously conscious of the line of French kings that stretched back more than a millennium, determined to preserve his kingdom and extend his glory. At the same time, when he died in 1715, he left behind a troubled kingdom, one that was anxious that the king might have gone too far, that his wars were too many and too expensive, and that the means he had used to promote these wars had upended the ancient prerogatives of the various governing bodies of the realm. These anxieties were based on standards that measured wise kingship from a conservative point of view, but within a generation of his death these ideas were laying the basis for ideas of a constitution and the claims of individual conscience.



*Louis XIV*  
(1638–1715)

by Hyacinthe Rigaud, 1701

The powers of French kings and many of their European counterparts derived from their authority as dispensers of justice. They were also conceived of as representatives of God on Earth, and since God was the source of justice, royal justice reflected divine. That is why there could be no thought of rebelling against the king. Rebellion was a sin. All the risings of the seventeenth century accordingly began as petition drives to seek redress from the king. They always exempted the king from blame for high taxes or religious persecution.

French kings were “absolute” in that they had final authority. They were by no means tyrants. Their coronation oath and custom alike bound them to respect the Salic Law (that kings had to descend from the male line); to extirpate heresy; to respect the hereditary privileges of the clergy and nobility and the rights of provinces and towns.

The rights and privileges of the three orders—clergy, nobility, and everyone else—were regarded as compensation for services to the kingdom. These included exemptions, especially tax exemption, monopolies, and so on. The clergy, for instance, was tax exempt down to the end of the Old Regime, had its own courts, collected the tithe, and had precedence over the other orders.

While Louis XIV certainly respected his heritage, he was determined to

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assert the primacy of the monarchy. He claimed in the memoirs he wrote as a young man that glory ought to be the goal of any worthy king. In addition, rebellions in the early part of his reign marked his political outlook permanently. In particular, the “Fronde” (1648–52), an urban and aristocratic rebellion against the fiscal sacrifices the monarchy demanded during the Thirty Years War, made the young king deeply suspicious of Paris and of the high nobility.

The king’s solution was to enhance his own position at the center of the polity. The great symbol of this policy was the construction of the Palace of Versailles. The palace was located in a forested area where the king could indulge in hunting, a great passion of his, yet it lay within the boundaries of the city of Paris. The court moved to the new palace in 1682. Its architecture was designed to impress everyone with the king’s majesty.

Versailles was also the backdrop to a magnificent court with Louis at the center. An elaborate ceremonial was designed to govern proximity to the King and make supplicants compete for his favor. In other words, the court was also a vast source of patronage and perhaps the largest marriage market in the kingdom.

The king would also have argued that he strengthened the Catholic church in France. The Gallican Articles of 1682 confirmed a long-standing claim of the French Church’s independence of the papacy and of the superiority of church councils over the pope in matters of faith.

Other religious measures were more controversial. Louis’s piety deepened as he aged, and he found the existence of the Protestant minority in France an affront. All contemporaries believed that religious diversity was harmful. Protestants were a tempting target for France’s enemies, England and the Dutch Republic, and a religious minority was in itself divisive. Louis’s grandfather, Henri IV, had been forced to grant Protestants some rights of assembly and civil status in 1598, not so much out of conviction as a means of pacifying the kingdom. His successors had gradually whittled down Protestant privileges and the numbers of Protestants, or “Huguenots,” gradually dwindled to less than a million. The occasion for the final blow was France’s refusal to aid the rival, albeit Christian, Hapsburgs in the defense of Vienna against the Turks in 1683. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 aimed to highlight the king’s Catholic *bona fides*. Not only did the new Edict maintain that there were no more Protestants left, there followed a multigeneration persecution of pastors and their flocks. The result was an huge emigration and an intractable revolt, known as the Camisard Rebellion, that broke out in 1702.

Louis’s reputation as a tyrant was laid in Protestant Europe and later in the Enlightenment. In France itself at the time, the praise was nearly universal.

Another heresy, at least from the perspective of Louis, Jansenism, proved more difficult to contend with. Jansenism was potentially subversive because it claimed that human institutions were fallible and so presented a challenge to the divine origin of the monarch’s justice. One of Louis’s last acts was to prevail upon the papacy to reissue its condemnation of Jansenism in the bull *Unigenitus* in 1713. This drove Jansenists underground, where their doctrines spread independently of episcopal supervision. The result was that Jansenists began to develop concepts of freedom of conscience and religious toleration.

The theme of the history of the French monarchy is centralization. War forced the kings, however, to violate or negotiate away many privileges. In the province of Languedoc, for example, most tax money was spent on local services. Local elites also welcomed the suppression of the Huguenots. On other occasions, the Crown was more repressive. It imposed a head tax on the nobility in 1695, thus eliminating one of the distinctive characteristics of the Second Estate forever. It put such pressure on office holders for loans and gifts that the market value of the office declined so much it never recovered.

Louis's wars had been costly, not least because the sacrifices he demanded made some writers criticize the king for undermining traditional notions of kingship. For instance, theologian and writer Fénelon (1651–1715) used allegory to criticize the state of the realm. His novel *Télémaque* followed the son of Ulysses throughout the ancient world to analyze the problems of various states. Like France in the 1690s, these places suffered from rulers surrounded by flatterers and sycophants. Better advice from more sincere councilors would put these countries at peace with their neighbors, discourage the production of useless luxury goods, promote agriculture, and keep taxes low. This idealized vision of kingship implicitly criticized Louis for vanity and vain-glory. Yet Fénelon was no revolutionary. He was calling for a return to the principles of true monarchy.

A comparable critique emerged from the courtier and memorialist, the duc de Saint-Simon (1675–1755). Again, this was a complaint about the degeneration of government under Louis XIV. Saint-Simon blamed the rise of the ministries that had displaced the high nobility from its natural role in government. Like Fénelon, or the rebels of the period, for that matter, Saint-Simon saw the issue as bad advice to the king. He deplored the influence of mere courtiers, ambitious parvenus of low birth, and of the vain and limited Madame de Maintenon, the king's most devoted mistress.

If the criticisms of the Sun King looked back to a better time, the complaints also looked forward. Saint-Simon charged that the king had broken the fundamental laws of the royal succession and so implied there were limits on the king's authority. It was a position the Jansenists had already taken. The complaint about women in government would have a great future in the loathing of Madame de Pompadour and Marie-Antoinette. Comparing a real king to an ideal standard was ultimately subversive.

Despite these difficulties, though, the age of Louis XIV was in many respects the glorious apogee of France and of French culture and cultural influence. It took a potent international coalition to contain Louis's political and military ambitions, and the French Court set the tone and established the fashion for aristocrats all over Europe, and to some degree, for generations to come.

French adventurers, traders, and missionaries explored the interior of the North American continent and established an empire arching from north of the St. Lawrence, through the Great Lakes, to the mouth of the Mississippi, and the Gulf of Mexico, which to this day shapes the culture of Quebec and, to a lesser degree, of Louisiana. And the France of Louis produced the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, the comedies of Molière, and the theological and neotheoretical works of Pascal. It was, all told, a most impressive legacy.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. From what were the powers of French kings derived?
2. What moral demands did Jansenism make on its adepts?

### Suggested Reading

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Beik, William. *Louis XIV and Absolutism: A Brief Study with Documents*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

### Other Books of Interest

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Black, Jeremy. *From Louis XIV to Napoleon: The Fate of a Great Power*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Wolf, John B. *Louis XIV*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974.

**Lecture 2:  
Voltaire  
(Professor Donald M.G. Sutherland)**

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Roger Pearson's *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom*.

Voltaire was at the center of some of the most important issues of public policy in the eighteenth century. Along with other writers, he had a major influence in transforming ideas on religious toleration, and the penal codes of his day.

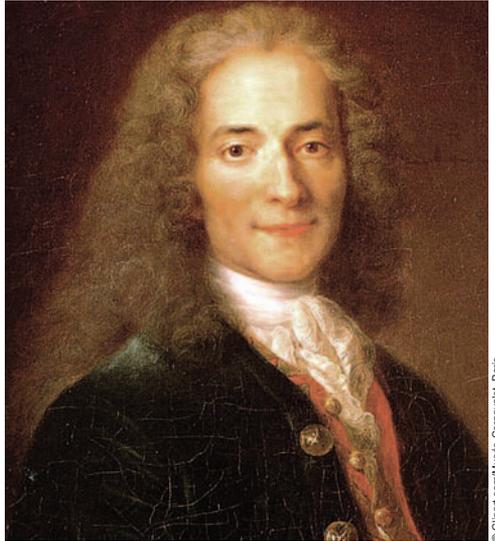
He was born in 1694 as Francois-Marie Arouet, the son of a rich Parisian notary. As a young man he was imprisoned in the Bastille for hinting that the Regent had an incestuous relationship with his daughter, after which he took the *nom de plume* "Voltaire." Just before his death in 1778, he was feted in Paris by huge

crowds in one of the most memorable celebrations of the century. Even in death, he remained controversial, and the Bishop of Paris

refused him a Catholic funeral. His enemies put out the story that his corpse was diseased and filthy. It was not until the Revolution that he was given full recognition. He was one of the first to be buried in the Panthéon in Paris, the lasting home of French national heroes. The events of his youth, old age, and death epitomize both how much he was spurned and lionized over the course of his career. Even though he was a hero to the crowds at the end, the forces of obscurantist, bigoted religion, *l'infâme*, to use his phrase, were still strong enough to marginalize him in death.

His enforced exile in England transformed him. He insulted the chevalier de Rohan, who, refusing a duel with someone who was not his social equal, sent his lackeys to thrash him. Voltaire was so incensed he tried to hunt Rohan down. The police advised the young writer to leave the country. While in England, Voltaire studied the religious and political practices of the country, and soaked himself in the ideas of Locke and Newton.

Voltaire was a Deist, that is, someone who believed in a God as a Creator and First Cause but not in the Christian God who was omniscient and omnipotent. Voltaire argued that this was the clear implication of Newtonian



*Portrait of Voltaire*  
(François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778)  
by Nicolas de Largillière, 1718

© Clipart.com/Musee Carnavalet, Paris

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cosmology. The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century suggested that the universe functioned by immutable laws sufficient unto themselves that required no supernatural intervention to keep going. God was accordingly the “Divine Watchmaker,” essential to create the watch and wind it up, no more. But paradoxically, the god of the eighteenth-century philosophers was a beneficent god, a being who created the universe for human happiness and convenience. Natural religion celebrated the goodness of nature and tolerance among peoples. True religion was common to all humanity. “All sects are different,” Voltaire wrote, “because they come from men; morality is everywhere the same, because it comes from God.”

On the other hand, he never ceased to mock established religion. “Our religion with no contradiction is the most ridiculous, the most absurd and the most bloody that has ever infected the world.”

He also believed that religion had a social purpose. “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him” was his most famous aphorism. It showed his distrust of the common people whom he thought were incapable of appreciating sophisticated knowledge. Religion was useful to protect the social hierarchy against disorder from below. In short, he was no democrat.

He also drew from Locke the idea that true knowledge derived from what could be known from nature. Revealed knowledge was superstition and claims to a universal moral truth were false. Morality derived from experience. It varied through time and was relative to geography. Again, paradoxically, this did not imply a complete relativization of morals, a passive tolerance of any outrage. Voltaire condemned slavery, noble pretense, religious intolerance, tyranny, censorship, Jews and Muslims on occasion, and much else. He was also extraordinarily judgmental. He insulted his enemies by comparing them with a veritable zoo of repulsive or ferocious animals and insects.

He also devoted his humor to serious subjects. In his short novel *Candide* (1759), for example, he combined a totally improbable series of catastrophes and coincidences with a reflection on optimism in human affairs. Pangloss, Candide’s tutor, represents the German philosopher Leibniz. Whatever disaster befalls the characters in the novel—massacre in war, shipwreck, earthquake, enslavement, the pox—Pangloss endlessly repeats that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Despite the constant suffering, Candide does not become an anti-Pangloss/Leibniz, a pessimist, but encourages his friends to stay home and cultivate their garden. The conclusion is deliberately ambiguous, but it seems to mean that one ought to do what one can to improve things in one’s sphere.

He was also a crusader for more humane punishment. The Italian criminologist/reformer Beccaria made a huge impression on him. Beccaria argued that punishments should not exact revenge but deter people from committing further crimes. Beccaria was against torture and capital punishment. Voltaire took up the cause. He argued, “It is better to risk sparing a guilty person than to condemn an innocent one.” He almost plagiarized Beccaria’s arguments against capital punishment: “Let the punishments of criminals be useful. A hanged man is good for nothing; a man condemned to public works still serves the country, and is a living lesson.”

His passion for justice and his hatred of religious bigotry came together in the Calas Affair. Jean Calas was executed by breaking on the wheel, and strangling, his corpse burned and ashes scattered in Toulouse in 1762 for murdering his son to prevent him, so it was said, from converting to Catholicism. In fact, the son was probably a suicide but the family tried to cover this up to avoid the shame and the possible financial penalties that were visited upon family members of suicides. The elder Calas had no attorney, the trial was in secret, and he was tortured after the verdict to obtain a confession.

When he heard of this travesty, Voltaire devoted himself to clearing the elder Calas's name. In pamphlets and letters, he denounced the religious bigotry of the judges, the presumption that Protestants were in league with the foreign enemy—the affair occurred during the Seven Years War with the English—the lack of due process, and the torture. By 1765, Voltaire had won and Calas was rehabilitated.

He never said, "I disagree with what you are saying but I will fight to the death for your right to say it." On the other hand, he did say, "The best is the enemy of the good." And, "It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets."

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How was Voltaire transformed by his enforced exile in England?
2. What were Beccaria's arguments on crimes and punishments?

### Suggested Reading

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Pearson, Roger. *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2005.

### Other Books of Interest

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Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet). *Candide and Other Stories*. Trans. Roger Pearson. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006.

———. *Philosophical Dictionary*. Trans. Theodore Besterman. New York: Penguin, 1984.

## Lecture 3: David Hume (Professor Joel F. Richeimer)

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Barry Stroud's *Hume*.

David Hume was an eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher. He actually never held a position as a professional philosopher. He was not an academic philosopher. He was professionally a historian. And he wrote a classic history of England in six volumes. He was also a famous economist.

But his greatest influence was as a philosopher. When Albert Einstein was asked who had the greatest influence on his views, the interviewer expected Einstein to mention some scientist or some experiment. Instead, Einstein said, "David Hume." Immanuel Kant, who is perhaps the greatest philosopher of the modern era, said that David Hume awoke him from his dogmatic slumbers.

Charles Darwin, who, of course, developed the theory of natural selection and the theory of evolution, named David Hume as his favorite philosopher. Adam Smith, the founder of classical economics, who worked out the economics of the marketplace, was profoundly influenced by David Hume. The logical positivists, one of the most important philosophical movements of the twentieth century, saw themselves as followers of David Hume. And the list goes on.

Basically, Hume was saying—and this is an oversimplification, but it is a good place to start—don't take your beliefs so seriously. Hume was attacking the abuse of belief. He was attacking your confidence in your beliefs. If you understand how your beliefs were formed, you would not take many of your beliefs so seriously.

Hume's philosophical point of view was undoubtedly a reaction to the Protestant/Catholic religious wars and to the political ideologies that led up to the French Revolution. Hume went on to claim that irresponsibly held beliefs led to human suffering.

Here is a story. It is not Hume's. But it helps to understand Hume's philosophy. A feral cat routinely comes to our house. We feed it. Sometimes we feed it moist, tasty cat food. And the cat clearly likes it. And sometimes, we feed it



David Hume  
(1711–1776)

by Allan Ramsey, 1766

© Photos.com/Scottish National Portrait Gallery

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dry, not-so-tasty cat food. And clearly the cat does not like it as much. It is obvious to us that the cat can tell the difference. But here is the first point. The cat can't figure out why one day it gets tasty moist cat food and another day it gets tasteless dry cat food. Perhaps the cat is trying to correlate its behavior to the food. But it can never figure out why. We give it fancy cat food when the supermarket has a sale on moist cat food. But not knowing anything about supermarkets or sales, the cat is simply incapable of figuring out why it gets great cat food one day and terrible the next.

Now here is a fact about you. You are, according to Hume, just like a cat. Some things, you can't figure out. It is simply beyond your capabilities. Call those things—"metaphysics." Metaphysics is supposedly knowledge that goes beyond human experience. Hume claims there is no such *knowledge*. Note Hume is not saying there are no such truths. He is saying there is no such knowledge. You can't know such things. There is a truth why the feral cat gets tasty food one day and tasteless food the next. But the cat can't know why.

Hume's core philosophical claim is that naturalism is true. Naturalism is the claim that there is a profound continuity between us and animals. We are animals. This is obviously contrary to many religious and metaphysical views, which emphasize the discontinuity between humans and animals. Religious thinkers often say that humans have souls and animals don't. Metaphysical thinkers often say that humans have reason and animals don't.

That leads us to Hume's second thesis. According to Hume, naturalism leads to empiricism. Empiricism is the view that all knowledge comes from experience. So Hume thinks that as animals we are restricted to what our senses tell us. In other words, empiricism is true.

Hume says you can see that all of your ideas come from experience by looking at what is called "Hume's microscope." Hume's microscope is a metaphor for your ability to introspect each of your ideas. If you look at each of your ideas, you will see that it is based on a bit of experience. So my idea of "blue" is based on my experience of blue. And if I had no color experience, then I would not have any color ideas. By experience, Hume means sensory experience—what I can taste, touch, see, feel, or smell. This empiricist thesis even applies to ideas of imaginary things. If you take Hume's microscope and look at an imaginary creature, let's say, Pegasus (the flying horse)—you will see that it is composed of the experience of horse and wings, which you combined. People have the idea that imagination is free. You can imagine anything you want. But according to Hume and empiricism, your imagination is bound to your senses.

This is how Hume puts it:

Nothing at first view may seem so unbounded than the thought of man . . . we shall find upon a nearer examination, that is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all of this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by our senses and experience.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 64. 3rd printing. New York: Open Court Publishing, 1988.

But note while every idea comes from experience, not every word comes from experience. I can make up a word, let's say, "ooga." Now I can examine that word with Hume's microscope and lo and behold, there is no experience behind it. Of course, I just made up that word. But if I repeat "ooga" enough times and convince my friends to start using it, you might begin to think it really means something. Hume accused religious figures and metaphysicians of doing just that.

This introduces "Hume's razor." You take Hume's microscope, you introspect your ideas. If something is not based on experience, then you take Hume's razor and cut out what is not based on experience. Hume wants to purify our thoughts from anything not based on experience.

Here is an example. Isaac Newton based his theory of physics on the idea that space is absolute. Space, for Newton, is a giant container. Since space is a container, then there would be difference, for Newton, between remaining at rest relative to space or moving in a straight line at a constant velocity. Of course, there would be a difference, in one case you are moving and in the other case you are not.

Newton knew however that there is no empirical difference, no observational difference between remaining motionless and moving in a straight line at a constant velocity. So if you put a glass of water on your dashboard of your car, and drive in a straight line at a constant velocity, the water will not move. It would be as if the water is not moving.

Einstein read Hume. He applied Hume's microscope to Newton's notion of absolute space, that space is a container. And he saw that Newton's absolute space was not based on experience. So Einstein used Hume's razor and cut it out. He then rewrote Newton's physics without the metaphysics of absolute space. And he produced the Special Theory of Relativity.

So Hume's naturalism leads to empiricism and Hume's empiricism leads to minimalism—shaving off the metaphysical crud of our beliefs.

I want to look at three other of his attacks before we look at his positive views: Hume's attacks on necessity, miracles, and reason.

Necessity is the metaphysical claim that some things have to be. They can't be otherwise. When I say something is necessary, I am saying that it is absolute.

Hume claims that this is a psychological illusion. We live in a contingent world. Things can be otherwise. Contingency goes all of the way down. Nothing is necessary.

It is perhaps easy to see what Hume is talking about when you consider a classic investment scam. You get a list of one thousand wealthy people, perhaps from a membership list from a country club or similar place. You write each of them a letter saying that you have an investment firm and to demonstrate your firm's skills, you will give them some free investment advice. To five hundred of the one thousand people, you write that your firm predicts that GM stock will go up May 1. And to the other five hundred of the one thousand people, you write that your firm predicts that GM stock will go down on May 1. Let's say, GM stock goes down on May 1. Then you write letters only to the people to whom you gave the correct prediction that GM stock will go

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down. And to two hundred fifty of those five hundred people, you write, we correctly predicted that GM stock would go down on May 1; we now predict that Boeing stock will go up May 15. And to the other two hundred fifty of the five hundred people, you write, we correctly predicted that GM stock would go down, and now we predict that Boeing stock will go down on May 15. Let's say, Boeing stock goes up. So again you write a letter only to those to whom you sent a correct prediction. You write, we were right about the GM stock going down, we were right about the Boeing stock going up, and now we will give you a final prediction. Of the remaining two hundred fifty people who received only correct predictions, you send one hundred twenty-five of them the prediction that Kraft stock will go down on June 1 and to the other one hundred twenty-five of them you predict that Kraft stock will go up June 1. Let's say it goes up. Now you write a letter to those one hundred twenty-five people who received the three correct predictions. We gave you three correct predictions. We will continue to send you our predictions for fifteen thousand dollars. This is a classic scam.

The scam works because from the vantage point of the letter receiver, one cannot see the contingency of the situation. It is as if there is some sort of necessity between the newsletter and the predictions. But there is none. There is no connection at all. The correct predictions are pure chance. But all the final receivers of letters see are the successes. They don't see the failures. And they don't see the situation.

This line of argument had tremendous influence on the thinking of both Charles Darwin and his theory of natural selection and Adam Smith and his theory of the market place. When you look at a plant or an animal, you don't see all of the plants or animals that did not survive or all of the possible plants and animals. All you see are the successes. So it looks as if things had to be the way they are. But actually, every possibility is being tested. And we are surrounded by unseen failures.

Here is another example of how contingency runs all the way down. This story might not be true. But it is often repeated. As you know, the space shuttle needs a back-up landing field, in case there is bad weather in Florida. It is in Texas. So the shuttle designers had to find a way to transport the shuttle from Texas to Florida. They use in part the rail system. So the limitations of the American rail system set up constraints on the design of the shuttle. The shuttle design had to be such that it could be taken apart in such a way to fit on American trains. So the gauge of the track of American trains created an engineering constraint for the design of the shuttle. What determined the gauge of American trains? It turns out that the United States uses the same train gauge as Britain. And then the question is, Why does Britain use that gauge? Apparently the gauge of the trains was designed around the size of carriages in England. Carriage builders designed the first railroad cars. But why were carriages designed that way? The axle length of carriages had to be the same size as the ruts in the dirt roads, the grooves in the roads. Axles were made of wood. One drove one's carriage in such a way that each wheel would fit in a rut. If one wheel was in a groove, the rut, and the other was not, there was a danger that the wooden axle would break. But what determined the width of the ruts? Apparently, when the Romans invaded England under Julius Caesar, they created the original ruts. The Roman chariots made the

original ruts that simply got reinforced by further use. By what determined the distance between the wheels of the Roman chariots? The Roman chariots were designed to be maneuverable during battle and they were designed around the size of the particular type of horse that the Romans favored. So it was the size of the hindquarters of the Roman horses that constrained the design of the space shuttle.

Contingency goes all of the way down. We live in a contingent world. Remember Hume was a professional historian. He wrote what was for decades the standard history of England.

Here is another example, a quicker one: if your parents had sex a moment earlier or later, you would not be here. Your existence is contingent on many variables.

The contingency of our lives is hard to grasp.

Hume's attack on necessity is one part of his attack on metaphysics. Here is another example of Hume's attack on metaphysics. Hume attacked miracles. Clearly miracles were central to many religions. Miracles are a violation of the law of nature, otherwise they would not be miracles. But why do we believe in the laws of nature? We believe in the laws of nature because we have repeated experience that they are true. So Hume asks, what is more likely—the law of nature being violated or the person who witnessed the miracle being deceived or lying? In every case, Hume argues, it is more likely, the miracle did not happen. Here is how Hume puts it:

When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider . . . whether it is more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived or that the fact related should really have happened. I weigh one miracle against the other . . . and always reject the greater miracle.<sup>2</sup>

So, according to Hume, you have no reason to believe in miracles. Hume is not saying that miracles can't happen. He is not making a metaphysical claim. He is saying that you cannot know. Remember you are like the cat. There is a reason why I sometimes buy fancy cat food and why I sometimes buy tasteless cat food, but the cat can't figure it out.

Hume has a famous ending to his classic work *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, where he totally repudiates metaphysics. He writes:

When we run over libraries persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.<sup>3</sup>

Hume wants to eliminate metaphysical beliefs from our lives.

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2. Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 149. 3rd printing. New York: Open Court Publishing, 1988.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

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Hume, of course, had many opponents. Religious thinkers and rationalist philosophers, such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, all attacked empiricism. They argued that we have another source of knowledge besides experience—if religious, they said it was revelation, if rationalist, they said it was reason. Let's focus on the claim that we can transcend our experience with reason, that we are not bound to our experience, that we can discover eternal and necessary truths, that is to say, metaphysical truths.

Hume denied this. He had two broad attacks on the claim that reason had this power.

The first was a set of technical arguments that showed that reason cannot tell us about the world. Reason can only tell us how ideas are related to each other.

The second is that even if reason could tell us about the world, we are not governed by reason. We are animals, after all. This is Hume's naturalism. I am going to focus on this second argument, that reason is ineffective. It is not really a force in our lives. Hume probably overstated his position when he said: "Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions"—which seems to be saying reason is not only a minor player in our lives, but it should be a minor player. We shouldn't trust reason. That might be too strong—given Hume's views.

But certainly, he thinks this—we overestimate how rational we are. We don't realize that we are animals.

But how can Hume show this? If Hume tries to show this by using a reasoned argument and we are convinced, then aren't we governed by reason? His argument would contradict itself. How can Hume use a reasoned argument to show that reason does not govern us?

Hume is no dummy. He understood this. He shows that you are forced to believe in certain things—in spite of reason. And this introduces his positive theory that we are governed by natural instincts. Here is an example. Descartes raises the possibility that everything I see and experience is a product of an evil demon. I am being systematically fooled. Reason can successfully raise these skeptical doubts. But all I would have to do, to use Hume's example, is play a game of billiards. And all of these metaphysical worries vanish. They would no longer seem real. Hume writes:

But all of [these philosophical arguments] . . . in reality admit of no answer and produce no conviction. Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion.<sup>4</sup>

And Hume elsewhere writes,

Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

Hume's philosophy is not really a theoretical philosophy at all, but it is actually a way of life. Religious and metaphysical beliefs, for Hume, are unnatural.

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4. Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. p. 186. 3rd printing. New York: Open Court Publishing, 1988.

5. *Ibid*, p. 85.

Hume is recommending, and lived, a modest life with modest and minimal beliefs—a life governed by one's natural instincts, the cultivation of friendships, and the suppression of desires that go beyond natural needs. It is a life of moderation.

Even though Hume was not a Christian and was anti-religious, he was called St. Hume in his native Scotland—because of his life of moderation and his personal demeanor.

Hume died in 1776 of cancer. And even in death, he became for many a model of cheerful acceptance of the natural order.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How was Hume's philosophical point of view a reaction to the Protestant/Catholic religious wars and the political ideologies leading up to the French Revolution?
2. What were Hume's attacks on necessity, miracles, and reason?

### Suggested Reading

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Stroud, Barry. *Hume*. London: Routledge, 1985.

### Other Books of Interest

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Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. 3rd printing. New York: Open Court, 1988.

———. *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*. Ed. J.C.A. Gaskin. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999.

**Lecture 4:  
Immanuel Kant  
(Professor Joel F. Richeimer)**

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Roger Scruton's *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*.

Kant is considered to be the greatest philosopher of the modern era. By the modern era, we mean since about 1500. The philosophy of Kant is simply too complicated to summarize. It is too deep. So this summary will be nasty, brutish, and short.

A little cartoon history will provide some stage setting to help locate Kant's philosophy. The most important event in the last five hundred years is the scientific revolution. Science seems to be discovering that we are not free, that we have no free will. Our behavior is determined by society or genetics or the environment or what have you. For instance, science seems to be saying: all of your thoughts occur in your brain.

Your brain is a biochemical machine that obeys the deterministic laws of biochemistry. So one has to conclude that your thoughts are determined by those laws. The periodic table determines your psychology.

If that is true, then, of course, you are not really responsible for your actions. Morality would be just an illusion. Our self-understanding, who we think we are, is an illusion. We would be robots who won't admit that we were robots.

This move to determinism is just one of the major changes that science seems to be making. For instance, color seems to be an illusion. Really all that there is is electromagnetic waves; the color is in our head. There is under this view no real color in the world. Likewise, the solidity of this table is an illusion. The table is mostly space. And the list goes on. It seems that science is telling us: face the facts. We are just matter in a world of oozing matter. Most of what we think is wrong. We are not really who we think we are.

Confronted with this, there are two common reactions. One is to accept science and accept that much of life is illusory. The other seems to be to reject science or to come up with an alternative, whether it is a New Age philosophy or Creationism or whatever.

Kant denies that we are confronted with that choice. Kant argues: first, science is discovering deep truths about the world and second, science cannot have those conclusions about morality and free will.



*Immanuel Kant*  
(1724–1804)

Unknown artist, ca. 1770s

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How does Kant get there? To answer that question it will be easiest for us to divide Kant into four separate projects, though he himself did not do this. Afterwards, we will try to combine them.

### **Project #1**

Kant's first project is asking what are the minimal necessary conditions for having an experience, for having a thought?

First thing, it should be obvious not everything has experience or has thoughts. This podium has no thoughts. This chair has no experience. Not everything has experience or thoughts. A computer metaphor might help to understand what Kant is up to here. Think of this as an engineering problem. When personal computers first came out, like the Commodore 64, they built into the hardware of the computer a lot of software, for instance, the operating system. Then someone realized that is not such a good idea. Every time you want to update the operating system, you would have to throw away the computer. So they decided not to build the operating system into the computer. But that course of action raises the engineering question: what is the least amount of software that you have to build into a computer to make it work? A computer cannot be a blank slate. If it was, it would not be able to read the disks or download information. There must be some built-in minimum structure to make a computer work. So empiricism is wrong. The idea that all knowledge comes from experience can't be right. Something innate has to read the experience and make sense of it.

So the first project for Kant is to find out the minimal necessary conditions for having an experience. What is the minimum needed? Now this is a long story. But here is a short version. It is, in part, space and time. To experience a physical object, you must experience it as having temporal and spatial properties.

To understand this—consider mathematics. There are three interesting facts about mathematics. First, mathematicians don't get dirty. Biologists get dirty, chemists get dirty, but mathematicians don't. They don't need goggles and they don't need lab coats. Second, they discover eternal truths. They discover, for instance, that for a right triangle in Euclidean space, the square of the hypotenuse equals the square of the sides (that is,  $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$ ). Or they discover that there are an infinite number of prime numbers. Third, mathematics applies to everything. And I mean everything. There is a mathematics of pine cones, lottery winning, jet engine design, you name it.

Those are the obvious facts of mathematics. Here is one that is not so obvious. According to Kant, we treat mathematics differently than the way we treat empirical claims. Math, according to Kant, does not come from experience; it is part of that innate structure that is prior to experience, that makes experience possible.

Consider how we treat empirical claims differently than mathematical claims. Take for instance, the claim that everyone listening to this at this moment has less than five hundred dollars on them in cash. That could be true. But even if true, we know how it could be wrong. We allow that claim to be violated. And we would not be surprised if it were not true.

But note—we don't think that way about mathematics. We do not allow its claims to be violated. Take the simplest example:  $1 + 1 = 2$ . There are plenty

of cases where that seems simply wrong, but we *ignore* those cases. We don't count them. We don't treat them as violations of the rule. For instance, one quart of orange juice and one quart of milk will get you two quarts of delicious orange juice and milk. But one quart of orange juice and one quart of gin does not give you two quarts of orange juice and gin. You get less. Try it—if you don't believe me. But no one would consider that a violation of  $1 + 1 = 2$ . No one sees that as disproving  $1 + 1 = 2$ . We would say instead that that case is irrelevant. It is besides the point.

Or consider adding one drop of water to one drop of water. What do you get? Well, you get one drop of water. Have I disproved  $1 + 1 = 2$ ? Or consider what happens when your checkbook does not balance. You might blame the bank. You might blame yourself. But you don't blame mathematics. We treat mathematics as different from normal empirical claims. Kant thinks he knows why. They are part of the minimal structure that makes experience possible.

When a rule gets violated—we have two possible kinds of responses. You can say the rule is wrong (and give the rule up). So if I say everyone here has less than one hundred dollars on them and someone has more. I would have to give up that rule. Or—when the rule seems wrong, I can say you misapplied the rule. According to Kant, for math we do the latter. We don't allow anything to violate mathematics. Because, according to Kant, mathematics is not about the world. It is about us. It is that innate structure.

That explains why mathematicians don't get dirty when doing mathematics. They are not doing research about the world in the way that, for instance, chemists are. And that explains how mathematicians can be discovering eternal truths. They are discovering the structure of all possible experience. And that explains why mathematics always applies, wherever we look, because it makes looking possible. According to Kant, mathematics is part of the cognitive autobiography of rational beings.

Arithmetic, according to Kant, is the formalization of our intuition of time.

Geometry, according to Kant, is the formalization of our intuition of space. Space and time are part of that minimal necessary structure necessary to have any experience at all.

Here is how Kant put the situation. Kant, I should warn you, is not a great writer. But these passages are some of his clearest:

We should then be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus . . . Failing satisfactory progress in explaining the movements of heavenly bodies on the supposition that they revolved around the spectator, he tried whether he might not have better success if he had made the spectator to revolve and the stars to remain at rest. A similar experiment can be tried in metaphysics, as regards to the intuition of objects. If intuition must conform to the constitution of objects, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter a priori, but if the object . . . must conform to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility . . . We can know a priori of things only what ourselves put into them.<sup>1</sup>

1. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 22–23. 2nd rev. ed. Trans. Kemp Smith. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

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Kant is saying we cannot make sense of the necessity and universality of mathematics if we had to discover them. All we would discover is that the triangles we have so far examined have interior angles of 180 degrees. We would have no reason to believe that all triangles have interior angles of 180 degrees. But it makes sense that we can discover the necessity and universality of mathematics—if we are the ones that put the necessity and universality into mathematics.

## Project #2

Kant has another project. He is not only trying to discover the minimal conditions for having an experience, but he is also, according to Kant, trying to discover the maximal conditions. He is trying to figure what you cannot have an experience of.

Now for Kant, that is the same project. Identifying the minimal conditions is the same as identifying the maximal conditions. But we can consider them as different.

The first project, in effect, is a criticism of the empiricism. It is a criticism of the theory that we are blank slates. The second project is a critique of metaphysics of the rationalist tradition, of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Malebranche. They attempted according to Kant to answer questions that can't be answered.

This is the same project because when you establish minimal conditions to thought you are also establishing what one can't think about.

To understand this, it is necessary to see that English (or for that matter any language) allows you to say things that have no meaning, but which do not violate the rules of the language. For instance, I can say I am thinking right now of a round square (in Euclidean space). That does not violate the rules of grammar; but Kant wants to argue it violates the rules of thought. There is no such thought. It is just words.

Or for instance, it makes sense to say that right now it is noon in New York City, and if so, it is 9 AM in Los Angeles. That makes sense given our rules of time. But what if I asked what time it is right now on the moon? Is it 10 AM or 1 PM? And the answer is that there is no answer. There are rules for applying a concept like "what time it is" to Los Angeles or New York, but given that system, there is no rule for determining what time it is on the moon.

Or for instance, it makes sense to ask whether Michigan is north of Ohio. It makes no sense to ask what is north of the North Pole. If you ask what is north of the North Pole, you are not violating rules of English grammar. You are violating the rules of thought.

Kant is arguing that there are limits to thoughts. One can misuse concepts. One can misapply concepts. Once one sees that there are rules for applying concepts, rules for making sense, then one sees it is possible to violate the rules and say nothing.

That is why it makes no sense to say that since one quart of orange juice and one quart of gin equals less than two quarts of orange juice and gin, then  $1 + 1 = 2$  is false.

That brings us to Kant's third project.

### Project #3

Kant's third project provides an analysis for our tendency to go beyond the limits of possible thought. He is critical of it. But he thinks it is natural. Basically, his argument comes down to this: if you give a kid a hammer, he thinks everything is a nail. If you give a person the ability to think, he thinks everything is thinkable. Kant's point is of course that not everything is thinkable. You can think of this tendency as the "imperialism of reason." Reason does not know when to stop.

Thinking for Kant has a structure. Basically, think of thinking as a toolbox. There are implicit rules for using tools. For instance, a hammer presupposes a rule that a nail is not made of glass. When you are using a hammer, you are assuming that the hammer will not shatter the nail. When you use a hammer, you are making assumptions about the world. Likewise, the same is true with thoughts, with thinking. Thinking is not neutral. It has a point of view. It has rules for use. And consequently it can be abused.

Kant writes at the very beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, his masterpiece,

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened with questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all of its powers, it is also not able to answer.<sup>2</sup>

That brings us to Kant's fourth project.

### Project #4

Kant has a bit of jargon here. He calls this project "transcendental idealism."

And this brings all of the projects together.

To understand this you first have to make a distinction between facts and rights. It is a distinction in our legal system. Something might be a fact, but it does not make it right. There is a difference between a fact and it being right. Let's go back to the  $1 + 1 = 2$  example. It is fact—according to Kant—that we don't *allow* anything to violate  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Every possible counterexample we treat as irrelevant. We say it does not apply. But note—and this is Kant's point—that does not show that it is right. Just because we do that does not mean what we are doing is right.

Another way of making the same point is that just because it is innate does not mean it is true. Project #1 shows that the minimal structure is innate. *But maybe it is innate and false.*

This is where Project #2 kicks in. *There is no such possible thought.* The very idea that it can be innate and false is not a possible thought.

The minimal conditions for a thought are true not because they are justified or because they have a foundation, no, because there is no alternative.

This is what Kant is doing. First, Kant is showing us that we just don't see the world as is. Rather, our thoughts have a built-in structure, a built-in

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2. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. p. 7. 2nd rev. ed. Trans. Kemp Smith. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

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perspective, a built-in metaphysics, built-in rules (think about the hammer and its assumptions). But if that structure is a necessary condition for thinking, then there is no place to stand to say that structure is wrong.

Another way of saying the same thing, there are some thoughts you cannot get outside of. For instance, take the thought that I am thinking now. There is no outside to that thought. It cannot be doubted. It cannot be doubted because any attempt to doubt it is thinking. There is no outside to the thought that “I am thinking right now.”

Or, for instance, I cannot make sense of the claim that reason can be wrong, because I would have to use reason to criticize reason. Again, there is no outside. There is no alternative.

Kant is not saying that the minimal structure to thought is right because it is true. No, what is true and right depends on the structure of thought.

Reason, for instance, has authority, not because it has some justification, but because it is a kind of thought from which there is no appeal beyond itself. Its validity is unconditional because it is necessarily employed by any challenge to it.

Kant is not saying that there is some truth out there and we can't figure it out. That is what the skeptic says. And Kant is not a skeptic.

Kant is drawing the limits of thoughts by showing that there is nothing out there. As Kant puts it—transcendental idealism becomes empirical realism. Understanding how thoughts work shows that the ordinary way of thinking is basically right, that is, unavoidable.

Take the example from the beginning of the lecture. Your thoughts occur in your brain. Your brain is a biochemical machine. Biochemical machines operate by deterministic laws. Thus, you are not free.

Kant argues that is not a thought; it is not a possible thought. It is self-refuting.

If it were true, you would have no reason to trust your thoughts, *including that one*. You can say your thoughts are determined by deterministic laws of biology, but you cannot truly believe it. Just like you can say that you are going north of North Pole. You can say it, but that means nothing. You can say your thoughts are controlled by deterministic laws, but then they would be no such thoughts there. You can't *really* believe it. Because if it were true, you would have no thoughts, including that one.

Or to put it differently, if you could get yourself to believe it, you would be committing “cognitive suicide”—you would have left us.

Kant is attacking a picture of how we think we are in the world. You might think that science can explain morality or whether we are free. But that is confused, according to Kant. To do science presupposes that you are free. To do science, scientists have to distinguish between good evidence and bad evidence, between good arguments and bad arguments. Science presupposes that you are responsible for your thoughts, that your thoughts follow your reasons, that you are a person, and that your thoughts follow from the evidence and not just the by-products of chemical reactions. At bottom, these are conditions for thinking that make science possible.

But Kant is not saying you are free. As Kant puts it in his *Groundwork*,  
Freedom . . . is only an idea of reason whose objective reality is itself  
questionable . . .<sup>3</sup>

You can always ask questions whether you have free will. But he adds,  
The concept of an intelligible world is thus only a point of view which  
reason sees itself compelled to take . . .<sup>4</sup>

Kant is not saying you are free, but you must presuppose you are free.

There is little doubt that the most important philosopher of the modern era is Kant. Almost all of modern philosophy can be traced back to ancient thinkers. They modernize the ancients and transformed them. But that is not true with Kant. Kant was truly a revolutionary thinker, a truly original thinker, who created a philosophy that influenced all of modern thought.

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3. Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 63–79. Ed. Lara Denis. New Haven: Yale University Press/Broadview Press, 2005.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 56, and pp. 67–73.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. What are the minimal necessary conditions for having an experience?
2. How is it possible to go beyond the limits of thought?

### Suggested Reading

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Scruton, Roger. *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*. Rev. ed. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.

### Other Books of Interest

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Cassirer, Ernst. *Kant's Life and Thought*. Trans. James Harden. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. 2nd rev. ed. Trans. Kemp Smith. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

———. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. Lara Denis. New Haven: Yale University Press/Broadview Press, 2005.\*

\*Professor Richeimer recommends reading Section 3 and then Sections 1 and 2 of *Groundwork* in that order to obtain the best understanding of this work.

**Lecture 5:**  
**Jean-Jacques Rousseau**  
**(Professor Fred E. Baumann)**

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Rousseau: "The Discourses" and Other Early Political Writings* and *Rousseau: "The Social Contract" and Other Later Political Writings* (edited and translated by Victor Gourevitch).

### Introduction

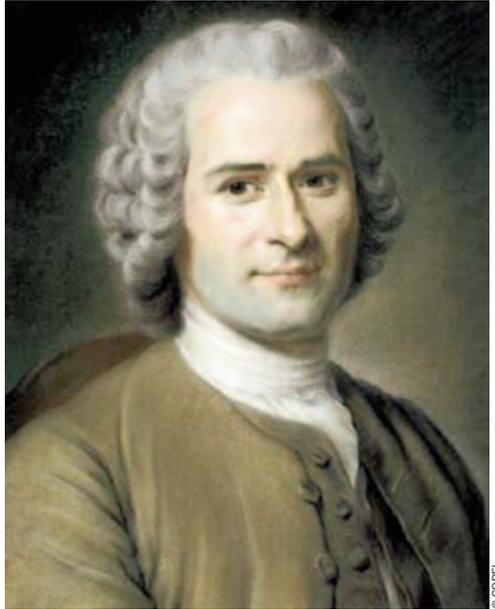
Much of the intellectual furniture in our heads was built by Rousseau—even pieces that don't seem to belong together. Even on his own terms he seems an inexplicably diverse and even contradictory thinker. How can the philosopher of *The Second Discourse*, who sees natural man as a kind of gentle, solitary ape, be squared with the author of *The Social Contract*, who speaks of "forcing men to be free"? In fact, what unites all the Rousseaus is the common problem to which each provides a partial answer.

### The Common Problem

Rousseau lived at the height of the Enlightenment. Superstition was to be replaced by reason, feudalism with, first, the rational centralized state and then by the improved Lockean liberal model. Warriors, saints, and peasants were to become burghers. This meant that private life, and above all economic life, was made paramount. We were understood as naturally individual and isolated. Higher claims were debunked. The vista of a just and happy world had its own nobility, but it ultimately seemed to celebrate the world of the "industrious and rational," that is, of hard-working producers and smart consumers. They were free to pursue happiness. But would they find it?

### The Statement of the Problem

Rousseau, who had left the French Swiss city of Geneva early and had enjoyed a lively, checkered, and unsuccessful career in France and Italy, made a name for himself with his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, which turned the self-satisfaction of the Enlightenment inside out. The *Second Discourse*, on the origins of inequality, deepened the message. Were those clever modern men, who knew how to live soft lives by using others and letting



Jean-Jacques Rousseau  
(1712–1778)

by Maurice Quentin de La Tour, 1753

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themselves be used, really the superiors of their simpler and nobler ancestors? Was the life of the anxious, self-, and image-conscious bourgeois, who is nothing in himself but his desires and fears, really the species' crowning achievement? If not, how could we regain our humanity?

### **Rousseau's Answers**

Rousseau developed one answer in romantic tales, like the *New Heloise*, in which erotic feelings are sublimated into moral self-overcoming. Our deepest longings are stirred up to remind us of who we genuinely are. Another appears in *Émile*, where an all-wise and omnipresent tutor instructs an ordinary young man so that he becomes able to live an uncorrupted life within a corrupt society. Again, the isolation of the Hobbesian individual is combated through love, here issuing in the joys of domesticity. A third appears in *The Social Contract*, which tries to form a unified quasi-individual out of many. Finally, the *Reveries* explore what happiness could be for someone like Rousseau himself, that is, for a philosopher.

### **The Second Discourse**

Rousseau retells the familiar story of solitary natural men in the state of nature, but with a twist. These are no longer Locke's Englishmen without clothes, longing to get back to London and sell something, but real natural men (that is, apes, indeed, perhaps orangutans). Lacking reason and speech, they have simple needs and satisfy them simply. But they are apes who are not limited by instinct, who suffer from "perfectibility," the power to adapt, out of which even, somehow, speech and reason emerge. As they do, men become social, for practical reasons, without ever ceasing to be profoundly individual. Now their desires become infinite and their treatment of each other becomes ever more despotic and slavish. Simple self-love is replaced with vanity, comparative esteem. We are largely alienated from our nature but remain what we are just enough to be miserable. Rousseau's story is not meant as anthropology. I think it is meant as a way of bringing to mind the mute inner self that is concealed by all the talk and attitudinizing required in modern society. The last part of the *Discourse* shows how we have reached the world that Locke and Hobbes tell us about and seems to side, at least provisionally, with Lockean politics, without however, much optimism.

### **The Social Contract**

If human beings today are yoked together by necessity but still engaged in a kind of conflict that goes so deep as to challenge their own identities, perhaps the solution is to make them into one person. This is done by a quasi-Hobbesian social contract ("quasi" because thoroughly democratic). All rights are given up to everybody else. The new collective person has a new "general" collective will, each individual seeking not his own advantage but the collective good. But in order to make this drastic theoretical move seem even somewhat plausible in practice, the rest of the book reveals both the conditions for and the limits of the general will. The overall effect is like the disappearance of the Cheshire cat; only the smile remains.

First, we discover that people cannot be expected to will generally where their interests are involved. So "government" is necessary to deal with most

actual rule-making and enforcing. This government, however, is conceived of as merely the executive; the true laws are those very general proclamations of the general will. Government, having its own corporate personality and its own collective will, eats away at the society's own sovereign will. Then a wise "legislator" is needed to teach the people the need for and the ways of the new collective society. And only a few peoples, like the Corsicans, are still fit for such a society. So what are the odds? In addition, slavery seems to be necessary to provide the leisure for the free citizens to assemble, and only small states where everyone can gather could manage this, in a world of great nation-states. Rousseau ends the book by admitting he has no answer to that problem.

### **Rousseau's Real Project**

I doubt very much that the political project of the *Social Contract* is meant entirely seriously. It is a story, rather like that of natural man, whose purpose is to remind us that we do not need to be slaves to our reason-inflated desires. What makes the contract work is what Rousseau calls "moral freedom," the capacity to say no to one's immediate desires. This is based ultimately not on the classical Socratic model of reason ruling the desires, but on the deepest feelings of the self itself, which was better off when we were naturally limited but which now requires the aid of conscious, moral limitation. The real project I take to be the familiar task of much of nineteenth-century European culture, the ennoblement of the bourgeoisie through art, culture, and above all the cultivation of sincere, deep, and noble feelings.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How were erotic feelings treated in the *New Heloise*?
2. What are the problems associated with ensuring the general will?

### Suggested Reading

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Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Rousseau: "The Discourses" and Other Early Political Writings*. Ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

———. *Rousseau: "The Social Contract" and Other Later Political Writings*. Ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

### Other Books of Interest

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Damrosch, Leo. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

**Lecture 6:  
Adam Smith  
(Professor Fred E. Baumann)**

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

### Introduction

The Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Adam Smith is best known to us as the theorist of what later came to be called “capitalism.” In fact, he was far more than an economist, as his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* demonstrates, though we will focus on *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. In political economy, however, he is best understood as extending Lockean views beyond Locke himself in liberating economic life from the rule of politics and the state. In Smith's day, “mercantilism” was the standard teaching. Even Locke largely accepted it. Its referent was the modern top-down centralized state, which saw in trade an opportunity for increased political strength. A favorable balance of trade was sought, sometimes in outright “bullionist,” that is, gold or silver, form essentially to hire those early modern armies that wouldn't fight without pay, to conquer other states' provinces and colonies and thus to add to the nation's wealth. As foolish as Smith makes mercantilism sound, it is worth remembering that, for instance, Prussia did quite well with it.



Adam Smith  
(1723–1790)

Unknown artist engraving, ca. 1780s

### The Lockean Basis

Locke, like Hobbes, teaches that human beings are above all concerned with survival and that, of the two paths that seek to ensure it, the peaceful one of reciprocal relations governed by law is better than war and conquest. Smith's project assumes the truth of that view. Where Locke tells us that God gave the world to the “industrious and rational,” Smith goes so far as to distinguish man from the animals because of his “trucking” (trading) disposition. “Nobody ever saw one animal . . . signify to another this is mine, that yours.” And Smith shares Locke's view of the essentially individual and self-interested character

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of human beings. Thus, we address ourselves to others in trade “not to their humanity but to their self love.”

### **The Economic Argument**

The most fundamental economic claim Smith makes also derives from Locke, namely the basis of all value in human labor, which emerges from the human situation described by Locke—the need to root, hog, or die in a hostile and uncaring nature. It follows that the more specialized and repetitive labor can be made, the more efficient it is, and that the more it can be allotted to fast and specialized machines, the more wealth there will be at the relatively lowest cost. Here the story of the last few centuries bears him out, with the rise of cities, of the textile and other industries, of the putting-out system and finally, of the first industrial factories. Smith adds to this a theory of relative efficiency through prices. At the root of prices in a market unconstrained by political considerations is the relation of supply and demand, that is, how much there is and how much the people who can afford it want it. The “natural price” is not natural, but it is the price around which the market, under basically common, continuing conditions, fluctuates. That price reflects, rather democratically, not what people ought to want, that is, what priests, philosophers, and the food police think is good for them, but what they really want. And for just that reason it provides the most efficient allocation of resources possible. The implications of this for government policy are pretty clear: hands off! The desire, say, to protect farmers or unskilled workers by fixing prices directly or indirectly, actually harms the common good and ultimately even the intended beneficiaries. The same holds even for international trade. The effort to achieve a “favorable balance of trade” is folly. Thus Milton Friedman, a loyal Smithian, once asked why we were concerned that the Japanese were sending us so many television sets and getting pieces of printed paper in return. The doctrine of comparative advantage, illustrated by the folly of trying to make good wine in Scotland and good whisky in France, again ensures that free trade provides the best of everything at the lowest prices to everyone involved. To this the “mercantilists” (or indeed earlier philosophers) might object that this teaching is unpolitical for two reasons: first, that it misses what can be gained by conquest as opposed to trade and second, that the efficiency of markets may not be the highest political good; for example, we might want to preserve a social class like the small farmer for reasons of morale or help the unskilled worker for reasons of morality. The implicit answer to the first objection was already given by Locke: the nation that releases the economic energies of its people “will soon be too strong for its neighbours.” To the second I think Smith would concede something in principle, but as we shall see, be very skeptical of in practice.

### **Implications of the Economic Argument**

This further emancipation of the private against the public is the basis of much contemporary libertarianism. It shares with it also a deep and highly democratic skepticism against the claims of rulers, “the greatest spendthrifts of society,” to benefit the common good. Smith is scathing about all “unproductive” labor and about the claims of professional vanity. Here the case for the commercial bourgeoisie is presented with lively and contemptuous rhetoric

against courtly “spaniels” and an incompetent aristocracy that seeks, by regulating property, to maintain its position. Also, the vision of a world of self-regulating traders has its own descendants, up to NAFTA, the EU, and perhaps even Marx’s stateless idyll. Yet Smith does not indulge in such dreams.

At the same time, Smith feels the force of the concern that the pursuit of economic efficiency can degrade human life, especially that of the industrial worker. He sees the problem and offers universal primary education as a possible palliative, but it seems to me that he knows that this isn’t really adequate. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith may offer a clue to what his real answer is to the problem of degradation, though it does not apply to the industrial worker, namely a well-educated, prudent, and reasonable commercial class, animated by those natural sentiments of compassion and benevolence that coexist with self-love.

Finally, one should note something odd about Smith’s denunciation of the unproductive professions. It includes “men of letters,” that is, philosophers like himself. Indeed, Smith goes out of his way on several occasions to belittle philosophers. Why? I suspect that, in a way reminiscent of Hobbes, Smith saw the need to inspire and encourage the commercial bourgeoisie, to keep it from being too impressed with the claims of superiority of aristocrats, preachers, and moralists, too compliant with their high-minded excuses for vainglorious undertakings. Here Smith really does take the opposite tack from Rousseau, but I suspect his overt philistinism may be as rhetorical in purpose as some of Rousseau’s more heroic flights may also have been. Smith’s philosopher also is reminiscent of Bacon’s, those providers of good things to the people who rule indirectly and, for the most part, out of sight. The philosopher of the bourgeoisie must maintain a proper humility, whatever the reality such a procedure might conceal.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. How did Adam Smith extend Lockean views?
2. What is the doctrine of comparative advantage?

### Suggested Reading

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Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations*. New York: Modern Library, 2000.

### Other Books of Interest

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Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2007.

## Lecture 7: The *Federalist Papers* (Professor Fred E. Baumann)

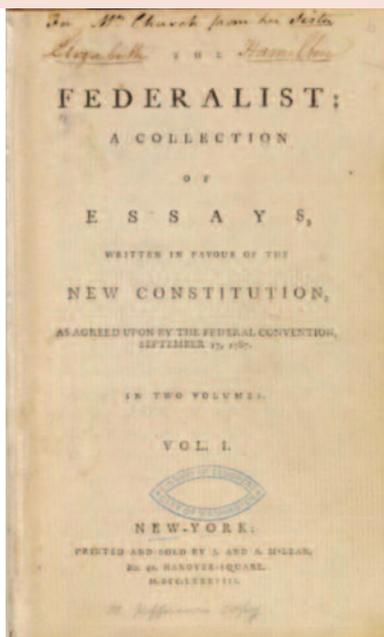
The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Monroe's *The Federalist Papers* (edited by Isaac Kramnick).

### Introduction

The *Federalist Papers* are, with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, among the most important founding documents of the United States. They were Alexander Hamilton's idea, written mostly by him and James Madison with some help from John Jay, in order to get the Constitution ratified by New York State in 1787. The Constitution was drafted on a somewhat *ad hoc* basis because the Articles of Confederation had proved a disaster, with a weak Congress presiding over weak and often incompetent state governments, and in order to set up a stronger and more competent federal government. The Constitution was opposed by the "Anti-Federalists" who saw it as reintroducing tyranny. Thus, Publius (the pen name all three adopted) had, in effect, the task of showing how Lockean political theory could be applied to a particular place and time and provide a government that was both strong and limited.

### Our Difficulty

The *Federalist* is hard for us to appreciate precisely because the Constitution has been such a great success that it appears retrospectively unproblematic. We tend to think that democracy works in some self-evident way, and that the people are wise enough to rule themselves as a matter of course. Thus, we tend to dismiss the great dangers that the Founders thought they were facing and to become impatient with their fears about democracy. Yet Lincoln only echoes *Federalist* 1 when he sees the Civil War as "testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure."



This is the title page of the first edition of *The Federalist*, considered one of the most important works on statecraft and political theory written by Americans. This particular copy was owned by Alexander Hamilton's wife, Elizabeth, who gave it to her sister, Angelica Church, from whom her friend, Thomas Jefferson, acquired it.

Jefferson was one of Hamilton's greatest opponents. The essays in *The Federalist* were written over the pseudonym "Publius," because identifying the individual authors aroused controversy.

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## The Basic Solution

“Mixed government,” that is, the balancing of different interests through institutional power allotment, is a story as old as Aristotle. The Constitution does that through its three separate branches, its division of the legislative branch through federalism. But those “parchment barriers” have to be grounded in the actual situation of the country, as the fate of many American-style constitutions in post-colonial Africa and Asia has demonstrated. *Federalist* 10 demonstrates how the American situation can be made to work. The problem is majority faction, that is, the danger of democratic tyranny. Madison rules out dealing with the “root causes.” Either you would have to shut people up altogether, which destroys the point of free government, or you would have to make them virtuous, in the old classical way. The latter won’t work because, following Hobbes and Locke, human passions coexist with their reason; that is, reason can’t control them and hence a virtuous republic is not in the cards. But the effects can be dealt with, paradoxically, by encouraging and multiplying faction as much as possible, by “extending the sphere,” so that the very size and multiplicity of the country can be used to create a kind of perpetual, largely economic and therefore compromisable conflict that will sort itself out in large, wobbly political coalitions that will compete for those factional allegiances. Human selfishness, properly arranged, can produce long-term stability and reasonably enlightened and moderate government. Within government, as 51 demonstrates, the same principle can be used to uphold the institutional conflicts that prevent one branch from becoming tyrannical. Thus “ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.” This seems pretty cynical, but Madison is unrepentant: “It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?”

## Then and Now

The historical context of the debate has to be kept in mind. The *Federalist* was open about the need for a vigorous executive. Later differences on this between Hamilton and Madison had not yet arisen. Similarly, legislative supremacy, supported by the power of impeachment, was assumed. The relative weakness of the Supreme Court, and thus its need to be buttressed, was also pretty much taken for granted. The danger was seen as a radically populist House of Representatives that would go in for “a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of property,” a danger that would be checked by the aristocratic, unelected Supreme Court and the indirectly elected Senate. The world that arose after the advent of Progressivism, with its egalitarian professional upper classes, changed a lot of the institutional forces and characters and made some original concerns almost incomprehensible. Particularly hard to understand, once the extension of equality had become the program of the morally superior, was, in Richard Hofstadter’s words, the Founders “distrust of . . . the common man and democratic rule” so clearly expressed in 51. Was the United States really only about the accommodation of base interests through clever technical means?

## The Low and the High

In fact, the political rhetoric of the *Federalist* points to a different understanding of the appropriate nobility of democratic life than today's, where it is typically understood as seeking the extension of equality. Thus, in *Federalist* 1, Hamilton, and following him, Jay, in 2, raises the question of bad motives. First, Hamilton attacks the bad motives of the Anti-Federalists, but, aware that such charges can be made reciprocally and that they tend to destroy trust and demoralize political life, he backs off and admits that their intentions may be upright. Consequently, he will not reveal his own motives; everything must depend on the power of his arguments. Similarly, Jay urges that the Constitution receive "sedate and candid consideration," but he admits that this "is more to be wished than expected." Somehow, candor about the low and interested realities of political life becomes the basis for civility of discourse. Because we all know we have interests, we don't have to moralize indignantly about how immoral our opponents are. Though we know that the debate is likely to be ugly, we can still reasonably try to hold to higher standards ourselves. Admission of baseness as the basis of magnanimity and tolerance may sound strange to us, but it gives an important clue to what the Founders had in mind for the "enlightened statesmen" they speak of. While these worldly, Lockean gentlemen might not always be present and might have to be substituted for by low, institutional expedients, still the Founders had hopes that, when present, their ambitions would lead them to broader, more public-spirited views, and that the institutions that had been designed to hold a place for them might let them balance against the more naïve and grubby forms that simple democratic fervor might take. In that, they recognized that the ultimate balancing act required here was between the radically democratic principles of the regime and the necessary checks against simple democracy that its long-term survival required.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. What was demonstrated in *Federalist* 10?
2. How did Progressivism make the concerns expressed in the *Federalist* almost incomprehensible?

### Suggested Reading

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Hamilton, Alexander, John Jay, and James Monroe. *The Federalist Papers*. Ed. Isaac Kramnick. New York: Penguin, 1987.

### Other Books of Interest

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Ketcham, Ralph, ed. *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*. New York: Signet, 2003.

## Lecture 8: The French Revolution and Empire (Professor Donald M.G. Sutherland)

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Donald M.G. Sutherland's *The French Revolution and Empire: The Quest for a Civic Order*.

The goal of the French Revolution was to establish the principles stated in the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” of August 26, 1789. These principles included equality of taxation, equality before the law, freedom of expression, assembly, and religion, defense of private property, and due process of law.

Although generally accepted now, at the time they were revolutionary because they challenged the political and social structure of Old Regime France. Equality before the law and equality of taxation abolished the tax privileges of the Church, nobility, certain office holders, and certain provinces. Freedom of expression and assembly eliminated the monopoly of the Catholic Church on public worship. Due process of law eliminated arrest without trial, the famous *lettres de cachet*. Public consent to taxation ended the right of the king to levy taxes more or less unilaterally. The revolutionaries were not, however, republicans. Louis XVI was immensely popular at the beginning and the revolutionaries thought it possible to construct a constitutional monarchy with separation of powers that would guarantee political liberty.

This situation had come about because of the mounting expense of warfare in the eighteenth century. While many defended monarchy as efficient, and militarily necessary, others worried about the Crown's claims to tax without consultation of property owners. The propaganda of the Enlightened writers also promoted religious toleration as opposed to the leading bishops who opposed it, while a series of sex scandals brought the Queen and the Court into disrepute. The ultimate issue was the constitutional right to tax and fiscal accountability.

The Estates General, later the National Assembly, met at Versailles in May 1789 to solve these issues. There was a broad

This contemporary rendering of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” shows that French revolutionary patriotism borrowed from the familiar iconography of the Ten Commandments.



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consensus that fiscal privileges would have to go, but the deputies were at loggerheads over the issue of birth versus merit in access to public office. This was eventually settled by August 1789, but it took force from the outside to ensure it.

Popular violence made the French Revolution distinct from the struggles among elites that marked other European countries. But the violence in Paris was never independent of broader political contexts either. Parisians believed that protecting the National Assembly from dissolution was essential to obtaining tax relief and lower bread prices. Thus they attacked the Bastille on July 14, 1789, to obtain powder for their weapons, a step that would be necessary to forestall the feared dissolution of the National Assembly.

Politicians were also capable of profiting by popular violence to advance their agendas. One example would be the night of August 4, 1789, where noble and clerical deputies were made to renounce their privileges to forestall the spreading peasant insurrection in the provinces. The now renamed “Constituent Assembly” in this session eliminated tax privileges, clerical and seigneurial dues and tithes, private ownership of public offices, provincial immunities, and the monopolies of guilds. The obverse was the “Declaration of the Rights of Man,” which redefined the relationship of citizens to the state.

Another example of the confluence of action between the politicians and the crowds was the October Days of 1789. Huge throngs of women later followed by the National Guards journeyed to Versailles to avenge an insult to *la patrie* by royalist troops and to force the royal family to take up residence in Paris. But as the crowds were escorting the “Bakers’ family” to the Tuilleries Palace, politicians took advantage of the chaos to intimidate Louis XVI into sanctioning the “Declaration of Rights” and a law allowing him only a suspensive, not an absolute veto over future legislation.

The Revolution could not stabilize itself because growing popular opposition to its major legislation made an extremist response attractive, and those radicals to whom such a response was attractive saw the removal of Louis XVI as essential. The king had ruined his reputation among the revolutionaries for his unfortunate attempt to flee Paris: the Flight to Varennes episode on June 21, 1791.

Moreover, opposition to several reforms of the Constituent Assembly provoked violent outbursts. This was especially true for the oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. This redefined the Church-state relationship after the nationalization of Church property and the abolition of the tithe and feudal dues. By subjecting the parish clergy to popular election, the measure jeopardized the independence of the local clergy. A majority of the parish clergy was willing to surrender its independence, but in large areas of the country, they were not. In Lower Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, Poitou, Flanders, Alsace, and parts of southern France, huge majorities of clerics refused the oath, and many lay people supported them. The counterrevolution was gaining popular support.

At the same time, the king’s flight to the eastern frontier alerted revolutionaries to the possibility of Austrian intervention—Marie-Antoinette was the sister of the Austrian Emperor. Jacobin orators, especially Jacques-Pierre Brissot,

argued for a preventive war that would disperse the émigré armies which had gathered, composed in large part of noble officers who had fled the country. France was sure to win, these speakers claimed, because a free people was invincible against slaves. Robespierre and his colleagues spoke against war, arguing the time was not ripe. This was the beginning of a major split in the Jacobins, or political radicals between pro-war “Girondins” and (for the moment) anti-war “Montagnards.” As it happened, the Girondins won the debate and France declared war on April 20, 1792.

The war and the internal crisis put Louis XVI in an impossible position. He vetoed laws designed to contain the antirevolutionary clergy, to punish the émigrés, and to reinforce troops on the frontiers. The Jacobin clubs in Paris and the provinces erupted in rage, claiming Louis could not use his constitutional veto to undermine the Constitution. Provincial National Guard battalions set out to Paris to overthrow the king. The most famous were those from Marseille singing the marching song that still is the French national anthem.

On August 10, 1792, the provincials and troops of Parisian radicals overthrew the monarchy. But this failed to solve the problems of invasion and internal insurrection. As a way of forestalling a fifth column, behind the front lines radical journalists like Marat and Fréron urged a prison massacre before setting off to fight the Allied invaders. This was the motive behind the notorious September Massacres, where fourteen hundred prisoners, mostly civilians, many simply prostitutes, were hacked to death in prison yards or in the streets.

This action divided the newly elected National Convention from the start. Girondins were appalled; Montagnards defended the atrocities as national defense. All they could agree on was the proclamation of the Republic on September 22, 1792.

In fact, the artillery battle at Valmy turned back the Prussian army on September 20, 1792. Later, the much-derided French army defeated the Austrians at Jemappes (November 6, 1792), which led to the annexation of Belgium.

This gave time for the Convention to conduct the trial of Louis XVI. The king was found “guilty” nearly unanimously, but the deputies split over his fate. Girondins wanted to refer the question to a referendum while Montagnards wanted immediate execution with no reprieve. The Montagnards won that vote, and so Louis XVI was executed on January 21, 1793. This dramatic defiance of European opinion did nothing to solidify the Republic, but it did create the suspicion that the Girondins were secret counterrevolutionaries because they had tried to save the king.

These divisions, both inside the Convention and elsewhere in the country, created a massive challenge for the revolutionaries. With the declaration of war on Great Britain, Spain, and the Dutch Republic in February and March 1793, France found itself at war with every great power except Russia. When the Convention decreed conscription to meet this challenge, large areas of the country rebelled. In the West of France, in the area known as the *Vendée militaire*, whole communities formed a Catholic and Royalist Army to demand a restoration of the ancestral religion and traditional monarchy. Also, General Dumouriez, the commander in Belgium, tried to rouse the army to restore the

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“sane part of the Convention.” He failed, but the Austrians defeated the French at Neerwindin on March 18, 1793. Other regions of the country rebelled too. Many of the large cities of the South, cities that had suffered their own version of the September Massacres, one by one rebelled against the Jacobins in a movement known as the “Federalist Revolt.” Finally, the economy was on the verge of collapse. Since the government financed the war through inflation—taxes were in huge arrears—prices soared, there were shortages of everything, and food rioting was spreading.

The Convention responded with a series of *ad hoc* emergency measures—price controls, preemptive arrests of suspects, special powers for courts that permitted quick verdicts with truncated procedures, a Revolutionary Tribunal in Paris with similar powers, the establishment of a Committee of Public Safety to oversee all aspects of government, which sent out its own members as “representatives on mission” to supervise recruiting and other special measures, and so on.

Outside challenges led to an increasingly radical application of these measures. The string of victories of the Vendean armies, the Federalist takeover in Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux, and Toulon, the forcible expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention on May 31, 1793, Charlotte Corday’s murder of Marat in his bath, and the accession of Robespierre to the Committee of Public Safety—all made extremist solutions more attractive. Thus following the mass demonstrations in Paris on September 4 and 5, 1793, the Convention passed a new Law of Suspects, put Terror on the order of the day, ordered the Girondins and Marie-Antoinette put on trial where they were promptly found guilty, and tightened economic controls.

The greatest repression came after the victories against the Federalists and Vendéans. At Lyon, for example, hundreds of prisoners were mowed down with cannon fire. Vendéan prisoners were drowned at Nantes, one military commission in the West condemned over six hundred people to death in three days, the Committee of Public Safety endorsed a slaughter of civilians within the Vendée itself, and the Convention passed a law in June 1794 that stripped the accused of remaining legal protections; this led to more people being executed in Paris in the succeeding six weeks than in the entire previous year.

Many deputies, however, found such measures threatening and so a small cabal brought Robespierre and his friends down on July 28, 1794. Robespierre’s execution inaugurated a period known as the “Thermidorean Reaction,” a failed attempt to establish the rule of law. This opened the way for Bonaparte’s dictatorship.

This rise of Napoleon Bonaparte was the confluence of his extraordinary military success and the conviction of the political class that the source of the instability of the Revolution was the electorate’s habit of electing the wrong sort of people. Fickle elections forced the politicians to subvert the vote through violence or chicanery. The solution appeared to be the adoption of a constitution that would filter out the voice of the electorate. Napoleon would be an ideal figurehead, because it would associate the army with the project. Yet Napoleon’s popularity made him independent of the politicians. His extraordinary victories in Italy in 1796 and his dictating of the Peace of Campo Formio the next year electrified the public who saw him as the “man of 1792,”

the defender of Liberty in France, and its missionary abroad.

Thus, following the coup of November 1799, Napoleon was able to transform his position from First Consul to Consul for Life, and finally to Emperor in 1804. The process was to exploit victories like those of Marengo and Hohenlinden (1800) that released troops to suppress royalist insurrections at home that in turn convinced the British and their allies that there was no alternative except to make peace (Treaties of Luneville and Amiens, 1801–02). He also used royalist assassination plots in 1800 and 1804 to repress Jacobins and to assume more power, including, at last, the Crown.

The Consulate was the most productive period in the creation of permanent French institutions. While political liberty certainly suffered, the Concordat (1801) ended most of the religious strife of the previous decade by granting religious liberty. A literalist definition of equality also suffered with the introduction of the Legion of Honor (1802) and later with the establishment of the imperial nobility (1808); anyone was eligible on the basis of merit and achievement, not birth. This same legal egalitarianism permeated the Civil Code (1804) and the Criminal Code (1811). Distinctions were based on gender, not birth or class. That is, women could not serve on juries, married women's property rights were restricted, and there was a gendered standard of divorce. Finally, the phenomenon of having elected citizens administer local government was ended with the institution of prefects, a form of government that exists to this day. Prefects administer the territorial units called departments on behalf of the central government, with locals in only a consultative role.

The peace with Britain broke down in 1803 over colonial issues, trade rivalries and tariffs, and finally, British refusal to evacuate Malta, and the great struggle against Great Britain and a shifting array of allies continued until Napoleon's final and decisive defeat at Waterloo in what is now Belgium in 1815. But much of the Napoleonic legacy endures to this day even so.



*Napoleon Bonaparte Abdicates in Fontainebleau*  
by Paul Delaroche, 1845

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. Why were the principles stated in the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” so revolutionary?
2. Why did radicals see the removal of Louis XVI as essential?

### Suggested Reading

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Sutherland, Donald M.G. *The French Revolution and Empire: The Quest for a Civic Order*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

### Other Books of Interest

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Andress, David. *The French Revolution and the People*. London: Hambledon & London, 2004.

———. *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006.

Brown, Howard G. *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006.

Doyle, William. *Origins of the French Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1989.

———. *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1990.

Lyons, Martyn. *Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994.

**Lecture 9:  
Romanticism and Romantic Art  
(Professor Timothy B. Shutt)**

**The Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Meyer Howard Abrams's *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* and William Vaughan's *Romantic Art*.

### **The Romantic Era**

The legacy of Romanticism is still very much with us. As a more or less self-conscious movement, to be sure, Romanticism faded well more than a century ago. But the movement left its mark, and as a culture, in many respects, we all still share in the sensibility that Romanticism fostered.

In the short term, Romanticism marked a reaction to the high culture of the mid- to late-eighteenth century, in the first instance to Classicism and the tendency to value in art above all balance and proportion, the finished perfection and polish that the age attributed to Classical art, but also, and perhaps more profoundly, to the quantifiable world of matter in motion—and on some accounts, of nothing else—revealed by the scientific revolution. And more profoundly still to something not far from the whole Enlightenment project, the wish in all possible ways to base human life and institutions not on tradition and religious conviction but on the dictates of reason.

The Enlightenment, in its turn, had arisen in large part in reaction to the age of religious warfare in aftermath of the Reformation, which had itself arisen in reaction to the perceived excesses and corruptions, theoretical and practical alike, of the late medieval and Renaissance Church. A thoroughly rationalized view of the world, though, once the wish for it had come to dominate elite culture, seemed less fully satisfying and less persuasive than had been hoped. It seemed, in fact, to leave out of the picture and unaccounted for a good deal of what in practice made life worth living. And those excluded or marginalized factors were precisely what Romanticism sought to emphasize and celebrate.

Romanticism tended accordingly to favor mystic apprehension, to favor intuition and passion over reason, to favor chaos over order, to favor individual genius and inspiration over balance and equipoise, to favor process over product, the glorious fragment over the perfected whole—and in a very far-reaching change in sensibility, to favor the sublime wilderness, the untamed forest, mountain crags, and the stormy sea over trim, tended gardens and fertile fields. From our own post-Romantic perspective, it is hard to imagine that for centuries, indeed for millennia, wild, untamed nature—the wilderness—had been far more often feared and avoided, even hated, than cherished and sought. But so it was. The paradigm of beauty was not the Alps, the Lake District, or Yosemite. It was the enclosed garden—the Garden, as it were, of Eden rather than the Wilderness of Zin.

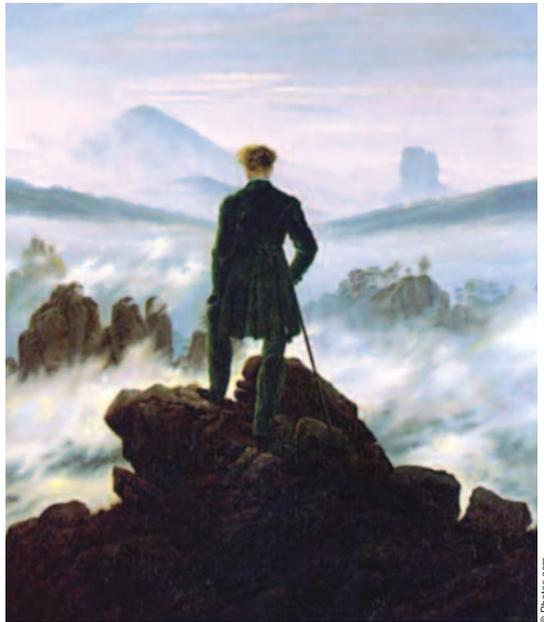
With Romanticism all this changed and changed on a wide front. Romanticism tended to be more or less democratic and anti-hierarchical in its tendencies, interested in freedom, in the common people, very much against the slave trade, favorable to women and to the still often inchoate stirrings of

interest of what would become women's issues. It was interested in what from a European perspective was exotic, in far-off places and foreign cultures. And it was interested in the irrational, in transgression, in sexuality, in wildness, in violence, and in evil.

The writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), in particular his celebration of the natural affections and his mistrust of the morally debilitating effects of sophisticated and ambitious social life, anticipated and encouraged some aspects of Romantic sensibility, and so too, in a more concrete sense, did the values and upheavals of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic era which followed, as French armies sought to abolish feudal hierarchies wherever they triumphed. In 1806, for example, the French soundly defeated the forces of Prussia at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt, and what is now Germany proved highly susceptible to Romantic sensibility in all its guises. A whole array of German philosophical thinkers contributed in one way or another to the movement, among them Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), the brothers August Wilhelm (1767–1845) and Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854), and perhaps most prominently, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). The brothers Jacob Ludwig Carl (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Carl Grimm (1786–1859) published their famous collection of German folktales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, in 1812 and 1815. And Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) became perhaps the most celebrated Romantic artist of them all.

### Romantic Art

In the visual arts, meanwhile, Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) made his own distinctive contribution. In 1973 critic M.H. Abrams published his influential study, *Natural Supernaturalism*, arguing, among other things, that the Enlightenment critique of traditional religious belief, and of traditional Christianity in particular, opened the space for a new sort of spirituality that found the expression of the divine not so much in doctrine or in ritual as in nature. Friedrich strikingly exemplifies just such a sensibility in visual terms. In his *Cross in the Mountains* (1808) and his *Abbey in the Oakwood* (1810), for example, and in many other paintings, he



*The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*  
by Caspar David Friedrich, 1818

depicts traditional religious symbols and religious structures in a vividly portrayed natural context that suggests, in effect, that the religious meaning which they once bore has been taken over by nature herself. In another large series of paintings, of which *Woman Before the Sunset* (1818) and *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* can serve as examples, he depicts from the rear, and most often at some distance, a figure or small group of figures staring at a splendid natural scene, a sunrise or sunset, the open sea, a mountain landscape or whatever. We are implicitly invited to share in their rapt contemplation. And in at least some paintings, the splendid *Meadows before Griefswald* (1820–25), for instance, Friedrich relies on the landscape itself to bear his meaning.

Very different in sensibility were figures like the Swiss Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), whose *The Nightmare* (1781) offers a terrifying, and more or less explicitly erotic, vision of a sleeping woman visibly beset by evil dreams in the form a ghostly horsehead and, kneeling upon her, a grinning incubus. More accomplished still, and more disturbing, is the great Spaniard, Francisco Goya (1746–1828). I remember as a child first seeing a reproduction of his print, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (ca. 1798), in the guise of strange, demonic owls emerging from a sleeper's head and body, and being genuinely frightened. More unsettling still are his very late paintings, among them *Saturn Devouring One of His Children* and *Vision of the Pilgrims of San Isidro* (both ca. 1820–23).

French Romantic painters were, on the whole, more attuned to the exotic than the grotesque, though Théodore Géricault's (1791–1824) *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818) is grisly enough to satisfy all but the most jaded. The younger Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) was particularly fascinated by violent action and often enough by exotic locales, whether in Algeria, the imagined past or the underworld, or even, as in *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), in the streets of Paris.

The Romantic painters of England, despite the powerful mythological fantasies of William Blake (1757–1827), were on the whole closer to Friedrich in sensibility. The two most accomplished were both powerful in depicting the natural world. John Constable (1776–1837) was reared in the flatlands of East Anglia and showed throughout his career a special love for the open sky and for atmospheric effects, visible not only in more conventional works like *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Grounds* (1823), but perhaps even more strikingly in his later studies of the ever-changing English cloudbscape. Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) was so interested in the evocation of atmosphere that by the end of his career his works, whatever their putative subject, verge close to abstract expressionism, as *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhoon Coming On* (1839) or, perhaps even more clearly, in *Rain, Steam, and Speed* (1844) clearly reveal. Turner seems, ever more fully, to be interested not so much in depicting what things look like as in evoking how they might make us feel, relying upon broad swathes of color to evoke their energy and power.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. What are the major characteristics of Romanticism?
2. What was Joseph Turner's artistic aesthetic?

### Suggested Reading

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Abrams, Meyer Howard. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973.

Vaughan, William. *Romantic Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1978.

### Other Books of Interest

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*Friedrich*. Trans. Anna Bennett. London: Dorling Kindersley, 1999.

Lecture 10:  
Romanticism and Literature  
(Professor Timothy B. Shutt)

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are found in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, edited by Alexander W. Allison, Herbert Barrows, Caesar R. Blake, Arthur J. Carr, Arthur M. Eastman, and Hubert M. English, Jr.

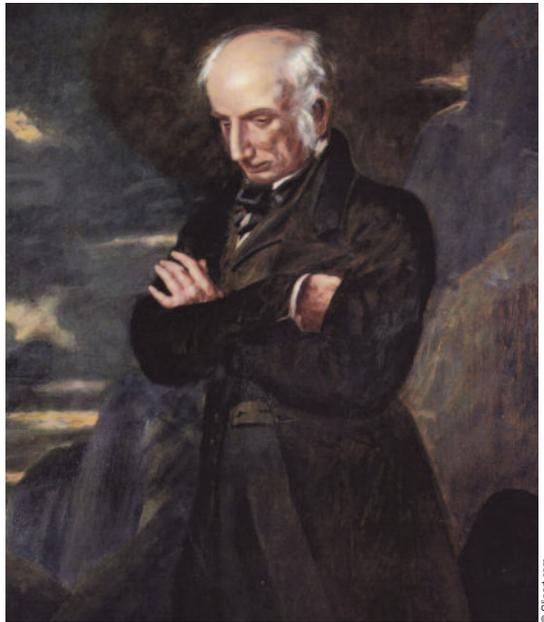
Romanticism by no means found its only expression in visual art, and the legacy of Romantic literature is, if anything, even richer, particularly in Germany and England, which proved particularly susceptible to the Romantic impulse. Probably the most distinguished of all writers generally considered to be Romantic in orientation—though even such a capacious rubric as that will not contain him—is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), generally considered as well to be the greatest of German writers simply. His acknowledged masterpiece is his *Faust*—a drama concerning the German magus who by legend sold his soul to the devil—upon which Goethe worked for most of his long professional life, beginning about 1770 as a young man, publishing Part I in 1808, and publishing Part II only in 1832, the year of his death. No work in German is more celebrated, and in German it is magnificent, but for some reason, it does not translate into English as smoothly as other works of comparable merit. More influential for Romanticism, perhaps, was the early and semiautobiographical *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) about an unhappy love-affair, a work which ended with a suicide that, so we are told, prompted would-be imitators all over Europe. Likewise celebrated in Germany and beyond were the dramatist and poet Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), a friend and associate of Goethe, and Friedrich Leopold von Hardenberg, a poet and novelist who wrote under the pseudonym “Novalis” (1772–1801).

I rather doubt that at that time anyone considered themselves pre- anything, but in retrospect, several English writers have frequently come to be taken as “pre-Romantic,” notable among them Christopher “Kit” Smart (1722–1771) and, even more so, William Blake (1757–1827). Smart suffered from a compulsion to pray in public severe enough to lead for a time to his being confined as insane. While in confinement he composed his *Jubilate Agno*, a long litany of praise based on Hebrew verse forms, the most celebrated portions of which are the eighty-odd lines that he charmingly devotes to his “Cat Jeoffry,” his companion in confinement, who according to Smart “duly and daily” does his best to serve “the Living God.” The brilliant and vigorous eccentric William Blake was a visual artist of distinction as well as a poet, who engraved and illustrated his own works. Blake was a visionary, formulating his own mythological cosmos, expounded in long, elaborate works (like *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*), which appeal primarily to specialists, but his earlier *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) are more accessible and include, among others, as a counterpart and counterweight to his “The Lamb,” his famous “Tyger! Tyger! burning bright / In the forests of the night.”

Romanticism in England often enough ran in parallel with what for the time were radical political views and with, to put the matter gently, rather unconventional sexual behavior. Mary Shelley (1797–1851), author of *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), which she wrote in her late teens, was the daughter of William Godwin (1756–1836), author of *Caleb Williams* (1794) and a noted radical in his own right, and of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), who died shortly after giving birth to her. Godwin thereafter remarried, and in 1814 both Mary Shelley and her stepsister Jane “Claire” Clairmont ran off, at the ages of seventeen and fifteen respectively, with the already once-married Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), establishing a *ménage à trois* which would endure until Shelley’s death (which did not, however, preclude Claire Clairmont’s bearing a child to Lord Byron in the meantime). Shelley’s first wife, meanwhile, drowned herself in the Serpentine in London in 1816, leaving two children behind. George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824), who spent much of 1816 in Geneva with the Shelley entourage, had meanwhile established himself as the prototypical transgressive, dark, and dangerous Romantic hero, both in his writings and in his life. He was legendarily attractive to women—by reputation not least among them his half-sister Augusta—he swam the Hellespont, living out in real life the famous classical story, and he died, of disease as it happened, hoping to assist the Greeks seeking independence from the Ottoman Empire. To this day popular figures and celebrities seek, knowingly or not, to recapitulate the glories of his career. He was an immense popular success with works like *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, *The Corsair*, and *Manfred*, and the crisp, ironic swagger of *Don Juan* still reads well, though his reputation is not what it was in his own time.

Percy Shelley, too, still gains admirers, to some degree for his impassioned lyrics, and to some degree as well for his relentless, uncompromising, full-throttle commitment to his own views, whatever the cost—either to others or to himself.

The most accomplished, and in the end, the most highly regarded of the English Romantics, however, were less self-destructive in their passions. And no English lyric, perhaps, ever written has been more influential and far-reaching in its effects than William Wordsworth’s (1770–1850) “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.” “Tintern Abbey” was, in the



William Wordsworth  
by Benjamin Haydon, 1842

first case, influential in terms of stylistics. It was a thematic centerpiece of Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (1772–1834) *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800), which according to its *Preface* sought to introduce a simpler, more colloquial poetic style, and to introduce as well a sort of poetic ethic of sincerity, seeing poetry at least in part as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.” But “Tintern Abbey” was likewise influential in its full literary evocation of the “religion of nature,” most clearly, perhaps, in the following celebrated lines in which Wordsworth proclaims himself a “worshipper of Nature” (152). In regarding the natural world, Wordsworth maintains,

I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. (93–102)

Influential as Wordsworth was, however, at his rare best Wordsworth's friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge was even better. Coleridge was slightly younger than Wordsworth, a brilliant and charismatic student, though sometimes sickly and given to depression. He took opium in the guise of laudanum to help him cope with these ills, and in later life had to work hard to fight his addiction. But at the peak of his powers, he was an inimitable, inspired poet. Coleridge's “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” his own major contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*, exemplifies some of his powerful work, and testifies to a very different sort of Romantic sensibility than that exemplified in “Tintern Abbey”—a love of mystery and mantic vision, of far-off places and times long past. So, perhaps, even more so, “Kubla Khan,” which Coleridge bills as “A Vision in a Dream, a Fragment.” “Kubla Khan” was evidently written in 1797 and remained incomplete. Coleridge published it only in 1816. On his own account of the matter, he composed most of it quite literally in a dream after falling into an opiated doze while reading about Kubla Khan in “*Purchas's Pilgrimage*,” an early seventeenth-century collection of travel narratives. Upon awakening, he began to write, only to be interrupted “by a person on business” from the nearby village of Porlock—and when he returned to his pen, he found that his dream verses were lost. The tale itself is a sort of exemplar of the evanescence of Romantic inspiration—to paraphrase a later poet, our poetic reach must exceed our grasp if we are to have inspiration at all. But fragmentary as it is, the poem is stunning in its exotic, evocative power. The opening lines are unforgettable.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea. (1–5)

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The power of Coleridge's imagery here speaks for itself, but what might not rise to full consciousness on an early reading is the incantatory character of the lines' assonance and alliteration. Coleridge is master of sound and meter, and here his mastery works with something close to mesmeric effect. But as he himself concedes in concluding his "Fragment," to maintain such vision, even fully to recover it, is beyond his powers. "Could I revive within me" that "symphony and song," he says,

To such deep delight 'twould win me,  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise. (43–54)

John Keats (1795–1821) was a contemporary of Shelley and Byron, and as a poet, tragically brief as his career was—he died of consumption before he was out of his mid-twenties and wrote his greatest works a year or two earlier, before his health failed—Keats was by consensus superior to either—indeed, from some perspectives one of the four or five greatest poets ever to write in English. Shelley and Byron were both aristocrats and educated accordingly. Keats's father, by contrast, ran a livery stable. Nonetheless, he overcame such disadvantages to write some of the finest works in the language, notable for a kind of tough-minded, rueful wisdom as well surpassing felicity of expression. Particularly noteworthy were his great "Odes": "To Autumn," "On Melancholy," "To a Nightingale," and perhaps above all, his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in which, prompted by an ancient Greek vase, he ponders mortality from the perspective of a young man who knows it all too well, and ponders as well, in the light of mortality, what to make of the joyful but fleeting moments of inspiration and vision that seem to suggest that in spite of all, our life is meaningful and rich. He concludes his meditation addressing the "urn" in the following terms:

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (46–51)

Which I take to mean that we have no guarantees, joy and delight, those moments of coherence when everything seems not only to make sense but to glow with what feels to be an otherworldly light are what they are. And that's all we can say.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. Why did the Romantics tend to value wilderness and wildness?
2. Why did the Romantics tend to value process over product?

### Suggested Reading

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Allison, Alexander W., Herbert Barrows, Caesar R. Blake, Arthur J. Carr, Arthur M. Eastman, and Hubert M. English, Jr., eds. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983.

### Other Books of Interest

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Wu, Duncan. *Romanticism: An Anthology*. 3rd ed. Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Lecture 11:  
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel  
(Professor Joel F. Richeimer)

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller.

Hegel is easily the hardest philosopher to talk about. He is also probably the worst writer in the history of philosophy. And that is saying something. And to make matters worse, if they could be worse, to understand his final philosophy, you will need to study the introduction to his philosophy, a five-hundred page densely written book, called the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

So you would think that between the terrible writing and the length of his books, no one would read his books. And in fact, few do. But what Picasso said is perhaps typical of many of Hegel's fans. An interviewer asked Picasso who was his favorite philosopher. Picasso said, "Hegel." The interviewer was surprised, knowing the difficulty of reading Hegel. And the interviewer asked if he had read any of Hegel. And Picasso said, "No, of course not."

Yet in spite of the fact, that Hegel's books are a hell to read and very long and he can't write a clear sentence, Hegel is engaged in a profound project. And if you look at his work seriously, it will transform you. Hegel's influence is enormous, even if indirect. Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, and British Idealism are only a few of the movements that treat Hegel as their founder.

But it also has to be said that this is the one philosopher where there is no doubt that it is best to begin with a secondary source.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the introduction to his philosophical work. "Phenomenology" means a description of your experience from the internal point of view, not from an outsider's point of view. "Spirit" is harder to explain. It is sometimes translated as "mind" or it is left is the German as "Geist." I will explain what spirit means later. But for now, think of it as self-awareness. So the phenomenology of spirit is the study of experience of growing self-awareness—from the point of view of the person who is self-aware.



Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel  
by Jakob Schlesinger, 1831

© Clipart.com/Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin

Hegel, in this audacious, ambitious, even arrogant book, is mapping out the stages of self-awareness. Try to think back to high school. And try to think of the kind of awareness you had at that time. It is of course hard to remember the mindset one had in high school. Most of it cannot be recovered. But some very general and abstract things can be said. For instance, the kind of self-awareness you have now is quite different from the kind of self-awareness you had then. You don't see the world in the same way.

Likewise, the mindset you had in high school could not imagine what you think or feel now.

But, finally, what you feel and think now is not totally disconnected from what you thought then. Maybe you can't recall the connection. But there is probably some connection, even if it is hard to identify.

Hegel is making a map of all of the stages of human consciousness, not just for the individual, but for the human race as a whole. So far this is all very vague. But here is another example that might help locate his project. We tend to think of some societies as politically advanced, as politically sophisticated in some way. For instance, they can handle democracy and its conflicts in a peaceable and rational way. They can deal with diverse populations and maintain a civil society. They have low levels of corruption. Other societies are less successful. They can't deal with their conflicts. There is less social trust. And so we think of societies as being ranked on degrees of success. Or to put this in a more Hegelian way, different societies have achieved different degrees of self-awareness. In this way, we do have a Hegelian feeling, some informal idea, that different societies have achieved different levels of consciousness.

Here are some general points to Hegel's project that will hopefully begin to fill in the picture.

First, as I already mentioned, Hegel thinks of self-consciousness or self-awareness as occurring in stages and thinks that these stages can be mapped. This is perhaps key.

Second, for Hegel, there is no one to one mapping between biology and the level of consciousness. There is no direct link between the age of the individual and the stage of consciousness. And the same is true for societies. You cannot read off the age of the individual from where they are in Hegel's map of self-awareness.

Third, in fact, for Hegel, individuals and societies can get stuck. Hegel is interested in how people get stuck in a certain stage. And he writes a good deal on that topic. Also, some individuals and some societies move faster than others through the stages. So it is wrong to think of the stages in too biological rigidly terms.

Fourth, Hegel's account is phenomenological. It is told from the insider's point of view. This requires some more explanation. Every individual and every society is aware of itself. It has some self-awareness. Hegel claims that its self-awareness is incomplete or abstract. That incompleteness or abstraction generates an instability within that awareness. And that instability sets off the dynamic either to move on and develop a deeper sense of self-awareness or to get stuck and repeat oneself over and over again.

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As I said, Hegel thinks that the instability within self-awareness can be caused by either incompleteness or abstraction. Incompleteness is easier to understand. Incompleteness is not being wrong; it is being partial. It is easy to discover that your understanding is incomplete.

The other case requires a bit more discussion. Instability within your self-awareness can be caused, according to Hegel, by the overly abstract nature of your thought. Now that sounds like a joke. Even a mere glance at Hegel's book—you might consider it just a series of abstractions. What can be more abstract than Hegel's book, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? Yet Hegel thinks that it is the average person who is lost in abstractions!

To make sense of Hegel's point, consider looking at a tree. You walk down a path and alongside the path are trees. What do you see? Well, if you are me, you just see "tree"—the abstract category "tree." I don't usually notice each tree. And I certainly don't notice every leaf of each tree, I don't see the bark, I don't attend to how each limb bends and twists. No, I just see a vague notion of "tree." It is true that I can stop and look at a tree. I will then see more. But in general, I just see "tree." Now imagine a botanist walking down the same path among the same trees. What does the botanist see? Clearly, more. The botanist will see that there is a maple or that there is an elm. The botanist might notice the type of maple trees or what have you. Now imagine a botanist who specializes in tree diseases walking down the same path. What would that person see? Clearly even more. That person will notice that a particular maple has a specific disease on a particular branch. He might notice how the disease is spreading among the trees, how certain leaves are curled, how a certain tree might be resistant and show no signs of the disease. And on it goes. Hegel's point is this—as your concepts increase, you think less abstractly. The botanist has more concepts than me, so for Hegel the botanist thinks less abstractly than me. The tree specialist has more concepts than the botanist, so the tree specialist sees even more—precisely because they have more concepts. For Hegel, the ordinary person is lost in abstract and vague concepts.

*For Hegel, as your concepts increase, the distance between your thoughts and the world decreases.*

That point is absolutely central to understand Hegel. And it is worth repeating: as your concepts increase, the distance between your thoughts and the world decreases.

Now we can understand a bit better what Hegel means by "spirit." The movement of self-awareness has its own dynamic. The movement of spirit is to increase concepts so that the gap between thought and the world decreases. Of course, Hegel is not claiming that you are aware that is what you are doing. But later, when you reflect on the process of becoming more and more aware, that is what you will discover is happening.

This brings us to the fifth point. When an individual or a society achieves a higher level of awareness, it does not abandon its previous understanding. It does not drop it like a hot potato. It just sees its limits (either as too abstract or as incomplete), so in some sense it is still preserved. Actually, even when people think they are totally rejecting their past, they are, according to Hegel,

preserving it. By doing the opposite as before or by rebelling, one is, in a sense, working within the same categories, the same way of thinking. If considering the history of revolutions, for instance, what are purportedly dramatic breaks in history in hindsight reveal strong continuities. It is not obvious that the Russian Revolution was really such a deep break from the Tsarist regime.

So that introduces the sixth point. You can't really skip stages. You can't hand a country a democracy. They have to work through the process and find it for themselves. So-called "skipping a stage" means really not getting beyond a stage. It means being trapped in the same stage but perhaps using different terms to describe it. Again, you can't skip stages, because these stages are not something intellectual that you could learn from a book. You have to live it. There is no alternative. You have to do the work.

The seventh point is that there is analogy between what Hegel is doing and what historians of science are doing. The historians of science do not write a complete history of science. Most of the history of science is left out. The history of science is really the history of the *successes* of science. It is the story of Galileo and Newton and Einstein. It is not the story of "Joe Schmo." It is not the history of all of the scientists. Most of whom were doing fairly routine things. So what is the history of science? It is the history of the most advanced elements of the scientific community. The history of science is the history of the successes and failures of—if you wish—the *avant-garde* of the scientific community.

Hegel is doing something quite similar. He is tracking the most advanced elements of human consciousness. He is interested in how some people get stuck and how some people find their way out and move on to an even more advanced stage of consciousness. He is tracking the *avant-garde* of consciousness.

The eighth point is that, according to Hegel, all understanding is retrospective. It is after the fact. Understanding and living move in opposite directions. You live forwards but you always understand backwards. If that is true, then *you really can't understand where you are now*. You can only understand your past. You can only understand previous stages.

Which brings us to the ninth point. We are now in a better position to understand the difficulty of Hegel's book, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. If you read the book, you will only understand the book up to a point. Which point? The place where you are now. You can't understand the book beyond your present stage of consciousness.

This is perhaps similar to the common experience of parents. They know that their children simply can't understand certain things. They are not at a stage where they can understand. So parents say things such as, "You will understand when you get older" or "You will understand when you have children." Of course, the parent knows that it is hopeless to say those things. There are simply some things that you can't explain to a thirteen-year-old. It is not because the child lacks the facts, but because he or she lacks a certain kind of awareness.

The final point is that Hegel himself must have absolute knowledge. He must have complete understanding. Why? Because he was able to write the book.

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At least, that is how he explains the situation.

We need an example to make this a bit clearer. Hegel unfortunately does not give examples. So let's examine the most famous chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the so-called “Master and Slave” chapter.

It would help to imagine a stage of consciousness where the meaning of “you,” your worth, the truth of who you are, is seen by you as outside of you. So imagine the consciousness that places its worth in how it is perceived.

So we are imagining a stage of consciousness, to use Hegel's terms, where “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” (Hegel, 110).† Or also as Hegel puts it, “self consciousness exists in and for itself when and by the fact, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (Hegel, 111).

So the other has a power over you. Their judgment matters to you. But of course you are the one who gives them that power. You define yourself by their judgment. But note in this stage that you lack the awareness that it is you that is giving them this power.

That “other” need not be any one in particular. It might be an undefined “other.” It is just “they,” the them, no one specifically, but you feel the weight of their judgment.

There are different pathways and responses that one can go down from here. Some lead to dead ends. You might remain a prisoner of the other. Or you might try to impress the other—thereby thinking you will free yourself from his judgment. Or you might resolve the tension through fantasy life, imagining yourself as showing the other that you are really great or misunderstood or not whom he thinks you are.

In any case, all of those options *preserve* the power of the other over you. They maintain the importance of the other in your life. So, for instance, if you try to impress the other—you are not really liberating yourself from the other. You are keeping the other as a force in your life.

One could of course remain in this stage.

But imagine that the other becomes for you a specific person. No more—a vague “they.” Rather there is someone in particular whose judgment is haunting you. As Hegel puts it, “self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness” (Hegel, 111). But Hegel quickly adds, “It does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self” (Hegel, 111). You are confronted with a particular person whose judgment of you matters to you. But—and here is Hegel's point—you do not really see that person as a person, as an essential being. You just see them in terms of you. In some deep way, they are not even there. It is your understanding of them that is haunting you.

Consider again a child's relationship to his mother. The child really cannot see the mother as a human being, who, as a human being, has interests,

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† All Hegel quotes are from Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1979.

desires, plans, fantasies, and hopes. The child sees the mother purely as a mother. The child cannot see the essential being of the mother as a person.

Again, there are many possible pathways here, many ways one can respond. One can remain in that state. One can try to dismiss the person. But, according to Hegel, the path that leads to greater self-awareness is conflict—a conflict between two individuals, each trying to dominate the other. Each is trying to make their reality *the* reality.

The productive conflict only works if it is mutual. If the other person does not take you seriously, if they refuse to get into a conflict with you, then the conflict will only be in your head. And you will still be trapped.

Let's say it is mutual. Hegel writes, "in such a situation, those involved recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another" (Hegel, 112). You can think of this as an ego clash. Hegel again, "Each seeks the death of the other" (Hegel, 113). Each is seeking the psychic death of the other person to affirm his or her own reality. The idea that my worth is in the hands of that other person, that that person "sees" me and defines me and judges me—is too much. So there is a conflict. Again for Hegel there are many pathways, many possible outcomes.

But Hegel is insistent that the person who avoids such a conflict actually loses. That person has no opportunity to liberate himself from the judgment of the other. Hegel writes, "the individual who has not risked his life may be well recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (Hegel, 114). Hegel is saying that the person who has avoided such an ego-threatening conflict is still, of course, a person. But such a person has not attained the self-confidence that arises from self-awareness that they are an independent consciousness. It is only by engaging in such a conflict that you can gain your independence. Avoiding the conflict, for Hegel, traps you.

Let's call the winner of the conflict the "master." And we will call the loser of the conflict the "slave."

Hegel points out that the master in some deep way actually loses. The master wins the conflict, by definition. But now the master is dependent on the slave. The master needs the slave as a witness to his victory. In terms of self-awareness, it is the master who loses. He becomes dependent on the slave acknowledging him as a master.

Success is a trap. Consider a rock star. A rock star creates his fans, creates his audience. The audience loves the rock star. The rock star thinks he is a master. He is in control. The audience only exists because of him. But actually, according to Hegel, the reverse has happened. The rock star is dependent on the audience. The rock star needs the audience as a witness to his achievement. But his need makes him, in effect, a prisoner of the audience. The audience is, of course, fickle. The audience controls the value of the rock star. The rock star created the music and plays the music. But the value of the music is now in the hands of the fans. And so the value of the rock star is in the hands of the fans.

Karl Marx was very influenced with this idea. He saw the great industrialists as creating the workers. Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, and others, these

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giants, created industries. They took farmers and peasants and transformed them into industrial workers. They created the factories. They created the industries. They created the workers. But what happened over time? According to Marx, the creators died and the factories were taken over by their children, who did not understand how the factories worked. So they hired workers and made them managers to run the factories for them. So what happened? The masters create the slaves, but then the masters are dependent on the very slaves they created. Marx, of course, predicted that this will lead to revolution.

The master, according to Hegel, fought and risked his psychic life for recognition. But now this recognition is from someone who has no value to him. Marcel Proust, in the classic *Remembrance of Things Past*, tells the story of Marcel. Marcel is wealthy. He has power. He has a mistress named Albertine. He controls Albertine. He can have her any time he wants. She will do whatever he says. He thinks he is the master. But this all becomes an illusion. He wants Albertine to love him. She knows who butters her bread. So she says, "I love you." But he wants her to "really" love him. She says, "I really love you." He controls her. He is the master. And yet, he finds himself dependent on her. He created her. He made her his mistress. But now he needs the approval and the love of a mistress whose approval can't mean much because he controls it. Meanwhile, Albertine, though she is under the thumb of her master, has reached a higher degree of self-awareness of whom she is and what matters. As Hegel says, "in this experience, self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness."

This is a small sliver of Hegel's map of the unfolding of self-consciousness.

If you work through all of these stages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, you are, according to Hegel, ready to read his philosophy.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. Why might it be better to begin a study of Hegel with a secondary source?
2. What is meant by, "As your concepts increase, the distance between your thoughts and the world decreases"?

### Suggested Reading

Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1979.

### Other Books of Interest

Harris, H.S. *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995.

Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Lauer, Quentin. *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. 2nd ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 1993.

Soll, Ivan. *An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Taylor, Charles. *Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

**Lecture 12:**  
**Karl Marx**  
**(Professor Fred E. Baumann)**

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* (translated by Samuel Moore).

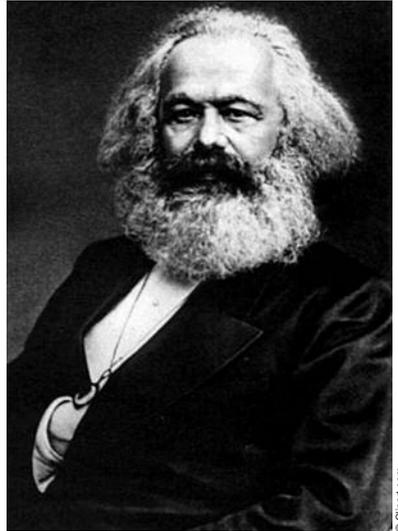
### Introduction

Karl Marx is best known as the founder of Communism. Its failures seem for many to mean Marx's failure too, but that is a hasty conclusion. True, most philosophers were too prudent to put their bets on the future, but Marx was in a way compelled to do it. An emancipated German Jew, a philosopher who accepted the historical nature of truth as taught by Hegel, he was born in a restored dynastic world whose very "restorer" knew it to be doomed. A new world was being born with great speed and power; Marx's task was not only to understand it but to change it for the sake of humanity.

### Marx's Problems

Marx's thought can be understood as a response to two problems, one philosophical, one political. By showing man as historically adaptive, Rousseau had begun to undermine the very teachings of natural right he himself still employed. If humans are truly self-creating beings then there is no standard (natural or otherwise) outside history to judge them, and no standpoint within history, including the present, has any claim to authority. Thus historicism foreshadows nihilism. Marx's teacher Hegel had a daring answer. By demonstrating that all of history was comprehensible immanently, by relating every phenomenon to every other one, he had shown that history's point was to reveal to man his own freedom, his own transcendence of mere happenstance. This in turn implied that history, understood as alien necessity, was over and a rational standard could again be used to judge the human world. Marx accepted this answer, speaking of an end of "pre-history" and the imminent beginning of a true history of human freedom.

The political problem also stemmed from Rousseau, namely the apparent failure of the French Revolution to make the general will a reality. Hegel was willing to accept that the legal state that emerged from that revolution had, in effect, achieved that reality. Marx, and the other Left Hegelians, found this response grossly inadequate. It was in his rejection of idealism, both political and epistemological, and in his reception of English economics that Marx found a way that history itself would make real the world of the general will.



*Karl Marx*  
(1818–1883)

© Clipart.com

## The Communist Manifesto

A popular pamphlet, coauthored by Engels, the *Manifesto* is still a good guide to the elements of Marx's theory. It begins with the claim that the history of the world is class struggle. This means that the Hobbesian fight for survival actually continues in civil society but in team form. Liberal individualism is bogus and we have, in effect, never left the "state of nature." One class controls the historically crucial means of production (once land, now factories) and the others suffer. Oppressors have to oppress because there isn't enough to go around. And their oppression is universal; it includes culture and philosophy, which present its "ideology," that is, rationalizations for oppression.

Thus liberalism, with its individual rights (including property), is bourgeois ideology. Like all others, the liberal state is despotic. The good news, though, is that the bourgeoisie, through its insensate pursuit of property, has solved the problem of natural scarcity. Industrialism has called up the possibility of a world of undreamed of wealth where there is more than enough for everyone, and where someday people's lives can mostly be spent freely pursuing their interests and desires. The bad news is that the rule of the bourgeoisie has replaced natural with artificial scarcity. It is the pursuit of profit that drives the engines of efficient production. Yet this means paying workers as little as possible (that is, stealing from them in the form of hours of labor per day, in order to sell as cheaply as possible). This becomes a vicious self-strangulating cycle in a globalized economy where workers as a whole are also, ever more, the market as a whole. That is, capitalism is predicated on a world that no longer exists, where private property reflected the realities of private production. In the new world, production is social and private property an absurdity. Hence, the really good news: communism solves the problem of artificial scarcity and emancipates humanity from necessity. Fortunately, too, everything the rich bourgeoisie is doing to protect itself actually brings on that emancipation. Its agent is the industrial proletariat, those oppressed, alienated workers who are thrown together into quasi-military production gangs, abandoned by the world, and who can find only in collective action, and the collective consciousness that arises with it, the way to overcome their plight. Industrialism destroys all the old "middle" classes and reduces the world to a conflict between one huge class and one tiny one, with its criminal and luxury-trade hangers-on. Ruthless competition among capitalists makes it impossible for the bourgeois class as such to buy off the workers by hiking wages or even to avoid the ever more cataclysmic economic crises that eventually will likely set off a revolution in the most powerful, industrialized nations in the world.

Marx is cautious about describing the new world. A transitional "dictatorship of the proletariat" is to give way ultimately to full communism, in which the state, as an agent of compulsion, gives way to mere administration. People will live with a degree of collective consciousness (the general will made second-nature) unknown now, but at the same time will be far freer individually than ever before. Religion (a "defect") will disappear as unneeded. Death will be accepted as the species renewing itself and the horizon of what the young Marx called "species being" will give enough meaning to life.

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## The Significance of Historical Events

In fact, liberal societies succeeded in buying off the industrial workers. Communism came through war and conquest to countries that, according to Marx, weren't really prepared for it. What to make of this? First, perhaps Marx was not situated historically as well as he thought. Capitalism changed, as even Lenin admitted. Second, the theory of the proletariat as the salvific universal class may have been grounded less in analysis and more in hope. Third, religious and national sentiments proved more resilient than Marx expected. Fourth, the transcendence of politics was not so easily achieved, particularly within the Communist movement itself, where what Marx thought relatively unproblematic, the leadership of a proletarian movement by bourgeois intellectuals, proved highly problematic. Aristotle might have asked Marx about the implications for human nature of the unexpected longevity of political differences even among Communists. Yet, whatever one thinks of Marx's thought in itself, it is worth considering that it represents a kind of high-water mark for the claims of the modern project, of the Enlightenment. It proposes to resolve all contradictions. Community, liberty, wealth, nobility, living for self, living for others, the pursuit of happiness and its attainment, all are to be made real, under the benevolent eye of human science.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. What two problems were Marx's thoughts a response to?
2. What is meant by "species being"?

### Suggested Reading

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Engels, Friedrich, and Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*. Trans. Samuel Moore. New York: Penguin, 1967.

### Other Books of Interest

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Kolakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume 1. The Founders*. Trans. P.S. Falla. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

———. *Main Currents of Marxism. Volume 2. The Golden Age*. Trans. P.S. Falla. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Lecture 13:  
Darwin and the Theory of Evolution  
(Professor Timothy B. Shutt)

The **Suggested Readings** for this lecture are Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* and *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*.

Charles Robert Darwin is, along with Aristotle, probably the most influential biological thinker who ever lived, and the theory of evolution that Darwin developed not only serves as a conceptual framework for vast reaches of contemporary biological thought, but has proved instructive and influential in many other fields as well. Darwin's early life, however, gave relatively little indication of the great achievements which were to come. He was born to a wealthy and distinguished family. His grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, had in fact toyed with evolutionary ideas in his own right, and his mother's family were the Wedgewoods of Wedgwood china fame. After a reportedly happy childhood in the hills and fields around Shrewsbury, Darwin went off to Edinburgh in hopes of becoming a physician and then to



Charles Darwin, age 51  
(1809–1882)

Christ's College, Cambridge, in hopes of becoming a clergyman. He distinguished himself at neither institution, devoting a good deal of time to collecting the natural specimens that had intrigued him since childhood. In 1831, he procured, on the recommendation of J. S. Henslow of Cambridge, an invitation to serve as an unpaid naturalist on H.M.S. *Beagle*, bound to South America and then into the great South Sea and around the world. Darwin's exasperated father was less than impressed with the offer, but his grandfather Wedgwood proved more indulgent, and Darwin embarked on his life-changing voyage. En route he kept up with his reading, regularly sending specimens home, and on the Galapagos Islands in September and October 1835, he encountered the closely related array of finches that had, in that isolated and restricted environment, seemingly adapted to fill a whole range of otherwise vacant and ordinarily unfinchlike environments. By the time he returned to England in 1836, at least the outlines of his great theory were clear. Well aware of the controversy its publication was likely to arouse, how-

ever, he postponed publishing to gather an array of what he hoped would prove incontrovertible evidence.

The problem confronting him was how to account for life and consciousness, for the seeming orderedness and designedness of the biological world, in the sort of mechanistic, non-teleological or non-goal-driven terms in which Newton had accounted for the motions of the cosmos. For the biological world seemed to resist such explanation. It made little sense to inquire what purpose the planetary orbits or geological features might fulfill. To ask what the purpose of the eye or the digestive system served, though, seemed a very different sort of question. They really did seem designed, and indeed, surpassingly well designed, in order to perform a certain function. How, then, to account for them in the more or less resolutely non-theological, non-goal-driven terms in which it seemed that one could plausibly characterize the inanimate world? It seemed, in fact, that one could not do so, and indeed, the most influential work addressing such subjects in Darwin's youth was William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), which argued in detail that the orderedness of the biological world was a powerful argument in favor of its divine creation.

Darwin's alternative answer depended on three interrelated factors. The first was random variation. Though each organism is in many respects very much like the other members of its species, no two (save identical twins and the like) are in fact identical, and Darwin was well acquainted with the efforts of livestock breeders who took advantage of just such variations to develop new breeds of domestic animals. He had at his disposal no mechanism by which he could account for the transmission of inherited characteristics—that would not come until Gregor Mendel's work on genetics became readily available after Darwin's death. But he knew perfectly well that in practice such characteristics were transmitted.

In the course of stockbreeding, though, the breeder chooses which animals will reproduce and which traits are to be selected. What Darwin needed, by contrast, was some mode of *natural* selection between variants, and he found it in the writings of Thomas R. Malthus, who in *An Essay on the Principles of Population* argued that reproduction always outpaces the resources necessary for life, and hence, that all living organisms are under some sort of population pressure. Not all can survive, not all can reproduce. That pressure provides the means for selection. All things being equal, those organisms best adapted to their environment, whatever that environment might be, are more likely to survive and to reproduce than those less well adapted. And as the process continues from generation to generation, their descendants will, by and large, be better adapted still.

For all of this to take place, though—for different species to develop with the exquisite adaptations which in fact we see—seemed to require a great deal of time, more time, as it happened, than was available by virtue of then-prevailing ideas. By Darwin's time the traditional notion that the world was only a few thousand years old seemed to be losing credibility, but Darwin needed much more time than that and Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* gave it to him. Lyell's assumption was that existing geological features are the long-term result of the same sort of processes that we see at work at present, and if that were so, the age of the earth was to be measured not in thousands of years but in many millions.

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That completed the puzzle. To account for the diversity and the well-adaptedness of the biological world, then, Darwin relied upon the process of natural selection working upon random variation over the course of deep time—resulting in the origin of species. He still hesitated, though, to make these ideas public. What prompted him at last to do so was a paper from a younger naturalist—and potential rival—Alfred R. Wallace (1823–1913). In June 1858, Darwin received a copy of Wallace’s “On the Tendency of Varieties to Depart Indefinitely from the Original Type.” Wallace’s ideas were close enough to Darwin’s own that he thought it best to overcome his reticence, and in July 1858, Wallace’s essay and some previously unpublished writings by Darwin himself on the subject were presented to Linnean Society of London. Under the circumstances, Darwin felt unable to publish the huge—and hugely conclusive book—which he had planned, and the existing *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), extensive work though it is, represents what, in Darwin’s own perspective at least, he was able to patch together in relatively short order. *The Descent of Man* followed in 1871.

Darwin, then, proposes a relatively straightforward answer to the perennial question, what is the meaning of life? From a biological perspective the matter is simple—survive and reproduce, and indeed, our inclinations guide strongly in just that direction. But on another level, Darwin’s theory is very sophisticated indeed and represents, in its way, something close to a whole new style of thinking. Random variation followed by selection represents a new and remarkably effective solution to what is termed the “uncertain futures” problem. Planning can deal only with changes that it anticipates, and many changes are unexpected. Random variation, though, can, and on occasion does effectively, if accidentally, anticipate changes which are unforeseen. Evolution is, in this sense, simultaneously random and bounded—random insofar as underlying variation is concerned, bounded, though, by virtue of selection for the conditions obtaining in the immediate environment. We are accustomed to thinking of things as either random or determined, but Darwinian thinking refuses to adhere rigidly to either possibility—Darwinian processes are in one sense random, in another not. And once the paradigm is established, it is not difficult to find Darwinian processes at work, not just in the biological world, but elsewhere, to take one salient instance, in the marketplace, where all sorts of companies seek to thrive by efficiently fulfilling commercial demand—and some succeed and many do not. Indeed, as William James, among others, recognized, there is something not unlike a Darwinian marketplace in the world of ideas and perceptions as well. Some allow us to engage the world successfully, others markedly less so. That sort of selection, indeed, is going on around us all the time. Effective direction without foresight, working by means of feedback loops in a stochastic, self-regulating process of adaption—that is the Darwinian paradigm.

None of which is to suggest, however, that Darwinian thought does not raise its own array of problems. One has to do with “intermediate adaptations.” For evolution to work, an adaption has to be advantageous at every stage of its development, “half-wings” and “almost eyes” have to be adaptive in their own right in a mode that has challenged the ingenuity and energies of theorists and paleontologists.

More far-reaching perhaps are the difficulties arising from sexual selection. All things being equal, it would seem disadvantageous for a bird living in the treetops to be bright red, like a male Scarlet Tanager, and the peacock's tail, as has been so often noted, seems little help in the process of either concealment or food-gathering. In most respects life is probably easier without an extensive rack of antlers. But—if one can prosper in spite of such disabilities, one's well-being is an unfalsifiable testament to overall vigor and fitness in much the way we would be forced to assume that a marathoner winning while wearing a backpack was a better runner than those left behind and less encumbered. So sexual selection. We all, from a Darwinian perspective—or all us likely to leave descendents—want the best deal that we can get. Sometimes there are advantages to disadvantage.

In large part because of its political implications, as vexatious a Darwinian issue as any is the issue of altruism and group selection. At first thought the Darwinian world would appear to propose a rigorously individualistic zero-sum game. I win to the extent that you lose. Period. Social theorists, though, have generally been unhappy with a doctrine that at least seemingly suggests that we must prey upon one another like monsters of the deep. But how to account for altruism? The answer here appears to be that if the goal of the Darwinian game is to send as many genes as possible into the next generation, then there are times when selfishness does not pay. We share half our genes with our full siblings, half with each of our parents, half with each of our children. Hence, two of them (and the younger the better) equals one of us. That plus even the most distant cousin tips the balance in favor of altruism. Or so the argument runs.

But Darwinism is still vexatious, notoriously so from at least some religious perspectives from Darwin's day to our own, but by no means only on religious grounds. Progressive thinkers, and straightforwardly Marxist thinkers in particular, tend to find Darwinian thought objectionable, if not indeed dangerous, precisely because Darwinian thought suggests that there is in fact such a thing as human nature, a bequest of biology, which can only to a certain extent be perfected or modified by even the most salutary material conditions and the most thorough-going programs of educational or reeducational outreach.

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

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1. What was Darwin's answer to the question of the meaning of life?
2. Why is Darwinism vexatious to Marxist thinkers?

### Suggested Reading

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Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life and The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. The Modern Library (1859, 1871). New York: Random House, 1965.

### Other Books of Interest

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Appleman, Philip, ed. *Darwin*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979.

Lecture 14:  
The Nineteenth-Century Novel  
(Professor Timothy B. Shutt)

The **Suggested Reading** for this lecture is Stephen Regan's *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Critical Reader*.

As a cultural monument, the nineteenth-century novel stands with the drama of ancient Athens and Elizabethan England, and with the painting of the High Renaissance and of the Dutch Golden Age—the time and the place were somehow right and a whole array of artists produced masterpiece after masterpiece, which would have been unthinkable in ages beforehand and stand unsurpassed in retrospect. The novel was, of course, far and away the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century, and a hundred years and more later, it still governs our expectations of what we read. It has become for us a kind of cultural default setting.

One of the reasons that students often find philosophy and poetry hard going is that neither yields very easily to a novelistic mode of reading.

For that, outside of textbooks and the like, is what we expect—that is how we are inclined to operate when we decide to take up a book. And though in our own time the novel has to some degree been superseded by film and television as a popular narrative form, novels are most assuredly still written and still read.

The comparison with film and television, though, is instructive, for in their nineteenth-century heyday, novels were, without serious competition, the dominant narrative art. And from the outset, a commercial art. It may or may not be true, as Anthony Trollope reputedly said, that no one but a blockhead ever wrote save for money, but Trollope himself, and his Victorian counterparts, most assuredly did. And they made money. For like film and television, like, for that matter, the Shakespearian stage and Golden Age Dutch painting, novels were popular. In fact, they often ran in serial form in magazines



*Young Girl Reading*  
by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 1776

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designed more or less exclusively to sell them in that guise. That is one reason that they are typically so long. And that too accounts for some of their power. A reader of a serialized novel enjoyed some of the effects that make soap operas or continuing television series so engaging, long-term familiarity with characters who mean more to us the longer we know them.

But all of this presupposes relatively high literacy rates. You can't make money selling novels unless a lot of people want to read them and are able to read them. That is one reason why novels developed when and where they did, for at all times fluent literacy has been relatively difficult of attainment (it is much easier, even still, for most people to watch a film), and before the time that novels developed, the literate population was small. Drama, let us recall, makes no such demands and, still less so, visual arts. Before the rise of the novel, the default setting for narrative was oral, and oral narrative, rather surprisingly from our own novel-centered perspective, was most typically composed in verse. Think of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, of Dante and Chaucer and even Milton. Think, for that matter, of traditional ballads. For in a functionally nonliterate world, even written narrative is ordinarily read aloud, and is accordingly written, in some sense, as much or more as a script than a text.

It is interesting and revealing that we don't really get "art novels," novels, that is to say, which are written in the first instance not to entertain and to sell, but rather to impress critics until the high-water mark of the genre is already past. Novelists like Thomas Pynchon, like William Faulkner, and like Virginia Woolf come a generation or more later than the mid-nineteenth-century masters. You can, indeed, watch the process at work in the career of a writer like James Joyce, as he moves from *Dubliners* (1914), to *Ulysses* (1922), to *Finnegans Wake* (1939), the first read by many, the second by some, and the third, if at all, by specialists. As C.S. Lewis once observed, you can't persuade the public that you are entertaining unless, in fact, you entertain.

Antiquity offers relatively few examples of prose fiction, and those from the time of the Roman empire, when literacy rates were relatively high, by previous and immediately subsequent, if not by nineteenth-century standards. During the Middle Ages, however—outside of Iceland at least—verse fictional narratives were the norm, and it is not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that in picaresque tales like the Spanish *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1553) or Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) and in the grand novelistic burlesque of courtly romance, Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (Pt. 1, 1605; Pt. 2, 1615) that we get even acknowledged precursors to the novel. Even the first generally accepted novels in English, like Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (ca. 1688) or Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722) found their way as purported memoirs or histories. It took a while for authors fully to conceptualize what they were up to. Samuel Richardson, before writing the immense, epistolary *Clarissa* (1747, 1748), purportedly the longest novel in English, began in *Pamela* (1740) by writing a series of exemplary letters for the use of those in need of epistolary models, a series of exemplary letters, which, rather to his surprise, took on a narrative life of their own. Henry Fielding termed his splendid *Tom Jones* (1749), still in many respects one of the most impressive novels in English, a "comic epic in prose." But by the latter half of the eighteenth century, the genre was well-

established and growing in popularity, enough so, indeed, that in *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) Laurence Sterne was able to play with novelistic convention, consistently thwarting our expectations about more or less orderly plot-lines in a work that consists, and consists deliberately, almost entirely of (admittedly witty and slyly subversive) digression.

It is telling, though, that even so successful a novelist as Sir Walter Scott, a breathtaking best-seller in his day, and effectively the founder of historical fiction in his series of *Waverly* novels beginning in 1814, first gained real fame as a narrative poet and wrote his first novel well into his own forties. At his best, by the way, he remains well worth reading, shrewd and good-hearted, firm in his convictions, and blessed with a most acute sense of character and a wonderful gift for, particularly Scots, dialogue. His *Old Mortality* (1816) and, even more so, *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), are particularly fine.

Jane Austen (1775–1817), for one, greatly admired his work, and the work of Richardson as well, but in her own right she surpassed both of them, and stands, indeed, among the very best novelists writing in English. Her works are crisp, short, understated, and all but flawless, each concerned with the efforts of an agreeable young woman to find a husband among the gentry, or, in some instances, in a more exalted station in life. This limited range might seem an impediment, but, albeit by implication, Austen's range is in fact vast. Her subject is really, in a sense, ethics, how one should behave, and despite her taut irony and lightness of touch, she is a most perceptive and exacting moralist. And a delight to read as well. Works like *Pride and Prejudice* (1812) and *Emma* (1816) remain among the most beloved novels in English, and the more somber *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Persuasion* (1818) are, if anything, even better.

The three Brontë sisters, however, Anne (1820–49), Charlotte (1816–55), and Emily (1818–48), who first published their works under the names Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell, found the world of Jane Austen a bit dry and prim. Their own sensibility was more Romantic, honed by the consumption-clouded parsonage on the Yorkshire moors where they grew up in isolation, whiling away their time in elaborate, precocious fantasies that they tirelessly committed to writing, and which the most gifted among them, the fearless and visionary Emily, never entirely gave up. Anne's *Agnes Grey* (1848) is still well-regarded, Charlotte's works, particularly *Jane Eyre* (1847), even more so. And Emily's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is a work of eccentric, ferocious genius.

The most successful of all the Victorians, however, was by a wide margin Charles Dickens (1812–70), and the serial publication of his novels gained him something close to worldwide celebrity. The best known of his works are still common currency, among them *Oliver Twist* (1837), *David Copperfield* (1849–50), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1860–61). And they represent but a fraction of his works. Henry James once characterized the novels of his Victorian predecessors as “great, baggy, monsters,” and that characterization applies with as much justice to Dickens as anyone. Air-tight plotting was not his strong suit, and in latter days, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, he was excoriated for sentimentality as well as lauded for his social conscience. His great gifts, though, make up for all. Only Dostoevsky rivals him in the depiction of the seamy side of urban life—at his

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best he writes with almost unendurable intensity. And in the exuberant, seemingly effortless evocation of character and characters, not by the dozen, but by the hundred, and in his ear for the idiosyncrasies of human speech, Shakespeare, perhaps, is his only rival.

At the time, Dickens's great rival was William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63), but time has not treated Thackeray as kindly. His *Vanity Fair* (1847) is still read (though in my opinion his *Henry Esmond* [1852] is better), but he shows a kind of mean-spiritedness which just has not worn as well. A better writer, and if his books are a reliable reflection of character, a better man, was Anthony Trollope (1815–82), in some sense the Victorian novelist *par excellence*. He completed no fewer than forty-seven novels, many of which bear repeating characters, who reappear, consistently depicted, getting on with their lives, from one novel to the next and, in effect, evoked something close to a parallel Victorian universe. His most celebrated works are the six novels in the Barchester series, beginning with *The Warden* (1855) and ending with *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867) and the subsequent six in the Palliser series, beginning with *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864) and ending with *The Duke's Children* (1880). Though his works are more rounded and, it must be admitted, a bit rougher and less polished, Trollope addresses many of the same themes as Jane Austen, at vastly greater length for certain, if not with greater insight or precision.

The last, and some would argue, the greatest of the English Victorians, is Mary Anne (or Marian) Evans, who wrote under the name George Eliot (1819–80). She was a woman of tremendous intellect, who began her career translating skeptical, cutting-edge theological works from the German in the 1840s and 1850s, and in 1871–72 she published in *Middlemarch* perhaps the most complete and rich of Victorian novels. I remember as an undergraduate, having cut my teeth on modernist works, reading *Middlemarch* for the first time. No stream-of-consciousness, none of the razzmatazz of more recent works. Instead, an overwhelming, careful intelligence brought to bear at blinding full power upon the details of everyday life. It was a revelation to me. I didn't know novelists could do such a thing.

The nineteenth-century novel, though, was by no means confined to the English-speaking world, and at least four other novelists can easily stand comparison with the very best of their English-speaking counterparts. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), in his *Comédie humaine*, a series of some ninety-one works written from 1827–1847, puts even Trollope to shame in devising parallel universes. And though I do not find him much to my taste, for many of the reasons which give me pause in Thackeray, the formal perfection of Gustave Flaubert's (1821–80) *Madame Bovary* has bedazzled critics since it was written. Even more distinguished are the great Russians, the tortured Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky (1821–'81), most celebrated for *Crime and Punishment* (1864) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), and his even greater contemporary, the Count Lev (or Leo) Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828–1910), still, and deservedly, the leading contender, by general, if not universal consensus, for consideration as the most distinguished novelist of them all on the basis of his monumental *War and Peace* (1863–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1873–77).

## FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING



### Questions

1. What progression is shown in the novels of James Joyce?
2. What are the great virtues of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens?

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