

BA2 Core Course 2012
REASON, FAITH, AND SCEPTICISM
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Modern history seems to owe much of its living force to the conflict between two authoritative principles between which there can be no harmony of coexistence. Should human life be directed by divine revelation or unaided human reason? Each strives to subject the other to its own criteria of validity: philosophy places religion within the limits of reason, while religion places reason within the limits of revelation. By answering in favor of human reason, modern philosophy would feel compelled to provide an ultimate foundation for human knowledge, a purpose justifying all modern systems of thought. However, and in contrast to what happened before, the modern conflict between reason and revelation has not been confined to the pages of metaphysical and moral speculation. Rather, its history has also been a social and political one, at times dividing whole nations in bitter and open struggle. Nor should it be assumed that the forms of the conflict have long ago been decided. As we shall see, the question has taken new and sometimes surprising shapes every time it has been addressed. And for some, it is the very notion of a conflict which appears devoid of sense, either because the two principles belong to entirely different spheres of life or because, unknown to both, they share a common essence.

Grade distribution

Participation 30%

Essays 70%

Written assignments

2 papers 5-7 pages each

First paper due end of Week 4. 23:59 Sunday Feb 5

Second paper due end of Week 9. 23:59 Sunday March 18

WEEK BY WEEK SYLLABUS FOR CORE SEMINAR

Week 1

Galileo Galilei: Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina (1615)

Week 2

René Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy (1641)

Week 3

René Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy

Week 4

Blaise Pascal: Pensées (1670)

Selections:

Week 5

State of the World Week (2012)

Week 6

Denis Diderot: Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream (1761, 1769)

Week 7

Voltaire: Candide (1759)

Week 8

Immanuel Kant: Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (1783)

Week 9

Selections from one of the following:

William James: The Will to Believe

G. K. Chesterton: Orthodoxy

Adorno /Horkheimer: Dialectics of Enlightenment

Week 10

Visual arts