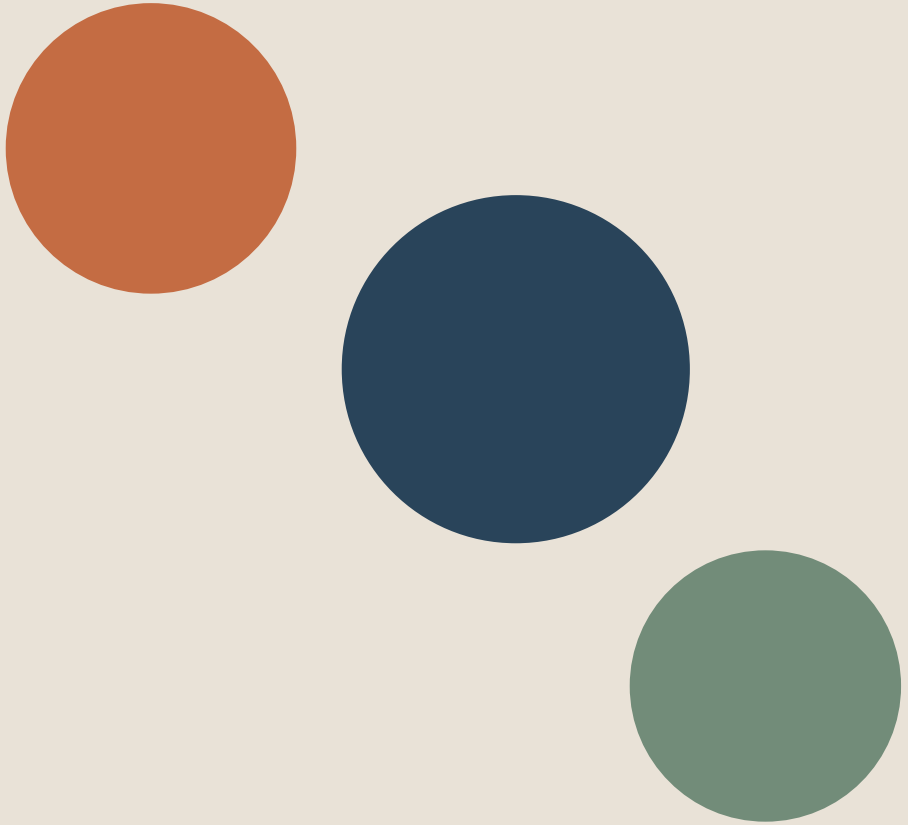
Practical Session No. 5

Philosophy of the 17th–18th Centuries

From the birth of science and the dispute over method to social contract theory and the Enlightenment

The practical deck turns each question of the seminar plan into an answer framework with contrasts and discussion prompts.



science • method • state • enlightenment

How to work with the practical session

Students should define the concept, explain the doctrine, contrast positions, and show the consequence of each idea.

Block I	Block II	Block III	Block IV
Science and method	Spinoza and Leibniz	Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu	Deism and Rousseau
Bacon, Descartes, Locke	monism and monadology	social contract and rights	progress, sovereignty, critique

Answer formula

term → thesis → contrast → consequence → discussion

General purpose

Show how reason becomes the principle of science, politics, and social reform.

The Birth of Science and the Method of Cognition

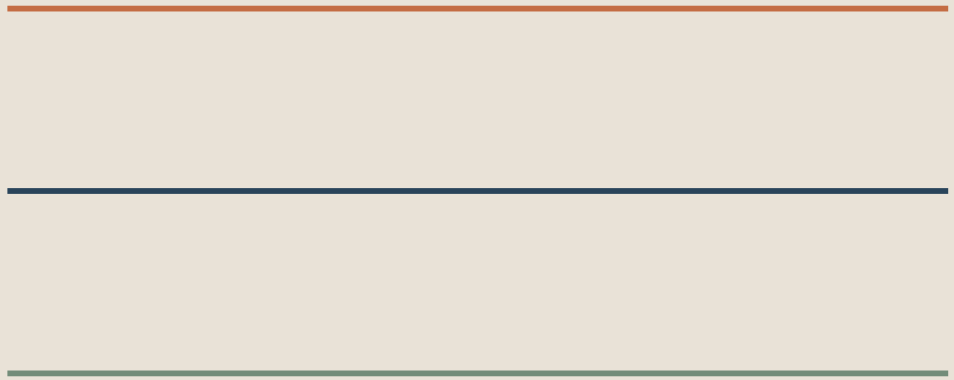
Empiricism and rationalism become the first decisive split of Early Modern philosophy.

BLOCK I

The Birth of Science and the Method of Cognition

Empiricism and rationalism become the first decisive split of Early Modern philosophy.

Seminar emphasis: thesis, comparison, consequence, discussion.



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Francis Bacon: knowledge as practical power

Bacon opposes sterile authority and redirects cognition toward experiment, utility, and mastery over nature.

Crisis of authority

- Scholastic authority no longer guarantees truth.
- Nature itself must be questioned by experiment.
- Knowledge is valuable because it increases human power over reality.

Main slogan

Knowledge is power

Science becomes an instrument for transforming the world rather than merely contemplating it.

How students should answer

- Contrast Bacon with the medieval goal of salvation-oriented knowledge.
- Explain why practical effectiveness becomes a criterion of truth.
- Connect Bacon with the rise of experimental science.

Bacon's Idols and the "Path of the Bee"

The mind must be purified from false images before induction can produce genuine scientific knowledge.

Idol	Meaning	Modern example	Student point
Tribe	human tendency to distort reality	fake patterns, biases	error rooted in species nature
Cave	private prejudice	personal echo chamber	error of individual perspective
Marketplace	confusion of words	media manipulation	often the most dangerous today
Theatre	blind faith in systems	ideological dogma	authority as stage illusion

Ant
Spider
Bee

Bee = experience transformed by reason.
That is why induction is Bacon's true scientific method.

Descartes, radical doubt, and Locke's tabula rasa

The dispute over knowledge becomes a dispute about the structure of the mind itself.

Descartes

- Doubt everything that can be doubted.
- Cogito ergo sum is the first certainty.
- Clear and distinct ideas ground truth.
- Innate ideas make deduction possible.

Key contrast

active mind vs. blank slate

This is the center of the rationalism–empiricism conflict.

Locke

- No universal consent proves there are no innate ideas.
- The newborn mind is tabula rasa.
- All ideas arise from sensation and reflection.
- Experience fills the mind before reason systematizes.

Metaphysical Systems of the 17th Century

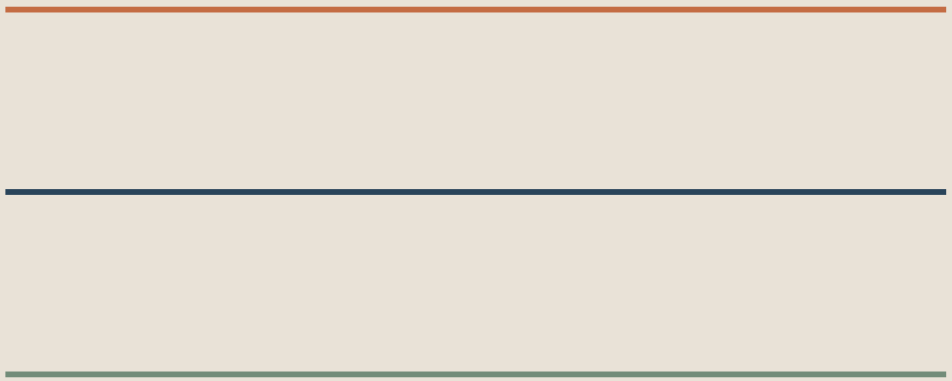
Spinoza and Leibniz respond to Descartes by rebuilding rationalism in opposite ways.

BLOCK II

Metaphysical Systems of the 17th Century

Spinoza and Leibniz respond to Descartes by rebuilding rationalism in opposite ways.

Seminar emphasis: thesis, comparison, consequence, discussion.



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Spinoza: one substance, determinism, freedom through understanding

Spinoza overcomes dualism by identifying all reality with a single infinite substance.

Deus sive Natura

- There is only one substance, not two.
- Thought and extension are attributes of the same reality.
- Finite things are modes of the one substance.
- Pantheistic monism restores unity.

Freedom as necessity understood

free will = illusion
freedom = rational understanding of necessity

The wiser person does not abolish causality, but understands it.

What to stress in an answer

- Explain how Spinoza solves the Cartesian split.
- Define monism, attribute, and mode clearly.
- Show why his concept of freedom is paradoxical but not meaningless.

Leibniz: monads and pre-established harmony

Leibniz defends plurality, individuality, and a coordinated universe without direct causal contact among monads.

Question	Spinoza	Leibniz	Why compare?
Basic reality	one substance	many monads	two anti-dualist solutions
Order	necessity of one being	pre-established harmony	two ways to secure rational cosmos
Freedom	understood necessity	inner unfolding of monads	different meaning of autonomy
Image of world	unified ocean	plurality of centers	unity vs individuality

Monad

simple immaterial windowless unit of force

Harmony is guaranteed by God from the start.

Man and the State

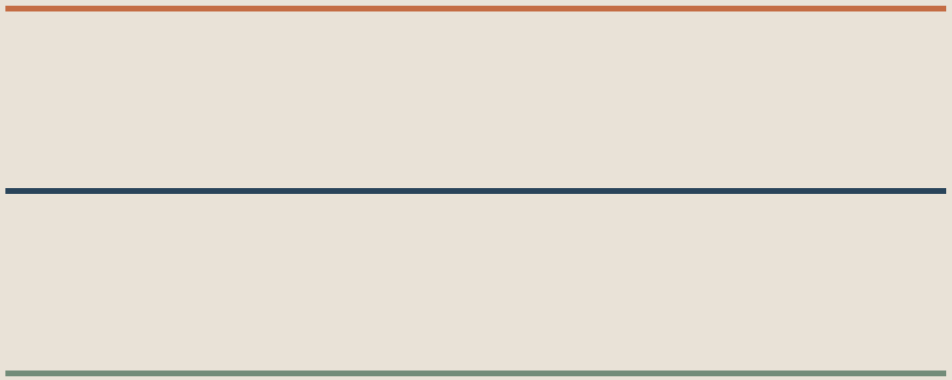
Political philosophy applies rational analysis to power, rights, security, and institutions.

BLOCK III

Man and the State

Political philosophy applies rational analysis to power, rights, security, and institutions.

Seminar emphasis: thesis, comparison, consequence, discussion.



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From Hobbes to Locke and Montesquieu

The social contract tradition moves from fear and sovereign order to rights, law, and institutional restraint.

Aspect	Hobbes	Locke	Montesquieu
State of nature	war of all against all	natural rights but insecurity	focus shifts to institutions
Why the state?	to escape chaos	to protect rights	to prevent tyranny
Main idea	Leviathan	life, liberty, property	separation of powers
Political meaning	security first	liberal government	checks and balances

How to explain the contrast

Hobbes: better harsh order than anarchy.

Locke: the state exists to secure freedom, not absorb it.

Montesquieu: liberty requires structure, not trust in rulers.

The Era of the Enlightenment

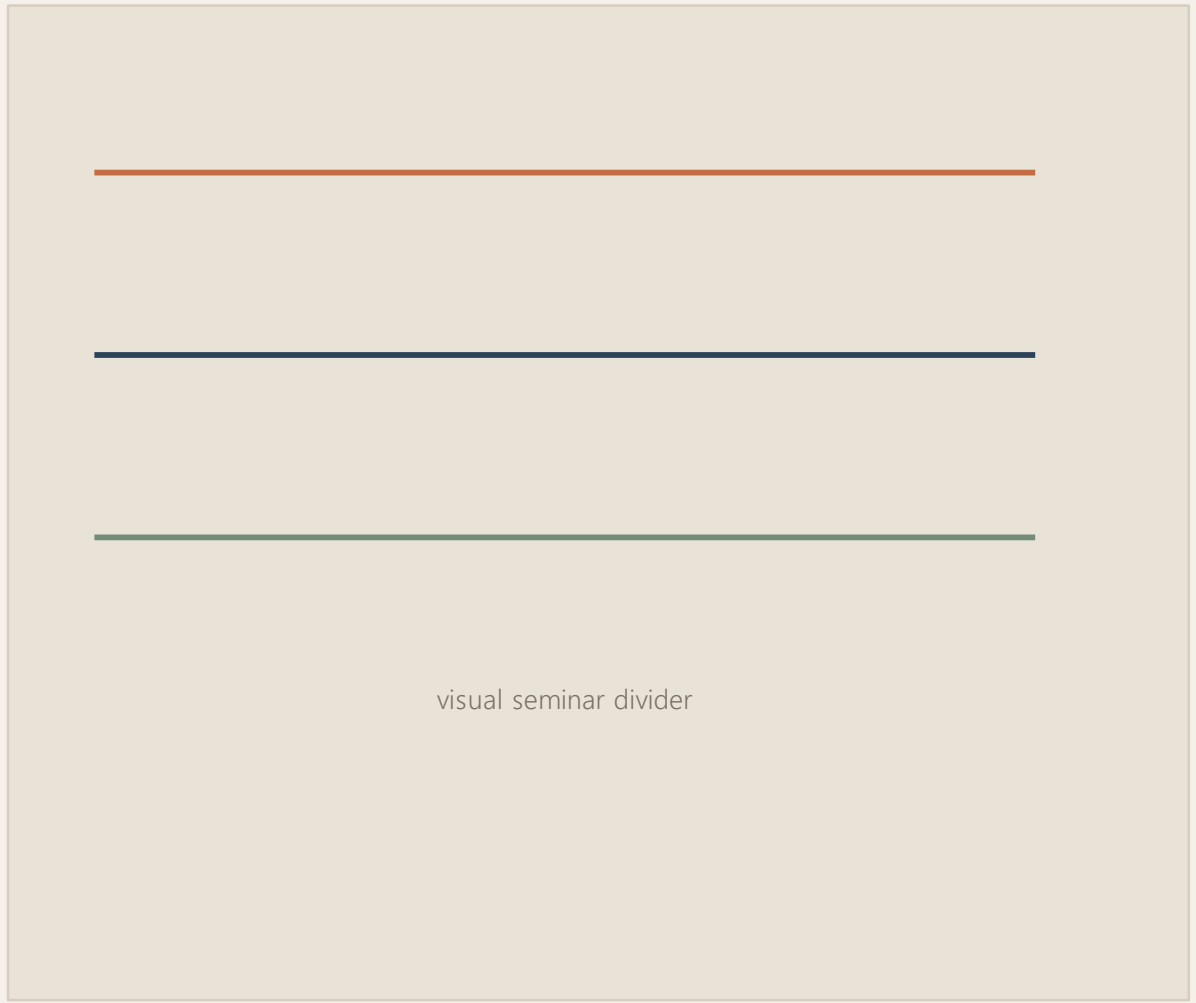
Reason becomes not only a method of knowledge but an ideology of progress and reform.

BLOCK IV

The Era of the Enlightenment

Reason becomes not only a method of knowledge but an ideology of progress and reform.

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Deism, progress, and Rousseau's paradox

The Enlightenment trusts reason, yet Rousseau exposes the moral ambiguity of civilization.

Deism and progress

- God becomes the Great Clockmaker.
- Miracles and church authority lose centrality.
- Knowledge and education promise liberation from ignorance.

Rousseau

- Sciences and arts may corrupt morals.
- Civilization can increase vanity and inequality.
- Popular sovereignty makes the people the source of legitimate power.

Why revolutionary?

- If sovereignty belongs to the people, privilege loses legitimacy.
- Rousseau thus prepares both democratic politics and revolutionary energy.
- A strong answer should mention the tension between freedom and collective will.

Conceptual connections

This slide can be used for oral recap or for a short written self-check at the end of the class.

- 1. Bacon’s ascent from particular facts to general laws is induction.
- 2. Descartes’ doctrine of mind and matter as two substances is dualism.
- 3. Rationalism claims that some ideas are innate.
- 4. Locke compares the newborn mind to tabula rasa.
- 5. Spinoza’s identification of God and world is pantheism or monism.
- 6. The state arising by agreement is the theory of the social contract.
- 7. Enlightenment belief in a creator who does not intervene is deism.

These links matter because they force students to translate long theories into exact philosophical language.

What ties the whole session together?

Early Modern philosophy turns reason into the key principle of science, metaphysics, politics, and social transformation.

methodical science → rational systems → contractual state → enlightened reform

A strong final answer should show that the same age that asks how we know the world also asks how we should build society.

Closing discussion: Are we still living inside the Bacon–Descartes–Locke–Enlightenment project, or have its limits become visible?