

Modern Philosophy – Lecture 1 Study Guide

Title: Birth of the Modern

Key Themes

- **A new mindset (c. 1500):** confidence to explore the unknown, remake knowledge, and focus on this-worldly life.
 - **From authority to experience:** shift from deference to books/theology to **empirical observation, experiment, and tools.**
 - **Humanism & dignity:** celebration of the human being (art, anatomy, politics) as worthy of direct study.
 - **Reform across domains:** exploration, printing, art, science, politics, and religion all undergo transformation.
 - **Bacon's program:** rebuild knowledge on **experience + method**, uniting empirical and rational faculties.
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Main Concepts & Developments

- **Global Exploration:** Columbus signals a new era of **globalization** and practical confidence in facing the “unknown.”
- **Printing Revolution (Gutenberg):** explosion in **literacy, circulation of ideas,** and **lowered costs** of knowledge.
- **Renaissance Art & Humanism:** Michelangelo's *David* (1501–04) portrays a **confident, natural, nude human form**—future-oriented rather than backward-looking.
- **Scientific Anatomy:** Vesalius (1543) models **forbidden → empirical** inquiry via documented dissection and illustration.
- **Political Realism:** Machiavelli grounds politics in **how people actually behave,** not inherited theological abstractions.
- **Cosmology Recast:** Heliocentric thinking challenges human centrality; **math + observation** trump tradition.
- **Religious Reform:** Protestant Reformation emphasizes **individual conscience, direct access to scripture,** and responsibility for one's soul.

- **Perspective & Naturalism in Art:** accurate **perspective/scale** reflects a turn to **this-worldly observation**.
 - **Classical Revival:** Raphael's *School of Athens* celebrates **Greek reason** (Plato vs. Aristotle) as living interlocutors.
 - **Two inheritances in tension: Greco-Roman naturalism & reason vs. Judeo-Christian faith & dogma.**
 - **Aquinas:** integrate Aristotle with Christianity.
 - **Luther (rhetorically anti-Aristotle):** protect Christian purity from pagan philosophy.
 - **Francis Bacon's Project**
 - **Great Instauration / Novum Organum:** a **new toolset (organon)** for inquiry.
 - **Start from experience:** build up cautiously by **induction**, not leap to grand universals.
 - **Tools for senses & mind:** instruments (compass, telescope) and **methodical logic** amplify human powers.
 - **Bias vigilance:** the **mind has built-in distortions** ("idols"); method must detect/correct them.
 - **Empiricism + Reason:** a "**true and lawful marriage**" of the empirical and rational faculties.
 - **Telos of knowledge:** not status or scholastic wordplay but "**the benefit and use of life.**"
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Important Quotes / Definitions (from the lecture's text)

*"The entire fabric of human reason... is badly put together... There is but one course left... **to try the whole thing anew upon a better plan.**" – Bacon*

*"**Unencumbered with literature and book-learning...** philosophy and the sciences may... rest on the **solid foundation of experience.**" – Bacon*

*"**Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.**" – Bacon*

*"I have established forever a **true and lawful marriage between the empirical and the rational faculty.**" – Bacon*

Knowledge sought “for the benefit and use of life,” not for fame, power, or mere contention. — Bacon

Examples & Applications

- **Exploration:** move from “**here be monsters**” to **charted seas** via instruments + method → metaphor for intellectual courage.
 - **Anatomy labs:** outlawed dissections become **normative science**, improving medicine.
 - **Policy design:** from theological premises to **data on incentives, behavior, and institutions**.
 - **Scientific method today:** hypothesis → controlled observation → iterative refinement = Bacon’s **inductive program** operationalized.
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Summary (5–7 sentences)

“Modern” names a civilizational pivot around 1500 in which Europeans re-oriented toward **experience, method, and human agency**. Exploration, print, art, science, politics, and religion each embraced **this-worldly investigation** over inherited authority. Artists and scientists alike treated the **human being**—body, mind, action—as proper objects of empirical study. In religion, reformers stressed **individual responsibility and direct access** to scripture; in politics, Machiavelli modeled **realist analysis**. Cosmology shifted toward **heliocentrism** by following mathematics and observation wherever they led. **Francis Bacon** synthesized the moment’s promise into a program: **rebuild knowledge** from the ground up by **disciplined induction, tools**, and a **marriage of empiricism and reason**, explicitly aimed at **improving life**. This is the **birth of the modern**: confidence to discover, innovate, and progress.

Questions for Review

1. In what concrete ways did exploration, printing, and perspective painting instantiate the **modern turn to experience**?
 2. Contrast **Aquinas's integration** strategy with **Luther's rejection** of Aristotle. What did each seek to protect or achieve?
 3. How does **Machiavelli's** method differ from theological or classical idealism in political theory?
 4. Explain **Bacon's critique of syllogistic logic** and his case for a **reformed induction**.
 5. What does Bacon mean by a "**marriage of the empirical and the rational**"? Why does he think the "divorce" harmed philosophy?
 6. Why must **tools** (instruments and methods) augment both **sense** and **intellect**?
 7. Interpret "**Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.**" Give two modern examples.
 8. According to Bacon, why is **book-learning** insufficient as a starting point for knowledge?
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Key Terms (quick reference)

- **Great Instauration / Novum Organum** — Bacon's blueprint for rebuilding knowledge via methodical induction.
 - **Induction (reformed)** — From **many disciplined observations/experiments** to carefully warranted generalizations.
 - **Empiricism** — Knowledge begins with the **senses**; experience is foundational.
 - **Rational Faculty** — Concept-formation, abstraction, and logical/mathematical reasoning; to be **joined** to empiricism.
 - **Idols of the Mind** — Built-in **biases/distortions** that mislead inquiry; method must detect/correct them.
 - **Humanism** — Focus on **human dignity, agency, and earthly flourishing**.
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