

# Modern Philosophy – Lecture 5 Study Guide

## Title: Counter-Enlightenment

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### Key Themes

- **French Revolution as turning point (1789):** From aristocratic reform → liberal Enlightenment phase → Jacobin Reign of Terror.
  - **Voltaire vs. Rousseau:** Deep rivalry; Rousseau emerges as the philosophical inspiration for Counter-Enlightenment.
  - **Shift in politics:** From class struggle to ideological struggle between liberals and Jacobins.
  - **Rousseau's rejection:** Opposed to nearly every Enlightenment value (reason, science, progress, property, free press).
  - **Rise of collectivism:** The individual to be reabsorbed into the collective “general will.”
  - **Religion repurposed:** Tool of social control rather than individual conscience.
  - **David Hume's skepticism:** Undercuts Enlightenment optimism in epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.
  - **Three-way debate emerges:** Conservatives (tradition/religion), Enlightenment liberals (reason/progress), and Counter-Enlightenment (Rousseau/Hume).
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### Historical Context

- **French Estates-General (1789):** Aristocracy forces meeting; liberals from all estates (aristocrats, clergy, commons) defect to Enlightenment cause.
- **Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789):** Universal human rights, modern notion of citizenship vs. subjecthood.
- **Lafayette:** Hero of two worlds, influenced by American Revolution and Locke's ideals.
- **Early feminism:** Olympe de Gouges (1791), *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*.

- **Jacobins:** Robespierre, Saint-Just, Danton, Marat → disciples of Rousseau; escalate into Reign of Terror (guillotine, censorship, authoritarianism).
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## **Rousseau (1712–1778) – Counter-Enlightenment Prophet**

### ***Core Ideas***

- **Against Enlightenment arrogance:** Science and arts corrupt, distract, and enslave.
- **Civilization = slavery:** “Garlands of flowers” masking chains of oppression.
- **Against printing press:** Called for censorship, abolition of printing, destruction of art/theater as corrupting.
- **Against reason:** Reason breeds egocentrism and isolation. Advocated **feeling and faith** as true guides.
- **Against property rights:** Property is origin of inequality and crime. True principle: “The fruits of the earth belong to all, and the earth to no one.”
- **Communalism:** Individuals should dissolve into collective body guided by the “general will.”
- **Religion as political tool:** Legislators may enforce conformity; disbelievers may be punished with death.
- **Authoritarian collectivism:** Surrender of body, goods, and will to the nation (e.g., Corsica constitution draft).

### ***Famous Lines***

*“The sciences, letters, and arts cover with garlands of flowers the iron chains that bind them.”*

*“The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, said ‘This is mine,’ ... was the true founder of civil society.”*

*“The fruits of the earth belong to all, and the earth to no one.”*

*“Transforming each individual... into part of a larger whole.” – **The Social Contract***

*“Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions.” (later echoed by Hume, but similar spirit of anti-rationalism)*

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### **David Hume (1711–1776) – Skeptic of Reason**

#### ***Epistemology & Metaphysics***

- **Empiricism radicalized:** Sensations = foundation of all knowledge.
- **Nominalism:** Concepts = names for collections of impressions; abstractions are subjective labels, not realities.
- **Criterion of meaning:** Terms must trace back to impressions, or they are meaningless.
- **Skepticism results:**
- No impression of **cause and effect** → causality = mental habit, not observable reality.
- No impression of **identity/persistence** → “self” is a bundle of impressions, not a stable entity.
- No secure basis for **induction** → generalizations (like “all copper melts at 1000°F”) lack rational justification.
- No way to know external world independent of impressions.
- No rational proof of God.

#### ***Ethics***

- **Reason cannot ground morality.**
- Introduces **is–ought problem:** cannot derive prescriptive moral “ought” from descriptive “is.”
- Morality rooted in **sentiment and passions**, not reason.
- Famous line: *“Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions.”*

#### ***Consequence***

- Empiricism (Bacon → Locke) ends in skepticism (Hume).
  - Rationalism (Descartes) collapses into doubt and failed proofs.
  - Philosophy left in a skeptical dead end by mid-1700s.
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### Summary

The Counter-Enlightenment arose at the very height of Enlightenment optimism. Politically, the French Revolution began with liberal ideals but devolved into the Jacobin Reign of Terror, guided by Rousseau's collectivist doctrines. Rousseau rejected Enlightenment ideals wholesale: science, art, reason, press freedom, property rights, and individualism, advocating instead communal authoritarianism justified by religion and the general will. Hume, on the epistemological side, took empiricism to its extreme, showing that fundamental concepts like cause, identity, induction, and even selfhood cannot be justified by impressions, leading to skepticism. Together, Rousseau and Hume represented a profound intellectual backlash, undermining Enlightenment faith in reason and liberty. By the 1780s, Europe faced a three-way debate: conservatives defending tradition, Enlightenment liberals promoting reason and progress, and Counter-Enlightenment thinkers offering skepticism and collectivism as alternatives.

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### Questions for Review

1. How did the French Revolution move from aristocratic reform to liberal Enlightenment ideals, and then to Jacobin terror?
  2. In what ways was Rousseau opposed to nearly all Enlightenment principles?
  3. What does Rousseau mean by "civilization is slavery"?
  4. Why did Rousseau reject the printing press, theater, and the arts?
  5. How does Rousseau's conception of property differ from Locke's?
  6. Explain Rousseau's idea of the **general will** and its implications for individual freedom.
  7. How does Hume's empiricism lead to skepticism about cause and effect?
  8. What is the **is-ought problem**, and why does it undermine Enlightenment morality?
  9. How does Hume's view of the self as a "bundle of impressions" challenge traditional metaphysics?
  10. What are the three main intellectual camps of the late 1700s?
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### Key Terms (Quick Reference)

- **Counter-Enlightenment** – Intellectual movement rejecting Enlightenment ideals.
  - **Jacobins** – Radical faction in French Revolution; disciples of Rousseau.
  - **General Will** – Rousseau’s concept of collective authority over individual will.
  - **Nominalism** – View that general ideas are merely names for sets of impressions.
  - **Cause & Effect (Hume)** – Habit of association, not observable fact.
  - **Is-Ought Problem** – Hume’s critique of deriving moral norms from factual claims.
  - **Bundle Theory of the Self** – Idea that the “self” is just a collection of impressions.
  - **Skepticism** – Doubt about possibility of certain knowledge.
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