

Come Follow Me: A Seminarian's Journey

Installment 3 – Why Study Philosophy?

1. An Overview

- Last week, we saw that there are generally two periods of study in the life of a seminarian. First, in college seminary or as a pre-theologian, the seminarian studies *philosophy* (2-4 years). Second, he transitions to study *theology*.
- But why does he study philosophy? What is philosophy in the first place?

2. What is Philosophy?

- Philosophy comes from the Greek word *philosophia* (“love of wisdom”). It is the study of reason, nature, knowledge, reality, and existence. Philosophy can be divided into three main branches:
 - Natural philosophy** studies the nature of things in the physical world.
 - Moral philosophy** studies goodness, right and wrong, and virtue.
 - Metaphysical philosophy** studies things pertaining to reason, existence, cause/effect, God, and abstract objects.

3. Historical Periods of Philosophy

- **Ancient philosophy** (600 B.C.–300 A.D) includes the ancient Greek philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, among others.
- **Medieval philosophy** (300–1500 A.D.) was dominated by Christians working to harmonize ancient Greek thought with theological concerns. Key Medieval thinkers include St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Boethius, and Anselm.
- **Modern philosophy** (1500–Present) is often dominated by atheistic ideas and secularism, but also gave us the scientific method. Major modern thinkers include Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Marx.

4. Good Philosophy can correct Bad Philosophy

- Secular modern philosophy tends to undermine the need for God. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously said, “God is Dead.” Atheistic communism was founded on the thought of Karl Marx. Our culture is dominated by secularism founded on modern philosophy.
- Using good philosophy can correct the errors of modern philosophy.

5. Philosophy leads to Faith

- Aristotle, a pagan philosopher, provided the basis for understanding God as the source of all things (the *unmoved mover*). Later, St. Thomas Aquinas used Aristotle to posit 5 philosophical proofs for the existence of God.
- Philosophy is also interested in matters like the afterlife, morality, and virtue—of which faith offers a deeper understanding.

6. Theology needs Philosophy

- Seminarians also study philosophy because it is needed to properly understand theology.
- Philosophical concepts help us to understand beliefs such as the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, God as Trinity, the Incarnation (God becomes man), and the immortality of the human soul.
- In general, theological study also requires the ability to think through things and reason well—a skill the seminarian acquires in philosophy.
- Faith (theology) and reason (philosophy) are meant to be complementary. (See JP II’s encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* i.e., Faith and Reason)

(Next Week – Installment 4 – Studying Theology)