

**Announcing the 27th Annual Summer Symposium of the Program of Liberal Studies:
June 1 - 6, 2025**

The Past, Present, and Future of Liberal Education

As the Program of Liberal Studies prepares to celebrate its 75th anniversary this coming academic year, we invite our alumni/ae, relatives, and friends to join us to reflect on the history and future of liberal education in our twenty-seventh annual Summer Symposium.

Registration will open in late February / early March.

Prof. Walt Nicgorski: “The Nature and Purpose of Liberal Education” (1 lecture, 1 Seminar session)

This lecture draws its primary inspiration from Aristotle’s understanding of genuine human development. Under that general motif, the formulations of Cicero, St. John Henry Newman and Leo Strauss are also explored. Why liberal education or education in the liberal arts is distinct from both general education and humanistic education is clarified. Whether such an education can save itself from developing and nourishing manipulative instrumental reason and rank sophistry is raised for consideration.

Seminar: Plato’s *Phaedrus*. It appears that this text has been read and discussed in the Program from its first days until today. Let us have a traditional seminar on it. Let us see how it looks to us now, years later and richer in life’s experiences. Among other things, our discussion is likely to underscore the classical appreciation for education in the liberal arts and to bring us to confront the limits of this education. Bring any translation as long as it utilizes the standard Stephanus paragraph numbering of the Platonic corpus.

Prof. Chris Chowrimootoo: Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and Aesthetic Education (3 Seminar sessions)

In this three-day seminar, we will examine Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9 in D minor* (Op. 125) both as an end-in-itself and for the insight it sheds into late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ideas about “aesthetic education.” More specifically, we will analyze key passages from Beethoven’s celebrated work alongside select passages from Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794). We will also discuss the *Ninth*’s fascinating reception history, from the 1824 Vienna premiere through to Leonard Bernstein’s performance to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Prof. Eric Bugyis: Nietzsche, Anti-Education (2 Seminar sessions)

In 1869, two decades before descending into madness and declaring himself the anti-Christ, Friedrich Nietzsche was hired as a promising, idealistic young professor of Classics at the University of Basil and tasked with giving a set of lectures on the future of Germany's academic institutions. The coordinates of the debate, to which Nietzsche was asked contribute, were not unlike our own: Educational institutions were being encouraged by the government to take in more students and to prepare them for the scientific and technical jobs of the future, while at the same time faculty were incentivized to produce more and increasingly specialized research. Interest in the humanities was waning, and yet, students were still graduating with big existential, social, and political questions that they were turning to journalists and novels (today, we might say podcasters and Youtube videos!) to answer. Written in the form of an imagined dialogue with an "old philosopher," Nietzsche wonders about the prospects for classical education in such a culture of distraction. Is it possible for students to make the "jump" from the latter to the world of Homer, Socrates, and those few modern "classics" still worthy of the name, and even if it is, are there any professors still equipped with the time and broad expertise to guide them?

Text: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anti-Education: On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, edited by Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, translated by Damion Searles (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2015).

Prof. Henry Weinfield: The Tragedy of Dante's Comedy (3 Seminar sessions)

Dante's *Commedia* (1321) is a comedy in the Aristotelian sense of having a happy ending. After being guided through hell, purgatory, and heaven by Virgil and then Beatrice, Dante (the pilgrim) receives a vision, however partial, of the Eternal Light and of God's plan for the universe, which, significantly, Dante (the poet) symbolizes as a book. "I saw—ingathered / and bound by love into one single volume— / what in the universe seems separate, scattered," he tells us in the last canto of the *Paradiso* (33.85-87). Talk about a happy ending! Yet, Dante's great poem—a poem central to the Western canon, to Catholic Christianity, and therefore (at least in my view) to the PLS seminar sequence—is permeated by tragedy. I am thinking not only of the fate of the sinners in *Inferno* but of that of the virtuous pagans, including Virgil himself, Dante's guide. Dante's tragic vision, indeed, is at the heart of what makes him such a deeply moving and compelling poet.

Prior to attending the symposium, participants should read and study all three canticles of the *Commedia* (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*) in the translation by Allen Mandelbaum (Bantam Books, 1980-84) that we have used in PLS for many years. Because we only have three

sessions, and because we shall want to focus closely on a number of crucial issues and cantos, we have to pick our spots. I am especially interested in what Dante is doing with the figure of Virgil, a figure whom we encounter in the opening canto of *Inferno* and who remains with Dante until he vanishes in *Purgatorio* 30. No doubt we shall want to pay close attention to cantos 1-5 of the *Inferno*. I anticipate that we may want to discuss Paolo and Francesca (*Inf.* 5), Farinata (*Inf.* 10), Brunetto Latini (*Inf.* 15), and Ulysses (*Inf.* 26). In *Purgatorio*, in conjunction with our examination of Dante's Virgil, we may want to look at the Sordello and Statius cantos (*Purg.* 6 and 21), as well as the canto in which Virgil disappears (30). In *Paradiso*, I am especially interested in "the man . . . born along / the shoreline if the Indus River" (19.70-71). To grasp what Dante is saying about this man, we need to study cantos 19 and 20 of the *Paradiso*. All of this probably too much for only three sessions, but we'll see what we can accomplish.

By way of background, reading (or rereading) Aquinas's treatise on faith from the *Summa Theologiae*, especially questions 1, 2, and 10, will be helpful; see Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On Faith*, trans. Mark Jordan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). No need to do this, but if you would like to see where I am coming from, you might want to glance at my recent article: "Bad Faith (and Good) in the Test of Faith of *Paradiso* 24," *Modern Philology* 121:2 (Nov. 2023), 125-44.

Prof. Jennifer Martin: "The Idea of a University: St. John Henry Newman's Vision of Liberal Education and the Cultivation of a Philosophical Habit of Mind" (2 Seminar sessions)

Assigned Text: John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982). Link to purchase the book is [here](#). Alternatively, all texts can also be accessed online [here](#).

Course Description: This two-day course considers a representative sampling from St. John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*, a collection of nine lectures (or "discourses") intended to promote the first modern Catholic university in Ireland that he delivered in Dublin in 1852. Both Catholics and non-Catholics, however, consider the *Idea* to be a significant and foundational text within the liberal education tradition. To be truly educated in the liberal arts, according to Newman, is not "a mere extrinsic or accidental advantage, which is ours today and another's tomorrow, which may be got up from a book, and easily forgotten again, which we can command or communicate at our pleasure, which we can borrow for the occasion, carry about in our hand, and take into the market"; rather, it is "an acquired

illumination, it is a habit, a personal possession, and an inward endowment” (V.113). This selection of discourses will introduce seminar participants to Newman’s vision of higher education, which includes such themes as the unity and integration of all knowledge, the relation between faith and reason, the deliberate cultivation of the well-rounded student (what he calls the “gentleman”), and the nature of knowledge as ordered to no other end but itself.

Day One:

Discourse 2, “Theology a Branch of Knowledge,” 19-42.

Discourse 5, “Knowledge its Own End,” 99-123.

Discourse 6, “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning,” 124-150.

Day Two:

Discourse 7, “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill,” 151-178.

Discourse 8, “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Religion,” 179-211.

Discourse 9, “Duties of the Church Toward Knowledge,” 212-239.

Prof. Arman Schwartz: Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (2 Seminar sessions)

Text: Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

A study of the eccentric pedagogue Joseph Jacotot (1770-1840), a veiled intervention into contemporary debates about the nature of the French educational system, and a utopian teacher’s handbook, Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) is simultaneously addressed to the past, present, and future of liberal education. It is also one of the philosopher’s most beguiling and elusive books. In the course of two sessions, we’ll read Rancière’s “five lessons in intellectual emancipation,” trying to gain an understanding of its peculiar tone, and considering its surprising resonances with (as well as departures from) some of the central values of the “Great Books” movement.

Schedule:

Day 1: “An Intellectual Adventure,” “The Ignorant One’s Lesson,” “Reason between Equals” (Chapters 1-3)

Day 2: “The Society of Contempt,” “The Emancipator and His Monkey” (Chapters 4-5)

Prof. Phil Sloan: “The Phenomenology of the Seminar” (lecture)

Prof. Felicitas Munzel: Discussion of her Opening Charge plus Arendt, “What is Freedom?” (1 Seminar session)

[Full description forthcoming]

Prof. Robert Goulding: “Generative AI & Poetry” (2 Seminar sessions)

[Full description forthcoming]