

# Modern Philosophy

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CATHOLIC STUDIES  
ACADEMY



# Modern Philosophy

## Syllabus & Objectives

### Modern Philosophy

Modern philosophy initiated a revolution in political, religious, and cultural ideas that still impacts our world today. In this course, students will be introduced to the major figures and ideas of this period with an emphasis on the foundational, motivating ideas of modern philosophy, namely, freedom and the primacy of human reason. Through the course we will see how these ideas develop and interact. Ultimately we see how modern philosophers engaged with new questions and attempted to create a new intellectual paradigm to synthesize the modern experience of the new sciences and widespread aspirations for greater freedom and equality. In addition students will be made familiar with key philosophical movements including rationalism, idealism, modern dualism, etc.

Students in this course will be equipped to:

- demonstrate familiarity with the major figures and movements of early modern philosophy including Renes Descartes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant;
- formulate the distinguishing questions and methods adopted by modern philosophers;
- define and critically engage with the core ideas of early modern philosophy including rationalism, the religion of reason, the ideas behind the French Revolution, classical liberalism, and Kant's "Copernican revolution" in philosophy, et cetera;
- identify the continuing importance and relevance of early modern philosophy for catholic theology and contemporary culture.

# Modern Philosophy

## Lectures and Recommended Readings

The following lectures will be provided in this course:

1. What is Modern Philosophy?
2. Reforming Religion and Politics
3. Turning towards Method
4. Freeing mind from the Machine of Nature
5. Exploring the Rational Unity of all Things
6. Reforming Metaphysics in the Light of Experience
7. Overcoming Tyranny
8. Recognizing the Limits of Reason
9. Overcoming Metaphysics
10. Embracing the Ethics of Autonomy
11. Discovering the Philosophical Significance of History
12. Discovering the Material Dialectic of History
13. Unmasking the Pretensions of Reason and Freedom
14. Understanding Modern Philosophy

Texts for the Course:

1. Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation*, Fourth Edition (McGraw-Hill, 2002)
2. Garrett Thomason, *Bacon to Kant* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2012),

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# What is Modern Philosophy?

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Suggested Readings:

Garrett Thomason, Bacon to

Kant (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2012), Introduction.

Identify the historical circumstances and sources of modern philosophy

Clearly define the motivating ideas and spirit of modern philosophy

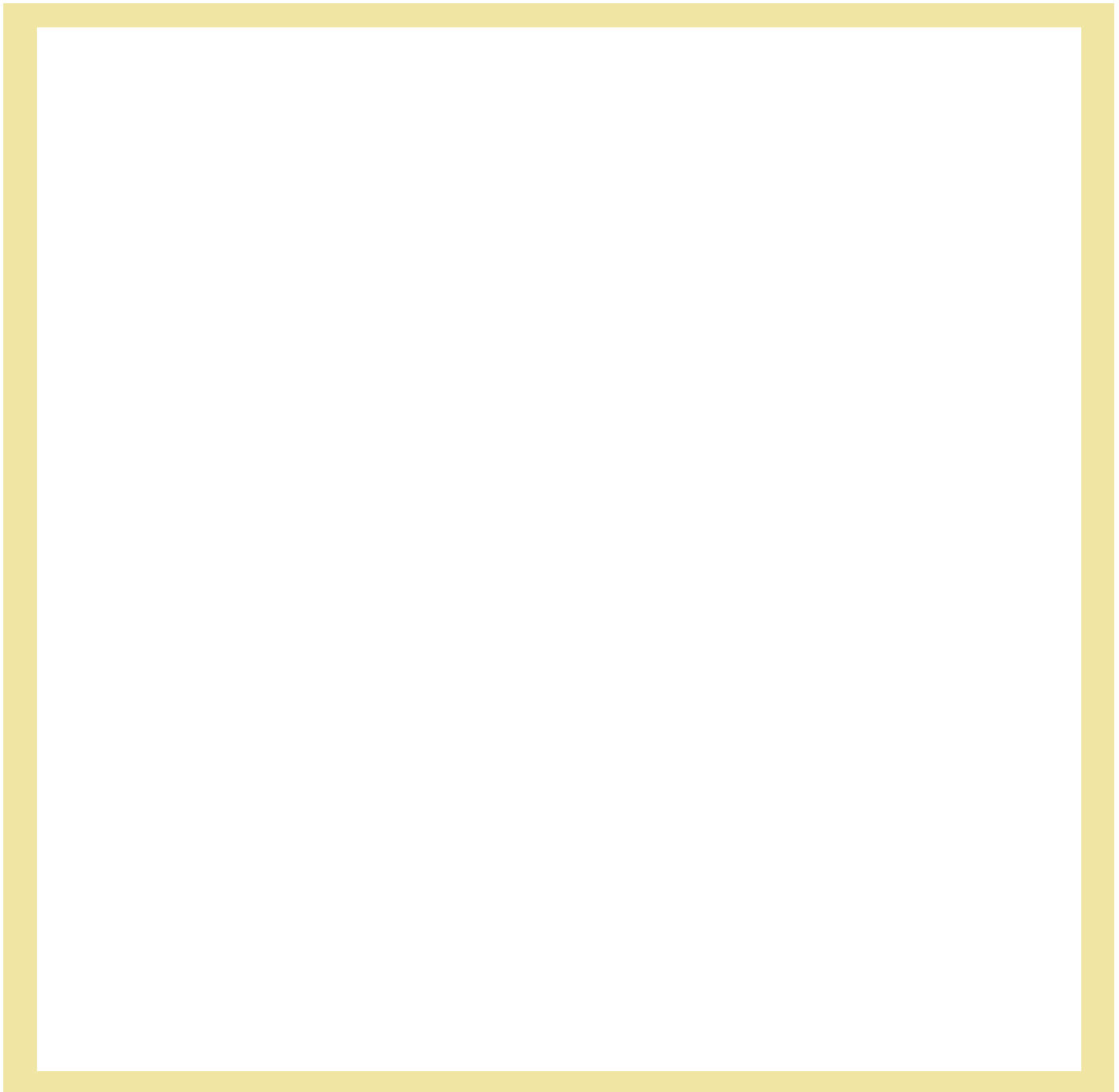
Distinguish modern philosophy from ancient and medieval philosophy

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# What is Modern Philosophy?

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Notes:



# Reforming Religion and Politics

Reading: Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, Fourth Edition (Boston: McGrawHill, 2002), c. 12.

Define the “modern” meaning and importance of reason

How did the new understanding of reason impact religion?

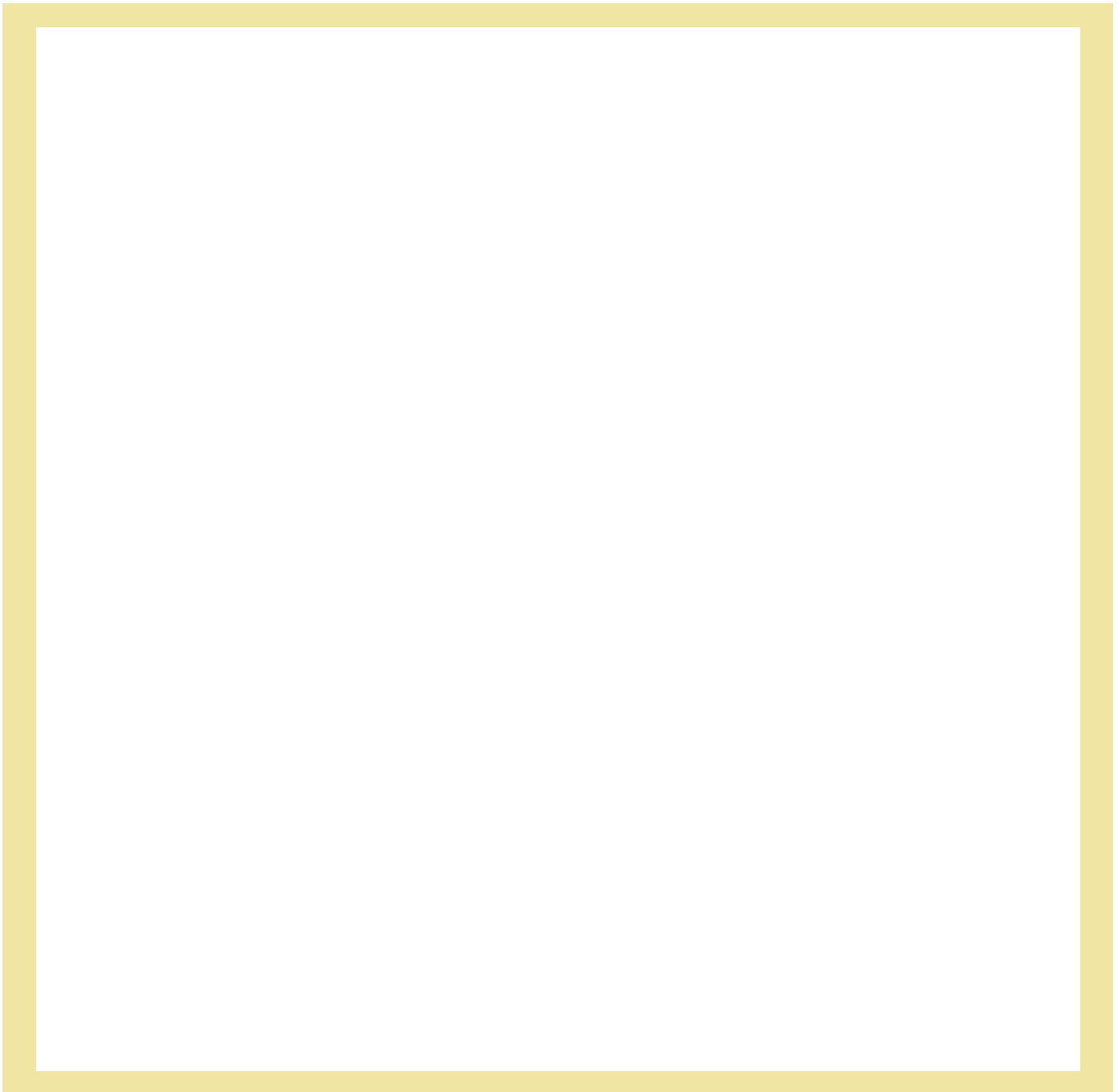
How did the new understanding of reason impact political life?

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# Reforming Religion and Politics

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# Turning Towards Method

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Reading: Melchert, 322-327.

What is rationalism?

What is the theory of methodical doubt? What is its purpose?

Explain the dream argument

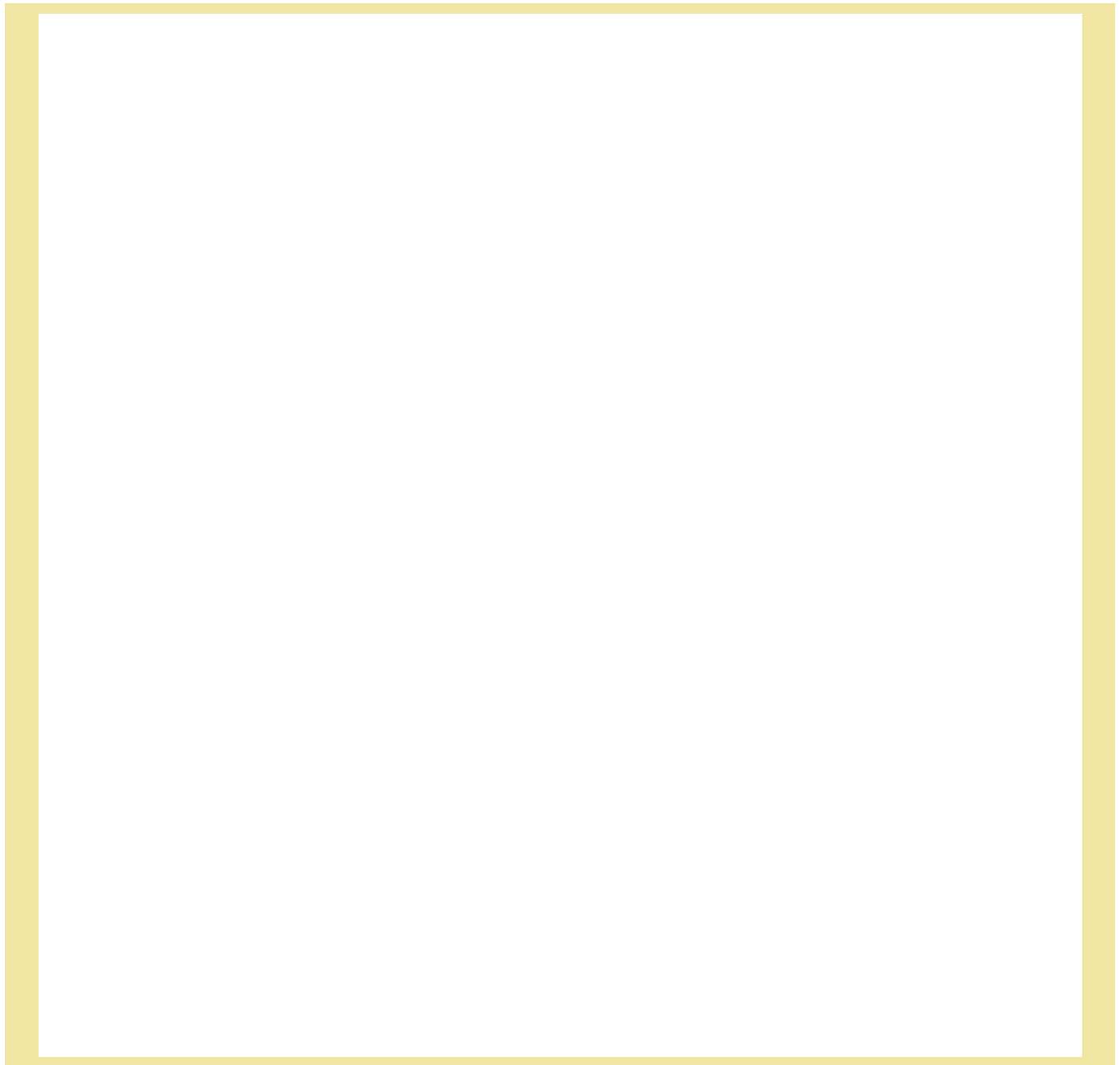


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# Turning Towards Method

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# Freeing Mind from the Machine of Nature

Reading: Thomson, c. 3. and Melchert, pp 341-344.

What is dualism?

What are the arguments for dualism?

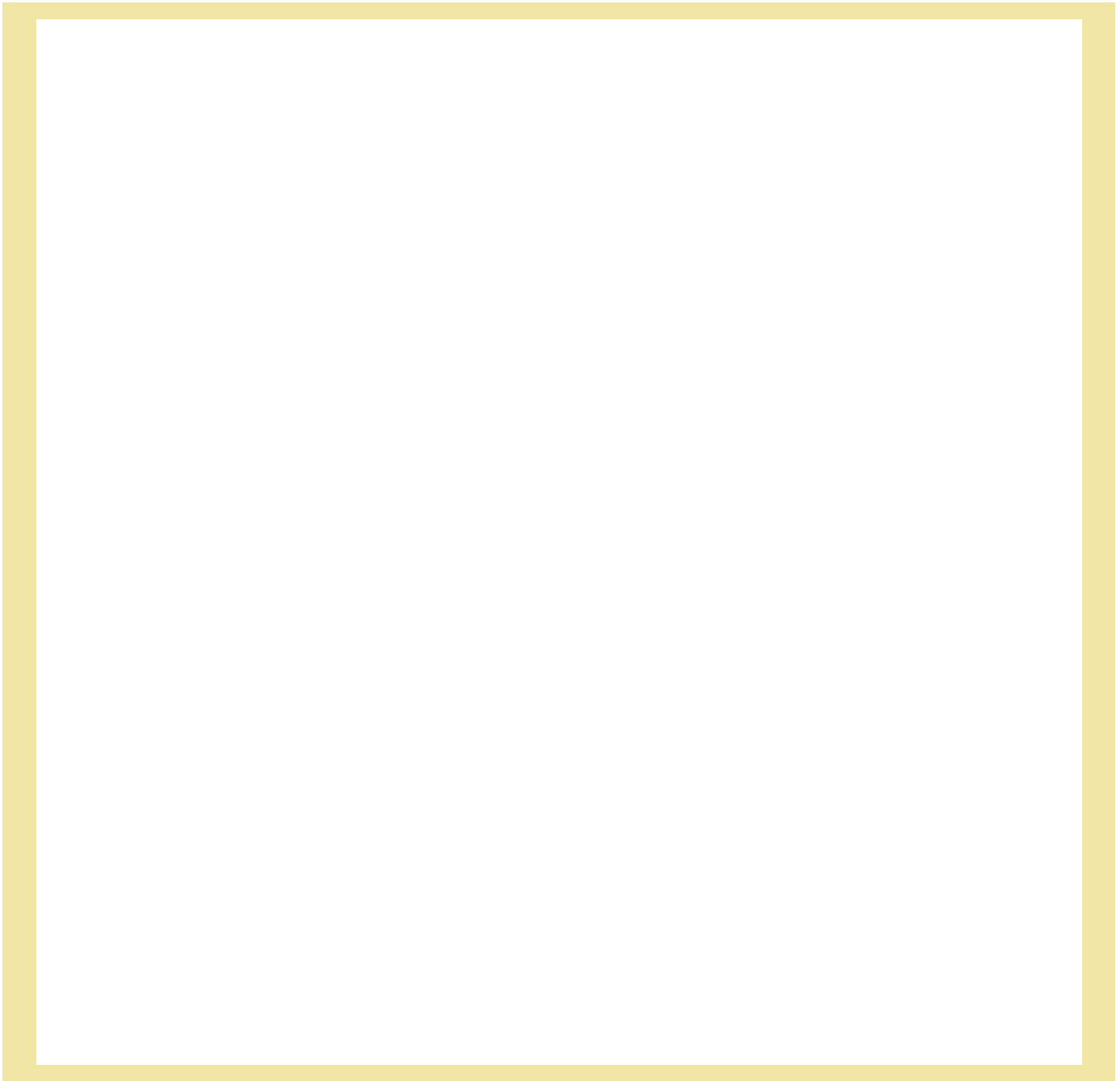
Explain the importance of Descartes' "cogito."

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# Freeing Mind from the Machine of Nature

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Notes:



# Exploring the Rational Unity of all Things

Reading: Thomson, c. 4.

Why did Spinoza reject dualism?

Explain the arguments for pantheistic monism

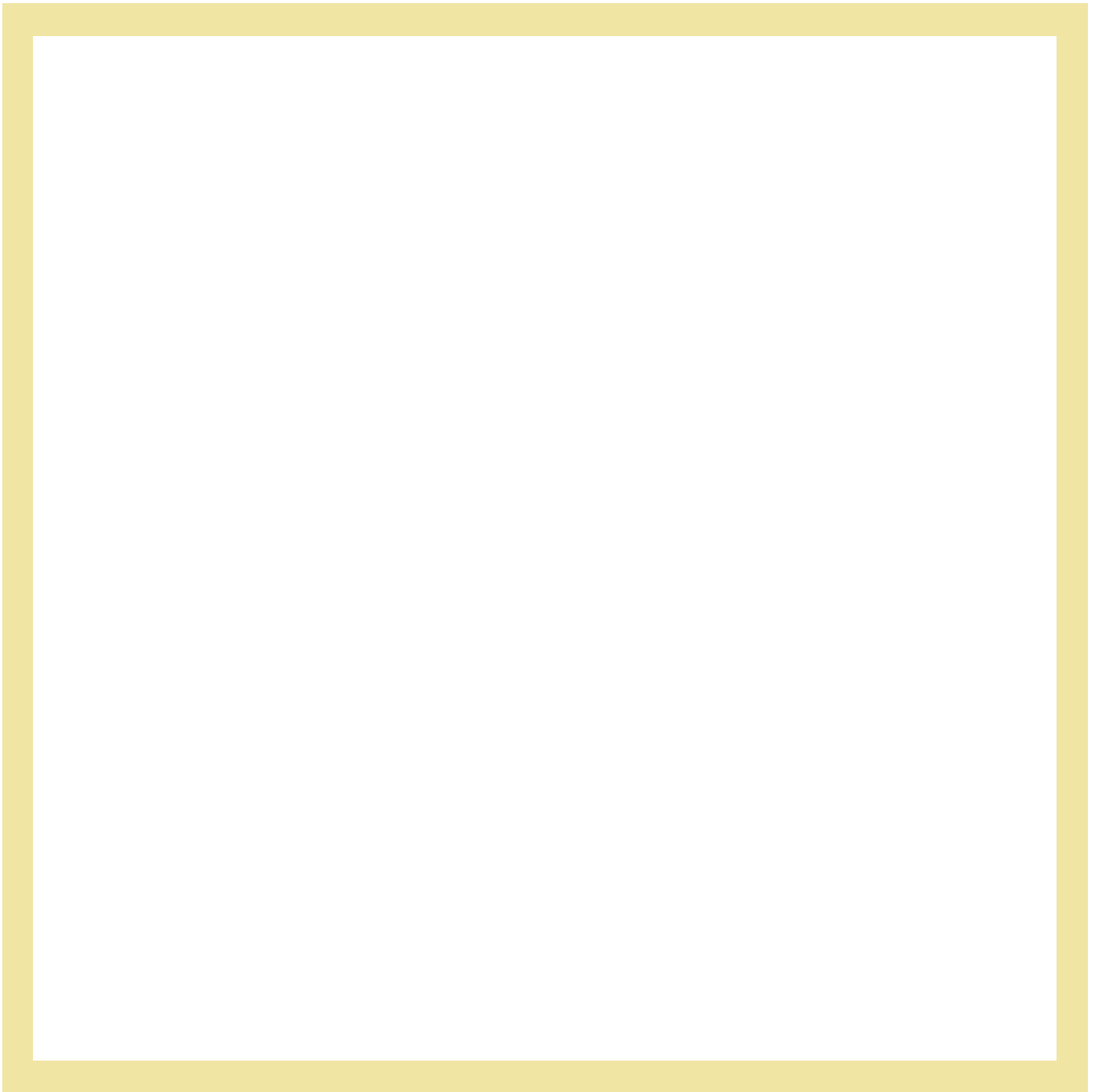
Why must every truth be a necessary truth according to Spinoza?

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# Exploring the Rational Unity of all Things

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# Reforming Metaphysics in the Light of Experience

Reading: Thomson, c. 13 and pp. 162-164.

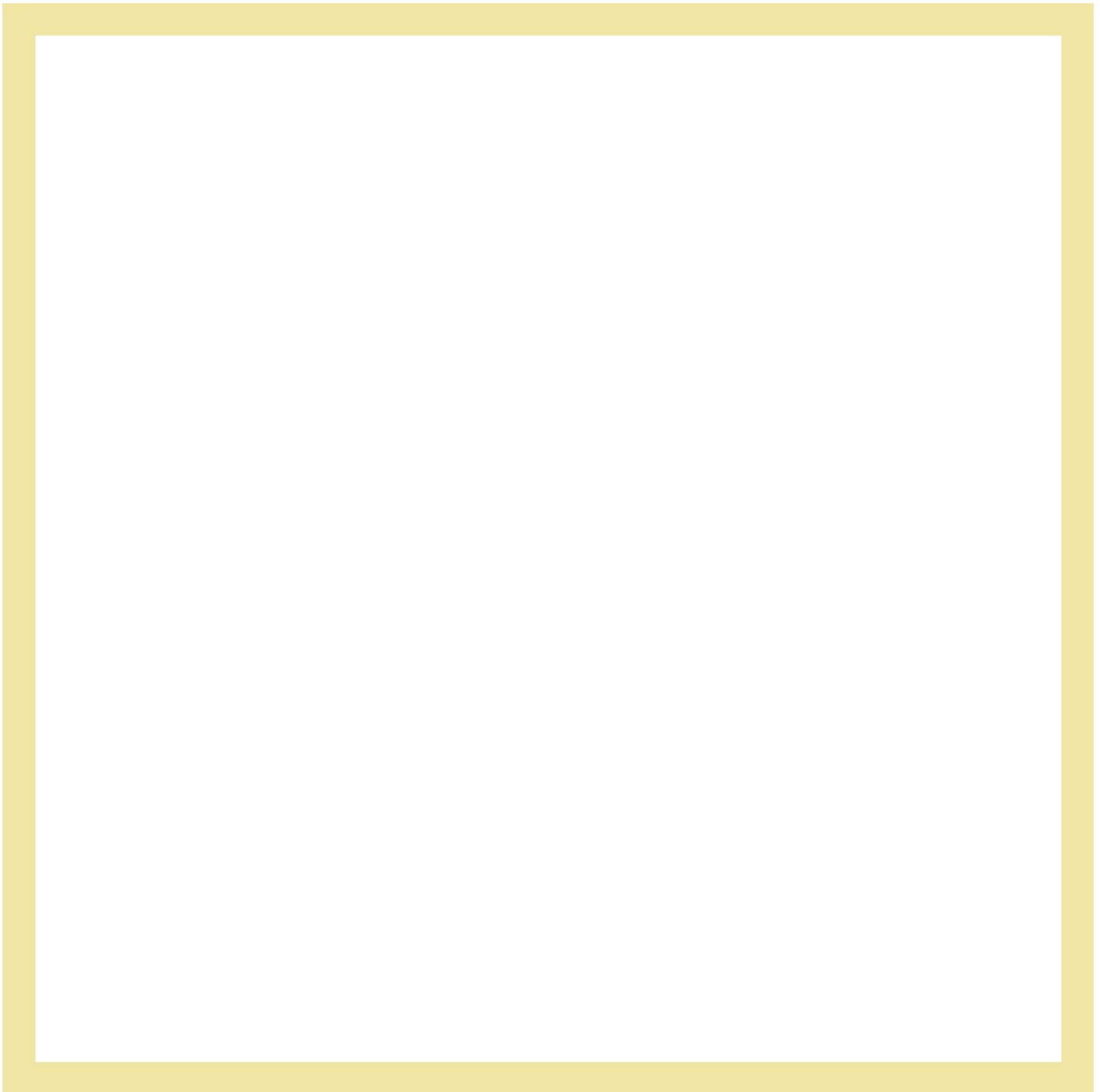
What is empiricism? How does it differ from rationalism?

Whether substance is real according to John Locke?

Explain the relationship of empiricism to a reductionist epistemological stance.

# Reforming Metaphysics in the Light of Experience

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# Overcoming Tyranny

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Suggested readings: Melchert, pp. 386-389

What is the state of nature?

Why do all men enjoy a natural right to liberty?

Why should political communities embrace religious toleration?

How are liberty and toleration related to empiricism?

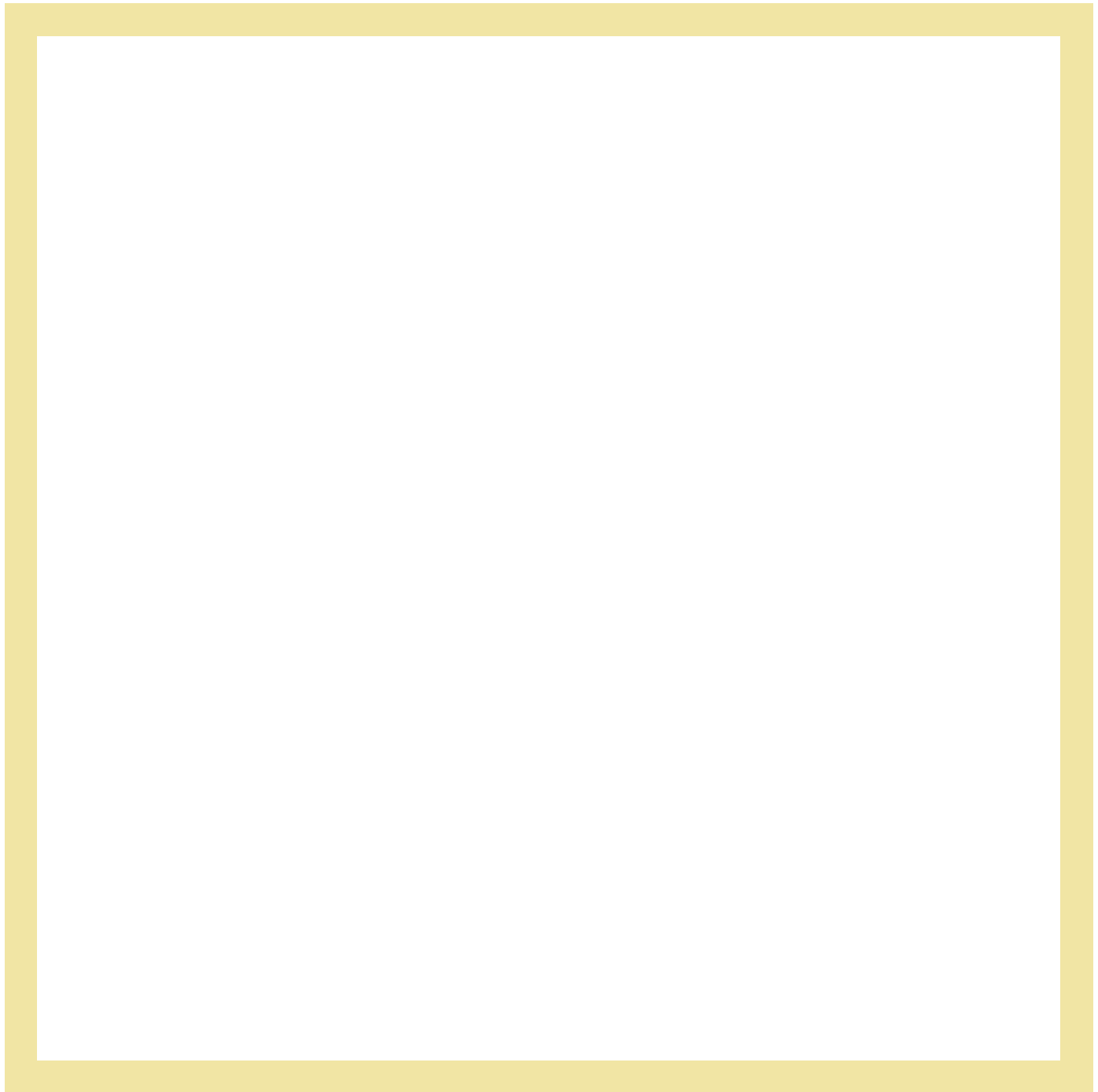


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# Overcoming Tyranny

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# Recognizing the Limits of Reason

Reading: Melchert, pp. 401-423..

How are ideas formed according to David Hume?

Whether causality is grounded empirically?

May valid enquiry ever go beyond the data of experience?

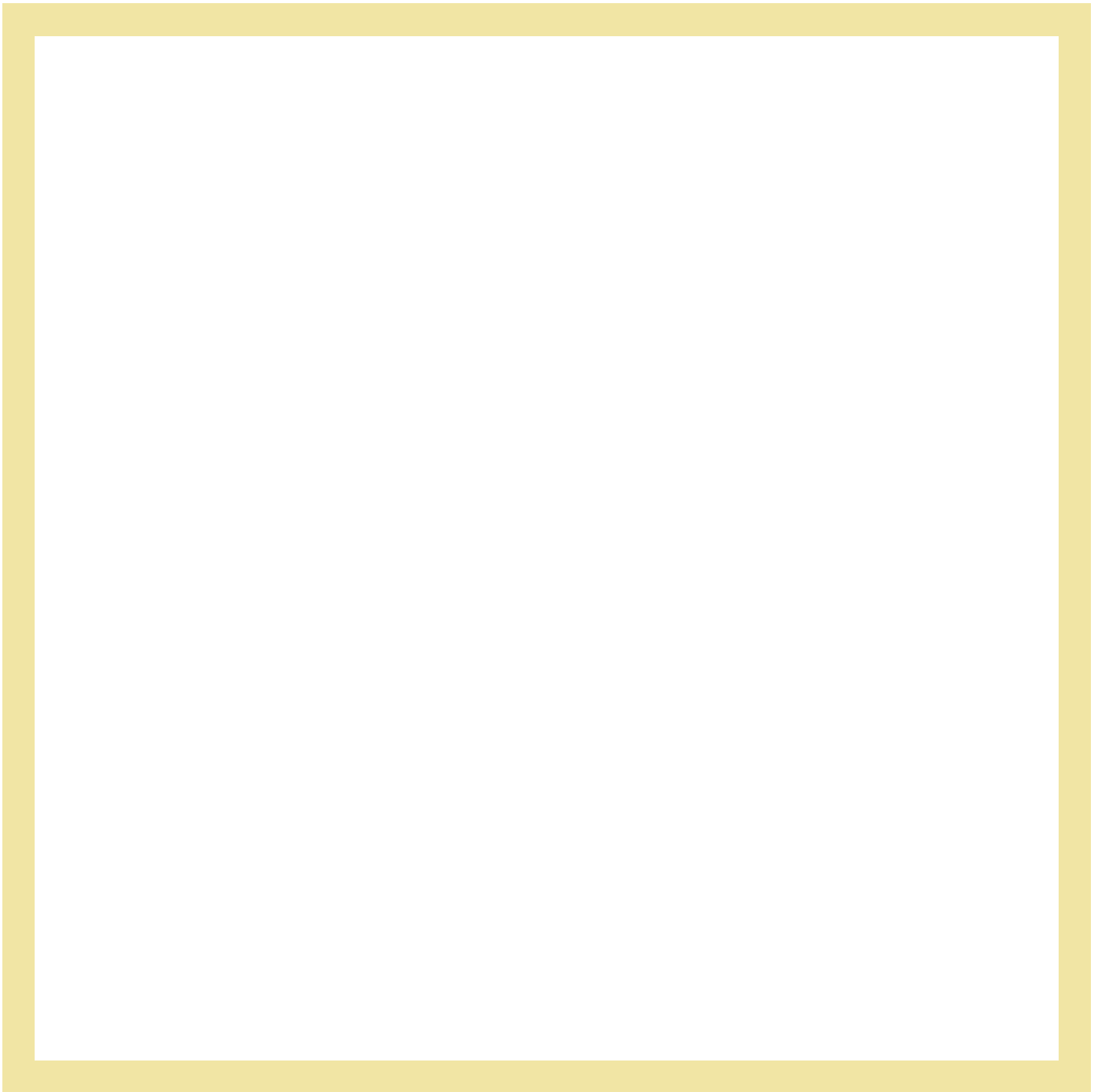
What are the radical implications for knowledge posed by Hume's criticisms?

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# Recognizing the Limits of Reason

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# Overcoming Metaphysics

Reading: Melchert, 431-454. Additional listening:  
<https://catholicstudiesacademy.com/episode-69-understand-the-modern-mind/>.

What is Immanuel Kant's Copernican revolution in philosophy?

What are the sources of experience?

What does this indicate about our access to reality in itself?

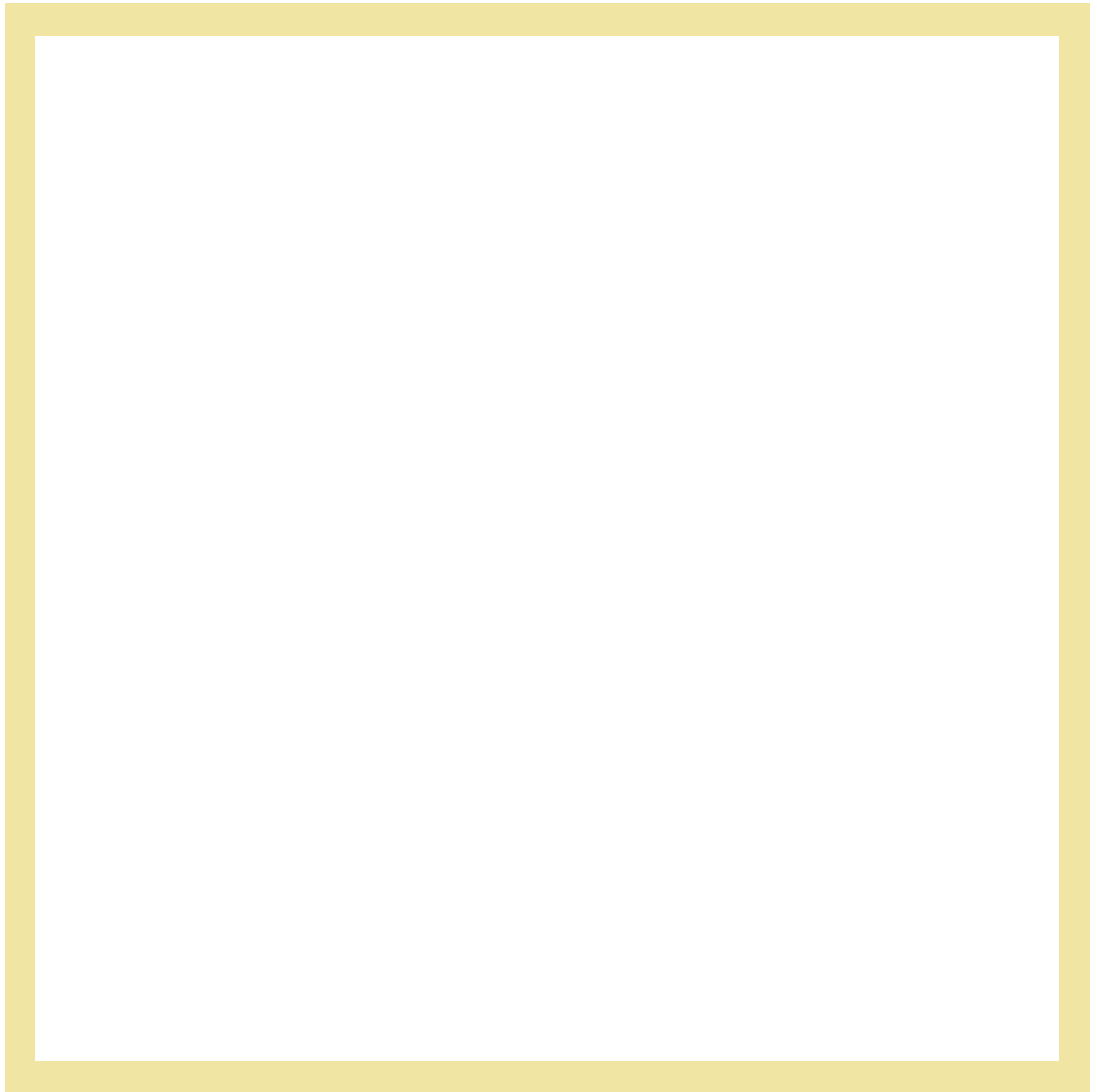
Explain how this suggests a turn to the subjectively mediated interpretation of reality.

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# Overcoming Metaphysics

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# Embracing the Ethics of Autonomy

Reading: Melchert, pp. 431-445.

How does Kant distinguish between practical and theoretical reason? Why is this important?

Why are happiness and desire irrelevant to being moral?

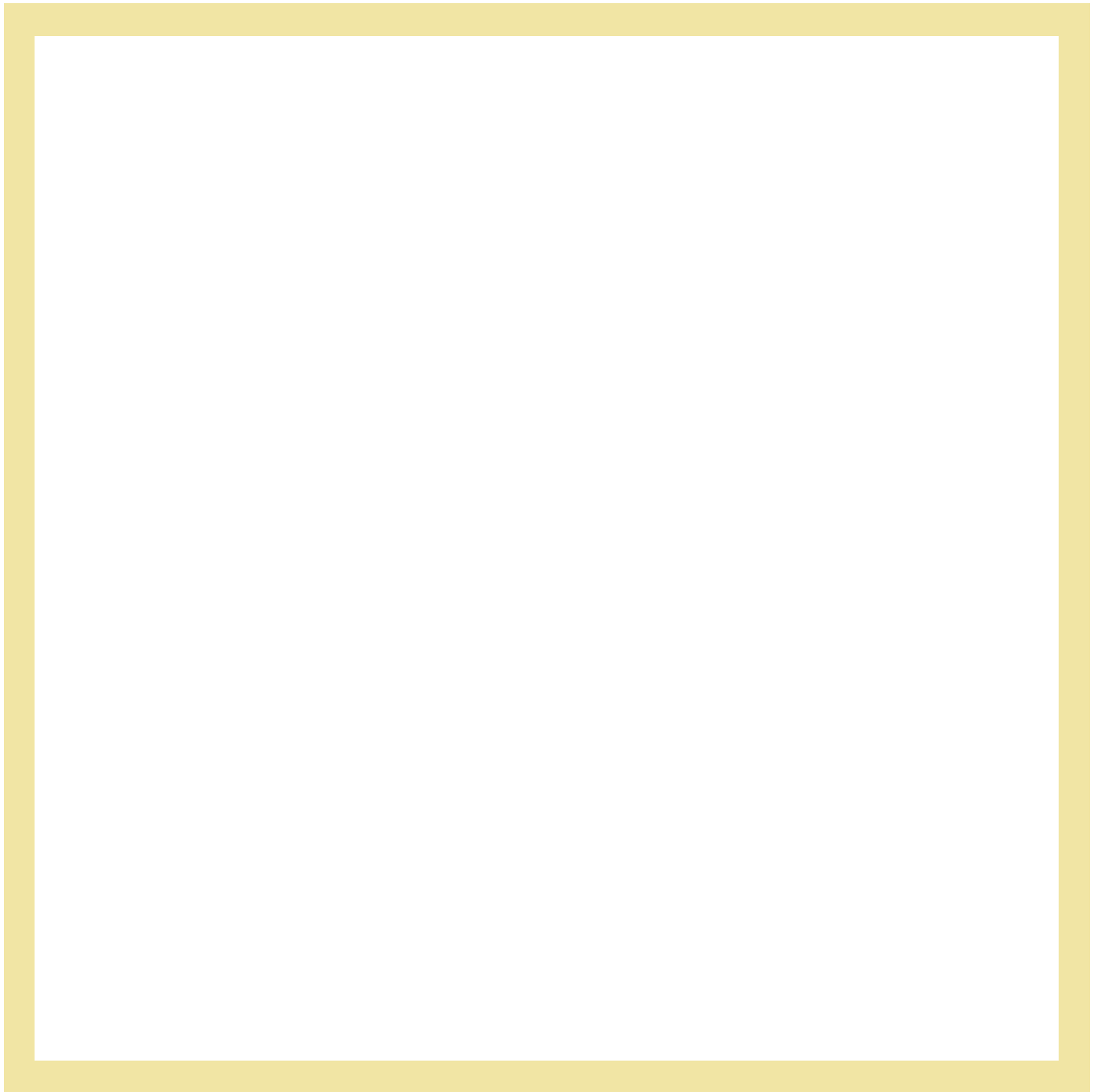
Why is autonomy the ground of morality? How is it related to the dignity of the person?

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# Embracing the Ethics of Autonomy

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Notes:



# Discovering the Philosophical Significance of History

Reading: Melchert, c. 17.

Identify Hegel's criticism of Marx

What is idealism?

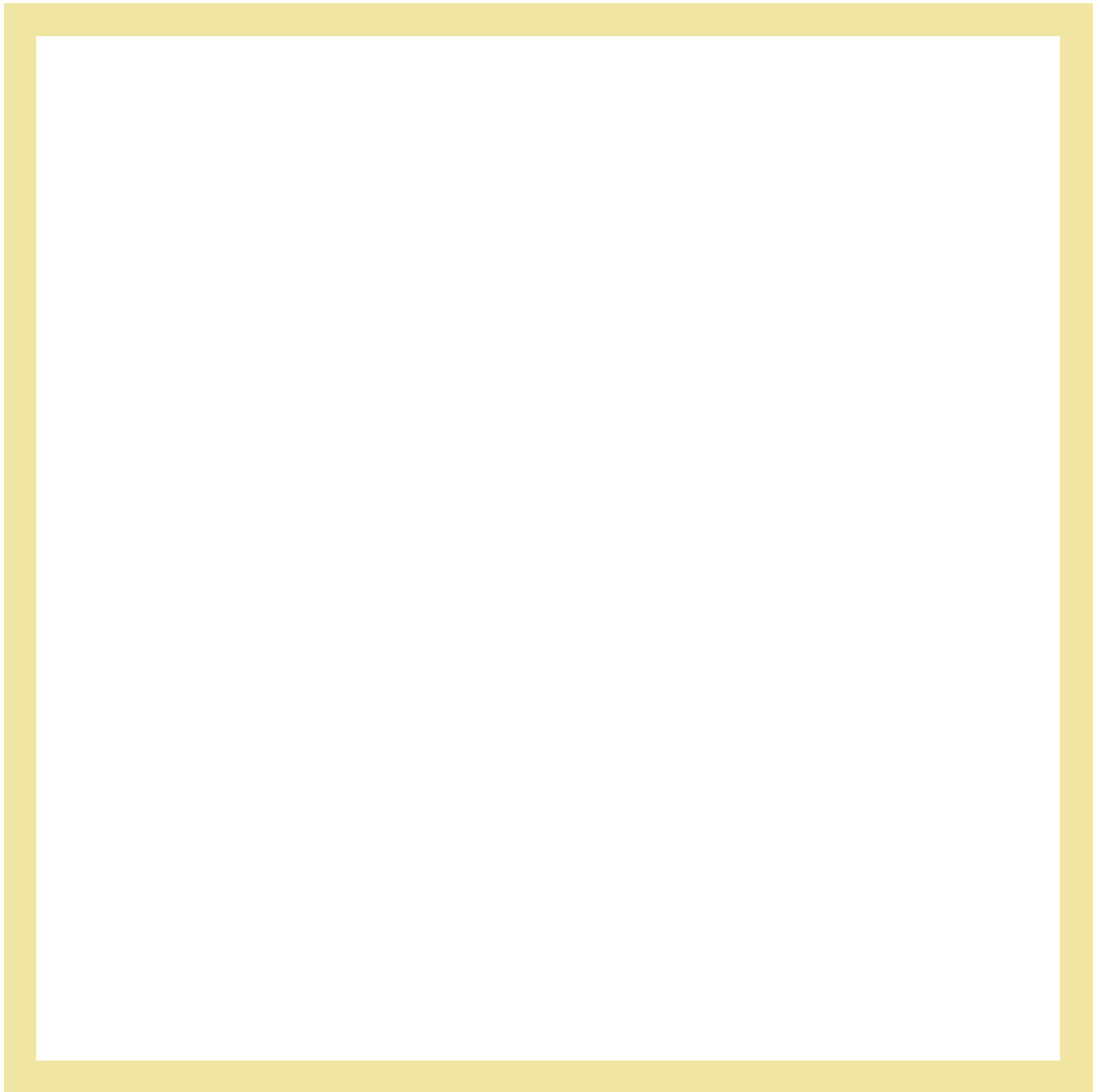
Explain the Hegel's internal dialectic of spirit

What are the ethical and political implications of idealism?



# Discovering the Philosophical Significance of History

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# Discovering the Material Dialectic of History

Reading: Melchert, 515-522.

How does Karl Marx invert idealism?

What is the material dialectic of history?

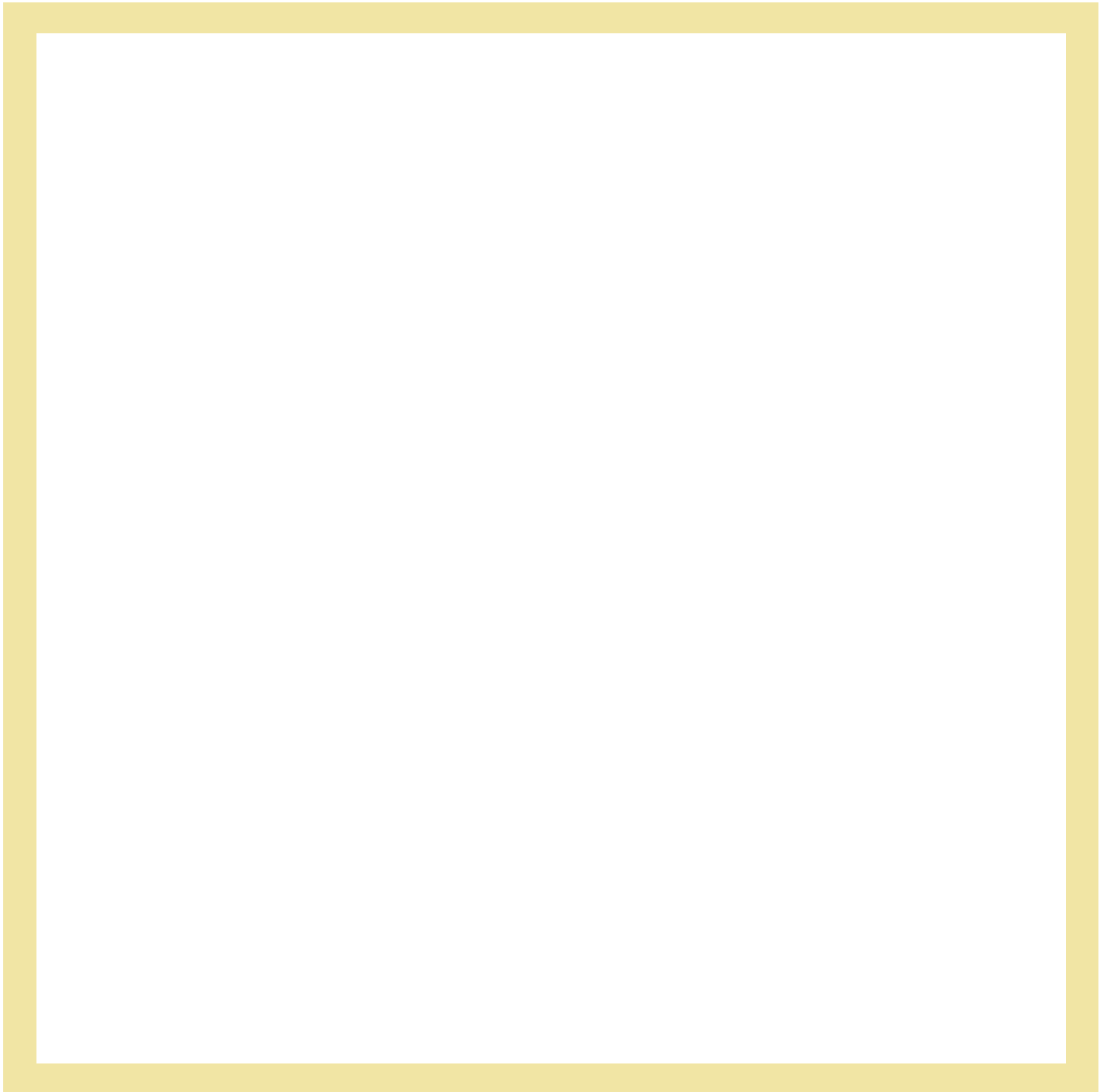
Explain the alienation and exploitation of the proletariat.

Identify Marx's critique of philosophy (and culture).

What is the solution to the alienation created by capitalism?

# Discovering the Material Dialectic of History

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# Unmasking the Pretensions of Reason and Freedom

Reading: Melchert, 542-572

Explain Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of reason and knowledge.

What is the meaning of the "death of God?"

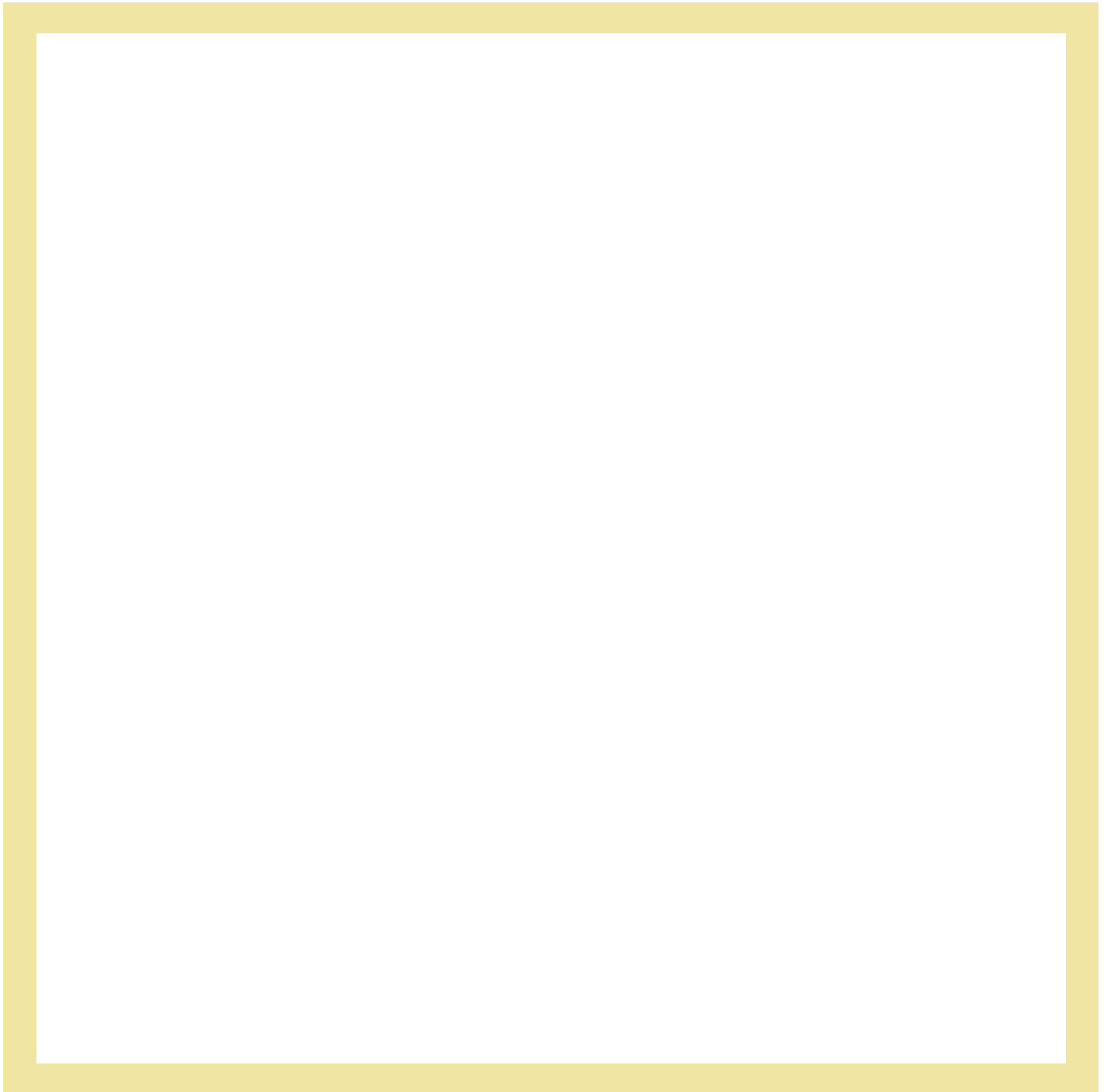
Explain the reevaluation of all values? How does this process challenge modern commitments to democracy and freedom?

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# Unmasking the Pretensions of Reason and Freedom

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Notes:



# Understanding Modern Philosophy

Reading: Melchert, 515-522.

Whether modern philosophy constituted a distinct way of understanding human experience?

What experiences gave rise to the questions faced by modern philosophy? Do these experiences and questions remain relevant today?

How did modern philosophy contribute to the philosophical project? How did modern philosophy distort or undermine philosophical progress?

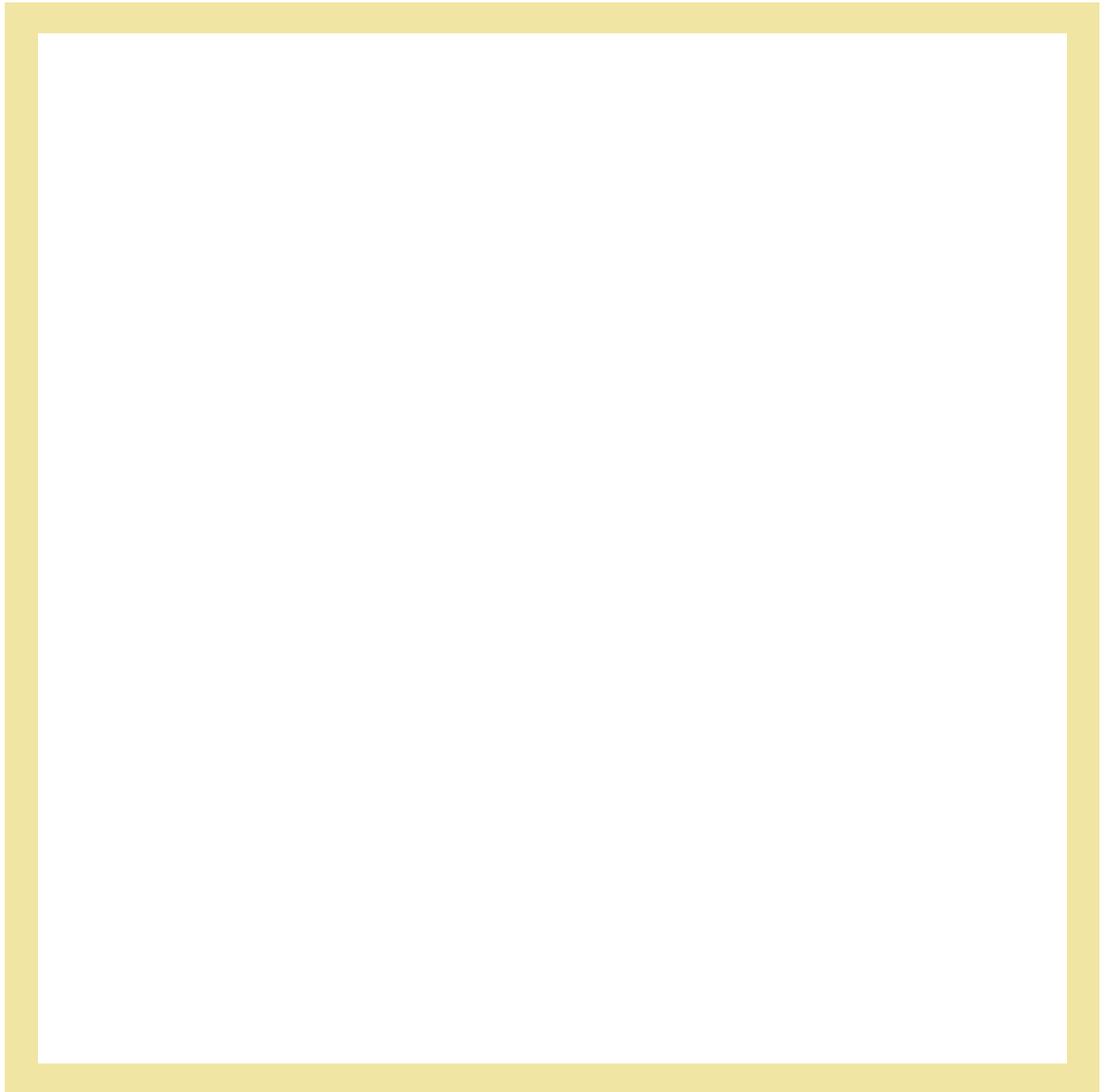
Whether modern philosophers formulated an understanding of modern experience adequate to the data and critically warranted?

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# Understanding Modern Philosophy

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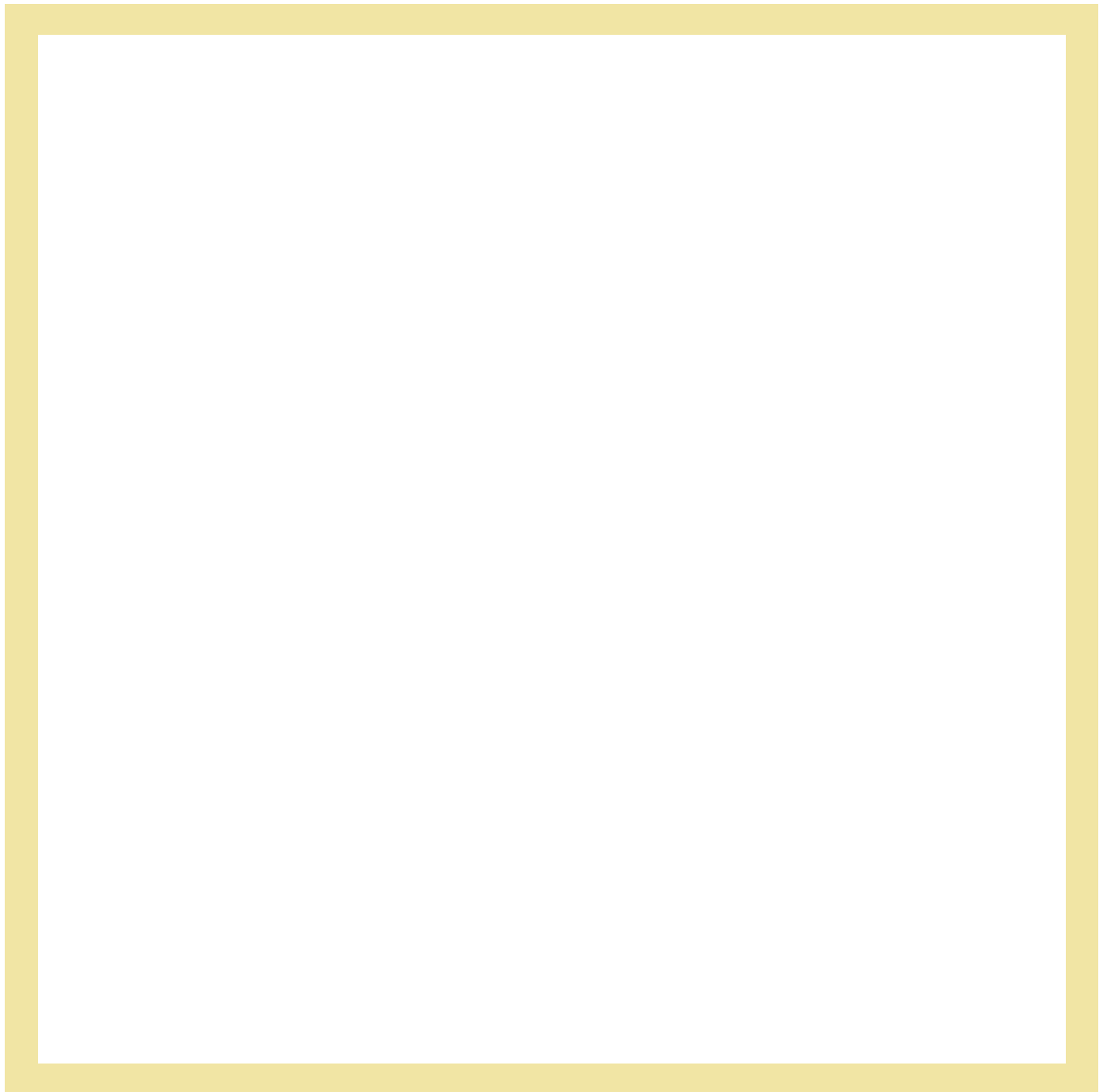


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