
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO MODERN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY*

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are,

- To orient the learner towards the philosophical developments that appeared in Western Europe signifying the “Modern” period of thought.
- These developments will primarily be traced through the appearance of movements such as Rationalism, Enlightenment, Colonialism, Capitalism, Individualism, Romanticism, etc.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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This course will familiarize the reader with the history of ideas in Western Europe from approximately 1500 to 1800 CE. “Modern” stands for what is “new” or “untested”. So, the question arises, what ‘novelty’ was evidenced in these three centuries the like of which had not been witnessed before? A related query is, what was being challenged or repudiated?

Well, religion, in its orthodox version, came under attack. José Casanova coined the term “secularism” as a need to undertake societal modernization. Simply put, secularism was a belief system that implied a separation of church and the state, along with economy and science. This was a very significant development in modern Western thought. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648* resulted in the transfer of territories previously under ecclesiastic control to the dominion of political authorities.

Another related development was that humanism became a matured ideology in modern Western philosophy.†

This refers to a variety of Western beliefs, methods, and philosophy that places emphasis on the human realm. Hitherto, religion had monopolized the debates in the West, accompanied by an interest in a transcendent world, resulting in a neglect of other spheres of human knowledge.

Finally, there was the rise of individualism in the modern era. It was partly an outcome of the Renaissance, and partly that of the liberal values of the Enlightenment. Stress on individual autonomy and uniqueness were integral to individualism. The individual in the pre-modern times was perceived either as a believing Christian, or as a political subject. The emergence of individualism puts a premium on the pursuit of self-interests as contrasted to collective interests.

The Reformation

A salient feature of this era was its critical engagement with orthodox religion, here, Christianity. Accompanying this critique emerged ideals of secularism, humanism, scientific temper, individualism, faith in progress and an enhanced focus on issues of knowledge, skepticism and justification. These ideals will be elaborated upon in this Unit.

The phrase *Modern Western Philosophy* implies a reconsideration of the religious preoccupations of the Middle Ages*, it signified a rejection of the authority of the Roman

*The Peace of Westphalia is the collective name for two peace treaties signed in 1648 in the Westphalian cities of Osnabrück and Münster. The power of the Holy Roman Emperor was broken, the states could determine the religion of their lands.

†Humanism was first evidenced in the thinking of Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1538).

Catholic Church. The Church possessed plenipotentiary powers and had begun intruding into the matters of the State. The Reformation, as this movement by the rebels was called, is generally recognized to have begun in 1517, when Martin Luther, a monk and a university professor, posted his ninety-five theses on the castle church in Wittenberg, arguing basically for reforms in the Church. The reformers, who began to be called Protestants, rejected the papal authority as well as many of the principles and practices of Catholicism of that time. The Reformation brought about a repudiation of medieval philosophy and established a “Protestant Ethic” in its place. Plato and Aristotle, among many others, revived during the Renaissance, were censured for the cosmologies that they represented and sank into relative oblivion. Modern Western philosophy emerged on the horizon as the harbinger of a new science.[†]

It would be facile to presume that scientific activity was in abeyance during the Middle Ages, obviously science, as every other intellectual discipline thrived in this epoch, however, it was subservient to theology and was expected to justify itself in the court of religion. For example, the Polish astronomer Nicolas Copernicus displaced the Ptolemaic physics that had perceived the earth as the center of the solar system. He gave incontrovertible evidence that the sun was the center, and that the earth was not stationary but moving around the sun. This theory was anathema to the medievalists because it undermined their idea of mechanics. The fear of incurring the wrath of the Church made Copernicus delay the printing of his work.

One significant consequence of the Reformation was that, since the universalist authority of the Church was demolished, it strengthened the territorial state under the rule of the King. This was an inkling of the times to come as Europe’s political future began to take shape in terms of independent, sovereign nation-states.

Yet another concrete impact of the Reformation was the emergence of a middle class. This was also the consequence of the beginnings of modern capitalism. The accumulation of wealth ceased to invite moral contempt, it was legitimized by being perceived as the fulfillment of God’s purpose on earth. Finally, the rebellion against an authoritarian Church

*The phrase “Middle Ages” refers generally to a period in Europe between the fall of Rome in 476 CE and the beginning of the Renaissance in the 14th century.

†The changes here being discussed were gradual, from the late Middle Ages through the Renaissance and on into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Moreover, there was no neat way in which any epoch in history could be described. Hence, within the ‘Modern’ era in Europe the continued prevalence of Christian images and metaphors should not surprise us.

resulted in a certain amount of religious individualism, and this ideology spread gradually to other fields.

1.2 The Scientific Revolution

Modern philosophy might be said to begin with the rise of science. It is pertinent to cite here the observations made by Herbert Butterfield. He writes, (the scientific revolution) “outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes.”* The scientific revolution redefined human thought. This reorientation in human thinking found its manifestation in the Industrial Revolution around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The medievalist tended to view the world as creation by a divine fiat. The modernist perceived it as a world of events operating mechanically. When Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) publicly avowed support for Copernican astronomy, he received a reprimand from the Church. Even his famous invention, the telescope, was viewed with suspicion as it militated against the understanding of astronomy held by the clergy. Galileo was threatened with torture if he dared to engage with the Copernican system in any way. In a letter that he wrote to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany, he wrote, “Me thinks that in the discussion of natural problems, we ought not to begin at the authority of places of scripture, but at the sensible experiments and necessary demonstrations.”†

One concrete outcome of this confrontation between the clergy and the scientists was that the “Aristotelian sky” was dismantled by modern physics. The heavenly bodies, according to Aristotle, were not made of matter, they were perceived to be of a higher order than the earth. The new, emerging science challenged this assumption as uniform laws were formulated to study *both*. The early birds of modern times such as Bacon, Hobbes and Descartes were inspired by these advances made by science.

Ponder Box I

A new physics was evidenced in modern Western thought, an ideology of man versus nature. Contrast it with Medieval science that viewed the world as a “creation.”

1.3 RATIONALISM

1.3.1 René Descartes

*Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*, New York, 1952, p. viii.

†Cf. Edwin Arthur Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, p.72.

The adulatory phrase “father of modern philosophy” has been awarded to René Descartes (1596-1650) by historians of philosophy. Descartes was raised in a Jesuit Seminary, and acquired considerable proficiency in science and mathematics.* His early training in a religious institution was to remain with him as a formative influence on his writings. Exposed to Galileo’s exciting findings, Descartes reflected on the fallibility of appearances, and our relative dependence on reason to extend our knowledge. The “New Science”, as the theories advanced by Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo was called, resulted in the erosion of the evidence of the senses in the visible world. The sun did not move, the earth did, the Galaxy unraveled never- heard-of-before secrets, in brief, the invisible world underlying the visible one, comprising atoms, collided with the conservative cosmology of the Church. Yet another matter that wielded tangible influence on Descartes’ methodological preoccupations was the perpetual religious warfare in Europe. He believed that *reason* could offer to the suffering humanity a way out of this belligerence in the name of religion.

A revolutionary thesis advanced by Descartes was about the need for intellectual autonomy. He castigated knowledge based on common sense as frequently being nonsensical. The inaugural moment of his philosophy was the demand that each of us strive for truth independently, based on reason, unmediated by ecclesiastic authority, tradition or experience. He stressed on searching for a certitude that had the character of a mathematical certitude. The method of doubt was invented by him to achieve this end. Skepticism, or withholding consent till proved without a shadow of doubt, became the guiding motto of his rationalism. The search for indubitable truth led Descartes to the use of the method of deduction. This implies the existence of some axioms that are self-evident. From these other principles of knowledge must be deduced. The axiom that he established incontrovertibly was the celebrated claim “I think, therefore I am.” This was called “a self-testimony subjectivism” by the scholars. Even if I am fooled by an evil genius, I must nonetheless exist in order to be fooled. Once Descartes has resolved his skepticism he proceeds to prove the existence of God, and then, once that is established, the existence of the external world.

Was the method of doubt an outrage against our experience? Was the quest for certain knowledge unrealistic? Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), a French thinker relatively unknown and uncelebrated by historians, had doubted the human capacity for finding truth. Unlike Descartes’ striving for invariant and absolute truths, Montaigne was fascinated by the

* Jesuits were members of society of Jesus, which was a Roman Catholic order.

contingency of human belief. However, the credit for initiating the discourse about subjectivity goes to Descartes. Obviously, this is a multifarious term, connoting an “inner” space, “introspection”, as also mere “opinion” or “personal beliefs.” Of course, Descartes’ intent had been to employ it as non-relative, and as indicative of a “foundation.” Crucially, the affective and conative meanings of the subject, meaning the notion of the subject as suffering from the vicissitudes of emotions, or prejudices, or sentiments, was completely ruled out by Descartes’ explicit rationalist position.

Descartes undoubtedly left behind a legacy of subjectivism that was appropriated as an argument for individualism. He went on to stress that this *Cogito* was the center of thought. Eventually he would go on to look at a person as a compound of mind and body. This dualism left a lasting impact on thought in the West. There were traditions that critiqued this premise as problematic, there were others that jumped on to the dualist bandwagon as it liberated the physical world for the scientist, while the mind acquired considerable breadth over centuries, being seen now as a soul, now as a political subject, now as a site for freedom, and so on.

1.3.2 Spinoza and Leibniz

The next two philosophers in this series of modern western thinkers were the Dutchman Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and the German Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716). In the manner of his predecessor Descartes, Spinoza set up mathematics as the paradigm to follow in his philosophy. Further, he affirmed only one substance, God, and perceived in it a totality of everything that is. Spinoza constructed a rationalist system in which everything was interconnected by a relation of implication. Hence, knowledge implied a comprehension of the whole nexus of implicatory relations of which each human was to be identified as a finite part. Effectively Spinoza talked about an awareness of a rational order that had God at its center. But this God was accessed not through faith but through understanding. Moreover, the evidence being presented before the potential knower is of the nature of a geometric proof. A poignant expression coined by Spinoza is “the intellectual love of God,” which is a fundamentally rationalist insight that we are inseparable from God.

It was a foregone conclusion that Spinoza was perceived as a heretic who had blasphemed against Christianity. An immanent God was an anathema to theologians, the distinction between the creator and the created was necessary for orthodoxy, hence a transcendent God was a necessary tenet in Christianity. By dissolving the distance between God and the world Spinoza was implicated in a formal *Ex-Communication*, which meant that he was banished

from his Jewish community. A concrete contribution of Spinoza to modern Western thought was his affirmation that God could be approached through reason rather than faith. When confronted with the skepticism from orthodoxy that one could not possibly pray to a *System of Truths* (viz. Spinoza's conception of God) Spinoza is supposed to have retorted that metaphysics is an attempt to ascertain the truth about reality—not designed to assuage the fears of the superstitious.

Leibniz challenged Descartes' and Spinoza's view that mechanics was concerned with extension, matter and body. He questioned the assumption that extension was an ultimate principle that was the central concern of physics. In place of this view, he advocated the notion of substance as *force* rather than as matter in motion. He looked upon the physical world as a continuum. Therefore, rather than using motion, which was discontinuous, he argued in favor of a kind of flow, or a drive that ensures that the transitioning of the motion from one point to the next is smooth. So the essential point that he was driving home was that the physicist has to deal not with motion, but infinitely small units of force.

These units were called "monads" by Leibniz. Each monad was a substance, differing from others in respect of thought. Leibniz believed that, rather than being bodies, monads were minds. He pointed to our first-hand experience of ourselves; we sense ourselves as being alive, this, according to Leibniz comes from that thrust or drive that is at the foundation of physical movement and change. These monads differ from one another, not because they occupy different points in space (that argument is disallowed to Leibniz since monads are not physical points to be found in space) but because they have different thoughts. So, Leibniz visualizes a universe comprising a vast assembly of different individuals, operating at different levels of consciousness. This is indicative of a hierarchy among the monads, the degree of consciousness, or self-consciousness is not uniform among the monads. Every monad mirrors the universe in its own unique way, interaction among the monads is ruled out. Adopting the analogy of a watchmaker Leibniz brings in God who maintains a perfect harmony among the diverse perceptions and experiences of different monads.

As I had observed before, it would be a folly to look at rationalism as being guided only by reason, or empiricism only operating with sense experience. Leibniz is a perfect example of a thinker who displays the influence of Aristotle (the notion of entelechy/thrust) and theology (a pre-established in a world peopled by many monads, being harmonized according to a divine design). He proceeds to affirm the divine goodness in choosing the "best possible

world” for humans out of multiple choices available to Him. In *Candide** Voltaire (1694-1778) lampooned this thesis of ours being the best possible universe.

1.4 SIR ISAAC NEWTON

Newton’s (1643-1727) physics had a considerable influence on philosophical thought in the eighteenth century. Newton had been Janus-faced, he felt inspired by both the material and mechanical physical theory of the world, and Christianity. One crucial debate between science and philosophy was on the notion of space and time, and involved Newton and Leibniz. Newtonian mechanics envisaged a world of matter in motion taking place in an infinite and empty space. Similarly time was conceived as an endless and beginning less medium. Various events in nature took place in these two mediums. Leibniz hotly contested this since his metaphysics revolved around monads as spiritual units. He asserted the relativity of space and time, relative to bodies and events.

1.5 THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Following upon the achievements of Newtonian mechanics Europe witnessed a resurgence of faith in reason, albeit a scientific rationality. Enlightenment was the name of this movement, emerging first of all in England, following in the wake of the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. Subsequently Enlightenment spread to France, transmitted by young intellectuals like Voltaire who had spent a fairly long time in England. It would not be an exaggeration to look at the French Revolution in 1789 as being the culminating point of the Enlightenment ideology. The impact of this movement was felt in Spain, Italy and Germany, traditional ways of thinking were attacked in these places.

The ideology of the Enlightenment was not overtly anti- religion. Yet its encouragement to rationality, outside of theocratic frameworks, placed it in opposition to the church. Intellectual autonomy was emphasized, as also, significantly, a variety of cosmic humanism. Sectarian battles in the name of religion had resulted in the fragmentation of people. Enlightenment provided the healing touch to a populace fatigued with senseless bloodshed. The philosophers in this era called upon a unification of humanity cutting across national

*The publication of this novella was prompted by the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 which claimed 20,000 innocent lives. Essentially *Candide* was a satire against Leibnizian optimism about our world being the best possible world. Voltaire’s final advice to the reader, in *Candide*, was to continue living life and working, without theorizing. That would be the best way to endure “evils and pain” that come, unbidden, to our doorstep.

boundaries. Through reason they believed, they would tap the basic resources of nature and establish a heaven on earth. It goes without saying that this mission of consolidating riches for humanity in general were realized only through the toils of slaves brought from Africa. Europeans, specifically, the Portuguese, invaded Africa around 1415, looking for gold and spices. One hundred years later the Africans were being seized and sold as slaves.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Briefly mention the salient features of Enlightenment movement.

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1.6 COLONIALISM

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506), an Italian explorer, intending to find a short route to India, completed four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, opening the way for the extensive European colonization of the Americas. By the sixteenth century, the Portuguese had conquered the trade routes to Asia that had formerly been controlled by Africans, Asians and Arabs. Soon the Spanish jumped into this race for accumulating wealth. Missionaries were taken to these foreign lands to seek the conversion of the indigenous population of these lands to Christianity. The English, the Dutch, and the French all eventually joined this mission to conquer new lands, and establish colonies. Obviously, this rapacious conduct made them enemies of each other as they rushed to displace each other and establish their exclusive dominion. The need to siphon precious metals and other resources required man power. Thus was established a market for African slaves. Apart from colonizing North America, inroads were made into Africa and India. The British had to leave America following the American War of Independence in 1776, not to be beaten, they infiltrated into Australia, New Zealand and a large number of Pacific Islands. A Eurocentric colonialism was firmly in place.

Ponder Box II

Do you think colonialism was intended to bring “civilization” to the native population, or was it undertaken out of greed?

1.7 EMPIRICISM

1.7.1 Locke

Empiricism, simply stated, is the philosophical theory according to which all knowledge begins with sense experience. John Locke (1632-1704) did not subscribe to the rationalist confidence in reason. He suggested that, rather than rely on abstract reason we should employ experience to gather all that we need to know. This was a breakthrough as intellectual thought in the West since Plato had repudiated sense-based knowledge as fallible. Locke authored two of the most celebrated treatises on government. Locke would display sensitivity to the notion of human rights which had got newly incorporated into the political discourse, especially the right to private property.

Locke contested the doctrine of innate ideas which was seminal to rationalism. He perceived the mind as a “blank tablet” on which experience will keep scribbling throughout a lifetime. There is nothing innate to the mind, everything that exists in the mind is transported into it by our senses. Many scholars are of the opinion that Locke sowed the seed of democracy and the liberal movement. He had famously observed that any government derives its power from the consent of the governed. The “governed” must possess reason if they are to participate in a government.

1.7.2 George Berkeley

Berkeley (1685-1753) actually repudiated the existence of a “substantial” world apart from the world in our mind. He was a deeply devout Christian who felt perturbed at the continuous conflict between science and religion. It was his firm conviction that the atheists subscribed to the existence of an independently existing matter while deriding an immaterial substance and providence. So, his project was to decline the existence of matter without jeopardizing the whole scientific enterprise. This he achieved in his thought by asserting that there was no substantial world apart from our experience. This experience comprises ideas, and these ideas, since an external world has already been rejected, must be sourced to God. Berkeley’s celebrated utterance “To be is to be perceived,” is an articulation of his belief that God is at the core of the universe; in other words, when not being perceived by the human mind, the world is assured perpetuity in a divine consciousness.

Berkeley’s empiricism was rather feeble, he undoubtedly employed the empiricist test to decline the existence of matter, but did not carry it to test his convictions regarding the existence of a material substance.

1.7.3 David Hume

I wish to begin a discussion on Hume (1711-1776) by citing from *Enquiry*, it is a pithy statement of Hume's position. He says, "...Accurate and just reasoning is the only catholic remedy, fitted for all persons and all dispositions; and is alone able to subvert that abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon, which, being mixed up with popular superstition, renders it in a manner impenetrable to careless reasoners, and gives it the air of science and wisdom."* According to Hume, all simple ideas are memory copies of simple impressions, complex ideas are combinations of simple ones. This is called the empirical criterion of meaning.

Nominalism was the logical outcome of this criterion. Implied therein is also a rebuttal of universals. Hume applied a rigorous version of the empirical criterion to repudiate the notions of substance and self. Hume has advanced elaborate arguments to combat both these foundational concepts in Western thought. In a similar vein he pointed out that no evidence can be produced for the existence of an external world. He sourced this belief in an external world to the faculty of imagination. I shall not go into the details of the argument he has formulated to do this, suffice it is to say that Hume has asserted that the grounds for belief in an external world, or material objects are not logical, they are psychological.

Hume's contribution to modern Western thought is the discovery that a total suspension of beliefs is untenable. Skepticism, pure and simple, is an unviable alternative. For Hume ordinary people carry on the business of their lives despite the absence of a logical evidence for an external world in which these lives are anchored.

1.8 CAPITALISM, INDIVIDUALISM

Let us pause and, interrupting the ongoing descriptions of specific philosophers, try and take stock of the evolving ideas in the modern era. As Robert Solomon has observed, "Modern philosophy was not an extended debate about ontology, epistemology, and metaphysics. It was a defense of humanism and reasonableness, a plea for lively conversation instead of deadly massacres."† There is a dawn of capitalism, and the felt need for a new philosophy to justify it. The Protestant ethic had brought the focus back on worldly success rather than in redemption in a transcendental world. The world of new colonizers witnessed an expansion

* *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, ed., L.A.Selby-Bigge, Clarendon, Oxford, 1894, p.1.

† *A Short History of Philosophy*, Robert C. Solomon & Kathleen M. Higgins, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 198.

of their territories, this was true of England, France, Holland and Spain. Trade was no longer localized within, instead an international trade, along with a money-based economy, was generated.

Adam Smith (1723-1790), called the father of free-enterprise system, observed how self-interest could serve public good. A competitive society, prompted by self-interested individuals, will lead to consumer satisfaction and lower prices. The guild-economy, characteristic of a feudal society, gradually declined as a demand for *Laissez-faire* (leave us alone) became shrill. Individualism, as purely commercial, found its passionate defense in Smith.

1.9 VOLTAIRE, ROUSSEAU, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution of 1789 was, to begin with, a revolution of ideas, of justice, equality and governance. It sought to completely overhaul the relationship between the monarch and the ruled, and to redefine the notion of political power. The monarchy was overthrown in France. The ideas of thinkers like Rousseau (1712-1778) and Voltaire (1694-1778) played an important role in bringing about the revolution. Voltaire had been a vicious critic of the French State and the Church. An admirer of Locke, he argued passionately for reason. Rousseau emphasized that a good government must have the freedom of all its citizens as its central tenet. Rousseau is endlessly quotable. He is reported to have observed that he prefers liberty with danger than peace with slavery. His Social Contract theory stressed that government attains its right to exist and to govern by the consent of the governed. This was a radical position in the eighteenth century. Monarchs, he observed, were not divinely empowered to legislate, only people are sovereign. This thinking exercised a major impact on the French Revolution. The revolution originally, was a popular uprising against the privileges and wealth of the elite.

It would be remiss not to mention The American War of Independence in 1776. It is noteworthy that, since the early settlers in America had very little leisure to engage in complex metaphysical queries, they settled down with a pragmatic sensibility. The English Discourse of Rights was evidenced in the Constitution that was drawn for the fledgling nation. From our point of view it is significant that the talk about Rights and various judicial entitlements got firmly entrenched in the Western consciousness.

1.10 IMMANUEL KANT

Let us resume our historical narrative now. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) marked the definite juncture of the conflict between science and religion. While Kant was a devout Christian, he also believed in Newtonian mechanics. He believed that the discourse about God, freedom and immortality has been consistently present in human civilization, it cannot be offloaded to science. He talked about being fascinated equally by astronomy, as well as the Moral Law. In popular imagination Kant has been likened to a philosopher-magician who seceded from pure versions of rationalism and empiricism, and stressed the need to see their complementarity. However, it may be asserted that this perception of Kant is too restrictive, it projects him as having grappled with only those concerns that had been raised by his fellow-philosophers. Kant may in fact be identified as a genius who worked on many “agendas,” and wished to establish science, religion and morality on a rationalist footing. To Kant goes the credit for having splintered rationality along dual lines, *pure* and *practical*.

Kant divided the world into two aspects, the phenomenal and the noumenal. Metaphysical issues, such as God, Freedom and Immortality fell under the realm of Practical Reason, and belonged to the noumenal realm. On the other hand, the external world pertained to the Pure Reason, an equivalent of scientific rationality. For Kant, the constitution of the objects of our experience proceeds in conformity with the *a priori* intuitions of Space and Time, and the *a priori* Categories of the Understanding. For example, a term like “substance” is not inferred from its attributes, it is a Category, a structuring principle according to which we experience an object. Kant’s rejoinder to the rationalists and the empiricists is that, while knowledge undoubtedly begins with experience, it cannot be sourced out of experience. Experience gains coherence only by being organized by the Categories that lie *a priori* in the Understanding.

This was the picture of the phenomenal world, the world of Newtonian science that found its vindication in Kant. Kant has affirmed a noumenal world as well. This was no arbitrary import. It is meant to curtail the scientific rationality with its attendant determinism. Our capacity to exercise choice, to *will*, is symbolic of our freedom. Of course, here, as in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is emphatic on the need for a universalization. Morality requires us to respect the intrinsic humanity of others, his famous Categorical Imperatives bear testimony to that.

So, how did Kant impact modern Western thought? In multiple ways, which may be evaluated thus: Firstly, his justification of Newtonian science in

Ponder Box III

Apart from the ways in which philosophers and scientists have talked about space and time, try and think about the ways in which we, you and I, experience them.

the *Critique of Pure Reason* may be seen as a poignant gesture, since one does not find an equivalent support for a scientific theory by any other philosopher. Second, his “faculty” view of consciousness, a fairly problematic notion, has had considerable influence on subsequent traditions of thought in philosophy and in psychology. A consciousness fragmented along affective, conative and cognitive lines in Kant’s moral theory found many critics, who endeavored to bridge the “gaps” in consciousness. Finally, the notion of a human “as an end in him/herself,” and a defense for human autonomy in Kant’s moral theory has had multiple takers. It was a revolutionary call for its time. Today, nearly two hundred and fifty years later, we have to continually remind ourselves of this invaluable insight.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Which ideas proposed by Kant influence the future trajectory of western philosophical thinking?

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1.11 Romanticism

This movement in Europe arose as a protest against an unadulterated scientific rationality being employed to arrive at truths in philosophy and literature. “Truth” in philosophy is not always deductive, inspiration or intuition are more often the norm in this realm, is the Romantic’s plea. Johann Herder (1744-1803), following in the footsteps of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), lamented that the universalism in Kant made him feel “homeless.” He complained that truth has been perceived as timeless by philosophy. The Romantic Movement highlighted the “irrational” aspects of human life, reason cannot be the sole category to look at existence, that was the Romantic premise. Not just reason, but discord, conflict and change are to be found in human life.

1.12 Hegel, Marx

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) began his philosophy by overcoming the dichotomies that he had inherited from his fellow-philosophers. One such duality was phenomenon-noumenon in Kant. Similarly, a faculty view of consciousness was unacceptable to him. This is the reason why he contested the categorical imperative, it

exemplified only reason, abstracting from individual contingencies. Similarly, the Cartesian dualism between mind and body was rejected by Hegel as an incorrect conceptualization of reality. Self-consciousness in Hegel's thought was not a private mental occurrence; it was located always in a social space. A key Hegelian insight was to discern unity in this vast multiplicity of norms, customs, cultures and world-views. An expression frequently employed to understand Hegel's philosophy is "dialectical." *Dialectic* means "giving reasons"—each form of life vindicates what it takes to be authoritative for itself, or reasons why revisions within the world-views must be undertaken.

Karl Marx (1818-1883), though a consistent critic of Hegel, ended up displaying not an insubstantial influence by the latter. Hegel had talked about contradictions that come into a philosophy, his mission was to resolve them. Marx perceived the conflict between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat* as exemplifying an economic confrontation. Where Hegel had looked at contesting *ideas*, Marx applied this concept of conflict in a concrete historical, social context. Inscribed upon Marx's grave are the following words, "*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.*"

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are the salient features of Modern Western Thought? OR, Discuss how ideas in the modern Western thought have evolved.

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1.13 LET US SUM UP

We have dealt here with many philosophers and their thinking, some movements, social, political and literary, have also been highlighted. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been equally eventful. Phenomenology, Existentialism, Structuralism, and Post-Structuralism are some of the most prominent ways in which thinking in the West has articulated itself. This later thought has borrowed heavily from the traditions that we have studied in this Unit. The key issues discussed in this unit were,

- A history from approximately 1500-1800 CE.
- The Reformation as a challenge to the authority of Roman Catholic Church.
- A science deriving from theological sources challenged, the dawn of a new physics.

- The impact of movements such as Rationalism, Empiricism & Criticism.
- With Descartes a legacy of subjectivism is inaugurated. Truth available directly to the thinker, the mediation of the clergy not necessary.
- Enlightenment: A resurgence of Reason.
- Colonialism resulted in territorial expansion, expanded international trade.
- Locke sowed the seeds of democracy and liberalism.
- A Protestant ethics gave legitimacy to capitalism and individualism.
- With French Revolution new ideals of liberty and equality introduced into societies that had been hierarchical.
- Kant's contribution to modern Western thought is the recognition of human dignity, and the need for autonomy.
- Hegel gave to us a dialectical movement among ideas, Marx applied this method in a concrete socio- economic context.

1.14 KEY WORDS

Reformation: The Reformation was the start of Protestantism and the split of the Western Church into Protestantism and what is now the Roman Catholic Church.

Romanticism: A movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.

The Enlightenment: It was an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries with global influences and effects. Also, the age of scientific reason.

1.15 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Bronowski, J. & Mazlish, B. *The Western Intellectual Tradition*. London: Hutchinson, 1960.
- Jones, W.T. *Hobbes to Hume*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969.
- Solomon, R.C. & Higgins K. M. *A Short History of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Web-links

- http://sdeuoc.ac.in/sites/default/files/sde_videos/SLM-19508-%20Philosophy-Modern%20western%20philosophy.pdf
- <https://iep.utm.edu/category/history/>
- <http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/>

1.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

(Guideposts to Answers. Learners are advised to substantiate their answers by using their own illustrations and examples, wherever applicable.)

Check Your Progress I

1.

- Faith in Reason.
- Intellectual Autonomy.
- Cosmic Humanism.

Check Your Progress II

1.

- Justification of Newtonian Physics.
- Faculty view of consciousness/Categories of reason.
- Human as an end in her/himself.
- Idea of Human autonomy.

Check Your Progress III

1.

- Mention the time-frame, i.e., 1500-1800 CE.
- A revolt against the Roman Catholic Church because the Church was interfering into matters of the state. Besides, it was promoting cosmologies that were unacceptable to the new science.
- The scientific revolution begun by Copernicus that knelt a death-blow to Aristotelian science.
- Descartes in the rationalist tradition inaugurated the era of subjectivity in the West. Individualism is also a consequence.
- Enlightenment, celebrating a scientific reason, fought against dogma and superstition.

- Colonialism, accompanied by enhanced trade, generated capitalism and a competitive society.
- Kant's call for autonomy, and the intrinsic dignity of human beings.
- Hegel's Spirit, inspired by a cosmic humanism, a unificatory ideal.
- Marx's agenda to change the world by redefining the class relations.



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