Early Modern Philosophy:

Early modern philosophy encompasses the 17th and 18th centuries. The philosophers in this period are traditionally divided into empiricists and rationalists. However, contemporary historians have argued that this is not a strict dichotomy and more a matter of varying degrees. These schools have in common that they seek a clearly established, rigorous, and systematic method of inquiry. This philosophical focus on method reflected the advances happening simultaneously as part of the scientific revolution. Empiricism and rationalism differ concerning the type of method they promote. Empiricism focuses on sensory experience. Rationalism emphasizes reason – particularly the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason – and innate knowledge. This focus on method was already foreshadowed in Renaissance thought but only came to full prominence in the early modern period. The second half of this period saw the emergence of the Enlightenment movement. It used these advances to challenge traditional authorities while promoting progress, individual freedom, and human rights.

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677):

Spinoza's philosophy is characterized by his pantheism, the belief that everything is God or a part of God. He argued for a deterministic universe where everything that happens is a necessary consequence of God's nature.

His work "Ethics" is a systematic treatise that explores metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and psychology, outlining his views on the nature of reality and the human mind.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716):

Leibniz made significant contributions to mathematics, co-inventing calculus independently of Isaac Newton. He also developed a comprehensive metaphysical system that sought to reconcile the ideas of substance, causality, and freedom.

He is known for his principle of the best of all possible worlds, which suggests that God, being perfect, created the best possible universe.

John Locke (1632-1704):

Locke's empiricism posited that all knowledge comes from experience. He distinguished between primary qualities of objects (like shape and size) and secondary qualities (like color and taste), arguing that the latter are subjective and dependent on perception.

His political philosophy laid the groundwork for liberal democracy, emphasizing natural rights such as life, liberty, and property, and the idea of a social contract between citizens and government.

George Berkeley (1685-1753):

Berkeley's philosophy of idealism argues that reality consists of minds and their ideas. He rejected the existence of material substance, arguing that physical objects are merely bundles of perceptions.

His theory of vision proposed that we perceive distance by associating visual cues with ideas of touch, suggesting a subjective nature to our perception of space.

David Hume (1711-1776):

Hume's empiricism extended to his critique of causality, where he argued that we cannot know the necessary connection between cause and effect, but only observe regularities in nature.

He also famously critiqued the concept of the self, arguing that there is no enduring self, but rather a bundle of perceptions and experiences.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778):

Rousseau's political philosophy emphasized the idea of the social contract, where individuals agree to form a society and abide by its rules for the common good.

He also influenced educational theory with his work "Emile," which advocated for a natural education that follows the child's natural development, emphasizing learning through experience rather than rote memorization.