

---

# UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

---

## Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Analytic Philosophy
- 1.3 Continental Philosophy
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Key Words
- 1.6 Further Readings and References
- 1.7 Answer to Check Your Progress

---

## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

---

The main objective of this unit is to introduce the two main philosophical groupings of Contemporary Western Philosophy: Analytical and Continental philosophies. By the end of this unit you must be able to get familiar with:

- The Analytical tradition and its subdivisions
- The Continental tradition and its subdivisions

---

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

---

The scope of philosophy in the ancient understanding, and the writings of the ancient philosophers, was all intellectual endeavours. It began with the basic questions regarding the origin of the nature. These were widely debated in the ancient Greece and several possible answers were suggested. As a result, many other problems such as the nature of reality, source of validity of knowledge, limitations and possibilities of human reasoning, norms of human conduct etc. arose as subjects of philosophical analysis. It also included many other disciplines, such as pure mathematics and natural sciences such as physics, astronomy and biology. Over the time, academic specialization and the rapid technical advance of the special sciences led to the development of distinct disciplines for these sciences and their separation from philosophy. Today, philosophical questions are usually explicitly distinguished from the questions of the special sciences, and characterised by the fact that they are the sort of questions which are fundamental and abstract in nature, and which are not amendable to being answered by experimental means.

Contemporary Western philosophy is a piece of technical terminology in philosophy that refers to a specific period in the history of Western philosophy. Contemporary philosophy may be described as the present period in the history of Western philosophy beginning at the end of the nineteenth century with the rise of analytic

and Continental philosophy. Hence in Contemporary terms Western philosophy refers to two main traditions of Contemporary philosophy: Analytic philosophy and Continental philosophy. Continental philosophy began with the work of Brentano, Husserl, and Reinach on the development of the philosophical method of phenomenology. This development was roughly contemporaneous with the work by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell inaugurating a new philosophical method based on analysis of language via modern logic, hence the term 'analytic philosophy'. The relationship between philosophers who label themselves 'analytic' and those who label themselves 'continental' is often a hostile one, but there are some Contemporary philosophers who have argued that this division is harmful to philosophy and attempt a combined approach.

Within these broad branches of Analytic philosophy and Continental philosophy there are now numerous sub-disciplines. Western philosophers have often divided philosophy into several major branches based on questions typically addressed by the people working in different parts of the field. Philosophy is done primarily through reflection. It does not tend to rely on experiment. However, in some ways philosophy is close to science in its character and method. Some Analytic philosophers have suggested that the method of philosophical analysis allows philosophers to emulate the methods of natural science. Whatever philosophy essentially is or is concerned with, it tends to proceed more abstractly than most natural sciences. It does not depend as much on experience and experiment, and does not contribute as directly to technology as the other sciences.

---

## 1.2 ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

---

Analytic philosophy is a generic term for a style of philosophy that came to dominate English-speaking countries in the twentieth century. It is ordinarily dated to the work of English philosophers Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. They turned away from the then-dominant forms of Hegelian objectives in particular to its idealism and purported obscurity and then began to develop a new sort of conceptual analysis, based on new development in logic.

The Contemporary philosophers who self-identify themselves as analytic have widely divergent interests, assumptions and methods. In its Contemporary state analytic philosophy is usually taken to be defined by a particular style characterized by precision and thoroughness about a narrow topic. In the opinion of Michael E. Rosen, the term analytic philosophy can refer to:

- a) A tradition of doing philosophy characterized by an emphasis on clarity and argument, often achieved via modern formal logic and analysis of language, and a respect for the natural language.
- b) The positivist view that there are no specifically philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. As a result, many analytic philosophers have considered their inquiries as continuous with, or subordinate to, those of the natural sciences.
- c) The view that the logical clarification of thoughts can only be achieved by analysis of the logical form of philosophical propositions. The logical form of a proposition is a way of representing it often using the formal grammar and symbolism of a logical system to display its similarity with all other propositions of the same type.

Russell in his early career, along with collaborator Alfred North Whitehead, was deeply influenced by Gottlob Frege. Most importantly Gottlob Frege helped to develop the predicate logic. In contrast to Husserl's philosophy of arithmetic, which attempted to show that the concept of the cardinal number derived from psychical acts of grouping objects and counting them, Frege sought to show that mathematics and logic have their own validity, independent of the judgements or mental states of individual mathematicians and logicians.

Like Frege, Bertrand Russell and Alfred North Whitehead attempted to show that mathematics is reducible to fundamental logical principles. Their *Principia Mathematica* encouraged many philosophers to take a renewed interest in the development of symbolic logic. In addition, Bertrand Russell adopted Frege's predicate logic as his primary philosophical tool, a tool he thought could expose the underlying structure of philosophical problems.

Later analytic philosophers like Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein focused on creating an ideal language for philosophical analysis, which would be free from the ambiguities of ordinary language that often got philosophers into trouble. This philosophical trend can be called formalism. Russell and Wittgenstein sought to understand language, and hence philosophical problems, by making use of formal logic to formulize the way in which philosophical statements are made. Ludwig Wittgenstein developed a comprehensive system of logical atomism in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. He there argued that the world is the totality of actual states of affairs and that these states of affairs can be built up by expressing atomic facts in atomic propositions, and linking them using logical operators.

Though not very easy to have a clear separation between the branches of Continental and Analytic traditions, we will try to make a survey on the main branches discussed in Analytic philosophy:

## **ETHICS**

First half of the century was marked by the widespread neglect of ethical philosophy and the popularity of sceptical attitudes towards value. As an influence of logical positivism, Contemporary analytic philosophers began to have a renewed interest in ethics. At present the contemporary ethical philosophy is dominated by three schools: utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and Kantianism. Another major development in the latter half of the twentieth century has been contemporary ethical philosophy's overwhelming interest with practical applications, especially in relation to environmental issues, animal rights and the many challenges thrown by advancing medical science. Because of the focus on logic and language in the early years of analytic philosophy, the tradition initially had little to say on the subject of ethics. The attitude was widespread among early analytics that these subjects were unsystematic, and merely expressed personal attitude about which philosophy could have little or nothing to say.

## **LOGICAL POSITIVISM**

Russell's and Wittgenstein's formalism was developed by a group of thinkers in Vienna and Berlin, who formed a Vienna Circle and Berlin Circle into a doctrine known as logical positivism. Logical positivism used formal logic tools to underpin an empiricist account of our knowledge of the world. Philosophers such as Rudolf Carnap and Moritz Schlick, along with other members of the Vienna Circle, held

that the truths of logic and mathematics were tautologies, and those of science were verifiable empirical claims. These two constituted the entire universe of meaningful judgements; anything else was nonsense. The claims of ethics, aesthetics and theology were, accordingly, pseudo-statements, neither true nor false, just meaningless nonsense.

Logical positivists typically saw philosophy as having a very narrow role. For them, philosophy was concerned with the clarification of thoughts, rather than having a distinct subject matter of its own. The positivist adopted the verificationism, according to which every meaningful statement is either analytic or is capable of being verified by experience. This led the logical positivists to reject many traditional problems of philosophy, especially those of metaphysics, as meaningless.

## PRAGMATISM

Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that includes those who claim that an ideology or proposition is true if it works satisfactorily, that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that impractical ideas are to be rejected. Pragmatism, in William James' eyes was that the truth of an idea needed to be tested to prove its validity. Pragmatism began in the late nineteenth century with Charles Sanders Peirce. Through the early twentieth century it was developed further in the works of William James, John Dewey and George Santayana.

Pragmatist proceeds from the basic premise that the human capability of theorizing is internal to intelligent practice. Theory and practice are not separate spheres; rather, theories and distinctions are tools or maps for finding our way in the world. Theory is an abstraction from direct experience and ultimately must return to inform experience in turn. Thus an organism navigating his or her environment is the grounds for pragmatist inquiry.

From the outset, pragmatists wanted to reform philosophy and bring it more in line with the scientific methods as they understood it. They argued that idealist and realist philosophy had a tendency to present human knowledge as something beyond what science could grasp. These philosophies then resorted either to a phenomenology inspired by Kant or to correspondence theories of knowledge and truth. Pragmatism tries to explain how the relation between knower and known works in the world.

## POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Current political philosophy owes much to John Rawls and his book *A Theory of Justice*, which produced a sophisticated and closely argued defence of liberalism in politics. Recent decades have also seen the rise of several critiques of liberalism.

Another development in the area of political philosophy has been the emergence of a school known as Analytic Marxism. The best known member of this school is Oxford University philosopher G. A. Cohen, whose work, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* is generally taken as representing the genesis of this school. Cohen attempted to apply the tools of logical and linguistic analysis at the elucidation and defence of Marx's materialistic conception of history.

Communitarians such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor advance a critique of Liberalism that uses analytic techniques to isolate key assumptions of Liberal

individuals, such as Rawls, and then Challenges these assumptions. In particular, Communitarians challenge the Liberal assumption that the individual can be viewed as fully autonomous from the community in which he lives and is brought up. Instead, they push for a conception of the individual that emphasizes the role that the community plays in shaping his or her values, thought process and opinion.

### 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 state the main features of Analytic philosophy.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2) Explain briefly the subdivisions of Analytic philosophy.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 1.3 CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Continental philosophy in Contemporary usage refers to a set of traditions of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy from mainland Europe. The term originated among English speaking philosophers in the second half of the twentieth century, who found it useful for referring to a range of thinkers and traditions outside the Analytic movement. The main branches of Continental philosophy are German idealism, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, structuralism, and post-structuralism.

The history of Continental philosophy is usually thought to begin with German idealism led by figures like Fichte, Schelling, and later Hegel. German idealism developed out of the work of Immanuel Kant. It was closely linked with both romanticism and the revolutionary politics of the Enlightenment. Edmund Husserl has been a canonical figure in Continental philosophy. The term Continental philosophy, like Analytic philosophy marks a broad range of philosophical views and approaches not easily captured in a definition. Continental philosophy is often characterized by its critics as lacking the rigor of analytic philosophy.

The term Continental philosophy, like analytic philosophy, lacks clear definition and may mark merely a family resemblance across disparate philosophical views. Michael E. Rosen has identified certain common themes that typically characterize Continental philosophy. They are the following:

- a) Continental philosophers generally reject scientism, the view that the natural sciences are the best or most accurate way of understanding all phenomena.

Continental philosophers often argue that science depends upon conditions of possible experience, and that scientific methods are inadequate to understand such conditions of intelligibility.

- b) Continental philosophy usually considers experience as determined at least by factors such as context, space and time, language, culture, or history. Thus Continental philosophy tends towards historicism.
- c) Continental philosophy typically holds that conscious human agency can change the conditions of experience. Thus Continental philosophers tend to take strong interest in the unity of theory and practise, and tend to see their philosophical inquiries as closely related to personal, moral or political transformation. This tendency is very clear in the Marxist tradition, and it is also central in existentialism and post-structuralism.
- d) A final characteristic trait of Continental philosophy is an emphasis on meta-philosophy. In the wake of the development and success of the natural sciences, Continental philosophers have often sought to redefine the method and nature of philosophy. In some cases such as German idealism or phenomenology, this manifests as a renovation of the traditional view that philosophy is the first foundational, *a priori* science. In other cases such as hermeneutics, critical theory, or structuralism, it is held that philosophy investigates a domain that is irreducibly cultural or practical. And some Continental philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, the later Heidegger, or Derrida doubt whether any conception of philosophy can be truly coherent.

The main subdivisions of Continental philosophy are the following:

### GERMAN IDEALISM

German idealism was a philosophical movement that emerged in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It developed out of the work of Immanuel Kant and was closely linked both with romanticism and revolutionary politics of the Enlightenment. German idealism was born of the need to retain a variation of the concept of God after Kant had demonstrated its senselessness. The most well-known thinkers in the movement were Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

The philosophical meaning of idealism is that the properties we discover in objects depend on the way that those objects appear to us as perceiving subjects, and not something they possess in 'themselves' apart from our experience of them. The very notion of a 'thing in itself' should be understood as an option of a set of functions for an operating mind, such that we consider something that appears without respect to the specific manner in which it appears. The question of what properties a thing might have 'independently of the mind' is thus incoherent for idealism. Immanuel Kant is generally considered the first of the German idealists.

### PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is a philosophical method developed in the early years of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl and a circle of followers in Germany. 'Phenomenology' comes from the Greek words *phainomenon*, meaning 'that which appears', and *lygos*, meaning 'study'. In Husserl's conception, phenomenology is primarily concerned with making the structures of consciousness

and the phenomena, which appears in acts of consciousness, objects of systematic reflection and analysis. Such reflection was to take place from highly modified 'first person' view point, studying phenomena not as they appear to 'my' consciousness, but to any consciousness whatsoever. Husserl believed that phenomenology could thus provide a firm basis for all human knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and could establish philosophy as a 'rigorous science'.

In its most basic form, phenomenology attempts to create conditions for the objective study of topics usually regarded as subjective: consciousness and the content of conscious experiences such as judgments, perceptions, and emotions. Phenomenology seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of consciousness and conscious experience.

An important element of phenomenology is intentionality. Intentionality refers to the notion that consciousness is always consciousness of something. Whether this something that consciousness is about is in direct perception or in fantasy is inconsequential to the concept of intentionality itself. The object of consciousness does not have to be physical object apprehended in perception: it can just as well be fantasy or a memory. The structures of consciousness like perception, memory, fantasy etc are called intentionalities.

## EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism is a term that has been applied to the work of a number of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences, generally held that the focus of philosophical thought should be to deal with the emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts of individual person and his/her conditions of existence. The term 'existentialism' seems to have been coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel in the first half of the twentieth century. The label has been applied retrospectively to other philosophers for whom existence and, in particular, human existence were key philosophical topics. Soren Kierkegaard came to be regarded as the first existentialist, and has been called the 'father of existentialism'. In fact he was the first to explicitly make existential questions the primary focus in his philosophy.

Soren Kierkegaard maintained that the individual has the sole responsibility of giving meaning to one's own life and living that life passionately and sincerely, in spite of many existential obstacles and distractions including despair, angst, absurdity, alienation, and boredom. Subsequent existential philosophers retain the emphasis on the individual, in varying degrees, on how one achieves and what constitutes a fulfilling life, what obstacles must be overcome, and what external and internal factors are involved. Many existentialists have regarded traditional systematic or academic philosophy as too abstract and remote from concrete life experience. Existentialism became fashionable as a way to reassert the importance of human individuality and freedom.

## HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation theory, and can be either the art of interpretation, or the theory and practise of interpretation. The word 'hermeneutics' is a term derived from the Greek word *hermeneuo* which means translate or interpret. Hermeneutics can be traced back to Aristotle's work *On Interpretation*. It is the earliest extant philosophical work in the Western tradition to deal with the

relationship between language and logic in comprehensive, explicit, and formal way.

Contemporary hermeneutics encompasses everything in the interpretative process. This includes verbal and nonverbal forms of communication as well as prior aspects that affect communication, such as presuppositions, pre-understandings, the meaning and philosophy of language, and semiotics. Philosophical hermeneutics refers primarily to Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of knowledge as developed in *Truth and Method*, and some times to Paul Ricoeur. A 'hermeneutic' refers to one particular method or strand of interpretation.

Traditional hermeneutics involves interpretation theories that concern the meaning of written texts. These theories focus on the relationships found between the author, reader and text. Hans-Georg Gadamer argued that the meaning of the text goes beyond the author, and therefore the meaning is determined by the point where the horizons of the reader and the writer meet. Paul Ricoeur argued that the text is independent of the author's intent and original audience, and therefore the reader determines the meaning of the text.

The scope of hermeneutics has expanded to include the investigation and interpretation not only of oral, textual and artistic works, but of human behaviour generally, including language and patterns of speech, social institutions, and ritual behaviours. It interprets or inquires into the meaning and import of these phenomena, through understanding the point of view and 'inner life' of an insider, or the first-person perspective of an engaged participant in these phenomena.

## STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism was a fashionable movement in France in the second half of the twentieth century, and grew to become one of the most popular approaches in the academic fields concerned with the analysis of language, culture and society. Structuralism as an approach to the human sciences attempts to analyze a specific field as a complex system of interrelated parts. It began in linguistics with the work of Ferdinand De Saussure. But many French intellectuals perceived it to have a wider application, and the model was soon modified and applied to other fields, such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, literary theory and architecture.

The work of Ferdinand De Saussure concerning linguistics is generally considered to be a starting point of structuralism. The term 'structuralism' itself appeared in the works of French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and gave rise, in France, to the 'structuralist movement', which spurred the work of such thinkers as Louis Althusser, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, as well as the structural Marxism of Nicos Poulantzas. Structuralism is closely related to semiotics.

Structuralism states that human culture is to be understood as a system of signs. Robert Scholes defined structuralism as a reaction to modernist alienation and despair. Structuralists attempted to develop a semiology. Ferdinand de Saussure focused on the underlying system of language rather than the system of language and called his theory semiology. The discovery of the underlying system had to be done via examination of speech. He argued that linguistic signs were composed of two parts, a signifier and a signified.



## POST-STRUCTURALISM

Post-structuralism emerged in France, in the second half of the twentieth century, criticising structuralism. Post-structuralism encompasses the intellectual movements of certain Continental philosophers and sociologists who wrote within the tendencies of twentieth-century French philosophy. The movement may be broadly understood as a body of distinct responses to structuralism. The contributors, most notably Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Julia Kristeva, either inverted structuralist principles or set out to reject them outright. Theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard merged traditional Marxian ideas relating to capitalist exchange of value with such novel principles, bringing into attention the relationship between consumerism and the realm of sign. The movement is closely related to postmodernism. Anti-humanism is often a central tenet.

Post-structural practises generally operate on some basic assumptions: Post-structuralists hold that the concept of 'self' as a separate, singular, and coherent entity is a functional construct. Instead, an individual comprises tensions between conflicting knowledge of claims. Therefore, to properly study a text a reader must understand how the work is related to his or her personal concept of self. This self-perception plays a critical role in one's interpretation of meaning. While different thinkers' views on the self vary, it is often said to be constituted by discourses.

The author's intended meaning, as it is, is secondary to the meaning that the reader perceives. Post-structuralism rejects the idea of a literary text having a single purpose, a single meaning, or a singular existence. Instead, every individual reader creates a new and individual purpose, meaning and existence for a given text. To step outside of literary theory, this position is generalizable to any situation where a subject perceives a sign. Meaning is constructed by an individual from a signifier.

## POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism literally means 'after the modernist movement'. While 'modern' itself refers to something 'related to present', the movement of modernism and the following reaction of postmodernism are defined by a set of perspectives. It is used in a critical theory to refer to a point of departure for works of literature, drama, architecture, cinema, journalism and design, as well as in marketing and business and in the interpretation of history, law culture and religion in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

Postmodernism is an aesthetic, literary, political or social philosophy which was the basis of the attempt to describe a condition, or a state of being, or something concerned with the changes to institutions and conditions as post-modernity. In other words, postmodernism is the 'cultural and intellectual phenomenon', especially in new movements in the arts, since the first half of the twentieth century, while post-modernity focuses on social and political outworking and innovations globally since the second half of the twentieth century in the West.

Postmodernity is a derivative referring to non-art aspects of history that were influenced by the new movement, namely developments in society, economy and culture since 1960s. When the idea of a reaction or rejection of modernism was borrowed by other fields, it became synonymous in some contexts with post-modernity. The term is closely linked with poststructuralism and modernism, in terms of a rejection of its perceived bourgeois, elite culture.

## 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) Sketch out the main features of Continental philosophy.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What are the main subdivisions of Continental Philosophy?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3) What is Phenomenology?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4) Briefly explain Existentialism.

.....

.....

.....

.....

## 1.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give an overall view of Contemporary Western philosophy. We tried to expose the two main philosophical traditions in Western world with its sub-divisions. In the last century, philosophy has grown more specialized and more distinct from the natural sciences. Much of philosophy in this period concerns itself with explaining the relation between the theories of the natural sciences and the ideas of the humanities. In the Anglophone world, analytic philosophy became the dominant school. In the first half of the century, it was a cohesive school, more or less identical to logical positivism. In the latter half of the 20th century, analytic philosophy diffused into a wide variety of distinct philosophical views. On continental Europe, no single school enjoyed dominance. 20th-century movements such as phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics,

critical theory, structuralism, and poststructuralism are all included within this category.

---

## 1.5 KEY WORDS

---

- Formalism** : The view that mathematics concerns manipulations of symbols according to prescribed structural rules.
- Behaviourism** : A semantic thesis about the meaning of mentalistic expressions. It received its most sanguine formulation by the logical positivists who asserted that statements containing mentalistic expressions have the same meaning as, and are thus translatable into, some set of publicly verifiable statements describing behavioural and bodily processes and dispositions.
- Intentionality** : Things that are about other things exhibit intentionality. The adjective 'intentional' in this philosophical sense is a technical term not to be confused with the more familiar sense, characterising something done on purpose.
- Semiotics** : The study of the interpretations of formal languages. A formal language can be defined apart from any interpretation of it. This is done by specifying a set of its symbols and a set of formation rules that determine which strings of symbols are grammatical or well formed.
- Deconstruction** : A demonstration of the incompleteness or incoherence of a philosophical position using concepts and principles of argument whose meaning and use is legitimately only by that philosophical position. A deconstruction is thus a kind of internal conceptual critique in which the critic implicitly and provisionally adheres to the position criticised.
- Fallibilism** : The doctrine, relative to some significant class of beliefs or propositions, that they are inherently uncertain and possibly mistaken. The most extreme form of the doctrine attributes uncertainty to every belief; more restricted forms attribute it to all empirical beliefs or to beliefs concerning the past, the future, other minds, or the external world.

---

## 1.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Critchley, Simon. "Introduction: What is Continental Philosophy?" In *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*, Edited by Simon Critchley and William R. Schroeder, Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1998.

Jackson, Frank & Michael Smith, (ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Peacocke, Christopher. "The Philosophy of Language", In *Philosophy 2*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Rosen, Michael. "Continental Philosophy from Hegel," In *Philosophy 2*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Soames, Scott. "Analysis, Philosophical," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, vol. I.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by C. K. Ogden. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922.

---

## 1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

---

### Check Your Progress I

- 1) Analytic philosophy is a generic term for a form of philosophy that came to dominate English-speaking countries in the twentieth century. It is ordinarily dated to the work of English philosophers Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. They turned away from the then-dominant forms of Hegelian objecting in particular to its idealism and purported obscurity and then began to develop a new sort of conceptual analysis, based on new development in logic. In the opinion of Michael E. Rosen, the main characteristics of Analytic philosophy are the following:
  - a) A tradition of doing philosophy characterised by an emphasis on clarity and argument, often achieved via modern formal logic and analysis of language, and a respect for the natural language.
  - b) The positivist view that there are no specifically philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. As a result, many analytic philosophers have considered their inquiries as continuous with, or subordinate to, those of the natural sciences.
  - c) The view that the logical clarification of thoughts can only be achieved by analysis of the logical form of philosophical propositions. The logical form of a proposition is a way of representing it often using the formal grammar and symbolism of a logical system to display its similarity with all other propositions of the same type.
- 2) It is very difficult to have a clear separation between the branches of Continental and Analytic traditions. Analytic philosophy may be subdivided as follows:
  - a) **Ethics:** Contemporary analytic philosophers began to have a renewed interest in ethics under the influence of logical positivism. At present the contemporary ethical philosophy is dominated by three schools:

utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and Kantianism. Another major development in the latter half of the twentieth century has been contemporary ethical philosophy's overwhelming interest with practical applications, especially in relation to environmental issues, animal rights and the many challenges thrown by advancing medical science. Because of the focus on logic and language in the early years of analytic philosophy, the tradition initially had little to say on the subject of ethics. The attitude was widespread among early analytics that these subjects were unsystematic, and merely expressed personal attitude about which philosophy could have little or nothing to say.

- b) **Logical Positivism:** Russell and Wittgenstein's formalism was developed by a group of thinkers in Vienna and Berlin, who formed a Vienna Circle and Berlin Circle into a doctrine known as logical positivism. Logical positivists typically saw philosophy as having a very narrow role. For them, philosophy concerned the clarification of thoughts, rather than having a distinct subject matter of its own. The positivist adopted the verificationism, according to which every meaningful statement is either analytic or is capable of being verified by experience. This led the logical positivists to reject many traditional problems of philosophy, especially those of metaphysics, as meaningless.
- c) **Pragmatism:** Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that includes those who claim that an ideology or proposition is true if it works satisfactorily, that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that unpractical ideas are to be rejected. Pragmatism is that the truth of an idea needed to be tested to prove its validity. Pragmatism began in the late nineteenth century with Charles Sanders Peirce. Pragmatist proceeds from the basic premise that the human capability of theorizing is internal to intelligent practise. Theory and practise are not separate spheres; rather, theories and distinctions are tools or maps for finding our way in the world.
- d) **Political Philosophy:** Current development in the area of political philosophy has been the emergence of a school known as Analytic Marxism. The best known member of this school is Oxford University philosopher G. A. Cohen, whose work, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* is generally taken as representing the genesis of this school. Cohen attempted to apply the tools of logical and linguistic analysis at the elucidation and defence of Marx's materialistic conception of history.

## Check Your Progress II

- 1) Continental philosophy in Contemporary usage refers to a set of traditions of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy from mainland Europe. The history of Continental philosophy is usually thought to begin with German idealism led by figures like Fichte, Schelling, and later Hegel. German idealism developed out of the work of Immanuel Kant. It was closely linked with both romanticism and the revolutionary politics of the Enlightenment. Edmund Husserl has been a canonical figure in Continental philosophy. The term Continental philosophy, like Analytic philosophy marks a broad range of philosophical views and approaches not easily captured in a definition.

The term Continental philosophy, like analytic philosophy, lacks clear definition and may mark merely a family resemblance across disparate philosophical views. Michael E. Rosen has identified certain common themes that typically characterise Continental philosophy. They are the following:

- a) Continental philosophers generally reject scientism, the view that the natural sciences are the best or most accurate way of understanding all phenomena. Continental philosophers often argue that science depends upon conditions of possible experience, and that scientific methods are inadequate to understand such conditions of intelligibility.
  - b) Continental philosophy usually considers experience as determined at least by factors such as context, space and time, language, culture, or history. Thus Continental philosophy tends towards historicism.
  - c) Continental philosophy typically holds that conscious human agency can change the conditions of experience. Thus Continental philosophers tend to take strong interest in the unity of theory and practice, and tend to see their philosophical inquiries as closely related to personal, moral or political transformation. This tendency is very clear in the Marxist tradition, but is also central in existentialism and post-structuralism.
  - d) A final characteristic trait of Continental philosophy is an emphasis on metaphilosophy.
- 2) The term Continental philosophy, like Analytic philosophy marks a broad range of philosophical views and approaches not easily captured in a definition. The main branches of Continental philosophy are German idealism, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, structuralism, and post-structuralism.
  - 3) Phenomenology is philosophical method developed in the early years of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl and a circle of followers in Germany. 'Phenomenology' comes from the Greek words *phainomenon*, meaning 'that which appears', and *lygos*, meaning 'study'. In Husserl's conception, phenomenology is primarily concerned with making the structures of consciousness, and the phenomena which appears in acts of consciousness, objects of systematic reflection and analysis. In its most basic form, phenomenology attempts to create conditions for the objective study of topics usually regarded as subjective: consciousness and the content of conscious experiences such as judgements, perceptions, and emotions. Phenomenology seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of consciousness and conscious experience.
  - 4) Existentialism is a term that has been applied to the work of a number of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences, generally held that the focus of philosophical thought should be to deal with the emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts of individual person and his/her conditions of existence. The term 'existentialism' seems to have been coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel in the first half of the twentieth century. The label has been applied retrospectively to other philosophers for whom existence and, in particular, human existence were key philosophical topics. Soren Kierkegaard came to be regarded as

the first existentialist, and has been called the 'father of existentialism'. In fact he was the first to explicitly make existential questions a primary focus in his philosophy. Soren Kierkegaard maintained that the individual has the sole responsibility of giving meaning to one's own life and living that life passionately and sincerely, in spite of many existential obstacles and distractions including despair, angst, absurdity, alienation, and boredom. Subsequent existential philosophers retain the emphasis on the individual, in varying degrees, on how one achieves and what constitutes a fulfilling life, what obstacles must be overcome, and what external and internal factors are involved.