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# UNIT 1 CHARACTERISTICS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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## Contents

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Brief History of Western Philosophy
- 1.3 Characteristics of Western Philosophy
- 1.4 Critical Constructions of Western Philosophy
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Further Readings and References

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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‘Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences . . . The result of philosophy is not a number of ‘philosophical propositions’, but to make propositions clear.’ Says Wittgenstein. Philosophy is an important branch of human knowledge. It is an effort to understand the world systematically and holistically. The conceptions of philosophy and approaches of philosophy have been varied with social context. Western philosophy has been constructed on certain propositions. This chapter explores the some of the basic characteristics of western philosophy with an historical note. The western philosophy has taken its starting point from Greco- Roman philosophy. It has followed by medieval thought which has mostly influenced by the religion. The modern western philosophy has not only critical about orthodox religion but also came with ideals of secularism, humanism, scientific temperament, progress and development. Skepticism, rationality, individualism and scientific methods are influenced the human conception in understanding the world. The western philosophy under the spell of modernity has an impact on the non- western world too. This has been coincided with colonial rule of western over Afro-Asian nations. However, western modernity has different meanings and implications for the world. In recent times, the methods and foundations of western philosophy and its ideals of modernity has been attacked in west and outside by the thinkers postmodern, post colonial and communitarians. The objective of this chapter is to make familiar the characteristics of western philosophy.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Philosophy is the search for comprehensive view of nature, an attempt at a universal explanation of things. The ideas of philosophy have evolved with social necessity of times. Philosophy is neither science nor religion, though historically it has been entwined with both. In the beginning the distinction between science, religion, and philosophy was not as clear as it became in later centuries. The function of philosophy is critical evaluation of our beliefs and clarification of concepts. Philosophy is the search for conceptual clarity in all areas of life.

Philosophy maintains the distinguishing features of abstraction and concern for truth. Philosophers analyse and clarify concepts. Philosophy tries to explore critically the foundations of human practices, such as science, politics, religion or morality. The distinctive feature of philosophy is logical argument. Philosophers engage in arguments either by inventing of their own or by criticizing other people or doing both. Philosophy involves expounding existing ideas, creating new imaginative ideas, and critically assessing the soundness of the arguments put forward in support of views claimed to be true. Philosophers are often debated what is ultimate reality? How do we know that reality? What constitutes good life? What is the meaning of life? These questions gave rise to branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, logic and aesthetics. These questions are interrelated in evaluating the social reality and in understanding the world in order to lead a good life. Western philosophy is a philosophy evolved from western civilization and its historical development. With changing socio- economic and political conditions, western philosophy too changed over a period of time. But it had maintained its continuity from Greek philosophy to the contemporary times. The approaches and styles of doing philosophy may vary, but we can identify certain features on which western philosophy got constructed. In the light of contemporary struggles, the very assumptions and foundations of philosophy are under scrutiny. It does not mean that it dismissing the philosophical thought of western society, but arguing for new methods of inquirers in understanding the western reality against the dominant view of western philosophy.

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## **1.2 BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY**

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The philosophical ideas have to be understood historically. The social context plays a crucial role in understanding the ideas of philosophers. In fact, our ideas emerged out of social tensions and chaos of the world. Philosophy is a social expression of this situation and provides comprehensive understanding of social reality. Philosophical ideas not only provide clarification but also lead for betterment of life. In other words, philosophers prompt a direction for humanity by providing the comprehensive and critical understanding of the world in which they live. Historically, Western philosophy has enriched by many philosophers of western countries. In ancient times, Greco-Romans are the leading philosophers. In medieval times, the Greek philosophy has influenced the religion and comes with philosophy of religion. The modern philosophy developed with industrial revolution of the west. Though British, German and French and American and other European nations have different social and political contexts, there are efforts to construct philosophical thought of these as western. Within west, we may find different philosophical traditions with different styles of doing philosophy and at the same time we may find some kind of convergence of philosophical thought commonly identified as western philosophy.

The western philosophy finds its roots in Greek philosophy of 6th century B.C. Greek philosophy has considered as a starting point for western philosophy. The later philosophy has shaped by this philosophy. In other words, the very definition and nature of philosophy of west has identified, continued and developed further from the Greek philosophy. The Greek philosophy has not only speculated about the world, but also tries to differ from the religion and theology. It has its roots in naturalism and critical about prejudice, beliefs and tradition. 'From the very beginning, Greek philosophy was an intellectual activity,

for it was not a matter only of seeing or believing but of thinking, and philosophy meant thinking about basic questions in a mood of genuine and free inquiry.' (Stumpf, p.4)

For our understanding we may divide history of western philosophy into ancient, medieval and modern, and contemporary.

- a. Ancient philosophy- (Greek, Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy) Greek philosophy from Thales to Aristotle, Greco-Roman Philosophy, Neo Platonism of the Alexandrian School.
- b. Medieval philosophy or scholasticism from fifth to fifteenth century. (Patristic and Scholastic Philosophy)
- c. Modern philosophy- the renaissance from the 15th to the 17th century, the period of enlightenment from Locke to Kant, German philosophy from Kant to Hegel
- d. Contemporary philosophy from 1860 to the present. (20th century - Postmodernism)

### **Greco-Roman Philosophy**

The early Greek philosophers are concerned about the nature of things. What is everything made of, or what kind of stuff goes into the composition of things? What is permanent in existence? Thales considered the element 'water' as the foundation of all physical reality. Others were following Thales with alternative solutions. The Pythagoras came with mathematical basis of all things. There are attempts to explain change and permanence. Heraclitus came with a proposition that 'all things are in flux'. Parmenides, the founder of Eleatic school of philosophy is critical about both Heraclitus and Milesian philosophies that all things emerge out of something else. He rejects very notion of change and considered phenomenon of change is basically an illusion. For him, the concept of change was logically neither thinkable nor expressible. Whatever exists 'must be absolutely, or not at all. Thales believes that every thing is made up of water, Anaximenes believes everything is made of air, Anaximander believes that everything is made up of 'boundless', Democritus believes everything is made up of atoms.

Ancient Greek philosophy may be divided into the pre-Socratic period, the Socratic period, and the post-Aristotelian period. The pre-Socratic period was characterized by metaphysical speculation, often preserved in the form of grand, sweeping statements, such as "All is fire", or "All changes". Important pre-Socratic philosophers include Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Democritus, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. The Socratic period is named in honor of the most recognizable figure in Western philosophy, Socrates, who, along with his pupil Plato, revolutionized philosophy through the use of the Socratic Method, which developed the very general philosophical methods of definition, analysis, and synthesis. While Socrates wrote nothing himself, his influence as a "skeptic" survives through Plato's works. Plato's writings are often considered basic texts in philosophy as they defined the fundamental issues of philosophy for future generations. These issues and others were taken up by Aristotle, who studied at Plato's school, the Academy, and who often disagreed with what Plato had written. The post-Aristotelian period ushered in such philosophers as Euclid, Epicurus, Chrysippus, Hipparchia the Cynic, Pyrrho, and Sextus Empiricus.

## Medieval Philosophy

The medieval period of philosophy came with the collapse of Roman civilization and the dawn of Christianity, Islam, and rabbinic Judaism. The medieval period brought Christian scholastic philosophy, with writers such as Augustine of Hippo, Boethius, Anselm, Robert Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Nicholas of Cusa, and Francisco Suárez. The philosophy of this period is characterized by analysis of the nature and properties of God; the metaphysics involving substance, essences and accidents. That is, qualities that is respectively essential to substances possessing them or merely happening to be possessed by them.

Many of these philosophers took as their starting point the theories of Plato or Aristotle. Medieval philosophy had been concerned primarily with argument from authority, and the analysis of ancient texts using Aristotelian logic. The philosophy of medieval age was an attempt to construct religious thought with reasoned account of its various doctrines. In other words, it characterizes with synthesis of theology and philosophy. The doctrines of Plato and Aristotle were reinterpreted to fulfill their religious demands. In medieval age to a large extent the speculative theories of Aristotle combined with theological presuppositions in the Bible. The state has been subordinated to spiritual dominion, to the power of the Pope.

## Renaissance

The Renaissance saw an outpouring of new ideas that questioned authority. Roger Bacon (1214–1294) was one of the first writers to advocate putting authority to the test of experiment and reason. Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) challenged conventional ideas about morality. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote in favor of the methods of science in philosophical discovery. Renaissance, embracing the classical tradition, highlighted the Greek culture as supreme achievement in western civilization, and also had a stressing the importance of this world, by emphasizing the dignity of man, by championing the possibilities of reason and pointed to a new scientific age. The ideal of Humanism was the most important intellectual development emerged out of renaissance. It has belief in man and a passion for learning. Humanists believed that reason is self-sufficient and more important than faith. Though the ideals of humanism in renaissance age mostly confined to aristocratic class, it stresses exact knowledge, the validity of reason and need for moderation in making intellectual assertions. Interestingly, the period of renaissance coincided with an expansion of Western Europe. Nature was regarded as the standard of all things. The Machiavelli, the renaissance thinker believed that religion should be dominated by the state. It did not matter whether a religion were true or false. Machiavelli, the realist viewed man not an image of God but as a creature governed by self-interest. In philosophy, the Renaissance refers to the period of the break-up of feudalism (15th to early 17th century), when trade grew up around the merchants and craftspeople of Northern Italy particularly, and a bourgeois society began to flourish and gave rise to a humanist culture in opposition to the official scholasticism.

## Modern Western Philosophy

The modern philosophy begins with immense faith in human capacity to know every thing. The authority of the church was diminished and the authority of

science got increasing. Though the method of philosophy was radically changed with modern western philosophy, but the much of its content remained same. The medieval philosophy had close nexus to theology, but the modern philosophy was subservient to scientific methodology. The modern philosophy developed the philosophical method, formation of philosophical systems and humanism. The modern western philosophy flourished with philosophical traditions of Rationalism of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, and Empiricism of Locke, Berkley and Hume. The reconciliation of these two can be seen with enlightenment philosopher Kant. It has taken to further heights by the Hegel through his method of Dialectical idealism, and Dialectical Materialism of Marx. The modern western philosophy has further carried by analytical, phenomenological and continental philosophical traditions.

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### 1.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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Though it is a difficult task to characterize or identify the specific features of western philosophy, but we may mark some common features marked with western philosophy. Philosophical traditions may vary from ancient Greek philosophy to contemporary western philosophy, but there are efforts to construct the essential features of western philosophy. The idea of west got its prominence and distinctiveness in relation to other Afro-Asian nations, which are under the control of colonial rule of west. The following are some of the features of western philosophy:

#### **Philosophy as an Intellectual Speculation**

From the beginning, western philosophy characterizes as an intellectual enterprises in understanding the social reality. As Bertrand Russell viewed philosophy is something intermediate between theology and science. Like theology, it consists of speculations on matters as to which definite knowledge has so far, been unascertainable; like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to authority, weather that of tradition or that of revelation. As Russell argues all *definite* knowledge belonged to science, and all dogma as to what surpasses definite knowledge belonged to theology. All the questions of the most interest to speculative minds are such as science can not answer, and the confident answers of theologians no longer seem so convincing as they did in earlier times. Western philosophy from its very beginning maintained that philosophy is distinct from science and theology. Science is the realm of empirical investigation and attempts to understand the world explain the observable events and formulate the laws of nature, and a human experience has explained accordingly. We also find some of the questions answered differently from this. In some occasions the questions generated by science may pass beyond its ability to solve them. There are attempts to understand the world as whole and some times beyond this empirical phenomenon. The final cause and meaning of the world have been found by invoking God, or universal idea or a supreme principle. This kind of inquiry in understanding the world has treated as metaphysical. This may have convergence with religion and faith. In other words, it is justifying the central claims of religion by providing a rational grounding.

Philosophy as distinct from theology, began in Greece in the sixth century B.C. after running its course in antiquity, it was again submerged by theology as

Christianity rose and Rome fell. Its second great period, from eleventh to fourteenth centuries, was mostly dominated by Catholic Church. This period was brought to an end by the confusions that culminated in the reformation. The third period, from the 17th century to the present, is dominated, more than either of its predecessors, by science; traditional religious beliefs remain important, but are felt to need justification, and are modified wherever science seems to make this imperative. Few of the philosophers of this period are orthodox from catholic standpoint, and the secular state is more important in their speculation than the church. However, Western philosophy for the most part consists of insightful remarks about the nature of reality or human beings ('everything changes' or 'the unexamined life is not worth living', or no decision is a decision), analyses the fundamental concepts ('knowledge is justified true belief'), and systematic treatments of the basic structures of reality ('everything is a body' or 'Only minds and ideas exists')

### **Classification of Philosophy**

Western Philosophy has evolved into various branches in course of time. One may find clear cut divisions in western philosophy into *metaphysics*, *epistemology* and *axiology*. And axiology further classified into *ethics*, *aesthetics* and *logic*. The most of the philosophical questions raised and systems of philosophy was developed around the issue of ultimate reality. In that sense metaphysical questions are central to philosophy. It deals about the conceptual schemes in understanding reality. Epistemology is an inquiry into the nature, origin, conditions and limits of knowledge. It is a science of knowledge. Scientific and logical understanding of the world got its priority with an emphasis on epistemology. The questions of knowing ultimate reality are addressed by revisionary metaphysics with a marked difference from speculative metaphysics. As a result, whether epistemology is subservient to metaphysics or otherwise, is a debating point for some time. Though philosophers initiated their debates in pursuit of well being and good society, they are primarily concerned either with metaphysics or epistemology. In this process, ethics has treated subservient to both. In recent times, the continental philosopher Levinas came with a proposition that ethics as first philosophy by negating the dominant way of doing philosophy by prioritizing either metaphysics or epistemology. However, one may find clear cut compartmentalization of western philosophy into metaphysics, epistemology and axiology, and developed accordingly.

### **Metaphysics**

In the history of western metaphysics usually we find two conceptions – *descriptive* and *reversionary* metaphysics. The philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant and Strawson are forerunners of former and the Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley are representatives of reversionary metaphysics. This distinction may not cover all metaphysical systems, but it has been greatly influential in reviving work in metaphysics. Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world; reversionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure. Descriptive metaphysics aims to describe the most general features of our conceptual scheme, that is, to describe reality as it manifests itself to the human understanding. Conceptual analysis is its main method. Reversionary metaphysics, on the other hand, attempts to revise our ordinary way of thinking and our ordinary conceptual scheme in order to provide an intellectually and morally preferred picture of the world. The reversionary

metaphysicians generally like to establish a well-organized system beyond the world of experience.

The issue of appearance and reality occupies important place in the history of metaphysics. The distinction between appearance and real paves the way for idealism. This views that we have direct access to in sense-perception is at best the mental representations of things. Plato explains that sensible world is in some sense less real than the Forms. For Plato, the 'forms' are unchanged, eternal, universal and known to reason alone. Descartes distinction between the mental and physical provides the basis for the identification of a realm of appearances as distinct from reality. Kant's transcendental *idealism* views that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all; representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intuition. For Hegel no appearance can be absolutely false, and therefore in absolute contrast with reality, despite the natural opposition between the concepts of appearance and reality. From Hegelian point of view appearance can be only a less coherently organized form of reality; the supposed contrast that the terms 'appearance' and 'reality' suggests is thus, officially, a matter of degree, not strict opposition. In this sense, reality is in a sense both other than and inclusive of appearance. Reality both transcends and also includes its appearances. Realism proposes alternative view to idealism. According to this reality is independent of us and our minds, and that what we think, understand and recognize does not necessarily exhaust what that reality involves. Against idealism and phenomenalism, realism asserts the independent existence of material objects and their qualities.

The dualism of Descartes was vigorously attacked by Hobbes. Matter and mind are not separate, he declared; they are homogeneous and are subject to the same laws. The great dualism in nature is only between matter and spirit, and spirit is a subject for theology, not for philosophy. Space and time, Hobbes maintained, do not possess metaphysical reality; they are merely 'attenuated' images of the physical body. They have a material content which characterizes the nature of all reality. Hobbes interpreted the religion naturalistically and argues that the source of religion, lie in curiosity and fear.

### **From Nature Centric to Ethical and Human Centric**

The first philosophers of Greek thought are mostly concerned about the nature, the physical world and its composition. The principle question had been about the natural physical world to shifted to ethical, how human beings should behave. The sophists and Socrates shifted the concern of philosophy to the study of man. Instead of debating about alternative theories of nature, philosophers started addressing themselves to the problem of human knowledge, asking whether it was possible for the human mind to discover universal truth. Could there be a universal concept of goodness if men were incapable of knowing any universal truth?

Ethical discourses are central to any philosophical systems. Some of the philosophers are directly addressed the well being and social good. The philosophical ideas of some of the philosophers have implications for ethics. The sophists consider *man is measure of everything*. For them, what gives pleasure is good. Socrates emphasized on *virtue as knowledge* and *unexamined life is not worth living*. Socrates devised a method for arriving at truth, linking *knowing* and *doing* to each other in such a way as to argue that to know

the good is to do the good. Plato considered good with identification of cardinal virtues. Medieval philosophers maintained goodness with religious morality and the authority of religious text. The modern philosophers were started identifying with the ideals of humanism and secularism. The utilitarian philosophers such as Bentham and J.S. Mill developed ethical theories in the line of utility. The consequence of action determines the good. Kant again revised the virtue ethics through good will and categorical imperative. G. E. Moore argues that good is indefinable. Any attempt to define it in naturalism leads to a naturalistic fallacy. But at the same time he argues that objective moral truths are known through intuition. The emotive theory of ethics of A. J. Ayer with an application of method of logical positivism argues that ethical statements are neither positive nor negative. But ethical statements exclamatory and indicates emotions.

The ethics of ancient and medieval theories are founded on religious morality. The ethical theories of modern times are developed on the human nature. J.S. Mill maintains that human being by nature seeks pleasure and avoids pain. For Kant, human beings by nature are rational and argue for universal moral duty on this basis. The existential thinker Jean Paul Sartre argues that there is no human nature as such. Human beings are made up in situation. There is no objective morality, but subjective.

### **Comprehensive Understanding**

Socrates developed dialectic as a method of argumentation. Plato brought together all the major concerns of human thought into a coherent organization of knowledge. This comprehensive understanding of reality become a feature of western philosophy and had influence on later philosophers of west.

The history of western philosophy reveals that, Plato has critically appraised. As whitehead remarked that 'the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.' The earliest philosophers, the Milesians were concerned chiefly with the constitution of physical nature, not with foundations of morality. Similarly, the Eleatic philosophers Parmenides and zeno were interested chiefly in arguing that reality consists of changeless, single reality, the one. Heraclitus and Pythagorean, on the other hand, considered reality as always changing, full of flux, and consisting of a vast multitude of different things. Socrates and sophists showed less interest in physical nature and instead, steered philosophy into arena of morality. Plato's great influence stems from the manner in which he brought all these diverse philosophic concerns into a unified system of thought. Plato argues that the kind of knowledge that helps one to distinguish between shadows, reflections, and real objects in the visible world is just the kind of knowledge that man needs to discriminate the shadows and reflections of the genuinely good life. Plato had argued that the truth of the world is not revealed to ordinary sense perception, but to reason alone; the truths of reason are necessary, eternal and *a priori*; that through the cultivation of reason man can come to understand himself, God, and world as these things are in themselves, freed from shadowy overcast experience.

### **Skepticism**

Skepticism is doubting or denying the possibility of attaining true knowledge. In ancient Greece, the sophists provide their argument based on skepticism. The modern skepticism is associated with Hume, and J.S. Mill. It is reaction



against dogmatic metaphysics and is the logical consequence of a through – going empiricism. Descartes introduced the method of doubt, which has influenced the western philosophy significantly. He considered doubt is the source of knowledge. To doubt was not an end in itself; it was a process of purification, of eliminating various false hoods, and of ultimately arriving at an unshakable foundations of truth. In fact, our doubt implies the reality of our thoughts. Doubting means thinking, this implies a self consciousness. *Cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). Descartes regarded it as primary truth of reason. For Locke, skepticism was not an end in itself; it was prelude to a more scientific philosophy. Though out the western philosophy, one form or other skepticism has becomes one of its features. In fact, Western philosophy has progressed further with skepticism.

### **Scientific Method**

Rational understanding of the world has one of the dominant features of philosophy. The rational understanding has enriched with scientific method against dogmatic and orthodox religious traditions. Descartes was a founder of seventeenth century continental rationalism. It was Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz fashioned a new ideal for philosophy. In the wake of developments in science, it was inevitably philosophy was affected by this new ways of discovering facts. The early modern philosophers considered the methods of science a fresh way of developing knowledge.

As Fredirich Mayer out lined in *A History of Modern Philosophy*, modern philosophy has reflecting the spirit of science. In 16th and 17th centuries philosophy was influenced a lot by the dev elopement of natural and physical sciences. It has changed the perspective of philosophers. In 18th century the growth of the social sciences changed the outlook of philosophers. The optimism of 18th century philosophers was based on belief that progress can be achieved by making the world more rational, by eliminating obsolete traditions, and by destroying the spirit of prejudice. In 19th century, the growth of new biological concepts stimulated philosophical thinking, but the conclusions of biology were less comforting. The new scientific theories of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo revolutionized man’s concept of the physical world. There is no doubt that the scientific discoveries and scientific methods of looking at world have changed the direction and conception of western philosophy in a significant way.

### **Philosophical Method**

Philosophical method is a combination of rules, assumptions, procedures, and examples determining the scope and limits of a subject and establishing acceptable ways of working within those limits to achieve truth. The question of philosophical method is itself a matter for philosophy and constitutes a major example of the reflective nature of the subject. Historically, the philosophers disagree about the appropriate philosophical method. The identifying mark of a philosophical school or movement lies mainly in the method it adopts. Ancient philosophy was developed according to various interpretations of dialectic method, and modern philosophy was initiated by Descartes ‘s method of doubt. Analytic philosophy is characterized by linguistic method, while non-analytic European philosophy is characterized by phenomenological, historical, and textual methods. Historically, philosophers have tried to model their work on the methods of successful sciences, such as mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, and computer science, but the appropriate relationship between philosophical and

scientific method is a matter of dispute. Some philosophers draw methodological implications from the claim that philosophy is a part of science or ancillary to science, while others derive their account of philosophical method from the claim that philosophy is prior to science.

The method of philosophy is empirical as well as rational, inductive as well as deductive. In the history of western philosophy, we find different theories of philosophical methods and the limits of knowledge. Dogmatism, skepticism, criticism and dialectic are prominent methods of inquiry. Dogmatism is the method of philosophical inquiry without a prior criticism of knowledge. A dogmatic philosophy assumes without hesitation the capacity of mind to know realities. It assumes, without justification, i.e, without explanation or proof, certain fundamental principles as well as self-evident or axiomatic and then deduces conclusions from them. It does not question the truth of the premises with which it starts. Dogmatism generally characterizes ancient philosophy, for the first inclination of the human mind is to act without questioning itself. Skepticism is doubting or denying the possibility of attaining true knowledge. In ancient Greece, the sophists provide their argument based on skepticism. The modern skepticism is associated with Hume, Mill. It is reaction against dogmatic metaphysics and is the logical consequence of a through-going empiricism. Kant used the critical method. Kant points out that knowledge is not wholly built of sensations as Hume supposes, it involves *a priori* as well as *a posteriori* elements- reason as well as sensation. The matter of our ideas is furnished by senses; their form is the work of reason. This is reconciliation of both empiricism and rationalism.

The conflict of opposite dogmas gives rise to doubt as to the possibility of knowledge. Dogmatism gives rise to skepticism. Doubt leads to reflection, skepticism to criticism. Hume's critical reflection leads to extreme skepticism. According to him, we can never pass beyond the range of actual and possible sensations, and knowledge is wholly built up out of the elements of sensations. As per the critical method of Kant knowledge involves not merely sensations, but also certain a priori notions (forms and categories) supplied by the thinking principle from within itself. Our knowledge of the world has no resemblance of kind to the 'real world', so that there are two worlds- a world of human thought and a real world of things-in-themselves.

Dialectic is a method used to a form of reasoning by finding out contradictions or opposites. It is classified into negative and positive dialectic. The negative dialectic as a method was used by Socrates. It consists in exposing the inconsistencies or self-contradictions involved in opinions and thereby destroying them. The positive dialectic method was adopted by Hegel. It is essentially a process of reconciliation or unification. Hegel maintained that human thought proceeds dialectically; its movement involves a process of contradiction and reconciliation. An idea can be understood only in relation to its opposite or contradictory. Heidegger's Phenomenological method views Philosophy is the study of phenomena, where phenomena referring to whatever 'shows itself'. Phenomena are not mere appearances, but those things which *show themselves* to consciousness.

Further, philosophers approached reality from different stand points. Descartes described reality as dualism consisting of two basic substances, thought and extension; Spinoza proposed monism, saying that there is only a single substance,

Nature, which has various attributes and modes; Leibniz was pluralist, saying that although there is only one kind of substance, the monad, there are nevertheless different kinds of monads accounting for the various elements in nature. It is evident that there are different philosophical methods adopted in the tradition of western philosophy.

### Theories of Knowledge

In Greek philosophy, knowledge is perception held by atomists and the sophists. Protagoras and Gorgias are important thinkers in this regard. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are important critics of this theory. For Socrates and his student Plato, knowledge means what is universal and valid and free from contradiction. Perception is momentary and relative to different persons. For Aristotle that no sense contradicts itself at the same moment about the same object. If all opinions and appearances be equally true, then it would lead to self contradicting statements. The modern philosophy has an emphasis on human capacity to know the world against the medieval view. It appealed to natural agencies in place of super natural ones. In modern philosophy, empiricism and rationalism are come with a distinct view of knowing the reality. The empiricists draw their model from empirical experience of everyday life. The rationalists draw their model from mathematics. For empiricists, experience is the source of knowledge and for rationalists, reason is the source of knowledge. The empiricists believe that mind is a clean state or *tabula rasa*. All the character of knowledge are acquired through sense-experience. As per rationalism, intellect is an independent source of knowledge. This gives us innate or a priori ideas. Knowledge, according to it, consists in these innate ideas alone. These self evident universal truths are given by our intellect, the best example of which is found in mathematics. According to rationalism, experience does not constitute but serves an occasion for the exercise of intellect, whose innate ideas constitute knowledge. Intellect is an independent source of knowledge. This supplies us with self evident innate ideas. Knowledge is constituted by innate ideas alone. Knowledge so gained is universal and necessary.

Rationalism and empiricism are chief currents of modern western philosophy. It is Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz of continental nations fashioned a new ideal for philosophy. They are influenced by the progress and success of science and mathematics; they attempt to provide philosophy with the exactness of mathematics. They set out to formulate clear rational principles that could be organized into a system of truths from which accurate information about the world could be deduced. Their emphasis was upon the rational capacity of human mind, which they now considered the source of truth about man and about the world. Although they did not reject the claims of religion, they did consider philosophical reasoning something independent of supernatural revelation.

The British empiricists Locke, Berkeley and Hume consider experience as the source of knowledge. Empiricism is the view that all our knowledge is based on experience alone, and that, therefore, the true philosophical method is experimental or empirical. Locke argues that all knowledge is derived from experience; do not deny the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. For Hume, nothing is really knowable or thinkable beyond the range of experience no certainty or knowledge about realities. Attack on innate ideas- Locke started his philosophy with an examination of the first principles of knowledge and attacks the doctrine of innate ideas. The doctrine of innate ideas is popular with

continental philosophers especially Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza. It was derived from Plato and thus had a very ancient lineage. It gave regularity and consistency to knowledge; it explained the universality of ideas and concepts. Locke pointed out that this universality is not real and there is no reason for the acceptance of innate ideas.

### **Theories of Truth**

The prominent theories of truth are correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic. According to the correspondence theory, a claim is true if it corresponds to what is so (the “facts” or “reality”) and false if it does not correspond to what is so. What we believe or say is true if it corresponds to the way things actually are- to the facts. A belief is true if and only corresponds to a fact. This view could be seen in various forms throughout the history of western philosophy. In modern times, the analytical philosophers Russell and G.E. Moore holds this position. According to the coherence theory of truth, a statement is true if it is logically consistent with other beliefs that are held to be true. A belief is false if it is inconsistent with (contradicts) other beliefs that are held to be true. A belief is true if and only if it is part of a coherent system of beliefs. The idealistic philosophers are in favour of this theory. Like correspondence theory, this theory too prominent in western philosophical thought. This theory is associated with British idealists in modern times. According to the pragmatic theory, a statement is true if it allows you to interact effectively and efficiently with the cosmos. The less true a belief is, the less it facilitates such interaction. A belief is false if it facilitates no interaction. In other words, truth is end of inquiry. Truth is satisfactory to believe. The most famous advocate of the pragmatic theory is the American philosopher William James.

### **Political Philosophy**

Western philosophy has diverse traditions of political philosophy, from social contract to communitarianism. Historically, Greek thought followed the Christian natural law. The Christian natural law was undermined by the individualism of seventeenth century. This period was informed by the new vision of progress and freedom. Science had revolutionized people’s life and thinking. Relationship between individual and god was replaced by the relationship between individual and individual as the foundation of social enquiry. This individualism becomes the basic characteristic of the subsequent liberal tradition. The idea of social initiative and social control surrendered to the idea of individual initiative and individual control. In simple terms, new material conditions gave birth to new social relationships and new philosophy was evolved to afford a rational justification for the new world which had come into being. This new philosophy became known as liberalism. Liberalism acquired different flavors in different national cultures. The difficulties in liberal theory lie in its basic foundations of seventeenth century individualism and its quality of possessiveness. The possessive quality lies in the conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities owing nothing to society. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as a part of a larger social whole, but as a proprietor of himself. The basic assumption of possessive individualism –that man is free and human by virtue of his sole proprietorship of his own person, and that human society is essentially a series of market relations, were deeply embedded in seventeenth century foundations. This theory may correspond with the market society of seventeenth century. Society becomes the web of free equal individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities.

Society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange. Later theories of politics tried to articulate from the point of community or individual in relation to community. The inconsistency lies inherently in the market society itself. Market society automatically brings the class differentiations. The propertied class would like to hold power over the subordinate classes. Men no longer saw them selves fundamentally equal in an inevitable subjection to the determination of market. Alternatives emerged for the market system. Articulation of proletarian politics gave a serious blow to the liberal politics. There are altogether different assumptions about man and society. The community has replaced individual. Marxist theory aims at the radical change in society and its human relations. Human society has seen from the perspective of the class considers human being as primarily a producer. His relations are determined by his involvement in social production. Other than the Marxist notion there is a conservative political theory would like to see society from the point of view of community. Conservatism has reverence for tradition, religion and age old custom. Edmund Burke is the one of the examples for conservative tradition. As per the conservative views, the inherent imperfections of human nature make a strong state necessary. It is needed to control the anti-social impulses of the individual. State has been seen as a crucial institution necessary to prevent society from dissolving into disorder and chaos. The conservative thinkers consider the forms of inequality and privilege as ineradicable and necessary elements of society. In the domain of political thought, the contemporary dilemma can be phrased broadly in terms of the relationship between 'contract' and 'community'.

The liberals have 'persistently tended to cut the citizen off from the person', putting on their pedestal 'a cripple of a man' without a 'moral or political nature' and without 'moorings in any real community'. Libertarianism is an individualist philosophy, with a strong focus on the rights of citizens in a democracy. Whereas the libertarian Rawls seemed to present his theory of justice as universally true, communitarians argued that the standards of justice must be found in forms of life and traditions of particular societies and hence can vary from context to context. Liberals insist that democratic self-government requires a fair and neutral political framework in which individuals can enjoy freedom and be treated as equals. As such, a democratic state must be as minimal as possible; its primary function is to maintain the social conditions and political institutions under which free and equal persons can live harmoniously together. On the communitarian view, democracy requires that individuals embody the virtues that make them capable of the true freedom of self-Government, and that these virtues can be properly nurtured only within the context of a proper community. Therefore, the state in a democratic society must undertake the project of forming its citizens' characters by providing the necessary conditions under which communities, and hence the individuals who compose them, can flourish.

Liberals posit a self that is by nature autonomous and thus enters into social associations by voluntary choice. According to communitarians, selves are essentially tied to the social contexts within which they live. Such contexts form the dispositions, desires, interests, and commitments of individuals. Communitarian thinkers in the 1980s such as Michael Sandel and Charles Taylor argued that Rawlsian liberalism rests on an overly individualistic conception of the self. However, the western political thought has dominant streams such as liberalism, conservatism radicalism and communitarianism.

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## 1.4 CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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In recent times, there are many critical notes about the dominant constructions of western philosophy from within west and outside. The postmodern philosophical inquiries are not only critical about grand philosophical narratives but also provide different direction to philosophy by bringing into view the marginalized philosophical narratives. The periphery has brought into centre by celebrating the differences, which is either subsumed or negated in generalization. The social movements such as feminists, blacks, ethnic, ecological, post colonial are critical about the very foundations and constructions of western philosophy. The continental thinker Emmanuel Levinas opposes the orientation of western philosophy with a claim of *ethics as first philosophy*. Against the construction of philosophy around centre, he proposes 'other' as central. The postmodern thinker, Michel Foucault discusses possibility of discourse by analyzing the relationship between knowledge and power. Antonio Gramsci reminds the role of intellectuals in forming counter hegemony against ruling class hegemony. Edward Said in *Orientalism* exposes the colonial interests in writing/viewing other. The post colonial thinkers are not only critical about western imperialist forces but also their knowledge systems by highlighting the specificity of indigenous/local cultures. The western rationality and its scientific progress were critically viewed. Against the modern liberal self, embedded self was celebrated.

The distinguishing characteristic of postmodernist theorizing is its rejection of traditional philosophy and metaphysics. The postmodernists claim to have rejected not one thesis or another but rather the entire philosophical tradition from Plato through George Santayana. They problematised the notion of modernity and the philosophy constructed around that idea. The theoretical discourses of modernity from Descartes through the Enlightenment and its progeny championed reason as the source of progress in knowledge and society, as well as the privileged locus of truth and the foundation of systematic knowledge. Reason was deemed competent to discover adequate theoretical and practical norms upon which systems of thought and action could be built and society could be restructured. This Enlightenment project is also operative in the American, French, and other democratic revolutions which attempted to overturn the feudal world and to produce a just and egalitarian social order that would embody reason and social progress. Yet the construction of modernity produced untold suffering and misery for its victims, ranging from the peasantry, proletariat, and artisans oppressed by capitalist industrialization to the exclusion of women from the public sphere, to the genocide of imperialist colonialization. Modernity also produced a set of disciplinary institutions, practices, and discourses which legitimate its modes of domination and control. The Postmodern theory argues that meaning is not simply given, but is socially constructed across a number of institutional sites and practices. The postmodern thinkers such as Foucault and others analyze the institutional bases of discourse, the viewpoints and positions from which people speak, and the power relations these allow and presuppose. They interpret discourse as a site and object of struggle where different groups strive for hegemony and the production of meaning and ideology. From these beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, postmodernists continued their attack on conventional philosophic and social scientific approaches, developing a wide range of views that challenged the notion of progress, truth, reality, and

values. Among the writers who are often classified as postmodernist are Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Roland Barthes, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Paul Virilio, and Arthur Kroker. Postmodern philosophy is a philosophical direction which is critical of the foundational assumptions and structures of philosophy. There is no single world view that captures reality, no master story (or meta-narrative) that underlies humanity. Reason is to be distrusted because there is no way to know which person's reason is reliable. There is no such thing as objectivity. There is no "truth" to appeal to for understanding history and culture. There are no moral absolutes. The West, with its colonialist heritage, deserves ridicule. Texts, whether religious or philosophical or literary, do not have intrinsic meaning. Ideas are cultural creations.

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## 1.5 LET US SUM UP

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Western philosophy is an intellectual enterprise in comprehensive understanding of reality. From the beginning it evolved as a distinct discipline by keeping distance from both theology and science. It has classified into metaphysics, epistemology and axiology and developed further in the same line of demarcation. Skepticism, scientific method, individualism are identified as the features of modern western philosophy. In metaphysics, descriptive and revisionary are two dominant approaches of doing metaphysics. In epistemology, Empiricism and rationalism are two chief currents in knowing reality and the theories of knowledge are further developed by different thinkers. Correspondence, coherence and pragmatic are prominent theories of truth. In Political philosophy, liberalism, radicalism, conservatism and communitarianism are prominent theories. However, in recent times with the rise of new social movements and postmodern thinking, the dominant constructions of western philosophy are under scrutiny.

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## 1.6 KEY WORDS

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Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, skepticism, philosophical method, postmodernism, liberalism, empiricism, rationalism, theories of truth, renaissance, medieval, modern, Greco-Roman

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## 1.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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