

Lecture 7

Post-Classical Philosophy

Late 19th Century • Crisis of Rationalism • Suspicion,
Will, Existence, Science, History

Schopenhauer • Kierkegaard • Nietzsche • Positivism • Marxism

Lecture Map

- From the collapse of classical confidence in Reason to the emergence of post-classical distrust.
- Schopenhauer: the world as Representation and the blind force of the World Will.
- Kierkegaard: the single individual, existential choice, dread, despair, and the leap of faith.
- Nietzsche: will to power, critique of morality, nihilism, and the revaluation of all values.
- Positivism: science replaces metaphysics; philosophy becomes the organizer of knowledge.
- Marxism: material conditions, class struggle, alienation, and revolutionary transformation.

Why Post-Classical Philosophy Begins with Crisis

- The second half of the nineteenth century exposed deep cracks in the optimistic worldview of Enlightenment rationalism.
- Industrialization, urbanization, and social upheaval made history appear less like the triumph of Reason and more like a field of conflict and dislocation.
- The promise of progress was shadowed by alienation, instability, and the individual's loss of significance inside impersonal systems.
- As a result, philosophy turned away from total systems and toward hidden forces, lived experience, and the suffering human subject.

From Classical to Post-Classical Thinking

Dimension	Classical View	Post-Classical Shift	What Changes	Result
Reason	Supreme guide to truth	One force among others	Reason loses sovereignty	Suspicion
Human being	Bearer of universal rationality	Concrete, vulnerable, finite self	Existence becomes central	Anthropological turn
History	Rational unfolding of Spirit	Arena of contradiction and domination	Progress becomes ambiguous	Disillusionment
Philosophy	System-building	Interpretation, critique, diagnosis	Less architecture, more unmasking	Anti-systematic style
Truth	Objective and universal	Conditioned, mediated, often concealed	Surface meanings are distrusted	Depth analysis

Core Features of Post-Classicism

- Rejection of all-encompassing speculative systems that claim to explain the whole of reality.
- A decisive turn toward the concrete human being rather than abstract universal categories.
- Growing interest in irrational, pre-rational, or non-rational forces: will, instinct, anxiety, unconscious drives.
- An emphasis on interpretation, critique, and exposure rather than rational reconciliation.
- A new tragic tone: philosophy becomes a response to fragmentation, crisis, and the loss of guarantees.

The “Philosophy of Suspicion”

- Paul Ricoeur later used this term to unite thinkers who distrust the transparency of consciousness.
- Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are called the “masters of suspicion” because each unmasks a hidden force beneath conscious motives.
- Conscious thought is no longer taken at face value: it may be shaped by class interest, instinct, desire, or repression.
- The shift is profound: philosophy moves from “I think” to the unsettling insight that “I am thought” by forces deeper than myself.

A New Anthropocentrism

- Post-classical philosophy remains centered on the human being, but not in a triumphalist sense.
- Man is no longer the instrument of a universal rational order; he becomes a tragic and unstable center of reflection.
- The subject must search for meaning without the old guarantees of God, metaphysics, or historical inevitability.
- This anthropocentrism is therefore dramatic: freedom expands, but certainty collapses.

01

Arthur Schopenhauer

The first great skeptic of rational order: beneath the world's calm surface lies a blind and insatiable Will.

World as Representation

- For Schopenhauer, the world of objects, laws, and everyday order is only Representation: reality as it appears to a knowing subject.
- What we ordinarily call “the world” is a structured image, filtered through the forms of human cognition.
- This means the visible order of things is not ultimate truth but a veil drawn over something far darker and more fundamental.
- Intellect therefore does not reveal the essence of reality; it merely organizes appearances.

The World Will as Hidden Reality

- Behind representation stands the World Will: blind, unconscious, purposeless striving.
- This Will is not rational design, divine wisdom, or moral order; it is a restless force without final aim.
- It manifests in every level of existence: natural processes, bodily drives, passions, and the urge to continue living.
- The intellect is secondary—it serves life, survival, and the needs of the Will rather than governing them.

Pessimism: Why Life Means Suffering

- Because the Will endlessly strives, human life is defined by lack, tension, and dissatisfaction.
- When desire is unfulfilled, we suffer from deprivation; when it is fulfilled, we fall into boredom.
- Thus existence moves between pain and emptiness, never arriving at stable fulfillment.
- Schopenhauer strips away heroic illusions and presents life as the tragic self-reproduction of a force that never rests.

Temporary and Radical Paths of Liberation

Temporary Release

- Art suspends practical desire and lets the subject contemplate without wanting.
- In aesthetic contemplation, the person becomes a "pure subject of knowledge."
- For a moment, the tyranny of the Will loosens its grip.

Deeper Liberation

- Compassion arises when one recognizes shared suffering in all living beings.
- Asceticism negates the will to live through self-restraint and the refusal of desire.
- Liberation comes not by satisfying the Will, but by refusing to serve it.

02

Søren Kierkegaard

The single individual against the system: truth becomes inwardness, choice, and risk before God.

Kierkegaard against Hegel

- Kierkegaard rejects the grandeur of Hegel's system because it dissolves the concrete individual into abstract categories.
- A philosophical palace may be architecturally brilliant, yet still leave no place for the living, suffering person.
- What matters is not the logic of totality but the inward drama of existing as a self.
- His revolt is therefore existential: philosophy must begin with the individual, not the system.

Subjective Truth

- For Kierkegaard, truth is not merely a correct proposition; it is the truth by which a person exists.
- The decisive issue is not detached knowledge, but how one relates oneself to what one claims to believe.
- Objective explanations may describe the world, yet they cannot substitute for personal commitment.
- Truth becomes inwardness: lived appropriation, not mere conceptual possession.

The Three Stages of Existence

Stage	Defining Aim	Dominant Mood	Inner Problem	Possible Transition
Aesthetic	Pleasure, immediacy, novelty	Excitement mixed with emptiness	No stable self	Despair
Ethical	Duty, responsibility, stable choice	Seriousness	Cannot overcome finitude	Crisis of guilt
Religious	Absolute relation to God	Faith amid paradox	Reason cannot secure certainty	Leap of faith

The Aesthetic Stage

- The aesthete lives in the present moment, pursuing pleasure, novelty, and stimulation.
- This life appears attractive, but it lacks continuity and inner center: the self is scattered across experiences.
- Beneath the brilliance of aesthetic life lies boredom and the fear of emptiness.
- In the end, the aesthetic stage collapses into despair because pleasure cannot ground a stable self.

The Ethical Stage

- In the ethical stage, the individual chooses commitment, responsibility, law, and stable personal identity.
- Marriage, vocation, and duty give form to life and rescue the self from fragmentation.
- Yet ethics is still not the final answer: the ethical self remains finite and cannot reconcile itself with the Absolute by its own power.
- This is why even the ethical life eventually confronts crisis.

The Religious Stage and the Leap of Faith

- The religious stage is not routine religiosity but a personal relation to God that surpasses rational certainty.
- The leap of faith occurs where thought and ethics reach their limit and cannot guarantee meaning.
- Abraham becomes the model because faith may require obedience beyond ordinary ethical intelligibility.
- Faith is therefore risk, paradox, and solitude rather than calm possession of doctrine.

Dread, Despair, and the Authentic Self

Dread / Anxiety

- The dizziness of freedom before open possibility.
- A sign that the individual must choose and cannot hide behind systems.
- It reveals responsibility rather than psychological weakness.

Despair

- The sickness unto death: failure to become oneself rightly before God.
- Either refusing the self or asserting it in rebellion against its source.
- Passing through despair may become the beginning of authenticity.

03

Friedrich Nietzsche

Suspicion becomes a hammer: values, morality, and metaphysics are tested as symptoms of life.

Will to Power

- Nietzsche replaces both rational order and Schopenhauerian resignation with an energetic image of life as expansion.
- At the center of existence stands the will to power: the drive to grow, interpret, overcome, and intensify one's force.
- Life is not primarily contemplation or suffering; it is self-assertion and transformation.
- Every ideal must therefore be examined genealogically: what kind of life does it serve?

Apollonian and Dionysian

Apollonian Principle

- Order, measure, form, clarity, beautiful appearance.
- The shaping power that gives boundaries and intelligible structure.
- Necessary for culture, but dangerous when absolutized.

Dionysian Principle

- Ecstasy, excess, chaos, instinct, dissolution of rigid individuality.
- The deep energy of life before rational domestication.
- Without it, culture becomes sterile and life-denying.

"God Is Dead"

- This formula does not simply express atheism; it diagnoses the collapse of the entire metaphysical horizon of Western civilization.
- If God is dead, then inherited moral certainties lose their unquestioned authority.
- Humanity can no longer rely on transcendent foundations to justify truth, value, and purpose.
- The consequence is both terrifying and liberating: the old sky is empty, but creation becomes possible.

Nihilism and the Revaluation of All Values

- The death of inherited meaning opens the danger of nihilism: the experience that nothing has objective value.
- Nietzsche refuses passive nihilism and turns crisis into a demand for active creation.
- The revaluation of all values means critically overturning morality born from weakness, resentment, and herd conformity.
- New values must arise from strength, affirmation, and fidelity to life.

The Übermensch

- The Übermensch is not a biological species or political ruler, but an existential ideal of self-overcoming.
- Humanity is transitional: man is a rope stretched over an abyss, not a final achievement.
- The overman creates values instead of merely inheriting them, and says “yes” to life without appealing to higher guarantees.
- Nietzsche’s ideal therefore unites freedom, creativity, courage, and discipline of spirit.

Eternal Recurrence as Ethical Test

- Eternal recurrence imagines that every moment of your life must return again and again in exactly the same sequence.
- This thought functions as a severe ethical filter: can you affirm your life so completely that you would will its endless repetition?
- To bear recurrence is to love fate rather than merely endure it.
- The strongest spirit is the one capable of affirming existence in its totality, including suffering.

04

Positivism

A scientific answer to crisis: abandon metaphysical speculation and reorganize knowledge around observation, law, and empirical method.

Why Positivism Distrusts Metaphysics

- Positivism expresses suspicion in a different way: it doubts the value of speculative explanations that cannot be verified.
- Questions about ultimate causes, absolute essences, and hidden substances are treated as pseudo-problems.
- Knowledge becomes legitimate only when grounded in observation, experiment, and scientifically established regularities.
- Philosophy must stop ruling above the sciences and begin serving the coordination of their results.

Comte's Law of Three Stages

Stage	How the World Is Explained	Typical Concepts	Limitation	Outcome
Theological	By gods or supernatural powers	Divine agency, sacred will	Mythic dependence	Pre-scientific
Metaphysical	By abstract essences and "causes"	Substance, spirit, nature	Too speculative	Transitional
Positive	By laws discovered through observation	Regularity, relation, method	Renounces ultimate why	Scientific maturity

The Positive Stage and the New Role of Philosophy

- In the positive stage, inquiry shifts from asking why things exist to asking how they function and relate.
- Philosophy ceases to be the queen of sciences and becomes a systematizer of specialized knowledge.
- Its task is synthetic and organizational rather than metaphysical: to connect the sciences into a coherent order.
- Truth is therefore redefined as scientifically valid knowledge.

Herbert Spencer and the Organic Theory of Society

- Spencer extends positivism by interpreting society through the lens of evolution.
- He compares society to a living organism whose parts differentiate and cooperate as complexity increases.
- Government resembles a nervous system, while economic life resembles circulation and nourishment.
- The human being loses metaphysical exceptionalism and is inscribed within wider natural processes.

What Positivism Contributes to Post-Classical Thought

- Unlike existential and irrationalist currents, positivism seeks stability through method rather than inwardness.
- Its importance lies in narrowing philosophy's ambitions and tying knowledge to empirical responsibility.
- Yet the cost is also clear: meaning, value, and existential depth risk being excluded as unscientific residues.
- Post-classical philosophy therefore contains both anti-rational and scientific responses to crisis.

05

Karl Marx and Marxism

Suspicion becomes socio-economic critique: consciousness is shaped by labor, production, class conflict, and material life.

Marx's Reversal of Hegel

- Marx argues that Hegel placed reality “on its head” by treating Spirit as primary and material life as derivative.
- He reverses this perspective: consciousness does not create social being; social being conditions consciousness.
- Dialectic remains, but its engine is no longer Spirit. It is material contradiction embedded in historical production.
- This move grounds philosophy in labor, economy, and concrete social relations.

Dialectical Materialism

- Reality is not static matter but matter in development, conflict, and transformation.
- Historical life unfolds through contradictions built into economic and social structures.
- The dialectic is no longer an abstract logic of concepts but the movement of material history itself.
- To understand society, one must analyze production, property, labor, and the conflict they generate.

Base and Superstructure

Base

- The economic foundation of society: productive forces and relations of production.
- Determines how life is materially organized and how labor is distributed.
- Provides the real structure beneath political and cultural forms.

Superstructure

- Law, politics, religion, art, and ideology arise on the basis of the economic order.
- They do not float independently above history but reflect and stabilize class interests.
- Ideals often mask material relations of domination.

Class Struggle as the Motor of History

- For Marx, history is driven by conflict between classes positioned differently within the mode of production.
- Those who own the means of production confront those who must sell their labor-power to survive.
- Class struggle is not accidental; it is structural and historical.
- Through this conflict, social forms become unstable and new historical orders emerge.

Alienation under Capitalism

- The worker becomes alienated from the product of labor, which no longer belongs to him.
- He is alienated from the activity of labor, which becomes external compulsion rather than self-expression.
- He is alienated from other people and from his own human essence, reduced to a function within a mechanism.
- Alienation therefore names both economic dispossession and a deformation of humanity itself.

Praxis: Not Only Interpret but Change

- Marx's suspicion culminates in a practical demand: theory must become a force of transformation.
- If the existing order is built on exploitation and mystification, explanation alone is insufficient.
- Philosophy reaches fulfillment when it contributes to the abolition of alienation and class domination.
- Thus Marxism joins diagnosis to revolution, critique to praxis.

The New Determinations of Human Existence

- Biological determination: in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, life is governed by will, force, instinct, and vitality.
- Existential determination: in Kierkegaard, the self is shaped by anxiety, choice, inward struggle, and faith.
- Economic determination: in Marx, consciousness is inseparable from production, labor, class position, and ideology.
- Epistemic determination: in positivism, valid knowledge is disciplined by empirical method rather than metaphysical ambition.

Three Competing Responses to the Same Crisis

Response	Main Question	What It Distrusts	Primary Lens	Representative Thinkers
Irrationalism	What rules beneath reason?	Surface rational order	Will, instinct, inward experience	Schopenhauer, Nietzsche
Existentialism	How can the individual exist authentically?	Systemic abstraction	Choice, anxiety, faith	Kierkegaard
Scientism / Positivism	What counts as valid knowledge?	Metaphysical speculation	Observation and law	Comte, Spencer
Historical Materialism	What structures social consciousness?	Ideological self-deception	Labor, class, production	Marx

Why Lecture 7 Marks a Turning Point

- The human being is no longer presented as the transparent subject of reason celebrated by classical philosophy.
- Instead, man is conditioned by forces larger or deeper than conscious intention: biological, existential, social, and economic.
- Post-classical thought tears away masks and reveals dependence, vulnerability, conflict, and the fragility of meaning.
- This shift opens the path toward twentieth-century philosophy, where crisis becomes a normal starting point.

Legacy for Twentieth-Century Thought

- Without Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the existential analyses of Sartre and Camus would be unimaginable.
- Without Marx, critical theory and the social critique of the Frankfurt School lose a decisive foundation.
- Without the suspicion of hidden structures, later post-structuralism and genealogy would not take their characteristic form.
- Lecture 7 therefore introduces not only new doctrines, but a new mood of philosophy: restless, critical, and unillusioned.

Final Synthesis

- Post-classical philosophy begins where the confidence of classical rationalism breaks down.
- It asks what lies beneath the official surface of reason, morality, religion, science, and society.
- Its answers differ dramatically—Will, faith, power, science, class—but all reject the innocence of appearances.
- The result is a transformed philosophy centered on crisis, interpretation, and the difficult task of creating meaning without old guarantees.