Practical Session Plan No. 7

Post-Classical Philosophy

Designed for guided discussion, concept clarification, comparative analysis, and short oral responses.

Core route

Crisis of rationalism
↓
Suspicion and irrationalism
↓
Schopenhauer
Kierkegaard
Nietzsche
↓
Positivism and Marxism
↓
Case study and synthesis

How to use this deck in class

A practical session presentation is not only for reading but for steering discussion

- Use each philosopher block to combine short content input with one central discussion question.
- Pause after key theses and ask students to reformulate them in their own words.
- Return to the recurring oppositions: reason vs. will, system vs. existence, science vs. metaphysics, spirit vs. material conditions.
- Treat the case study and conceptual mapping as integrative tasks that reveal how post-classical philosophy “reads behind appearances”.

Session learning goals

By the end of the practical session, students should be able to do four things

- Explain why post-classical philosophy emerges from a crisis of confidence in classical rationalism.
- Differentiate the central theses of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, positivism, and Marxism.
- Apply the optics of suspicion to moral, social, and cultural phenomena.
- Compare distinct concepts of human existence: will, dread, freedom, labor, science, and value-creation.

Seminar roadmap

Four blocks define the practical session

- Block I: the crisis of rationalism and the birth of suspicion.
- Block II: irrationalism and existential challenges.
- Block III: scientific and social structures: positivism and Marxism.
- Block IV: case study, conceptual mapping, vocabulary, and final synthesis.

Block I. The historical turn

From the self-confidence of classical reason to a fractured modern world

- Grand systems promised a rational order of reality and history.
- Industrial society exposed alienation, instability, inequality, and depersonalization.
- The individual no longer felt like a transparent participant in Reason’s triumph.
- Philosophy shifted from universal logical systems toward the suffering, anxious, concrete subject.

Why did classical rationalism enter crisis?

Why the old model seemed insufficient

- It overestimated the power of reason to explain the whole of life.
- It treated history as meaningful necessity rather than lived conflict.
- It left too little room for anxiety, desire, suffering, and irrational forces.
- It often dissolved the person into abstract concepts or historical logic.

What post-classicism changed

- It refused total systems as the final form of philosophy.
- It placed existence, interpretation, and hidden motives at the center.
- It treated consciousness as unstable and partly deceptive.
- It made philosophy more diagnostic, critical, and anthropological.

The “fundamental rift”

A core seminar question: what separates classical from post-classical thought?

- Classical philosophy trusted reason as the supreme medium of truth.
- Post-classical philosophy suspects that reason is often a surface effect, a mask, or an instrument.
- The center of inquiry shifts from the structure of the Absolute to the contradictions of lived human existence.
- This is not the abandonment of thought, but the radicalization of critique.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Paul Ricoeur's later label helps name a deeper 19th-century tendency

- Suspicion means that consciousness cannot simply be trusted at face value.
- Meaning is not only expressed openly; it is concealed, distorted, or displaced.
- Interpretation becomes unmasking: one asks what force, interest, or desire hides beneath ideals.
- This method is especially associated with Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as "masters of suspicion".

Why are the "masters of suspicion" revolutionary?

Marx

He uncovers material and class interests behind law, religion, and ideology.

Nietzsche

He exposes morality as a historical product of resentment, weakness, and value struggle.

Freud

He reveals unconscious drives beneath rational self-description and moral self-control.

Shared move

All distrust the transparency of consciousness and seek the hidden mechanism behind surface meaning.

Anthropocentrism: old and new

Classical anthropocentrism

- The human being is valuable as a rational participant in universal order.
- The subject is often integrated into reason, spirit, or moral law.
- Human dignity is linked to universality and intelligibility.

Post-classical anthropocentrism

- The human being becomes tragic, fractured, embodied, desiring, and historically conditioned.
- The person is not only rational but anxious, alienated, and internally conflicted.
- Humanity stands at the center precisely because certainty has disappeared.

Block II. Irrationalism begins with Schopenhauer

The visible world is not the final truth of existence

- Schopenhauer reinterprets the world as Representation: the world as it appears to a subject.
- Behind representation stands the World Will: blind, irrational, restless striving.
- The intellect is not sovereign; it is an instrument developed in the service of life.
- Pessimism follows because willing condemns beings to endless lack, struggle, and boredom.

Representation and Will

Representation

- The ordered phenomenal world perceived through forms of consciousness.
- A surface of intelligibility that allows practical orientation.
- Necessary for life, but not the deepest reality.

World Will

- The underlying force of all striving and self-assertion.
- Blind, aimless, insatiable, and indifferent to human happiness.
- The true foundation of the world for Schopenhauer.

Why is the intellect only an instrument?

A key practical-session prompt

- The intellect serves survival rather than disinterested truth in the first instance.
- Reason rationalizes desires that originate deeper than thought.
- Human consciousness is therefore secondary to the more primitive force of willing.
- Schopenhauer's critique weakens the classical image of the self-governing rational subject.

Escapes from the tyranny of the Will

Art

Aesthetic contemplation suspends practical desire and lets the subject become temporarily disinterested.

Compassion

One recognizes shared suffering because the same Will pulses through all living beings.

Asceticism

The deepest liberation is the negation of desire and the refusal to serve the Will.

Tone

Freedom is not triumphant self-realization but release from compulsion and craving.

Discussion question: Schopenhauer

Suggested oral response route

- If love, ambition, and striving are masks of the Will, what becomes of personal freedom?
- Ask students whether Schopenhauer liberates the subject by revealing illusion, or destroys agency by reducing consciousness to a tool.
- Encourage answers that distinguish between temporary aesthetic freedom and radical ascetic negation.

Kierkegaard and the birth of existentialism

Against systems that explain everything except the individual

- Kierkegaard challenges Hegelian system-building from the side of personal existence.
- Truth is not only objective correctness but subjective appropriation.
- The decisive questions are lived inwardly: choice, anxiety, despair, guilt, faith.
- The single individual matters more than abstract reconciliation in universal spirit.

Three stages of existence

Aesthetic

Life seeks novelty, pleasure, immediacy, and the avoidance of commitment.

Ethical

Life accepts responsibility, duty, stable choice, and a coherent self.

Religious

Life enters a paradoxical relation to God beyond purely ethical universality.

Movement

Human development is not automatic; it requires existential decision.

Why is the ethical stage not final?

Kierkegaard's paradoxical move beyond moral universality

- Ethics provides seriousness and responsibility, but not the ultimate answer to existential rupture.
- The self still confronts finitude, guilt, and the impossibility of grounding itself completely.
- The religious stage introduces a personal relation to God that cannot be reduced to public moral norms.
- This move is paradoxical because it exceeds reason without becoming mere irrational chaos.

Leap of Faith and Despair

Two linked concepts for class explanation

- Despair reveals that the self cannot securely found itself within worldly meanings alone.
- The Leap of Faith is not logical proof but existential commitment in the face of uncertainty.
- Faith therefore becomes a risk, not an epistemic possession.
- Kierkegaard transforms philosophy into a drama of inward decision.

Discussion question: Kierkegaard

Suggested oral response route

- Why does Kierkegaard think that a complete philosophical system can still fail the individual?
- Ask students to distinguish objective explanation from existential appropriation.
- A strong answer should show why dread and choice cannot be “solved” by conceptual totality.

Nietzsche: life, value, and critique

Suspicion now turns against morality itself

- Nietzsche reads morality historically rather than as eternal truth.
- He opposes life-denying moral ideals that glorify weakness, guilt, and ressentiment.
- His project is not mere destruction, but the creation of stronger evaluative possibilities.
- He radicalizes suspicion by making values themselves objects of genealogy.

“God is dead”

A cultural diagnosis rather than a simple atheistic slogan

- The phrase signals the collapse of a shared metaphysical and moral horizon.
- Inherited values persist, but their transcendent foundation has eroded.
- Modernity therefore faces nihilism: how can one justify meaning after the death of absolutes?
- Nietzsche’s answer is active revaluation rather than passive despair.

Revaluation of all values

What Nietzsche rejects

- Morality that sanctifies weakness and dependence.
- Life-negating resentment disguised as virtue.
- Submission to inherited norms as if they were eternal truths.

What Nietzsche affirms

- Creative self-overcoming and spiritual strength.
- The courage to evaluate rather than merely obey.
- A future-oriented culture capable of producing new values.

Key Nietzschean concepts in the seminar

Will to Power

A basic tendency toward expansion, enhancement, ordering, and self-overcoming.

Übermensch

The figure who creates values beyond herd morality and inherited dependence.

Eternal Recurrence

A thought-test: can one affirm life so fully as to will its infinite repetition?

Apollonian / Dionysian

Form and measure versus ecstatic excess; culture lives through their tension.

Discussion question: Nietzsche

Suggested oral response route

- Does Nietzsche simply destroy morality, or does he demand a higher responsibility for value-creation?
- Invite students to compare passive nihilism with affirmative self-overcoming.
- Ask whether the Übermensch is a social ideal, an existential type, or a provocative critical metaphor.

Block III. Positivism and Marxism

Two very different responses to the crisis of metaphysical philosophy

- Positivism answers the crisis by restricting valid knowledge to science and empirical method.
- Marxism answers it by relocating consciousness within material social relations and historical production.
- Both reject speculative metaphysics, but they do so in very different styles and with different aims.
- For the seminar, students should learn to distinguish scientific reduction from socio-historical critique.

Positivism: science instead of metaphysics

Auguste Comte's key thesis

- Human thought develops through stages; metaphysics is not the final achievement of reason.
- The mature mind seeks lawful, observable relations rather than ultimate hidden essences.
- Philosophy loses the role of "queen of sciences" and becomes their organizer or systematizer.
- Knowledge must be positive: testable, ordered, and empirically grounded.

Comte’s Law of Three Stages

Theological

Phenomena are explained through divine or supernatural agencies.

Metaphysical

Abstract entities and essences replace myth but remain speculative.

Positive

Science seeks regularities, laws, and verifiable relations.

Implication

Modern philosophy must coordinate sciences, not compete with them through speculation.

Discussion question: Positivism

Suggested oral response route

- Why did Comte think metaphysics belonged to an earlier stage of intellectual development?
- Ask students whether philosophy loses importance here or gains a new interdisciplinary function.
- Encourage them to distinguish explanation by causes from explanation by lawful relations.

Marxism: the materialist conception of history

A shift from ideas to production, labor, and social relations

- Historical life is structured by how people produce and reproduce material existence.
- Economic relations form the base of society; institutions and beliefs arise as superstructure.
- Ideas are not independent clouds above life but socially situated products.
- Critique must therefore reveal the relation between consciousness and material interests.

Base and Superstructure

Base

- The totality of production relations and material economic organization.
- The structure that conditions class position, labor, and property relations.
- The foundation of social life in the Marxist model.

Superstructure

- Law, politics, religion, morality, and cultural forms.
- These do not float freely above society but reflect and stabilize the base.
- Ideology can disguise material domination as universal truth.

Why are religion and law not “independent”?

A key practical-session prompt

- Marx does not deny their reality, but rejects their autonomy from material conditions.
- They can universalize and legitimize historically specific class interests.
- Institutions of meaning often participate in the reproduction of social order.
- Suspicion here targets not individual sincerity first, but structural dependence.

Alienation: Kierkegaard and Marx

One term, two very different diagnostic frameworks

- In Kierkegaard, alienation appears as despair, inward rupture, and estrangement from the true self before God.
- In Marx, alienation appears in labor when the worker is separated from product, process, species-being, and others.
- Both diagnose a divided human condition, but one is existential-religious and the other socio-economic.
- The seminar task is to identify both divergence and convergence.

Convergence and divergence

Points of convergence

- Human beings become separated from what they most deeply are.
- Everyday life contains hidden distortion beneath ordinary normality.
- Freedom requires a transformation rather than mere description.

Points of divergence

- Kierkegaard centers inward subjectivity and relation to God.
- Marx centers labor, class, and material social structures.
- One diagnoses existential despair; the other diagnoses structural exploitation.

Block IV. Case Study: The optics of suspicion

Marriage as a social phenomenon to be interpreted rather than simply celebrated

- Task: strip away the romantic surface and search for the hidden motive.
- Use this case to demonstrate how post-classical thinkers reinterpret familiar institutions.
- The goal is not cynicism for its own sake, but methodological training in philosophical diagnosis.
- Students should compare what each thinker sees beneath appearance.

Marriage through four lenses

Schopenhauer

Romantic love can be read as nature’s strategy for species reproduction through individual illusion.

Marx

Marriage may function as an economic form that secures property, inheritance, and social reproduction.

Nietzsche

Marriage may either intensify self-overcoming or reduce partners to mutual domestication and herd security.

Kierkegaard

Marriage separates aesthetic novelty-seeking from ethical responsibility and commitment before God.

Schopenhauer on romantic love

Why is love an illusion in this framework?

- Individual passion disguises the impersonal aim of the species.
- The subject believes in unique fulfillment while serving the reproduction of life's blind striving.
- Love therefore looks intimate from within but objective from the standpoint of the Will.
- This is suspicion directed toward one of the most idealized human experiences.

Marx on marriage

What does the contract consolidate?

- Marriage can be interpreted as part of property relations and the organization of inheritance.
- It participates in the reproduction of labor power and social order across generations.
- Its emotional language may obscure legal and economic functions.
- This reading does not deny affection, but asks what social form the union stabilizes.

Nietzsche on marriage

How can marriage be judged through the Will to Power?

- A strong union would be one of mutual elevation, discipline, and self-overcoming.
- A weak union becomes reciprocal limitation motivated by fear, conformity, and comfort.
- The question is whether marriage creates higher life or protects mediocrity.
- Nietzsche's lens makes marriage a test of vitality rather than mere social respectability.

Kierkegaard on marriage

Aesthetic versus ethical interpretations

- The aesthetic individual sees marriage in terms of attraction, novelty, and emotional intensity.
- The ethical individual sees it as a sustained choice and responsibility-bearing commitment.
- Marriage reveals whether a person wants endless possibility or a concrete form of duty.
- Kierkegaard turns the institution into a mirror of existential maturity.

Suggested class discussion after the case study

Bring the four perspectives into direct confrontation

- Which interpretation is the most reductive, and which is the most illuminating?
- Can one institution genuinely contain biological, economic, existential, and power dimensions at once?
- Ask students whether suspicion destroys meaning or deepens understanding by exposing hidden layers.

Exercise: conceptual mapping

Students connect paired terms in one logically complete sentence

- Base – Superstructure (Marx).
- Leap of Faith – Despair (Kierkegaard).
- Eternal Recurrence – Übermensch (Nietzsche).
- Law of Three Stages – Positive Stage (Comte).

Model connection: Marx

Base – Superstructure

- The totality of economic relations forms the base of society.
- Law, religion, politics, and culture arise as ideological superstructure upon that base.
- The sentence students should reach: material production conditions the symbolic and institutional order.

Model connection: Kierkegaard

Leap of Faith – Despair

- Despair appears when earthly meaning cannot fully ground the self.
- The Leap of Faith is the paradoxical answer that commits the self beyond rational certainty.
- The completed sentence should show how existential crisis leads to personal transcendence.

Model connection: Nietzsche

Eternal Recurrence – Übermensch

- Eternal Recurrence tests whether one can affirm life without resentment or escape.
- The Übermensch is the figure strong enough to will life repeatedly and creatively.
- The logical connection is affirmation: only a higher type can desire the recurrence of existence.

Model connection: Comte

Law of Three Stages – Positive Stage

- Human thought moves historically from theological to metaphysical to positive explanation.
- The positive stage culminates this development through scientific knowledge.
- The completed sentence should express necessity of transition from speculation to empirical law.

Vocabulary for philosophical discourse I

Alienation

A condition in which human activity confronts the person as an alien dominating force.

Representation

For Schopenhauer, the world as it appears within the forms of consciousness.

Will to live

The blind, insatiable force that constitutes the world's inner essence.

Asceticism

Voluntary self-restraint aimed at negating the tyranny of desire.

Vocabulary for philosophical discourse II

Leap of Faith

An existential act of commitment beyond demonstrative reason.

Dread / Anxiety

The dizziness of freedom and the burden of possible choice.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Interpretation as unmasking concealed motive and false consciousness.

Revaluation of Values

Nietzsche’s call to destroy inherited moral absolutes and create new meanings.

Vocabulary for philosophical discourse III

Base

The economic structure of society: production relations and material organization.

Superstructure

The legal, political, religious, and cultural forms built upon the base.

Positivism

The doctrine that authentic knowledge is grounded in empirical science.

Will to Power

Nietzsche's name for the drive toward expansion, enhancement, and dominance.

Comparative synthesis

What unites these very different thinkers?

- All challenge the sovereignty of transparent rational consciousness.
- All refuse to accept surface meaning as sufficient philosophical truth.
- Each philosopher reveals a deeper layer: Will, inward despair, power, scientific law, or material production.
- Post-classical philosophy thus becomes an art of diagnosis rather than a final system of reconciliation.

Comparison matrix

Main object of critique

- Schopenhauer: rational optimism and the illusion of willing subjects.
- Kierkegaard: system and objective truth without lived inwardness.
- Nietzsche: inherited morality and life-denying values.
- Comte: metaphysical speculation detached from scientific method.
- Marx: ideology detached from material social relations.

Key hidden layer uncovered

- World Will.
- Despair, choice, and subjective existence.
- Will to Power and genealogy of values.
- Positive scientific law.
- Economic base and class-conditioned consciousness.

Final discussion prompts

Questions for the last 10–15 minutes of class

- Does suspicion liberate us from illusion, or does it make trust impossible?
- Which thinker gives the most persuasive account of hidden motivation in modern life?
- Can post-classical philosophy still preserve human dignity after dismantling rational certainty?
- Is science, faith, value-creation, or social transformation the strongest answer to the crisis of meaning?

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Post-classical philosophy teaches that the human being is not transparent to itself. To think means to interpret, to question appearances, and to seek the force that speaks beneath the surface.

Seminar conclusion

Takeaway slide

One-sentence summary for the teacher to end the seminar

- From Schopenhauer to Marx, post-classical philosophy replaces confidence in pure reason with a search for deeper determinants of human life—will, dread, power, science, labor, and hidden interest.