Lecture 8

Contemporary Western Philosophy

Phenomenology and existentialism • psychoanalysis • analytic philosophy • hermeneutics • post-structuralism • postmodernism

From the search for authenticity to the critique of truth, power, and reality itself.

Map of the Lecture

Five intellectual turns organize the whole course material.

- Phenomenology and existentialism ask how a human being can live authentically after the collapse of secure systems of meaning.
- Psychoanalysis questions the transparency of the self and reveals unconscious drives, repression, and psychic conflict.
- Analytic philosophy shifts attention from metaphysical entities to the structure, limits, and use of language.
- Hermeneutics and post-structuralism reinterpret truth as historically mediated, linguistically shaped, and entangled with power.
- Postmodernism diagnoses the decline of universal narratives and the replacement of reality by signs, simulations, and plural micro-narratives.

Why Contemporary Philosophy Changes the Agenda

The 20th century no longer trusts Reason as an unquestioned refuge.

Historical pressure

- World wars, mass violence, and social upheaval undermine confidence in the idea of inevitable progress.
- Earlier critiques of reason already exposed hidden mechanisms of will, ideology, and psyche.
- Modernity produces both unprecedented knowledge and deep experiences of alienation.

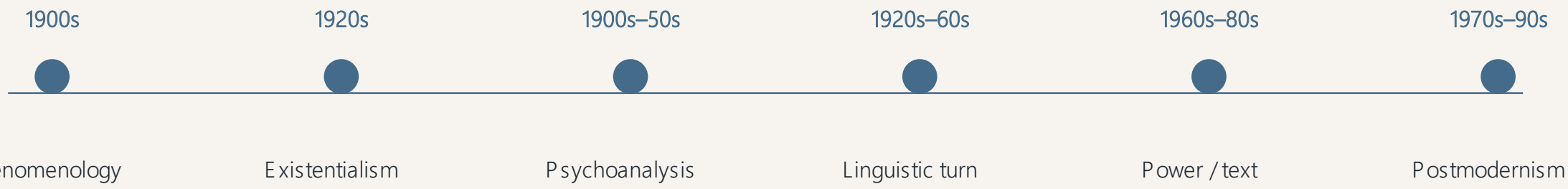
Philosophical consequence

- The focus moves from total systems to lived experience, language, interpretation, and fractured subjectivity.
- Truth is treated less as a static possession and more as a problem of access, mediation, and power.
- The human being appears as finite, conflicted, interpreted, and historically situated.

OVERVIEW

The Master Arc of Lecture 8

A broad movement from presence and meaning toward interpretation and simulation.



Each stage redefines what counts as reality, truth, subjectivity, and freedom.

Section I: The Quest for Authenticity

The first movement turns toward consciousness, existence, finitude, and revolt.

- Phenomenology suspends ready-made theories in order to describe how things are given in experience.
- Existentialism radicalizes this turn by focusing on freedom, anxiety, responsibility, death, and authenticity.
- The central question becomes: what remains for the human being when objective guarantees and inherited values collapse?

Authenticity is the keynote: not abstract certainty, but the struggle to inhabit one's own existence consciously.

Edmund Husserl: Back to the Things Themselves

Husserl wants philosophy to become a rigorous science of consciousness.

- The aim is not first to theorize about the external world, but to examine how phenomena appear to consciousness.
- Phenomenology strips away assumptions and returns to the immediate givenness of experience.
- The slogan “Back to the things themselves!” is a methodological demand for descriptive clarity rather than speculative construction.

Phenomenological Reduction and Epoché

Truth begins with suspension rather than assertion.

What Husserl brackets

- Naive belief in the independent existence of the external world.
- Inherited theories, explanatory habits, and everyday assumptions.
- The rush to treat objects as already fully known.

What Husserl seeks

- The pure essence of things as they are given in lived experience.
- A disciplined attention to appearance, structure, and intentional relation.
- A foundation for philosophy grounded in first-person evidence.

Intentionality: Consciousness Is Always of Something

Consciousness is active, directed, and relational.

- Intentionality means that consciousness is never an empty container and never a passive mirror.
- We do not encounter "pure seeing" or "pure loving"; we always see something, fear something, remember something, or desire something.
- The relation to the object belongs to the very structure of consciousness itself.

Phenomenology therefore studies not detached mental contents, but meaningful directedness.

Martin Heidegger: From Consciousness to Being

Heidegger shifts the center from cognition to existence itself.

- Heidegger introduces Dasein, the being for whom its own being is a question and a task.
- The human being is not just a thing among things, but the site where the world is disclosed and made meaningful.
- Ontology becomes a reflection on presence, finitude, and the conditions under which existence becomes authentically one’s own.

Dasein, Thrownness, and Das Man

Ordinary life begins in a condition not of our choosing.

Thrownness

- We find ourselves already placed in a world, history, language, and network of circumstances we did not choose.
- Existence starts from facticity rather than sovereign self-creation.

Das Man

- The anonymous “They” governs everyday life through public opinion, fashion, convention, and idle chatter.
- Inauthenticity is not evil but a way of fleeing the anxiety of freedom and responsibility.

Being-towards-death and Authenticity

Finitude becomes the decisive condition of genuine choice.

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> *Only the courageous recognition of finitude turns the “here and now” into a space of valuable choice.*

Heideggerian insight

Jean-Paul Sartre: Existence Precedes Essence

Without a divine plan or fixed human nature, freedom becomes absolute.

- Unlike manufactured objects, the human being has no pre-given essence or built-in purpose.
- Man first exists, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself through action.
- The self is therefore a project rather than a substance: what we are is what we make of ourselves.

Freedom as Burden and Responsibility

The absence of excuses intensifies freedom rather than diminishing it.

Condemned to be free

- Freedom is not a gift comfortably possessed; it is an unavoidable condition of existence.
- No external code can fully relieve the individual of decision.

Absolute responsibility

- Every choice becomes an act of self-creation.
- In choosing for oneself, one simultaneously projects an image of the human for all humanity.

Albert Camus: The Absurd

Meaning-seeking consciousness meets the silence of an indifferent world.

- The absurd is born from the collision between the human hunger for meaning and the world's refusal to answer.
- The world is not itself absurd; it is indifferent. Absurdity arises in the relation between the mind and that silence.
- Camus refuses both resignation and false transcendence, seeking dignity within lucidity.

Sisyphus and Metaphysical Rebellion

Awareness does not cancel the struggle; it transforms its meaning.

The myth

- Sisyphus endlessly pushes the stone up the mountain only to watch it roll back down.
- He becomes the emblem of repetitive labor and the human condition.

The paradoxical answer

- One must imagine Sisyphus happy because consciousness itself becomes a form of victory over fate.
- Rebellion is fidelity to oneself in a meaningless world, not hope for final triumph.

Section I Synthesis

From consciousness to finitude, the first section redefines the human condition.

- Husserl seeks descriptive certainty in the structures of experience.
- Heidegger turns from consciousness to existence and discovers authenticity through finitude.
- Sartre radicalizes freedom by denying pre-given essence.
- Camus preserves dignity through lucid rebellion in an indifferent universe.

Section II: Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious

The self is no longer transparent to itself.

- Psychoanalysis strips reason of its status as the unquestioned master in its own house.
- The psyche appears as a battlefield of drives, prohibitions, compromises, and symbols.
- Human culture is reinterpreted as both the fruit and the cost of repression.

Sigmund Freud: The Divided Psyche

Personality is a structure of conflict rather than a transparent unity.

- Freud describes the psyche through the dynamic relation of Id, Ego, and Superego.
- The Id seeks instinctual satisfaction according to the pleasure principle.
- The Ego mediates between instinct, social reality, and moral demand, while the Superego acts as internal censor and judge.

Id, Ego, and Superego

The core Freudian model of psychic conflict.

Instinct and pressure

- Id: dark, inaccessible unconscious energy driven by primitive desires.
- Pleasure principle: immediate satisfaction without moral or rational restraint.

Law and mediation

- Superego: internalized norms, prohibitions, and cultural ideals.
- Ego: fragile mediator trying to negotiate between desire, reality, and guilt.

Repression, Culture, and Sublimation

Civilization is born through renunciation and redirection.

- Culture emerges through repression: direct instinctual satisfaction is limited by social life.
- Psychic energy is redirected into socially approved forms such as art, science, and work.
- This conversion of instinct into creative activity is called sublimation.
- The gains of civilization therefore carry a hidden cost in neurosis, discomfort, and inner conflict.

Carl Gustav Jung: Beyond Repression

The unconscious also contains symbolic depth and the possibility of wholeness.

- Jung expands the unconscious beyond personal trauma to a shared collective dimension.
- This collective unconscious is structured by archetypes: primordial symbolic forms such as the Mother, the Hero, the Wise Old Man, and the Shadow.
- The psyche is not only a site of conflict but also a field of symbolic growth.

Archetypes, Shadow, and Individuation

Personal maturation means integration rather than repression alone.

Deep symbolic structures

- Archetypes shape dreams, myths, and fundamental patterns of imagination.
- The Shadow names the rejected or unacknowledged side of the self.

The path to wholeness

- Individuation integrates conscious and unconscious elements, including Anima and Animus.
- Its goal is the Self: an inner principle of order and psychic totality.

Freud and Jung Compared

Two different anthropologies of the human spirit.

Freud

- Human being as a conflicted animal struggling with instinct.
- Strong determinism and attention to repression, neurosis, and the "archaeology" of the past.
- The unconscious is primarily a hidden source of pressure and symptom.

Jung

- Human being as a spiritual project seeking integration and meaning.
- A more teleological model oriented toward realization of potential.
- The unconscious is also a source of wisdom, symbolic order, and possible wholeness.

Section III: Analytic Philosophy and the Linguistic Turn

Many philosophical problems are recast as problems of language.

- The linguistic turn shifts attention from metaphysical entities to the structure and use of language itself.
- Clarity of expression becomes a test of conceptual seriousness.
- Philosophy increasingly appears as analysis, clarification, and therapy rather than system-building.

Early Wittgenstein: Language as Logical Picture

In the Tractatus, language mirrors the structure of the world.

- The world is the totality of facts, not of isolated things.
- A meaningful proposition pictures a possible state of affairs through logical form.
- The limits of language become the limits of the world that can be thought and stated.

The Unspeakable and the Limits of Philosophy

What cannot be logically said must be passed over in silence.

What can be said

- Logically structured propositions about facts.
- Statements whose form corresponds to the structure of possible reality.

What exceeds logical saying

- Ethics, religion, aesthetics, and the mystical do not fit within strict logical depiction.
- They are not simply false; they belong to the unspeakable.

Later Wittgenstein: Language-games

Meaning depends on use inside living practices.

- In the later period, language is no longer a rigid mirror but a plurality of social practices.
- Words gain meaning through use within language-games, not through direct attachment to fixed essences.
- Science, religion, and everyday life operate according to different rules, aims, and forms of life.

Philosophy as Therapy

The task is to untie conceptual knots made by language.

- Classical philosophical puzzles often arise when rules from one language-game are mistakenly applied to another.
- Philosophy should not manufacture new metaphysical systems but dissolve confusion.
- Its work is therapeutic: to restore words to their ordinary or proper use and thereby calm the intellect.

Logical Positivism and the Vienna Circle

Philosophy becomes the logical analysis of scientific language.

- Logical positivists attempt to purify thought by eliminating ambiguity and pseudo-problems.
- The verification principle declares a statement meaningful only if it can in principle be empirically tested.
- Metaphysical statements about God, soul, or Absolute are rejected not as wrong answers, but as meaningless pseudo-propositions.

Section IV: Hermeneutics and Post-structuralism

Truth becomes inseparable from language, context, and institutions.

- Hermeneutics claims that understanding is always historical and mediated by tradition.
- Post-structuralism questions the sovereignty of the subject and reveals hidden structures of discourse and power.
- Interpretation replaces pure transparency; every act of knowledge is situated.

Hans-Georg Gadamer: Truth and Dialogue

We do not merely use language; we dwell within it.

- Gadamer transforms hermeneutics from a technique of textual interpretation into a philosophy of human understanding.
- There is no "pure observer" standing outside history; all understanding begins from a pre-structured horizon.
- Tradition is not a dead burden but the living medium that makes meaning possible.

Pre-understanding and the Fusion of Horizons

Dialogue enlarges the limits of what we can understand.

Horizon

- Each interpreter has a historically shaped field of vision defined by experience, language, and prejudice.
- Understanding is always situational rather than neutral and timeless.

Fusion

- True understanding occurs when the horizon of the present meets that of the text or the other person.
- Meaning emerges in dialogue, not in mechanical recovery of an original intention.

Michel Foucault: Archaeology of Knowledge

The subject is shaped by historical structures that define what can count as truth.

- Foucault studies the anonymous rules of discourse rather than assuming an autonomous knowing subject.
- The episteme of an epoch silently determines what is thinkable, scientific, normal, or deviant.
- Knowledge is therefore historically organized and inseparable from the structures that produce it.

Power-Knowledge and Discipline

Modern institutions do not simply serve; they classify, normalize, and control.

Power-knowledge

- Knowledge is never neutral; it participates in strategies of regulation and control.
- Truth is produced inside institutional practices rather than discovered outside them.

Disciplinary mechanisms

- Prisons, clinics, schools, and psychiatric institutions produce “docile bodies”.
- Modern power acts through surveillance, normalization, examination, and expertise.

Jacques Derrida: There Is Nothing Outside the Text

Reality reaches us through signs, traces, and endless interpretation.

- Derrida does not deny reality; he argues that reality is always mediated by sign systems and textual structures.
- Western thought is marked by logocentrism, the desire for a final grounding principle or stable center of meaning.
- Deconstruction exposes the instability of such foundations.

Différance and Deconstruction

Meaning is never fully present; it is always deferred and differentiated.

Différance

- A word never contains fixed meaning in itself.
- Meaning arises through difference from other words and is indefinitely deferred along a chain of signs.

Deconstruction

- The aim is not destruction but the uncovering of hidden hierarchies, exclusions, and contradictions inside a text.
- Texts always say more than their authors intend.

Section V: Postmodernism

Contemporary culture becomes suspicious of universality itself.

- Postmodernism is both a philosophical orientation and a diagnosis of a cultural condition.
- The ideals of progress, universal reason, and common historical destiny lose their self-evidence.
- Truth becomes plural, localized, and entwined with media, simulation, and context.

Jean-François Lyotard: Incredulity toward Metanarratives

The legitimacy of knowledge no longer depends on a universal story.

- Lyotard defines the postmodern condition as distrust toward grand narratives that once claimed to explain history as a whole.
- Projects such as Enlightenment progress, Hegelian spirit, or universal emancipation lose persuasive authority.
- Their place is taken by local narratives, limited perspectives, and situated claims.

Micro-narratives and Plural Truth

The postmodern world is mosaic rather than monolithic.

What declines

- Single, overarching explanations of humanity, history, and reason.
- The belief that one discourse can legitimately organize all others.

What emerges

- Micro-narratives: contextual stories of groups, minorities, practices, and local forms of life.
- Truth becomes plural, situated, and inseparable from language-games.

Jean Baudrillard: Simulacra

Signs no longer reflect reality; they replace it.

- Baudrillard argues that modern culture is saturated by images, media, and symbols that become "more real" than the things they represent.
- A simulacrum is a copy without an original: a sign detached from any stable referent.
- Media images, advertising, and curated digital identities do not simply distort reality; they often constitute the only reality many people encounter.

Hyperreality and the Death of the Real

The map becomes more powerful than the territory.

Hyperreality

- Models, narratives, and screens become more convincing than direct experience.
- Representation no longer points outward; it circulates within a self-referential system of signs.

The consequence

- Reality dissolves into an endless flow of simulations.
- Experience becomes navigation through artificial constructs rather than contact with a stable real.

BIG MOVEMENT

From Subject to Language, Power, and Simulation

Lecture 8 can be read as a sequence of decenterings.

- Husserl still begins from the subject, though now as intentional consciousness.
- Heidegger, Freud, and Jung fracture the idea of a fully transparent rational self.
- Wittgenstein and logical positivism relocate philosophy in language.
- Gadamer, Foucault, and Derrida show that understanding is historically and discursively mediated.
- Lyotard and Baudrillard conclude with a culture where no universal center remains secure.

Key Concepts to Remember

A compact conceptual map of the course material.

Epoché • Intentionality • Dasein • Das Man • Being-towards-death • Existence precedes essence • Absurd • Rebellion

Id • Ego • Superego • Repression • Sublimation • Collective unconscious • Archetypes • Individuation

Linguistic turn • Language-games • Verification principle • Hermeneutics • Fusion of horizons • Episteme

Power-knowledge • Deconstruction • Différance • Metanarratives • Micro-narratives • Simulacra • Hyperreality

Enduring Legacy of Contemporary Western Philosophy

The lecture does not close philosophy; it radicalizes its tasks.

- Philosophy becomes less a supplier of final systems and more a practice of description, interpretation, critique, and vigilance.
- It teaches suspicion toward transparent selves, neutral language, innocent institutions, and universal narratives.
- At the same time, it preserves the demand for authenticity, dialogue, and responsibility in a fractured world.

Final Conclusion

The search for meaning survives, but without absolute guarantees.

> *If grand narratives no longer lead us by the hand, the search for meaning becomes a personal task sustained by critical reflection and interpretive courage.*
>
> Lecture 8 synthesis

Contemporary philosophy leaves us without easy certainties, yet it equips us with richer tools for understanding consciousness, language, power, and reality.