
UNIT 1 PHENOMENOLOGY

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1.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to present the story and method of phenomenology rather elaborately. It is done on purpose, since most of the continental philosophers of contemporary period basically follow Husserl's phenomenological method, although they have deviated considerably from him. Other prominent thinkers of the movement are Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95). In the problems they dealt with, as well as in the theoretical content of their philosophies, these thinkers differed from one another considerably. For Husserl phenomenology was primarily a means for the philosophical clarification of the formal *a priori* sciences (logic and formal mathematics). Heidegger saw in it the means to overcome the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy through a 'fundamental ontology;' Sartre saw there a window that opens to existentialism; for Maurice Merleau-Ponty it offered the means to lay bare the pre-scientific consciousness; and Emmanuel Levinas saw in it the promise of an ethics. Phenomenology is not confined to Husserl's philosophy, nor is it right to say that all of Husserl's philosophy is phenomenology. All the same, the central figure of and the initiator to *this* movement is none other than Husserl. Hence Husserlian phenomenology serves as the basis and foundation for the contemporary Western philosophy. It will enable the students to handle the other thinkers of contemporary period with facility.

After introducing phenomenology in a preliminary manner, we shall make this study in two parts: the first part will focus on the story of phenomenology as developed by Husserl, and the second part, on the phenomenological method. The first part is intended as the foundation for the second part which is more important, and it will focus on second stage of Husserl's thought during which the phenomenological method got developed.

1.1. INTRODUCING PHENOMENOLOGY

A general introduction on phenomenology cannot but be centred on Husserl, as he is the central figure in it. Before we launch ourselves into phenomenology, it is good to have a pre-view of phenomenological method. The term ‘phenomenology’ reminds us of Kant’s distinction between phenomenon and *noumenon*. Husserl was opposed to this dualism of Kant. He agrees that only phenomenon is given, but in it is given the very essence of that which is. When one has described the phenomena, one has described all that can be described. The problem of reconciling reality and thought about reality is as old as philosophy itself. We meet consciousness as the consciousness of something, and something as the object of consciousness. The history of philosophy is a series of attempts at reconciliation of these two aspects: the subjective, and the objective. The difference in reconciling occurs due to the more or less emphasis on the subjective or the objective. Husserlian phenomenology is an attempt at reconciling them; but he too experienced in himself this difference of emphasis in his reconciling consciousness and reality.

Phenomenology is a return to the things themselves, as opposed to mental constructions, illusions etc. The ‘thing’ is the direct object of consciousness in its purified form; hence it is never merely arbitrary, being conditioned subjectively. The phenomenologist is convinced that an analysis of the things themselves can be made by a return to the pure consciousness. Phenomenology, thus, is the methodical attempt to reach the phenomenon through an investigation of the pure consciousness, the objective content of which is the phenomenon.

1.2 THE STORY OF PHENOMENOLOGY

It was as a programme of clarifying logic and mathematics through the descriptive-psychological analysis of the acts of consciousness which ‘constitute’ the entities that make up the subject-matter of these sciences, that phenomenology had its birth in Edmund Husserl. Many others too belong to this movement with their shared concern with consciousness—a concern that is born out of the belief that consciousness is essentially involved in knowledge, in ways that were not suspected in hitherto philosophies. Different phenomenologists would conceive of the contribution of consciousness in different ways, and would differ in the degree of that contribution. But all of them are convinced of the contribution of consciousness to the objects known. We are concerned here with Husserl’s understanding of phenomenology.

Husserl wanted his philosophy to have the scientific rigour and philosophical radicalism. For the modern humans scientific ideal is considered as the highest ideal. According to Husserl, Philosophy, being the greatest of the sciences, should employ the ideal of rigorous science. This does not mean that philosophy has to blindly imitate empirical sciences which deal with objects as facts that are measurable. Philosophy is not factual, but ideal or essential (*eidos*=essence). Philosophy can be rigorous science, since it is possible to reach truly scientific knowledge of ideal objects, or essences of things. When he speaks of scientific rigour, he had in mind the deductive sciences like *mathematics*. Science for him is a system of knowledge wherein each step is built upon its precedent in a necessary sequence. Such a rigorous connection requires ultimate clarity in basic insights, and systematic order in building up further on them.

Although philosophy claims to be a rigorous science, it has never been so. It can become a radical science by means of critical reflection and profound methodological investigations. For this, it is necessary to have ultimate clarity and systematic order. Together with the scientific rigour, Husserl craves for philosophical radicalism. It necessitates a return to the roots or foundations of all knowledge. The ultimate foundation of all knowledge is to be found in the *things themselves*, the original phenomena to which all our ideas refer ultimately. Going deeper into the things, he was convinced that these roots must be sought in the very consciousness of the knowing subject, to whom the phenomena appear.

Historians of philosophy distinguish three periods in the development of Husserl's philosophy, and this distinction is based on the varying emphasis he placed on the subject or on the object: the pre-phenomenological, phenomenological and the period of pure phenomenology.

The Pre-Phenomenological Period belonged to his philosophical infancy, during which he came to a slightly greater emphasis on the 'objective'. This was occasioned by certain events and persons. A chance-listening to the lectures by Brentano aroused in Husserl interest in scientific psychology and philosophy. Following Brentano Husserl had given in his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* a psychological foundation to the concept of number. It developed the idea that the concept of number originated in consciousness as a result of the acts of connecting, collecting and abstracting the 'contents of consciousness.' Thus numbers are entirely of psychical nature. They have only an intentional being. Gottlob Frege, in his review of this book, criticized it, saying that it was a form of psychologism. Husserl took seriously the critique made by Frege. Hence in his *Logical Investigations part I*, Husserl refuted psychologism. 'Psychologism' is the view that the theoretical foundation of maths and logic is supplied by psychology, specially by psychology of knowledge. According to this theory, the laws of maths and logic have existence and validity only because they have occurred to some consciousness. In his *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl gives a still wider meaning to it, i.e., objects of any type are converted into psychological experiences.

Thus, realizing his mistake, Husserl came to the conclusion, i.e., the untenability of psychologism. In his critique he shows the absurdity of its consequences, and the prejudices on which it is based. The axioms and principles of maths and logic are true, not because the human thinks of them, but valid in themselves. Besides, if logical laws are dependent on the psychological characteristics of human thinkers, we make them relative to these thinkers. Psychologism is now seen as a form of skeptical relativism and anthropologism in philosophy. Relativism is self-contradictory, as it denies the possibility of all knowledge, while asserting its own truth. Mathematics is concerned with numbers, and not with the operation of counting them. Two plus two is four, even if I do not know or think about it. The mathematical and logical objects are ideal objects, and are beyond the limitations of time; whereas psychical acts are real and temporal in nature. Ideal objects are what they are independently of our knowledge about them. Thus during the pre-phenomenological period Husserl could not come to a clear philosophical stand; rather he was looking for a place to stand as a phenomenologist, which he was able to find during the phenomenological period.

1.3. THE METHOD OF PHENOMENOLOGY

In this section we come to the most important part of phenomenology, namely, the method, which got developed during the second stage of Husserl's thought. It is at this period that Husserl reached a philosophical maturity; and he achieved the reconciliation between the subjective and the objective—the act of consciousness and its objective correlate. He had to look for some reconciliation since the problem posed itself as to how the 'ideal' objects are given to *consciousness*. He takes up this task in Vol.11 of *Logical Investigations*. Some thought that it was a lapse into 'psychologism,' rejected in Vol. I. But by making use of the theory of 'intentionality, Husserl has worked out this reconciliation in such a way that it was not a choice of the one at the rejection of the other.

1.4 INTENTIONALITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In Vol.11 of *Logical Investigations* Husserl holds that a separation between logic and psychological phenomena is inadmissible and impossible. Ideal logical entities are given to us in experiences. The relationship between the 'ideal objects' of pure logic and the subjective experiences corresponding to them illustrates an insight which pervades whole of his philosophy, i.e., 'intentionality'. According to this, there is a parallelism between the subjective act and the objective correlate. This parallelism forms the basis for a correlative investigation under which both the aspects of any phenomenon are to be studied and described in conjunction. To study one without the other would be an artificial abstraction. In Husserl's terms this parallelism came to be known as that between the '*noetic*' (act) and '*noematic* (content). (*Noesis* is abstract noun, and *noema* is concrete noun). His aim has been a reconciliation of the objectivity of truth with the subjectivity of the act of knowledge.

The central insight in phenomenological analysis is the theory of intentionality. He owed to Brentano for this theory. According to Brentano, all psychical phenomena intentionally contain an object. Husserl objects to this conception of the immanence of the intentional object to consciousness. For him intentionality means the directedness of the act of consciousness to some object. This object is not immanent to the consciousness itself, but remains transcendent to it. For phenomenology it is not of importance whether or not the object of consciousness actually exists. The object is considered from a special point of view, namely as the objective correlate of an intentional act. Thus for Husserl, intentionality means this: consciousness is directedness to an object, as expressed in: conscious of..., joyful at..., desirous of..... etc. All '*cogito*' contains a '*cogitatum*'. Husserl's notion of intentionality can be clarified with the help of its four characteristics, as developed by one of his commentators, Herbert Spiegelberg.

First of all, *intentionality objectivates*. It presents the given data in such a way that the whole object is presented to our consciousness. The various acts of consciousness are referred to the same intentional object. The sameness of the object is compatible with the various ways of referring to it such as: love, doubt, thought, which are the qualities of 'intention' as opposed to the object. When one gives thought to one's mother, it is the person of one's mother that is the objective correlate. It is not the fragmentary aspects, like the kindness or generosity of the mother, but the mother as kind or generous is the objective correlate. Secondly, *intentionality*

identifies. It allows us to assign a variety of successive data to the same referent of meaning. Without an identifying function, there would be nothing but a stream of perceptions, similar but never identical. Intentionality supplies the synthetic function by which the various aspects, perspectives and stages of an object are all focused upon and integrated into the identical core. For instance, the various intentional experiences of one's mother do not take one to different referents, but to the identical referent: one's mother. Thirdly, *intentionality connects*. Each aspect of the identical object refers to the related aspects, which form its horizon; an object is apprehended only within the context, or horizon that consists of the possible apprehensions. The actual intentional experience of an object does not stand in isolation, but links itself to the other possible intentional experiences. To give an example from the realm of sense experience: the frontal aspect of the statue refers to the lateral, and the lateral to the rear. Because of this 'connecting' function are we able to perceive the 'statue.' Finally, *intentionality constitutes*. It constitutes the intentional object. The intentional object is not conceived as the pre-existent referent to which the intending act refers as something already given, but as something which originates or is constituted in the act. The snake as fearsome is constituted in the act of one's getting frightened.

Husserl, as a phenomenologist, is not interested in the object in itself, but in the intentional object, constituted in the act consciousness. According to him, the intentional object is not immanent to consciousness, as Brentano held, but as transcendent to it.

1.5 THE MEANING OF ESSENCE

The core of Husserl's philosophy is the notion of essence, since Husserlian phenomenology tries to attain the knowledge of 'essence' of reality. But the meaning of 'essence' in Husserl is different from what has been traditionally held as opposed to 'existence.' Natural science begins with experience and remains therein. They are sciences of *facts*. The world is not exhausted by 'facts,' having a spatio-temporal existence as something existing somewhere and sometime. Every individual being is contingent insofar as it is such and such, but essentially could be other than what it is. It belongs to the meaning of every contingent thing and event to have an essential being, an *eidōs*, that can be apprehended in all its purity.

In order to come to the knowledge of essences, Husserl proceeds step by step. He distinguishes between ordinary experience and transcendent experience or intuition. The first is the accurate apprehension of the individual fact. In the ordinary experience man finds himself as a unique person, the empirical ego. The phenomenologist is not interested in the ordinary, but in the transcendental experience, which is the essential intuition proper. In the transcendental experience, I bracket all reference to existence. For the phenomenological reduction of essences, Husserl proposes to use 'inductive generalization' and 'imaginative variation' that enable one to eliminate the inessential features in order to come to the essential. Inductive generalization is not anything typically phenomenological; it means nothing other than universalizing from the various particular experiences. 'Imaginative variation' can be understood only in the light of the Husserlian notion of 'horizon'. An object is actually experienced or apprehended only within a setting or horizon, which is the context of the possible apprehensions. The objective and essential extends beyond the limits of actual perception. It is by imaginative variation that one can move from the limitation of the actual perception to the indeterminacy of what can be perceived. The

horizon or the setting of the 'can be perceived' is the objective correlate of the 'can perceive' or the un-actualized capacity of the perceiver. Thus by a varied and systematic process, Husserlian phenomenology claims to attain a 'direct essential insight' or transcendental reduction into the pure eidetic sphere. The essence is the objective content of my transcendently reduced conscious experience. Looking at the object of consciousness, I reach the essence by a method of variation. I can vary the various view-points. The essence is what remains invariable, when I vary the various view-points.

1.6 EIDETIC REDUCTION

The act of grasping the essence has two aspects: one positive, and the other negative. Eidetic reduction is the positive aspect. It is the gradual penetration into the purified essential residue, gradually revealing the pure subjectivity as the exclusive source of all objectivity. Reduction to objectivity is one of the most difficult notions in Husserl, who has not clearly dealt with it in his published works. In his *Ideas*, he makes a distinction between two types of reductions that are complementary. They are *eidetic* reduction and *transcendental* reduction. Eidetic reduction refers to the distinction between 'fact' and 'essence': factual (particular, historical, existential) is converted into essential (ideal, universal and timeless). This is done by keeping away the 'this-ness' or 'suchness' from the particular object. The transcendental reduction refers to the distinction between the real and the non-real. Essences as the pure *noemata* of pure consciousness are *real*, whether or not it is reduced from an existent or non-existent object. Thus the intentional presence can be reduced from a situation of physical absence. Husserl speaks of several levels of reduction, on each of which we have a subject of greater purity. When the subject is at its purest form, we have the strict science of phenomenology. Only when the subjectivity is absolutely pure, can it be the universal a priori source of objectivity. To know the subjectivity that has the function of 'constitution' is to know one, which is transcendently related to the objects, i.e., intentionality.

1.7 BRACKETING (EPOCHÉ)

After the *Logical Investigations* the concepts of *epoché* (bracketing) and reduction began to occupy an important place in Husserl's reflections. It was in the two series of lectures which he delivered at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1906/07 and in the summer semester 1907 that Husserl for the first time explicitly introduced these concepts. It was further elaborated in the *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology* (1913). Epoché was conceived as something which the phenomenologist has to perform; the performance would lay bare before him the infinite field of his research. The performance consists in suspending or 'putting out of action' the 'thesis of the natural attitude.' The thesis of the natural attitude is the belief that the world and objectivities exist independently of and apart from being related to consciousness. Once this belief is suspended, Husserl claims, the world and the entire field of objectivities would appear before us as being correlated with consciousness. Further, we would reach transcendental consciousness which 'constitutes' the world.

Bracketing is the negative aspect in grasping the essence. It is the radical and universal elimination of any aspect of factual existence. The factual or the existential is kept in parenthesis or in bracket. Things under consideration may have existence, but it has no significance

whatsoever with regard to the essence of things. Besides the elimination of 'existence', to describe the phenomena correctly, the phenomenologist too must be free from all cultural and philosophical bias. It requires an ascetic neutrality in one's attitude to the phenomenon of one's awareness. Phenomenology deals with the insight into the essences, without *regard* to the empirical conditions of their perceptibility, nor even their existence. It is not a question of making it appear in its factual reality or in its existence, but in its intentional presence as transcendent to consciousness. There is a similarity between Husserl's epoché and Descartes' methodological doubt. Descartes doubted everything; only the ego indubitably exists. In Husserl the world is not doubted, but the judgements about it are suspended. The epoché demands that the philosopher takes a distance from the various solutions, which in the course of history have been proposed for different philosophical problems. It aims at eliminating the factuality, the root of all 'contingency'.

Thus, during the 'phenomenological period' Husserl developed the phenomenological method, and succeeded in reaching reconciliation between the subjective and the objective. Although the method is presented step by step, the phenomenological intuition of the essences takes place in a single act of grasping. This is the reason why he uses the expression 'phenomenological reduction' rather than 'phenomenological deduction.'

1.8 PERIOD OF PURE PHENOMENOLOGY

After having come to a more or less satisfactory method of phenomenology, Husserl continued his philosophical thinking and reflection. This ended up in a transcendental (pure) phenomenology. It is called 'pure' in order to differentiate it from other pseudo phenomenologies. The distinction is based on the subject matter. The subject matter of pure phenomenology is pure phenomena. The pure phenomena are reached by means of the pure consciousness. Since the publication of *Ideas*, pure phenomenology goes by the name, 'transcendental phenomenology'. In *Ideas* 'transcendental' meant that the phenomenologist suspends all assertion about reality other than that of consciousness itself. Later on it meant, reaching back to the ultimate source of all knowledge, the subjectivity. Emphasis on the pure subjectivity as the source of all objectivity is the characteristic of this phase.

During the phase of pure phenomenology, Husserl speaks of a universal phenomenology, conceived as the ultimate foundation of all knowledge. His intention was to achieve phenomena in its pure and indubitable form; and for this he bracketed all accidental and incidental aspects, all judgments and interpretations of reality. Husserl started his career with a cry for 'scientific philosophy'. Phenomenology claims to fulfill the need of a scientific philosophy with ultimate clarity in basic insights and systematic order in building up on them. Such a philosophy must be the foundation of all sciences. Since these are found realized in Husserl's phenomenology, it claims to be the 'first philosophy'.

As Husserl moved more towards the subjective, his critics gave him the label of an 'idealist', which he hesitatingly accepted; but he insists that his 'idealism' must be distinguished from the subjective idealism of Berkeley, that makes all being dependent on the psychological consciousness. By contrast, Husserl ties up Being with the transcendently reduced consciousness. Being is nothing apart from the 'meaning' which it receives in the bestowing act

of consciousness. Husserl gives two arguments for his idealism: the self-contradictory nature of realism, and the direct phenomenological evidence, supplied by the analysis of transcendental constitution. According to him, being, by its very meaning, refers us back to acts which assign such being. In other words, being derives its meaning from consciousness. The idea of reality as unrelated to consciousness is self-contradictory. The next argument is related to the first, i.e., the doctrine of transcendental constitution. 'Constitution' does not refer to a static structure of an object, but the dynamic process by which it is built up as an object. It is the intentional consciousness that actively achieves this constitution. Objects exist for me only as objects of consciousness. In his *idealism*, reality is extra-mental, but the meaning of reality is in the mind. His philosophy is called 'idealism' also because it is a search into the *eidos* (essence, meaning). It is transcendental idealism in the sense that the real world is reduced to its pure, transcendental significance.

Thus, in the final phase of his thought, especially in the *Crisis of the European Sciences* (posthumous, 1954), Husserl takes up pre-predicative consciousness or life-world for phenomenological analysis. It may have been influenced by Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has later continued this line of thought especially in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). It has also influenced Hans-Georg Gadamer in his development of philosophical hermeneutics. Together with 'life-world,' Husserl gradually wanted to develop a phenomenological philosophy by applying the method to some *sui-generis* realities.

Husserl developed the idea of a 'life-world'—the world of our immediate experience in our everyday life, a world of our concrete experience. The scientist conceals the world as *our* world. It is a vast domain of subjective phenomena, as they are immediately experienced in all colours and practical meaning. Sciences left out the subjective and the practical aspect of the world, and took only the *objective* aspect. A life-world is to be conceived as an oriented world, with an experiencing self at its centre, designated as such by personal pronouns. Thus the world becomes the one related to life and to the humans, with his human values and aspirations. He tried to make a phenomenological reflection on 'time' as well. The inner consciousness of time shows the following structure: a primal impression of a streaming present, surrounded by a horizon of immediate retention of the past (to be distinguished from active recollection) and of immediate protention (to be distinguished from active expectation). Describing retention, Husserl shows how the consciousness of the present sinks off steadily below the surface, and becomes sedimented in such a way that it is accessible only to acts of recollection. He has not given us any evidence of an active 'constitution' of time, but only of a passive synthetic genesis. Thirdly Husserl was forced to consider the 'Other', as he was criticized that phenomenology is a purely solipsistic explanation of the intentional constitution. For, when phenomenological reduction brackets, even the belief in the existence of the other subjects too is suspended. In his *Cartesian Meditations* he shows the difficulty of transcendental ego constituting other egos, as equal partners in an intersubjective community. If the other subjects are to be meaningful, they are to be constituted. But it is not possible, since if the constitution is subjective, it is a constitution of one's own self; if it is objective, others as subjects cannot be constituted. This problem remains unsolved in his published works. For a phenomenological evidence for the knowledge of others, Husserl makes use of 'empathy' giving his own interpretation to it. It is a kind of intentional category, by which I experience another's experience. When we perceive a body other than our own, as there rather than here, we apperceive it as the body of an 'alter ego' by way of an assimilative analogy with our own ego. In this process, the analogizing ego and the analogized

'alter ego' are paired in a characteristic 'coupling'. While the other ego is not accessible as directly as his body, it can be understood as a modification of our own 'pure ego', by which we put ourselves into his, as if we were in his place. The other egos are thus constituted as transcendental, and these form a community, and thus communication is possible. Finally, he gives a thought about God in his phenomenological structure. When Husserl started his philosophical career, although he was a Jew, he kept the Bible away from him. For, he wanted to start a philosophy absolutely presuppositionless. He was not much concerned about bringing God into his philosophy, nor was there a place for God in his philosophy. His philosophy needed only intentional experience, subjectivity and objectivity. Remaining a bit away from his philosophical method, God is placed in between the ego and the world, who creatively constitutes the world, while my subjectivity meaningfully constitutes the world. Since God is the absolutely absolute, he cannot be comprehended within the focus of my ego.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

Husserl's mature thought begins with a concern for the foundations of mathematics, continues with the development of phenomenological method, and concludes with a kind of idealism that is associated with the doctrine of the transcendental ego. His merit consists in the fact that he introduced for the first time the phenomenological method that brought the subjective and the objective to their right place. Thus the greatest contribution of Husserl is the theory of intentionality, with the help of which the subject and object are brought closer to reconciliation. Many of the later philosophers who used the phenomenological method deviated from him, regarding the importance given to essence rather than existence. But in spite of this difference, contemporary continental philosophers greatly owe to Husserl's contribution to phenomenology. Since Husserl did not develop a philosophy with the application of phenomenological method, he could not see some of the weak-points in his method. All the same, we cannot but admire the unique contribution of his to the philosophical world.

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UNIT 2 EXISTENTIALISM

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to give a 'General Introduction' to existentialism. Study of the various existentialists has to be based on such an introduction, since it is intended to serve as a horizon for the particular thoughts of individual thinkers to be situated. A particular thought can be comprehended in its depth and width only in the light of its general background. In fact, what is vaguely and generally delineated in the 'General Introduction' takes different concrete shapes in the thoughts of different existentialists. Hence the 'General Introduction to Existentialism' and the 'Deeper Study of Individual Existentialists' complement each other: the former is given a *depth* in the latter, and the latter is given a *width* in the former. Besides, even when one is not able to make a study of the various existentialists, this 'General Introduction' can serve as a supplement, since it considers most of the existential themes.

In this unit we begin with an introduction on the meaning and definition of existentialism; it will be followed by a look into the general background (what gave rise to existentialism), and sources (the tracing of the gradual growth of existentialism). It is important to look into its various characteristics in order to show the specificity of existentialism as a different way of philosophizing. Finally we take a quick glance at some of the important families (groups) of themes in existentialism. Consideration of these points will hopefully give the searching minds of the students at the Master's level a solidity of basis for further personal search and academic research into different existentialists.

2.1 INTRODUCING EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism got developed mainly in the first half of 20th century in continental Europe. Although it is primarily a philosophical movement, we can find its 'roots' and 'branches' (basis and influence) in various fields, such as art, literature, religion culture, etc.. Traditional philosophy did not bother about the problem of concrete existence, like death, love, despair, body, finitude, anxiety, hope, etc. As humans were caught up in the trap of their naked and concrete existence, they could not get away to an ideal and abstract realm. In such a situation existentialism made its appearance not as a stroke of chance but of necessity. The luxury of

philosophizing was not limited to the few arm-chair philosophers; existentialism brought philosophy to the appeal of the ordinary humans.

Existentialism is an elusive notion that escapes all definitions. The term itself is surrounded by a certain amount of confusion, ambiguity and lack of precision, since it includes the widely disparate philosophers and philosophies, ranging from Kierkegaard's theistic commitment to Sartre's categorical denial of the existence of God. Besides, what was intended as a serious type of philosophy has been vulgarized to the level of a fad so that the existentialist label gets applied to all sorts of peoples and activities. At the same time, the difficulty in defining existentialism is in keeping with the nature of its philosophizing. All the thinkers of this movement are against constructing any 'system' of philosophy, and hence it is more appropriate to address this movement as a way of *philosophizing* rather than a *philosophy*. Just as existentialism refuses to be labeled as a 'system,' so also most of the thinkers of this movement do not want to be categorized as 'existentialist.'

Although no adequate definition of existentialism is possible, the following seems to be quite significant: "Existentialism is a type of philosophy which endeavours to analyze the basic structures of human existence, and to the call individuals to an awareness of their existence in its essential freedom." From this definition—so also from most of the other ones—it is evident that existentialism first of all deals with the question of the human who alone is said to be existing. Secondly, existentialism is not a theory about the human, but it is a *call* that keeps on calling the human away from the intellectual and social forces that destroy freedom, and from the stifling abstractions and automatic conformity. It bids and challenges each individual to sort out the existential problems in authentic freedom, instead of taking easy answers from someone else. It pays heed to those existential questions that are usually passed over by the academic philosophers. Instead of retreating to a realm of eternal truths, existentialism hugs close to the terrain of ordinary living. Thus existentialism has brought about a revolution in philosophizing.

2.2 GENERAL BACKGROUND OF EXISTENTIALISM

Although existentialism made its arrival as a corrective to the traditional philosophy, there are certain factors that have accelerated its appearance in the 20th century. As the background of existentialism we present two fundamental experiences in the West: experience of 'nothingness' in the decline of religion, and of 'finitude' in the economico-scientific growth.

Experience of 'Nothingness' in the Decline of Religion

Although religion has not totally disappeared from the West, its all pervasive character has been lost. It is no more the uncontested centre of human life. The waning of religion is so complex a fact that it penetrates the deepest strata of human's psychic life. In losing religion humans lost the connection with the transcendent realm of being; they were set free to deal with this world in all its brute objectivity. Besides, they were forced to find themselves 'wanderers' and 'homeless' on the face of this earth that no longer answered the needs of the inner spirit. Religion and reason reigned supreme in the middle ages. They no longer have the same sway in the contemporary period. The rationalism of the medieval philosophy was well contained by the mysteries of faith and dogma, which were powerfully real and meaningful. Whereas the approach of the modern rationalism was different! With the newly found scientific attitude, humans began to be critical to all that the religion has been standing for. The religion-less human is like the earth set free from the sun—a human picture that is grim, bleak, dark and naked!

A similar experience can be seen in the context of the movement of Protestantism that laid stress on the irrational datum of faith, as against the imposing rational structure of medieval catholic theology. The institutional character of the Catholic Church was in keeping with the rational nature of medieval theology. Faith as an intellectual assent never touched the interior of the human. As against this, Protestantism succeeded in raising the religious consciousness to a higher level of individual sincerity and strenuous inwardness. Faith for the Protestantism is the numinous centre of religion, stripped of all mediating rites and dogmas. But the cosines of the bourgeois civilization made the protestant Western humans more secularized, and their faith began to lose its grip on them. This too made them starkly naked; and their relation to God turned out to be a relation to *nothingness*! It is in the wake this deterioration that the theistic existentialists call the humans to a life of faith as a personal commitment.

Experience of 'Finitude' in Económico-Scientific Growth

Protestantism and capitalism went hand in hand, seemingly to prove that this earth itself is the Promised Land. Capitalism emerged from the feudal society as the enterprising and calculating mind who must organize production rationally to show a favorable balance of profits over costs. Everything is calculatively done in the interest of efficiency. The capacity for easy living seemed to be within human power. But the tremendous economic power of modern society is accompanied by human ambiguities, and rootlessness. Life is reduced to a bundle of needs and wants. The human is looked at in terms of functions. The First World War shattered the apparent stability of this human world. The stability, security and material progress rested upon the void. The human came face to face with oneself as a stranger. The question: 'what is human being?' came out of the bourgeois society in a state of dissolution. With capitalism, society has become more secular, rational, utilitarian, and democratic, with the accompanying wealth and progress. But the unpredictable realities like wars, political upheavals were on the increase. In this impersonal mass society the human is terribly alienated: a stranger to god, to nature, and to the social apparatus, and a stranger to oneself! The economic growth has only entrenched human limitation.

The modern age is characterized also by rapid scientific growth. This is countered by the growing awareness of human inability, fragility and the impotence of reason. On the one hand, there seemed to have no limits to the technological conquest of the nature. But science had to reconcile to the human finitude. Several theories in mathematics, science and philosophy during the first half of 20th century pointed to the human finitude: Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, Skolem's and Godel's theories on mathematics, Heidegger's philosophy in his *Being and Time*, Spengler's prophecy in his *The Decline of the West*, etc. When events run parallel this way independently of each other, we can conclude that they are not meaningless coincidences, but meaningful symptoms of humans becoming convinced of their finitude. All these thoughts shed light on the sad plight of the Western humans, and point to the impending finale.

Thus, the two deep experiences of the Western people—that of 'nothingness' and of 'finitude'—have touched their inner being, and from out of this experience the new school of existentialism was born. In this new thought-pattern 'nothingness' and 'finitude' found themselves at home.

2.3 SOURCES OF EXISTENTIALISM

After having seen the events and contexts that gave rise to existentialism, we take a journey back to see its sources. The little source that began from the Old Testament period gradually gathered momentum, and became a powerful movement in the 20th century.

Hebraic Source

Existentialism can be traced as far back as Hebraism—the life and thought of the Hebrews or Jewish people. There is a clear contrast between Hebraism and Hellenism, the two rival forces that influence and move our world, at least in the West. The Hebrews are concerned about practice and right conduct, whereas the Greeks, with knowledge and right thinking; duty and conscience for the Hebrews, and intelligence or reason for the Greeks. The Hebrews see the human in his/her feebleness and finitude as creatures, standing naked in the presence of God. The Greeks keep all the difficulties and contingencies out of view in their life and thought.

The Jewish community was held together not so much by law, as with 'faith.' Faith is well depicted in the book of Job. In the experience of extreme difficulties, Job in his whole person meets God; it was a confrontation or meeting between two persons in the fullness and violence of his passion, with the unknowable and overwhelming God. The relation between God and Job was one of I and thou. It is not a confrontation between two rational minds, demanding an explanation that will satisfy the reason. They meet on the level of 'existence' and not of 'reason'. Job's relation to God remained one of faith from start to finish although it took on the varying shapes of revolt, anger, dismay and confusion. In this personal relation the meaning of faith takes its shape. Faith here is not a propositional one, but personal trust. This trust embraces the whole man, his anger and dismay, his bones and bowels, his flesh and blood. No separation of body and soul is made. As a person of flesh and blood, the Hebrew is very much bound to the 'earth,' the 'dust,' a creature of time. The human is a 'nothing' before one's Creator; one's temporal existence is compared to wind, shadow or bubbles. Hebraism contains no eternal realm of essences, as an intellectual deliverance from the evil of time. In short, the Hebrews emphasized the contingent and finite individual, standing naked before God in personal trust and faith. The approach taken by the Hebrews is very much existential.

The Hebraic approach can be better seen in opposition to the Hellenistic one. Among the Greeks we note a different picture. The Greeks achieved victory of reason over mythology—victory of *logos* over *mythos*. In the period between 480 and 322 BCE (from Heraclitus to Aristotle) the human enters history as 'rational animal.' From Heraclitus Plato learned that there is no escape from death and change. Tormented by this vision, Plato desired at all costs a refuge in the eternal realm from the insecurities of time. Only the eternal is really real. For him the individual is less real. This is totally against the existentialist approach that seeks to establish the importance of the individual. Plato's was a philosophy of essence, and not of 'existence.' With Aristotle philosophy became purely theoretical and objective discipline. For him reason is the highest part of our personality. The primacy of reason is rested on the fact that everything has a 'reason,' i.e., everything is rationally explicable. Thus the Greeks touched nothing of human finitude, but rather they made an exaltation of human reason.

The emphasis on the personal dimension, as opposed to the rational, made Hebraism to be the very first source from which existentialism began its flow of thought.

Christian Sources

The distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism continued to show itself in Christianity in the form of faith and reason. Christianity belongs to the Hebraic rather than to the Hellenistic side of

human's nature, since it is based on faith rather than reason. Christian faith is more intense in the sense that it is beyond and even against 'reason.' The opposition between faith and reason is the one between the vital and the rational. The question is as to where the centre of human personality is to be located: St. Paul places in faith, Aristotle in reason. Christian faith is paradoxical since Christianity is foolishness to the Greeks and scandal to the Jews, because the Greek demand 'wisdom,' and the Jews, sign.' Christian faith is not based on either.

Although Christianity has been on the side of faith rather than reason, there were varying emphases on one or the other even in Christianity itself. Tertullian is one of the precursors of existentialism who stresses the violence of the conflict between faith and reason. Augustine, with his existentialist bend of mind, asks 'who am I?,' rather than 'what is man?' as did Aristotle. This is well expressed in his *Confessions*. He looks at the human not with a detached reason but from personal experience. As a theologian he was trying to harmonize faith and reason. Thomas Aquinas took the theoretical intellect as the highest human faculty, following the example of Aristotle. According to him the end of the human is beatific vision of God's essence. Dun Scotus insisted on the primacy of will and love. Thus the problem between faith and reason reappeared in the form of a controversy between voluntarism and intellectualism. We may put it thus: a controversy between the primacy of the thinker over his thoughts, and thoughts over the thinker. The source of existentialism that started with Hebraism, continued with faith, and then with voluntarism of the Franciscan school in the middle ages.

Blaise Pascal (1623-62) is uniquely different from other philosophers of his time with his existentialist type of thinking, and thus he too is referred to as a source of existentialism. He was living in a world of science, especially of astronomy. Pascal spoke about the homelessness of the human in the infinite space. Reason cannot help this homelessness of the human. Faith takes up where reason leaves off. One has to search and find the sign-posts, that would lead the mind in the direction of faith, in the radically miserable condition of the human. Religion is the only cure for this desperate condition of the human that is inadequate, empty, and impotent. Living in an age of science, he experienced the feebleness of human reason as well. Reason cannot deal with God or Religion as its objects. Hence his famous outcry: "not the God of philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." He also is said to have said: "The heart has its reason that reason does not know." He has expressed very powerfully about the radical contingency that lies at the heart of human existence. He could find 'the contingent' in the apparently insignificant in human existence: in the length of Cleopatra's nose that marked the destinies of mark Antony and of Roman Empire; in the grain of sand in Cromwell's kidney, that put an end to his military dictatorship. 'Nothingness' for Pascal opens both downward and upward. He lives in the age of microscope and telescope, when the finite cosmos is expanded in both the direction, toward the infinitesimally minute and the infinitely great, and the human occupying a mid-position between both. This mid-position is the perfect image of human finitude, invaded from both sides by nothingness. The short duration of our life is swallowed up in the eternity before and after. Such thoughts of Pascal make him an existentialist, and gave rise to the existentialism of the 20th century in full vehemence.

2.4 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism does not refer so much to a particular philosophical system as to a movement in contemporary philosophy. Since it includes several philosophies with opposing characteristics, it is difficult to show any set of clearly defined characteristics that will mark off existentialism

from all other forms of philosophy. All the same, we can still point to certain general characteristics of existentialism.

The first characteristic of existentialism is that it begins philosophizing from human being, rather than from reality in general. The human being that is referred to in existentialism is a *subject* that *exists*, rather than an *object* that *is*. Formerly the human has been submerged in the physical cosmos as just one of the items in nature. The existentialist subject is not the epistemological subject—the subject that stands apart as the knower to the known, rather it is the ontological subject that exists. Here the term ‘to exist’ has a meaning, more comprehensive than the term ‘to be.’ The term ‘existence’ has to be taken in the dynamic and active sense of the ‘act of being,’ rather than the mere ‘fact of being;’ and it implies a width of meaning that includes the human as the centre of feeling, of experience, of freedom, of actions and thought, and thus an incarnate being-in-the-world. Such a subject is passionately involved in the actualities of existence, and philosophizes not merely with reason, but the whole person with one’s feelings and emotions, with will and intellect, with flesh and bones, philosophizes. Thus existentialism begins with the human as existent.

Although existentialism begins with ‘existence,’ it does not take ‘existence’ as a notion, but as experienced by oneself. Thus we can say that existential philosophy arose from the existential experience of existence. Different philosophers have had varying experience of existence, and it is with one’s basic experience of existence that each philosopher carries out one’s philosophizing: in Jaspers it was an awareness of the brittleness of being, in Heidegger, Dasein as being-towards-death, in Sartre, the experience of existence as nauseating and superfluous, in Marcel and Buber, the experience of the ‘I’ as necessarily related to a ‘thou’, in Levinas, the experience of the epiphany of the other and of one’s ethical responsibility in the face of another, etc.

Existentialism can be described as an attempt to philosophize from the stand point of ‘actor’ rather than of ‘spectator.’ The attitude of Aristotle was that of a spectator, looking at the world impersonally. Kierkegaard on the other hand philosophizes from his own personal experience. Philosophy arises as a response to the questions, to be met on the existential level, rather than on the conceptual level. The existentialist does not stand back from the problems as an impersonal analyst or spectator, but grapples with them as one who is involved in them. The questions are not matters of ‘intellectual curiosity’ but of ‘vital concern.’ Marcel’s distinction between *mystery* and *problem* corresponds to ‘actor’ and ‘spectator.’ The problem lies over against me to be analyzed by me as an epistemological subject. I do not approach the problem with my uniqueness, but as an impersonal I, that could be replaced by anyone, even by a machine. A mystery, on the other hand, is a question which involves the very ‘being’ of the questioner. The problems can be solved and an exhaustive solution can be given; but no solution can be given for a ‘mystery.’ The standpoint of an ‘actor’ is found in all the existentialist thinkers. Marcel and Kierkegaard were personal thinkers, who reflected on questions arising from personal experiences. There is a close relation between biography and philosophy in the case of Kierkegaard. For Marcel philosophy was part of his spiritual itinerary.

Another characteristic of existentialism is that it functions as a corrective to the traditional tendency of engulfing the human in the physical cosmos. It stands as a protest against all that threatens human’s unique position as an ‘existent.’ This is why Kierkegaard revolted against the Hegelian exaltation of the absolute at the expense of the individual. He was also against submerging the individual in the collectivity or universality. Heidegger calls the human from being the ‘they-self’ (*das Man*) to one’s ownmost self. Sartre wants the human to take over one’s freedom in good faith rather than to evade it in bad faith; in short, existentialism asserts the

human freedom, and calls the human to appropriate it; thus existentialism functions as a corrective to the traditional tendency of depersonalization and of reduction of the human in collectivity.

If existentialism has been a corrective to the traditional way of thinking, then its advent was taken as a ray of hope to the humans in a situation of strangled thought. In various respects the humans have been strangled. To the religionless human, cut off from the divine, hope is given with a person-centred religion. To the humans who are unable to find in themselves the answers to the problems that beset them, the message of existentialism seems to be addressed. Jaspers shows that even in the face of earthly disasters, the human can still affirm one's relationship to the transcendent. Heidegger speaks to the human thrown into the world, that s/he is faced with the possibility of choosing the authentic self.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

1. Briefly describe the historical background for emergence of Existentialism.

2. Discuss the characteristics of Existentialism

2.5 IMPORTANT THEMES IN EXISTENTIALISM

It is impossible to give an exhaustive list of all the themes in existentialism. But there are certain outstanding themes that often recur in most of the existentialists. We tabulate them into different families.

Existence, Individuality, Freedom, Choice, Creativity, Possibility

Existentialism is centred on the human, characterized by existence, and it insists on a return to the concrete, individual existent as against the essence and nature of things. It emphasizes the primacy of existence over essence. For most of the existentialists the essence of the human consists in one's existence. Existence is a dynamic notion that implies a constant attaining of the self in the self-directed life of the individual. To exist as individual means to become individual in freedom and choice. As existent, the human creates oneself. By virtue of one's freedom the human is not only what one has become, but also what one can become. To escape into the crowd is same as running away from one's responsibility to exist as an individual. It is uncomfortable to stand alone in one's uniqueness; hence it needs courage to exist, to assert oneself as an individual. In a widely growing situation wherein anonymity is the saving virtue, numerical superiority is the decisive consideration and mass opinion is the criterion of truth, all the existentialists call on the human to exist, to become, to choose as an individual in freedom and courage.

Finitude, Death, Guilt, Anxiety, Nothingness

Although humans are primarily free and self-creative, their quest for authentic personal being meets with resistance, and sometimes even frustration. Humans' ability to choose is restricted by

their ultimate possibility, death, that places a limit to their choice, and on which they have no choice. As the ultimate possibility and facticity, death surrounds human existence with the boundary wall, revealing humans' *limit-situation*. The human experiences the presence of the 'not' (nothingness) in one's being; and before this existential awareness of one's finite freedom, one experiences dread or anxiety. Anxiety is had before the nothingness of human existence. The presence of nothingness in the human is same as human finitude or ontological guilt, that makes guilty action possible.

Authenticity and Inauthenticity

In the face of one's finite freedom, humans have the possibility to be *authentic* or *inauthentic*. These terms (authenticity and inauthenticity) are mainly employed by Heidegger, but others too make the distinction between what the human should be (authenticity), and what one is prone to be normally (inauthenticity). Both theists and atheists make this distinction. Different philosophers propose different ideals as the authentic mode of existence. Thus for Kierkegaard, authenticity consists in making a leap of faith, and in becoming totally committed to a life of subjectivity and truth. For Heidegger, the authentic Dasein has to choose to be itself in the face of the temptation to be the they-self. For Buber and Marcel authenticity is grounded in communion and intersubjectivity. The I-thou relation between two human beings bestows authentic existence upon them as they reach out to the absolute and eternal thou. For Sartre authentic human is one who accepts one's freedom in good faith. For Camus, authentic existence is a life of resistance amidst the absurd. It demands a rejection of the physical and the philosophical suicide.

Community, Intersubjectivity, Love, Commitment, Faith

The themes of togetherness, I-thou, being-with, etc., are fundamental to Marcel, Buber, Levinas, etc. No existentialist considers oneself to be solipsist. Even Sartre accepts the presence of the other, though with a hateful stare. Thus even Sartrean notion of hatred is a mode of intersubjectivity. The I is necessarily related to a thou. Those who take the positive aspect of intersubjectivity, consider that this relation is characterized by availability, fidelity, commitment etc. The other is a genuine means of enriching one's existence. Marcel and Buber speak of the I-thou relationship. The other is not an object, a problem, an it, or a functionary, not even a 's/he' but a 'thou,' a subject with whom I communicate. Heidegger speaks of the essential character of Dasein as being-with. According to Levinas, the face reveals the indubitable presence of the other. Even in later Camus, a sense of togetherness and community become the dominant theme. When this relation of commitment is extended to the Transcendent being, it is referred to as 'faith.'

Absurdity, Homelessness, Rootlessness, Meaninglessness

To the contemporary human, absurdity or meaninglessness has become a catch-word. It stands for humanity's plight as purposelessness in an existence out of harmony with its surroundings. The 20th century neurosis is the neurosis of purposelessness, valuelessness, hollowness and emptiness. Most people continue with the business of living in it, but the existentialists cry out in anguish that they are gratuitous in an impossible world. The main spokespersons for human absurdity are Sartre and Camus. For Sartre 'absurdity' is the awareness of oneself as superfluous. One finds oneself as unnecessary, and thus there is no reason for one to exist. Camus considers absurdity as an awareness of oneself as condemned to tragic purposelessness. He traces to absurdity the dilemma of modern human, groaning under the structures of organized injustice and hypocrisy. In this tragic situation the human should not try to run away from it by suicide, rather one should accept it as a rebel. The fate of meaningless existence becomes tragic when

one is conscious of it. The tragic hero of the *Myth of Sisyphus* bears his burden without joy of hope, refusing any of the palliatives offered by religion or philosophy, and without distractions of pleasure or ambition.

Depersonalization, Dehumanization, Objectification, Functionalization

Existentialism made its origin as a reaction to the reduction of the human to a mere object in the universe. Marcel and Buber fight against treating the human as an 'it' rather than a 'thou'. The disproportionate growth of 20th century technology is instrumental to the frightening erosion of human values and dignity by the use of strict 'scientific method' in investigations, and functional approach in dealings. The human is made an 'object' of analysis, and a commodity of transactions. As against this calculative approach, the existentialists suggest that the other be considered as a 'thou,' as another existing subject. Depersonalization can be present in two ways: (i) by keeping the human in an impersonal collectivity of anonymity, mediocrity and facelessness. People are regimented and packed together in the service of the powerful, or (ii) by reducing the humans as mere objects for one's purpose. This is what takes place in the so-called free situation of capitalism and globalization.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

As a philosophical movement, existentialism is based on phenomenology initiated as a method for the first time by Husserl. This does not mean that the existentialists merely copied what Husserl proposed; far from it. In fact the existentialist thinking is centered on existence, bracketed by Husserl. But the underling basic inspiration that guides the type of thinking in phenomenology and existentialism is the same.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your Answers.

1. Explain the understanding of Existentialists on human relationship.

2. Discuss the 'limit situations' of human existence.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Intersubjectivity: Theme of togetherness, I-thou, being-with, etc., a relation that is characterized by availability, fidelity, commitment etc.

Dasein: Heidegger speaks of the essential character of being as being-with.

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UNIT 3 HERMENEUTICS AND POSTMODERNISM

Contents

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 - 3.3 Hermeneutics: Major thinkers and their contribution
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 - 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will feature the following topics:

- A basic description of hermeneutics and postmodernism
 - Major thinkers and their contribution in both these fields
 - Primary features or aspects of hermeneutics and postmodernism
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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutics and postmodernism are movements which are in continuity with the reaction against the Enlightenment criterion of neutral, objective and universal *reason* as the ultimate arbiter of truth and meaning. The field of hermeneutics has to do with interpretation, and more specifically the interpretation of texts. Hence hermeneutics in itself is a very old field, as there have been numerous interpretations of literary, legal and religious texts from time immemorial. However, philosophical hermeneutics, which has to do with the *principles* involved in the interpretation of texts, arose as a discipline only during the 'Modern Period' of Western Philosophy. These hermeneutical principles were found to involve not just universal or objective reason, but other influences such as subjective interests, particular cultural standpoints, aesthetic sensitivities, etc. In a similar vein, postmodernism grew as a reaction against *epistemic certitude* which was both the presupposition and the goal of Modern Philosophy. Much of scientific progress is based on the deductive logic and systematic investigations which arose from the rational and empirical moorings of Modern Philosophy. But the presuppositions, logic, investigative methods and goals of philosophical and scientific rationality have been called into question by postmodern theorists, who point out severe gaps or problematic areas within these apparently sure-footed fields of knowledge and progress. We will first familiarize ourselves with a basic description of these contemporary philosophical fields. Then, in each subsection we will first outline the more significant insights presented by key theorists in these respective fields and then focus on major themes within these philosophical disciplines.

3.2 BASIC DESCRIPTION OF HERMENEUTICS AND POSTMODERNISM

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, or ‘the theory of interpretation,’ is a field in Contemporary Western Philosophy which deals with principles and processes instrumental in the course of interpretation, especially the interpretation of texts. There has been a long history of the interpretation of a wide variety of texts, mainly featuring scriptural exegesis, jurisprudence and literary analysis. What philosophical hermeneutics has contributed is the formulation of principles and processes which are applicable in textual analysis in general. These principles and processes pertaining to interpretation are especially relevant within the fields of the humanities and the human sciences. But the theory of interpretation may equally well be applied to any natural or social phenomena, to the extent that these are expressed and understood cognitively or textually.

The word ‘hermeneutics’ comes from the Greek ‘hermeneuein’ (to make intelligible), derived from the Greek God ‘Hermes’ who interpreted the messages of the Gods for human beings. Unlike epistemology, which presupposes objectivity in knowledge and is primarily concerned about the adequacy of ‘truth-claims,’ contemporary hermeneutics is more concerned about the significance of ‘meaning-claims.’ This is because in contemporary hermeneutics the understanding of any aspect of reality is a relational process, wherein both knower and known—or subject and object—are necessarily intertwined within a contextual matrix. This matrix involves not only the use of reason but also other elements which come into play, such as subjective interests, aesthetic sensitivities, cultural conditions, economic and political factors, etc.

Some hermeneutical thinkers like Schleiermacher and Dilthey give more importance to the personal creativity of the individual author of the text or creator of the work of art, while others like Gadamer and Ricoeur stress the ‘autonomy of the text’ from the ‘intention of the author.’ This latter position leaves more room for creative contemporary interpretations, which may go much beyond what the author intended, or what the text meant in the past. Postmodern thinkers dissolve the text completely in favour of a variety of possible interpretations. According to Roland Barthes, “the author must die so that the reader may live.” ‘Critical theorists’ like Habermas question the innocence of texts, and stress the need to read texts in the light of personal and social forces which may contain dysfunctional or dominating mechanisms.

Postmodernism

The word ‘postmodern’ itself indicates a discontinuity with whatever was mainly construed with the term ‘modern.’ Modern Philosophy largely adopted the programme of Descartes, which was the establishment of clear and distinct ideas, arrived at by using rigorous methodological investigation. The belief that language—theoretical, technical and practical—corresponded to or represented (mirrored) reality was taken for granted as self-evident, as it served as the foundation for philosophical, scientific and moral discourse. A gradual outcome of the ‘modern’ way of looking at things was the growing ascendancy of scientific discourse and technological progress, which soon led to the dominance of a ‘secular’ mindset as being more true to reality, as opposed to an earlier more traditional and faith-related worldview. All of this led to the belief that Western culture was more developed and superior to other cultures and worldviews. Another

significant presupposition concerned the human 'subject' as an independent centre of rational and moral consciousness, i.e., a separate 'self,' independent of one's tradition and community, which possessed consciousness, responsibility and creativity. This understanding of the self fuelled the growth of individualism in the West.

The 'postmodern' way of thinking was opposed to all of these features of Modern Philosophy, and manifested itself not only in philosophy, but also in literature, art, architecture and in a new way of life in general. According to this new perspective, language and knowledge processes do not lead us to a greater awareness of how reality is structured, as there is a fundamental gap between language and reality. Every language and culture is a relatively unique and 'constructed' set of epistemological, metaphysical, moral and aesthetic beliefs and claims, and there is no universal vantage point by which one may adjudicate which is better or worse. There is no privileged culture or system of thought—no 'centre' of meaning and purpose—as each of these social constructions have their own strengths and weaknesses. This gives rise not only to a greater appreciation of difference and plurality, but more radically to an all-pervasive, comprehensive and consistent 'relativism' which is the hallmark of postmodernism. Furthermore, the individual 'subject' of Modern Philosophy is only a nodal point within a larger matrix of cultural meaning. Thus linguistic and cultural structures determine personal consciousness, identity and agency.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is common to hermeneutics and postmodernism?

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2) Give a basic description of both hermeneutics and postmodernism.

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3.3 HERMENEUTICS: MAJOR THINKERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION

The age of the Enlightenment witnessed a gradual preference for rationally-based interpretation as opposed to traditionally and faith-based interpretation. Among the first thinkers who developed a methodological theory of understanding and interpretation in this age are Johann Chladenius, Georg Meier, Friedrich Ast and Friedrich Wolf. But hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline came into its own mainly as a reaction to the over-emphasis on rationality which dominated the Modern Age. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who may be considered to be the 'father of contemporary hermeneutics' stressed the 'Romantic' aspect of the imaginary,

creative, and affective (emotional) dimensions which come into play in the articulation and interpretation of texts. Schleiermacher elevated the theory of interpretation from its particular or regional fields of application (exegesis, philology and jurisprudence) to a generalized theory of understanding as it is applied to texts. Furthermore, with Schleiermacher, hermeneutics became a properly philosophical discipline governing the nature, scope and function of the process of understanding itself. Interpretation became the art of avoiding misunderstanding so as to understand the text correctly. Schleiermacher's philosophical hermeneutics had two aspects: a subjective or 'psychological' aspect and an objective or 'grammatical' aspect. In his earlier works, he seemed to have given more importance to the 'grammatical' features of interpretation which have to do with aspects of discourse related to a particular culture. However, the later Schleiermacher seemed to increasingly favour the dominance of 'psychological' concerns in the process of interpretation. The next significant contributor was Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who unlike Schleiermacher, was influenced by the positivistic spirit of the late nineteenth century, and was inclined to elevate history to the same level of exactness as the positive or natural sciences. It was Dilthey who distinguished between the knowledge of the natural and the human sciences: nature needed to be *explained*, while history needed to be *understood*. He hoped to formulate systematic rules for understanding *social* (especially historical) phenomena, just as the natural scientists had formulated systematic rules for explaining *natural* phenomena. However, by subordinating hermeneutics to the young science of psychology, Dilthey too, like the later Schleiermacher, began to view the meaning of a text largely in terms of the intention of its author.

In *Being and Time* (1927), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) viewed understanding as a foundational aspect of one's contextual situatedness or 'being-in-the-world.' Opposing the subject-object dichotomy found in epistemology and scientific methodology, Heidegger presented the process of understanding in terms of a projection of ontological possibilities rather than a static cognitive correspondence with ontic reality. This projection of possibilities does not start from nowhere, as there is already an understanding as such that is operative in human consciousness. Heidegger's epistemology is thus an existential one. We always already find ourselves in a world of meaning, in a world always already imbued with pragmatic projects: we are 'beings-in-time.' However, this world of meaning is not a predicative, but rather a pre-predicative, *a priori* existential world of meaning, which Heidegger refers to as 'understanding.' Upon this primordial level of consciousness or understanding is founded a multi-layered level of interpretation, from the least conscious (e.g., using a hammer without explicitly being aware of it) to the most conscious (reflection over the nature and function of the hammer). Discourse arises from the most conscious level of interpretation, and one can see that it has only a derivative status, as it is based upon deeper levels of interpretive meaning, and a still deeper level of understanding. Hermeneutics, then, for Heidegger, is clearly dependent upon the two pre-predicative, pre-discursive levels of understanding and interpretation. Hence texts both arise from and are interpreted from a projective exercise based upon one's being-in-the-world. This is why Heidegger's contribution to hermeneutics is rightly called 'ontological hermeneutics.'

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) continues the ontological hermeneutics of Heidegger and makes it more concrete in the importance he gives to tradition and its cumulative historical efficacy in terms of creating specific ontological 'prejudices' or a foundational perspective which form the bedrock for interpretation. In his major work, *Truth and Method* (1960), Gadamer

clearly gives priority to ‘truth’ and has serious problems in the use of ‘method’ in the process of interpretation, because methodology implicitly presupposes a perspective-free objectivity which Gadamer argues is impossible. What really happens in a process of interpretation or in any encounter with a phenomenon is an understanding which takes place via a fusion of horizons between the worlds of the interpreter and that which is interpreted. Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) is indebted to both Heidegger and Gadamer, but makes space for the use of method in the process of interpretation. Ricoeur would agree that there is always a ‘surplus of meaning’ in the text which resists explanatory reductionism leading towards a univocal understanding of the text. However, rather than employ a dialogical model with the text which Gadamer prefers, Ricoeur argues that a process of objective distanciation which allows for textual exegesis is possible and even necessary, if one is to arrive at a deeper and better interpretation. In his later works, Ricoeur creatively expands the scope of hermeneutical theory to include the interpretation of human actions and narratives, to the extent that they have cognitive and communicative value.

3.4 PRIMARY THEMES WITHIN HERMENEUTICS

There are **three primary dimensions of interpretation, viz., explanation, understanding and application**. The focus in explanation is on the *validity* of textual meaning, viz., the ‘behind’ and the structure of the text, rather than the possibilities for textual *significance*, viz., the ‘forward’ or applicative value of the text. In explanation, the text is treated more like a *window*, whereby one sees *through* a text in order to explore its nature and origins, rather than like a *mirror*, wherein one stands *before* a text in order to understand it from within a particular context and guided by personal and social interests. Schleiermacher and Dilthey tend to focus on the ‘behind’ of the text so as to arrive at textual meaning in terms of the original intention of the author. In contrast to this position, Gadamer focuses primarily on the ‘forward’ of the text, or how it may be understood by various readers in various contexts. Ricoeur partially combines both of these positions. In making room for a vigorous structural investigation of the text, he gives importance to the role of ‘explanatory’ procedures—such as structuralism and by extension, historical-critical methods—in textual research. However, in line with many contemporary literary theorists, he does not give much significance to the original intention of the author. A comprehensive interpretation of the text, however, would necessitate the adoption of a variety of focuses: the ‘behind,’ the ‘forward’ and the structure or nature of the text itself. Such a comprehensive methodology is necessary, because unless one subscribes to interpretive ‘relativism,’ there is a need to establish valid argumentative grounds in order to justify a particular interpretation. These grounds would not have the rigidity of the natural and even the social sciences, but they would at least help us to determine the *probability* of the validity of the interpretation being claimed. Ricoeur argues that explanation and understanding need to be dialectically engaged, for understanding without explanation would be blind, whereas explanation without understanding would be empty. The recognition that there is a significant difference between a naïve and a more refined or critical understanding of a text reveals the importance of providing an ‘explanation’ of a text. Ricoeur rightly asserts: “to explain more is to understand better.”

A second theme of significance within interpretation theory is that of the contrast and dialectic between the hermeneutics of trust and the hermeneutics of suspicion. The hermeneutics of trust—or affirmation or retrieval—operates from an ‘understanding’-based standpoint. The

hermeneutics of suspicion operates from the perspective of critical theory, and the ‘masters of suspicion,’ according to Ricoeur, are Marx (1818-1883), Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Freud (1856-1939). Each of them attempts a radical questioning and even a rejection of what is commonly accepted as normative for rationality and communication. Marx exposed unequal economic power relations which lie at the basis of ideology; Nietzsche argued that a natural will to power is repressed in the name of conventional morality; and Freud demonstrated that the repression of primal forces in civilized society could lead to psychological disorders. All of them led us to suspect what is superficial in terms of social communication. However, Ricoeur argues that these thinkers are not only destructive but also constructive in their critique. Marx invites us to transform unjust economic processes in order to create a more equal society. Nietzsche and Freud help us to overcome unnecessary repressive strategies so as to live authentic, creative and free lives. In his debates with Gadamer, the neo-Marxist critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (1929-) expressed a concern about the radical conservatism which may result from the hermeneutical approaches of Heidegger and Gadamer. This is because they do not adequately provide normative explanatory and critical criteria which are integral to any process of understanding. To avoid this limitation, Habermas—and Karl-Otto Apel (1922-)—developed normative regulations that govern speech acts, including acts of textual interpretation. According to them, every ideal communicative claim or interpretation entails statements that are understandable, aimed at the truth, expressed truthfully and in an appropriate manner. These four criteria help to expose distorting and inhibiting forces which may be part of traditional and dysfunctional interpretations.

A third theme concerns the **nature of the hermeneutical circle or spiral**. The most common demonstration of the operation of a circular movement in interpretation is that one cannot understand the whole text unless one becomes familiar with individual parts of the text, and one cannot understand the parts unless one has a sense of the whole. This circle becomes a spiral when a progressive interplay between the whole and the parts leads to a better understanding of both. This happens when one moves from a prior understanding of a text through explanations of the text—questions, hypotheses, answers—towards a refined understanding of the text, etc. In other words, this happens when one moves from a guess reading through a process of validation, towards a more probable reading which may still be in need of further validation, etc. From a subject-object based epistemological perspective, any form of ‘preunderstanding’ in the process of knowing the text would imply a vicious circle, wherein the ‘preunderstanding’ would be identified as an epistemological prejudice which interferes with a reading of the text. But Heidegger argues that this is not the case: one cannot get out of the circle to attain objectivity; rather, one must know how to enter into the circle—i.e., ask questions of a text or phenomenon—in a skillful manner. The circle is also operative within the dialectic between the hermeneutics of trust and suspicion. One moves from a tradition-based sense of trust, through a moment of reflective, critical distancing, towards a new level or paradigm of trust. Once this new level of trustful ‘belonging’ gets stabilized, it would then constitute what Ricoeur calls a ‘second naïveté.’

A final theme has to do with the **relevance of hermeneutics in terms of contemporary contextual applications**. Interpretation is a widespread phenomenon which takes place at both the theoretical and practical levels of human existence. For example, developing a scientific theory entails a process of the interpretation of natural or social phenomena by means of which

one may understand empirical data in a systematic and productive manner. At the practical level, interpretation takes place in a wide variety of fields: arriving at an ethically appropriate decision, engaging in responsible financial speculation, providing professional medical prognostication, etc. In all of these fields, one needs to be familiar with procedural or operational principles which serve as constraints or interpretive controls. Without such constraints, guiding principles or explanatory procedures, the process of interpretation would become mere guesswork and sophistry. With regard to the Indian situation, hermeneutics has much to offer by way of complementing our predominantly oral tradition with the strengths of the Western written tradition. In an oral tradition, less attention tends to get paid to the text and more to the living interpreter of the text in the form of the teacher, guru or resource person. In keeping with this traditional approach, there is much more of an emphasis paid to the role of 'understanding' rather than that of 'explanation.' Consequently, there is less scope for the employment of historical-critical methods and critical theory in textual study. A balanced hermeneutical approach would employ both explanation and critique in order to arrive at more accurate, meaningful and just interpretations of the text and of social phenomena in general.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1). What are the main hermeneutical insights of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur?

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2) What are some of the key themes within hermeneutical theory?

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3.5 POSTMODERNISM: MAJOR THINKERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION

Postmodernism, a contemporary form of philosophical skepticism, only finds expression in the second half of the twentieth century. However, there are a number of influential thinkers and movements which have influenced postmodern thinkers. One of the 'hermeneuts of suspicion,' namely, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), radically proposed that "there are no truths, only interpretations." Later the postmodernists will stress the reality of diverse interpretive frameworks rather than the validity of universal standpoints, systems or rationality itself. Nietzsche further argued that human beings are fundamentally driven by a "will to power," which is subtly suppressed by different social mechanisms, including religion. Postmodernists highlight the role of power which is latent in the way language and consciousness are constructed. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) radically overturned the subject-object epistemology at the basis of much of the Western rationalist and scientific outlook. For Heidegger, both subject and object entail one another, so that human knowledge is always a situated, contextual, limited and existentially-based knowledge. As a consequence of this, the Cartesian ego or independent,

autonomous subject—sacrosanct in Modern Philosophy—could no longer retain its status as the source and origin of meaning and purpose. Instead, it was one's *Sitz im Leben* or situation in life which determined the contents of consciousness. This radical subversion of the subject in favour of a community-constituted consciousness was to become one of the main tenets of postmodern belief. Postmodernism was also influenced by the 'structuralism' of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. Saussure drove a wedge between the world of 'signifiers' (words, images, signs) and the world of the 'signified' (the conceptual reality they refer to), by arguing that signifiers are arbitrary and do not have a specific or necessary relationship with the concepts signified by them.

Poststructuralists like Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)—one of the foremost postmodern thinkers—would take structuralism to its logical conclusion by arguing that there is a perpetual differentiation between words. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida argues that a word necessarily refers to another word for its meaning (this constitutes '*différance*' or a difference between words). But when this happens, meaning is always deferred or postponed (this constitutes '*différance*' or a perpetual suspension of meaning). All of this makes it impossible for oral or written communication to successfully represent any state of reality in an objective and universal manner. Furthermore, any articulation, either at the level of language (*langue*) or speech (*parole*)—a distinction made by Saussure—if not 'deconstructed,' would likely contain within itself oppressive cultural binary opposites, which in turn would lead to dysfunctional social relationships. Examples of such binary opposites are: soul versus body, male versus female, white versus coloured, clear versus ambiguous, Western versus Oriental, etc. These binary terms are not only opposed to one another but also contain implicit or explicit value-judgements which place one term above the other. Furthermore, Derrida argued against the privileged position which living speech enjoyed against the status of a written text. Living speech was thought to bring about the 'presence' of the matter under consideration, while writing was considered vague, subject to interpretation, and hence incapable of representing reality. Derrida's intention was to demonstrate that speech or discourse or even written texts cannot represent reality—a presupposition that he termed 'logocentrism'—as there will necessarily be a 'slippage' or ambiguity of meaning even in speech. Indeed, the role of the postmodern approach is to deconstruct texts—starting with philosophical texts which assumedly deal with truth and reality—in order to show that there is no exact correspondence between the world of linguistic signs and the posited real world.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) carried on this project of deconstruction by demonstrating that specific knowledge structures ("the order of things") are not neutral representations of truth, but instead have overt or covert power equations inbuilt within them. Foucault demonstrated the power of deconstruction by analyzing different social structures and mechanisms in different historical epochs and contexts. He showed how institutional parameters have changed in different historical contexts, especially in the areas of crime, psychological disorders ('madness') and sexual mores. Foucault first presented the 'archeology'—an objective and descriptive examination—of these systems, especially in his works on madness, e.g., *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), and on knowledge in general, e.g., *The Order of Things* (1966). Then, following Nietzsche, who tried to outline the genealogy of morality, he adopted the genealogical approach—tracing the evolution of knowledge systems—in which he showed how one system metamorphosed into another. This he did mainly in his works on crime and punishment, e.g.,

Discipline and Punish (1975), and on sexuality, e.g., *The History of Sexuality* (1976), showing how standards changed, but still managed to retain their controlling or disciplinary mechanisms.

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) wrote more consciously about the programme of postmodernism in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), especially its vocation to expose the latent violence within 'knowledge/power' dynamics. Unlike Bacon's dictum that 'knowledge is power,' i.e., that the possession of knowledge (or rational skills) gives one power (e.g., over nature), Lyotard's dynamic phrase of 'knowledge/power' connotes an intrinsic relationship in which one terms entails the other, and the goals of each domain involves the employment of the other. Hence Lyotard writes against the fundamental malaise within any knowledge system or operation, as it takes for granted or assumes certain discrepancies or injustices which are inbuilt at the levels of both ends and means of the system. These strategies of inbuilt inequality and domination need to be made transparent or 'deconstructed.' While there is much in common with critical theory in this approach, unlike Marxian or other forms of critique, there is no final goal or utopia which is proposed. Rather, the project of deconstruction entails a continual purification of linguistic and cultural works. Lyotard is also famous for his definition of postmodernism as an "incredulity towards metanarratives." This phrase entails a critique of all 'totalizing' systems of thought, including capitalism—and globalization—because of its presupposition of economic and cultural development, and to a lesser extent Marxism, because of its theory of (necessary) historical development towards utopia.

Other postmodernists include Gilles Deleuze, who wrote on the nature and role of 'difference' in *Difference and Repetition* (1968); Roland Barthes, who wrote a seminal essay on "The Death of the Author" (1968); Richard Rorty, the American pragmatist who wrote against epistemological foundationalism in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979); Jean Baudrillard, who wrote on the 'simulacrum' or a copy without reference to an original in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981); and Frederic Jameson who expounded on Postmodernism as an historical epoch in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

The postmodern contribution to philosophy has been challenged on a variety of issues: How can postmodernism account for the validity of its own discourse? If reality cannot be understood by language, and if communication is always in danger of 'slippage of meaning,' then how seriously is one to take the claims of postmodern literature? If all cultures and systems of meaning (the various 'Others') are equally valid (the position of 'relativism'), then what is the rational basis for the opposition to injustice within and between systems? If individual human consciousness is simply the byproduct of cultural influence, then why should one give significance (including intellectual property rights) to individual postmodern thinkers who propose seminal insights? If there is no scope for the notion of progress, then is human endeavour mostly an exercise in futility? These, and many more questions, pose serious challenges to a wider acceptance of postmodern thinking in philosophical and secular discourse.

3.6 PRIMARY THEMES WITHIN POSTMODERNISM

From clarity to ambiguity (a new epistemology): The clarity of Modern Philosophy is replaced with the ambiguity of Postmodernism. The metaphysics of transparency and presence, in which words could capture reality and represent it via concepts was replaced with ambiguous

language or texts [overcoming 'logocentrism'], in which there is no direct relationship between the signifier and the signified. Instead, the world of both the signifiers and the signified is an entirely socially constructed world, and furthermore, features a continual 'difference,' in the manner in which a dictionary contains words which only make sense in relationship to the other words in the dictionary. Thus, 'truth' and 'objectivity' are no more goals to aspire towards, as there is a tendency of linguistic slippage of meaning, in which one cannot totally convey what is meant, but only roughly or functionally. There is no ideal, universal, objective rationality.

From the human subject as the centre of interest to 'language' as the centre of interest (a new anthropology): The human phenomenon becomes replaced with language. Likewise, the focus on individual consciousness (the Cartesian 'subject') which dominated Modern philosophy gets replaced by a new focus on linguistic and cultural systems or structures of meaning (an objective and impersonal structure), within which the individual finds a place. Individual moral and personal responsibility gets replaced by attention to a larger world of linguistic meaning in which the individual is only a nodal point of creative expression. Thus, for example, according to Heidegger, the origin of the work of art is not the individual artist but 'art' itself.

From knowledge to knowledge/power (a new socio-political philosophy): There is a need to overcome binary thinking, which favours the rational over the emotional, the mind (or soul) over the body, clarity over ambiguity, unity over diversity, the male over the female, the Western over the non-Western, and the supernatural over the natural. Universal or 'totalizing' metanarratives which have a linear understanding of history and progress and which favoured Western cultural dominance become replaced with smaller and more local narratives which need not have a 'progressive' view of history and time.

From universality to plurality (a new metaphysics):

There are as many worlds of reality as there are cultural communities. Instead of one centre of meaning and purpose, in the decentred world of postmodernism there are various centres of power. The rationality of the 'Other' (culture, knowledge system) needs to be recognized as a distinct system of knowledge and value. What we have are various constructions of knowledge systems, the products (discourse and texts) of which are in continual need of 'deconstruction' in order to become purified of inconsistencies and latent power interests.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are some of the most significant contributions of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard towards the postmodern way of thinking?

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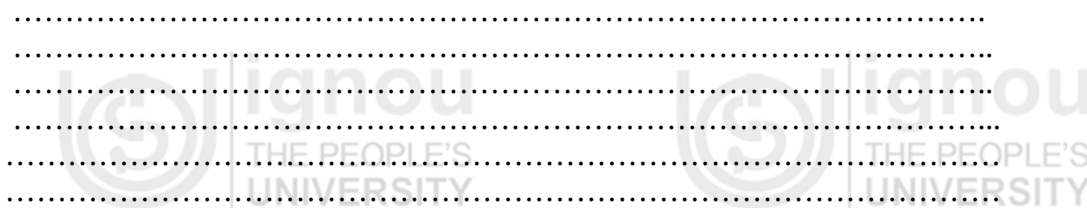
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2) What are some of the key themes or features of postmodernism?



3.7 LET US SUM UP

Both Hermeneutics and Postmodernism are reactions against the emphasis in Modern Philosophy on reason and neutral objectivity alone as the ultimate norm for truth and meaning. Hermeneutics points to other features like personal creativity, aesthetic and affective factors, individual interests, cultural influences, social forces and a variety of applications, both in the construction and the interpretation of texts. Hence texts—and human phenomena which share features of textuality—have a “surplus of meaning,” in the words of Paul Ricoeur, which allows for a variety of ways of creating and understanding them.

While ‘structuralism’ pointed to the arbitrary nature of signifiers (words, images, signs) as well as their differential nature with respect to other signs, ‘poststructuralists’ went beyond that to argue for the arbitrary and differential nature of the world of the signified (concepts, ideas) as well. ‘Postmodernism’—a development of such thinking—argued that reality cannot be grasped and controlled by language, even though every knowledge and cultural system tries to do so, and in the process lands up playing power games. In reality each system and product of knowledge is a limited and internally-dependent cultural and linguistic mechanism, which is in need of constant purification of inconsistencies and dysfunctional assumptions via the process of deconstruction.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Author intention: The original motivation and reason with which a text is constructed. (For some theorists, the meaning of a text has to be reduced to what the author intended. For most theorists, the meaning of a text goes beyond this intention).

Hermeneutic circle: To understand a part of the text one needs to understand the whole, but to understand the whole text one needs to understand the parts. The circle becomes a productive spiral when one starts with a guess reading, then seeks for better explanations, and arrives at a more sophisticated understanding, and so on.

Poststructuralism: Since the world of signifiers (signs, words, images) is arbitrary, inter-dependent, and differential (perpetually postpoing their meaning in reference to other signs), there is no direct relationship between signifiers and signified (concepts, ideas). As the world of the signified is also arbitrary, inter-dependent and differential, there is no way that language can connect us to the way things are in reality.

Deconstruction: The method used to uncover hidden or suppressed meanings of a discourse or text, which may include ambiguities, inconsistencies, contradictions and dominating or oppressive tendencies.

3.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4 NEO-SCHOLASTICISM AND FEMINISM

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Traditional Elements
- 4.3 Adaptations to Modern Needs
- 4.4 Prominent Neo-Scholastics
- 4.5 Feminist Philosophy: Introduction
- 4.6 General Characteristics of Feminist Thought
- 4.7 Historical Definitions
- 4.8 Some Feminist Philosophers
- 4.9 Need for Indian Feminist Philosophy
- 4.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.11 Key Words
- 4.12 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the students to the need of neo-scholastic philosophy.
- To acquaint them with some key notions of neo-scholasticism.
- To provide them with some elementary ideas of feminism.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Scholasticism is the system of theology and philosophy taught in medieval European universities, based on Aristotelian logic and the writings of the early Church Fathers and having a strong emphasis on tradition and dogma. This philosophy (or theology) which originated in the 9th century, was a medieval Christian school of philosophy and theology whose high point coincided with the rise of universities during the 12th and 13th centuries. The name was derived from the fact that those involved were the "Schoolmen" who taught at cathedral schools and universities. These philosophers sought to organize and systematize every aspect of Christian belief.

Saint Bonaventure (1221–1274) Bonaventure, Saint Thomas Aquinas, (1225–1274), John Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308) and William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347), were the great philosophers of High Scholasticism.

Neo-Scholasticism is the development of the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is not merely the resuscitation of a philosophy long since defunct, but rather a restatement in our own day of the philosophia perennis which, elaborated by the Greeks and brought to perfection by the great medieval teachers, has never ceased to exist even in modern times. It has some times been called neo-Thomism partly because St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century gave to Scholasticism among the Latins its final form, partly because the idea has gained ground that only Thomism can infuse vitality into twentieth century scholasticism. But Thomism is too narrow a term; the system itself is too large and comprehensive to be expressed by the name of any single exponent. This unit will

deal with the elements which neo-Scholasticism and the main features of it (De Wulf 1911).

4.2 TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS

Neo-Scholasticism seeks to restore the fundamental organic doctrines embodied in the Scholasticism of the thirteenth century. It claims that philosophy does not vary with each passing phase of history; that the truth of seven hundred years ago is still true today, and that if the great medieval thinkers - Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus - succeeded in constructing a sound philosophical system on the data supplied by the Greeks, especially by Aristotle, it must be possible, in our own day, to gather from the speculation of the Middle Ages the soul of truth which it contains. Following De Wulf (1911) these essential conceptions may be summarized as follows:

(1) God, pure actuality and absolute perfection, is substantially distinct from every finite thing: he alone can create and preserve all beings other than Himself. His infinite knowledge includes all that has been, is, or shall be, and likewise all that is possible.

(2) As to our knowledge of the material world: whatever exists is itself, an incommunicable, individual substance. To the core of self-sustaining reality, in the oak-tree for instance, other realities (accidents) are added - size, form, roughness, and so on. All oak-trees are alike, indeed are identical in respect of certain constituent elements. Considering this likeness and even identity, our human intelligence groups them into one species and again, in view of their common characteristics, it ranges various species under one genus. Such is the Aristotelean solution of the problem of universals. Each substance is in its nature fixed and determined; and nothing is farther from the spirit of Scholasticism than a theory of evolution which would regard even the essences of things as products of change. But this static world requires as its complement a moderate dynamism, and this is supplied by the central concepts of act and potency. Whatsoever changes is, just for that reason, limited. The oak-tree passes through a process of growth, of becoming; whatever is actually in it now was potentially in it from the beginning. Its vital functions go on unceasingly (accidental change); but the tree itself will die, and out of its decayed trunk other substances will come forth (substantial change). The theory of matter and form is simply an interpretation of the substantial changes which bodies undergo. The union of matter and form constitutes the essence of concrete being, and this essence is endowed with existence. Throughout all change and becoming there runs a rhythm of finality; the activities of the countless substances of the universe converge towards an end which is known to God; finality, in a word, involves optimism.

(3) Man, a compound of body (matter) and of soul (form), puts forth activities of a higher order - knowledge and volition. Through his senses he perceives concrete objects, e.g. this oak; through his intellect he knows the abstract and universal (the oak). All our intellectual activity rests on sensory function; but through the active intellect (*intellectus agens*) an abstract representation of the sensible object is provided for the *intellectus possibilis*. Hence the characteristic of the idea, its non-materiality, and on this is based the principal argument for the spirituality and immortality of the soul. Here, too, is the foundation of logic and of the theory of knowledge, the justification of our judgments and syllogisms. Upon knowledge follows the appetitive process, sensory or intellectual according to the sort of knowledge. The will) in certain conditions is free, and thanks to this liberty man is the

master of his destiny. Like all other beings, we have an end to attain and we are morally obliged, though not compelled, to attain it. Natural happiness would result from the full development of our powers of knowing and loving. We should find and possess God in this world since the corporeal world is the proper object of our intelligence. But above nature is the order of grace and our supernatural happiness will consist in the direct intuition of God, the beatific vision. Here philosophy ends and theology begins.

4.3 ADAPTATION TO MODERN NEEDS

The neo-Scholastic programme includes, in the next place, the adaptation of medieval principles and doctrines to our present intellectual needs. Complete immobility is no less incompatible with progress than out-and-out relativism. To make Scholasticism rigid and stationary would be fatal to it. The doctrines revived by the new movement are like an inherited fortune; to refuse it would be folly, but to manage it without regard to actual conditions would be worse. With Dr. Ehrhard one may say: "Aquinas should be our beacon, not our boundary". We have now to pass in review the various factors in the situation and to see in what respect the new Scholasticism differs from the old and how far it adapts itself to our age.

Elimination of False or Useless Notions

Neo-Scholasticism rejects the theories of physics, celestial and terrestrial, which the Middle Ages grafted on the principles, otherwise sound enough, of cosmology and metaphysics; e.g. the perfection and superiority of astral substance, the "incorruptibility" of the heavenly bodies, their external connexion with "motor spirits", the influence of the stars on the generation of earthly beings, the four "simple" bodies, etc. It further rejects those philosophical theories which are disproved by the results of investigation; e.g. the diffusion of sensible "species" throughout a medium and their introduction into the organs of sense. Even the Scholastic ideas that have been retained are not all of equal importance; criticism and personal conviction may retrench or modify them considerably, without injury to fundamental principles.

Study of the History of Philosophy

The medieval scholars cultivated the history of philosophy solely with a view to its utility, i.e. as a means of gathering the deposit of truth contained in the writings of the ancients and, especially, for the purpose of refuting error and thus emphasizing the value of their own doctrine. Modern students, on the contrary, regard every human fact and achievement as in itself significant, and accordingly they treat the history of philosophy in a spirit that is more disinterested. With this new attitude, neo-Scholasticism is in full sympathy; it does its share in the work of historical reconstruction by employing critical methods; it does not attempt to condense the opinions of others into a syllogism and refute them with a phrase, nor does it commend the practice of putting whole systems into a paragraph or two in order to annihilate them with epithet or invective. Neo-Scholasticism, however, does not confine its interest to ancient and medieval philosophy; its chief concern is with present-day systems. It takes issue with them and offsets their theories of the world by a synthesis of its own. It is only by keeping in touch with actual living thought that it can claim a place in the twentieth century and command the attention of its opponents. And it has everything to gain from a discussion in which it encounters Positivism, Kantianism, and other forms or tendencies of modern speculation.

Dialogue with the Sciences

The need of a philosophy based on science is recognized to-day by every school. Neo-Scholasticism simply follows the example of the Aristotelean and medieval philosophy in taking the data of research as the groundwork of its speculation. That there are profound differences between the Middle Ages and modern times from the scientific point of view, is obvious. One has only to consider the multiplication of the sciences in special lines, the autonomy which science as a whole has acquired, and the clear demarcation established between popular views of nature and their scientific interpretation. But it is equally plain that neo-Scholasticism must follow up each avenue of investigation, since it undertakes, as Aristotle and Aquinas did, to provide a synthetic explanation of phenomena by referring them to their ultimate causes and determining their place in the universal order of things; and this undertaking, if the synthesis is to be deep and comprehensive, presupposes a knowledge of the details furnished by each science. It is not possible to explain the world of phenomena while neglecting the phenomena that make up the world. "All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact. . . . Like a short-sighted reader, its eye pores closely, and travels slowly, over the awful volume which lies open for its inspection. . . . These various partial views or abstractions . . . are called sciences . . . they proceed on the principle of a division of labour. . . . And further the comprehension of the bearings of one science on another, and the use of each to each, and the location of them all, with one another, this belongs, I conceive, to a sort of science distinct from all of them, and in some sense, a science of sciences, which is my own conception of what is meant by philosophy." There is, of course, the pedagogical problem; how shall philosophy maintain its control over the ever-widening field of the various sciences? In reply, we may cite the words of Cardinal Mercier, a prominent leader in the neo-Scholastic movement: "As a matter of fact", he declares, "the difficulty is a serious one, and one may say in general terms, that it is not going to be solved by any one man. As the domain of fact and observation grows larger and larger, individual effort becomes less competent to survey and master it all: hence the necessity of co-operative effort to supply what is lacking in the work of isolated investigators; hence too the need of union between the synthetic mind and the analytic, in order to secure, by daily contact and joint action, the harmonious development of philosophy and science."

Innovations in Doctrinal Matters

Once it turned its attention to modern fashions of thought, neo-Scholasticism found itself face to face with problems of which medieval philosophy had not the slightest suspicion or at any rate did not furnish a solution. It had to bear the brunt of conflict between its own principles and those of the systems in vogue, especially of Positivism and Criticism. And it had to take up, from its own point of view, the questions which are favourite topics of discussion in the schools of our time. How far then, one may ask, has neo-Scholasticism been affected by modern thought? As to metaphysics: in the Middle Ages its claim to validity met with no challenge, whereas, in the twentieth century, its very possibility is at stake and, to defend it against the concerted attack of Hume and Kant and Comte, the true significance of such concepts as being, substance, absolute, cause, potency, and act must be explained and upheld. It is further needful to show that, in a very real sense, God is not unknowable; to rebut the charges preferred by modern philosophers against the traditional proofs of God's existence; to deal with the materials furnished by ethnography and the history of religions; and to study the various forms which monism or pantheism nowadays

assume. Cosmology can well afford to insist on the traditional theory of matter and form, provided it pay due attention to the findings of physics, chemistry, crystallography, and mineralogy, and meet the objections of atomism and dynamism, theories which, in the opinion of scientific authority, are less satisfactory as explanations of natural phenomena than the hylomorphism of the Scholastics.

Neo-Scholasticism proceeds by analysis and introspection it states the problem in the terms which, since Kant's day, are the only admissible terms, but as against the Kantian criticism it finds the solution in a rational dogmatism. Its aesthetics holds a middle course between the extreme subjectivism of many modern thinkers who would reduce the beautiful to a mere impression, and the no less extreme objectivism which the Greeks of old maintained. It is equally at home in the field of experimental psychology which investigates the correlation between conscious phenomena and their physiological accompaniments. The laws and principles which the modern science of education has drawn from experience find their adequate explanation in neo-Scholastic doctrine; thus, the intuitive method, so largely accepted at present as an essential element in education, is based on the Scholastic theory that nothing enters the intellect save through the avenue of sense.

As regards the relations between philosophy and religion, there are important changes to note. For the medieval mind in the Western world, philosophy and theology were identical until about the twelfth century. In the thirteenth the line of demarcation was clearly drawn, but philosophy was still treated as the preliminary training for theology. This is no longer the case; neo-Scholasticism assigns to philosophy a value of its own as a rational explanation of the world, on a par in this respect with Positivism and other systems; and it welcomes all who are bent on honest research, whether their aim be purely philosophical or apologetic. Parallel with these modifications are those which affect the pedagogical phase of the movement. The methods of teaching philosophy in the thirteenth century were too closely dependent on the culture of that age; hence they have been replaced by modern procedures, curricula, and means of propagation. It would be ill-advised to wrap neo-Scholastic doctrine in medieval jargons. In this connexion, the use of living languages as a means of exposition has obvious advantages and finds favour with many of those who are best qualified to judge.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does Neo-Scholasticism adapt to modern needs?

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2) Does Neo-Scholasticism take science seriously?

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4.4 PROMINENT NEO-SCHOLASTICS

Jacques Maritain

Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), French philosopher and political thinker, was one of the principal exponents of Thomism in the twentieth century and an influential

interpreter of the thought of St Thomas Aquinas. Raised as a Protestant, he converted to Catholicism in 1906. An author of more than 60 books, he helped to revive St. Thomas Aquinas for modern times and is a prominent drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Pope Paul VI presented his "Message to Men of Thought and of Science" at the close of Vatican II to Maritain, his long-time friend and mentor. Maritain's interest and works spanned many aspects of philosophy, including aesthetics, political theory, the philosophy of science, metaphysics, education, liturgy and ecclesiology.

Joseph Maréchal (1878 - 1944) was a Belgian Jesuit priest, philosopher and psychologist at the Higher Institute of Philosophy of the University of Leuven who founded a school of thought called Transcendental Thomism, which attempted to merge the theological and philosophical thought of St. Thomas Aquinas with that of Immanuel Kant. Maréchal joined the Jesuits in 1895 and after a doctorate in Biology in Leuven (1905) he specialized first in Experimental Psychology, spending some time in Munich with Wilhelm Wundt (1911). Till the end of his life Maréchal would say that his real interest was rather in Psychology than Philosophy. Prompted by the call of Pope Leo XIII to revitalize Thomist theology, he started studying in depth the works of St Thomas Aquinas in order to understand the inner coherence of his system, along with the works of other scholastic thinkers, modern philosophers and scientists of the day. From this (and in particular from influences from Kant's transcendental idealism) emerged a new and more dynamic Thomism, recapturing the union of 'act and power' of the original thinker. The development of his thought can be grasped in the five 'cahiers' (see bibliography) in which after exposing the weaknesses of traditional Thomism he evaluated Kant's Philosophy (3d cahier) with whose help he proposes a modernized Thomism in the 4th and 5th cahier. The work of Maréchal had a great influence on such contemporary theologians and philosophers as Gaston Isaye, Joseph de Finance, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and J.B. Lodz. He proceeded in the same way in his study of the psychology of the mystics. Till his death (11 December 1944) he taught Philosophy and Experimental Psychology at the Jesuit house of Studies in Leuven.

Karl Rahner, SJ (1904 —1984) was a German Jesuit and theologian who, alongside Bernard Lonergan and Hans Urs von Balthasar, is considered one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century. His theology influenced the Second Vatican Council and was ground-breaking for the development of what is generally seen as the modern understanding of Catholicism.

Bernard J.F. Lonergan, SJ (1904 –1984) was a Canadian Jesuit Priest. He was a philosopher-theologian in the Thomist tradition and an economist from Buckingham, Quebec. He is the author of *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957) and *Method in Theology* (1972), which established what he called the Generalized Empirical Method (GEM).

Emerich Coreth SJ (1919 - 2006) was an Austrian Jesuit deeply making Scholastic thought relevant through his metaphysics. Following insights from Kant and Heidegger, he tried to present a philosophy (especially metaphysics and anthropology) that is consistent with the Christian vision.

4.5 FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY: INRODUCTION

Feminist philosophy emerged in the US in the 1970s following only a decade behind the rise of the US women's movement in the 1960s. Although Simone de Beauvoir published her now highly influential *The Second Sex* in 1953, it would take at least a decade for women in the US to begin to organize around the injustices Beauvoir identified, and even longer for feminist philosophers in the US to turn to her work for inspiration.

Although feminist philosophies are common in US, it is important to stress that it is still evolving, especially in India. Feminist philosophies have histories that date back historically at least to the early modern period, and have different genealogies in different geographical regions. Understanding the emergence of feminist philosophy in the U.S. requires an overview of at least two contexts — the political context of what came to be called the “second wave of the woman's movement” and the nature of philosophy in U.S. academies.

4.6 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMINIST THOUGHT

Feminism is, in fact, a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women. Its concepts overlap with those of women's rights. Much of feminism deals specifically with the problems women face in overcoming social barriers, but some feminists argue that gender equality implies a necessary liberation of both men and women from traditional cultural roles, and look at the problems men face as well. Feminists—that is, persons practicing feminism—may be persons of either sex (Wikipedia).

Feminist philosophy emerged from these feminist movements and includes general theories and theories about the origins of inequality, and, in some cases, about the social construction of sex and gender, in a variety of disciplines. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's rights—such as in contract, property, and voting—while also promoting women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy and reproductive rights. They have opposed domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. In economics, they have advocated for workplace rights, including equal pay and opportunities for careers and to start businesses.

Today's feminists seek access to education through fair consideration for women for scholarships, inclusion in athletic programs, and equal treatment in the classroom; to economics through equal access for women to jobs and careers, equal pay, and equal consideration for promotions and career enhancement as well as family-friendly and flexible workplaces with less hierarchical management structures; and to politics through a 50% voice for women in decision making at all levels of government and power structures (Harlan 1998).

Feminists also seek a change in control over reproduction through reproductive freedom for all women, including maintaining legal access to abortion and unhindered sex education and access to birth control. They seek control over sexuality through the right of all to define their own sexuality and the freedom to practice it without discrimination, either overt or subtle. They seek an end to violence through ending control over women's mobility and personal freedom, ending domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape, and limiting the prevalence of pornography which leads to violence against women. They seek a change in control over society through transformation of social institutions which perpetuate inequality of the sexes and values genders differently.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Who is Emerich Coreth?

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2) Give some general characteristics of feminist thought

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4.7 HISTORICAL DEFINITIONS

The following definitions given by Judith Harlan (1998) give a rough idea of the growth of feminist thought, especially in the United States.

Wave Feminists

The feminists who fought for suffrage in the United States and beyond, beginning with the meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 and culminating in the right to vote in 1920, are today call the 'first wave'. These were the women who broke through the barriers of their day to speak in public, to demand property rights, and to claim a political voice (Harlan 1998).

Second Wave

Taking up the cause of women's rights in the early to mid-1960s, these feminists founded feminist organizations and raised the consciousness of the women and men of the country, focusing on winning pay equity for women, access to jobs and education, recognition of women's unpaid labor in the home, and a rebalancing of the double workload of family and outside work for women in the paid labor force. The wave began with the founding of women's liberation groups that took New Left political groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society as their models, joined soon after by other groups that sought political change within the system and through political organizations of their own, forming feminist groups and the mass of the second wave. This second wave is usually considered to have begun about 1963 and run until the backlash of the 1980s, when feminism is seen to have stagnated.

Third Wave

The third wave consists of many of the daughters and sons of the second wave, as well as the second wavers themselves. These feminists grew up with many of the advantages that the second wave fought for, and their issues are today's issues - parental leave and day care for the children of working parents, gaining decision-making positions in corporate and governmental high offices, worldwide sustainable development, and a global awareness of feminist causes. The third wave is a global surge, and in the US is multi-cultural and inclusive, supporting women of all heritages as well as the rights of lesbian women and gay men.

Some of these third-wave feminists are issuing a challenge to the older feminists, seeing feminist rhetoric as entrenched in victimization, with an emphasis on the oppression engendered by a patriarchal system. They grew up in a country transformed by second-wave feminist leaders, with established equal employment and education laws, access to birth control and legal abortion, support within police departments for prosecution of rapists, and women holding a vocal presence in politics. Many third wavers see women as fundamentally strong, confident, brave

individuals. They seek to establish that image of women within the public consciousness, and they look for greater integration of women into politics, economics, and social forums.

Liberal (Equality) Feminism

Liberal feminists are individualists who stress the importance of freedom, especially the freedom to choose. They see more similarities between women and men than differences and envision a community of equitable opportunity for both sexes. They also see most stereotypically masculine or feminine traits as culturally imposed. They view choice as an absolute right, and they seek control over the body and social circumstance. They strive to avoid the imprint of gender codes and the gender socialization of children, looking instead for an authentic, unengineered, and individual approach to life. Some of today's liberal feminists describe themselves as equality feminists and see a link between themselves and first-wave or early second-wave feminists.

Cultural (Difference) Feminism

Emerging in the 1970s and becoming a strong voice by the 1980s, cultural feminism attempts to revalue the feminine aspects that have been devalued by society. It celebrates all things female, whether these derive from social, class, or biological circumstances of women's lives. Difference feminists see many gender traits as biological, or at least deeply structured cultural, traits. They celebrate the differences between women and men, seeing feminine qualities as a source of personal strength and pride and providing affirmation that women occupy the moral high ground. Instead of political change, cultural feminism focuses on cultural transformation, stressing the role of the nonrational, intuitive, collective side of life. This thread of reasoning can be traced through feminists history to first-wave debates within feminist circles.

Those debates centered on the need for women's input in government as guiding, moral voices - the conscience of the nation.(First-wave difference feminists also argued for protective labor legislation for women).

Radical Feminism

Also stressing the differences between females and males, radical feminism values women and likens males to a separate species. Whether the difference is biological or gendered by society is not at issue; the results of male difference and dominance are. According to the radical feminist ideology, the violence of the heterosexual male has led to the patriarchal and hierarchical cultures of today. Further, the male as oppressed and victimized the female through pornography, violence, and the militarization of the world.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Feminists who agree with the tenets of Marxist and socialist feminism believe women are seen as a sex class, gendered by society into a secondary position through a systemic sex gender system that dictates social roles, purposes, and norms. These feminists believe that women are exploited as both a sex and a class, and that women are consigned to reproduction and their natures tethered. Men take the roles of goods production and potentially reach freedom. To change this situation, Marxist and socialist feminists seek an end to gendered socialization, and alliance of oppressed groups, and a beginning of a sharing of the wealth.

Ecofeminism

Growing from the idea of women's values as separate from men's and also closer to nature, Ecofeminism revalues and defines feminine traits. Women are seen as in tune

with nature and seeking to work in conjunction with it; men have a hierarchical relationship to nature and seek to control it. This view poses the idea that men's control of nature up to now has created a crisis, and ecocide, in much of the world. Ecofeminists look for life-affirming and nonviolent solutions to world problems. Ecofeminists see feminine values as virtues needed by the world's patriarchy to survive and evolve. Ecofeminists may also subscribe to liberal, radical, or Marxist/socialist thought, but focus on ecology, both of nature and human systems.

Black Feminism

Though African American feminists may not have been included in early mainstream second-wave feminism, they have always been a vocal presence in feminist criticism and ideology. Racism, they have said, is a problem that lives alongside sexism. And so is classism (the hierarchy created by a caste-like economic and social class system). They have demanded that feminists consider the problems of racism and classism along with sexism; further, they have explained the interlacing interconnections from racism to sexism to classism. Sexism cannot truly be understood without understanding its racist undertones; by the same token, racism embodies sexism.

They have refuted the stereotypes of black women as matriarchs and superwomen and have spearheaded movements to gain economic and political clout for women of color. African American women support numerous feminist and women's issues organizations, some of them chiefly for women of color. They are also part of the general feminist movement and leadership, both in the United States and globally.

Male Feminists

Men have been allies, mentors, and supporters of feminism from the beginning of the women's movements. They may consider themselves to be Ecofeminists, cultural feminists, liberal feminists, and so on. Usually, their goal is to see beyond the accepted stereotypes of males that they have grown up with, to create nonsexist relationships, to join in the battle to end violence against women, and to develop partnerships with women instead of hierarchies.

4.8 SOME FEMINIST PHILOSOPHERS

Simone de Beauvoir

Simone-Ernestine-Lucie-Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir, often shortened to Simone de Beauvoir (1908 -1986), was a French existentialist philosopher, public intellectual, and social theorist. She wrote novels, essays, biographies, an autobiography in several volumes, and monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues. She is now best known for her metaphysical novels, including *She Came to Stay* and *The Mandarins*, and for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. She is also noted for her lifelong polyamorous relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre.

Julia Kristeva (1941) is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, psychoanalyst, sociologist, feminist, and, most recently, novelist, who has lived in France since the mid-1960s. She is now a Professor at the University Paris Diderot. Kristeva became influential in international critical analysis, cultural theory and feminism after publishing her first book *Semiotikè* in 1969. Her immense body of work includes books and essays which address intertextuality, the semiotic, and abjection, in the fields of linguistics, literary theory and criticism, psychoanalysis, biography and autobiography, political and cultural analysis, art and art history. Together with

Roland Barthes, Todorov, Goldmann, Gérard Genette, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Greimas, and Althusser, she stands as one of the foremost structuralists, in that time when structuralism took a major place in humanities. Her works also have an important place in post-structuralist thought.

Mary Daly (1928 – 2010) was an American radical feminist philosopher, academic, and theologian. Daly, who described herself as a "radical lesbian feminist", taught at Boston College, a Jesuit-run institution, for 33 years.

4.9 NEED FOR INDIAN FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

While Western feminists and Western theoretical models of feminism have done a commendable job of deconstructing several age-old binaries that have characterised dominant philosophical and political thinking on gender, what is remarkable is the continued existence of the dichotomy of the West and 'the Rest' in their discourse. Books on feminist theories, even if they claim to give 'multicultural' or 'global' perspectives on women's studies, are still dominated by Western classifications.

In such books, feminist perspectives from Asia or India, if included at all, are usually relegated to one chapter. The implication is that there is uniformity or even agreement on what feminism means in these very diverse cultures of Europe and India. They bring together different geographies and histories until difference is lost and one world feminism' becomes interchangeable with another. Maitrayee Chaudhuri's collection *Feminism in India* challenges this reduction of local feminisms.

Tracing the history of the concept of feminism from colonial times to contemporary India, Chaudhuri explores the infinite variety of Indian feminisms and their characteristics. Chaudhuri tries to give a broad picture of feminist thought in India and its development. Some of the 'Challenges to Feminism' in India described in this book are the politics of the Hindu Right, the Hindutva movement and globalisation,

Another distinguished Indian feminist writer, novelist, and author of several short story anthologies, Sarojini Sahoo, through her blog, "Sense & Sensuality," explores why sexuality plays a major role in our understanding of Eastern feminism. To the question, "Is feminism in India different from feminism in the West?" she answers: "At one time in India - in the ancient Vedic period - there were equal rights between men and women and even feminist law makers like Gargi and Maitreyi. But the later Vedic period polarized the sexes. Males oppressed females and treated them as 'other' or similar to a lower caste." She holds that patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies which keep females down, oppressed by the traditional system.

Madhu Kishwar is a fearless and provocative thinker, unafraid to ride against the wave. She holds that "Feminism is inviting such disdain and backlash in India because it lacks both fighting power and integrity. In the west at least, women fought bitter battles. Here, men led the way. The Gandhis, the Phules. I'm not ashamed to acknowledge that." (Tehelka series on public intellectuals.) Thus India badly needs an Indian feminist philosophy, which is in the making.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is radical feminism?

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2) Who was Simone de Beauvoir?

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4.10 LET US SUM UP

We have studied in this unit some of the elementary notions of neo-scholasticism and feminism.

4.11 KEY WORDS

Beatific vision: In Christian theology, the beatific vision (Latin: visio beatifica) is the eternal and direct visual perception of God

Hylomorphism: The metaphysical view according to which every natural body consists of two intrinsic principles, one potential, namely, primary matter, and one actual, namely, substantial form.

Ecofeminism: It is a social and political movement which points to the existence of considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism, with some currents linking deep ecology and feminism

4.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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