

UNIT 4 SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATION

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4.0. OBJECTIVE

In this unit, we will see the emergence of modern Western philosophy and its impact on different spheres of human society and in the domain of academic. We will also see the chronological development of modern Western thinkers.

By the end of this unit one will be able to:

- * Know the glimpses of modern western philosophers
- * Their influence on society and human thoughts in general

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we discuss the socio- political implications of Modern Western Philosophy we should know the distinction between ancient, medieval and modern. These three terms are used to divide human history and civilization. Accordingly history is divided into ancient history, medieval history and modern history. Sometimes the term pre-history is used to stand for very very ancient time. It should be remembered in this connection that ancient, medieval and modern are relative terms. That which is modern today will be medieval tomorrow and ancient day after tomorrow and so on. Further, it is not necessary that ancient and medieval are useless and modern is very useful. To get rid of these confusions and obviate the difficulties these terms have to be redefined in terms of mind sets and attitudes. So ancient, medieval and modern stand for particular mind sets and attitudes.

Seen in this light according to some sociologists ancient means superstitious medieval means religious and modern means scientific. One thing common between ancient and medieval is that faith and unquestioned belief characterize these two mind sets whereas doubt and questioning spirit characterize the so called modern mind set. If this definition of modern and modernity is accepted then Francis Bacon should be regarded as the precursor and father of modern and

modernity. Bacon prescribes a method of cleansing the mind before we do any philosophy or science. Human mind is infected with idols or false beliefs and misconceptions. After removing the idola from mind one should develop questioning spirit. According to Bacon, Idols are of the following types; (i) Idols of Tribe, (ii) Idols of Cave, (iii) Idols of Market place and (iv) Idols of Theatre. In nutshell, human mind is the source of all superstitions. So it has to be kept neat and clean. In other words before understanding any inquiry or investigation one has to clean the mind set and one has to approach native with a clean slate. Mind has to be kept neat and clean. But Bacon's views should not be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Bacon recommends elimination of blind belief, prejudice and superstitions.

4.2. DESCARTES, SPINOZA AND LEIBNITZ

However, it is conventional to treat Rene Descartes and not Francis Bacon as the father of modern Western philosophy. Descartes was a French Philosopher and made original contribution to mathematics and geometry. He is known as the father of the modern western philosophy because he introduced absolutely a new method of philosophizing. Do not take anything granted. Think, reflect and doubt and then we will know – was the motto of Descartes. This methodological doctrine ultimately led to *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I exist). This is otherwise known as the method of universal doubt. At the same time Descartes streamlined matter and mind as two distinct substances that influenced and inspired both Spinoza and Leibnitz. The trios are known as the modern rationalist philosophers as Plato and Aristotle are known as the ancient rationalist in Europe. Modern rationalism did give rise to a new wave of metaphysics, ontology and epistemology. But it did influence socio-political life of people in Europe. Descartes protected and preserved the independence of mind and spirit against the onslaught of materialism. Further Cartesianism made God a necessity because without God matter and mind cannot interact. So Deism got a booster. Further, mathematics and geometry were influenced by Descartes to such an extent that the subsequent thinkers made search for universal and indubitable truths. Only reason, unalloyed reason can give us truth.

Pantheism became the watch word of Spinoza. In a sense deistic religion got a set back but in another sense pantheism reigned supreme. If there is a God it is all pervasive. There is nothing that falls beyond the purview of God and divinity. The spinozistic metaphysics did encourage humility, tolerance and universal brotherhood.

Leibnitz's concept of monad and God as the monad of all monads restored Omnipresence, Omnipotence and Omniscience to God. Thus the supposed materialism that was likely to flow from Newton's concepts of matter, motion and energy was obstructed and came to a halt. Newton and Leibnitz were contemporaries. There was some kind of jealousy between the two. But in many ways Leibnitz surpassed Newton.

The medieval conflict between science and theology came to a stop with philosophies of Descartes Spinoza and Leibnitz. Matter and mind or spirit belongs to two different spheres and sometimes God the Divine plays a very important role in the world. But at the same time the emphasis on mathematics geometry and mathematical reasoning by the philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz paved the way for greater applications of mathematics and mathematical methods in understanding the world at large. Emphasis on reason and rationality

glorify reason. It led to the conclusion that there is only one order of rationality. Thus universalism reigned supreme and any kind of specificity and particularity as denounced. Cultural universalism replaced cultural relativism and cultural pluralism. This type of metaphysics aimed at eliminating and uprooting all types of particularity and in due course of time the Western or European model of society and culture was treated as the paradigms for all cultures and societies. The social scientists particularly the social anthropologists who were influenced by this type of philosophical ideology began to denounce the non-western culture and civilization.

4.3 EMPIRICIST MOVEMENT

After the rationalists it is the empiricists like Locke, Berkeley and Hume who played a major role in shaping the socio cultural history of Europe. The empiricist emphasis on experience and experiential knowledge inspired empirical sciences. Empirical method is one of the primary methods of knowing and studying the world. Locke, Berkley and Hume are the accredited empiricists though Bentham Mill and Spencer are also included in the group for various reasons. It is necessary in this connection to mention that liberalism and individualism in politics, Laissez Fair in Economics and Behaviorism in psychology go along with empiricist epistemology and theory of knowledge. Locke's thesis that simple and complex ideas constitute knowledge gives rise to the thesis that individuals are the basic units of the state. The social contract theory advocated by Locke was the logical outcome of such an epistemological theory. In due course of time, Locke's philosophy encouraged and inspired politics in England and the United States of America.

It is said that it is Berkeley who made Locke consistent. That empiricism ultimately leads to solipsism was shown and argued out in detail by Berkeley. Berkeley was a bishop and he had to account for the omniscience of God. Accordingly he gave sophisticated arguments for the existence of an omniscient God.

It is said that Hume made empiricism consistent. According to Hume, experience is the ultimate source of knowledge and no knowledge about the world can be necessary. Thus Hume was led to classify propositions into two broad types. They are (i) synthetic or empirical and (ii) analytic or necessary. Synthetic or empirical propositions are probable; there is no necessity in them. On the other hand, the so called necessary propositions are vacuous or empty; they are devoid of factual content. The positivistic distinction between analytic and synthetic thus owes its origin to Hume's classification of propositions. The phrase "Commit it to flame" was very famous with Hume. Any proposition that is neither analytic nor synthetic must be committed to flames. The later day dictum that metaphysics is nonsense is really Humean in nature. The idea of synthetic a priori was crumbled thus dethroning mathematics from its pristine glory. It paved the way for Kant but did not give up faith and belief from human world. Empiricist epistemology and metaphysic gave rise to probabilism. It is note worthy to note that Locke and Newton were contemporaries. But while Locke's theory was bound to give rise to probabilism Newton's Mathematical and Physical theory gave rise to some kind of universalism and necessity in the sphere of natural world. Further Berkley's dictum '*Esse est Percipi*' along with certain other principles was almost to give rise to Einstein's theory of relativity making motion and rest relative to the position of observer. This shows how the so called abstract philosophical and metaphysical theories shape construction and reconstruction of physical theory. Further the empiricist epistemology gave rise to hedonistic and utilitarian ethical theories.

4.4 ERA OF IMMANUEL KANT

The empiricist tradition particularly the Humean analysis of experience gave a serious jolt to Copernican – Galilean – Newtonian mechanics. There is no necessity in any knowledge worth its name. The Humean probabilism aroused Kant, it is said, from the latter’s dogmatic slumber. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is a defense of Newtonian mechanics. Kant’s argument was that there is necessity in the world and knowledge. This necessity comes from mind. It is mind that is the source of necessity. Two forms of intuition that is space and time and twelve categories constitute the very basis of scientific knowledge. It is the alpha and omega of knowledge. Thus the necessity and universality of knowledge that was challenged by Hume was restored to it by Kant.

Mathematical and scientific knowledge are synthetic a priori. It is synthetic because it gives us information and it is a priori because it is necessary and universal.

Further, Kant brought to an end the age old conflict between science and religion by introducing two concepts such as phenomenon and noumenon. Science belongs to the domain of phenomenon and religion ethics, and aesthetics etc. belong to the domain of noumenon. Thus Kant’s philosophy gave an assurance not only to philosophers and scientists but also to common man as well. The boundaries of knowledge, faith and belief were clearly drawn. The long drawn conflict between science and religion came to an end. It was shown by Kant that science and religion have distinct and different domain. Therefore there is no scope for conflict between the two. Thus Kant not only brought an end to the conflict between rationalism and empiricism but gave a new direction to philosophising. This justification of the Newtonian mechanics was unparalleled. It is Kant who treated moral principles as *Sui generis*, unique, and autonomous so that it cannot be reduced to anything at all. Autonomy of moral was the slogan. Neither utility nor subjective sentiment nor even pragmatic value can justify the moral principles. Thus Kant’s synthetic a priori and categorical imperative held roost many many years almost in every field. Thus, Kant’s three critiques, Critique of Pure Reasons, Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of Judgment can be said to have defended *Satyam Shivam and Sundaram* (Truth, Good and Beauty). The Critique of Pure Reason lays down the conditions of truth scientific and otherwise; Critique of Practical Reason lays down the conditions of morality and the Critique of Judgment lays down the conditions of Beauty. In this sense they are the three milestones or land marks in the history of human thought.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Explain the four types of idols according to Francis Bacon.

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2) Explain briefly the impact of Descartes on later thought
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4.5 HEGEL AND HIS DIALECTIC METHOD

But soon philosophers were dissatisfied with the bloodless ballets of categories. The Kantian categories were fixed in number and static. They do not grow and thus are still and lifeless. It was Hegel who was dissatisfied with the Kantian categories. Being, Nonbeing and Becoming or Thesis, Anti Thesis and Synthesis soon replaced the fixed Kantian categories. Reality or Geist is dynamic, it grows and develops until it achieves and attains completion. Thus for Hegel law of contradiction is the basic law. It is not only the law of logic but also the law of reality as well. The law of contradiction operates in the world.

Hegelian dialectics changed the cognitive structure of people. Hegel supported the cause of absolute monarchy. He pleaded that freedom is obedience to the order of the state. It may not be out of place to mention in this connection that dictatorship got support from the Hegelian philosophy. Hitter and Mussolini the two notorious dictators were inspired by Hegel's philosophy. But Hegelian dialectic was not only adopted but also used by Marx in understanding human society. It is said that Hegel was standing on his head and Marx made him stand on his leg. This is a metaphor but the metaphor is very meaningful in the context. Hegel used dialectics and the dialectical method to support the spirit (Geist). The Geist or the spirit is the final reality. But for Marx it is Matter that is the ultimate reality. On the surface Hegelian philosophy appears to be strange and replete with contradiction. But attempt has been made by scholars like Findlay and others to trace back analytical philosophy and the modern philosophy of language to Hegel. The Hegelian doctrine that the absolute reality is a totality and dynamic gives significant insight to the man and nature. That the entire world is interrelated and interdependent is a Hegelian insight. The supposed dichotomous division between man nature and God does not really exist. The entire universe or the world is an interdependent unit.

4.6 MARXIAN ALTERNATIVE OR DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Marx replaced the tripartite dialectic by Haves and Have-nots or Bourgeoisie and Proletariat a classless society. Engles joined hands with Marx in this respect. Both Marx and Engles claim that human society has been divided into two opposing classes: (i) the capitalist and (ii) the labouring class. That was the period of industrial revolutions when Marx was writing. He saw in his own eyes in England how the industrial workers were being oppressed and exploited. Marx vehemently argued that Hegel was standing on his head and he made him stand on his legs.

Dialectical spiritualism was replaced by dialectical materialism. The Communist Manifesto and the Das Capital are full of vivid description of the suffering of the tooling masses. Marx developed an economic theory to support his thesis. According to Marx, though land, labour, capital and organization are the known factors of production yet labour plays an important role in the process of production. The value of a commodity is equal to the units of labour consumed in the process of its productions. The value and the price of a commodity increases solely because of labour. Marx characterizes it as the theory of surplus value. The capitalists without doing any work corner, appropriate and enjoy the surplus. As a result, the toiling masses, the labourers progressively get pauperized. The capitalist successfully exploit the workers by using religion as a means. Marx treats religion as the opiate of people. The Common man falls an easy prey to the booby trap of religion set by the capitalist. Both Marx and Engels gave clarion call to the workers --- “Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to loose but only the fetters”. The workers were inspired. Marx and Engels predicted that the proletariat revolutions will take place in highly industrial society but interestingly the communist revolutions took place in highly agrarian societies like Russia and China. The Bolshevik and Kamitang revolutions are testimony to the triumph of Marxist and communist ideology. Both Soviet Union and China went RED. This is for the first time in world history that a philosophical theory brought about radical socio-economic change. Of course this is true that the philosophical thesis of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, Mill Bentham and Spencer had great impact on human society but not to the extent in which Marxism encouraged revolution. Marx’s dictum that religion is the opiate of the people brought into bold relief the point how religion has been misused through the ages. Bentham’s views on society and man led to extensive jail reforms in England. That economy plays an important and pivotal role in the human world was emphasized by Karl Marx. In the Upanishadic and Indian tradition it is said that *Anam eva Brahman* (Food or eatables are basic realities). No philosophical or political theory affords to ignore economy or material conditions. To reorder and change the society is to reorder and change the economic conditions. No social theory could be understood without reference to matter or economic conditions. This is a crash truth and this was emphasized by Marx.

4.7 PHENOMENALISM AND EXISTENTIALISM

Phenomenology and Existentialism grew as a reaction to Hegelian absolutism. Jean Paul Sartre, Kierkegaard and Albert Camus are the chief exponents of existentialism. It protested and revolted against all types of absolutism and moral and political paradigms. According to the existentialists, it is individual human person who has to decide what is good or moral for him. We are condemned to be free. Freedom, morality and ethics cannot be imposed from above. In a sense, we are all condemned to be free. Thus existentialism brought about a major change and revolution in the field of morality. Soon young people were inspired by the existential view of morality and the slogan existence precedes essence gained ground. There is no universal morality and ethics. The individual creates his/her morality. Therefore, no morality can be imposed from above. The Hippies and the Beatles were inspired by this type of philosophy and they made it a life style. They questioned all types of age old traditions and customs. They wanted a seamless limitless free society. To be guided by any tradition is to act like a slave. Slavery and bondage curtail freedom of the individual.

Thus nothing but absolute freedom of the individual became the motto of the existentialist. Thus phenomenology and existentialism currents of thoughts and varieties became the life style. The existentialist emphasized the context element in morality. There may be Moral Universals and paradigms but when the individual is called upon to take a decision he/she faces a dilemma. What is to be done under a particular situation? This becomes the pertinent problem before the active agent and he/she has to take a decision. This context aspect of the moral situation has been not been taken care of by what may be called as the Universal Moralism. Thus existentialism provides an answer to the individual in a tying situation.

In the first part of 20th century astounding discoveries and inventions were made both in natural Sciences and Mathematics and Mathematical logic. For centuries together philosophers and mathematicians were thinking on the foundation of mathematics and geometry. Euclidian geometry provided the basis for Newtonian mechanics. But slow and silent revolution was taking place in the domain of mathematics and geometry. Gauss and Riemann established and demonstrated the view that an alternative Non-Euclidian geometry is possible. If the Euclidian geometry formed the basis and foundation of Newtonian mechanics the non-Euclidian geometry formed the basis of Einstein's physics.

The Newtonian mechanics advocated absolute motion and absolute rest. Einstein replaced absolutism by relativism. Further the logistic view of Mathematics that the so called synthetic a priori knowledge is not possible began to undermine the foundation of Mathematics. The publications of *Principia Mathematica* by Russell and A.N. Whitehead played a major role in this regard. Mathematical propositions are not synthetic a priori as held by Kant; they are purely analytical and tautological. The entire intellectual process gave rise to the movement of logical positivism.

4.8 LOGICAL POSITIVISM

A.J.Ayer, Rudolf Carnap, Moritz Schlick and others started the positivistic movement in philosophy. Positivism as a philosophical movement not only decried metaphysics as non-sense and meaningless but decried ethics and religion as meaningless and nonsense. For the positivists, all significant propositions are of two types (i) analytic and (ii) synthetic. Metaphysical propositions are neither synthetic nor analytic. Further, positivism also dethroned synthetic a priori propositions from its pristine glory. Thus positivism created an intellectual vacuum. Only sciences and scientific methods hold the sway. Even grand Social theories were ridiculed. Only science and scientism were encouraged. For a spell, metaphysics came to a grinding halt. Philosophers were busy with discussing and discovering the concepts of meaning and verification. It made philosophers self conscious. Thus, the task of philosophy was reduced to analysis of language and methods of sciences. No more philosophy was held in high esteem for the simple reason that now it has a very minor and insignificant function, no more it has the important function of guiding the people.

It is necessary in this connection to mention the role played by Karl Popper with reference to positivism. Popper replaced verification by falsification. Scientific theories are falsifiable but metaphysical theories are not. Popper went steps ahead and castigated historicist doctrine. Thus he vehemently criticized Plato, Hegel and Marx Popper's doctrine, thus gave rise to the concepts

of paradigms and paradigm shift. It is time that logical Positivism gave a serious blow to speculative metaphysics. It is challenged all the concept of necessary truth and infallible reason. In this sense positivism resembles the Carvak system of philosophy in India. The Carvakas denounced all types of universalism and metaphysical speculation. Buddhism in India did reject all types of *kalpanas* (Imaginative Creations). It directed the attention of man to concrete human situations. Thus in a sense Buddhism Carvakas and Logical positivism are on the same intellectual place. In nut shell these three philosophies tried to demystify thought and there by tried to set man free from age old dogmas.

4.9 STRAWSON WITH AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO METAPHYSICS

P.F. Strawson an Oxford philosopher tried to rehabilitate metaphysics. He made a distinction between reversionary metaphysics and descriptive metaphysics. Reversionary metaphysics aims at revising the basic categories of thought. Revision of concepts is occasioned because of various reasons. Thus reversionary metaphysics is not meaningless and non-sense. It caters to the need, aspirations and expectations of people. On the other hand, descriptive metaphysics aims at describing the basic categories in terms of which we think about the world.

Strawson in this sense may be regarded as a neo-Kantian. Like Kant he assumed that material bodies and human persons in space and time constitute the basic particulars. Identifications and re-identification are the process by means of which human mind operate. The critics of metaphysics became less aggressive and more tolerant. Consequently today philosophers are falling back on classics for illuminations and insight.

Social and Cultural impact of modern western philosophy cannot be fully appreciated without reference to instrumentalism and pragmatism. Instrumentalism and pragmatism treat knowledge as efficient instruments. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is discarded as old fashioned ideas. Thus American education and politics were greatly influenced by the two great philosophers such as John Dewey and William James. Further, this view of education also spread to other countries of the world in due course of time. Today in the so called modern world it is the view of James and Dewey that operate in the world of education. These instance clearly show that philosophy is not only a cognitive and intellectual enquiry but also it influences and effects life at various points. It should be noted in this connection that philosophy is a very serious cognitive and intellectual activity: Various currents and cross currents of it testifies to the claim. Not only speculative philosophy was taken seriously but positivism including its theory of meaning were taken seriously too. Did it stop there? The answer is 'no'. Examination and re-examination of views and counterviews is an ongoing process in philosophy. This makes philosophy lively, vibrant and relevant intellectual enterprise.

4.10. LET US SUM UP

Now that I have sketched out in broad strokes some of the impacts of modern philosophy, especially its impact on later philosophers and societal institutions. Not all environmental determinism leads to Marxism, nor does all biological determinism lead to the Holocaust. Not all existentialism or postmodernism leads to immoral behavior, either. However, false conceptions of philosophy can lead to destructive behavior and harmful policies, both by societies and by individuals. It can and does affect the way we treat other human beings. Human rights are meaningless in a world of determinism or social (or individual) constructivism. The underlying philosophical vision in any society shapes the political and social institutions, the laws, and the entire culture in far-reaching ways. The converse is also true – the political, social, and legal developments in a society influence its philosophical views too.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How did Hegelian dialectic change the cognitive structure of people?

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2) Positivism was influenced by Modern Philosophy. How?

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4.11. KEY WORDS

Solipsism: Solipsism is an epistemological or ontological position that knowledge of anything outside the mind is unjustified. The external world and other minds cannot be known and might not exist. In the history of philosophy, solipsism has served as a skeptical hypothesis.

Instrumentalism: Instrumentalism is the view that a concept or theory should be evaluated by how effectively it explains and predicts phenomena, as opposed to how accurately it describes objective reality.

4.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.13. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Bacon prescribes a method of cleansing the mind before we do any philosophy or science. Human mind is infected with idols or false beliefs and misconceptions. After removing the idols from mind one should develop questioning spirit. According to Bacon, Idols are of the following types; (i) Idols of Tribe, (ii) Idols of Cave, (iii) Idols of Market place and (iv) Idols of Theatre. In nutshell, human mind is the source of all superstitions. So it has to be kept neat and clean. In other words before understanding any inquiry or investigation one has to clean the mind set and one has to approach nature with a clean slate. Mind has to be kept neat and clean. But Bacon's views should not be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Bacon recommends elimination of blind belief, prejudice and superstitions.

2. Descartes was a French Philosopher and made original contribution to mathematics and geometry. He is known as the father of the modern western philosophy because he introduced absolutely a new method of philosophizing. Do not take anything granted. Think, reflect and doubt and then we will know – was the motto of Descartes. This methodological doctrine ultimately led to *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I exist). This is otherwise known as the method of universal doubt. At the same time Descartes streamlined matter and mind as two distinct substances that influenced and inspired both Spinoza and Leibnitz. The trios are known as the modern rationalist philosophers as Plato and Aristotle are known as the ancient rationalist in Europe. Modern rationalism did give rise to a new wave of metaphysics, ontology and epistemology. But it did influence socio-political life of people in Europe. Descartes protected and preserved the independence of mind and spirit against the onslaught of materialism. Further Cartesianism made God a necessity because without God matter and mind cannot interact. So Deism got a booster. Further, mathematics and geometry were influenced by Descartes to such an extent that the subsequent thinkers made search for universal and indubitable truths. Only reason, unalloyed reason can give us truth.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Hegelian dialectics changed the cognitive structure of people. Hegel supported the cause of absolute monarchy. He pleaded that freedom is obedience to the order of the state. It may not be out of place to mention in this connection that dictatorship got support from the Hegelian philosophy. Hitler and Mussolini the two notorious dictators were inspired by Hegel's philosophy. But Hegelian dialectic was not only adopted but also used by Marx in understanding human society.

2. A.J. Ayer, Rudolf Carnap, Moritz Schlick and others started the positivistic movement in philosophy. Positivism as a philosophical movement not only decried metaphysics as non-sense and meaningless but decried ethics and religion as meaningless and nonsense. For the positivists, all significant propositions are of two types (i) analytic and (ii) synthetic. Metaphysical propositions are neither synthetic nor analytic. Further, positivism also dethroned synthetic a priori propositions from its pristine glory. Thus positivism created an intellectual vacuum. Only sciences and scientific methods hold the sway. Even grand Social theories were ridiculed. Only science and scientism were encouraged. For a spell, metaphysics came to a grinding halt. Philosophers were busy with discussing and discovering the concepts of meaning and verification. It made philosophers self conscious. Thus, the task of philosophy was reduced to

analysis of language and methods of sciences. No more philosophy was held in high esteem for the simple reason that now it has a very minor and insignificant function, no more it has the important function of guiding the people.

