BLOCK 1

Philosophy as such took a new direction towards the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. It all began with some of the noted philosophers criticizing the traditional methods and ways of thinking. The foundations were laid by the negation and the critique of Nietzsche of the rationalistic tradition that had gone by, a demand for focusing on the methodology of sciences, the shift to pay more attention to the now and here existence of the human being, going deeper into the pragmatic notion of humans and the discussion over the notion of language and its analysis. Although the initial push was given by various thinkers, yet they shared one common goal, the criticism of all that tradition had exalted. The contemporary thinkers were of a revolutionary type, trying to bring about a radical change. This whole movement was a combined effort of Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Freud (though a Psychologist) and others. In this block we shall limit ourselves to studying the origins of the contemporary concerns of philosophy and later we will venture into it in detail.

This block consisting of five units deal with introductory remarks on contemporary western philosophy and its foundations laid down by Karl Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.

Unit 1 “Introduction to Contemporary Western Philosophy” tries to introduce the major divisions of contemporary western philosophy and their main thrust. In the Anglophone world, analytic philosophy became the dominant school. On continental Europe, no single school enjoyed dominance. 20th-century movements such as phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, critical theory, structuralism, and post-structuralism are included within this category.

Unit 2 is on the philosophical thinking of Karl Marx. In this unit the students will be introduced to his life, philosophical heritage of German Idealism, and the political and economic situation of the time that played a major role in his thinking. Apart from this, we have his historical materialism, the struggle that goes on between the classes, the role played by the labour and how one becomes alienated in the process;
Unit 3 highlights the contribution made by Friedrich Nietzsche. Beginning with his life, you will be introduced to his philosophical stance, his strong critique of religion and morality, particularly Christian religion and morality, with the catch phrase: “death of God”. However, he does not stop here; he introduces the phase of Nihilism and the concept of Over-man or Superman.

Unit 4 details the thinking of Sigmund Freud. Here, we begin with his life and the influences that shaped his thinking. We also deal with different stages: psycho-sexual development in a human person, the various crises that a person undergoes during each stage of growth if his needs are not well taken care of and the remedial measures to be adopted to deal with such situations. This block briefly introduces us into what contemporary philosophy is and the pioneers of this range of thinking. It will also give us a picture of what had gone ahead of them and how it was unique for that movement; yet it had its own pitfalls challenged by the succeeding thinkers.