

**Psychoanalysis & Philosophy:
Enlightenment vs. Romanticism
From Descartes to Spinoza and Kant**

25 April 2020, Dr. Keith Barrett

Session 1: A central figure in the early stages of the Enlightenment, Rene Descartes was the mathematician and scientist who initiated modern philosophy by making individual consciousness the foundation of knowledge, and by establishing an absolute distinction between mind and body. We will explore in detail Descartes' reasoning in the *'Meditations'* (1640), explaining the relation of his ideas to modern theories of the nature of consciousness – and examining the critique of his assumptions advanced by Lacanian psychoanalysis and post-modern cultural theory.

Session 2: Descartes set the thinkers who followed him two fundamental philosophical problems: that of the relationship between mind and body, and that of explaining how we can be sure that the ideas in our consciousness truly correspond to reality outside it. The thinker who proposed the most radical solution to the 'mind-body' problem was Baruch Spinoza, and his re-thinking of the foundations of Descartes' philosophy profoundly influenced Goethe, Hegel and Nietzsche, for example, making him one of the most important intellectual figures in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. We will explore Spinoza's non-dualist understanding of the mind-body relationship, and his theories of freedom and the passions – demonstrating why he has often been called 'the philosopher of psychoanalysis'.

Session 3: At the end of the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant proposed a radical solution to the second problem - of how we can be certain that what we experience in consciousness truly represents reality as it is outside our consciousness. His solution was based on a new understanding of the nature of human knowledge – premised on a radically new conception of the way the mind operates, which was to provide the basis for the theory of psychoanalysis. Kant's philosophy represents the culmination of the Enlightenment, while opening out into what will become Romanticism (in philosophy) and post-Romanticism. We will study Kant's new analysis of the nature of human knowledge, and explore his relation to Rousseau and Goethe, who are the direct precursors of psychoanalysis.