

Psychoanalysis & Philosophy: Enlightenment vs Romanticism

From Descartes to Spinoza and Kant

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Psychoanalysis has its roots both in the Enlightenment – and in the Romantic reaction against it.

The Enlightenment grew out of the seventeenth century scientific revolution, as a cultural movement centred on belief in the possibility of progress through the use of reason. The Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment, which began to gain momentum in the second half eighteenth century, found the exclusive focus on reason superficial, and emphasised the fundamental importance of feeling and the irrational in human life.

The course will focus on three philosophers who were central in articulating the Enlightenment vision, in bringing it to its highest expression, and in pointing forward to the Romantic revolt against to it. We will trace the continuing importance of their ideas today and examine the way psychoanalysis itself came into being in a unique moment of fusion between the Enlightenment tradition and Romanticism at the very end of the nineteenth century.

SCHEDULE

Session 1: A central figure in the birth of the Enlightenment, Rene Descartes was the mathematician and scientist who created modern Western philosophy by making individual consciousness the foundation of knowledge, and by establishing an absolute distinction between mind and body. We will explore Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1640), tracing the importance of his ideas in initiating modern theories of the nature of consciousness. We will examine the continuing importance of Cartesian dualism in our

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contemporary understanding of the mind, and review the latest thinking on the relation of the mind and brain emerging from the findings of contemporary neuroscience. We will also explore the debate over the relationship between neuroscience and psychoanalysis.

Session 2: Descartes set the thinkers who followed him two fundamental philosophical problems: that of explaining the relationship between mind and body, and that of demonstrating that 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 radical re-thinking of the foundations of Descartes’ philosophy profoundly influenced the Romantics, and fascinated Goethe, Hegel and Nietzsche. We will study Spinoza’s non-dualist understanding of the mind-body relationship, and explore 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 bequeathed by Descartes – namely, of how we can be certain that what we experience in consciousness truly represents reality as it is outside us. Kant’s solution was based on a new understanding of the nature of knowledge – premised on the radically new idea that the mind is active in the process of knowing, rather than passive, as philosophers had previously assumed. This theory led to the notion of the dynamic unconscious, the foundation stone of psychoanalysis. We will study Kant’s new analysis of the dual nature of the human mind (conscious and unconscious), and explore his role as a bridge between the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Session 4: In the final session we will discuss Rousseau and Goethe, examining their roles as pre-cursors of psychoanalysis, and follow the vicissitudes of the Enlightenment vision and the Romanticism over the course of the nineteenth century. Finally, we will see how psychoanalysis emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as a unique synthesis of the key elements of these two previously opposed and incompatible cultures.

This course will take place over 2 days: 20 and 21 April 2023, from 13.30 – 17.00 each day (time includes a tea break). All attendees will also receive access to the recording.

Keith Barrett BA PhD received his first degree in philosophy from Oxford University after having spent three years working as a nursing assistant in psychiatric hospitals. It was in this practical context that Keith first encountered existentialism and psychoanalysis. He then began postgraduate studies on both Freud and Heidegger, leading finally to a PhD from the Wellcome Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL for a dissertation on ‘Freud’s Self-Analysis’. Keith has been a philosophy teacher for over 20 years, and has been delivering courses at the Freud Museum for over a decade, where he has developed a series of introductory lectures on Freud, psychoanalysis after Freud, and exploring the overlap of philosophy and psychoanalysis.