

Psychoanalysis & Philosophy: Existentialism to Post-Modernism

From Heidegger and Sartre to Foucault and Lacan

Keith Barrett, BA PhD



Before Hegel, Western philosophy took ‘ultimate reality’ to be an eternal realm existing outside time. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, Hegel brought philosophy down finally into human history and into the ever-changing flux of society.

On this course we will explore the new, social and historical vision of human life that was opened up by Hegel and the thinkers who followed him, including Marx and Nietzsche, and trace its influence in psychoanalysis. We will review attempts to synthesise Marx and Freud, and explore the use of psychoanalytic ideas to understand contemporary society, including psychoanalytic studies of the psychology of Fascism. Finally, we will examine some recent works of cultural history which situate the emergence of psychoanalysis itself in relation to the historical and cultural changes that brought modern society into being.

SCHEDULE

Session 1: We will explore the new beginning for philosophy proposed at the start of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl (Freud’s exact contemporary) with his creation of ‘Phenomenology’, and study Martin Heidegger’s brilliant development of it, set out in his masterpiece ‘Being and Time’ (1927), undoubtedly one of the most important philosophical works of the 20th century. This crucial work contains a powerful analysis of human existence integrating all the fundamental advances of

nineteenth century thought, and we will study Heidegger's understanding of human existence and its relationship to psychoanalysis.

Session 2: We will examine Sartre's version of existentialism, and the broader existentialist critique of Freud, comparing existential psychotherapy with psychoanalysis. We will also explore the themes of the novels of Sartre and Camus, and the plays of Samuel Becket, noting their close relationship to the key ideas of the 'Object-Relations' school of psychoanalysis (and noting the personal encounter between Becket and Wilfred Bion).

Session 3: In this session, we will review the debate over the scientific status of psychoanalysis, which unfolded in the English-speaking world over the second half of the twentieth century, critically examining the contributions of Karl Popper, Adolf Grunbaum, Paul Ricoeur, and Jurgen Habermas and others.

Session 4: We will explore Heidegger's later thought, and his philosophical critique of modernity, culminating in his thinking on the violence of modern technology. This will lead to an examination of the philosophical 'anti-humanism' of Foucault and Lacan (inspired by the later Heidegger), and the emergence of 'post-humanism', for example, in the profound meditations of Heidegger's foremost critic, Emmanuel Levinas. We will put Levinas together with Lacan and Foucault, and explore Lacan's brilliant synthesis of Freud and Heidegger, and Foucault's developing understanding and evaluation of psychoanalysis.

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.