Question 1. Discuss in detail the characteristics of western philosophy.

Ans: Some of the characteristics of Western Philosophy are -
1. Philosophy as an Intellectual Speculation.
2. Classification of Philosophy.
4. From Nature Centric to Ethical and Human Centric.
5. Comprehensive Understanding.
7. Scientific Method.
8. Philosophical Method.
9. Theories of Knowledge.
10. Theories of Truth.
11. Political Philosophy.

Due to the various changes in western thought to say that these characteristics applied to the complete history of western thought would be incorrect. A brief summary of the general characteristics, trends and changes are given below. It is followed by Notes that talk about historical and philosophical developments. Do not miss reading them.

1. Greek philosophy started as a kind of naturalism as the distinction between mind and matter was not clearly recognized that time, now called Materialism by some philosophers with a scientific basis. But we must note that a naturalism that does not distinguish between mind and matter has an equal possibility of developing into materialism or spiritualism. Indians and the Chinese worshipped elements of nature were worshipped too.

2. The Greek Gods were natural Gods (like the early Indian Gods). The Water of Thales was considered God. Heraclitus said that reality is change and identified it with fire, which he treated as God. Fire is one of the five elements of nature worshipped by the Vedic people, is a part of most Indian marriages.

3. A naturalistic approach towards religion can be inward and outward. The Apollinian strand of Greek religion was outward looking, found its gods among the natural forces while the Orphic form was inward-looking found its gods in spiritual, mental factors. But the inwardness did not go further due to the use of reason in man, which is why Pythagoras glorified Mathematics. For the Ionians the creative principle of the universe was water, air but for Pythagoras it was reason.

4. In Plato the two thoughts blended and human reason became the judge of what is true, good and beautiful but retained some difference from inwardness. Aristotle made reason more outward and could retain inwardness mainly in God in whom reason became a pale thought. The solution to the problem of creation was mythological by Plato and arbitrary by Aristotle who considered God the first mover.

5. Plotinus interpreted the world as an overflowing of the being of the spirit, the One. But the extreme inwardness of medieval philosophy, when combined with the faith demanded by Christianity, depressed reason, and man lost confidence in himself and his reason. Reaction against this outlook started from the 16th century.

6. As the Greek philosophical approach was made from man and society, the Greeks were able to lay the foundations of systematic social thought.

7. The same reason made the Greeks attach great importance to the achievements of man and made them history-minded. It was real and important to them.

8. So far as the Jewish factor of western thought goes, the first thing that strikes an eastern thinker is the extreme transcendence of the Jewish God. Aristotle’s God, after becoming the first mover, keeps aloof. He is to be approached by man through his own reason, but not in the sense of rationally and conceptually thinking about Him.

9. The Jewish God does not reason, is Infinite Will. In this respect, the Jewish God is the opposite when compared to the Greek God.

10. As far as Jewish ethics goes, God’s Will is good because it is his Will, and the human will is good because it obeys Gods commands. But what is God’s Will, nature is not determined by man. To judge the goodness of God from the goodness of his commandments is a wrong approach. Here also the Jewish, Greek thoughts are at variance.

Question 2. “Pragmatists have consistently sought to purify empiricism of the vestiges of Cartesianism.” Discuss the anti-Cartesian stand in pragmatism.

Ans:

Question 3. Explain the Cartesian notion of innate ideas and its criticism by the empiricists.

Ans:

Question 4. What are the general characteristics of existentialism? Explain the important themes discussed in existentialism.

Ans: General Characteristics of Existentialism are
Existence preceding essence