

Lecture 18: Rationalism

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction

- Descartes' notion of innate ideas is consistent with rationalism
- Rationalism is a view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification.
 - The criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive.
 - Since the Enlightenment, rationalism is usually associated with the mathematical methods of Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza.
 - This is commonly called **continental rationalism**, as distinguished from British empiricism.

I. INTRODUCTION

B. Rationalism vs. Empiricism

- Differences between empiricism and rationalism
 - Status of Mind
 - Empiricists describe a passive mind which acts in mechanical way
 - Rationalists proposed an active mind that acts on information from the senses and gives it meaning
 - Determinism
 - Empiricists proposed that experience, memory, associations, and hedonism *determine* not only how a person thinks and acts but also his or her morality.
 - For rationalists, there are rational reasons for some acts or thoughts being judged more desirable than others.

I. INTRODUCTION

B. Rationalism vs. Empiricism

- Differences between empiricism and rationalism
 - Explanations
 - Empiricists emphasize mechanical causes of behavior, which emphasize the power of environmental factors
 - Rationalists emphasize reasons for behavior. Which emphasize the power of reflection on options.
 - Methods
 - Empiricists stress induction which involves generalizing from observables.
 - Science
 - Rationalists stress deduction which involves inferring from first principles.
 - Mathematics

II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

A. Baruch Spinoza

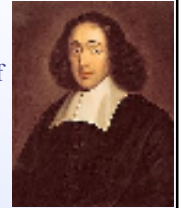
- Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677)
 - Dutch philosopher of Portuguese Jewish origin.
 - Considered one of greatest rationalists
 - Contrary to Descartes, he proposed that God, nature, and mind were aspects of the same substance
 - God, nature, and mind were inseparable
 - Pantheism: God was nature
 - To understand nature is to understand God as God is present everywhere and in everything.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

A. Baruch Spinoza

- Contrary to Dualism, Spinoza proposed *Double Aspectism*
 - Mind and body were two aspects of the same thing.
- We really do not have free will.
 - Nature (God) is lawful and humans are part of nature
 - Thus thoughts and behavior are lawful – determined.
 - Our “freedom” is realizing that everything that *is* must necessarily *be* and everything that happens must necessarily happen - because everything results from God.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

A. Baruch Spinoza

- Pleasure comes from entertaining clear ideas, which are conducive to the mind’s survival
 - When the mind entertains unclear ideas, it feels weak and vulnerable.
- Passion is a general upheaval not associated with a particular thought.
 - Emotion is linked to a particular thought.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

B. Nicolas de Malebranche

- Nicolas de Malebranche (1638 – 1715)
 - French rationalist philosopher.
 - He sought to demonstrate the active role of God in every aspect of the world.
 - Proposed mind-body Occasionalism
 - When a person has a desire to move a part of the body, God is aware of this and moves the body part.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

C. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz

- Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646 - 1716)
 - German philosopher invented calculus independently of Newton
 - Also invented the binary system.
 - Disagreed with Locke, believing ideas don't come from experience
 - Ideas are immaterial and cannot be caused by material activity such as sense activity.
 - Ideas must be innate – which means the potential for an idea s innate.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

C. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz

- Monads
 - The universe consisted of an infinite number of life units called monads.
 - A monad is like a living atom; all monads are active and conscious.
 - Monads differ in clarity of consciousness in a hierarchy
 - In general the hierarchy goes from God, the highest, to humans, then to animals, followed by plants, and nonliving matter.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

C. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz

- Mind-body issue
 - Leibniz proposed a psycho-physical parallelism with a pre-established harmony.
 - Argued that monads never influence each other; it only appears that they do.
 - The mind and body appear to influence each other, but they do not work in parallel.
 - They work in harmony because God planned it that way.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

C. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz

- Perceptions
 - Perceptions can be conscious or below consciousness (petites perceptions)
 - As petites perceptions accumulate, their force causes apperception.
- Law of Continuity
 - All differences in nature are characterized by small gradations.
- Limen
 - Threshold



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

E. Thomas Reid

- Thomas Reid (1710 –1796)
 - Scottish philosopher and founder of the Scottish School of Common Sense
 - Reid claimed that our common sense (*sensus communis*) justify our belief in an external world.
 - Because all humans are convinced of the existence of physical reality, it must exist.
 - Direct Realism
 - Sensations are an accurate reflection of reality immediately, not after the mind has operated on them.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

F. Thomas Reid

- Reasoning powers of the mind include several faculties.
 - More than a classification, as done by other faculty psychologists (c.f., human mind consists of separate or trainable powers or faculties).
- Mental faculties are active powers of the mind
 - They actually existed and influenced people's thoughts and behavior.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

G. Immanuel Kant

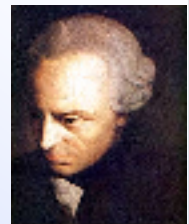
- Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804).
 - Proposed that the mind must add something to sensory data before knowledge can be attained.
 - Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but ...let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

G. Immanuel Kant

- The quality of mind was provided by *a priori* (or before experience) categories of thought.
- 10 *A priori* categories of thought:
 - Unity, totality, time, space, cause and effect, reality, quantity, quality, negation, possibility- impossibility, and existence- nonexistence.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

G. Immanuel Kant

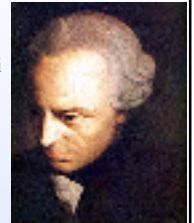
- Our mental experience
 - Always structured by the categories of thought.
 - Our “phenomenological experience” is an interaction of sensations and the categories of thought.
 - Can never know the true physical reality just appearances (phenomena) that are controlled by the categories of thought.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

G. Immanuel Kant

- Apriori (prior to experience)
 - The mind adds the concept of time and space to sensory information.
 - They are both provided by an a priori category of thought.
- Categorical Imperative
 - The rational principle which governs or should govern moral behavior
 - Similar to older moral precepts such as the “golden rule”.
- Anthropology
 - A nonscientific way of studying how people actually behave



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

H. Johann Friedrich Herbart

- Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776 - 1841)
 - German philosopher and psychologist who began pedagogy – the study of way of teaching.
 - Did not believe psychology could be an experimental science.
 - The mind acts as an integrated whole therefore it could not be fractionated.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

H. Johann Friedrich Herbart

- Psychic Mechanics
 - Ideas had a force or energy of their own and the laws of association were not necessarily to bind them.
 - Ideas have the power to attract or repel other ideas, depending on their compatibility.
 - Ideas attempt to gain expression in consciousness and compete with each other to do so.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

H. Johann Friedrich Herbart

▪ Apperceptive Mass

- Compatible ideas that are in consciousness to which we are attending at given moment.
 - Ideas outside apperceptive mass (incompatible ideas) are repressed by the powers of the ideas in the mass.
- Limen
 - The threshold between conscious and unconscious
 - Goal was to mathematically express the relationships among the apperceptive mass, the limen, and the conflict among ideas.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

H. Johann Friedrich Herbart

▪ Effective Teaching:

- Review material already learned
- Prepare students for new material by giving overview of upcoming material
- Present new material
- Relate new material to what has already been learned
- Show applications of new material
- Give an overview of next material to be learned.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

I. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

▪ G.W.F. Hegel (1770 –1831)

- German philosopher, and one of the creators of German idealism
- He developed a concept of mind or spirit that manifested itself in a set of contradictions and oppositions that it ultimately integrated and united.
- The Absolute
 - Universe is interrelated unity
 - True knowledge is attained by relating isolated instances to the “whole.”



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

I. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

▪ Our understanding progresses toward the absolute by the dialectic process,

- First have a thesis (a point of view) and an antithesis (opposite point of view),
- Then have a synthesis (a compromise between the thesis and the antithesis), which is a new point of view.
- This new point of view now becomes the thesis for the next dialectic process.



II. THE CONTINENTAL RATIONALISTS

I. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

- Hegel proposed the concept of alienation (self-estrangement)
- Later used in theories of Eric Fromm, Carl Rogers, and the existentialists.

