

## Lecture 18: Romanticism and Existentialism

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. Introduction

- The Enlightenment is a period during the 18<sup>th</sup> C.
  - Reason was advocated as the primary source and legitimacy for authority.
    - Reason could be used to combat ignorance, superstition, and tyranny and to build a better world.
      - Principal targets of Enlightenment Philosophy were religion and the social domination by a hereditary aristocracy.
  - Enlightenment political influence was strong
    - The signatories of the American Declaration of Independence, the United States Bill of Rights, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the Polish-Lithuanian Constitution were motivated by "Enlightenment" principles.

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### B. Romanticism

- Romanticism and existentialism were reactions to and criticisms of the ideas of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.
- Romanticisms
  - Romanticism was more a widespread movement, both in its origins and influence than the Enlightenment.
  - No other intellectual/artistic movement has had comparable variety, reach, and staying power since the end of the Middle Ages.

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### B. Romanticism

- Romanticism is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement.
  - It originated in later 18<sup>th</sup> C. in Europe, and strengthened during the Industrial Revolution.
    - It was partly a revolt against aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment. It was also a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature
  - It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature.
    - The movement stressed strong emotion as a source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on emotions

## I. INTRODUCTION

### B. Romanticism

- It was a popularist movement
  - It elevated folk art and custom to something noble.
    - Argued for a "natural" epistemology of human activities as conditioned by nature in the form of language, custom and usage.
    - Realism was polar opposite to Romanticism.
  - Romanticism elevated achievements of heroic individuals and artists who altered society.
    - Legitimized individual imagination as a critical authority which permitted freedom from classical art forms.
    - There was a strong recourse to historical and natural inevitability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### C. Existentialism

- Existentialism applied to the work of a number of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers
  - They took the human subject as a starting point for philosophical thought.
    - Broader than the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual and his or her conditions of existence
  - Existential philosophy is the "explicit conceptual manifestation of an existential attitude"
    - It is a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world.
    - Traditional academic philosophy was too abstract and remote from concrete human experience.

## II. ROMANTICISM

### A. Jean Jacques Rousseau

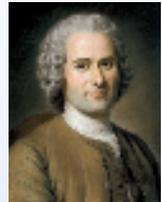
- Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)
  - Father of Romanticism
  - Rousseau emphasized feelings in contrast to reason as the important guiding force in human nature.
    - The best guide for human conduct is a person's honest feelings and inclinations.
  - For Rousseau, humans are basically good – born good but are made bad by societal institutions.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### A. Jean Jacques Rousseau

- Social Nature of Humans
  - Humans are, by nature, social animals who wished to live in harmony with other humans.
    - The general will is what is best within a community and should be sharply distinguished from an individual's will.
  - Suggested that education should take advantage of natural impulses rather than distort them.
    - Educational institutions should create a situation in which a child's natural abilities and interests can be nurtured.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### B. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 -1832)
  - Was a German writer and considered Germany's greatest man of letters.
    - Goethe's works span the fields of poetry, drama, literature, theology, philosophy, humanism and science.
  - He was a polymath
    - Best known for the novel *Faust*.
    - He was author of the scientific text on colors and he influenced Darwin by his work on plant morphology.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### B. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- Psychology
  - Goethe viewed humans as being torn by the stresses and conflicts of life.
    - Life consisted of opposing forces, love and hate, life and death, good and evil.
    - The goal of life should be to embrace these forces rather than to deny or overcome them.
  - These themes were picked up by Freud and quickly became a part of psychoanalytic theory.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### B. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- Psychology
  - Goethe insisted that intact, meaningful psychological experience should be the object of study, rather than meaningless isolated sensations
  - Was an early phenomenologist.
  - Goethe proposed a theory of evolution before Darwin
  - Used a form of what is now called behavior therapy.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### C. Arthur Schopenhauer

- Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860)
  - German philosopher who examined whether reason alone can unlock answers about the world.
    - He emphasized the role of man's basic motivation, which he called will.
    - His analysis led him to the conclusion that emotional, physical, and sexual desires can never be fulfilled.
      - Consequently, Schopenhauer favored a lifestyle of negating human desires, similar to Buddhism and Vedanta.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### C. Arthur Schopenhauer

- Will
  - Equated Kant's noumenal world (things in themselves in nature) with "will" – a blind force which cannot be known.
  - In humans, this force manifests itself in the will to survive.
  - This will to survive causes an unending cycle of needs and need satisfaction.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### C. Arthur Schopenhauer

- Most human behavior is irrational
  - An unending series of pains due to unsatisfied need which causes us to act to satisfy the need
  - This is followed by a brief experience of satisfaction (pleasure)
  - This is followed again by another need to be satisfied, and on it goes.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### C. Arthur Schopenhauer

- "Almost all our sufferings spring from having to do with others"
  - Felt that the intelligent humans suffer the most.
    - Intelligent people seek solitude while the common people are gregarious.
  - For the intelligent, solitude has two advantages
    - Can be alone with his or her own thoughts,
    - Prevents needing to deal with intellectually inferior people.



## II. ROMANTICISM

### C. Arthur Schopenhauer

- A way of looking at life is as the postponement of death.
  - People do not cling to life because it is pleasant, rather, they cling to life because they fear death.
  - Wrote of positive and negative impulses, the unconscious, repression, and resistance
  - Also had a strong influence on Freud.



### III. EXISTENTIALISM

#### A. Introduction

- Existentialism
  - Stressed the meaning of human existence, freedom of choice, and the uniqueness of each individual.
  - The most important aspects of humans are their personal, subjective interpretations of life and the choices they make in light of those interpretations.
- Existentialism emerged as a movement in 20 C. literature and philosophy.
  - It was foreshadowed most notably by nineteenth-century philosophers Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche.
  - Although there are some common tendencies amongst "existentialist" thinkers, there are major differences and disagreements among them.

### II. EXISTENTIALISM

#### A. Søren Kierkegaard

- Søren Kierkegaard (May 1813 - 1855)
  - A prolific 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian.
    - Much of his work deals with religious themes such as faith in God, the institution of the Church, Christian ethics and theology, and the emotions and feelings of individuals when faced with life choices.
  - Widely considered the first existentialist



### II. EXISTENTIALISM

#### A. Søren Kierkegaard

- Søren Kierkegaard
  - Religion
    - As noted, he was an outspoken critic of organized religion.
    - He believed the most meaningful relationship with God was one that was personal and not dictated by the church.
  - Truth
    - Truth is subjective: What a person believes privately and emotionally.
    - Truth cannot be taught logically, truth must be experienced.



### II. EXISTENTIALISM

#### A. Søren Kierkegaard

- The approximation of personal freedom occurs in stages.
  - Aesthetic stage
    - People are open to many types of experiences, and do not recognize their ability to choose.
    - Live on a hedonistic level.
  - Ethical stage
    - People accept responsibility for making choices but use as their guide ethical principles established by others.



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### A. Søren Kierkegaard

- The approximation of personal freedom occurs in stages.
- Religious stage
  - People recognize and accept their freedom and have a personal relationship with God.
    - The nature of the relationship is personal.
  - People at this stage see possibilities in life that usually run contrary to convention, and tend to be nonconformists.



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### B. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900).
  - 19 C. German philosopher.
    - He wrote critical texts on religion, morality, contemporary culture, philosophy, and science.
  - His influence remains substantial within and beyond philosophy, notably in existentialism and postmodernism.



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### B. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

- Philosophy
  - Questioned the value and objectivity of truth
    - Resulted in much commentary and interpretation
  - His key ideas include the interpretation of tragedy as an affirmation of life,
  - He rejected Platonism and repudiated both Christianity and egalitarianism (especially in the form of democracy and socialism).



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### B. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

- Nietzsche proposed two aspects of human nature:
  - Apollonian aspect
    - Rational side
    - Desire for tranquility, predictability and orderliness.
  - Dionysian aspect
    - Irrational side
    - Attraction to creative chaos and to passionate, dynamic, experiences.



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### B. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

- He believed the Western philosophy had emphasized the intellect and minimized the human passions
  - Result was lifeless rationalism
- Urged a fusion of the two aspects
  - Not a totally irrational, passionate life but a life of reasonable passion.



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### B. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

- Believed that because of human actions, we had, in essence, made God “dead.”
  - Philosophers and scientists who killed God took purpose from the universe and stripped humans of any special place in the world.
  - Convictions are thought to reflect truth, but cause fanaticism
    - Opinions are tentative, challengeable, and easily modified in light of new information.



## II. EXISTENTIALISM

### B. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

- All people have a will to power
  - To control one’s life, tendency to gain mastery over one’s self and one’s destiny.
    - Supermen are people who are approaching their full potential because standard morality does not govern their lives
  - This was misused by the Nazi party who claimed that the German people were these supermen.

