**RATIONALISM**

**Introductory**

Reason is the chief source of knowledge or any view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge. *Definition*: rationalism is a theory in which the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive.

Rationalists believe that reality has intrinsically logical structure; because of this, certain truths exist and the intellect can directly grasp these truths; i.e. certain rational principles exist in logic, mathematics, ethics, and metaphysics that are so fundamentally true that denying them causes one to fall into contradiction; therefore proof and physical evidence are unnecessary to ascertain truth; ‘there are significant ways in which our concepts and knowledge are gained independently of sense experience.’

**1. Philosophical usage**

often contrasted with empiricism; broadly speaking, these views are not mutually exclusive, since a philosopher can be both. Extremes – empiricist: ideas/knowledge comes to us *a posteriori*; rationalist: ideas/knowledge comes to us *a priori* (through the use of logic so independent of experience).

**1.1. Theory of Justification**

Theory of justification is part of epistemology that attempts to understand the justification of propositions and beliefs; concerned with various epistemic features of belief (justification, reality, warrant and probability – these are the terms used with regard to beliefs).

If ‘A’ makes a claim and then ‘B’ casts doubt on it, and A’s next move would normally be to provide justification. Rationalists and empiricists use different methods to justify their stand.

**1.2. Theses of Rationalism**

Rationalism consists of three basic claims: (a) the Intuition/Deduction thesis; (b) Innate knowledge thesis and (c) Innate concept thesis (they adopt one of the claims); in addition they can adopt the claims of ‘Indispensability of Reason’/ ‘Superiority of Reason’

**1.2.1. The Intuition/Deduction Thesis**

“Some propositions in a particular subject areas, S, are knowable by us by intuition alone; still others are knowable by being deduced from intuited propositions.”

*Intuition*: a priori (no mediation, immediate knowledge).

*Deduction*: process of reasoning from one/more general premises to reach a logically certain conclusions (deduce from *intuited* premises); e.g. number 3 is prime and greater than ‘2’ (we come to conclusion in ‘a priori’ method). Hume is willing to accept this thesis for describing the relationship among our own *concepts*. In this sense empiricist argues that we are allowed to *intuite* and *deduce* truths from knowledge that has been obtained *a posteriori*); rationalist says that by intuition and deduction we can know truths of mathematics, ethics and metaphysics.

Different understanding: some rationalists say that beliefs are true only when they are beyond even slightest doubt; some others say that beliefs are true when they beyond a reasonable doubt. *Connection between intuition and truth*: intuition is infallible (‘truth is as such’); some others say intuition is not always a source of certain knowledge (possibility of a *deceiver* who might cause the rationalist to intuit a false proposition in the same way a 3rd party could cause the rationalist to have perceptions of non-existent objects).

**Gottfried Leibniz**: senses give us only *instances* (bits and pieces of information); to confirm a general truth these instances (however many/innumerable they may be) are not sufficient (because there is no guarantee in future); though senses are involved in the mathematical truths they are beyond senses.

**1.2.2. The Innate Knowledge Thesis**

*Rationale*: we have knowledge of some truths in a particular subject area, S, as part of our rational nature.

It is similar to the *intuition/deduction thesis*; knowledge is a priori; difference is ‘how’ that knowledge is gained. Knowledge is simply a part of our rational nature; experiences can trigger a process that allows this knowledge to come into our consciousness, but the experiences do not provide us with the knowledge itself, e.g. of a photographer (adjusts the lenses to focus but the background is always there); ‘focus’ is ‘inquiry’ – Plato – Meno: knowledge by inquiry seems impossible; if we already have knowledge then no need of inquiry; if we lack knowledge then we do not know what and where to find; therefore inquiry is not the knowledge of theorem, yet, we know some theorem; so there is a paradox; this thesis offers a solution: knowledge is already with us, consciously or unconsciously; we do not really ‘learn’ but bring to light what we already know.

**1.2.3. The Innate Concept Thesis**

*Rationale*: we have some of the concepts we employ in a particular subject area, S, as part of our rational nature.

Similar to the innate knowledge thesis; concepts are part of our rational nature; sense experience is irrelevant (though it can help bring the concepts to our conscious mind); some philosophers like John Locke say that the two theses are one and the same; some others llike Peter Carruthers say that they are distinct. The more a concept is removed from the experience the more plausible it may be claimed to be immediate, e.g. triangle and pain (triangle is far from experience so it is ‘immediate’ whereas pain is part of experience so it is mediate).

Descartes’ *Meditations on 1st Philosophy*: 3 classifications of ideas: (a) innate: by my own nature I know what a thing is, truth is, thought is (b) adventitious: I know by senses (like noise etc.) (c) invented by me: sirens (Greek mythological nymphs), hippogriffs etc.

G. Leibniz: mind plays a role in determining the nature of concepts. *New Essays in Human Understanding*: mind is viewed as veined marble, not *tabula rasa*, in *tabula rasa* the fig of Hercules would be ‘indifferent’; but if there are ‘veins’ in the figure they make the figure distinct; the figure would be only Hercules and no other; it make difference and this is ‘innate’; labour is involved in ‘figuring out’ the figure; it is in this way ideas and truths are innate in us, like natural inclinations and dispositions, habits or potentialities.

**1.2.4. The Other Two Theses**

These two theses are not essential to the rationalism; *1. The Indispensability of Reason*: “The knowledge we gain in subject area, S, (by intuition etc.) could not have gained by us through sense experience” (experience cannot provide what we gain by reason, hence reason is indispensible). *2. The Superiority of Reason*: knowledge we gain by intuition etc. has innately is superior to sense knowledge.

Most rationalists reject skepticism because the *areas of knowledge* they claim are knowable *a priori* (innately known to us, so no doubting).

**2. Background**

In rationalism there is no major figure or no period of history recorded before Enlightenment; (exception – St. Augustine) till the period of Enlightenment the belief is that knowledge is as far as human ability goes to know, otherwise (beyond the human ability) we should not know; knowledge is either by mystical revelation or by ideas.

Continental rationalism brought mathematics into philosophy; it is in contrast with British Empiricism; but this distinction came at a later period of time; there is no clear-cut (watertight) distinction between empiricism and rationalism at that time; e.g. ‘ideas’ according to Descartes and Locke are the same.

**3. History**

**3.1. Rationalist philosophy from antiquity**

Complicated nature of rational thinking, nature of philosophy – there is no division between rationalism and empiricism; it was complex; for rationalism the foundation is there in ancient history but not as we understand the concept today.

**3.1.1. Pythagoras (570-495 BCE)**

Mathematician, mystic, scientist; theorem – mathematical relationship; music – relationship of the length of the string and the quality of the music; ‘all are numbers.’

**3.1.2. Plato (427-347 BCE)**

Meno and *Republic* 🡪 Forms/Ideas are non-material abstracts; but they are substantial and real; reason is important not the sense; admired reason especially geometry.

**3.1.3. Aristotle (384-322 BCE)**

Syllogistic logic: ‘syllogism is a discourse in which certain (specific) things having been supposed, something different from the things supposed results of necessity because these things are so.’ He limits himself to categorical syllogism (3 categorical propositions – major, middle and minor).

**3.1.4. St. Augustine**

**Introductory**

Belief in God and knowledge; we have knowledge ‘for’ and ‘against’ belief in God; according to epistemological knowledge God’s existence is affirmed by theoretical justification.

Materialists argue that the only known entity is matter and God is not material so we cannot know God’s existence.

The idealists take the opposite view (opposite to materialists); they argue that the human intellect can only know ideas; God is known through the flow of ideas; the existence of God (idea of God) is in the mind and not in the matter.

**3.1.4.1 Problem of Knowledge Theory**

We have something called ‘scientific discovery’; the belief is that it (scientific discovery) is true and useful to the universe; we do not know for sure that it does what it says, so it is a ‘myth’ for the epistemologists. The same way the religious claims are myth to the scientists.

Let us take the example of the infant getting knowledge in the first two to three years; the infant gets the religious knowledge, space and time, language and numbers; this knowledge is not ‘empirical’ (not directly from the senses); how do we explain this type of knowledge; according to the rationalists this knowledge is ‘innate’ and for the religious the innate is the knowledge kept by God.

We have some knowledge which we can call as ‘subjective knowledge.’ Let us take the ‘intuitive ideas’ like freedom, justice, democracy etc. the knowledge about these ideas differ from person to person; the meaning of these ideas also differ from person to person; since the knowledge and the meaning of the ‘intuitive ideas’ is personal (subjective) it is called subjective knowledge. Disagreement with regard to these ideas leads either to arguments (verbal) or to the combat (physical fight); whoever wins the case (either arguments or in the combat) their view of the knowledge is accepted; the saying ‘might is right’ is proved here.

**3.1.4.2. Theory of Knowledge according to St. Augustine**

The world is a system created by God; God teaches and guides people; it is more direct than material (the knowledge that we get through the materials); since there is no mediation like material, sense experience etc. it is immediate knowledge; this is ‘Divine Illumination’ according to St. Augustine.

*Divine Illumination*: (from the book, *City of God* by St. Augustine): we have the material apprehension by our senses but what about the judgment? The judgment is an ‘idea’ and we get it through the ‘intellect.’ The same way the ideas like ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ are absent in the material objects; so we do not get the knowledge of these ideas through the senses; we also get the ‘false cognition’ and ‘unjust ideas’ as just; it is through the absence of the positive knowledge from God.

When we have a problem the solution cannot be given by the senses because there is nothing in the material objects that can be proved objectively as solution; solution is knowledge supplied by the intellect; the solution is a truthful idea placed in the mind by God through wisdom which is the Holy Spirit; It (the Holy Spirit) helps us to have the correct understanding of the problem.

**ALL PROBLEMS, CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD ---> {The Holy Spirit} ---> ALL SOLUTIONS = THE CORPUS OF KNOWLEDGE**

The Holy Spirit gives all knowledge, but only in response to requisitions for problem solutions. St. Augustine does not assert this general case but the claim appears in the Christian Scriptures.

**3.1.4.3. The Inner Sense of Truth**

**St. Augustine’s work reveals a lifelong quest for the truth** and he moved from position to position in an increasingly better understanding of religion. His inner sense of the truth was subject to continuous improvement. If his method of working is analysed it reveals a pattern based on problems and their solutions. Firstly he became aware of the existence of the problem which he then came to understand through study and experience. Secondly he became aware of the solution which was placed in his intellect by the Interior Master. Thirdly he examined the solution in relation to his problem understanding and judged it to be true.

Three understandings are involved in this process which are the understandings of the problem, the solution, and the truth. These understandings were retained more or less permanently in Augustine’s intellect. Putting this into the context of the saint’s life the statement may be expanded to say that the understandings of all the problems that he ever investigated, and all the solutions he achieved to these problems, were retained in Augustine’s intellect. For each problem he solved his understanding of the truth was expanded and improved. In the Augustinian model of the intellect this expanding understanding of the truth is the subjective philosophy. The subjective philosophy which is committed to its own truthful development follows the path of faith seeking understanding.

There is no need here to assume that St. Augustine correctly understood all his problems and, therefore, his solutions were always true. His doctrine of Predestination has been seen by later thinkers to be flawed, and this error may be traced to his incorrect understanding of the problem. It follows that incorrect problem understandings produce false solutions, which agrees with common experience.

The problem arises of the origin of false solutions. It appears that God the Interior Master matches the solution to the problem understanding and incorrect problem understandings can lead to incorrect solutions.

Error is better than confusion, and false solutions may be seen as a stage on the path to truth, since their shortcomings will become apparent in later experience. For this reason science tests its theories to discover possible errors of understanding. This possibility of error gives the incentive to study the problem carefully since the problem must be understood correctly for the solution to be true.

**3.2. Modern Rationalism**

**3.2.1. Rene Descartes (1596-1650)**

He is called the ‘father of modern philosophy’; the modern Western Philosophy is a response to his writings; according to him dreams and conscious experience are dubitable; knowledge and all forms of other knowledge is based on ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ (thinking mind – ‘I think therefore I exist’); he proposed ‘*metaphysical dualism*’ – there are two types of beings, i.e. *res extensa* (body) and *res cogitans* (mind); these two are independent of each other and irreducible; what we really ‘know’ is only through the mind not by the body (senses).

**.2.2. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)**

### 3.2.2.1. The human mind

Spinoza argues for a distinct conception of the human mind in Part Two of *The Ethics*. He says the following:

The first thing that constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists.

He then argues that it follows that "the human Mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God." Further, Spinoza says: "Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human Mind must be perceived by the human Mind." From this we get a clear rejection of Descartes' mind/body dualism: "The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the Body, or a certain mode of Extension which actually exists, and nothing else."

### 3.2.2.2. The emotions

One thing which seems, on the surface, to distinguish Spinoza's view of the emotions from both Descartes’ and Hume’s pictures of them is that he takes the emotions to be cognitive in some important respect. Spinoza provides several demonstrations which purport to show truths about how human emotions work. Spinoza's treatment of the emotions in Part Three of *The Ethics*, "On the Origin and Nature of the Affects", utilizes a broad set of terminology, clearly intended to cover the whole of human experience. He tells us in the Preface:

The Affects, therefore, of hate, anger, envy, etc., considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and force of nature as any other singular things. And therefore they acknowledge certain causes, through which they are understood, and have certain properties, as worthy of our knowledge as the properties of any other thing, by the mere contemplation of which we are pleased.

### 3.2.2.3. Human freedom

Whether there is any meaningful kind of freedom which humans may genuinely have is, in Spinoza's picture, at least contentious. He certainly claims that there is a kind of freedom, namely, that which is arrived at through adequate knowledge of God, or, what is the same: the universe. But in the last two propositions of Part Two of *The Ethics*, he explicitly rejects the traditional notion of free will:

In the Mind there is no absolute, or free will, but the Mind is determined to will this or that by a cause which is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity.

So from this we get a strong sense of Spinoza's Naturalism, that is, that the natural and human orders are contiguous. With that being the case, human freedom of a kind which would extricate us from the order of physical causes is impossible. However, Spinoza argues, we still ought to strive to understand the world around us, and in doing so, gain a greater degree of *power*, which will allow us to be more active than passive, and there is a sense in which this is a kind of freedom.

**3.2.3. Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716)**

Leibniz rejected Cartesian dualism and denied the existence of a material world. In Leibniz's view there are infinitely many simple substances, which he called "monads."

Leibniz developed his theory of monads in response to both Descartes and Spinoza. In rejecting this response he was forced to arrive at his own solution. Monads are the fundamental unit of reality, according to Leibniz, constituting both inanimate and animate things. These units of reality represent the universe, though they are not subject to the laws of causality or space (which he called "well-founded phenomena"). Leibniz, therefore, introduced his principle of pre-established harmony to account for apparent causality in the world.

**3.2.4. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**

Kant named his branch of epistemology **Transcendental Idealism**, and he first laid out these views in his famous work *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In it he argued that there were fundamental problems with both rationalist and empiricist dogma. To the rationalists he argued, broadly, that pure reason is flawed when it goes beyond its limits and claims to know those things that are necessarily beyond the realm of all possible experience: the existence of God, free will, and the immortality of the human soul. Kant referred to these objects as "The Thing in Itself" and goes on to argue that their status as objects beyond all possible experience by definition means we cannot know them.

To the empiricist he argued that while it is correct that experience is fundamentally necessary for human knowledge, reason is necessary for processing that experience into coherent thought. He therefore concludes that both reason and experience are necessary for human knowledge. In the same way, Kant also argued that it was wrong to regard thought as mere analysis. In Kant's views, a priori concepts do exist, but if they are to lead to the amplification of knowledge, they must be brought into relation with empirical data."