

## BLOCK-2 INTRODUCTION

Rationalism is the view that reason as the source of knowledge or justification. It is a method or a theory in which the criterion of truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive. Different degrees of emphasis on this method lead to a range of rationalist standpoints, from the moderate position that reason has precedence over other ways of acquiring knowledge to the radical position that reason is the unique path to knowledge. It has long been the rival of empiricism, the doctrine that all knowledge of matters of fact ultimately derives from and must be tested by sense experience. As against this doctrine, rationalism holds reason to be a faculty that can lay hold of truths beyond the reach of sense perception, both in certainty and in generality. The block, which consists of 4 units, exposes the rationalist views of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. The block is concluded with a critical evaluation.

Unit 1, “Descartes,” studies philosophy of René Descartes who is widely considered to be the ‘father of modern philosophy.’ In this unit we deal with Descartes’ life and works, his method and criterion of knowledge, proofs for the existence of God, the existence of the world, the relation of mind and body and the theory of innate ideas.

Unit 2 is on “Spinoza,” who is one of the most important of the post-Cartesian philosophers. His thought combines a commitment to Cartesian metaphysical and epistemological principles with elements from sources such as Stoicism, Jewish Rationalism, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Descartes, and a variety of heterodox religious thinkers of his day. For this reason he is difficult to categorize, though he is usually counted, along with Descartes and Leibniz, as one of the three major rationalists.

Unit 3 is on “Leibniz.” Leibniz tried to reconcile Plato with Democritus, Aristotle with Descartes, the scholastics with the moderns, theology and morals with the dictates of reason. He tried to achieve this highly critical aim with the help of a few leading principles. Leibniz was a great mathematician and along with Newton shared the credit of inventing infinitesimal calculus. Naturally like Descartes and Spinoza he was biased for a mathematical method in philosophy and as such he intended to give geometrical proof in metaphysics.

Unit 4, “Resume and Critical Appraisal,” highlights the points of convergence and divergence among the continental rationalists: Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. Descartes was bothered by the question of certainty and he designed an ingenious “method of doubt” in order to arrive at what could not at all be doubted. Spinoza’s method is not only thoroughly deductive like the mathematical method, but even the exposition of his philosophy is rigorously deductive. Leibniz is no less rationalistic and deductive in his philosophy.

To conclude: With the view that reason as the source of knowledge or justification, rationalism became a method in which the criterion of truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz were convinced of this view.