

## THE DISINTEGRATION OF METANARRATIVES AND THE EMERGENCE OF MULTIPLE RATIONALITIES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY PHILOSOPHY

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### Summary

This article offers a systematic historical-philosophical analysis of the transformation of rationality in twentieth-century philosophy through the disintegration of metanarratives and the emergence of multiple forms of rationality. Classical modern philosophy was grounded in the idea of a unified, universal reason capable of legitimizing knowledge, morality, and political order. The dramatic historical experiences of the twentieth century—world wars, totalitarian regimes, technological acceleration, and radical changes in scientific knowledge—undermined the credibility of such universal foundations. Drawing on original texts by Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard, the article reconstructs the internal philosophical logic of this transformation. It is argued that plural rationality should not be interpreted as epistemological relativism or the rejection of reason as such. Instead, plural rationality is conceptualized as a historically conditioned reconfiguration of reason that allows critical thinking to persist after the collapse of universal legitimating narratives. The scientific novelty of the article lies in interpreting plural rationality as a structural response to the crisis of modernity rather than as a symptom of philosophical decline. This interpretation makes it possible to understand twentieth-century philosophy as a coherent, though non-totalizing, intellectual project oriented toward contextual justification, reflexivity, and ethical responsibility.

**Key words:** metanarratives, rationality, twentieth-century philosophy, postmodernity, plural rationalities.

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### 1. Introduction

The scientific novelty of this article consists in a reinterpretation of the plurality of rationalities in twentieth-century philosophy as a constructive reconfiguration of reason rather than its dissolution. The article demonstrates that the emergence of multiple rationalities represents a methodological strategy aimed at preserving critical thought under conditions of historical contingency, cultural fragmentation, and the loss of universal foundations. This approach allows plural rationality to be understood as an internally coherent response to the crisis of modern rationality.

#### *Research Aim:*

The aim of this study is a systematic historical-philosophical analysis of the transformation of rationality in the twentieth century through the disintegration of metanarratives and the emergence of multiple forms of rationality. The study seeks to demonstrate that plural rationality should not be interpreted as philosophical decline or epistemological relativism, but as a

historically conditioned reconfiguration of reason that allows critical thinking to persist after the collapse of universal legitimating narratives.

*Research Objectives:*

1. To analyze the historical context of the twentieth century influencing the transformation of notions of rationality, including world wars, totalitarian regimes, and scientific-technological changes.

2. To reveal the philosophical foundations of classical modern rationality and demonstrate its limitations through the critique of Nietzsche and Heidegger.

3. To examine the role of linguistic practices, scientific paradigms, and social structures in the emergence of plural rationality (drawing on Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Foucault, and Lyotard).

4. To systematize the concept of plural rationality as a methodological strategy for preserving critical thought in twentieth-century philosophy.

5. To construct a logical presentation of the material from the analysis of classical rationality to the postmodern plural approach, demonstrating the internal coherence of the transformations of rationality.

**Research Methodology.** The study employs a combined historical-philosophical and logical-analytical approach, allowing for the integration of historical reconstruction of philosophical concepts and conceptual analysis of key ideas.

Historical-philosophical method is used to reconstruct the context of the critique of universal rationality and the process of metanarrative disintegration in the twentieth century.

Logical-analytical method enables the systematization and comparison of philosophers' views (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Lyotard) to identify common principles in the formation of plural rationality.

Comparative analysis method is applied to juxtapose different approaches to rationality in science, morality, and social practices (Kuhn, Lyotard).

Systemic approach ensures the logical presentation of the material: from the historical context of modern rationality → critique of classical rationality → linguistic, social, and scientific transformations → the concept of plural rationality.

This methodology demonstrates that plural rationality is not the dissolution of reason but its reorganization, adapted to historically changing conditions and cultural diversity.

## 2. Main part

Twentieth-century philosophy developed in a historical context characterized by unprecedented ruptures. Two world wars, the experience of genocide and totalitarian violence, the collapse of colonial empires, and the rapid expansion of scientific and technological power fundamentally transformed the intellectual landscape of Europe and the world. Philosophical systems that had once claimed universal explanatory and normative authority increasingly appeared incapable of accounting for these experiences.

At the center of this crisis stood the concept of rationality. Since the Enlightenment, reason had been understood as a universal faculty capable of grounding knowledge, morality, and political legitimacy. This conception presupposed that rationality was unified, ahistorical, and normatively binding for all subjects. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, this assumption had become deeply problematic.

The concept of the metanarrative provides a key to understanding this transformation. Metanarratives are overarching narratives that legitimize social practices, scientific knowledge,

and moral norms by appealing to universal principles such as progress, emancipation, or absolute truth. The gradual erosion of confidence in such narratives marks a decisive shift in philosophical self-understanding. This article argues that the disintegration of metanarratives did not lead to the abandonment of rationality but rather to its pluralization and contextualization.

*Modern Rationality and Its Discontents.* Modern philosophy, especially in its Kantian formulation, conceived rationality as a unified normative structure. Kant's critical project sought to delimit the scope of reason while simultaneously securing its universal validity as the condition of possibility of experience, knowledge, and moral obligation (*Kant, 1998*). Despite its critical intentions, this framework preserved the idea that rationality could provide universally binding criteria of truth and normativity. Rationality was thus conceived as both a cognitive instrument and a moral compass, capable of guiding human action toward objective, universal ends.

During the nineteenth century, this conception came under increasing pressure. The rise of historical consciousness, the development of the human sciences, and the growing awareness of cultural plurality challenged the assumption that reason could transcend historical and social conditions. Thinkers began to recognize that knowledge and value judgments were profoundly influenced by contingent factors such as language, culture, social institutions, and historical circumstances. The philosophical ideal of a context-independent rationality became increasingly tenuous, provoking debates on the nature, scope, and limits of reason.

These tensions culminated in the radical critiques of the late nineteenth century. Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy represents a decisive break with the modern ideal of universal rationality. Nietzsche's genealogical method exposes moral values, concepts of truth, and rational norms as products of historical struggles and psychological drives rather than expressions of timeless reason (*Nietzsche, 1974*). Rationality is inseparable from interpretation, perspective, and power relations, making it inherently plural and contingent. Nietzsche emphasizes that the pursuit of universal truth often masks underlying power dynamics, ideological commitments, and unexamined assumptions.

Nietzsche's critique is not merely negative. By uncovering the historical and psychological roots of values, he opens the possibility for a reflective, self-conscious rationality. Rational evaluation becomes a matter of examining origins, functions, and consequences rather than adhering to pre-given universals. This perspective lays the groundwork for understanding reason as a historically situated and interpretive practice, paving the way for twentieth-century thinkers who would expand the concept of plural rationality.

*Ontological Critique and the Historicity of Reason.* In the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger deepened the critique of modern rationality by questioning its ontological foundations. Heidegger argues that Western philosophy, since Plato, has understood Being in terms of presence and objectivity, reducing thought to calculative rationality (*Heidegger, 1962*). Such rationality emphasizes control, prediction, and technological mastery, often neglecting more fundamental ways of understanding existence.

Heidegger's ontological analysis reveals that rationality is historically constituted rather than universally given. Each epoch manifests a particular understanding of Being that shapes what counts as rational, meaningful, or true. Rationality is therefore plural and context-dependent, though this plurality is often concealed by metaphysical claims to universality. By exposing the historical grounding of reason, Heidegger challenges the assumption that rationality can operate independently of temporal, cultural, and existential conditions.

This ontological critique also reorients philosophical methodology. Instead of seeking timeless principles, philosophers are encouraged to investigate the structures of understanding

that inform human experience in specific historical contexts. Rationality becomes a mode of engagement with the world, grounded in lived experience and attentive to the limits imposed by finitude, contingency, and historical circumstance. Heidegger's insights underscore the necessity of situating rational critique within the broader horizon of human existence.

Furthermore, Heidegger's approach opens avenues for alternative forms of rationality that escape the strictures of calculative logic. By recognizing the diversity of ontological frameworks across time and culture, it becomes possible to appreciate multiple ways of reasoning, evaluating, and interpreting phenomena. Rationality is thus pluralized, not dissolved, and its critical function persists even in the absence of universal foundations. This reconceptualization directly informs later developments in philosophy of language, science, and postmodern thought, creating a continuum from historical critique to contemporary pluralistic epistemology.

*The Linguistic Turn and the Pluralization of Meaning.* The pluralization of rationality becomes particularly evident in the linguistic turn of twentieth-century philosophy. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his later work, abandons the search for a universal logical structure underlying language and meaning. He introduces the notion of language games, emphasizing that meaning and justification are inseparable from the specific forms of life and practical contexts in which they occur (*Wittgenstein 1953, §§23-43*).

According to this framework, rationality cannot be understood as the application of abstract, context-independent rules. Each language game is governed by norms internal to the form of life it presupposes, shaping what counts as meaningful, true, or rational. These norms emerge from regularities and conventions within social practices, and they are maintained through participation, shared understanding, and the ongoing negotiation of meanings. Rational evaluation, therefore, is not externally imposed but immanent to the practices themselves.

This shift has significant implications for epistemology and the philosophy of language. Philosophers must attend to the diversity of rational practices, analyzing how justification operates differently across contexts. The demand for a single, overarching criterion of rationality is rendered obsolete, replaced by sensitivity to the internal coherence, functional adequacy, and discursive rules of each practice. Rationality is thus plural, but still structured, intelligible, and normatively significant within its context.

Wittgenstein's perspective also highlights the role of interpretation, negotiation, and communal understanding. Grasping a statement or argument requires engagement with the relevant language game. Disagreement between different language games does not signify irrationality but underscores the contextuality of reasoning and the necessity for interpretive competence. Misalignment between language games reveals the boundaries of rational evaluation and emphasizes the need for situationally grounded critique.

The methodological consequences are profound. Philosophy and social theory must investigate the practices, conventions, and forms of life that give meaning to reasoning rather than appeal to abstract universals. Critique is redirected toward the internal consistency and practical functionality of specific forms of discourse, allowing evaluation without recourse to context-independent standards. Rational assessment becomes a matter of examining coherence, adequacy, and justificatory mechanisms embedded in particular practices.

Moreover, the linguistic turn introduces an ethical dimension. Recognizing the plurality of rational standards requires attentiveness, reflexivity, and responsiveness to context. The rational agent is no longer guided by universal principles but by situated norms and the responsibilities that these entail. Rationality is thus enriched, demanding, and responsive to the complexity of social and historical realities.

Extending these insights, the linguistic turn provides a conceptual foundation for understanding twentieth-century rationality as both plural and normatively rigorous. Rational practices are not arbitrary but are structured by the internal logic of language games, shared community standards, and historically situated norms. This theoretical reorientation sets the stage for understanding scientific paradigms, power-knowledge dynamics, and postmodern fragmentation. It demonstrates how rationality persists and transforms in contexts where metanarratives have collapsed, preserving critical and evaluative capacities.

In sum, the linguistic turn does not erode reason; it pluralizes, situates, and enriches it. Rationality becomes context-sensitive but critically robust, historically informed yet normatively coherent, and locally grounded yet communicatively effective within each form of life. By articulating multiple standards of rationality, this perspective bridges localized reasoning and broader philosophical critique, offering a coherent strategy for navigating epistemic diversity and maintaining the integrity of rational discourse across fragmented, pluralistic landscapes of twentieth-century thought.

*Scientific Rationality and Paradigm Shifts.* Parallel developments in the philosophy of science further undermine the modern ideal of unified rationality. Thomas Kuhn's analysis of scientific revolutions challenges the view of science as a cumulative, linear progression toward truth (Kuhn, 1962). Kuhn argues that scientific research operates within paradigms—shared frameworks of concepts, methods, and standards—that define what counts as rational scientific practice.

Scientific paradigms encompass a wide array of tacit assumptions, methodological norms, and conceptual structures that guide researchers in problem selection, hypothesis formation, experimental design, and data interpretation. These frameworks are learned, socially transmitted, and largely invisible to practitioners until a crisis occurs. Within a paradigm, scientific judgments are highly rational, coherent, and structured, but they are intelligible only relative to the internal logic of that paradigm. What counts as an anomaly or a falsifying event, for example, depends on the interpretive standards of the prevailing scientific community.

The process of scientific revolution, in which one paradigm replaces another, reveals the historically contingent and plural character of rationality. Kuhn demonstrates that competing paradigms are often incommensurable: they employ different conceptual vocabularies, research questions, and evaluative criteria, making direct comparison extremely difficult or impossible. Consequently, the rationality operative within one paradigm cannot simply be transferred to another; what is rational in one context may be unintelligible or invalid in another. This insight destabilizes the Enlightenment conception of reason as context-independent and universally binding.

Moreover, the paradigm-based understanding of science illuminates the social and institutional dimensions of rationality. Scientific communities enforce standards of evidence, methodological rigor, and theoretical coherence, but these standards are embedded within professional practices, academic hierarchies, and historical contingencies. Rationality is thus both epistemic and social, operating through networks of scientists, publications, and research institutions.

Kuhn's framework also emphasizes the temporal dynamics of rationality. Scientific knowledge is not static; it evolves through cycles of normal science, crisis, and revolution. During periods of normal science, rationality appears highly structured and predictable. However, crises reveal the limitations of existing frameworks and necessitate theoretical creativity, epistemic flexibility, and the recognition of alternative rational possibilities. The paradigm shift is therefore not a loss of rationality, but a transformation in its operational conditions.

In addition, Kuhn's insights challenge simplistic understandings of scientific objectivity. Objectivity is not abolished but reinterpreted: it is realized within the constraints of specific paradigms and the methodological norms they establish. This situates rationality within historical

and social contexts, highlighting its plural character without undermining its normative and epistemic authority.

The implication is not that science is irrational, but that rationality itself takes different forms depending on historical, disciplinary, and institutional contexts. Plural rationalities emerge as a necessary response to the diversity and complexity of scientific practice, reflecting the contingent, dynamic, and socially embedded nature of reason in the twentieth century.

*Power, Knowledge, Paradigms, and Plural Rationality Beyond Relativism.* The transformation of rationality in twentieth-century philosophy cannot be adequately understood without examining the complex interplay between knowledge, power, language, and scientific practice (Foucault, 1980; Kuhn, 1962; Lyotard, 1984). The collapse of metanarratives does not occur in an abstract theoretical vacuum; it unfolds within concrete historical configurations in which forms of rationality function as instruments of organization, normalization, and critique (Foucault, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990).

Michel Foucault's genealogical analyses demonstrate that rationality is always embedded within regimes of power. Rather than treating reason as a neutral cognitive faculty, Foucault reveals it as a historically situated practice that structures fields of knowledge, produces subjects, and regulates social behavior (Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 1972). What counts as rational, true, or normal is inseparable from institutional frameworks such as medicine, law, education, and the human sciences (Foucault, 1977). Rationality thus operates as a productive force, generating forms of knowledge while simultaneously excluding alternative modes of understanding. This insight radically destabilizes the modern belief in a single, universally valid rational order (Habermas, 1987).

At the same time, developments in the philosophy of science reinforce this critique of unified rationality. Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigms shows that scientific rationality itself is plural and historically contingent (Kuhn, 1962; Kuhn, 1970). Scientific communities operate within shared conceptual and methodological frameworks that determine what counts as a legitimate problem, acceptable evidence, and valid explanation. Paradigm shifts are not merely theoretical corrections but involve profound changes in standards of rationality (Hacking, 1983). The incommensurability between paradigms reveals that rational evaluation cannot always appeal to neutral, paradigm-independent criteria (Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend, 1975).

Jean-François Lyotard integrates these insights into a broader diagnosis of postmodern knowledge. The collapse of metanarratives, according to Lyotard, signifies the loss of overarching legitimating stories such as progress, emancipation, or the unity of science (Lyotard, 1984). Knowledge fragments into heterogeneous language games, each governed by its own rules of justification. This condition does not entail the disappearance of rationality, but its localization. Rationality becomes performative and context-bound, oriented toward specific goals and practices rather than universal foundations (Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1989).

The emergence of plural rationalities is often criticized as a slide into epistemological relativism. Such criticism, however, rests on a misunderstanding. Relativism implies that all claims are equally valid and that no rational grounds for critique remain (Putnam, 1981). Plural rationality, by contrast, presupposes the existence of internal norms, standards, and criteria within specific contexts (Foucault, 1980; Kuhn, 1962). Rational judgment does not vanish; it is transformed. Evaluation becomes immanent rather than transcendent, relying on coherence, consistency, practical adequacy, and ethical responsibility (Lyotard, 1984; Habermas, 1987).

Plural rationality thus preserves the critical potential of philosophy under conditions of historical contingency. It enables critique without appealing to absolute foundations, allowing philosophy to address the limits, exclusions, and power effects of particular rational regimes

(Foucault, 1980; Kuhn, 1970). In this sense, plural rationality represents not the end of reason, but its reflexive maturation. Reason becomes aware of its own conditions, limits, and responsibilities, operating as a historically conscious practice rather than a totalizing authority.

This integrated perspective shows that twentieth-century philosophy does not dissolve into fragmentation or irrationalism. Instead, it articulates a complex landscape of rational practices capable of mutual critique and transformation. Plural rationality emerges as a structural response to the crisis of modernity, maintaining the possibility of rational discourse while rejecting the illusion of universal, context-free foundations (Foucault, 1980; Kuhn, 1962; Lyotard, 1984).

### 3. Conclusions

The disintegration of metanarratives constitutes one of the most profound and far-reaching transformations in the history of twentieth-century philosophy. What collapses in this process is not merely a set of theoretical constructs, but an entire model of philosophical legitimacy grounded in universal reason, linear progress, and comprehensive explanatory systems. The erosion of these legitimating narratives reveals a deep structural crisis of modern rationality, exposing its historical contingency and its entanglement with specific social, political, and epistemic conditions.

Twentieth-century philosophy responds to this crisis not through a simple rejection of rationality, but through its systematic reconfiguration. The emergence of multiple rationalities reflects an effort to preserve the critical function of philosophy under conditions in which universal foundations can no longer be credibly sustained. Rather than abandoning reason, philosophers re-articulate it as situated, reflexive, and internally regulated by contextual norms. In this sense, plural rationality represents a transformation of reason that allows philosophical inquiry to remain meaningful after the collapse of totalizing frameworks.

The analyses of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Lyotard demonstrate that rationality in the twentieth century becomes inseparable from historical experience, linguistic practice, and power relations. Each of these thinkers exposes different dimensions of the limits of modern rationality while simultaneously developing alternative modes of critique. Nietzsche's genealogical method reveals the perspectival character of values and truths; Heidegger uncovers the ontological presuppositions that shape calculative thinking; Wittgenstein situates rational justification within forms of life; Foucault links rational regimes to practices of power; and Lyotard conceptualizes the fragmentation of knowledge after the collapse of metanarratives. Taken together, these approaches articulate a shared philosophical horizon in which rationality is no longer unified but irreducibly plural.

Interpreting plural rationality as a form of epistemological relativism fails to capture the critical ambitions of twentieth-century philosophy. Plural rationalities do not imply the equivalence of all claims or the suspension of judgment. On the contrary, they require more demanding forms of justification that operate immanently within specific contexts. Rational critique persists through coherence, internal consistency, pragmatic effectiveness, and ethical accountability. The loss of universal foundations thus gives rise not to arbitrariness, but to heightened responsibility in the exercise of reason.

From this perspective, twentieth-century philosophy can be understood as a coherent, though non-totalizing, intellectual project aimed at rethinking the conditions of rationality in a fragmented world. The shift from universal to plural rationality reflects an attempt to reconcile

critical thinking with historical finitude and cultural diversity. This reconfiguration does not signal the end of philosophy, but rather its transformation into a practice attuned to contingency, difference, and reflexivity. In this sense, plural rationality emerges as one of the most significant philosophical achievements of the twentieth century, redefining reason not as an instrument of domination or totalization, but as a fragile yet indispensable medium of critique and responsibility.

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