

Empiricism

HZT4U1 - Mr. Wittmann - Unit 3 - Lecture 3



The Dream by Henri Rousseau

What can give us more sure knowledge than our senses? How else can we distinguish between the true & the false?

-Lucretius

Can the Senses Account for All Our Knowledge?

- **Empiricism** states that all knowledge about the world comes from, or is based on, the senses.
- Reacting sharply to rationalism
- Empiricists claim that the human mind contains nothing except what experience has put there.
- **posteriori knowledge** is empirically verifiable; based on inductive reasoning from what is experienced.

Can the Senses Account for All Our Knowledge? (continued)

- Western empiricists:
 - **John Locke** (1632–1704)
 - **George Berkeley** (1685–1753)
 - **David Hume** (1711–1776).
- Indian empiricists:
 - **Charvaka**
 - **Nyaya**

John Locke



- English philosopher **John Locke** (1632–1704) was the first to launch a systematic attack on rationalist beliefs.
- At birth the mind is a *tabula rasa*, that only experience can fill.
- There are no innate ideas or processes.

John Locke (continued)

- So how do we know if our sense experiences of physical objects accurately describe these physical objects?
- How can we know the nature of reality which exists outside of our experience of it?
- Do perceptions ever in fact correspond with the objective reality of things?

John Locke (continued)

- But the external physical objects, which source of our perceptions, must exist independent of our perceptions of them.
- We only directly perceive our ideas, not the external objects that cause them.
- Thus there is a problem about the connection between our ideas & the external world.

Primary & Secondary Qualities

- **Primary qualities** such as weight, size, & shape are really “in” the objects we perceive, & our experiences of primary qualities are “copies” of the primary qualities of objects, & are reliable indicators of the external world.
- **Secondary qualities** such as colours, tastes, & sounds are not “in” the objects we perceive, but are sensations in us that objects cause us to have, & are relative.

Primary & Secondary Qualities

(continued)

- We have knowledge of things, because our ideas of primary qualities actually resemble the primary qualities of objects in the external world.
- For example, if we experience the tree as being a certain height, we can trust that idea to resemble how the tree really is; if we experience it to have a certain shape, we can trust that idea to resemble how the tree really is.

John Locke Video

OXYGEN THIEVES

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Berkeley & Subjectivism



- **George Berkeley** (1685–1753) agreed with Locke that ideas originate in sensory experience.
- In his **A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge**, Berkeley addresses primary & secondary qualities.

Berkeley & Subjectivism

(continued)

- Berkeley accepted Locke's argument that secondary qualities are subjective.
- But he insisted that so were primary qualities.
- Both primary & secondary qualities, are perceptions & are dependent on the mind.
- We only know that the conscious mind & perceptions exist, not external objects.
- Thus, external objects only exist if perceived
- ***esse est percipi.***

Berkeley & Subjectivism

(continued)

- **Subjectivism** states that there can be nothing without a perceiver & that the only thing that is real is the conscious mind & its perceptions.
- When we say that something exists, we mean that it is or can be perceived.
- Things we experience are nothing more than ideas in the mind, thus external objects may not exist.

Berkeley & Subjectivism

(continued)

- **Solipsism** claims that nothing else exists besides my own mind & its contents.
- Three Dialogues Between Hylas & Philonus
 - Berkeley avoided solipsism by saying that God exists & that God produces the sensations in my mind.

Hume & Skepticism



- **David Hume** (1711–1776) accepted Berkeley's view that all we experience are our own sensations & ideas, which he called "impressions."
- But if all our knowledge is derived from sense impressions, an idea not derived from a sense impression is meaningless or nonexistent.

Hume & Skepticism

(continued)

- Thus, the idea of **causality** or **causal conjunction** is not derived from any sense impression.
- Thus causality is nothing more than the habitual expectation.
- A feeling formed by repeatedly seeing the same sequence of events in the past
- Seeing one event always followed by another event

Hume & Skepticism

(continued)

- Thus external reality does not exist, only our perceptions
- We have no access to an external world beyond our sense impressions
- Thus we have no justification for believing that any external reality , include ourselves, exists beyond our impressions & ideas (**Bundle Theory**).

David Hume Video

S. PETER DAVIS
PRESENTS

Summary

Locke (Primary & Secondary):

- External reality exists
- But, some perceptions (of primary qualities) are similar to and come from external reality

Berkeley (Subjectivism):

- External reality may exist
- But, there is no connection between perceptions & external reality
- Thus, God is the source of perceptions
 - Solipsism: only my mind & perceptions my exist

Hume (Skepticism):

- No external reality (no self and no God) exists beyond perceptions
- Remove all qualities/properties and all things cease to exist

THE END