

### 3 ORIGIN OF IDEA AND PERCEPTION - DAVID HUME

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2.0 Origin of Ideas

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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

David Hume (1711-1776) was one of the great philosophers of the early modern period and a proponent of empiricism. His work is crucial in understanding human knowledge; and he argued that all knowledge originates from sensory experience. Central to his philosophy is how the mind processes ideas and perception. In his seminal work, "A Treatise of Human Nature", Hume distinguishes between impressions and ideas, analyzes the process of perception and the limit of human cognition, in order to understand how humans interpret the world.

## 2.0 ORIGIN OF IDEAS

in Hume

The origin of idea got its top spot, due to the influence of Locke's attack on innatism. Hume's theory is a derivative from Locke's essay concerning human understanding. Here, Locke's ideas become the foundation or background for Hume's theory of ideas. It is crystal clear that David Hume is an empiricist and as such he upholds human experience as the source of human knowledge, thereby denying innatism. Based on this fact, Hume explored his theory of ideas.

The vague word "idea" was used by John Locke for whatever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks. Hence for Locke, sensation and thoughts are categorized as ideas. Hume considers this broad usage to be inappropriate, for it combines together two distinct mental operations, namely: the awareness of sensation or feelings, and the consideration of thoughts. For Hume, only the latter (thoughts) can properly be called "ideas" in the conventional sense. Thus, he restricts the scope of "idea" to thoughts alone, coining the new term "impression" to refer to sensation and feeling.

## 3.0 DAVID HUME'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN IMPRESSIONS AND IDEAS

Hume argued that there is a considerable difference between the perception of the mind, when a man feels the pain of excessive heat, and when he afterwards recalls to his memory this impression or anticipates it by imagination. For Hume,

higher faculties (thought) can mimic or copy perception of sense, but they cannot entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment.

Consequently, Hume argues that when we reflect on the past sentiment and affections; our thought is a faithful mirror, and copies its objects truly, but the colour which it employs are faint and dull, in comparison to those in which our original perceptions were clothed. At this point, Hume divided all human perceptions of the mind based on their different degree of force and vivacity.

a.) Impressions (vivid and immediate) : They are the most immediate and forceful perceptions. These include sensations, emotions and passions that arise directly from sensory experience. For example, the sharp pain of touching a hot stove or the vivid image of a red apple are impressions; characterized by their vividness and intensity.

b.) Ideas (faint copies of impressions) : Ideas, in contrast, are the mental representations or recollections of these impressions. When one recalls the taste of an apple or imagine a flame, they are forming ideas based on prior impressions. Ideas are less vivid and weaker. For Hume, the mind cannot invent new ideas ex nihilo; it can only manipulate and combine impressions it had previously enumerated.

Hume asserts that all the materials of thinking are derived

either from our outward or inward sentiments. Hence, all our ideas or mere feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions.

Hume calls this the "Copy Principle". Even the most abstract ideas can be traced back to simply sensory experiences.<sup>Eg God Mountain</sup> To prove this, Hume puts up two arguments:

First, Hume argued that when we analyze our thoughts or ideas, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. For example, the idea of God, as meaning infinitely intelligent, wise, powerful, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind and argument without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom.

The second argument to prove that all our ideas are copies of impressions is that, if it happens from a defect of organ, that a man is susceptible of any species of sensation, we always find that he is as little susceptible of the corresponding ideas. A blind man can form no notion of colours; a deaf man of sounds. Restore either of them that sense in which he is deficient by opening this new inlet for his sensation, you also open an inlet for the ideas; and he finds no difficulty in conceiving these objects. An idea can have access to the mind, to wit, by the actual feeling and sensation.

### An Exception?

Although Hume maintains that ideas originate from impressions,

he accepts that there is one contradictory phenomenon, which proves that it is not absolutely impossible for ideas to arise independent of their correspondent impressions. This exception is the idea of the "mixing shade of blue". Experiencing various shades of blue except for one specific shade, for Hume, the mind is capable of inferring using reasoning and imagination. What the mixing shade might look like. Here, each shade produces a distinct idea independent of the rest. In this case, simple ideas are not always in every instance derived from correspondent impression. Though acknowledging this, Hume insists that this case is so singular that it scarcely worth observing, and does not merit it. Therefore, it alone should not alter the general principle (Copy principle) which in him is valid for nearly all instances of human thought.

### 3.1 ASOCIATION OF IDEAS

Hume's analysis of ideas extends beyond their origins to the mechanisms by which they are organized and connected to the mind. He identified three principles of association that govern the way ideas are linked:

- a) Resemblance: Ideas that are similar tend to be associated with one another. For example, seeing a portrait may lead one to think of the person it represents.
- b) Contiguity: It describes association of ideas that occurs

close together in time and space. Such ideas tend to become linked. For instance thinking of your school, may invoke the memories of a particular event that occurred there.

c) Cause and Effect: It is regarded as the most significant principle. This association occurs when one event or idea is perceived to lead to another. For instance, the idea of striking a match is immediately associated with the idea of a flame.

#### A.ii EVALUATION

David Hume's theory of ideas contribute greatly to philosophy by reshaping the way we approach human cognition, knowledge, and limits of understanding, through his emphasis on experience as the foundation of all knowledge, distinction between ideas and impressions, and principles of association.

However, critics critiqued Hume's copy principle, arguing that not all ideas can be traced back to specific impressions. Abstract concepts like infinity, justice, in mathematics seem to transcend sensory experience.

Also modern developments in cognitive science and psychology challenge Hume's rejection of innate ideas, suggesting that humans may possess innate cognitive structures that guide perception and understanding.

## GO CONCLUSION

David Hume's brilliance inspires us to think critically about the nature of ideas, the role of experience, and the limits of human understanding.

# EPISTEMOLOGY

## 1 WHAT IS EPISTEMOLOGY

Outline:

1.0 Introduction.

2.0 Definition and Explanation of Epistemology.

3.0 Meaning of Human Knowledge.

3.1 Sources of Knowledge.

3.2 Processes of Knowledge.

3.3 Types of Knowledge.

4.0 Schools of Thought in Epistemology.

4.1 Rationalism.

4.2 Empiricism.

4.3 Skepticism.

4.4 Pragmatism.

5.0 Evaluation.

6.0 Conclusion.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, philosophy has engaged itself with challenges and problems which could be classified into various branches.

Epistemology is one of those branches of philosophy, which deals with the issues related to human knowledge and evaluating what we know.

The seminal firms of epistemology were made in the skepticisms of the Sophists who doubted many epistemic conventions, institutions and traditions. The Sophists questioned the certainty of knowledge, as well as the possibility and validity of customs, belief systems and morality. However, it was in the epistemic activities of the Perantics

and the post-Socratic that epistemology received its first Ancestry. The Socratic period laid the foundation of classical epistemology, which will be sustained in the course of philosophy through the ages to come after Socrates and Plato. Attempts to answer the questions of the Sophists, and the need to differentiate opinion or unexamined truth from true knowledge spurred the birth of epistemology.

## 2.0 DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION OF EPISTEMOLOGY

The term "Epistemology" is from two Greek words "episteme" which means knowledge and "Logos" which means a study of something. The word epistemology then means the study of knowledge. This term was first used by a Scottish philosopher, James Frederick Ferrier in 1854 to designate the branch of philosophy concerned with the discovery of the meaning of knowledge. He called it "the meaning of philosophy". Epistemology, therefore, means a study of human knowledge of human knowledge which is believed to be true and reliable. It specifically studies what we know or claim to know and how we know it:

Epistemology strives to validate one's claim to truth and empowers one to intellectually defend the possibility of attaining human knowledge in the face of those that tend to deny or doubt it. Celestine Bitte puts it that the purpose of epistemology is to submit our knowledge to a critical examination & investigate the rational grounds on which it rests so as to discover whether we are justified in having the spontaneous convictions that our knowledge is valid and true in its claim to be truthful interpretation & reality.

Epistemology is also related to other branches of philosophy but it relates to psychology and logic more intimately. Psychology studies the working of the human mind, and epistemology deals with the product of the working of the mind which is knowledge. Logic deals with the science of correct reasoning, and epistemology can only function when one reasons correctly.

Epistemology has been described in different names. Some call it "Theory of knowledge" which evaluates the system of knowledge. Others have called it "Criteriology" as it set rules for examination of authenticity and certainty of knowledge. It has also been termed "Gnoseology" because it studies the nature of top truths. Another description of it is "Major Logic". Jocque Maritain, due to the critical nature described it as "Criticism".

### 3.0 MEANING OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

Human knowledge is an important part of human life and it is the main object of study in epistemology. We are all aware that we know or that things are known to us. In some forms of knowledge, it is explicit when one is aware that one knows. In other circumstances, knowledge is tacit when one may not be clearly aware of one's act of knowing. Knowledge revolve around the idea that knowledge has to do with consciousness, understanding, originality, familiarity, and intentional acquaintance of an object or experience by a human person.

Bertrand Russell in his work, "On Denoting and Problems of Philosophy", defined knowledge by putting two ways of knowing. According to him, there are knowledge by acquaintance (direct cognitive relation to the object) and knowledge by description (indirect relation to the object either through writings, images etc.). The latter involves explanation and may not be accepted without doubts. Also, Michael Polanyi, in his book "Personal Knowledge" explains that there is a difference between knowledge how and knowledge that. For instance, one might know the physical law in riding a bicycle without knowing how to ride bicycle and vice versa. We can therefore say that knowledge can be propositional (theoretical), procedural (practical), and by acquaintance (experience).

### \*\* Justified True Belief \*\*

However, beyond mere basic explanations, knowledge is essentially tied to three basic epistemological concepts, which include belief, justification, and truth. Dovid Hume writes, "one condition of being said to know something is that what one claims to know must be the case; if it is an object that one claims to know; this must exist; and if what one claims to know is formulable in a proposition, this must be true". This implies that knowledge is characterized by the fact that what is known must exist, factually or logically (justification), i.e. must be accepted to exist (belief), and it must be true (truth). These conditions are the reasons the most widely accepted definition of knowledge is "Justified True Belief". This definition was

accepted in enlightenment era to substitute the medieval notion that based knowledge on divine revelation.

Belief is the subjective state of the knower in the process of knowing. It is the disposition of the knower in accepting or rejecting something as either true or false. Truth, another essential element of knowledge, refers to a condition in which a belief, proposition, judgement or any other article of belief as knowledge must agree with reality or reason. The certainty of truth is one of the reasons Plato demonstrated in his allegory of the divided line that truth is eternal and immutable. The third principal element, justification, refers to the good grounds or reasons, one must present or show to make the truth of a belief rationally admirable and factually reliable. Such ground for justification might rest on perceptual experience.

Knowledge as justified true belief was challenged in the 1960s by the explosive thoughts of the American philosopher, Edmund Gettier. In 1963, Gettier wrote a three-page article entitled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"; challenging justified true belief and creating what is known in contemporary epistemology as the Gettier's problem. However, irrespective of these challenges, every form of knowledge is generated through a process.

### 3.1 PROCESSES OF KNOWLEDGE

The processes of knowledge involve both sensory and intellectual operations. Through cognition, the subject and the object unite,

creating an intuitional act where the object became present in the mind, not physically but as a cognitive representation.

Sentient knowledge arises from sensation which receives impressions and perception which interprets impressions, relying on external senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) and internal senses (common sense, memory, imagination, estimative sense). Intellectual knowledge, in contrast, transcends the materiality of objects.

Knowledge involves progression from sensory experience to intellectual insight, uniting the knower and the known in a process that is intentional, relational, and ultimately aimed at grasping truth beyond physical reality.

### 3.2 SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

① **Sensory Perception**: It is a cognitive act in which there is a presentation of the ordinary mind-independent object to a subject who experience the object in a process of what Kant will call "immediate consciousness". It involves the perceiver, the object perceived, the sensory experience and the cognitive interaction between the object and subject of perception. The external senses (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch) give us primary data regarding objects we encounter. The process of sensation leads to perception.

② **Reason (inferential thinking)**:

It is the mental process by which we move from certain truths already known to another distinct one, which is

derived from the earlier truth. The power of reasoning places us above lower brutes or animals. Inductive and deductive patterns are two major patterns of reasoning logically. We acquire learning through the process of ideation like remembering, abstraction and divine illumination.

③ Testimony: In epistemology, it is a means of propagation conveyed by a person or group to another. Testimony does not have its own cognitive faculty; it relies on others to acquire knowledge and communicate to us. It can be done through speech writing, facial expression, and so on.

④ Memory:

It is the function which retains, reproduces, and recognizes the representations of the objects formally perceived from the external sense in the past. Memory may be of present, not just the past events. However, memory does err.

#### FOUR SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN EPistemology

① Skepticism: It is a school of thought that argues against the possibility & certainty of human knowledge. Skeptics were the first known sceptics and epistemologists. Some of them include Gorgias, Pyrrho, et al., Sextus et al. Sceptics observed that sometimes our opinions over something are not uniform.

② Foundationism: This school rejects skepticism, and argue that knowledge is possible and certainty of it can be found in or

justified in undisputable foundation or dogma. For them, there are propositions we cannot fail to believe because they are true and cannot but be true in themselves. The early Greek philosophers, John Locke and other modern philosophers, however, support or accept foundationalism.

### ② Rationalism:

This school of thought holds that rational or reason is the main source of knowledge. They believe that we have innate ideas which may be intuitive and not derived from experience, which gives us true knowledge. Among the prominent rationalists are Plato, Descartes, Spinoza & Leibniz.

### ③ Empiricism:

It holds that the only way to knowledge is experience. It is an epistemological response to rationalism. It emphasizes that the sources of knowledge are based on observation and perception. Among the empiricists are Francis Bacon, David Hume, George Berkeley, and John Locke, Thomas Hobbes.

## 5.0 EVALUATION