



BPYC-134

Block 3

EMPIRICISM



BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Empiricism refers (British) to the 18th century philosophical movement in Great Britain which maintained that all knowledge comes from experience. Continental Rationalists maintained that knowledge comes from foundational concepts known intuitively through reason, such as innate ideas. Other concepts are then deductively drawn from these. British Empiricists staunchly rejected the theory of innate ideas and argued that knowledge is based on both sense experience and internal mental experiences, such as emotions and self-reflection. Exactly like rationalism, empiricism is also an extreme view. It holds that *all* substantial truths about the world are discoverable only by empirical experience. Thus, reason is substituted by empirical or sense experience. This block studies the major British empiricists: Locke, Berkley and Hume.

Unit 8 is on “Locke,” who may be regarded as the founder of Empiricism, which holds that sense experience is the only source of philosophical knowledge. The conception of substance was a dominant category during the time of Locke, who did not attempt to reject it wholly. He thought in terms of concrete details rather than of large abstractions. He wanted to break from the bondage of words, from the bondage of wrong methods and from the bondage of the assumption that philosopher’s business is to speculate.

Unit 9, “Berkley,” describes the salient ideas of the British philosopher George Berkeley who followed John Locke and whose theory of knowledge became the focus of criticism. The unit proposes to study the arguments put forward by Berkeley to resolve some perennial and perplexing issues of epistemology and metaphysics. The unit exposes his theories of empiricism and subjective idealism and tries to explain the meaning of his famous saying: *esse est percipi* meaning, ‘to be is to perceived.’

Unit 10 is on “Hume,” who believed that the science of human nature affords fundamental insight not only into such domains as morals, aesthetics, and politics but even mathematics, natural philosophy, and natural religion. Human nature is thus the ‘capital or centre’ of sciences. The experimental method which has been applied with such success in natural science should also be applied in the study of human.

Unit 11, “Criticisms of Empiricism” examines how empiricism defended the assumptions

of and methods of science and developed a complimentary theory of mind. By grounding all knowledge in sensory experience and suggesting that experience may only represent or mirror the external world, empiricism reinforced Descartes' first-person stand-point and his conception that persons have privileged access to their own sensations. Continental philosophers often claim that empiricists overlook the temporal unity of and internal relations among experiences, and that they presuppose an arbitrarily limited conception of experience and of their possible combinations.

To conclude: Empiricism, which maintains that all knowledge comes from experience, is an extreme philosophical view. All major British empiricists – Locke, Berkley and Hume – were united in this view.



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Structure

8.0 Objectives

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Refutation of Innate Ideas

8.3 Theory of Ideas

8.4 Locke's Representative Theory of perception

8.5 Locke's Theory of Knowledge

8.6 Critical Appraisal

8.7 Let Us Sum Up

8.8 Key Words

8.9 Further Reading and References

8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress.

8.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to introduce the philosophy of John Locke, the founder of Empiricism. At the end of the unit one should be able to,

- draw the distinction between rationalism and empiricism,
- understand Locke's emphasis on the importance of sense-experience.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

John Locke was born in 1632; he was the apostle of the Revolution of 1688, which successfully brought in reforms in England. Most of Locke's works appeared within a few years of 1688. His chief work in theoretical philosophy is *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* published in 1690.

Locke may be regarded as the founder of Empiricism; according to which sense experience is the only source of philosophic knowledge. The conception of substance was the

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dominant category during the time of Locke. This was considered vague and not useful by Locke. However, Locke did not attempt to reject it wholly. He allowed the validity of metaphysical arguments for the existence of God. Locke thought in terms of concrete detail rather than of large abstractions. Locke wanted to break from the bondage of words, from the bondage of wrong methods and from the bondage of the assumption.. Thus in the epistle to the readers in his Essay Locke says, “It is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in cleaning the ground a little and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way of Knowledge.” Further, in Book-I of his Essay, Locke says that his task is “to enquire into grounds and degrees of belief, opinion and assent.”

8.2 REFUTATION OF INNATE IDEAS

Locke begins his Essay with a critical examination of the theory of innate ideas. In Book-I, Ch. 2 of the Essay, Locke gives his arguments for the rejection of innate ideas. He argues against Plato, Descartes and the Scholastics. Locke attacked the Scholastic maxims, specially the Law of Identity (whatever is, is) and the Law of Contradiction (what is, cannot be, both be and not be). Since they are self-evident, the proponents of the theory of innate ideas felt that they were innate or a part of mind’s initial equipment. Locke argued that self-evidence and innateness are not equivalent. Locke says that in particular our knowledge begins and spreads itself by degrees to generals. Descartes as a rationalist believed in innate ideas that are known a priori and are beyond doubt. However, Locke rejects the views of Descartes saying that if there were ‘innate ideas’ in the mind, then all minds should be having knowledge about them. But children and idiots do not claim to have such knowledge. Some rationalists try to improve their theory of innate ideas saying that even though such ideas are there in all minds, some minds may not have knowledge about them. Locke rejects this line of argument saying, “No proposition can be said to be in the mind which it never yet knew, which it never yet conscious of.” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Ch. I, Sec. 5). Further, if someone says that ideas are there but we come to be aware of it through reason, Locke questions, why should they be taken as innate?

Locke was against the theory that there are certain special ideas which are imprinted on the mind by God or Nature. The proponents of innate ideas held that they constituted a distinct sort of truth, a class apart, having a special authority and distinct from adventitious ideas, that come from outside. Rejecting this theory, Locke says, that there are neither

innate speculative principles nor innate practical principles. He demolishes the universal assent argument. Most moral principles are got through convention and custom. All our ideas can be traced back to an origin in experience. What we can say is that mind has the capacity to know and not that the propositions are already there. Having disposed of the doctrine of innate ideas Locke went on to give his own theories. Locke says that the mind is like a white paper, the mind is empty. It is “tabula rasa”, an empty tablet. From where does all the materials of knowledge and reason come? Answer of the Locke is- Experience.

8.3 THEORY OF IDEAS

Ideas are the central conception of the philosophy of Locke. His view on the concept of ‘idea’ is presented in Book-II of the Essay. Locke says, “I have used it to express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, species or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking...” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction, Sec. 8) To Locke idea is ‘the object of the understanding when a man thinks’ where thinking includes all cognitive activities. Ideas form the materials of knowledge. The meaning of ‘idea’ can be understood as -

1. The immediate objects of understanding
2. Signs or representations of the world of things.
3. The modifications of the mind.
4. Caused by experience.

Our ideas are derived from two sources (a) sensation and (b) reflection or perception of the operation of our own mind which may be called ‘internal sense.’

Our senses convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things. This is what is called sensation. This is a process through which the mind receives ideas from external objects. By means of inner sense or introspection the mind gets the ideas not from the existing objects but by reflecting on its own operations within itself. This is the process of thinking, doubting, believing, willing, etc. The mind has powers of analyzing and reassembling the raw materials received.

Locke makes a distinction between simple ideas and complex ideas. Sensory experiences of the uniform character are called simple ideas. Colour smell, sound, numbers, extension, etc are simple ideas. They are the contents of actual experience. Locke says that the mind uses some kind of liberty in forming those complex ideas, in contrast with simple ideas

where the mind is passive. But Locke is not able to maintain this distinction successfully. He says that some complex ideas are given in experience. "Some ideas are observed to exist in several combinations united together." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XII, Sec. 1) Again, Locke says that there are certain simple ideas with a complex content i.e. extension. He further argues that some ideas are simple but not atomic, for example, ideas of space and time. Locke says that by comparing ideas, mind obtains ideas of relations and by abstracting mind attains general ideas. Complex ideas according to Locke are of three kinds. They are ideas of substances, modes and relations. Complex ideas are combination of simple ideas representing distinct particular things. Locke says substance is the idea of a support or substratum in which the simple contents inhere. The notion of substance is implied because qualities have to inhere in something. It seems to be a necessity of thought.

According to Locke the idea of modes is dependent on substance. For example, the idea of a dozen or a score is based on the idea of a unit and there is the operation of addition. We give fixity by giving it a name. Moreover, complex ideas are derived from simple ideas. The idea of relation is formulated through an act of comparison. Mind has the capacity to look beyond a particular object and involve in the mental operation of comparison. Also, of all the ideas of relations, the relation of cause and effect is the most important. Next, Locke speaks of the concept of identity as the relation between the thing and itself. The adjective "same" and "identical" have different senses in their application to different kinds of things, and he distinguishes a number of different senses of the word "identity". In the case of a simple material particle, we trace its identity in space and time. In the compound, identity is established by ensuring that all the particles making up the compound are identical. In a machine, identity consists in the organization or structure of the parts. Locke rejects the traditional view on personal identity that it is the identity of soul instead according to Locke personal identity consists in identity of consciousness over time

With regard to general ideas, Locke says that no general idea is given to us in sense perception. We form this idea by an act of abstraction. When we abstract something we look at that concept as standing for a whole set of particulars of the same kind.

Locke gives a range of meaning to the word 'idea' and therefore it looks that Locke uses this term very ambiguously. However, this ambiguity does not matter too much because Locke supposes them to have the same function. They are all signs which represent the external world of physical objects and the inner world of consciousness.

Commenting on Locke's concept of 'idea',

Gibson says, "The idea for him is at once the apprehension of content and the content apprehended." (Gibson, *Locke's Theory of knowledge*, Page 19)

Locke argues that in order to discover the nature of ideas 'better and to discover them intelligently', one further distinction must be examined. This is the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. In Book II of his Essay, Locke gives his definitions of Primary and Secondary qualities. Primary qualities of bodies are those qualities which are "utterly inseparable from the body in what state so ever it be." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter VIII, point 9, p. 161) Such qualities are solidity, shape, motion, rest and number. The secondary qualities "in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter VIII, Sec. 10) Under this category come qualities, like color, auditory qualities, taste, scent and so on. They do not belong to the objects themselves. We get them as a result of the primary qualities. Our ideas of primary qualities are resemblances of the objects. They are 'real qualities.' On the other hand, the ideas of secondary qualities are mainly effects of certain operations of factors. They represent the powers in the things. One difference between primary and secondary qualities is that the former are perceived through more than one sense while the secondary qualities are perceived through only a single sense.

According to Locke, the objects also have a third type of quality, simply called "powers". These qualities are the capacities which bodies have in virtue of their primary qualities. This power causes changes in bulk, figure, texture and motion of a body and it will affect our senses such that we can sense the difference for instance, the power of fire to make lead fluid. They are also called tertiary qualities.

Check your progress I

- Note:** a). Use the space provided for your answer.
b). Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Examine Locke's refutation of the doctrine of innate ideas.

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2. Give a brief account of Locke's Doctrine of Ideas.

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8.4 LOCKE'S REPRESENTATIVE THEORY OF PERCEPTION

The distinction between primary and secondary qualities by Locke leads to his representative theory of perception. He maintains that the ideas of primary qualities are true copies of those qualities and they are caused by those qualities. This is not the case with secondary qualities. Of primary qualities Locke remarks "Ideas of primary qualities are resemblances of them and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter VIII, Sec. 15) Idea is the immediate object of perception. It is the object of understanding when a man thinks. Sense experience is the fountain of all ideas. According to Locke, the material substance is passive and the mind is also passive. So, how does the material substance which is out there get in touch with the mind which is in the human organism? Locke solved this problem with the help of his representative theory of perception. According to this theory, the external object or material substance throws its own image into the mind through the respective sense organ. This image is called the idea and this idea acts as the 'copy' or representation of the external object. The ideas are spoken of as the *tertium quid* (third thing) between the mind and matter. The ideas represent the object. Consequently, the mind perceives the external object through the medium of the idea which is a copy. Thus sensation stands as a symbol of external things. Sensation arises by bodily affection and it is representative of real things.

To verify the ideas as true copies, we should be able to see the original external object, which is impossible on this theory. If we would see the qualities directly, then the ideas would be superfluous. The representative theory is therefore subjected to criticisms. This representation leads to either, of the three conclusions:-

1. It leads to subjective idealism (like that of Berkeley) according to which ideas are the only objects of knowledge when we use the term 'copy' we mean resemblance. The question remains that how can one idea be a copy of that which is not an idea?
2. It leads to realism. The realists say that the representative theory is not correct since the mind knows the objects straight away and there is no need

for ideas.

3. The other position that comes out due to representative theory is that of the sceptic who says that we do know that there are objects but do not know what exactly they are – a position taken by Hume.

What encouraged a theory like the representative theory? First, the fact that our perceptions are relative dependent on the position in space from where the perceptual judgment is made. Secondly, the fact that one may have illusions due to certain factors also encouraged philosophers to fall back on a theory of representative perception with “idea” bridging the gulf between matter and mind. In fact, Locke’s theory of ideas presupposes Descartes dualism of the matter and mind, but Locke gave it an epistemological hue.

8.5 LOCKE’S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Locke stresses that the central problem is to assess the nature and possible extent of human knowledge. According to Locke, knowledge and certainty cannot be distinguishable. If someone knows something that means he/she is certain of that thing. And if someone is certain of something, that means he/she knows that thing. In book IV he says, “With me, to know and to be certain is the same thing. What I know that I am certain of; and what I am certain of that I know. What reaches to knowledge I think may be called certainty, what comes short of certainty, I think cannot be knowledge.” (John Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, Volume IV, P. 145). The simplest element of knowledge is for Locke a Judgment or an act of thought by which an affirmation or denial is made. The distinction between these two kinds of judgments is one of degree. Locke is certain that there is nothing like doubt in knowledge. “What we once know, we are certain is so, and we may be secure that there are no latent proofs undiscovered, which may overthrow our knowledge or bring it in doubt.” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter XVI, Sec. 3)

Knowledge according to Locke’s well-known definition consists in the “...perception of the connection and agreement or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas.” (Book II, Chapter 21, point 5) This power and the power to perceive the ideas themselves in our minds and apprehending the significance of signs constitutes the “power of perception, which we call the Understanding.” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXI, Sec. 5). In this special form of perception, Locke

finds absolute certainty, “where this perception is, there is knowledge and where it is not there, though we may fancy, guess or believe, yet we always come short of knowledge.” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter I, Sec. 2) In the various forms of judgments we ‘think’, ‘take’, ‘suppose’, or ‘presume’ our ideas to agree or disagree, but we do not perceive their agreement or disagreement.

Locke distinguishes two forms of knowledge viz., intuitive knowledge and demonstrative knowledge. Intuitive knowledge is that which we get by the mere consideration of the ideas themselves. This knowledge is self-evident. On the other hand, demonstrative knowledge is mediate. It depends on certain ‘proofs’ or ‘intervening ideas.’ “If we will reflect on our own ways of thinking, we shall find that sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves without the intervention of any other, and this, I think we may call intuitive knowledge.” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter II, Sec. 1) In this form of knowledge there is no place for doubt, hesitation or examination.

Turning to demonstrative knowledge we see that it is not always as reliable as Intuition. Demonstration, on every step is dependent upon intellectual intuition. Memory plays a part in this. Demonstrative knowledge consists of a series of intuitions in which the agreement or disagreement of each idea with its next is immediately perceived. In this way, a mediate relation is established between the first and the last idea. We definitely cannot perceive all the intuitive connection together and thus we fall back on memory. Locke traces the cause of all our errors to memory.

Locke sets forward four ways in which ideas may agree or disagree.

1. *Identity and Diversity*- the Mind perceives the agreement between an idea and itself and a disagreement in this respect between it and all others, i.e. white is white and not black.
2. *Relation*- the Mind perceives a relation between its ideas, i.e. two triangles upon equal bases between two parallels are equal.
3. *Co-existence*- the Mind perceives ‘a co-existence or non-co-existence in the same subject’ For example, the specific gravity of gold and its solubility in *aqua regia* (*Aqua regia* is a mixture of concentrated nitric and hydrochloric acids. It is a highly corrosive liquid able to attack gold and other resistant substances.).

4. *Real existence*- The mind perceives actual real existence agreeing to any idea. For example, God.

Locke implies that our object of knowledge is always in a proposition or an inference. Knowledge of real existence is of course real knowledge but knowledge may be real without involving an affirmation of real existence. With only exception of substance, the reality of our knowledge is guaranteed if the ideas are of possible existents. The reality of all simple ideas is guaranteed by their very simplicity. Each of these ideas corresponds to some element or characteristic in the real world.

Considering the reality of complex ideas, Locke finds no difficulty except in so far as the ideas of substance is concerned. The ideas of relations and modes are formed by the free activity of the mind without any reference to any archetypes to which they conform. What is non-contradictory is capable of real existence.

In the case of the substances, Locke thinks our claim to reality cannot be made easily and by a priori method. We may say that our knowledge of substances is real only when our ideas of these have been derived from experience. Locke says that we have three kinds of knowledge of real existence. Our knowledge of our own existence is intuitive, our knowledge of God's existence is demonstrative and our knowledge of things present to sense is sensitive (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter III).

Even while talking of complex ideas as made up of simple ideas, he says we have no knowledge except (1) by intuition (2) by reason examining agreement or disagreement of two ideas (3) by sensation perceiving the existence of particular things (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter III, Sec. 2).

Locke's ethical doctrine is hedonistic as he believes that things are good or evil in relation to pleasure and pain. He states that morality is capable of demonstration.

Locke makes a distinction between 'instructive' and 'trifling' propositions. Here Locke anticipates the Kantian classification of judgments as analytical and synthetic.

Under trifling propositions Locke includes the purely identical propositions in which a term is predicted of itself. Although such propositions have certainty, yet they possess only 'verbal certainty and not instructive. The identical propositions just teach what everyone who is capable of discourse knows viz., that the same term is the same term and the same idea is the same idea. Also the analytical propositions can explain the meaning of a name to one who is ignorant but their function is confined to verbal elucidation.

Apart from verbal certainty, Locke asserts the synthetic character of all instructive

propositions. “We can know the truth and so may be certain in propositions which affirm something of another which is necessary consequence of its precise complex idea, but not contained in it. This is a real truth and conveys with it instructive real knowledge.” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter VIII, Sec. 8). By such propositions we are taught something more than what a word barely stands for.

For giving us real knowledge, the predicate of our propositions should carry beyond the idea for which its subject stands. His examination of ideas is a curious mixture of psychology and logic together with the introduction of some metaphysics (more apparent in Book IV). Thus, Locke traverses many by-paths in order to reach his goal of accounting human knowledge and its extent.

Locke gives three instances of insoluble problems-

1. That infinite things are too large for our capacity and our finite minds cannot know the infinite things i.e., those things which it cannot know.
2. The essences of substantial beings are beyond our understanding.
3. How, nature produces several phenomena and continues the species.’

As a matter of logic, we may be in a difficult position to say that certain things are insoluble, but practically speaking, there are certain problems which we know are insolvable for a considerable time to come.

8.6 CRITICAL APPRAISAL

1. The controversy of the innate ideas is a problem to the empiricists, particularly the universal and necessary principles. Also, modern psychology has shown that certain ideas may exist at the sub-conscious level.
2. The notion of substance raises several difficulties for Locke. By accepting that substance is something ‘we know not what’, we are accepting that we do not know the essence of either matter or mind. Just to take an example, when we say ‘It is an apple’ what is meant is that it is red, round, juicy, etc. But what is ‘It’ apart from these qualities. Common sense presumes that it is the ‘thing’ or ‘substance’ in which these qualities reside. Since this is the knowledge we get from sense experience, Locke was forced to accept that substance is nothing but a combination of ideas of primary qualities and we only look for a support or base for these qualities. Locke neither affirms nor denies firmly the existence of a material substance. Also, he was not very clear on the question of spiritual substance. Without rejecting the traditional theology, which

believes in a soul, he argues that we must believe in a substance wherein thinking, knowing, doubting, and a power of moving, etc., do persist. After claiming that all our concepts originate from either sensation or reflection, the idea of a substance poses a great problem to Locke. Locke ceases to be a consistent empiricist by his inability to deny the notion of substance altogether. However, positively speaking, we have to admit that Locke should be credited for rejecting the metaphysical view of substance. Also, he begins the elimination of subjective factors from the real world by his concept of primary qualities, which are measurable. In Chapter VI of Book III 'Of the Names of Substances', Locke is concerned to refute the scholastic doctrine of essence. We can conclude this unit by quoting Bertrand Russell who says that in spite of Locke's merits and demerits, his views are valuable "Not only Locke's valid opinions but even his errors, were useful in practice." (Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Page 585)

Check your progress II

Note: a). Use the space provided for your answer

b). Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Critically examine Locke's representative theory of perception.

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2. Examine Locke's theory of knowledge and critically estimate if he is a consistent empiricist.

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8.7 LET US SUM UP

Locke can be called the founder of Empiricism, a theory according to which knowledge originates from sense experience. He was against his predecessors who believed in innate ideas. According to Locke, the mind is a blank paper or a tabula rasa. Mind has the capacity to apprehend but it is wrong to say that certain propositions are already there. The material of knowledge comes from experience. Idea is the object of understanding when a man thinks. Our ideas are derived from two sources- sensation and reflection, which can be called the inner sense. Locke makes a distinction between simple ideas and

complex ideas. Simple ideas are the most basic impressions and mind has the capacity to combine the simple ideas to form complex ideas. Complex ideas are of three kinds viz., that of substances, modes and relations. The notion of substance is implied because qualities have to inhere in something. The idea of modes is dependent on substance. The idea of relation is formulated through an act of comparison. The idea of a general proposition is formed through abstraction. One further important distinction brought out by Locke is the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are solidity, shape, motion, rest and number and they are measurable and inseparable from the body. They are objective. Secondary qualities are color, auditory qualities, taste, scent and so on. They have a subjective side to them. Ideas of primary qualities are true copies of those qualities. This idea acts as a copy or representation of the external object. Thus Locke believed in the representative theory of perception. Coming to his theory of knowledge, Locke said only what is certain is what qualifies itself as knowledge. Knowledge consists in the perception of the connection and agreement or disagreement of our ideas. Knowledge is of three kinds (1) Intuitive Knowledge that is ideal, infallible and self-evident (2) Demonstrative knowledge that is relational, analytic, and concerns with abstractions. Knowledge on morality, God's existence and mathematical knowledge belong to this category (3) Sensitive knowledge which is concerns co-existence, based on simple ideas and complex ideas. Speaking of the limitation of knowledge, Locke says, "We can have knowledge no further than we have ideas."

8.8 KEY WORDS

Empiricism: the philosophical belief that all knowledge is derived from the experience of the senses.

Idea: A concept that exists only in the mind or a mental image that reflects the reality.

8.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1. Locke starts his philosophy by criticizing the 'doctrine of innate ideas'. Locke's arguments gives a three arguments: (i) if there are 'innate ideas' as the rationalists say, in the mind, then all minds must have knowledge about them. But children, savages and 'idiots' do not claim to have such knowledge. (ii) Locke says that the rationalists cannot improve their position by saying that even though there are innate ideas in all minds, yet some minds may not have knowledge about them. It will be wrong to say that something is in the mind and yet the mind does not know of it. (iii) Even if the rationalists argue that innate ideas are present in the mind still they cannot be called 'innate' as they require reason for their discovery. Hence there are no such principles as innate ideas.

2. The material of knowledge comes from experience. Idea is the object of understanding when a man thinks. Our ideas are derived from two sources- sensation and reflection, which can be called the inner sense. Locke makes a distinction between simple ideas and complex ideas. Simple ideas are the most basic impressions and mind has the capacity to combine the simple ideas to form complex ideas. Complex ideas are of three kinds viz., that of substances, modes and relations. The notion of substance is implied because qualities have to inhere in something. The idea of modes is dependent on substance. The idea of relation is formulated through an act of comparison. Idea of a general proposition is through abstraction. One further important distinction brought out by Locke is the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are solidity, shape, motion, rest and number and they are measurable and inseparable from the body. They are objective. Secondary qualities are color, auditory qualities, taste, scent and so on. They have a subjective side to them.

Check your progress II

1. According to Locke, the material substance is passive and the mind is also passive.

The mind is within the human organism. The material substance is outside human organism. But the mind being passive cannot go out of the human organism to contact the external material substance nor can the material substance directly come to the mind. Hence, there is a problem in explaining the contact. Locke answers this with his theory of representative perception. According to this theory the external object gives its image to the mind through the sense organ. This is the idea which is the copy of the object. Therefore the perceptual knowledge is indirect. Sensation stands as symbol of external things. This theory implies epistemological dualism between matter and mind.

2. Locke said only what is certain is what qualifies itself as knowledge. Knowledge consists in the perception of the connection and agreement or disagreement of our ideas. Knowledge is of three kinds (1) Intuitive Knowledge that is the ideal, infallible and self-evident (2) Demonstrative knowledge that is relational, analytic, and concerns abstractions. Knowledge on morality, God's existence and mathematical knowledge belong to this category (3) Sensitive knowledge that is concerning co-existence, based on simple ideas of sense and complex ideas. Speaking of the limitation of knowledge, Locke says, "we can have knowledge no further than we have ideas."

UNIT 9

BERKELEY*

Structure

9.0 Objectives

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Refutation of Materialism

9.3 Rejection of Abstract Ideas

9.4 *Esse est Percipi*

9.5 God and the Existence of Things

9.6 Refutation of Dualism, Atheism and Skepticism

9.7 Let Us Sum Up

9.8 Key Words

9.9 Further Readings and References

9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is

- to learn about the salient ideas of the British philosopher George Berkeley.
- to give an exposition of his theories of empiricism and subjective idealism and
- to explain the meaning of his famous dictum: *esse est percipi*.
- to see how Berkeley refutes atheism, materialism, dualism and skepticism and shows how an omniscient and omnipresent God is the sole guarantor of the existence of an external world.

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

As a critic of John Locke and precursor of David Hume, George Berkeley presented a profoundly original perspective on some of the crucial questions in epistemology and metaphysics. Denying the existence of matter with remarkable ingenuity Berkeley initiated an outlook to which philosophy has been indebted ever since. George Berkeley, an Irish man, was born in 1685. After his schooling in Kilkenny he entered Trinity College, Dublin in his sixteenth year where he had a brilliant career, first as a graduate student and later as a tutor and fellow, for about thirteen years. In those days Trinity was deeply impacted by Newtonian science and the new philosophies of Descartes, Locke and Malebranche. Berkeley with his keen intellect soon involved the young minds in scientific and philosophical deliberations.

Visiting London in 1713, he made an indelible impression upon the great literary men of the age like Swift, Steele, Addison and Pope. He devised a scheme for a college in Bermudas and for this purpose he went to America. But having spent three years (1728-31) in Rhode Island he relinquished the project and returned to England being excited about the future possibility of the new world. He wrote the poem containing the frequently quoted line, 'Westward the course of Empire takes its way' on account of which the town of Berkeley in California was called after him.

In 1734 he became Bishop of Cloyne in the south of Ireland, where he led a retired life, engrossed with scholarly studies, publishing books and articles from time to time but, above all, striving to ameliorate the wretched economic conditions of the peasants. When Berkeley's health began to fail he left Cloyne for Oxford at the age of sixty-seven and a year later in 1753 while sitting quietly at tea with his family he died. He was buried in Christ Church Chapel in Oxford.

Berkeley wrote extensively but his best work was over while he was still quite young. Some of his famous works are: *Commonplace Book* (1706-08), *A New Theory of Vision* (1709), *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), *The Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous* (1713), *Alciphron* (1732) and *Siris* (1744). His writings after the age of twenty-eight were of less consequence. Berkeley wrote with great elegance and lucidity.

Berkeley belonged to an age in which under the influence of developments within science a

tendency towards materialism and atheism was beginning to strengthen. A deeply religious man, Berkeley held out against such a disposition by declaring that the reality of the physical world is essentially spiritual for it is the manifestation of the activity of spirit and the goodness of God's Will. This spiritualism seemed so obvious to him that he did not find it necessary to defend it. The refutation of materialism became essential to him and he executed the task by eliminating the inconsistencies involved in Lockean empiricism and taking it to its logical conclusion.

Check your progress I

Note: a). Use the space provided for your answer.

b). Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Write a short note on Berkeley's life and works.

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2. What were the main issues with which Berkeley grappled?

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9.2 REFUTATION OF MATERIALISM

Treating Locke's 'commonsense' philosophy as a point of departure, Berkeley developed the most provocative thesis in all philosophy. It is termed subjective idealism. It declares that there are no material substances, no physical objects, just minds and ideas in the minds. This astonishing position arises from Locke's thesis by three simple moves. First, it is in agreement with the argument that it is not possible to form an idea about a substance for all that can be known of a thing are its sensible properties. Secondly, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities as Locke had argued, a distinction between properties inherent in the objects themselves as opposed to properties that the objects cause in us cannot be. And, thirdly, that once it has been established that all knowledge of the world, except that of one's existence and God, must be acquired through experience, the question of anything other than our experience does not arise. Berkeley argued that a consistent empiricist must turn down not only the causal theory of perception but also reject

the notion of physical objects. The reason is that whatever we can experience is neither the objects themselves nor their causation, but only their effects in the form of the ideas they cause in us.

Making use of the basic tenets of empiricism laid down by Locke, Berkeley establishes idealism thereby refuting materialism and atheism. Following Locke's claim that sensation and reflection are intrinsic to all knowledge, and ideas are all we know, it becomes inconceivable to know a world of bodies i.e. a material world external to us. Our states of consciousness are limited to ourselves and any comparison of our ideas with these corporeal substances cannot be achieved because we are ignorant as to what they are and whether they are.

Berkeley further says that if an independent substance like matter and a world of pure space were to be possible, then an infinite, eternal and immutable reality would co-exist along with God thereby limiting Him or even tending to negate the very existence of God. The belief in matter forges the path towards atheism and materialism, which can be avoided by disclaiming the premise that nurtures these tendencies – the assertion that matter exists.

9.3 REJECTION OF ABSTRACT IDEAS

In conformity with the practice of the preceding modern philosophers, Berkeley begins his *Principles of Human Knowledge* by cleaning the clutter of what he believed to be the false presuppositions of the past. Locke had discarded innate ideas and Berkeley, in advancing empiricism, further rejects abstract ideas. Locke started by declaring that only particular things exist but he further said that by making a comparison of these things with each other it becomes viable to abstract common characteristics and assign names such as 'extension', 'colour', 'motion', 'man', 'animal' etc. He went so far as to maintain the existence of a 'substratum' which holds together the diverse qualities of material objects, although he did admit that neither a direct experience of such a substratum is possible nor is it feasible to explore its true nature or the relation it bears to the ideas in our experience, which we link it to. Berkeley insists that we can never experience any such abstract idea, and the terms by which they are referred to are simply names, for there is nothing in reality that corresponds to them.

Berkeley was agitated with philosophers who joined up with scientists in complicating

relatively simpler things by confusing the common man in saying that the authentic means to apprehend reality was not through perception but through an insight into universal concepts. This in turn led to doubt regarding certainty of knowledge giving rise to skepticism.

The emphasis of the prevalent science of the day on the rationalistic approach to reality together with the *Lockean* conception of the unknown substance incited a revolt from Berkeley, a staunch defender of morals and religion. In a closely Cartesian mode science discards the ability of senses to deliver certain knowledge and glorifies reason as the arbiter of truth. Berkeley expressed his complete dissent with this stance and argued that scientists themselves made use of the empirical method though also continually discrediting it. Berkeley was opposed to the scientist's subscription of a rationalist viewpoint, for the subsistence of physical sciences in the absence of observation was inconceivable. Berkeley's endeavour was to redeem the harm done to religion and morals by skepticism and atheism by demonstrating the incongruity in belief in abstract ideas as well as matter.

Hume remarked that Berkeley's dismissal of abstract ideas was 'one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that had been made of late years in the republic of letters.' Berkeley himself considered his rejection of abstract ideas as a vital component in the argument for immaterialism, for 'if we thoroughly examine (the belief in unperceived objects) it will perhaps be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of abstract ideas.'

Berkeley's arguments were designed with the dual purpose of achieving an immediate target and a remote target. The immediate target lay in countering Locke's account of the ideas of determinable or generic things such as 'red' as opposed to any particular shade of red or 'triangle' as opposed to an isosceles triangle or a right angled triangle. The remote target was to dismantle any doctrine of concepts that allows that they are, in any sense, intrinsically universal. Berkeley was trying to work to completion the idea that everything is particular, whether it lies within the mind or outside it. In doing so his intention was to disengage his philosophy of the perennial problem of universals, which in some form or the other had been pivotal to scholastic metaphysics. Berkeley's theory declares that not only are there no forms, species or universals in the world but even concepts are, in themselves, purely particular. Locke, too, maintained particularism, but according to Berkeley he endorsed an incoherency inherent in it. Locke's particularist programme is

confronted with a dilemma- for the concept of red, for example, is by definition something that includes many things and is incapable of simply being a particular. Locke's defense is, "words become general by being made the signs of general ideas." (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Chapter III, Sec. 6). He grouped all mental contents, including concepts together as ideas and treated ideas as mental images. To further elaborate it: a mental image is quite clearly a particular, but a particular is incapable of accommodating a generic concept such as red or triangle. According to Berkeley, Locke's explanation to this is that such an image has an indefiniteness to it: "Does it not require some pains and skill to form the general idea of a triangle... for it must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect that cannot exist, an idea wherein some parts of several different and inconsistent ideas are put together." (An Essay Concerning to Human Understanding, Book IV, Chapter VII, Sec. 9; also see, Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (PHK)*, Introduction, Sec. 13). So there is indefiniteness implicit in this which manifests itself in two different ways. On the one hand the image is triangular without itself being either scalene or equilateral and, on the other, it is all of these incompatible properties at once, for it includes them all. In this way one has a particular object – the image – which both excludes all specific forms, and is a superimposition of the specific forms, thus encompassing just the right generality of things. Berkeley's objection is that one can have neither indeterminate particulars lacking a specific form, nor contradictory ones containing incompatible forms. Thus Locke's attempt to combine imagism with intrinsic generality fails.

To further clarify Berkeley's position, it is an impossibility to be able to perceive 'space' or 'bare extension' which is neither a line, nor a surface, nor a solid and can form no such ideas. To form an idea of a triangle which is neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural nor scalenon but all and none of these at once is inconceivable. The definition of a triangle as 'a plane surface comprehended by three right lines' ignoring the specific peculiarities of any particular triangle applies to all triangles, but this in no way implies that we actually have an abstract idea of triangle in general. Similarly, it is not possible to form an abstract idea of colour in general that is neither blue nor green nor orange nor any other determinate colour.

Strictly conforming to the empirical doctrine that all knowledge arises from the simple ideas

of sensation and reflection Berkeley establishes the impossibility of abstract ideas for they appear in neither. He further says that any word used to designate common features of particular objects of our experience can only be a name and not the description of a fact. He called this theory nominalism that claimed that abstract ideas or universals are just names. Berkeley was of the view that the use of words that correspond to nothing in actual experience has only contributed to disorientation on account of confusing words with realities. Berkeley's suggestion is to attend to ideas actually experienced. He says, 'No one can be led into an error by considering his own naked undisguised ideas.' (*PHK*, Introduction, Sec. 25).

Check your progress II

Note: a). Use the space provided for your answer.

b). Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. How does Berkeley prove the immateriality of substance?

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2. What did Berkeley wish to achieve by his rejection of abstract ideas?

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9.4 ESSE EST PERCIPI

Berkeley argues 'to be is to be perceived,' or *esse est percipi*, which entailed that if something were not perceived, it would not exist. This most naturally raises the question whether it exists when it is not being perceived. For Berkeley the entire issue depends on how we understand or interpret the word 'exists'. Berkeley writes, "The table I write on I say exists; that is, I see it and feel it: and if I were out of my study I should say it existed; meaning thereby that if I were in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it." (*PHK*, Part one, Sec. 3). By this he means to say that there can be no imaginable situation where the term 'exists' is put to use without simultaneously assuming that a mind is constantly perceiving it.

The impossibility of an unperceived body follows from the idea of body as held by Locke. A body according to Locke is a solid, extended, figured substance possessing the power of motion, a certain colour, weight, taste, smell and sound. These latter set of

qualities are simply the effects of the body that are produced in the perceiving subject and hence are present in the perceiver and do not reside in the body itself. They are not inherent in the body and are for that matter to be called secondary qualities. On the other hand the qualities that are inherent in the substance, i.e. the body itself are called primary qualities. Extension, figure, solidity, motion and rest are such primary qualities. Berkeley disagrees with this distinction drawn by Locke and argues that the so called primary qualities are just like secondary qualities. He says that the ideas of solidity and extension which Locke claims to be of primary qualities are acquired through the sense of touch and become sensations in my mind much like the secondary qualities. It is not possible to disentangle the idea of extension from the idea of colour and other such secondary qualities. Besides, an extended thing which is not at the same time coloured cannot be perceived. The primary qualities are thus inseparably integrated with the secondary qualities making it impossible to cull out the secondary qualities leaving behind an extended solid substance, which is just that and nothing else. If we examine an object of our knowledge, a table, for instance, we do not find that its shape is 'out there' while its color is 'in here.' Thus the distinction that Locke makes between primary and secondary qualities is redundant. What is seen is not the coloured and the extended but the coloured extended object.

Locke had said that substance, or matter, supports or acts as a substrate to the qualities we sense. In Berkeley's First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous, Hylas expresses Locke's view, 'I find it necessary to suppose a material substratum, without which (qualities) cannot be conceived to exist.' (*Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Dialogue 1). Philonous answers that the word substratum has no clear meaning for him and he needed to 'know any sense, literal or not literal, that you understand in it.' (*Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Dialogue 1). Hylas conceded his inability to assign a definite meaning to the term substratum, saying, 'I declare I know not what to say.' From this it is concluded that 'The absolute existence of unthinking things (matter) are empty words carrying no meaning.' (*PHK*, Part One, Sec. 24). This is however not to say that sensible things do not possess reality but only that sensible things exist only insofar as they are perceived. This in other words means that only ideas exist. He says that whatever we see, feel, hear, or any way conceive or understand, remains as secure as ever, and is as real as ever. (*PHK*, Part one, Sec. 34). To this the question arises as to why should one say that only ideas, instead of things exist? This, Berkeley says, was to eliminate 'the futile concept of matter:' "I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflection....

The only thing whose existence we deny is that which philosophers call matter or corporeal substance.” (*PHK*, Part one, Sec. 35).

Since it was the science of his day, in particular, physics that leaned so heavily on the notion of matter, Berkeley realized the necessity to challenge its basic assumptions and methods. What agitated Berkeley most was that scientists made use of general and abstract terms as though they had reference to real entities, in particular to an underlying material substance in nature. Berkeley protested that we never encounter such a substance, for substance is an abstract idea, a misleading inference drawn from observed qualities. Berkeley says, “As several of these (qualities) are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name, and so to be reputed as one *thing*. Thus for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted as a distinct thing, signified by the name ‘apple’; other collections or ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book and the like sensible things- which as they are pleasing or disagreeable excite the passions of love, hatred, joy, grief, and so forth” (*PHK*, Part one, Sec. 1). He aspired to clarify the approach of scientific language wherein terms such as force, gravity and causality refer to nothing more than an assembly of ideas, which our minds derive from sensation.

The more Berkeley examined the functioning of his mind and grappled with the relation of his ideas with objects outside his mind the more certain he became that no object independent of his ideas could be discovered. Berkeley said, ‘when we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies we are all the while contemplating our own ideas.’ He said there is nothing out there of which we do not have some perception.

As a clinching argument Berkeley remarked that ‘an idea can be like nothing but an idea,’ and so when Locke says that ideas and real things are different; ideas being mental and real things material and mental and material being disparate in nature, there is a contradiction evident in his views. Berkeley says if mind and matter are unlike each other and if knowledge depends upon the likeness of the unlike then it is an absurdity. For Berkeley if my ideas are like anything outside my mind, it must be another idea in another mind. Since he had refuted Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which is the very essence of Locke’s thought, he has in effect refuted the entire system of representative realism.

9.5 GOD AND THE EXISTENCE OF THINGS

A thing, says Berkeley, must be experienced in order to exist. This means if I see an object then it exists as I see it. But then the question remains if I do not see an object how would I know whether it exists or not and how then shall we account for the seeming reality of objects when they are not observed since Berkeley had neither denied the existence of things nor their order in nature. To this Berkeley responds by saying, “When I deny sensible things an existence out of the mind...There is... some other mind wherein they exist during the intervals between the times of my perceiving them.” (*Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Dialogue 3). And because all human minds are intermittently diverted from things “there is an omnipresent eternal Mind, which knows and comprehends all things, and exhibits them to our view in such a manner and according to such rules as he himself hath ordained, and are by us termed the Laws of Nature.” (*Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Dialogue 3).

The existence of things, in other words, depends upon the existence of God, and God is the cause of the orderliness of things in nature.

Berkeley says that in attempting to describe reality as I experience it, I realize that there are other persons like myself who are endowed with minds, much like my own mind, and just as I possess ideas other persons too have ideas in their possession. But above and distinct from my mind and the minds of other finite beings, there is a greater mind and that is God's Mind. The regularity in nature is on account of God's Ideas. He further elaborates that the ideas that occupy the minds of human beings are God's ideas, which He communicates to humans. Thus the perceptions made on a day to day basis by humans are caused by God and not by matter or substance. Also, it is God who coordinates all experiences of finite minds, assuring regularity and dependability in experience which, in turn, enables us to think in terms of the 'laws of nature.' However, there lies a disparity between the orderly and neat arrangement of ideas that belong to God's mind and those which are transmitted from God's mind to the minds of human beings on account of the difference in competence between the divine and the finite mind. The ultimate reality is thus spiritual and not material in nature and the continued existence of objects when we do not perceive them is explained by God's continuous perception of them. Berkeley applies a unique interpretation of causation when he suggests that the ideas in the minds of human beings emanate from God. He did not deny that we have an insight into causation but was resolute

that our sense data do not disclose to us a unique causal power.

These causal connections are understood on account of our mental operations.

9.6 REFUTATION OF DUALISM, ATHEISM AND SKEPTICISM

Berkeley maintains that his idealistic theory eliminates several obscure and abstruse questions of philosophy. Apart from reducing human knowledge to knowledge of *ideas* and *spirit* it discards the dualism of objects in the mind (intelligible objects) and objects outside the mind (real objects). This dualism, he said, was the root of skepticism for how can we know that the things which are perceived conform to the things which are not perceived. If colour, figure, motion, extension etc. refer to things outside the mind, only appearances are perceived, not the real qualities of things. This distrust of the senses leads to skepticism which Berkeley believes is dispelled by the idealistic theory.

Berkeley held that the doctrine of matter was responsible for the prevalence of atheism and in discarding materialism the entire structure of atheism would collapse. He says if a self-existent, inert, unthinking substance is the origin of all things then naturally freedom, intelligence and design will have to be excluded from the formation of the universe. Berkeley also felt that idolatry persists on account of upholding matter as a permanent reality. If objects of sense are merely a cluster of sensations in the mind then it would be ridiculous for human beings to worship their own ideas. Further still he said if material substance were to be stripped from what is seen and felt by every ordinary person as a body, which happens to be a combination of qualities or ideas, then every objection to bodily resurrection comes to nothing.

Berkeley was confident that through his doctrine of *esse est percipi* he had convincingly undermined the position of philosophical materialism and religious skepticism. Building upon Locke's empiricism Berkeley made the decisive point that the human mind reasons only and always about particular sense experiences and that abstract ideas refer to no analogous reality. Hume, who later carried empiricism to its fullest expression, spoke of Berkeley as "a great philosopher (who) had disputed the received opinion in this particular, and has asserted that all general ideas are nothing but particular ones.... I look upon this to be one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that have been made of late years in

the republic of letters.” (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part I, Sec. VII)

Check your progress III

Note: a). Use the space provided for your answer.

b). Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Did Berkeley accept Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities?

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2. What does Berkeley mean by *esse est percipi*?

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9.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to understand the chief tenets of Berkeley’s philosophy. Berkeley was an empiricist and his philosophy is called subjective idealism. He refuted the doctrines of the reality of material substances and abstract ideas. He gave his famous theory of *esse est percipi* which meant that things are not out there in an external world to be perceived by man but are in man’s perception of them. In other words, ideas of things in minds are their existence. Berkeley’s views about the existence of God also came under discussion because according to him an external world exists only in so far as it is perceived by an eternally perceiving God. This was followed by Berkeley’s refutation of the theories of dualism, atheism and skepticism.

9.8 KEY WORDS

Empiricism: A type of theory in epistemology that says that our five senses are the source of our knowledge and that there is no knowledge before or beyond the experience.

Subjective Idealism: The philosophical theory that says that ordinary physical objects would exist if and only if they are experienced. All reality is mind-dependent which means it either exists in human or God’s mind.

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9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1. George Berkeley was an Irishman who was born in 1685. He joined Trinity college, Dublin when he was sixteen years old. He had a brilliant career, first as a graduate

student and later as a tutor and fellow for about thirteen years. In 1734 he was pronounced bishop of Cloyne where he involved himself in scholarly work, publishing books and articles periodically. Berkeley wrote extensively, some of his main works being: *Commonplace Book*, *A New Theory of Vision*, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, *The Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous*, *Aliciphron dn Sins*. When Berkeley's health suffered he went to Oxford where he died in 1753. He was considered by all known to him as a very pious and gentle being.

2. During Berkeley's time the tendencies towards atheism and materialism were strengthening under the influence of contemporary developments within science. Berkeley, who was a deeply religious man, contested those ideas by declaring that the reality of the physical world is basically spiritual in nature for it is the product of the goodness of God's will. He eliminated the inconsistencies of Locke's empiricism through his refutation of material substance thereby developing his own distinctive philosophical theory.

Check your progress II

1. Berkeley proved the impossibility of material substances by arguing that all that can be known of a thing are its sensible properties and the idea of a substance does not qualify for this. Further, he rejected Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities where the former were treated as being inherent in the objects while the latter were said to be those that caused the sensations in us. He said that all knowledge of the world must be acquired through experience and the question of the existence of anything that cannot be experienced does not arise.

2. Berkeley had a dual purpose in refuting the abstract ideas. One was to counter Locke's account of ideas of generic things such as 'red' as opposed to any particular shade of red or 'triangle' as opposed to a particular type of triangle like an isosceles or right angle triangle. His other purpose was to prove the theory that everything was particular. For this he disproved the old doctrine of concepts as being intrinsically universal. He said that there are no forms, species or universals and the concepts too are particulars.

Check your progress III

1. According to Locke a body has certain qualities. Some qualities like color, sound, taste, smell are simply the effects of the body that are produced in the perceiving subject

and hence are present to the perceiver and do not reside in the body itself. Such qualities are called secondary qualities. On the other hand primary qualities are qualities that are inherent in the body such as extension, figure, solidity, motion and rest. Berkeley does not agree with this distinction and argues that the so called primary qualities are no different from the secondary qualities in so far as they too are acquired through the sense of touch and sight etc. and become sensations in much the same way as do the colour, sweet etc. Besides, the primary and secondary qualities are quite integrated into each other making it impossible to separate them. For what we perceive is not the colour or extension of an object but a coloured, extended object.

2. In saying 'to be is to be perceived' Berkeley means that if I see an object then it exists as I see it. But the question remains how I would know an object to exist when I do not see it. To this Berkeley answers that it would still exist because it is being perceived by some other mind. And if there is no human mind to perceive an object that does not mean it has ceased to exist for an omnipresent mind i.e. God would be there to perceive it and thereby to ensure its existence.

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Hume's Science of Human Nature
- 10.3 The Elements of Science of Human Nature
- 10.4 Causal Relations
- 10.5 Fundamental Maxims
- 10.6 Skepticism
- 10.7 Passions
- 10.8 Will
- 10.9 Religion
- 10.10 Morality
- 10.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.12 Key Words
- 10.13 Further Readings and References
- 10.14 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will acquaint the learner with some of the foundational dimensions of David Hume's philosophical ideas, including

- Human nature,
- Causal relations,
- His understanding of the Two fundamental beliefs,
- Skepticism,
- His concepts of passion, will, religion, politics and morality.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

* Prof. Jose Kannanaikkal, Suvidya College, Bangalore. (This unit is a revised version of the unit titled "Hume" of BPY-008).

Born on April 26, 1711, in Edinburgh, Scotland, David Hume attended Edinburgh University from the ages of eleven to fifteen, in which city he remained to study law. Finding this not to his taste, Hume read widely in ancient and modern literature, improved his knowledge of science and languages, and devoted himself above all to philosophy. Hume returned to England in 1737 with the intention of publishing the first two books, *of the Understanding* and *of the Passions*, which he decided to call *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. However, reviewers were mostly hostile and uncomprehending. Having wisely taken the precaution to publish anonymously, Hume soon recovered from his failure and decided to apply his immense literary gifts to the more widely accessible medium of the essay. Hume presented a selection of the doctrines of the *Treatise* with some previously unpublished material in the form of *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* in 1748. A sea change in the reception of Hume's theory of understanding occurred in 1783, when Immanuel Kant declared that Hume's treatment of cause and effect was responsible for awakening him from his dogmatic slumber.

10.2 HUME'S SCIENCE OF HUMAN NATURE

Hume believed that the science of human nature affords fundamental insight not only into such domains as morals, aesthetics, and politics but even Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion. Human nature is thus the 'capital or centre' of the sciences. His point is that the experimental method which has been applied with such success in natural science should be applied also in the study of man.

10.3 ELEMENTS OF SCIENCE OF HUMAN NATURE

10.3.1 Perception

Hume considered human nature always and only in terms of perceptions. Perception refers to all objects insofar as they are immediately present to one by consciousness, be it in sensation, reflexion, or thought. Reflexion is Hume's catch-all term for the objects present to internal sense or inward sentiment,

including passions, emotions, desires, volitions, and mental operations generally. Hume derives all the contents of the mind from experience and he divides perceptions into impressions and ideas.

10.3.2 Impressions and Ideas

Impressions are the immediate data of experience, such as sensations. Ideas are the copies or faint images of impressions in thinking and reasoning. If I look at my room, I receive an impression of it. Hume describes the difference between impressions and Ideas in terms of vividness. It is under impressions that we comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions. This does not mean that impressions always make a forceful impression, for they can be as gentle as altogether to escape notice. Nor does it mean that they are vivid in the usual sense, since seeing a gray blur on an otherwise black night (visual sensation) is still more vivid than a brilliantly lit, detailed image in a day dream (visual idea).

10.3.3 Impressions of Sensation and Reflection

Impressions can be divided into impressions of sensation and impressions of reflection. The first kind arises in the soul originally from unknown causes. The impressions of reflections are derived in great measure from ideas. Suppose that I have an impression of cold, accompanied by pain. A 'copy' of this impression remains in the mind after the impression has ceased. This 'copy' is called an 'idea', and it can produce new impressions of aversion, for example, which are impressions of reflection. In the long run, therefore, impressions are prior to ideas.

10.3.4 Simple and Complex Perceptions

Hume makes a distinction between simple and complex perceptions. The perception of a red patch is a simple impression, and the thought (image) of the red patch is a simple idea. But if I stand on the hill of Montmartre and survey the city of Paris, I receive a complex impression of the city, of roofs, chimneys, towers and streets. And when I afterwards think of Paris and recall this complex impression, I have a complex idea. In this case the complex idea corresponds in some degree to the complex impression; though it does not do

so exactly and adequately. But let us take another case. 'I can imagine to myself a city as the New Jerusalem, whose pavement is gold, and walls are rubies, though I never saw any such'. In this case my complex idea does not correspond to a complex impression. We cannot say, therefore, with truth that to every idea there is an exactly corresponding impression.

10.3.5 The Idea of Substance

Hume says that the idea of Substance cannot be derived from impressions of sensation. If it is perceived by the eyes, it must be a colour; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste. But nobody would say that substance is a colour, or a sound or a taste. If, therefore, there is an idea of substance, it must be derived from impressions of reflection. But these can be resolved into our passions and emotions. And those who speak of substances do not mean by it the word passions or emotions. Hence the idea of substance is derived, therefore, neither from impressions of sensation nor from impressions of reflection. Thus, he comes to the conclusion that we have no idea of substance apart from a collection of particular qualities. For instance, if a child comes across the word 'skyscraper', he may ask his father what it means. He can explain its meaning by definition or description. That is to say, he can explain to the child the meaning of the word 'skyscraper' by employing words such as 'house', 'tall', 'storey', and so on. But the child cannot understand the meaning of the description unless he understands the meanings of the terms employed in the descriptions. In Hume's language, the child must be given 'impressions'.

10.3.6 Rejection of Abstract Ideas

In the first place, abstract ideas are individual or particular in themselves. For instance, the precise length of a line is not distinguishable from the line itself. We cannot form a general idea of a line without any length at all. Nor can we form the general idea of a line possessing all possible lengths. Secondly, every impression is determinate and definite. Since an idea is an image or copy of an impression, it must itself be determinate and definite, even though it is fainter than the impression from which it is derived. Thirdly, everything which exists must be individual. No triangle, for instance, can exist, which is not a

particular triangle with its particular characteristics. To postulate an existent triangle which is at the same time all and none of the possible kinds and sizes of triangle would be an absurdity. But what is absurd in fact and in reality is absurd also in idea. He thus agrees with Berkeley that there are no abstract general ideas.

10.4 CAUSAL RELATIONS

Causal relations are the centerpiece of Hume's theory of understanding. This is because, of all relations linking ideas to impressions, none approaches cause and effect in its power to produce belief. If I see smoke coming into the room, my belief in the reality of the unseen fire causing it is as great as in the smoke itself. It is to be noted that though causation may be a philosophical relation, as implying contiguity, succession and constant conjunction; yet it is only in so far as it is a natural relation and produces a union among our ideas that we are able to reason upon it or draw any inference from it.

10.4.1 Causation as a Natural Relation

The word 'relation' signifies the quality or qualities by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination. These qualities are resemblance, contiguity and the causal relation, and Hume calls them natural relations. In the case of natural relations, therefore, ideas are connected with one another by the natural force of association, so that the one tends naturally or by custom to recall the other. In causation considered as a natural relation there is, indeed, an inseparable connection between ideas.

10.4.2 Causation as a Philosophical Relation

There is a certain over-lapping between natural and philosophical relations and this is not due to any oversight on Hume's part. He explains, for example, that no objects can be compared unless there is some resemblance between them. Resemblance is, therefore, a relation without which no philosophical relation can exist. Hume enumerates seven types of philosophical relation: resemblance, identity, relations of time and place, proportion in quantity or number, degrees in any quality, contrariety and causation. Causation, considered as a philosophical relation, is reducible to such relations of space and time as

contiguity, temporal succession and constant conjunction or togetherness.

10.4.3 Contiguity

Objects considered as causes or effects are contiguous. He does not mean, of course, that the things which we consider to be causes and effects are always immediately contiguous; for there may be a chain or series of causes between thing A, which we call a cause, and thing Z, which we call an effect. But it will be found that A and B are contiguous, B and C, and so on, even though A and Z are not themselves immediately contiguous. He does not regard spatial contiguity as essential to the idea of causation.

10.4.4 Temporal Priority

Hume argues that the cause must be temporally prior to the effect. Experience confirms this. But if all effects were perfectly contemporary with their causes, it is plain there would be no such thing as succession, and all objects must be coexistent. This is, however, patently absurd. Therefore, an effect cannot be perfectly contemporary with its cause, and that a cause must be temporally prior to its effects.

10.4.5 Idea of Constant Conjunction

The idea of constant conjunction is the idea of regular recurrence of two kinds of similar events according to a constant pattern of contiguity and succession. But we cannot, in Hume's opinion, derive the idea of necessary connection from observation of regular sequences or causal connections. We must say, therefore, either that there is no such idea or that it must be derived from some subjective source. Hume cannot adopt the first of these alternatives; for he has already laid stress on the importance of the idea of necessary connection. He must therefore adopt the second alternative; this is in fact what he does. To say that the idea of necessary connection is derived from a subjective source is to say that it is derived from some impression of reflection. Observation of the repetition does, however, produce new impression in the mind.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Explain the meaning of “reflexion.”

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2. Why does Hume reject abstract ideas?

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10.5 FUNDAMENTAL MAXIMS

According to Hume, there are certain fundamental customary beliefs which dominate human life and condition our specific beliefs: belief in the continuous and independent existence of bodies, and the belief that everything which begins to be has a cause.

10.5.1 Whatever Begins to Exist must have a Cause

The maxim that whatever begins to exist must have a cause of its existence is neither intuitively certain nor demonstrable. If this principle is neither intuitively certain nor demonstrable, our belief in it must arise from experience and observation. It means that we frequently experience the conjunction of two objects, say, flame and the sensation which we call heat, and we remember that these objects have appeared in a regular recurrent order of contiguity and succession. We always tacitly presuppose the uniformity. This supposition that the future resembles the past is not founded on arguments of any kind, but is derived entirely from habit or custom.

10.5.2 Belief in the Independent and Continuous Existence of Bodies

According to Hume, we are confined to the world of perceptions and we cannot, therefore, ever conceive what objects would be like, or are like, apart from our perceptions. It is important to understand that Hume does not intend to deny the existence of bodies independently of our perceptions but we are unable to prove that. In the first place the senses cannot be the source of the notion that things continue to exist when they are unperceived. For in order for this to be the case,

the senses would have to operate when they have ceased to operate. And this would involve a contradiction. Nor do the senses reveal to us bodies which are distinct from our perceptions. In the second place it is not reason which induces us to believe in the continuous and distinct existence of bodies. Whatever convincing arguments philosophers may fancy they can produce of establish the belief of objects independent of the mind, it is obvious these arguments are known but to very few; and that it is not by them that children, peasants, and the greatest part of mankind are induced to attribute objects to some impressions and deny them to others.

10.5.3 Imagination

Our belief in the continued and independent existence of bodies must be due, therefore, neither to the senses nor to the reason or understanding but to the imagination. The question thus arises, which are the features of certain impressions that work on the imagination and produce our persuasion of the continued and distinct existence of bodies? Hence we have to look elsewhere of the peculiar features of certain impressions, which work upon the imagination.

10.5.4 Constancy and Coherence

Hume mentions two such peculiar features, namely, constancy and coherence. Those mountains and houses and trees which lie at present under my eye have always appeared to me in the same order; and when I lose sight of them by shutting my eyes or turning my head, I soon after find them return upon me without the least alteration. Here we have constantly recurring similar impressions. But, obviously, bodies often change not only their positions but also their qualities. However, even in their changes there is coherence. When I return to my chamber after an hour's absence, I find not my fire in the same situation in which I left it; but then I am accustomed, in other instances, to see a like alteration produced in a like time, whether I am present or absent, near or remote. This coherence, therefore, in their changes, is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their constancy. But though coherence may give rise to the supposition of the continuous existence of objects, the idea of

constancy is needed to explain our supposition of their distinct existence; that is, of their independence of our perceptions. Reflection, however, shows us that the perceptions are not the same. Hence we can feign a continued existence of objects. Yet we do not merely feign this; we believe it.

10.5.5 Memory

According to Hume, belief in the continuous and independent existence of bodies, and the belief that everything which begins to be has a cause can be explained by reference to memory. Memory presents us with a great number of instances of similar perceptions which recur at different times after considerable interruptions. His point is that we have an inevitable and ineradicable propensity to believe in the continuous and independent existence of bodies. This propensity produces belief and all attempts to give a rational justification of this belief fail. In short, natural belief inevitably, and rightly, prevails.

10.6 SKEPTICISM

Was Hume a skeptic? If a skeptic is one who doubts or even rejects the use of reason as a means of arriving at truth, then Hume was no skeptic. However, Hume recognized that many beliefs are pointless to doubt because one is literally incapable of disbelieving them or not taking them for granted in all one's reasoning, including such philosophically contentious topics as the existence of external objects and the self, space and time, and the necessity of a cause to every beginning of existence. What makes Hume a skeptic is that he supposed one's ineliminable beliefs skeptically unassailable not because they are founded on reasons too strong to be undermined by skeptical argument but because they are not founded on reasons at all.

10.6.1 The Immateriality of the Soul

Hume suggests that the question whether perceptions inhere in a material or an immaterial substance is a meaningless question, in the sense that we can attach no clear meaning to it and cannot, therefore, answer it. It may be said that we have an idea of substance because we can define it as something which may exist by itself. However the definition will not serve to distinguish substance

from accident or soul from perceptions. Perceptions cannot inhere in a body. In order to do so, they would have to be present locally. But it is absurd to speak of passion, for example, being situated locally in relation to a moral reflection, as being above or below it, to the right or left of it. It does not follow, however, that perceptions can inhere in an immaterial substance. The conclusion which he draws is that the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible.

10.6.2 Idea of the Self

Hume is obviously compelled to deny that we have any idea of the self as distinct from our perceptions. All our perceptions are distinguishable and separable, and we can discover no self apart from or underlying these perceptions. According to Hume, we tend to confuse the two ideas of identity and of a succession of related objects. For example, an animal body is an aggregate, and its component parts are constantly changing: in the strict sense it does not remain self-identical. But the changes are normally gradual and cannot be perceived from moment to moment. Further, the parts are related to one another, enjoying a mutual dependence on and connection with one another. The mind thus tends to neglect the interruptions and to ascribe persistent self-identity to the aggregate. Now, in the case of the human mind there is a succession of related perceptions. Further, our perceptions are mutually related by means of the causal relation. It is only by memory that we are able to be aware of the causal relations between our perceptions. Hence memory is to be counted as the chief source of the idea of personal identity.

10.7 PASSIONS

Hume used the word passion to cover all emotions and affects without confining it to unregulated bursts of emotion. The passions are divided by Hume into direct and indirect passions.

10.7.1 Direct Passions

Direct passions are those which arise immediately from the experience of pleasure or pain; and Hume mentions desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear,

despair and security. The pain of gout, for instance, produces direct passions. Hume also mentions direct passions which arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable. Of this kind is the desire of punishment to our enemies and of happiness to our friends; hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites.

10.7.2 Indirect Passions

Indirect passions do not arise simply from feelings of pleasure or pain; they arise from what Hume calls a double relation of impressions and ideas. The most fundamental indirect passions are pride, humility and love, hatred, but they also include ambition, vanity, envy, pity, and malice. What differentiates love and hate from pride and humility is simply the object of the passion. For just as I take pride in my body or mind, or some object, insofar as it possesses some pleasing quality and has a strong relation to me- my looks, my brilliance, the imposing house I own, the beautiful painting I created, the coveted office to which I have been elected, and so on- so too, I love or esteem someone else from precisely the same causes. Otherwise, these passions exhibit the same double relational structure. The object of pride and humility is the self.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the two fundamental beliefs?

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2. Was Hume a skeptic? Explain.

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10.8 WILL

Hume speaks of the will as one of the immediate effects of pleasure and pain. He describes it as the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body or new perception of our mind. Volitions, for Hume, are feelings, felt excitations to mental or physical action. They are full-fledged perceptions (impressions of reflexion) in their own right, distinct from all others under the separability principle, capable of existing in complete isolation. As such, they are completely indefinable: like flavors. According to Hume, passion actuates the will. Reason can never directly oppose, curb, or in any way act as a counterweight to the actuation of the will by passions. It can do so only indirectly, by giving rise to some new passion, as when it informs one that the object of one's desire is unattainable, or attainable only by a different course of action, whereupon it will produce an aversion to counter, or a desire to override, the existing passion. Passions are therefore never rational in and of themselves; and since experience shows that only passions can actuate the will, reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions.

10.8.1 Denial of Free Will

According to Hume, a free will would be one that acted blindly and randomly, unresponsive to one's desires and heedless of one's beliefs. Thus, from his standpoint, it is fortunate that experience shows one's will not to be free, but instead to act only when necessitated to do so by some passion, be it calm or violent, beneficial or destructive, responsive or unresponsive to the deliverance of reason. The will is free as a cause to the extent the actions of one's body and mind are subject to its control, which is, causally necessitated by it. This is the freedom one would lose if one's body or mind became unresponsive to the will or responded only to some external control. By contrast, the will is free as an effect only if its action is not necessitated by any cause, including one's own passions and beliefs, and so acts at random. The latter is the kind of freedom no one wants and, on the evidence of experience, no one has.

10.8.2 Problem of freedom

Hume admits that the problem of freedom is to a certain extent a linguistic problem, in the sense that though freedom must be denied if it is defined in such a way as to exclude necessity, it can be asserted if it is defined in another way. For instance, if freedom is identified with spontaneity, there is freedom. For it is clear that a great number of actions proceed from a man as a rational agent without any external coercion. For, Hume maintains, if so-called free actions are due to chance and are not caused by the agent, it would be unjust for God or man to hold human beings responsible for bad and vicious actions and to pass moral condemnation on the agents. Having reduced freedom to spontaneity, Hume attempts to prove the truth of two propositions. The first proposition is that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will, and the second is that reason can never oppose passion in the direction of the will. It is obvious that when any object causes pleasure or pain we feel a consequent emotion of attraction or aversion and are impelled to embrace or avoid the object in question. But the impulse which governs our actions is only directed by reason; it does not arise from it. Thus Hume concludes that if reason has no immediate influence of its own, it cannot withstand any principle, such as passion, which does possess efficacy. In asserting this view of the subordination of the reason to the passions Hume held that reason alone cannot affect conduct and that it is the passion or affections which are the fundamental springs of action.

10.9 RELIGION

At a fairly early age, Hume discarded the Calvinistic doctrines which he had been taught in boyhood. Once he had shed his initial Calvinism, religion was for him a purely external phenomenon and in this sense he was an irreligious man. Furthermore, he came to the conclusion that the influence of religion was far from beneficial and religion impairs morality by encouraging people to act for motives other than love of virtue for its own sake. According to Hume, religion originated in such passions as fear of disaster and hope of advantage or betterment when these passions are directed towards some invisible and intelligent power. In the course of time men attempted to rationalize religion and to find arguments in favour of belief. Hume refused to recognize the validity of

metaphysical arguments for God's existence; that is to say, he refused to allow that the existence of God is demonstrable. It is plain from the *Dialogues* that he disliked any form of the argument which is based principally on an analogy between human artificial constructions and the world. The fact of the matter seems to be that Hume set out, as a detached observer, to examine the rational credentials of theism, maintaining in the meantime that religion rests on revelation, a revelation in which he personally certainly did not believe. The result of his investigation was to reduce the religious hypothesis to as meager a content that it is difficult to know what to call it. Its content is ambiguous, and Hume meant it to be ambiguous.

10.9.1 The Idea of God

Hume professed agreement with Locke that the idea of an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being has its origin in one's reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom. Nevertheless, he also maintained that the attempt to realize this definition in an idea is fraught with difficulty. Thus, Hume ended up on the same side as the most pious monotheists in insisting on the incomprehensibility of the nature of the divine.

10.9.2 Religious Belief

Having established that one has no clear idea of God to underwrite religious discourse or any rational basis for religious belief, Hume concluded that one believes in God and accepts the proofs of purported revelation from the same causes that lead one to form other beliefs not proportioned to experience (unphilosophical probabilities). The implication is that, however widespread a religious belief may be, it is not imposed on one by human nature, and so is not irresistible in the way that belief in causes, continued distinct existents, and the self are. Hume did not deny that religious belief can ever be agreeable or useful, either for the individual or society, but he did seem to think that, in the forms it actually takes—especially when vitiated by superstition or enthusiasm— it is neither.

10.10 MORALITY

In the case of moral discourse the question that was decisive for Hume regarding its objective significance is whether one's experience of good and ill is limited to passions and desires, or whether there is, in addition, a source of distinctively moral ideas. Moral ideas originate in a species of impression of reflexion that is entirely independent of imagination. The special status of the impression of reflexion as a source of moral ideas therefore derives not from any special authority intrinsic to these feelings themselves but from the unique circumstances of their causation and the special place in one's life they derive from.

10.10.1 Virtue and Vice

Hume defines virtue to be whatever mental action or quality which gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary. Hume distinguished four (nonexclusive) types of virtue:

- (a) Mental qualities immediately agreeable to their possessors, such as skill, greatness of mind, cheer, equanimity in the face of adversity, and courage.
- (b) Qualities immediately agreeable to others, such as tact, delicacy, wit, and good manners.
- (c) Qualities useful to their possessors, such as intelligence, industriousness, skill, patience, and perseverance.
- (d) Qualities useful to others, such as gratitude, faithfulness, reliability, and charity.

10.10.2 Justice

Justice is founded on self-interest and also on a sense of utility. Even when injustice does not affect us personally as victims, it still displeases us. We share the uneasiness of other people by sympathy. And since that which in human actions produces uneasiness arouses disapprobation and is called vice, while that which produces satisfaction is called virtue, we regard justice as a moral virtue and injustice as a moral vice. Thus self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice: but sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation which attends that virtue. Hume calls Justice an 'artificial'

virtue in the sense that it is an invention of man, invented as a remedy for human selfishness and rapacity combined with the scanty provision which nature has made for his wants. Hume, therefore, will not allow that there are eternal laws of justice, independent of man's conditions and of public utility. Men establish the laws of justice out of a concern for their own and the public interest. But this concern is derived not from reasoning about the eternal and necessary relations of ideas but from our impressions and feelings.

10.11 LET US SUM UP

Technology has changed since the eighteenth century, and the modern empiricist tries to avoid Hume's tendency to muddle up logic and psychology. But of the modern empiricist's direct or indirect debt to Hume there can be no doubt. His insight, which showed the centrality of man in the whole conspectus of the various sciences, is most welcome in a world where progress is conceived along very impersonal lines. However, his reduction of the difference between what he calls impressions and ideas to a mere a question of quantity is also open to question. We cannot deny that Hume's scathing attack on principle of causality did spark of a lot of serious in-depth reflection by later thinkers. In short, assessing the insightful contribution made by Hume, he deserves the epithet- the father of empiricism.

Check Your Progress III

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Why does Hume think that the problem of freedom a mere linguistic problem?

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2. "Incomprehensibility of the nature of the divine" Explain.

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10.12 KEY WORDS

Impressions: Impressions are the immediate data of experience, such as sensations.

Ideas: Ideas are the copies or faint images of impressions in thinking and reasoning.

Passion: Hume used the word passion to cover all emotions and affects without confining it to unregulated bursts of emotion.

Perception: Perception refers to all objects insofar as they are immediately present to one by consciousness, be it in sensation, reflexion, or thought.

Relation: The word 'relation' signifies the quality or qualities by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination.

Will: Will is the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body or new perception of our mind.

10.13 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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10.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. Reflexion is Hume's catch-all term for the objects present to internal sense or inward sentiment, including passions, emotions, desires, volitions, and mental operations generally.
2. In the first place, abstract ideas are individual or particular in themselves. For instance, the precise length of a line is not

distinguishable from the line itself. We cannot form a general idea of a line without any length at all. Nor can we form the general idea of a line possessing all possible lengths. Secondly, every impression is determinate and definite. Since an idea is an image or copy of an impression, it must itself be determinate and definite, even though it is fainter than the impression from which it is derived. Thirdly, everything which exists must be individual. No triangle, for instance, can exist, which is not a particular triangle with its particular characteristics. To postulate an existent triangle which is at the same time all and none of the possible kinds and sizes of triangle would be an absurdity. But what is absurd in fact and in reality, is absurd also in idea. He thus agrees with Berkeley that there are no abstract general ideas.

Check Your Progress II

1. According to Hume, the two fundamental beliefs are: belief in the continuous and independent existence of bodies, and the belief that everything which begins to be has a cause.
2. What makes Hume a skeptic is that he supposed one's ineliminable beliefs skeptically unassailable not because they are founded on reasons too strong to be undermined by skeptical argument but because they are not founded on reasons at all.

Check Your Progress III

1. Hume admits that the problem of freedom is to a certain extent a linguistic problem, in the sense that though freedom must be denied if it is defined in such a way as to exclude necessity, it can be asserted if it is defined in another way. For instance, if freedom is identified with spontaneity, there is freedom. For it is clear that a great number of actions proceed from a man as a rational agent without any external coercion. For, Hume maintains, if so-called free actions are due to chance and are not caused by the agent, it would be unjust for God or man to hold human beings responsible for bad and vicious actions and to pass moral condemnation on the agents.

2. Hume professed agreement with Locke that the idea of an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being has its origin in one's reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom. Nevertheless, he also maintained that the attempt to realize this definition in an idea is fraught with difficulty. Thus, Hume ended up on the same side as the most pious monotheists in insisting on the incomprehensibility of the nature of the divine.



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UNIT11 CRITICISMS OF EMPIRICISM*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 John Locke
- 11.3 Berkeley
- 11.4 David Hume
- 11.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Further Readings and References
- 11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we evaluate the Philosophy of British empiricists from an objective point of view to deepen and enrich the study that we have already made in the previous units. The unit shall help a student of philosophy to study and appreciate the different movements in philosophy without being subjected to their influence. The three important philosophers of British Empiricism, discussed in this unit, are considered very influential in the political and intellectual history of humanity.

By the end of this unit one should be able to:

- Learn to appreciate objectively and critically the contributions of British Empiricism to philosophy.
- Have a holistic and comprehensive approach to the philosophies of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. .

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Empiricism holds that only sense knowledge is valid, for it alone securely rests on the impressions of the thinking subject. Hence the question arises: Can an objective metaphysics be established through the analysis of sense modifications? We shall examine this problem in the philosophical teachings of those philosophers called the Empiricists.

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“British” Empiricism refers to the 18th century philosophical movement in Great Britain, which maintained that all knowledge comes from experience. Continental rationalists maintained that knowledge comes from foundational concepts known intuitively through reason, such as innate ideas. Other concepts are then deductively drawn from these. British Empiricists rejected the theory of innate ideas and argued that knowledge is based on both sense experience and internal mental experiences, such as emotions and self-reflection.” (https://intranet.newriver.edu/images/stories/library/Stennett_Psychology_Articles/General%20Glossary%20-%20Empiricism.pdf, p. 4).

11.4 JOHN LOCKE

It should be noted that Locke, while in error on many points regarding the traditional philosophical questions, made a major contribution to the development of modern political philosophy. For instance, Locke holds that rights can be determined from the relations that exist between an infinitely intelligent being (God) and a rational but dependent being. The moral norms are hence rational, and are identified with the divine right and then with natural right. Moral laws must have a due sanction (rewards and punishment) which is imposed on the will in such a manner as to restrain man from diverging from the tendency that leads to his own well-being.

Locke also opposes Thomas Hobbes' theory of society by holding that in the state of nature man did not live in a wild condition, in which right was force. Men even at this time were rational and had the notion of the fundamental rights of life, liberty, property, and so forth. From man's natural condition to the state of society, there is a progression; but no innovation is involved. The sovereign who fails in his obligation to defend the rights of his subjects is no longer justified in his sovereignty and may be dismissed by his subjects. Locke is considered the founder of classical liberal politics, and his influence during the centuries following his lifetime has been great, including his philosophical contributions to the founding of the American Republic.

Locke was convinced that, once the human mind had learned to grasp things clearly, once it knew its own powers and recognized its true limitations, once it was sure of the nature and extent of its knowledge, the developing of philosophy would be sheerly natural growth. Thus, Locke's interest was in the epistemological question. Locke was keen on clarity of knowledge but he did not escape the fatal confounding of sense-knowledge with intellectual

knowledge. And so he proceeded to make confusion more confounded, so that one may take not only different, but opposite, doctrines from the premises his theories afford.

11.4.1 Theory of Knowledge

Locke strenuously opposed Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas. All knowledge has its origin in experience, in sense-perception. The elements of knowledge are the ideas, and Locke, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, explains the idea in the following manner: "It being that term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Introduction, Sec. 8).

Descartes placed all sense-perception in the spiritual mind, thus identifying sense-perception with spiritual activity; Locke here does the reverse, by reducing ideas, at least in part, down to the level of sense-perception (phantasm, species). By thus arbitrarily blurring the nature of the idea so as to include sense-perception, he laid the foundation for *sensism*, where all thinking is nothing but a form of sensation. Another important feature of this definition of "idea" is, that the "idea" is the object of our understanding, instead of the reality of things being the object of our knowledge. Ideas, according to Locke, are derived from two sources -- sense-perception and reflection; and all knowledge is restricted to "ideas". "Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chapter I, Sec. 1)

For Locke, knowledge is the perception of the connection of an agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas. (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXI, Sec. 5).

This means, of course, that we do not really know objects or things-in-themselves, but ideas or conscious states of the mind; and this is the standpoint of Descartes and idealism. However, Locke, did not deny the existence of material substances, such as bodies, nor of spiritual substances, such as the soul and God; but substance is unknowable to us, whether material or immaterial. However, there must be something there, because otherwise the sense experiences that are dropped on the blank sheet could never be analyzed. All knowledge of objects in the physical world originates from this. Locke does

not take into consideration innate capacities as being something a priori in the mind. Locke states there are three degrees available to the human mind, intuitive knowledge, demonstrative knowledge, and sensitive knowledge. The first type, compounding, is simply the combination of two or more simple ideas to form a more complex idea.

John Locke's work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, was said to usher in the Enlightenment. It is important to realize that he did not claim that his philosophy could discover all certainties, but that it could discover those things that were certainly beyond our comprehension. For Locke this type of knowledge is the most certain, and provides the foundation of all other knowledge. For Locke all ideas are classified as either simple or complex. These are formed by comparing one idea to another. Locke answers this question by stating that, ideas will only resemble external objects in the world to the degree God wills it. Demonstrative knowledge is the degree of knowledge we can know by revealing through a process of logical steps, certain certainties. These ideas are formed by three different activities of the mind, compounding, relating, and abstracting. Simple ideas according to Locke are the most fundamental mental particles. The idea of a grape would be formed by the simpler ideas of roundness, red, and soft.

"Our idea of substance is equally obscure, or none at all, in both; it is but a supposed I-know-not-what, to support those ideas we call accidents." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Sec.15). "By the complex idea of extended, figured, colored, and all other sensible qualities, which is all that we know of it, we are as far from the idea of the substance of the body, as if we knew nothing at all." (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXIII, Sec. 16).

While Locke, therefore, admits the existence of material and spiritual "substances," he asserts that they are unknowable; "accidents" or "phenomena" alone are knowable; he is termed as an empirical phenomenalist. Locke was an analytical thinker. His main interest was in illuminating knowledge and examining its validity. He was the first to give logic for Empiricism. However, Locke, prescinding from what he had established in the question of knowledge, attempts a demonstration of the existence of God, of the world, and of the knowing subject.

11.4.2 Primary and Secondary Qualities

Locke distinguishes primary and secondary sense-qualities in bodily things. In his study upon the nature of knowledge, he had constantly to face such questions as: are sense-

objects really what they appear to be; is the grass really green; is the whirling wheel actually in motion; is the stone truly solid? Locke decided that there are certain qualities common to all bodies (impenetrability, extension, shape, rest, motion) and these are primary qualities which exist as objective things. He said that there are also other qualities not found in all bodies alike (color, sound, taste, odor, temperature, resistance) and these are secondary qualities which are largely subjective, that is, not so much objective things as the perceivings or feelings of the person who senses them.

Criticisms can be raised on Locke's distinction of sense-qualities as primary and secondary as they lack objective reality. We are wholly unaware of the primary qualities except through the medium of the secondary and if the secondary be unreliable (being largely subjective) we have no reason to put any trust in the actuality of the primary qualities.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for the answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are the basic ideas of Empiricism?

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2. Explain the Epistemology of John Locke.

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11.5 BERKELEY

John Locke had constructed a theory of knowledge in which the subject was closed up within himself. The object of such knowledge was consequently ideas (subjective impressions) and not things. If ideas are the immediate object of our knowledge, is it ever possible to admit an external reality corresponding to such ideas?

George Berkeley denied this theory and reduced the reality of the external world to the existence of finite spirits and the infinite spirit (God). There is no material world. For Berkeley, even Locke's concept of substance was merely a name devoid of reality. There exists only the world of spirits, dominated by God, the Supreme Spirit.

Berkeley's starting point in philosophy is Locke's theory of language. According to Locke

words have meaning by standing for ideas, and general words such as sortal predicates, correspond to abstract general ideas. The ability to form such ideas is the most important between humans and dumb animals.

Berkeley extracts from Locke's Essay two different accounts of the meanings of general terms. One, which we may call the representational theory, is that a general idea is a particular idea which has been made general by being made to stand for all of a kind, in the way in which a geometry teacher draws a particular triangle to represent all triangles. Another, which we may call culminative theory, is that a general idea is a particular idea which contains only what is common to all particulars of the same kind: the abstract idea of 'man' eliminates what is peculiar to Peter, John and James, and retains only what is common to them all.

11.5.1 Theory of Knowledge

Berkeley's theory of knowledge accepts the Empiricist teaching of Locke that the immediate object of our knowledge is ideas (subjective impressions) but rejects the distinction of Locke regarding primary (objective) and secondary (subjective) qualities.

The primary qualities (time, space, motion) are not perceptible separately from the secondary qualities (color, sound, tactile qualities, etc.). Indeed we know the primary qualities only in conjunction with and through the secondary qualities. If we know means to perceive subjective impressions, such impressions cannot be divided into two categories, one subjective and the other objective. All impressions are subjective as they are impressions felt by the subject.

Furthermore, Berkeley refuses to accept Locke's concept of substance as a mysterious objective substratum, which would be the cause of our impressions. Berkeley asks whether such a material substratum, separate from our sensations, exist. If it is separate from our impressions, then it is not perceptible, is reduced to a term void of significance, and is unknowable and inconceivable. If it is connected with our impressions as a support of those impressions, then it resides in the subject and material substances are cognitive phenomena and hence are subjective.

Therefore, it is impossible that matter be something existing in itself, objective, inert, devoid of thought. When we say that a thing exists, we mean nothing more than that such a thing is perceived by us. The being of things consists in this act of perception: "esse est percipi." (To BE is to be PERCEIVED.)

Primary or secondary qualities, substance and impressions are nothing other than acts of perception, that is, mental facts; and their existence signifies their being perceived as mental acts. Berkeley's theory of knowledge thus reduces all reality to phenomena. The material world exists only as a cognitive act, produced and existing in a mental act, and hence is subjective and not objective.

Berkeley denied general or universal ideas. The mind cannot represent a general color which would be neither red nor white nor must any determined color, such as the universal concept of color be. Hence, only particular and determined ideas exist. The so-called universal ideas are names, not ideas, and exist neither in the mind (because they are not ideas) nor outside the mind (because it is absurd that there be a color which is not determined).

Berkeley's nominalism is more radical than Locke's in so far as he denies all value to general and abstract ideas, whereas Locke had only imposed restrictions upon them.

11.5.2 Nature of the Universe

Berkeley, while denying the existence of a material world and reducing it to a phenomenon of knowledge, did not deny the existence of the world of spirits. He believed that he had proved the existence of the subjective spirit from the very presence of ideas, for ideas can be produced only by a spirit. Having thus assured himself of the existence of his own spirit, Berkeley devoted himself to determining its nature: the spirit is both active, a producer of ideas, and passive, a receptacle for ideas. Its activity is revealed in the imagination and in the memory, with which we produce or recall ideas and the coordination of ideas. Passivity, as we have said, is revealed in the fact that the spirit receives ideas that it has not produced. For example, it is not within my power to see or not to see the objects that are in my room.

The passivity of the spirit gave Berkeley the means of proving the existence of other finite spirits, independent of his own, as well as the existence of God. In fact, he asked, what is the origin of these ideas that are imposed on my spirit and of which I am not the origin -- for instance, the objects I mentioned before as being present in my room?

They are produced by the will of other spirits, since I perceive, besides my own spirit, other particular agents like myself, who participate with me in the production of many ideas. Besides, there are ideas that I perceive which are not only not produced by my spirit, but are not produced by any finite spirit -- for instance, the regularity of natural phenomena. Fire

always burns, independently of any will. Such ideas presuppose a cause superior to all finite spirits -- God, who exists, whose infinite will produces the order and harmony and constancy of natural phenomena.

Having thus demonstrated the existence of God, Berkeley believed that he had solved all the difficulties that could be raised against his idealistic phenomenalism. If, for example, one asks whether the objects in my room exist when I am outside and there is no one in my house, Berkeley answers in the affirmative; because if the objects are not perceived by a finite spirit they are perceived by God. If one should inquire about the difference between real fire and painted fire, why one burns and the other does not, Berkeley would have answered that God, the producer and supreme ruler of all ideas, unites to the first (real fire) the idea of burning, and denies it to the second (fire depicted in a painting).

In a word, the phenomenal world of Berkeley is not unlike the phenomenal world that everyone knows, with this difference: While commonly it is believed that natural phenomena are the product of a physical, material world, for Berkeley this material world does not exist. That which we attribute to matter, he says, must be referred to God, the exciter and revealer of ideas corresponding to material things. We are on the ground of the occasionalism of Malebranche: God presents to our souls -- produces in them -- the ideas that impress us. The constant relationship with which God determines the ideas of our spirits are the so-called laws of nature. They are the language with which God reveals Himself and speaks to us. Thus Berkeley believed that he had carried out the work he had set for himself: to justify theism against the attacks of incredulity; and to point out the emptiness of materialism by proving that the world as conceived by the materialist does not exist.

However, the question remains, did Berkeley really attain his goal? The existence of the (finite) spirit as something distinct from ideas implies the concept of spiritual substance; the activity and passivity of the spirit imply the concept of cause; the affirmation of the existence of God implies both the concepts of substance and of cause. Now, all these concepts should have been established in a preliminary metaphysical study; this Berkeley did not do, and because of his empiristic position, he could not do it. The development of Empiricism toward complete phenomenalism stops halfway in Berkeley.

It was David Hume who drew the logical consequences from Empiricism, and affirmed complete phenomenalism not only in reference to matter, as Berkeley had done, but also in reference to spiritual substance, the concept of cause, and the concept of God.

Berkeley feared to allow universals any validity. He denies universals and axioms when there is no necessity for this denial. The weakness of his philosophical doctrine is that it leaves too much to be explained, especially the explanation of the outer (external) world. Berkeley's fundamental premise -- the mind can know only its own ideas -- has been called the "egocentric predicament." This is the predicament of one trying to imagine something unknown. Two lines of thought proceed from Berkeley's philosophy:

The weaker side -- the denial of universals, leads to David Hume.

The stronger side -- the supremacy of the spirit, leads to German idealism witnessed in the philosophy of Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel.

11.6 DAVID HUME

For Hume, custom and tradition provide structure to the mind by guiding the manner in which experiences are organized and synthesized. Commonsense concepts embody the accumulated sum of experiences assimilated by prior generations. New generations may supplement them, but must not ignore them. However, custom and tradition have no greater authority than the experiences they summarize. If entirely new kinds of experience emerge (for example, as a result of new instruments, like, the electron microscope or new technologies, like, magnetic resonance imaging), then customary habits of thought would require appropriate modification. Most Empiricists sharply distinguish facts and values. Value judgments derive from "irrational" elements of the mind such as feelings, emotions or attitudes, which lack experiential validation. Purely descriptive and verifiable facts are statements that allegedly confirm to experience. Many Empiricists insist that evaluative claims cannot be derived from mere facts as they are emotional reactions to facts, which may readily differ for different persons. Only if ethical claims could be reduced to peoples' actual desires or to the maximization of actually experienced pleasures could Empiricists find them defensible. This is why later empiricists e.g., J. S. Mill and James, gravitated toward utilitarianism in moral theory. Empiricists generally interpret the mind to be passive i.e. imprinted with representations of real objects. Reason's major function is to discover similarities and differences among representations. In this way it creates concepts through grouping similarities into types and modest generalizations noting constant conjunctions to better organize future experience.

11.6.1 Causation

Hume argues that if we look for the origin of the idea of causation, we find that it cannot be

any particular inherent quality of objects; for objects of the most different kinds can be causes and effects. We must look instead for relationships between objects. We find indeed, that causes and effects must be contiguous to each other and that causes must be prior to their effects. But this is not enough: we feel that there must be a necessary connection between cause and effect, though the nature denies that whatever begins to exist must have a cause of existence. If there is no absurdity in conceiving something coming into existence, or undergoing a change, without any cause at all, there is a fortiori no absurdity in conceiving of an event occurring without a cause of some particular kind. Because many different effects are logically conceivable as arising from a particular cause, only experience leads us to expect the actual one.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it is not our inference that depends on the necessary connection between cause and effect, but the necessary connection that depends on the inference we draw from the one to the other. Hume offers not one, but two definitions of causation. The first is this: a cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another and where all the objects resembling the former are placed in a like relation of priority and contiguity to those objects that resemble the latter. In this definition, nothing is said about necessary connection, and no reference is made to the activity of the mind. Accordingly, we are offered a second, more philosophical definition. A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it in the imagination that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.

It is noticeable that in this second definition of cause the mind is said to be determined to form one idea by the presence of another idea. The originality and power of Hume's analysis of causation is concealed by the language in which it is embedded, and which suffers from all the obscurity of the machinery of impressions and ideas. But we can separate out from the psycho-logical apparatus three novel principles of great importance.

- a. Cause and effect must be distinct existences, each conceivable without the other.
- b. The causal relation is to be analyzed in terms of contiguity, precedence, and constant conjunction.
- c. It is not necessary truth that every beginning of existence has a cause.

Each of these principles deserves, and has received, intense philosophical scrutiny. Some of them were as we shall see, subjected to criticisms by Kant and others have been modified or rejected by more recent philosophers. But to this day the agenda for the discussion of the

causal relationship is the one set by Hume.

Given Hume's theory of causation we may wonder what right 'give rise to' has to appear in this definition. Yet if we replace 'we knowingly give rise to any new motion, with any new motion is observed to arise' the definition no longer looks at all plausible. Given Hume's official philosophy of mind and his official account of causation, there seems to be no room for talking of 'secret springs' of action. In fact, his thesis that the will is causally necessitated is difficult to make consistent either with his own definition of the free will or with his own theory of causation.

Hume's doubts about causation, induction and the self can also be directed to the "laws" of logic and to the sanctity of the individual. The exact status of logical laws vexed Empiricists. They should regard them as generalizations from actual thought processes which are frequently flawed, but logic's certainty seems more deeply rooted than this. Skepticism about the foundations of logic also threatens the legitimacy of scientific reasoning. Also, since causation is essential to the mechanistic world-view, Hume's skepticism threatened this as well. Similarly, Hume's doubts about the existence of distinct personal selves threaten the legitimacy of individual rights and the entire first-person standpoint.

Hume's vague philosophy has a very modern sound: a collection of impressions collected nowhere; contents of a mind which is not a container. Here we have the smug unintelligibility of the modern antirealist's definition of mind as "a cross-section of the environment." Hume holds that the only thing that can be said, with full certainty, to exist is our perceptions (impressions and ideas). In and among these perceptions there is no causal connection; indeed, there is no knowable causality anywhere. If things outside us really do exist, there is no proof of their existence available to us. His theoretical empiricism concludes with the collapse of all rational understanding; it inevitably leads to Skepticism and, of course Subjectivism and Relativism.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for the answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Evaluate Berkeley's Theory of Knowledge

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2. What is David Hume's Theory of causation?

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

Empiricism defended the assumptions of and methods of science and developed a complimentary theory of mind. Oddly, as scientists made significant strides in explaining nature, empiricist philosophers became more skeptical about the foundations of scientific thought. Hume, for example, came to doubt whether causes really exist and whether induction could be legitimated. He believed that humans attribute causation to regularly recurring events that are constantly conjoined. The only defensible empirical claim is that one event typically follows another (rather than being caused by it). Similarly, there could be no experimental assurance that future conjunctions of sensations will resemble past ones. At best, this could only be contingent fact. Likewise, he came to doubt the existence of a self that unifies experiences because he could not discover it in experience. (Later Hume reversed himself, suggesting that experience does not always speak with one voice.) Hume's skepticism epitomizes the entire Empiricist movement.

Three claims define empiricism: all knowledge derives from experience- typically from sensory experience; the mind is a "blank slate" prior to experience so that concepts emerge via abstraction from and association among sensations; and sensations are atomic and simple or at least can be reduced to atomic and simple elements. By grounding all knowledge in sensory experience and suggesting that experience may only represent or mirror the external world, empiricism reinforced Descartes' first-person stand point and his conception that persons have privileged access to their own sensations. However, by denying the existence of innate ideas, Empiricism departs from Descartes by limiting the importance of reason. "Concepts" derive from associations of similar experiences. If certain concepts-such as causality or the self – are not directly experienced, then they may have no genuine application. Empiricism generally assumes that the mind's structure derives from experience; since it lacks structure prior to experience, different cognitive organizations may result from different arrays of experience. Different cultures and civilizations thus may acquire different concepts because they interact with different environments. The only explanation for similarities in cross-cultural concepts is a common material world that engenders experience. If this common world were lacking, then

intercultural and even interpersonal understanding might become impossible. The third claim – concerning simple, atomic “ideas” (raw elements of experience) – denies that experience possesses any organic wholeness. Relationships among experiences must be established externally by comparison with previous experiences. Close attention to experience, however, may reveal essential interconnections, especially when experience is broadened to include imagination, desire, emotion and volition. This atomistic analysis is often extended to social theory by interpreting individuals to be the fundamental social atoms of society and taking all social relationships to be the result of explicit contracts. Although this individualistic position can ground fundamental human rights, it often remains oblivious to the need for strong institutions to guarantee such rights.

Continental philosophers often claim that Empiricists overlook the temporal unity of and internal relations among experiences, and that they presuppose an arbitrarily limited conception of experience and of their possible combinations. Phenomenologists, for example, discover a directedness (or intentionality) in experience and a complex nested structure among conscious states. These features are rarely acknowledged in Empiricism. They also insist on examining the full range of experiences, including emotions, intentions, valuations, and imagination, and on exploring the inter-subjective sources of experiential unity which are only minimally foreseen in Hume’s notion of custom.

Because Empiricism produces skepticism about its own greatest achievement, science, some continental philosophers develop an alternative to conception of systematic knowledge. Hegel, Marx, Phenomenologists, Structuralists and others explore alternative conceptions of a “Scientific System”, requiring an expanded rationality and revealing structural relations among phenomena that are neither causal nor conceptual. Continental philosophers also resist the sharp Empiricist posture that appearances represent reality and thus actual things in themselves cannot be directly known, many continental philosophers reject this division. They insist that experience reveals reality as it is, or at least genuine features of and perspectives on it.

11.8 KEY WORDS

Empiricism: All the knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses. Our knowledge is based on perception and observation.

Knowledge is not possible without experience.

11.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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11.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

1. Empiricism is the position according to which experience is the only source of warrant for our claims about the world. Having assigned experience this exclusive role in justification, empiricists then have a range of views concerning the character of experience, the semantics of our claims about unobservable entities, the nature of empirical confirmation, and the possibilityof non-empirical warrant for some further class of claims, such as those accepted on the basis of linguistic or logical rules. Given the definitive principle of their position, empiricists can allow that we have knowledge independent of experience only where what is known is not some objective fact about the world, but something about our way of conceptualizing or describing things. Some empiricists say we have knowledge of verbal equivalences or trivialities; some argue that any non-empirical tenets are not even properly called knowledge, but should be

seen as notions accepted on pragmatic rather than properly epistemic grounds. What no empiricist will allow is substantive a priori knowledge: according to empiricism we have no pure rational insight into real necessities or the inner structure of nature, but must rely on the deliverances of our senses for all of our information about external reality. Some versions of empiricism argue against the very notion of real necessities or metaphysical structure behind the phenomena; other versions take a more agnostic approach, arguing that if there is a metaphysical structure behind the phenomena it is either out of our epistemic reach, or known only to the extent that it can be grasped through experience, rather than through rational reflection.

2. Locke states there are three degrees available to the human mind, intuitive knowledge, demonstrative knowledge, and sensitive knowledge. The first type, compounding, is simply the combination of two or more simple ideas to form a more complex idea. John Locke's work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was said to usher in the Enlightenment. It is important to realize that he did not claim that his philosophy could discover all certainties, but that it could discover those things that were certainly beyond our comprehension. For Locke this type of knowledge is the most certain, and provides the foundation of all other knowledge. For Locke all ideas are classified as either simple or complex. These are formed by comparing one idea to another. Locke answers this question by stating that ideas will only resemble external objects in the world to the degree that God wills them. Demonstrative knowledge is the degree of knowledge we can know by revealing through a process of logical steps, certain certainties. These ideas are formed by three different activities of the mind, compounding, relating, and abstracting.

Check your progress II

1. George Berkeley is perhaps one of the most unique and intriguing figures in the history of modern philosophy. Dissatisfied with materialist philosophies of his contemporaries, especially the ideas of John Locke, Berkeley called for a return to "common sense." But "common sense," for Berkeley, involved not just a skeptical view of materialism, but the assertion that the material world does not exist at all! Berkeley utilizes persuasive logical arguments and empiricist principles in order to refute the existence of matter. However, when he attempts to account for what *does* exist, he makes a startling claim which does not hold up to his own rigorous logical standards. Berkeley's argument is as follows:
 1. We have established that only ideas exist and that reality is comprised of ideas.

2. For an idea to be existing, it must be perceived by someone or something.
3. But real things continue to exist even when no person perceives them. (For example, when everyone leaves the room, the room does not disappear.)
4. Therefore, ideas which are unperceived by people must still be perceived by

something.

5. That something else is the infinite mind of God.

2. In his ground-breaking book, *A Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume made the scientific hunt for causes possible, by freeing the concept of causality from the metaphysical chains that his predecessors had used to pin it down. For Hume, causality, as it is in the world, is a regular succession of event-types: one thing invariably following another. His famous first definition of causality runs as follows: "We may define a CAUSE to be 'An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are placed in like relations of precedence and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.'" Taking a cue from Malebranche, Hume argued that there was no perception of the supposed necessary connection between the cause and the effect. Being an empiricist, Hume argued that all causal knowledge stems from experience. He revolted against the traditional view that the necessity that links cause and effect is the same as the logical necessity of a demonstrative argument. He argued that there can be no a priori demonstration of any causal connection, since the cause can be conceived without its effect and conversely. His far-reaching observation was that the alleged necessity of causal connection cannot be proved empirically either.