

## Re-Reading Hume's Empiricism

Jahangir Khan<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Sabitri Devi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph. D. Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Cotton University, Email: jahangirkhan.rock@gmail.com, Mobile: 9706501961

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor and Head, Department of Philosophy, Cotton University, Email: sabitridevi65@gmail.com, Mobile: 9435549686

**Citation:** Jahangir Khan et al (2024), Re-Reading Hume's Empiricism, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1) 3128 - 3131

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.7050

### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

Empiricism is an epistemological approach that contends that experience teaches us everything. Supporters of this viewpoint are referred to as empiricists. Empiricism originated with John Locke. Locke sees experience as the source of knowledge. According to him, we learn about exterior objects by sensation and internal mental objects through reflection. Locke's theory of knowledge recognizes three elements: the perceiver mind, external objects or substance, and thoughts. Berkeley, like Locke, believes that true knowledge can only be obtained via experience. However, Berkeley differs from Locke in that, while Locke accepts three elements in his theory of knowing, Berkeley acknowledges only two: perceiver minds, mind, and ideas, and rejects the presence of matter. David Hume was the last and great British empiricist philosopher and he pushed empiricism to its skeptical conclusions. For Hume all our knowledge is based on perception. Further Hume divides perception into two parts- impression and ideas. And he denied the existence of mind or soul. In this paper I shall try to delineate Hume's empiricism and also try to compare his empiricism with Locke and Berkeley's empiricism.

**Keywords:** empiricism, sense- experience, matter, ideas, association of ideas.

### Introduction

Empiricism was an 18th-century philosophical movement that held that all knowledge is derived from experience. Empiricism was almost entirely founded on the process of experimenting via experience, observation, and reflection. Francis Bacon realized for the first time the value of empirical research in the pursuit of authentic truth. However, Bacon was more interested in identifying the technique of scientific investigation than in developing an empiricist theory of knowledge. That is why Bacon cannot be considered a prominent empiricist. The most renowned empiricist philosophers of early modern Western philosophy were John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. These three scholars are commonly referred to as the 'British Empiricists', and they established the empiricist tradition in Britain.

### Objectives of the study

- To explore the basic concept of Locke, Berkeley and Hume empiricism
- To find out the more consistent empiricist philosopher among Locke, Berkeley and Hume

### Research Methodology

This study has been used analytical method. In this paper I explore Locke, Berkeley and Hume's empiricism and finally I found out who is more consistent as an empiricist philosopher. The data which I use in this research paper all are secondary. All the data are collected from books, journals and Google.

### Empiricism in Locke's Philosophy

Locke could be regarded as the father of empiricism. He began his empiricism by rejecting the concept that men were born with innate knowledge. According to Locke, we are born with no knowledge; the mind is a blank slate. According to Locke, "all knowledge comes from the sense experience." <sup>(1)</sup> Locke states that

sensation allows us to know external objects, and he describes sensation as a process known as perception in modern psychology. And, via contemplation, we learn about the interior objects of our minds. It is known as the introspective process in psychology. In his book 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding', John Locke refutes the rationalist philosopher René Descartes' notion that the human mind is born with no innate concepts or principles. He claims that our thoughts are empty at birth and that we know nothing; he calls this 'a tabula rasa'. According to him, all innate thoughts that the mind does not consciously consider must be preserved in memory.

However, 'unless remembrance may be without remembrance', the thoughts held in memory are brought from there by remembrance and must be known when recalled to have been in the mind earlier. But, this is not conceivable for inherent information, which is defined as not derived from natural sources; thus, innate knowledge cannot reside in memory. So, according to Locke, the mind has no innate ideas. He believes that experience is the ultimate source of wisdom. <sup>(2)</sup> For him, introspection and sensory perception are the foundations of all human knowledge. However, Locke's theory of knowledge recognizes the importance of reason. He believed that all points of view should be exposed to the tribunal of reason and opposed the replacement of emotionally charged remarks with well-reasoned conclusions. In this aspect, he remained logical. Locke resumes his materialist stance by accepting the existence of matter. Three elements are accepted by Locke in his theory of knowledge: ideas, exterior objects or matter, and the perceiver's intellect. <sup>(3)</sup> However, he was not a rationalist in the sense that rejects the existence of spirits.

### **Empiricism in Berkeley's Philosophy**

Berkeley's empiricism begins with his famous words 'esse-est-percipi', which translates as 'to be is to be perceived'. In other words, something exists and can be perceived. If something cannot be perceived, then it does not exist. Berkeley advanced his empiricism by rejecting Locke's exterior material objects. Concerning the nature of exterior material objects, Locke claimed that it is unknown. We are unable to know the external material items. Berkeley believes that if we cannot know the external material world, it is equivalent to denying its existence. For him, saying that matter exists but is unperceived (unknown) contradicts itself. If it exists, it must be perceived by a mind.

According to Berkeley, the table in front of you exists because you perceive it. When you perceive the table, it exists as an idea in our mind. When you are not present to observe the table, the table remains real since it is perceived by another person. When no one is present to view the table, it still exists because it is perceived by God's limitless thought. As a result, Berkeley establishes the line 'esse-est-percipi', which translates 'to be is to be perceived'. In other words, an object's essence is determined by how it is seen. According to him, we do not see God, but rather perceive him. But, we experience God, because there is a power behind universe. Berkeley in his philosophy accepts- perceiver mind, God and ideas. <sup>(4)</sup>

From the above discussion of Berkeley's empiricism it is found that he is rightly criticized Lock's materialism. Since material objects are unknown for Locke and as a result we can't perceive them. So as an empiricist Berkeley refute the existence of material objects. But Berkeley accepts the existence of God as an infinite mind. Here he went beyond empiricism. Since, we can't perceive the existence of God. So we can't consider Berkeley as a pure empiricist philosopher.

### **Empiricism in Hume's Philosophy**

David Hume was the last Empiricist philosopher after Locke and Berkeley. He strictly followed empiricism in his philosophy. Hume holds that we acquire knowledge through perception. So he denied the existence of everything which is not come from perception. Further he divides perception into two types- impression and ideas. Hume's empiricist philosophy is founded mainly upon two things- the first is the **origin of ideas**.

According to Hume, all of our ideas come from two types of experiences, or impressions. <sup>(5)</sup> Experience is two folds – sensation and reflection. Sensation is external perception and it is the source of our knowledge of external objects. Reflection is internal perception and it is the source of our knowledge of the internal states of mind. For instance, the idea I have of the color red ultimately came from some external sensory experience that I had of the color red that was stored in my memory. Similarly, the idea I have of fear came from an internal feeling of fear that I experienced in the past. Again when we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas, gold, and mountain, with which we were formerly acquainted. So, all the materials of thinking are derived either from our external or internal sentiment.

The second thing of Hume's empiricism is the **law of association**. For Hume our flow of ideas is connected together by three principles of association. They are-

### a) Resemblance

The idea of one object tends to call to mind ideas of resembling objects. For instance- the idea of 'honey' resembles the idea of sweet and liquid.

### b) Contiguity in time or place

In the law of contiguity in time and place our brains tend to see objects as continuous rather than discontinuous. For instance-when we think of thunder then we think lightning or rain.

### c) Cause and effect

Hume give more emphasizes on the law of cause and effect. Some philosophers hold that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect. But Hume denied their views and says that no necessary relation is found between cause and effect. For Hume, cause and effect is not reasoning a priori but entirely from experience. Our knowledge of cause and effect relations remains limited to experience. The mind steps beyond experience and engage in reasoning. But this type of reasoning is not supported by any argument or process of understanding through relations of ideas or through reasoning a priori. This type of reasoning is supported by habit or custom. Hume says that between cause and effect there is connection only through experience which is based on habit.

### Hume's Rejection of Self identity

As an empiricist philosopher, Hume rejected the reality of the self. For Hume, the 'empirical self' refers to a series of mental states--the connection of sensations, sentiments, and desires--that lack any underlying principle of unity. Hume defined the self as a succession of mental processes. It is a collection of thoughts, feelings, and intentions. These mental processes are not inherent in any substance. The laws of association bring together mental processes. Their combination requires no self-generated synthetic activity.

According to David Hume, what we called a 'mind' is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and supposed, thought falsely, to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity. Hume in his words says - "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception".<sup>(6)</sup>

Hume believes, the identity we give to man's thinking is purely fictional, as is that which we ascribe to vegetative and animal bodies. According to Hume, there is no permanent and abiding spiritual substance apart from a series of feelings and ideas; we can never perceive the so-called permanent self or spirit; whatever we try to perceive, we only see a series of feelings, sensations, or ideas; we see nothing beyond them. The so-called spirit or self is really a fiction of the imagination. Thus, according to Hume, the self is nothing more than a succession of mental processes.<sup>(7)</sup>

David Hume believes in Berkeley's doctrine 'esse-est-percipi', which states that the existence of any entity is determined by its perception. He extends this statement to the so-called mind, self, or spirit, which is considered a permanent spiritual essence. Hume denies the existence of any permanent spiritual element separate from concepts or mental processes. Hume opposed the opinions of philosophers who argued that 'we are every moment intimately cognizant of what we term our 'Self,' that we experience its existence and continuation in existence'.<sup>(8)</sup>

### Conclusion

Based on the preceding examination of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume's empiricism, it is clear that Locke correctly opposed Descartes' intrinsic idea, stating that we are born with an empty mind that gradually fills with experience via sense organs. Lock's theory of knowing acknowledges reason as superior. He believed in subjecting all thoughts and beliefs to the tribunal of reason and despised the replacement of emotional and sentimental expressions for rationally grounded judgments. In this sense, he was a rationalist. Again, by acknowledging the presence of matter, Locke becomes materialistic. We can consider him an empiricist only if he acknowledges that we learn from experience and rejects spiritual reality.

Thus, we cannot regard Locke to be a pure empiricist. Berkeley, by attacking Locke's tangible objects, developed his empiricism, and he was correct in this sense. Berkeley's empiricism asserts that something exists and can be perceived. However, by recognizing the existence of mind and God, Berkeley created a self-contradiction. We cannot perceive the existence of consciousness or God. So, like Locke, Berkeley cannot be regarded a pure empiricist. Hume's empiricism maintains that all knowledge is perception-based. For him, hatred, love, thinking, and feeling are all various types of perceptions. Hume discovered no soul or spirit, only thoughts inside himself. So he denied the existence of the soul or mind. Hume did not believe the existence of anything other than concepts. Finally, we might conclude that Hume is a more consistent empiricist than Locke or Berkeley.

### References

1. D. Odegard, (1965) '*Locke as an Empiricist*', Philosophy, Vol. 40.
2. Gibson, J., (1918) *Locke's Theory of Knowledge*.
3. Singh, Chungkhan Bheigyachandra, (2002) '*An Examination of the Empiricism of Locke, Berkeley and Hume*', Manipur University.
4. Gupta, Suman, (1995) '*Knowledge and Man - A Marxist Approach*', Man, Science and Social Progress (2).
5. Goswami, Sauravpran, (2008) '*Self Hume and the Tradition*', Bhabani Offset & Imaging system Pvt. Ltd.
6. Shakuntala, Ph.D, (2009) '*Enquiry into Nature of Self*', Chitrabon Printers 263, R.G. Baruah Road Guwahati.
7. Chaturvedi, Vibha, (1988) '*The Problem of Personal Identity*', Ajanta publication.
8. Hume, David, (2003) '*A Treaties of Human Nature*', book-I, part IV, section VI.