

is one-sided and dogmatic.  
Sh notes Set.

## 2. Empiricism as a theory of the origin of knowledge

Empiricism is a reaction against rationalism. According to empiricism, all our knowledge is derived from sense-experience. The empirical account of knowledge makes knowledge wholly a product of experience. Sense-experience is the only source of knowledge. Locke revolted against Cartesian rationalism, and propounded the



distinct. The ideas created by the mind by the conjunction of ideas are factitious. These are the ideas created by imagination. They are also not clear and distinct. But the innate ideas, which are neither adventitious nor factitious, are clear and distinct. These innate ideas are implanted in the mind by God at the time of our birth. They are self-evident. The idea of causality, infinity, eternity, perfect being or God and the like are innate ideas. They are clear and distinct. Clearness and distinctness of ideas are the test of their truth. The development of true knowledge consists in the logical deduction of other truths from these self-evident innate ideas. Descartes, thus, applies mathematical method to philosophy. Paulsen has characterised Descartes' philosophy as *mathematical rationalism*. Descartes started with universal doubt. To doubt is to think to think is to exist. *Cogito ergo sum*, 'I think, therefore, I exist'.

Descartes starts with the certainty of the self, which is known intuitively. He deduces the existence of God from the innate idea of God. The idea of God is the idea of an infinite Being. This cannot be produced by me, because I am a finite being. The cause must contain as much reality as is contained in the effect. So God or the Infinite Being is the cause of the innate idea of God. We also have a conviction that external things exist. The rationalists maintain that there are certain fundamental principles of reality which are innate and recognised as true by reason, by intuition. Intuition is immediate apprehension by reason.

Descartes held that some of our ideas are innate, and Spinoza agreed with him. Leibniz maintained that all of our ideas are innate. Every mind is a self-contained world in miniature. Ideas, according to Leibniz, are at first implicitly contained in the mind, and later on brought out and made explicit by mental activity. Leibniz maintains that truths of facts are derived from experience. They are particular and contingent. Necessary truths are derived from reason. They are universal and self-evident. Locke, the empiricist, said, "There is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the sense." Leibniz amends Locke's dictum thus: "There is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the sense—except the intellect itself."

**Criticism:** The pivot of rationalism is the doctrine of innate ideas. The doctrine of innate ideas has been vigorously attacked by all empiricists beginning with Locke. (If any of our ideas were really

innate, such ideas would be equally present in all minds and would be universally accepted. But there are no such ideas. Observation seems to show that children, idiots and uncivilised people are not conscious of any innate ideas or principles.)

(Moreover, if there were innate ideas they would be of the same nature in all minds. But the ideas of God, morality etc., are found to be different in different societies, and in different ages. They differ in different persons even at the same time in the same society.)

The general principles which are regarded as innate are not really the first principles of knowledge, but are derived from sense-experience. The first facts of knowledge are particular instances of experience from which the general laws are derived. A child knows that sweet is not sour long before he understands the principle of contradiction.

(If knowledge consists in deducing truths from the innate self-evident ideas, the theories established by the rationalists should be identical. But this is not the case.)

Hence the rationalistic contention that true knowledge originates in reason or is wholly *a priori* is untenable. The world of ours is not identical with the world of mathematics. Thus the mathematical method cannot be the sole method of philosophy. Philosophy deals with the concrete world of experience. So mere reason cannot be the source of the knowledge of the world. To say that true knowledge originates in reason alone, and experience is unreliable is sheer dogmatism. The knowledge of the world that is obtained by logical deduction from certain self-evident innate principles must agree with the concrete world of ours before this knowledge can be accepted as true. This verification is possible on the evidence of sense-experience. (The part which does not spring from experience is *a priori*.) But this *a priori* cannot exist independent of sense-experience. Hence rationalism as a theory of the origin of knowledge is one-sided and dogmatic.)

**Empiricism as a theory of the origin of knowledge**

(Empiricism is a reaction against rationalism. According to empiricism, all our knowledge is derived from sense-experience.) The empirical account of knowledge makes knowledge wholly a product of experience. (Sense-experience is the only source of knowledge.) Locke revolted against Cartesian rationalism, and propounded the



with which they strike upon the mind. Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. — By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning.

(Hume advocates thoroughgoing empiricism). Our knowledge does not owe anything to reason or intellect. (Discrete impressions and ideas are automatically combined with one another by the laws of association which are contiguity, similarity and causality. These laws of association are purely subjective. Discrete impressions and ideas do not require any *a priori* forms of reason to connect them with one another.)

(Hume rejects the ideas of material substance, soul or mind-substance and God, as we have no evidence for their existence in our impressions. Hume rejects all metaphysical entities. He admits only particular and contingent truths which are given by experience. We can never step beyond our sensations to reality outside them. Thus Hume is landed in sensationism and scepticism. There is no absolute certainty in knowledge. Probability is the guide in life.)

Criticism: Empiricism, as advocated by Locke and pushed