

# British Empiricism

Learning by Observing

# Another bridge between science and philosophy.

- By the end of the 17th century, science had fully developed.
- Philosophers began to think you could use this to explain how we think, how we understand, and how we should live.
- Made philosophers hopeful that they could find a new approach to religion, human rights, and human nature.

# The Brits

- Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626)
- Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
- John Locke (1632-1704)
- Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)
- David Hume (1711-1776)
- George Berkeley(1748-1832)

# John Locke

- All knowledge comes from observation and experience. There are no innate ideas.
- Understanding is made up of impressions, ideas, sensations and reflections, all responding to experience and interacting to produce everything you think.
- Even imaginary ideas (dragons, winning the lottery) are based on experience.

# Tabula Rasa (the blank slate)

- You start with nothing, experience and observation are your only knowledge.
- Revision on Aristotle:
  - A-the things we perceive are in our minds when we perceive them
  - Locke- Perceptions produce sensations, from which we form ideas. These ideas may be very different from the things themselves.

# Knowledge as an Accident

- Critics thought he didn't give enough respect to logic and reason. We know of substance, the self, and God without having to experience them. There's a divine plan.
- Popular and influential anyway. Limited knowledge meant that much of what you thought you knew had to go out the window.

# Down with Divine Right

- Divine Right of Kings: All true kings descended from Adam, and given dominion over the people by God.
- Locke lived through two revolutions. Clearly, we need a new plan.
- Locke proposed a government based on reason and natural rights.

# Natural Rights

- Life
- Liberty
- Property
  - Work gives you the right to the fruits of your labor.
    - This helps promote capitalism

# Locke's Social Compact

- WAY nicer than that of Hobbes.
- People come together into governments in order to have rights protected.
- This doesn't have to be formal. If you live in a society without complaint, then you're agreeing to live by the rules.

# The New Empiricists

- David Hume: We have to put up with not being sure about a lot of things, despite experience.
- George Berkeley: Material substance doesn't exist. All that exists are ideas and the souls that perceive them.

# George Berkeley

- Everything is an idea: Some we perceive, some we remember, and some we invent out of others. (Ideas, God, and souls)
- If a tree falls...? Yes: God is there to hear it.
  - Since ideas exist in the mind of God, Berkeley is an idealist (like Plato).
  - Since ideas are all we can experience, he's also an empiricist.

# David Hume

- Wanted to develop a “science of the mind” that was as reliable as the science of physics.
- Created a new way to think about the way impressions come together to form ideas. Like masses are drawn together by gravity, impressions are drawn together.
- This is known as *associationism*.

# Ideas Associated

- The mind associates things we experience together. (dogs and fleas)
- While Hume was an empiricist, this ain't exactly empirical. Resemblances and coincidence aren't the stuff of Newton.
- Hume settled this apparent problem with *Hume's Fork*.

# Hume's Fork

- The split between facts and reason.
- You can't tell for sure that facts exist, or use them to know anything certain about other facts.
- Facts don't even need to exist.
- Facts and relationship exist like the prongs of a fork, and at best, we use them to make guesses.

# Hume's complaints

- philosophers make assumptions about reason based on facts (and vice-versa) to come up with metaphysical ideas about reality. This includes God, the self, and causality. You can't prove these.
- We tend to think things have causes, but make huge assumptions about what they are.
  - natural instincts
  - Habits
  - Social Conventions
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# Inner Virtue

- Applied his scientific view not just to facts, but to moral judgements as well.
- Newton said light doesn't really *have* color, it just produces a color sensation in our minds when we see it. Hume argues that actions are neither good or bad, but produce moral judgements in us.
- Killing someone is neither good nor bad. It causes us to judge the killing as a bad thing.

# Human Nature

- The tendency to judge is part of human nature.
- It is in *us* rather than the actual event we respond to.
- “Beauty in things exists in the mind that contemplates them.”

# Human Nature

- Moral judgements about how things ought to be isn't logical. Facts and judgements have no necessary relationship.
- People like to *believe* that their actions and judgements are based on logical reasons.
- Hume says you're only fooling yourself. Actions and beliefs are based on desire, not reason.

# Is, Isn't, Ought

- *Naturalistic Fallacy*: Saying what *ought* to be true based on what *is* true.
  - places ethics and morals on uncertain footing.
  - Science can tell us much about what the world is, but nothing about how it should be.
  - Follow our instincts.
    - they tend to work
    - Its unreasonable to say they don't work just because you can't prove that they do.

# The Least You Need to Know

- Locke used empiricism to explain how human understanding works.
- All understanding is based on experience, according to Locke; there are no innate ideas.
- Berkeley believed that only ideas exist, perceived by human souls and by God.
- Hume said that, even though experience is our only source of knowledge, it can't tell us much about reality. As a result, most belief is based on habit, convention, and human nature.