

Rationalists



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Rationalists hold that knowledge is based on ideas or reason. On the other hand, empiricists posit that knowledge comes from one's senses or impressions. Therefore, it is a clear distinction between these two schools of thought. With respect to differences between ideas and impressions the distinction can be studied closely to come up with an understanding of the source of knowledge. The distinguishing factor that explains the perspective of the true source of knowledge is the concept of deity. This paper will evaluate Descartes' argument on the source of knowledge in comparison to the argument advanced by Hume. The two gentlemen fall in the two classes, that is rationalist and empiricists respectively. It is my considered opinion that Descartes' philosophical opinion on knowledge is more realistic and believable than Hume's philosophy on the same topic of knowledge. As will be clear enough in this paper Descartes' claim that knowledge is derived from man's understanding or reason outweighs the counterclaim from Hume that all our thoughts stem from previous or past sense impressions.

I fully concur with Descartes' assertions that 'I think therefore I am'. Man is a creature that bases its knowledge and actions on his understanding and reasoning capacity. Genetically man is wired to be rational in decision-making and acquiring knowledge. Undeniably, thinking occurs, and it is inextricably linked with man's existence. The crux of Descartes' philosophy on knowledge revolves around doubt and certainty. The more certain a fact is the less doubt exists about that fact. When there is no doubt about an issue then this forms knowledge as the absence of doubt renders it incontrovertibly true. In the same token by expressing doubt, man is using

his understanding and reasoning to assess a fact or an issue. Both ways it proves that knowledge is based on understanding and reasoning.

Hume's counter philosophy on knowledge that it is based on past sense impression relies on the contribution of experience and evidence. This is more so sensory experience role or contribution in building of knowledge hence it is known as empiricism. This is in direct contrast to Descartes innate reasoning and understanding. Man's knowledge is based on his observations and the impressions he makes during these observations. These impressions are closely linked to the sensations he feels during the observations. Hence his memory of these impressions and sensations form the basis of his ideas and thus his knowledge. Hume avers that knowledge is not wholly attributable to rational thought and understanding. He preferred knowledge as a consequence of habits that have been acquired because of sensations that have been experienced. On the issue of inductive reasoning, he believed that the past is not an absolute parameter or resemblance of the future.

Hume's philosophy in some way explains the reason man is a creature of habit and sometimes commits the same mistakes that brought him ruin. As a toddler starts its knowledge or learning curve though it mostly bases its actions on observations and copying other members of the society, some habits and knowledge are a result of experience of sensations or otherwise such as getting burnt by the fire is knowledge through sensation. The philosophy of Hume can also be extended to scientific experiments where knowledge is derived from observations and impressions which lead to a set of habits of doing things.

Hume's philosophical theory depends too much on assumption. Observation of the relationship between cause and effect of a past event is used to determine the future relationship between the two. It assumes that when two events happen together then in the future it follows that the result of the two occurrences will be the same as in the past. It is impossible for future events to be exactly or an absolute replica of past events. A variation of circumstances when the events are occurring is to be expected. A major flaw with Hume's philosophy is the assumption that if something is not observed to occur and sensation or impressions noted then it does not exist and hence it is not a fact or part of knowledge. This is obviously not the case as there are things that form part of our knowledge that we have not observed, or it is impossible to observe and form impressions. Thus, Descartes theory of understanding and reasoning better encapsulate knowledge. Its basis of using reasoning to understand if something is possible or rational explains the knowledge we have but not through observations, impressions, or habits.

An objection to Descartes philosophical theory on knowledge is the certainty of knowledge. As Hume proposes on his disagreement with Descartes theory, knowledge cannot be certain as it is impossible to know the relationship between a cause and its effects until an observation is made on the link between the two. A repeated observation is the only way to determine knowledge on an issue. This dependence on observation and impressions limits the extent of knowledge as abstract theories on topics such as metaphysics is not possible. Abstract theories on the possible and the impossible form part of our knowledge and are pivotal in extending

knowledge. The basic component of logic which I regard as the foundation of knowledge is innate reasoning and understanding.

From this analysis, I am compelled to support Descartes philosophical stand concerning knowledge as it seems more realistic compared to that of Hume. The argument put forward by Descartes that knowledge comes from one's understanding far outweighs the argument of Hume that our thoughts come from previous impressions.