

Hume and locke's skeptical empiricism



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Empiricism is the assumption that knowledge can only be derived from experience. It tries to oppose the early notions on knowledge that is founded on rationalism - the belief that knowledge can be achieved even by reason alone. In this principle, skepticism greatly helps the supporters of empiricism by complementing its basic premise that experience is the source of knowledge. In being a skeptic, one suspends his judgment on particular things unless its certainty is proven.

Among these skeptic empiricists who attempted to undertake the study on knowledge by appealing to experience are John Locke and David Hume. John Locke and David Hume Locke advocates the idea of Tabula Rasa or blank slate which means that one acquires knowledge only by gaining experience (Williams, 2001). He denies Descartes argument on innate ideas. He said that if there is really such a thing as innate ideas then even the babies or children and mentally disordered individuals could understand everything.

Yet that is not really the case. He furthers that one cannot deny his own existence. It is the very thing that is indubitable to the person himself who thinks and feels (Williams, 2001). Such knowledge of one's existence is known through reflection - one of the twofold characters of experience. Moreover, his idea of God is proven through the principle of causality. He said that the idea of God only exists in the logical order but not in the external reality.

On the other hand, Hume has the strongest hold to skepticism and empiricism. He does not allow the idea that even without experience one can gain knowledge (Williams, 2001). He maintains that unless something is

empirically verified it should not be labeled as knowledge. He denies the idea of causation and argued that it would not really explain the relationship and connection of ideas unless it is based from experience.

By having this argument, he is also against the concept of scientific laws which is governed by the idea of cause and effect (Williams, 2001).

Nonetheless, he accepts the fact that if one would really be so in tuned of being a complete skeptic he would go foolish and insane. Thus he separated the realm of true knowledge and practical knowledge which allows the idea that people would really have to think by means of causation (cause and effect) (Williams, 2001). He denies many ideas and principles that the former epistemologists formulated. He refutes Berkeley and Locke for saying that there is a material substance that holds the perceived qualities. He even repudiates from the idea of existence of oneself by saying that all things are mere sets of different perceptions.

Analysis and Conclusion In looking at the two philosophies established by Locke and Hume, it seems that though they are both advocating skepticism and empiricism their ways of putting the very idea of knowledge are really different. As mentioned above, Hume does not permit anything that is not derived from experience - meaning certainty of ideas is proven only by its being empirically verifiable (Williams, 2001). On the contrary, Locke is not that strict with the principle of skepticism. He even allows the idea of God and a substratum which hold the primary and secondary qualities. Hence, it can be inferred that the two differ with regards to their consistency in their epistemology. As an analysis, confusions and perplexities would arise in a

situation wherein one would suggest a particular idea and yet it is weakened by the existence of another contradicting arguments or ideas.

Such becomes so obvious in Locke's epistemology. Whereas, Hume became very consistent in his arguments about certainty and knowledge – that is unless something cannot be doubted anymore it is considered knowledge. It is important to clarify which idea has the sounder and more credible character with regards to the study of knowledge. In effect, there are weak and strong points that Locke and Hume offer in their epistemology.

Reference: Williams, M. (2001).

Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology . Oxford University Press.