

PHI 101 - Epistemology

Lecture 5



David Hume's Epistemology

The Logical Consequences of Empiricism

David Hume (1711-1776 CE)

The Consequences of Empiricism

I. Intellectual Background: the other British Empiricists

A. John Locke -

1. no innate ideas,
2. ideas derived from sensation,
3. distinction between primary and secondary qualities,
4. existence of matter

B. George Berkeley -

1. no distinction between primary and secondary qualities,
2. *esse est percipi* - *im*materialism

David Hume (1711-1776 CE)
The Consequences of Empiricism

II. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748):

A. Hume's Distinction between mental operations (i.e., cognitions):

1. **Impressions** (*sensations*) - lively, vivid, strong
 - a. sensory data
 - b. emotions
 - c. desires/will
2. **Thoughts** (*ideas*) - faint, mediated, dependent
 - a. compounds
 - b. abstractions
 - c. imagination

David Hume (1711-1776 CE)
The Consequences of Empiricism

3. Two Arguments for the distinction between Impressions and Thoughts:

- a. Thoughts/Ideas are always *compounded from simpler ideas* (which derive from impressions)
- b. *Necessity of impressions* for thoughts

B. The Spheres of Human Reason (*knowledge*)

1. **Relations of Ideas** - the internal, logical organization of ideas in the mind

- a. Evidence - **pure reason** (*logical relations*)
- b. demonstrable and certain
- c. *Examples*: Geometry, Arithmetic, Algebra, tautologies, analytic propositions

David Hume (1711-1776 CE)
The Consequences of Empiricism

2. **Matters of Fact** - everything that does not fall into the previous category (*the contrary of every factual proposition is logically possible*)
 - a. Evidence - **Cause and effect**
 - b. The **Problem of Induction** - *How* do we *know* causation?
 - i. *not a priori* - cause and effect are distinct observations with no *logical* connection.
 - ii. *not a posteriori* - past effects do not necessarily
 - iii. determine future effects (*the same phenomena may give rise to different consequences in the future*)
 - c. There exists *no idea of causation*, only the mental **habit** of expecting the **Constant Conjunction** of phenomena in the mind.

Summary

- Locke was correct to:
 - Reject innate ideas
 - derive all ideas from sensory impressions
- Berkeley was correct to:
 - Reject the distinction between primary and secondary qualities
 - Reject the necessity of matter
- There are two distinct operations of the mind (regarding knowledge):
 - **Matters of Reason** - the logical relationship between ideas
 - **Matters of Fact** - determined by *the way things are*
- Since *we cannot observe causation*, our idea of it is only the mind's habit of *expecting* future observations to correspond with the past (there is ***no knowledge of matters of fact***).