

Chapter 1: THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The branch of philosophy that studies the nature, source and limits of knowledge is known as epistemology. It is the theory of knowledge. The basic questions of epistemology can be put down in the following manner¹:

1. What is the nature of knowledge: this question asks what does it mean to say that someone knows. How do we distinguish between cases in which someone knows something and cases in which someone does not know something?
2. How do we acquire knowledge: here we try to find the sources and origin of our knowledge. How can we use our various faculties like reason, senses, or other resources to acquire knowledge? We try to find out how we gain the concepts we use in our thought.
3. What is the scope of knowledge or what can we know: this query tries to answer whether there are limits to what we can know. For example, whether there are things which are unknowable for us. Is it possible that we do not know as much as we think we do?

This Unit will introduce you to the second question of epistemology, that is, how we acquire knowledge.

ORIGIN AND SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

There are many ways that one might come to know something or acquire knowledge. We acquire our knowledge of empirical facts about physical world through perception, that is, by using our senses. Science is the best example of empirical knowledge with its collection of data. Our everyday knowledge also mostly comes from the senses, as we look, listen, smell, touch, and taste the various objects in our environments.

But knowledge is not simply made up of sensations. All knowledge requires some amount of reasoning. Data collected by scientists must be analyzed before knowledge is yielded, and we draw inferences based on what is given to us by our senses. In case of knowledge of abstract or non-empirical facts one has to rely exclusively upon reasoning.

Some philosophers regard memory also as a source of knowledge. In memory we come to know something which we knew in the past but which is no longer present to our senses now. Knowledge can also be acquired through testimony, that is, from the words of some trusted person or books that can be believed to be true.

THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

There are three main theories of origin of knowledge.

1. Rationalism: It is a theory that regards reason as the chief source of knowledge. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz are advocates of Rationalism.
2. Empiricism: It is a theory that regards experience as the source of knowledge. Locke and Hume are the chief exponents of this theory.
3. Criticism: It is also called the Critical theory of knowledge. It is advocated by Kant. He advocated the view that both experience and reason together yield knowledge.

Knowledge?

Knowledge can be defined as justified true belief.

This view of knowledge is suited to propositions, that is statements that affirm that something is true or false. We have a different concept of knowledge in mind when we speak of 'knowing how to ride a bike', or 'knowing the Parramatta area well'.

To count as knowledge, a proposition must be:

- True: it must actually be true, as opposed to simply believed. False propositions cannot count as knowledge.
- Believed: you must actually believe that the proposition is true. Without subjective conviction there is no knowledge.
- Justified: you must have the right kind of justification for your belief. It must be reasonable or rational for you to take the proposition as true: it isn't enough to be accidentally right, or to claim that something is true on the basis of some unreliable or non-evidence-based process.

All three of these conditions must be met.

I. RATIONALISM

Rationalism is the theory of knowledge according to which reason or intellect is the main source of knowledge. Rationalism rejects all knowledge derived from sense experience. Socrates and Plato are the earliest rationalist philosophers. According to them, true knowledge originates from reason. The Rationalism that was advocated by these two philosophers became articulate in the philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. However, the rationalist philosophers differ among themselves regarding how much importance should be given to experience in yielding knowledge. Some rationalists regard experience as wholly misleading while others attach some values to it. They say that the knowledge given by experience is confused knowledge. But in spite of their differences they all agree that reason alone can give us certain and perfect knowledge. Rationalism is also called a priori theory of knowledge as according to this theory, knowledge is prior or independent of experience.

- Rationalism existed as a movement during the 17th and 18th centuries. The main three names usually mentioned in connection with it are:
 - René Descartes
 - Baruch Spinoza
 - Godfried Willhelm Leibniz

Standpoints of Different Philosophers

RENE DESCARTES (1596-1650)

As it has been mentioned above, modern rationalism begins in the philosophy of Descartes. Descartes is considered as the father of modern western philosophy. Descartes was a mathematician

and according to him, the perfect form of knowledge can be gained only through mathematical demonstration. Such demonstration consists in starting with self-evident principles and deducing other truths from these self-evident principles.

Descartes divides ideas into three kinds: adventitious, factitious and innate. Adventitious ideas are imposed on the mind from without. They are not clear and distinct. Factitious ideas are created by the mind by the conjunction of ideas. These are created by imagination. They are also not clear and distinct. But innate ideas are clear and distinct. They are implanted in the mind by God at the time of birth.

According to Descartes, knowledge is given by clear vision of intellect or reason. Descartes calls it intuition. For him intuition is the undoubted, immediate apprehension of self-evident truth by reason. God imprints certain innate ideas in the mind at the time of 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 is the test of their truth. The development of true knowledge consists in the logical deduction of other truths from these principles. Thus Descartes applies mathematical method to philosophy. Therefore, Paulsen has characterized Descartes' philosophy as Mathematical Rationalism.

According to Descartes, certainty is the criterion of truth. Therefore, he rejects knowledge derived from sensation. He starts with universal doubt. He doubts all knowledge including mathematical demonstration. One can doubt everything, but in doubting one cannot doubt the doubting itself. To doubt is to think. To think is to exist. "Cogito ergo sum". "I think, therefore, I exist".

Once he establishes the existence of the self, Descartes moves to prove the existence of the external world. Each one of us has the innate ideas of which God is the most important. From this idea of God Descartes proves the existence of God. The idea of God is the idea of infinite Being. But I being finite cannot produce this idea of infinite Being in me. Another human being cannot produce it, as he too is finite. This idea also cannot be produced by addition of finite beings and things as the sum of finite is also finite. So, this idea of the infinite Being must be produced by that which itself is infinite, that is, by God himself. So God must exist. Now God is benevolent and truthful. As such he cannot deceive us. And we have conviction that external things exist. So, they must exist. For otherwise God will turn deceitful. Descartes thus proves the existence of the external world

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Theory of origin of knowledge is studied in the branch of philosophy known as Metaphysics. True/ False
2. Plato's philosophy cannot be claimed to be rational in nature. True/ False
3. A priori means 'knowledge is after experience'. True/ False
4. Innate ideas are implanted in the mind at the time of birth by God. True/ False
5. What are three kinds of ideas according to Descartes?
6. What is the criterion of truth according to Descartes?

BENEDICT SPINOZA (1632-1677)

Spinoza gave a developed form to the rationalism initiated by Descartes in modern western philosophy. Like Descartes, Spinoza had immense faith in reason. Like a true rationalist Spinoza holds that we can know truth through reason. Reason can give us knowledge of reality because reality itself is rational in nature. According to Spinoza, God himself creates the world rationally and intuition is the realization of true knowledge. It is intuition by which one knows the necessary relations between different phenomena.

According to Spinoza, the goal of philosophy is to get complete knowledge of things. He holds that this is possible only by clear and distinct thinking. Like Descartes he believed that if we start with self-evident principles and prove the steps involved in the argument then we will be able to reach certain and universal knowledge.

Spinoza uses geometrical method to philosophy to arrive at certain truths. His method is geometrical because he lays down certain definitions, axioms and postulates and from these principles he deduces propositions with proofs. Spinoza starts with the innate principle or idea of God or Substance. According to him, a substance is that which exists by itself and is conceived by itself. This substance is infinite and it has infinite attributes. Out of these attributes we can know only thought and extension which themselves are infinite. They are parallel and co-exist with each other. These attributes are modified into infinite intelligence and will and infinite extension and motion. They are the infinite modes of Substance. Infinite intellect and will are again modified into finite intellects and will or finite minds. Infinite extension and motion are modified into finite extension and motion or finite objects. Thus finite minds and finite objects are modification of the one and same Substance.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The method in philosophy used by Spinoza is:
 - a. mathematical b. geometrical
2. According to Spinoza, God has
 - a. two attributes b. three attributes c. infinite number of attributes

GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ (1646-1716)

Leibniz was a famous mathematician. He held that the world has logical and mathematical order. Laws that govern this world order are rational. Therefore, the world can only be comprehended by reason.

Leibniz's theory of knowledge is based on his metaphysical theory. Leibniz established that the world is composed of dynamic units or immaterial, unextended, simple units of force. These are called monads. According to him, monads are windowless and hence they cannot receive any knowledge from any external source. Leibniz holds that we cannot derive any invariable law concerning the functions of the universe on the basis of sense experience. Knowledge is simply brought out and manifested by experience. He holds that nothing can exist in the intellect that did not first exist in sensation- except, he adds, the intellect itself. The rational laws governing the world are to be found only in reason because the world has been created by God on the basis of reason.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Monads are extended. True/ False
2. According to Leibniz, the role of experience in knowledge is to manifest it. True/ False

ACTIVITY

State three characteristics of rationalism.

Name one important book written by each rationalist philosopher.

Key Concepts of Rationalism²:

Whilst rationalists shared an appreciation for science and empirical enquiry, they also emphasised certain key notions that were not shared by empiricism and became the subject of keen debate between the two camps.

1. *A Priori* Knowledge – “Some ideas are true independent of experience”. Whilst rationalists did not deny that the senses give us important information about the world, they did not consider them to be the sole means of knowledge. In fact, they quite often thought that the senses mislead us. For this reason, they argued that knowledge which is independent of experience must be more trustworthy because it has less to do with the senses. So, for instance, maths was considered “more pure” than Geography or physics. Such ideas they called *a priori*, which is a Latin phrase meaning “prior to” or “before” – experience, that is. Examples of such knowledge include:
 - a. Mathematical propositions ($2 + 2 = 4$).
 - b. Things which are true by definition (all bachelors are unmarried).
 - c. Self-evident truths (such as “I think therefore I am” or “God exists”).
2. Innate Ideas – “Some ideas are present from birth”. Amongst those ideas which do not require the proof or suggestion of sense experience are concepts which are present from birth. These ideas – which are called *innate* – can theoretically be discovered or ‘brought out’ (the original meaning of the word “education”) from within the mind of each individual. So, for example, one of Descartes’ arguments for the existence of God is that the idea is present in the mind from birth, left there almost as if an artist had signed his work or left a trademark.
3. Logical Necessity – “Some things cannot be conceived of as otherwise”. Another important idea for rationalists is that of necessity. Although we may use the word every day, the rationalists actually meant something very specific by it. So, for instance, we might say something like, “In order to pass your exams you have to study hard”. However, in reality, there are lots of ways you might pass your exams: you may have a natural talent for learning so that you don’t have to work hard (it just sticks); you may be lucky; you may bribe an examiner – or cheat. However, if we were to say something like, “In order to have 3 things you have to have more than 2 things,” then we are approaching more what the rationalists meant by the term. To distinguish between these two uses, philosophers generally call the first sort – passing your exams – “empirical necessity” (it could be otherwise); the latter sort (having 4 things) is called a logical necessity or logical truth. So, if we can prove that something is true because “it could not be otherwise”, then we have achieved *logical necessity* and an absolute degree of certainty. The goal for rationalists was

therefore to find those “logical necessities” which would help us find certainty in the world and answer those difficult moral, religious and metaphysical questions that interest us so much.

II. EMPIRICISM

Empiricism is a theory according to which experience is the source of true knowledge. It is a reaction against rationalism. In direct opposition to rationalism, empiricism holds that knowledge is derived from sense experience. The empiricists hold that the so-called a priori rational principles are actually derived from experience. As contrasted with rationalism, empiricism is called a posteriori theory of knowledge because according to this theory, knowledge is posterior or dependent on experience.

The Main Empiricists:

- The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) was not alone in considering that the mind is “white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas”. This idea can be traced back to Aristotle, the pupil of the Greek philosopher Plato, who said: “There is nothing in the mind except what was first in the senses.”
- Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1783). An Irish philosopher and clergyman, he is considered the founder of *Idealism*, a view which sees ideas as the only reality.
- David Hume (1711-1776). A Scottish philosopher and modern sceptic who was to influence the twentieth century movement of Logical Positivism (among others).

Though these three philosophers differed in the actual details of their philosophies, they were all pretty much in agreement in their opposition to the principles of Rationalism. We will now deal with these one by one.

Standpoints of Different Philosophers

JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704)

Locke revolted against Descartes’ rationalism and criticized his theory of innate ideas. He criticized the theory of innate ideas on the following grounds:

1. If there were innate ideas they should be equally present in all minds. But there are no such innate ideas which are equally present in all minds. For example, we do not find that savages, children or idiots are conscious of so called innate ideas like causality, infinity, eternity etc.
2. If there were innate ideas they should be the same in all minds. But the ideas of morality, God and the like are not the same in all minds. Different ideas are held in different societies. Sometimes the same society may hold different view at different times or ages.
3. Even if there were the same ideas in all minds, it would not make them innate on that account. Everybody has the same idea of fire. But all of us get the idea of fire from experience. It is not an innate idea. Universality of an idea does not prove the innateness of it.

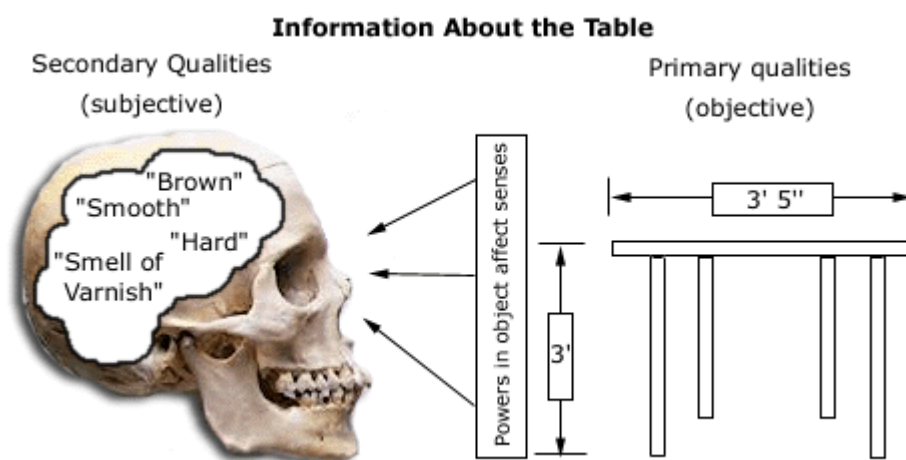
According to Locke, at the time of birth the mind is a tabula rasa or blank sheet. Mind is a clean slate in the beginning on which experience writes. According to him, ‘there is nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses’. Mind receives ideas from experience. This

experience is twofold: sensation and reflection. Sensation is the source of our knowledge of the sensory qualities of objects. Reflection is the source of our internal states of mind, such as, perception, belief, thought and reasoning etc. We get our first ideas from sensation and then we reflect upon it. Sensations are the materials on which the mind thinks.

According to Locke, the mind is passive in receiving ideas. But it is active in comparing and combining these ideas. The ideas that are passively received by the mind are the simple ideas. these simple ideas are combined by the active power of the mind into varieties to make complex ideas. Locke says that there are four simple ideas: Firstly, the ideas which enter our minds through one sense organ only. For example, colour, sound, taste, heat, cold solidity. Secondly, the ideas which enter the mind by more than one sense organ. For example, space, figure, rest, motion which enter through both sight and touch. Thirdly, the ideas that are received by reflection only. For example, perception, retention, discerning, comparing, compounding, naming and abstracting. Fourthly, the ideas that we receive both through sensation and reflection. For example, pleasure, pain, power, existence, unity, succession and duration.

According to Locke, the power that an object has to produce idea in our minds is a quality. But he makes an important distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities belong to the objects themselves. They cannot be separated from the object. As such he calls them objective. Examples of primary qualities are solidity, extension, motion, shape, size, impenetrability etc. Secondary qualities on the other hand are mere sensations or ideas in the mind of the knower. They are sensations produced in the mind by the primary qualities. They vary under different conditions. They are subjective.

Locke is an empiricist, but he believes in the existence of matter, mind or soul and God though they are not given in experience. He says that we have to assume the existence of matter as the substratum of primary qualities of objects though we do not perceive it. Similarly, the existence of mind is inferred from various mental operations. Its existence must be assumed as the substratum of power of perceiving, thinking, feeling and willing. Similarly, we infer the existence of God as the maker of the external world. Locke being an empiricist refuses to believe that knowledge can be derived from any other source than sense-experience, but he crosses the bounds of empiricism by accepting the existence of matter, mind and God.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Why empiricism is called a-posteriori theory of knowledge?
2. Locke maintains that at the time of birth we are born with innate ideas. True/ False
3. Reflection is prior to sensation. True/ False
4. Locke is a thorough going empiricist. True/ False
5. Mind is given in experience and therefore, according to Locke we should believe in its existence. True/ False

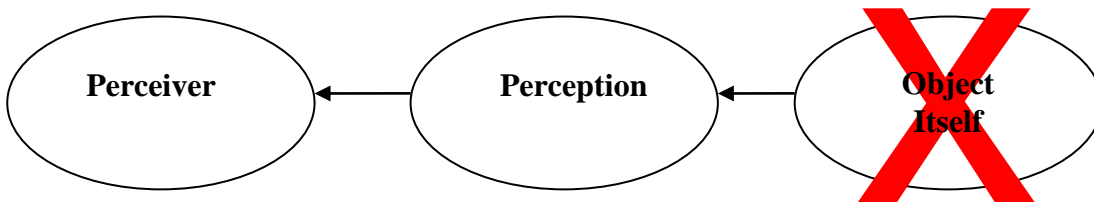
Berkeley, G

Berkeley's Criticism of Locke³

Berkeley considered Locke and other philosophers to have opened the door to atheism and scepticism by this view of knowledge. In an attempt to defend faith in God and knowledge from such attacks, Berkeley attempted to show that, rather than sensations of objects arising from powers in the object itself (as Locke thought), the experiences were actually in the perceiver (*us*).

What this means is that the object does not need to possess any *powers* with which it produces effects on our senses, because the object *does not exist apart from our perception of it*. This allows Berkeley to deny the sceptical argument that we do not see objects as they really are.

Berkeley's View of Reality



Arguments for Idealism

The main arguments for Idealism are based on the idea that our perceptions of objects are *in us*. In other words, when we say that an object is red its redness is part of our perception of it, not in the object or - as Locke argues - an effect of some power of redness in the object.

So what arguments does Berkeley use? First he attacks the idea that secondary qualities can exist in the object:

1. Sensation. When you put your hand in cold water, the temperature feels different depending on the temperature of your hand. If your hand is hot, the water will feel colder; if your hand is cold, the water will feel warmer. The water cannot be hot and cold at the same time. Therefore the perception of temperature must be in the perceiver.

2. Taste. If a taste is pleasurable, such as the sweetness of sugar, how can we say that pleasure exists in the object itself (the sugar)? This would be to ascribe feeling to an inanimate substance - which would be ridiculous. Therefore, since we cannot separate the taste of sweetness from our pleasure, both must exist in the perceiver and not in the object (the same obviously goes for displeasure).

Next he tries to show that some perceptions are relative, attacking both primary and secondary qualities:

3. Colour. If two people see the same object from different perspectives, one might think it was a different colour to the other. Both colours cannot exist in the object at the same time, so the colour must exist in the perceiver and not in the object.
4. Speed. If I am standing still and I see a train passing, the people on that train are moving at a certain speed, but to each other they appear to be sitting still. If speed exists in the object, how can the people on the train be both moving and at rest? The answer must be that the quality exists in the perceiver.

Finally, Berkeley tries to show that there is no difference between *real* and *apparent* qualities:

5. The Master Argument. Berkeley's main argument is meant to show that it is impossible for something to exist without being perceived (or, as he says, *esse est percipi*, Latin for "To be is to be perceived"). This means that if we cannot imagine what the perception of something must be like, we cannot really say that it exists. Berkeley uses this idea to attack the notion of substance or matter, for if all the qualities that we ascribe to it are either primary or secondary qualities, can we actually say that the substance *itself* exists?

DAVID HUME (1711-1776)

Hume developed Locke's empiricism to its logical conclusion. Hume is a true empiricist and he does not accept the existence of anything that is not given in experience. As such he denies the existence of mind, matter and God, because these are not given in experience. According to him, all knowledge comes from impressions and ideas. Impressions are lively perceptions and images are their faint copies. There are impressions of sensations or external perceptions and impressions of reflection or internal perception. They constitute the original materials of knowledge.

Impressions and ideas are discrete or disconnected from one another. Impressions and ideas are automatically combined with one another by the laws of association, such as law of contiguity, similarity and causality. A picture suggests the object it represents due to law of similarity. An inkpot suggests a pen due to law of contiguity in space. A lightning suggests a thunder due to law of contiguity in time. Fire suggests burning due to law of causation. Thus discrete impressions get connected with one another due to the laws of association. Thus our knowledge is composed of impressions and ideas combined by the laws of association. Our knowledge does not owe anything to reason or intellect. However, these laws are subjective in nature. As such the connection they provide to the impressions are also subjective. Hume rejects the idea of material substance, mind and God, as we do not have any empirical evidence of them. He also rejects all metaphysical entities, as we cannot have any ideas of these entities. Hume admits only particular and contingent truths as they alone are given in experience. It is not possible to go beyond sensation to know reality outside them. Hume's theory thus lands up in sensationism and scepticism.

Hume's Fork

Hume divided knowledge into what he termed “relations of ideas” and “matters of fact”. Relations of ideas are what we have been calling *analytic truths* or *a priori knowledge*. These are such things as “All bachelors are unmarried”, “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”, etc. These are certain in as much as we cannot conceive of them being otherwise. Matters of fact, however, *can* be falsified. I may say, “The sun will rise tomorrow” (which is extremely likely) – but is not impossible that it will not.

Ideas and Impressions

For Hume, ideas are simply weaker versions of sense impressions. So, for instance, an idea of the Sun is not as vivid as actually looking at the thing itself. Furthermore, nothing can exist in the mind without either first being experienced or formed through the combination of other experiences.

Causation

The Rationalists argued that there was such a thing as “necessary connection”. We looked at the idea of necessity earlier and saw how it was meant to show that certain things were the case because mathematical or logical principles meant that they could not be otherwise.

However, Hume argued that all our knowledge of cause and effect came through habit. So, for instance, if we see the Sun rise it is not because it corresponds to some eternal and unchangeable law, but because we have seen it rise countless times – what he terms, “constant conjunction”. Therefore, the more we have experienced things, the more certain they will be.

To point out that empiricists do not deny the existence of *a priori* knowledge, but they do deny the existence of innate ideas. The reason for this is that empiricists consider the mind to be a blank slate. That is, that when we are born our minds are clear of any ideas or impressions. However, as we have seen, *a priori* knowledge also includes such things as mathematical truths ($2 + 2 = 4$) and things which are true by definition (all bachelors are unmarried). So, we can deny the possibility of innate ideas without having to deny that some things are true independent – or prior to – experience.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Why does Hume deny the existence of matter, mind and God?
2. Experience can give us necessary truths. True/ False

ACTIVITY

What is scepticism?

Name at least one book each written by Locke and Hume.

➤ **The Key differences between the two Rationalism and Empiricism**

The Reflection of the Rationalism & Empiricism

Concerning the theory of knowledge, there are two prominent schools which go by the names of rationalism and empiricism: one holding the opinion that knowledge arises from within by the very

nature of the reason of the individual; the other holding the opposite view that knowledge arises by the contact of the senses with objects, i.e., objects cause the knowledge. These two camps have held their stand for centuries and it was difficult to reconcile the two views – viz., does knowledge arise from within man himself spontaneously, or is it an effect produced by an occurrence in the phenomenal world? This subject has been a headache to philosophers both in the West and in the East, which difficulty seems to have arisen due to the concept of reality which each one stuck to, and the consequence of having based all analyses and studies on this conclusive notion about the nature of the ultimate reality itself.

For the Empiricists, the mind is a *Tabula Rasa* (which is Latin for “blank slate”). When we learn or experience things, it is as if the mind is being written on. For the Rationalists, however, the mind is like a computer: the hardware already has some functions (innate ideas) before the software (experiences, specific knowledge) is loaded onto it.

III. CRITICISM

The doctrine of criticism is synthesis of rationalism and empiricism. As we see neither rationalism nor empiricism is a satisfactory theory of knowledge. By denying the role of experience rationalism has become one sided. Empiricism also is one sided as it denies the role of reason in knowledge.

However, rationalism rightly emphasizes the universality or necessity of knowledge. But it is wrong in accepting innate ideas. If we accept innate ideas then we also will have to accept that there is no progress in knowledge as knowledge consists simply in analytical deduction of innate principles. Therefore, empiricists are right in emphasizing that knowledge is acquired through experience. But the problem with empiricism is that it denies universal and necessary knowledge as experience gives us only contingent truths. However, true knowledge should be universal and at the same time it should be novel.

Immanuel Kant tries to reconcile rationalism and empiricism in criticism and give a satisfactory view of knowledge that is both universal and contains novelty.

Standpoints of Different Philosophers

IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

According to Kant, no knowledge is possible without sensation. But he also holds that knowledge is not wholly derived from experience, as it cannot give us universality. The part of knowledge that is not given by experience is a priori.

According to Kant, human mind receives sensation from without. *The sensations are produced by noumena or things-in-themselves. These are the materials of knowledge. These sensations are discrete or disconnected from one another. As such they cannot give us knowledge unless they are connected with one another by the mind with its synthetic activity. Thus the form of knowledge is supplied by the mind from within itself. According to Kant, both forms and matter of knowledge*

always go together. In the words of Kant: “Conception without perception is empty; perception without conception is blind”.

Kant divides the faculty of knowing into three subordinate faculties: *the faculty of sensibility, the faculty of understanding and the faculty of reasoning*. **Faculty of sensibility: When we perceive a thing, we perceive it in space and time.** Space and time are the forms of perception that sensibility applies to the disconnected sensations and converts them to intelligible objects. Space and time do not belong to the things-in-themselves. **They are the forms of perception.** They are the a priori ways of perceiving things.

Faculty of understanding: Categories of understanding are the universal necessary characteristics of experience which are found in all *mental experience*. *Understanding applies its categories, namely, substance, causality, unity, plurality etc., to the sensations that are already arranged in space and time by sensibility.* Like the forms of perception they also do not apply to things-in-themselves.

Faculty of reason: *Reason is the faculty by which the mind tries to employ its innate forms and categories where there is no sensuous experience. Sensations arranged in space and time by sensibility and subsumed under the categories of understanding are co-ordinated by reason. Reason co-ordinates sensibility and understanding according to its ideas of the world, soul and God. These three ideas of reason are regulative ideas. Kant proposes that there are three regulative ideas that lead us beyond sense experience and which are necessary in our attempt to unify the plurality of our experiences. These ideas are: the self, cosmos, and God (the world, soul and God). These ideas are transcendental because they do not correspond to any object of our direct experience. These are the ideas by which reason organizes the facts of experience into a system. The discrete sensations supplied by experience are reduced to a unity by the synthetic activity of the mind.*

According to Kant, sensations are the materials of knowledge, while the faculties of knowing-forms of sensibility, categories of understanding and Ideas of reason are supplied by the mind itself. Thus our knowledge is confined to phenomena or appearances only. Noumena or the things-in-themselves remain unknown and unknowable. Human mind cannot know them.

All thinkers before Kant regarded that our perceptions correspond to the characteristics in the external world. Kant, on the other hand, maintains that objects in order to be known must conform to the constitution of our minds. Thus according to Kant, in knowledge, instead of mind conforming to an independent nature, it is nature that conforms to mind. This is known as the Copernican Revolution in philosophy.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Forms of knowledge are a priori. True/False
2. Mind can know only phenomena. True/ False
3. Why according to Kant we cannot know noumena?

ACTIVITY

Why Kant’s philosophy is called critical?
Name the three ‘critiques’ of Kant.

LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have studied the sources or the origin of knowledge as advocated by different philosophers. The philosophers are considered rationalists or empiricists on their choice of whether they regard experience or reason as the main source of knowledge. You have studied that according to the empiricist, mind is a clean state at birth while according to the rationalist, mind is creative and not passive. Criticism holds that knowledge begins with experience but it stimulates the mind to become creative. In knowledge experience is moulded and transformed by a priori elements contributed by the mind.

Experience cannot give us universal and necessary knowledge. Particular truths are meaningless unless they are interpreted by reason. As such empiricism is not a satisfactory theory of knowledge. Rationalism also is not satisfactory as it ignores experience altogether. Without experience reason has nothing to do with knowledge. Thus, rationalism is also not satisfactory. Critical theory reconciles both experience and reason together constitute knowledge. It points out that without sense materials reason alone cannot constitute knowledge and without reason sense experience is meaningless.

Thus we find that, empiricism and rationalism emphasize some aspects of knowledge and neglect the other. But Kant's theory by taking into consideration both the factors for knowledge stays the most satisfactory theory of knowledge.

Questions

1. Discuss Empiricism as a theory of knowledge.
2. Discuss Rationalism as a theory of knowledge.
3. Discuss Criticism as a theory of knowledge.
4. Give a comparison of Empiricism and Rationalism.
5. Write short notes on:
 - a. Innate ideas
 - b. Descartes' mathematical method in philosophy
 - c. Locke's refutation of Innate ideas
 - d. Primary and secondary qualities
 - e. Faculties of Knowing

Chapter2: Moral Philosophy

Deontology

Deontologists believe that morality is a matter of duty (*deon* (Greek) means 'one must'). We have moral duties to do things which it is right to do and moral duties not to do things which it is wrong to do. Whether something is right or wrong doesn't depend on its consequences. Rather, it is something about any particular action that makes it right or wrong in itself. In order to make moral decisions, we need to consider our duties. The syllabus connects deontology to 'rights, duties and principles'. However, our discussion will focus only on duties. 'Principles' are not connected to deontology alone; for example, act utilitarianism has the principle of utility, while rule utilitarianism can claim that the rules we should follow are all principles. A deontological principle simply states that x (some act) is our duty. We can also discuss rights in terms of duties. If someone has a right, say the right to life, then the people have duties, the duty to respect that right. However, people also have duties that go beyond rights. For example, many deontologists argue that we have a duty of charity; but this does not mean that the poor have the right to receive charity. Rights entail duties, but not all duties entail rights

DUTIES

Most deontological theories recognize two classes of duties. First, there are general duties we have towards anyone. These are mostly prohibitions, e.g. do not lie, do not murder. But some may be positive, e.g. help people in need. Second, there are duties we have because of our particular personal or social relationships. If you have made a promise, you have a duty to keep it. If you are a parent, you have a duty to provide for your children. And so on. We each have duties regarding our own actions. I have a duty to keep my promises, but I don't have a duty to make sure promises are kept. Deontology claims that we should each be most concerned with complying with our duties, not attempting to bring about the most good. In fact, all deontologists agree that there are times when we should not maximize the good, because doing so would be to violate a duty. Most deontologists also argue that we do not have a duty to maximize the good, only a duty to do something for people in need. As this illustrates, many deontologists think our duties are quite limited. While there are a number of things we may not do, we are otherwise free to act as we please.

Discovering our duties

If we need to consider our duties when making moral decisions, how do we find out what our duties are? Deontologists tend to appeal to moral reasoning and insight. For example, W. D. Ross argued that it was self-evident that certain types of actions, which he named *prima facie* duties, were right (*The Right and the Good*). He listed seven classes of *prima facie* duties: duties of fidelity (such as keeping a promise), reparation (when we have done something wrong), gratitude, justice, beneficence (helping others), self-improvement, and non-maleficence (not harming others). Aquinas started from insight into what is good and the nature of human flourishing. We have direct rational insight into what is good; and this informs our idea of what human nature is. It lays down that what is good is truly desirable, and what is bad is truly undesirable. Aquinas then argued that certain things, such as life, marriage, living in friendship and harmony with others, and practical reasonableness, are truly desirable, and that this is self-evident. By contrast, contractarians believe that morality derives, in some way, from what people would agree to if making a contract with each about how to behave. Different theorists give different accounts of what the conditions for making the contract should be, and of how morality derives from this contract. One version, defended by Thomas Scanlon, argues that moral principles are principles of behaviour which no one can reasonably reject (*What We Owe to Each Other*). If an act is permitted by a principle that could be reasonably rejected, then it is wrong. How do we know what is 'reasonable'? Scanlon develops an intuitionist theory of moral reasoning.

Conflicts of duties

A duty is absolute if it permits no exceptions. This causes problems in cases where it seems that two absolute duties conflict with each other: anything we can do will wrong. Should I break a promise or tell a lie? Should I betray a friend to save a life? One response is to say that a real conflict of duties can never occur. If there appears to be a conflict, we have misunderstood what at least one duty requires of us. If duties are absolute, we must formulate our duties very, very carefully to avoid them conflicting.

Another response is that (most) duties are not absolute. For instance, there is a duty not to lie, but it may be permissible to lie in order to save someone's life. Duties can 'give way' – Ross argues that our usual duties are not absolute, but 'prima facie duties' – they are duties 'at first sight'. In cases of conflict, one will give way and no longer be a duty in that situation. But how do we know how to resolve an apparent conflict of duties? Ross argued that there are no hard and fast rules about this; we have to use our judgment in the situation in which we find ourselves. But if we have no criteria for making these decisions, won't disagreements about what to do be irresolvable? Deontologists may reply that this lack of guidance is a strength of the theory. Choices in life are difficult and unclear, a moral theory should not pretend to provide all the answers. A moral life calls for insight and judgment, not knowledge of some philosophical theory.

We may object that this is an unsatisfactory answer for a deontologist to give, because one of the two acts is wrong in itself while the other is not. If one act was good, but the other act better, the issue of not being able to tell which was which might not be so pressing.

RATIONALITY AND CONSEQUENCES

Utilitarians object that deontology is irrational. If it is my duty not to murder, for instance, this must be because there is something bad or wrong about murder. But then if murder is bad, surely we should try to ensure that there are as few murders as possible. If I know that unless I kill someone deliberately, many people will die, how can I justify not killing them by appealing to duty? Surely it is only my duty not to kill because death is bad. So I should prevent more deaths. To insist that I don't do anything 'wrong' seems a perverse obsession with 'keeping my hands clean'. Utilitarianism understands all practical reasoning – reasoning about what to do – as means-end reasoning: it is rational to do whatever brings about a good end. The utilitarian thinks it is just obvious that if something is good, more of it is better, and we ought to do what is better. The deontologist disagrees and offers an alternative theory of practical reasoning. Intuitionist versions are discussed in the handout 'Moral truth' and another account is discussed in the handout on 'Kant's ethics'.

ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS

Deontology says that certain types of action are right or wrong. How do we distinguish types of action? For example, a person may kill someone else. A conventional description of the action is 'a killing'. But not all 'killings' are the same type of action, morally speaking. If the person intended to kill someone, i.e. that is what they wanted to bring about, that is very different than if the killing was accidental or if the person was only intending to defend themselves against an attack.

Actions are the result of choices, and so should be understood in terms of choices. Choices are made for reasons, and with a purpose in mind. These considerations determine what the action performed actually is. So deontology argues that we do not know what type of action an action is unless we know the intention. We should judge whether an action is right or wrong by the agent's intention. This does not make moral judgment subjective. What matters is the real reason the person made the choice to act as they did. It may be difficult to know what the real reason is, but that is a different point.

Kant's ethics

Immanuel Kant argued that moral principles could be derived from practical reason alone.

We only need to understand what it is to make a decision in order to discover what decisions we should make. To understand his claim, we need to put some premises in place.

First, Kant believed that, whenever we make a decision, we act on a maxim. Maxims are Kant's version of intentions. They are our personal principles that guide our decisions, e.g. 'to have as much fun as possible', 'to marry only someone I truly love'. All our decisions have some maxim or other behind them.

Second, morality is a set of 'laws' – rules, principles – that are the same for everyone and that apply to everyone. If this is true, it must be possible that everyone could act morally (even if it is very unlikely that they will).

From this, Kant devises a test for working out whether acting on a particular maxim is right or wrong. The test, the 'Categorical Imperative', is 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*). (An 'imperative' is just a command. The moral command is categorical because we can't take it or leave it, as we choose.) If I act on a maxim that it is impossible for everyone to act on, I must be acting immorally – because it is always possible for everyone to act morally. For example, suppose you want a gift to take to a party, but you can't afford it, so you steal it from the shop. Your maxim is something like: 'To steal something I want if I can't afford it'. This can only be the right thing to do if everyone could do it.

THE TWO TESTS

There are two different ways in which we could fail to be able to will our maxim to become universal.

The first, which Kant calls a 'contradiction in conception', is if the situation in which everyone acted on that maxim is somehow self-contradictory. If we could all just help ourselves to whatever we wanted, the idea of 'owning' things would disappear. But, by definition, you can't steal something unless it belongs to someone else. Stealing presupposes that people own things. But people can only own things if they don't all go around helping themselves whenever they want. So it is logically impossible for everyone to steal things. And so stealing (at least just because one wants something) is wrong.

The second way our maxim can fail is a 'contradiction in will'. Kant's example relates to helping others. It is logically possible to universalize the maxim 'not to help others in need'. The world would not be a pleasant place, but this is not what Kant focuses on. Kant does not claim that an action is wrong because we wouldn't like the consequences if everyone did it. His test is whether we could will for our personal maxim to be a universal law, not whether we'd like the results.

Kant argues that we cannot will that no one ever help anyone else. First, a will, by definition, wills its ends (goals). Second, to truly will the ends, one must will the necessary means. And so, third, we cannot will a situation in which it would be impossible for us to achieve our ends. It is possible that the only available means to our ends, in some situations, involves the help of others. We cannot therefore will that this possibility is denied to us. So we cannot will a situation in which no one ever helps anyone else. To do so is to cease to will the necessary means to one's ends, which is effectively to cease to will any ends at all. This contradicts the very act of willing.

THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE IS BASED ON REASON

Kant argued that it is not just morally wrong to disobey the Categorical Imperative, it is also irrational. It must be possible for all rational animals to choose to behave rationally. So deciding to behave in a way that it is impossible for everyone to follow is irrational. As the tests show, disobeying the Categorical Imperative involves a self-contradiction. Through the Categorical Imperative, reason both determines what our duties are and gives us the means to discover them. By why should morality be about behaving rationally? Morality is supposed to guide our actions, which it can only do if it motivates us. Kant argues that there are, ultimately, only two sources of motivation: happiness and reason. But happiness can't be the basis of morality, for two reasons.

First, what makes people happy differs from person to person. If morality was about happiness, then different people would be motivated to act in different ways. But morality is the same for everyone. A utilitarian would object that morality can be the same for everyone and be about happiness if morality is about creating the greatest happiness. Kant would respond that everyone else's happiness does not necessarily motivate me, only my own happiness does. And, in fact, utilitarians usually appeal to reason here themselves, saying that caring about other people's happiness is rational or reasonable.

Second, happiness is not always morally good. If someone is made happy by hurting others, this is no reason to say that it is morally good to hurt others. In fact, their happiness is morally bad. So we evaluate happiness by morality. That means the standard of morality must be independent of happiness. Since morality can't be based on happiness, then it must be based on reason. This is confirmed by the characteristics that morality and rationality share. Morality is universal, the same for everyone; so is reason, says Kant. Morality and rationality are categorical; the demands to be rational and moral don't stop applying to you even if you don't care about them. Neither morality nor rationality depend on what we want. Finally, we intuitively think that morality applies to all and only rational beings, not just human beings. In Douglas Adams' *The Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy*, Arthur Dent protests to the Vogons, aliens who are going to destroy the Earth, that what they are doing is immoral. Morality

doesn't apply to beings that can't make rational choices, such as dogs and cats (pets misbehave, they don't act morally wrongly).

OBJECTIONS TO THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

In addition to the objections posed to deontology generally, Kant's theory faces the objection that the Categorical Imperative is a flawed test. First, couldn't any action be justified, as long as we phrase the maxim cleverly? In stealing the gift, I could claim that my maxim is 'To steal gifts from large shops and when there are seven letters in my name (Michael)'. Universalizing this maxim, only people with seven letters in their name would steal only gifts and only from large shops. The case would apply so rarely that there would be no general breakdown in the concept of private property. So it would be perfectly possible for this law to apply to everyone. Kant's response is that his theory is concerned with my actual maxim, not some made-up one. It is not actually part of my choice that my name has seven letters, or perhaps even that it is a gift I steal. If I am honest with myself, I have to admit that it is a question of my taking what I want when I can't afford it. For Kant's test to work, we must be honest with ourselves about what our maxims are.

However, Kant's test delivers some strange results. Say I am a hard-working shopassistant, who hates the work. One happy Saturday I win the lottery, and I vow 'never to sell anything to anyone again, but only ever to buy'. This is perhaps eccentric, but it doesn't seem morally wrong. But it cannot be universalized. If no one ever sold things, how could anyone buy them? It is logically impossible, which makes it wrong according to Kant's test. So perhaps it is not always wrong to do things which requires other people do something different. Kant argues that it is not rational to act in a way that not everyone could act in. This is not means-end reasoning, but picks up on other formal features of reason (universal, categorical, independent of desires). However, some philosophers argue that Kant has wrongly taken the features of theoretical reason – reasoning about facts, science, logic and so on – as features of practical reason. Practical reason does not require us to follow a rule that everyone can follow. Instead, being irrational involves taking the wrong means to one's ends.

RESPECTING HUMANITY

Kant gave an alternative formulation of the Categorical Imperative, known as the Formula of Humanity: 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end'. Kant does not say we cannot use people as a means, but that we can't use them simply as a means. We rely on other people in many ways as means to achieve our own ends, e.g. people serving me in a shop are a means to getting what I want to buy. What is important, says Kant, is that I also respect their humanity as an end in itself. By 'humanity', Kant means our practical rationality, our ability to rationally determine which ends to adopt and pursue. To treat someone's humanity simply as a means, and not also as an end, is to treat the person in a way that undermines their power of making a rational choice themselves. Coercing someone, lying to them, stealing from them, all involve not allowing them to make an informed choice.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION IN MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

At the heart of deontology is the idea of the 'good will', a will that intends and chooses what is right because it is right – one's duty – to do so. To do what is morally right because it is morally right is to act from the motive of duty. Much of the time we do things just because we want to. However, if we do not care whether what we do is right or wrong, we are motivated only by what we want. But if we wouldn't do what we want to do if it were wrong, then we are, at least in part, motivated by duty. The clearest case of being motivated by duty is when we do something we don't want to do, because we feel we ought to. Kant compares two shopkeepers, who both give the correct change to their customers. The first is honest because he is scared of being caught if he tries to cheat his customers.

The second is honest because he believes it is morally right to be honest. The first shopkeeper doesn't act from duty; the second shopkeeper does. Suppose the first shopkeeper gives correct change because

he wants people to like him, or even because he likes his customers. He still isn't acting from duty, because the fact that it is his duty to be honest is not his reason for being honest.

Objection

Many philosophers object to the idea that we should be so concerned with 'doing the right thing'. Surely, if I do something nice for you, like visit you in hospital, because I like you, that is also a morally good action. Much of the time we do good things because we feel warmly towards the people we benefit. Kant seems to say we have to want to benefit people because it is our duty to do so, not because we like them. Some philosophers have thought putting duty above feelings in our motives is somehow inhuman. Kant can respond that he is not trying to stop us from being motivated by our feelings. His point is that, when we are choosing what to do, how we feel should not be as important as what it is morally right to do. But when you do something for a friend, should you think 'I'll do this because he is my friend; and it is morally right to do so'? Perhaps Kant can reply that you only need to be willing to refuse to help your friend if that involved doing something morally wrong. The objection does not apply to other deontological theories. Aquinas, for instance, argues that practical reasoning starts with what is good, and that the right response to what is good is to choose in accordance with it. To intend to do something bad, such as lie or kill, (even in order to bring about some good consequence) is not to order one's will in accordance with what is good. A good will aligns itself with what is good, and that includes friendship. If we do something out of friendship, this is morally good. We do not need an additional motive of duty to make the action morally good.