

EMPIRICISM

Empiricism is an epistemological theory which states that "sense-experience" is the only valid source of valid knowledge. Empiricism is a reaction against rationalism. John Locke wrote against "Cartesian Rationalism" and propounds the doctrine of empiricism, in his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding." He criticizes Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas, and espounds the doctrine of Empiricism.

Chief Characteristics of Empiricism:

- 1) Mind at birth is a clean slate or tabula - rasa. - All the characters of knowledge are acquired through sense-experience.
- 2) Sensation and reflection, the outer and the inner sense experience, are the only two windows through which the dark chamber of mind comes to be filled with light.
- 3) The elements of experience, for example, the sensations of light and heat, colour and smell etc. are all simple and unrelated.
- 4) Knowledge can never be exhausted by particular supplied by senses. It does not deal with universals. But, empiricism holds that universal propositions can satisfactorily be explained by particulars. In this sense the contribution of Hume, and Mill is important.
- 5) According to empiricist the ideal of knowledge is the factual sciences not the conceptual sciences which is accepted by rationalist.
- 6) Empiricist never claim ~~the~~ about necessary and universal ~~idea~~ idea concerning world. The conclusion given by ~~empiricist~~ experience is ~~not~~ possible ~~but~~ necessary.
- 7) All empiricist agree on source of experience as the valid knowledge, but they differ in relation to the nature of experience. Some accept external as well as internal experience. external experience we get from our five sense organs and internal experience we get from our mental sense. On the other hand, some empiricist accept external sensation as the source of valid knowledge. these views are called as "Sensationalism."

Hume rightly concluded on the basis of empirical postulates that, only mathematics and science are possible and philosophy is not possible. Thus, it can be said that Hume's scepticism was the necessary conclusion of empiricism.

Criticism

Critics have raised many objections against empiricism.

① According to empiricists mind passively receives sensations, while, critics, says that it is proved by modern psychological researchers, that, mind selects in reception of sensations. A man cannot equally attend to all the sensations and therefore he does not experience those sensations to which he does not pay attention. Thus mind is not passive at the time of obtaining knowledge.

2) ~~mind~~ According to empiricists mind makes ideas on the basis of sensations received by it. Then how can it remain passive? Does it not become active in the process of making ideas?

3) According to critics John Locke and David Hume have tried to distinguish between knowledge and ideas they could not explain the distinction properly because in fact both ideas and knowledge are two aspects of same process.

4) According to empiricist the ideas are different from the objects. But they do not point out as to what is the nature of this object. Is it different from an idea? And if so then how can we have knowledge of the object through the idea? The explanation advanced by empiricists in this connection is not satisfactory.

5) According to the Empiricists, the knowledge based on experience is relative, indefinite and particular. It is clear that such a knowledge cannot solve philosophical problems. We cannot hope to get universal knowledge on the basis of empiricism.

The logical conclusion of empiricism in philosophy is scepticism. Thus, we can say that empiricism culminates into 'scepticism'.

6) According to the sensation reach the mind one by one. As against this the modern Gestalt psychologist believe that perception is not a putting together of different bits of sensation but is an whole.

7) According to empiricists our sense organs and the medium through which the qualities of the external objects reach the mind. According to modern psychology, perception also depends on past experience mental set, attention and interest besides sensations. Critics say that empiricism lacks proper explanation of perceptions.