

A portrait of David Hume, an 18th-century Scottish philosopher, wearing a red coat with gold embroidery and a white cravat. The background is dark.

David Hume: An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding

By Cara Quigley and Louisa Savage

The Empiricists

- Locke, Berkeley, and Hume all argued that we cannot truly know the external world
 - We are only aware of our ideas
 - External world only inferred
- Locke claimed knowledge of external world through his Resemblance Hypothesis and Principle of Abstraction

Against Locke

- Berkeley and Hume disagreed with Locke's theories
- Berkeley believed in Idealism
 - Idealism: no material world
 - Everything depends on God's will
- Hume rejects Idealism, embraces skepticism as a philosophy
 - Embraces the lack of ability to know



Skepticism

- Approach Hume takes towards pursuing knowledge/answering questions
 - *“We must submit to this [method of inquiring seriously into the nature of human understanding] in order to live at ease ever after and must cultivate true metaphysics with some care in order to destroy the false and adulterate”*
 - Proposes accurate and just reasoning as a way to go about penetrating abstruse philosophy

Of the Different Species of Philosophy

- There are 2 types:
 - Easy and Obvious Philosophy
 - Aimed solely at appealing to man's emotions
 - Uses beautiful images and figurative language to direct man towards virtue
 - Passive, shallow
 - Accurate and Abstruse Philosophy
 - Speculative approach to the world
 - Aggressively pursue knowledge of the world until they arrive at original principles that are the limit of human understanding



- Regarding the Easy Philosophy:

*“But a philosopher whose only purpose is to represent the common sense of mankind in more beautiful and engaging colors, if by accident he falls into error, goes no further, but, renewing his appeal to **common sense** and the natural sentiments of the mind, returns into the right path...”*

- *Enquiry, AW, p. 534b*

- Regarding the Abstruse Philosophy:

*“The other species... regard human nature as a subject of **speculation** and, with a narrow scrutiny, examine it in order to find those principles which regulate our understanding, excite our sentiments, and make us approve or blame any particular object, action, or behavior.”*

- *Enquiry, AW, p. 534a*

- Was he describing himself/his method of philosophy?



Hume's Objective:

- To organize and distinguish the different distinct components of the mind
 - Mind obviously has several distinct “powers and faculties” (AW, p. 537b)
 - Will vs. understanding
 - Imagination vs. passions
 - Other more philosophical distinctions
 - Though more difficult to immediately comprehend
- The organization of the mind is *just as important* as the organization of external bodies, like the planets

Objective, cont.

- *“If it lies within the compass of human understanding, [knowledge] may at last be happily achieved; if not, it may, however, be rejected with some confidence and security”*
 - *Enquiry, I, 538a*
- *“We have, in the following inquiry, attempted to throw some light upon subjects from which uncertainty has deterred the wise up to now, and obscurity the ignorant.”*
 - *Enquiry, I, 538b*



Impressions vs. Ideas

- Impressions: immediate perceptions of the mind (Pain of excessive heat, pleasure of moderate warmth)
 - “all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul”
 - *T*, I, 1, 1 p. 7
- Ideas: memory/reflection of the initial sensation
 - “The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation” (*Enquiry*, II, 539a)



The Gold Mountain

- *“All this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience.” (Enquiry, II, 539b)*
- A gold mountain comes from the combination of the ideas of a mountain and the color gold
- Unicorn= horse + horn
 - *How far down can one keep reducing an idea?*



Logical Positivism

~~*I think, therefore I am.*~~

~~*What is Reality?*~~

~~*Is truth relative?*~~

~~*What is the meaning of life?*~~

~~*Is there a God?*~~

- Verification vs. Falsification
- Induction vs. Deduction
- Can truth be found?
- Knowledge as a tool, rather than truth-preserving



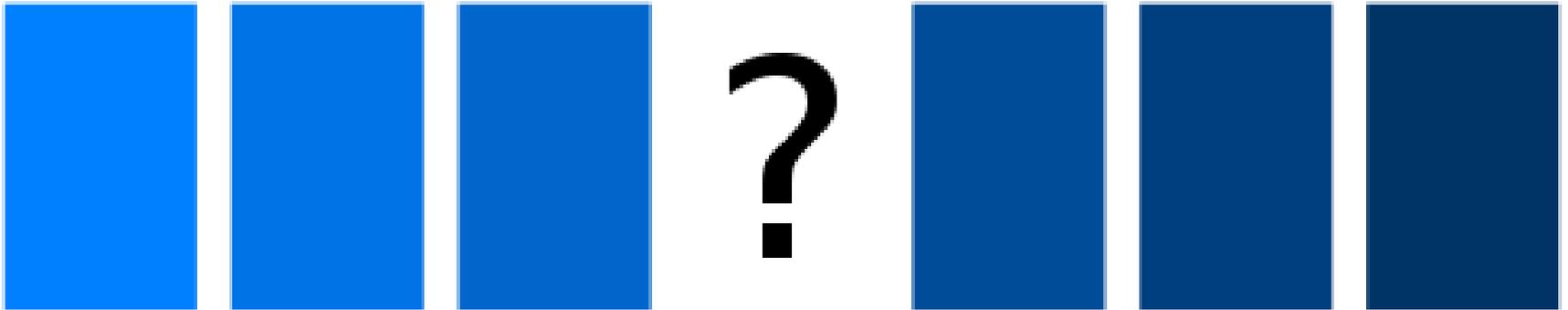
Simple Ideas

- To every simple ideas corresponds a simple impression that resembles it
- Which comes first?
 - *Simple ideas or simple impressions?*
 - Ex. Pineapple.

ideas/impressions dependence:

- Always reduce thoughts to their simple ideas as derived from a sentiment/feeling
 - All ideas are derived from a related impression
- If man is unable to experience sensation (due to defect of an organ), he cannot develop the corresponding ideas of the initial impression
 - Ex. Blind Man or Deaf Man
 - One exception: Missing Shade of Blue example

Missing Shade of Blue



Missing Note in Scale



Association of Ideas

- Addresses connection between thoughts/ideas in the mind with their appearance in memory/imagination
 - “even in our wildest and most wandering reveries...we shall find... that the imagination did not run altogether at adventures, but that there was still a connection upheld among the different ideas which succeeded each other”
- A succession of thought exists within the mind
 - References back to the idea of the planets and the organization that Hume was planning on outlining

Principles of Association

- Resemblance
 - A picture that calls to mind the original
- Contiguity
 - Mentioning of one apartment leads to the inquiry of other apartments
- Cause or effect
 - Think of a wound and recall the pain that followed



Quick look to End of *Enquiry*:

- “When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance—let us ask: *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. **Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.**” (AW, *Enquiry*, 600b)

Matters of Fact/Relations of Ideas

- Hume divides human reasoning into matters of fact and relations of ideas
 - Matter of fact: empirical claims
 - A posteriori
 - “the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides”
 - Relations of Ideas: mathematics and logic
 - A priori, necessary, deductive