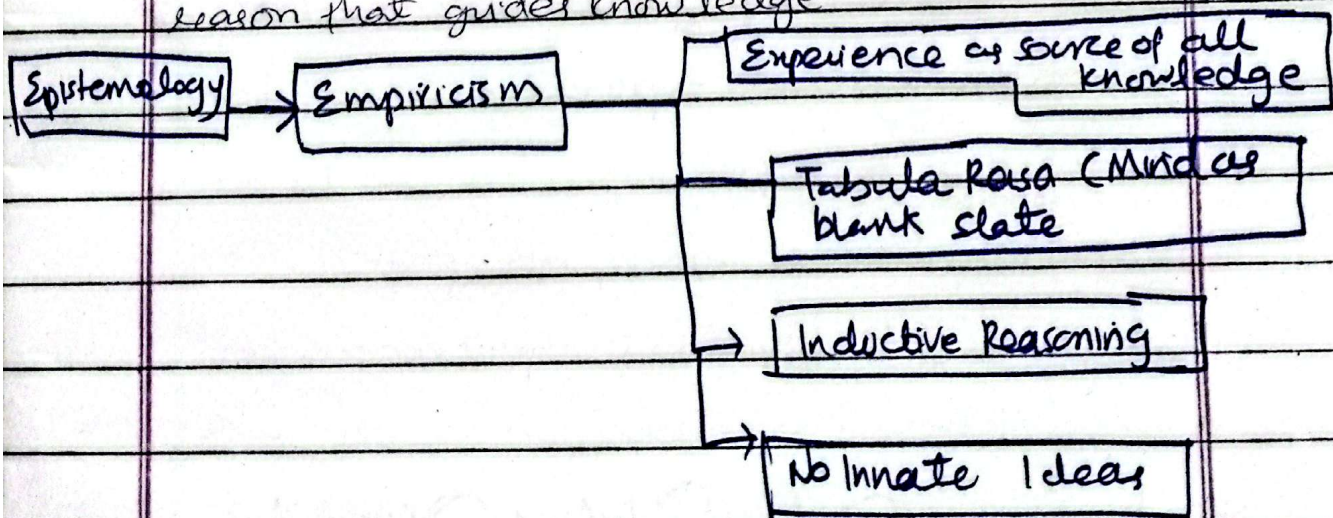


Qno: 2 Explain David Hume's Theory of Epistemology in detail. How did he carry his Empiricism / skepticism to its logical limits?

Answer:

Introduction:

David Hume was a Scottish philosopher who was a radical empiricist. He introduced his epistemology (theory of knowledge) asserting that all knowledge comes from experience. However, he showed the limits of experience and by extension, knowledge and science. He avoided nihilism and dogmatism in the process and remained a moderate Skeptic. He rejected the existence of innate ideas or reason that guides knowledge.



② David Hume's Theory of Knowledge

David Hume introduced his own theory of epistemic knowledge in order to reject the abstract first principles of rationalists. Rather, he wanted to build a "science of man".

"The science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences" — Treatise

He outrightly rejected metaphysical theory as 'Sophistry and illusion'. Even Bertrand Russell commented that Hume "swept away the debris of dogmatism from philosophy".

(a) Impressions Precede Ideas

Knowledge is constructed from the loose mental events which are impressions and ideas. Humans do not directly sense experiences in the outside world. Rather, they form impression which later make ideas as fainter copies of those very immediate and vivid experiences.

* Impressions → ideas → beliefs → knowledge
(source of knowledge (epistemic))

(b) Hume's Copy Principle

According to David Hume, experience from sensory organs precedes everything else.

We cannot experience what we cannot think of before. He put impressions at the centre.

(c) Hume's Fork

According to David Hume, there are only two legitimate kinds of true statements.

(i) Relations of Ideas

They are analytical and mathematical statements that are true and infallible.

According to Hume, it has tautological reasons because of which relations of ideas are necessarily true. But they do not reveal any new fact about the world.

(ii) Matters of Fact

They are synthetic and empirical claims about the world. They are probabilistic and cannot be absolute truths. They

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are dependent on human experiences.
So, we termed them as a posteriori truths.

(D) Circular Reasoning of Inductive

According to Hume, inductive reasoning is not a philosophical truth but a psychological habit. Humans are prone to build science on habit, not reason. The foundation of empirical sciences is probabilistic, not certain. Inductive reasoning relies on the very principles it seeks to justify.

(E) Bundle Theory of Self

Humans are not a holistic self, but a fragmented bundle of perceptions. This 'self' is a psychological construct of individual feelings, thoughts, and sensations. However, our mind out of habitual reasons see us as coherent beings.

(E) Causation as Habit

According to David Hume, there are no natural bonds between cause and effects.

Human do it out of their habit.

There are no as such causal links between our experiences in the outside world.

(F) Limits of Hume's empiricism

(a) Subjective and Fallible Impressions

Hume pointed out the limitations of his own theory of knowledge in his copy principle. He asserted that impressions can deceive due to illusions, dreams, or even hallucinations. Since sense organs are our source of knowledge, these impressions become uncertain and fallible.

(b) Classic Begging the Question

Hume's copy principle is itself an idea that has not any ~~prior~~ impression. This makes it meaningless and presupposes its own

conclusions. This is a clear case of Cartesian reasoning which shows the limits of experience as the source of all human knowledge.

(C) Flaws of Inductive Reasoning in science

David Hume also exposed the flaws of logical reasoning in science. Since scientific methods were trusted blindly at his time, Hume exposed the problems of inductive. Just because future experiences mirror past ones does not mean that it will lead to a logical conclusion.

(D) illogical causal interconnection

He also exposed the limits of natural laws. He saw no natural bonds that connect causes and effects. He saw it as an illogical and flawed interconnection that people do out of their habit.

(E) Limitations of
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(F) Is-
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(E) Limitations of 'Self'

He regarded 'self' as a psychological construct. David Hume exposed the flaws of epistemology that studies 'self' as a coherent being. Thus, he revealed the flaws in science and the limitation it comes inherently.

(F) Is-Ought Debate

According to Hume's skeptical approach to epistemology, no amount of descriptive statements (is) can lead to prescriptive ones (ought). Morality thus, does not rely on facts but passion.

Criticism

David Hume was not a radical skeptic, but a moderate one. He called for a mitigated skepticism that does not relegate the positive aspects of science, logic, and reason. He exposed the limitations of knowledge and its sources.

equally. According to him, some beliefs are beyond human experiences. Also, he encouraged his readers to pragmatically accept these limits in everyday lives.

Conclusion

Thus, David Hume pushed empiricism to its logical limits by showing that knowledge derived out of sense experiences is probable and not certain. He did not doubt everything but initiated a modern sceptical debate in epistemological branch of philosophy. His works like *An enquiry concerning Human Understanding* inspired Kant to assert that he was awoken from his dogmatic slumber. Popper too, founded a whole new falsificationism theory from Hume's works.