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ABSTRACT

One of the never-ending processes in life is the process of knowledge acquisition which to the layman may not constitute any problem as regards how it is acquired. But to philosophers, from time past this has constituted serious debacles. However, in philosophy, it has become the special concern of epistemology one of its branches to analyze how knowledge is acquired. Epistemology has rationalism and empiricism as its most outstanding schools. These two schools in analyzing how knowledge is acquired have come to be the opposite of each other, because while rationalism holds that knowledge comes through reason, empiricism on the other hand holds that it comes through sense-experience. In this long history of philosophy, however, David Hume has remained the most consistent empiricist and for some reasons, we deemed

it necessary to make the aim of this work be the critical analysis of David Hume's theory of empiricism so that in the end we would have demonstrated whether it exhausts all possible knowledge of reality or not.

Now our problem is what must have led to Hume's radical position that sense-experience is the only possible guide to the acquisition of knowledge that is certain? We however, discover that it is not unconnected to the fact that the search for knowledge that is certain, which Aristotle shifted to concrete objects through experimentation and which also cut through the time of John Locke and George Berkeley who laid emphasis on perception, influenced Hume to a great extent. Therefore by building on the philosophy of Locke and Berkeley which emphasized sense perception, Hume came to develop his radical position about sense experience as the limit of human knowledge.

In this, Hume categorized the objects of human reason into relations of ideas and matters of fact and he concentrated on the latter which he argued can only be ascertained through sense-experience. He went further to hold that these sense-experiences are acquired as impressions that is at the time of direct contact with an object, and later as ideas when the mind reflects on the impressions.

Analytically one discovers that impressions are however Hume's only guarantee for measuring reality, even the ideas in the mind he argued must conform to these impressions so as to be considered as guaranteeing knowledge as real. In short, for something to be considered as real, it must generate impression.

Hume argued, causality can not be real because in reality, only what we experience are the preceding and succeeding events separately and not any causal relation between the two events. All other metaphysical concepts are not real because they do not generate impressions and therefore cannot be experienced. To demonstrate his utter rejection of metaphysics, Hume campaigned for the burning of every book that contains metaphysics.

In spite of all these, Hume's rejection of metaphysics was an unsuccessful exercise because Hume used the method of knowledge acquisition through sensation which does not apply to metaphysics.

Then come our wonder, why should sense-experience be the only standard of the measurement of reality for Hume? Are the senses not fallible? Of course, they are. Hardly do two people perceive on thing the same way, what of illusions and hallucinations, all these demonstrates that the senses furnish us most times with appearances and not reality. It therefore amounts to wrong conception of reality as guaranteeing reality.

What the senses furnish us with has to be moderated by human reason before they are considered, qualified as certain knowledge.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF DAVID HUME'S CRITIQUE OF NATURAL RELIGION

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