

KNOWLEDGE, TRUTH AND PERCEPTION REVISION SUMMARY

| THEORY | KEY IDEAS | MAIN CRITICISMS | THINKERS LINKED |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <p>Cartesian rationalism</p> | <p>Types of Substance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two kinds of substance – <i>mind and matter, or thought and extension</i> This division of reality into two kinds of substance, one physical and one mental, has become known as <i>Cartesian dualism</i> Descartes undermined Aristotelian & Scholastic notions of many substances/essences/natures ∴ founder of modern philosophy (Substance = nature of a reality); substance ≠ physical matter) <p>Cartesian method of doubt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> D. used <i>global scepticism</i> as a means to establish sure foundations for knowledge: argument from illusion, dreaming, evil deception ... 'Cogito ergo sum' – I think therefore I am D. then asserted the existence of God as guaranteeing that appearances were not deceptions. D. believed that 'clear and distinct ideas' were the foundations – some of these were 'innate ideas' – e.g. 'God exists' and mathematical truths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empiricists reject the claim that knowledge comes chiefly through reason; the senses, they say, are the chief route to knowledge. How convincing is D.'s belief in innate ideas? Ludwig Wittgenstein, a 20C. Austrian born philosopher, undermined the Cartesian claim that 'knowing one's private mind' was the foundation – is there such a thing as 'private mind' and 'private language'? Aren't our ideas and concepts formed within a communal framework? The modern philosopher D. Z. Phillips pointed out that we couldn't make mistakes about reality unless (most of the time) our perceptions were accurate. Would the concept of 'dreaming' exist unless we knew what it is to be awake and not dreaming? Is global scepticism, then, a valid philosophical stance to take? D. requires the existence of God to hold his theory together. D.'s mind-body dualism is problematic – how do our minds affect our bodies and vice versa? | <p>René Descartes (1596-1650), French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician, often called the founder of modern philosophy.</p> <p>Descartes has been enormously influential in later philosophy – even amongst philosophers who oppose him.</p> <p>In the writings of Plato we can see lines of thought that resurface in one way or another in Descartes.</p> |
| <p>Locke's empiricism</p> | <p>Truth = what corresponds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∴ Correspondence theory <i>Indirect Realism</i> (a.k.a. <i>Representative Realism</i>) Foundation – sense experience – ideas – knowledge <p>Types of Knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intuitive – most certain Demonstrative – less certain Sensitive – still less certain (however still almost always reliable) <p>Perception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Tabula rasa</i> – mind gradually builds complex ideas from simple ones Primary qualities (e.g. shape, hardness) Secondary qualities (e.g. scent, colour) P. Q.s produce S. Q.s P.Q.s are objective; S.Q.s vary from one perceiver to the other ∴ subjective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influenced by Newtonian worldview – empirical science powerful tool to discover truths and knowledge. BUT Newtonian worldview has been challenged by later scientific views (esp. Einstein's theories of relativity). Scepticism – can the modes of perception be trusted? Berkeley's attack – since it is only by mental perceptions that we discover truths, then there are no objects outside minds. If there are no innate ideas (or concepts of some kind), how do we learn anything at all? Kant tries to solve this by saying we interpret reality through preset mental categories. Aristotelian and Scholastic attack – Locke supposes that ideas are things we're aware of. Instead, ideas are ways <i>by which</i> we become aware of real things. We cannot be aware of 'ideas' as such, just like we cannot see 'sight'. Sight is how we see; ideas are how we think. Thus, <i>direct/naïve realism</i> is a simpler and subtler theory than <i>indirect/representative realism</i>. Locke believes that God's existence is an intuitive idea (agreeing with Descartes, a rationalist). How certain/intuitive is this? | <p>John Locke (1632-1704)</p> <p>Although much of what he argued had its roots in earlier thinkers, some ancient, some just before him, e.g.:</p> <p>Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), English philosopher</p> <p>Francis Bacon, (1561-1626), English philosopher, one of the pioneers of modern scientific thought</p> |
| <p>Berkeley's Idealism</p> | <p>Truth = what is perceived'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Esse est percipi</i> There is no such thing as matter (contrast with Locke) All things perceived in the mind of God ∴ guaranteed to remain after we've stopped perceiving them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although like Locke an empiricist, Berkeley's main concern was to attack Locke's theories of perception. He thought they left a gap between 'things as they are' and 'our perceptions/ideas of them'. This left a gap for scepticism and, he feared, atheism. Berkeley thus avoids the sceptical attack that could be made on Lockean theory of perception simply by saying 'our mental perceptions = things as they are' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once again, the notion of God is brought in to try to tie up the loose ends of a theory. What's the relation between the ideas in God's mind and the corresponding ideas in human minds? There cannot be one idea, shared between God and people, since God's ideas are so much fuller unless people are prepared to admit that there are many things about their own ideas of which they are unaware. If, on the other hand, the ideas in God's mind are different from those in people's minds, the gap that existed in Locke's philosophy resurfaces as a gap between the ideas in consciousness and the ideas in God's mind that also give cause to them. | <p>Berkeley, George (1685-1753), Irish philosopher and Anglican Bishop, generally regarded as the founder of the modern school of idealism.</p> <p>He has few philosophical followers, although his ideas have been very influential.</p> |
| <p>Hume's Scepticism</p> | <p>Knowledge and Scepticism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two kinds – 'relation of ideas' and 'matters of fact' (c.f. analytic and synthetic statements) Matters of fact, cause and effect, etc. are not 'must be so's' (i.e. necessary truths) Matters of fact are based on past experience; this is our guide - not a certain guide, but the only guide we've got | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hume's line of scepticism seems hard to refute. He cuts out the infinite regress attack (if k. is based on foundations, on what are the f. based etc?) by simply saying there is <i>no</i> foundation that is 'rock-solid' (i.e. based on necessary truth). For establishing 'matters of fact' all we have is common experience of regularity in nature. The only necessary truths are what he calls 'relation of ideas' (e.g. bachelors are unmarried males; 1+1+2; etc. (cf. analytic statements)). Upon reading Hume, Kant was 'woken from his dogmatic slumbers'. Kant designed an epistemological system that combats Hume's scepticism. Kant tried to re-establish, for example, 'every cause has an effect' as a <i>necessary</i> truth (must be so) because that's one way how the mind interprets reality to make sense of it. | <p>Pyrrho (c. 360-c. 272 BC), ancient Greek philosopher, who introduced pure scepticism into Greek philosophy, founding the school known as Pyrrhonism, and who is thus considered the founder of philosophical scepticism.</p> <p>Sextus Empiricus (2nd C. philosopher-sceptic) argued that causality is not a real relation, but a <i>fiction of the mind</i>.</p> |
| <p>Coherence theory</p> | <p>Coherence theory (Non-Realism) is an alternative to Correspondence theory (Realism)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The metaphor for Coherence T. is a ship rather than a building. A building holds together but is also anchored; a ship holds together but is not anchored. Coherence T. holds that all that we call truth is a connected mesh or network by which we make sense of our world ∴ no foundations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherence T. (like Idealism) tries to avoid the perception-reality gap problems of realist theories by saying 'what connects and makes sense in your world is what is true' Coherence T. also suffers from infinite regress – we can only justify one truth by reference to another, and we keep going round in circles. There is no other 'checking criteria' for establishing the validity of 'truths' other than their coherence (how they hang together) ∴ a collection of fantasies, so long as they hung together, would count as truth In fact, with Coherence T., it is difficult to call any coherent world view fantasy Seems to lead to epistemological and moral relativism (i.e. your truth is your truth, my truth is mine etc.) | <p>Certain strands of ancient Indian philosophy seem to involve Coherence Theory</p> <p>Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), Austrian-British philosopher, philosophical ideas set the stage for modern Coherence Theory (Non-Realism)</p> |