

Radical Skepticism

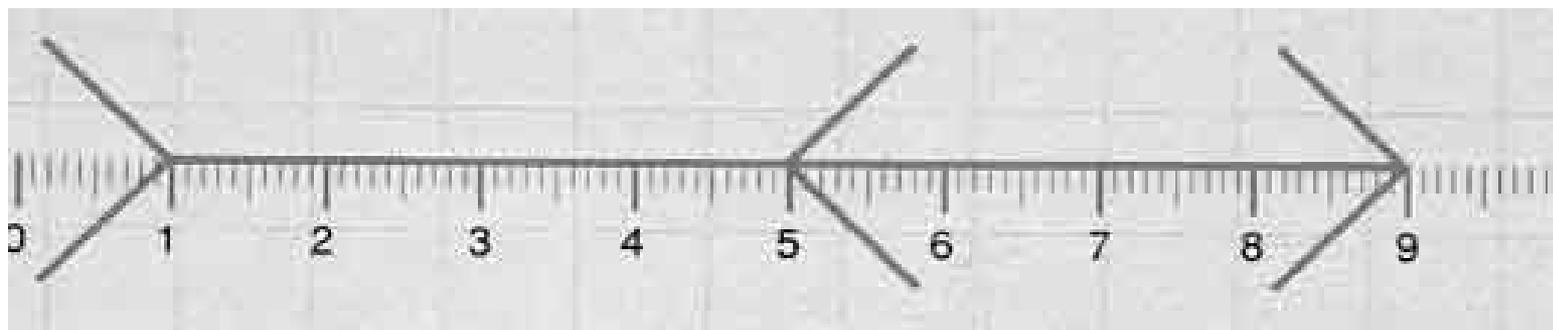
Sextus Empiricus, "Outlines of Pyrrhonism"

Two Kinds of Skepticism

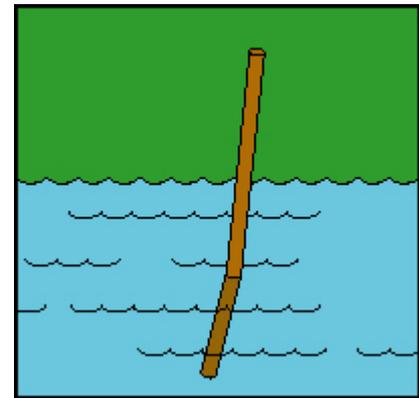
- **Moderate Skepticism:** I don't know certain things
 - Socrates: if you do know the definition of piety, then you don't know what piety is, but we still know plenty of other things
- **Radical Skepticism:** we know little, if anything
 - Pyrrho: "I don't know anything – not even whether I know anything"



Which line is longer?

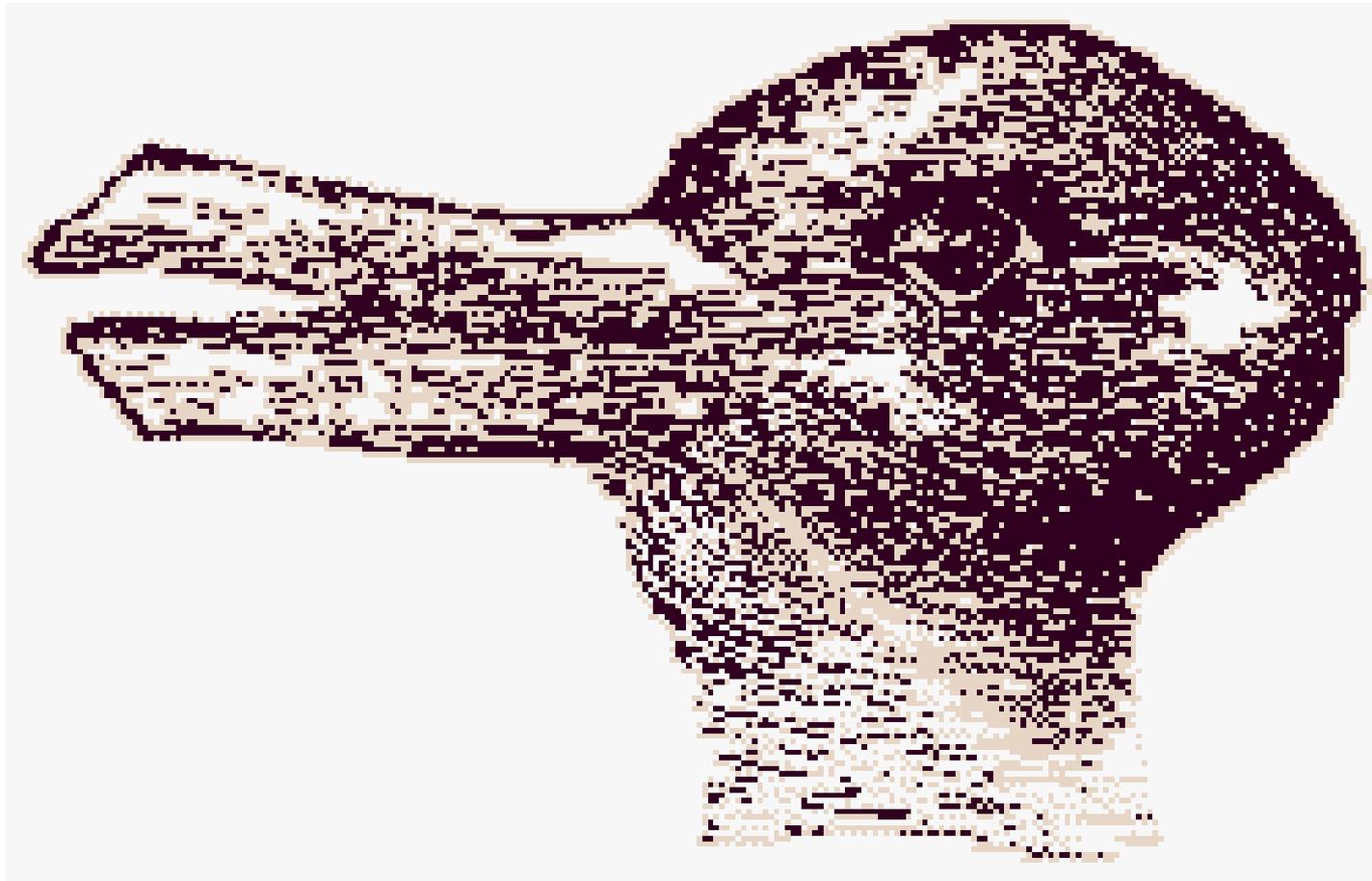


- A stick outside the water appears straight
- The same stick in water appears bent
- How do we know which appearance is the right one





Duck or a Rabbit?



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Infinite Regress

- I know that I am alive
 - I believe that I am alive
 - It is true
 - I have evidence X that I am alive
- But, now we asks, “how do you know you have evidence X?”
 - I believe that I have evidence X
 - It is true
 - I have evidence for evidence X
- But, now we ask, “how do you know you have evidence for evidence X?”
- Ad infinitum

Empiricism

John Locke, excerpt from *An Essay on Human Understanding*

Rationalism vs. Empiricism

Rationalism (Descartes, Leibniz, Kant)

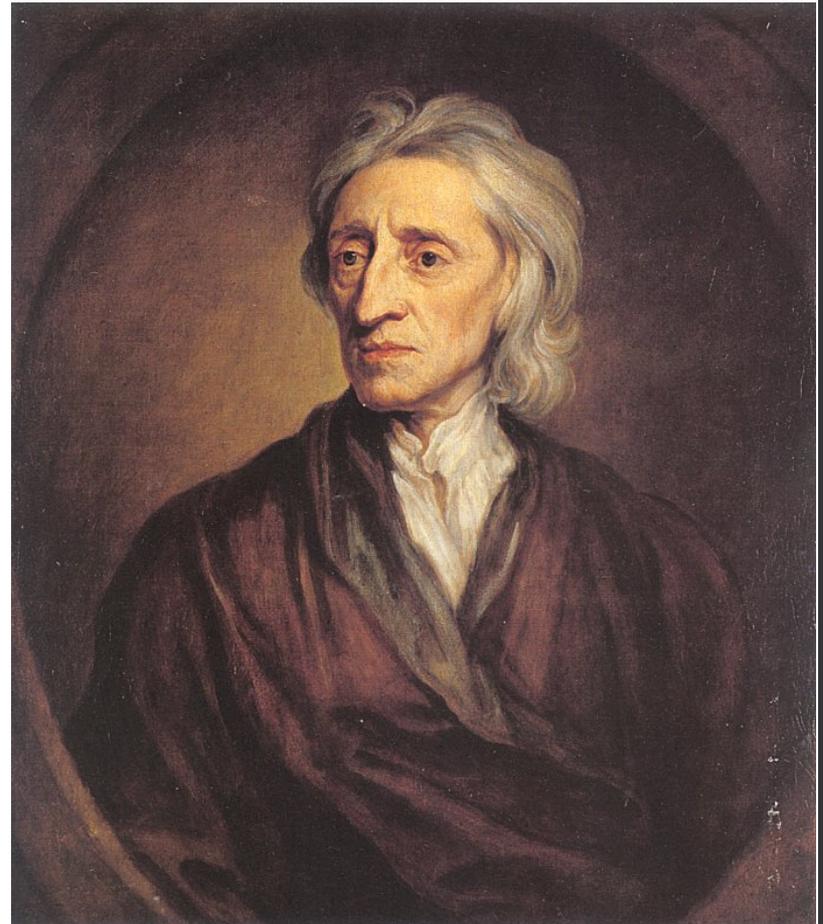
- T1: We can have a priori knowledge about the external world
- T2: Some of our ideas are innate

Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume)

- T1: We cannot have a priori knowledge about the external world; only a posteriori (empirical) knowledge
- T2: There are no innate ideas: all of our ideas are derived from experience

John Locke (1632-1704)

- Highly influential figure in empiricism and political science
- Treatise on Government (1689) – main philosophical influence on the Declaration of Independence (1776)
 - Human Rights given to us by God (independent of society) as central to morality and role of government
- Influential in epistemology for his modern (even though fairly crude) formulation of Empiricism



Locke's Empiricist Project

- Locke described his purpose in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding as being "to inquire into the origin, certainty, and extent of human knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent" (Book I, Chapter 1, Section 1).
- To carry out his purpose, Locke investigated extensively "the nature of the understanding," in order to discover its powers: "how far they reach, to what things they are in any degree proportionate, and where they fail us" (Book I, Chapter 1, Section 4)
- Locke compared his task with "master-builders," Boyle and Newton. He adopted similar empirical methods, but chose to study the mind (or the understanding) instead of nature
- Locke's project is a precursor to psychology

Two Kinds of Experience

- **Faculties**
 - Vision, Hearing, Smell, Taste, Touch
 - Reflection: thinking about perceptions and ideas
- **Experience 1: Perceptions**
 - E.g. perceiving a blotch of red, perceiving a smooth texture, etc.
- **Experience 2: Ideas: Ideas are faint perceptions**
 - “All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure: The mind has but a slender hold of them: They are apt to be confounded with other resembling ideas; and when we have often employed any term, though without a distinct meaning, we are apt to imagine it has a determinate idea, annexed to it.”
 - simple/complex
 - Abstract/non-abstract
- **Empiricist Credo:** All knowledge is derived from experience perceptions or ideas

Creation and Complex Ideas

- The imagination can be used to create new complex objects and images
- Like the objects in this painting
- complex pictures which we have never seen
- Note: must be from using things which they have seen before



Creation and Simple Ideas



- However, the imagination, though powerful in a creative person, cannot create even a single new simple idea.
- No artist could create a single new simple color like red or yellow, but can only use them

Complex Ideas

- Complex ideas
 - 1. **Combination**: assemble new ideas from simple ones
 - 2. **Comparison**: compare two simple (or complex) ideas side by side (e.g.)
 - 3. **Abstraction**: examine particular objects and extract a complex idea
- Some complex ideas are abstract (e.g. number 5)
- Some complex ideas are non-abstract (e.g.)

Some Problems

- How do the following ideas derive from sense experience?
- E.g. logical notions (or, and, not)
- E.g. causation: perceive correlations only
- E.g. the self: what am I? (a bundle of perceptions, ideas)

Skepticism Revisited

- How do we know anything about the real world?
- **Primary Qualities:** Things as they are in themselves: (E.g. size, shape, mass)
- **Secondary Qualities:** Things as we perceive them: (e.g. colorful, attractive, pleasant, warm, cold, etc.)
- If all we perceive on Locke's view is secondary qualities (because we cannot see things as they are in themselves) and so ideas that we could have are derived from

Locke's Metaphysical Position

- Representational Realism:
 - There is a world; part of that world causes our ideas
 - All that we can know is not the world but the ideas that represent the world [this is a limitation because we are only some (small?) segment of the world]

Speculative Metaphysics

- Speculative (A Priori) Metaphysics starts out with foundational principles about the world which are known a priori
- Some Examples of arguably a priori principles
 - Every event has a cause
 - God is merciful
 - The world is perfect – best of all possible worlds
- Speculative Metaphysics proceeds from the foundational principles and by inference is lead to uncover lots of others
- Locke thinks that this has lead to so many different opposing philosophical systems that another approach is needed