

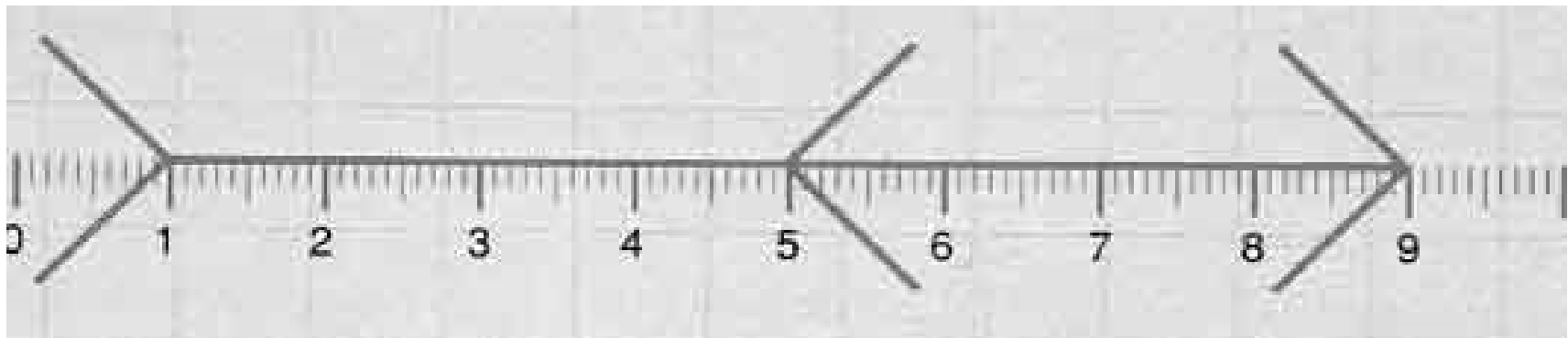
# Radical Skepticism

Sextus Empiricus, "Outlines of Pyrrhonism"

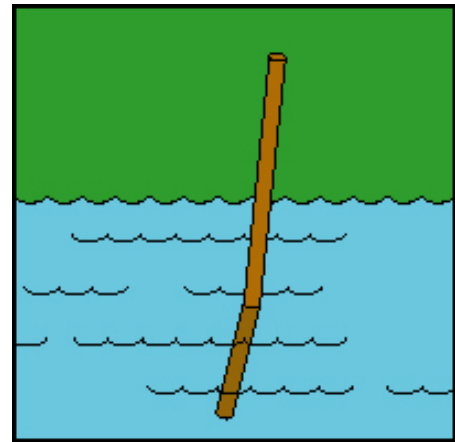
# Two Kinds of Skepticism

- **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"

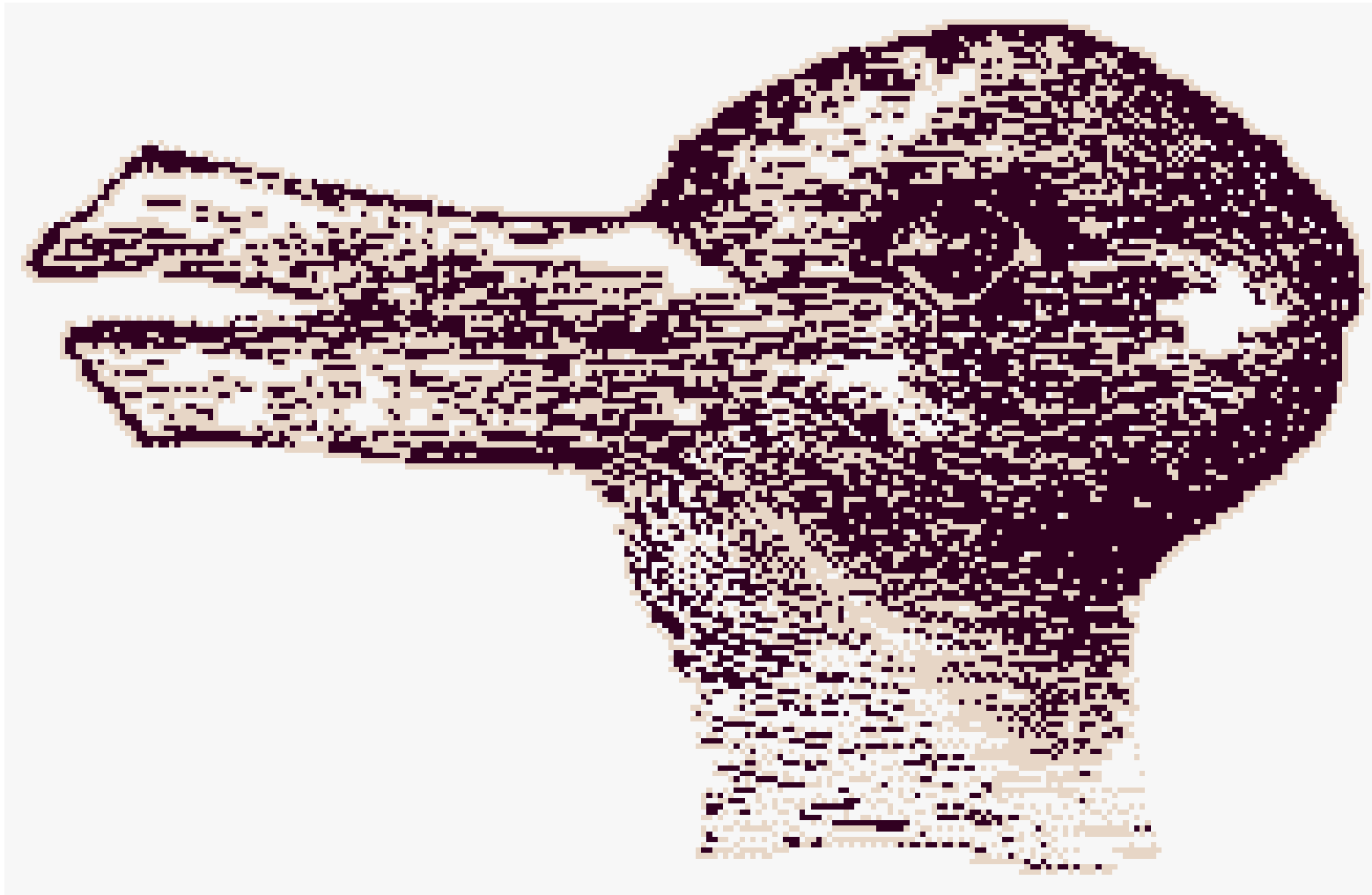
Which line is longer?



- 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

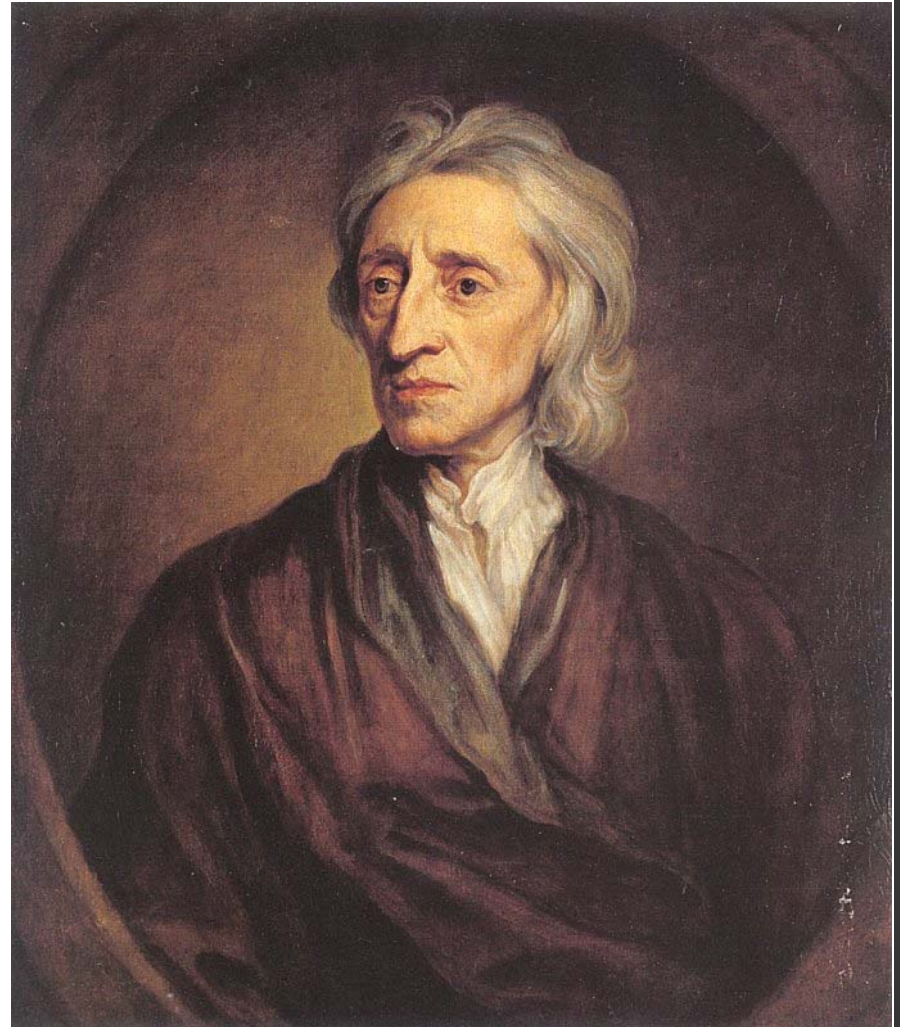
Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume)

- 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