

History of Modern Philosophy: Empiricism

PHIL 3110

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MWF 11:00 – 11:50



John Locke 1632-1704

A good empiricist. The father of modern empiricism, claiming that the mind at birth is *tabula rasa*, a blank slate and that all our knowledge is acquired through experience. Nevertheless he still claimed that our knowledge gained through our senses gave us reliable information about the way the world was constructed. He was not entitled to make this claim.



Immanuel Kant 1724-1804

Not an empiricist at all -- nor a rationalist.

Basically what he said was, "No. Just no. You are all wrong. So wrong. This isn't how any of this works! You are all making the same mistake. Here, let me fix it." And he did.



George Berkeley 1685-1753

A better empiricist. He claimed that we only knew what we had experienced and that we only ever experienced our ideas and so the only reality was that we could know was grounded solely in the realm of our ideas. His crucial point was "*esse est percipi*" which means "to be is to be perceived." Thus, Berkeley gave us the theory of Idealism.



David Hume 1711-1776

The best empiricist. Hume said we don't even know that we exist or that we have a mind, or that there is a God. Or morality. Or that there is an external world. All we experience is a "passing parade of perceptions." Hume is the guy who pretty much killed off philosophy -- until Kant came along.