

Some Points of Difference between Rationalism and Empiricism, as outlined by Leibniz in *New Essays on Human Understanding* (written 1703-5; published 1765)

- A. The mind is not a **tabula rasa**, on which all its ideas come solely from sense experience, as Aristotle and Locke thought. Rather, the mind already contains the source of all its notions and doctrines, as Plato, the Schoolmen, and Leibniz hold. Although the senses are necessary for all our actual knowledge, they aren't sufficient to give us all our knowledge, since the senses only give us particular truths, not general or universal necessary truths. Necessary truths, such as those provided by mathematics, must have principles whose truth does not depend on the testimony of the senses.
- B. The beasts, and many humans, are 'simple empirics', guided solely instances or particulars. The consequences that beasts draw are only 'a shadow of reasoning', the connections being provided by the imagination -- when a new situation appears similar to a preceding one, simple empirics expect to find the same consequence. Only human reason is capable of demonstrative knowledge -- we are able to establish sure rules, formulate exceptions to uncertain rules, and deduce necessary consequences; thus we can foresee occurrences without having to experience the sensible links between the images provided by our imaginations, as beasts and simple empirics are reduced to doing.
- C. The Aristotelian and Lockean maxim, 'Nothing in the mind which was not first present in the senses' must be revised. We must add: 'except the mind itself'. In fact, Locke's "reflection" must mean that we pay attention to what is within us. The senses do not give us what we already bring with us. There is much that is innate in our minds: being, unity, substance, duration, change, action, pleasure -- none of these are derived from our sense experience. Instead of the blank tablet, we should view the mind as a block of veined marble; the block marks out the shape of Hercules rather than some other shape. Ideas in the mind are like natural inclinations, dispositions, or potentialities that are already present in us.
- D. Locke holds that the mind does not always think. But this is not correct -- we are not always conscious of our thoughts. We have many forgotten apperceptions. Locke argued that the mind does not always think in the same way that the body is not always in motion. However, strictly speaking, there is never any body without motion; similarly, there is no mind without thought occurring. At every moment, there is an infinity of perceptions within us, just as no body comes to absolute rest; there is always motion or activity, though it is often not perceptible by us.
- E. 'Insensible perceptions' (or 'petite perceptions') play a central role in our philosophy of mind, just as corpuscles play a similar role in physics. The nature of reality is such that there is an immense subtlety underlying human experience; there is an actual infinity of motion that is always taking place. At every moment, there is an infinity of perceptions taking place within us, though we are often not aware of them, just as there is an incredible roar produced by the sea, but when we are in its presence, we tune out that roar of perceptions. Also, due to these insensible variations among things, there are no 2 individual things exactly alike.
- F. Lockean materialism claims that the void is necessary for motion (atoms or solid bodies must have space in which to move). In contrast, Leibniz argues that space is filled with matter that was originally fluid, and matter was capable of any kind of division. This means that no body is hard or fluid to an ultimate degree, i.e. no atom has insuperable hardness. The order of nature, governed by the law of continuity, destroys atomism and materialism.

- G. Locke in *Essay* (Bk. IV, Ch. III) had argued that matter could think, if God so chose to empower it to do so. Leibniz counterargues that Locke was right to retract this statement in his reply to the 2nd letter of Bishop Stillingfleet. Stillingfleet's argument: if matter can think, then reflection can no longer assure us of the existence of mind. Leibniz furthers this line of objection: substances cannot be conceived in their bare essence without activity -- action is the essence of substance. Motion is the essence of material substance; thought is the essence of mental substance. Thus, it is not natural for matter to sense and think.