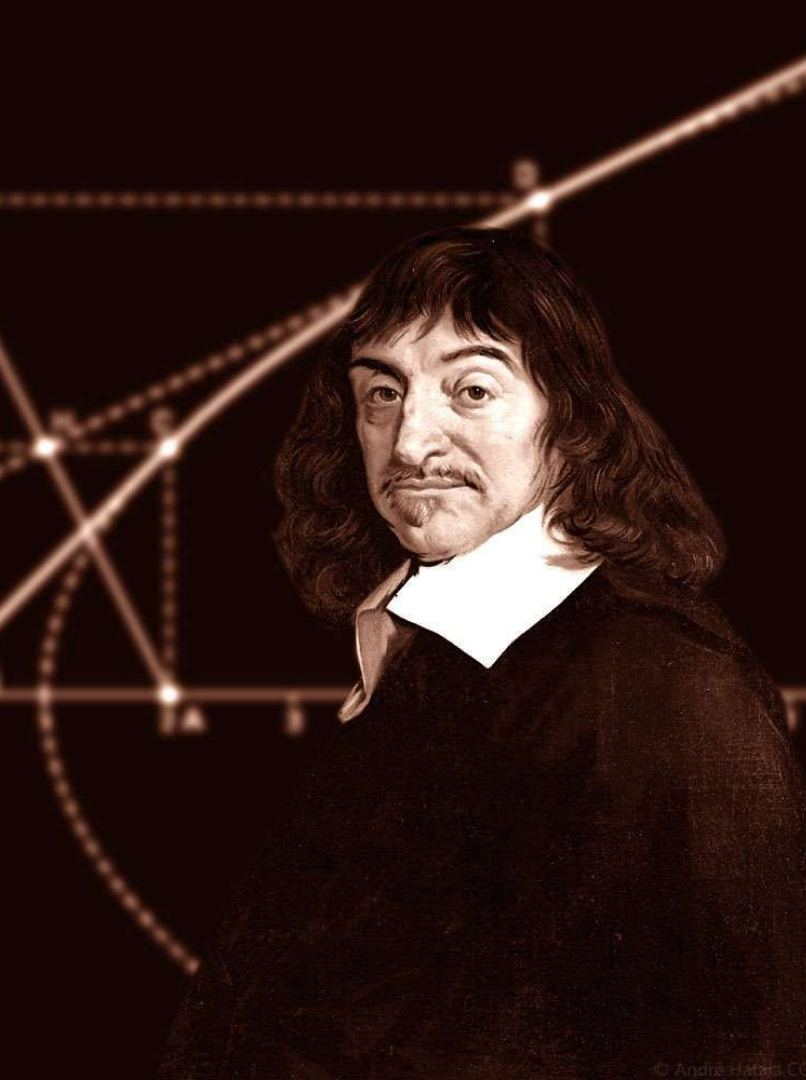




# Empiricism v. Rationalism

**Problems with Descartes' view...**

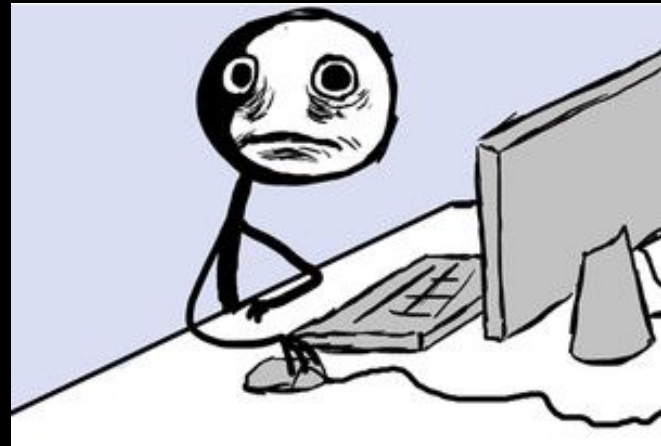


**Descartes arrived at 4 foundational truths:**

- a. He, at the moment he is thinking, must exist.**
- b. Each phenomenon must have a cause.**
- c. An effect cannot be greater than the cause.**
- d. The mind has within it the ideas of perfection, space, time, and motion.**

## How do we know:

- That other people have minds?
- That others see colors the way we see them?
- That we're not in a simulation?



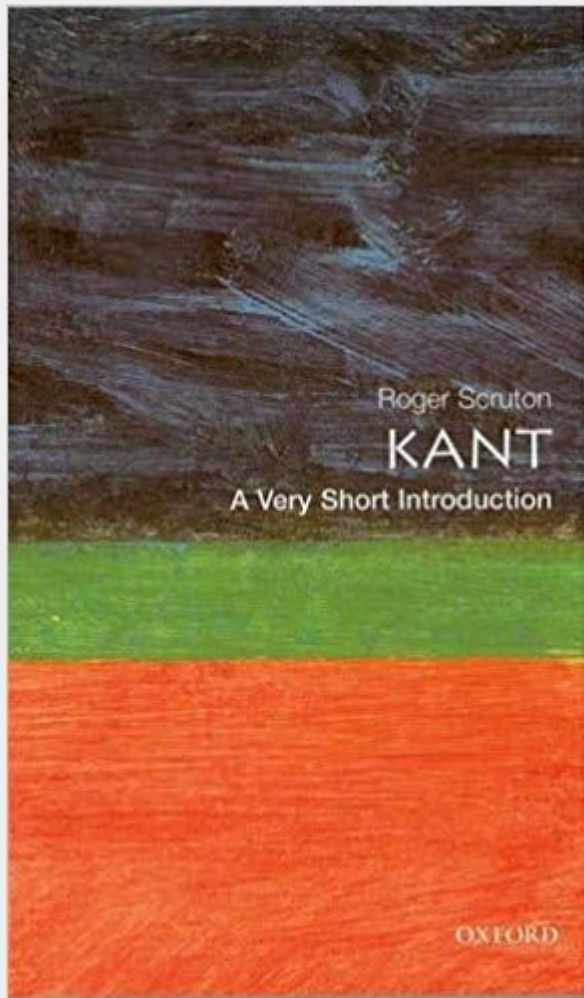








**Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**



**“This convenient, though contentious, division of his predecessors into rationalists and empiricists is in fact due to Kant. Believing that both philosophies were wrong in their conclusions, he attempted to give an account of philosophical method that incorporated the truths, and avoided the errors, of both” (Scruton 2001: 21).**





# DILEMMA #2

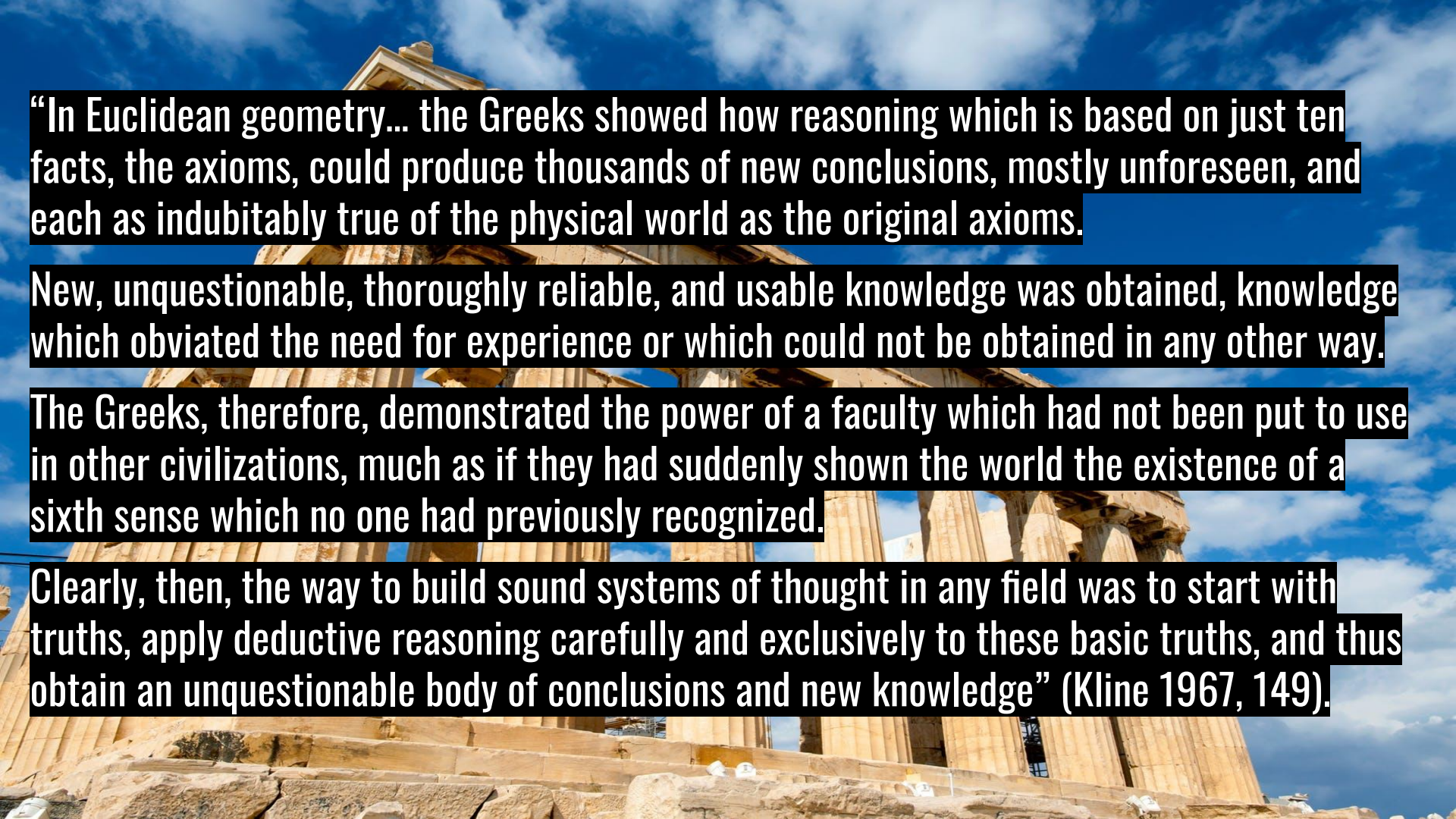
Empiricism or Rationalism?



**Empiricism v. Rationalism:  
Important Concepts**

**Rationalism** derives all claims to knowledge from the exercise of **reason**, and purports to give an absolute description of the world, uncontaminated by the experience of any observer; it is an attempt to give a **God's-eye view** of reality.

**Empiricism** argues that knowledge comes through **sensory experience** alone; there is, therefore, no possibility of separating knowledge from the **subjective** condition of the knower.



**“In Euclidean geometry... the Greeks showed how reasoning which is based on just ten facts, the axioms, could produce thousands of new conclusions, mostly unforeseen, and each as indubitably true of the physical world as the original axioms.**

**New, unquestionable, thoroughly reliable, and usable knowledge was obtained, knowledge which obviated the need for experience or which could not be obtained in any other way.**

**The Greeks, therefore, demonstrated the power of a faculty which had not been put to use in other civilizations, much as if they had suddenly shown the world the existence of a sixth sense which no one had previously recognized.**

**Clearly, then, the way to build sound systems of thought in any field was to start with truths, apply deductive reasoning carefully and exclusively to these basic truths, and thus obtain an unquestionable body of conclusions and new knowledge” (Kline 1967, 149).**







placet / redam, ~~et~~ quamquam sub ea etiam  
 tempus aut velocitatem aut quidem aliquid  
 intelligere liceat. Habemus Unde, <sup>ascendendo</sup> infini-  
 tam infinites infinitam, infinites infini-  
 tesis infinitam et ita porro. Rursus  
 ab ordinaria descendendo habemus infinitesi-  
 missima infinitesimam infinitesima ab  
 infinitesima infinitam et ita porro.

~~prode~~  $ddd x \mid ddx \mid dx \mid x \mid \sqrt{x} \mid \sqrt[3]{x} \mid \sqrt[4]{x}$   
 ut in vulgari lege Homogeneorum

$\frac{1}{x^2} \mid \frac{1}{x} \mid 1 \mid x \mid x^2 \mid x^3 \mid x^4$

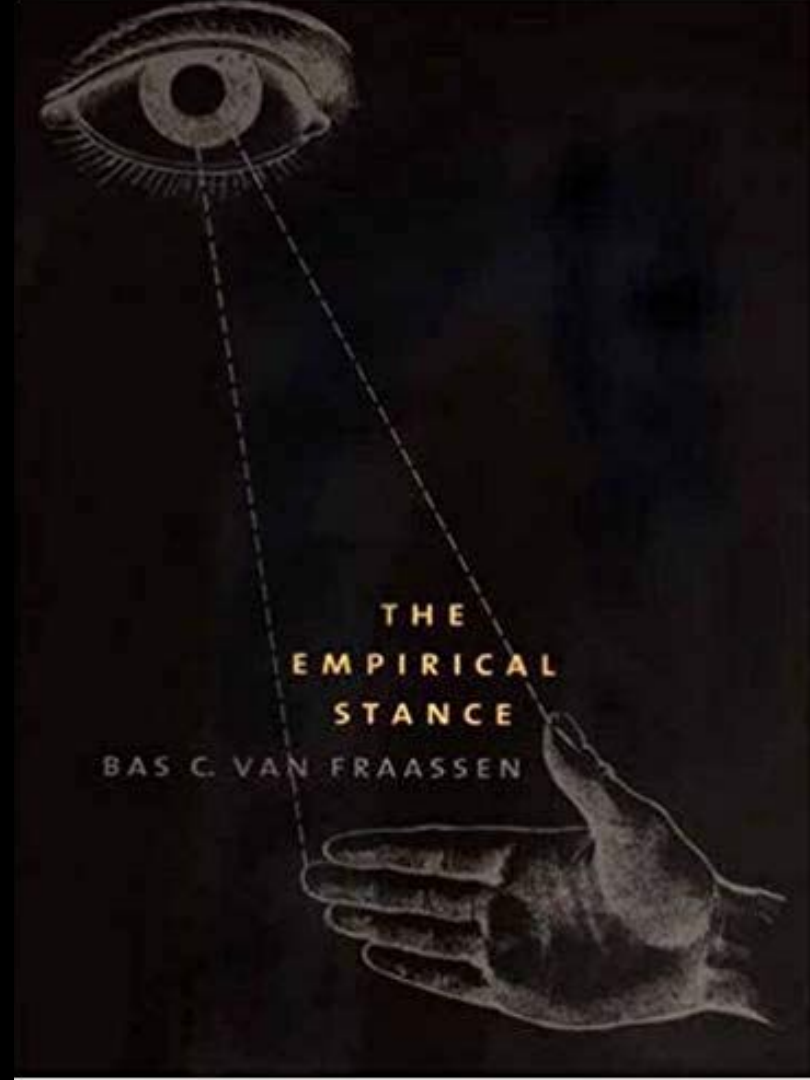
~~Exponentes gradus tam in vulgari quam in Transclan-  
 di lege Homogeneorum sunt~~

$x^{-2} \mid x^{-1} \mid x^0 \mid x^1 \mid x^2 \mid x^3 \mid x^4$

Et veri exponentes graduum sunt progressionis  
 arithmeticae in vulgari lege, ita et in nostra nova Transclan-  
 di Nam  $x ddx$  et  $dx^2$  sunt ~~per se~~ homogenea, quia  
 $\sqrt{x} dx = x ddx + dx^2$ . ergo cum ipsis  $x$  exponat  
 sit unitas si ipsis  $dx$  exponat sit  $e$ , utiq; patet  
~~si~~ et ipsis  $ddx$  sit  $f$  fiet  $f+1 = 2e$ .  
 eodem modo ~~et~~  $dx ddx$  et  $dx^3$  sunt homogenea, adeo  
 exponentiarum Affectionum exponentes sunt progressionis  
 arithmeticae. Hanc autem legem in differentia

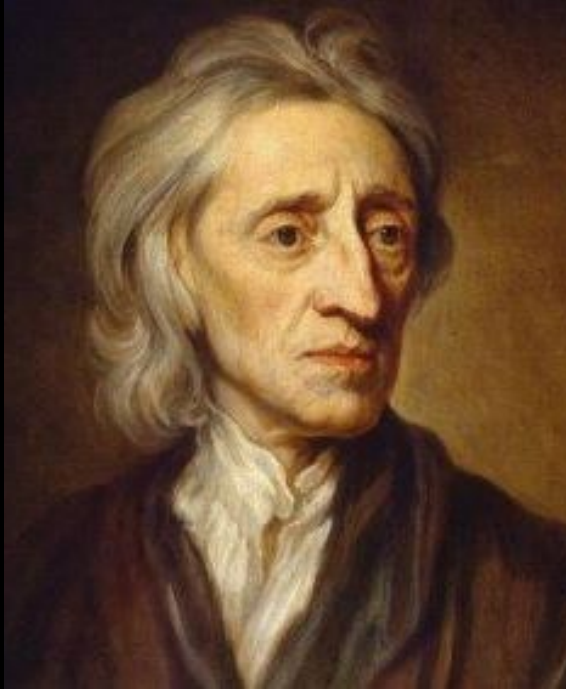
While ascribing a joint methodology to the rationalists is suspect, it is even more contentious to put the “empiricists” into a single camp.

This is because there are well-documented cases of “empiricists” denouncing empiricism (see in particular Lecture 2 of Van Fraassen 2008).





# Person of Interest: John Locke



## Occupation:

Philosopher

Physician

## Notable Accomplishment:

Known as “Father of Liberalism”

## Notable Works:

Two Treatises of Government, 1689

An Essay Concerning Human

Understanding, 1689



**Context**

**Descartes argued  
that he could get  
us out of  
skepticism...**

In a nutshell, he argued that he could prove God exists and that such a being wouldn't let us be deceived about those things of which we have a "clear and distinct perception" (see Meditation Three).

**Descartes argued  
that he could get  
us out of  
skepticism...**

His argument, in an unacceptably small nutshell, was that he has an innate idea of a perfect God.

An **innate idea** is an idea that you are born with.

This perfect idea could have only been provided (or implanted?) by a perfect being, which is God.

So, God exists!



**For more in-depth analysis, take  
Dr. Leon's Philosophy of  
Religion class or read  
Descartes' Third Meditation.**





**John Locke:  
Important Concepts**

# **Locke's Argument Against Innate Ideas**

- 1. If humans really had innate ideas (e.g. our idea of self, of perfection, of God, of logical principles, etc.), then young children would understand them.**
- 2. Children, however, don't show any comprehension whatsoever of these particular ideas; they must be taught.**
- 3. Therefore, humans aren't born with innate ideas.**



He then makes clear that just because something is self-evident or is universally agreed to, that doesn't mean that it is innate.

Moreover, there are no innate ideas of moral (which he calls *practical*) matters, either:

“It will be hard to find any moral rule that has as much claim to immediate universal assent” as does a logical principle.



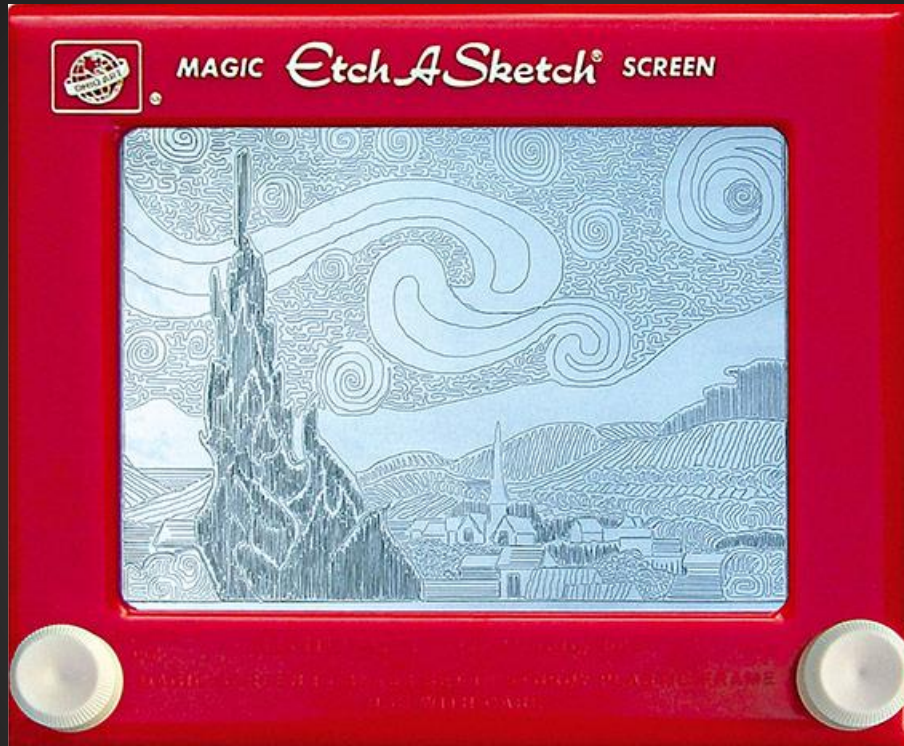




**In Book II, Locke  
lays out his view  
on how we come  
to know things...**

**Ch 1, § 2: Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge?**

**To this I answer, in one word, from experience; in that all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself.**



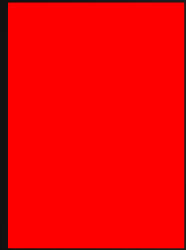
**The Blank Slate**



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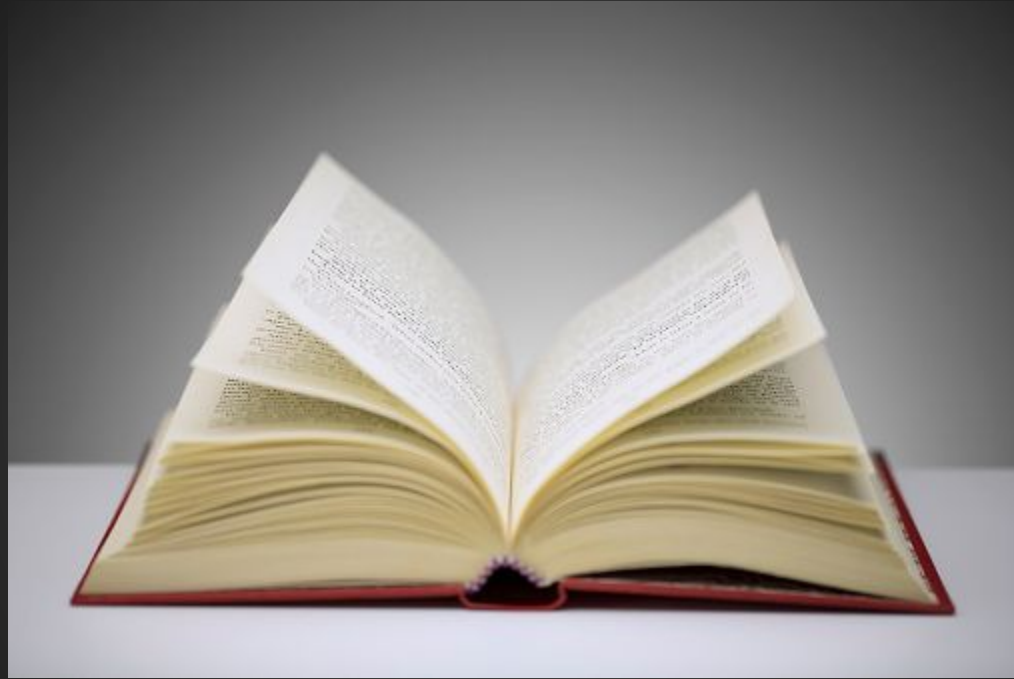
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sweetness

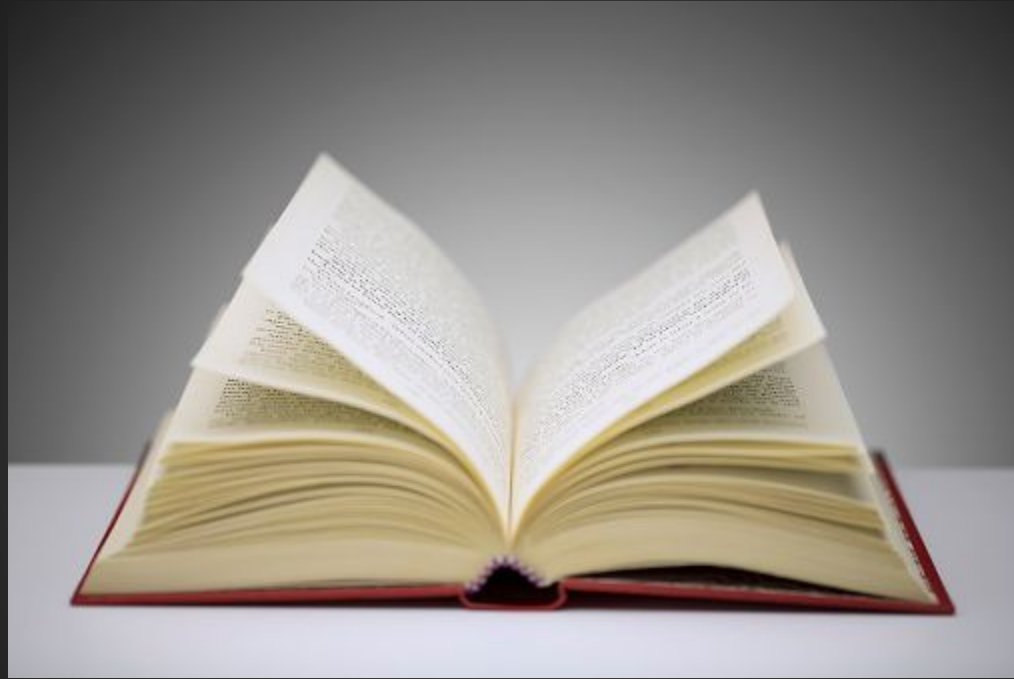
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**Simple ideas and Complex ideas.**



**Primary Qualities**



**Secondary Qualities**

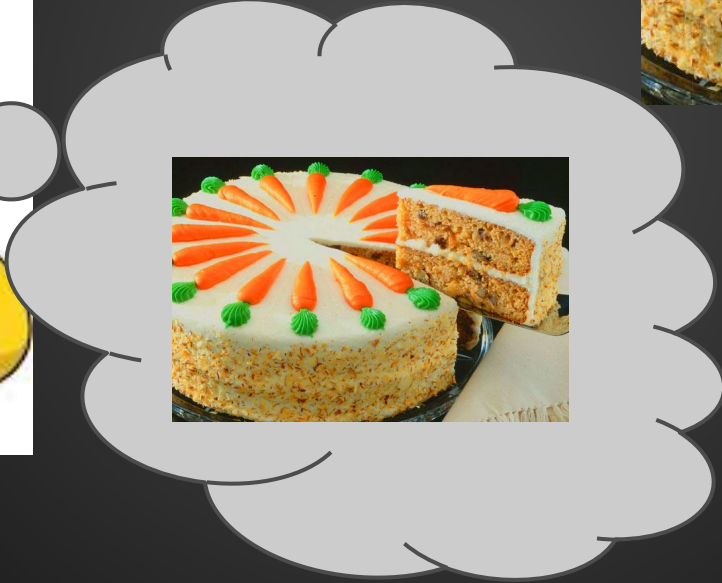






**Indirect realism** is the view that all we ever perceive is our own ideas, not the external world; our ideas, however, are similar to the external world.





A cartoon illustration of Homer Simpson's head and shoulders. He has a thoughtful expression with his hand on his chin. A thought bubble above his head contains a small image of a carrot cake with a slice cut out.

**Internal World**

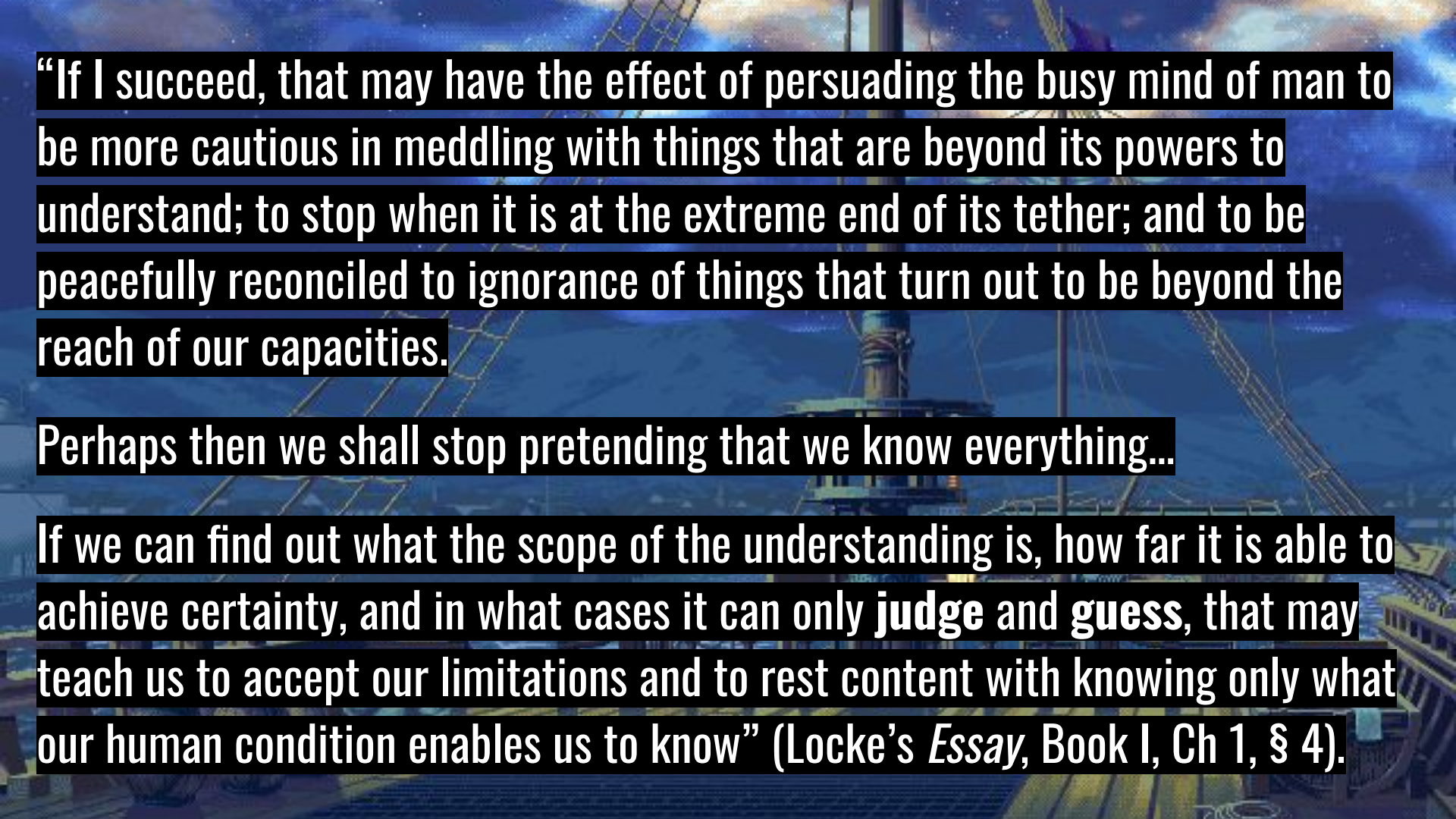


**External  
World**



**Lastly...**

**Faith or opinion is acceptance of something as true when we don't know for certain that it is true.**



“If I succeed, that may have the effect of persuading the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things that are beyond its powers to understand; to stop when it is at the extreme end of its tether; and to be peacefully reconciled to ignorance of things that turn out to be beyond the reach of our capacities.

Perhaps then we shall stop pretending that we know everything...

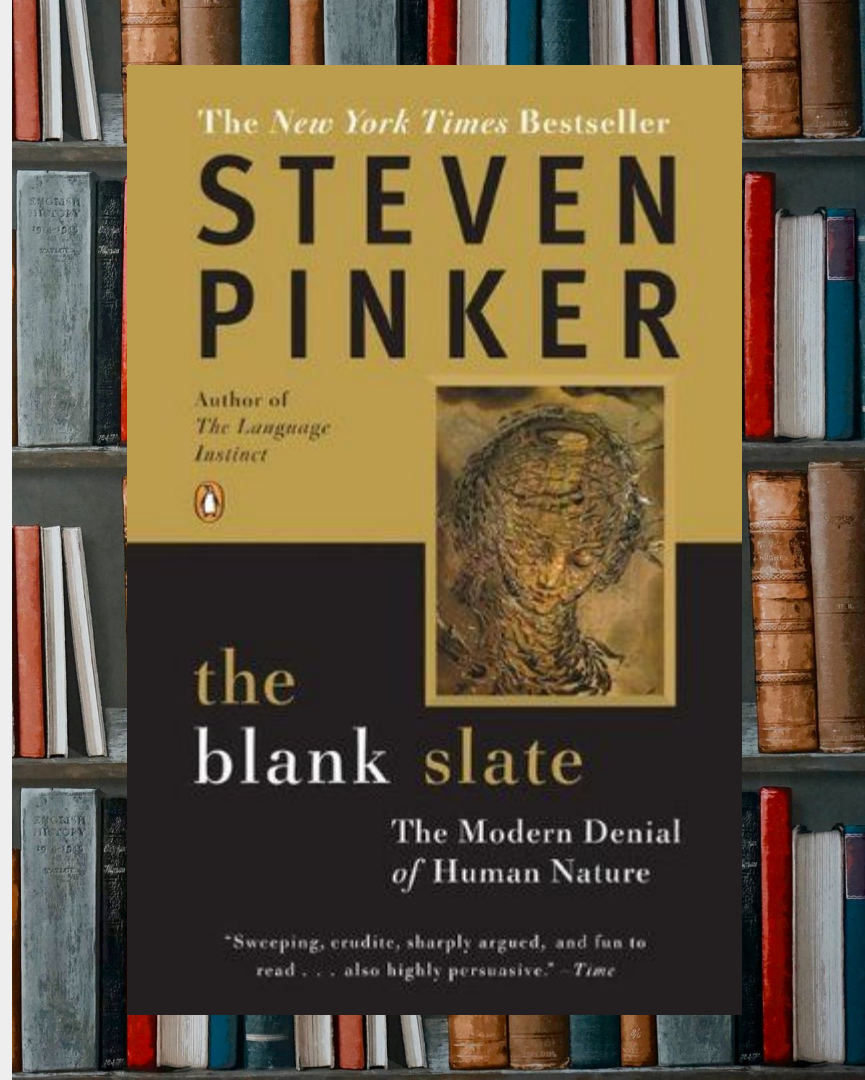
If we can find out what the scope of the understanding is, how far it is able to achieve certainty, and in what cases it can only **judge** and **guess**, that may teach us to accept our limitations and to rest content with knowing only what our human condition enables us to know” (Locke’s *Essay*, Book I, Ch 1, § 4).

**Problems with Locke's view...**

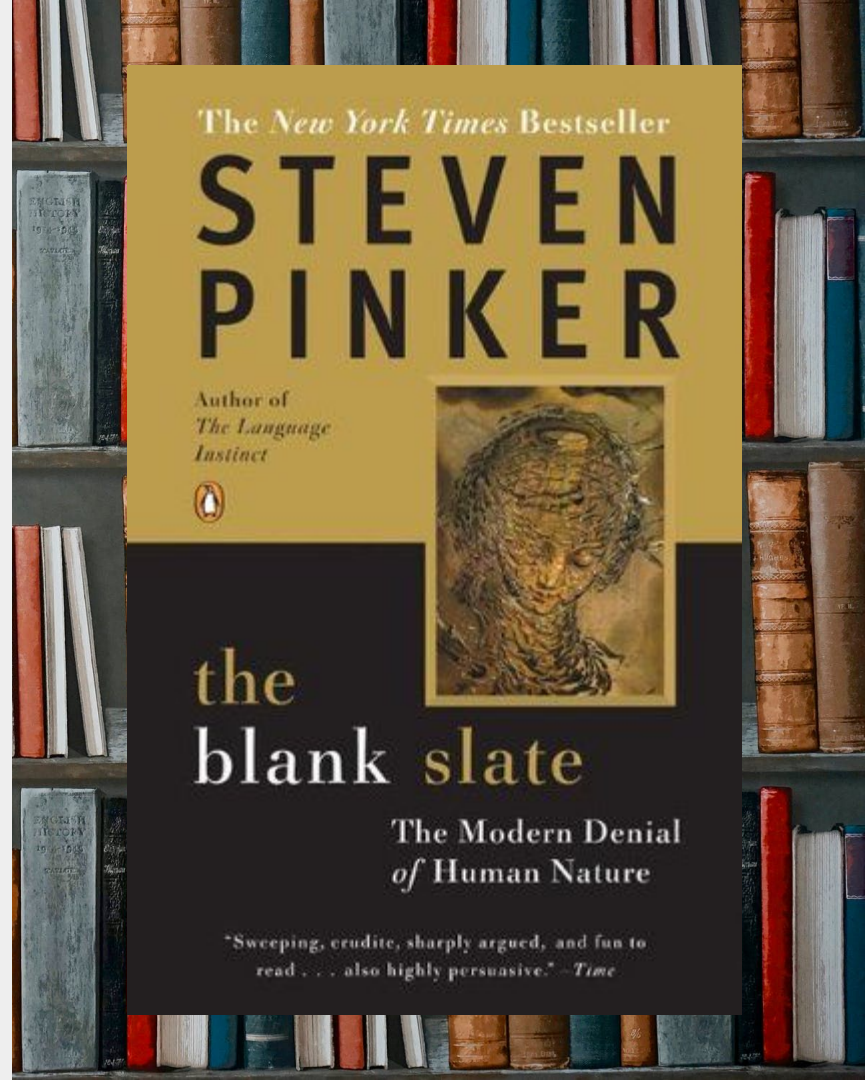
There are, of course, numerous empirical problems with Locke's view (see Pinker 2002)...

We will cover these on the day titled *The Labyrinth*.

Stay tuned.



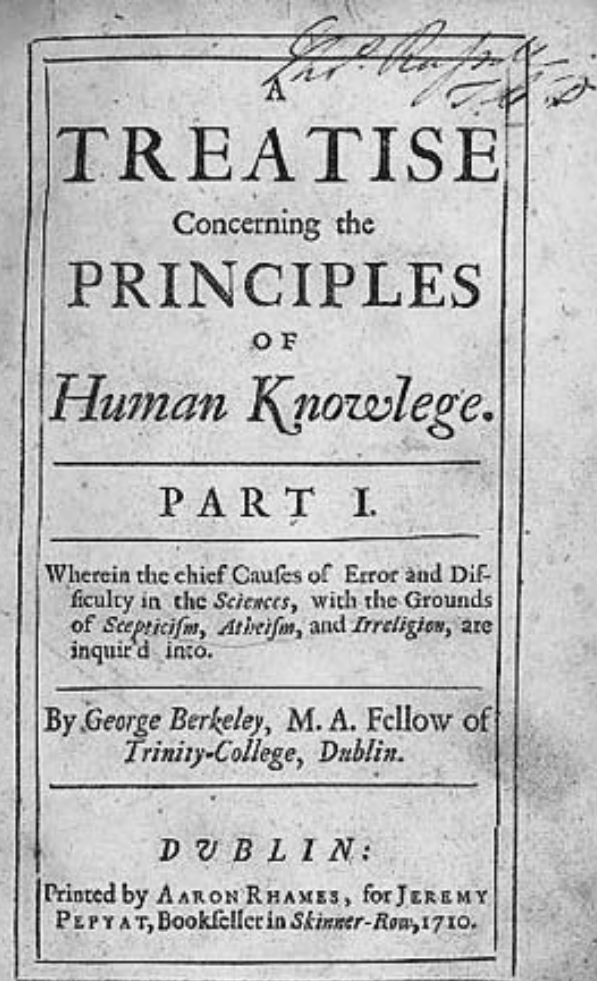
However, given the time period we are covering, we should focus on philosophical objections about how this project helps one escape from skepticism.





Some objections to Locke are that this system could also lead to skeptical conclusions.

This is because you could never check that your ideas of the world actually represent the world itself, as George Berkeley argued (another “empiricist”).





**In fact, the most famous skeptic of this (and perhaps any) time period, David Hume, uses empiricism to lead us to skepticism.**

# Reasons to opt for Rationalism

1. Rationalism purports to be able to get us certainty, and this is appealing.
2. Hume uses empiricism to lead us into skepticism.

