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**Chosen Topic:** 3

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3. "Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of reason and of taste are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation..."

David Hume

Reason and taste. Sense and sensibility. Logos and mythos?

In order to compare them and to ascertain their functions and boundaries, one first has to define those terms separated from each other, which seems to be an easy task for David Hume: For him, reason "conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood" and "discovers objects, as they really stand in nature". So can his comprehension of "reason" be put in one word: knowledge. Knowledge of the world, how it really is. But isn't that a risky claim, as already the oldest ancient greek philosophers were convinced that this is near to impossible? Hume turns around radically what Socrates explained with his cave parable: According to latter, what we believe to be "reality" is just the shadow of a world only consisting of certain ideas. Though in his opinion those apriori analytical always being true ideas can be discovered; and by discovering them one can see the world how it really is. This ability to get knowledge and therefor also gain knowledge of truth and falsehood would be compatible with Hume's theory, though Socrates was a rationalist and Hume certainly stands for empirism. But after the Kopernikanical turning point philosophers are more or less unified in the opinion, that knowledge of the world is impossible, as we see everything with different eyes, from our point of views. My sight of a green bottle can't be experienced by anybody else. And I personally do not know how a bat sees its world.

Animals anyways seem to be left out in Hume's theory, unless they can reflect reasonable. According to him, reason is need in order to discover objects as they really stand in nature, and being on the assumption that animals do not have any reason, they obviously are not able to discover nature. But was is it then, that animals "see", and why should the human be forced to be the only organism being able to recognize reality?

Furthermore, as EVERY human being has reason (according to Hume), and EVERY human being is able to discover the world how it really is "without addition or diminution", the world is the same for

everybody and every human being also has to be able to know what is true and what is right, as reason conveys this. So, there has to be only ONE truth and ONE falsehood in this world. But if we take a close look at our society, that definitely is not the case. Truth can only exist in a closed system, where everything is built up on put and unified values, like in a computer system. But how can be our world a system with the same “true” beginning values everywhere? What is felt as truth by our society is based on myths and can never be clearly defined, also because our language and our thinking are so limited. Knowledge of this kind could only be experienced by a superior authority, who “looks down from a higher level”, and by all disagree with Hume, I do not believe him capable of being megalomaniac enough to see the human being as “Deus”, who is able to see every possible present and future. But knowledge of the world is by force followed by latter, so here we have an aspect probably not taken into consideration by Hume: Determinism.

Let’s move on to the question of taste: After declaring that reason allows us all to see the same, Hume now explains how our taste affects us; how it makes us subjective. I criticized Hume for his understanding of reason, but now he gives an explanation for why the world after all is not the same for everybody. Taste bases on feeling, on personal opinion. After the objective reason here is now place for subjectivity. A rose, being just a neutral subject for the reason, now gets its beauty, redness and meaning. But isn’t it kind of a contradiction, that truth and falseness should be defined by the ratio and vice and virtue by feelings? Isn’t it rather the case that our moral understanding of values and virtues creates truth and falseness?

In contrast to the reason without addition and diminution, taste now has a “productive faculty”; includes personal feelings. But again the “easily ascertained distinct boundaries and offices of reason and taste” get blurred more and more, as no reasonable human being in the world is able to distinct his reasonable thoughts clearly from the influences of his feelings, social background and education and even from genetic predispositions. Living, acting and thinking after Hume’s theory would require total freedom of any influence, which is basically impossible. Even the “logos” roots in the “mythos”.

I do not think that Hume is totally wrong with his believes, but maybe he could have expressed it better. The whole aim of the quotation seems to be the *distinction* of reason and taste, to tear them apart and treat them one at a time. I took over this strategy in my essay, but not in order to support this idea, but rather in order to now destroy this distinction: Taste and reason can’t be separated, only their working together defines us. Nobody has knowledge of the world how it really is, because everybody is unwillingly and irremovably affected by feelings. Still, we need our reason, or what would distinguish us from animals? But not the passive knowledge of the world is our reason’s task,

but reflecting and giving the fundament for acting morally. Hume probably tries to explain empirism and rationalism and to unify the objective world with the subjective human being, but trying to *distinct* them does not make him successful. Only an interaction between the two makes us who we are and creates an identity.