

[1968. In *Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edwin A. Palmer, ed. Wilmington, Delaware: National Foundation for Christian Education.]

EMPIRICISM, strictly speaking, is the theory of epistemology that bases all knowledge on experience or sensation alone. Aristotle was an empiricist. So was Thomas Aquinas, for whom special revelation provided truths of faith but provided no philosophical knowledge. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume in the 18th century are the classical British empiricists. They held that the mind at birth is blank, that there are no innate ideas, and that all knowledge comes by experience. Hume's skeptical conclusions may be taken as evidence that if one starts with a blank mind, one's mind remains blank. Therefore Kant, though he assigned an important role to sensation, held that the mind was in-formed with this material in the form of *a priori* intuitions and concepts. The Positivism of Auguste Comte and contemporary Logical Positivism are empirical theories. So too is behavioristic psychology and the philosophy of John Dewey, though his description of the learning process is quite different from Locke's.

The Scriptures do not discuss empiricism as such, but the doctrine of the image of God in man, the law written on the hearts of the Gentiles, and the transmission of original sin all indicate an innate, non-empirical inheritance, which precludes this philosophy.

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