

Why is it Sensible to Trust the Senses?

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Empiricism is, without doubt, a venerable philosophical view. According to this view, and roughly speaking, we should only trust sensorially obtainable beliefs. Two broad challenges have emerged against it. The first is quite general and questions the very idea of putting trust in any belief, i.e. whether sensorially obtainable or not. The second embraces that idea wholeheartedly but questions its circumscription to the merely sensorially obtainable. This talk develops a line of reasoning that follows the latter of the two paths to challenging empiricism. But it does so with a twist. Instead of attempting to demonstrate the trustworthiness of (certain types of) non-sensorially obtainable beliefs, it (first) seeks to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the sensorially obtainable. This is an important and non-trivial task, as the grounds for this trustworthiness remain, at least partly, elusive. Appearances to the contrary, the majority of empiricist accounts either take the existence of those grounds for granted or offer a perfunctory nod about them. It turns out, or so it will be argued, that it is the satisfaction of certain wide-ranging principles that grounds the trustworthiness of the sensorially obtainable. Moreover, since satisfaction of these principles is not restricted to the sensorially obtainable, empiricism, as it is traditionally conceived, appears to be in dire straits. The talk ends on a more positive note with a suggested emendation to empiricism that aims to embody the said principles.