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Innate Ideas and the *Tabula Rasa*

Dueling Beliefs

- Innate Ideas

- Belief that some ideas are intrinsic; given to us by the grace of God
- Descartes

- Tabula Rasa

- The mind is a clean slate, through which we imbibe experience
- Locke

Descartes: For Innate Ideas

- 2nd Meditation: Wax Argument
- 5th Meditation: Triangle
 - + Further proof of God's existence
- Clear and distinct perceptions are made certain because God exists,

Gassendi: Refuting Innate Ideas

- Clear and Distinct Problem: Innate Ideas not clear and distinct.
 - e.g. infinity: no clear and distinct understanding of infinity
- Innate Ideas can be created from ancient experience.
 - Induction to general ideas, rather than deduction from innate ideas.

Locke: Against Innate Ideas

- *-koinai ennoia*
- Locke provides arguments against this notion:
 - 1) Color argument
 - 2) the impossibility of universal consent
 - 3) the "unfolding" idea

The *Tabula Rasa* and Knowledge

- Before providing his own ideas:
- *Tabula Rasa*
 - "Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas....From where does it have all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience; our knowledge is founded in all that, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about external sensible objects or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from which all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring (§II.I.2, AW 323a).
- How we gain knowledge
 - "The steps by which the mind attains several truths. The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet, and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them. Afterwards the mind proceeding further abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names. In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with ideas" (§I.II.15, AW 321a).

Against the *Tabula Rasa*

- Leibniz
 - Although the senses are necessary for all our actual knowledge, they are not sufficient to give us all of it, since the senses never give us anything but instances, that is, particular or individual truths. Now all the instances confirming a general truth, however numerous they may be, are not sufficient to establish the universal necessity of that same truth, for it does not follow that what has happened before will always happen in the same way. (AW 423ab)
 - As a result it appears that necessary truths, such as we find in pure mathematics and particularly in arithmetic and geometry, must have principles whose proof does not depend on instances nor, consequently, on the testimony of senses, although without the senses it would never occur to us to think of them...Logic, together with metaphysics and morals, of which the one shapes natural theology and other natural jurisprudence, are full of such truths, and consequently, their proof can only arise from internal principles, which are called innate (AW 423b)

Leibniz, Cot'd

- Identity of Indiscernibles
 - Where could one find some tablets which do not have a certain amount of variety in themselves? Will we ever see a perfectly homogeneous and uniform surface? (AW 425a)
 - Two individual things cannot be perfectly alike and just always differ in something over and above number. (AW 427a)
- Matter as a Thinking Thing
 - Recall Leibniz's example of walking inside a giant mechanical brain or Ned Block's Chinese Nation thought experiment

Conclusion/Questions