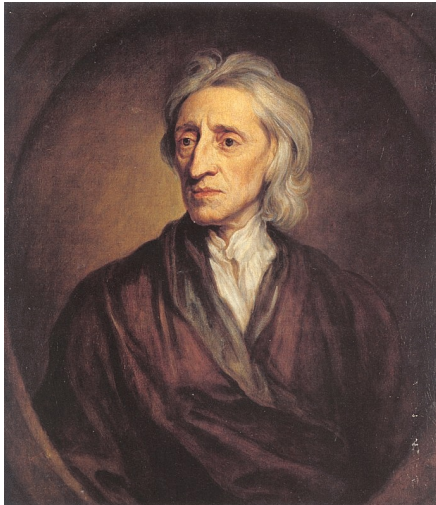


Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

Russell Marcus
Hamilton College
Spring 2015



Class #13/14 - Locke
Against Innate Ideas
For the Primary/Secondary
Distinction

Business

- Today: Locke, innate ideas and the P/S distinction
- Tuesday: Locke on Personal Identity and the Doctrine of Abstract Ideas (which could wait for after break)
- Next Thursday: Midterm
 - Questions on line
 - Review session? (Tuesday evening?)
- Clickers will return on Tuesday

Locke's Goals

- Reign in the rationalists' speculative metaphysics.
 - ▶ “It may be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension, to stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether, and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities” (I.I.4, AW 317a).
- Avoid skepticism while limiting the scope of the understanding.
 - ▶ Descartes's standard for knowledge is too high.
 - ▶ “If we disbelieve everything because we cannot certainly know all things, we shall do quite as wisely as he who would not use his legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no wings to fly” (I.I.5, AW 317b-318a).
- Present a less-contentious epistemology.
 - ▶ “Men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions, and may arrive at certainty without any such original notions or principles”(I.II.1, AW 319a).

Four Central Topics in Locke's Work

- ⇒ **1. Arguments against innate ideas**
- 2. The primary/secondary distinction
- 3. An account of personal identity, including Locke's approach to the mind/body problem
- 4. Locke's philosophy of language, including the doctrine of abstract ideas

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- Common or general ideas
- Descartes had pure intuitions, and clear and distinct perceptions of innate ideas.
 - the self
 - God
 - mathematics
 - laws of physics
- Spinoza
 - rational and intuitive knowledge
 - Our minds are literally part of God.
- Leibniz
 - truths of reason
 - Against transeunt causation, monads are self-contained.
- Grand metaphysical systems which claimed that reality is much different from our ordinary interpretations of sense experience.

Limits of Innateness Claims

- We do not know some of the ideas which Descartes and others allege to be innate.
 - ▶ “It is evident that all *children*...do not have the least apprehension or thought of them. And the lack of that is enough to destroy that universal assent which must be the necessary concomitant of all innate truths...” (§I.II.5, AW 319b).
- The defender of innate ideas might claim that such ideas require development.
 - ▶ We have to reason to them, or unfold them from within.
- Locke takes such recourse on the part of the rationalist to be a concession.
 - ▶ “It [seems] to me near a contradiction to say that there are truths imprinted on the soul which it does not perceive or understand” (§I.II.5, AW 319b).

Innate Ideas and Poverty of the Evidence

- The rationalists we have read appeal to an argument that has come to be known as a poverty of the stimulus or poverty of the evidence argument.
- Sense experience is insufficient to account for some kinds of knowledge.
- Descartes's argument:
 - All ideas must be innate, acquired, or produced by me.
 - But some ideas could neither be acquired (chiliagon) nor produced by me (independent).
 - So, there must be innate ideas
 - Other evidence is too weak to account for our knowledge of mathematics or God.
- Leibniz presents similar arguments.
- Spinoza calls some ideas 'common notions'; we can take them as innate, too.
 - Everything's innate for Spinoza!
- Noam Chomsky and Linguistic Nativism
 - Children learn both the vocabulary and grammar of their first language too quickly to be explained by behavioral conditioning.

The Doctrine of Universal Assent

- Locke instead ascribes a doctrine of universal assent to the rationalists.
- It is difficult to discern precisely the argument Locke attributes to them.
- Three possibilities, for any proposition p :
 - ▶ UA1 Everyone agrees that p if and only if p is innate.
 - ▶ UA2 If everyone agrees that p , then p is innate.
 - ▶ UA3 If p is innate, then everyone agrees that p .
 - But children
 - Goldbach's conjecture
 - Such examples leave UA2 alone.

Against UA2

UA2 If everyone agrees that p, then p is innate.

- Locke provides further examples which undermine UA2.
 - ▶ Green is not red.
 - ▶ “I imagine everyone will easily grant that it would be impertinent to suppose the *ideas* of colors innate in a creature to whom God has given sight and a power to receive them by the eyes from external objects...” (I.II.1, AW 319a).
- It is likely that some of the defenders of innate ideas contemporary with Locke did hold some form of a doctrine of universal assent.
- But no one appeals explicitly to such a doctrine, so it is difficult to know how important Locke’s criticisms really are.

Innateness and Experience

- No one questions whether experience is necessary for us to have knowledge.
 - ▶ “I cannot accept the proposition that whatever is learned is not innate. The truths about numbers are in us; but we still learn them...” (Leibniz, *New Essays*, 85).
- The question is whether experience is sufficient.
 - ▶ “Although the senses are necessary for all our actual knowledge, they are not sufficient to provide it all, since they never give us anything but instances, that is particular or singular truths. But however many instances confirm a general truth, they do not suffice to establish its universal necessity; for it does not follow that what has happened will always happen in the same way” (Leibniz, *New Essays*, 49).
- Something like II would be more plausible to ascribe to the rationalists.
 - ▶ II An idea is innate if it is not possible to learn it from experience.
- If the empiricist opponent of the doctrine of innate ideas wants to undermine II, she should show that experience is sufficient to account for our knowledge of the purportedly innate ideas.
 - ▶ Ockhamist principles of simplicity



Locke's Positive Project

- To show that we can account for all of our knowledge without appealing to innate ideas.
- Can we justify all of our good beliefs?

The *Tabula Rasa*

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any *ideas*. How does it come to be furnished? From where does it come by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? 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).

Two Lines of Attack

against the rationalists

1. Give up some of the general principles supposedly known innately.
2. Attempt to reclaim some of the knowledge that was formerly thought to rely on innate ideas.

Two tools

1. Sensation, and any ideas which can be attributed to our sense experience
2. Psychological capacities of our minds, including memory and the ability to reflect on our ideas.



Perceptions

- Individual perceptions are simple.
- Impressions of the same object under different sense modalities are independent.
 - The taste of the lemon is independent of its yellowness, and of its texture and odor.
- We'll see this *particularism* again going forward.
 - Berkeley and Hume
 - Wittgenstein and Russell
 - Logical empiricism
- Locke's claim that the sense modalities are independent explains his response to the Molyneux problem.

The Molyneux Problem

- “Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nearly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man be made to see. Quaere, whether by his sight, before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube?” (II.IX.8, AW 338b).
- Locke denies that the blind person could tell which was the sphere and which was the cube without touching the objects.
 - Our sense of touch is independent of our vision.
- There is experimental research supporting Locke’s solution.
- The question has not been resolved completely.



Sensation and Reflection

- Simple ideas of sensation come from individual sense experiences of particular objects.
 - ▶ We can hold those ideas in memory, and recall them.
 - ▶ Language primarily consists of names of our simple ideas.
- Using our naturally developing ability to reflect, we can go beyond the limits of particular sense experience, and memory of such experience.
 - ▶ “The other fountain from which experience furnishes the understanding with ideas is the *perception of the operations of our own mind* within us, as it is employed about the *ideas* it has gotten - which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of *ideas*, which could not be had from things without. And such are *perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*, and all the different actings of our own minds, which we, being conscious of and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct *ideas* as we do from bodies affecting our senses... I call this REFLECTION” (II.I.4, AW 323b).

Varieties of Reflection

- Locke uses 'reflection' to cover a wide variety of psychological capacities.
 - ▶ contemplation
 - ▶ memory
 - ▶ discerning
 - ▶ comparison
 - ▶ composition
 - ▶ abstraction

Abstraction

- Abstraction is the key to Locke's attempt to get at Descartes' eternal truths.
 - To respond to innateness claims based on II.
 - II: An idea is innate if it is not possible to learn it from experience.
- We can generalize, or abstract, to find universals, like those of mathematics.
 - "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" (I.II.15, AW 321a).
- Thus, Locke believes that we have some inborn, if developing, capacities to reflect on our own ideas.
 - An inborn capacity is not an innate contentful idea.

Other Capacities for Reflection

Similarity and Difference

- We can recognize similarities and differences among our ideas.
- “If we will reflect on our own ways of thinking, we shall find that sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two *ideas* immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other. And this, I think, we may call *intuitive knowledge*” (IV.II.1, AW 389a).
- Intuitive knowledge is of the agreement or disagreement of ideas.
- Locke claims that there are four kinds of agreement or disagreement among ideas.
 1. Identity or diversity;
 2. Relation;
 3. Coexistence or necessary connection; and
 4. Real existence.
- Again, Locke believes that these comparisons can be *intuitively* apprehended without commitments to innate ideas.

Similarity, Difference and Plato

- Plato argued, in the *Phaedo*, that we can not learn about equality merely by seeing equals, that we must have knowledge of equality in order even to see two objects as equals.
 - ▶ We bring our concept of equality (identity and difference) to our experiences.
 - ▶ We can not learn it from those experiences.
- Plato concludes that we are born with knowledge, foreshadowing the moderns' doctrine of innate ideas.
- Locke uses the argument to deflate the innatists' claims.
 - ▶ “This is so absolutely necessary that without it there could be no knowledge, no reasoning, no imagination, no distinct thoughts, at all. But this the mind clearly and infallibly perceives each *idea* to agree with itself, and to be what it is, and all distinct *ideas* to disagree, i.e., the one not to be the other, And this it does without pains, labor, or deduction, but at first view, by its natural power of perception and distinction” (IV.I.4, AW 386b).
- All we need to perform these kinds of reflections is a natural power of perception and distinction.

Demonstrative Knowledge

- In addition to intuitive knowledge, Locke claims that reflection yields demonstrative knowledge.
 - ▶ Demonstrative knowledge requires proof.
 - ▶ Each step of the proof must be intuitive.
- Demonstrative knowledge requires chains of reasoning.
 - ▶ Doubt, which does not infect intuitive knowledge of agreement of ideas, can arise.
- Demonstrative knowledge grounds both mathematical and moral claims.
 - ▶ Mathematics is justified by a combination of intuitive first principles and secure methods of proof
 - Euclid, Frege
 - ▶ In moral philosophy, Locke also claims that we have intuitive knowledge of some primitive relations among ideas.
 - “*Morality [is] among the sciences capable of demonstration*; in which I do not doubt but from self-evident propositions, by necessary consequences, as incontestable as those in mathematics, the measures of right and wrong might be made out to anyone who will apply himself with the same indifference and attention to the one as he does to the other of these sciences... “*Where there is no property, there is no injustice*,” is a proposition as certain as any demonstration in *Euclid*” (IV.III.18, AW 397b-398a.).

God

- Locke argues that even our idea of God comes from experience, rather than from naturally imprinted first principles.
- “If we examine the *idea* we have of the incomprehensible supreme being, we shall find that...the complex *ideas* we have both of God and separate spirits are made of the simple *ideas* we receive from *reflection*: e.g. having, from what we experiment in ourselves, gotten the *ideas* of existence and duration; of knowledge and power; of pleasure and happiness; and of several other qualities and powers, which it is better to have than to be without. When we would frame an *idea* the most suitable we can to the Supreme Being, we enlarge every one of these with our *idea* of infinity; and so putting them together, make our complex *idea of God*” (II.XXIII.33, AW 366b).

The Challenge for Locke

- We have seen that Locke criticizes innate ideas, and argues that we have psychological capacities for attaining reflective knowledge.
- Further, he criticized Descartes's demand for indubitable certainty.
- Still, if he is not to beg the question of whether knowledge is possible, he should explain, in greater detail, how sense experience leads to veridical beliefs.
- Can Locke account for the errors which motivated Descartes, the false beliefs that he had taken as true in his youth, and demonstrate ways to avoid such errors without relying on innate ideas?

Four Central Topics in Locke's Work

- ✓1. Arguments against innate ideas
- ⇒2. **The primary/secondary distinction**
- 3. An account of personal identity, including Locke's approach to the mind/body problem
- 4. Locke's philosophy of language, including the doctrine of abstract ideas

Descartes Against the Senses

- Aristotle had taken sensory qualities to be properties of external objects.
 - ▶ The redness and sweetness of an apple are real properties of the apple itself.
 - ▶ Our senses are attuned to the external environment.
 - ▶ Color vision occurs when a person's eyes are changed to be like the color of an external object.
- Descartes presented (at least) three considerations which weighed against the veridicality of sense experience:
 1. The illusion and dream doubts;
 2. The wax argument; and
 3. The rejection of the Resemblance Hypothesis on the basis of the example of the sun.
- The moral of the illusion argument is merely to take care to use one's senses in the best way possible.
 - ▶ We need not dismiss all of our sense evidence on the basis of illusion.
 - ▶ The dream doubt encourages a mere skepticism.
 - ▶ Locke puts skepticism aside.

Appearance, Reality, and the Wax

- Physical objects can have contradictory sense properties.
 - ▶ The wax (like all material objects) is an extended body which can take various manifestations.
 - ▶ The same object may have many different appearances.
 - ▶ We should identity objects with none of their particular sensory qualities.
- The appearance of an object is distinct from its real qualities.
- Which qualities are real, and which are mere appearances?
 - ▶ The primary/secondary distinction

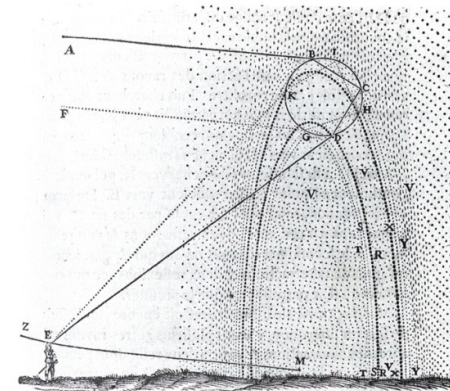


Primary Qualities Before Locke

- Descartes believed that the only real property of physical objects was their extension.
 - ▶ “The only principles which I accept, or require, in physics are those of geometry and pure mathematics; these principles explain all natural phenomena, and enable us to provide quite certain demonstrations regarding them” (Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* II.64, AT VIII.A.78)
 - ▶ Imagination is not capable of representing true extension.
 - ▶ We use pure thought.
- Boyle and Galileo
 - ▶ size, shape, mass, motion, and number
 - ▶ Again, mathematically-describable properties
- The expansion of the list of real properties from Descartes’s extension to the other qualities does not indicate any difference in principle.
 - ▶ The primacy of mathematics

Secondary Properties Before Locke

- Descartes's rejection of the Resemblance Hypothesis
 - ▶ The sun example
 - ▶ Sensory properties are artifacts of interactions between our bodies and other bodies.
 - ▶ They are not real properties of those external bodies.
 - ▶ “Most philosophers maintain that sound is nothing but a certain vibration of the air which strikes our ears. Thus, if the sense of hearing transmitted to our mind the true image of its object then, instead of making us conceive the sound, it would have to make us conceive the motion of the parts of the air which is then vibrating against our ears” (Descartes, *Le Monde*, AT XI.5).
- Descartes is a nominalist about secondary properties.



Galileo and Locke

- Galileo:
 - ▶ ...that external bodies, to excite in us these tastes, these odours, and these sounds, demand other than size, figure, number, and slow or rapid motion, I do not believe, and I judge that, if the ears, the tongue, and the nostrils were taken away, the figure, the numbers, and the motions would indeed remain, but not the odours, nor the tastes, nor the sounds, which, without the living animal, I do not believe are anything else than names (Galileo, *Opere* IV, 336).
- Locke:
 - ▶ Take away the sensation of them; let the eyes not see light, or colors, nor the ears hear sounds; let the palate not taste, nor the nose smell; and all colors, tastes, odors, and sounds as they are such particular *ideas* vanish and cease, and are reduced to their causes, i.e., bulk, figure, and motion of parts (Locke, II.VIII.17, AW 334b).
- The importance of the distinction for Locke is obviously not its originality with him.
- Its importance is mainly in how he uses it to support his empiricism.
 - ▶ And a bit on how he refines the argument.

Locke's Water Experiment

- The same object displays incompatible properties at the same time.
- The Heraclitean response to the wax example
 - ▶ “No one subject can have two smells or two colors at the same time. To this perhaps will be said, has not an opal, or the infusion of *lignum nephriticum*, two colors at the same time? To which I answer that these bodies, to eyes differently placed, it is different parts of the object that reflect the particles of light. And therefore it is not the same part of the object, and so not the very same subject, which at the same time appears both yellow and azure. For it is as impossible that the very same particle of any body should at the same time differently modify or reflect the rays of light, as that it should have two different figures and textures at the same time” (IV.III.15, AW 396b).
- The Heraclitean response is unavailable in the water case.
 - ▶ The exact same water displays the incompatible properties.
- Locke needs an account of the error that will not force us to abandon all sense experience to the poverty of the stimulus argument.



Ideas of an Apple

- Red
- Round
- Cool to the touch
- Sweet, though a bit sour
- Shiny
- Smooth
- Sits still on the table
- Crunchy
- Weighs 4 oz.
- Has a mass of 120 grams
- Is one apple
- Is being considered by you
- Smells apple-like



Locke's Destructive Principles

- Locke tacitly presumes two principles to distinguish veridical ideas from misrepresentative ones.
- LP1: If one perceives an object as having two (or more) incompatible ideas, then those ideas do not represent real properties of the object.
 - ▶ Besides hot and cold, other sense ideas are not veridical, according to LP1.
 - ▶ Color in porphyry (II.VIII.19)
 - ▶ Taste in almonds (II.VIII.20)
 - ▶ Descartes's wax example
- LP1C1: Even if a change in us entails the change in the perceived quality, the ideas which vary can not be veridical.
 - ▶ Orange juice
- LP1C2: Qualities that appear different to different observers are not veridical.
 - ▶ Color-blindness

Locke's Constructive Principle

- LP2: If an idea of an object is the same under all conditions, that idea is veridical.
 - “We may understand how it is possible that the same water may, at the same time, produce the sensations of heat in one hand and cold in the other; which yet figure never does, that, never producing the *idea* of a square by one hand, which has produced the *idea* of a globe by another” (II.VIII.21, AW 335b).
- LP2C: If every observer receives the same idea from an object, then that idea is veridical.

Apple, Redux

- Red ■ Misrepresentative
- Round ■ Real
- Cool to the touch ■ Misrepresentative
- Sweet, though a bit sour ■ Misrepresentative
- Shiny ■ Misrepresentative
- Smooth ■ Misrepresentative
- Sits still on the table ■ Real
- Crunchy ■ Misrepresentative (But consider its brittle texture)
- Weights 4 oz. ■ Misrepresentative
- Has a mass of 120 grams ■ Real
- Is one apple ■ Real
- Is being considered by you ■ Misrepresentative
- Smells apple-like ■ Misrepresentative



- Thus, we have arrived at the primary/secondary distinction via argument:
- “These I call *original* or *primary qualities* of body, which I think we may observe to produce simple *ideas* in us, namely, solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. *Secondly*, such *qualities* which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their *primary qualities*...these I call *secondary qualities*” (II.VIII.9-10, AW 333a-b).

Primary Qualities and Secondary Qualities

- Primary
 - Solidity
 - Extension
 - Figure
 - Motion/ Rest
 - Number
- Secondary
 - Color
 - Odor
 - Hot/ Cold
 - Sound
 - Texture
 - Taste
- We can justify our beliefs on the basis of sense experience without worrying that we will be forced to accept errors as true because we are relying on our senses, rather than pure reason.

A Worry

- “Qualities thus considered in bodies are, first, such as are utterly inseparable from the body in whatever state it is, such as in all the alterations and changes it suffers, all the force can be used upon it, it constantly keeps, and such as sense constantly finds in every particle of matter which has bulk enough to be perceived, and the mind finds inseparable from every particle of matter, though less than to make itself singly perceived by our senses - e.g., take a grain of wheat, divide it into two parts, each part has still *solidity*, *extension*, *figure*, and *mobility*; divide it again, and it retains still the same qualities; and so divide it on until the parts become insensible, they must retain still each of them all those qualities” (II.VIII.9, AW 333a).
- Why doesn't the change in extension of the wheat show that extension is a secondary quality?
- Do electrons have shape?

The Primary/Secondary Distinction, the Resemblance Hypothesis, and Empiricism

- Locke accepts the Resemblance Hypothesis, for primary qualities only.
 - The *ideas of primary qualities* of bodies *are resemblances* of them and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves, but the *ideas produced* in us *by* these *secondary qualities have no resemblance* of them at all. There is nothing like our *ideas* existing in the bodies themselves (II.VIII.15, AW 334a).
- Our ideas of extension resemble extension in the world.
- My ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble anything in an object.
- On the basis of my ideas of primary qualities, then, I can justify significant conclusions about the world (i.e. the new science) without appealing to innate ideas.

Descartes and Locke

- Both Descartes and Locke were writing in support of modern science.
- Descartes believes that the essential characteristic of physical objects is extension.
- Locke believes that extension is just one of several primary qualities.
- They disagree more strongly about how we know about those properties.
- Their disagreement is mainly epistemological, not metaphysical.

Locke's Metaphysics

- God, finite intelligences, bodies
- The material world is nothing but particles in motion.
- Sense qualities of objects are not really in the world.
 - ▶ Lemons are not really yellow, or sour.
 - ▶ They are made of particles (atoms or corpuscles) that appear yellow or sour to normal human senses.
 - ▶ These minute particles unite in varying ways.
 - ▶ Depending on how they unite, they affect us in different ways.
- We might say that the lemon has a 'dispositional property' which makes us see it as yellow.
 - ▶ But the dispositional property is not yellowness, which is, properly speaking, a property only of my experience.