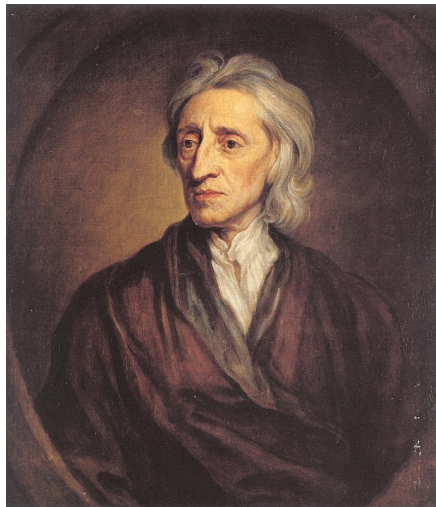


**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

**Russell Marcus**  
**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2016**



**Class #13 - Locke**  
**Against Innate Ideas**

# Business

- End of Unit 2 Writing Assignment is due now.
  - Please put yours in the team folder.
- The second paper assignment is in there; take one.
- RAT3
  - Generally better scores
  - Why?
- Time for Peer Review
  - I'll send you a Google form, and a list of your team member names.
  - Read the short essay on feedback (in your folders).
  - Then complete one form for each team member.
  - These are due next Tuesday, March 8.
- Then, Midterm Course Evaluations

# Empiricism Topics

Through the week after break

1. The primary/secondary distinction
  - We're mostly done with this one.
2. Locke's arguments against innate ideas
3. Empiricism and perception
4. Locke on Minds, Bodies, and Thought
5. Locke's account of personal identity
  - including his approach to the mind/body problem
6. The doctrine of abstract ideas
  - Locke for
  - Berkeley against
7. Three arguments for idealism
  - against the reality of primary qualities
8. Idealist accounts of mathematics and science

# Primary Qualities and Secondary Qualities

- Primary: intrinsic to the object
  - ▶ Solidity
  - ▶ Extension
  - ▶ Figure
  - ▶ Motion/ Rest
  - ▶ Number
- Secondary: extrinsic, arising from interactions of bodies
  - ▶ Color
  - ▶ Odor
  - ▶ Hot/ Cold
  - ▶ Sound
  - ▶ Texture
  - ▶ Taste

# Primary Qualities and Decomposition

- “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).
- 1. Color is classified as secondary because it changes with the environment.
  - Why doesn't the change in extension of the wheat show that extension is a secondary quality?
- 2. Are there primary qualities all the way down?
  - Do electrons have shape?
- We'll return to such worries next Thursday, with Berkeley's criticisms.

# The Primary/Secondary Distinction, and the Resemblance Hypothesis

- 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.

# Empiricism Topics

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## ***koinai ennoiai***

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



# Team Activity

## Innate Ideas

- Locke presents a variety of considerations against innate ideas.
- Match each of the five examples with one (approximate) quote describing an argument from Locke against innate ideas.
  1. “The knowledge of some truths is very early in the mind” (AW 321a).
  2. “If there were certain truths in which all mankind agreed it would not prove them innate” (AW 319a).
  3. “To be in the understanding and not to be understood, to be in the mind and never to be perceived, is all one, as to say anything is and is not in the mind or understanding” (AW 320a).
  4. “There cannot be anything more opposite to reason and experience than to suppose all our ideas of colors to be innate” (AW 322a).
  5. “By what kind of logic will it appear that any notion is originally by nature imprinted in the mind in its first constitution, because it comes first to be observed and assented to when a faculty of the mind, which has quite a distinct province, begins to exert itself?” (AW 321a).

# Innateness and Universal Assent

- We do not know some of the ideas which Descartes and others allege to be innate.
- 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).
- Locke instead ascribes a doctrine of universal assent to the rationalists.
  - If everyone agrees that p, then p is innate?
    - Green is not red.
  - If p is innate, then everyone agrees that p?
    - Children
    - Goldbach’s conjecture
- Not really an argument that we find in the rationalists’ work anyway.
  - Put it aside.

# 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.
- Perhaps ‘An idea is innate if it is not possible to learn it from experience’ is more plausible.
  - ▶ Poverty of the evidence
- The empiricist opponent of the doctrine of innate ideas should show that experience is sufficient to account for our knowledge of the purportedly innate ideas.
  - ▶ Ockhamist principles of simplicity



# 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. Perception
  - ideas which can be attributed to our sense experience
2. Reflection
  - Psychological capacities of our minds
  - Including memory



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# Team Activity

## Empiricism and Perception

- Classify each of the given ideas into one of the following categories:
  - A. Simple ideas acquired by one sense
  - B. Simple ideas acquired by more than one sense
  - C. Simple ideas of reflection