

## 0 The Essay

Locke's purpose: "to inquire into the origin, certainty, and extent of human knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent" (1.1.2)

"Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct." (1.1.6)

Locke's method (1.1.3):

- Origin of ideas
- Knowledge: certainty, evidence, extent
- Faith or opinion: reasons, degrees

## 1 Ideas

Locke on "idea": It being that term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by *phantasm, notion, species*, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it." (1.1.8)

The origin of ideas: sensation and reflection

- "From where does [the mind] 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." (2.1.1)
- Locke argues against the doctrine of innate ideas, held by Descartes and Leibniz, among others.
  - Innate ideas are imprinted on the mind from birth.
  - Speculative principles thought to be innate:
    - "Whatsoever is, is."
    - "Tis impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be."

Opponent's argument:

1. A principle is universally assented to if and only if it's innately known.
2. Speculative principles are universally assented to.
3. Therefore, speculative principles are universally known.

Locke's criticisms:

- If there is some other adequate explanation for why a principle is universally assented to, then it won't follow that it must be innately known.
- If certain truths are innate, then they are imprinted on the mind.
  - If there are truths imprinted on the mind, then they are perceived (that is, assented to).
    - If it were possible for a truth to be imprinted on the mind yet unperceived, then the explanation would be in terms of capacity for knowing – that is, it could only be because such truths were knowable by the mind.

- But then all possibly known truths would be imprinted on the mind, and hence innate.
  - This would be an abuse of language.
- So, if certain truths are innate, then they are perceived, and hence universally assented to.
- Children and idiots do not assent to speculative principles.

In contrast, Locke holds a “blank slate” theory of the mind.

- The soul does not think without perceiving. (Sleeping...)
- “...the objects of our senses do, many of them, obtrude their particular *ideas* upon our minds whether we will or not; and the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least, some obscure notions of them.” (2.1.25)

Simple ideas: of one sense; or of more than one sense: space, extension, figure, rest, motion

Ideas of mixed modes: contain a combination of several ideas of several kinds

Ideas of substances: combinations of simple ideas taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves

Simple ideas:

- Passively received, mediated by sensory organs
- “...the simple *ideas* thus united in the same subject are as perfectly distinct as those that come in by different senses.” (2.2.1)
- Complex ideas are formed from simple ones by repeating, comparing, and uniting.
- We cannot form complex ideas out of simple ideas we have not received by sensation or reflection.
- Simple ideas may come to us by one or more senses, one or more reflections (understanding and will).
  - One sense: white, red, heat, cold, solidity (or impenetrability), ...
  - More than one sense: space (or extension), figure, rest, motion, ...
  - One reflection: remembrance, discerning, reasoning, judging, knowledge, faith, ...
  - Both: pleasure, pain, existence, unity, power, succession, ...