

1 Real knowledge

Knowledge is the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas. (4.1.2)

“As to the fourth sort of our knowledge, namely, of the *real actual existence* of things, we have an intuitive knowledge of our own *existence*; and a demonstrative knowledge of the *existence* of a God; of the *existence* of anything else, we have no other but a sensitive knowledge, which does not extend beyond the objects present to our senses.” (4.3.21)

“Our knowledge therefore is *real*, only so far as there is a conformity between our *ideas* and the reality of things.” (4.4.3)

Real ideas conform with archetypes of real things – that is, that which they are taken to represent.

- They “have a foundation in nature ... have a conformity with the real being, and existence of things.” [2.30.1]

So, each sort of idea is attached to a certain supposition of what actually exists:

- Simple ideas are supposed to correlate with presently existing things, where the correlation is set up by the creator.
 - “And thus our simple ideas are all real and true, because they answer and agree to those powers of things which produce them in our minds, that being all that is requisite to make them real, and not fictions at pleasure.” [2.30.3]
 - All are real.
- Ideas of mixed modes are supposed to represent things that are possible.
 - “...all our complex ideas, except those of substances, being archetypes of the mind’s own making, not intended to be the copies of anything, nor referred to the existence of anything, as to their real origins, cannot want any conformity necessary to real knowledge. For that which is not designed to represent anything but itself can never be capable of a wrong representation, nor mislead us from the true apprehension of anything, by its dislikeness to it...” (4.4.5)
 - Some are real (if they’re made of consistent ideas).
- Ideas of substances are supposed to represent real beings.
 - They’re real if there exist things corresponding to them that we suppose that there are.
 - May (1) refer to (supposed) real essences or (2) be representations of things that do exist by ideas discoverable in them.
 - But first, real essences are unknowable.
 - Second, the common features we observe in things are only as adequate as experience.

2 Knowledge of the existence of God

An argument for God (4.10.2-6)

1. I am thinking, so a thinking being exists.

2. A nonentity cannot produce a thinking being, so there must be an eternal thinking being.
3. An eternal thinking being must be all powerful and all knowing.
4. Therefore God exists.

Locke goes on to argue that this thinking being must be immaterial.

3 Knowledge of external objects, or “sensitive knowledge”

Locke thinks that we can have a kind of knowledge about the existence of external objects.

- It is not as certain as intuitive or deductive knowledge.
 - “*The notice we have by our senses of the existing of things without us, though it is not altogether so certain as our intuitive knowledge, or the deductions of our reason employed about the clear abstract ideas of our own minds, yet it is an assurance that deserves the name of knowledge.*” (4.11.3)
 - “*There is, indeed, another perception of the mind, employed about the particular existence of finite beings without us; which going beyond bare probability, and yet not reaching perfectly to either of the foregoing degrees of certainty, passes under the name of knowledge.*” (4.2.14)
 - “*...we may add to the two former sorts of knowledge, this also, of the existence of particular external objects, by that perception and consciousness we have of the actual entrance of ideas from them, and allow these three degrees of knowledge, viz. intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive: in each of which, there are different degrees and ways of evidence and certainty.*”
 - In intuitive knowledge, our certainty is evidence-based.
 - In sensitive knowledge, it is not evidence-based.
- It is well-grounded confidence.
 - “*...the confidence that our faculties do not herein deceive us, is the greatest assurance we are capable of, concerning the existence of material beings. For we cannot act anything, but by our faculties...*” (4.11.3)
- Other evidence:
 - Corroboration by evidence of those without certain sense organs
 - Sensation versus memory
 - Ideas without pleasure or pain
 - Corroboration by various sense organs
- “*For our faculties being suited not to the full extent of being, nor to a perfect, clear, comprehensive knowledge of things free from all doubt and scruple, but to the preservation of us in whom they are, and accommodated to the sue of life, they serve to our purpose well enough, if they will but give us certain notice of these things, which are convenient or inconvenient to us.*” (4.11.8)

The account:

- We’re naturally disposed to suppose a correspondence between simple ideas and qualities.
 - It is sufficient for knowledge that the brain is hooked up in the right way.
 - Note that we don’t have to *know* that they brain is hooked up in the right way.
- Sensitive knowledge is knowledge of the existence of things acquired by sensing them.

- The idea we have from external objects is in our minds, but this intuitive knowledge alone doesn't get us the existence of a thing corresponding to the idea.
- We only have sensitive knowledge about the existence of a thing when it is present and causing certain ideas of ours.
 - Memory doesn't yield sensitive knowledge, though it yields knowledge of the past existence of things.
 - The difference between perceptions of the existence of external things and those that are illusory is plain, e.g. ideas via the senses versus ideas via the memory.
- So we can only have sensitive knowledge about the existence of particular things.

Problems with Locke's account:

- Is sensitive knowledge ruled out by Locke's definition of knowledge?
 - Knowledge of the existence of things doesn't fall under perception of agreement or disagreement among ideas.
- Even if we call it "knowledge," it's not certain.
 - So by what right can we be confident of the existence of things?
 - Is it inferential? And if so, aren't we faced with the problem of skepticism?