

John Locke

Book II: *Of Ideas in General, and  
Their Origin*

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## Purpose of Book II

- Book I focused on rejecting the doctrine of innate ideas (Descartes and rationalists)
- Book II focused on explaining how all ideas are derived from experience.

# Definition of IDEA

- *“Idea is the object of thinking”* (AW 322b)
- Locke holds that it is past any sort of Cartesian doubt that “men have in their minds several *ideas* such as are those expressed by the words *whiteness, hardness, sweetness, thinking, motion, man, elephant, army, drunkenness, and others.*” (AW 322b)

# Splitting from the Doctrine

- Locke finds fault in the common opinion that we are born with *native ideas* and *original characters*.
- He holds that in various “ways and degrees [ideas] come into the mind” (AW 323a)
  - He seeks to reveal this to his audience by appealing to observation and experience.

# Source of Ideas

- Primary source of Ideas is EXPERIENCE.
- Locke holds that the mind is, at birth, a “white paper, void of all characters, with any *ideas*” (AW 323a)
- It is by means of *experience* that we begin to fill in the *blank slate*.
- It is Locke’s belief that the origin of reason and knowledge is founded in experience.
- And from our observations one can see that “external sensible objects or... the internal operations of the mind, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking.” (AW 323a)

# Fountains of Knowledge

- Two fountains of knowledge derived from experience give rise to ideas: SENSATION and REFLECTION.
  - Sensations - “*convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways in which those objects do affect them.*” (AW 323a)
  - Reflections - a source of ideas that “every man has wholly in himself; and though it is not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects, yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called internal sense... the *ideas* it affords being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself.” (AW 323b)

# Summary of Origin of Ideas

- **Sensation - focused on external material things influencing the mind**
- **Reflection - focused on the operations of the mind within**
  - Locke uses the term OPERATION here to describe the actions of the mind, including the passions of it that give rise to the satisfaction and uneasiness which sometimes arises from any thought.

# One or the Other and No More

- “*All our ideas are of the one or the other of these. The understanding seems to me not to have the least glimmering of any ideas which it does not receive from one of these two.*”  
(AW 323b)
  - External objects give the mind, and thus us, sensible qualities through the different perceptions they produce in us.
  - The mind itself gives us the understanding with ideas of its own operations.

# Look to the Children

- Once again Locke uses the behavior of children to demonstrate his theory.
  - Actions of children give us no reason to believe that they have any innate ideas.
    - We can't remember our earliest experiences because our mind wasn't prepared yet in its ability to register time or order.
    - “If a child were kept in a place where he never saw any other but black and white until he were a man, he would have no more *ideas* of scarlet or green than he who from his childhood never tasted an oyster or a pineapple has of those particular relishes.” (AW 324a)

# Experience is Unique

- Men become furnished with simple ideas as we interact with more or less objects from which we can converse and think about in more or less ways in a sort of reflection.
- This is what gives rise to unique experience and variety amongst men.
  - A simple idea is all that is had unless a man turns his thoughts to consider them attentively. Doing this won't give rise to a clearer and more distinct distinct idea, but rather develop a **particular idea**.

# Particular Ideas

- A **particular idea** differs from a “normal idea” in so far that one may encounter a clock everyday and obtain a *confused idea* of this clock, but won't understand it more fully until they take the time to turn their attention to the individual parts of the clock and how their interactions effect its ability to imprint a more complete picture specific to the clock.

# Order of Developing Ideas

- Ideas derived from sensation come before those derived from reflection because reflection requires attention.
- “It is pretty late before most children get *ideas* of the operations of their own minds; and some do not have any very clear or perfect *ideas* of the greatest part of them all their lives, because, though they pass there continually, yet, like floating visions, they make not deep impressions enough to leave in their mind clear, distinct, lasting *ideas*, until the understanding turns inward upon itself, *reflects* on its own *operations*, and make them the objects of its own contemplation.” (AW 324b)

# Limit of Knowledge

**“Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man’s own own mind... No man’s knowledge can go beyond his experience” (AW 327a)**

# Origin of Knowledge

- “The origin of all our knowledge. In time the mind comes to reflect on its own *operations* about the *ideas* gotten by *sensation* and in this way stores itself with a new set of *ideas*, which I call *ideas* of reflection. These are the *impressions* that are made on our *senses* by outward objects that are extrinsic to the mind and its *own operations*, proceeding from powers intrinsic and proper to itself, which, when *reflected* on by itself, become also objects of its contemplation, and *are*, as I have said, *the origin of all knowledge.*” (AW 327b)
- SIMPLE IDEAS

# Simple Ideas

- **Uncompounded appearances**
  - Each sense has an idea of an object separate from other senses.
  - “Simple ideas thus united in the same subject are as perfectly distinct as those that come in by different sense.” (AW 328)

# Simple Ideas

- “The mind can neither make nor destroy them.” (AW 328a)
- “When the understanding is once stored with these simple *ideas*, it has the power to repeat, compare, and unite them, even to an almost infinite variety, and so can make at pleasure new complex ideas. But it is not in the power of the most exalted with or enlarged understanding, by any quickness or variety of thought, to invent or frame one new simple *idea* in the mind.” (AW 328a).

# Solidity

- **We receive the idea of solidity from touch.**
  - “Arises from the resistance which we find in body to the entrance of any other body into the place it possesses, until it has left it.” (AW 330a)
- **Fills Space**
  - Prevent the entrance of other objects into the area of its being
- **Distinct from Space**
  - All the objects in the world wouldn't be able to compress a drop of water... unlike pure space which isn't capable of resistance nor motion.
- **Solidity differs from hardness**
  - Solidity is the ultimate exclusion of other objects
  - Hardness refers to the firm interaction of entire mass.

# Solidity

- Is an extension of body, rather than an extension of space
- Extension of Body: the cohesion or continuity of solid, separable, movable parts.
  - Relies on their mutual impulse, resistance, and protrusion.
- Extension of Space: the continuity of unsolid, inseparable, immovable parts.

## *Mr. Molineaux 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 is the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on the 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 sphere?” (AW 338b)

## Of Simple Ideas by More Than One Sense

- **Space, extension, figure, rest, and motion are the ideas that we get by more than one sense.**
- **This is because they make perceivable impressions on both the eyes and touch thus the ideas of each are conveyed into our minds both by sensing and feeling individually.**

# Of Simple Ideas of Reflection

- **Locke sees simple ideas as the working of the mind about other ideas.**
- **He sees two great principles of the mind**
  - **Perception or thinking-this is the understanding**
  - **Volition-this is the will**
- **The modes of these simple ideas of reflection are such things as discerning and reasoning.**

## Of Simple Ideas of Both Sensation and Reflection

- Pain and Pleasure are conveyed to the mind through both sensation and reflection.
- They signify whatever delights us or is distasteful to us.
- Power also comes from both because we observe ourselves moving things and also because we see other objects producing effects in each other and even occurring to our senses.
- Simple Ideas are also the basic material from which our knowledge arises.

## Other Considerations Concerning Simple Ideas

- **Locke believes that one can get simple ideas from privation because there is a distinction between having a clear idea of something, say a color, and having a clear idea of how the particles are arranged to give the specific color.**
- **“Thus the ideas of heat and cold, light and darkness, white and black, motion and rest, are equally clear and positive ideas in the mind, though perhaps some of the causes which produce them are barely privations in subjects from which our senses derive those ideas.” (E8, AW 332a)**

# Examples

- **Locke begins a reason based in natural science to justify positive ideas coming from privation but stops because he prefers to remain in the realm of experience. His example concerns a shadow.**
- **“the shadow of a man, though it consists of nothing but the absence of light (and the more the absence of light is, the more discernible is the shadow), does not, when a man look on it, cause as clear and positive idea in his mind as a man himself” (E8, AW 332b).**

# The Primary and Secondary Distinction

- In order for Locke to accomplish his goal of proving that all knowledge comes from simple ideas, which themselves come from the senses, he must refute the wax argument presented by Descartes because it shows error in sense experience.
- Locke gives an example concerning three buckets of water. One has hot, one has cold, and one has warm. He then explains how the water can feel different to each hand at the same time.
- His reasoning behind such an event is that the feeling of temperature isn't present in the water in reality, thus forming the primary secondary distinction.

# Types of Qualities

- **Primary Qualities**-qualities that are actually present in things themselves whether they are perceived or not. Cannot be removed from an object no matter the divisions that occur.
  - Examples: bulk, figure, number, situation, and motion/rest.
- **Secondary Qualities**-the power that is in a body to produce a sensation and thus an idea in the mind of a person.
  - Example: Sight, sound, and taste
  - **Tertiary Qualities**-really a subset of secondary qualities. The power that is any body to make a change in the primary qualities of another body so that it's secondary qualities change to us. Irrelevant though because no one considers these to be the real qualities of an object.
    - Example: The sun and tanned skin

# Source of Primary Qualities

- **Produced through what Locke calls impulse. It is the extension of motion through our nerves and to our animal spirits. So if I touch a soda can I feel the cylindrical shape of the can due to a primary quality that the soda can contains.**
  - **This is because the ideas of primary qualities are actually resemblances of the primary quality and their patterns do exist in the body of an object.**
  - **Locke accepts the Resemblance Hypothesis for primary qualities.**

# Source of Secondary Qualities

- Secondary Qualities are “produced, namely, by the operation of insensible particles on our senses” (E8, AW 333b). Basically the different motions and figures of the primary qualities affect our sense organs and cause such ideas as colors, taste, and sound. The ideas of secondary qualities are not resemblances of the quality in the object.
- “These (distinct bodies after division) 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” (E8, AW 333a-b).

# Fire Example

- “what reason he has to say that his idea of warmth, which was produced in him by the fire, is actually in the fire; and his idea of pain, which the same fire produced in him the same way, is not in the fire.” (E8, AW 334b).
- This example questions how fire can cause two different sensations in one person. If either quality actually exists in the fire it should be present in both situations.

# Manna Example

- Locke's next example is of manna and concerns and how it can cause sickness in someone though a quality that isn't always present in manna. He then connects the sickness of the manna as a secondary quality to the whiteness of the manna as an additional secondary quality.
- “And yet men are hardly to be brought to think that sweetness and whiteness are not really in manna; which are but the effects of the operation of manna by the motion, size, and figure of its particles on the eyes and palate, as the pain and sickness caused by manna are confessedly nothing but the effects of its operations on the stomach and guts” (E8, AW 334b-335a).



# The Problem of Personal Identity

# Personal Identity

- What is the *self*?
- Descartes—metaphysical (the soul)
- Hobbes—Materialistic
- Locke—Neither!

## Distinguishing Between “Man” and “Person”

- What kind of thing is it?
- “And whatever is talked of other definitions, ingenuous observation puts it past doubt that the *idea* in our minds, of which the sound *man* in our mouths is the sign, if nothing else but of an animal of such a certain form” (AW 369b)
- Aliens

# Against the soul

- We can't pretend to know everything about the soul—it could have been present in a number of individuals
- “Suppose it to be the same soul that was in *Nestor* or *Thersites* at the siege of *Troy*...which it may have been, as well as it is now the soul of any other man. But he now having no consciousness of any of the actions of either of *Nestor* or *Thersites*, does or can he conceive himself the same person with either of them? Can he be concerned in either of their actions, attribute them to himself, or think them his own more than the actions of any other men that ever existed? Thus, this consciousness not reaching to any of the actions of either of those men, he is no more one self with either of them than if the soul or immaterial spirit that now informs him had been created and began to exist, when it began to inform his present body...” (AW 372a)

# Against pure materialism

- Hobbes: the self is the sum of our material parts
- But we are constantly changing!
- “An oak growing from a plant to a great tree, and then lopped, is still the same oak” (AW 368b)
- Oak’s identity is not in instantaneous form, but “a participation of the same continued life” (AW 369a)
- Distinguish between being the *same* and being the *same thing*

# Identity defined by consciousness

- We are aware of our identity through thought
- “[A person] is a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places, which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it...” (AW 370a)
- “For it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only” (AW 370b)

# Socrates waking vs. Socrates sleeping

- Definition of identity is problematic
- “If the same *Socrates* waking and sleeping does not partake of the same *consciousness*, *Socrates* waking and sleeping is not the same person”  
(AW 373b)
- Are we not the same person day and night?

## “Person” as a forensic/moral idea

- “But is not a man drunk and sober the same person? Why else is he punished for the fact he commits when drunk, though he is never afterwards conscious of it? Just as much the same person as a man who walks, and does other things in his sleep, is the same person, and is answerable for any mischief he shall do in it.”  
(AW 374b)
- Practicality—conferring responsibility