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 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 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)