

A summary of john locke's concerning human understanding assignment

[History](#)



John Locke wrote an Essay Concerning Human Understanding to give his philosophy of mind and thought. In Book I, Locke told that discovering where our ideas come from, ascertaining what it means to have these ideas and what an idea essentially is, and examining issues of faith and opinion to determine how we should proceed logically when our knowledge is limited were the three goals of his project. He disagreed with the idea of Plato and Descartes that all men have an innate knowledge.

He states that no principle is accepted by every human, and if one did exist, it would not be because of innate knowledge. He also believes that humans cannot have ideas that they are unaware of, and that to possess even the most basic principle, they must be taught it, or learn for themselves through experience. Also, God is not innate knowledge, since not all people believe in it. In Book II, he proposes that knowledge is built up from ideas, so the most basic units of knowledge are simple ideas, which come only from experience.

He explains that there are two types of experience; sensation (experiences from the outside world), and reflection (when the mind recognizes ideas about it's own functions). He also explores things that our minds are capable of, such as making judgments about our own perceptions to refine our ideas, remembering ideas, discerning between ideas, comparing ideas, enlarging simple ideas, and finding simple ideas in more complex ideas. In Book III, Locke talks about abstract general ideas.

He says that everything that exists in the world is a particular " thing. " We make general ideas about these " things" because it's too hard to remember a name for every single thing that exists, if that many words existed,

communication would be extremely difficult, and the goal of science is to generalize and categorize everything. He agrees with Plato that we can only recognize something as a member of a species because we know the essence of the species.

He explains two types of essences; nominal, which are the collections of observable properties, and real essences which are the invisible structures and arrangements of corpuscles or atoms that make the nominal essences observable. He also discusses language, stating that the most significant problems with words is that they do not mean the same thing to all people. Book IV is about the nature of knowledge itself. Locke believes that knowledge is what the mind is able to perceive through reasoning out the connection, or lack of connection, between any two or more of our ideas.

There are three degrees of knowledge, which are intuition, demonstration, and sensitive knowledge. He says that we can never really develop a system of knowledge in natural philosophy, and that all we can do is make observations that tend to occur together on a regular basis. He states that almost all of science is subject to opinion or judgment. He defines reason as the faculty we use to obtain judgment and knowledge, and faith as the acceptance of revelation and has its own truths, which reason cannot discover.

Lastly, he says that all human understanding can be divided into three sciences; natural philosophy, ethics, and logic. John Locke's ideas were definitely enlightened, following the second tenet of enlightenment (laws can be discovered by people) the most. The majority of his ideas were based

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around the fact that no knowledge is known by everyone from birth, and that everyone must be taught it, or experience it for themselves. He believed that all knowledge comes from experiences, which lead to simple ideas, which lead to complex ideas, so all knowledge essentially comes from people's experiences.

Hearing that any normal person was able to gain new knowledge simply from experiences and simple ideas would be extremely motivating. Also, since most people believed in God, having him prove through logic that a God is not innate knowledge would be very shocking to many. The fact that he went against Plato and Descartes ideas would also be very bold, since their ideas were accepted by most people. All in all, his ideas were very revolutionary, or enlightened, and definitely helped lead to a new world view.