

John lock'es view on innate knowledge

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Innate ideas John Locke, a renowned English philosopher in the seventeenth century, argued against the pre-existing prevalent belief of innate knowledge, such as those led by Descartes. Many of Locke's arguments begin with criticisms on philosophers' opinion on innate knowledge, notably Descartes. Therefore, many of Locke's arguments are direct rebuttals of Descartes and other philosophers' beliefs about the existence of innate knowledge. To arrive at the conclusion that innate knowledge is impossible, Locke comes with various premises and rebuttals that add weight to his arguments.

First, Locke emphasizes that knowledge and ideas are learned through experience, not innately. He argues that people's minds at birth are 'blank slate' that is later filled through experience. Here, the 'senses' play an important role because 'the knowledge of some truths, as Locke confesses, is very in the mind; but in a way that shows them not to be innate'. By this, Locke argues that some ideas are actually in the mind from an early age but these ideas are furnished by the senses starting in the womb. For example, the color blue and the blueness' of something is not that which is learned innately but is some is learned through exposures to a blue object or thing. So if we do have a universal understanding of 'blueness', it is because we are exposed to blue objects ever since we were young. The blue sky is what many would acquaint with blue easily and at a young age. Second, Locke argues that people have no innate principles. Locke contended that innate principles rely upon innate ideas within people but such innate ideas do not exist. He says this on the basis that there is no 'universal consent' that everyone agrees upon.

Locke quotes that ' There is nothing more commonly taken for granted that there are certain principles universally agreed upon by all mankind, but there are none to which all mankind give a universal assent'. This argues against the very foundation of the idea of innate knowledge because principles that garner universal assent are thought to be known innately, simply because it is the best explanation available. However, it cannot even be an explanation for such belief because no ' universal consent' exists. Rationalists argue that there are in fact some principles that are universally agreed upon, such as the principle of identity. But it is far-fetched to claim that everyone knows this principle of identity because for the least, children and idiots, the less-intelligent ones are not acquainted with it. There are several objections to these premises and arguments that are outlined above. The argument by Locke that there are some ideas that are in the mind at an early age gives credence to argument for the innate ideas. For ideas to be furnished by the senses later on there has to be ideas that are laid as foundations.

If such ideas are innate, as acknowledged by Locke, no matter how trivial or less significant these ideas may be as one may argue, such claim could give weight to the idea of innate knowledge. Innate knowledge or ideas, after all, doesn't imply that all ideas are innate because as one can see, there are things that we learn through our experiences and encounters in life as well. So as long as there is even the basic principle that is innate early in life, then innate knowledge can be known to exist. The validity behind the claim that there is no ' universal consent' is also questionable.

Locke argues that no principle that all mankind agrees upon exists because there are those who are not acquainted with such principle, notably children and idiots. However, the terms children and idiots are somewhat misguided. How are children and especially the idiots categorized? Is there a specific criteria used for those who are classified as idiots? It is hard to generalize that idiots or those who are deemed less intelligent are not acquainted with certain principles because at times, intelligence is not the best indicator of someone's knowledge or ideas.

There are many intelligent people out there who take their status for granted and do not think, contemplate or make an effort to their best extent. The objections that are made against the initial arguments can be defended in certain ways. Regarding the objection that since there are innate ideas in the mind at an early age, innate knowledge exists, the term 'innate' should be thought of again in greater detail. Innate knowledge has to be significant enough for us to recount to be considered such. Thus, there comes a risk with considering the ideas within our minds early on as innate.

For example, the knowledge of our hands and feet maybe imbedded to us at a very early stage. The knowledge of using our hands and feet are not so significant. The knowledge that we gain through our use of hands and feet could be vital knowledge that we may recount throughout. Throwing a baseball properly under a coach's instructions is an example. Also, there is the claim that intelligence cannot be the sole indicator of one's acquisition of 'universal consent' and that there isn't a clear distinction of those who can understand universal principles to those who cannot.

However, the important focus here should not be on defining 'idiots' and intelligence but on that universal consent is hard to be assembled by every single mankind. Therefore, more should be considered than just innate knowledge that could garner universal consent. Empirical principles that are derived from experience could garner universal assent too. For example, the fear of 'dying' or 'getting seriously injured' could mean that people would not jump out the roof from tall buildings. And this belief could be universal among all.