

John locke's some thoughts concerning education; philosophy essay

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Daniel Dwyer Mykytyn, N. January 11, 2013 HZT 4U1-01 John Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education John Locke, famous sixteenth century philosopher and "Father of Classical Liberalism" wrote a work based on the human mind and learning methods entitled Some Thoughts Concerning Education. This work outlines Locke's views on how the brain absorbs and remembers new ideas through a theory known as the "tabula rasa" or blank slate. This theory constitutes that humans are born with a blank mind and that as we are taught new concepts, they are inscribed into this blank slate and remain there until we pass on.

According to Locke, the goal of education is not to create a scholar, but to create a virtuous man. He believes that learning morals is more important than any other kind of learning. He believes that education should create a person who obeys reason instead of passion. One of the most emphasized points in Locke's work is that children should enjoy learning and that there is no good reason that they should dislike learning and love playing. This idea covers almost two thirds of his work on education as Locke believes that we should begin teaching humans correctly from a young age.

All together, John Locke's work emphasizes three base ideas, the concept of the tabula rasa, moral learning is more important than any other kind of learning, and that children should enjoy learning. The first subject being covered is the subject of the tabula rasa or blank slate that allows humans to think freely in a sense. The concept of the tabula rasa, as told by John Locke, delves into the human mind deeper than one could simply comprehend by studying the surface of the human mind. Locke explains part of a pre-

established concept introduced by Aristotle, known as priori and posteriori knowledge.

His work places more emphasis on posteriori knowledge in that this learning method imposes that humans are born with a blank slate in their mind and that as they learn, subjects and ideas are essentially burned into their minds. This is based off of the basic "nature versus nurture" concept in that humans learn in one of two ways. These are either through nature, in which we are born with knowledge and that we are basically unlocking it through experience and all learning is basically recollection.

The other method emphasized by Locke is nurturing, humans are taught through action and all learning is just the basic collection of new ideas. Locke held firmly the idea that with the tabula rasa, one is given the ability to bend their mind and tailor themselves to certain ways of learning. This is an important point in Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* because it is the basis for the entirety of this work. This lets people define who they are, or, their character. If every human were to learn through recollection then truly we have no freedom as this means our character and mind are virtually predestined for us.

Tabula rasa gives humans the freedom to learn on our own and shape our own characters without having to worry about what might come in our predetermined fates. This also slightly mixes in a single quality of priori knowledge in that once we learn something, it is permanently engraved into our minds, and as we grow older, lose our knowledge as we might, it is simply because we can not recall it. It is held within the library of knowledge

that is our brain, but we simply can not remember it. The second argument I would like to introduce is John Locke's personal views on virtues.

Locke was a general liberal Protestant Christian, meaning he held very strong his values and ethics. This is apparent when he explains that moral learning is more important than any other kind of learning. Locke believed that the goal of education was not to raise a man of passion, but to raise one of reason and morals. He also held that another goal of education was not to create a scholarly man, but to create a virtuous man, much like Locke himself. Normally, on the standpoint of religion, philosophers were men of science and logic.

Locke directly opposed these earlier ideas by stating that morals, virtues, and ethics were a more important section of learning than any variety of math, algebra, chemistry, etcetera. More specifically, Locke wanted the educational system to instill what he named, the Principle of Virtue. This was an idea that Locke wished to impose that would divert a child's mental attention from their appetites and desires to reason. Locke deeply rooted his philosophies in his devout dedication to Christianity. Locke strongly supports moral learning because he believes that one who holds strong morals and implements them in their daily lives can improve the quality of society as a whole. He believes that society looks well upon the virtuous because society profits from virtuous acts. Locke wanted to teach these values to young people still going through earlier stages of development so that they would be passed down through generations as the ideal behaviours. The third and final point is Locke's strong emphasis on the teaching methods implemented

on young children. He held a strong belief that children were the future of our society, and he was correct.

This is why he disliked the educational system of his time. He did not like the concept of children being taught languages, mathematics, and science because he knew and he understood that children dislike learning these subjects. He believed that children could have fun learning due to his theory that children hate learning and love playing because they are forced to learn and they are not forced to play. Children enjoy playing because it is an instinct for children to prefer having fun and playing games than being forced to learn the difficult new concepts held within mathematics, algebra, science and languages.

He says that children should be nurtured and taken seriously regardless of their behaviour or situation. In saying this, what he means to say is that children should not be beaten, or scolded, and that behaviour, good or bad, should be taken lightly and that children should not be punished for causing trouble due to their age. Locke also puts emphasis on the point that every child's mind is different, and that teachers should tailor their education towards certain students' characters.

Locke stresses that all children should learn a manual skill such as carpentry, painting, or playing an instrument as it offers relief from the stressful hours spent learning in school. The point of Locke's essay is to take a stand against schools in a sense. He does this by criticizing their teaching methods and offering ideas on how children should learn and how they should grow. He implements his own opinion by utilizing a strong Christian background and by analyzing the minds of young children.

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He argues many points and opinions in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, but the most strongly emphasized are the concept of the *tabula rasa*, that moral learning is the most important form of learning, and that children should be taught through less strict methods of teaching. He believes that people grow through development of the mind, rather than recollection of complicated ideas. In the nature versus nurture argument, Locke strongly supports the notion of nurturing the brain and makes that a strongly opinionated statement through one of his most influential works, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.