

Locke & Leibniz on Innateness

Two senses of “innate”

Strong nativism

- Everyone is born/created with a “stock” or set of innate ideas or principles
 - appeal to best explanation of “universal consent” of basic principles
 - * some people don’t assent (children, “idiots”, etc.)
- 1. Occurrent vs. Non-occurrent ideas
 - Locke assumes: there are no unconscious ideas (all ideas are conscious)
 - Leibniz: isn’t memory a case of non-conscious or *non-occurrent* ideas?
- 2. “Little” perceptions
 - There are occurrent ideas of which we are not, and perhaps cannot be, aware (individual sounds of orchestra or ocean wave)
- 3. Enthymeme
 - Enthymeme** argument with one or more tacit or unexpressed premises
 - Locke is mortal because he is human.
 - All humans are mortal
 - Locke is mortal
 - Locke is human

Weak nativism

Ideas are innate in the sense that once one reaches “intellectual maturity” (age of “reason”) one would assent to the relevant ideas or principles

1. Upon first use of reason
 2. Any “exercises” of reason
- (1) is wrong because it confuses self-evidence with innateness (2) is true but trivial (or absurd)
1. Leibniz’s reply
 - Innate are (1) non-trivial (2) non-occurrent
 - (a) Marble Analogy

- we can have a non-occurrent idea innately in the sense that the mind is “pre-disposed” to form the occurrent idea in some context or another
- Content nativism :: ideas are “in” the mind in a literal sense – the content of the idea is there on the creation of the mind
- Dispositional nativism :: ideas are “in” the mind innately only in the sense that one has the capacity or disposition to form the occurrent idea in some contexts

2. General Objections by Leibniz

- (a) 1. What is the source of our representation of universality & necessity?
- (b) 2. Locke confuses animality & rationality
- (c) 3. Personal Identity