

Locke's Project

- Working as an “underlaborer” for science
- Advance scientific understanding by removing intellectual obstacles
- Examination of our cognitive powers

Locke on Innate Ideas

Two versions of nativist thesis

Strong Nativism (I.ii.2-5)

Human beings are born with a “stock” of innate ideas and principles of which they are aware

1. There are some basic truths & principles to which all human beings consent
 2. There would be no universal consent unless these truths & principles were innate
 3. At least some basic truths & principles are innately known
- Locke: there are empirical counterexamples to universal consent (e.g. children, mentally disabled, etc.)
 - All ideas are conscious (consciously perceived – see I.ii.5)

Weak Nativism (I.ii.6-14)

Once a human being reaches intellectual maturity (becomes a rational being), that person will assent to the relevant truths or principles

1. Two versions of weak nativism (I.ii.7)
 - (a) Innate ideas are those we assent to ‘on first hearing’ (I.ii.18)
 - i. False
Confuses self-evidence with innateness
 - (b) Innate ideas are those we are disposed to know
 - i. False b/c absurd
Anything we might be able to know would be innate on this view, and all ideas cannot be innate

Locke's Empiricism

- All ideas originate in experience (II.i.2)
 - External sense (sensation)
 - Internal sense (reflection)
- Content empiricism :: all the content of what we can think must be derived from experience
- Justificatory empiricism :: everything that we can justify to be the case (and so know) must be derivable from experience