

Philosophy of JOHN LOCKE: An Overview

The Syllabus

PHIA- SEMESTER 2- CC 4 (History of Western Philosophy- II)

- a) Locke: Refutation of innate ideas, The origin and formation of ideas, Simple and Complex ideas, Substance, Modes and Relations, Nature of Knowledge and its degrees, Limits of knowledge, Primary and Secondary qualities, Representative Realism.

A brief sketch on JOHN LOCKE

- **John Locke** (1632 – 1704) was a British philosopher
- He was a proponent of modern empiricism
- He was widely regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers and commonly known as the “Father of Liberalism”
- His monumental work was *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)
- His areas of interest were metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of education and economics



Locke's Refutation of Innate Ideas

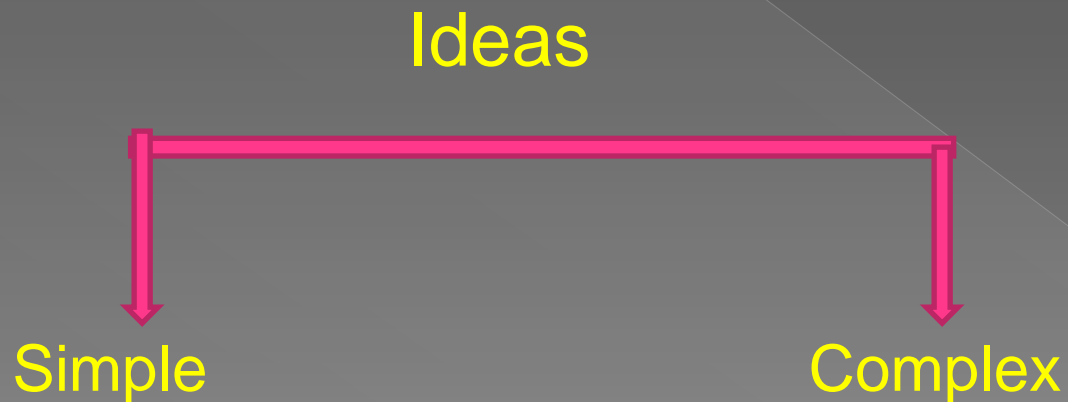
- Locke rejected Descartes' concept of innate ideas
- In the Book I of the *Essay* Locke describes innate ideas as “some primary notions...Characters as it were stamped upon the Mind of Man, which the Soul receives in its very first Being; and brings into the world with it” (I.2.1, N: 48)
- Locke's point is that human beings can not have ideas in their minds of which they are not aware
- He argues that if propositions were innate, they should be immediately perceived by everyone including infants and idiots — but there is no evidence that they are
- If there were innate ideas, it would be present not only universally, but also in a universal manner of which there is no evidence

The origin of Ideas

- In Book II of the *Essay*, Locke gives his positive account of how we acquire the materials of knowledge
- Locke distinguishes a variety of different kinds of ideas in Book II.
- Locke holds that the mind, at birth, is a *tabula rasa* or **blank sheet** until experience in the form of sensation and reflection provide the basic materials—simple ideas—out of which most of our more complex knowledge is constructed under certain circumstances

Classification of Ideas

- Locke claims that all our ideas come exclusively from our experience
- Ideas are the materials of knowledge
- Ideas are of two types :



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Simple Idea

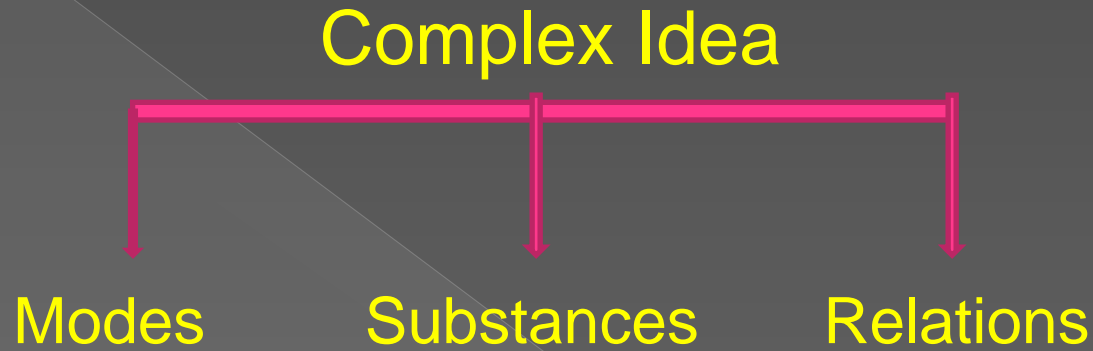
Simple ideas are the elements of thought we passively receive through sensation or perception or both sensation and perception . Our mind can not create it. For example, ideas of blueness or sweetness or extension etc.

Complex Idea

Complex ideas are built from simple ideas. Mind actively form complex ideas by combining, simple ideas; or by bringing of two ideas without uniting them; or by abstracting general ideas from particulars. For example, idea of beauty or causality etc.

Types of Complex Ideas

Complex ideas may be divided into three classes:



- **Modes** : Modes are those combinations of simple ideas which can not subsist by themselves, but need a substance or support or substratum in which to subsist. Modes are of two types : **simple modes** (e.g., a dozen) and **complex modes** (e.g., beauty)

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- **Substance** : Substance is the substratum in which in which the modes inhere. This is an “I know not what” which is the support of qualities which cannot subsist by themselves. For example, ideas of matter, soul and God
- **Relations** : Relations are not copies of real things, but are their own archetypes. For example, ‘son’, ‘father’, ‘incomplete’ etc are relative terms. There are different types of relations like causal relations, spatial and temporal relations etc.

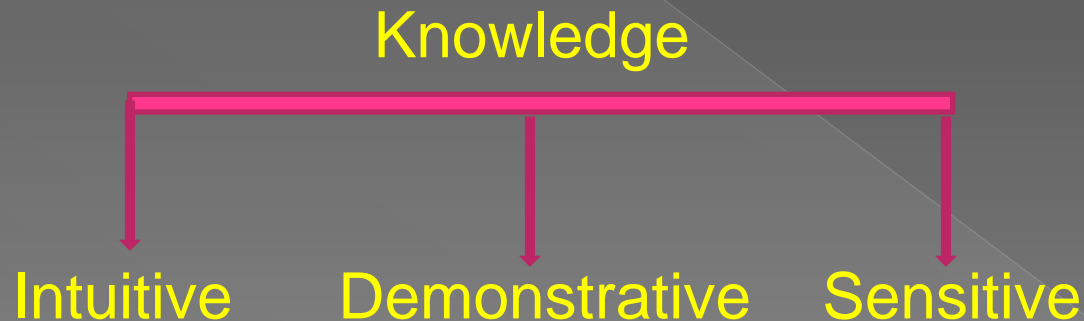
Formation of Complex Ideas

Complex Ideas are formed by the mind by comparing, combining and abstracting from simple ideas. There are **three** ways of constructing complex ideas:

- **Combination:** Formation of the ideas of beauty, human beings, universe, army etc.
- **Relation:** Formation of the ideas of 'father and son', 'big and small', 'cause and effect' etc.
- **Abstraction:** Formation of the idea of 'whiteness' from chalk, milk, ice etc.

Knowledge - nature and classification

- **Knowledge**, according to Locke, is the perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas. From this definition it follows that our knowledge does not extend beyond the scope of human ideas.
- Locke divides knowledge into three types:



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- **Intuitive Knowledge:** It involves direct and immediate recognition of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas with perfect certainty, e.g., 'Square is not circle'
- **Demonstrative Knowledge:** It occurs when we perceive the agreement or disagreement of two ideas indirectly through a series of immediate ideas, e.g., 'If $A > B$ and $B > C$, then $A > C$ '
- **Sensitive Knowledge:** It is caused by existing things even we do not know what causes the idea within us, e.g., 'There is something producing the odor I can smell'

Primary & Secondary Qualities

- **Primary qualities** are thought to be properties of objects that are independent of any perceiver, such as, **solidity, extension, motion, number** etc.
- These are inseparable from the objects
- These are unchangeable irrespective of any situation
- These are measurable
- **Secondary qualities** are thought to be properties that produce sensations in perceivers, such as, **color, taste, smell, sound** etc.
- These are separable from the objects
- These are changeable with varying circumstances
- These are not measurable

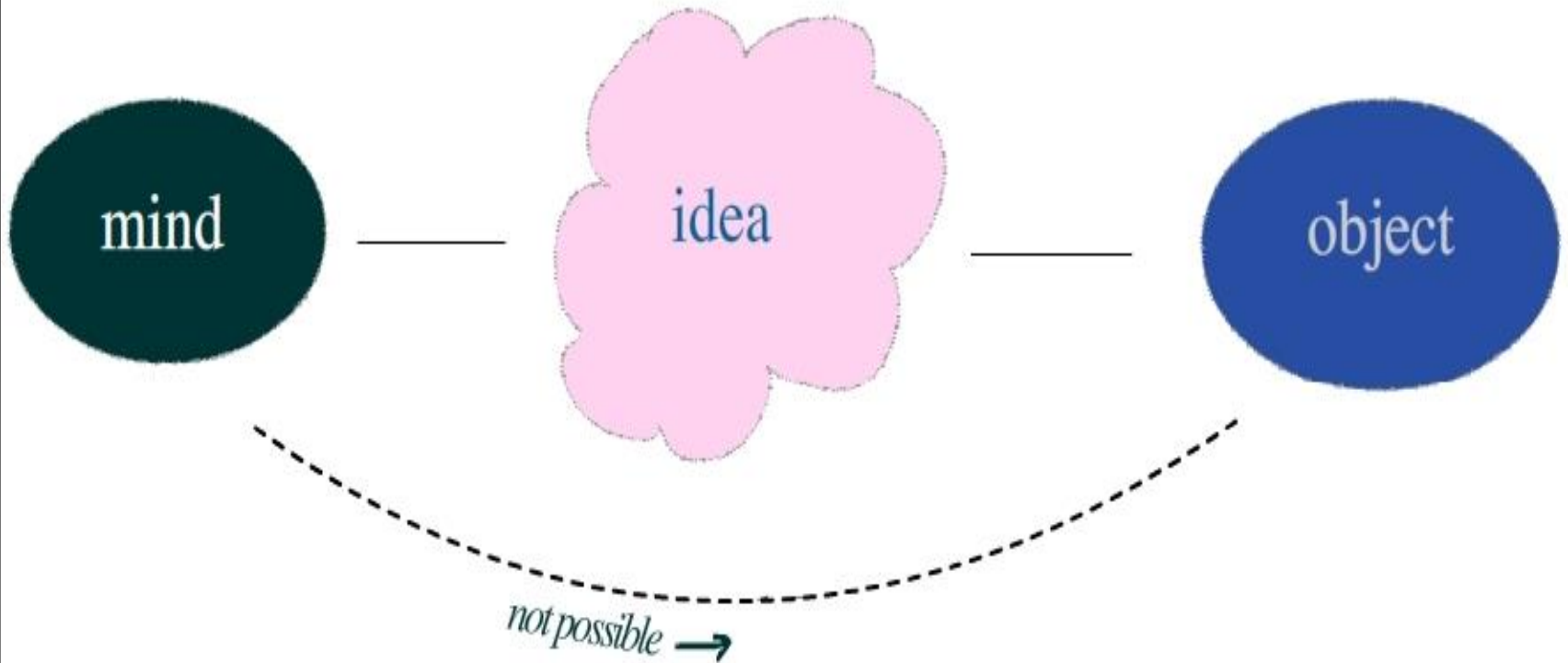
Representative Realism

- Locke said, “The mind represents the external world, but does not duplicate it”
- We know the external world **indirectly**
- We know only our ideas or representations of objects in the world.
- Instead of actually experiencing the world first hand we indirectly experience it through **representations**, i.e., through our **ideas**
- That is why Locke’s representative realism is called ‘indirect realism’

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Representational Theory of Perception

(dualist version)



Thank You

Any query regarding the topic
is always welcome