

Chapter 7

Locke

7.1 Introduction

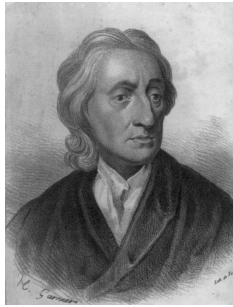


Figure 7.1: John Locke

7.1.1 Readings and Study questions

- Readings: Ideally, you would read Books I and II of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* entirely, but here is what is required (chap stands for chapter, par for paragraph):
 - Book I (p.270 1st ed. / 316 2nd. sq.): chap. 1 par. 1-8, chap. 2 par. 1-5, and par. 18-19
- Study questions:

1. What are Locke's main aim in the *Essay*? Why does Locke think it is important to know the limits of our understanding? What is Locke's ultimate goal in his inquiry? What is the main challenge that he wants to meet?
2. What does Locke mean when he says he will employ a plain, historical method. Why does he think it is sufficient for his purposes?
3. What is naturalism? Explain the difference between *methodological* naturalism and *ontological* naturalism.
4. Explain the argument in favor of the existence of innate ideas which appeals to the notion of universal consent. What are the objections that Locke levels against this argument?
5. Explain the argument in favor of the existence of innate ideas which appeals to the notion of self evidence. What are the objections that Locke levels against this argument?
6. Does Locke deny that there are self-evident and/or universal propositions?

7.1.2 Life and work

- John Locke: 1632-1704 – Puritan, modest family
- Historical Background: Religious and political conflicts – Locke committed in politics – hectic political life following the hectic political situation in England during these times:
 - Conflict between the monarchy and the parliament – ended with the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 – when the parliament wins over the monarchy
 - Conflicts between Catholics and Protestants
- Education: Westminster school (King's scholar) and then Oxford – i.e. the best you could get in England at the time
- Contact with the new science and the new (mechanical) philosophy, especially Bacon and Boyle – knowledge of corpuscularism.
- Most important Work:
 - *Essay concerning human understanding*

- *Two treatise of Governement*

- *Letter concerning Toleration*

7.1.3 Locke's *Essay*: topic, method, horizon

The *Essay*'s topic : inquiry into the limits of human understanding:

- I, I, 1: the understanding is what "sets man above the rest of sensible beings"

- I, I, 7: to inquire into the limits of our understanding is necessary to avoid getting lost in vain inquiries and useless disputes over things that are beyond our capacities

→ *Locke presents here a rather common goal. He aims at setting the limits of our understanding. One of his main claims is that we do not have any innate ideas. In fact, according to him, all our ideas are built on the basis of our experience.*

Locke's method : an empiricist, naturalist and descriptive account of ideas

- **Locke's empiricism:**

Remember that the empiricist claims that all knowledge comes from experience. This is what Locke claims in II,I,2: where does all human knowledge come from: "To this, I answer, in one word, from experience; out knowledge is founded in all that, and from that it ultimately derives itself".

This is not saying that everything we know is just the mirror or a copy of our experience: the understanding has many ways in which to combine/generalize/ compare the materials provided by experience. That said, ultimately, everything in our understanding is grounded in our experience.

- **Locke's naturalism:**

Locke's aim is to give a natural account of our understanding, that is to say, an account which appeals only to natural causes. So, unlike with Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, we should not expect Locke to appeal to God.

Commitment to naturalism is most often linked with modern scientific method: the point of science is to give a description of

the world strictly in terms of natural causes and natural mechanism. Any appeal to supernatural causes or mechanisms is not considered acceptable.

Now, *this does not imply that Locke is an atheist!* – quite the contrary in fact. In order to understand this, we need to distinguish between two kinds of naturalism: methodological and ontological.

Definition 17 – Methodological Naturalism

Methodological naturalism is the view that the proper method in science and philosophy is to appeal only to natural objects and mechanisms.

Methodological naturalism does not involve any commitment about the fundamental nature of the world. In particular, it does not involve any commitment about whether there exists any supernatural elements in the universe.

Definition 18 – Ontological Naturalism

Ontological naturalism is the view that the universe is only made of natural objects and mechanisms. Ontological naturalism does involve a commitment about the fundamental nature of the world. In particular, it involves the rejection of the existence of supernatural elements in the universe.

Presumably, someone who is committed to ontological naturalism will also be committed to methodological naturalism. The converse, however, is not true: one can easily be committed to methodological naturalism, without being committed to ontological naturalism. Indeed, this is the position of many scientists today!

→ *Locke is committed to methodological naturalism but not to any form of ontological naturalism. That is to say, he is committed to the idea that the advancement of scientific and philosophical knowledge is best served by giving accounts of the universe in terms of natural mechanisms between natural objects.*

- **Locke’s “historical, plain method” (I,I2):**
- The expression of “historical method” comes from Bacon:

Definition 19 – Historical Method (Bacon)

The historical method consists in giving a strictly descriptive account of an object of study. Such a description is supposed to be free of any theoretical hypothesis.

- Locke's object of study being the human understanding, he takes as a starting point the notion of idea. See the end of I,I, 7: Locke asks us to grant him that humans have ideas in their minds.
- Locke also assumes that humans have *faculties* which allow them to constitute and use their ideas, including the faculty of understanding.
- From this assumption, Locke wants to give a mere description of how our understanding come to know these ideas and what kind of knowledge we can hope to attain, *without making any further theoretical hypothesis about the nature of ideas.*
- In particular, Locke claims that he does not have to give an account of the physical constitution of the mind (cf. I,I 2), or of the way in which external objects physically affect the human mind such that ideas are produced – he claims that these considerations would be too speculative.

Locke's horizon : Locke's ultimate goal is eminently practical.

Not knowing the limits of understanding puts us in moral danger:

- Endless controversies, idle despair and/or arrogant skepticism – Locke is dissatisfied with the speculations of the Aristotelian philosophy, which produces vain controversies between Scholars.
- Dissatisfaction and Complaints: the immediate beneficial moral consequences of knowing our own limits should be that we be able to be content (I.I 4) – instead of blaming God about our imperfection

So, the aim of the *Essay* is practical: to recognize the limits of our understanding, without knowing everything about how we know will be *useful*:

Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct. (I,I,6)

- Analogy with the sailor and his line: the sailor cannot fathom the depth of the ocean, but can fathom the depth when it becomes useful (i.e., when coming closer to the shore)

—→ *Locke is not aiming at giving an absolutely true foundation for the new science, nor is he aiming at knowledge for itself. His ultimate aim is practical and moral.*

Organization of the *Essay* :

Locke gives us his program in the book :

1. The origin of ideas
2. The kind of knowledge attained by the understanding through such ideas
3. The nature and grounds of what is called faith and opinion

Now, this is not exactly how the book is organized:

- Book I provides a criticism of the notion of innate ideas – Before giving his own, positive, account, Locke needs to criticize the common view that we possess innate ideas
- Book II correspond to 1. above: the origin of ideas
- Book III gives an analysis of language which is not announced here – Locke finds out that our knowledge crucially depends on language.
- Book IV deals with 3 and 4 above.

We will focus on Book I and II: that is to say, Locke's account of the origin of ideas. The idea is to see how Locke tries to give an account of our ideas from the point of view of the empiricist. Our main question will then be: is it possible to do without innate ideas??

One of the main challenges that Locke has to meet is to account for the existence of morality without appealing to innate ideas. If you think about it, the existence of morality (and the idea that we ought to act upon such morality) is easily explained by the existence of absolute moral truths. Rationalists – Leibniz in particular – insisted that the only way to account for the existence of moral truths is to take them as innate ideas that we access by means of our pure reason. If none of this is true, that is, if there is no such things as innate, absolute truths, does it mean that morality does not exist, or is "merely relative"? This is the conclusion that Locke wants to avoid.

—→ *In short, the challenge for Locke is to account for the entirety of our cognitive life (including moral thinking and abstract reasoning) without appealing to the existence of innate ideas.*

7.2 Against Innate Ideas

7.2.1 Introduction

Why does Locke need to criticize the rationalist view – Locke presents his criticism of the idea that there are innate ideas or principles. He explains that he needs to do so because he expects his reader to be prejudiced and biased.

- an unbiased reader would readily accept the positive account of how ideas are constituted from experience
- a biased reader needs to see reason why he should doubt what he holds true: that is to say, that we are innate ideas and principles

Who is Locke's target – this has been a matter of controversy

- One could of course think that Descartes is the target – but then it seems that Locke is attacking a straw man (attributes to Descartes claims that Descartes never held)
- Recent scholarship suggests that Locke is targeting a much broader range of English philosophers, among which it may have a common view.
- The idea seemed to have been at the time that to deny the existence of innate ideas would open the door to the denial of morals.

→ *Again, Locke needs to argue both against the existence of innate ideas and against the claim that to deny the existence of innate ideas amounts to denying the existence of morality.*

7.2.2 Locke's argument(s) against the notion(s) of innate ideas

Locke's argument is not perfectly clear. I propose here to reconstruct his argument as the criticisms against two arguments in favor of two notions of innateness.

Against the argument of universal assent :

- The first argument that Locke targets here goes as follows:

1. There exist some propositions that are the object of universal consent
 2. That there is universal consent over a given proposition is sufficient to prove that such a proposition is innate
 3. So: there exists innate propositions
- Locke's criticism criticizes both premises:
 1. There is no such thing as propositions on which everybody agrees: children and idiots are unaware of the principles that philosophers cherish the most (principle of contradiction etc)
 2. *Even if* there were such propositions, universal consent does not imply innateness
 For example, one could imagine that everybody agrees that (well watered) grass is green. Such a universal consent would not make the proposition: "(well-watered) grass is green" innate.

→ *None of the premises holds, so the argument is not sound.*

Against the argument of unconscious but self-evident innate ideas
:

One way to answer the criticism above is to say that the children and idiots are unaware of their ideas. Remember Plato's experiment with the slave boy: the slave boy does not know any principle of geometry at the beginning of the experiment. He will discover that he possesses such knowledge without being aware of it. The traditional argument for innateness is then that, when we become aware of such truths as the truths of geometry, they appear self-evident and indubitable to us. Self-evidence is often given as the sure mark of innateness.

- The second argument that Locke targets here goes as follows:
 1. There exists propositions in our understanding of which we are not conscious;
 2. Some propositions appear to be self-evident when we focus our full attention on them;
 3. That such propositions appear to be self-evident is a sufficient proof of their innateness;

4. Hence, there exists self-evident but dormant innate ideas in our minds.
- Locke's criticism targets both premises:
 1. Against the first premise, he sets up the following dilemma:
 - Either the rationalist holds the strong view that innate ideas are in all human minds at all times, or she holds the weaker view that all humans possess an innate faculty of knowledge
 - The first branch of the alternative is impossible :

[It seems to me] a near contradiction to say that there are truths imprinted on the soul which it does not perceive or understand – imprinting, if it signifies anything, being nothing else by the making certain truths to be perceived. For to imprint anything on the mind without the mind's perceiving it seems to me hardly intelligible. (I, II, 4)

The core of Locke argument for this is the thesis that *all thoughts are conscious*:

No proposition can be said to be in the mind which it never yet knew, which it was never yet conscious of.
(I, II, 4)

 - The second branch of the alternative is trivial: no one has ever denied that humans have a faculty of understanding!!
 2. Locke then argues that evidence does not imply innateness:
 - he does not deny that there are self-evident propositions
 - but he denies that self-evidence makes these proposition innate
 - indeed, he explains that, if we were to accept self-evidence as a sufficient criterion of innateness, then an infinite number of propositions would qualify, and the thesis is rendered absurd. Example: blue is not red, cats are not dogs etc.

In general, one can formulate an infinity of propositions of the type : A is not B , for all A and B , $A \neq B$.

 - One could object that such propositions, which concern particulars, are *derived* from the general principle of non-contradiction, and that, while the general principle is primary and innate, the particular propositions are secondary and derivative.

Locke answers that anybody learns the propositions about particulars before the general principle. Moreover, most people know that red is not blue, but don't know about the principle of contradiction.

Locke's conclusion is that the general principles are constructed on the basis of singular experiences, through reflexion and abstraction.

→ *None of the premises holds, so the argument is not sound.*

Conclusion :

- Locke has given a thorough criticism of the most important arguments in favor of innate knowledge. In particular, Locke denies that either universal consent or self-evidence constitutes sufficient criteria for innateness.
- An important assumption in Locke's argument is that all thoughts are conscious: we cannot have any ideas that we are not aware of.
- That said, it is important to notice that Locke does *not* deny the existence of self-evident propositions on which anyone will agree on when she pays attention to it. What he denies is that such propositions are innate, imprinted in our minds beforehand. Instead, he will contend that such self-evident propositions are constructed on the basis of experience.

→ *Universality and Evidence exist, but are not the mark of innateness*

7.2.3 Against Innate Ideas: The Moral Point of View

Remember that Locke also targets the view that denying the existence of innate ideas puts morality in danger. Locke is going to argue the opposite view, that is to say, that claiming that there are innate ideas is detrimental to morality

Morality and Innate Ideas : the view was that we can answer the challenge of moral relativism only in affirming the existence of universal, self-evident, and absolute moral principles, imprinted (by God) in humans' minds.

Locke's view is exactly the opposite:

- To rely on imprinted principles is to rely on mere authority. But obedience to authority is not the right way to relate to moral principles. In other words, we are not fully moral when we follow a principle only because it was imposed on us. Rather, we are fully moral when we fully understand why such and such principles are right or wrong.

- To rely on authority and innate principles also implies that no discussion of such principles will be possible. In short, such principles will have to be accepted instead of properly examined by our reason. Unexamined and narrow-minded conservatism lurks.

- What matters is that we make good usage of our reason, be it for mathematics or morals. To be fully moral, one must to construct her principles of morality, step by step, through hard work of reasoning. Substituting authority to hard inquiry is immoral.

→ *According to Locke, the idea that moral principle are innate promotes laziness, ignorance and servitude instead of true moral behavior, which involves the proper use of reason.*

7.2.4 Conclusion on the First Book

- Locke hopes to give an account of humans' understanding from a naturalistic and empiricist standpoint. He admits the existence of intellectual faculties – in particular the understanding – and of ideas, and aims at giving a descriptive account of the mechanisms by which we attain knowledge.
- Locke's preliminary duty is to provide arguments against the rationalist view that humans possess innate knowledge. He considers the various ways in which the notion of innate ideas is traditionally defended, and provide thorough criticisms.
- Locke does not deny that there are universal and self-evident propositions but denies that self-evidence and universality are sufficient criteria for innateness.
- What matters is to use properly our reason. This is true concerning all domains, from mathematics to morals. The idea of innateness bears

with it the dangers of authoritarianism. It could promote ignorance and laziness over critical use of reason.

7.3 Ideas and Qualities

7.3.1 Readings and Study questions

- Readings: Ideally, you would read Book II of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* entirely, but here is what is required (chap stands for chapter, par for paragraph):

Book II: chap. 1 par. 1-8 + par. 23-25; chap 2; chap. 8 par. 8-23; chap. 9 par. 8; chap. 23 par 1-4; + Book III, chap. 2 par. 9.

And optional is Book 2 chap 27 (on personal identity, but I doubt we'll have time to discuss it)

- Study questions:
 1. What are the two origins of all human knowledge according to Locke? Is the formation of ideas an active, or a passive process?
 2. What are simple ideas? How do we construct complex ideas according to Locke? Provide an example.
 3. How do we construct abstract ideas according to Locke?
 4. What are qualities according to Locke? Explain the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Provide examples.
 5. What argument does Locke provide in support of the thesis that secondary qualities only exist in our mind, and not in the external objects

7.3.2 Introduction

What is at stake: giving an empiricist account of knowledge: Locke's notion of the mind as a blank slate

- Locke is explicitly empiricist: all knowledge comes from experience.

From where does it have all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience* ... (II,I, 2)

- Locke's famous image: the mind is similar to white paper, which becomes imprinted through experience.

Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas (II, I, 2)

- Locke gives an account of the production of ideas which will be criticized by Berkeley and Hume.

In a sense, Berkeley and Hume will turn Locke's arguments against Locke himself, showing that Locke did not go far enough on the empiricist road.

→ *Locke will give a "natural" but also rather "naive" account of how ideas are formed in our understanding on the basis of experience. Our aim here is to understand his account as well as the ambiguities that it contains, such that we will understand how Locke opens to Berkeley's and Hume's philosophies.*

7.3.3 The Origin of Ideas: Sensation and Reflection

Two origins of knowledge : sensation and reflection

- Sensation and Reflection are the sole sources of knowledge:

All ideas come from sensation or reflection. (II,I, 2)

External objects furnish the mind with the ideas of sensible qualities, which are all those different perceptions they produce in us. And the mind furnishes the understanding with ideas of its own operations.(II, I,4)

- Sensation – external sense – impressions coming from the external objects – produces ideas of sensible qualities

Ideas from sensations historically come first. Our body is "fit" to receive information about the external objects. Sensations are

produced by the external objects, which Locke take to be fundamentally constituted of material corpuscles (atoms) (he follows his mentor Boyle on this).

- Reflection – internal sense – perception and understanding of the operations of the mind – produces ideas of the operations of the mind
 - Ideas from reflection come later.
 - Locke does not give any “mechanical” explanation of how ideas of reflection are imprinted on us – this would involve to give a mechanical explanation of the internal structure of the mind and of ideas, upon which, you will remember, he said he wanted to avoid speculating.

Active or passive process :

- On the one hand, Locke tells us that we are mostly passive when we form ideas of the external objects in our understanding
- On the other hand, he explains that, in order to form ideas, both from sensation and from reflexion, the attention of the mind is needed (II,I,7). No one can have clear ideas of the operations of the mind unless she turns her attention to it. And no one can have clear ideas of a clock unless she turns her attention to it.
- Finally, in II,IX,8, Locke admits the importance of judgment in perception, and mentions Molineux’s problem.

Molineux: would a blind man who has just recovered sight recognize a cube from a sphere by just looking at them (while he knows how to distinguish them by touch) ?

The fundamental question is whether or not active judgment of the understanding is crucial to sensations. Are there anything like sense-data, or do our sensations always go through the filter of our understanding?

Reminder: Descartes: wax / hats, coats and men.

- That our perception, even of external object, is more active than passive could cause some trouble concerning Locke’s view that our ideas are copies of the external objects.

Conclusion :

—→ *Locke gives an empiricist account of the origin of our ideas. All our ideas originates either in our sense of external objects – sensation – or in our sense of internal operations of the mind – reflection. In both cases, the understanding must be attentive to the internal or external sensations in order to construct these ideas. There remains an ambiguity in Locke’s account concerning the supposed passivity of the understanding when forming ideas from sensations. Berkeley will exploit it later.*

7.3.4 Simple and Complex Ideas

Two kinds of ideas : simple and complex

Simple Ideas : Though sensations are complex, ideas are simple, because distinguished according to various senses.

Complex ideas are made of simple ideas, by comparison, repetition, composition etc.

Locke gives an account of abstraction: abstract ideas are ideas from which we have stripped some qualities. For example, the abstract idea of a circle is formed when we take the idea of a particular circle, and strip this idea from all the properties which make this circle a particular circle (color of course, but also particular diameter for example). Thus we form the notion of an abstract circle.

Berkeley will criticize this notion of abstract idea in saying that it does not make sense: I cannot have any idea of circle without a particular diameter for example.

Simple ideas or the psychological atoms :

Locke’s analogy: simple ideas are like material atoms

Just as we cannot destroy or create the elements of matter, but only decompose and recompose them, we cannot destroy or create the elements of thought. but only decompose and recompose them.

The role of experience : Experience is necessary in order to construct these ideas – a blind man does not have any ideas of colors.

Appeal to introspection – Locke does not give much of an argument in support of his classification of ideas. Instead, he appeals to common sense and introspection. He encourages us to look into our own understanding and notice his workings. Of course, this does not seem to have much of a convincing power. That said, such a method seems consistent with Locke’s commitment to empiricism, which advocates to rely on experience rather than on rational speculation. Introspection can be seen as the experiment of the mind.

—→ *Locke seems to give a rather straightforward classification of our ideas. In appealing solely to the analogy with material atoms and observation from introspection, he seems to be faithful to his commitment to empiricism.*

7.3.5 The Object of Ideas: Qualities

Locke has given us an account of how ideas are produced in our mind. It remains to say what the object of these ideas is. The answer is simple: qualities.

Ideas and Qualities : while ideas are in our minds, qualities are in the objects. Locke defines a “quality” by contrast to “idea” as follows:

Whatever the mind perceives in itself or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call *idea*, and the power to produce any *idea* in our mind I call a *quality* of the subject in which the power is.

According to the above definition:

- *Qualities are powers in the external objects, to produce some effects on our minds.*
- *Ideas are perceptions in our minds of whatever the qualities produce in them.*

Two (or three) types of qualities – Qualities come into two types according to Hume: primary and secondary.

- Reminder: Descartes’ piece of wax – Descartes reduced matter to extension and movement. All other “sensible qualities” were taken to be the product of the interaction between the properties of the object

and our own body and sense organs rather than properties of the object

- Locke, with some modifications, takes up the same distinction. The idea is the following. One must admit that some of our sensations do not correspond to the properties of external objects (heat is a classic example here). That said, Locke, following Descartes, believes that *there remains some sensations which correspond or resemble the true properties of external objects*. The game is thus to find out which of the sensible qualities that we perceive are “really” within the objects, and which are mirroring the interaction between our body and the external objects.

NOTE: Locke mentions a third type of quality, “tertiary” if you wish. These correspond to the powers that some bodies have to produce some modification in other bodies, modifications which turn can produce some effect on us.

For example: The sun melts the wax and the wax appears melted to us.

Locke seems to consider tertiary qualities as a subclass of secondary qualities. There is no need to make things more complex than they are, and for this reason, we will talk only of the primary and secondary qualities.

Primary qualities – The primary qualities are the “real qualities” in the sense that they belong to the external bodies.

Locke gives a longer list than Descartes does: extension (“bulk” in Locke’s terms), figure, movement, number + solidity.

While for Descartes, solidity was a sensible quality which did not pertain to the external bodies, it does for Locke. Remember that Locke embraces Boyle’s atomism. The notion of atom is still understood as a “solid corpuscle” at the time.

So, the characteristics of the primary qualities are that:

1. they are “real” in the sense that they belong entirely to external bodies (II, viii, 17)

2. they belong to *all bodies* : Locke's example is a grain of wheat. Divide it as much as you want, the parts obtained will always be extended, movable, solid etc.
3. they are inseparable from the bodies. The same example applies. Locke's argument in support of this claim seems to be similar to Descartes', that is to say: one cannot conceive of bodies without extension, movement, figure, number and solidity

Of course, a question arises here: if it is true that primary qualities are these qualities without which one cannot conceive of bodies, how come that Descartes and Locke did not come up with the same list? How are we going to justify where to put the demarcation line between primary and secondary qualities?

4. the ideas produced by these qualities resemble these qualities. See in particular paragraphs 15 and 18. Locke claims that the idea of the circle and the circle as it exists in external bodies are the same.

There would be a lot to say about this notion of resemblance. As most of Locke's account, it is natural, and attractive for that reason, but also far too naive.

Secondary qualities – The secondary qualities do not belong to external bodies. One can conceive of bodies without these qualities. Bodies possess secondary qualities only in so far as they are perceived by a subject. By themselves, bodies have no color, no heat etc.

Our ideas of secondary qualities are produced by the primary qualities, and ultimately by the effect of insensible corpuscles on our sense organs.

Our ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble anything in the external bodies. Instead, they are really sensations on our side.

So, given an external body:

- its primary qualities produce some ideas in our mind (of its extension, movement, number and solidity) which resemble these qualities
- its primary qualities also produce some ideas in our mind in their interactions with our sense organs

The argument: heat and pain – In order to argue that secondary qualities do not pertain to the external bodies, Locke proposes two arguments concerning the quality of heat:

1. Secondary qualities are relative:
 - The same water feels hot or cold depending on how warm your hand is.
 - Being the same water, it has identical properties.
 - So, warm and cold are not properties of the body
2. Comparison between warmth / coldness with pleasure and pain (II,viii, 16)
 - Everybody admits that pleasure and pain are not properties of external bodies, but rather sensations in our own bodies produced by the properties of external bodies
 - There is no empirical distinction between warmth/ coldness and pleasure/pain: the same fire which produces warmth and pleasure at a distance, produces pain when we get closer. So, there is no reason to give a different ontological status to the two sensations
 - Warmth and coldness, just as pleasure and pain, are in the mind and not in the external bodies.

—→ *There is no empirical evidence that coldness and warmth are sensations produced by a different mechanism that pain and pleasure. Hence, there is no reason to give them different ontological status. If we agree that pain and pleasure exist in us rather than external properties, so should we agree that it is the case for warmth and coldness as well.*

A worry – Could not the above argument be turned against Locke himself?

Locke explains that there is no reason to distinguish between heat and pain: both are qualities which do not pertain to the external bodies, but rather exists in so far as a body is perceived by a subject. But, could not we make the same argument concerning the distinction between primary and secondary qualities?

The worry here is of course to justify why primary qualities would have different types of effects. For example, how to justify the claim that our idea of extension correspond to a true property of the external body

while our idea of color does not?? The mechanism by which the ideas are produced seems to be similar in both cases: ideas are produced by the impact of insensible corpuscles on our sense organs. Why would our sensation of extension be any different in character than our sensation of color?

So, the very same argument which shows that secondary qualities exist only as in us could be used to show that this is the case for primary qualities, unless one finds a way to distinguish between them.

We have seen that Locke appeals to the argument that one cannot conceive of bodies without extension. Such an argument does not seem to be faithful to the commitment to empiricism though: from the empiricist stand point, there seem to be no clear distinction between our sensations of extension and our sensations of color and heat, and hence, it seems that we could easily conclude that extension exists in us rather than in external bodies.

Berkeley will exploit this problem at length.

7.3.6 Conclusion: Locke's two notions of idea

Summing up – Locke's view and its difficulties

Locke's epistemology : The following notions should now be clear:

- Origin of ideas: sensation and reflection
- Types of ideas: simple and complex
- Object of ideas: primary and secondary qualities

The main difficulties faced by Locke's epistemology:

- Active vs passive production of ideas by the understanding
- Distinction between primary and secondary qualities: could not we claim that all qualities, whether "primary" or "secondary" exist only in us rather than in external bodies?

A common source for the problem – Locke's two notion of ideas.

Both difficulties above can be understood better as related to a more fundamental problem within Locke's accounts of ideas. His account indeed features an important ambiguity concerning *what ideas refer to*.

- At first sight, it seems that Locke takes ideas to refer *directly* to the qualities of external objects and the operations of the mind.
- That said, whether they come from sensation or reflection, ideas are constructed through the attention of the mind, which needs to take “notice” of them (II, I,7).
- Locke’s use of the term ‘idea’ is ambiguous: sometimes the object of ideas are qualities, and sometimes the object of ideas is the mental product of these qualities.
- In other words, the question is whether the relationships between ideas and their object is direct or mediate – for example for ideas coming from sensation:
 - external objects directly produce ideas of these objects. In this case, our ideas refer to external objects.
 - external objects produce internal, mental entities – say ‘impressions’ – of which the understanding must take notice in order to construct an idea. In this case, our ideas refers to some internal, mental products of sensation.
- Locke does not take any stance and explicitly maintains the ambiguity. The difference is important though, as we shall see when reading Berkeley and Hume.
- Basically, the problem is the following:
 - On one hand, it seems impossible to maintain that we have a direct contact with external objects: attention is clearly needed in order to produce ideas.
 - On the other hand, if we admit that our ideas refer to mental products, then what do we know about the relationships between our ideas and the external objects?

At least two questions arise:

1. In what sense can we say that our ideas ‘resemble’ external objects?
2. How can we assess such a resemblance? Aren’t we “stuck” in our representations?

→ *This is the dilemma that Berkeley is going to set up for Locke.*

