§1. Anti-innatism and empiricism

T1 ‘It is an established Opinion amongst some Men, That there are in the Understanding certain \textit{innate Principles}; some primary Notions, \textit{κοινα ἐννοιαι}, 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…’ (1.2.1, N 48)

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{Innatism} & There are some propositions that are \textit{in us} from birth. \\
\textit{Anti-Innatism} & There are no propositions that are \textit{in us} from birth. \\
\textit{Simple Knowledge Innatism} & There are some propositions that \textit{we know} from birth. \\
\textit{Simple Knowledge Anti-Innatism} & There are no propositions that \textit{we know} from birth. \\
\textit{Knowledge Rationalism} & There are some propositions that we know \textit{a priori}. \\
\textit{Knowledge Empiricism} & There are no propositions that we know \textit{a priori}. \\
\end{tabular}

P1 There are no propositions that we know \textit{a priori}.  

P2 If we know a given proposition \textit{a posteriori}, we do not know it from birth.  

C There are no propositions that we know from birth.  

P1 There are some propositions that we know from birth.  

P2 If we know a given proposition \textit{a posteriori}, we do not know it from birth.  

C There are some propositions that we know \textit{a priori}.  

T2 ‘Let us then suppose the Mind to be… without any Ideas; How comes it to be furnished? To this I answer, in one word, From \textit{Experience}. In that, all our Knowledge is founded… Our Observation employ’d either about \textit{external, sensible Objects}; or about the internal Operations of our Minds… These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the Ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring. (E 2.1.2, N 104)
§2. The argument from universal consent

P1    There are some propositions that everyone accepts.
P2    If everyone accepts a given proposition, this proposition must be in us from birth.
C    There are some propositions that are in us from birth.

Locke rejects P1.

T3    ‘But yet I take liberty to say, That these Propositions are so far from having an universal Assent, that there are a great Part of Mankind, to whom they are not so much as known…’ (1.2.4, N 49)
T4    ‘…For, first, ’tis evident, that all Children, and Ideots, have not the least Apprehension or Thought of them…’ (1.2.5, N 49)

Locke also rejects P2.

T5    ‘…if it were true in matter of Fact, that there were certain Truths, wherein all Mankind agreed, it would not prove them innate, if there can be any other way shewn, how Men may come to that Universal Agreement, in the things they do consent in; and this I presume may be done.’ (1.2.3, N49)

And he thinks he can turn the argument back upon Innatism!

T6    ‘…which is worse, this Argument of Universal Consent, which is made use of, to prove innate Principles, seems to me a demonstration that there are none such: Because there are none to which all Mankind give an Universal Assent.’ (E 1.2.4, N 49)

P1    There are no propositions that everyone accepts.
P2    If a given proposition is in us from birth, it must be one that everyone accepts.
C    There are no propositions that are in us from birth.
T7    ‘…that universal Assent, which must needs be the necessary concomitant of all innate Truths.’ (1.2.5, N49)

Why couldn’t a proposition be in us without being one that we accept?

For Locke, Innatism just is Simple Knowledge Innatism.

T8    ‘…it seeming to me near a Contradiction, to say, that there are Truths imprinted on the Soul, which it perceives or understands not…’ (1.2.5, N49)
A proposition is in us if and only if we know this proposition.

If we know a proposition then we accept this proposition.

If a proposition is in us then we accept this proposition.

§3. Dispositional innatism

'I have also used the analogy of a veined block of marble... if the soul were like a blank tablet then truths would be in us as the shape of Hercules is in a piece of marble when the marble is entirely neutral as to whether it assumes this shape or some other... However, if there were veins in the block which marked out the shape of Hercules rather than other shapes, then that block would be more determined to that shape, and Hercules would be innate in it. This is how ideas and truths are innate in us – as inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural potentialities, and not as actualities...' (Leibniz, New Essays, RB 52)

Dispositional

Knowledge

Innatism

There are some propositions that we have a disposition to know from birth.

What does it mean to say that we have a disposition to know a given proposition from birth?

Cf. fragility, diseases to which we are predisposed.

§4. The argument from a priori knowledge

'Logic abounds in such truths, and so do metaphysics and ethics, together with their respective products, natural theology and natural jurisprudence; and so the proof of them can only come from inner principles, which are described as innate.' (Leibniz, New Essays, RB 50)

There are some propositions that we know a priori.

If we know a given proposition a priori, it is one that we have a disposition to know from birth.

There are some propositions that we have a disposition to know from birth.

'Innate Ideas are in Every Man Born with him... The Man who says that we have No Innate Ideas must be a Fool & Knave, having No Conscience or Innate Science.' (William Blake, Marginal note on Reynolds' Discourses on Art)

Locke rejects P1.
He thinks we know the truths of ethics and metaphysics (e.g. the existence of God) \textit{a posteriori}.

What about logic and metaphysics?

One option is to allow that knowledge of these things is not \textit{a posteriori}, but deny that it is \textit{knowledge} properly speaking.

Cf. Locke’s distinction between ‘trifling’ and ‘instructive’ propositions.

T12 ‘As that the external Angle of all Triangles, is bigger than either of the opposite internal Angles; which relation… making no part of the complex Idea, signified by the name Triangle, this is a real Truth, and conveys with it instructive real Knowledge.’ (4.8.8)

The other option is to insist that that if knowledge of these things is knowledge properly speaking, it is \textit{a posteriori}.

References