Locke and Berkeley

Lecture 1: Locke’s Anti-Innatism
The text...


References...

‘And therefore GOD.’
(4.10.6, N 621)
The plan for today…

§1. Anti-innatism and empiricism

§2. The argument from universal consent

§3. Dispositional innatism

§4. The argument from a priori knowledge
British empiricists and continental rationalists…
§1. Anti-innatism and empiricism
‘It is an established Opinion amongst some Men, That there are in the Understanding certain innate Principles; some primary Notions, κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι, 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)
**Innatism**

There are some propositions that are *in us* from birth.

**Anti-Innatism**

There are no propositions that are *in us* from birth.

But what do the words *in us* mean in this context?
A proposition *in us* if and only if *we know* this proposition.

*Simple Knowledge Innatism*

There are some propositions that *we know* from birth.

*Simple Knowledge Anti-Innatism*

There are no propositions that *we know* from birth.
Knowledge Rationalism

There are some propositions that we know *a priori*.

Knowledge Empiricism

There are no propositions that we know *a priori*.

We know a given proposition *a priori* if and only if we know it, but *not* on the basis of what we have seen, touched, or otherwise perceived.
NB!

The opposite of innate knowledge is not empirical knowledge…

…it is acquired knowledge!
How are these positions related?

P1 There are no propositions that we know *a priori*.

(*Knowledge Empiricism*)

P2 If we know a given proposition *a posteriori*, we do not know it from birth.

C There are no propositions that we know from birth.

(*Simple Knowledge Anti-Innatism*)
How are these positions related?

**P1** There are some propositions that we know from birth.

(*Simple Knowledge Innatism*)

**P2** If we know a given proposition *a posteriori*, we do not know it from birth.

**C** There are some propositions that we know *a priori*.

(*Knowledge Rationalism*)
All *Simple Knowledge Innatists* are *Knowledge Rationalists*…

All *Knowledge Empiricists* are *Simple Knowledge Anti-Innatists*…

Must all *Knowledge Rationalists* be *Simple Knowledge Innatists*…?

Must all *Simple Knowledge Anti-Innatists* be *Knowledge Empiricists*…?
Here’s one *Knowledge Rationalist* who is definitely not a *Simple Knowledge Innatist*…
Locke is a *Knowledge Empiricist* (and, therefore, a *Simple Knowledge Anti-Innaitist*).

‘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 *Experience*. In that, all our Knowledge is founded…

…Our Observation employ’d either about *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)
§1. The argument from universal consent
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. (Innatism)
Locke rejects P1.

What are the best candidates for propositions that everyone accepts?

‘Whatsoever is, is’
(the Principle of Identity)

‘’Tis impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be’
(the Principle of Contradiction)

(1.2.4, N 49)
‘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)

‘…For, first, ’tis evident, that all Children, and Ideots, have not the least Apprehension or Thought of them…’ (1.2.5, N 49)
‘...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)
Locke also rejects P2.

He thinks it is perfectly possible for there to be a proposition that everyone accepts…

…but that is not in us from birth.

Why couldn’t there be a proposition that we know a posteriori...

…and that everyone accepts?
‘…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)
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.  

(Innatism)
The argument from universal consent...

P1 There are no propositions that everyone accepts.

P2 If everyone accepts a given proposition, this proposition must be in us from birth.

C There are no propositions that are in us from birth.

(Anti-Innatism)
The argument from universal consent...

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.

(Anti-Innatism)
‘…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?

‘…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)
P1 A proposition is *in us* if and only if *we know* this proposition.

P2 If *we know* a proposition then *we accept* this proposition.

C1 If a proposition is *in us* then *we accept* this proposition.

For Locke, *Innatism* just is *Simple Knowledge Innatism*.
§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…’

(Leibniz, *New Essays*, RB 52)
‘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)
Innatism

There are some propositions that are *in us* from birth.

*Simple Knowledge Innatism*

There are some propositions that *we know* from birth.

*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?

Having a *disposition* to know a given proposition is not the same thing as having the *capacity* to know this proposition.

You have the *capacity* to know that I am a Spurs fan.

You don’t have a *disposition* to know this.
What is it for an object to be fragile?

If it were dropped on the floor, or hit with a hammer, it would break.

What are the conditions in the case of having a disposition to know a given proposition?
§4. The argument from *a priori* knowledge
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)
The argument from a priori knowledge...

P1 There are some propositions that we know *a priori*.

(*Knowledge Rationalism*)

P2 If we know a given proposition *a priori*, it is one that we have a disposition to know from birth.

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

(*Dispositional Knowledge Innatism*)
‘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 mathematics?
Locke could deny that knowledge of these things is knowledge in the proper sense of the word…

Cf. ‘trifling’/‘instructive’ propositions…

‘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)
Or he could insist that knowledge of these things is *a posteriori*…

But mathematical propositions…

‘…affirm something of another, which is a necessary consequence of its precise complex *Idea*, but not contained in it.’ (4.8.8)
Next week…

Locke on primary and secondary qualities