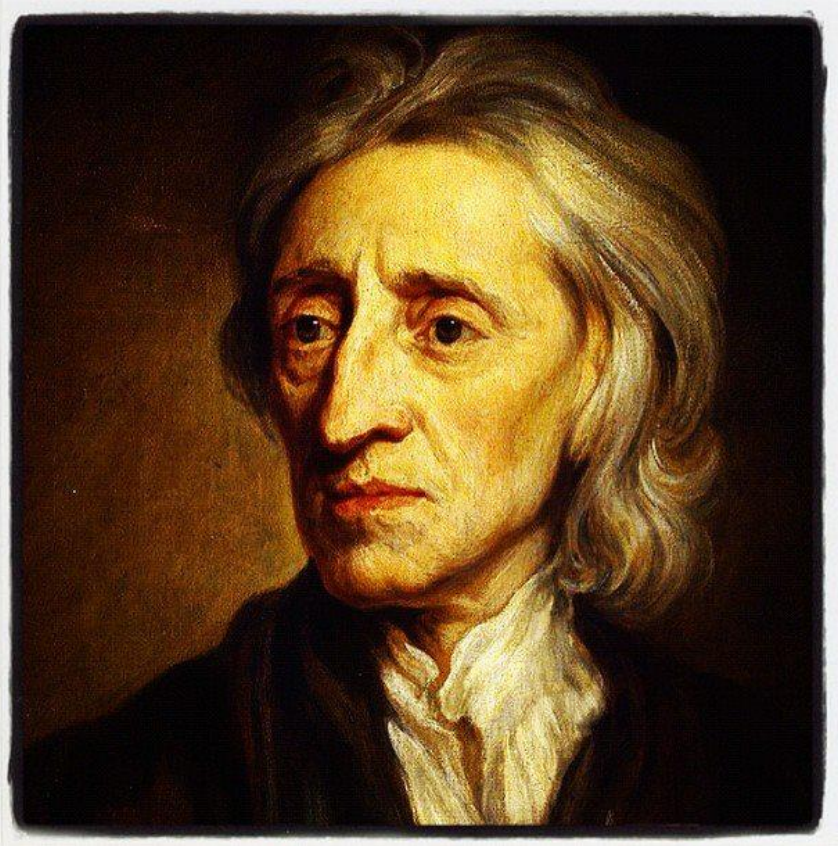


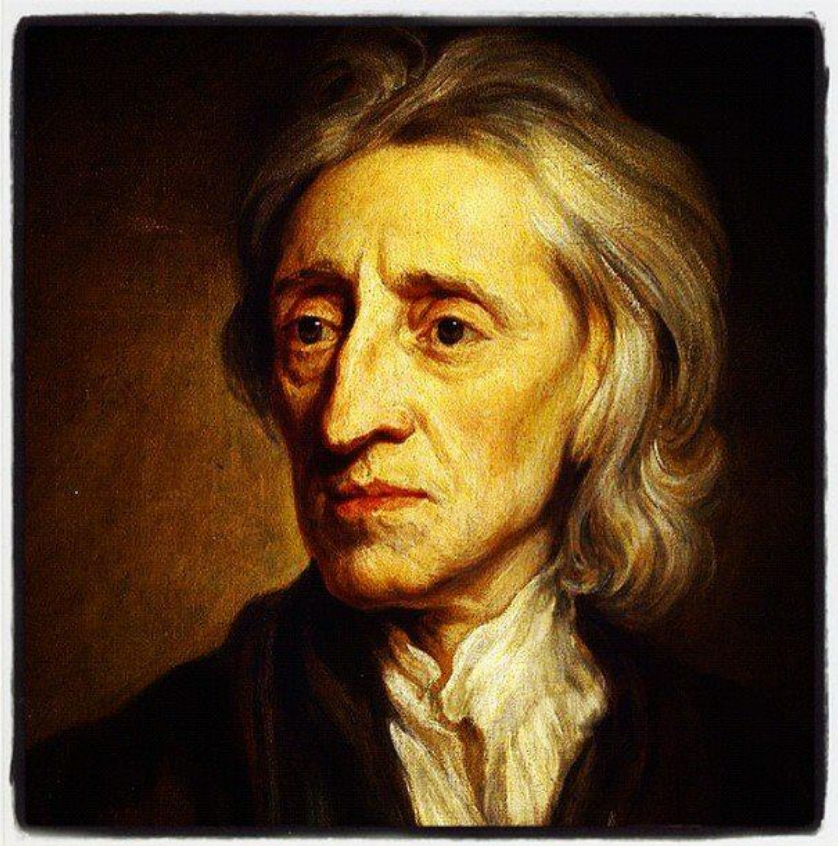
Essay Concerning Human Understanding

John Locke

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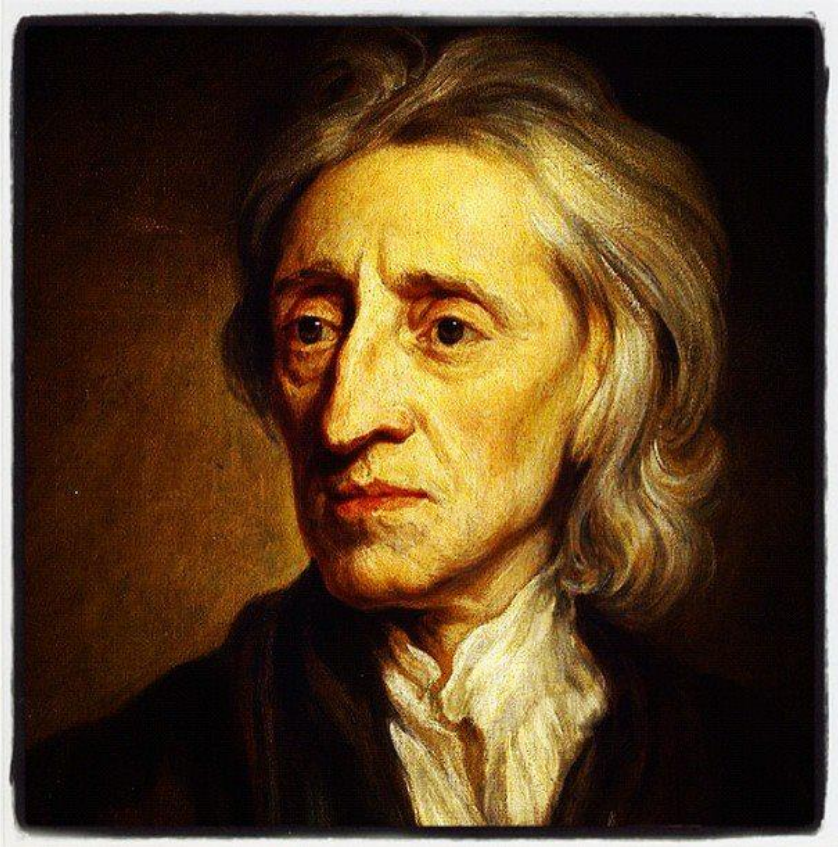


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- Well known for:
 - Contributions to early modern scientific thought (empiricism)

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 - Political philosophy (Second Treatise on Government)



Ideas

- Ideas are the entities that the mind deals with, NOT actual objects.
- Where do we get our ideas like “whiteness, hardness, sweetness, thinking, motion, man, elephant, army, drunkenness and others...”?
- From experience

Empiricism

- “Let us suppose the mind to be white paper void of all characters. How comes it to be furnished? From experience; in that all our knowledge is founded”
- The view that ALL of our ideas come from experience is called ‘empiricism’.
- If empiricism is true, then humans have no innate ideas, and every idea and ability we have is learned by experience.

Kinds of experience:

- “First, our senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to the various ways wherein those objects do affect them.”
- Locke calls this kind of experience ‘sensation’



Kinds of experience:

- “Secondly, the other fountain from which experience furnisheth the understanding with ideas is the perception of the operations of our own minds within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got.”
- Locke calls this kind of experience ‘reflection’

Qualities:

- “The power to produce any idea in our mind, I call quality of the subject wherein that power is.” (92)
- “Qualities such as are inseparable from the body, in whatsoever state it may be...I call primary qualities of body.” (92)

Qualities:

- “The power to produce any idea in our mind, I call quality of the subject wherein that power is.” (92)
- “Such qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us...I call secondary qualities.” (92-3)

Primary Qualities

- Solidity
- Mobility
- Extension

Secondary Qualities

- Color
- Texture
- Flavor
- Scent
- Etc...
- All of these can be changed, and so cannot be *in the object itself* but must be a result of how the object's "insensible parts" affect the senses.

Locke's skeptical challenge

- “How shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves?”
- Short answer: It can't.

Longer answer:

- At least the primary qualities must themselves be in the objects, right?
- Not necessarily. Locke mentions that shadows create a distinct idea in the mind, but are the absence of a thing rather than the thing itself. Other objects may, for all we know, be like that.

Locke's reply to Descartes

1. Those who lack certain senses lack certain ideas.
2. Ideas are produced in my mind even when I try to shut them out
3. Memories of things do not have the same quality as the things themselves (e.g. pain)

Locke's reply to Descartes

- In other words, Locke thinks that ideas from the senses, though by no means certain, should count as a form of knowledge.
- “How vain, I say, is it to expect demonstration and certainty in things not capable of it”

Locke's skepticism

- One major assumption of science is that there exist objects outside of our minds and that our senses give us true information about the objects themselves.
- If our senses do not necessarily give us true or certain knowledge of objects themselves, what happens to science?