

Izabel Goveia

Professor Louis Sanchez

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### John Locke and the Empiricism

The epistemological theory of John Locke is about the mind and its ability to acquire knowledge. In his work “Essay concerning Human Understanding”, he named all that can be thought of as ideas and defended that its origin would be the sensations. Being a defender of knowledge from experience – that is – empiricism, he started his work criticizing Rationalism and its premise that human beings have innate ideas, and all knowledge comes from reason and rationality. Locke believed that knowledge comes before anything else from experiences with the world and is a result of what we do with the information we receive from these experiences. He didn’t deny that human beings have innate capacities, but he argues that a capacity to come to know something is not the same as an innate knowledge of this something.

Locke stated that the senses are the primary source of all knowledge and said: “Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas:— How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this, I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that, it ultimately derives itself.” (p. 32). On this empiricist conception, observation via the senses, plus the mind's subsequent reflection on the information acquired, constitutes the basis of all knowledge we have or can have. In other words, experience, and experimentation, for him, sensations and reflection.

The biggest concern related to this theory is exactly about its own argument that experience is the one and only source of knowledge. Rationalism, the bigger opposition to Empiricism defends that not every idea and knowledge we have is based on experience or experimentation, sometimes they are a result of formal reasoning and logical disciplines like Math or Geometry. Rene Descartes, a French philosopher who wrote “I think, therefore, I am”, wrote: “Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.” (p. 23) He firmly believed that truth and knowledge can only be acquired through reason. Another concern and actually a limitation regarding Empiricism is that, if something is impossible to be perceived, or experimented with, then, it is impossible to determine if it is true or false, so it is completely dependent on people’s observation, and therefore, it cannot be used as a main source of scientific knowledge.

I believe that Locke’s theory provides a great starting point for the reflection on knowledge because it leads to a more realistic and tangible understanding of reality since all theories and hypotheses should be tested and observed to be even considered. Because this theory is based on experimentation, it allows human beings the opportunity to participate in the production of knowledge and also to self-correction, since this is a result of impressions, perceptions, and feelings.