

Locke, *Essay* Epistle and I.i.1-4,6-8; I.ii.1-9,12,14-16; I.iii.1-6,9,22,24-25; I.iv.1-5,8-9,24-25  
 Innate Ideas

All that I shall say for the Principles I proceed on, is, that I can only *appeal* to Mens own unprejudiced *Experience*, and Observation, whether they be true, or no; and this is enough for a Man who professes no more, than to lay down candidly and freely his own Conjectures, concerning a Subject lying somewhat in the dark, without any other design, than an unbiass'd enquiry after Truth.  
 – Locke, *Essay* I.iv.25

Though John Locke's *Essay concerning human understanding* appeared three years after Newton's *Principia*, it was not written with the views of Newton in mind. Locke had been working on the *Essay* for some ten years prior to the date of its publication, and though Newton had also been working on his ideas for some time, he had not discussed them prior to publication. As a result, by the time Newton's *Principia* appeared, the main outlines and doctrines of Locke's *Essay* had already been worked out. Thus, even though Locke described himself in the introductory Epistle to the *Essay* as an "under-labourer" striving to clear the rubbish of obscure and confused ideas and meaningless and unintelligible jargon out from under the feet of such giants as Boyle, Sydenham, Huygens, and Newton, such confluence as there is between his epistemology and Newton's scientific methodology is serendipitous and not always complete (for instance, and as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, Locke was unwilling to accept the possibility of action at a distance). Nonetheless there is a great deal of affinity between Locke's study of the scope and limits of human knowledge and Newton's claims concerning the foundations of reasoning in natural philosophy. Locke's book could easily be read as an account of the epistemological foundations of Newtonian scientific methodology, and this coincidence was one factor that helped to advance its positive reception in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

However, another, much more significant factor behind the positive reception of Locke's work was its agreement with the increasingly republican and anti-authoritarian political views of the day. Unlike Descartes, Locke was not primarily motivated to write his book on human understanding in order to provide a justification for a certain kind of philosophy of nature. Instead, he was motivated by social, religious, and political concerns. The introductory Epistle to the *Essay* contains a famous allusion to these concerns.

Were it fit to trouble thee with the History of this Essay, I should tell thee, that five or six Friends, meeting at my Chamber, and discoursing on a Subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the Difficulties that rose on every side. After we had a while puzzled our selves, without coming any nearer a Resolution of those Doubts which perplexed us, it came into my Thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that, before we set our selves upon Enquiries of that Nature, it was necessary to examine our own Abilities, and see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with. [Epistle, Nidditch 7, Winkler 1-2]

James Tyrell, one of the "friends" present at this famous meeting, later reported that the subject of discussion had not been any topic in natural philosophy, but rather the principles of morality and revealed religion. It was the foundations for our knowledge of these topics that Locke was most concerned to investigate.

The general project of examining what things our understandings are and are not capable of coming to know is one that Locke found to be hindered, rather than helped, by the philosophy of



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Descartes. Despite his avowedly great concern to proceed from absolutely certain first principles, and not accept anything that he could not clearly and distinctly perceive to be true, Descartes was not very reflective about his own understanding or about the other operations of his mind, such as imagining, willing, judging, and believing. As has been noted in past chapters, Descartes never really paused to consider how he could tell a clear and distinct perception on the part of the understanding apart from a natural instinct, or either apart from a hasty judgment. He had more or less simply helped himself to these notions, as if they were patently evident.

As far as Locke was concerned, this was tantamount to an open invitation to others to do the same, and base their most fondly cherished beliefs not on reasoning or evidence, but the bald affirmation that these beliefs were patently evident to the understanding, innately known, or divinely inspired through a special gift of Grace, illuminating the understanding with a power it could not resist.

Locke had seen all too much of this. He was born in 1632, when Descartes was already 36 years old, and he died in 1704. When he was born Charles I was King of England, and during Locke's lifetime the English civil war (1642-51), the execution of Charles (1649), the period of Cromwell's protectorate, the restoration of the monarchy (1660), and the "Glorious Revolution" (1689) all occurred in England. These were civil upheavals that had their roots in religious disputes. Even more significantly, they had their roots in religious disputes between parties who appealed to the authority of direct illumination from God and of conscience to justify their positions. During the course of the Protestant Reformation in England, a form of worship had developed that rejected all forms of Church ritual and hierarchy, from the authority of Bishops and Archbishops and even Priests to the use of statuary and common prayer books. In place of these "superstitious" elements, the new religion focused on an intense, inward attempt to feel the presence of God, and many worshipers imagined themselves to actually be in communication with God and to receive messages and inspiration from Him. This form of worship was described at the time as "enthusiasm," a term that today no longer carries the same technical associations with a charismatic, visionary, and intensely emotional form of religious worship that it did in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The natural concomitant of "enthusiastic" religious practices was a belief in the priesthood of all believers (or at least, those among them — the "Saints" — who had been elected for salvation and chosen by God to receive his Grace). These practices and beliefs were inimical to all forms of authority, be they ecclesiastical, civil, or military. The Tudor and Stuart monarchs in England had reacted with varying degrees of severity to the perceived threat that "enthusiasm" posed to their civil power, just as the Papacy in Rome had reacted to the broader European threat that enthusiasm posed to its ecclesiastical power. But because of changing economic conditions, the English constitution, which required the consent of the lower house in Parliament (the "Commons") to taxation, had ended up investing increasing power in the Commons. The Court needed the approval of the Commons to obtain revenue. The Commons had come to be dominated by members of violently enthusiastic Protestant sects: the "Puritans," and the "Independents." Continued attempts by Charles I and his Archbishop of Canterbury, Laud, to restrain the development of the Church of England in enthusiastic directions had so inflamed the Puritan Commons that they had risen up in arms, seized power (despite having an army of "Saints" ill-disposed to recognizing the authority of their generals), deposed, and eventually executed Charles, and instituted a brief period of republican rule under Oliver Cromwell, a man who was himself an extreme enthusiast, given to "wrestling with the Lord" in an effort to receive the messages he



believed God would undoubtedly offer to him as one of the Elect. The eventual restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II had only renewed the tensions, especially when Charles's brother and eventual successor, James, declared himself a Catholic.

Apprehensive of yet more violent consequences were the enthusiastic "Country" and Episcopalian and Catholic "Court" parties in England to continue to inflame one another's passions, friends of Locke's such as Charles II's one-time Prime Minister, Shaftesbury, had gotten involved in plots to prevent James's succession. When those plots had failed and been discovered Locke himself, as an associate of the plotters, had been forced into exile in Holland, and even had to go into hiding for fear of extradition. He was only able to return to England after the Glorious Revolution, which resulted in the deposition of James II and the transfer of the Crown to William of Orange. Tensions remained, as James and his Catholic successors maintained their pretensions to the Crown and managed to mount periodic, though uniformly unsuccessful attempts to invade England.

As far as Locke was concerned, all of these civil upheavals had arisen from people's absolute conviction of the correctness of their opposed beliefs on matters of morals and revealed religion, a conviction that had fostered a spirit of intolerance and disputation that was eventually carried to arms. And, to reiterate, as far as Locke was concerned, the philosophy of Descartes, with its uncritical attitude towards the difference between understanding, belief, faith, and opinion, had done more to invite than to remedy this circumstance.

Locke took the proper antidote to intolerance and disputation to rest with a careful examination of the powers of our understanding. Knowledge, as far as Locke was concerned, arises when we make judgments about the significance and implications of the information available to us. For Locke, as for Descartes, this information was presumed to take the form of "ideas" that are apprehended by the understanding. Judgments assert the existence of relations between ideas, and are made true or false by whether the ideas actually prove upon inspection to exhibit the relations affirmed in the judgment. The limits of our knowledge are accordingly coincident with what ideas we can actually apprehend, and what content those ideas exhibit.

What was needed, therefore, was an examination of the origin and nature of our ideas. If we could once agree on what ideas we truly possess, precisely ascertain the content of those ideas, reject those that are perhaps not even ideas at all, but merely unintelligible nonsense or meaningless words masquerading as rational thought, determine what in general can be inferred from these ideas, and determine what can and cannot be accepted on the basis faith or revelation in the absence of a clearly apprehended relation between ideas, then perhaps, Locke hoped, a way would be cleared for us to end our disputations or at least develop a more tolerant attitude to opposed beliefs.

However, this project could only be brought off if we could in fact agree on what ideas we do and do not possess (or better put, if we could agree on which of our words are actually used with meaning and significance, to refer to some idea we actually possess, and which are unintelligible jargon with no clear ideas corresponding to them). It is in this connection that Locke made a crucial observation: Were it allowed that we have innate knowledge, as Descartes, among others, had supposed, then there could be no hope of reaching agreement on what ideas we do and do not possess and the entire project of undertaking a critique of the understanding would be scuttled. If it is supposed that we are just born knowing certain things, then no one can assail that knowledge by claiming that it is not based on acceptable sources of ideas or not established by sound reasoning from the information supplied by those sources. Innate knowledge is not obtained by inference from previously obtained ideas, or if it is, those ideas are ones that did not come from any external



source. Innate knowledge just *is*, and innate ideas just *are* (since we are supposedly born with them), and therefore no one can question our claim to possess them. The most that they can do is claim not to have this supposedly innate knowledge or these supposedly innate ideas themselves, and that could be taken to be nothing more than the admission of a birth defect. Establishing the existence of even one item of innate knowledge and even one innate idea (if only the idea of God) would thus open the door to enthusiasm and undermine the project of a critique of the understanding. For, if there were one such item of knowledge, there could be others, and anyone who saw their most cherished convictions questioned by a critique of our knowing powers could simply maintain that these convictions are innate and beyond question, and that those who do not accept them are defective or corrupt in some way (perhaps, following a line of thought very popular in the predestinarian Presbyterian and Puritan denominations, it could be charged that the unbelievers have been corrupted by original sin, not remedied by God's Grace, and have simply not been chosen to be among the "Saints" elected by God for salvation).

Not surprisingly, therefore, Locke devoted a good deal of effort to a preliminary attack on the supposition that there are certain ideas and certain principles that we are just born knowing. In opposition to this view, he maintained that all our ideas are obtained from sensory experience, and that all our knowledge is obtained from discerning relations between ideas that have previously been obtained from sensory experience, or from some mental processing operation (such as compounding, dividing, abstracting or naming) performed on ideas previously received from experience. On this supposition, there is a criterion that we can appeal to in order to determine whether we do or do not have a certain idea: we need merely trace the purported idea back to its roots in sensory experience, identify the sorts of circumstances under which the root parts of the idea are supposed to have arisen, put ourselves in those circumstances, and see what idea we get in those circumstances. Whatever idea we get, that is *all* that the name for that idea can possibly refer to. Then we need merely determine what can be inferred from that content. This is so much the case that Locke quite consistently applied the principle to himself. He observed that his own results in the *Essay concerning human understanding* were subject to being in conformity with what his own readers could justly infer from their own sensory experience. And he claimed no more certain validity for them (*Essay* I.iv.25).

This is quite opposed to Descartes's insistence that we must start from absolutely certain first principles, but as Locke saw it, if sense experience is not recognized as the one, solid source of our ideas, then there can be no limits to what can be proposed as a starting point for our knowledge. Cromwell's mystical illuminations would be on a par with Descartes's conviction that he must exist as a thinking thing.

At the same time that Locke's insistence on beginning with experience is radically anti-Cartesian, it is serendipitously Newtonian. For Newton, too, we are to accept those things as true that are universally confirmed by experience, and we must allow that, even though induction from past experience does not yield perfect certainty, it is nonetheless reliable enough for our purposes, and gives us all the certainty that we can reasonably hope to achieve.

There is a further affinity between Locke's project and Newton's. Though he meant to investigate the origin of our ideas, Locke stressed that he did not propose to undertake this investigation by doing the sort of physiological research into the workings of the brain and central nervous system that Hobbes had attempted to pursue. As Locke put it at *Essay* I.i.2, he did not propose to "meddle" with the physical consideration of the brain, or speculate about the motions in it that might give rise to our ideas. (Locke had been trained as a physician, and he doubtless knew



better than Hobbes how dim the prospects there were for obtaining any significant knowledge of the workings of the mind by doing brain research with the investigative apparatus available to seventeenth century physicians.) Rather, Locke proposed to follow what he called the “historical, plain Method” of starting with those ideas that manifestly first arise in consciousness, and then looking at how this original, raw data is worked up by the mind into the content of our knowledge. This “historical, plain Method” was paralleled by the methodology coincidentally being employed by Newton. Newton, too, had proposed to begin with the phenomena that are manifest or evident to observation and experience, and had insisted that the method of analysis or induction to first principles ought always to precede the method of synthesis or deduction from first principles. And just as Locke proposed to just take the ideas that first arise through experience as they are given without being unduly concerned about the hidden physiological mechanisms responsible for producing those ideas, so Newton had proposed to investigate the laws in accord with which the forces of attraction and repulsion produce those motions that manifestly do occur, without being unduly troubled about the occult causes that make those forces work as they do.

### QUESTIONS ON THE READING

1. What was the main question that the *Essay concerning human understanding* was written to answer?
2. What has so far served as the main impediment to the advancement of knowledge?
3. In what does the “Historical, plain Method” consist?
4. What are the main consequences of a failure to inquire into the limits of what can be known by our understanding?
5. What does the term, “idea,” stand for?
6. What is the argument from universal consent?
7. What, in general, is wrong with the argument from universal consent?
8. What is wrong with supposing that there might be certain truths that we have always known and that were imprinted on our minds at birth, but that we are unconscious of?
9. Did Locke deny that we have innate capacities?
10. What is wrong with supposing that there might be certain truths that we have always known and that were imprinted on our minds at birth, but that we need to employ reason to discover what they are?
11. What is wrong with supposing that there might be certain truths that we have always known and that were imprinted on our minds at birth, but that they only come into our consciousness when we attain the age of reason?
12. What is there about the fact that there are some truths that we come to know very early in life that actually goes to prove that these truths are not innately known?
13. Did Locke believe that there are absolute truths concerning what is right and wrong, or did he hold that moral rules are purely conventional?
14. What reasons did Locke offer for rejecting the view that criminals still accept the truth of moral principles even though they do not act in accord with them?
15. Did Locke deny that we have innate dispositions and tendencies?
16. What are the main factors inducing people to take principles upon trust?
17. What special reason does a consideration of the “parts” of principles give us for thinking that there could be no innate principles?
18. What are the principal considerations leading Locke to deny that ideas are innate?



*Note: Essay I.iv.4-5. In this passage, Locke made a number of allusions to the ancient Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation, according to which our souls could be born again, perhaps in the bodies of other kinds of animal. His suggestion is that even were the Pythagorean doctrine generally accepted, there would be some who would hesitate to maintain that when the soul that previously occupied the body of Pythagoras is reincarnated in the body of a cock, the cock deserves to be considered to be “the same” as Pythagoras. He also notes that anyone who thinks these speculations outlandish would have to confront similar problems when considering the Christian doctrine of the resurrection. Would the resurrected soul still be the same were it placed in a different body?*

19. What is Locke’s principal reason for denying that the idea of God is innate?

#### NOTES ON THE READING

Locke devoted most of Book I of the *Essay* to a protracted attack on the belief that we have innate knowledge. The attack is executed under three heads: I.ii attacks the supposition that we have innate speculative knowledge (for example, knowledge that God exists and is no deceiver, that the essence of body is extension, or that the mind is distinct from the body); I.iii attacks the supposition that we have innate moral knowledge (for example, the knowledge that suicide is immoral), and I.iv attacks the notion that we have innate ideas (for example, the idea of an all perfect being or of the ideas perfect geometrical shapes).

Locke’s comments on the second of these topics caused a great deal of consternation in certain circles of British society. In his chapter on innate practical principles Locke drew attention to the variation in ethical customs that is evident to anyone who has “look’d abroad beyond the Smoak of their own Chimneys” (I.iii.2), and appealed to this evidence to undermine the claim that people are born knowing certain ethical principles. Locke was no relativist. He believed that ethical propositions have an absolute foundation. But he also believed that this foundation is not to be found in a little voice of conscience or an innate sense of the natural law. It is rather to be found in reasoning from the relations we are able to discern between our ideas — reasoning that is no more innate than the reasoning that establishes any other demonstration in geometry or logic or mathematics, but that is much less evident and easy to obtain. The wide variety of opinion in moral matters is not due to the fact that morals are merely conventional, but rather to the fact that they are so difficult to figure out correctly that many if not most cultures have simply gotten them wrong. To many in Locke’s day, this looked like an attempt to supplant an ethics based on the divinely revealed commandments with a purely secular morality based on rational principles. The proposal was not one that endeared Locke to partisans of either the puritanical or the “high” church forms of Christianity in England, but it was one of a half dozen features that helped earn his *Essay concerning human understanding* the status of the bible of enlightened thought in Europe (the others will be discussed in following chapters).

Locke’s general attack on innate principles is drawn from one basic argument. The argument proceeds by first establishing a kind of reverse onus: it is incumbent on those who believe in innate knowledge to prove there is such a thing. After all, it is evident that we do have senses and learn things from sensory experience. Anyone who wants to go beyond this, and postulate that in addition to sensory experience we have some special, extra-sensory source of knowledge, is first obliged to tell us why sensory experience is not alone adequate to give us all the knowledge we have.



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Locke proceeded to observe that there has only been one argument ever offered for innate knowledge: what we can call the argument from universal consent. This argument claims that there are some principles that all people in all times and cultures have always known and agreed upon. These include speculative principles, such as the principle of non-contradiction, and practical principles, such as the principle that stealing is unjust. From the fact that there is universal knowledge of and agreement to these principles, the argument goes on to conclude that these principles must be innate or inborn in us all.

Somewhat more formally laid out, the nativist's argument is as follows:

1. If any principle is universally assented to, then it is innate.
  2. Some principles (e.g., the law of non-contradiction) are universally assented to.
- Therefore, these principles are innate.

Locke charged that each of the premises of this argument is false. The second premise is false because there is no principle that is accepted by all people, at all times, and in all cultures. Even the principle of non-contradiction is not such a principle, because it is not known by children and idiots. Neither are any other supposedly innate principles.

The first premise is false because, even were we to grant its antecedent, its consequent could still be false. That is, even were grant that there is some principle that everyone knows and agrees to, this could still be because they learned it from sensory experience. For example, the principle that the sky is blue is probably known even more generally than the principle of non-contradiction, but no one would think that this is because it is innate in us. It is rather because the blueness of the sky is one of the first and most easily obtained of our sensory experiences.

Where moral principles are concerned, Locke had a few special remarks to make. In addition to remarking at some length on the variety and conflict between moral principles believed in different societies and at different times, he observed that were moral principles truly innate, it would be absurd to ask for a justification for them. Yet in fact there is no moral principle that is so evident and so much beyond controversy that people simply accept it and do not demand a justification. What is more, those moral principles that seem most universally accepted, such as the principle that one ought to keep one's promises, are given *different* justifications by different peoples, and this goes to prove that, even where there might appear to be widespread agreement on a particular principle, it is not because the principle is innate, but merely because a number of different considerations all imply it.

Locke claimed that all principles, even the principle of non-contradiction, are actually learned from sensory experience. [As noted earlier](#), Locke argued that all our knowledge arises from making judgments about or, as he put it, discerning the relations among our ideas. This means that knowledge requires first obtaining ideas from sense experience, then comparing those ideas with one another, and then describing the general results of those comparisons. In the case of the principle of non-contradiction, we first have to have an experience of more than one idea. Then we need to compare these two ideas with one another and discover that the one is not the other. This teaches us a kind of specific principle of non-contradiction that applies just to the incompatibility between those two ideas. We then need to note a number of other instances of specific principles of non-contradiction. At that point, we are put in a position to make an induction from all of these specific principles to a general rule governing them all: that everything is what it is and is not anything else. For example, the child suckles at its mother's breast and gets the idea of sweet, then tastes wormwood and gets the idea of bitter. Reflection on these ideas teaches it that sweet is not



the same as bitter. Then it looks at one thing and gets the idea of red, at another and gets the idea of white. Comparing all these ideas, it observes that they are distinct — that sweet is not the same as bitter or red or white, that red is not the same as white or sweet or bitter, and so on. It then generalizes these discoveries and others like them to formulate the principle that each idea is what it is and no idea is ever what it is not. In effect, the general law of non-contradiction arises by induction from experience in the same way as the law of universal gravitation, and the former is no more necessary and no less dependent on observation and induction than the latter. On Locke's view, a child kept in a sensory deprivation environment, where it is allowed to only ever get one idea, would never discover the principle of non-contradiction.

According to Locke, what holds for the principle of non-contradiction holds for all supposedly innate principles, including the principles of mathematics and geometry. These principles are known only by first obtaining, through sensory experience, ideas of particular shapes and numbers of things, isolating the general features of those ideas, and then comparing and contrasting the features so isolated and making judgments about the relations of identity, similarity and difference, or equality and inequality that those ideas are shown by experience to exhibit.

People do not recognize these facts, Locke observed, because they mistake principles learned very early in life for principles they were born with, especially if those principles are broadly accepted and frequently repeated in their society. To this fact we must add the consideration that most people simply do not have the leisure to sit back and reflectively examine their principles. The needs of life compel them to make quick decisions, and lacking the opportunity for reflection, they simply act on the basis of what they have been taught, discover that it generally proves reliable, and so conclude that they are best off if they simply accept the principles they have been taught. (As Locke put it, they accept the principle that principles ought not to be questioned.) These are practices that can be further entrenched by laziness, impatience, ignorance of the existence of widespread exceptions (in those who have not looked beyond the smoke of their own chimneys, as Locke put it), and indoctrination, all of which can dispose even those with the leisure to reflect on their principles to refrain from doing so. It is much easier to justify one's practices and beliefs by simply insisting that they are innate and beyond question than to go to the hard labour of investigating the justice of them.

There is a further factor that leads people to suppose that moral principles are innate: conscience. When people consider violating moral principles, particularly ones that they have been indoctrinated in since earliest childhood, they sometimes feel a little voice of conscience advising them to stop and do the right thing. This leads them to suppose that conscience is a special moral cognitive capacity that they were born with, that knows moral rules, and that tells those rules to them. Locke dismissed this reasoning, claiming that conscience is not knowledge of right or wrong, but merely a feeling of pride or guilt about doing those things we have previously been taught are right or wrong. Someone who had been taught at her parent's knee that loyalty to family comes before loyalty to the law would feel the same twinge of conscience about betraying a family member as someone who had been taught the opposite would feel about breaking the law for the sake of a family member.

It should be remarked in passing that though Locke denied innate knowledge he did not deny either innate dispositions or capacities, or innate tendencies of the will. He was quite willing to admit that we are born with certain abilities already developed in us, such as the ability to sneeze, the ability to make judgments or the ability to learn. (For obvious reasons, if we had to learn how to learn, we would be in deep trouble.) Indeed, Locke was willing to grant that we are born with all



our cognitive capacities intact and ready to work. But to be born with the ability to learn or to make judgments is not at all the same thing as to be born with a particular judgment already learned and in your head. The capacity may be innate, but for Locke nothing emerges from that capacity until it is applied to sensory experience. There can therefore be no innate products of cognitive processes, even though there can be innate cognitive capacities.

Similarly, Locke was willing to admit that we might be born with innate impulses or tendencies of will. We might be born, for instance, with an innate tendency to curl our toes when the sole of the foot is stroked, or an innate tendency to crawl back from a precipice, or an innate tendency to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, that is, to act out of self-interest. But a tendency to motion is not a belief. You do not curl your toes when your sole is stroked because you believe anything. The sensory stimulus simply elicits that motor response. Similarly, the infant need not shrink back from a precipice because it believes it will fall over the edge, or pursue pleasure and avoid pain because it believes that pleasure is good for it, but simply because the visual or tangible stimulus elicits that response.

### ESSAY QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Locke's definition of "idea" as "whatever it is, which the Mind can be employ'd about in thinking," (*Essay* I.i.8) has long puzzled commentators. According to one theory, Locke expressed himself so vaguely because he wanted to include both images formed by the imagination and concepts grasped by the intellect under the umbrella of the term, "idea." However, other commentators have criticized Locke's definition for failing to provide adequate guidance on the question of whether ideas are acts whereby the mind thinks of an object or "third things" (in addition to the mind and the objects in the external world) that are produced in the mind as a consequence of the activity of objects. These questions have recently been judiciously reviewed by Michael Ayers, *Locke*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1991), vol. 1, chs. 5-7. Summarize and comment on Ayers's position.
2. The main objection that Locke raised against innate knowledge in *Essay* I.ii-iii is that no good argument has been offered for supposing that there is any such thing. However, Locke only ever considered one argument for innate knowledge: the argument from universal consent, and it might be objected that this is to attack a straw man, for there are better and more convincing arguments for innate knowledge. Locke was attacked in just this way by Leibniz, who wrote an extended commentary on Locke's *Essay*, the *New essays on human understanding*. Leibniz's *New essays* have been translated by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Review Book I of Leibniz's *New essays* (which comments on Book I of Locke's *Essay*) and write a paper outlining Leibniz's main objections to Locke. Assess whether Leibniz or Locke has the better case.

