John Locke 2 Essay, Research Paper

John Locke (1632-1704)

John Locke was born at Wrington, a village in Somerset, on August 29, 1632. He entered Westminster school in 1646, and passed to Christ Church, Oxford, as a junior student, in 1652. The official studies of the university were uncongenial to him; he would have preferred to learn philosophy from Descartes instead of from Aristotle. He was elected to a senior studentship in 1659, and, in the three or four years following, he took part in the tutorial work of the college. Little is known of his early medical studies. He cannot have followed the regular course, for he was unable to obtain the degree of doctor of medicine. It was not till 1674 that he graduated as bachelor of medicine. He died on October 28, 1704.

Writings: In February 1690 the book entitled Two Treatises of Government was published, and in March of the same year appeared the long expected Essay concerning Human Understanding, on which he had been at work intermittently since 1671. The financial difficulties of the new government led in 1691 to his publication of Some Considerations of the Consequences of Lowering of Interest, and Raising the Value of Money, and of Further Considerations on the latter question, four years later. In 1693 he published Some Thoughts concerning Education, a work founded on letters written to a friend. In the first book of the Essay, on the subject of innate ideas, Locke points to the variety of human experience, and to the difficulty of forming general and abstract ideas, and he ridicules the view that any such ideas can be preceding to experience. All the parts of our knowledge, he insists, have the same rank and the same history regarding their origin in experience

Ideas: The mind has no innate ideas, but it has innate faculties: it perceives, remembers, and combines the ideas that come to it from without; it also desires, deliberates, and wills; and these mental activities are themselves the source of a new class of ideas. Locke’s account of knowledge thus has two sides. On the one side, all the material of knowledge is traced to the simple idea. On the other side, the processes which transforms this crude material into knowledge are activities of the mind which themselves cannot be reduced to ideas. Starting from the simple ideas which we get from sensation, or from observing mental operations as they take place, Locke has two things to explain: the universal element, that is, the general conceptions with which knowledge is concerned or which it implies; and the reference to reality which it claims. Knowledge of Mathematics, Ethics, the Self, and God. In the fourth book of his Essay Locke

applies the results of the earlier books to determine the nature and extent of knowledge. Locke also distinguishes between two degrees of knowledge: intuition and demonstration.

Beliefs: Empiricism: A philosophical doctrine which regards experience as the only source of knowledge. The empiricist draws his rules of practice not from theory but from close observation and experiment, emphasizing inductive rather than deductive processes of thought. In seventeenth- and eighteenth- century medicine, however, empiricism was synonymous with quackery, and in literary criticism the term is also generally employed to characterize an uninformed judgment. John Locke, in his enormously influential Essay concerning Human Understanding, refuted the concept on “innate ideas” and insisted that all human knowledge was of empiric origin.

John Locke did not agree with political democracy. Life, liberty, and property were natural rights and property meant that the propertied class was protected and had the right to exercise political authority.

Quotes:

“I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts.”

-John Locke

“The mind furnishes the understanding with ideas”

-John Locke (Bk. 2:1:5)