

## Locke 2

### Locke—and Descartes—on Ideas as the immediate objects of thought:

-I,1,8(p. 1): sloppy def. of idea: “whatever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks”  
-but, Locke also clearly uses “idea” such that ideas are in the mind. This definition would seem to imply that we can each only think about things in our own mind.

-II,8,8 (p. 9): more careful statement: “whatever the mind perceives in itself or is the *immediate* object of perception, thought, or understanding” (emphasis added)

-compare Descartes:

Considering the ideas of all these qualities which presented themselves to my thought, although the ideas were, strictly speaking, the only *immediate* objects of my sensory awareness, it was not unreasonable for me to think that the items which I was perceiving through the senses were things quite distinct from my thought, namely bodies which produced the ideas. –6<sup>th</sup> par. of M6, AT 75.2, Cottingham translation, emph added; compare our tr., p. 49.7

-Note that this representationalism is far from obvious: a Reidian alternative

### Knowledge, especially of “Real Existence”

-at 4,1,1-2, p. 18: “Our knowledge conversant about our ideas only”!

-yet already at 4,1,3, p. 19:; Locke allows that we have some knowledge of “Real existence”

-4,10,1-3, p. 19: Knowledge of God seems to come via a causal inference from one’s own existence

-Knowledge of anything else “is to be had only by actual sensation” (4,11,1, p. 20). Seems to just squeak in as knowledge, through some generosity: “not so certain as demonstration, yet may be called knowledge” (4,11,3, p. 20).

-But (in terms Hume will pick up), “this knowledge extends as far as the present testimony of our senses” (4,11,9, pp. 22-23) and (added at 4,11,11, p. 23) our memory of what our senses testified to in the past.

-No such generosity is extended to the present existence of things not now sensed (4,11,9, pp. 22-23), or of the existence of “other finite spirits” (4,11,12, pp. 23-24)!

**The Idea of Power:** One of the ideas we get from both sensation and reflection (listed as such at 2,7,8, p. 8). But our clearest idea of active power (distinguished from passive power at 2,21,2, p. 13.8) comes from reflection, not sensation: 2,21,4, pp. 13-14. We will pick this up later in our discussion of the empiricists, as Berkeley will argue we get our idea of active power only from reflection, and not at all from sensation, and then Hume will argue that we don’t get it from reflection, either, and so we in a way don’t have any idea of active power.

### Liberty/Freedom and Necessity — Book II, Chapter 21

-The question *whether man’s will is free or not?* is “unintelligible” (§14, p. 15.9): It is the agent, the person, who is free

-The question is when is an agent free or at liberty (§21, p. 16), or, presumably, whether a particular action is freely performed (which can be understood as the question whether the agent was free in performing the action). Answer (at least early in the chapter): “That so far as anyone can, by the direction or choice of his mind preferring the existence of any action to the nonexistence of that action, and vice versa, make it exist or not exist, so far he is free” (§21, p. 16.3)

- Locke's account makes use of conditionals ("if..., then..." statements): "For a man who sits still is said yet to be at liberty, because he can walk if he wills it. But if a man sitting still does not have the power to remove himself, he is not at liberty; so likewise a man falling down a precipice, though in motion, is not at liberty, because he cannot stop that motion if he would" (§24, p. 16).
- The account suggested is that for action A to be done freely, this is required: that if the agent had willed not to do A, they would not have done A. To be at liberty with respect to a potential action, you must have the power to do it if you will to do it, and to not do it if you will not to do it.
- This is a compatibilist account. Like Leibniz, Locke tries to motivate this account by means of a "what more could you want?" question: "For how can we think anyone freer than to have the power to do what he will?" (§21, p. 16.4). In a very prescient maneuver, Locke also urges that a lack of determination is a problem, and determination (of the right kind) is an "improvement and benefit" to freedom (§49, p. 17.9).
- Things get more complicated later in the chapter. In section 48, Locke speaks of the mind's "power to suspend the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them, examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty man has" (p. 17.7). Locke's discussion is complicated and long, but sects. 48-50 give a good idea of his new view. I say "new," because these later sections of Ch. 21 are from later editions of Locke's Essay, the earlier editions having a simpler view. As Locke writes in sect. 73 (not included in our readings): "To conclude this enquiry into humane Liberty, which as it stood before, I my self from the very beginning fearing, and a very judicious Friend of mine, since the publication suspecting, to have some mistake in it... The result of our judgment upon that Examination is what ultimately determines the Man, who could not be free if his will were determin'd by any thing, but his own desire guided by his own Judgment."
- It may not be entirely clear whether the new view counts us free in cases where we are moved by our desires without engaging in the suspension-and-judgment, but we had the power to suspend-and-consider (we would have suspended-and-considered had we willed to). I'm inclined to take him as requiring only the power to s&c. But in either case (whether Locke requires just the power to s&c, or whether he requires actual s&c-ing of truly free acts), his seems a compatibilist view: It's OK if we're determined; the determination just has to follow the right kind of path. We seem to have an early, simple account of the right kind of path, followed by a later, more complicated account, which *perhaps* may be read in a couple of different ways.