

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Lecture 15: John Locke

Welcome in lecture 15 of the course Philosophy and Critical Thinking. Today, we are going to talk about John Locke, philosopher of Western philosophy. Today, we will be discussing the refutation of innate ideas and the origin of knowledge. Already we have discussed the concept of innate ideas and since this course is philosophy and critical thinking, therefore, it is also very important to understand one concept and then refutation of this concept. And that is why today we will be discussing the argument which can against the concept of innate idea. Before starting the John Locke, I would like to remind you which already we have been discussing in the last few classes about the knowledge, the knowledge, and the source of knowledge. This is a very important question, what we are discussing in this class and the last class and next class. So, there is an argument about that we have knowledge or we have idea of any object, let us say, what is the source of this knowledge, experience, or the idea. Now, the one way of saying that we are experiencing an object, therefore, we have idea of an object and another group is arguing that no, the experience, or sense perception is not source of right knowledge or valid knowledge. So genuine knowledge what we have, it is coming from idea and ideas are the sources of knowledge. Now, this experience is we are not getting a genuine knowledge, to senses we are not getting this idea. John Locke, what he did, he addressed this problem. Now, he refuted this idea of innate idea and also this idea of that idea of idea saying that ideas are the source of knowledge. So, in that sense, John Locke is a very important philosopher.

Now, let us start the John Locke, John Locke, timing of the John Locke was 1632 to 1704. His work is very important work, it is an “Essay concerning human understanding” which is published in 1619. Now, John Locke basically was interested in the origin of our idea. So, there are, I mean, the last few classes we have discussed about the certain knowledge, like for example, Descartes, Spinoza, all of them arguing that we need a certain knowledge and they have used a different method, came to the different conclusion. So certain knowledge was on a very important and focused point. John Locke saying that certain knowledge is okay, but first, we need to know that the origin of our idea, from where we are getting this idea and that is a very important part. Now, Spinoza and Descartes have their own way to answer this question that the idea is coming from X, Y and Z. Now, John Locke has a different way to answer this question. He argued that knowledge must be real, for it must refer to and hold good of this actual state of affairs. So, the problem of Locke was of determining the nature and possible extent of human knowledge. He argued, I

thought, he writes in his book, I thought that the first step towards satisfying and several inquiries the mind of man was apt to run into was to take a survey of our understanding, examine our own powers and see to what things they were adapted. So, John Locke is mainly interested in our understanding, examine our own power. He argued the men extending their inquiries beyond their capacities. So basically he is talking about the limitation. So what we can know, what we cannot. He writes, men extending their inquiries beyond their capacities and letting their thoughts render into those depths where they can find no sure footing. He has an argument that we are basically moving around in some area where we are right, that is beyond our capacity. And he is sure about that, that we cannot find our footing there. I mean, we will not be getting any pure or sure knowledge there. And then he talked about the innate knowledge of principles by Descartes. How Descartes has argued about the innate idea. He said that innate idea is an inborn. So we are coming in this world with this idea. He calls as an implanted by God. He also argued and gave an example of the idea of God. We have discussed in the last class where Rene Descartes is arguing that the idea of God is not product of our experiences, because this world is full of imperfect thing. But idea of God is perfect thing. So, if you have an idea of God, first you think that what is this idea? Then he realizes that this idea is the idea of perfect thing. So, God is perfect. Now what is the cause of this idea? Our experiences is not. Because through experience what we are experiencing in this world is just an imperfect thing. An imperfect thing cannot produce an idea of perfect thing. And therefore, if we have an idea of perfect thing, it cannot be caused by something which is imperfect. Because imperfect thing only produce the idea of imperfect. Now, this also cannot be said that we got this idea from nothing. Because nothing cannot produce something. So, this is the argument. Now again there is a problem if this is not an effect of nothing, it is not an effect of or product of experience. But still, we have an idea of this God. What does it mean? That it means that the cause of this idea is God itself. And this idea is in it. So, this is when we are coming in this world, we are coming with some ideas, that is called innate ideas, an inborn idea. Now John Locke, what he did, he defeated this idea. He argued that there are no practical principle present to the minds of men. And even if there were, they might have acquired in the same way as others truth. So basically, he is rejecting the idea of innate idea and saying that even if we believe that we have this idea, this idea we also have got as we have got other truths, other ideas. So, we have many ideas. So, one idea is called idea of God. John Locke said that the source of this idea is the same as a source of others idea. And if it is not, for example, what Rene Descartes said, no, the innate idea is inborn. So, it means that there are innate ideas or there is innate idea, for example, the idea of God is an innate. So, this idea is innate. But at the same time, we also have some idea which is not innate. And in that case, we assure that this what are the innate or what are the not innate, and this is not possible. We do not have the clear idea about the innate idea and not innate idea. There will be no way to distinguish that, okay, this set of ideas are innate and this set of ideas are not innate. Now if talking about this innate idea and this innate idea is also present in all of

us. So, children and the uneducated are in possession of their reason without knowing them, without knowing the innate idea. They have this reasoning. For example, you are saying that innate idea, we have the innate idea and you can only know through this reason. The reason is that all of us has this reason. For example, children, what we are saying, unculture person, uneducated person, so on. They also have reason without knowing them, but they are not aware of this innate idea. He also gave an example of like moral laws. Moral laws cannot be called innate because they are not self-evident or universally recognized. So, there are laws like it depends on the person to person, or society to society. They are saying this set of action is right, this set of action is not right and so on. But in one society which is one set of action or one action is not right, in next society or another society or other place that same action is right. So what we are thinking that this law is universal, reality is not universal. We are following that. So, any moral law for any action what we are performing cannot be universal. Now again he argued that if you hold any innate idea, suppose we have any idea by birth, we are coming with this world with that set of idea or idea that it means that it cannot be obliterate. We cannot remove that. Now take an example of the children, an educated person. If this innate idea is with us, we all of us, we all of us coming in with this idea. Then why the children, the uneducated, uncultured, they do not have this idea of God. It only means that this idea of God is not innate. There are tribes, Locke giving an example, they do not have this idea of God and then clear impression of this idea. So what Descartes is arguing that this is an innate. So innate means that this is enough for everyone but there are examples of tribes where they do not have the idea of God. Now he gave another example. He said that idea of fire, the sun, heat are not proved to be innate on the ground that they are so universally received and known amongst mankind. So even the idea of fire is universal. Still, we are not arguing or just not prove that this idea of fire, idea of sun is innate. So, this argument cannot be based on this argument saying that this is a universal we received, therefore it is innate. So, the denial of innate idea does not mean that denial of the truth of science, moral and religion. John Locke is saying that I am rejecting that this idea, innate idea, but it does not mean that I am rejecting the truth of science, moral and religion. He argues that the universal knowledge which we think can be explained by the theory of Empiricism. Now, Empiricism means the source of the information is that experience. So, what the John Locke is arguing that whatever we are getting the source of knowledge is experience. So, knowledge like two and two are equal to four or sweet is not bitter is not gained by having innate idea but having clear and distinct idea through experience. So, he is now arguing about the idea which we have and he is for example two plus two equal to four. For example sweet is not bitter. So, he is arguing that this idea is not gained by because we have some innate ideas. This idea is just a product of our experience. So, there is an object we experienced and then we got this idea. And then he argued, he claimed that the mind in its first state is 'Tabula Rasa.' Tabula Rasa means a dark chamber or empty cabinet, white paper. So, when we are coming in this world, we are coming in this world with blank slate let us say. No white

paper. It is nothing there. It only means that we are coming in this world with empty mind. Empty mind in the sense that it is nothing there and no idea. And now we are experiencing and then we are getting idea. So this idea is not by birth. So, whatever we have, this idea is product of our experiences. This argument about the dark chamber and all, it is also in our Indian system. And where we have talked about whether we are coming in this world with this idea or without any idea. So I will give you an example. This example is by the text, Buddhist text. And I am putting this example in my own words. So, it will be easy to understand for you. Text says that baby is coming in this world with ideas. Now text is giving an argument. So once I was in hospital and one of my elder sister was about to deliver a baby. So I heard this news and I was went to the hospital. We were in a room and then waiting for good news, and after some time one person came with this news that finally we have one baby, a new member of our family. After some time, the person came with a baby. So, we were very happy and I had an idea that I am an expert in handling this infant. So I can hold the baby properly. Now the moment I started, you know, I am trying to comfort this baby but baby was crying. I had this idea that since I have handled this infant many times in my past, so I am in a right person to do that. So, I was trying my best to hold this baby. But this baby was crying. There was no break. After some time, 20 minutes or 30 minutes, mother came. Now this mother is the first time mother. So, I was arguing that even she does not know how to hold a baby. But I was asked to hand over this baby to mother. But the moment mother does this on baby, baby was at peace. He was completely, there was no crying. So the idea, the text argues that baby when it is coming in this world, it has an idea of pleasure and pain. So, when we are coming in this world, we are coming in this world with idea. So, John Locke argued that whenever we are coming in this world, we are coming in this world with blank slate. It is a tabula rasa. So, we are coming in this world with dark chamber, empty cabinet or white paper and now what we are doing, we are experiencing and we are getting an idea. So, he argues that all our knowledge is founded on and ultimately derived from experience. So, he is saying that all kind of knowledge which we have, the cause of this knowledge is experience. Now what he did, he talked about the two kinds of sources of our idea. So, we have an idea, the source of, now he is talking about the sources of the idea.

So, he said the two kinds of sources, first is sensation and second is reflection. Now sensation, the mind is furnished with sensible qualities and reflection is the mind is furnished with ideas of its own operation such as perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing. John Locke argues the idea means whatsoever the mind directly apprehends or which is the immediate object of perception, thought or understanding. So this is the rather idea. Now he argued for the two kinds of idea, one is simple idea and then complex idea. So, John Locke is basically is explaining our experiences, how do we get an idea. So we are experiencing and we are getting an idea. This idea, we have a two kind of idea, one is simple idea and complex idea. Now I will be discussing about the simple idea. So, no understanding has the power or to invent the frame

a new simple idea. Now simple ideas are, which is cannot be divided in the parts for example, some of the simple idea we are getting through our senses is called idea of color, sound, taste, heat, cold, solidity. We have the simple idea which we are getting from one sense and some of the idea we are getting from more than one senses for example, space, extension, figure, rest and motion. Some of the idea we are getting from reflection for example, operation of perception, retention and recall in memory, comparing, compounding, naming and abstracting. Simple ideas we receive through both sensation or reflection. Among these are pleasure, pain, unity, duration. Now again when Locke is arguing for the simple idea, they are also very important to know about the qualities. So, he talked about there are two kinds of qualities. First are the qualities, its original quality, a primary quality and secondary quality. Now he is defined the quality that the power which object have to produce different idea in us and it is inseparable from the object. For example, solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest number. These are the qualities, this is called primary qualities or original quality and this quality is inseparable. This quality is produced by an object in us. Now this is another quality is secondary qualities and secondary qualities are powers in bodies to produce idea in like us, like color, taste, smell and so on that are caused by the interaction of our particular perceptual appetites with the primary qualities of the object. Locke also distinguishes a second class of secondary properties that are the power that one substance has to affect another, the power of fire to melt a piece of wax. Now the next is the complex idea. Now we have the simple idea. Now simple idea, the mind has a power to arrange and rearrange this more than one or two ideas. So, what he is doing that he is putting together many simple idea making complex idea. So, in experience what we are doing, we are getting ideas. There are some ideas which is simple and once we have the simple idea, we are putting together in different combination and making this complex idea. He gave an example of the idea of beauty. Beauty which consists of a certain composition of color, figure causing delight or pleasure in the beholder. So, we have many ideas for example, which we have discussed in Descartes and Spinoza, the moods, substance. So these ideas are complex idea. So, when we are perceiving an object, we have some ideas getting through our sensation or reflection. Now this idea we have and mind has a power to put this many simple ideas in different combination and making complex idea. So, this complex idea is just a product of the simple idea. So, putting together the simple idea and then we have a complex idea. The John Locke is arguing even what we have in name of complex idea or in modes and idea of substance, these are also a product of your experience. So, you have experience, now you have ideas, putting together simple ideas and then you have complex ideas. So, this idea is not a product of or because of any innate idea. So, whatever we have, it is a product of our experiences. John Locke has a basic argument is that everything, all kind of knowledge which we have is just a product of experience. However, we will be continuing this discussion in next class.

So, thank you for your kind attention. This lecture was based on this book, *A Critical History of Western Philosophy* and a history of philosophy by Frank Thilly and again Stanford Encyclopedia. So, thank you so much for your kind attention. Thank you.