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# The Opposing Arguments of Rene Descartes and John Locke on the Origin of Innate Ideas

Philosophers over the years have written and evaluated numerous topics in philosophy. Occasionally, these scholars concede to their ideas and sometimes disagree with each other's thought. Two scholars had distinctive ideas about where innate ideas originate from and how we get these sorts of ideas. Notably, these two philosophers who had an opposing argument on where innate ideas originated from were Rene Descartes and John Locke (Brandhorst, 2010, p. 56). Descartes based his perspectives in the Meditations on First Philosophy, on the other hand, Locke's based his situated in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. By utilizing these sources, the paper seeks to offer a critical comparison of the two authors theories on innate ideas. In this case, the paper explores the similarities and the differences in the philosophies of Locke and Descartes.

## Innate ideas Definition

Innate ideas are ideas supposedly inborn in human brain contrary to the ideas received or acquired through experience (Tooby & Barrett, 2005, p. 23). The principle that some ideas, for example, those of infinity, God, as well as a substance can be considered as innate since there is no satisfactory experimental origin of them. The theory of innate ideas thrived in the 17th century, and it was stated by Descartes.

## Descartes view on innate ideas in human nature

Rene Descartes was the champion of the convention of innate ideas. Descartes together with other delegates focused on the theory of innate ideas set in the human brain by God during childbirth. Other than scientific standards and simple thoughts, the fundamental innate idea as stated by Descartes was the idea of the existence of God, thought that could not be gotten from experience. Consequently, Descartes hypothesized that information about God is inborn for everyone as a result of the faith and belief we have towards God (Brandhorst, 2010, p. 44). In spite, the fact that there is apparent variation among individuals because of social, cultural, and economic impacts, innate ideas are said to have a significant impact on human life.

Rene Descartes was a mathematician and to a great extent a brilliant man. The idea of God played an important role in the establishment of his theory. Additionally, by opposing ideas, Descartes gets at the thought of God and wonders where innate ideas originate from. In this case, Descartes concludes that we ought to agree with two things. One is that something

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cannot originate from anything. He understands that God is a perfect being and to come up with the idea that God exists certain thoughts must be taken into account. In fact, for him to develop his theory, Descartes questions himself where do we get thoughts. He concludes that ideas do not originate from the world of imagination since the world contains material items and as well perfection does not exist. Besides, Descartes illustrates that God cannot be envisioned since no one can make the world perfect as God is. In this case, he concludes by saying that he did not make the idea of God, but instead the idea was engraved on him.

## **Locke's view on innate ideas in human nature**

Different philosophers, most remarkably the British Empiricists, denied the presence of innate ideas. Locke was one of those scholars who disagreed with the theory and argued that all human knowledge was established through experience rather than as stated by Descartes. In his book "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," John Locke contends against innate ideas utilizing various arguments. The pragmatists trusted that genuine knowledge came through experience and philosophers, for example, Descartes believed in the presence of ideas and information at childbirth (Locke & Yolton, 1974, p. 78). Unlike Descartes, John Locke trusted that every knowledge one acquires starts from the experiences he/she encounter in life.

The first proposition that Locke raises to counter Descartes claim is that he says that there is no widespread assent. In this case, he believes that for there to be a presence of innate ideas; there would be ideas that everybody all around the world agrees to yet this is not the situation (Locke & Yolton, 1974, p. 67). He asserts that "there is no thought that all men have, and no ideas that everybody acknowledges." His second proposition says that children do not have any ideas that they share hence this means that there are no ideas born with them.

## **Critical comparison of Descartes and Locke philosophy on innate ideas**

The central distinction between Descartes and Locke is that Descartes holds that the ideas are gained when one is born while Locke trusts that ideas come just through experience. Consequently, Descartes endeavors to find from the fundamental principle the thought of the existence of God. On the other hand, Locke declares that we secure ideas by sensation, direct experience from the external world, as well as reflecting on impressions to develop new thoughts.

Locke rejects the presence of any innate ideas basing his arguments on two grounds. He claims that there are no innate ideas since if they existed the children could be born aware of them (Newman, 2009, p. 73). Locke likewise clarifies that if any thought is innate, then also the idea of God existence is innate. Nevertheless, because there does not exist a universal belief in the existence of God, then the thought of God cannot be termed as innate. Notably, Locke clarifies

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that there are no innate thoughts in the human brain, rather the brain is a white paper drained of all characters with no ideas. It is by experience that the human brain gets to pick up some knowledge and new ideas.

Descartes claims that innate ideas are existence whereby he based his idea with the thought human perceive the existence of God. Unlike Descartes, Locke argues that human beings are not constituted to know everything, but rather are conceived with enough crucial information to empower us to stay away from trouble. This statement briefly portrays his conviction that human develops ideas from experiences that are seen through the individuals part of life and not through some imaginable response. Through the process of human development, Locke believes that the ideas acquired through experience, which is afterward accessible in the human brain as memories can be consulted and utilized to facilitate learning and contribute to gaining knowledge.

Contrary to Descartes view of innate ideas in human nature, John Locke does not concur with the fact that there is certain knowledge which is innate. Besides, Locke believes in the knowledge that is equated to a significant degree and not that which is based-on perception. In his book, "Essay Concerning Human Understanding," Locke clarifies that ideas rely greatly on the senses and reflection (Locke & Yolton, 1974, p. 87). More importantly, he concludes by saying that all ideas are created from reflection and observations. Hence knowledge is based on experience.

Despite the fact that the philosophies of Descartes and Locke show significant differences, there does exist the possibility of similarities. Indeed, as illustrated by numerous sources, there are various instances that the two authors are seen to agree with each other's perspective. Consequently, Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" is not directly written to oppose Descartes claims about innate ideas but it is a record of epistemology which was impacted to some extent by Locke's reading Descartes's work. In this case, a significant similarity is derived whereby Locke acquired huge numbers of Descartes' philosophical thoughts and criticisms and as well adopted a lot of his terminologies.

Locke's thought of the idea is one case of a term acquired from Descartes. Locke defines an idea as that which the brain sees in itself or as the quick object of perception, thought, and comprehension. This is by all means precisely the way Descartes defines the idea. Notably, Descartes defines idea as whatever is promptly perceived by the brain.

In conclusion, the paper has explored the differences and similarities in the philosophies of Locke and Descartes specifically basing on innate ideas in human nature. In various ways, Locke is drawing from Descartes work and at some point, opposing some of his thoughts. Particularly, Locke and Descartes disagree on the origin of innate ideas. As a result, the two

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authors offer different philosophical answers to this question. Notably, as much as their philosophies may differ, I find Descartes philosophy more convincing than the philosophy of Locke. One is because everything that happens depends upon the nature of God the creator of the world. Besides, everything that exists and happens is eventually reducible to terms of brain and substance. According to me, Descartes claim the God's will is beyond human's understanding is right.

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