Chapter III

Constructive side of Locke’s Theory of Knowledge

III.1 Origin of Idea

Locke’s arguments given in Book I of the ‘Essay’ and designed to prove that none of our ideas are innate, are discussed in Chapter II of the present work. The positive or the constructive side of his theory of knowledge is the subject matter of this chapter. Locke’s contention that the mind contains no innate ideas or principles led him to the basic empiricist tenet, the principle that nothing is in the mind which was not first in the sense. It should be noted that Locke was not the first philosopher to propose this basic empiricist tenet. Before Locke, St. Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, stated that all our natural ideas and knowledge are grounded in experience. He also argued that there are no innate ideas. For him, sense-perception and introspection or reflection were the fountains of ideas.¹

According to Locke, the mind is a tabula rasa i.e. it is void of all characters and is without any idea. It should be noted in passing that the phrases ‘void of all characters’ and ‘without any idea’ mean ‘without any positive content.’² Locke did not mean that the mind has no positive character in the sense of having no characteristic function or activity. He contended that all the materials of knowledge and reason come from experience. He said:
Whence comes it by the vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From Experience; …

By ‘Experience’, Locke intended to mean ‘sensation’ and ‘reflection’. These two are the fountains of knowledge from where all the ideas are derived. Locke said that the existence of these ideas need no proof. Everyone is conscious of these ideas in himself. Our observation may be employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds. The former is the source of most of the ideas which we have, and as it depends ‘wholly upon our senses’, it is called ‘sensation.’ The latter is a source of ideas which ‘every man has wholly in himself’ and it might be called ‘internal sense’; to this Locke gave the name ‘reflection.’ Ideas of reflection include thinking, doubting, perceiving, believing, reasoning, willing and in general, all kinds of ideas that are not produced from sensible things. Locke said:

This great Source of most of the Ideas we have, depending wholly upon our Senses, and derived by them to the Understanding, I call SENSATION.

About reflection, Locke said:

By REFLECTION then, in the following part of this Discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the Mind takes of its own Operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof, there come to be Ideas of these Operations in the Understanding.

Sensation and reflection are the two windows through which all the ideas enter into the dark chamber of the Understanding. They do not open simultaneously but one after
another. As the perceptions of the sensible qualities of the bodies, which we receive through sensations, require less effort of attention, we receive them earlier. Internal perceptions always come after external perception.

According to Locke, the raw materials of knowledge, i.e. ideas come either from sensation or reflection. After receiving these raw materials, the mind acts upon them until they construct some complex forms. The final product of experience does not resemble the original ideas from which they originate. O’Conner pointed out that Locke did not give sufficient attention to these ‘processes of manufacture’ by which the original raw materials of knowledge are worked on by the mind. Some critics have suggested that Locke believed that human experience was a sort of mosaic in which particular pieces of ideas were received through either sensation or reflection. These critics have also pointed out that the findings of psychology are not in accord with Locke’s explanation of experience. However, American psychologist William James contended that the mind, instead of receiving different sorts of simple ideas, received a blooming, buzzing confusion that it first analyses and then puts in order. O’Conner pointed out that this is not a criticism of Locke. Locke, like a philosopher, tried to give a catalogue of all the materials of knowledge received through sensation and reflection. He also tried to show how these materials could explain all kinds of human knowledge and prescribe its limits. O’Conner said:

*He is not trying to describe the actual processes by which knowledge originates and develops in human minds. He is merely trying to give a rational reconstruction of the process of knowing, to distinguish the various elements involved in it and trace them to their origins in experience.*
Locke attempted to draw our attention to the fact that experience is the only source of the materials of knowledge. He contended that the mind might analyze, mix, breakdown, build-up, sort, and order the materials given in sensation and reflection. However, mind cannot add any new material. Locke said:

\[
All \ those \ sublime \ Thoughts, \ which \ tower \ above \ the \ Clouds, \ and \ reach \ as \ high \ as \ Heaven \ itself, \ take \ their \ Rise \ and \ Footing \ here: \ In \ all \ that \ great \ Extent \ wherein \ the \ mind \ wonders, \ in \ all \ those \ remote \ Speculations, \ it \ may \ seem \ to \ be \ elevated \ with, \ it \ stirs \ not \ one \ jot \ beyond \ those \ Ideas, \ which \ Sense \ or \ Reflection, \ have \ offered \ for \ its \ Contemplation.\]

O’Conner pointed out that we may regard the above statement of Locke as a summary of Locke’s empiricism.

In the opening section of the ‘Essay’, Locke held that his intention is not to enquire into the correlates of sensation on the physical and physiological side. He said:

\[
I \ shall \ not \ at \ present \ meddle \ with \ Physical \ Consideration \ of \ the \ Mind; \ or \ trouble \ myself \ to \ examine, \ wherein \ its \ Essence \ consists, \ or \ by \ what \ Motions \ of \ our \ Spirits, \ or \ Alterations \ of \ our \ Bodies, \ we \ come \ to \ have \ any \ Sensation \ by \ our \ Organs, \ or \ any \ Ideas \ in \ our \ Understanding; ...\]

Locke actually wanted to follow ‘historical plain method’ i.e. to accept facts as they were, without an attempt to find out the ultimate explanation. He accepted the fact that we do have ideas in sensation.

Aaron pointed out that although Locke tried to follow the ‘historical plain method’ in theory, he followed a different procedure as he developed his argument in the second book.
Here the origin of ideas rests upon a theory of sensation, which is not very explicit in the ‘Essay’ but always implied.

Aaron commented that Locke’s description of sensation is very vague. Locke said:

*First, Our Senses, conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct Perceptions of things, according to those various ways, wherein those Objects do affect them.*

When the external objects affect the senses, they convey perceptions into the mind. It seems that Locke was not satisfied with this explanation. Therefore, he tried to give an appropriate explanation of sensation. He said:

*...when I say the senses convey into the mind, I mean, they from external objects convey into the mind what produces their those Perceptions.*

The senses do not convey perceptions into the mind but something that can produce perceptions. We get a more explicit explanation of sensation in Book II of the ‘Essay’ where Locke dealt with primary and secondary qualities. Here he said:

*I have in what just goes before, been engaged in Physical Enquiries a little farther than, perhaps, I intended. But it being necessary, to make the Nature of Sensation a little understood. ...*

Aaron pointed out that an explanation, which is implicit in this statement, is that, in the external world, physical objects that are composed of minute particles or corpuscles, affect our sense organ. This affection goes to the brain, which afterwards affects the mind. As a result, ideas are produced in the mind. Aaron remarked that Locke nowhere taught this theory explicitly. Since he accepted this explanation, Aaron argued that three consequences follow that his ‘Essay’ never proves. First, physical objects exist, so he accepted realism. Secondly,
as the brain, after being affected by the outer object, in turn affects the mind, it appears that he admitted of an interaction theory of mind-body relation. Thirdly, there is a causal connection involved in perception. Perception arises from the action of physical objects on the mind.

In Book II of the ‘Essay’, Locke claimed that we depend upon ‘sensation’ and ‘reflection’ for the beginning of our knowledge. Although according to Locke, most of our ideas spring from sensation, yet it is misleading to identify Locke’s empiricism with sensationalism in a narrow sense. According to sensationalism, we know the external world only through the act of sensing. Those who believed in sensationalism held that seeing is equivalent to knowing. In Book IV of the ‘Essay’, Locke said that we know the existence of things in sensing. However, he never claimed that we know the full nature of things only through sensing. Moreover, Locke also pointed out in the ‘Essay’ that we know many qualities and the co-existence of the qualities of the things through sensation. However, it does not follow from this that Locke identified knowing with sensing. According to Locke, sensation provides us no knowledge but only materials for knowledge. It generates ideas in our mind, which we consider as materials of knowledge. Knowledge arises only after perceiving the agreement or disagreement of these ideas. Therefore, it is incorrect to identify Locke’s empiricism with sensationalism in a narrow sense. Aaron said:

*His empiricism is no sensationalism, and yet many who read Book II hastily and do not bother to understand Book III and IV mistakenly write it down as such.*
However, we should note that existential knowledge, as recognized by Locke, compelled him to admit, in spite of his main theory of knowledge, that sensing is in itself knowing, although it is a very doubtful one.

According to Locke, we receive the ideas of sensations passively through the mind, like a mirror. He said:

*These simple Ideas, when offered to the mind, the Understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor blot them out, and make new ones in itself, than a mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the Images or Ideas, which, the objects set before, do therein produce.*

Jenkins pointed out that Locke did not deal with the question - if the medium that receives the sensation may also distort them. In the case of the mirror, it has the capability of distorting the objects placed before it. Morris also raised the same criticism. He said that the nature of the image in a mirror is to some extent affected by the mirror and the mirror can distort images. Jenkins said that Locke did not show the analogy to be inappropricate in this respect. However, it was Locke’s duty to show that the mind faithfully reproduces the objects through ideas in the mind. In order to combat his representative theory of perception, it was a necessary task for Locke.

Regarding ideas of sensation, Locke held that they depend completely on our senses and therefore are independent of any reflection. Locke said:

*First, Our Senses, conversant about particular sensible Objects, do convey into the Mind, several distinct Perceptions of things, according to those various ways, wherein those Objects do affect them; And thus we come by*
those ideas, we have of Yellow, White, Heat, Cold, Soft, Hard, Bitter, Sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities,...

However, Morris pointed out that our mind can never receive any idea without reflection. He argued that we could form ideas of yellow, white, hot, cold, soft, hard, etc. only by the activities of comparison and abstraction\(^\text{15}\). Therefore, the mind is dependent on reflection while forming those ideas. The idea of ‘heat’ has no meaning in itself unless we distinguish it from cold. Only thinking can make this distinction. Morris argued that it is not correct to term whatever the mind gets through sensation as the ‘idea of heat.’ Locke has failed to discover what the simple ideas of sensations are, with which reflection occupies itself.

We may observe here in passing that a child’s initial idea of ‘heat’ is what he passively receives and not what he actively compares with and contrasts from ‘cold.’ It is true that in the subsequent stage, reflection may set in and try to evaluate his primary sensation.

According to Locke, our thinking always presupposes an object. When we think we think about some object. The object of thinking, to him, must be ideas like heat, cold, colour, softness, etc. These ideas cannot be innate as Locke did not admit of innate ideas. Again, as materials of thinking, these ideas cannot arise from thought itself. Therefore, these ideas must owe their origin to sensation. Morris pointed that Locke has given us an important contribution to the theory of knowledge by emphasizing that sense perception plays an important role in knowledge and that thought can never fulfil this function. The Cartesians failed to trace this.

As O’Connor noted, Locke did not claim that his catalogue of ideas of sensation was complete.\(^\text{16}\) By ideas of sensation, Locke implied only such ideas that arise from the
operation of external objects on our sense organs. However, O’Connor pointed out that important sources of ideas such as sensations of movements of joints or tensions of muscles and tendons, organic sensations like nausea, vertigo, etc., are ignored by Locke.

In modern times, we refer to reflection as ‘introspection.’ The ideas of reflection are perception, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all different operations of our mind. Locke contended that the term ‘operation’ has a wide sense. The word ‘operations’ include not only the actions of the mind but also some sort of passion arising sometimes from them, such as the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought. Locke said:

The term Operations here, I use in a large sense, as comprehending not barely the Actions of the Mind about its Ideas, but some sort of Passions arising sometimes from them, such as is the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought.¹⁷

Jenkins argued that it is not clear as to what kinds of passions he referred to or how they arise exactly.¹⁸ The example of passions, which Locke has given, i.e. satisfaction, which arises from reflecting on the thought that on a particular occasion, he had acquitted himself well, shows that he has deviated somewhat from the initial definition of reflection as a source of ideas. The passion, which he has mentioned, is the result of reflection upon the content of the thought as opposed to reflection upon the specific act of thinking.

Locke argued that reflection is almost similar to sensation. However, it differs from the latter in two ways. These are: (i) reflection is not stimulated directly by external objects and (ii) it is a secondary mode of cognition since it does not arise without our effort to examine our own mental operations.
III.2. Meaning of the word ‘Idea’

The word ‘idea’ is the key word in Locke’s philosophy. Locke himself has used the word frequently in his ‘Essay’ in various senses. Vere Chappell commented that:

*The very word ‘idea’ appears more frequently in the Essay concerning Human Understanding than any other noun; its occurrences outnumber even those of such common words as ‘he,’ ‘have,’ and ‘for.’*

It is impossible to understand Locke’s philosophy, especially his theory of knowledge, without understanding the meaning of the word ‘idea.’ The usage of this word is not original with Locke. It had a wide use in seventeenth century philosophy. We get a definition of the word ‘idea’ from the philosophy of Descartes and Malebranche, which is similar to that given by Locke. Erdman aptly commented, ‘Locke agrees with Descartes in applying the word ‘idea’ to everything which falls within our consciousness.’

Descartes defined idea as follows:

*...all that is in our mind when we conceive a thing, in whatsoever manner we may conceive it.*

Descartes has used the term ‘idea’ to denote the contents of human mind, whether of thought or sense perception. Like Locke, he has used the term ambiguously. In usage, it sometimes means the object of a mental act and sometimes as the mental act itself.

According to Malebranche, the things that the mind perceives are its own sensations, imaginations, and ideas. He held that whatever the mind perceives must actually be present and intimately united to it.

Early in the ‘Essay,’ Locke defined ‘idea’ as follows:
It being that Term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by Phantasm, Notion, Species or whatever it is, which the Mind can be employed about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it.  

Later, in another passage, Locke said that

> Whatsoever the Mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of Perception, Thought, or Understanding, that I call Idea; and the Power to produce any Idea in our mind, I call Quality of the Subject wherein that power is. Thus, a Snow-ball, having the power to produce in us the ideas of White, Cold and Round, the Powers to produce those Ideas in us, as they are in the Snow-ball, I call Qualities; and as they are Sensations, or Perceptions, in our Understandings, I call them Ideas.

Locke, in response to Stillingfleet, defined idea as:

> The thing signified by ideas is nothing but the immediate objects of our minds in thinking.

In the ‘Essay’, there are at least two independent and separate definitions of the term ‘Idea.’ Locke, nowhere in the ‘Essay’ claimed that he has used the term equivocally. According to him, an idea is something that exists in the mind, more specifically in the understanding, which is mind’s intellectual or cognitive part, as opposed to its volitional or appetitive part. Now, the question is – What does it mean to say that an idea exists in the mind? Locke himself did not give any clear answer to this question. He maintained that the
two phases ‘to be in the understanding’ and ‘to be understood’ are equivalent. However, Descartes, to whom Locke is very much indebted, held that:

\[
I \text{ hold that there is no more difference between the mind and its ideas than between a piece of wax and the diverse figures of which it is capable.}^{24}
\]

According to Descartes, as each piece of wax has a determinate figure and cannot exist without that figure, mind also, as it is constantly thinking, cannot stay without its ideas. Locke did not believe in this theory. He contended that mind could exist without thinking. Therefore, there are times when it exists without containing or having any idea. Ideas as conceived by Locke, are the objects of our mental actions or operations, i.e. thinking or perceiving. For Locke, thinking and perceiving are not two different activities of our mind. He held that there is no thinking or perceiving without an idea as its object. Thinking or perceiving, by nature, directs towards an object. There is no such thing as mere thinking. Thinking always presupposes an idea as its object.

Locke defined ideas as immediate objects of our thought. All ideas exist in our mind. However, we perceive things that are outside of our mind in the sense that they exist independently of our mind. We see stars, hear conches, and remember Paris in the spring. As we can perceive them, they are objects of our mind. However, none of them exists in our mind and is therefore, not an idea. Locke, by recognizing ideas as immediate objects of our thought, distinguished them from the external things, which the mind does not perceive immediately and hence are not ideas.

We often have perception in which no external object is involved. Macbeth saw a dagger (in Shakespeare’s play ‘Macbeth’), which was not there. As he is engaged in a
perception, there must be an object of his perception. Since this object here cannot be
even, it must be internal. In addition, this is what Locke conceived ideas to be.

We have noticed that Locke identified idea with the object of our thinking, i.e. all
kinds of cognitive activity. The term ‘idea’ denotes phantasm (identified as sense data
nowadays), memories and images, notions, species, etc.

Sense data are the objects of our immediate awareness as coloured patches, noises,
odours, feelings of heat and cold and so on. In the ‘Essay’, Locke identified ideas with sense
data or sensible qualities as is explicit from the following:

...as he who thinks and discourses of the Sun, has been more or less accurate,
in observing those sensible qualities, ideas, or properties, which are in that
thing, which he calls the Sun.\(^{25}\)

Locke also made similar attempts to identify ideas with sensible qualities or sense data in the
‘Essay’ in Chapter II -

The coldness and hardness, which a Man feels in a piece of Ice, being as
distinct Ideas in the Mind, as the Smell and Whiteness of a Lily;\(^{26}\)

and, again in Chapter VIII -

...Qualities of Light and warmth, which are Perceptions in me when I am
warmed, or enlightened by the Sun, are no otherwise in the Sun... \(^{27}\)

Ryle opined that while explaining sense perception, Locke adopted the usual line of
explanation of the data of the five senses\(^{28}\). Locke held that sensible qualities such as
softness, hardness, coldness, warmth, white, red, sweet, etc. are states of the perceiving mind.
They are the result of some physical impulses from the minute constituents of the external
body upon the minute constituents of the percipient’s appropriate sense organ. As Ryle
maintained, Locke failed to observe that the arguments, which prove that the sensible qualities are relative to the percipient, also prove that they are relative to the physical situation and condition of the percipient’s body. Therefore, sensible qualities are dependent on the percipient in the special sense, as they are modifications of his mental conditions. They are, like pain and fear, in the mind, as they are special conditions in which a mind may be on perception. Ryle contends that there is no special objection to Locke’s usage of the term ‘idea’ in the sense of sense data or sensible qualities.

Locke, in his discussion on memory and imagination in the ‘Essay’, has used the word ‘idea’ in the sense of images, etched in our memory or imaginations. It is in this sense in which Berkeley and Hume have used the term. In his ‘Essay’, Locke said:

\[
\text{And thus it is by the Assistance of this Faculty that we are said to have all those ideas in our understandings, which though we do not actually contemplate, yet we can bring in sight, and make appear again, and be the Objects of our Thoughts, without the help of those sensible Qualities, which first imprinted them there.}^29
\]

In the above passage it is clearly evident that Locke has used the word ‘idea’ in the same sense as ‘images’ for he said that one can recall all those ideas in the understanding which were once imprinted in his memory, without the help of those sensible qualities, which helped to imprint the ideas. Images are no doubt mental but it is hard to tell the senses in which they are mental. Unlike sense data, they are not the direct effect of external object.

O’Connor pointed out\(^30\) that Locke has used the word ‘idea’ to refer to characteristics or properties in general sense, such as thinking, motion, and gratitude. These are not restricted to sense qualities. In this sense, ‘idea’ means ‘general property’, ‘concept’, or even
‘meaning.’ Further, Ryle also pointed out that Locke has used the term ‘idea’ to imply ‘notion’, ‘species’, ‘conceptions’ and ‘terms’. According to Locke, ‘ideas’ are what words are signs of or what word stands for or are the names of or what are expressed by the words whiteness, sweetness, thinking, motion, man, elephant, crazy, etc. This usage of the word ‘idea’ suggests that Locke has used the word in the sense of ‘concept.’ However, Locke has not used the word ‘concept’ in the ‘Essay’ although the word ‘conception’ has appeared in the ‘Essay’ occasionally. A ‘concept’ is an apprehended attribute, property, quality, or character and ‘conception’ is the apprehension of an attribute, property, quality, or character.

Ryle held that this use is of two kinds. In one sense, having an idea means knowing or thinking something to be of a certain character. When we know something is moving or something is an elephant, we can also think in abstraction the characters which those things possess respectively, i.e. being in motion or being an elephant. Ryle argued that when Locke used the word ‘idea’, except where his special representative theory is under consideration, he has used the word in the sense of mental acts of considering something to be of a certain character. The acts of considering, as performed by the mind, are obviously in the mind.

In the second sense, he has used the word ‘idea’ to imply character or attribute itself and not to the apprehending of a character. He has used this sense when he discussed about space, time, number, infinity, power, substance, activity, identity, and personality. Here, Locke has tried to observe the characteristics or properties of space, time, number, infinity, etc. and has not considered how a thing becomes one or the other of these by possessing a determinate characteristic or property, which these things posses respectively.
Although, Locke’s definition of the term ‘idea’ in the ‘Essay’ is confined to stand for whatsoever is the object of understanding, Aaron, O’Connor and Ryle have shown that Locke has also used the term in the sense of act of knowing itself.

O’Connor pointed out that some critics of Locke have accused him for using the word idea not in the sense of object of knowing but in the sense of the act of knowing itself. Aaron has also raised the same objection against Locke. He said:

*It is frequently argued, however, that in his actual usage Locke goes beyond even these wide bounds and sometimes, means by idea, not so much an object of thinking but the thinking itself, the perceiving of Object.*

An example of this use of the word idea exists only in what Locke called ideas of reflection. Ideas of reflection are the ideas of the activities and operations of the mind.

*The two great principal Actions of Mind, which are most frequently considered, and which are so frequent, that everyone that pleases may take notice of ’em in himself, are these two – Perception, or thinking, and Volition, or willing.*

In case of ideas of reflection, the act of knowing something is itself considered an object of simultaneous act of introspection. Locke called the act of knowing an idea, for it becomes an object in the further act of introspection. Locke opined that we could not know anything without being conscious of it. Since ideas are that of which we are conscious, it would follow that all our acts of knowing are ideas. Therefore, in a sense, Locke has regarded acts of knowing as ideas. However, he, as such does not consider the act of knowing, as an idea. He called it an idea when this act becomes an object of other act. Therefore, there is no confusion in using the term idea for an act of knowing, which his critics accuse him of.
Ryle has also shown that Locke has used the term ‘idea’ to denote an act of thinking about something. He said that in the chapter ‘Association of Ideas’ in the ‘Essay’, Locke has referred to many cases where we are led to think of one idea with the help of the thought of another, although one has no real relevance to the other. Locke said:

\[A \text{ man has suffered Pain or Sickness in any place, he saw his friend die in such a Room; though these have in Nature nothing to do one with another, yet when the Idea of the Place occurs to his Mind, it brings (the Impression being once made) that of the Pain and Displeasure with it, he confounds them in his Mind, and can as little bear the one as the other.}\]

Here one idea has caused us to think of the other. Ryle said that in this use, the term ‘idea’ denotes the act of alternation or consideration.

Vere Chappell argued that Locke did not identify ideas with perceiving. He pointed out that Locke did not mean by ‘idea’ an act or occurrence of perception or thought, as opposed to the object of such an act or occurrence. It is true that Chappell argued that Locke occasionally identified ideas with perceptions and even with sensations (see quotation; Ref. 22). However, Chappell pointed out that whenever Locke spoke of ideas as perception, he actually implied perception in the object-sense of the word whereas whenever he implied perception in the ‘act sense’, he used ‘having an idea’ and not just ‘idea’. Locke said:

\[To \text{ ask, at what time a Man has first any Ideas, is to ask, when he begins to perceive; having Ideas, and Perception being the same thing.}\]

Douglas Greenlee, in his article ‘Locke’s idea of idea’, noticed that Locke’s definition\(^{21}\) of the term ‘idea’ does not express some important features of the concept of ‘idea’ generally attributed to Locke\(^{36}\). It is said that Locke’s ideas are mental images.
Greenlee argued that many examples of simple ideas are examples of ideas that we cannot meaningfully consider as images, viz. perception, willing, power, existence, and unity. Again, he nowhere suggested that all ideas are images. Greenlee pointed out that the emphasis on any object whatsoever suggests that he wanted to avoid the assumption that ideas are necessarily images.

Secondly, Greenlee held that Locke’s definition of idea does not reveal that ideas are mentally entities. Greenlee possibly believed that Locke had taken it for granted that ideas are mental entities although he did not state it clearly. The direct realist may, Greenlee suggested, accept the expression ‘whatsoever is the object of understanding’ within the definition of idea as the object of immediate perception. ‘Whatsoever’ is, in fact, such an object; a table when a table is being observed, a concept when a concept is being understood, a society when a society is being studied. However, the following remark, which Locke has made after introducing the definition of idea, suggests that he wanted to rule out direct realism. He said,

I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such ‘ideas’ in Men’s Minds; every one is conscious of them in himself, and Men’s Words and Actions will satisfy him, that they are in others.\(^{37}\)

Admittedly, in the case of a perception of a table, the table perceived is not in the mind. However, the question is - what did Locke mean by ideas are ‘in’ the mind. In Book I, Locke himself explained the point. He wrote:

For if these words (to be in the understanding) have any Propriety, they signify to be understood. So that, to be in the Understanding, and, not to be
Greenlee contended that Locke’s usage of the expression ‘ideas are in the mind’ does not necessarily distinguish between the location of an idea and the person who has it. Location here means possession. He further held that there is nothing in the conception of idea, which excludes the possibility that an idea in the mind may be an outside thing. Greenlee said that

…there is nothing to ‘idea’ which excludes the possibility that an idea in the mind may be an ‘outside’ thing as understood. Indeed a close reading of the ‘Essay’ reveals Locke’s using ‘idea’ to designate the object of perception when it is clear that the object in question is the ‘outside’ thing.  

Gunnar Aspelin argued that Greenlee’s opinion regarding Locke’s definition of idea, not excluding the possibility of ideas in the mind being outside objects, is not tenable. Aspelin held that the expressions ‘immediate object’ and ‘whatsoever the mind perceives in itself’ within the definition of the term ‘idea’ suggest that the object of perception cannot be an outside object. Since ideas are in the mind and are its immediate object, they cannot but be mental. Aspelin further contended that the passage that Greenlee has referred to, in favour of his view that the object in the mind may be an outside object, fails to confirm his assertion.

Aspelin further argued that after defining the term ‘idea’ in Section 8 of Chapter VIII, Book II, Locke defined ‘quality’ as the ‘power to produce any idea in our mind.’ Aspelin said that when Locke spoke of ideas ‘as in the things themselves’, he actually implied ‘those qualities in the objects which produce them (i.e. the ideas) in us.’ However, Locke also has sometimes identified ideas with qualities. This would lead us to believe that ideas take us
to an immediate contact with the external world. Therefore, it is also possible to link ideas to external objects. Nevertheless, in order to be fair to Locke’s interpretation of the term ‘idea’, we must mention that he has himself accepted this inadequacy of the definition of the term. Aspelin has correctly pointed out in this context that towards the end of the first draft of the ‘Essay’, Locke clarified:

_idea when it is spoken of as being in our understanding is the very perception or thought we have here, when it is spoken of as existing without is yet cause of that perception, and is supposed to be resembled by it, and this I call quality._  

Aspelin also pointed out that the ‘Essay’ has passages, which are inconsistent with the view that ‘idea’ and outside object are interchangeable. Locke said that

_‘Tis evident, the Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them. Our Knowledge therefore is real, only so far as there is conformity between our ‘ideas’ and the reality of Things. But what shall be here the Criterion? How shall the Mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with Things themselves?_  

In his ‘Essay’ Locke has used many terms, which are possible to interpret in various ways. However, Locke here said clearly that we cannot perceive object directly, but only through the intervention of ideas. Aspelin argued that there are many passages in the ‘Essay’, which express the same line of thought. It is hard to find any negative instance.

We have seen that Locke has not used the word ‘idea’ equivocally in the ‘Essay.’ He used the word in different senses. Still there is a common core among these meanings. These
different senses of the word ‘idea’ point to an identical function. This function is representation of the external or internal world through sensation or reflection, respectively.

**III.3. Function of Ideas and Locke’s Representative Theory of Perception**

As already stated earlier, ideas, according to Locke, represent the external and internal world through sensation and reflection, respectively. Knowledge to him is possible only through ideas. The process of knowing involves three factors; a mind, the object and the idea of the object. A theory of perception that refers to ideas as intermediary objects between the knowing mind and the ultimate object, both in perception and knowledge, is called the representative theory of perception. These ideas, which act as intermediaries, represent the ultimate object. According to this view, we never know the external world directly but only through ideas. We refer to Locke’s theory of perception and knowledge as the representative theory of knowledge.

We find two extreme viewpoints regarding Locke’s representationalism. There are those who uphold the view that Locke was an advocate of realism even though he was an original inspirer of representative theory. On the other hand, there are arguments that say that although Locke appears to be a representationalist, he was actually a direct realist.

The orthodox or traditional interpreter interprets Locke’s idea as something special, distinguished from all other material objects. They consider ideas as mental entities of a specific kind, i.e. a mental image locked up inside the mind. The relationship between the ideas and of which they are ideas is said to be analogous to the relation of a picture to its original. They represent the originals. Ideas are produced in the mind but cannot escape from it. This interpretation of the word idea shows that Locke adopted the representative theory of
perception and knowledge in its crudest and most straightforward sense. This is the picture-
original theory of perception.

The following passages are in favour of the opinion that Locke actually propounded
the representative theory of perception.

Locke said in the ‘Essay’:

\[\textit{Whatsoever the Mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of}
\textit{Perception, Thought, or Understanding, that I call Idea;} \]  

A more forceful expression of the doctrine appears in where Locke held:

\[\textit{It is evident, the Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the}
\textit{intervention of the Ideas it has of them.}\]  

Again, there is a more positive expression in which Locke said:

\[\textit{For since the Things, the Mind contemplates, are none of them, besides itself,}
\textit{present to the Understanding, it is necessary that something else, as a Sign or}
\textit{Representation, of the thing it considers, should be present to it: And these are}
\textit{ideas.}\]  

From the above passages, it follows that Locke excluded physical objects as the
immediate object of perception. He claimed that whatsoever the mind perceives immediately
is nothing but ideas. Locke held that some of these ideas actually resemble those that they
want to represent. However, others are not. The first are the ideas of primary qualities while
the second are the ideas of secondary qualities. Two consequences follow from this. First, the
general consequence that Locke was an epistemological dualist who asserted, on the one
hand, the world of ideas to which all human experience and knowledge are confined and, on
the other, a mind-independent separate world, causally related to the first. Secondly, the
special consequence that he held a crudely representative theory of perception or the picture-original theory of sense-perception that postulates that we never perceive anything in the outer world but only ideas which represent the world outside us.

Locke’s representative theory of perception is open to many criticisms (Chapter 4 of this work discusses the important criticisms). Woozley has commented that

*Now, if that was Locke's view of ideas, the objections to it are so elementary and so obvious that it hardly needed a Berkeley to point them out.*

However, the question remains as to why we should consider Locke’s theory of perception as picture-original theory of perception. For, the ground of the picture-original thesis lies in the fact that we have an easy access to an original and some possibility of confronting picture with the original. Upon Locke’s view, neither of these is applicable. Hence, it is hard to give any rational explanation as to why an important philosopher like Locke propounded such a doctrine, which rests on so many elementary errors.

In the introduction to his Fontana Library abridgement of the ‘Essay’ (London, Collins, 1964) Woozley has put arguments against the traditional interpretation of Locke that he held a picture-original theory of sense perception. He quoted a passage from Locke’s examination of Malebranche’s opinion to show that Locke himself was aware of the criticism. Locke said:

*...This I cannot comprehend, for how can I know that the picture of anything is like that thing, when I never see that which it represents?*

Woozley thus argued that it is quite amazing why Locke himself held the representative theory even after knowing the fault of the theory. He said:
It is scarcely credible both that Locke should be able to see and to state so clearly the fundamental objection to the picture-original theory of sense perception, and that he should have held the theory himself. 48

Woozley argued that Locke’s contention should shake some of our confidence in attributing to Locke the view of perception that we usually do. He further contends that Locke certainly held some kind of representationalism. However, it is hard to detect what kind of representationalism it is. Woozley further pointed out that there is another reason for questioning the traditional interpretation of Locke’s sense perception. Parallel to the sense perception Locke has explained introspection. By introspection, we get knowledge of the inner world. Woozley argued that in explaining introspection, Locke nowhere suggested crude representationalism, which held that we are acquainted with the operations of our minds through the intervention of ideas representing those operations. Locke always held that we directly observe the actions of our own minds. According to Woozley, it is himself that a person is observing in case of retrospection. Perhaps, this is why Locke held that we observe the operations of the mind directly.

Jenkins has commented that Woozley’s argument appears to him to be not as conclusive. According to Jenkins, it is possible that Locke acknowledged the objection but considered that he could overcome it and could answer it. 49

J.L. Mackie in his work ‘Problems from Locke’ argued that Locke’s criticism of Malebranche does not show that he could not himself have held the picture original theory of perception. 50 In the quotation, 47 which Woozley has quoted from Locke’s work, Locke has criticized Malebranche’s thesis that we see all things in God and that bodies are not visible by themselves; they cannot react on our mind or represent themselves to them. Therefore,
what Locke has criticized in Malebranche is a non-causal theory of perception. Locke said that if we follow Malebranche’s principle that bodies do not cause the ideas, it is insoluble how we can know that the picture of anything is like that thing, when we never perceive that which it represents. However, Locke did not say that it is intrinsically insoluble. Malebranche’s version is quite different from Locke’s version of representationalism. In this context, Mackie commented:

In any case, Locke’s awareness of the picture-original problem for Malebranche cannot stand as proof that he himself would not have adopted a theory, which involved the same problem, in the face of his own explicit admission that his view did involve this problem. 50

Locke has himself raised a question about his theory in the ‘Essay’ - when the mind perceives only its own ideas and nothing else, how can it come to know that the ideas correspond to things themselves. However, Locke overcame this difficulty by appealing to the causal relationship, which Malebranche has denied. Locke said:

... I think, there be two sorts of Ideas, that, we may be assured, agree with Things.

First, the first are simple ideas, which since the Mind, as has been shewed, can by no means make it to itself, must necessarily be the product of Things operating on the Mind. ...Simple Ideas are not fictions of our Fancies, but the natural and regular productions of Things without us, really operating upon u; and so carry with them all the conformity which is intended; or which our state requires. 51
According to Mackie, critics may find that this reply of Locke is not satisfactory since it does not solve the problem; his causal account explains only the conformity between ideas and reality. However, this conformity does not answer the question how without actually perceiving the originals we can say that some of our ideas conform to the originals accurately.

Again, Locke said:

...the having the Idea of any thing in our Mind, no more proves the Existence of that Thing, than the picture of a Man evidences his being in the World, or the Visions of a Dream make thereby a true history.

It is therefore the actual receiving of Ideas from without, that gives us notice of the Existence of other Things, and makes us know, that something doth exist at that time without us, which causes the Idea in us...

In this passage, Locke himself compared ‘the having the idea’ with a picture. Here he openly admitted holding a view that gives rise to the problem whether there is something external answering to our ideas. Mackie held that Locke’s criticism of Malebranche, like his remarks in Book IV of the ‘Essay’, shows only that he was aware of the difficulty. However, he thought that the difficulty is fatal for those who have denied the causal process of perception like Malebranche. However, Locke thought that he could somehow solve the difficulty.

H.E. Matthews held the view that Woozley’s arguments appear to be too weak even for achieving the modest end of shaking our confidence in the traditional interpretation of representationalism of Locke. Matthews said:
In short, whatever else Malebranche’s theory was, it was not an example of a ‘picture-original theory of sense-perception’, as Woozley calls it. In attacking it, therefore, Locke was not attacking a theory of this type, and his ability to see objections to it does not imply any awareness of objections to the traditional type of Representative theory. What he is criticizing is not the view that the material object which causes our ideas is itself unknowable, but the view that our ordinary sense-perception does not even give us an indirect acquaintance with material objects, since the sensations which we actually perceive are not even genuinely caused by the effect of the material objects on our sense-organs. 53

Furthermore, Woozley has commented that in the ‘Essay’, Locke has used the word ‘idea’ in more than one sense. He has argued that it is not difficult to find passages where Locke has used the word ‘idea’ to mean a mental image. Locke said that we could not form an idea of a thousand-sided figure distinct from the idea of a nine hundred ninety-nine sided figure. 54 However, Woozley pointed out that such uses are rare and outnumbered by passages where he termed idea to mean only thought, so that an idea of x will be what we think x to be, or what we mean or understand by the word x. In his letter to the Bishop of Worcester, he said:

If your Lordship tell me, what you mean by these names (‘matter’, ‘motion’, etc.) I shall presently reply, that there, then, are the ideas that you have of them in your mind. 55

According to Locke, forming an idea is identical with understanding words. Locke also referred to idea as a universal, a logical content or meaning. The idea of matter is what
we mean when we use the word matter. Woozley argued that if we take the word ‘idea’ in this sense then idea cannot be considered as a collection of pictures in the private gallery of our mind from which it cannot come out for conformation with the world outside the gallery.

Woozley pointed out that then our idea of a horse is what we think or take a horse to be, i.e. what we mean by the word ‘horse’ or what I am saying (or describing) of a thing when I say that it is a horse. In the case of substances and their qualities, our ideas are correct if we think of them as they actually are and incorrect otherwise. Modes do not have the same existential reference as do our ideas of substances and qualities. In the case of modes such as murder or sacrilege, the situation is different. The idea of murder or of justice will be correct if it conforms to the ideas of other people. They are incorrect if they fail to conform. Woozley has commented:

Locke’s new way of idea does not have to be interpreted according to the model of a man shut inescapably up in his own private gallery, and in the light of his explanations to Stillingfleets, it is fairly clear that he meant nothing of that kind. 56

According to the afore-mentioned interpretation of the word ‘idea’, Woozley argued that an idea of an object is what we think or understand that object to be or what we mean by the word that denotes it. Now, what we think or understand by the word that denotes the object depends on how it appears to us. Therefore, it is possible to make a distinction between appearance and reality - how the object appears to us and how it really is. This distinction points to a kind of representationalism, although not of its crudest kind, i.e. the picture-original theory of sense perception.
However, the question remains – if Locke had taken the word ‘idea’ in the afore-
mentioned sense, why do we interpret it as peculiar mental entities. Furthermore, how would we use words like *represent, resemble, and picture* in relation to the word ‘idea’.

Woozley suggested that the word ‘idea’ is a noun and a noun generally names a thing. Therefore, philosophers have taken the word ‘idea’ to mean a mental identity. Furthermore, he pointed out that it is easier to take words like *represent, resemble, picture, etc.*, used in the ‘Essay’, literally rather than metaphorically. However, this is not necessarily the correct usage. The word ‘represent’ does not signify only one kind of relation. Locke had argued that ideas represent reality, implying thereby that there is a correspondence between what we believe the world to be and the real world. The improvement of knowledge consists in the increase of this correspondence. Ideas also represent reality in the sense that we can think about things in their absence. Woozley commented that in the context of Locke’s contention (in the ‘Essay’) that some ideas resemble the qualities they sand for, it is only plausible to take the meaning according to the picture original model. Locke maintained that some ideas resemble their qualities. We can think of a material object with shape, size, extension, motion, etc. Not only does the object appear to have these qualities; it also possesses these qualities in reality. These qualities are the primary qualities. There are other ideas such as colour, softness, hardness, etc. that do not resemble their objects. These are secondary qualities. Our thinking that the object possesses these qualities is incorrect. Woozley commented that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities might not be tenable, at least in the form in which Locke has proposed it to be. It appears that it was impossible for Locke to go beyond the barriers of ideas and access the external world to find out which ideas correspond with the external world and which do not. However, Woozley
argued that this did not suggest that Locke’s assertion regarding primary and secondary qualities lacked sense. He maintained that primary qualities are really, as we think them to be and are consistent with our visual description. Secondary qualities, on the other hand, are not as we think them to be (in reality) and are not consistent with our visual description. The word ‘description’ does not signify something that could be similar to a primary quality of a material object in a literal and straightforward way. Having a description is not similar to having something locked up in our mind.

Apparently, Woozley wanted to say that it is misleading to regard the way in which something appears to us, as mental entities, housed in the mind. There are material objects and they appear to us in a way. To talk about how things appear to us points to a descriptive tendency. We must try to see the world as it presents itself to us and our descriptive abilities as a response to that presentation. Woozley contended that if our idea of a certain thing is what we think of it or understand by it, we could hardly object to Locke’s occasional reference to ideas as pictures or that he was committed to ideas as pictures in a literal sense.

Jenkins held, in agreement with Woozley, that ‘ideas’ involved in sense perception need not always be taken as mental entity. Jonathan Bennett has further clarified this point by giving the analogy of ‘mood.’ Bennett has argued that a mood is not some kind of mental entity lodged in one’s mind. However, we can say that mood is a set of dispositions or tendencies to do or not to do certain things, to react or fail to react in certain ways. In the same way, we can say that perceiving an object amounts to being able to say certain things about how it appears to us. To have an idea means to be in a certain state or to have a certain sort of ability to say or do certain things and not to have something lodged in the mind. It seems that this interpretation of the term ‘idea’, rather than supporting Locke’s
representationalism, argues for direct realism in its place. If we do not regard idea as mental entity, acting as intermediaries between the observer and the object, we must perceive the world directly. However, Jenkins has commented that, here also, we find a distinction between how things appear to us and how they really are, i.e. between appearance and reality. Having an idea of an object amounts to being able to say something about how it appears to us. Talking about how things appear is always distinct from how things really are. This is evident from the acknowledgment that when something appears to us in a certain way, we can always ask whether this corresponds with the actual object. This in turn, points to a kind of representationalism rather than direct realism. So long as we perceive the distinction between appearance and reality, the question of correspondence between them remains.

However, as we have seen earlier, Woozley has shown that Locke’s opinion regarding the knowledge of our self contradicts his representationalism. Locke held that we know our self immediately without the intervention of any ideas. Aaron commented:

...though nominally Locke remains representationalist in his explanation of the knowledge we have of our minds, actually he proceeds as if we know ourselves and our operations directly in reflection and as if this knowledge was in all cases exact. Indeed, at the close of the ‘Essay’ the mind alone of all existing things is said to be known directly without the mediation of an idea. 59

Moreover, Locke showed inconsistency in his ‘Essay.’ He sometimes identified ‘ideas’ with quality. This implies that by possessing an idea we are in immediate contact with the external world. However, he recognized his own fault and said:
Which ideas, if I speak of sometimes, as in the things themselves, I would be understood to mean those Qualities in the objects which produce them in us.  

However, in spite of the inconsistencies in Locke’s writings, Aaron has pointed out that Locke’s theory is certainly a kind of representationalism. Aaron emphasized that Locke, after recognizing his fault, has changed the definition of idea to suit it with his representationalism in the same paragraph.

Aaron holds that although Locke was a representationalist, he did not accept copying theory or picture-original theory of sense perception. Aaron said:

... he does not accept the copying theory in itscrudity; for him representation or idea does not necessarily signify copy. Moreover, as we have seen, some ideas do not appear to be representative, but to be logical meanings, complete in themselves and putting to nothing beyond themselves, while as will become clear, even representations are to some extent universals as well. Thus, while Locke accepts representationalism as his own general standpoint, he modifies it considerably.

However, in conclusion, we may say that the opinions of Aaron and Woozley are not tenable. Locke did not discard the picture-original theory altogether. A cursory glance into Locke’s ‘Essay’ will convince us that according to him, knowledge comes through two channels – sensation and reflection. Through the former, we may have information about the outer world while the latter provides us information about the inner world. A serious student of Locke’s writings will feel that Locke’s energy is mostly devoted to understanding the existence of the outer world. Being an empiricist, he never denied the reality of what we see, hear, or feel. In this sense, he was a believer in the independent existence of objects in the
world. In addition, he attempted to explain how error creeps into our knowledge of objects through seeing, hearing, and feeling by saying that there exists a possibility of something intervening between the knowing mind and the object.

If we admit that the mind knows the object directly as it is, then there is hardly any room for explanation of error. If on the contrary, we admit of his (Locke’s) intervening ideas in between the knower and the known, we can successfully explain the possibility of error. If an idea, which is a copy of the object it represents, agrees with the object itself, our knowledge is true. If it does not agree with the object it represents, our knowledge is false. Therefore, Locke is certainly a representationalist and he admitted the picture-original theory of sense perception so far our knowledge of the external world, received through sensation is concerned. However, if we look at our knowledge through reflection, we cannot maintain representationalism. We are directly aware of our mental state in reflection. Therefore, there is no point in asking if these reflections are representations? In conclusion, we can say that Locke was a representationalist who admitted its crude form as far as our knowledge of the outer world is concerned but not so when it comes to reflection. The critics of Locke fail to realize this distinction in his understanding. As a result, they accuse Locke of inconsistencies.

III.4. Classification of Ideas into Simple and Complex

Locke himself made a number of divisions within the class of ideas: between simple and complex, particular and general, concrete and abstract, adequate and inadequate, and so forth. Here we shall discuss the distinction between simple and complex ideas.

At first, an exposition of Locke’s simple idea will be in order.
According to Locke, simple ideas are materials of all our knowledge. They have their source in experience, i.e., they come into our mind by sensation and reflection. Understanding passively receives these ideas. Once understanding has the ideas, it cannot refuse, blot or alter them. It has no power to generate new simple ideas by itself. Although the qualities that affect our senses and produce simple ideas are united and blended with object, yet the ideas they produce are simple and unmixed. A simple idea is in itself uncompounded, containing one uniform appearance, or conception in the mind and is not distinguishable into different ideas. Therefore, they are the atoms of our experience. V. Chappell said that this definition of simple idea suggests that the defining feature of simplicity in an idea is experiential or phenomenal. An idea is simple if there is no perceptible variation or division within it. Nevertheless, in other passages he held that Locke had proposed a semantic or logical criterion of simplicity. Locke said simple ideas are those

The Names of [which] are not capable of any definition.

This means that it is not possible to analyze or understand such ideas as entailing other ideas. Chappell has suggested that these two definitions may not be equivalent but this was not a fatal difficulty for Locke. Locke’s main purpose in marking of simple ideas was to establish his empiricism that is the doctrine that all materials of reason and knowledge are ultimately derived from experience.

John Hospers pointed out that Locke’s simple ideas may be defined only ostensibly. The reason behind this is that there is no other way of communicating what the simple ideas mean. As simple ideas are not analyzable into other ideas, there is only one way of conveying the meaning of these ideas, i.e. confronting people with the relevant sense experiences.
According to Locke, no one could frame a simple idea, which he had not received from either sensation or reflection. He supported this opinion by challenging anyone to form a simple idea, which he or she never received from either of these two sources. This becomes evident from the intended senses when Locke wrote—

_I would have anyone try to fancy any Taste, which had never affected his Palate; or frame the idea of a Scent, he had never smelt; And when he can do this I will also conclude, that a blind man hath ideas of Colours, and deaf Man to distinct Notions of Sounds._  

There is striking resemblance between what Locke said about simple ideas and Hume said regarding ideas and impressions. It is interesting to note that Hume’s ideas and impressions stand for Locke’s simple ideas and sensations, respectively. Hume advanced two arguments in favour of his thesis that says that all our ideas (i.e. feeble perceptions) are copies of our impressions (lively perceptions.)  

Hume has put forward two arguments in favour of this thesis. The first argument says that an analysis and examination of our ideas or thoughts reveal that they are derived from preceding impressions. He argued that it is impossible to produce any idea, which is not a copy from previous impression. He, like Locke, was convinced that no one could ever produce an idea without a previous impression.

The second argument in favour of Hume’s thesis runs like this – if anyone is deficient of an impression, he is also deficient of an idea. To quote his words,

_A blind man can form no notion of colours, a deaf man of sounds._

Hume, however, said that there might be some exceptions to this. According to him, a man who has become acquainted with every shade of blue but one can supply the missing shade from his imagination. Thus, we find that Hume, in drawing a distinction between impressions
and ideas, is substantially in agreement with Locke. The only point of difference between them seems to be this: while Locke made ideas alone as the contents of mind, Hume looked upon impressions and ideas, not merely ideas, as the contents of mind.

According to Locke, simple ideas are of four types. These are simple ideas that come into our mind by

(a) one sense only,

(b) by more senses than one,

(c) by reflection only,

(d) by all the ways of sensations and reflections.

A brief discussion of these follows in the following:

(a) Simple ideas of one sense are those that we acquire through one sense only, like colours, sounds, smells, etc.

(b) The second class consists of those, which we acquire through more than one sense, such as space or extension, shape and motion that come to us through both sight and touch.

(c) Ideas that come from reflection only form the third class.

Simple ideas of reflection are the operations of the mind about its other ideas. According to Locke, the two principle actions of the mind are (i) perception or thinking and (ii) volition or willing.

Locke said,

The Power of Thinking is called the Understanding, and the Power of Volition is called the Will, and these two Powers and Abilities in the Mind are denominated Faculties."
These two ideas, i.e. thinking and willing are simple ideas of reflection and all other ideas of reflection, being modes of these, are complex.

(d) Simple ideas, which come into the mind by ways of sensation and reflection, are pleasure and delight, or their opposites, pain and uneasiness, and power, existence and unity. To these, Locke added the ideas of succession.

According to Locke, complex ideas are formed from simple ideas. In generating complex ideas, mind voluntarily exerts power upon the simple ideas it has. Falckenberg here remarked that the mind is active but not creative in producing complex ideas. Locke has mentioned the actions of the mind involved in generating complex ideas. He says:

*When the Understanding is once stored with these Simple Ideas, it has the Power to repeat, compare, and unite them even to an almost infinite Variety, and so can make at Pleasure new Complex Ideas.*

There are different kinds of complex ideas. The classification of complex ideas, which Locke has given in the first edition of the ‘Essay,’ differs from that given in the fourth edition. In the first edition of the ‘Essay’, Locke has classified complex ideas into ‘substance’, ‘modes’ and ‘relation’. In the fourth edition, however, we find that he has considered ideas of ‘relation’ and ‘general’ ideas as separate classes of ideas.

We have already seen (while defining complex ideas) that according to Locke, complex ideas form out of simple ideas. This is in accordance with the compositional theory, which postulates that all ideas, which are not simple, are composite or complex ideas, composed of the simple ideas. Aaron, however, pointed out that ideas of relation and general ideas are not composite in this sense. He said that Locke perhaps realized the inadequacy of
his classification, made in the first edition, and made a change in the fourth edition. In the
first edition, he made the following remarks regarding simple ideas:

These, when we have taken a full survey of them and their several modes and
compositions made out of them we shall find to contain our whole stock of
ideas.\textsuperscript{72}

In the fourth edition, however, he has substituted the phrase ‘and compositions made out of
them’ by ‘combinations and relations’. In this edition, he considered ‘relation’ and ‘general
ideas’ as distinct class of ideas.

O’Conner, however, has attempted to explain the differences in the classification in
the first and the fourth edition.\textsuperscript{73} He said that the original classification described in the first
edition of the ‘Essay’ is in terms of the various types of ‘object’ for which the ideas stand. In
the fourth edition, Locke made an additional classification, without amending his earlier
remarks (made in the first edition), based on the activities of our minds. O’Conner pointed
out that in the first edition of Locke’s ‘Essay’, complex ideas are divided into ‘substances’,
‘modes’ and ‘relations’.

As mentioned above, Locke’s classification in the fourth edition has its base on the
operations of the human mind. Here, Locke has stated that complex ideas result from mental
operations, which consist of combining several simple ideas. In this edition, he considered
ideas of relation and general ideas as distinct classes of ideas. He said that ideas of relations
are the products of the mind’s power to compare ideas, both simple and complex, with one
another. On the other hand, general ideas or universals are defined as the product of the
operation of abstraction in which the mind separates ideas from all other ideas that
accompany them in their real existence. O’Connor has commented that in the fourth edition,
Locke has revised the classification of complex ideas as if to exclude relations and to add a new class of ideas, namely general ideas or universals. The classification presented in the first edition is incompatible with that presented in the fourth. While writing the rest of the ‘Essay’, Locke has followed the classification given in the first edition.

Frederick Copleston has also made comments regarding the classification of complex ideas by Locke that are similar to what O’Connor has stated (given in the previous paragraph). In addition, Copleston has mentioned in his book that Locke, in the original draft of the ‘Essay’, divided complex ideas into several classes. These are (i) ideas of substance such as the idea of a man or of a rose, (ii) ideas of collective substances like an army, (iii) ideas of modes and modifications, e.g. idea of figure or thinking, and (iv) ideas of relations, i.e. considering of one idea with relation to another.

We have seen that complex ideas, as considered by Locke, are of three kinds. These are the Ideas of Modes, Substances, and Relations. He defines modes as:

\[
\text{complex Ideas, which however compounded, contain not in them the position of subsisting by themselves, but are considered as Dependences on, or Affections of Substances; such are the ideas signified by the Words Triangle, Gratitude, Murder, etc.}\]

Modes are of two kinds, viz. simple and mixed. Simple modes are

\[
\text{Variations or different combinations of the same simple idea, without the mixture of any other, as a dozen, or score; which are nothing but the Ideas of so many distinct Units added together}.
\]

On the other hand, mixed modes are
Compounded of simple Ideas of several kinds, put together to make one complex one.\textsuperscript{76}

Examples of mixed modes, proposed by Locke, are beauty, theft, obligation, murder, etc. The idea of beauty consists of certain composition of colour and figure, which causes delight in the beholder.

According to Locke, the idea of substance is

\emph{such combinations of simple Ideas, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves.}\textsuperscript{77}

He has cited examples like idea of man and idea of lead as ideas of substance. Locke said that a combination of the idea of a certain kind of figure with the power of motion, thought and reasoning, joined to substance, make the ordinary idea of man. Beside these distinct ideas of particular substances, Locke has elsewhere in the ‘Essay’ defined the general idea of substance. It is a supposed but unknown substratum of the collection of qualities. We do not perceive substances; we infer them as the support of qualities or modes, as the latter cannot subsist by themselves.

Again, there are two kinds of substances, viz. single and collective. Single substances are those that exist separately, e.g. a man or a sheep. On the other hand, the idea of collective substances is made up of many particular substances considered together. Examples are army of men, a flock of sheep, etc.

The last type of complex idea, as recognized by Locke, is relation. It ‘consists in the consideration and comparing one Idea with another.’\textsuperscript{78} The words father and son, bigger and less, cause and effect, etc. constitute examples of such ideas.
It is worth noting that when Locke first dealt with complex ideas in Book II of the ‘Essay’, he spoke of ‘ideas of substance’ but used the terms ‘mode’ and ‘relation’ as if they are ideas themselves. This is consistent with his official metaphysical position. According to Locke, substances are real beings, existing outside the mind whereas relations and modes are ‘creatures of understanding, having no other reality, but what they have in the Minds of Men.’ However, Locke himself deviated from his official metaphysical position in Books III and IV and spoke of ‘ideas of modes’ and ‘ideas of relations’ in these Books.

Let us examine the following queries in this context:

(i) Does knowledge begin with simple ideas?
(ii) Is the mind passive while receiving simple ideas?
(iii) How far do we accept Locke’s simple ideas? and
(iv) Is the distinction between simple and complex ideas tenable?

According to A.C. Fraser, some critics have accused Locke of meaning that at the beginning of life each human being is conscious only of simple ideas, i.e. of isolated sensations only. Gradual association and generalization of these simple ideas lead to the formation of complex and abstract ideas when the child attains adulthood. These critics have also complained that Locke has not offered an adequate explanation for why and how they become complex and abstract.

Cousin, a critic of Locke, has said that the process of acquisition of ideas or thoughts about things, by an individual, is quite opposite to that described by Locke. Cousin said that we begin with complex ideas and then by abstraction of these, we advance to those, which are simple. The reason behind this is that our faculties, largely, act simultaneously. The simultaneous activity of the senses at once affords us at once several simple ideas in the
unity of an individual substance. All our primitive ideas are complex, particular, and concrete.

According to Fraser, this charge against Locke is not tenable. According to Fraser, the second book of Locke’s ‘Essay’ can be interpreted from the point of view of the facts presented therein, if not in form, as a logical analysis of the complex ideas of things. Locke has said in this book that simple ideas exist in different combinations united together. The mind however, has the power to consider them separately. He further pointed out that the qualities of a thing that affect our senses are so closely united with the thing that separation between them is not possible. However, the ideas they produce in us are simple and unmixed, and contain in themselves nothing but one uniform appearance or conception. Fraser said that Locke here accepted what the psychologists called ‘abstraction of senses.’ The ‘abstraction of senses’ implies that the intellect operative in each sense abstracts or extracts the simple ideas of colours through the eye, ideas about the sound through the ear, etc., from the objects/things, which the mind comes across. Fraser said that this does not mean that human being perceives the simple ideas only in their simplicity or that we do not refer to them as qualities of things or individual substances at the beginning. Locke has indeed acknowledged in the fourth book that we have an intuitive knowledge of qualities of things, framed from ideas, which are necessarily complex.

Green and some other critics have charged Locke with mixing two contradictory theories about ideas and about the origin of knowledge. They have argued that in some parts of the ‘Essay,’ Locke said that our knowledge begins with simple ideas of isolated sensations, which gradually proceed towards complex ideas. However, in other parts of the ‘Essay,’ especially when Locke dealt with general terms, the critics commented that Locke
was self-contradictory when he said that knowledge begins with individual substances manifested in their qualities, i.e. to say with complex ideas.

Fraser pointed that the above-mentioned charge against Locke is not tenable.  He stated that these charges of confusion in Locke’s theories arose due to the critic’s oversight of Locke’s own standpoint in those parts of the ‘Essay’ where Locke seemed to say that knowledge begins with unrelated sensations and in those other parts where he treated complex ideas as the starting point. Fraser argued that Locke did not support the view that knowledge of the unrelated is possible. In fact, Locke has stated clearly in Book IV that knowledge necessarily involves perception of relation among ideas. In one of the two passages that are supposed to be contradictory, Locke has given a true logical analysis of matter or the phenomenal constituents of already formed complex and abstract ideas. In the other set, he described, like a psychologist, the generalization of the understanding starting from the complex individual presentations of sense phenomenon or ‘sense ideas’, which symbolizes the growth of our knowledge.

Regarding the second query, Locke contended that the understanding passively receives simple ideas. He has given the analogy of the mirror to clarify this point in the ‘Essay.’ He said:

These simple ideas, when offered to the mind, the understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor blot them out, and make new ones in itself, than a mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the Images of Ideas, which, the objects set before it, do therein produce.  Locke contended that the mind receives the ideas of sensation passively, as the mirror does. It cannot refuse to reflect the object placed before it. If we take this analogy literally and
emphasize that the mirror is passive, the natural criticism follows. This is that in the reception of simple ideas, the mind is active rather than passive. Aaron pointed out that Locke has not used the terms passive and active consistently. In the ‘Essay,’ Locke said that while receiving simple ideas ‘the understanding is merely passive.’ Again, in the heading of the same paragraph, Locke said that ‘the understanding is for the most part passive.’ Aaron commented that in spite of this inconsistency, it is clear that while sensing, the mind merely perceives the simple ideas. It does not create them. We merely receive simple ideas. The mind does not create them. In this sense, the mind is passive. However, in another sense the mind remains active since receiving itself is an activity.

Jenkins stated that in receiving simple ideas, the mind is active without doubt. This is because, to have a simple idea, for example the idea of the colour yellow in the mind, implies the mind can compare and discriminate it with other ideas of colours. The difficulty arises because Locke did not clarify the status of these ideas. He suggested in Chapter I of the ‘Essay’ that ideas are the kind of things of which we are necessarily conscious. To be conscious of something, necessarily implies activity on the part of the mind such as making a contrast or a comparison. Jenkins held that it is one thing to receive sense data, where the process may be passive but it is another thing to identify what one receives, for it involves an activity on the part of the understanding. He contended that there are reasons to hold that Locke has not taken the mirror analogy so literally. It is evident from his explanation of the ideas of reflection that mind has many in-built powers. Jenkins further pointed out that as perception is one of these powers, it suggests that mind is active in the reception of simple ideas. Locke himself said:
A sufficient impulse there may be on the organs, but, is not receiving the observation of the mind there follows no perception.\textsuperscript{85}

Jenkins held that Locke’s remark here perhaps suggests that his intention was not to draw a distinction between what is passive with what is active but between what is passive with what we deliberately choose. His contention is that if the senses function properly and the powers of the mind are alert, simple ideas would come to the mind. Locke believed that the contents of our sensation are immediately given but the powers of the mind must be at work to receive them.

Concerning the acceptability of Locke’s simple ideas, O’Conner\textsuperscript{86} and Aaron\textsuperscript{87} have pointed out that the term ‘simple’ is ambiguous. O’Conner remarked that Locke has used the term ‘simple’ in the ‘Essay’ in four different senses. First, the term ‘simple’ is used in the sense of the smallest unit or the ‘atom’. A simple idea contains within itself nothing but one uniform appearance or conception and is not distinguishable into different ideas. Therefore, we can very well call it an atom. Secondly, it is sometimes used in the sense of a single sense quality, like blue, square, sweet, etc. Thirdly, Locke has used the term in the sense of what is given to the mind in experience, in contrast to what is constructed by the mind from the materials provided by sensation and reflection. According to Locke, simple ideas come into our mind either by sensations or by reflections. They are materials of our mind. Complex ideas are made out of these simple ideas. Lastly, it sometimes means a determinable quality, like ‘coloured’ or ‘shaped’, in contrast to a determinate quantity like a particular shade of colour or shape. This particular meaning is obvious in his account of ideas of reflection. O’Conner has pointed out that it is very hard to extract a perfectly clear description of simple
ideas. He suggested that we could be characterizing it negatively, as ideas that are not complex.

Aaron further argued that if simple ideas are characterized as atoms of experience then they could not be defined as given. These two meanings are inconsistent. The atoms are the outcome of a process of abstraction rather than products of sensation. Locke, however, has used the term ‘simple’ sometimes in one and sometimes in another sense, thereby creating confusion.

Aaron observed that Locke’s distinction between simple and complex ideas in not acceptable. The question is – whether the distinction between simple and complex is the distinction between what is given and what is not given or between the atomic and the composite. Both the distinctions are untenable. In the ‘Essay,’ complex ideas are also said to be given. ‘Simple ideas’, Locke remarked, ‘are observed to exist in several combinations united together.’ Here, what Locke wanted to express is that the complex idea is also given. Again, Locke had to admit that some simple ideas are not atoms. The ideas of space and time are simple, yet it is the very nature of both of them to consist of parts. On the other hand, not all complex ideas are composite, for example, ideas of relations, and general ideas. These ideas are not made up of simple ideas. Hence, not everything given is simple idea and not all composites are complex ideas.

III.5. Distinction between Ideas and Qualities

Our thinking necessarily presupposes an object. According to Locke, this object cannot be innate. The object of thinking comes from the ideas of sensation and reflection.
While explaining the origin of simple ideas from sensation, Locke came upon the definition of qualities. He defined qualities as follows:

\[ ......the \ Power \ to \ produce \ any \ idea \ in \ our \ mind, \ I \ call \ Quality \ of \ the \ Subject \ wherein \ that \ power \ is. \]

Locke clarified this with the example of a snowball, producing in us, ideas of white, cold, and round. According to Locke, the snowball can produce these ideas in us only because it has certain powers to produce these ideas in us. These powers are what Locke referred to as qualities.

III.6. Classification of Qualities - Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary

Qualities

According to Locke, qualities produce the simple ideas of sensations. He made several classifications while stating his theory of qualities. Qualities, which are utterly inseparable from the body, such as bulk, figure, extension, number, and motion, irrespective of the changes it undergoes, are primary qualities. \(^{89}\) Beside these, he said that there are other qualities or powers, which help us to take notice of bodies and distinguish them from one another depending on their primary qualities. Some of these qualities produce ideas in us by \textit{immediately} operating on our bodies. These are termed secondary qualities that are immediately perceivable. \(^{90}\) They produce various sensations in us about the objects, like sensations of colour, smell, taste, etc. by their primary qualities such as bulk, figure, texture, etc. The other class of secondary qualities is \textit{mediately} perceivable. They bring about certain changes of bulk, figure, texture, and motion in other bodies, so that the latter operate on our
senses in a way different from the way in which they operated before the changes were brought about. This class of quality is termed tertiary qualities. He said:

...The Power that is in any Body, by Reason of the particular Constitution of its primary Qualities to make such a change in the Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion of another Body, as to make it operate on our Senses, differently from what it did before. Thus the Sun has a Power to make Wax white, and Fire to make Lead fluid.\(^91\)

However, we note that Locke did not lay much importance on the role of tertiary qualities in his ‘Essay.’ Indeed, Locke never used the term ‘tertiary’ in the ‘Essay.’ Instead, he spent most of his energy in drawing the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. These are discussed in the following.

The distinction between primary and secondary qualities is not original with Locke. Bennet\(^92\) has stated that Locke inherited from Descartes or borrowed from Newton or Boyle, a distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Locke, like Descartes, asserted that primary qualities are

...utterly inseparable from the Body, in what estate soever it be; such as in all the alterations and changes it suffers, all the force can be used upon it, it constantly keeps.\(^89\)

Furthermore, Locke has defined primary qualities as follows:

...The Bulk, Figure, Number, Situation, and Motion, or Rest of their solid Parts; those are in them, whether we perceive them or no; and when they are of that size, that we can discover them, we have by these an Idea of the thing,
as it is in itself, as is plain in artificial things. These I call primary Qualities.⁹¹

However, the question is - how do we know the important truth that primary qualities are inseparable from a corporeal object?

The first suggestion of an answer to this question regarding constant presence of the primary qualities in the object is found in the ‘Essay’ where Locke asserted:

...Sense constantly finds (them) in every particle of Matter, which has bulk enough to be perceived.⁸⁹

According to Aaron, this would imply that whenever we perceive a corporeal object, ideas of primary qualities are part of the whole complex idea which we then have.⁹³

Secondly, Locke went further and said that the mind finds primary qualities inseparable from every particle of matter:

....the Mind finds (them) inseparable from every particle of Matter, though less than to make itself singly be perceived by our senses.⁸⁹

Aaron contended that our knowledge of physical objects does not depend merely on sensation. Locke has cited an example to clarify this matter in the ‘Essay.’ He said that if we divide a grain into two parts, each part must retain all the qualities such as solidity, extension, figure, and mobility of the unbroken grain. Again, if we go on dividing the grain until the parts become insensible, they must retain all the qualities of the grain. According to Locke, such qualities are primary or original qualities. It is not the senses, Aaron pointed out, which gave Locke the knowledge about the object, since sense cannot provide us with the full information about insensible parts of the body. It is through the mind that we know the truth.
According to Locke, the ideas of primary qualities are exact resemblances of the primary qualities of the object. In the ‘Essay,’ he said that

...the Ideas of primary Qualities of Bodies are Resemblances of them, and their Patterns do really exist in the Bodies themselves.\(^9^4\)

Locke contended that our idea of figure, for example, resembles the object itself that causes the idea in us. The object really has figure. Locke himself did not offer any proof of this important principle. He held that primary qualities like bulk, number, figure and motion of the parts of the object are really in them, whether anyone perceive them or not. Therefore, they are the real qualities.

In the ‘Essay,’ Locke defined secondary qualities as follows:

Such Qualities, which in truth are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their primary Qualities, i.e. by the Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion of their insensible parts, as Colours, Sounds, Colours, Tastes, etc. These I call secondary Qualities.\(^9^5\)

Again, he said:

The power that is in any Body, by Reason of its insensible primary Qualities, to operate after a peculiar manner on any of our Senses, and thereby produce in us the different Ideas of several Colours, Sounds, Smells, Tastes, etc.\(^9^1\)

The secondary qualities are not really in the objects themselves. They are merely powers in the object that produce different sensations in us by their primary qualities. Considered as powers, the secondary qualities are in the body and are not just in our mind. Locke said that the ideas of secondary qualities are produced in us by the operation of insensible particles on our senses. All sensible qualities, e.g. colours, sounds and tastes are
secondary qualities. Locke considered the coldness and whiteness of snowball as secondary qualities. These are not in the snowball; they constitute the powers to produce the sensation in us through the primary qualities. According to Locke, the ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble the qualities in the object.

We can trace the subjective nature of the secondary qualities using the arguments put forward by Locke. Although these arguments are not clearly distinguishable in the text itself, John J. Jenkins has stated these arguments in his book ‘Understanding Locke.’ By critically analyzing these arguments, Jenkins has shown that Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities is not tenable.

The first of these arguments has its base on the contemporary scientific understanding of Locke’s period. Locke had accepted, like Boyle, the corpuscular theory of matter. According to this theory, matter is composed of insensible things called atoms which possess the primary qualities in themselves. Therefore, the secondary qualities like colours, tastes, smells, etc. must depend upon the observer since these qualities are not associated with the atoms. It is then perfectly reasonable to state that the ideas of secondary qualities, produced in our minds, are somehow the results of the behaviour of the minute particles called atoms. This is completely consistent with Locke’s description of secondary qualities. It is worth mentioning here that although the contemporary scientific knowledge, now considered outdated, formed the basis for these ideas, there are enough reasons to regard them seriously. Firstly, modern day physicists, while talking about the structure of the world, use terminologies similar to those used in the ‘Essay.’ Secondly, present day physiologists argue that an object appears to be of a particular colour, for example green, when light reflected from the object produces the sensation of green colour on striking the retina of our eye.
although nothing greenish exist in the object itself. The sensations of sound and heat are also attributable to various waves stimulating the different sense organs of our body. These understandings are consistent with Locke’s views that secondary qualities are not contained in the objects themselves; certain powers in the objects produce them.

However, Jenkins contended that what Locke or the modern scientists suggest is a causal analysis of our sense experience of the so-called secondary qualities. However, a causal analysis of something is not necessarily to be identified with that of which it is a causal analysis. Existence of light waves may always be a pre-condition of seeing a colour and this would always accompany the seeing of a colour. Nevertheless, it does not follow that we have to identify the colour that we see as light waves. Jenkins pointed out that Locke’s definition of secondary qualities sometimes misleadingly suggest this.

In the second place, Jenkins has discussed Locke’s argument in the case of a man suffering pain from the effect of a sword piercing his flesh. Locke argued here that we do not suppose that his sensation resembles something objectively existing, that is, a pain in the sword. In the same way, Locke contended that we do not expect a colour, e.g. green, resembles some external quality. Locke’s contention here is that if there can be an absence of resemblance or correspondence between sensations of pleasure and pain, and what causes them, there is no reason to expect a resemblance between our idea of secondary qualities and what causes them.

Jenkins further pointed out that Locke’s argument is possible only by the illegal assimilation of ideas or images to the general realm of sensations. This would imply that the experience of seeing green is comparable to the experience of feeling pain although the idea of green is a mental event whereas pain is a sensation, where physical feelings seem to be the
paradigm. However, if the distinction between ideas or images and sensations were to be real, one can argue against Locke that it does not follow from the fact that as we do not project our feelings of pain and pleasure upon objects, it would be inappropriate to project our experiences of colour.

According to Jenkins, it is very hard to distinguish between ideas and sensations. However, in one aspect, ideas differ from sensations. Ideas are those that one has while reminiscing or is involved in deep thought. However, seeing green colour is not a case of having an idea in this sense. For, it involves a sensory experience and it is more like the experience of a sensation. Hence, Locke’s argument becomes more persuasive.

Jenkins argued that even if we show that seeing the green colour is the case of having an idea it would not go against Locke’s argument. His argument depends upon a general comparison between the sensation of pain on the one hand and sensory experience on the other and not upon a comparison between pain and the sense of sight in particular. In case of the sensation of sight, it is possible to draw a distinction between idea and sensation as the experience of seeing is completely distinct from sensation. However, in respect of other experiences, e.g. smells, tastes, sounds, and tactual experiences, the feeling that they are not in the same category as pain is lost for these experiences can themselves be painful. Jenkins argued that the more general and important difficulty for Locke over this argument is that he has no way of showing why our perception of primary qualities is different from our perception of secondary qualities. There is nothing to prevent a person from saying that just as pain does not reside in the sword, shape or size also do not reside in objects.

In the third argument, like the previous one, Locke pointed out an inconsistency in our everyday thinking about the qualities of objects. He argued that the same fire, which
produces warmth in us, also produces pain when we approach close to it. Although the same fire produces both sensations, in the case of warmth we ascribe it to fire whereas in the case of pain we ascribe it to ourselves. Locke argued that if we are contented to regard pain as subjective, then we should also regard the warmth produced by the fire as subjective. In both cases, the primary qualities of fire produce the ideas.\textsuperscript{98}

Jenkins pointed out that Locke’s third argument stands on the assumption that the two sensations, warmth and pain lie on the same scale. Warmth gradually transforms itself to pain. If pain lies on one end of the scale, then warmth, which lies on the other end of the same scale, cannot be objective simply by virtue of being less intense. Jenkins contended that a straightforward approach would be to regard that warmth or heat remains constantly objective. The experience of warmth becomes unpleasant at a certain point and we employ the word ‘pain’ to designate the unpleasant internal experience. Accordingly, pain belongs to a different category. It would be a category mistake to suggest that warmth or heat is similarly internal. This would also imply that there might not be any inconsistency in our thinking as Locke suggested.

Jenkins observed that Locke made another argument\textsuperscript{99} (the fourth argument) related to the relativity of our sensations. Locke said that the same water might feel hot to one hand and cold to another, depending on the circumstances. However, the water cannot be both hot and cold at the same time. Therefore, the quality of temperature, i.e. of being hot or cold does not reside in the object. It is somehow relative to us. Locke has made a similar argument regarding the colour of an object. He has said that colour is a secondary quality depending upon us and/or light waves; it is not an intrinsic part of the object. However, Jenkins observed here that it would be incorrect to surmise that heat is not objectively present in the
water simply because it gives rise to different sensations to the two hands. This merely reflects the inability of the human being to detect it accurately. The question as to whether the water objectively contains a specific degree of heat remains unresolved.

Jenkins referred to Locke’s last argument for the subjective nature of secondary qualities as the ‘microscope’ argument. Locke has pointed out in the ‘Essay’ that if we place a hair or a drop of blood under a microscope, the hair may not appear to be black and the blood will not appear to be uniformly red as it is to the naked eye. This is further evidence in favour of the view that colour cannot be intrinsically a part of things and is therefore a secondary quality. Locke suggested that this indicates that the hair is not black or brown or that the blood is not red as it appears. Jenkins pointed out that the microscope only brings out the truth; it does not establish the lack of colour in the object. Locke, however, made the additional point that the drop of blood under a more powerful microscope would appear to be completely colourless. Thus, in order to make the point that the blood is colourless, Locke had to accept that the microscope actually brings out the reality to us. This is in line with our experience that the microscope actually helps us to see things as they really are and is like a spectacle, which corrects our vision. Though the microscope reveals features which are not visible to the naked eye, we would see the world just as the microscope tells, if our vision permitted. Therefore, Jenkins said, that Locke’s view that things do not necessarily have the qualities which they appear to have, seems to have a sound basis. However, Locke failed to demonstrate what he needed the most, namely that there is also a viable distinction between primary and secondary qualities in this respect (microscope quality). The microscope, Jenkins said, would also tell us that the naked eye does not give us a true idea of the shape of an object, which according to Locke is a primary quality. The same may not be true for some
primary qualities such as size and extension but would be true about some other primary qualities like solidity, motion, rest, etc. Hence, the microscopic argument appears to upset the distinction Locke sought to make between primary and secondary qualities.

George Berkeley, the sharpest critic of Locke, also thought that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is untenable. He argued secondary qualities are inseparable from the primary ones. The shape, which is a primary quality according to Locke, is inseparable from colour. We cannot imagine a shape without a colour. The shape, according to Berkeley is simply the boundary (or limits) of a colour.

Berkeley pointed out that if the relativity of the secondary qualities proves their subjectivity, then on the same ground, the primary qualities are also subjective. The primary qualities like figure, shape, or motion of an object depend on the relative position of a perceiver with respect to the object.

According to Locke, our ideas of primary qualities are exact resemblances of these qualities of the object. Nevertheless, our ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble any quality of the object for there are no such qualities but only the power to produce certain sensations in us. Berkeley, however, pointed out that how could we ever know that ideas of primary qualities resemble those qualities in the object itself. According to Locke, we acquainted only with our ideas and nothing beyond them. Berkeley further pointed out that an idea can resemble nothing but another idea. We can compare sense experience or ideas with only other sense experience or ideas but not with the supposed causes of these sense experiences.

Locke’s definition of quality raises a problem. We have seen that Locke defined quality in terms of power. For him
In Locke’s own example, the snowball produces the idea of white, cold, and round in our mind only because it has certain powers to produce these ideas in us. These powers are what Locke called quality.

It appears from Locke’s example that the definition of quality covers both the qualities – primary and secondary. This is to say, he seems to acknowledge, that both primary and secondary qualities are to count as powers. In his example of a snowball, he said that the power of the snowball not only produces the ideas of white and cold but also the idea of round.

However, it is important to note that Locke also recognized properties like solidity, extension, figure, and mobility as primary qualities in the ‘Essay.’ These are not powers; rather, they are, as Mackie characterizes them in his ‘Problem from Locke’ – intrinsic properties of things. According to Locke, these qualities are ‘utterly inseparable from the body.’

It therefore, appears that Locke had two different notions of qualities in mind - one as power, and the other as intrinsic properties of things. The problem is how to connect these two notions of qualities.

If we consider Locke’s description of secondary qualities as already discussed earlier in this work, we find him denying that the secondary qualities are ascribable to things in question. This becomes obvious once we get the force of the word ‘but’ aright and read it as ‘except’ in the following:
Such Qualities, which are truth, are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers, to produce various Sensations in us by their primary Qualities.

Moreover, Locke said that these secondary qualities could have their base or ground in primary qualities. This becomes apparent once we understand the significance of the construction ‘by their primary qualities’.

In the light of these readings of Locke’s text, we can resolve the problems, raised earlier in connection with his two-fold characterization of qualities. While we can say that both secondary and primary qualities belong to the object, the secondary qualities belong simply as powers to produce various sensations in us. However, powers as they (secondary qualities) essentially are, they require their grounds or bases. Primary qualities, which are intrinsic properties of objects, provide these grounds. Alternatively, we can say that Locke would not deny ascribing colour (a secondary quality) to objects but would deny that objects have colour in the same way as they have shape or size (primary qualities). We perceive an object to have a colour only through the sense-experience of the perceiver. On the other hand, an object possesses a shape irrespective of any observer.

However, the question remains – is it utterly impossible to give a characterization of Locke’s primary qualities in terms of power? We may say that we can identify primary qualities with powers. A square object has the power to produce the idea of squareness in us in favourable conditions of observations.

Locke’s conception of primary qualities is open to many objections. Although it is possible to resolve the problems regarding the definition of qualities in the above-mentioned way, one problem remains unresolved. According to Locke, primary qualities like solidity, extension, and figure are inseparable from the substance. However, Locke also held that a
substance is unknown and unknowable and it is only possible to know it by inference as a substratum of qualities. Therefore, it is very difficult to decide which qualities are inseparable and hence are primary qualities of a substance.

John J. Jenkins has remarked that the reason behind Locke’s claim that primary qualities are inseparable from the object is conceptual or logical rather than empirical. Locke’s illustration of a grain of wheat, already discussed earlier in work, explains this point well. Locke said that if we take a grain of wheat and divide it into two parts, the parts retain the same primary qualities as the grain. Jenkins argued that as long as the parts remain sensible or understandable, this is an empirically verifiable proposition. However, Locke’s stronger claim here is that if we go on dividing ‘till the parts become insensible, they must retain still each of them all those qualities.’ Jenkins pointed out that if we take ‘insensible’ to mean, in principle, beyond the reach of senses, then we can only take ‘must’ in the above quotation to be of a conceptual character. In principle, they would not be observable. In the absence of empirical observations, Locke was empirically in the dark and could not claim that the insensible particles of objects posses these qualities. It is noteworthy here that Locke utilized an avenue of knowledge that is not empirical explicitly. Locke’s claim here involves an assertion of an intuitive insight. He has formulated an account of intuitive knowledge in Book IV of the ‘Essay,’ but it remains a doubt whether the particular insight involved here conforms to that account.

Furthermore, Aaron has pointed out that Locke used the term ‘primary quality’ sometimes in the sense of ‘determinable’ and sometimes in the sense of ‘determinate’ in the ‘Essay.’ Therefore, no clear answer can be given to the question whether Locke’s primary qualities are ‘determinates’ or ‘determinable’.104
O’Conner has also said that Locke did not make it clear whether the term ‘quality’ is to be taken in the sense of ‘determinable’ or ‘determinate’ quality. He said that Locke intended the first alternative when he said that primary qualities are ‘utterly inseparable from the body in what state so ever it be’. Locke pointed out that whenever we break an object into smaller pieces, the object must retain the primary qualities, e.g., solidity, shape, number, etc., although the determinate forms taken by some of these general properties will be different. Further, O’Conner observed that when Locke asserted that the ideas we have of these primary qualities really resemble them, it means as if he was using the term ‘quality’ in the sense of ‘determinate quality’. Locke said that when we experience a primary quality, e.g. ‘circularity’ of a particular object, what we do in fact assert is that the particular shape (i.e. ‘circular’) is really in the object. This corresponds to a determinate quality in the context of Locke’s ‘Essay’.

O’Conner also argued that motion and rest could not be termed as primary qualities as claimed by Locke. According to Locke, motions, which are very swift or very slow, are often unperceived. O’Conner therefore contended that Locke could not consistently claim that our ideas of rest and motion are exact resemblances of these primary qualities of the object. The same is true about the textures, i.e. the microscopic arrangement of particles of bodies (the crystalline structure being an example). The texture of objects helps to determine the ideas of secondary qualities, which an object generates in us. However, our knowledge about the textures of objects is often incorrect since we derive it indirectly from complex scientific processes.

According to O’Conner, Locke’s claim that solidity is a primary quality is not tenable. Locke defined solidity as a property of a body by virtue of which it occupies space
and excludes all other solid substances. O’Conner argued that if solidity has its usual meaning, it could not be a primary quality of an object. Locke said that primary qualities are ‘utterly inseparable from the body in what so ever it be.’ However, bodies lose their solidity whenever they transform into liquid or gaseous states.

O’Conner has pointed out that secondary qualities, according to Locke, are dispositional causal properties of objects. Whenever, our sense organs come into appropriate spatio-temporal relationship with the bodies, these qualities tend to excite in us sense data of colour, taste, sound, etc. Locke’s doctrine of secondary qualities said (a) the ideas of secondary qualities are events, which are caused; (b) that they are not properties, which qualify material bodies in the way in which primary qualities qualify such bodies. The second part of the doctrine is independent of the first. Locke put forward a proof to establish the first proposition. Every material body has its own microscopic structure due to the arrangement of its primary particles. We can change the sensible qualities of an object by mechanical means. We can change, for instance, the appearance, and taste of an almond by pounding it with a pestle. The mechanical deformation can change the arrangement and pattern of its primary particles. Therefore, the changes in the arrangement of primary particles of a body are the causes of the changes in the sensible appearance of the body.

Locke has supplemented the above argument. He said that porphyry, which has no colour in the dark, appears to be red and white when light strikes it. The presence of light is the cause, which provides an occasion for the porphyry to reveal its dispositional property of causing red and white sense data in an observer.

These arguments, like Mill’s method of experimental enquiry, are inductive arguments designed to identify the causal elements in a complex situation by varying certain
conditions and keeping others constant. Such inductive arguments are frequently in use in both science and everyday experience. However, there is an important difference between the use of these methods by the scientist and the philosopher. In philosophy, we neither experience directly the secondary qualities nor can render its existence probable or improbable by any observable evidence. The scientist postulates hypothetical entities like genes, atoms and molecules, whose existence could be justified by observable results and refuted if the expected results were not forthcoming. However, Locke’s theory of secondary qualities has not proved to be false by any evidence whatsoever. The secondary qualities, as put forward by Locke, are compatible with all of our experiences.

According to Locke, ideas of primary qualities resemble real qualities in the object whereas in the case of secondary qualities there are no qualities in the object for the ideas to resemble. Therefore, if an object appears to have a shape, it really has shape but if it appears to have colour, in reality, it has no colour. It appears that Locke has drawn a distinction between appearance and reality, which may be objectionable. Morris, however, has pointed out that this objection does not stand at all. Reality is comprehensible only when it appears. If reality lies under the appearance, it is not possible to know it. Morris contended that as this difficulty did not occur to Locke, it is better not to raise it. He further said that if we represent Locke more critically than he really was, it is difficult to understand him. In Locke’s view, a cubical block of stone, placed before us, may appear white, although it may not be so. On the other hand, if it appears to have a shape, it really has shape. Now the question is, in particular, if the box appears cubical – is it cubical in reality? It is very difficult to determine what Locke’s answer to this question was. While speaking of primary qualities, Locke sometimes said that certain things have the actual qualities that they appear
to have. Therefore, if they appear to be cubical, they are cubical in reality. However, in some cases, Locke appeared to be cautious and only asserted, like Descartes, that shape is inseparably associated with bodies. It leads us to believe that according to Locke, we are often deceived in trying to comprehend the actual figure a particular object has. It must have some figure. However, this does not necessarily mean that in perception, we immediately know its true figure.

Peter Alexander, in his article, ‘Boyle and Locke on primary and secondary qualities,’ stated clearly that some orthodox criticisms of Locke are inaccurate. Locke was an empiricist who also claimed that it might be possible to explain our ideas of primary and secondary qualities in terms of the corpuscles. One of the objections of his critics is that an empiricist should not believe that the ideas of sensation represent and arise from unperceived external objects such as the corpuscles. The critics argue that corpuscles bear no perceptual evidence; reasons cannot establish their existence. However, Alexander pointed out that Locke made no claims of any knowledge of the corpuscles either through sense experience or through reason. He said that Locke believed that their existence is a hypothesis, adopted by natural philosophers as a basis for providing explanations of our experiences and the world around us. If the hypothesis were able to provide a plausible explanation, it would support their existence.

Peter Alexander said that although Locke was an empiricist he recognized that empiricism in natural philosophy does not provide us with true knowledge in the strict sense but may give us something called ‘probable conjecture’, which is also valuable. Rather than believing that experience alone is the basis of all knowledge, Locke, according to Alexander, showed that our knowledge has its foundation on experience, and that sensation and
reflection together supply our understanding with all the materials for thinking in order to derive knowledge. All these clearly suggest, said Alexander, that Locke was consistent as an empiricist.

Another serious criticism of Locke concerns the Philosopher’s use of the term ‘resemblance or likeness’ while he talks of the ‘ideas’ of primary qualities and the ‘primary quality’ itself. Alexander has pointed out that Locke’s writings should not be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Locke’s idea of a foot rule is surely not twelve inches long or that the abstract idea of a triangle has an indeterminable or an unspecified shape. Alexander emphasized that the resemblance that Locke talked about lies only in the description. However, Alexander has also added that Locke should have given an account of an accurate idea. He should have said that the ‘idea’ of primary qualities is accurate ideas of those ‘qualities.’ This is not true for secondary qualities. For example, the abstract idea of a triangle is of a ‘plane figure bounded by three straight lines’ is accurate if any triangle is a plane figure bounded by three straight lines. The ‘idea’ of a triangle and the quality of triangle may not resemble each other.

Whether there is a viable distinction between primary quality and secondary quality is a genuine question. Many critics and commentators have interpreted that Locke founded his distinction of primary qualities from secondary qualities upon the relative nature of the secondary qualities. They feel that the distinction is based on the evidence for sensory illusion in the case of the secondary qualities only. Locke argued that water might appear to be warm to one hand and cold to the other. However, the primary qualities of an object (such as shape, figure, extension, etc.) do not vary this manner. An object never produces the idea of a square by one hand and the idea of a globe by the other. It seems that here, Locke
attempted to establish the view that while primary qualities never deceive us, secondary qualities do.

Jenkins however sounded cautious and said that Locke may have seen the primary qualities as being subject to illusion also\textsuperscript{110} depending upon the interpretation of the text. Jenkins pointed out that Locke had indeed written accordingly in his ‘Essay.’\textsuperscript{111} Based on this interpretation, Locke’s view was that while there is illusion over both sets of qualities, the illusion is more radical in the case of secondary qualities as there is nothing at all that resembles them in the objects they qualify.

However, several complications arise in arriving at a definite interpretation of Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Although, he stated as indicated above, illusion may be associated with both sets of qualities, he seems to suggest at other places in the ‘Essay’ that we are not deceived by the primary qualities while the secondary qualities always deceive us. Besides, it is not clear if Locke was referring to particular primary qualities or general forms of primary qualities. It would be natural to infer, said Jenkins, that Locke intended to refer to primary qualities in general, implying that all objects must have some shape, size, extension, motion, or rest. This would be consistent with the scientific understanding of the period. However, complications arise since Locke claimed that our ideas of primary qualities actually resemble the qualities. This implies that Locke was referring to particular versions of these qualities since an idea can only resemble a particular shape, not shape in general. The idea of squareness in a particular object is particular and cannot characterize all objects. Not all objects can be square. Jenkins commented that it is impossible to determine unambiguously from the ‘Essay’ the view that Locke held. It appears that Locke may have tried to hold both views, i.e. the primary qualities
refer to the qualities in general and that the ideas of the primary qualities resemble the qualities. These two views are clearly mutually incompatible.

The relevance of the above-mentioned arguments concerning the nature of the primary quality (particular or general) is crucial in the context of the sensory illusion, closely associated with secondary qualities. If Locke implied that the primary qualities are particular or determinate, they would be deceptive or illusive just like the secondary qualities. Berkeley said that this somehow escaped Locke’s attention. On the other hand, if Locke were thinking of the primary qualities as general or determinable, it would be perfectly plausible for Locke to suggest that we are subject to illusion only in the case of the secondary qualities. Hence, the distinction between primary qualities and secondary qualities, as proposed by Locke, will stand or fail, depending on the nature of the interpretation of the primary qualities.

Locke has often faced criticism for his writings on the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, where he based his arguments on the invariable and non-illusive nature of perceptions of primary qualities in contrast to our perception of secondary qualities. However, Alexander emphasized that Locke was well aware of the fact that the shape or size of an object might appear to be different to different observers viewing the object from different positions. Locke has also mentioned about illusion regarding primary qualities at various places in his ‘Essay.’ Alexander further said that if Locke were to be specific, he would indeed have stated that having an accurate idea of something, did not, and must not imply that the perception should be same under all conditions. The fact that an object looks smaller from a distance of fifty feet than it appears from a distance of ten feet provides an example.
As we have already seen, Berkeley has made criticism against Locke to upset the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Berkeley contended that secondary qualities are as essential as primary qualities for us to perceive an object:

*For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moved, but I must withal give it some colour or other sensible quality.*  

Jenkins pointed out that Berkeley’s claim was too broad. He said that it is hard to accept that one would not be able to frame an idea of an object just because it is deprived of its smell, taste, or sound. However, the claim is stronger in relation to colour, and this would be sufficient to upset the primary-secondary distinction. Berkeley’s main contention is that we cannot perceive shape, size, or motion without colour. Shapes are coloured shapes and sizes are coloured sizes. Therefore, colour is essential for an object to be an object, i.e. to have shape, size, or motion. However, Berkeley’s argument about colour does not prevent Locke from making the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities in any way. Locke would only have to admit colour into the class of primary qualities.

However, we note that Berkeley’s argument regarding colour directed against Locke is only of limited significance. A colour-blind man, for example, can identify objects, even though he cannot distinguish colours. Even a congenitally blind man, who has never experienced colour, can distinguish shapes and sizes and has some idea of motion and rest. In contrast, the predicament of the hypothetical ‘size-blind’ man, made famous by Jonathan Bennett, is more serious. His nature of handicap, compared to that of a congenitally blind person, is more radical and he would be incapable of comparing sizes and distances or distinguish between lengths, breadths, and heights. Life would be incredibly difficult for such
a person. Therefore, it is clear that size-blindness and colour-blindness or complete blindness is not analogous. It is thus straightforward to infer that while the knowledge of size is essential for us to cope with the world, colour is not. Similar arguments would show that the other primary qualities, defined by Locke, such as shape, solidity and motion are equally significant as size, although colour is not. It would seem therefore that Locke’s classification of colour, as a secondary quality remains valid in spite of Berkeley’s criticism.

Jenkins has further pointed out a conceptual difference between the two sets of qualities. According to him, it is possible to conceive an object even if it does not have any secondary qualities. However, if we take away the primary qualities such as shape, size, and solidity from an object, nothing remains that we can properly conceive of as existing. This conceptual difference between the two sets of qualities shows that the distinction that Locke had drawn between them cannot be overthrown easily.

We may argue against Jenkins that if primary qualities were alone real there was no need for admitting the secondary qualities. If nothing remains apart from primary qualities, where do the secondary qualities stand? The truth of the matter seems to lie in the fact that the secondary quality is present where there is a primary quality. Thus, colour is present where there is figure. Therefore, we should view all qualities as either primary or secondary, their locus being the same. In such circumstances, the distinction seems to be arbitrary.
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