

An Examination of the Traits of Philosophical Discourse by John Locke

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Abstract: It is generally considered that modern thought in the United Kingdom developed primarily in the 17th and the 18th centuries. John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume contributed to the foundation of English empiricism which led to more practical modern thought, affecting economics, science, and moral values in general. Their ideas also served to establish individualism in England, where the concept of individuality and freedom as a civil right developed significantly earlier in comparison to other European countries. The 17th century was the age when the Thirty War had ended, and though human reason was regarded as important, metaphysical ideas were still main-stream in Western philosophy due to the well-established religious traditions on the continent. Although concepts of religious faith and Deity were highly important in metaphysical discourse, John Locke specifically denied “innate principles” in the human mind, putting higher importance on human experience than anything else. He rejected innate ideas on universality, Deity, morals or conscience, and instead tried to clarify certainty and clearness of human intellect, reason or the understanding through an individual’s education, discipline, learning and reflection which could be nurtured by experiences as a human.

Historically, it was Great Britain that had grown and developed economic, political and technical power in the modern era of Europe prior to other European countries. It is certain that Locke’s ideas influenced the way of thinking for an individual in his age and for England. This essay aims to examine the characteristics of John Locke’s philosophical discourse and compare his thoughts with the discourse of other philosophers.

Key words: Metaphysical ideas, Descartes’s cogito, Innate principles, Words and the understanding.

1 The idea of individuality in metaphysical thought

First of all, it is necessary to confirm that it was John Locke who developed philosophical ideas based on individual experience, in complete contrast to the philosophy of continental Europe in the 17th century, where thinking was based mainly on metaphysical ideas. On the continent, around the 1640s, the influence of René Descartes’ philosophy was great¹⁾. In the United Kingdom, Locke developed such a simple and understandable philosophical discourse that later it was applied to many fields, including politics, ethics, social movements and literature. The geological, cultural, or

national characteristics of England also affected his ideas. From a historical viewpoint, it is apparent that the United Kingdom developed dramatically through the first industrial revolution (primarily by wool industry or trade from colonies), and that the development was promoted by practical science, technology and economic strategies. Behind this innovative development, practical thought and values surely played a role in realizing benefits to the country. Locke’s ideas partially affected the fundamental way of thinking in the nation. Later, the concept of respecting freedom of individuality indirectly influenced the revolution in North America against Britain. In short, his philosophy was regarded as independent humanism which was separated from the old order. In contrast,

ideas such as Descartes were prevalent in the continent as reason-centered, idealistic logic. In order to compare with Locke's ideas, it is necessary to consider the continental philosophy first. Specifically, the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, one of most representative thinkers who built the theoretical system of Christianity in the 13th century, and René Descartes, the man who clarified the importance of existence of a subjective individual as a "thinking" human in the 17th century will be examined.

Through promulgating his idea of 'cogito,' Descartes developed the concept of certainty of 'subjective individuality,' thereby realizing the notion of identity of an individual. This established an essential entity of a modern person who was capable of thinking more independently than those of the Middle Ages. In effect, Descartes allegedly connected subjective individuality with the act of thinking through his works. The act of subjective thinking and introspective understanding was promoted by other philosophers, implying the development of a new spirit of European individualism which led to subjectivism in the modern era.

Descartes created an elaborate system of thought, and inherited some of the ideas of scholastic philosophy from the Europe of the Middle Ages. In order to understand scholastic theory, we must refer to the ideas of Thomas Aquinas. It was he who established the theory in his work, *Somma Theologiae*, attempting to describe the theological ideas which included existence, essence, knowledge, goodness, creatures, or other elements of "God." Aquinas explained the existence of God, making remarks on infinity, unity, or eternity. He used the idea of 'analogia secundum esse' in order to connect the relationship between a profound and infinite Deity and finite human existence created by God. 'Analogia,' (here, "analogy" in English) is essentially a term for mathematics, meaning a proportion or rate. Aquinas utilized this idea, replacing its meaning with that of relationship. In this respect, the idea is particularly used for the role of forming a bonding relationship in terms of existence between God and human. It is essentially impossible to perceive and understand the existence of infinite and eternal God by perception or the understanding of a finite and limited human existence. Moreover, the

conception of 'eternity' or 'infinity' cannot be explained by mathematics nor human perception. Aquinas attempted to explain it by the use of the somewhat mathematical idea of 'analogia secundum esse,' to link with human reason and the intellectual knowledge (the knowledge endowed by God as the gospel), by alteration of the meaning of "analogia," thus making it possible to understand by means of the transcendental relationship between the essence and nature of God and the limited knowledge of human reason: "... things that are from God, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being"²⁾. Here, things from God mean humans themselves, created by him. And these things possess the likeness of God by "analogy." The existence of things has proportionate "imago" or "likeness" of God by the idea of analogy. Or alternatively, Aquinas thinks God is the supreme good, not by the concept of human understanding, but by more excessive supremacy that is beyond human intellect. He continuously affirms that recognition of Deity is by cognition of this analogical relationship. "God is not said to be not existing as if He did not exist at all, but because He exists above all that exists, since He is His own existence. Hence it does not follow that He cannot be known at all, but that He exceeds every kind of knowledge, which means that He is not comprehended....there can be a proportion of the creature to God, in so far as it is related to Him as the effect to its cause, and as potency to act; and in this way the created intellect can be proportionated to know God"³⁾. This might be seen as an important trial for Aquinas who had to constitute the theology of the religion of "Christianity" by means of philosophical discourse which had to be explicated 'scientifically' as much as possible. As a result, the transcendental, infinite existence of God became the axiom for the supreme first principle of human existence. In the Middle Age of Europe, it was supposed that a human was an existence supported by intellect and knowledge endowed by God. Aquinas contributed to the definition of Deity in metaphysical discourse ("scientific" in his sense). After about 350 years, Descartes developed a more modern philosophical discourse.

In *A Discourse on Method* Descartes proclaimed the significance of the certainty of subjective thinking. He

proposed this identity as a primary predisposition, and a certainty of clear conception that brings about truth; “I then concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that “I,” that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body, and is even more easily known than the latter, and is such, that although the latter were not, it would still continue to be all that it is”⁴). Descartes bound man’s existence with the act of “thinking,” and demonstrated the certain existence of human mind. “By the word thought, I understand all that which so takes place in us that we of ourselves are immediately conscious of it; and, accordingly, not only to understand (*intelligirer, entendre*), to will (*velle*), to imagine (*imaginari*), but even to perceive (*sentire, sentir*), are here the same as to think (*cogitare, penser*)”⁵). The importance of the identical relationship between the human mind and thought is also indicated repeatedly in *The Principles of Philosophy*. “Thought” plays the most important role in the human mind through perceiving confirmation of the human subjective identity as an individual, for it seems to be certain that the manner of the act of thinking that leads to cognition of identity for Descartes. He also recognizes the importance of ‘the understanding’ and ‘reason’ which precede every sense of a human and that raise possibility of leading a human to an error or uncertain judgment⁶). His suggestion that “we ought never to allow ourselves to be persuaded of the truth of anything unless on the evidence of our reason” means that reason of being for a human, with that understanding, is the ability and measure for human recognition of an object⁷). Furthermore, distinctness and clarity of a truth is dependent on the existence of God; “all the things which we clearly and distinctly conceive are true, is certain only because God is or exists, and because he is a Perfect Being, and because all that we possess is derived from him”⁸). Descartes’ philosophical discourse is fundamentally dependent on Deity, hinting at the innate principle of distinctive Deity and the benefit of its endowment.

As he emphasizes the importance of the close bond between ‘thought’ and the human mind, he also stresses the

importance and clear distinction of “the understanding,” “intention,” “the will” or “reflection” in the mind. Idealism in this age starts at this point: the process of perception and senses in the mind of an individual, and the mechanism of recognition and understanding through the process of the understanding and reason. Descartes was the man who established the importance of subjective individuality, for it is a “thinking man” who pays special attention to continuous reflection based on reason and understanding. Moreover, superiority of understanding and the human mind is supported by God. He attempts to explain independence and subjectivity of an individual by fusing them with metaphysical logic, the existence of God and his absolute help for human beings. Since the existence of humankind is an attribute of God, Descartes believes that: “the conclusions that God exists, and that my own existence, each moment of its continuance, is absolutely dependent upon him, are so manifest, — as to lead me to believe it impossible that the human mind can know anything with more clearness and certitude”⁹). Deity is undoubtedly a certain truth for him. And, as for various errors committed by humans, he considers the fundamental factor which causes human errors. Generally, while a human thinks, perceives, or considers many things, those things have to be recognized as good or not good through examination of a moral code. Descartes refers to the factors which are associated with human errors: ‘cognition’, ‘free choice’, ‘the understanding,’ and ‘the will’ are among them. He thinks that the faculty of “the will” of a human is so great when used for making decisions about things, and “the knowledge of the understanding ought always to precede the determination of the will”¹⁰). ‘The understanding’ is the first criteria of many ideas for moral judgment, and then ‘free choice by the will’ which is endowed by God. Free choice of will is the peculiar ability for innate human instinct to potentially lead a human to make a mistake due to unrestricted will¹¹). Therefore, according to the logic of Descartes, ‘the understanding’ has indispensable priority in regards to intention for moral judgment. In these arguments, it is disclosed that Descartes depends upon metaphysical logic supported by complete existence, namely “God.” While he tried to introduce it in

his views for preparing for theoretical argument, excessive emphasis of it has rather the reverse effect in the discourse. This is the point where it is supposed that Descartes aimed to formulate his theory by respecting metaphysical aspect in his discourse. Deity, the supreme entity of God, had to be set as an evident core of the discourse in order to demonstrate the theoretical system. In this sense, God is an indispensable element and driving force for his theory. Subjective identity of an individual is guaranteed only by intellectual knowledge endowed by God who is the preliminary principle for his discourse.

This is one point where John Locke criticized metaphysical concepts with regard to the ideas which are supposed to be innate principles. What is of greatest significance is the negation of all the innate metaphysical ideas provoked in the human mind, ideas which had already spread through every stage of philosophical thought in the 17th century. Locke more rationally cuts down such theological essence, inherited from the age of Renaissance, in order to establish a more modern humanism in the 17th century in Europe, and stressed more explicit logic framed in more easily understood language. Locke seems to aim at humanism based on more distinctive logic which can demonstrate the roles of reason, knowledge, and understanding of humankind.

2 What 'No Innate Principles in the Mind' suggests

John Locke starts his description of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* by stating his belief; "This, therefore, being my purpose to enquire into the Original, Certainty, and Extent of humane Knowledge; together, with the Grounds and Degrees of Belief, Opinion, and Assent"¹²⁾. This belief, "to enquire into Certainty and Extent of humane knowledge," describes one of the most important purposes of this essay. In order to realize this purpose, he first tries to examine various expressions of ideas in the minds of humans, including general ideas, maxims, perception, truth, probabilities, Deity, or the use of words. In the 17th century, as already indicated, European philosophers like Descartes, Pascal, or Spinoza enquired

into the essence of being of a human and the existence of God, developing the arguments concerned with human ideas, mind, reason, and understanding. However, there is a tendency for them to have equally common factors; their discourse of idealism was metaphysical description. As suggested in the former chapter, it is certain that Descartes focused on the act of 'thinking' for emphasizing the subjective individual who is confident of the existence of itself through the act of 'thinking.' Nevertheless, there was a condition that intellect and knowledge were preliminary endowed by God. They tended to think of idealism in terms of an 'a priori' conception that fuses the bond between human reason and Deity. Thus, it was thought that humanism and human intellect were benefits bestowed by God.

Here, the idealism of Spinoza, born in the same year as Locke, is referred to in order to compare with that of Locke. First of all, in Spinoza's discourse, 'infinity' and 'absolute existence' of God are repeatedly emphasized as his primary proposition. For Spinoza, the ideas of the existence of God and of the infinite nature of God are the most important propositions, above all others, and to which all concepts of entity of a substance and the attributes of human ideas are led. "*Except God, no substance can be or be conceived.* Dem.: Since God is an absolutely infinite being, of whom no attribute which expresses an essence of substance can be denied, and he necessarily exists, ... From this it follows most clearly, first, that God is unique, that is, Nature there is only one substance, and that it is absolutely infinite"¹³⁾. In the theory of Spinoza, God is "the efficient cause", and "All ideas are in God; and insofar as they are related to God, are true and adequate"¹⁴⁾. These propositions suggest the supremacy of God and the place of a human's ideas which are attributed to God. "*God is the immanent, not transitive, cause of all things.* Dem.: Everything that is, is in God, and must be conceived through God, and so God is the cause of things, which are in him. That is the first. And then outside God there can be no substance, that is, thing which is in itself outside God"¹⁵⁾. These propositions are prior to a description of the nature of the human mind, forming the base of every principle of humankind. On the other hand, Spinoza regards

human reason as a critical essence of human nature: “it is of the nature of reason to regard things as necessary, not as contingent. Dem.: it is of the nature of reason to perceive things truly, namely, as they are in themselves, that is, not as contingent but as necessary, q.e.d.” “It is of the nature of reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity”¹⁶). It seems that the certainty of human reason, a criteria for the human essence of ethical values, is guaranteed by the eternal certainty of the attribute from God which is inside human mind¹⁷). Spinoza’s explicit discourse on human essence is eminently understandable in the line of metaphysical and rational logic which regarded human reason as being of primary importance. A human who lives by following reason and conscience is certainly and virtually right. One of the moral virtues of European people in the 17th century was decisively the very human reason that had spread among people and society. Spinoza developed his ideas based on the eternity of God and human reason which makes every effort to pursue. For him, since the essence of the human mind is ‘recognition,’ it has to make continuous effort to perfect reason and intellect. The human mind is, therefore, the source of every human action. “...since this striving of the mind, by which the mind, insofar as it reasons, strives to preserve its being, is nothing but understanding, this striving for understanding is the first and only foundation of virtue, nor do we strive to understand things for the sake of some end. ...The greatest thing the mind can understand is God, that is a being absolutely infinite, without which nothing can either be conceived. And so, the mind’s greatest advantage, *or* good, is knowledge of God”¹⁸). The purpose of these somewhat redundant discourses is to describe the essence of the human mind, reason (or instinct), and to clarify the virtue of human life based on reason and ethics. Spinoza’s idea seems to be a time-worn concept from the 21st century’s view, yet aimed to introduce his ethics to people living in his age. “In life, therefore it is especially useful to perfect, as far as we can, our intellect, *or* reason. In this one thing consists man’s highest happiness, *or* blessedness. Indeed, blessedness is nothing but that satisfaction of mind which stems from the intuitive knowledge of God. But perfecting the intellect is nothing but understanding God, his

attributes, and his actions, which follow from the necessity of his nature”¹⁹). The logic of Spinoza’s humanism is so plain and simple that it is understandable to be read as simply an ethical discourse in his age. In this point, the logic is almost the same as that of Descartes, describing a highly metaphysical argument. Nevertheless, this plain and simple metaphysical humanism based on the relationship between God and human reason was one that John Locke fundamentally suspected, and clearly denied. What he sought in his ‘thinking’ was to disclose ‘certainty’ and ‘truth.’ And the consequence of thinking is not derived from metaphysical consideration, but from more fundamentally pure ‘logic’ through the act of thinking with simple words, thus removing any suspicious ideas. Hence, it is necessary to examine his discourse more concretely.

Locke began his essay by the complete negation of innate principles in the mind of a human. According to his discourse: “there are certain Principles both *Speculative* and *Practical* universally agreed by all Mankind: which therefore they argue, must needs be the consent Impressions, which the Souls of Men receive in their first Beings, ... This Argument, drawn from *Universal Consent*, has this Misfortune in it, That if it were true in matter of Fact, that there were certain Truths, wherein all Mankind agreed, it would not prove them innate, if there can be any other way shewn....this Agreement of Universal Consent, which is made use of, to prove innate Principles, seem to me a Demonstration that there are none such: Because there are none to which all Mankind give an Universal Assent”²⁰). This statement implies negation of the idealistic concept of “universality.” Universal assent is, for Locke, speculative and an imaginary product of consideration in the human mind which has no adequate grounds for truth. Certainty of universal assent was credited by philosophical discourse in the 17th century. It was closely connected with the moral absoluteness of God, and the good of the human mind as realized through conscience. Every aspect of virtue and justice protected by human reason seemed to be supported by this speculation. In other words, universal assent, or universality is a truth endowed from God as a metaphysical and spiritual certainty. However, Locke simply denies its role in constructing a more creditable

discourse for human morals and intellect. John Locke's philosophical discourse is more cautious and gradual. He explains an elaborate pathway, showing how a human gets an idea through sense, mind and language. "The Senses at first let in particular *Ideas*, and furnish the yet empty Cabinet: And the Mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the Memory, and Names got to them. Afterwards the Mind proceeding farther, abstracts them, and by Degrees learns the use of general Names. In this manner the Mind comes to be furnish'd with *Ideas* and Language, the Materials about which to exercise its discursive Faculty: And the use of Reason becomes daily more visible, as these Materials, that give it Employment, increase"²¹). This means the process of "experience" through which a man perceives things and can deal with them by reason and language, abstracting them into ideas. He does not introduce metaphysical argument in this pathway, because he completely denies every innate theory with respect to recognition of things in the human mind and human society. His negation of innate principles includes all aspects of recognition. He thinks that humans cannot know any maxims innately. Maxims imply universal criteria through that a human can follow as a system of laws for moral and inner well-being in society. In addition to this, he denies innate principles of 'a priori' ideas for morals and conscience. His theory targets any probability of innate morals, because he believed that any moral rules or ideas of justice were not innate. On the other hand, he says: "Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These indeed are innate practical Principles, which do continue constantly to operate and influence all our Actions, without ceasing: These may be observ'd in all Persons and all Ages, steady and universal; but these are Inclinations of the Appetite to good, not Impressions of truth on the Understanding"²²). This agreement means an essence of human inclination or institution which does not consent with human intellectual understanding. Alternatively, he thinks that the human mind is always immature and imperfect and must be disciplined through experience and reflection by reason. After all, Locke considers human essence as being very vulnerable to any kind of desire and unable to avoid its inclinations.

Locke, while he admits that conscience is important for checking the evil side of the human mind, thinks that a conscience to provide a moral code is also not essentially innate. He thinks those are obtained through sound education, learning and experiences. "Perhaps *Conscience* will be urged as checking as for such Breaches (of moral rule), and so the internal Obligation and Establishment of the Rule be preserved....*perswasion however got, will serve to set Conscience on work*, which is nothing else, but our own Opinion or Judgment of the Moral Rectitude or Pravity of our own Actions"²³). Therefore, for Locke, human conscience is something that should be nurtured through a process of gaining wide experience in education, daily life in society, or tasks. He was convinced that moral conscience is not easily immanent in the human mind, rather accumulated gradually through continuous reflection and consideration over the whole period of a human life. Conventional ideas of the same age suggest that conscience of a human is endowed from God, who is the nucleus of an efficient impetus that controls the whole system of human society and mind through faith and its dogmatic effect. The supreme deity contains every aspect of people's minds and can lead them to ethical values and moral justice. However, Locke clearly cut out the innate idea of Deity. This is the most important definition in his discourse.

"It seems to me plainly to prove, That the truest and best Notions Men had of God, were not imprinted, but acquired by thought and meditation, and a right use of their Faculties: since the wise and considerate Men of the World, by a right and careful employment of their Thoughts and Reason, attained true Notions in this, ..." "Since then though the knowledge of a God, be the most natural discovery of human Reason, *yet the Idea of him, is not innate*, as, I think, is evident from what has been said; I imagine there will be scarce any other *Idea* found, that can pretend to it: since if God had set any impression, any character on the Understanding of Men, it is most reasonable to expect it should have been some clear and uniform *Idea* of Himself, as far as our weak Capacities were capable to receive so incomprehensible and infinite an Object"²⁴). In this suggestion, Locke had clearly denied an innate knowledge of Deity. Instead,

he considered it an idea obtained by thought and reason through careful consideration. Since the 20th century, it became quite natural that there is no innate principle, nor proposition endowed by God, namely that the world consists of individuality. But the 17th century was an age on the border line, in which ideas of the modern and pre-modern era intermingled. The historical background of the period saw the Thirty Years War divide faith in two in western Europe, but subsequently concluded in 1648 after the treaty of Westminster reconciled the two faiths. England was comparatively fortunate, in that it was immune to such religious disaster. (But Locke himself had to leave his country due to political domestic conflict with the Netherlands, following Sir Anthony Ashley-Cooper (1st Earl of Shaftesbury) whom he served as a physician and adviser.) After the 17th century, England developed as a unique economic and industrial power which drove the country to form a great kingdom in the western world. In that situation, the sense and cognition of distinctive individuality was firmly established in the level of philosophical thought. Locke's way of thinking was exceptionally innovative and contributed to more practical and realistic values of individuality. Negation of innate principles was important in terms of independence from metaphysical and scholastic ideas. In the next unit, Locke's ideas are associated with substance and words in much more detail.

3 Importance of human reason and the role of clearness of words

Words and language are very important factors for Locke who persistently considered the relationship between the substance and words in his discourse. Ideas through perception, as he defines ideas and knowledge which come into the human mind, are founded on "experience"²⁵). Thus the human mind has to process all things through perception via experience. Locke explains the activity of the human mind thus: "The two great and principal Actions of the Mind,...*Perception*, or *Thinking*, and *Volition*, or *Willing*. The power of Thinking is called the *Understanding*, and the Power of Volition

is called the *Will*, and these two Powers of Abilities in the Mind are dominated *Faculties*"²⁶). He classifies and explains the types of ideas: simple, complex, confused, or fantastical ones. Necessity of classification is based on his investigation of 'certainty' or 'truth' of ideas which the human mind perceives through experience. All ideas are processed by thinking, or the understanding and Locke removes every uncertainty, regarding confused or fantastical ideas as 'chimerical' or 'inadequate' modes. As far as human ideas are correctly understood by the mind, simple ideas are "*all real*, all agree to the reality of things"²⁷). In this sense, as he makes a suggestion, in order to clarify the way of ideas, the relationship between ideas (or substances) and words becomes important; "there is so close a connection between *Ideas* and Words; and our abstract *Ideas*, and general Words, have so constant a relation one to another, that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our Knowledge, which all consists in Propositions, without considering, first, the Nature, Use, and Signification of Language"²⁸). Although it is natural that ideas have close connection with words, the true purpose of this seems to clarify the working of language for humans. In metaphysical discourse, language is a benefit endowed by God and discourse through language is protected by deity and never became an object of skepticism. In Locke's philosophy, as words became the foundation of description and explanation of human experience and ideas, consideration on words became significantly important, thus making it necessary for him to think more clearly about the role of words and language: "it was necessary, that Man should find out some external sensible Signs, whereby those invisible *Ideas*, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others ...The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of *Ideas*; and the *Ideas* they stand for, are their proper and immediate Signification"²⁹). He emphasizes that words play a role as "Signs" which connect language with various ideas in the mind: "That they (words) being immediately the Signs of Mens *Ideas*; and, by that means, the Instruments whereby Men communicate their Conceptions, and express to one another those Thoughts and Imaginations..."³⁰).

Since words are the instrument which connect ideas and

give them their clear meaning, the role of words as signs is recognized as an instrument that conveys human ideas simply to others. Hence, confused or unclear ideas which cannot be expressed by words are regarded as inadequate modes of signs, for ideas can be inevitably described by words, and potentiality of expression of words is the prerequisite for ideas. Adequate use of words allows conceptions, ideas to be held rightly in mind, and then others which lack distinctive explicitness are classified as chimerical and fantastical products. Locke develops the argument on the use of words, and describes carefully the possibility of the abuse of words. According to his discourse, the use of words is divided into two categories: to record one's thought and to convey thought through communication with others. Although this classification and explanation of mistake of the use of words seems to have some difficulty in logic (because it is not easy to categorize the use of language) it is understandable that he tries to explain that human ideas essentially consist of the clear use of words, and remove other elements which cannot be explained by words. Thus the concern develops to another level: the relation between the term and the substance. All substances have terms which suggest suitable meaning for the substances. Hence, general terms indicate adequately clear meaning for substances. But Locke doubts the conceptions on "general" or "universal", which seem essentially ideal (or fantastic), having no reality. "That *General and Universal*, belong not to the real existence of Things; but *are the Innovations and Creatures of the Understanding*, made by it for its own use, and concern only Signs, whether Words, or Ideas ...universality belongs not to things themselves, which are all of them particular in their Existence, even those Words, and Ideas"³¹). Here, Locke unquestionably thinks that the meaning of "universality", which is an invention or creature of understanding, has no ground for reality and its substance. In the discourse of explaining the simple ideas, the complex ideas and mixed modes, Locke stresses that the real thing has its name, or is equal to nominal essence. Words have to function properly as nominating ideas for proper meanings. Abstract ideas, therefore, are positively expressed by their names, but have no reality

beyond the meaning of words. "*That the Names of mixed Modes always signifie* (when they have any determined Signification) *the real Essence of their Species*. For these abstract Ideas, being the Workmanship of the Mind, and not referred to the real Existence of Things, there is no supposition of any thing more signified by that Name, but barely that complex Idea, the Mind it self has formed, which is all it would have express'd by it; and is that, on which all the properties of the Species depend, and from which alone they all flow: and so in these the *real* and *nominal Essence* is the same"³²). What Locke attempts to do here is to combine the function of words and various ideas. Although classification of ideas (simple, complex, abstract, or mixed modes) can never be simply treated in this discourse, because he himself did not clarify the difference, for example, between simple ideas and complex ideas, as far as the discourse on human ideas depends on signification of words, it is not possible to explain perfectly the significance of these kinds of ideas. Nevertheless, it is certain that he positively clarifies what ideas generally suggest through human understanding and words. It is the reason why he pursues the relationship between words and substances. And the "essence" of ideas is beyond human understanding, because it cannot be described by words. "'Tis true, I have often mentioned as *real Essence*, distinct in Substances, from those abstract Ideas of them, which I call their *nominal Essence*. By this *real Essence*, I mean, that real constitution of any Thing, which is the foundation of all those Properties, that are combined in, and are constantly found to co-exist with the *nominal Essence*; that particular constitution, which every Thing has within it self, without any relation to any thing without it. ...Indeed, as to the *real Essences* of Substances, we only suppose their Being, without precisely knowing that what they are: But that which annexes them still to the *Species*, is the nominal Essence, of which they are the supposed foundation and cause"³³). These important suggestions imply that the real essence of human ideas are identified with nominal essence, that is, real substance and are able to be explained by words. Indeed, the properties of human ideas coexist with nominal essence of words. Moreover, the real essence of substances (including ideas) can be recognized by their

existence, but fundamentally it is beyond the understanding of humans, because the real essence of substances, (or universality) exceeds understanding through words. Locke thinks that it is important to understand various ideas (the nominal essence of ideas) using “words,” but there is a limit beyond which humans are not able to understand them within the ability of words, but only to perceive or recognize the existence of their importance. At least, he proposes a limit of human understanding by words. Considering the relationship between words and ideas (substances), Locke stresses the importance of understanding ideas by words and description, and the constitution of human ideas through distinctive and intellectual explanation by words. Such an attitude towards human ideas contributed to empirical knowledge and understanding for building a true personality in his century. His age was in the transition period from metaphysical philosophy to empirical thought by human reason. The reason why John Lock describes this essay *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* is that he tried to first deny the innate principles and the abstract ideas on universal essence which could not be understood by words. By removing metaphysical ideas or idealism, he extracted distinctively clear human understanding and knowledge through experiences. Locke’s ideas were inherited by David Hume and George Berkeley who developed his philosophy into more sophisticated and skeptical ideas which affected English philosophy and modern European ideas. In conclusion, it is necessary to point out one more important aspect of Locke’s ideas.

Conclusion

As it has been suggested, John Locke was an intellectualistic humanist. His empirical theory, based on experience and intellectual knowledge, is developed from a negation of “innate principles,” which has already been described in this essay. His emphasis on the negation and the importance of the function of words finally leads to the importance of human reason itself³⁴. Locke never denied God (albeit denying innate principles of God,) for he thought the truth of God could be learned through

faith, education, and experience. “Whatever GOD hath revealed, is certainly true; no Doubt can be made of it. This is the proper Object of *Faith*: But whether it be a divine Revelation, or no, *Reason* must judge; which can never permit the Mind to reject a greater Evidence to embrace what is less evident, nor allow it to entertain Probability in opposition to Knowledge and Certainty. There can be no evidence, that any traditional Revelation is of divine Original, in the Words we receive it, and in the Sense we understand it, so clear, and so certain, as that of the Principles of Reason”³⁵). He put high importance in faith to God and judgment by human reason at the last of his essay. He unquestionably developed his discourse for the purpose of the original, certainty, and extent of humane knowledge within the system of nominal ideas by words. Nothing is more important for him than distinctive certainty for human knowledge. And for him, words, the understanding, and reason of a human were the foundation of his system of theory.

Notes

- 1) It is noteworthy that it was the 17th century when philosophy based on reason and understanding of humankind developed, affecting Western culture, politics, and peoples’ way of life.
- 2) Thomas Aquinas. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, revised by Daniel J. Sullivan. 1952. *The Summa Theologica* Volume I Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. : 23.
- 3) Ibid., 51.
- 4) René Descartes. 1984. Translated by John Veitch. *A Discourse on Method Meditations and Principles* Everyman’s Library, London: 27.
- 5) Ibid., 167.
- 6) Descartes suggests that “there is nothing in the understanding which was not previously in the senses.” in *A Discourse on Method*.
- 7) Descartes. Op.cit., 32.
- 8) ibid., 31.
- 9) ibid., 111.
- 10) ibid., 117.
- 11) Descartes thinks that every activity of the mind means that the will of a human works, and the activity of the will is attributed to mind, or dependent on only mind in

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- 12) John Locke. 2011. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Clarendon Press Oxford: 43.
- 13) Benedict De Spinoza. Edited and Translated by Edwin Curley. 1996. *Ethics* Penguin Books: 9-10.
- 14) Ibid., 54. "The efficient cause" of God affects and controls the essence of whole things.
- 15) *ibid.*, 16.
- 16) *ibid.*, 59-60.
- 17) Spinoza stressed the infinity of Deity, and the idea of infinity was opposed to complete unity of scholastic views. Spinoza developed this infinite and multi-existent feature of Deity for more popular faith and morals of the people.
- 18) *Ibid.*, 128-9.
- 19) *ibid.*, 155.
- 20) John Locke. *Op.cit.*, 49.
- 21) *Ibid.*, 55.
- 22) *ibid.*, 67.
- 23) *ibid.*, 70. (of moral rule) is added by the author.
- 24) *ibid.*, 94-5.
- 25) Locke first of all defines distinctively the importance of "experience" in the beginning chapter of 'Of ideas of general, and their Original.'
- 26) Locke. *Op.cit.*, 128.
- 27) *ibid.*, 372.
- 28) *ibid.*, 401. Locke stresses the significant bonds between human ideas and words.
- 29) *ibid.*, 405.
- 30) *ibid.*, 407. (words) is added by the author.
- 31) *ibid.*, 414.
- 32) *ibid.*, 436-7.
- 33) *ibid.*, 442.
- 34) In the chapter of "Reason," Locke explains its role in detail. Reason is the pivotal point for judgment and understanding of things for a human. "According to Reason are such Propositions, whose Truth we can discover, by examining and tracing those *Ideas* we have from *Sensation* and *Reflexion*; and by natural deduction, find to be true, or probable": 686.
- 35) *ibid.*, 695-6.