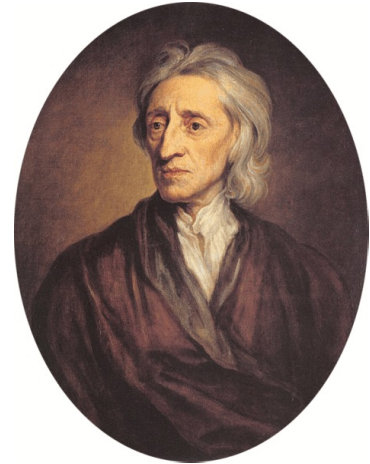


Experience

The English philosopher, John Locke (1632-1704), stated, in *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, that the mind is as a "white paper, void of all characters, without ideas," like an "empty cabinet," as yet unfurnished. The mind is *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. The material to furnish the cabinet is the knowledge that comes from experience. For Locke, all knowledge is founded on observation, the senses. And so is founded the empirical method, i.e., "relating to experience." Knowledge is the precise correspondence between what is observed by the human senses and what exists in the natural world.



The world Locke is referring to is the natural world of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and sociology. It is a world that exists independent of the mind, with its own structures and governed by its own processes, all of which can be discovered through rigorous observation.

The empiricist begins with observations of the natural world. These observations must be controlled, objective, verifiable and replicative. Subjectivity must be kept out. The observations are based on those senses that can be controlled and objective, i.e., sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. An example of an empirical observation would be--the walls of Jericho are 2.7 meters thick, 3.2 meters high and seven hundred meters in circumference.

The empiricist then forms a hypothesis that attempts to account for the observations. The process is called induction, i.e., reasoning from a limited number of observations to a conclusion or hypothesis. For example, the walls of Jericho are built to keep something out and to keep something safely within them.

From the hypothesis, testing begins. Deliberate, systematic experimentation and extensive observation now occur to discover if the hypothesis is indeed correct or needing revision. The hypothesis is tested. The attempt is to verify what was originally observed. Replication is the criteria for verification. At Jericho, the empiricist might observe the types of objects kept within the walls, distinct from those found outside the walls. What is observed are the trappings of a domesticated people within the walls: quantities of stored food stuffs, valuable trade items, finely crafted tools. All valuable objects. Further observation shows that these objects are not to be found among those who lived outside the walls of Jericho. This would lead the empiricist to conclude that the walls are indeed built to keep something out and to keep something safely within.

If a reasonable verification results, the empiricist then ventures a prediction of what will be discovered under similar natural circumstances. When walls similar to those at Jericho are found, they are likely built to keep something out and to keep something safely within. The strength and legitimacy of the empirical method is its ability to predict what occurs in the natural world.