Essay concerning humane understanding – Locke
chapter 1. No innate principles

1. The way shown how we come by any knowledge is sufficient to prove it’s not innate. People think that there are innate principles. Men may obtain all the knowledge they have by natural faculties, E.g. colour isn’t innate but we all know it as we all have eyes.

2. It is taken for granted that both speculative and practical principles, some are agreed by all mankind. This (it is argued) means they came with the soul into the wold.

3. Universal consent proves nothing innate as there are other paths to agreement.

4. There isn’t anything man gives universal assent to (E.g. ‘whatsoever is, is’ or ‘it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be’) as there is “a great part of mankind to whom they are not so much known”.

5. Children and idiots. It seems a contradiction that there are imprinted truths neither seen nor understood. If not natural, not innate if imprinted, how can they be unknown? So the mind is of all the truths it ever shall know. They’re all innate or none of them are. “so that to be in the understanding and not to be understood; to be in the mind and never to be perceived, is all one as to say anything is and is not in the mind or understanding.”

6. That men come to know them as they come to the use of reason - answered.

7. "If reason discovered them, that would not prove them innate”.

8. Anything reason discovered must be naturally imprinted, if we apply reason in the right way.

9. It is false that reason discovers them, if reason is necessary, how are they innate? It can’t be innate if we need reason to discover it. Reason (according to them) is nothing but deducing the unknown truths from principles or propositions that are already known. “We may as well think of the use of reason necessary to make our eyes discover visible objects”. Use reason to understand what is original engraved.

10. No use is made of Reason when discovering these two maxims. They’re not assented to as soon as proposed without much the two maxims however are assented to. It requires no pains of our thoughts.

11. It is false that we need reason to see the truth of these two maxims. If it were that still does not prove them innate.

12. The reason came before the maxim in Children. Ignorant men must first come to reason before they have the frame of mind to see the maxims. However (Locke) denies that this is the same instant.

13. They are not distinguished from other knowable truths.

14. If the use of reason was the same moment as the discovery of the maxims, that is still not enough to prove them innate. All they are saying is “the making of general abstract ideas and the understanding of General names, being a concomitant of the rational faculty” and Children don’t get those ideas nor learn those names till having used reason for a while on more familiar ideas.

15. The steps by which the mind attains several truths. The senses let ideas in which by degrees become more familiar. After the mind abstracts them and learns the use of general names. This makes reason visible. The having of general words and the use of reason grow together. This doesn’t make them innate. Ideas are acquired not innate. Children reason and have ideas before they have the words for them, E.g. Sweet and bitter.

16. Assent to ‘innate’ truths depends upon knowing how to define terms. A child can only agree that 3+4=7 when they know the meaning of ‘3’ and ‘=’. He knows this because his mind knows the true distinct ideas that the names (‘three’) stand for. You’ve got to learn what it means before you can agree.