

The Purity of Lockean Essences (sorry Dr. Strangelove ¹)

It's annoying not to read right the through. However, the argument shifts from types of ideas, to naming and thence to names of substances vs. essences.

When I finished reading this I also saw Locke as a set-theory guy (a problem because his complex stuff just seems to be squished not richly combined², but maybe I haven't read enough) and, surprisingly (or not) a philosophy of language guy.

With the corpuscles and the pressures etc. he's clearly heading for a modern atomic theory too, just the wrong way round, instead of atomic attractive forces, we have pressures. There's another essay that shows he was familiar with Hooke³ and the microscope (whom Newton hated/sabotaged) and Boyle, for example.

Part I

Simple Ideas

Always adequate

Complex Ideas

Modes, adequate since artificial constructs, we say when they're complete
Other complex, usually (always?) inadequate

Adequate and Inadequate Ideas

	Simple (Concrete)	Simple (Abstract)	Complex (Substances)	Complex (Modes)
Adequate	Yes, always	Yes, because artificial	No, never	Yes, because artificial
Inadequate	No, never	No, never	Yes (fuzzy sets)	No, because artificial

(Ideas of) Substances

Always inadequate argument (thing itself problem, microscopic structure etc. etc. Kant and others)

Real essences

Does the name stand for the real essence (man, stands for the essence of man?) No

People, in general, don't know what the 'real essence' is, if asked (that's weak)

People assume that if there's a name there's a thing (chapter 31 book 2)

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dr._Strangelove

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_\(mathematics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_(mathematics))

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Hooke

Also a theoretical complex idea doesn't lead to the constituents, iron doesn't lead to hard, magnetic etc. Later on 'gold' is unfindable and doesn't lead to malleable, noble etc. (actually in terms of modern physics/chemistry, he's wrong isn't he?)

Also real essences (or names of real essences) are mistakenly used as sortals by (ignorant) men (that's weak too)

So, all in all, **all complex ideas of substances are inadequate**, gold, iron etc are inadequate ideas, not clear and distinct (hello Descartes) and no clear component parts.

Side track: Courage, adequate since we've defined it, but the problem of your 'courage' and my 'courage' (smells a little of Wittgenstein and social anthropology of language⁴)

Part Deux

The iteration problem, we can never be sure that we know all the powers (secondary properties) of a body, so any idea of it is necessarily inadequate (of course we can never be sure that we will never know either, see Strawson). Anyway, we 'ought' to be agnostic, it'll give us a better chance of eudamonia, this is Pyrrhonian⁵ thinking, I believe.

Naming: Book 3 Chapter 3

Impossible for every single thing to have its own name. That's rubbish really, see globally unique identifiers (GUID⁶) and IPV6⁷ device addresses (theoretically allowing 2 to the power of 128) , simply very inconvenient, for example, '*come here eac9c0a2-3787-49aa-97b9-ae2c9a5e412c*'.

Names must be agreed and shared, back to social anthropology again.

His better argument is that individualised naming doesn't help with categories, but we need both systems.

Generalisation, finding stuff in common. Abstraction, leaving out some of the characteristics of stuff. However not properties of reality itself, just helps us to simplify our lives.

So essentially, essences are just abstract ideas and sortals⁸, not actually something unique and 'metaphysical'. As least, as he says later, this is how the idea is used nowadays it's classificatory not essentially and mysteriously metaphysical. I didn't realised that Locke actually invented the idea of a Sortal, of which the idea has now become rather blurry too⁹.

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_Investigations

5 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrrhonism>

6 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universally_unique_identifier

7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IPv6_address

8 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sortal>

9 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sortals/>

Chapter Vi Names of Substances

Nominal essence and the real constitution of essence.

I am quite a contingent assembly. See also the bicycle and start taking away stuff, less blood.