Reading Questions

1. Was Locke a foundationalist?
2. What is empiricism? Was Locke an empiricist?
3. What is Locke’s test for foundationality?
4. According to Locke, are you justified in taking as foundational the belief that your body exists? Why or why not?
5. According to Locke, are you justified in taking as foundational the belief that your bed, which you last saw this morning, exists? Why or why not?
6. Locke gives four arguments to show that we aren’t hallucinating, that our sensory ideas are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. Can you recognize and explain the problems with each argument, when presented with them?
7. Explain why Locke changed his epistemological objective from probable truth to useful belief.

Introduction to Locke

John Locke (England)
1632-1704

Our study of Descartes left us at an impasse. It’s easy to share Descartes’ desire for absolute truth, but in following this desire, we’re inextricably drawn into solipsism. What can you know for certain, except that you have a mind? And don’t you want to know more than that? Another philosopher, John Locke, might be able to show us the way out of this dilemma.

Locke, like Descartes, is a foundationalist, but unlike Descartes, Locke is an empiricist. While rationalism, as we’ve seen, distrusts sense experience and take pure reason to be the best, or fundamental, source of justified belief, empiricism maintains that experience is the origin of all knowledge and the ultimate source of justification. As an empiricist, Locke wants us to take beliefs derived from sense experience as foundational beliefs. This would allow us to know lots of things without argument, including everything we see and hear, and so it would rescue our belief in the everyday external world around us. Accordingly, it would enable us to avoid solipsism.

Of course, once the question “Why should we trust our senses?” has been raised – and it has been raised by Descartes - we can’t simply ignore it. Neither can Locke. Let’s take
a look at selections from Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to see if he succeeds in his attempt to justify trusting our senses. I’ll highlight the particularly important bits and talk about Locke’s ideas as we go along. Mine will be the indented writing in green.

Stop and Think:

How would you attempt to justify trusting your sense?

---

*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

by John Locke (1690)

**BOOK IV - CHAPTER XI: OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXISTENCE OF OTHER THINGS**

1. **Knowledge of the existence of other finite beings is to be had only by actual sensation.** The knowledge of our own being we have by intuition. The existence of a God, reason clearly makes known to us, as has been shown.

   The knowledge of the existence of any other thing we can have only by sensation: for there being no necessary connexion of real existence with any idea a man hath in his memory; nor of any other existence but that of God with the existence of any particular man: no particular man can know the existence of any other being, but only when, by actual operating upon him, it makes itself perceived by him. For, the having the idea of anything 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.

   Instance: whiteness of this paper. 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 that idea in us; though perhaps we neither know nor consider how it does it. For it takes not from the certainty of our senses, and the ideas we receive by them, that we know not the manner wherein they are produced: v.g. whilst I write this, I have, by the paper affecting my eyes, that idea produced in my mind, which, whatever object causes, I call white; by which I know that that quality or accident (i.e. whose appearance before my eyes always causes that idea) doth really exist, and hath a being without me. And of this, the greatest assurance I can possibly have, and to which my faculties can attain, is the testimony of my eyes, which are the proper and sole judges of this thing; whose testimony I have reason to rely on as so certain, that I can no more doubt, whilst I write this, that I see white and black, and that something really exists that causes that sensation in me, than that I write or move my hand; which is a certainty as great as human nature is capable of, concerning the existence of anything, but a man’s self alone, and of God.
Locke departs from Descartes here and makes his commitment to empiricism clear. He says that if we’re experiencing something right now, through our five senses, then we know that it’s real. In short, he follows common sense in taking immediate sense experience to be a source of foundational beliefs.

Of course, in light Descartes’ observations that we could be hallucinating all the time, how can Locke defend taking immediate sense experience as the source of his foundational beliefs? Let’s see.

3. This notice by our senses, though not so certain as demonstration [or mathematical proof, D.W.], yet may be called knowledge, and proves the existence of things without us. The notice we have by our senses of the existing of things without us, though it be not altogether so certain as our intuitive knowledge, or the deductions of our reason employed about the clear abstract ideas of our own minds; yet it is an assurance that deserves the name of knowledge. If we persuade ourselves that our faculties act and inform us right concerning the existence of those objects that affect them, it cannot pass for an ill-grounded confidence: for I think nobody can, in earnest, be so sceptical as to be uncertain of the existence of those things which he sees and feels. At least, he that can doubt so far, (whatever he may have with his own thoughts,) will never have any controversy with me; since he can never be sure I say anything contrary to his own opinion. As to myself, I think God has given me assurance enough of the existence of things without me: since, by their different application, I can produce in myself both pleasure and pain, which is one great concernment of my present state. This is certain: the confidence that our faculties do not herein deceive us, is the greatest assurance we are capable of concerning the existence of material beings. For we cannot act anything but by our faculties; nor talk of knowledge itself, but by the help of those faculties which are fitted to apprehend even what knowledge is.
Locke acknowledges that our sense experience may be mistaken, but he appears to discount the importance of this threat by noting that:

1) The evidence of our senses is probably true.
2) It’s psychologically impossible to doubt the evidence of our senses.
3) The evidence of our senses is sufficient to help us seek pleasure and avoid pain, and that’s all that really matters.
4) The evidence of our senses is the best evidence we can have for the existence of the external world.

Locke doesn’t discuss this, but of these reasons to trust our senses, the second and the fourth are incredibly weak.

Stop and Think:

Why does claim 2, the assertion that it’s psychologically impossible to doubt the evidence of our senses, fail to justify trusting our senses?

Why does claim 4, the assertion that the evidence of our senses is the best evidence we can have for the existence of the external world, fail to justify trusting our senses?

I don’t see how claim 2, the assertion that it’s psychologically impossible to doubt the evidence of our senses, justifies trusting it. After all, I might find it psychologically impossible to doubt that I’m the reincarnation of Cleopatra, having erected the fragile structure of my self-esteem on this basis, but that doesn’t mean I’m justified in taking myself to be the reincarnation of Cleopatra. How, then, does the fact that it’s psychologically impossible for us to doubt the evidence of our senses ensure that this trust is warranted?

And I don’t see how claim 4, the assertion that the evidence of our senses is the best evidence we can have for the existence of the external world, justifies our believing in the external world on that basis. If a hazy dream I had when I was 14 is the best evidence available to me for believing that I’m the reincarnation of Cleopatra, that doesn’t mean that I’m justified in believing that I’m the reincarnation of Cleopatra on that basis. Maybe my best evidence simply isn’t good enough. So how does the fact that the evidence of our senses is the best evidence we have for the existence of the external world vindicate our practice of believing in the external world on the basis of that evidence?

Because reasons 2 and 4 are bad, if Locke is to successfully argue that we should trust our senses in the face of their fallibility, he’ll need to rely on the first or third reason: the claim that the evidence of our senses is probably true, or the claim that the evidence of our senses is useful to us as we seek to avoid pain and attain pleasure.
In fact, we can see Locke as vacillating a bit between two different epistemological objectives: truth and utility. He seems to think that either objective would justify the practice of taking foundational beliefs from immediate experience, because he thinks that beliefs that stem from immediate experience will be both probably true and useful.

Stop and Think:

- The fact that true beliefs are often useful, and useful beliefs are often true, shouldn’t obscure the fact that truth and utility are different things.
- Can you think a situation in which a particular true belief wouldn’t be useful?
- Can you think of a situation in which a particular useful belief wouldn’t be true?

Locke will devote his immediate efforts to establishing that the evidence of our senses is probably true, so we’ll take probable truth as Locke’s epistemological objective. If the evidence of our senses is probably true, and if probable truth is all we want, it will be okay for us to take beliefs that stem from our immediate sensory experience as foundational.

Once Locke makes this move, however – once he justifies trusting our senses on the grounds that the evidence of our senses is probably true - he needs to answer Descartes. After all, if we are hallucinating all the time then the beliefs that we acquire from our immediate sensations aren’t even probably true; they’re always false. Consequently, it’s reasonable to think that beliefs gathered from our immediate sense experience are probably true only if it’s reasonable to think that we aren’t hallucinating all the time. Locke’s first epistemological objective can justify taking foundational beliefs from our senses only if we have reason to think our that our sensory ideas are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and the external world.
But besides the assurance we have from our senses themselves, that they do not err in the information they give us of the existence of things without us, when they are affected by them, we are further confirmed in this assurance by other concurrent reasons:

Locke is going to give us four different arguments for why we should believe that our sensory ideas are, in fact, the result of contact with an external world and are not, as Descartes initially speculated, the product of our own minds. In other words, Locke is about to argue that we can be reasonably sure that we aren’t hallucinating all the time. Let’s see if he succeeds.
4. I. Confirmed by concurrent reasons: First, because we cannot have ideas of sensation but by the inlet of the senses. It is plain those perceptions are produced in us by exterior causes affecting our senses: because those that want the organs of any sense, never can have the ideas belonging to that sense produced in their minds. This is too evident to be doubted: and therefore we cannot but be assured that they come in by the organs of that sense, and no other way. The organs themselves, it is plain, do not produce them: for then the eyes of a man in the dark would produce colours, and his nose smell roses in the winter: but we see nobody gets the relish of a pineapple, till he goes to the Indies, where it is, and tastes it.

**Locke’s First Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. People who have never had use of a given sensory organ don’t acquire the sensory ideas corresponding to that sense (for example, people who are born blind, never get the idea of red) and people who have never been exposed to a certain object don’t acquire the sensory ideas corresponding to that object (for example, people who have never tasted a kiwi fruit, don’t know what a kiwi fruit tastes like).

3. In order to acquire a sensory idea, we must expose our functioning sensory organ to an object in the world. Both the use of our sensory organs and exposure to an object in the world are necessary to acquiring the sensory ideas (i.e. having the sensations).

4. If our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) weren’t produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the world, then neither the use of our sensory organs nor exposure to an object in the world would be necessary to acquiring the sensory ideas (i.e. having the sensations).

\[
\begin{align*}
2 & \\
A \downarrow & \\
3 + 4 & \\
B \downarrow & \\
1 & 
\end{align*}
\]

**Stop and Think:**

Does this argument work? Remember to ask, for each premise “Do I think this is true?” and “Could someone who doesn’t already believe the ultimate conclusion think this is true?” Remember run the Bob test on the inferences.
Unfortunately, this argument is bad. Take a look at premise 2. It could only be believed by someone who already thinks that the external world exists and so it assumes the conclusion, making this argument circular.

**Locke’s First Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. People who have never had use of a given sensory organ don’t acquire the sensory ideas corresponding to that sense (for example, people who are born blind, never get the idea of red) and people who have never been exposed to a certain object don’t acquire the sensory ideas corresponding to that object (for example, people who have never tasted a kiwi fruit, don’t know what a kiwi fruit tastes like).

   [Someone who isn’t sure that the external world exists would respond “What sensory organ? What object in the external world?” This premise is exactly what someone worried about being a disembodied space alien would deny.]

3. In order to acquire a sensory idea, we must expose our functioning sensory organ to an object in the world. Both the use of our sensory organs and exposure to an object in the world are necessary to acquiring the sensory ideas (i.e. having the sensations).

4. If our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) weren’t produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the world, then neither the use of our sensory organs nor exposure to an object in the world would be necessary to acquiring the sensory ideas (i.e. having the sensations).
5. II. Secondly, Because we find that an idea from actual sensation, and another from memory, are very distinct perceptions. Because sometimes I find that I cannot avoid the having those ideas produced in my mind. For though, when my eyes are shut, or windows fast, I can at pleasure recall to my mind the ideas of light, or the sun, which former sensations had lodged in my memory; so I can at pleasure lay by that idea, and take into my view that of the smell of a rose, or taste of sugar. But, if I turn my eyes at noon towards the sun, I cannot avoid the ideas which the light or sun then produces in me. So that there is a manifest difference between the ideas laid up in my memory, (over which, if they were there only, I should have constantly the same power to dispose of them, and lay them by at pleasure,) and those which force themselves upon me, and I cannot avoid having. And therefore it must needs be some exterior cause, and the brisk acting of some objects without me, whose efficacy I cannot resist, that produces those ideas in my mind, whether I will or no. Besides, there is nobody who doth not perceive the difference in himself between contemplating the sun, as he hath the idea of it in his memory, and actually looking upon it: of which two, his perception is so distinct, that few of his ideas are more distinguishable one from another. And therefore he hath certain knowledge that they are not both memory, or the actions of his mind, and fancies only within him; but that actual seeing hath a cause without.

**Locke's Second Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren't hallucinating everything.
2. If our sensory organs are exposed to objects in the world in the right way then we entertain the relevant sensory ideas involuntarily.
3. We don't have complete control over our sensory ideas.
4. If our sensory ideas were produced by our minds alone then we would have complete control over our sensory ideas.
5. Our sensory ideas aren't produced by our minds alone.
6. We can tell the difference between our memory of a sensation and the immediate sensation.
7. Our memory of a sensation and the immediate sensation can't have the same causes.
8. Our memory of a sensation is caused by our minds alone.
Stop and Think:

Does this argument work? Remember to ask, for each premise “Do I think this is true?” and “Could someone who doesn’t already believe the ultimate conclusion think this is true?” Remember run the Bob test on the inferences.

This argument fails as well. It has three problems: premise 2 presupposes that the external world exists, premise 4 is false, and inference D is weak.

**Locke’s Second Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.
2. If our sensory organs are exposed to objects in the world in the right way then we entertain the relevant sensory ideas involuntarily.
   [Someone who doesn't already believe that the external world exists would say “What objects in the world?” This premise can be believed only by someone who already accepts the ultimate conclusion.]
3. We don’t have complete control over our sensory ideas.
4. If our sensory ideas were produced by our minds alone then we would have complete control over our sensory ideas.
   [In the words of the old song, this ain’t necessarily so. Your experiences in dreams are produced by your mind alone, but that doesn’t mean you have control of them. If it did, all nightmares would be masochistic.]
5. Our sensory ideas aren’t produced by our minds alone.
6. We can tell the difference between our memory of a sensation and the immediate sensation.
7. Our memory of a sensation and the immediate sensation can’t have the same causes.
   [The connection between idea 6 and 7 is pretty thin. Does the fact that you can tell the difference between two things mean that they come from different places? I can tell the difference between crullers and doughnut holes. That doesn’t mean they came from different bakeries.]
8. Our memory of a sensation is caused by our minds alone.
6. III. Thirdly, because pleasure or pain, which accompanies actual sensation, accompanies not the returning of those ideas without the external objects. Add to this, that many of those ideas are produced in us with pain, which afterwards we remember without the least offence. Thus, the pain of heat or cold, when the idea of it is revived in our minds, gives us no disturbance; which, when felt, was very troublesome; and is again, when actually repeated: which is occasioned by the disorder the external object causes in our bodies when applied to them: and we remember the pains of hunger, thirst, or the headache, without any pain at all; which would either never disturb us, or else constantly do it, as often as we thought of it, were there nothing more but ideas floating in our minds, and appearances entertaining our fancies, without the real existence of things affecting us from abroad. The same may be said of pleasure, accompanying several actual sensations. And though mathematical demonstration depends not upon sense, yet the examining them by diagrams gives great credit to the evidence of our sight, and seems to give it a certainty approaching to that of demonstration itself. For, it would be very strange, that a man should allow it for an undeniable truth, that two angles of a figure, which he measures by lines and angles of a diagram, should be bigger one than the other, and yet doubt of the existence of those lines and angles, which by looking on he makes use of to measure that by.

**Locke’s Third Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. Many sensations are pleasant or unpleasant, but the memory of them is not as pleasant or unpleasant as the original sensation.

3. If sensations were simply the result of our own minds then memories of the sensations would be as pleasant or painful as the original sensations.

4. Our sensations aren’t simply the result of our own minds.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
2 \quad + \\
A \downarrow \\
3 \\
\downarrow \\
4 \\
B \downarrow \\
\downarrow \\
1 \\
\end{array}
\]

Stop and Think:

Does this argument work? Remember to ask, for each premise “Do I think this is true?” and “Could someone who doesn’t already believe the ultimate conclusion think this is true?” Remember run the Bob test on the inferences.
So, is this argument any better than the first two? No. Premise 3 is false.

**Locke’s Third Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.
2. Many sensations are pleasant or unpleasant, but the memory of them is not as pleasant or unpleasant as the original sensation.
3. If sensations were simply the result of our own minds then memories of the sensations would be as pleasant or painful as the original sensations. [This isn’t true. A nightmare is simply the result of your own mind, but *remembering* a nightmare isn’t nearly as horrible as the nightmare itself.]
4. Our sensations aren’t simply the result of our own minds.

\[
\begin{align*}
2 & + 3 \\
A & \downarrow 4 \\
B & \downarrow 1
\end{align*}
\]

Thus I see, whilst I write this, I can change the appearance of the paper; and by designing the letters, tell beforehand what new idea it shall exhibit the very next moment, by barely drawing my pen over it: which will neither appear (let me fancy as much as I will) if my hands stand still; or though I move my pen, if my eyes be shut: nor, when those characters are once made on the paper, can I choose afterwards but see them as they are; that is, have the ideas of such letters as I have made. Whence it is manifest, that they are not merely the sport and play of my own imagination, when I find that the characters that were made at the pleasure of my own thoughts, do not obey them; nor yet cease to be, whenever I shall fancy it, but continue to affect my senses constantly and regularly, according to the figures I made them. To which if we will add, that the sight of those shall, from another man, draw such sounds as I beforehand design they shall stand for, there will be little reason left to doubt that those words I write do really exist without me, when they cause a long series of regular sounds to affect my ears, which could not be the effect of my imagination, nor could my memory retain them in that order.
Locke’s Fourth Argument

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.
2. Our senses often corroborate each other concerning the existence of an object; they are well coordinated.
3. If our sensations weren’t the result of our sensory organs interacting with an object in the external world then they wouldn’t be so well coordinated.
4. When I write, I know in advance what letters will appear on the paper, but they won’t appear unless I move my fingers no matter how much I think of the letters; and once the letters are on the paper, I can’t choose to see them as different letters.
5. The letters on the paper can’t be mere ideas in my mind.
6. When somebody else reads what I’ve written, they express the ideas I originally intended even if I have forgotten the exact ideas or wording.

Stop and Think:

Does this argument work? Remember to ask, for each premise “Do I think this is true?” and “Could someone who doesn’t already believe the ultimate conclusion think this is true?” Remember run the Bob test on the inferences.
This is Locke's last chance. Does he win the game at the last minute? No. Premise 3 is false, inference B is weak and premise 6 assumes the conclusion.

**Locke's Fourth Argument**

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.
2. Our senses often corroborate each other concerning the existence of an object; they are well coordinated.
3. If our sensations weren’t the result of our sensory organs interacting with an object in the external world then they wouldn’t be so well coordinated. [Why should we believe this? Couldn’t we have an incredibly well-coordinated hallucination or dream?]
4. When I write, I know in advance what letters will appear on the paper, but they won’t appear unless I move my fingers no matter how much I think of the letters; and once the letters are on the paper, I can’t choose to see them as different letters.
5. The letters on the paper can’t be mere ideas in my mind. [5 is supposed to follow from 4, but it doesn’t. Couldn’t a dream or hallucination work in exactly the way described in idea 4?]
6. When somebody else reads what I’ve written, they express the ideas I originally intended even if I have forgotten the exact ideas or wording. [Only someone who already believed in an external world could accept this. People unsure about the reality behind their experiences would say “How do I know there’s a somebody else? How do I know that this other ‘person’ isn’t just a projection of my own mind?”]

8. This certainty is as great as our condition needs. But yet, if after all this any one will be so sceptical as to distrust his senses, and to affirm that all we see and hear, feel and taste, think and do, during our whole being, is but the series and deluding appearances of a long dream, whereof there is no reality; and therefore will question the existence of all things, or our knowledge of anything: I must desire him to consider, that, if all be a dream, then he doth but dream that he makes the question, and so it is not much matter that a waking man should answer him. But yet, if he pleases, he may dream that I make him this answer, That the certainty of things existing in rerum natura when we have the testimony of our senses for it is not only as great as our frame can attain to, but as our
condition needs. For, our faculties being suited not to the full extent of being, nor to a perfect, clear, comprehensive knowledge of things free from all doubt and scruple; but to the preservation of us, in whom they are; and accommodated to the use of life: they serve to our purpose well enough, if they will but give us certain notice of those things, which are convenient or inconvenient to us. For he that sees a candle burning, and hath experimented the force of its flame by putting his finger in it, will little doubt that this is something existing without him, which does him harm, and puts him to great pain; which is assurance enough, when no man requires greater certainty to govern his actions by than what is as certain as his actions themselves. And if our dreamer pleases to try whether the glowing heat of a glass furnace be barely a wandering imagination in a drowsy man’s fancy, by putting his hand into it, he may perhaps be wakened into a certainty greater than he could wish, that it is something more than bare imagination. So that this evidence is as great as we can desire, being as certain to us as our pleasure or pain, i.e. happiness or misery; beyond which we have no concernment, either of knowing or being. Such an assurance of the existence of things without us is sufficient to direct us in the attaining the good and avoiding the evil which is caused by them, which is the important concernment we have of being made acquainted with them.

We’ve seen that Locke hasn’t given us any good reason to suppose that the evidence our senses is probably true, so if he wants to defend the practice of trusting his senses, he’ll have to abandon his first epistemological objective.

Inferentially Justified Belief

Inference

Inferentially Justified Belief

Inference

Noninferentially Justified (Foundational) Belief
  • e.g. “The paper is white.”

Test for Foundationality:
- Immediate Sense Experience

Epistemological objective:
- Beliefs that are Probably True

Epistemological objective:
- Beliefs that are Useful

Although Locke doesn’t explicitly acknowledge that his arguments for the probable truth of sensory experience are weak, he might very well feel a little uneasy about his reasoning. In any event, Locke does begin to place more emphasis upon the utility of our sensory beliefs: the evidence of our senses is sufficient to help us seek pleasure and avoid pain, and that, says Locke, is all that really matters. This is why we should trust our senses, not because they are trustworthy guides to truth, but because they are trustworthy guides to happiness. This is a profound move. Locke appears to change his epistemological objective from truth to something like utility.
Locke, like Descartes, is a foundationalist. But unlike Descartes, who is a rationalist, Locke is an empiricist. While rationalism distrusts sensory experience and takes pure reason to be the best source of justified belief, empiricism maintains that sensory experience is the origin of all knowledge and the ultimate source of justification. As an empiricist, Locke wants to take beliefs derived from sense experience as foundational beliefs. And Locke considers two possible epistemological objectives, either of which might justify taking foundational beliefs from immediate sense experience: probable truth and useful belief.

Locke begins by favoring the objective of probable truth, claiming that, although fallible, the beliefs so gathered are generally true. Of course, Locke can’t simply ignore the challenge posed by Descartes. If we’re constantly dreaming or hallucinating, then the beliefs gathered through our senses aren’t probably true.

Locke tries to justify trusting our senses by advancing four arguments to show that our experiences are caused by contact with a real, external, mind-independent reality. Unfortunately, none of these arguments work.
Locke’s First Argument

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. People who have never had use of a given sensory organ don’t acquire the sensory ideas corresponding to that sense (for example, people who are born blind, never get the idea of red) and people who have never been exposed to a certain object don’t acquire the sensory ideas corresponding to that object (for example, people who have never tasted a kiwi fruit, don’t know what a kiwi fruit tastes like).

[Someone who isn’t sure that the external world exists would respond “What sensory organ? What object in the external world?” This premise is exactly what someone worried about being a disembodied space alien would deny.]

3. In order to acquire a sensory idea, we must expose our functioning sensory organ to an object in the world. Both the use of our sensory organs and exposure to an object in the world are necessary to acquiring the sensory ideas (i.e. having the sensations).

4. If our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) weren’t produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the world, then neither the use of our sensory organs nor exposure to an object in the world would be necessary to acquiring the sensory ideas (i.e. having the sensations).
Locke’s Second Argument

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. If our sensory organs are exposed to objects in the world in the right way then we entertain the relevant sensory ideas involuntarily. [Someone who doesn’t already believe that the external world exists would say “What objects in the world?” This premise can be believed only by someone who already accepts the ultimate conclusion.]

3. We don’t have complete control over our sensory ideas.

4. If our sensory ideas were produced by our minds alone then we would have complete control over our sensory ideas. [In the words of the old song, this ain’t necessarily so. Your experiences in dreams are produced by your mind alone, but that doesn’t mean you have control of them. If it did, all nightmares would be masochistic.]

5. Our sensory ideas aren’t produced by our minds alone.

6. We can tell the difference between our memory of a sensation and the immediate sensation.

7. Our memory of a sensation and the immediate sensation can’t have the same causes. [The connection between idea 6 and 7 is pretty thin. Does the fact that you can tell the difference between two things mean that they come from different places? I can tell the difference between crullers and doughnut holes. That doesn’t mean they came from different bakeries.]

8. Our memory of a sensation is caused by our minds alone.
Locke’s Third Argument

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. Many sensations are pleasant or unpleasant, but the memory of them is not as pleasant or unpleasant as the original sensation.

3. If sensations were simply the result of our own minds then memories of the sensations would be as pleasant or painful as the original sensations.
   [This isn't true. A nightmare is simply the result of your own mind, but remembering a nightmare isn’t nearly as horrible as the nightmare itself.]

4. Our sensations aren’t simply the result of our own minds.
Locke’s Fourth Argument

1. Our sensory ideas (i.e. sensations) are produced by the interaction between our sensory organs and objects in the external world. In other words, we aren’t hallucinating everything.

2. Our senses often corroborate each other concerning the existence of an object; they are well coordinated.

3. If our sensations weren’t the result of our sensory organs interacting with an object in the external world then they wouldn’t be so well coordinated. [Why should we believe this? Couldn’t we have an incredibly well-coordinated hallucination or dream?]

4. When I write, I know in advance what letters will appear on the paper, but they won’t appear unless I move my fingers no matter how much I think of the letters; and once the letters are on the paper, I can’t choose to see them as different letters.

5. The letters on the paper can’t be mere ideas in my mind. [5 is supposed to follow from 4, but it doesn’t. Couldn’t a dream or hallucination work in exactly the way described in idea 4?]

6. When somebody else reads what I’ve written, they express the ideas I originally intended even if I have forgotten the exact ideas or wording. [Only someone who already believed in an external world could accept this. People unsure about the reality behind their experiences would say “How do I know there’s a somebody else? How do I know that this other ‘person’ isn’t just a projection of my own mind?”]
Having failed to give us any good reason to believe that our senses are trustworthy (although perhaps not explicitly realizing this), Locke changes his epistemological objective, claiming that although we might be hallucinating all the time, the evidence of our senses is sufficient to help us seek pleasure and avoid pain, and that’s all that really matters.

Epistemological objective:
Beliefs that are Useful

Test for Foundationality:
- Immediate Sense Experience

Inferential Justified Belief
Inference

Inferentialy Justified Belief

Inference

Noninferentially Justified (Foundational) Belief
- e.g. “The paper is white.”

Epistemological objective:
Beliefs that are Probably True