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## Knowledge as/and Experience

**Joseph Akshay**

Student of Philosophy, Jnana Deepa, Pune 411014, India

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**Abstract:** Knowledge is a key constituent in building up a better personality. What I know is crucial in making what I am. This gorgeous resource has immensely helped human kind to fuel for their innovations. Hence knowledge acquisition is recognised as an inescapable commitment. John Locke, the famous British empiricist argues that knowledge is acquired through experiences. He claims, ‘No man’s knowledge goes beyond his experience’. Experiencing different situations play a vital role to demarcate between what to do and what not. But is ‘Experience’ an only exclusive way to knowledge? Is there only a solitary approach to knowledge acquisition? This essay will help us understand the significance, limitations and applicability of this insight.

**Keywords:** Knowledge and Experience, Empiricism, A Priori and a Posteriori Knowledge, Tabula Rasa

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## Introduction

Knowledge is a highly valued state in which a person is in cognitive contact with reality (Zagzebski, 2017). From Womb to Tomb and Tip to toe, human like to identify themselves as seekers of knowledge. Perhaps this acknowledgement may have helped humans to distinct themselves from other species and rather honoured them to rule the whole earth. But how come this gorgeous resource reserved solely for humans? The credit goes to the highly complex nervous system that served human to develop a unique capability to extract abstract ideas from concrete experiences. The better understanding of this mechanism may have helped British empiricist John Locke to make his famous claim, “No man’s knowledge can go beyond his experience” (Locke, 1690).

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Empiricism, a philosophical theory, states that knowledge comes only through sense experience. (Psillos et al, 2010). Empiricists search for evidence that are unearthed through experiments or sense experiences. They reject any importance given to a priori information and admired the significance given to a posteriori knowledge. As an empiricist himself, Locke too gave a direct and rather strong relationship between Knowledge and experience. But it seems that Locke and the other empiricists had unknowingly constricted the scope of knowledge exclusively with experiences. Even if knowledge comes primarily through experiences, we must not forget the other approaches towards the same.

## John Locke

John Locke is an English philosopher and the first of British empiricist. His ideas influenced the development of epistemology and political philosophy and he is regarded as one of the most influential early and enlightenment thinkers. He inspired the American and French revolution. He argues that all of our Ideas are ultimately derived from the experience and knowledge of which we are capable of, is there for severely limited in its scope and certainty. His most famous works are ‘An essay concerning human understanding’ (Locke, 1690) and ‘Two treatises of government’ (Locke, 1689). He is often referred to as philosopher of freedom or father of philosophy.

### The Significance of the Insight

Locke truly believed that knowledge is shaped by experiences. To support his view, he claims that the human mind at birth is like a ‘tabula rasa’. ‘Tabula rasa’ or ‘blank slate’ is a philosophical concept that argues that the human mind is like an empty slate at birth, and later it gets filled with ideas through experiences (Erhard 2001). No tide has fallen back without kissing the shore. The analogy fits perfectly when defining Locke’s quote. Whatever situation we go through, makes portraits in our mind.

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This will then resurveys in near future as ideas and thoughts. Without seeing, smelling, feeling or hearing human cannot learn anything. For example, only through the experience we can know that flame can burn and cause harm. The statement disregards the existence of a Priori knowledge and sticks to the fact that is obtained by reasoning, which is justified by truth.

The empirical knowledge or a posteriori knowledge have really helped mankind to fuel up our majestic innovations. When the archaic men witnessed an accidental fire in the forest, he learned about the source of light, warmth, weapon against ferocious animals and an energy to cook. Then they began to use fire on daily basis and domestication of fire became a significant step on their way to the hegemonic position and wide innovations (Harari, 2015). Therein, every situation they confronted, harnessed immense knowledge from them. This led the transfiguration of the archaic to the modern humans. Hence, soundly these facts stress that Locke's quote worked well with humans.

### **Application for Our Times**

Our senses are our primary sources of knowledge. What I see, hear, experience and all will play a huge role in explaining what I am. To cast a good individual, we need to provide them with better experiences. 'For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. Good casts good, while evil casts evil' (English Standard Version Bible, 2009). The Environment we are brought up overwhelmingly plays an inevitable role in determining our character. What I know and experience is reflected in what I am.

In our present scenario, Locke's words have significant application. A child is learning through experiences. In the developmental stages of a baby child, there is infallible evidence from biological and behavioural sciences that gene activity interacts with events and experiences she receives (Carlson, 2005). The abstract ideas are extracted to the child's minds through concrete experiences. The house, classroom conditions, teachers, surrounding and all the circumstances child encounter, is his experience of the world. Deliberately, if better experience are made to coincided in a child's life, he/she can be very well mould into better personality.

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### My Take

Many people consider old people as wise because they have learned from good and bad experiences throughout their lives. Learning from experiences are the significant source of knowledge for us. Therefore, Locke's quote has an important application in our life. But still, we cannot assert our knowledge should be an exact reflection of our experience because there are other facts beyond our experiences. For example; I believe in the existence of God and I'm sure that he created everything but still I cannot empirically prove my belief is right or wrong. My knowledge and love of God is not from my experience, but beyond it and has an important role in making my life. Hence there are some facts that lay beyond our experiences. Our knowledge, therefore, should also consider the pre-existing beliefs, faiths, intuition, authority (include parents, doctors, teachers, priests, etc.) and other notions that our ancestors have preserved for us. We cannot instantaneously reject the

glimpses of truths in them for the simple reason for not experiencing it.

The quote also may feel like knowledge being constrained to experience alone. Locke seems to take an exclusive path to knowledge. But let us not forget other sub streams towards the same. Being little exposed to experiences, young minds will find it difficult to seek knowledge when stubbornly stick to experience alone. Therefore, in the present scenario, it is witless to stick on to experience alone as a source of knowledge. The competitive world surpasses all those who stick to one source of knowledge. A true seeker of knowledge must have access to all doors (of knowledge).

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## Conclusion

Knowledge is a significant factor in building our life better. To grow in our career, we need to acquire as much as knowledge as possible. Locke's insight seem to work very well with archaic humans but when considering the present scenario, relying to experience alone will certainly limit our access to knowledge. Also young minds will too will struggle because they are less exposed to experiences. The knowledge gained through reasons and reflections may be the best but let us also consider other approaches of knowledge too. As knowledge is too wide, relying on one approach alone will not do good to move further forward. Try to seek knowledge from whatever ways we can and stop not until and unless we 'kick the bucket'.

The knowledge gained through reasons and reflections may be the best but let us also consider other approaches of knowledge too. As knowledge is too wide, relying on one approach alone will not do good to move further forward. Try to seek knowledge from whatever ways we can and stop not until and unless we 'kick the bucket'.

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**Joseph Akshay** is a student of Philosophy (II BPh), at Jnana-Deepa, Pune. He belongs to the diocese of Cochin, Kerala. He is specialising in Philosophy and Economics. Email: josephakshay98@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-7256-8004

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