



AN EVALUATION OF JOHN LOCKE'S CONCEPT OF TABULA RASA IN THE LIGHT OF PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR POST-CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

ELIAS IFEANYI E. UZOIGWE

Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Email: eliasuzoigwe@unical.edu.ng; fruuzoigwe@gmail.com ORCID 000-0002-3809-7114

Corresponding author: *ELIAS IFEANYI E. UZOIGWE
Email: eliasuzoigwe@unical.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study aims at evaluating John Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* in the light of Plato's theory of Forms and find out how it contributes to post-contemporary philosophy. Plato's theory of Forms is the fulcrum upon which his entire epistemological theory revolves. Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* is the launch pad of his epistemic exploits. It is Plato's position that the Forms of the good, beauty, justice, are eternal essences or immutable patterns from where the particular visible instances derive their limited measures of these essences. These Forms, in Plato's understanding, can be known through the abstractive process of the mind. Locke did not subscribe to the idea of the Forms. He argues that knowledge is derived through sensation and reflection. For Locke, there is nothing in the intellect that was not originally in the senses. Rejecting the idea of *innatism* with his concept of *tabula rasa*, Locke argues against Plato's view that the human mind knows. It is Locke's position that all ideas derive from sense experience. For him, there are no innate ideas and ideal world is simply a figment of imagination worth casting into flames. At birth, there is no idea in the human mind, and only experience writes ideas on the mind, argues Locke. Plato holds that the human mind knows and only recollects which he technically describes as reminiscence. The counter positions of scholars to the positions of their predecessors just as Locke did to the Forms and innate ideas espoused by Plato is what this paper construes as epistemic resourcefulness and epistemic creativity, which is for the advancement of post-contemporary philosophy. Research methods adopted in this work include: analytic, conceptual, contextual, textual and historical.

KEYWORDS

Epistemic Creativity and Resourcefulness, Innatism, Rationalist-Idealist Philosophy, *Tabula Rasa*, and Theory of Forms.

Introduction

The issue remotely raised by Parmenides, employed by Socrates and unequivocally upheld by Plato in the classical era of philosophical discourse was that the human mind knows. This view that the human mind knows at birth was extensively espoused by Plato in his theory of Forms, allegory of the cave, allegory of the divided line, and the idea of knowledge as reminiscence. This work is concerned with the analysis of Plato's theory of Forms vis-a-vis Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* to see if they are of any relevance for post-contemporary philosophy. Plato is a rationalist-idealist philosopher who lived in the ancient era, while John Locke is the leader of British empiricism in the modern epoch of philosophical discourse. The rationalists, notable among them is Plato, argued that man is born with certain ideas in his mind (actually or virtually), and that as soon as he reaches the age of reason he comes to know these ideas spontaneously without having to learn them explicitly (Omogbe 57). On the other hand, John Locke, in the modern era rejected this position held by Plato. Locke argued that the human mind was like a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) at birth. According to him, it is with the aid of sense experience that knowledge is written on the human mind. The innate ideas which Plato held so tenaciously was further developed and systematically advanced by the Continental Rationalists (Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz), while the British empiricists (Hume and Berkeley) furthered the position of John Locke, their leader, though not without some uniqueness in their divergent views.

This research sets out to see if there is any point of convergence between these two divides of epistemic reflection represented by Plato's theory of Forms and Locke's concept of *tabula rasa*. It has to be noted that this impasse between Plato and Locke and, by extension, between the rationalists and the empiricists, has been a reoccurring decimal right from the earliest times down to the contemporary epoch. I did not consider it a problem rather *epistemic creativity and resourcefulness*, because it is in a situation of variegated approach to issues that epistemology in particular and philosophy in general thrives. If there is no such a thing like Plato's theory of Forms and the rationalists upholding their innate ideas against Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* and sense perception of the empiricists, Kant's *synthetic a priori* and contribution to knowledge, for example, would not have been possible. **It is in the process of views and counter views that more insights and adroit ingenuity is awakened for epistemic growth and advancement and post-contemporary epistemology with its complementary approach thrives.**

UNDERSTANDING SOME OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

The concepts chiefly to be clarified are the theory of Forms and *tabula rasa*.

Theory of Forms

The theory of Forms or theory of Ideas is Plato's argument that non-physical (but substantial) Forms (or ideas) represent the most accurate reality. When used in this sense, the word *Form* or *Idea* is often capitalized. Plato speaks of these entities only through the characters (primarily Socrates) of his dialogues who sometimes suggest that these Forms are the only objects of study that can provide knowledge; thus even apart from the very controversial status of the theory, Plato's own views are much in doubt. However, according to Ezenwanne as cited in *Internet Philosophy*, "some philosophers consider the theory as a classical solution to the problem of universals" (27). The early Greek concept of Form precedes attested philosophical usage and is represented by a number of words mainly having to do with vision, sight, and appearance. The words, εἶδος (*eidos*) and ἰδέα (*idea*) come from the Indo-European root word. Similarly, *eidos* (though not *idea*) is already attested in texts of the Homeric era, the earliest Greek literature. This transliteration and the translation tradition of German and Latin lead to the expression "theory of Ideas." The word is however not the English "idea," which is a mental concept only. It goes much beyond English understanding of the meaning of idea when employed within the context of philosophical reflections (Sarachukwuaka 18).

Tabula Rasa

The concept of *tabula rasa* must have found its way into the epistemic lexicon after the epistemic postulates of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas and John Locke (Ifeanyi 79). It has to be noted that Aristotle and Aquinas did not explicitly use the term *tabula rasa*, but it was their position just as it was also that of Locke that, *nihil intellectus quod non prius fuerit in sensus* - there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses (Mondin 5). The term *tabula rasa*, therefore, comes from the Latin (*tabula*-table) and *rasa* (scraped),

meaning (scraped tablet or clean slate). It was in a highly influential work of the leader of British empiricism, John Locke, titled *Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, that Locke restated the importance of the experience of the senses over speculation and argued that human mind at birth is a blank slate (scraped tablet or tabula rasa) upon which experience imprints knowledge (www.age-of-the-sage.org/philosophy-locke-tabula-rasa.html retrieved 13/05/2021).

PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS

Plato remains one of the most popular and influential philosophers of the classical period. This most intimate friend and devoted disciple of Socrates, was born around 427 B.C., to a wealthy family in Athens. Plato, who admired Socrates and became his disciple at the age of twenty, had a singular intention of becoming a politician. He was so disappointed by the way the politicians of Athens treated his master, Socrates. It was difficult for him to understand why such a good man, a disciplinarian, an excellent philosopher, and a moralist like Socrates could suffer so grievously in the hands of the Athenian authorities. He, therefore, concluded that the politicians were suffering from ignorance, and the only solution was to train future politicians to become philosophers. It was on this ground that he founded his famous academy, which later became the first university in Europe. Apart from philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and physical sciences were also studied in the academy. Notable among Plato's works are: *The Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphron*, *Meno*, and *Theaetetus*. Some of these works are in form of dialogue, while others are about the last days of Socrates. Plato died around 347 B.C.

Like Socrates, his master, Plato believed in innate ideas or innate knowledge. Plato linked this belief with his belief in the world of Forms and the pre-existence of the soul in the world of Forms prior to its coming into the world. Before coming into this world, the soul, according to Plato, lived in the world of Forms (the world of ideas) and while it was there it was acquainted with the Forms which are the real things, the real objects of knowledge. But when it was sent into this world and became united with a material body it forgot its knowledge of the Forms. **From Sense Experience to the Forms**

It has to be noted that it is the essences of things that Plato calls Forms or Ideas; and for him, they cannot be known through sense perception because they are not perceptible by the senses. As it were, Plato's epistemic views about the theory of Forms also have metaphysical and ethical undertone as it will be made evident in the course of this analysis. In his book, *The Republic*, Plato argues that all objects we experience through our senses are particular things. We don't ever sense anything 'abstract', but always some individual thing or other. For example, we only ever see this particular beautiful thing or that particular beautiful thing, but we never see 'beauty'. But, obviously, more than one thing can be beautiful. Beauty is a property that more than one thing can have (Book V, 476f). It is the contention of Plato that if many different things can be beautiful, then there is something they share in common, that is, beauty. There must be something which is 'beauty', even though we never experience beauty itself through our senses. In *Routeledge Internet Philosophicus*, "This idea of a universal, a property that more than one thing can have, is a first approximation to the idea of a Form. The Form of Beauty manifests itself in all the different things, in all the different ways, we call 'beautiful'. But why should we agree that just because many different things can be beautiful, there is something which is 'Beauty'?" (2). Plato further claims that, Forms exist independently of particular things. All particular beautiful things could also be destroyed, yet that won't destroy beauty itself. By implication, beauty must be a separate thing, existing in its own right. Therefore, "Plato concludes by arguing that particular things 'share' or 'participate' in the Forms, but these exist independently" (Lacewing 2).

Epistemic, Ethical, and Metaphysical Imports of Plato's Theory of Forms

It is of importance at this point to note that we cannot extensively discuss Plato's theory of Forms without making reference to his metaphysics of the Forms. This must have prompted Battista Mondin to aver that there is a very close link between epistemology and metaphysics (5). This I have discussed in details in my other work, '*Epistemetaphysics: Towards Understanding the Intercultural Philosophy and Indispensable Relationship between Epistemology and Metaphysics*'. In arguing that Forms exist independently of the particular things that 'participate in' them, Plato constructed an original and controversial metaphysics. Aristotle rejected this metaphysics in his philosophy of the essences of things (Asouzu 16); Locke also went in contra

distinction to this position in his concept of *tabula rasa*. In Plato's analysis which could be described as metaphysics of the Forms, several essential properties of the Forms were identified as follows:

i. Form of Good

It is Plato's position that of all ideas or Forms in the ideal world, the 'Form' of Good is dominant. The 'Form' of Good is like the sun that illuminates all the other Forms and is, in fact, the source of the being of all the other Forms. Every other Form participates in the Form of Good which is the unifying principle of all the Forms (Omogbe 41). Though this research is being carried out from the epistemological domain, it is the contention of Ryle that Plato's idea of the Good in his analysis of the theory of Forms is also ethical (21).

ii. Self-predication

It is Plato's position that the 'Form of Beauty' is itself beautiful. But this is different from the way in which all other beautiful things are beautiful. Every other beautiful thing is beautiful because it 'participates in' the Form of Beauty; but the Form is simply beautiful. Just as the Form is itself beautiful. Omogbe, in his systematized presentation further articulates that, "the objects of knowledge are not the material things of this world, but the Forms in the world of Forms, the supra-sensible world which Plato believed to be the real world" (64). It is what it is in virtue of itself. This also provides an explanation of why things that participate in Beauty are beautiful: participating in Beauty makes a particular thing beautiful because the Form is itself beautiful. Beauty is 'transmitted' to particular things that participate in it (Lacewing 3).

iii. Independence from particulars

According to Michael Lacewing, "it follows that each Form is its own essence. Because this is what a Form is, we can understand why it is that, Forms (can) exist independently of whether any particular object participates in them. Because it is its own essence, it is what it is regardless of whether particulars participate in it; it is not essential to its existence that it is exemplified in particulars" (4). A Form, therefore, also does not exist in time or space (either at a particular space/time or as distributed across all particulars exemplifying it).

iv. Perfection

For Plato, "a Form is the perfect example of itself". Nothing can be more beautiful than the Form of Beauty, and there is no way in which the Form is not beautiful. This is sometimes suggested as an important difference between 'participating in' and 'being' in Beauty: all particular things only approximate to the property of beauty, which is only perfectly possessed by the Form (Lacewing 4). From what has just been said, it is Plato's contention that particular things appropriate what Iroegbu described as the "kpim of reality" by way of participation in the Form.

v. Permanence

Against the Heraclitean maxim of fluxity, Plato maintains that "Forms do not change". The Form has no option than beautiful, because it is in its intrinsic nature to be beautiful. Lending his voice to this line of thought, Lacewing goes much further to argue that, "If it changed, then by the new Form of Beauty, the previous Form would not have been perfectly beautiful; by the previous Form; any change would be a change away from being beautiful. As this is impossible, Forms do not change" (4). It is Plato's contention that it is inconceivable to the Ideal world to admit any form of change, because it is the domain of knowledge.

vi. Simplicity

Plato repeatedly says the Forms are 'one'. Each Form has just the one property of which it is the Form: The Form of beauty is only beautiful (and the only thing which is only beautiful). However, Plato also suggests that each Form is good, and that the Form of the Good is the Form of Forms. Furthermore, Plato attempts to give full account of each Form that explains what it is. For example, in *The Republic*, Plato argues that justice is doing one's own job (433a). This equates justice to a particular set of properties, so it is not simple or just 'one'. In contrast to Forms, particulars are complex, changeable, and imperfect. These important differences suggest that the way Forms and particulars exist is different, and that the existence of the Forms is superior: they are in a way that particulars are not. Forms exist independently, but particulars only exist through participating in the Forms.

Plato speaks of 'two worlds', the world of Forms (Ideas) and that of particulars. But if they are so different, how can particulars 'share' or 'participate' in the Forms at all? One suggestion is that the properties particulars have are 'copies' of the Forms. The beauty of this rose is a copy of the Form of Beauty. While particulars are materials (made of matter), they can possess properties that are copies of the Forms. Unlike the Forms, a particular can lose its properties (e.g. its beauty) and even cease to exist as that particular (a rose can

become ash). A particular is what it is in virtue of the properties it has (e.g. a rose, beautiful, etc.). But its properties are how it participates in the Forms. So a particular only exists by participating in the Forms.

vii. Knowledge, Belief, and Ignorance

In the words of Lacewing, Plato's second argument for separating the Forms from the particular things we experience with the senses relates to the nature of knowledge. Particular things will always both be X – have some property, e.g. beauty or largeness – and not-X, either at different times, or to different observers, or in different contexts. And so, 'can we say that any of these many things *is*, any more than it is *not*, what anyone says it is?' (479b). Plato argues that because particular things are what they are (beautiful, large, etc.) only *relatively* and *transiently*, there cannot be *knowledge* of them. Knowledge needs more permanence and certainty. He argues that we cannot know what is not true; knowledge is about truth, about what is. So if something both is and is not X, then we cannot *know* that it is X. In contrast to particular beautiful things, the Form of Beauty is beautiful under all conditions, to all observers, at all times. The Form of Beauty is pure beauty; it alone is not both beautiful and not beautiful. It is therefore possible for us to acquire knowledge of the Forms. (As noted above, we can't *experience* Forms through our senses. We have this knowledge through reason). Because we can have knowledge of the Forms, but not knowledge of particular objects of sense experience, the Forms must be separate from particular things (7).

Plato's argument relies on making a distinction between knowledge (*epistémé*) and *doxa*, translated as 'belief' or 'opinion'. Just before giving the argument above, he argues that knowledge and opinion are different 'faculties' for two reasons (477a-478e): (a). Knowledge is infallible – you cannot know what is false. Opinion, however, can be mistaken. So opinion cannot be knowledge. (b). Knowledge is only of what is real. We cannot have knowledge of what is not real or does not exist. Knowledge is 'about' what is real. By contrast, ignorance relates to what is not real, what does not exist, i.e. 'nothing'. If you are completely ignorant of something, you don't think of it at all; if you don't understand it, you can't form an opinion about its reality. If there is something between what is real and what is not real (which Plato argues there are, viz. particular things, which are both X and not-X), then there must be something between knowledge and ignorance. We know from (a) that opinion is not knowledge; but opinion is obviously not ignorance either, because opinions are always 'about' something or other. And opinion does seem to be between complete ignorance and knowledge (Lacewing 7). According to Plato, opinion relates to the world of the senses, and knowledge to the world of Forms. So Forms must exist separately from particular things. It also has to be noted that it is in the world of Forms that what is real domiciles (Basden 67).

viii. Ways of Acquiring Knowledge of the Forms

In his book, *The Republic*, Plato argues that it is only those who acquaint themselves with the knowledge of philosophy that can construe the idea of the Forms. In the words of Lacewing, "Those people in Plato's Republic who eventually acquire knowledge of the Forms are those guardians who become philosophers. The guardians are trained in arithmetic, geometry and astronomy to bring them to *dianoia*. But to achieve *noésis*, the guardians must be additionally trained in dialectic, or philosophical argument" (6). Those outside the domain of philosophy simply express opinion which is within the purview of the world of senses. From this, we can see that even if knowledge and opinion are different faculties because knowledge is infallible and opinion is not, that does not mean that they have different objects. There is no need for the object (particular thing, Form) to match the epistemic state (opinion, knowledge). We can make the distinction in some other way, e.g. knowledge is always true and justified, whereas opinion can be false and unjustified (Lacewing 6).

Plato argues that to gain knowledge of the Forms, a person must be 're-oriented', away from being concerned and caught up in the world of the senses: 'the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good' (518c). It is this re-orientation that Asouzu described as preponderance of *noetic propaedeutic* (which is centered on re-education of the mind) in *Ibunyanidanda New Complementary Ontology* (22). For Plato, the mind must be educated to grapple with the knowledge of the Forms. The final step in the philosophers' education is not so much about imparting knowledge, but turning the mind towards the Forms. However, the question still remains how dialectic leads to an understanding of the Forms. As shown in Plato's *Republic* and other dialogues, dialectic establishes both the existence and the nature of the Forms (Lacewing 6) ... Dialectic asks 'what is justice?' or 'what is courage?', and so we think about the abstract ideas, the Forms, of justice and

courage (Lacewing 8). It can rightly be said that Plato's theory of Forms is a metaphysical concept that can be grappled with through the aid of human ratiocinative acumen.

JOHN LOCKE'S CONCEPT OF *TABULA RASA*

John Locke was born into a Puritan home in 1632. He studied theology, natural science, philosophy and medicine at Oxford University. Among his early influences was his contact with the works of Rene Descartes. This encounter spurred Locke extensively that he was challenged to be more creative and elicit lots of adroit ingenuity in him that he could reflect and publish seasoned works. Notable among his publications are: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, *An Essay Concerning Tolerance*, and *Consequences of the Lowering of Interest and Raising the Value of Moral*. To be noted is that Locke made an indelible contribution in almost all spheres of the enlightenment age. He died in 1704 at the age of seventy-two.

It has to be noted in this segment that Locke rejects the theory of innate ideas or innate knowledge championed by Plato and the rationalists. It is Locke's position that all ideas come from sense experience. For Locke, the human mind was a "tabula rasa – blank slate" at birth, that is, man is not born with any idea in his mind. And so, there are no innate ideas. In the words of Omoregbe, "The theory of innate ideas holds (in general) that man is born with certain ideas in his mind (actually or virtually), and that as soon as he reaches the age of reason he comes to know these ideas spontaneously without having to learn them explicitly" (57). Sometimes, as in Descartes, innate ideas were taken to be cognitive capacities rather than concepts or general truths, but these capacities, too, were held to be inborn (*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* 355). It has to be brought to sight that it was statesman-philosopher, Francis Bacon, who, early in the seventeenth century, first strongly established the claims of empiricism - the reliance on the experience of the senses - over those speculation or deduction of the mind in the pursuit of knowledge. It is this vision that Locke sets out to achieve when he stepped into the epistemic rostrum.

John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* restates the importance of the experience of the senses over speculation and holds that the human mind at birth is a complete, but receptive, blank slate (scraped tablet or tabula rasa) upon which experience imprints knowledge. It is Locke's position that people acquire knowledge from the information about the objects in the world that our senses bring. People begin with simple ideas and then combine them into more complex ones. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. How comes it be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? (Locke 311).

This 17th century British empiricist conceived "experience" as the fitting answer to the above question.

Similarly, it is worthy to note that Locke's ideas provided a basis for the development of *behaviourism*. He believed that children were born as passive "blank slates" (tabula rasa) and were formed through their experiences in the environment. Parents were viewed as tutors for their children, moulding their development by example and through careful and consistent instruction. Contrary to practices common at that time, Locke believed that children should be praised and loved, rather than being punished. His views contributed to a change in community attitudes to children, from harshness to kindness (Cengage Learning Australia 1). As the world advance in research and learning, Locke's position that children are simply "blank slates" has been challenged by both behaviourist like Piaget, who writes on child development and philosopher like Descartes, who in the same Platonic mindset strongly believes in innate ideas. Going further in his analysis to instantiate his claim on the human mind being *tabula rasa* at birth, in his book, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1697), as cited in Chimmuanya (19), Locke recommended practical learning to prepare people to manage their social, economic, and political affairs efficiently. He believed that a sound education began in early childhood and insisted that the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic be gradual and cumulative. In our own times the social and psychological sciences tend to take the view that human beings are 'formed' socially and psychologically by nature as well as by nurture and that there are inherited traits that society can build on and to some extent modify. By implication, there is no innate ideas with which children came into the world at birth.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS AND LOCKE'S CONCEPT OF *TABULA RASA*

Reflecting on the areas of convergence between Plato's theory of Forms and Locke's concept of *tabula rasa*, what should first strike us is that both thinkers employ the word "idea" in their divergent epistemic contributions (Basden 82). It is Plato's position that ideas play vital role in our cognitive process. On the other hand, it is the view of John Locke that "what we perceive are ideas and they are received through sensation and reflection" (Ozumba 35). Locke distinguished between simple and complex ideas. Simple ideas are the impressions that things make on our minds; they are the copies or representations which things leave in our minds when they impress themselves on them. Simple ideas are therefore directly caused by things and these ideas resemble their causes and correspond to them. Locke affirms that there is correspondence or resemblance between simple ideas in our minds and the things they represent. When two or more simple ideas are combined into one, we have a complex idea. Complex ideas therefore are combinations of simple ideas (Omogbe 59). This position of simple ideas is a representation which things leave in our minds; it can be recalled that Plato had earlier held that the things in the world of senses participate in the real things in the world of Forms. Beauty, perfection and anything we perceive as good in this world of shadow are replicas of their real nature in the Ideal world. According to Plato, 'Form' is unitary and simple, but many particular things can participate in it. There is only one Form of Beauty, but many things can be beautiful; looking like simple and complex ideas of Locke.

Plato's theory of Forms is embedded in rationalist approach to knowledge, and that is why the human reason is a key element in conceptualizing and comprehending the knowledge which domiciles in the Ideal world in Plato's thinking. Locke, from another perspective, has "some modicum of rationalism" in his postulates as he advanced his epistemology; only that he maintained from the onset that none of our ideas are native or innate. When Locke talked about reflection he was rationalist in that approach though he believed that human mind is a *tabula rasa* at birth and that is why he also employed sensation.

It is the essences of things that Plato calls Forms or Ideas; and for him, they cannot be known through sense perception because they are not perceptible by the senses. Locke, like Plato believed in substance which can as well be called essence in Aristotle's parlance. This was conceived as the underlying something which upholds the physical qualities of sensible things (such as size, shape, color, position, sound, and movement), and as something which likewise underlines and upholds the intellectual activities (such as thinking, willing, denying, doubting). In the first case the something is matter, and in the natural world, Locke was, like Descartes, a mind-matter dualist (Miller 133). What is common between the positions of Plato and Locke in this context is that they both agree that substance or essences of things are what make things what they are. It is only their approach in analysis that differ as expected; that is, their rationalist and empiricist divide, respectively. For Plato, ideas are objects of knowledge just as Locke holds. Locke expressed better than anyone else the view that has sometimes been called epistemological *dualism*... (Miller 133) with his idea of sensation and reflection. It is also apparent that in the dualistic epistemic outlook of Plato, he conceived the world of Forms as the world of knowledge, while the world of physical existence is the world of shadow and opinion.

Locke, in his epistemic analysis, identified primary and secondary qualities. A primary quality which exists independently of a perceiver; that is, it would exist even if no perceiver were present. Examples of primary qualities would be size, position, shape, and movement. A secondary quality is a quality which depends on a perceiver for its existence. It would cease to exist if there is no perceiver present. Colour, taste, sound, and texture are examples of secondary qualities. From another perspective, it is Plato's thinking that the world of Forms can exist independent of the world of shadow, which is only participating in the world of Ideas (Chimmuanya 21).

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS AND LOCKE'S CONCEPT OF *TABULA RASA*

Having considered the points of epistemic similitude between Plato's theory of Forms and Locke's concept of *tabula rasa*, the very first area of divergence between them that immediately calls to mind is their epistemic background. Plato is 'a charter member' of the rationalist school of thought, while Locke is the leader and chief protagonist of the British empiricism. The implication is that while Plato operates in his philosophy with modicum of rationalism, Locke on the other hand, operates with the modicum of experience not losing sight of his position on sensation and reflection as means of acquiring knowledge. Plato unmistakably wants us

to understand that he founded his theory of Forms on the foundation of reason, while Locke's concept of *tabula rasa*, the spring board of his epistemic discourse is grounded on his tenacity that though reason cannot be completely wished away, however, experience is the basis of knowledge. Plato's strong belief in innate ideas is at the basis of his postulations on the theory of Forms; while Locke's strong rejection of the idea of *innatism* occasioned his understanding which he espoused in his concept of *tabula rasa*. For Locke, the intellect receives all knowledge through the senses, but Plato had earlier averred that everything in the physical realm of sense experience is simply participating in its perfect nature in the Ideal world.

Contrasting their epistemological tenets, Plato argues that knowledge comes from the world of Ideas or Forms, which is the realm of reason, but Locke counteracted this position by arguing that all our knowledge cannot come from reason because the mind is a "tabula rasa" from birth, but only wears impression of ideas as it comes in contact with things. Hence all our knowledge must come from our senses for there is nothing in the intellect that does not come from the senses (*nihil est intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*) (Ojong and John 163). The inadequacy of Plato's theory of Forms in Locke's judgment propelled Locke to look somewhere for a more valid source of knowledge. All our knowledge cannot come from our reason, he contended, because the mind is a *tabula rasa* from birth and only puts-on impressions of ideas as it comes in contact with things.

THE RELEVANCE OF PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS AND LOCKE'S NOTION OF *TABULA RASA* FOR POST-CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY

Post-contemporary philosophy is philosophy that is espoused and advanced in the 21st century. It is philosophy that makes reference to the ancient, medieval, renaissance interlude, modern, and contemporary epistemological positions in order to come up with most current position. When Locke, a modern philosopher, employed his concept of *tabula rasa* to argue against Plato's (an ancient philosopher) theory of Forms that upholds the doctrine of innate ideas, some philosophers like Basden and Ezenwanne construe it as 'an attempt at demolition of the epistemic edifice constructed by Plato and the rationalists' (13 and 24), respectively. As it were, I do not subscribe to that position. For me, Locke has simply followed a living tradition of claims and counter claims upon which philosophy thrives as a living discipline. To have a counter position to already existing positions is not a problem as supposed, rather it is construed in this research as *epistemic creativity and resourcefulness* that will in turn lead to more advancement in epistemology. Even if this study accepts that it is a problem that will metamorphose into growth because: "When one problem is solved, other problems often emerge, and in an attempt to tackle it, more complex problems evolve from the proffered solutions. Solving such problems and gaining of new insights and ideas make philosophy interesting..." (Uzoigwe 49).

Going further, it is with the counter positions between the rationalists like Plato, Descartes and the likes and the empiricists like Locke, Berkeley and so forth, for instance, that Kant could think outside the box and came up with his *synthetic a priori* contribution to knowledge. Another case in point is that, after Gettier's counter examples to the traditional account of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB), epistemologists went in-search of a fourth criterion of knowledge. As a result, concepts like reliabilism, mentalism, coherentism, and foundherentism, etc. find their way in the epistemological lexicon. Therefore, explicating Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* in the light of Plato's theory of Forms is significantly relevant as part of epistemic creativity and resourcefulness whereby, new insights, ideas and philosophical theories emerge while closing the gaps in already established epistemological notions linking the diverse epochs of philosophical discourse for good.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has shown that Plato is a charter member of the rationalist school of thought, while Locke stands out as a prominent leader of the British empiricism. It has been observed that some points of convergence have been clearly identified in the epistemological postulates of Plato and Locke. In their meeting points Plato and Locke employed the concepts ideas, substance (essence), and mind. In their epistemic differences, Plato upholds the idea of *innatism*, while Locke argues that at birth the human mind was a *tabula rasa*. Plato was coming from the rationalist background as its charter member, while Locke advanced his course as the leader of the empiricist divide of knowledge that is experientially oriented.

It is worthy to note that apart from Locke many philosophers reject Plato's claim that knowledge must match something 'real' in the sense that Plato means 'things that don't change and perfectly exemplify some property'. Plato might be right that knowledge cannot change (it can't go from truth to falsehood), but that

doesn't mean the object of knowledge can't change. For example, I can know (it seems) that a particular object of sense experience. For instance, this book has a particular property; it is of a certain size, even though its size can change if you burn it. What I know is that the book is this size now (at a specific moment in time), and this truth won't change even if the size of the book changes. Plato seems to have confused a property about knowledge with a property about the object of knowledge.

From another perspective, John Locke unequivocally rose against Plato's theory of Forms in his critique of innate ideas. This doctrine was a standard thesis in the rationalistic tradition from Plato to Leibniz, but Locke raises a number of fundamental objections to it (Lawhead 281). This objection raised by Locke and in fact, much later by the empiricists was the driving force that made Kant to intervene with his *synthetic a priori*. While intervening, new ideas emerged showing that explicating Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* in the light of Plato's theory of Forms is relevant for post-contemporary epistemic discourse, if not for any other thing, for adding value to the philosophical lexicon by way of having new concepts that emerge from such counter claims to the already established epistemological theories. This brings about complementarity that is clearly evident in post-contemporary epistemology for instance, Susan Hack's foundherentism which is a nexus between foundationalism and coherentism. Such an insights springs forth in line with Kant's *synthetic a priori*. This kind of advancement is what I call *epistemic creativity and resourcefulness*.

WORKS CITED

- Asouzu, Innocent I. *Ibuanyidana New Complementary Ontology*. LIT, 2007. “*Ibuanyibanda*” and *The Philosophy of Essence*”, University of Calabar Press, 2011.
- Audi, Robert (Ed). *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Basden, Dalex. *Introduction to Epistemology*. UPI, 2009.
- Battista, Zanzu. *Epistemology: An Introductory Reflection*. Phoenix, 2013.
- Chimunya, Awele. *Basic Issues in Philosophy*. John Mark Printing Press, 2011.
- Davis, Osborn. *John Locke and the Enlightenment Campaign*, Charley-man Publishers, 2017.
- Ezenwanne, Ezenwanne. *A Short Essay on Ancient Philosophy*. Kim-Gee, 2018.
- Ifeanyi, Emmanuel. *Plato's Epistemic Ideas*. In Internet Episteme pdf., 2018.
- Lawhead, William F. *The Voyage of Discovery*. Second Edition, Wadsworth, 2002.
- Lacewing, Michael. *Plato's Theory of Forms*. Routledge, Updated 2017.
- Locke, John. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Herrnstein & Murray, 1994. www.age-of-the-sage.org/philosophy-locke-tabula-rasa.html. retrieved 13/05/21.
- Mondin, Battista. *A History of Medieval Philosophy*. TPI, 1991.
- Miller, Ed. L. *Questions That Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*, Fourth Edition, McGraw-Hill, 1996.
- Ojong, Kyrian A., John Elijah O. (Eds.). *Living Issues in Epistemology*. El-johns, 2013.
- Omoregbe, Joseph I. *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy*. Vol. Two. JERP, 1991. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge) A Systematic and Historical Study*. JERP, 2003.
- Ozumba, Godfrey O. *A Concise Introduction to Epistemology*. Mikro Ticha, 2015.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Ed. Lee Desmond. Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Ryle, Kimki. *The Epistemological Foundations of Philosophy*, Matrix Publishers, 2019.
- Sarachukwuaka, Emmanuel. *Theories of Knowledge*. Nova Publishers, 2018.
- Uzoigwe, Elias Ifeanyi E. “Understanding the Problems of the History of Philosophy: Focusing on the Key Areas” in *Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies*, 2021, 1(6),49.