



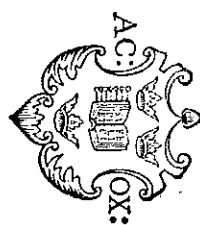
JOHN LOCKE
Portrait by John Greenhill, c. 1672
Photograph by courtesy National Portrait Gallery

JOHN LOCKE

AN ESSAY
CONCERNING HUMAN
UNDERSTANDING



EDITED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION, CRITICAL APPARATUS
AND GLOSSARY BY
PETER H. NIDDITCH



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BOOK III

CHAPTER I

Of Words or Language in General.

§ 1. GOD having designed Man for a sociable Creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind; but furnished him also with Languages, which was to be the great Instrument, and common Tyē of Society. Man therefore had by Nature his Organs so fashioned, as to be *fit to frame articulate Sounds*, which we call Words. But this was not enough to produce Language; for Parrots, and several other Birds, will be taught to make articulate Sounds distinct enough, which yet, by no means, are capable of Language.

§ 2. Besides articulate Sounds therefore, it was farther necessary, that he should be *able to use these Sounds, as Signs of internal Conceptions*; and to make them stand as marks for the *Ideas* within his own Mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the Thoughts of Men's Minds be conveyed from one to another.

§ 3. But neither was this sufficient to make Words so useful as they ought to be. It is not enough for the perfection of Language, that Sounds can be made signs of *Ideas*, unless those signs can be so made use of, as to *comprehend several particular Things*: For the multiplication of Words would have perplexed their Use, had every particular thing need of a distinct name to be signified by. To remedy this inconvenience, Language had yet a farther improvement in the use of general Terms, whereby one word was made to mark a multitude of particular existences: Which advantageous use of Sounds was obtained only by the difference of the *Ideas* they were made signs of. Those names becoming general, which are made to stand for general *Ideas*, and those remaining particular, where the *Ideas* they are used for are particular.

§ 1. *Man fitted to form articulate Sounds.* § 2. *To make them signs of Ideas.* §§ 3, 4. *To make general Signs.*

(20-7) To . . . particular.] *add.* 2-5

§ 4. Besides these Names which stand for *Ideas*, there be other words which Men make use of, not to signify any *Idea*, but the want or absence of some *Ideas* simple or complex, or all *Ideas* together; such as are *Nil* in Latin, and in English, *Ignorance* and *Barrenness*. All which negative or privative Words, cannot be said properly to belong to, or signify no *Ideas*: for then they would be perfectly insignificant Sounds; but they relate to positive *Ideas*, and signify their absence.

§ 5. It may also lead us a little towards the Original of all our Notions and Knowledge, if we remark, how great a dependance our *Words* have on common sensible *Ideas*; and how those, which are made use of to stand for Actions and Notions quite removed from sense, *have their rise from thence, and from obvious sensible Ideas are transferred to more abstruse significations*, and made to stand for *Ideas* that come not under the cognizance of our senses; *v. g.* to *Imagins, Apprehend, Comprehend, Advers, Conceive, Instill, Digest, Disturbance, Transmutability*, etc. are all Words taken from the Operations of sensible Things, and applied to certain Modes of Thinking. *Spirit*, in its primary signification, is *Breath; charged, a Messenger*: And I doubt not, but if we could trace them to their sources, we should find, in all Languages, the names, which stand for Things that fall not under our Senses, to have had their first rise from sensible *Ideas*. By which we may give some kind of guess, what kind of Notions they were, and whence derived, which filled their Minds, who were the first Beginners of Languages; and now Nature, even in the naming of Things, unawares suggested to Men the Originals and Principles of all their Knowledge: whilst, to give Names, that might make known to others any Operations they felt in themselves, or any other *Ideas*, that came not under their Senses, they were fain to borrow Words from ordinary known *Ideas* of Sensation, by that means to make others the more easily to conceive those Operations they experimented in themselves, which made no outward sensible appearances; and then when they had got known and agreed Names, to signify those internal Operations of their own Minds,

§ 5. *Words ultimately derived from such as signify sensible Ideas.*

(1) Besides] 2-5 | *Words* then are made to be signs of our *Ideas*, and are general or particular, as the *Ideas* they stand for are general or particular. But besides 1 (1-5) other words] 2-5 | others 1 (2) Men] 2-5 | Men have found and 1 (4) *Nil* in Latin] 2-5 | the Latin words, *Nil* 1 (13-15) *Vir* . . . senses] 2-5 | *Originals*, and are transferred from obvious sensible *Ideas* 1 (20) sources] 2-5 | *Originals* 1

they were sufficiently furnished to make known by Words, all their other *Ideas*; since they could consist of nothing, but either of outward sensible Perceptions, or of the inward Operations of their Minds about them; we having, as has been proved, no *Ideas* at all, but what originally come either from sensible Objects without, or what we feel within our selves, from the inward Workings of our own Spirits, which we are conscious to our selves of within.

§ 6. But to understand better the use and force of Language, as subservient to Instruction and Knowledge, it will be convenient to consider,

First, To what it is that Names, in the use of Language, are immediately applied.

Secondly, Since all (except proper) Names are general, and so stand not particularly for this or that single Thing; but for sorts and ranks of Things, it will be necessary to consider, in the next place, what the Sorts and Kinds, or, if you rather like the Latin Names, *what the Species and Genera of Things* are; wherein they consist; and how they come to be made. These being (as they ought) well looked into, we shall the better come to find the right use of Words; the natural Advantages and Defects of Language; and the remedies that ought to be used, to avoid the inconveniencies of obscurity or uncertainty in the signification of Words, without which, it is impossible to discourse with any clearness, or order, concerning Knowledge: Which being conversant about Propositions, and those most commonly universal ones, has greater connexion with Words, than perhaps is suspected.

These Considerations therefore, shall be the matter of the following Chapters.

CHAPTER II

Of the Signification of Words.

§ 1. MAN, though he have great variety of Thoughts, and such, from which others, as well as himself, might receive Profit and

§ 6. Distribution.

§ 1. *Words are sensible Signs necessary for Communication.*

(17-18) arg; ... consist; 4er-5 | arg; ... consist, 1-4 (22) Words; 4-5 | Words: 1-3 (L. below 30) Coste 'Division générale de ce Troisième Livre.

Delight; yet they are all within his own Breast, invisible, and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made appear. The Comfort, and Advantage of Society, not being to be had without Communication of Thoughts, it was necessary, that Man should find out some external sensible Signs, whereby those invisible *Ideas*, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others. For this purpose, nothing was so fit, either for Plenty or Quickness, as those articulate Sounds, which with so much Ease and Variety, he found himself able to make. Thus we may conceive how *Words*, which were by Nature so well adapted to that purpose, come to be made use of by Men, as the Signs of their *Ideas*; not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular articulate Sounds and certain *Ideas*, for then there would be but one Language amongst all Men; but by a voluntary Imposition, whereby such a Word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an *Idea*. The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of *Ideas*; and the *Ideas* they stand for, are their proper and immediate Signification.

§ 2. The use Men have of these Marks, being either to record their own Thoughts for the Assistance of their own Memory; or as it were, to bring out their *Ideas*, and lay them before the view of others: *Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them*, how imperfectly soever, or carelessly those *Ideas* are collected from the Things, which they are supposed to represent. When a Man speaks to another, it is, that he may be understood; and the end of Speech is, that those Sounds, as Marks, may make known his *Ideas* to the Hearer. That then which Words are the Marks of, are the *Ideas* of the Speaker: Nor can any one apply them, as Marks, immediately to any thing else, but the *Ideas*, that he himself hath: For this would be to make them Signs of his own Conceptions, and yet apply them to other *Ideas*; which would be to make them Signs, and not Signs of his *Ideas* at the same time; and so in effect, to have no Signification at all. Words being voluntary Signs, they cannot be voluntary Signs imposed by him on Things he knows not. That would be

§§ 2, 3. *Words are the sensible Signs of his Ideas who uses them.*

(2) Comfort; 4-5 | Comfort therefore 1-3 (Ihesus Coste) (7) this; 4-5 | which 1-3
4-5 | possess his Mind in so great variety 1-3 (19) Thoughts; 4-5 | Ideas 1-3 (20) out
(13) Sounds; 4-5 | Sounds, 1-3 (21) others; 4er-5 | others, 1-4 or 5 |
and 1-4 (25) Speech; 1T. er, 2-5 | the Speech 1 (30) Conceptions |
1er-5 | Conception 1

to make them Signs of nothing, Sounds without Signification. A Man cannot make his Words the Signs either of Qualities in Things, or of Conceptions in the Mind of another, whercof he has none in his own. Till he has some *Ideas* of his own, he cannot suppose them to correspond with the Conceptions of another Man; nor can he use any Signs for them: For thus they would be the Signs of he knows not what, which is in Truth to be the Signs of nothing. But when he represents to himself other Men's *Ideas*, by some of his own, if he consent to give them the same Names, that other Men do, 'tis still to his own *Ideas*; to *Ideas* that he has, and not to *Ideas* that he has not.

§ 3. This is so necessary in the use of Language, that in this respect, the Knowing, and the Ignorant; the Learned, and Unlearned, use the *Words* they speak (with any meaning) all alike. They, in every Man's Mouth, stand for the *Ideas* he has, and which he would express by them. A Child having taken notice of nothing in the Metal he hears called Gold, but the bright shining yellow colour, he applies the Word Gold only to his own *Idea* of that Colour, and nothing else; and therefore calls the same Colour in a Peacocks Tail, Gold. Another that hath better observed, adds to shining yellow, great Weight: And then the Sound Gold, when he uses it, stands for a complex *Idea* of a shining Yellow and very weighty Substance. Another adds to those Qualities, Fusibility: and then the Word Gold to him signifies a Body, bright, yellow, fusible, and very heavy. Another adds Malleability. Each of these uses equally the Word Gold, when they have Occasion to express the *Idea*, which they have apply'd it to: But it is evident, that each can apply it only to his own *Idea*; nor can he make it stand, as a Sign of such a complex *Idea*, as he has not.

§ 4. But though Words, as they are used by Men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the *Ideas*, that are in the Mind of the Speaker; yet they in their Thoughts give them a secret reference to two other things.

First, they suppose their *Words* to be Marks of the *Ideas* in the Minds also of other Men, with whom they communicate: For else they should talk in vain, and could not be understood, if the Sounds they applied to one *Idea*, were such, as by the Hearer, were applied to another,

§ 4. *Words often secretly referred, First, to the Ideas in other Mens Minds.*

(6) thus they] 4-5 | it 1-3 (7) Signs] 2-5 | Sign 1 (26) which] add. 4-5 (30-1) [and] the ... Speaker] 2-5 | their Minds 1 (1. below 26) In Coste, §§ 4-6 come under the same marginal summary as that for §§ 2, 3. other] 2-3, 5 | other] 4

which is to speak two Languages. But in this, Men stand not usually to examine, whether the *Idea* they, and those they discourse with have in their Minds, be the same: But think it enough, that they use the Word, as they imagine, in the common Acceptation of that Language; in which case they suppose, that the *Idea*, they make it a Sign of, is precisely the same, to which the Understanding Men of that Country apply that Name.

§ 5. Secondly, Because Men would not be thought barely of their own Imaginations, but of Things as really they are; therefore they often suppose their *Words* to stand also for the reality of Things. But this relating more particularly to Substances, and their Names, as perhaps the former does to simple *Ideas* and Modes, we shall speak of these two different ways of applying Words more at large, when we come to treat of the Names of mixed Modes, and Substances, in particular: Though give me leave here to say, that it is a perverting the use of Words, and brings unavoidable Obscurity and Confusion into their Signification, whenever we make them stand for any thing, but those *Ideas* we have in our own Minds.

§ 6. Concerning Words also it is further to be considered. First, That they being immediately the Signs of Mens *Ideas*; and, by that means, the Instruments whereby Men communicate their Conceptions, and express to one another those Thoughts and Imaginations, they have within their own Breasts, there comes by constant use, to be such a Connexion between certain Sounds, and the *Ideas* they stand for, that the Names heard, almost as readily excite certain *Ideas*, as if the Objects themselves, which are apt to produce them, did actually affect the Senses. Which is manifestly so in all obvious sensible Qualities; and in all Substances, that frequently, and familiarly occur to us.

§ 7. Secondly, That though the proper and immediate Signification of Words, are *Ideas* in the Mind of the Speaker; yet because by familiar use from our Cradles, we come to learn certain articulate Sounds very perfectly, and have them readily on our Tongues, and always at hand in our Memories; but yet are not always careful to examine, or settle their Significations perfectly, it often happens that Men, even when they would apply themselves to an attentive

§ 5. Secondly, To the reality of Things. § 6. Words by use readily excite Ideas. § 7. Words often used without signification.

(2) those] 2-5 | he 1 (3) have in their Minds] add. 2-5 (5) case] 1-4; om. 5 (19) it] 2-5 | this 1 (34) always ... in] add. 2-5

Consideration, do set their Thoughts more on Words than Things. Nay, because Words are many of them learn'd, before the Ideas are known for which they stand: Therefore some, not only Children, but Men, speak several Words, no otherwise than Parrots do, only because they have learn'd them, and have been accustomed to those Sounds. But so far as Words are of Use and Signification, so far is there a constant connexion between the Sound and the Ideas; and a Designation, that the one stand for the other: without which Application of them, they are nothing but so much insignificant Noise.

§ 8. Words by long and familiar use, as has been said, come to excite in Men certain Ideas, so constantly and readily, that they are apt to suppose a natural connexion between them. But that they signify only Men's peculiar Ideas, and that by a perfectly arbitrary Imposition, is evident, in that they often fail to excite in others (even that use the same Language) the same Ideas, we take them to be the Signs of: And every Man has so inviolable a Liberty, to make Words stand for what Ideas he pleases, that no one hath the Power to make others have the same Ideas in their Minds, that he has, when they use the same Words, that he does. And therefore the great *Aristotus* himself, in the Possession of that Power which ruled the World, acknowledged, he could not make a new Latin Word: which was as much as to say, that he could not arbitrarily appoint, what Idea any Sound should be a Sign of, in the Mouths and common Language of his Subjects. 'Tis true, common use, by a tacit Consent, appropriates certain Sounds to certain Ideas in all Languages, which so far limits the signification of that Sound, that unless a Man applies it to the same Idea, he does not speak properly: And let me add, that unless a Man's Words excite the same Ideas in the Hearer, which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly. But whatever be the consequence of any Man's using of Words differently, either from their general Meaning, or the particular Sense of the Person to whom he addresses them, this is certain, their signification, in his use of them, is limited to his Ideas, and they can be Signs of nothing else.

§ 8-11. Their Signification perfectly arbitrary.

(27) does not | 4-5 | cannot 1-3 | (28) let me add | 4-5 | it is also true 1-3
 (29) does not | 4-5 | cannot 1-3 | (30-2) consequence . . . Person | 4-5 | consequence of any Man's use of Words different either from their Publick use, or that of the Persons 2-3 | consequences of his use of any Words, different either from the Publick, or that Person 1 (17. or 'persons')