LOCKE ON THE MEANING OF POLITICAL LANGUAGE: THE TEACHING OF THE *ESSAY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING*

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, by John Locke. Edited with an Introduction, Critical Apparatus and Glossary by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1975. Pp. liv, 867. $38.50

My account of Locke's teaching in the *Essay* about the meaning or significance of moral and political language[1] is put forward with two broad purposes in mind. One purpose is to supply an indispensable part of the context that is required for the interpretation of Locke's political philosophy as a whole. The other is to bring out the deepest issues regarding language that political inquiry must face and to show how these issues have been resolved by a leading philosopher. Let us consider each of these purposes in turn.

The relationship of Locke's *Essay* to his specifically political writings, especially his *Two Treatises of Government,* is a matter of controversy. The controversy concerns not only how these works are related, but also whether or not they are related at all in their fundamental teachings. Peter Laslett, for example, has argued that Locke wrote the *Essay* and the *Two Treatises* for entirely different purposes and in entirely different states of mind. According to Laslett, the *Essay* is a philosophical account of the nature and limits of our knowledge, the *Two Treatises* is a political work on the principles of conduct, and there are few if any connecting links between them. Laslett thus thinks it inappropriate to call the *Two Treatises* a work in "political philosophy": "The political argument is not presented as a part of a general philosophy, and does not seem to be intended to be read as such" (1965: p. 98; *cf.* pp. 95-99). By contrast, Leo Strauss and his students have maintained that the *Two Treatises* and the *Essay* *are* joined by a consistent philosophical outlook, and they look to the

1. Locke's *Essay* takes up the broadest philosophical themes, but Locke makes it clear that he is interested chiefly in "morality," or those things "which concern our Conduct," including not• only "what is *Right,* and what is *Wrong"* and the "measures"of them, but "any thing necessary, or useful" for our conduct (I 1.6; IV 8.3). Locke thus uses the term "morals" to encompass what we would consider to be the subject matter of political science and the other social sciences as well as ethics in the strict sense. Since "moral" has a much narrower meaning today, I shall sometimes speak redundantly of "moral and political" in order to indicate Locke's inclusive concern.

Essay for illumination as to the meaning of Locke's political writings. Many of the inconsistencies and stylistic differences that Laslett points to in support of his argument are explained by the Strauss school in terms of Locke's careful use of "civil" language to conceal philosophical views that would have shocked the received opinions of his time (see Strauss, 1953: pp. 206-221; Cox, 1960: pp. 1-44; Zuckert, 1974). Most recent interpreters would probably grant that Locke did not simply put aside his philosophical principles when he wrote his political treatises, but there is sharp dispute about the interpretation of these principles that Strauss has offered (see Zuckert, 1975, 1978 for accounts of this dispute).

In order to settle the question of the relationship of Locke's *Essay* and his *Two Treatises,* it would first be necessary to understand each of these works as fully as possible on its own terms. Starting from the *Two Treatises,* we would need to ask if this work makes philosophical assumptions that it fails to justify or presents us with difficulties that force us to look elsewhere for a resolution. Starting from the *Essay,* we would need to explore its main topics—ideas and mental operations, words and language, knowledge, and probability—and then draw out the implications of what Locke says about these topics for morals and politics. If we should discover that each work points beyond itself to a more comprehensive teaching, we would then need to ask if each finds its complement in the other. Although we would wish to give proper weight to evidence that Locke often introduced surface inconsistencies in order to disguise deeper meanings, we also would wish to remain open to the possibility that Locke's philosophical principles are of such a nature that they cannot provide a consistent grounding for his understanding of morals and politics.

The interpretive endeavor which I have just described extends far beyond the scope of my study, but I hope to make a contribution to it by examining a part of Locke's *Essay* that has decisive implications for morals and politics, namely, its discussion of language. Locke emphasizes the utility of language for human association in both the *Essay* and the *Two Treatises.* According to the *Second Treatise,* God has fitted man with understanding and language so that he might "continue and enjoy" society (§77). According to the *Essay,* language "was given us for the improvement of Knowledge, and bond of Society" (III 10.13). It is "the great Bond that holds Society together" (III 11.1). The *Essay* goes beyond the *Two Treatises,* however, to consider the signification of language. At the conclusion of Book II of the *Essay,* Locke explains that he had first planned to move immediately from an account of our ideas to a discussion of the knowledge that we

have by them, but he found it impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our knowledge "without considering, first, the Nature, Use, and Signification of Language" (II 33.19). Accordingly, Book III of the *Essay* takes up the problem of what language signifies and how it signifies what it does. By examining this account of the signification of language, we can draw out the implications of the *Essay* on at least two crucial issues: What view of the political uses of language is required by Locke's principles of signification or meaning? What must the language of political science itself mean on the basis of these principles? The remaining task will be to decide if what Locke says elsewhere about the political uses of language is consistent with the principles of the *Essay* and if terms such as "good" or "man" or "justice" or "virtue," as used in his specifically political writings, presuppose what is said in the *Essay* about the signification of the names of simple qualities or of substances or of modes or of relations.

Besides contributing to our understanding of Locke's political philosophy, a study of his account of language can help us to understand some principles of signification or meaning that are quite influential in philosophy and political science today. Contemporary views of moral and political language have been shaped decisively by the great revolution against Aristotelianism that occurred in the seventeenth century. Locke was not the originator of this revolution. He built on foundations that had been laid by such predecessors as Descartes and Hobbes. Yet Locke discusses the language of morals and politics much more fully and systematically than had his predecessors;[2] and he anticipates many points that would come to be emphasized in later discussions. Among those who owe a great deal to Locke are the empiricists of our time, but it would be a mistake to assume that his views on moral and political language are essentially the same as theirs. Much that we now take to be counter-empiricist can be found in Locke's *Essay*. Indeed, our study will suggest that some of the most radical conclusions of contemporary thought about language and its relation to knowing and being are implicit in modern philosophy from the outset.

THE ORDER OF SIGNIFICATION OF WORDS

The most influential account of the signification of speech up to the

2. See Danford, 1978; pp. 44, 71-72. Danford provides a very useful comparison of Hobbes and Locke on language, signification, and meaning (pp. 43-72).

seventeenth century was that of Aristotle. Locke's discussion of what words signify is best understood against the background of this account, for his purpose is to replace it.

According to Aristotle's treatise *On Interpretation* (16a 3-10), written words are "symbols" of spoken words. Spoken words are "symbols" or "signs" of certain "passions in the soul," or "thoughts." Thoughts, in turn, are "likenesses" of things. This order of signification can be represented as follows:

written words	(symbols)	spoken words	(symbols, signs)	thoughts	likenesses	things

Aristotle's purpose in referring to words as "symbols" is to indicate that they owe their meaning to agreement or convention. Since words have a conventional origin, vocal sounds and combinations of letters do not have the same meaning everywhere. Yet Aristotle says in the passage under consideration that the thoughts which words can symbolize are "the same for all." For example, the words for our term "tree" vary from one language to another, but the various words can symbolize the same thought. The "concept" of a tree, to use the terminology of medieval Aristotelianism, can be the same everywhere. This sameness of thoughts or concepts arises from their relation to things, which Aristotle characterizes as a relation of "likeness." In his treatise *On the Soul,* Aristotle explains in highly metaphorical terms how it is that thoughts can be likenesses of things. In perception and in thinking, he argues, the mind itself is formed by the very "form" *(eidos)* that is at work in the thing to make it what it is. By a process analogous to the way in which wax receives the impression of a signet ring or the hand conforms itself to a thing in grasping it, the mind becomes like the things it knows by receiving their forms (417b 28 418a 6, 424a 16-25, 429a 10 - 432a 15). The relation of words to thoughts is thus a conventional one, but thoughts are related to things by likeness, which is a natural relation. Since thoughts are by nature the likenesses of things, words, by symbolizing thoughts, can disclose things as they are (see Klein, 1964; Mclnerny, 1978).

On first appearance, Locke's description of the order of signification of words is rather close to that of the Aristotelian tradition. Words are signs of "ideas" in the mind, and ideas, in turn, are signs of things:

words	("arbitrary"signs)	ideas	(signs that "conform" or "agree")	things

Locke emphasizes, as Aristotle does, the conventional character of words and their variability from one people to another. Particular articulate sounds come to be signs of certain ideas by "the arbitrary imposition of Men" or by "common use," through "a tacit Consent" (III 2.1, 2.8, 9.4). The "proper and immediate Signification" of words is the ideas that the words stand for in the mind of the speaker, although we suppose that they stand also for ideas in the minds of those with whom we communicate and often for the reality of things (III 2.1-7). Ideas and their agreement or disagreement are all that the mind knows immediately. This knowledge would be useless, however, if it did not reach beyond ideas to things. Our knowledge is "real" only so far as there is "a conformity between our *Ideas* and the reality of Things." In many cases, we can have assurance that our ideas "agree with Things" (IV 4.1-3).

Locke calls the Aristotelian tradition to mind also in what he says about propositional language. A proposition is the joining or separating of words so as to affirm or deny something of something else. Propositions are distinguished from other types of sentences, such as commands, by the fact that they alone are capable of truth or falsity (*cf.* I 2.12; II 31.1-3, 19; IV 5.2). "Verbal Propositions" are properly the signs of "mental Propositions," or a combining or dividing that takes place in thought (IV 5.2-5). They are true if words are affirmed or denied of one another as the ideas they stand for agree or disagree. Nevertheless, if these ideas are not combined or separated so as to agree with the reality of things, the truth contained in propositions will be "only Verbal." If propositions are to contain "real Truth," not only must words be joined as our ideas agree, but the ideas themselves must be put together or separated in the mind "as they, or the Things they stand for do agree, or not" (IV 5.6; *cf.* IV 5.1-9).

Despite these similarities between Locke's and Aristotle's views on the signification of words, there are also some fundamental differences between these views. At the heart of these differences is what Locke says about "ideas," especially about the ideas that are central to moral and political knowledge.

THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE NAMES OF SIMPLE IDEAS

Locke presumes that his readers will readily grant him that there are ideas in men's minds, which are the object of their thinking. Each one of us is conscious of his own ideas, and the words and actions of

others will satisfy us that they have ideas also. The first question to be raised, therefore, is how ideas come to be in the mind. Locke rejects the opinion that there are innate ideas and principles, which the mind receives in its very first being and brings with it into the world. Originally, the mind is "white Paper" (I 3.22; II 1.2) or, to vary the metaphor, an "empty Cabinet" (I 2.15) or a "dark Room" (II 11.17). All of its ideas are derived ultimately from experience. Locke identifies two basic kinds of experience or perception from which ideas originate: "sensation" and "reflection." Sensation, which is the "great Source of most of the *Ideas we* have" (II 1.3), conveys into the mind the qualities of external material things. Reflection furnishes the mind with ideas of its own operations, such as perceiving, willing, and the comparing and compounding of ideas.

The ideas that arise originally from sensation and reflection are referred to by Locke as "simple ideas." Each simple idea can be distinguished from all other ideas, but it is uncompounded and thus irreducible to simpler parts.

With the notable exception of "good" and "evil," the leading ideas of morals and politics are not simple ideas. Nevertheless, it is necessary for the sake of comparison to take notice of the place that Locke assigns to simple ideas in the order of signification. Words that signify simple ideas, such as "red," "hard," or "painful," are not often misunderstood, since the speaker is very likely to have in mind an idea similar to that of the speaker and to associate that idea with the same word. If the hearer doesn't know the meaning of the word, it is usually possible to make him have the simple idea that the word stands for by presenting objects to his senses or by appealing to his reflective experience *(cf.* III 4.4-11, 11.12-14; IV 18.3).

As for the relation of simple ideas to things, Locke holds that all simple ideas are "ectypes" or "copies" of things (II 31.12). They are "real" ideas, inasmuch as they have a foundation in nature and "conform" or "agree" with the reality of things (II 30.1-2). Moreover, all simple ideas are "adequate," that is, they "perfectly represent those Archetypes, which the Mind supposes them taken from; which it intends them to stand for, and to which it refers them" (II 31.1-2). We must notice, however, that only ideas of the "primary" qualities of sensible bodies—solidity, extension, figure, number, and motion or rest—are likenesses of the powers in bodies that produce them. They are "exact Resemblances" or "Images" of real qualities in bodies. Our ideas of the "secondary" qualities, such as colors, tastes, smells, and tactile qualities, have no likeness to the powers in bodies that pro-

duce them (II 8.1-26, 30.1-2, 31.1-2, 31.12). Whereas Aristotle had made likeness the fundamental relationship between thoughts and things, Locke holds that simple ideas alone, and only some of these, can bear a likeness to things. Later, we shall have to ask how moral and political ideas are related to things, if not by way of likeness.

The major issue concerning political language that Locke's discussion of simple ideas raises for us is whether or not there can be genuine propositions—statements that are either true or false—about the political and human good. This is the fundamental issue that divides contemporary empiricist philosophy and political science from ancient political philosophy, and we must determine where Locke stands on this issue.

In his important statement on political speech near the beginning of the *Politics* (1253a 7-19), Aristotle makes the political role of speech depend on its capacity to express genuine propositions about good and just things. According to Aristotle, nature has equipped human beings for political life by giving them alone, of all the animals, the faculty of speech *(logos)*. Speech enables human beings to form the association which seeks the good and happy life for its members in accordance with some conception of justice. Speech can play this crucial role because it is able to signify what is advantageous and harmful and also what is just and unjust in the distribution of political advantages and liabilities. The features of the political association that make it unique and set it apart from the instinctive associations formed by other animals thus depend on the distinctive _capacity of propositional speech to declare or make manifest what is good and just.

The most influential stream of empiricist thought over the past half-century has typically denied that genuine propositions are possible about the good and just things, and this viewpoint has given rise to accounts of the political uses of speech that make such propositions unnecessary. Logical empiricists have sought to establish the non-propositional character of "normative" sentences by an analysis of their meaning. According to this analysis, sentences such as "X is good" cannot be taken as propositions if they are to be interpreted as referring to some property of X, for then the truth or falsity of the assertion could not be tested as, for example, we might test the assertion "X is red."[3] Normative sentences thus belong not among pro-

3. Ayer's influential argument along these lines (1952: pp. 102-113) expresses an early formulation of logical empiricism. For the application of a similar argument to political science, see Oppenheim (1976).

positions, but among the family of optatives, along with commands, requests, wishes, and the like. They lack "cognitive" or "theoretical" meaning, but they might have noncognitive meaning components, especially an "emotive" or motivational meaning. Thus in the sentence "Democracy is good," the meaning of "good might be sought not in any quality that it refers to, but in the expression it gives to the speaker's emotions or feelings towards democracy or in its capacity to evoke similar feelings in others.'

In agreement with contemporary empiricism, liberal thought in its most recent form offers an account of the political uses of speech that dispenses with the need for propositions about the political good. An older liberalism had described and justified free speech as the means by which the people of a democratic or self-governing community can discover and declare the truth about the public good (see Mill, 1859; Meiklejohn, 1948). The newer liberalism most often assumes that there is no public interest or common good by reference to which public policy can be formed and judged. In its view, policy is formed by a process of bargaining and adjustment in which individuals or groups seek to gain particular interests. Government's role is not to deliberate about and plan for the common good, but to insure that the competition of interests proceeds according to rules and perhaps of counterbalancing interests that have inordinate power. Since policy is not the outcome of corporate action by either citizens or their representatives, speech need no longer be viewed as a means of arriving at the truth that such corporate action would require. It is regarded instead as a means of communication by which interests are expressed and reconciled, rules established, bargains negotiated, and agreements ratified.'

Where does Locke stand in this crucial debate over the possibility of propositions about the political and human good? His writings are perhaps the single most important source for both empiricist and liberal thought. Are contemporary views about the signification and uses of normative sentences foreshadowed or prepared for by what

4. See Carnap (1963: pp. 999-1013) and Stevenson (1967). Ogden and Richards (1923) were pioneers in arguing that ethical sentences do not have the same function or use *as* propositions. This argument has been developed more recently by analysts of moral language such as Hare (1952).

5. This viewpoint is perhaps illustrated most clearly by the political theory of "methodological individualism" (see Buchanan and Tullock, 1965), but its most influential expression is found in what is called "pluralism" or "interest-group liberalism" (see Bentley, 1908; Truman, 1951; for critiques, see Weinstein, 1962; Connolly, 1969). The work of John Rawls, on the other hand, shows that not all recent liberal thought would dispense with the need for propositions about the good and just.

Locke says?

Locke continues to agree with the Aristotelian view that propositions are possible about what is good for human beings and political communities. He never doubts that "good" and "evil" are terms that have cognitive meaning. Properly speaking, these terms signify certain simple ideas, namely, our own immediate feelings of pleasure or pain. They are as significant as "red" or "hard" or any other term that stands for an idea. It is only when "good" is removed entirely from simple ideas that it "signifies nothing at all" (II 28.18). Locke would thus reject the thesis of "radical empiricism" that there is "no relevant empirical test" for deciding the truth or falsity of putative propositions about what is good or bad (Ayer, 1952: 106-107). The good *is* pleasure, or what tends to produce pleasure in us; and the evil *is* pain, or what tends to cause us pain (II 20.2, 21.43, 21.63). Statements about the political or human good can be genuine propositions, and they are not reducible to commands, requests, or other optative forms of speech.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of Locke's account of language tend to bring into question the propositional character of what are now called "normative" statements. While Locke can agree with Aristotle that the terms "good" and "evil" have cognitive significance; he rejects the Aristotelian view that these terms signify some perception of things that is fundamentally different from the pleasant or painful sensations. Locke's hedonism, combined with the understanding of the human species or essence that we shall consider shortly, points toward the view that statements about the good are merely expressions of subjective feelings. His account of the signification of such terms as "justice" and "virtue" will give us even more reason to doubt that normative sentences can declare or make manifest what is true of things. As we would expect, Locke's turning away from the Aristotelian account of the signification of propositions about the goodness or justice of things leads him to take a somewhat different view also of the role that language plays in political life.

COMPLEX IDEAS

Locke emphasizes that the mind is "meerly *passive"* in its reception of simple ideas. When ideas are offered to the mind by sense or reflection, "the *Understanding can* no more refuse to have, nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor blot them out, and make new ones in it self, than a mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the Images or *Ideas*, which, the Objects set before it, do therein produce" (II 1.24-25).

Nevertheless, the mind can take the simple ideas that it receives in "bare naked *Perception"* (II 9.1) and combine them into compound or "complex" ideas.

Complex ideas are infinite in number and variety, but they can be reduced under three heads: "substances," "modes," and "relations." Moral and political terms usually signify one or another of these types of complex ideas. Consider, for example, the sentence "The man is a just king." The words of this sentence signify ideas of a substance (man), a mode (justice) and a relation (king).

Ideas of substance, according to Locke, are "such combinations of simple *Ideas,* as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves" (II 12.6). For example, our idea of a man represents a particular substance. It will typically include some simple ideas of reflection, such as life, sense, voluntary motion, and the faculty of reasoning. Our idea of a city or an army is a collective idea of substance, in which many particular substances are considered together as united into one idea (II 24.1-2).

Modes are complex ideas "which however compounded, contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves, but are considered as Dependences on, or Affections of Substances" (II 12.4). Simple modes are only variations or different combinations of the same simple idea, while mixed modes are compounded of simple ideas of different kinds, put together to make a complex one. We must notice that "the greatest part of the Words made use of in Divinity, Ethicks, Law, and Politicks, and several other Sciences" refer to what Locke calls mixed modes (II 22.12). In particular, the names of human actions and the dispositions that cause them signify these sorts of ideas *(cf.* II 22.10, 28.4). Examples of mixed modes that are mentioned at one place or another in the *Essay* include murder, parricide, theft, courage, jealousy, adultery, glory, gratitude, and justice.

Ideas of relation arise when the mind brings together two ideas so as to take a view of them at once, but without uniting them into one (II 12.1). Among the examples of political relations that Locke mentions are subject, judge, Englishman, superior, constable, and king. We shall find that ideas of relation are especially important for ethical and legal judgments, since these judgments view actions in relation to a rule or law.

It is necessary to examine each of these types of complex ideas in order to understand the signification of political language. Complex ideas are compounded entirely of simple ideas of sensation and reflection, and they can always be wholly reduced or resolved into the sim-

ple ideas from which they are made (*cf.* II 1.24, 12.1). Nevertheless, complex ideas stand in a quite different relationship to words and to things than do simple ideas, so they must be treated separately.

THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE NAMES OF SUBSTANCES

From Locke's standpoint the substance that is of greatest importance for morals and politics is *man.* It is not surprising, therefore, that his discussion of substances gives a great deal of attention to the signification of the names and ideas that we form of man. What is surprising is the conclusion to which we are forced by Locke's analysis, namely, that there is no constant and universal human nature, no essence in man himself, by reference to which moral and political science can take its bearings. It is widely recognized that the modern opposition to ancient and medieval conceptions of human nature led, by the nineteenth century, to a substitution of history for nature as the ground of political inquiry. Less well understood is how problematical the idea of human nature becomes in seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy, even before Rousseau. Although Locke's political writings may imply that man has a knowable essence, the *Essay* points in quite another direction, as we shall discover by examining its account of substances.

Complex ideas of substance arise from our experience that certain qualities represented by our simple ideas occur constantly together in nature. Since we are unable to conceive how these qualities can subsist alone or in one another, "we accustom our selves, to suppose some *Substratum,* wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *Substance"* (II 23.1, 21.4). We suppose that sensible qualities inhere in solid extended substances, or bodies, and that reflective qualities inhere in thinking substances, or minds. These substances are thought to persist despite alterations in their qualities. In Locke's view, the supposition or inference of substance is a necessary and unavoidable act of the mind. We "cannot doubt" that there are corporeal and spiritual substances. Experience "assures us of the Existence of such Beings" (II 23.29; *cf.* II 23.1-37).

According to Locke, all things that exist, including substances, are particulars, but the far greatest part of words that make all languages are general terms (III 3.1). Even in our references to particular things, we often use a general term in a qualified way, e.g., "this man" or "that tree." Locke teaches that words become general when they are used as signs of general ideas. Ideas, in turn, become general by a pro-

cess of "abstraction" from those circumstances that give things their particularity *(cf. 11* 11.9; III 3.6-9). Thus the mind adds nothing new in forming the abstract idea of man, but only leaves out of its complex idea "of *Peter* and *James, Mary,* and *Jane,* that which is peculiar to each, and retain[s] only what is common to them all" (III 3.7).

What do these general ideas of substances signify, if they no longer represent particular things? What are the "originals" or "archetypes" of which they are "copies"? Locke holds that our ideas of substances have a double reference: sometimes they are referred by the mind to a supposed "real essence" or inner constitution of a species of things; and sometimes they are designed only to represent the discoverable qualities that exist together in things. In either case, however, our ideas of substances are very "imperfect" and "inadequate" representations or copies of things (III 31.6).

Locke does not deny that substances have a "real essence" or some internal constitution that gives each thing its being and makes it what it is, although he uses the term "essence" only as a grudging concession to the established mode of philosophical discourse *(cf.* IV 6.4). What he does deny emphatically, however, is the claim that the mind can know this real essence and use it to sort things into kinds or species. In particular, he rejects the Aristotelian teaching that the species of things are determined by "substantial forms," which are intelligible to the mind in such a way that our thoughts can be likenesses of them *(cf.* III 3.17, 6.10-24, 10.14, 10.20). The real essence or internal constitution of substances, whatever it might be, is completely unknown to us, so that it can never be represented adequately by an idea or used to identify the species of things.

If our ideas cannot represent the real essence or inner constitution of a substance, then they must somehow represent its observable qualities. As Locke explains, we learn from sensation or reflection that certain qualities exist together in what we suppose to be a substance, and our idea of that substance is based entirely on ideas of these coexisting qualities. When we form an abstract idea from particular collections of coexisting ideas and signify it by a general name, we have what Locke calls the "nominal essence" of the substance. Locke insists that the human mind makes these nominal essences. In doing so, it also makes the species of things, for the sorting of particular substances into species must always be done by reference to nominal essences. The very species or "sorts" of things are thus *"the workmanship of the Understanding"* and not "Nature's Workmanship" *(cf.* III 3.13-14, 6.26-30). The *"boundaries of the Species,*

whereby Men sort them, are made by Men" (III 6.37).

If the species of things are the workmanship of the human understanding and not of nature, it seems to follow that the boundaries of the species will vary as men happen to fashion and name their abstract ideas differently. Different ideas must be taken as different species. Locke does not shrink from this radical conclusion. He writes: "And thus any two abstract *Ideas,* that in any part vary one from another, with two distinct names annexed to them, constitute two distinct sorts, or, if you please, *Species,* as distinctly different, as any two the most remote, or opposite in the World" (III 3.14).

Our complex idea of a substance can never be "adequate," even though it pretends to represent only those simple ideas that are observed to have a union in nature and not some unknowable real essence. This is because the mind can never include all the qualities and powers of a substance in this idea. Such completeness would not be required, of course, if certain of the simple ideas that we have or might obtain of a substance were more fundamental to its being than other ideas. Locke maintains, however, that none of these coexisting simple ideas has an "original precedency, or right to be put in, and make the specifick *Idea,* more than others that are left out" (II 31.8). All of these coexisting simple ideas have an "equal right to go into the complex specifick *Idea"* of the substance.(III 9.13). The mind must be selective in deciding which simple ideas to include in its idea of a substance, and nature itself sets no priorities. Our ideas of substances, and thus their species or sorts, are constructed a great deal more arbitrarily than might first appear.

It is possible now to see how Locke's account of substance calls into question a knowable nature or essence of man. First, he makes it clear that the sorting of individuals into human and nonhuman species depends wholly on the "nominal essence" of man, or on the abstract ideas that people form of man and signify by a general name. The boundaries of the human species depend entirely on man's making and not on nature: "Wherein then, would I gladly know, consists the precise and *unmovable Boundaries* of that *Species?* `Tis plain, if we examine, there is *no* such thing *made by Nature,* and established by Her amongst Men" (III 6.27; *cf.* III 10.21).

A second consequence of Locke's principles is that the human essence or species itself is variable. People in fact form different complex ideas of man; and as these ideas and the general names that signify them vary, there must be 'variation too in the human species; or in what counts as a man:

> He that annexes the name *Man,* to a complex *Idea, made* up of Sense and spontaneous Motion, join'd to a Body of such a shape, has thereby one Essence of the *Species Man:* And he that, upon farther examination, adds rationality, has another Essence of the *Species* he calls *Man:* By which means, the same individual will be a true *Man* to the one, which is not so to the other (III 6.26).

This statement implies that disagreements may very well arise as to whether or not an individual is a "true man." Locke provides us with many examples of such disagreements in supporting his contention that the boundaries of the human species are made by man and not by nature. An example that he considers at several places in the *Essay* is the misshapen foetus. It has been more than once doubted

> whether the *Foetus* born of a Woman were a *Man,* even so far, as that it hath been debated, whether it were, or were not to be nourished and baptized: which could not be, if the abstract *Idea* or Essence, to which the Name Man belonged, were of Nature's making; and were not the uncertain and various Collection of simple *Ideas,* which the Understanding puts together, and then abstracting it, affixed a name to it (III 3.14).

Later, he says emphatically that it is "past doubt" that there would be disagreement as to whether an oddly-shaped foetus were a man or not (III 6.27). Locke provides other cases in which disagreement would arise as to whether or not an individual is a true man: the "natural" or "changeling" (idiot), whose body is shaped like ours, but who lacks language and reason; the "drill" (ape or monkey), whose bodily shape resembles ours, but which is hairy and lacks the ability to speak; and creatures that do or conceivably could speak and reason, but whose bodily shape is very different from ours.

A third and decisive consequence of Locke's principles is that there can be no natural or experimental basis for settling these disagreements as to what a true man is. The "real essence" of man cannot provide such a basis, for it is completely unknown to us:

> No body will doubt, that the Wheels, or Springs (if I may so say) within, are different in a *rational Man,* and a *Changeling,* no more than that there is a difference in the frame between a *Drill* and a *Changeling.* But whether one, or both these differences be essential, or specifical, is only to be known to us, by their agreement, or disagreement with the complex *Idea* that the name *Man* stands for: For by that alone can it be determined, whether one, or both, or neither of those be a man, or no *(III* 6.39).

The boundaries of the human species must thus be determined by the "nominal essence," or the abstract idea of man that we form from

our experience'of individuals and signify by a general name. Yet "the precise number of simple *Ideas* which make the nominal Essence" of man are "far from being setled, and perfectly known," so that "very material Doubts may still arise" about the exact boundaries of the human species (III 6.27). As we have seen, one cannot include all possible simple ideas in a complex idea of substance, and nature sets no priorities as to which ones should be included. There seems to be no necessary reason, for example, why one should choose to include the idea of rationality in a complex idea of man *(cf.* II 27.29; III 6.26).

Rousseau is noted for having blurred the line between the human and the subhuman, but Locke pushes at least as far as would his successor the argument against a natural ground for fixing this line. In the *Second Discourse,* Rousseau seems willing to grant that we might determine by cross-breeding whether or not an ape is actually a primitive form of the human species (1964: pp. 208-209), but Locke writes:

> Nor let any one say, that the power of propagation in animals by the mixture of Male and Female, and in Plants by Seeds, keeps the supposed real *Species* distinct and entire. For granting this to be true, it would help us in the distinction of the *Species* of things no farther than the Tribes of Animals and Vegetables. What must we do for the rest? But in those too it is not sufficient: for if History lie not, Women have conceived by Drills; and what real *Species,* by that measure, such a Production will be in Nature, will be a new Question; and we have Reason to think this not impossible, since Mules and Gimars, the one from the mixture of an Ass and a Mare, the other from the mixture of a Bull and a Mare, are so frequent in the World (III 6.23).

Locke declares that he "once saw a Creature that was the Issue of a Cat and a Rat" (III 6.23), and he repeats without questioning them some reports of creatures having been born with a head or upper body of a man and the lower body of a swine (III 6.27; *cf.* IV 4.16).

Explicit denials of a constant and universal nature of man would be heard with increasing frequency after the mid-eighteenth century, as political philosophers began to think in terms of the historicity of man and the mutability of all species. We see that the denial of an intelligible nature or essence in man that might serve as the basis for moral and political science is contained already in Locke's teaching about ideas of substance. The fundamentally conventional character of any sorting into man and nonman is suggested by his remarkable statement that individual things, "according to their conformity to this or that abstract *Idea,* come to be ranked as under Ensigns: so that this is

of the Blue, that of the Red Regiment; this is a Man, that a Drill: And in this, I think, consists the whole business of *Genus* and *Species* (III 6.36). It seems that distinguishing between men and apes is as much a matter of convention as grouping men under different flags! In sum, Locke seems to go out of his way in the *Essay* to point to the arbitrariness and variability of the human species. We must wonder if the references to "man" in Locke's *Two Treatises* and other moral and political writings can be understood in terms of this account of substances, or whether these writings teach that man has a fixed and knowable essence or nature.[6]

THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE NAMES OF MIXED MODES

Since most of the terms that are used in discourse about man and politics signify ideas of mixed modes, we must examine these ideas carefully in order to see what political language can mean. Ideas of mixed modes, such as justice or murder, are not received passively by the mind, in the way that simple ideas are perceived. Modes, like substances, are complex ideas, which are constructed by the mind from simple ideas. Nevertheless, ideas of modes differ fundamentally from ideas of substances in their relationship both to words and to external things.

My discussion of the order of signification of mixed modes will be divided into two parts. I shall begin with the question of how our ideas of mixed modes are related to "Things existing without us" (IV 8.9) and then consider how names of mixed modes are related to these ideas. Some points of fundamental importance concerning Locke's view of political language will emerge from this discussion. We shall

6. In the *Second Treatise*, for example, Locke observes that a violator of the law of nature "may be destroyed as a *Lyon* or a *Tyger*, one of those wild Savage Beasts, with whom Men can have no Society nor Security" (§ 11). It appears that there is nothing essential to such a person—no natural form or divine image—that requires us to treat him differently from "any other wild beast or noxious brute" that threatens our safety (cf. § 172). Despite Locke's wish to affirm some kind of natural right, his teaching in the *Essay* about substances tends to call into question all natural standards for determining what is good or bad, noble or base, just or unjust for man. Passmore (1965) explores another aspect of Locke's teaching that might call the notion of a fixed human nature into question—his attack on innate ideas. In recent years, Locke has come under attack as a progenitor of modern racism (see Bracken, 1973; Poliakov, 1974: pp. 143-150; Squadrito, 1979), and some of the passages from Locke's discussion of substances have figured in this attack. I can find no basis in Locke's account of substances for criticizing someone who chooses to define the essence of man in such a way as to exclude Negroes or any other racial group.

discover not only that language is indispensable to our knowing or conceiving moral and political things, but also that the very being of these things depends on their being named.[7]

The relation of ideas of mixed modes to things. Locke emphasizes that the names of mixed modes signify quite differently from the names of both simple qualities and substances. Whereas the latter, in addition to signifying ideas immediately, *"intimate* also some *real Existence,* from which was derived their original pattern," the names of mixed modes *"terminate in the* Idea that is in the Mind, and lead not the Thoughts any farther" (III 4.2). In other words, our ideas of mixed modes do not require us to suppose any real existence or being from which these ideas are derived or to which they conform. The names for these ideas

> *lead our Thoughts to the Mind, and no farther.* When we speak of *Justice,* or *Gratitude, we frame* to our selves no Imagination of any thing existing, which we would conceive; but our Thoughts terminate in the abstract *Ideas* of those Vertues, and look not farther; as they do, when we speak of a *Horse,* or *Iron,* whose specifick *Ideas* we consider not, as barely in the Mind, but as in Things themselves, which afford the original Patterns of those *Ideas* (III 5.12).

In view of these passages, let us tentatively represent the order of signification of the names of mixed modes as follows:

names of mixed modes ——▶ ideas of mixed modes ——▶ (?)
(arbitrary signs) (?)

Our first task will be to understand what is indicated here by question marks—the nature of the relationship of ideas of mixed modes to things; and the status of the moral and political things themselves.

As for the relation of ideas of mixed modes to things, Locke emphasizes that these ideas are constructed freely by the mind without reference to any patterns or archetypes in nature. We have found that ideas of substances are copies, though necessarily inadequate ones, of something that exists in the world. The mind, in constructing them,

7. For useful discussions of Locke's treatment of mixed modes and relations, see Perry (1967) and Aronson and Lewis (1970). The latter essay in particular brings out the crucial ontological implication of Locke's account, namely, that a mixed mode does not exist independently of someone's having an idea of it. As Aronson and Lewis explain: "Of course, the properties which constitute that mixed mode exist independently of the formation of the complex idea of the mixed mode, but those properties do not constitute a mixed mode independently of the unity bestowed upon them by the formation of that complex idea (p. 193).

puts together simple ideas that are found to coexist in nature, although Locke grants that the mind, even here, exercises a great deal of selectivity. Ideas of mixed modes, by contrast, "are not Copies, nor made after the Pattern of any real Existence, to which the Mind intends them to be conformable, and exactly to answer" (II 31.14). They are made by the mind, as ideas of substances are, but they are "made *very arbitrarily,* made without Patterns, or reference to any real Existence" (III 5.3). In constructing mixed modes, the mind often unites into one idea "Things that in their Nature have no coherence" (III 5.13), while passing over other collections of ideas "that as often occurr in Nature, and are as plainly suggested by outward Things" (III 5.3). Locke goes so far as to suggest that the idea of a man has no greater connection in nature than the idea of a sheep with killing that would warrant our signifying the one species of action but not the other by the word "murder" *(cf.* III 5.6). Ideas of mixed modes are put together "without reference to any real Archetypes, or standing Patterns, existing any where" (II 31.3).

As for the status of mixed modes as things, we are compelled to wonder if Locke would even acknowledge that real things or beings of this sort exist, independent of our ideas. Mixed modes are "fleeting, and transient Combinations of simple *Ideas,* which have but a short existence any where, but in the Minds of Men, and there too have no longer any existence, than whilst they are thought on" (II 22.8; *cf.* II 22.1). More simply, mixed modes have "no other *reality* but what they have in the Minds of Men" (II 30.4). The very being of mixed modes—and thus the being of most of the moral and political things—depends on their being conceived and, as we shall see, on their being named.

Another way of expressing Locke's argument is to say that in the case of mixed modes, the real and the nominal essences are the same, or that mixed modes have no essence or being apart from our abstract ideas and general names for them *(cf.* III 5.14; IV 6.4). The species of mixed modes—the things that count as justice, courage, murder, and such—are thus determined entirely by human making. Locke had taken a similar position in regard to substances, but he had granted that there is always something about a substance—its real essence—that escapes human knowledge. There is never anything more to a mixed mode, however, than is contained in the idea of it—no real essence distinct from its nominal essence. If I say that "justice" consists of certain ideas, another person might propose to make the word stand for a different collection of ideas, but he cannot

properly say that justice is *really* something different from my idea of it.

Locke's account of mixed modes has the effect of divorcing moral and political knowledge from what can be observed or known about things in nature. The adequacy of our ideas about morals and politics cannot lie in any agreement or disagreement that they might have with anything existing *(cf.* III 5.3, 10.33). Rather than measuring our moral and political ideas by real things, we decide what particular collections of scattered and independent qualities will count as things by reference to these ideas. The things are not patterns or archetypes for the ideas. The ideas of mixed modes are archetypes themselves, and the mind denominates and ranks things "as they come to agree with those Archetypes or Forms it has made" (III 9.7; *cf.* II 31.14). Locke's interpretation of moral and political ideas as archetypes clearly anticipates the later view that the concepts of social science are "ideal types."

This way of understanding mixed modes underlies Locke's argument that moral and political science is properly a demonstrative science, like mathematics, and not an empirical science, like physics *(cf.* III 11.15; IV 3.18, 12.7-15). The real essences of such things as justice, property, government and liberty can be known precisely, since we have made them ourselves; and propositions such as *"Where there is no Property, there is no Injustice"* and *"No Government allows absolute Liberty"* can be "as certain as any Demonstration in *Euclid,"* since the congruity or incongruity of these things can be discovered entirely in the ideas themselves (IV 3.18; *cf.* III 11.16). Strictly speaking, moral and political knowledge, as Locke understands it, is not subject to empirical verification or falsification.

Although mixed modes are not constructed by reference to any connection that ideas have in nature, they *"are not made at random,* and jumbled together without any reason at all" (III 5.7). The construction of mixed modes is guided by the practical ends that men seek to achieve through discourse, especially legislating well and repressing vice and disorders *(cf.* II 22.5, 22.10; III 5.7, 9.7). If men join the idea of killing to the idea of father, so as to make it a different species from killing one's neighbor, and give the name "parricide" to the complex idea thus formed, this is simply because they have found it necessary to speak of this crime as being especially heinous and not because of any natural union of the ideas. Using the term "parricide" to signify this particular combination of ideas allows them to avoid circumlocutions and tedious descriptions *(cf.* III 5.7). Locke's position is not far from the view that language is "practical consciousness," or that

"language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men" (Marx and Engels, 1967, p. 19).

The relation of names of mixed modes to ideas. Our attention thus far has been focused on the relation of ideas of mixed modes to external things. We must now consider the other side of the significative order—the relation of words to these ideas. The chief use of words in communication is to signify to the hearer the same ideas that are in the mind of the speaker. In the case of mixed modes, however, Locke assigns to language some functions that go far beyond that of merely signifying ideas already present in the mind; and these functions give to moral and political language a very special character. I shall call these the "ligative" and the "indicative" functions of language.

When I say that the names of mixed modes have a "ligative" function, I am following up Locke's own metaphor of the name as a bond or knot that ties these complex ideas together. Our ideas of simple qualities and substances have a unity or coherence that derives from their status as copies of things in nature. In the case of mixed modes, however, the mind arbitrarily unites into one idea "Things that in their Nature have no coherence" (III 5.13). Ideas of mixed modes are "for the most. part such, whose component Parts no where exist together, but scattered and mingled with others," and "it is the Mind alone that collects them, and gives them the Union of one Idea" (III 11.18). Now, words or names play an indispensable role in this collecting and unifying activity of the mind. The name is the "Knot" that ties together the loose parts that the mind has collected into the idea of a mixed mode. The name gives the idea a lasting duration and keeps its parts from scattering (III 5.10). Names are thus vital to the very being of mixed modes. A name such as "justice" or "murder," besides signifying the complex idea to which convention has attached it, holds the different parts of this idea together in a complex unity. Without the name, there could be no idea of justice or murder and thus no reality for these mixed modes. We would not likely think of their several parts as making one thing. The being or reality of moral and political things thus depends fundamentally on their being named.

In speaking of the "indicative" function of the names of mixed modes, I have reference to the special role that these names play in making the mixed modes known to us. Locke lists three ways in which we get our ideas of mixed modes. The first way is by "Experience and *Observation* of things themselves," as when we get the idea of wrestling or fencing by seeing two men wrestle or fence (II 22.9; *cf.* II 22.2). This way of getting ideas of mixed modes must be quite rare,

for the emphasis of Locke's *Essay* is on the unlikelihood that such ideas can be derived merely from observation. Mixed modes are not there to be observed as naturally coherent things, like simple qualities and substances. Furthermore, the ideas of morals and politics, in particular, include elements that cannot be observed by the senses, such as the motives, intentions, and dispositions that lie behind bodily actions:

> What the word *Murther,* or *Sacrilege, etc.* signifies, can never be known from Things themselves: There be many of the parts of those complex *Ideas,* which are not visible in the Action it self, the intention of the Mind, or the Relation of holy Things, which make a part of *Murther,* or *Sacrilege,* have no necessary connexion with the outward and visible Action of him that commits either: and the pulling the Trigger of the Gun, with which the Murther is committed, and is all the Action, that, perhaps, is visible, has no natural connexion with those other *Ideas,* that make up the complex one, named *Murther (III 9.7).*

Thus if we wish to help someone to know the meaning of a moral or political term, it is seldom possible to show him the thing that the name stands for, as we ordinarily do in teaching others the meaning of the names of simple ideas and substances *(cf.* III 9.9, 11.18).

A second way of getting ideas of mixed modes is "by *Invention,* or voluntary putting together of several simple *Ideas* in our own Minds" (II 22.9). By Locke's account, the construction of an idea of a mixed mode proceeds as follows: the mind chooses a certain number of simple ideas, which may or may not exist together in nature; it collects them into one idea; and it ties the collection together with a name *(cf.* III 5.4; II 22.4). The point to be noted here is that while ideas of mixed modes usually originate from someone's inventiveness in assembling simple ideas that are scattered and mingled with others, most people do not invent their own ideas of mixed modes. Instead, they take over ideas that someone else has invented. Thus someone must have been first to invent the idea of justice or murder, and others no doubt invented the same ideas on their own, but usually we pattern our ideas of these things after the archetypes that someone else—perhaps a lawgiver—has fashioned.

The third and "most usual" way of getting ideas of mixed modes is through what I am calling the indicative function of language. In this instance, someone represents to us the idea he would have us conceive "by *explaining the names* of Actions we never saw, or Notions we cannot see; and by enumerating, and thereby, as it were, setting before our Imaginations all those *Ideas* which go to the making them up, and

are the constituent parts of them" (II 22.9). This way of forming the idea of a mixed mode presupposes, of course, that sensation and reflection have stored my mind with all those simple ideas of which the complex idea is compounded: "Thus a Man may come to have the *Idea* of *Sacrilege,* or *Murther,* by enumerating to him the simple *Ideas* which these words stand for, without ever seeing either of them committed" (II 22.3). The inventors of mixed modes have the ideas before the names, but most of us get the ideas *"by the explication of those terms that stand for them"* (II 22.3). What one of a thousand, Locke asks, "ever frames the abstract *Idea* of *Glory* or *Ambition,* before he has heard the Names of them" (III 5.15)? In fact, men seldom imagine any species of mixed modes *"but such as are set out by name"* (III 5.11).

In sum, most of what we know about man and politics is learned through language rather than observation. Language serves to give unity and coherence to our moral and political ideas and also to point these ideas out, to show them or make them manifest. By helping us to combine discrete elements of our experience, language discloses things that are not perceived or perceptible as things. We should not assume, however, that men usually reach clarity and agreement about the meaning of moral and political terms. The names of mixed modes "are very various and doubtful," because for the most part they *"want Standards* in Nature, whereby Men may rectify and adjust their significations" (III 9.7). The signification of moral and political terms varies widely not only in translations from one language to another, but even within the same language. Men learn the sounds of moral words, but spend little effort in searching out their true and precise meaning. Thus "these moral Words are, in most Men's mouths, little more than bare Sounds; or when they have any, 'tis for the most part but a very loose and undetermined, and consequently obscure and confused signification" (III 9.9). Locke's emphasis on the variability of moral and political ideas makes us wonder how the agreement necessary to political life can ever be secured.

THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE NAMES OF RELATIONS

Virtually all that has been said about names and ideas of mixed modes applies also to relations. Ideas of relation are complex ideas,

constructed "very arbitrarily" by the mind without reference tonatural patterns or archetypes. These ideas are archetypes themselves, and they must be "adequate" if they have been put together consistently (II 30.4, 31.3, 31.14). The names of relations lead the mind only to ideas and do not carry with them the supposition of some real being to which these ideas are conformable. They signify the real as well as the nominal essence, since the idea that they represent is the only essence that relations can have. In relations as well as modes, the complex idea is tied together and preserved by the name. Knowledge of the name of a relation usually precedes knowledge of the idea itself, and men seldom imagine a relation that is not named. The meaning of these names, which can be defined precisely but not made evident by observation, will vary widely from one person or nation to another, depending on what men find it useful to compare *(cf.* III 5).

Ideas of relation arise from the mind's activity of referring or comparing one thing to another in respect to extent, degrees, time, place, cause and effect, or some other circumstance. Anything is capable of *"almost an infinite number of* Considerations, in reference to other things" (II 25.7). One man, for example,

> may at once be concerned in, and sustain all these following *Relations,* and many more, *viz.* Father, Brother, Son, Grandfather, Grandson, Father-in-Law, Son-in-Law, Husband, Friend, Enemy, Subject, General, Judge, Patron, Client, Professor, European, English-man, Islander, Servant, Master, Possessor, Captain, Superior, Inferior, Bigger, Less, Older, Younger, Contemporary, Like, Unlike, *etc.* to an almost infinite number: he being capable of as many Relations, as there can be occasions of comparing him to other things, in any manner of agreement, disagreement, or respect whatsoever (II 25.7).

This is a particularly interesting example not only because it indicates that many of our political ideas are relations, but also because it serves to illustrate Locke's contention that our ideas of relation can be more precise than our ideas of the things which are related. In particular, "the Notion we have of a Father, or Brother, is a great deal clearer, and more distinct, than that we have of a Man: Or, if you will, *Paternity* is a thing whereof 'tis easier to have a clear *Idea,* than of *Humanity"* (II 25.8). Thus the fact that we cannot possibly form a precise idea of the substance *man* does not prevent us from developing a demonstrative science of morals and politics, since this science consists primarily of ideas of mixed modes and relations.

Of great importance to morals and politics are what Locke calls

"voluntary" relations and "moral" relations. Voluntary relations depend upon some agreement that men have made whereby someone comes to have a right, power, or obligation to do something (II 28.3). The human relationships peculiar to civil society are of this type, for as we see in the *Second Treatise,* these relationships arise from agreement or consent. Moral relations consist in the conformity or agreement of human actions to some rule or law to which they are referred *(cf.* II 28.4). This rule or law serves as a "Touch-stone" to which "we bring our voluntary Actions, to examine them by, and try their Goodness, and accordingly to name them" (II 28.14). Let us note that Locke's definition of moral goodness builds on his principle that what is good or evil for a person is his own pleasures or pains or else the things that cause, increase or diminish these simple perceptions. An action is morally good if complying with the law is apt to cause or increase pleasure, and it is morally evil if violating the law is apt to produce or increase pain *(cf.* II 28.5). Here we see the reason for Locke's insistence that conformity to a law cannot be the source of moral good and evil unless there is a lawmaker who imposes definite rewards and punishments.

Locke identifies three kinds of rules or laws that men refer to in judging the morality of their actions: the divine or natural law, the civil law, and the law of opinion or reputation. Very little is said about civil law in the *Essay.* The law of opinion or reputation is treated in more detail. Of particular interest is Locke's emphasis on how greatly our fear of being censured and disliked by the company we keep influences our thoughts and actions *(cf.* I 3.25, II 28.12). While he acknowledges that this pressure toward social conformity poses a danger to the advancement of knowledge *(cf.* IV 3.20, 15.6), he does not hold, as liberals in the nineteenth century would, that this pressure threatens liberty and individuality even more than governmental oppression does. One can even find a certain justification in Locke's *Essay* for these pressures to conform to society's fashions and opinions. Upon entering society, people give up their right to use force against any fellow citizen, but they retain the power "of Thinking well or ill; approving or disapproving of the actions of those whom they live amongst, and converse with: And by this approbation and dislike they establish amongst themselves, what they will call *Virtue* and Vice" (II 28.10).8

8. Horwitz (1976) recognizes that the law of opinion or reputation is "the most important basis for morality in Locke's thought" (p. 335), and he draws out some of the implications of this for education and politics.

The divine or natural law is discussed at very great length in the *Essay,* and the difficulties in finding a consistent teaching about this law are enormous. It is not possible here to address the fiercely debated question of whether the difficulties and even glaring inconsistencies in Locke's statements about divine or natural law in his various writings are intentional—whether he presents a surface teaching rather like medieval natural law doctrine, but intentionally contradicts it, thus indicating to the careful reader his preference for something like the alternative natural law doctrine that Hobbes had developed.[9] The most that our analysis entitles us to say on this matter is that Locke's strong insistence that ideas of relation have no standing patterns or archetypes and must therefore be fashioned arbitrarily by the human mind would seem to rule out a divine or natural law that stands as "the only true touch-stone of *moral Rectitude"* (II 28.8; *cf.* I 3.18).

One final point about moral relations should be noted. Locke argues that human actions, considered in themselves, are never morally good or evil. Their moral goodness or badness arises only when the action is referred by the mind to some rule or law. Thus an action such as murder or a disposition such as justice or courage has no moral goodness or value in itself. The moral value must be added by the work of the mind. To put this point in Locke's terminology, an idea of relation must be added to a mixed mode. A distinction is necessary between "the *positive Idea* of the Action" or mode and "the *reference it has to a Rule"* (II 28.16).

By conceiving of human actions as fully intelligible apart from considerations of moral good and evil, Locke points toward the radical separation of facts from values that occurs in twentieth-century social science. The action itself is one kind of idea—a mixed mode, and the moral value of the action is another kind of idea—a relation. The moral value is added to the action as a result of the mind's arbitrary decision to compare the action to a rule. Locke's position is different from value-free social science, however, in at least two important ways. While actions have no intrinsic goodness or badness of a *moral* sort, they may have what might be called a *natural* goodness or evil simply by virtue of their pleasant or painful character. Moreover, while moral judgments are not intrinsic to our understanding of an action, a science of man and politics will nonetheless go on to judge ac-

9. For a recent survey of the positions of the contending sides in this debate, see Zuckert (1978).

tions in moral terms. Locke thus observes that it is not enough for us to have formed distinct ideas of human actions "and to know what Names belong to such and such Combinations of *Ideas.* We have a farther and greater Concernment, and that is, to know whether such Actions so made up, are morally good, or bad" (II 28.4).

CONCLUSION

The immediate aim of my examination of Locke's *Essay* has been to set forth Locke's teaching about the signification of moral and political language and to show how this teaching breaks with Aristotelianism and prepares for views of language that would become influential in political science. Beyond this, I have sought to identify the fundamental issues regarding language that political inquiry must face. I can best summarize my findings on these points by listing the main issues that have come to light in our study and stating Locke's position on them.

The political categories. At a time when a sentence such as "X is red" is often taken as the model for understanding all factual propositions, it is beneficial to be reminded by Locke that the terms which we use to talk about things may not all "mean" or signify in the same way. Locke holds that terms such as "good," "man," "justice" and "citizen" signify, through the mediation of ideas, things that differ not only in what they are, but also in their very mode of being. Language thus points to the kinds of beings that moral and political things at bottom are or, to use traditional terminology, to the different "categories" to which these things belong. Locke treats things, ideas, and names by reference to four categories: simple qualities, substances, modes, and relations. Simple qualities are signified by such terms as "good" and "bad," substances by terms such as "man" and "city," modes by terms such as "theft" and "justice," and relations by terms such as "crime" and "citizen."

The signification of moral and political terms. Locke breaks sharply with the Aristotelian tradition in describing the order of signification of moral and political terms. The fundamental point on which he opposes Aristotelianism concerns the relation of ideas to things. This opposition leads necessarily to a new understanding of the way in which language can be true or false. What Locke does is to call into question the possibility that our moral and political ideas can be true representations or likenesses of things as they exist in themselves. There is no principle of coherence in moral and political things themselves, no in-

telligible essence or form, that ideas can represent by way of likeness. Locke's questioning of the representational character of moral and political ideas extends through all four categories. Strictly speaking, simple ideas of good and evil signify only subjective feelings of pleasure or pain and not the real qualities of things beyond the mind. The "real essences" of substances such as *man* are altogether hidden, so that they can never be represented adequately by an idea. Ideas of mixed modes and relations, which are the kinds of ideas that most moral and political terms signify, have no archetypes or patterns in nature at all. These ideas are not "likenesses" or "copies" or even "effects" of anything that exists in the world. This account of the signification of mixed modes and relations brings Locke close to the later view that the concepts of the human sciences are archetypal ideas or ideal types; and it opens the way to the view, which Locke himself expresses, that the creation of these concepts is guided not by patterns in nature but by practical or pragmatic ends.

Language and knowing. Locke's view of how we come to know political things is very different from the one suggested by the dominant stream of empiricist thought over the past century. By Locke's account, we have to depend on language for most of what we know about the political and human things; because these things, being mostly mixed modes and relations, are not given to observation in the manner of simple qualities and substances. Suppose that I refer to "the green tree." The words "green" and "tree" can signify to other people my ideas of a color and a substance, but the ideas themselves are derived from experience. If others should fail to understand the meaning of my words, I could show them what these words mean by pointing to observable things. Suppose, however, that I refer to "the just citizen." Here again, the words signify ideas, but they also do a great deal more. Justice and citizenship are not coherent beings in nature that people can observe. Experience supplies only the raw materials from which the human mind constructs these political ideas, and language is essential to this construction. The words "just" and "citizen" tie together and sustain in one complex whole the scattered elements that make up my idea of a certain mixed mode and a certain relation. Mixed modes and relations have no durable being apart from their names. What these names mean can seldom be established by a showing or by direct observation. Their meaning must usually be conveyed through language by a process of defining.

Language and being. It is remarkable how far Locke goes in holding that language, or the act of naming, is essential not only to our know-

ing the moral and political things, but also to their very being. Mixed modes and relations are, for the most part, constructed by the mind from elements that have no coherence in nature. They have "no other *reality* but what they have in the Minds of Men" (II 30.4), and their reality or thingness as an idea depends on the ligative function that names perform in tying loose parts together and keeping them from scattering. Thus in the case of such things as glory or murder or subjection or virtue, their being as well as their division into species or sorts depends on naming. Language fixes their real as well as their nominal essence. Even in the case of the substance *man,* the boundaries of the species depend entirely on man's making, or on the nominal essence, and there is no basis in nature for settling the disagreements that must inevitably arise as to what a true man is. This view of being has obvious consequences for knowing. Locke depicts morals and politics as a demonstrative science that begins from ideas that are constructed arbitrarily by the mind. Although he does not wish that this science should float entirely free of a grounding in nature, like a "Castle in the Air" *(cf.* IV 4.1), he tends to undermine its natural foundation, first, by denying that there are natural archetypes to guide the construction and testing of ideas of mixed modes and relations and, second, by holding that there is no intelligible nature or essence in man, or that the boundaries of the species *man* are constructed by man himself with a high degree of arbitrariness."

The possibility of normative propositions. Despite his fundamental break with Aristotelianism on the signification of language, Locke continues to hold that there can be genuine propositions about what is good and evil, just and unjust, or virtuous and vicious. He teaches, in fact, that the truth of such propositions can be known with certainty. These propositions are vital to the development of morals and politics as a demonstrative science. Locke would surely reject radical em-

10. Leibnitz recognizes that the tendency of Locke's account of mixed modes is to deny the reality of thingness of moral entities, such as justice and gratitude, as patterns for thought. In Leibnitz's critique of Locke's *Essay,* Theophilus, the apparent spokesman for Leibnitz, argues that these entities are not less real than qualities of the body: "It is true you do not see justice as you see a horse, but you understand it no less, or rather you understand it better; it is no less in acts than directness or obliqueness is in motions, whether you consider it or not. And to show you that men are of my opinion, and men, indeed, the most capable and most experienced in human affairs, I have only to avail myself to the authority of the Roman jurisconsults, followed by all others, who call these mixed modes or these moral entities, *things,* and in particular, *incorporeal things" (1949: p. 329).*

piricism's claim that normative sentences are devoid of cognitive meaning. He grants that words are insignificant when they fail to signify ideas *(cf.* III 10.2); but he insists that "good" and "evil" signify simple ideas in one way or another, that "justice" and "injustice" signify ideas of mixed modes, and that "virtuous" and "vicious" signify ideas of relation. Nevertheless, we are justified in doubting that the propositional character of normative sentences can be upheld on Lockean grounds. Locke prepares for the later denial of the possibility of normative propositions by teaching that there are no archetypes for our simple ideas of good and evil except for subjective feelings of pleasure or pain and no archetypes in nature at all for our ideas of mixed modes and relations.

The uses of political language. Locke's break with Aristotelianism regarding the signification of moral and political language requires a new understanding of the role of language in political life. Language may be the great "bond" or "tie" of society *(cf.* III 1.1, 10.13, 11.1), but its function cannot be to declare a perception of good or just things that is fundamentally different from pleasant or painful sensations. Moreover, the things that are signified by most moral and political terms—the mixed modes and relations—are not perceived, not discovered in nature, and thus speech about them cannot manifest the nature of reality in the way that Aristotle had taught. The meanings that we attach to these terms must be highly variable, since they cannot be fixed by reference to any natural patterns or archetypes *(cf.* II 32.10-12). In fact, the names of very complex ideas, "such as for the most part are moral Words, have seldom, in two different Men, the same precise signification; since one Man's complex *Idea* seldom agrees with anothers', and often differs from his own, from that which he had yesterday, or will have to morrow" (III 9.6). Because of this extreme variability, one important function of communication by language must be to promote consensus about the meaning of moral and political terms either through legislative fiat *(cf.* IV 4.10, but also III 2.8) or through voluntary agreement. Language creates and sustains the shared meanings that political life requires in a natural world that is empty of such meanings. Another function of political language must be to communicate private desires or interests and to maximize their satisfaction through the establishment of rules or laws that protect life, liberty, and the "pursuit of Happiness" (II 2.59). Locke thus anticipates those views of the political uses of language that have dominated recent thought.

University of Georgia EUGENE F. MILLER

REFERENCES

Aristotle, *On Interpretation.* Translated by Harold P. Cooke. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

__________, *On the Soul.* Translated by W.S. Hett. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957.

__________, *Politics.* Translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Aronson, Christopher and Douglas Lewis, "Locke on Mixed Modes, Knowledge, and Substances." *Journal of History of Philosophy Vol. 8:* pp. 193-199, 1970.

Ayer, Alfred J., *Language, Truth and Logic.* New York: Dover Publications, 1952.

Bentley, Arthur F., *The Process of Government.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908.

Bracken, H.M., "Essence, Accident and Race." *Hermathena Vol. 116:* pp. 81-96, 1973.

Buchanan, James M. and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962.

Carnap, Rudolf, "Replies and Systematic Expositions." *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap.* Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, pp. 859-1013, 1963.

Connolly, William E. *The Bias of Pluralism.* Edited by William E. Connolly. New York: Atherton Press, 1969.

Cox, Richard H. *Locke on War and Peace.* Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1960.

Danford, John W. *Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hare, R.M. *The Language of Morals.* Oxford: At the Clarendon Press.

Horwitz, Robert. "John Locke and the Preservation of Liberty: A Perennial Problem of Civic Education." *The Political Science Reviewer Vol. 6:* pp 325-353.

Klein, Jacob. "Aristotle: An Introduction." *Ancients and Moderns.* Edited by Joseph Cropsey. New York: Basic Books, pp. 50-69, 1964.

Laslett, Peter. "Introduction" to *Locke's Two Treatises of Government.* Edited by Peter Laslett. New York: Mentor Books, 1965.

Leibnitz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding.* Translated, with notes by Alfred Gideon Langley. LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1949.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Edited by Peter H. Nidditch . Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1975.

__________, *Two Treatises of Government.* A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Apparatus Critical by Peter Laslett. New York: Mentor Books, 1965.

McInerny, Ralph. "Can God be Named By Us?" *The Review of Metaphysics Vol. 32:* pp. 53-73, 1978.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology.* New York: International Publishers, 1967.

Meiklejohn, Alexander. *Free Speech and Its Relation to Self-Government.* New York: Harper and Row, 1948.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty.* London: Parker, 1859.

Ogden, C.K. and I.A. Richards. *The Meaning of Meaning.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1923.

Oppenheim, Felix E. *Moral Principles in Political Philosophy.* 2nd Edition. New York: Random House, 1975.

Passmore, J.A. "The Malleability of Man in Eighteenth-Century Thought." *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century.* Edited by Earl R. Wasserman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.

Perry, David L. "Locke on Mixed Modes, Relations, and Knowledge." *Journal of the History of Philosophy Vol. 5:* pp. 219-235, 1967.

Poliakov, Leon. *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe.* Translated by Edmund Howard. London: Sussex University Press and Heinemann Educational Books, 1974.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The First and Second Discourses.* Translated by Roger D. and Judith R. Masters. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964.

Squadrito, Kay. "Racism and Empiricism." *Behaviorism Vol. 7:* pp. 105-115, 1979.

Stevenson, Charles. *Ethics and Language.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944.

Truman, David B. *The Governmental Process.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.

Weinstein, Leo. "The Group Approach: Arthur F. Bentley." *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics.* Edited by Herbert H. Storing. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. 151-224, 1962.

Zuckert, Michael. "Fools and Knaves: Reflections on Locke's Theory of Philosophical Discourse." *Review of Politics Vol. 36:* pp. 544-564, 1974.

__________, "The Recent Literature of Locke's Political Philosophy." *The Political Science Reviewer Vol. 5:* pp. 271-304, 1975.

__________ "Of Wary Physicians and Weary Readers: The Debates on Locke's Way of Writing." *The Independent Journal of Philosophy Vol. 2:* pp. 55-66, 1978.