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The "Best Fence" against Nature's Ambiguity: The Role of Language in Locke's Thought

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In *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke suggests that nature provides little guidance for how human beings ought to live. This lack of guidance stems from nature's lack of "form" in the classical sense and its moral, ethical, and political neutrality. Regarding nature's ambiguity or lack of form, Locke counters much ancient and medieval thought by arguing that nature is always in flux and contains no basic metaphysical categories such as Platonic "*Forms*" or Aristotelian "*Essences*" that organize reality into visible kinds or species of things (e.g., "man" and "horse").[1] While nature is not altogether formless, Locke demonstrates that it is ultimately too complex to be described in terms of distinct species and accordingly insists that such groupings of phenomena are created by us, not by nature.[2] The "boundless[ness]" and flux of the "vast Ocean of *Being*" mean that our ideas about species are often but poor approximations of shifting shapes.[3] Thus understood, nature appears too ambiguous to have obvious implications for ethics, morality, or politics, a position reinforced by Locke's view that most ideas about what humans ought to do and how they ought to live are arbitrary. Specifically, he maintains that "the greatest part of the Words made use of in Divinity, Ethicks,

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Law, and Politicks" are "mixed modes," or "Combinations of simple *Ideas*" that are "put together by the Mind" and have no basis in nature, making them even more arbitrary than species notions.[4] Generally speaking, the understanding creates mixed modes without reference to nature in order to facilitate "Communication, which is the chief end of Language."[5]

These and other aspects of Locke's "'new way of ideas'" appear to upend reality as many people know it, a fact of which Locke is aware and an impression he attempts to combat.[6] His efforts at reassurance begin early in the *Essay*, where he frames his study of the human understanding as a means of helping us better adapt to our condition. Far from leaving us existentially unmoored, he suggests, a realistic assessment of our faculties allows us to manage our expectations of the world and grasp, for example, when we can "attain Certainty" and when we "can only judge and guess."[7] The "Sailor" should "know the length of his Line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the Ocean." He needs to know merely "that it is long enough to reach the bottom, at such Places, as are necessary to direct his Voyage, and caution him against running upon Shoals, that may ruin him."[8] It is true that when the limited human understanding sets to work on the vast fabric of reality, the yield is a rather meager store of actual knowledge. However, Locke insists that men "have Light enough to lead them to the Knowledge of their Maker, and the sight of their own Duties"; the "Candle" of the understanding "shines bright enough for all our Purposes," which primarily concern the regulation of our conduct.[9]

Because nature is an inadequate guide, the ground of Locke's optimism regarding our ability to navigate reality must be found elsewhere. This article maintains that Locke defends the convention of language as a way to anchor man in the universe. The potentialities inherent in language are what allow men to think, act, and live reasonably well together. Language does suffer from various natural "imperfection[s]" and remains ever vulnerable to men's "*wilful*" and negligent "abuse."[10] However, it can also assist us in clarifying and settling our use of words adequately for practical purposes, thereby helping to keep nature's ambiguity at bay.

Insofar as language serves as an aid rather than an obstacle to communication, it is a means of orienting ourselves in the world.

Normally, what Locke calls the "*civil Use*" of words is sufficient for regulating human affairs.[11] Civil or common discourse emerges over time as individuals formulate ideas based on their everyday experiences and use words to label their thoughts and communicate with others.[12] The aforementioned mixed-modal ideas and ideas about natural species, which Locke also refers to as "particular sort[s] of corporeal Substances," are among the types of ideas men have.[13] Because most people are born into communities with established languages, they find a vast array of named concepts already in common use, and often without thinking much about it, they fall into talking about things as the people around them do.[14] The existence of common terms with common meanings makes the world seem somewhat stable and orderly, and as a consequence many people live unaware of and therefore undisturbed by nature's ambiguity.

Notwithstanding his tendency to deconstruct men's ideas and describe some of them as "*inadequate*" or as having nothing to do with nature, Locke believes in preserving this beneficial linguistic situation.[15] To this end, he insists that those most likely to unsettle the common meanings of words unnecessarily—philosophers and other learned men—become public servants and commit to maintaining common discourse.[16] Oftentimes, this will require mere deference to how words are commonly used.[17] However, upholding common discourse will at times demand a more active superintendence that Locke calls "philosophical Discourse," a "*Use* of Words" distinct from traditional philosophy.[18] Public-spirited philosophers might, for example, clarify common meanings or even depart from common use, though the latter should be done "sparingly" and with the aim of improving common discourse.[19] This prescription of a conservative rhetorical response to nature's lack of guidance appears to be grounded in dispositional prudence rather than in Locke's basic philosophical premises, but it is nonetheless his stated preference.[20]

When one regards Locke's political works through the lens of the *Essay*'s analysis, the implications are relatively straightforward.

The *Second Treatise*, for example, would be considered an exercise in philosophically honed political rhetoric, its arguments understood as having no foundation in the nature of things. On this interpretation, Locke's political liberalism does not follow from the *Essay*'s epistemology and ontology but is simply a prudent response to specific historical circumstances.[21] This is a difficult claim for scholars to accept, largely because in the treatise Locke writes with such conviction about the nature of man and an associated set of moral and political ideas.[22] However, the *Essay*'s concept of civil discourse accounts for this disjunction. In Locke's view, works of civil discourse should obscure the truth about nature by, for example, making assumptions about human nature even though nature does not define "man."[23] For this concealment to be successful, however, the civil work must obscure its own status as a civil work. Locke's effectiveness in achieving this second concealment is a boon to scholars and, all things considered, to humanity.

Locke shows that language, specifically civil discourse, facilitates social stability and civic peace by serving as the "best fence" against nature's ambiguity.[24] To defend this claim, this article first considers his account of civil discourse, the upholding of which is the heart of his position. It then explores the limitations of civil discourse in settling the meanings of mixed-modal and substance names and, in light of these limitations, examines the extent to which philosophical discourse can improve civil discourse. Philosophical discourse can greatly benefit civil discourse regarding mixed modes; improving substance names is more difficult, though Locke proposes a strategy whereby notions of "man" can be improved for practical purposes. The article concludes by distilling the implications of Locke's philosophy of language for the interpretation of his political works.

The Establishment, Political Significance, and Maintenance of Civil Discourse

Although Locke's universe contains no natural species and is devoid of natural moral and ethical principles, he indicates that these facts do not ordinarily translate into public uncertainty

concerning the status of beings or the meanings of ideas. This is so because most people are born into cultures and communities in which certain ways of thinking and talking about things are established, if not uncontested. In other words, most people live according to "custom," which is a "greater power than Nature."[25] Custom, Locke claims,

> settles habits of Thinking in the Understanding, as well as of Determining in the Will, and of Motions in the Body; all which seems to be but Trains of Motion in the Animal Spirits, which once set a-going, continue in the same steps they have been used to: which, by often treading, are worn into a smooth path, and the Motion in it becomes easy, and as it were Natural.[26]

While Locke criticizes thoughtless adherence to custom, he seeks to exploit custom's ability to carve out a way of life for human beings in an ontologically uncertain world.[27] Habit, tradition, and belief are all aspects of custom that can help ground us in the universe, but one aspect of custom—language, especially common discourse—is particularly important for consolidating the salutary effects of custom in general.[28]

The distinction between the "*civil Use*" of words and their "*Philosophical Use*" is central to Locke's discussion of language, to which Book III of the *Essay*, "Of Words," is devoted.[29] Civil discourse is "such a communication of Thoughts and *Ideas* by Words, as may serve for the upholding common Conversation and Commerce, about the ordinary Affairs and Conveniences of civil Life, in the Societies of Men."[30] It is the currency of "Merchants and Lovers, Cooks and Taylors."[31] By contrast, philosophical discourse involves "such an use of [words], as may serve to convey the precise Notions of Things, and express, in general Propositions, certain and undoubted Truths, which the Mind may rest upon, and be satisfied with, in its search after true Knowledge." Locke asserts that the "two Uses are very distinct" and remarks that "a great deal less exactness will serve in the one [civil], than in the other [philosophical]."[32]

Near the beginning of his discussion of language, Locke furnishes an account of the process whereby the meanings of words are established.[33] Although he does not restrict his analysis to common meanings, the discussion is particularly applicable to common meanings because it emphasizes the public and unreflective nature of the process. The meanings of words in general and common words in particular are established through an iterative process that begins with a departure from what Locke considers the "*primary or immediate Signification*" of words.[34] Words "can properly and immediately signify nothing but the *Ideas*, that are in the Mind of the Speaker" because only the speaker can know precisely which idea or combination thereof he intends when employing a given word.[35] However, the desire to communicate with others leads men to make two suppositions when using language that, though potentially at odds with the "primary" signification of words, encourage verbal exchanges about their own ideas and the common world they inhabit. "*First,*" Locke says, "*they suppose their Words to be Marks of the* Ideas *in the Minds also of other Men, with whom they communicate.*" And "[s]econdly . . . they *often suppose their Words to stand also for the reality of Things.*" Men make the first supposition because they do not wish to "talk in vain" but rather to be "understood," the second because they "would not be thought to talk *barely* of their own Imaginations."[36] These suppositions set the stage for the possibility of life in society by drawing men into conversation about common things on the assumption that their discourse is not entirely futile.

As a consequence of men's sustained efforts to communicate, a convergence between "*certain Sounds*" and "certain *Ideas*" develops over time:

> That [words] 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.[37]

Locke complains that much of this "*constant*" joining of sounds and ideas occurs carelessly and without knowledge, and he never ceases to reiterate the only proper signification of words.[38] Nevertheless, the association of particular sounds with particular ideas is what makes words useful: "But so far as Words are of Use and Signification, so far is there a constant connexion between the Sound and the *Idea*; and a Designation, that the one stand for the other: without which Application of them, they are nothing but so much insignificant Noise."[39]

For Locke, the stakes of facilitating consensus regarding the meanings of words are high, for he holds that many "Controversies" are primarily "Verbal," or owing to the "uncertain or mistaken Significations" of words.[40] He says,

> But I am apt to imagine, that were the imperfections of Language, as the Instrument of Knowledge, more thoroughly weighed, a great many of the Controversies that make such a noise in the World, would of themselves cease; and the way to Knowledge, and, perhaps, Peace too, lie a great deal opener than it does.[41]

> And here I desire it may be considered, and carefully examined, whether the greatest part of the Disputes in the World, are not merely Verbal, and about the Signification of Words; and whether if the terms they are made in, were defined, and reduced in their Signification . . . to determined Collections of the simple *Ideas* they do or should stand for, those Disputes would not end of themselves, and immediately vanish.[42]

Locke registers a political preference: peace is desirable, and if the cause of many "Disputes" is the "uncertain or mistaken Significations" of words, then settling words' meanings becomes an urgent social and political necessity.

Locke employs the example of Caesar Augustus to illustrate both the force of common usage and the link between the stability of civil discourse and civic peace:

> And therefore the great *Augustus* 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.[43]

If one wishes to be understood, common usage will have a constraining effect on one's use of words. Even the "great *Augustus*" had to conform his speech to the "authority" of a particular language "tradition."[44] Moreover, the reference to Augustus in this context tacitly reinforces the explicit connection Locke makes between linguistic stability and peace. The association of Augustus with a period of internal peace in the Roman Empire is at least as old as Tacitus, and Locke could assume that his readers would be aware of the association.[45]

In Locke's view, the utility of common discourse in facilitating communication and keeping the peace generates an obligation for speakers to defer to common meanings and to avoid linguistic innovation whenever possible. He offers no reason beyond utility as a basis for this obligation and simply asserts that failure to accept the limitations on meaning imposed by common usage amounts to speaking improperly, or to being a purveyor of "insignificant Noise."[46] Should one believe that the meaning of a term *must* shift, Locke predictably insists that one announce or "make known that new Signification."[47] Even so, this is something that should be approached with the greatest circumspection, particularly in societies where a language is already established:

> For Words, especially of Languages already framed, being no Man's private possession, but the common measure of Commerce and Communication, 'tis not for any one,

> at pleasure, to change the Stamp they are current in; nor alter the *Ideas* they are affixed to; or at least when there is a necessity to do so, he is bound to give notice of it.[48]

Generally speaking, however, "in Communication with others, it is necessary, that we conform the *Ideas* we make the vulgar Words of any Language stand for, to their known proper Significations."[49]

Locke has harsh words for those who intentionally confound common discourse or are insufficiently attentive to the consequences of their use of words. For example, he lambastes "learned Disputants" who abuse language through "*affected Obscurity*, by either applying old Words, to new and unusual Significations; or introducing new and ambiguous Terms, without defining either; or else putting them so together as may confound their ordinary meaning."[50] When sophisticated men endeavor to prove that white is black, two ideas ordinary people know well how to distinguish, they undermine the usefulness of language and "destroy the Instruments and Means of Discourse, Conversation, Instruction, and Society."[51] More worryingly, such abuse of language has not "stopped in logical Niceties, or curious empty Speculations," but has "invaded the great Concernments of Humane Life and Society," bringing "Confusion, Disorder, and Uncertainty into the Affairs of Mankind." Particularly concerning are the unsettling effects of unrestrained disputation on "Religion and Justice," the "two great Rules" by which men live. Locke asks, "What have the greatest part of the Comments and Disputes, upon the Laws of GOD and Man served for, but to make the meaning more doubtful, and perplex the sense?"[52]

The "Imperfection" of Words and the Limitations of Common Discourse Regarding Mixed Modes and Substances

Much of the time, civil discourse suffices for the purpose of regulating men's common affairs. However, there are limits to how well common discourse can settle the meanings of words, and for reasons intrinsic to the nature of our ideas. There are, Locke claims, natural "imperfection[s]" of words.[53] An "imperfection" of

words is the "*doubtfulness* and uncertainty *of their signification*," and some of this "*doubtfulness* and uncertainty" is natural insofar as it arises from the natural variability of our ideas (as opposed to the "*wilful*" "abuse" of language).[54] However stable and authoritative a given language regime, the mixed-modal and substance ideas formed by different men will tend to differ. The variability occurs for different reasons in the two cases, but the result is the same:[55] the natural variability of men's ideas gives rise to a plurality of significations that inevitably produces some "*doubtfulness* and uncertainty" regarding the meanings of words.

Mixed Modes: "Combinations" of "Arbitrarily" Assembled Simple Ideas

Mixed modes are such complex ideas as "gratitude," "obligation," and "justice" that we think of as not having a substantial existence and which in fact exist solely in the mind.[56] They are, Locke says, "fleeting, and transient Combinations of simple *Ideas*" that do "not always exist together in Nature" but which are instead "put together by the Mind" to facilitate communication.[57] Because these ideas lack a "steady existence," names are essential to "hold . . . together" the simple ideas of which they are composed; names "keep the parts from scattering" and confer on these collections unity and "lasting duration."[58]

Although mixed-modal ideas are assembled "arbitrarily," the fact that men bring them into "common use" cannot be ignored.[59] As he argues regarding common discourse in general, Locke insists that we defer to the established significations of mixed modes whenever possible. To illustrate the authority common meanings ought to have, he crafts an extra-biblical story about the biblical Adam, whom we are to imagine "in the State of a grown Man, with a good Understanding, but in a strange Country, with all Things new, and unknown about him." When discussing with Eve the possible cause of another man's (Lamech's) "melancholy," Adam coins "two new Words"—*Kinneah* (a husband's "suspicion . . . of his Wife's Disloyalty," or jealousy) and *Niouph* ("the Act of Committing Disloyalty," or adultery). Like all ideas of mixed modes, Adam

formed these notions by "voluntarily" combining several simple ideas "without . . . regard to any Archetype, without respect to any thing as a Pattern." The names *Kinneah* and *Niouph* are marks of these complex ideas. Although Adam's conjecture about the cause of Lamech's melancholy proved mistaken, the words *Kinneah* and *Niouph* "lost not their distinct significations" and "by degrees grew into common use." Once this occurred, Locke argues, "the case [regarding man's freedom to 'voluntarily' combine ideas at will] was somewhat alter'd." Although Adam's children possessed the same faculties as their father for freely constructing ideas of mixed modes and devising names for them, because communication requires that "the same Sign stan[d] for the same *Idea* in two," they could not be indifferent to the inherited meanings of *Kinneah* and *Niouph*.[60]

> Those therefore of *Adam*'s Children, that found these two Words, *Kinneah* and *Niouph*, in familiar use, could not take them for insignificant sounds: but must needs conclude, they stood for something, for certain *Ideas*. . . . If therefore they would use these Words, as Names of Species already establish'd and agreed on, they were obliged to conform the *Ideas*, in their Minds, signified by these Names, to the *Ideas*, that they stood for in other Men's Minds, as to their Patterns and *Archetypes*.[61]

Because Adam's definitions had come into "common use," others who used these same words had to "conform" to the existing understandings.

While deferring to common use does help to settle the meanings of mixed-modal names, two facts about mixed modes prevent the complete homogenization of men's ideas, causing diverse significations of the same word to persist. First, Locke notes, our ideas of mixed modes are "very complex" and comprise many different ideas. Given the compound, complex nature of these ideas, it is unlikely that "Men's Names" for them will have the "same precise signification."[62] Second, the ideas that constitute a mixed mode have no "necessary" or "constan[t]" connection in nature but are,

rather, assembled into one complex idea "at the pleasure of the Mind." They, "for the most part, want *Standards* in nature, whereby Men may rectify and adjust their significations." Unavoidably, ideas formed arbitrarily and without reference to nature will "be often various in the Minds of different Men."[63] With no common "Authority to establish the precise signification of Words," the names of mixed modes will be used with "great latitude" in common discourse, the same word being understood in different ways even by men sharing a country and a language.[64]

Substances: Nature's Elusiveness

As far as substances are concerned, Locke maintains that nature is not responsible for dividing reality into kinds, sorts, or species of things.[65] Rather, humans themselves sort things into categories based on perceived similarities. Most men, Locke claims, "distinguish and sort [Things] for the common Affairs of Life" by considering only "some few obvious, and outward appearances of Things." These categories—designated "nominal Essences"—are often "gross and confused," although they normally prove serviceable enough for purposes of "*civil and common Conversation*."[66] In other words, we generally know what is intended by "horse" or "gold."

Using gold as an example, Locke tells another extra-biblical story to illustrate the direct, qualities-based approach men are inclined to take when conceptualizing and naming substances. After imagining Adam's construction and naming of two mixed modes, Locke proceeds to imagine "after the same manner, the Names of Substances, in their first Application." When confronted with a "glittering Substance," Adam considers its hardness, "bright yellow Colour," and "great Weight." If "at first" he notices only these three qualities, he might abstract from his experience the complex idea of "a Substance having that peculiar bright Yellowness, and a Weight very great in proportion to its Bulk." To this idea he gives the name "*Zahab*."[67]

Locke emphasizes the different procedures that precede naming a substance such as "gold" and naming a mixed mode.

In the latter case, the standard is "of [Adam's] own making," but in the former case, Adam forms his idea with reference to an actual physical entity.[68] The "real Existenc[e]" of this entity exercises a constraining effect on Adam's attempt to define and name it: "here he has a Standard made by Nature . . . he puts in no simple *Idea* into his complex one, but what he has the Perception of from the thing it self. He takes Care that his *Idea* be conformable to this *Archetype*, and intends the Name should stand for an *Idea* so conformable."[69] In Locke's view, by allowing nature to guide his understanding of substances, Adam does exactly what he ought to do. Unlike our ideas of mixed modes, "[i]n our *Ideas* of Substances we have not the liberty . . . to frame what Combinations we think fit." On the contrary, "we must follow Nature, suit our complex *Ideas* to real Existences, and regulate the signification of their Names by the Things themselves."[70]

The availability of natural "Patterns" or "Standards" would seem to make defining substances easier than defining mixed modes, but Locke's continued discussion of Adam shows that this is not the case. The problem is that nature's "Patterns" or "Standards" ultimately prove elusive, making it difficult to "regulate" our use of language with reference to them.[71] The inadequacy of Adam's initial definition of "Zahab" becomes apparent as he interacts with the substance over time in an effort to learn more about it. "[N]ot content with the Knowledge" of gold's "superficial Qualities," he begins to experiment and discovers such additional qualities as "Ductility," "Fusibility," and "Fixedness."[72] What had at first seemed discrete and knowable quickly becomes more complex as the number of its qualities proliferates. The number of potentially discoverable properties being very large, even "endless," different men cannot help but construct "different *Ideas* of the same Substance."[73] Moreover, considering the phenomenon itself, it is impossible to adjudicate among competing definitions. Because each individual "has a right to put into his complex *Idea*, those Qualities he has found to be united" in nature and because all the qualities discovered have "an equal right" to be included in the definition, no one has the "Authority" to say that one "Collection"

of simple ideas is superior to another.[74] Although Locke believes that this empirical approach to definition is the right approach, any definition of a substance concept based on a list of properties will be inadequate, rendering common discourse about that concept unavoidably "imperfect."[75]

Most men believe that there really are such distinct phenomena as "gold" and "horses" and dislike the idea that substance names would in principle have various meanings. Therefore, when they perceive that a riot of equally "essential" qualities threatens to undermine their efforts to define a substance, they make what seems like a reasonable inference: that all of the substance's qualities originate in a single metaphysical source.[76] Specifically, to "*fix their Species*," men "suppos[e] *a real Essence belonging to every Species*, from which these Properties all flow, and would have their name of the Species stand for that."[77] Locke indicates, however, that making dubious suppositions about "unknown" essences does not prevent people from having different ideas about the same substance. Since we know nothing about these supposed "real Essences," our significations cannot be "adjusted and established by those Standards" and will thus remain "very uncertain" and various.[78]

Although Locke views suppositions about "real Essences" as rationally indefensible and "nominal Essences" as fundamentally inadequate, he recognizes (a) that such notions inform common thinking about substances and (b) that substance names prove quite resistant to improvement, as we will see.[79] Accordingly, he recommends accommodating the mind's tendency to make assumptions about the "Natures" of substances, at least in the context of "moral Discourses."[80] In practical discussions of morality, if ideas about "man" are subject to constant scrutiny, there will be no starting point for moral reasoning about how humans ought to conduct themselves. Provided that they are shielded from inquiries about what "man" is "in a Physical Sense," assumptions about "man"—for example, that he is a "*corporeal rational Being*"—provide a basis for practical reasoning about moral, ethical, political, and legal matters.[81] This explicit commentary on the

status of "man" in "moral Discourses" generates expectations for what we might encounter in Locke's own practical political writings: definitions of "man" that are offered in a straightforward fashion without being "disputed" from a naturalistic point of view.[82]

Improving Civil Discourse?: The Possibilities and Limitations of Philosophical Discourse

While Locke occasionally suggests that civil discourse be left altogether undisturbed, he ultimately indicates that philosophical efforts "[*t*]*o remedy the Defects of Speech*" can in some cases clarify or otherwise improve civil discourse.[83] These remedies are not cures for the natural "imperfections" of language, the causes of which remain. However, they do reflect the fact that, using the resources of language itself, one can to some extent alleviate the symptoms of these "imperfections."

Not every form of learned discourse or philosophical activity will benefit civil discourse. Locke criticizes idle, unrestrained philosophical chatter precisely because it tends to undermine common discourse.[84] Assuming that one can distinguish traditional Socratic philosophy—at least its later phase—from frivolous chatter, Locke, like Plato, worries about its practical effects as well.[85] A hallmark of the traditional philosophic enterprise is persistent inquisitiveness about the whole of reality, but this often results in *aporia* and professions of ignorance rather than in politically useful ideas.[86] Locke's concern about philosophy proper is of course a matter of deep personal interest, for many of his own inquiries are motivated by radical doubt and reach skeptical conclusions regarding nature and human knowledge. His own practice exposes the underlying ambiguity of being and deconstructs the moral and ethical concepts essential for social and political life. By implication, in his view, "Truth" cannot be grounded in nature but is merely a linguistic phenomenon characterized by "the marking down in Words, the agreement or disagreement of *Ideas* as it is."[87] Locke is aware that if openly espoused, such enlightenment as this could corrode the common ideas and language necessary to hold a community together.

Locke does not wish to discourage philosophy proper so much as he seeks to ensure that the philosophically inclined are helpful rather than harmful to the community. Generally speaking, this requires that they pursue their deepest inquiries in private and adopt a public-spirited attitude when interacting with the wider society. Regarding the latter, a civic-minded philosopher defers to common discourse whenever possible and engages in a form of rhetoric Locke calls "philosophical discourse" when deference to common discourse would be impossible or unwise.[88] Again, philosophical discourse is a "*Use* of Words" that seeks to "convey the precise Notions of Things, and express, in general Propositions, certain and undoubted Truths, which the Mind may rest upon, and be satisfied with, in its search after true Knowledge."[89] Although Locke at times seems to associate philosophical discourse with traditional philosophy, his definition of the term alone suggests that this is not his primary meaning.[90] Philosophical discourse is concerned with communicating the "precise Notions of Things" and "express[ing] . . . certain and undoubted Truths." However, in Locke's view, philosophy proper rarely culminates in precision, certainty, or truth. Philosophical discourse aims to meet the popular need for such things by lending targeted theoretical support to common discourse.[91]

Because Locke holds that linguistic stability facilitates civic peace, the immediate aim of any philosophical intervention into common discourse should be to promote agreement about the meanings of words. It is worth noting that in adopting this position, Locke quietly confers on certain philosophers—and assumes himself—an authority that no man naturally has: the authority to establish the significations of words when the informal authority of common discourse proves insufficient.[92] In this connection, philosophical discourse-in-action might clarify common terms, redefine old terms, or add new terms to the popular lexicon. Any relationships between and among words should be described. In terms of what any of this might accomplish, Locke argues that philosophical discourse can profoundly benefit common discourse regarding mixed modes. Improving common discourse regarding substances

is more difficult, though Locke suggests an indirect approach to improving common conceptions of "man."

Philosophical Discourse and Mixed Modes

Careful analysis of our ideas and careful attention to how we use our terms can significantly reduce the "imperfections" of language where the names of mixed modes are concerned. When discussing his "*Remedies*" for the "*Defects of Speech*," Locke indicates several "Rules" to be followed by anyone interested in using language more clearly.[93] Two of these are particularly applicable to mixed modes. Endeavoring to "determin[e]" and, when necessary, to "*declare*" the meanings of mixed-modal ideas will greatly assist in settling the meanings of our mixed-modal terms.[94] Locke suggests that in principle this exercise in philosophical discourse could eliminate the ambiguity and uncertainty naturally associated with these words.

First, just as having "clear and distinct" notions of such simple ideas as "white" and "Cold" helps us think and communicate about them, having "*determinate*" ideas is essential in the case of complex ideas. When a complex idea is "determinate," we know precisely which simple ideas are included in the "Collection," and we consistently intend this particular collection when we call it by a given name. While having "determinate" ideas is important in settling the names of all complex ideas, it is "very necessary" in the case of "Modes . . . especially moral Words," which are mixed modes. Moral words are significant for our lives and yet, as mixed modes, are complex and refer to no "settled Objects in Nature." They are thus "apt to be very confused." For example, "*Justice*" often has a "very undetermined loose signification." Its signification will remain thus unless all the "component parts" that one's "complex *Idea* consists of" are identified. If one stipulates that justice is "such a treatment of the Person or Goods of another, as is according to Law," it is necessary to have a "clear and distinct *Idea* what *Law* is." Otherwise, the "*Idea* of Justice it self, will be confused and imperfect." Although such "exactness" might be thought "troublesome," Locke insists that failure to determine our

moral ideas will muddle our thinking about them and make our "Discourses with others" more contentious.[95] A second, closely related "rule" is that one must "*declare* [*words'*] *meaning*" when there might be room for doubt.[96] In the case of mixed modes, our ideas are often so complex and so apparently removed from observable reality that "declaring" is best accomplished by defining our terms, or by making known all the component ideas that our idea of a particular mixed mode comprises.[97]

Locke argues that the names of mixed modes "may be perfectly and exactly *defined*."[98] Paradoxically, the fact that mixed modes lack a foundation in nature is both the reason their significations are often doubtful *and* the reason their names may in principle be defined precisely. Without consulting nature, the mind "arbitrarily" fashions the collection of ideas that constitutes a mixed mode. Because these ideas are mental constructs, unlike substance concepts, they need not correspond with any "Archetyp[ical]" "external Beings," and "[m]en may, if they please, exactly know the *Ideas*, that go to each Composition, and so both use these Words in a certain and undoubted Signification, and perfectly declare, when there is Occasion, what they stand for."[99] In other words, we can have a better understanding of that which we make ourselves as opposed to that which does not depend on human making. While changing circumstances and the complexity of these ideas will be ever-present obstacles to precise definition, Locke maintains that not to specify the significations of mixed modes, which can be "known *certainly*," amounts to "Negligence or Perverseness" on the part of humankind.[100]

Locke returns to the example of "*Justice*" to contrast the relative ease of defining mixed modes with the difficulty of defining substances. "It is far easier," he claims, to fashion an idea of "*Justice*" that would serve as a "Standard" for evaluating human actions than it is to develop a "substance" standard on the basis of an encounter with Aristides, who, Locke presumes the reader knows, was celebrated as a just man.[101] Regarding the idea of justice, men "need but know the combination of *Ideas*, that are put together within their own Minds." However, developing a standard

based on a complex, substantial being is virtually impossible, for "to frame an *Idea*, that shall in all things be exactly like [Aristides]," men would have to "enquire into the whole Nature, and abstruse hidden Constitution, and various Qualities of a Thing existing without them."[102]

The fact that mixed modes can be defined so precisely leads Locke to make the "bold" assertion that, like sciences such as mathematics, "*Morality is capable of Demonstration.*" Since the significations of our mixed modes can be clearly established, relationships among these ideas may be "certainly discovered."[103] When this approach is applied to moral words, the resulting assemblage of logical relationships would constitute a system of ethics that could rival the science of mathematics for its clarity and precision.[104] As an example of what a demonstration in moral science might look like, Locke examines the proposition "*Where there is no Property, there is no Injustice*," which is, he claims,

> a Proposition as certain as any Demonstration in *Euclid*: For the *Idea* of *Property*, being a right to any thing; and the *Idea* to which the Name *Injustice* is given, being the Invasion or Violation of that right; it is evident, that these *Ideas* being thus established, and these names annexed to them, I can as certainly know this Proposition to be true, as that a Triangle has three Angles equal to two right ones.[105]

From everything that Locke has said about mixed modes, we know that the definitions of "*Injustice*" and "*Property*" are not given in the nature of things. It follows that men will not have "intuitive," or "clea[r] and immediat[e]," knowledge of the relationship between these terms; such knowledge must come following a "*Demonstration*." A demonstration is the "shewing" of "Agreement or Disagreement" between ideas by way of "intervening *Ideas*," or proofs.[106] The definition of terms is essential to a demonstration. In the foregoing example, "*Property*" is defined as "a right to any thing," and "*Injustice*" is defined as "the Invasion or Violation of that right." Having "thus established" these ideas, we can know

with certainty that the proposition regarding property and injustice is true, for in the absence of a property right, the commission of injustice is impossible.

The purpose of defining moral terms and demonstrating morality is political rather than philosophical. Since there is nothing objectively true about our definitions of mixed modes, the exercises in definition and demonstration provide no fundamental insight into reality. They do, however, model how a useful system of morality might be fashioned for the purpose of refining common discourse. For this reason, Locke's general discussion of moral science indicates what we should expect from and how we ought to interpret his moral demonstrations beyond the *Essay*. First, we should expect a focus on definitions and the relationships among terms, and indeed, this is exactly what one finds in the *Second Treatise*, where definition is ubiquitous.[107] Locke distinguishes, for example, "political power" from "paternal power," and the latter is also distinguished from "parental power."[108] Additional entries in the Lockean lexicon include "state of nature," "state of war," "liberty," "slavery," and "usurpation," as well as the "relations" of "ruler and ruled, master and slave, parent and child, conqueror and conquered."[109] Locke is also keen to emphasize how his terms are related.[110] Second, the *Essay* repeatedly states that mixed-modal definitions are arbitrary, and the clear implication is that Locke's own definitions both in the *Essay* and elsewhere should be viewed as arbitrary and "political." Whether Locke actually applies his official position regarding mixed modes to his own political concepts is discussed in the next section. Here, I simply emphasize that at the level of theory, he says nothing to indicate that his own definitions are special cases.[111]

At this juncture, I must mention an important caveat to the *Essay*'s insistence on clear and precise communication that becomes apparent as Locke writes about real political phenomena: there is no objective measure of adequate clarity or precision.[112] What constitutes a clear and precise definition cannot be settled in the abstract, but only with reference to common discourse. In some cases, clarity and precision might actually be achieved by blurring

the distinctions between terms.[113] In other cases, the meanings established by "popular Use" might suffice.[114] One might avoid detailed discussion of a complex subject that could confuse or perplex.[115] In any event, the philosophically inclined must keep their reference point in view when considering whether and, if so, how to intervene in common discourse.

Philosophical Discourse and Substances

Unlike mixed modes, substances have stubborn material referents that, Locke believes, make intentional efforts to improve their definitions difficult. Our ideas of mixed modes are naturally uncertain and arbitrary because they lack a foundation in nature, but the very absence of a foundation in nature becomes the basis on which clear and precise, albeit still arbitrary, definitions can be established. The uncertainty regarding our substance concepts cannot be so easily rectified.[116] Again, the problem is the sheer number of qualities potentially associated with any substance and the absence of a rational basis for labeling any one quality or collection of qualities "essential" to the definition.[117] Despite the initially promising suggestion that we might improve our knowledge of substances using natural history, Locke ultimately says little to suggest that further investigation of nature could ever render our substance concepts more definite.[118] A paradoxical implication of this, explored in the following section, is that philosophical efforts to improve common discourse regarding substances should avoid entanglement in debates about substances to the extent possible.

Notwithstanding the inherent difficulty of establishing substance names, Locke considers whether philosophical attention to the matter might help. One can often begin, he indicates, with the rather basic steps of "*shewing and defining*." We typically associate each species with some *"leading sensible Qualities*," and we tend to associate the name of each species with a quality we consider the "characteristical Mark" or "most distinguishing *Idea*." For example, "Figure" or shape greatly influences how we sort "Animals and Vegetables" into categories, and a particular shade of yellow is associated with "gold." Such prominent, generally

"observable" qualities are best determined by "shewing."[119] Qualities that we associate with particular substances but which are harder to point to must be defined—that is, "enumerat[ed]."[120]

"[*S*]*hewing and defining*" alone afford little assistance in improving our substance names, for they highlight the qualities that ordinary people have already associated with particular substances. However, Locke argues that because we take our substance ideas to stand for the reality of things, we cannot remain satisfied with the common signification of a word.[121] Our ideas of substances must be corrected and improved with reference to the external phenomena to which they refer. "[T]he improvement of our *Knowledge in substantial Beings*" thus necessitates a turn "from our own Thoughts, to the Things themselves."[122]

In Locke's view, improving our substance names involves following the lead of Francis Bacon and taking a natural-historical approach to the study of phenomena.[123] Based on inquiries "into the Nature and Properties of the Things themselves," natural history will enable us to go beyond the "ordinary complex *Idea*" of a substance and "rectify and settle our complex *Idea*."[124] Locke indicates that such inquiries would be best conducted by "[m]en, versed in physical Enquiries, and acquainted with the several sorts of natural Bodies."[125] In other words, natural history requires the use of natural science.

In Locke's version of the natural-historical method, the inquirer begins with the complex idea of a substance, presumably the idea generated by ordinary experience. However, unlike the refinement of mixed-modal concepts, which involves "contemplating our *Ideas*, and considering their Relations and Correspondencies," the inquirer gains little from merely contemplating the idea of a substance. After all, most of the idea's "leading Qualities" have already been identified by ordinary experience and incorporated into the common definition of the term. To expand his knowledge of substances, the inquirer must engage in experimentation.[126] He must follow the lead of the primitive Adam, that accidental scientist whose interaction with gold had complicated his initial idea. Just as Adam had "knock[ed], "beat[en]," and conducted

various other "Trials" with his parcel of gold, "'tis by trying alone" that one can discover "what other Qualities co-exist with those of" an existing "complex *Idea*."[127] Should malleability be added to a definition of gold that already emphasizes color, weight, and fusibility?[128] Experimentation will guide the way.

Or will it? Natural history aided by natural science has the potential to amass a great deal of information about "particular objects or qualities," but Locke is quick to limit the generalizability of the scientist's discoveries.[129] Although the hypothesis concerning gold's malleability must be subjected to the "trials" of experience and experimentation, the malleability of this or that piece of gold "makes me not certain, that it is so, in all, or any other *yellow*, *heavy*, *fusible* Bodies, but that which I have tried."[130] Even though we might determine that malleability coexists with yellowness, weight, and fusibility in a particular case or even in all known cases, the limits of our experience prevent us from inferring that it must always be so. Moreover, even in a single case, it is impossible to determine the *necessary* coexistence of a particular set of qualities. While we might elect to add malleability, fixedness, or some other quality to our complex idea of gold, we will nonetheless remain in the dark about whether these qualities with a "visible connexion" coexist necessarily.[131]

Given the difficulties of generalizing based on our experiences, natural philosophy can never be a science in the strict sense.[132] In the end, our knowledge of bodies—on which our knowledge of substances is based— will only ever be probable, or based on "Judgment and Opinion, not Knowledge and Certainty."[133] Locke does make significant claims on behalf of probability, or "likeliness to be true," which he suggests compensates for our lack of certain knowledge.[134] There are degrees of probability based on the kinds of evidence we have, but we can be almost certain, for example, that fire will warm and melt.[135] While Locke's tone is hopeful here, it is important to note that the discussion of probability does little to alter his fundamental conclusions about substances. Rather, it affirms what the reader already knows—namely, that an investigation of substances does not produce certain knowledge.

Although natural science might extend the list of coexistent properties associated with a particular substance, one cannot confidently generalize from all known instances. Indeed, anticipating David Hume, Locke seems to deny that a principle of induction is even possible.[136] Without such a principle, it is difficult for philosophy to improve fundamentally on ordinary people's substance concepts; accordingly, it is difficult for philosophical discourse to draw on natural science to improve the substance names one finds in common discourse.

Improving Substance Concepts for Practical Purposes

Exploring substances directly is unproductive for the purpose of fundamentally refining substance concepts, so one is left with Locke's claim that we must make assumptions about substances—"man" in particular—for practical purposes.[137] One could rely on unimproved common discourse for definitions, but Locke suggests an avenue whereby philosophical reflection might still help societies formulate more useful suppositions regarding "man." The key is to conceptualize "man" in ways that circumvent substance debates to the extent possible. Locke alludes to this strategy in Book III but begins to develop it in Book II's discussion of the problem of personal identity, where he presents the notion of a "person" as a useful practical concept.[138] Because the concept is more mixed-modal than substantial, it is unencumbered by the indefiniteness of substance and therefore susceptible to more precise definition.[139]

Locke proposes the concept of a "person" as a solution to the practical problem of holding individuals responsible for their actions. For this purpose, the concepts of "man" and "spirit" are insufficient because consciousness of one's actions—and thus responsibility for them— is separable from both the physical and spiritual "stuff" of which one is composed.[140] Since corporeal "man" and immaterial "spirit" are not reliably associated with consciousness, Locke constructs an alternative concept based on this crucial element. A "person" or "self" is defined as a "rational Being" that is self-concerned and conscious of its own actions.[141]

The concept is more akin to a mixed-modal idea than to a substance idea because corporeality, though often present, is not essential to the definition.[142] The consciousness that denotes personhood and permits moral responsibility can be located in a corporeal substance, an immaterial substance, or "diverse Substances" at different times.[143]

Although the *Essay* suggests that "person" is conceptually clearer than "man," people remain interested in "man." To ensure that "person" has influence in the real world, one must "operationalize" it with this in mind. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke demonstrates that this can be accomplished by using the concept to help define "man" for political purposes. By using "man" and "person" more or less synonymously, he infuses his political definition of "man" with qualities of "personhood."[144] For example, on the treatise's account, "man" is a rational agent who is responsible for himself to such an extent that Locke describes him as a self-owner.[145] When these characteristics are combined with the treatise's other assertions about human nature, the resulting conception of "man" is fairly abstract and, therefore, much clearer and more precise than any conception that could be derived from an investigation of nature.[146] While the "person-inspired" conception of "man" is not philosophically superior to other conceptions, it does illustrate Locke's belief that a less empirical, mixed-modal approach to defining "man" could provide an "immoveable" foundation for certain and precise political reasoning in a way that nature cannot.[147]

Conclusion: Detecting Lockean Civil Discourse

The *Essay* maintains that most ideas of social and political significance either do not reflect reality at all or bear only an imperfect relationship to it. Ideas about justice, morality, and ethics are arbitrary, and "man," though a natural phenomenon, could be defined in many possible ways. In Locke's view, the language used to signify these ideas should be understood accordingly.

Such straightforward, unambiguous claims are sufficiently radical that the reader need not suspect Locke of esotericism on

these points.[148] Perhaps too openly, he tells the truth as he sees it. Recognizing, however, that the plain truth will not do for social and political purposes, Locke prescribes relying in most cases on the customary views that ordinary people develop about man and the world. These ideas help to obscure nature's ambiguity and facilitate social and political life, and their expression in common discourse gives them greater permanence than they would have otherwise. Philosophical interference in this situation should occur only in circumstances where it might do more good than harm, the motive always being the ultimate improvement of civil discourse.

Locke's philosophy of language suggests that civil discourse regarding important matters is essentially rhetorical, and he seems to have understood his own civil thought in this light. However, arriving at this conclusion requires appreciating what one of Locke's civil works might look like. An effective work of philosophically honed civil discourse might take many forms, but it would not advertise the arbitrariness or inadequacy of the ideas contained therein. Rather, it would speak self-assuredly as if what it were saying were true and reasonable, and any of the author's doubts about his claims would be suppressed altogether or buried deep in the presentation. The reason, of course, is that the public prefers to believe that its moral, ethical, and political ideas are rooted in reality, and a public-spirited philosopher would reinforce, rather than undermine, this belief.

In form, the *Second Treatise* is the sort of civil work one might expect from the *Essay*'s author. Beginning with his willingness to criticize others' ideas, Locke leaves the reader with the impression that the treatise is his best attempt to understand the nature of man and political reality in an unqualified sense.[149] Just as he says one should in "moral Discourses," he makes assumptions about "man" and elaborates as if his particular conception were self-evident. There is no trace of the *Essay*'s anti-essentialism. Similarly, where mixed-modal words and "relations" are concerned, Locke defines his terms in a matter-of-fact way. There is no suggestion that these definitions might be arbitrary in an ultimate sense. One could

argue that despite the *Essay*'s skeptical framework, Locke believed he was describing the true essence of man and a constellation of objective moral and political ideas in the *Second Treatise*. However, such elementary theoretical confusion seems less likely than the probability that Locke was simply doing what he says philosophers ought to do and speaking to his fellow citizens as a citizen and not as a philosopher.[150]

If one focuses on the *Second Treatise*'s affirmation of a particular conception of man and particular understandings of justice, morality, and so on, a wide theoretical gap opens between the treatise and the *Essay*. The gap becomes intelligible, however, when one regards the *Second Treatise* as an instance of civil discourse. The fact that the treatise is almost completely devoid of clues pointing toward Locke's skeptical philosophical project has made academic careers possible as scholars wrangle over the question of Locke's consistency. Nevertheless, the concept of civil discourse is the interpretive key lying in plain sight. Hesitation to use it in reference to Locke's own political works is a testament to his audacious mastery of the genre: the *Second Treatise* is a civil work *par excellence*.

Notes

1. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II.xxiii.3, 6; III.vi.14–20, 24; see also ibid., III.iii.19. For a synopsis of Locke's rejection of the "Scholastic-Aristotelian tradition" (330), see W. L. Uzgalis, "The Anti-Essential Locke and Natural Kinds," *Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no. 152 (1988): 330–39.
2. Locke, *Essay*, III.vi.12, 30, 37. For further discussion, see Sara M. Henary, "The Problem of Human Equality in Locke's Political Philosophy," in *The Science of Modern Virtue: On Descartes, Darwin, and Locke*, ed. Peter Lawler and Marc Guerra (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), esp. 94–102.
3. Locke, *Essay*, I.i.7.
4. Ibid., II.xxii.1,12. A "simple idea" is an "uncompounded," "*uniform*" impression derived from "*Sensation*," "*Reflection*," or both sensation and reflection (ibid., II.ii.1–2).
5. Ibid., III.v.7; see also ibid., III.v.5–6.

6. Vere Chappell, "Locke's Theory of Ideas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 26, quoting Edward Stillingfleet, *Works* IV: 129–30. Locke acknowledges that "Parts" of his *Essay* are "somewhat out of the common road," and he responds to the "Imputation of Novelty" by urging that the work be read in its entirety ("Epistle Dedicatory" and "Epistle to the Reader," *Essay*, 3–4, 10). An epitome of the *Essay* had been published (1688) prior to publication of the complete work (1689), so Locke's opening remarks address actual reactions, not merely potential criticism (John W. Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956], 1; and James Hill and J. R. Milton, "The Epitome (Abrégé) of Locke's *Essay*," in *The Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter R. Anstey [London: Routledge, 2003], 3). Discussing the *Essay*'s early reception, Yolton observes that "many men" considered the work "dangerous" because some of its doctrines were thought to "challeng[e] . . . established morality and . . . revealed religion" (*Way of Ideas*, 13–14).
7. Locke, *Essay*, I.i.4.
8. Ibid., I.i.6.
9. Ibid., I.i.5–6.
10. Ibid., III.ix.1; III.x.1.
11. Ibid., III.ix.3.
12. Ibid., II.i.2–4; III.ii.2–5. I will use "civil discourse" and "common discourse" interchangeably.
13. Ibid., II.xxiii.4. Unless otherwise noted, "substances" will be used as shorthand for "particular sort[s] of corporeal Substances," or natural "species." This is consistent with Locke's usage.
14. Ibid., III.ii.7.
15. Ibid., II.xxii.1–2; II.xxxi.
16. Ibid., III.x.
17. Ibid., III.vi.51.
18. Ibid., III.ix.3–4.
19. Ibid., III.vi.51; see also ibid., III.xi.11–12.
20. See Sara Henary, "Human Malleability and Liberalism in Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*," *Perspectives on Political Science* 50, no. 3 (2021): 189.
21. See ibid., 182–92, where I offer a full defense of this claim.
22. The treatise asserts, for example, that men are equal and naturally free. John Locke, *Second Treatise*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), §4. Because

Locke's claims about human nature and morality in the treatise appear to contradict the *Essay*'s teachings on species and morality, scholars frequently argue either that Locke is inconsistent (e.g., Laslett and the "early" Dunn) or that somehow the treatise's assertions about "man" can be reconciled with the *Essay*'s anti-essentialism and general skepticism (e.g., Zuckert and Waldron). See Laslett, introduction, *Two Treatises*, by John Locke, esp. 79–92; John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the "Two Treatises of Government"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 203–41 (cf. Dunn, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?" in *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays, 1981–1989* [Oxford: Polity Press, 1990], 13–15); Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. chap. 3; and Michael Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), esp. chap. 9.

23. E.g., Locke, *Essay*, III.xi.16.
24. Note the usage in Locke, *Second Treatise*, §226.
25. Locke, *Essay*, I.iii.25.
26. Ibid., II.xxxiii.6.
27. For Locke's criticism of custom, see, e.g., ibid., II.xiii.27; II.xxxiii.18; and IV.xx.9. See also Ruth W. Grant, "John Locke on Custom's Power and Reason's Authority," *Review of Politics* 74, no. 4 (2012): 616–17; and Rita Koganzon, "'Contesting the Empire of Habit': Habituation and Liberty in Lockean Education," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 3 (August 2016): 547–58.
28. Grant observes that Locke uses the term "custom" to refer to "received opinion," "habitual behavior," "socially approved behavior," and "orthodox belief" ("Custom's Power," 611).
29. Locke, *Essay*, III.ix.3. On the significance of this distinction, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 220–21.
30. Locke, *Essay*, III.ix.3.
31. Ibid., III.xi.10.
32. Ibid., III.ix.3.
33. Ibid., III.ii.1–8.
34. Ibid., III.ii.2.
35. Ibid., III.ii.4. See also ibid., III.ii.2–3, and R. L. Colie, "The Social Language of John Locke: A Study in the History of Ideas," *Journal of British Studies* 4, no. 2 (May 1965): 42.

36. Locke, *Essay*, III.ii.4–5.
37. Ibid., III.ii.6.
38. Ibid., III.ii.7.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., III.ix.21; III.xi.7.
41. Ibid., III.ix.21.
42. Ibid., III.xi.7.
43. Ibid., III.ii.8.
44. Colie, "Social Language," 48.
45. Gaius Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (London: Macmillan, 1876), bk. I.
46. Locke, *Essay*, III.ii.7.
47. Ibid., III.vi.51.
48. Ibid., III.xi.11; see also ibid., III.vi.51.
49. Ibid., III.vi.51.
50. Ibid., III.x.6, 9.
51. Ibid., III.x.10.
52. Ibid., III.x.12.
53. Ibid., III.ix.1.
54. Ibid., III.ix.4; III.x.1–2.
55. Michael P. Zuckert, "Fools and Knaves: Reflections on Locke's Theory of Philosophical Discourse," *Review of Politics* 36, no. 4 (October 1974): 551.
56. Locke, *Essay*, II.xxii.1; III.v.3, 6, 12.
57. Ibid., II.xxii.1, 4, 8; III.v.5–7.
58. Ibid., II.xxii.1; III.v.10.
59. Ibid., III.v.6; III.vi.45.
60. Ibid., III.vi.44–45.
61. Ibid., III.vi.45.
62. Ibid., III.ix.6.
63. Ibid., III.ix.7.
64. Ibid., III.ix.8.
65. E.g., ibid., III.vi.4–10, 12, 14–29.
66. Ibid., III.vi.27, 30; ibid., III.ix.15.
67. Ibid., III.vi.46.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., III.ix.11; III.vi.46.
70. Ibid., III.ix.11.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid., III.vi.47.

73. Ibid., III.vi.47; III.ix.13.
74. Ibid., III.ix.13, 17.
75. Ibid., III.ix.13.
76. See Locke's usage of "essential" at ibid., III.vi.4–5.
77. Ibid., III.vi.49, including section title.
78. Ibid., III.ix.12.
79. Ibid., II.xxiii.3–4, 6, 14; III.vi.9–10, 14–18; III.ix.15.
80. Ibid., III.xi.16.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid., III.xi.2–3, 8. See Zuckert, "Fools and Knaves," 550.
84. Locke, *Essay*, III.x.6, 9–10, 12; III.xi.6–7.
85. For an overview of Socrates' "turn" away from natural science and toward a study of the human things, see Dustin Sebell, *The Socratic Turn: Knowledge of Good and Evil in an Age of Science* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), chap. 1. Despite his "turn," Socrates' philosophy is still perceived as a threat to the city. Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*, in *Four Texts on Socrates*, rev. ed., trans. Grace Starry West and Thomas G. West (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
86. See, e.g., Plato's *Euthyphro* and *Laches*. For discussion and additional examples, see Paul Woodruff, "Plato's Shorter Ethical Works," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Winter 2020 ed., ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/plato-ethics-shorter/.
87. Locke, *Essay*, IV.v.9.
88. Ibid., III.vi.51; III.xi.11. Zuckert describes "a philosopher addressing nonphilosophers" as "mixed discourse," but I suggest that this is involved in Locke's primary understanding of philosophical discourse ("Fools and Knaves," 559). Myers considers and rejects the idea that Locke has something like the narrow definition of philosophical discourse that I ascribe to him. Peter C. Myers, *Our Only Star and Compass: Locke and the Struggle for Political Rationality* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 55.
89. Locke, *Essay*, III.ix.3.
90. Locke seems to associate philosophical discourse with traditional philosophy at, e.g., ibid., III.ix.15.
91. Locke's account of philosophical discourse complicates his initial presentation of civil and philosophical discourse as "very distinct" (ibid., III.ix.3; see also III.xi.3).

92. Ibid., III.ix.8, 17.
93. Ibid., III.xi.1, 8.
94. Ibid., III.xi.9, 12.
95. Ibid., III.xi.9. See also ibid., II.iii.1.
96. Ibid., III.xi.12.
97. Ibid., III.xi.12, 13, 15.
98. Ibid., III.xi.15.
99. Ibid., III.xi.15, 17.
100. Ibid., III.xi.17.
101. Ibid. See Plutarch, "Aristides," in *Lives*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Hugh Clough, trans. John Dryden (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 439.
102. Locke, *Essay*, III.xi.17.
103. Ibid., III.xi.16.
104. Ibid., IV.iii.18.
105. Ibid. See Euclid, *Elements*, rev. ed., ed. and trans. Richard Fitzpatrick (2008), bk. I, prop. 32, http://farside.ph.utexas.edu/Books/Euclid/Elements.pdf.
106. Locke, *Essay*, IV.ii.1–3; IV.xv.1.
107. On the importance of definition in the *Second Treatise*, see Ruth W. Grant, *John Locke's Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 20–26, 64–65; and Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Dancing in Chains: Narrative and Memory in Political Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 15, 47. There is a special urgency to define terms in the *Second Treatise*, for Locke has just spent the *First Treatise* attempting to unsettle readers' attachment to an entire way of thinking about government (title page to the *Two Treatises*, ed. Laslett, 135).
108. Locke, *Second Treatise*, §2–3, 52. Discussing his preference for "parental" rather than "paternal" power, Locke explicitly acknowledges that meddling with established "words and names" can be justified "when the old are apt to lead men into mistakes, as this of *paternal power* probably has done" (ibid., §52).
109. Grant, *Locke's Liberalism*, 22n14. For Locke's concept of "relation," see *Essay*, II.xxv.5 and III.v.1, 16.
110. See, e.g., Locke, *Second Treatise*, §19, where he juxtaposes the "state of nature" and the "state of war."
111. Cf. Robert R. Albritton, "The Politics of Locke's Philosophy," *Political Studies* 24, no. 3 (1976): 260. It might be particularly tempting to conclude that Locke actually believes in his own definitions when similar definitions appear in more than one text. For example, the *Second Treatise*'s discussion of property and (in)justice is consistent

with what Locke says in the *Essay*: in the state of nature, if A violates the property of B, which Locke stipulates also includes B's person, B can claim that A has committed an injustice against her precisely because B owns herself and anything else with which she has mixed her labor (Locke, *Second Treatise*, §6, 11, and chap. V).

112. For the suggestion that Locke exaggerates the possibility of "direct and unambiguous communication," see Zuckert, "Fools and Knaves," 560.
113. See, e.g., the discussion of "man" and "person" in the subsection "Improving Substance Concepts for Practical Purposes."
114. See, e.g., Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), §134.
115. See Locke's comment regarding the "law of nature" (*Second Treatise*, §12).
116. Locke, *Essay*, III.ix.15.
117. See, e.g., ibid., III.vi.4, 39.
118. Ibid., III.xi.24.
119. Ibid., III.xi.19–21.
120. Ibid., III.xi.22 (e.g., "Ductility" in the case of gold and other "Powers" [ibid.]).
121. Ibid., III.xi.24.
122. Ibid., IV.xii.9; see also ibid., III.xi.24.
123. Peter R. Anstey, "Locke, Bacon and Natural History," *Early Science and Medicine* 7, no. 1 (2002): 65–92.
124. Locke, *Essay*, III.xi.24.
125. Ibid., III.xi.25.
126. Ibid., IV.xii.9.
127. Ibid., III.vi.47; IV.xii.9.
128. Ibid., IV.xii.9.
129. Anstey, "Locke, Bacon and Natural History," 71. See Locke's discussion of why assembling a full-blown "Dictionary" of natural history—which would detail all the "simple *Ideas*, wherein . . . the Individuals of each sort" were observed "constantly to agree"—would be an overwhelming task (*Essay*, III.xi.25).
130. Locke, *Essay*, IV.xii.9.
131. Ibid.
132. Ibid., IV.xii.10.
133. Ibid. For an overview of the idea of probability in Locke's thought, see Douglas John Casson, *Liberating Judgment: Fanatics, Skeptics, and John Locke's Politics of Probability* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

134. Locke, *Essay*, IV.xv.2–3.
135. Ibid., IV.xv.4; IV.xvi.1, 6.
136. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), bk. I, pt. iii, sec. vi. For discussion of the weakness of Locke's treatment of probability and the problem of induction, see Richard I. Aaron, *John Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 248.
137. Locke, *Essay*, III.xi.16.
138. Ibid.; ibid., II.xxvii.9–27.
139. Mattern considers the "self" or "person" as a modal idea. Ruth Mattern, "Moral Science and the Concept of Persons in Locke," *Philosophical Review* 89, no. 1 (January 1980): 39, with n30.
140. Ibid., 42–43. See Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.10–16.
141. Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.9, 17.
142. Mattern, "Concept of Persons," 39, with n30.
143. Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.7, 9, 17, 26, 29.
144. E.g., Locke, *Second Treatise*, §4, 6, 27, 44, 123.
145. Ibid., §4–6, 27, 44. See also Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism*, 276–83.
146. The treatise's other claims include the assertion that men are free and equal creatures whose most natural condition is a pre-political state of nature (Locke, *Second Treatise*, chap. 2, esp. §4–5).
147. Locke, *Essay*, III.xi.16.
148. This is not to say that Locke never wrote esoterically. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 33; and Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, esp. 202–22.
149. Locke criticizes, for example, the ideas of Sir Robert Filmer and Thomas Hobbes (*Second Treatise*, §1, 13, 19).
150. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 220–21.