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Signification, Intention, Projection

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Abstract Locke is what present-day aestheticians, critics, and historians call an intentionalist. He believes that when we interpret speech and writing, we aim—in large part and perhaps even for the most part—to recover the intentions, or intended meanings, of the speaker or writer. Berkeley and Hume shared Locke's commitment to intentionalism, but it is a theme that recent philosophical interpreters of all three writers have left largely unexplored. In this paper I discuss the bearing of intentionalism on more familiar themes in empiricist reflections on language, among them the signification of things (as opposed to ideas); the signifying role of whole propositions; and the possibility of reference to an "external" world.

Keywords Locke · Berkeley · Hume · Signification · Intention · Projection · Meaning · Intentionality · External world · Power · Causation

Locke is what present-day aestheticians, critics, and historians call an *intentionalist*. He believes that when we interpret speech and writing, we aim—in large part and perhaps even for the most part—to recover the intentions, or intended meanings, of the speaker or writer. My topic in this paper is the bearing of intentionalism on more

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familiar themes in empiricist reflections on language. I believe that Berkeley and Hume shared Locke's commitment to intentionalism,[1] but it is a theme that recent philosophical interpreters of all three writers have left largely unexplored.[2]

Let me begin by providing some evidence of Locke's intentionalism. I will be suggesting later on that what Walter Ott calls Locke's "linguistic thesis" and Norman Kretzmann "the main thesis of Locke's semantic theory"—his declaration that words, "in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them" (*Essay* III ii 2)—is itself an indication of Locke's intentionalism.[3] If, as I hope, intentionalism sheds light on Locke's most famous pronouncement about language, there will be more compelling evidence of his intentionalism than the scattered texts I'm about to mention. But those texts, especially those disclosing Locke's own practice as an interpreter, are not without evidential force.

"Our Intentions in speaking," Locke advises, "are, or at least should be, to be understood" (III xi 11). This very strongly suggests that our aim as interpreters should be, at least in part, to understand what speakers intend to say. For "the sense and intention of the Speaker" to be conveyed to a listener "without any manner of doubt and uncertainty" is, however, very difficult (III ix 22). Locke's interest in

[1] Demea, in Part 3 of Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, says that "when I read a volume, I enter into the mind and intention of the author: I become him, in a manner, for the instant; and have an immediate feeling and conception of those ideas, which revolved in his imagination, while employed in that composition" (p. 33 in Dorothy Coleman's edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Demea is not generally a spokesman for Humean views, but these remarks are treated by Hume as commonplaces that supply an uncontroversial background for a contrast between our aptitude for sharing the intentions of human authors and our inaptitude for sharing the intentions of the Author of Nature. Berkeley's intentionalism is documented in detail below.

[2] A striking exception (though I feel sure there must be others) is Alessandra Tanesini's brief entry on Locke in her *Philosophy of Language A to Z* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): "[Locke] proposed a view of language in which the meaning of a linguistic expression is the mental idea that the speaker intends to express when uttering the words" (p. 91). She goes on to say that "this suggestion has many problems: for example, it presupposes the notion of intention." Tanesini is not, on the whole, a careful reader of Locke. For example, she criticizes Locke for failing to take account of words such as "and," ignoring his treatment of particles (including his long discussion of the various shadings of "but"), and she concludes her entry by observing that Locke "did not seem to think about sentences as something other than a mere list of words," ignoring Locke's treatment of propositions and their truth-conditions. But in foregrounding Locke's intentionalism she is, I think, entirely correct. Charles Landesman touches briefly on the role of intentions in Locke's account of particles in "Locke's Theory of Meaning," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14 (1976), pp. 23–35, p. 34. In criticizing what he calls "the Lockean theory of communication," which holds that a speaker communicates when the hearer grasps a "mental object" that the speaker's words express, Christopher Gauker actually contrasts what he sees as Locke's own version of the theory, in which the objects expressed are ideas, with Donald Davidson's, in which the objects expressed are intentions. See Gauker, "The Lockean Theory of Communication," *Nous* 26 (1992), pp. 303–324, pp. 303–305.

[3] See Ott, *Locke's Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 7), and Kretzmann, "The Main Thesis of Locke's Semantic Theory," *Philosophical Review* 77 (1968), pp. 175–96. Intentions do play a role in Ott's presentation of Locke's views (see for example pp. 27–8), as well as in some of Hannah Dawson's remarks in *Locke, Language and Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), for example on p. 6, but neither Ott nor Dawson treats intentionalism as a significant force in Locke's thinking. I quote throughout from Peter H. Nidditch's edition of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). References to this edition, by book, chapter, and section, are provided in the text.

supplying readers of Book III with ways of mitigating this inevitable doubt and uncertainty is, in my view, the expression of a deep intentionalist commitment.

Locke's intentionalism comes out more clearly, perhaps, in his controversy with Stillingfleet, in both his general comments on the duties of a reader and in his thrusts and parries in the midst of battle. He tells Stillingfleet that in reading an author, he always attempts, "by a sincere endeavour, [to] have the same ideas in every place when I read the words, which the author had when he writ them" (p. 341).[4] This is, of course, in accord with Locke's linguistic thesis, but I assume that the ideas the author is said to have are viewed by Locke as the ideas he intended to communicate. Correcting Stillingfleet's misapprehensions of his intended meaning and insuring that he himself has justly apprehended Stillingfleet's intended meaning are Locke's constant preoccupations: "but that I may not be mistaken in what I mean" (p. 19); "to… clear my meaning in this matter" (p. 21); "that which your lordship seems to me principally to be driving at" (p. 26); "that I meant belief, not certainty, is evident from hence" (p. 53); "my purpose" (p. 58); "if they were intended as they were printed" (p. 65); "[to] apply my words, contrary to what I intended them" (p. 121); "your lordship's mistaking not only my meaning, but the very words of my book which you quoted" (p. 182); "to secure myself from the accusation of misrepresenting your sense" (p. 249); "my intention" (p. 270); "this I took you to be meaning" (p. 352); "in this sense therefore I shall take it, till your lordship shall determine it otherwise" (p. 433). The snippets I've assembled are an incomplete but representative selection. As a reader, Locke strives to capture an author's intended meaning, and he hopes for the same effort on the part of anyone reading (and especially anyone presuming to censure) him.

Locke was not a leading hermeneutical theorist; neither was Berkeley or Hume.[5] What we now call hermeneutics was, however, intensively cultivated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (as it had already been for many hundreds of years), but in application to scripture and the law, rather than to the kind of treatises that now occupy historians of philosophy. Scripture and law were, in Locke's no doubt typical view, the

[4] Page references to Locke's side of the Stillingfleet correspondence are to *The Works of John Locke*, tenth edition (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823), volume 4.

[5] For a somewhat different view of Locke and Hume, as thinkers "who...accorded the problems of interpretation intense and fruitful scrutiny" (p. ix), see Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Eighteenth-Century Hermeneutics: Philosophy of Interpretation in England from Locke to Burke* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Locke devoted two essays to the theory of interpretation: "An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles, by consulting St. Paul himself" (the introduction to *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, in *Works*, volume 8, pp. 1–23), and a Latin essay on infallibility written in 1661–1662 and first published by John C. Biddle as "John Locke's Essay on Infallibility: Introduction, Text, and Translation," *Journal of Church and State* 19 (1977), pp. 301–327 (and included in English translation, under the title "Infallibility," in John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 204–9). For comments on "An Essay for Understanding St. Paul," see the following footnote. The early essay on infallibility is discussed at length by Weinsheimer in his interesting chapter "Locke on Human Understanding," pp. 23–45. There Weinsheimer emphasizes what he sees as anti-hermeneutical themes in Locke's thinking (see for example pp. 26, 33, 35–36, and 44). In Hume, by contrast, he finds what he calls "an entire panoply of implicitly hermeneutic tendencies" (p. 110 in his chapter "Hume and Others," pp. 103–134). When he judges Locke an enemy of hermeneutics and Hume a promoter of it, Weinsheimer is operating with a conception of hermeneutics, derived from Hans-Georg Gadamer, that covers much more than the theory of linguistic interpretation, which is all I have in mind when I speak of hermeneutics in this paper. Weinsheimer's view of Locke is contested by Michael P. Berman in "Locke the Hermenaut and the Mechanics of Understanding," *Humanitas* 19 (2006), pp. 182–200.

texts whose interpretation really mattered.[6] "The Writings of Men, who have lived in remote Ages, and different Countries" are, he acknowledges, very hard to understand, as "numerous Volumes" of learned commentary testify. But, he reassures us,

> there being no Writings we have any great concernment to be very sollicitous about the meaning of, but those that contain either Truths we are required to believe, or Laws we are to obey, and draw inconveniences on us, when we mistake or transgress, we may be less anxious about the sense of other Authors; who Writing but their own Opinion, we are under no greater necessity to know them, than they to know ours. (III ix 10; see also III ix 22)

It is safe to assume that Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were familiar, for example, with the kind of interpretive rules laid down by Samuel Pufendorf in his *Whole Duty of Man*, and with the debates on the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments to which Anthony Collins's *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* was a leading and highly controversial contribution. Early modern writing on the interpretation of law and scripture was often explicitly intentionalist in the sense I have identified.[7] Pufendorf begins his brief chapter on "Meaning, or Interpretation"—a

[6] Locke himself devoted considerable effort to Biblical interpretation: see *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (in *Works*, volume 7) and *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (in volume 8). *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, an attempt to articulate the core of any genuine Christianity, is perhaps not explicitly intentionalist (see, though, p. 152 of volume 7, where Locke speaks of observing that "which is principally aimed at," so as to discover a writer's "true meaning and mind"), but its method admits very naturally of an intentionalist construal. The *Paraphrase*, as Hannah Dawson notes (*Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy*, p. 217), is decidedly intentionalist in orientation. In the introductory "Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistle's," Locke straightforwardly identifies St. Paul's having a "distinct meaning" in using particular words and phrases with "knowing himself what he intends by them" (*Works*, volume 8, p. 10). Our aim in interpreting an epistle, Locke says, should be "to understand the mind of him that writ it" (p. 14). Reading a letter through for the first time may give us some sense of its "drift and design," but to achieve "a good general view of the apostle's main purpose in writing" it, and of the "steps and arguments" by which he "prosecuted [that] purpose," the letter must be read again and again (pp. 14, 15). Locke is especially attuned to the ways in which our own philosophical prejudices can warp our interpretive results. "He that would understand St. Paul right," he warns, "must understand his terms, in the sense he uses them, and not as they are appropriated, by each man's particular philosophy, to conceptions that never entered the mind of the apostle. For example, he that shall bring the philosophy now taught and received, to the explaining of spirit, soul, and body, mentioned I Thess. v. 23, will, I fear, hardly reach St. Paul's sense, or represent to himself the notions St. Paul then had in mind. That is what we should aim at, in reading him, or any other author; and until we, from his words, paint his very ideas and thoughts in our minds, we do not understand him" (p. 21).

[7] The same is true of early modern writing on language. The influential *A New Grammar of the Latin Tongue..., to which is annexed, A Dissertation Upon Language*, third edition (London: C. Hitch, 1749), by the pedagogue John Clarke ("John Clarke of Hull," who is better known today, at least to historians of philosophy, as a writer on moral philosophy) is, for example, strongly intentionalist. Clarke comments often on the ways in which parts of speech and inflected forms make it possible for us to express fine-grained intentions. "*Lego*," he writes, "signifies not only a particular Sort of Action, but withal an Intention of the Mind of him that uses it, to affirm that Action of himself. *Lege* signifies the same action, but intimates a different Intention to command, desire or allow the Action to be done by the Person to whom the Discourse is directed" (p. 124). If there were no case endings, he explains, "it would then have been a dubious Point, whether [a given adjective] was in the Intention of the Poet" to be applied to a given substantive. (p. 140) Because a speaker is "not designing to speak of a Distemper in general, but of a Distemper of a certain degree, the Adjective proper to signify that Intention, by qualifying and restraining the Signification of the Noun..., is rightly placed next it" (p. 144). Unlike the Latin verb *lego*, "the English verb [*read*] has no Mood at all, that is, no Variation or Change, to signify the various Dispositions or Intentions of the Mind, with respect to the Thing signified by it" (p. 150). Speakers of English must therefore signify those intentions in other ways.

discussion that is, as it commences, no less relevant to the interpretation of the commands and covenants of scripture than it is to the interpretation of civil laws and human contracts—by sketching the following brief case for the utility of interpretive canons[8]:

> As in all Commands and Directions which Men receive from their Superiors, no other Obligation is derived on them from thence, but such as is conformable to the Will and *Intention* of the Superior; so likewise, when any Man of his own free Will, sets himself under any Obligation, he is bound only to that which himself *intended*, when he entered into that Obligation. But then, because one Man cannot make a Judgment of another Man's Intention, by such Signs and Actions as are apparent to the Senses; hence, therefore, every one, *in foro humano* [in a human forum], is adjudged, To be *obliged to that Thing, which he may fairly be supposed to have suggested by a right Interpretation of the outward Signs made by him.* Wherefore 'tis of great Use for the true Understanding both of Laws and Covenants, and for the better Discharging the Duties thence arising, that there should be laid down *Certain Rules for the true Interpretation of Words*, especially they being the most common and ordinary Signs whereby we express our Mind and Intention.

Language, Pufendorf declares, is an expression of the speaker's "Mind and Intention." A listener who arrives at a "right Interpretation" will know what the speaker's mind or intention is; he or she will have avoided what Locke describes, in another context, as "imposing our own sense and interpretations" (*Essay* III ix 23) on what a speaker delivers[9].

I have been deliberately vague in characterizing Locke's intentionalism. I haven't said that recovering an author's intentions is, in Locke's view, the only legitimate aim of an interpreter, or even an interpreter's primary aim. I want to allow that for Locke, the meaning of a text may not coincide exactly with what its author intended it to say. Annabel Patterson quotes a fascinating document in which Star Chamber judges saw more meaning in William Prynne's 1633 *Histriomastix* than he perhaps intended[10]:

> Itt is said, hee had noe ill intencion, noe ill harte, but hee maye bee ill interpreted. That must not be allowed him in excuse, for he should not have

[8] *The Whole Duty of Man According to the Law of Nature*, translated by Andrew Tooke, edited by Ian Hunter and David Saunders (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), Book I, Chapter xvii, first paragraph, pp. 159–160.

[9] The context is a comparison between the doctrines of revealed religion (which suffer from "the common and natural obscurities and difficulties incident to Words") and the truths of natural religion. Locke suggests that the latter are somehow exempt from the defects inherent in the rest of what we say and hear; they are "plain," "very Intelligible to all Mankind," and "seldom controverted" (III ix 23). The doctrine of innate ideas rejected in Book I of the *Essay* is one way of explaining how natural truths could be so universally received; a crucial task of the *Essay* (which Book I itself cannot complete) is to provide another and better explanation.

[10] "Intention," pp. 135–146 in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 135. For more detail on Prynne see Patterson's *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England, With a New Introduction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 113–115.

> written any thinge that would bear [that] construccion, for hee doth not accompanye his booke, to make his intencion knowne to all that reades it.

Whether an author is liable for constructions his words might bear (or for mischievous constructions they've actually borne) is, in fact, a point of disagreement between Locke and Stillingfleet, who was inclined to hold Locke responsible for constructions placed on his words by John Toland in his attacks on revealed religion. Hence Locke, in his debate with Stillingfleet, may have a personal motive for construing textual meaning very narrowly, as including no more than what the author actually intended. But nothing I say in this paper depends, I think, on such a narrow construal. In a letter to Newton, who had told Locke that on first reading the *Essay*, he took its author for a Hobbist, Locke is willing to take some responsibility for unintended constructions, at least to the extent of revising his text in order to forestall them[11]. And at several points in the *Essay* he actually recommends ways in which writers might "accompanye" their productions. The "import of [a] Discourse" will usually "lead candid and intelligent Readers, into the true meaning of it," he observes, but where "that is not sufficient to guide the Reader, there it concerns the Writer to explain his meaning and shew in what sense he there uses that Term" (III xi 27; see also III xi 12, on the value of declaring one's meaning). I want to leave it as an open question whether, in Locke's view, a given addition made in this spirit will create a new meaning or explicate an existing one.

Locke has a good philosophical reason for being an intentionalist, though I am uncertain he was consciously aware of it. "The end of Speech," in his view, is that "Sounds, as Marks, may make known [the speaker's] *Ideas* to the Hearer" (III ii 2). The speaker's ideas are what the speaker's words signify, and our task, as hearers, is to do what we can to assist the speaker in "conveying" those thoughts or ideas to our own minds (III i 2). At the moment of utterance, however, the speaker may be contemplating a whole welter of ideas. What will differentiate the ideas actually signified by her words from the other ideas attending them? There may be many ways of answering this question, but an appeal to the speaker's communicative intentions answers it very efficiently: the ideas signified are not merely those that are present at the time of utterance, but those among the ideas present that the speaker intends to communicate. Voltaire famously (and cynically) observed that one aim of language is to hide our thoughts from others; his point was that our mind may contain ideas that we intend not to signify, but to conceal. Mandeville made the same point, perhaps in response to Locke's piety or naivete about the aims of language:[12]

> *Horatio*. The Design of Speech is to make our Thoughts known to others.
>
> *Cleomenes.* I don't think so.

[11] See Locke's letter to Newton of 5 October 1693 in H. R. Fox-Bourne, *The Life of John Locke*, two volumes (London: H. S. King, 1876), volume 2, p. 227. Rousseau followed a different and more reckless policy. He reports it was his "own very imprudent maxim" never to suppress anything "out of fear that connections might be made, provided my conscience is my witness that I was not aware of them while writing"—provided, that is perhaps to say, that it could not have been intended (*Confessions*, Book 10, p. 501 in Angela Scholar's translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)).

[12] *The Fable of the Bees*, *or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, edited by F. B. Kaye, two volumes (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), volume 2, pp. 289–290. This is a reprint of the edition first published by Oxford University Press in 1924.

Horatio. What! Don't Men speak to be understood?

Cleomenes. In one Sense they do; but there is a double Meaning in those Words which I believe you did not intend: If by Man's *speaking to be understood* you mean, that when Men speak, they desire that the Purport of the Sounds they utter should be known and apprehended by others, I answer in the Affirmative: But if you mean by it, that Men speak, in order that their Thoughts may be known, and their Sentiments laid upon and seen through by others, which likewise may be meant by *speaking to be understood*, I answer in the Negative. The first Sign or Sound that ever Man made, born of a Woman, was made in Behalf, and intended for the use of him who made it; and I am of Opinion, that the first Design of Speech was to persuade others, either to give Credit to what the speaking Person would have them believe; or else to act or suffer such Things, as he would compel them to act or suffer, if they were entirely in his Power.

Horatio. Speech is likewise made use of to teach, advise, and inform others for their Benefit, as well as to persuade them in our own Behalf.

Cleomenes. And so by the help of it Men may accuse themselves and own their Crimes; but no Body would have invented Speech for those purposes; I speak of the Design, the first Motive and Intention that put Man upon speaking. We see in Children that the first things they endeavour to express with Words are their Wants and their Will; and their Speech is but a Confirmation of what they ask'd, deny'd, or affirm'd, by Signs before.

According to Locke's linguistic thesis, words stand immediately "for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them," but they don't stand for *whatever* ideas occupy the mind when the words are being used.[13] If the linguistic thesis is to be plausible, a speaker's words must often stand for ideas belonging to a proper subset of those ideas. If there aren't better ways of delimiting that subset, the linguistic thesis itself may give us evidence of Locke's intentionalism. At one point, Locke explicitly gives the thesis an intentionalist twist. Words, "in every man's Mouth," he writes at *Essay* II ii 3, "stand for the Ideas he has," to which he adds: "and which he would express by them." Perhaps he dimly realized that intentionalism was required to make his linguistic thesis plausible.

Having established, I hope, at least a presumption in favor of Locke's commitment to intentionalism, I now propose to tell a story—an intentionalist story—about some main strands in empiricist thinking about language from Locke to Hume. I will be discussing Locke in fair detail; what I say about Berkeley and Hume will be, by comparison, sketchy and only casually defended. I will begin by trying to clarify Locke's famous complaint about the way in which we sometimes manage our intentions: his protest against intending our words "to stand for any thing, but those

[13] A speaker may, of course, utter a word without intending to communicate, and we may infer from the sound that she has the idea the word stands for in mind. But this would be a degenerate case of linguistic signification, more akin to a cry than to a speech act.

Ideas we have in our Minds" (III ii 5). The text, along with some of its surroundings, is worth quoting in full:

> §4. But though Words, as they are used by Men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the *Ideas*, that are in the Mind of the Speaker; yet they in their Thoughts give them a secret reference to two other things.
>
> *First*, *they suppose their Words to be marks of the* Ideas *in the Minds also of other Men, with whom they communicate*….
>
> §5. *Secondly*, Because *Men* would not be thought to talk *barely* of their own Imaginations, but of Things as they really are; therefore they *often suppose their Words to stand also for the reality of Things.* But this relating more particularly to Substances, and their Names, as perhaps the former does to simple *Ideas* and Modes, we shall speak of these two different ways of applying Words more at large, when we come to treat of the Names of mixed Modes, and Substances, in particular: Though give me leave here to say, that it is a perverting the use of Words, and brings unavoidable Obscurity and Confusion into their Signification, whenever we make them stand for any thing, but those *Ideas* we have in our own Minds.

This is a puzzling complaint because as many of Locke's readers have noticed, he often speaks of us as discoursing about things themselves, and in doing so suggests that he takes it to be perfectly legitimate.[14] He takes it, in fact, to be not merely legitimate, but absolutely essential. We aim, Locke says, to "discourse of Things" (III vi 33), and so "our Names of Substances" are not "put barely for our *Ideas*," but are "made use of ultimately to represent Things, and so are put in their place" (III xi 24).[15] It is "Things" in general, rather than ideas, that "Men would be understood to speak of" (III ix 15). Equivalent idioms of what might be called "semantic realism" pervade Book III. Most names, we're told, "stand not particularly for this or that single Thing; but for sorts and ranks of Things" (III i 6; see also III iii 12, III vi 1, and III vi 36).[16] We make words "the Signs…of Qualities of Things" (III ii 2). Names have "Application" to things (III iii 2). Persons, countries, cities, rivers, mountains, and other places have "peculiar Names," by which they are marked "particularly," and "as it were, set before others" in discourse (III iii 5). General names enable us "to consider Things, and discourse of them, as it were in bundles" (III iii 20). Names of simple ideas and substances not only "immediately signify"

[14] See for example Ott, *Locke's Philosophy of Language*, p. 27, citing *Essay* III iii 13 and III vi 1.

[15] He does go on to say that "their signification must [therefore] agree with the Truth of Things, as well as with Men' Ideas," which could be taken to imply that the name signifies nothing but an idea which, when it agrees with the truth of things, establishes the name as a representation (but not a sign) of things.

[16] I cannot pause here to give an account of the metaphysics of Lockean sorts, but I believe they are best understood neither as sets (in our sense) nor as ideas (in Locke's sense), even though they depend for their existence on ideas—nominal essences—that we compose. When I talk with someone about "a Sort of Birds" (III vi 34), for example, it seems to be Locke's considered view that I am talking not about my ideas, but about something in the extra-mental world. But the nature of that thing is, in the *Essay*, left unclear. For a strongly realist passage about sorts, see *Essay* III vi 1 or the opening lines of III xi 25; for a contrary passage identifying sorts or species (and not merely their nominal essences) with ideas, see IV iv 17.

ideas but "intimate also some real Existence" (III iv 2). We "speak of" things (III vi 28). We must "regulate the signification of their Names by the Things themselves, if we will have our Names to be the signs of them, and stand for them" (III ix 11). We are wrong, Locke says, to use words "as Signs of real Beings, which never had any Reality or Existence" (III x 25), an observation strongly suggesting that they can be used as signs of real beings that do exist. Someone who supposes that "the Name *Centaur* stands for some real Being, imposes on himself" (III x 32); someone who supposes the same of the name *horse* presumably does not. At III xi 25, words are roundly described as "standing for Things."

I view the passages just surveyed as strong endorsements of our typical intentions as speakers and writers. In using words we intend to speak of things, and in the passages I've cited Locke seems to view this as perfectly permissible. But if our words are the signs of our ideas "and…can be," as Locke insists, "the Signs of nothing else" (III ii 8), how can these intentions be legitimate? Norman Kretzmann's answer is that "it is only *immediately* that words signify *nothing but* the user's ideas." "Where the ideas immediately signified are *themselves* signs—that is, representative ideas—their originals may be *mediately* signified by those words" ("The Main Thesis of Locke's Semantic Theory," p. 189). Walter Ott is unhappy with the implication that Locke equivocates on "signify" (*Locke's Philosophy of Language*, pp. 9, 21). What evidence is there, he asks, that Locke distinguishes between two forms of signification, one immediate (or primary), the other mediate (or secondary)?[17] Ott's own answer to the question I've raised is that the denomination of things by words is wholly reducible to the signification of ideas (pp. 26–27, 33, 93). He quotes Hobbes, for whom the word *stone* signifies a stone only insofar as "he that hears it collects that he that pronounces it thinks of a stone" (pp. 26–27). For Locke as Ott understands him, words do not *really* denominate or refer to things (see pp. 33 (where, admittedly, only direct reference is repudiated)), p. 138 (where Locke is said to believe that "there is no such thing as reference"), and p. 142 ("words are not about *anything*," but are instead "signals others can (although they often do not) use to infer what is going on in our minds")). It is, in Ott's view, perfectly all right to *say* that words refer to things, but in doing so a faithful Lockean will be speaking with the vulgar and thinking with the learned. Construed as "a construction out of signification" (p. 139), linguistic reference is analyzed away. When we "talk about" something in what Ott describes as "the pre-theoretical sense" of that phrase (p. 139), we're really sending out indications of what's passing in our minds.

I sympathize with Ott up to a point. If Locke really does allow for words to signify things mediately or secondarily, it is hard to account for the passion and persistence of the kind of condemnation he levels at us in III ii 5. Yet I'm not

[17] It is true that Locke "never so much as uses the phrases 'mediate' or 'secondary' signification" (p. 26), but they are, arguably, counter-concepts implicated in his use of "immediate" and "primary." Ott also notes that in claiming that words "properly and immediately signify" nothing but ideas, Locke implies that they must signify things improperly (p. 27), but the relevant contrast could be between what words signify in their own capacity and what they signify only with outside assistance. Finally, Ott observes that "in the course of Book III," Locke states the linguistic thesis without restricting it to primary or immediate signification, for example at III x 15, where he writes that words are "the Signs of our Ideas only" (p. 26).

altogether comfortable with Ott's reduction, though I find it hard to pin down exactly what it is about it that bothers me. At times I think it's the fact that the reduction, as Ott's quotation from Hobbes indicates, is offered from the viewpoint of the listener or reader. My emphasis on Locke's intentionalism inclines me to take the very different viewpoint of the speaker or writer. When, after a struggle, I find just the right word for the extra-mental thing I have in mind—just right word for fulfilling my intention to communicate—it is dislocating to be told that the fit between word and object is nothing over and above the likelihood that my audience will succeed in inferring what I'm thinking of. I feel as if the word is picking out the object *for me*, however others might respond, and Kretzmann gives me a way of acknowledging that. But Ott can very legitimately reply that struggling for the right word is a phenomenon he can accommodate, as a search for just the word that will enable others to identify my thought. At other times I wonder whether I'm troubled by Ott's reductive program because it threatens to do away with normal linguistic intentions altogether. Suppose I intend to say something (in what Ott calls the pre-theoretical sense) about my dog. What I'm doing, according to Locke as Ott presents him, is signaling that I have an idea of my dog in mind. But do I *intend* to signal that I have that idea in mind? Wouldn't I, were that the case, say of my mind (in the pre-theoretical sense of "of") that it includes an idea of my dog? But if I say *that* of my mind, according to Ott's analysis I'll actually be signalling that I have an idea of my mind as including an idea of my dog, and giving off that signal doesn't seem at all to be what I would then intend. I would then intend to *say*, of my mind, that it contains an idea of my dog. At bottom, then, my worry is perhaps this: we typically intend to speak about things in the pre-theoretical sense of "about," and if Lockean semantic theory robs us of pre-theoretical aboutness, it threatens to rob us of our intentions. Ott may reply that I can have my pre-theoretical intentions. I can intend to speak about things in the world; it's just that I can't actually succeed in doing so. (Ott consistently speaks in terms of reduction, but the view he ascribes to Locke, which recalls Berkeley's view that we can speak of rising suns and natural causes even though there aren't any, seems more eliminativist than reductionist.) But I'd rather not have my intentions if they're bound always to be frustrated. I want them sometimes to be fulfilled. Ott cannot allow that they ever are. If he does, his Locke will veer close (dangerously close, so far as Ott is concerned) to Kretzmann's. Kretzmann's Locke tells me that I do sometimes speak of things, because my words sometimes signify ideas that in turn signify things. I find that reassuring. But I'm far from sure that I've made my reactions to Kretzmann and Ott precise enough to be compelling. And even if I have, Ott can still point out that if Kretzmann were on the right track, Locke would praise the use of words to stand for the reality of things rather than complain about it. That Ott's interpretation can make sense of Locke's protest is perhaps its greatest strength.

I'm going to try to make headway by enlarging on Kretzmann's distinction between primary and secondary signification. It seems to me to be at work in the following passage from III iii 12:

> The next thing therefore to be considered, is, *What kind of signification it is, that general Words have.* For as it is evident, that they do not signify barely one particular thing; for then they would not be general Terms, but proper Names:

> so on the other side, 'tis as evident, they do not signify a plurality; for Man and Men would then signify the same; and the distinction of numbers (as Grammarians call them) would be superfluous and useless. That then which general Words signify, is a sort of Things; and each of them does that, by being a sign of an abstract *Idea* in the mind, to which *Idea*, as Things existing are found to agree, so they come to be ranked under that name; or, which is all one, be of that sort. Whereby it is evident, that the *Essences of* the *sorts, or* (if the Latin word pleases better) *Species* of Things, are nothing else but these abstract *Ideas*. For the having the Essence of any Species, being that which makes any thing to be of that Species, and the conformity to the *Idea*, to which the name is annexed, being that which gives a right to that name, the having the Essence, and the having that Conformity, must needs be the same thing: Since to be of any Species, and to have a right to the name of that Species, is all one.

What I find especially telling here is Locke's claim that the word signifies a sort *by* being a sign of an abstract idea in the mind. He seems to be telling us that the word's being a sign of an abstract idea in the mind *accounts* for its being a sign of a sort of things, because the various things populating the sort do so simply because they conform to the idea. Their conformity to the idea gives them, Locke says, the right to the name, a right transmitted through the idea to which the name has already been "annexed." Locke doesn't use the word "primary" here, but the word's signification of the idea seems to be primary and its signification of the sort (or the particulars falling within it) seems to be secondary, since the first relation gives rise to the second and accounts for it.

Kretzmann ("The Main Thesis," p. 189) quotes a similar but in my view less effective passage from the same chapter of the *Essay*. He thinks Locke offers no better statement of the main thesis of his theory:

> For the signification and use of Words, depending on that connexion, which the Mind makes between its *Ideas*, and the Sounds it uses as Signs of them, it is necessary, in the Application of Names to things, that the Mind should have distinct *Ideas* of the Things, and retain also the particular Name that belongs to every one, with its peculiar appropriation to that *Idea*. (III iii 2)

Here, as in the other passage, Locke suggests that the signification of things by words depends on, or derives from, their prior signification of ideas. I don't think it much matters whether the relationship between word and thing is entitled "signification"; perhaps Ott is right to prefer "denomination." The crucial point is that the connection between word and object takes rise from the relationship between word and idea. It runs through the conformity of the thing to the idea in the mind of the speaker, rather than (as in Ott's proposed reduction) through any inference from word to thing that might be made by others.

I'm going to quote one final passage on behalf of the distinction between immediate and mediate signification, though it's a passage whose puzzling character may limit its value as evidence. "It may not be amiss here again to consider," Locke writes at IV v 8, "that though our Words signifie nothing but our *Ideas*, yet being designed by them to signifie Things, the *Truth* they contain, when put into Propositions, will be only *Verbal*, when they stand for *Ideas* in the Mind, that have

not an agreement with the reality of Things." I take it that "by them" refers back to our ideas, but this is what makes the passage puzzling: what does it mean for ideas to *design* words to signify things? It's strange to attribute intentionality to ideas, and if an *intention* to signify things by words is all that's being ascribed to them, the passage won't be offering what someone friendly to Kretzmann might be hoping for: an admission that words *do in fact* signify things. If ideas are, according to the passage, actually successful in designing words to signify things, that would serve as powerful evidence that Locke is implicitly distinguishing between immediate and mediate signification. He would be insisting that words *immediately* signify nothing but ideas, and then admitting—indeed emphasizing—that they mediately signify things.

Now I'm in fact inclined to read the passage in just this way, but motivating my reading will take some work. We first have to look more closely at "designed by." I think it means that words are *designated* or *appointed* by ideas to signify things (a perfectly standard early modern meaning of "designed by"), in which case the passage is saying (or at least may be saying) that words do in fact signify things. We might still be troubled by the lingering intentionality that even this reading seems to assign to ideas. The intentionality of ideas is an issue I'll take up later on, but for now I don't see why we can't assume that the intentionality is, at bottom, lodged in us, even though it's an intentionality we can't exercise apart from our ideas, which is why the "by" in "designed by" remains appropriate. We can assume that we are the ones who suppose our ideas are copies and refer them to archetypes outside us (on this see, for example, *Essay* IV iv 12), but in the presence of that general intention, particular ideas signify particular things because of their distinctive features. If, then, we appoint a word to signify an idea, the idea will quickly take over and appoint or design the word to signify what the idea itself signifies. How, I'm tempted to ask, could things go otherwise? If the idea already reaches out to the thing and a word is then appointed to stand for it, how could the word escape standing also for the thing? It will remain true that properly and immediately, the word signifies only an idea. But "properly" here needn't mean that the word signifies the thing *im*properly. It may mean that the word, *in its own capacity* or *out of its own proper resources*, signifies nothing but an idea.[18] So understood, the passage strengthens the outlines of the general picture I've been drawing, in which the connection between words and the world takes rise from the dual connections between word and idea and idea and object.

Ott's weighty objection to this picture is that "signifies" is no longer being used univocally. It cannot always mean *indication*, because even if words indicate ideas in the minds of speakers and ideas of sense at least indicate things, words do not indicate (or license inference to the presence of) things. But ideas of imagination, which do not license inference to the things they signify (though they do signify them: see *Essay* IV xxi 4), may already provide us with a reason for thinking that signification is sometimes (as E. J. Ashworth proposes) a matter of *making*

[18] There is a use of "proper and immediate" along these lines in Chapter 9 of the *Third Letter for Toleration*. The "proper and immediate effect" of punishment, Locke says there, is pain or inconvenience. But, he adds, the "natural effect" of that pain or inconvenience—and, I would be inclined to say, the distal or mediate effect of the punishment—is obedience (in *The Works of John Locke*, volume 6, p. 392).

something known or *bringing it before the mind*.[19] Ott is reluctant to find, in Locke's talk of the denomination of words by things, "commitment to an altogether new semantic category" (*Locke's Philosophy of Language*, p. 27). This is what motivates his proposed reduction of denomination or reference to indication. But as I've already said, that reduction may undermine commitments that Locke, as an intentionalist, holds central.[20]

I return at last to Locke's complaint, which comes, I think, to this: since our words can play the role we typically intend for them—the role of designating or denominating items in the extra-mental world—only insofar as they conform to ideas that our words signify, we had better use words so that they (immediately) signify ideas. Because the complaint is directed particularly at our abuse of the names of substances, I'll devote the rest of my analysis to Locke's development of the complaint at *Essay* III x 17–21 (pp. 499–503 in Nidditch), and to passages elsewhere in the *Essay* that (I believe) illuminate it.

When a man, Locke explains there, says *gold is malleable*, he intends to say more than *what I call gold is malleable*. He wants to say that *what has the real essence of gold is malleable* (III x 17). But because the real essence is unknown, Locke says, the word *gold* thereby loses its signification (III x 19). Locke doesn't, in the series of sections meant to document the abuse, explain exactly why, but the basic reason is laid out very clearly earlier in Book III at ix 12:

> This real Constitution, or (as it is apt to be called) Essence, being utterly unknown to us, any Sound that is put to stand for it, must be very uncertain in its application; and it will be impossible to know, what Things are, or ought to be called an *Horse,* or *Antimony*, when those Words are put for real Essences, that we have no *Ideas* of at all.

[19] See her "Locke on Language," pp. 175–198 in Vere Chappell (ed.), *Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), and my review of Ott's book in *Philosophical Books* 48 (2007), pp. 76–78. Dawson says, diplomatically, that "'signify' is a rich term that is roughly equivalent to 'indicate' or 'make known'," and refers readers to both Ott and Ashworth (*Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy*, p. 14). There is another use of "signify" that may escape Ott's analysis at III viii 1, where Locke speaks of signifying that something is the case. I discuss this passage below.

[20] There may be another shift of perspective from speaker to hearer in Ott's account of Locke's defense of his linguistic thesis. Ott sees Locke's argument as resting on two premises, one about the nature of signification and one about the world. "Locke," he explains, "thinks that he can rule out proposals that things other than ideas (and mental acts) are signified [by our words] simply by consulting the definition of signification, and then seeing if these candidates can be linked with words in such a way as to meet that definition" (p. 32). According to Locke's definition as Ott understands it, signification is indication. To say that *x* signifies *y* is to say that *x* is an indication of *y*: that its appearance or presence is something from which the appearance or presence of *y* can be reliably inferred. "There is," Ott writes, "no logical impossibility about a world in which whenever anyone utters the words 'stone,' a stone appears" (p. 32). But that magical world "is not our world" (p. 32). Words in our world do not reliably indicate the presence of things. But they are reliable indicators of ideas in the minds of speakers. Hence words signify ideas and nothing but ideas. What Ott offers here is an argument against my supposing that your words signify things. But Locke's target seems to be my supposing that my own words do so. His concern, in other words, lies with something I do in my privacy (III x 19). I'm not convinced that the problem with that is the encouragement I offer others to think that my words, like incantations, might summon things into being.

Setting words in place of an unknown real essence renders the signification of a sortal word obscure and confused simply because, in the absence of an idea, we can't determine what particular things can be ranked beneath it. We thereby lose our power to sort or classify particulars. As Locke writes at III vii 50, "let it be never so true, that all *Gold*, *i.e.*, all that has the real Essence of *Gold*, is fixed, What serves this for, whilst we know not in this sense, what is or is not *Gold*? For if we know not the real Essence of *Gold*, 'tis impossible we should know what parcel of Matter has that Essence, and so whether it be true *Gold* or no." Not knowing "what is or is not *Gold*," we won't of course be certain that any particular quality is present in gold (IV vi 5). If, instead of assigning the word *gold* to an unknown real essence, we let it stand for a collection of co-existing qualities, we'll still fall short of knowing universal truths concerning gold, but we'll no longer be "uncertain" about "what Things are signified" by the word. As I'm interpreting III ii 5, then, instead of renouncing the right to use words to stand for things, Locke's complaint actually presupposes it. As Locke explains in II xxxii 8, an abstract idea or nominal essence is "something in the Mind between the thing that exists, and the Name that is given to it; it is in our *Ideas*, that both the Rightness of our Knowledge, and the Propriety or Intelligibleness of our Speaking consists." In order to talk of things in themselves —to select particular items for discussion—our words must signify ideas that serve, so to speak, as the modes in which things are presented to the mind. Whether something is or isn't of the species *gold* can be "determined only by that abstract *Idea*, to which every one annexed the name *Gold*" (III vi 35). In the absence of an idea we can gesture at a particular standing before us, but "when the Body it self is away," as Locke says at III x 19, it will be beyond the reach of words.[21]

It might be said that my efforts so far do nothing to explain the exact form taken by Locke's complaint at *Essay* III ii 5. If he's as comfortable as I've suggested with a distinction between immediate and mediate signification, why does he disapprove of referring words to the reality of things? This is the question that will be pressed not only by Ott but by Hannah Dawson, who writes that passages such as III ii 5 threaten "to jettison the objective world from…language" (*Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy*, p. 188). But is it really so clear that Dawson, at least, is right? Locke opens the section by calling attention to our tendency to suppose that words stand not only for ideas, but "also for the reality of Things." And he ends by bemoaning the obscurity and confusion caused by making words "stand for any thing, but those *ideas* we have in our own Minds." Could he perhaps be intimating that there's a difference between using words "also" for the reality of things and using them for anything "but" our own ideas? Perhaps he's prepared to allow for the first and means to condemn only the second, which he interprets not as using words for things outside the mind, but as using words for things *as opposed* to ideas. Imagine for a moment an angelic language, spoken by beings with insight into the inner constitutions of things. Their words would stand for real essences. But they would also stand for ideas: *their* ideas. "The names of Substances would be much

[21] For other passages exhibiting Locke's concern with securing reference to absent bodies see III vi 13, 25, and 46.

more useful, and Propositions made in them much more certain," Locke writes, "were the real Essences of Substances the *Ideas* in our Minds, which those words Signified" (III x 18). In principle, he seems to be saying, the real essences of substances can be the ideas our words signify; it is just that due to the limitations of our faculties, they happen not to be. If, then, we do have ideas of some real essences, perhaps the associated words can stand not only for our ideas but "also" for the reality of things, and do so without standing for anything "but" or "besides" ideas. The words stand for ideas, and precisely because they do, they also stand for a reality beyond them.

To buttress this suggestion, which I offer in an experimental spirit, I propose to consider words that according to Locke *do* signify real essences even in our minds: the names of simple ideas. "The Name *Blue*," Locke writes, "notes properly nothing, but that Mark of Distinction, that is in a *Violet*, discernible only by our Eyes, whatever it consists in, that being beyond our Capacities distinctly to know, and, perhaps, would be of less use to us, if we had Faculties to discern" (II xxxii 14). Note the characteristic Lockean slide from talk of an *idea* to talk of a *quality* (a slide to which Locke himself points at *Essay* II viii 8). A "Mark of Distinction" is, as the sentence begins, an idea, as it was explicitly a few earlier in II xxxii 14; but when, as the sentence continues, it is said to be *in* a violet it becomes, in accordance with Locke's instructions to the reader at II viii 8, a quality, which is what is has to be in order to "consist in" anything objective, whether it be a real accident that resembles the idea it causes or the corpuscular texture of the flower. So does the name *blue* signify an idea or a quality? I don't think a good Lockean really has to make the choice: it signifies both, but it signifies the quality through the idea, which means that it signifies it only as a *power* (see again II viii 8), rather than as the reality underlying the power, to which our ideas afford no access. Our ideas of qualities as powers are, nonetheless, not only adequate (II xxxi 2) and for the most part true (II xxxii 9), but also *real* (II xxx 2). Our ideas of qualities as powers, though they are not ideas of (say) the structures in which those powers are realized, are ideas of the reality of things. And their names are therefore names of the reality of things, as Locke seems to be saying in a striking passage to which I'll soon be returning for another (but related) purpose:

> *A Man is White*, signifies, that the thing that has the Essence of a Man, has also in it the Essence of Whiteness, which is nothing but a power to produce the *Idea* of Whiteness in one, whose Eyes can discover ordinary Objects; or *a Man is rational*, signifies, that the same thing, that hath the Essence of a Man, hath also in it the Essence of Rationality, *i.e.* a power of Reasoning. (III viii 1)

This is a rare (but not unique) passage in which Locke speaks, I believe, of a form of words as signifying *that*: of an apparently verbal proposition signifying something with a fact-like structure. The essences mentioned in it are nominal essences, but in the case of *white*, the name of a simple idea, and *rational*, the name I presume of a mixed mode, the essences are also real essences. It seems to follow that *white*, the name *white*, signifies a reality, but a reality *as known*, a reality conceived as a power, rather than as something in which that power is realized. By the same token, it should follow that the name *man* signifies a reality—otherwise the words wouldn't

be signifying that something is true of a thing—but once again only a reality as known. Legitimate ideas of substances, Locke says, are not referred to real essences, but are "design'd to be Pictures and Representations in the Mind, of Things that do exist, by *Ideas* of those qualities"—that is, those powers—"that are discoverable in them" (II xxxi 6). They too are ideas of powers, conceived as existing in a common substance or substratum. These representations are "no farther *real*, than as they are such Combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are really united, and co-exist"—and now we slide again with Locke from simple ideas to the qualities as powers that, as he often says, perfectly answer them—"in Things without us" (II xxx 5). I'm proposing, then, that the point of Locke's complaint at III ii 5 may simply be that we're unable to signify the reality beneath the powers we know, not that we're unable to signify the reality that coincides with those powers.

If my proposal is correct, there's less of an opposition than some of Locke's interpreters have supposed between a word's standing for an idea and its standing for a thing: words stand for things by standing for ideas, and our problem isn't that our words can't stand for or signify extra-mental objects, but that they can't stand for extra-mental objects of which we do not have ideas. Dawson writes, explicating Locke's argument for his linguistic thesis at III ii 2, that "words can only ever signify ideas, and nothing else for Locke, because insofar as they are invented by men, words can only be applied to what men know, that is, ideas" (*Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy*, p. 187). But according to Locke we know not only ideas but things. "'Tis evident,' he writes, that "the Mind knows not Things immediately," but he insists that it knows them in spite of that, "by the intervention of the *Ideas* it has of them" (IV iv 3). If we view the signification of things in the same general spirit, as something we can achieve thanks to the intervention of ideas, perhaps we needn't find, even in III ii 5, a clash between the condemnation it lays down and the communicative intentions that Locke elsewhere seems not merely to allow for, but to encourage.

There is at least one potential drawback to my suggestion, which is that it seems to blur the contrast Locke draws between simple ideas, where nominal and real essence coincide, and ideas of substance, where nominal and real essence radically diverge. I've emphasized, in the case of our simple ideas, something very much like the distinction between nominal and real essence: a gap between our conception of a quality as a power and our conception of whatever it may be in which that power is realized.[22] Locke seems to think that we don't refer the names of simple ideas to unknown underlying realities in the way we refer the names of substances to unknown real essences. His complaint at III ii 5 is, accordingly, addressed "particularly to Substances, and their Names." But by now, I must admit, I have trouble seeing any justification for Locke's divergent attitudes. Why, for example, don't some of those who fail properly to distinguish between primary and secondary qualities tend to suppose that the name *white* or *blue* signifies a real accident in

[22] That simple ideas or qualities might support a distinction between real and nominal essence is a suggestion made to me in conversation by Allison Kuklok, who has been pursuing it in her own work on Locke.

things? And why don't some of those who do properly distinguish them tend to suppose that the name *white* or *blue* signifies an aspect of a body's texture?[23]

Before moving on to Berkeley and Hume, I want to say a word about the passage from *Essay* III viii in which Locke comments on what *a man is white* signifies.[24] One effect of treating Locke as an intentionalist is to highlight his concern with propositions. In the end this may be misleading, because as Dawson observes, "early-modern philosophy of language is fundamentally a philosophy of *words*" (*Locke, Language, and Early-Modern Philosophy*, p. 7), and Locke's philosophy of language plainly shares in that prevailing emphasis. Yet Locke does speak, in several places, of a whole sentence's signifying *that* something is the case, as opposed to a term's signifying what it signifies.[25] The most striking of these passages is the one I've already quoted from III viii 1, where he writes that *a man is white* signifies that something with the essence of a man also has the power to produce an idea of whiteness. How should Lockean signifying-that be understood?

Ott does not deal with this question explicitly, but signifying-that could be analyzed, on the model of his account of the signification of terms, as a form of indication. What would it be, though, that *a man is white* indicates? I think several answers are possible.[26] It might indicate (and thereby license the hearer to infer),

[23] Consider II xxxi 2, where Locke says that things are "denominated by us...as if" simple ideas "were real Beings in them." Fire is said to be light and hot, "as if Light and Heat, were really something in the Fire, more than a power to excite these Ideas in us." Here it sounds as if the names of simple ideas do sometimes reach beyond the ideas they signify, just as the names of substances do. But then Locke goes on to say that words such as light and heat "truly signify nothing, but those Powers, which are in Things, to excite certain Sensations or Ideas in us." What does he mean by truly signifying? Perhaps, in the same sense, the names of substances do not truly signify anything more than combinations of simple ideas (together with the idea of substance or substratum). But does that mean that some people can't use them to signify (or to attempt to signify) something more? If I can signify more when it comes to man or gold, why can't I do so when it comes to light, hot, white, or blue?

[24] Is it altogether clear whether, at III viii 1, Locke is treating *a man is white* as a form of words, or (instead) as a juxtaposition of ideas? I believe he's treating it as a form of words, or that he's treating it simultaneously as a mental proposition (whose constituent terms are ideas) and as a verbal proposition (whose constituent terms are words). Other passages are more definite. In the marginal heading of Essay I ii 22, "Implicitly known before proposing, signifies that the Mind is capable of understanding them, or else signifies nothing," Locke certainly seems to be ascribing the power of signifying-that to a form of words. Similar passages include §28 in the *Examination of Malebranche* (in volume 8 of the *Works*), where Locke says, of the sentence "All beings are present to our minds," that "presence [either] signifies that we see them, or else it signifies nothing at all"; §51 of the same work, where he says that when Malebranche writes that "he is certain that the ideas of things are unchangeable," either these words mean that ideas are true unchangeable representations of things, or else "they can only signify, that the idea I have once had will be unchangeably the same as long as it recurs the same in my memory; but when another different from that comes into my mind, it will not be that"; and p. 66 in the Stillingfleet correspondence (volume 4 of the *Works*), where Locke writes that "these words, 'allowing the argument to be good,' in the received way of speaking, are usually taken to signify, that he that speaks them does not judge the argument to be good; but that for discourse-sake he at present admits it."

[25] Locke's chapter on particles is another indication of a concern with whole propositions, since he takes them to play a signifying role only in propositions or discourses (see III vii 1–3).

[26] For an early modern treatment of signification that takes account of some of the complexities I go on to consider here, see Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, edited by Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), *Illustrations*, section 3, pp. 161–162.

first, the presence, in the mind of the speaker, of the bare *thought* or mental *proposition* that a man is white; or, second, the presence, again in the mind of the speaker, of an *intention to communicate* that a man is white; or, third, the presence in the mind of the speaker of a *belief* that a man is white; or, fourth and finally, the *objective fact* that a man is white. I don't think it's easy to say which of these answers is most plausible, or even whether we have to choose among them. It might be suggested that the inference-tickets lose strength as we move down the list. That may be true, but in the absence of an agreed-upon threshold of strength below which a ticket loses all value, it isn't clear that an utterance of *a man is white* couldn't indicate, and thereby signify, any one of the four. If someone utters *a man is white* it's a fairly safe bet that he or she has formed the associated thought, but it's by no means a sure one: the speaker could be parroting the words. That the speaker intended to communicate *a man is white* is uncertain for at least the same reason, but it might also be the case that he or she intended to *conceal* the thought and, consumed by nervous guilt, let it slip. An inference to a speaker's belief that *a man is white* is bound to be precarious, for reasons suggested by Mandeville and Voltaire, but on the assumption that the speaker is sincere—an assumption that the context might well justify—it could be safe enough. An inference to the fact that *a man is white* might seem, in the abstract, to be the least deserving of confidence, yet the context might not only justify it, but render it more certain than the inference that the speaker believes it or intends to communicate it. (The speaker might blurt out words—*my husband murdered my mother*, say—that serve as evidence for the fact they express, even though the speaker doesn't believe that the fact holds, and has no interest at all in imparting it.) My point in all this is that if, in accordance with my hypothesis that Locke is an intentionalist, we highlight the signifying role of whole (verbal) propositions, we may have more reason than before to conclude that according to Locke, words are able to signify something in the world. They can signify the world because when speakers arrange them into propositions, they testify to facts.[27] So even if my earlier, poorly focused misgivings about Ott's reduction can (as perhaps they should) be set aside, I may have removed one of the main motives behind it. Even if we interpret signification as indication, words can signify things, since sentences can signify that facts obtain only if their terms signify the things participating in the facts.[28]

Now to the rest of my story, which will have to told more briskly, with little documentation and no quarreling with other commentators. It will be a story of intention, its fulfillment and frustration.

I earlier raised the question of how Lockean ideas (and, if my suggestions above are adopted, words signifying Lockean ideas) can achieve external-world intention-

[27] If my utterance signifies the fact that snow is white, thereby allowing my listeners to infer that the world contains white snow, it signifies, of snow existing in the world, that it is white.

[28] I realize that I am saddling Locke with a "realist" view of facts, one closer (say) to J. L. Austin's (in his essay "Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume 24 (1950), pp. 111–128) than to P. F. Strawson's (in his essay of the same title, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume 24 (1950), pp. 129–156). This seems to me justified by Locke's definition of truth (*Essay* IV v 2) and by his remarks on real as opposed to merely verbal truth at IV v 8.

ality. This isn't a question that Locke, so far as I know, formally addresses (though he's very concerned to understand why, on the assumption that ideas do refer, they refer to some things rather than others), but there are a number of possible answers suggested by his work. Before those answers can be even roughly surveyed, though, I need to make a distinction between two kinds of ideas. The first includes ideas as given; its clearest instances are simple ideas (or, in Hume's preferred vocabulary, impressions) of sensation. The second includes ideas as modified, in any way, by reflection. I want "modification by reflection" to be understood very broadly, so that it ranges all the way from the mere interpretation of an idea of the first kind to the creation of a complex idea out of ideas of the first kind. The problem of external-world intentionality can be raised with respect to both, but whether a candidate solution is natural or plausible will depend on the kind of idea we're considering.

With respect for example to ideas as given, Locke's *Essay* might be read as suggesting that they possess intentionality inherently (either by nature, or because God superadds it to them); or that they derive it from their causal relations to (or co-variation with) items in the world (relations that may flow from the very natures of the relata, or be arbitrarily annexed to them by God). As I want my distinction to be understood, an idea as given cannot owe its intentionality to us: if it did, it would be an idea modified by the reflective act (whatever it may be) that endows it with real-world reference. With respect to ideas as modified by reflection, it may be the view of the *Essay* that they derive their capacity for reference from the intentionality already possessed by the ideas as given that enter into them. But there are at least three other possibilities: that even ideas as modified possess intentionality inherently; that the mind can, by an otherwise ungrounded direction of its intention, project or "throw" ideas onto things; or that the mind grounds or supports such an intention by means of some relation to the world into which, it supposes, ideas as given enter. In the final case, an idea as modified will be what is sometimes called a relative idea. Note that it's one thing for an idea as given—a simple idea of color, say—to refer to the world because it stands in a causal relation to it, and quite another for an idea as modified—say the relative idea of the power to cause that idea of color—to refer to the world because we intend it to and call upon the causal relation in order to realize our intention. In the first case the external-world reference is "external" to our intention; in the second case it isn't.

As I said just a moment ago, Locke doesn't formally address the general problem of external-world intentionality. But for Berkeley and Hume it is a central concern. I will close by looking briefly at their responses to some of the Lockean strategies I've surveyed. (Neither addresses all of the strategies I have imagined.) Their responses include both an analysis of our communicative intentions and an assessment of the chances that we'll realize them.

Berkeley's commitment to intentionalism is, if anything, even clearer than Locke's. Here are two speeches by Euphranor in *Alciphron*:[29]

> When a great prince declareth his will in laws and edicts to his subjects, is he careful about a pure style or elegant composition? Does he not leave his

[29] My source for quotations from Berkeley is *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, nine volumes (London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–1957). References, by section or dialogue and sometimes by page number, are provided in the text.

> secretaries and clerks to express his sense in their own words? Is not the phrase on such occasions thought proper if it conveys as much as was intended? (Sixth Dialogue, §6, volume 3 of the *Works*, p. 228)
>
> It seems to follow, that no man's speech is defective in point of clearness, though it should not be intelligible to all men, if it be sufficiently so to those who he intended should understand it; or though it should not in all parts be equally clear, or convey a perfect knowledge, where he intended only an imperfect hint. (Sixth Dialogue, §8, volume 3, p. 233)

Both passages strongly suggest that the meaning of a text is determined, at least to a large extent, by the intention of its author—even if the author is not the actual writer of the words! Berkeley's own interpretive practice, for example in his *Reasons for Not Replying to Mr. Walton's Full Answer* (volume 4, p. 147), is altogether in line with this:

> At first I considered him [Walton] in another light, as one who had good reason for keeping to the beaten track, who had been used to dictate, who had terms of art at will, but was indeed at small trouble of putting them together, and perfectly easy about his reader's understanding them. It must be owned, in an age of such ludicrous humour, it is not every one can at first sight discern a writer's real design. But, be a man's assertions ever so strong in favour of a doctrine, yet if his reasonings are directly levelled against it, whatever question there may be about the matter in dispute, there can be none about the intention of the writer.

Here Berkeley not only endorses the recovery of intention as an interpretive imperative, but gives good practical advice on how it should proceed. If a writer's protestations are at odds with the clear tendency of his reasoning, he advises, trust the reasoning as a guide to his true intentions or "real design." Trust the tale, he in effect advises, and not the teller. Not surprisingly, in view of his general emphasis on design or intention, Berkeley sometimes speaks of what he's written as what he "intended to say" (*Theory of Vision* 88 in *Works*, volume 1, and *Principles* 135, in *Works*, volume 2). And his theoretical remarks on linguistic meaning in the Draft Introduction to the *Principles* are, in places, strongly intentionalist:

> They will have it that if I understand what I say I must make the name animal stand for an abstract, generical idea which agrees to and corresponds with the particular idea marked by the name Melampus. But if a man may be allow'd to know his own meaning I do declare that in my thoughts the word animal is neither supposed to stand for an universal nature nor yet for an abstract idea which to me is at least as absurd and incomprehensible as the other. Nor does it indeed in that proposition stand for any idea at all. All that I intend to signify thereby being this, that the particular thing I call Melampus has a right to be called by the name animal. (volume 2, p. 136; see also pp. 138 and 139)

Against the background of his intentionalism, Berkeley's efforts to interpret philosophical and common-sense speech are revealed as efforts to recover philosophical and common-sense intentions. He is especially struck by the

differences between them. Philosophers intend to speak of a world "without the mind"; the vulgar, by and large (but see *Principles* 4), do not. The vulgar, whose words signify real things directly, don't require the support of the Lockean strategies we've reviewed. The philosophers, whose words signify mere "notes or images, referred to *things* or *archetypes* existing without the mind" (*Principles* 87), do need some such strategy, but Berkeley closes off every one he contemplates. Ideas, he feels sure, have no inherent power to signify a mind-independent world. Ideas of imagination do signify, intrinsically, the ideas of sense they resemble, but that's as far as their inherent intentionality takes them. "An idea," as Berkeley writes, "can be like nothing but an idea" (*Principles* 8). Nor can we conceive of a causal relation between ideas and mind-independent things; hence neither ideas as given nor ideas as modified can achieve intentionality by means of it. There is, in Berkeley's view, a genuine, perfectly conceivable causal relation between ideas of sense and the God who causes them. Ideas of sense can therefore be said to mark out or signify God, but they wouldn't do so if we didn't already have a *notion* of God. Can the mind simply throw its ideas on to things? Berkeley doesn't take this question up directly, but it isn't hard to see what his answer would be. There can be no blind agency. Hence the mind can't refer an idea to an external reality without already having an idea of that reality. External-world intentionality, Berkeley concludes, is unattainable. Ideas can't achieve it on their own, and they can't do it even with our help.

Hume is both more complicated and more interesting, and I'll try to run through his responses to the Lockean strategies more systematically. With respect, first, to ideas as given—that is, to impressions—they do not, according to Hume in the *Treatise*, have an inherent capacity for reference beyond themselves. The senses, he claims there, "convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond" (4.2.2.4; SBN 189).[30] "A single perception," he adds, "can never produce the idea of a double existence," except by what I've called reflective modification: "some inference either of the reason or imagination" (4.2.2.4; SBN 189). As for a causal relation between ideas as given and an external reality, the bare possibility is one that Hume, at least as the *Treatise* begins, doesn't altogether foreclose. Impressions of sensations arise, as he says there, "from unknown causes" (1.1.2.1; SBN 7). But in order to say with even the slightest degree of confidence that ideas as given draw intentionality from the causal relations they stand in to things beyond them, we need to form, by reflective modification, an idea of those things—presumably a relative idea, derived either from the causal relation itself, or from some other. I therefore turn to Hume's views on the referential potential of ideas as modified.

On my reading of the *Treatise*, which I grant is controversial, Hume puts no stock at all in any of the strategies he briefly considers for arriving at a relative idea of

[30] I quote from *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), cited by book, part, section, and paragraph number, and *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), cited by section and paragraph number. I also provide page references to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, third edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), both edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, and referred to collectively as "SBN."

external existence: an idea of something specifically different from perceptions but related to them. "Since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions," he writes, "and since all ideas are derive'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we can never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd" (1.2.6.8; SBN 67–8). He follows this uncompromising dismissal with a paragraph that some readers see as a concession:

> The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppose'd *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions, and durations. But of this more fully hereafter. (1.2.6.9; SBN 68)

The reference forward, as the attached footnote indicates, is to I iv 2, on which I'll comment in just a moment. For now I'll focus on the first sentence which, far from conceding anything to a realism concerning objects specifically different, is setting it up for ridicule. The best we can do, Hume says in that sentence, is to form a "relative idea" of objects specifically different, "without pretending to comprehend" them. The word "comprehend" here does not mean, as I think some readers suppose, that objects specifically different are beyond our comprehension, thereby holding open the possibility of our *ap*prehending them—"touching" them with our thought, as Descartes might have said, even if we have no hope of "grasping" them. Hume is using "comprehend" in a flatter and more direct sense: our relative idea won't comprehend the related objects in the sense that it won't *include* or *encompass* them. The relative idea is therefore an idea of what he later describes as a "relation without a relative," in a passage referring back to this very section:

> To make this evident let us [and here there's a footnote to I ii 6] remember, that as every idea is derive'd from a preceding perception, 'tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, 'tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig'd either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression. (1.4.5.19; SBN 241)

Now as the observation that the difference is incomprehensible might itself suggest, a relation without a relative is an absurdity, as Hume says explicitly in I iv 2, the section to which I ii 6 looks ahead:

> As to the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from our perceptions, [and here there is a footnote to I ii 6], we have already shewn its absurdity. (1.4.2.2; SBN 188)

Now it turns out that in the view of the *Treatise* we can form an idea of external existence, if we conceive of it as the continued and distinct existence of perceptions. This is the idea Hume has in mind when he speaks, in I ii 6, of giving our perceptions different relations, connections, and durations. This, Hume says, is what we *generally* do: what most of us do, most of the time, and perhaps all of us, much of the time. According to Hume, in fact, it may be what all of us except a few philosophers do in some brief moments, because in his view, even those philosophers who regard our fleeting perceptions as representations of more enduring objects conceive of those further objects as perceptions. "Philosophers," he writes,

> … arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions….I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. (1.4.2.56; SBN 218)

There's no indication in any of these passages that when we "suppose" in general that there are objects specifically different from perceptions, we're doing anything other than intending words to reach where thoughts or ideas can't. In much the same way, I can "suppose" that "*x*" signifies an even number with an odd square.

Hume's views on external existence in the *Enquiry* are harder to pin down, because there he offers no analysis of the notion of external existence, and no account of how the belief in an external world arises. He does say that "we always suppose an external universe," but the little he provides in explication ("an external universe, which depends not on our perception, but would exist, though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated") suggests to me that he may well continue to think of the external world along the lines laid down in *Treatise* I iv 2, as a system of perceptions with continued and distinct existence (*Enquiry* 12.7; SBN 151). He is, in any case, no more receptive than he was before to a belief in objects specifically different from perceptions. "By what argument can it be proved," he asks, "that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from then, though resembling them (*if that be possible*)… ?" (12.11; SBN 152–3, my emphasis). That the supposed objects are "entirely different" is a way of saying they are specifically different. That they "resemble" perceptions is a way of insuring that we're able to conceive of them. The kicker "if that be possible" is meant to warn us that making external objects conceivable and at the same time specifically different from perceptions is a hopeless undertaking. When Hume later writes that "it is a question of fact, whether the perception of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them" (12.12; SBN 153), he's made it a question of fact only because the requirement of specific difference has been quietly dropped.

But perhaps the *Enquiry*'s dismissal of objects specifically different is too hasty. It may be pointless to try to think of them both as objects specifically different from perceptions and as objects resembling perceptions. But suppose we think of them as causing perceptions without in any way resembling them. Won't that be enough to give us the conception we're seeking?

The problem lies in conceiving of an object specifically different from a perception as "that which causes" a perception. It may be that in order to do so, we

must, according to Hume, project or spread our idea of power onto it. But we can't project our idea of power onto an object unless we're already thinking of it. From this it may follow that the causal relation cannot, in Hume's view, account for our capacity to refer to the external world. I suggested earlier that the real world of Locke's *Essay* is a field of powers; what I'm now saying on Hume's behalf is, I think, a direct challenge to that conception. In both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, Hume voices his dissatisfaction with Locke's account of the origin of our idea of power (*Treatise* 1.3.14.5; SBN 157; *Enquiry* 7.8; SBN 64). According to Locke it is an idea that we "collect"—that is, infer—from experience, to which Hume replies that reason, the faculty responsible for inference, cannot (according even to Locke) be the source of new ideas. When the origin of our idea of power is properly traced, Hume thinks, we find it in ourselves, in an impression of determination or expectation. We can spread this idea onto objects, but in order to do so we must already be conceiving of them.

It may help to review some of these points more deliberately. Despite Hume's reputation as a "projectivist," there's nothing *essentially* projectivist about his account of the causal relation or his account of causal judgment. When the projection of the impression of necessary connection first comes up in the *Treatise*, it is presented only as a way of accounting for the "biass" against Hume's conclusion that power and necessity are "qualities of perceptions, not of objects, and are internally felt by the soul, and not perceive'd externally in bodies" (1.3.14.24; SBN 166). "The contrary biass," Hume writes, "is easily accounted for. 'Tis a common observation," emphasized particularly by Malebranche, "that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses." "This same propensity is the reason," he explains, "why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them: notwithstanding it is not possible for us to form the most distant idea of that quality, when it is not taken for the determination of the mind, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant" (1.3.14.25; SBN 167). When Hume goes on to provide his two definitions of "cause" (1.3.14.31; SBN 170, and again at 1.3.14.35; SBN 172), talk of spreading or transferring (he never actually speaks of "projecting") is conspicuously absent.

The *Enquiry* is very similar. There was, in fact, absolutely no mention of transference or projection in the first edition of that book. Transference or projection entered the book only in 1750, in a footnote to Section 7. Hume writes there that

> No animal can put external bodies in motion without the sentiment of a *nisus* or endeavour; and every animal has a sentiment or feeling from the stroke or blow of an external object, that is in motion. These sensations, which are merely animal, and from which we can *a priori* draw no inference, we are apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose, that they have some such feelings, whenever they transfer or receive motion. With regard to energies, which are exerted, without our annexing to them any idea communicated motion [gravitational attraction is presumably an example], we consider only the constant experienced conjunction of the events; and as we *feel* a customary connexion between the ideas, we transfer that feeling to the objects; as nothing

> is more usual than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation, which they occasion. (7.29; SBN 78).

Apart from a single sentence added in 1756 to another footnote in Section 7 (7.15; SBN 67, which alludes to transference or projection only when read in conjunction with the lines just quoted), the "causal projectivism" of Hume's maturity is confined to this footnote. I emphasize this not because I doubt he believed in transference or projection. He clearly did. But he thought that his search for the "meaning" or "significance" of *power*, *force*, *energy*, and *necessary connection* ended with his discovery of the impression of determination. The projection of the impression isn't something that the meaning of those terms demands. In the *Enquiry*, Hume comments on projection somewhat neutrally. In the *Treatise*, where it receives more emphasis, the projection of inner determination represented as something silly.[31] Hume offers no elaborate argument against it (as he does, later in the *Treatise*, against our tendency to spread tastes and smells onto external objects); he simply takes it to be obvious that an impression of reflection is "incompatible" with objects like billiard balls (*Treatise* 1.3.14.27; SBN 168 Nidditch)—that in such cases the impression or idea is, to borrow from an earlier part of his discussion (1.3.14.14; SBN 162), "*wrong apply'd*."

The external objects to which the impression of determination is "*wrong apply'd*" are not objects specifically different from perceptions, but objects as we "generally speaking" suppose them to be: perceptions with relations, connections, and durations different from those of the perceptions we deem internal. If they were objects specifically different, Hume couldn't think of transference or projection as a vulgar tendency. This is, I think, confirmation that for Hume, the idea of power can never yield an idea of external existence: the idea of an external object must already be on hand, in order for our idea of power to be foisted onto it.

Signification, intention, and projection are all acts of the mind, or at any rate they all involve such acts. And the acts involved are in a broad way similar, because they seek (at least at times) to take our thoughts (or the thoughts of our interlocutors) beyond what we may have immediately in view. Acts of the mind have certainly not been ignored in studies of early modern empiricism, but they've received far less attention than the ideas on which the empiricists typically took them to operate. I hope I've persuaded readers that the notion of intention plays a greater role in early modern empiricism than most of us have realized. By giving more notice to linguistic intentions, we may be able to illuminate other acts, attitudes, and postures of the empiricist mind.

[31] There is a compelling statement of Hume's general point in David Pears, *Hume's System* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 112.