

WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF MEANING IN JOHN LOCKE'S *ESSAY*

THE NARRATIVE THREAD:
WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF MEANING IN
JOHN LOCKE'S
AN ESSAY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

By
PATRICIA CATHERINE SIMMONS, B.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Patricia Catherine Simmons, September 1996

MASTER OF ARTS (1996)
(English)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Narrative Thread: Weaving a Tapestry of Meaning in
John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*

AUTHOR: Patricia Catherine Simmons, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Peter Walmsley

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 171

2 Abstract 3

Richard Rorty's seminal work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), a text that critiques the foundationalist aspirations of philosophy, locates John Locke within a line of thinkers primarily concerned with discerning and accurately representing either the external "reality" of the world or the internal essence of human beings. Such thinkers, according to Rorty, have perpetuated the conception of philosophy as foundational—that is, mediating between "reality" and all other claims to knowledge in order to adjudicate accuracy of representation. Contending that the conception of philosophy as foundational derives from an obsolete vocabulary inherited from the seventeenth century, Rorty locates philosophic *texts* on par with all other *texts*, whose relation to the world is functional rather than foundational. Rorty then proposes that philosophy assume a more pragmatic cultural role as the promoter, but not the arbiter, of more fruitful redescrptions of ourselves to deal with the historically specific complexity of the world.

Rorty's conception of language as a tool that underpins his argument that texts bear a functional as opposed to foundational relation to the world forms the theoretical framework for my analysis of John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Although the putative impetus of Locke's *Essay* is discerning the origin of our ideas as the foundations of all knowledge, this thesis proffers an alternate reading of Locke's *Essay* by attending to its rhetorical structure. More specifically, I argue that the *Essay* is an *experiential* and *experimental* text that insistently involves the reader in the textual exegesis of mind. Based on my reading of the rhetorical movements and literal denotation of the *Essay*, I propose that the primary aim of the text was not to represent accurately the cognitive processes of the mind forming ideas about the world as the foundations of all knowledge; rather, I suggest that the *Essay* self-consciously functions metaphorically by proffering a new vocabulary with which to think about mind, world, language, and society as a viable alternative to endless sectarian strife.

Using Rorty's vocabulary to redescribe Locke's rhetorical project in the *Essay*, I suggest that Locke's text not only embodies an awareness of its own contingency, but *functions* within its historical context in the role which Rorty proposes for philosophy. In this regard, Locke and Rorty become aligned on an imaginative continuum in their shared rhetorical project of redescription with specifically pragmatic aims.

Dear Reader:

I Here put into thy Hands, what has been the diversion of some of my idle and heavy Hours. But the many heavy hours of its composition are necessarily contextualized within many more hours fortunately spent in the company of some extraordinary people, all of whom have, in different ways, significantly influenced my life.

I would initially like to thank God for crossing my path with Dr. Peter Walmsley, whose astounding intellectual curiosity, conversational candour, and humane understanding have gently guided and immeasurably enriched my exploration of the complexity of John Locke. This thesis, concerned as it is with the cultural role of conversation and narrative, attempts to relate many thoughts borne of many hours of our pleasurable conversation. To my second reader, Dr. David L. Clark, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the positive support offered to me since this project's inception; his countless kind words and generous actions have constantly encouraged the development of my thoughts. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Marshall Goldstein primarily for enthusiastically agreeing to let my bounded thoughts impose upon some otherwise leisured hours of his retirement, but also for many fruitful years of challenging me with the intellectual freedom to explore some thoughts out of the common undergraduate road. For such an enthusiastic, supportive, and knowledgeable committee, ever-aspiring to understand the interconnections amongst world, mind, knowledge, and language, I am truly grateful.

There are a number of people who have also had a formative influence in shaping not only my understanding of particular ways of thinking about particular periods, particular genres, and particular texts, but also my understanding of what it means to live a thoughtful life within an intellectual community. For their individual acts, some conscious, some not, whose influence has rippled out in circles as in water stirred, I would especially like to thank: Dr. Lisa Schnell, Dr. Donald Goellnicht, Dr. Sylvia Bowerbank, Dr. Maqbool Aziz, Dr. Anthony Brennan, Dr. Joan Coldwell, Dr. Mary O'Connor, Dr. Irene Gammel, Mary Shippey, and Michael McCabe.

Since any intellectual community is sustained by and intersects with networks of personal relationships, I would like to recognize the value of those enduring relationships that have unfailingly supported my personal aspirations, and largely kept me sane. Though, naturally enough, many people have figured prominently at different stages, I would like to thank Jennifer Higgins, Nicola Jones, Sian Jones, Tammy Feltis, and Marina Stavropoulos for their incredibly generous and kind hearts. I am especially indebted for years of caring friendship to Neville Newman, Elizabeth Locs, Nancy Stevens & Randy Smart.

Finally, but foundationally, I would like to acknowledge my deepest gratitude to my family: Patricia & Leo Simmons, Jackie & Piero Marrone, Peter Simmons, Jeannette & Mark Finlayson, Leslie Simmons & Malcolm Gordon, Onion (Evelyn Milloy), and, of course, the wee babes. Given the unpredictable roller coaster that, often enough, *is* my life, I am thankful to have always been able to fairly easily finagle a willing ear, and coax a frightened eye to peer with me into the abyss from the front car. I consider myself fortunate to have always had such a wonderful wellspring of concern and support from which to draw over the years, for which my drained mercy buckets seem pitifully inadequate. As living witnesses to the account of my origin, my familial society grounds me enough to venture into the abyss of uncertainty, yet pulls me back from the brink into the comfort of a more familiar rendering of a smaller world order in which I always occupy a meaningful place.

To
my parents,
Patricia & Leo Simmons,
for creating the home in which
my own story is, and always has been,
intricately woven with four other colourful sibling
strands to spin the tapestry of my youth. That home in which
I first learned, by living, how we are shaped by and shape our
personal stories, I carry with me still. That home in which I,
with a head the size of an orange sitting in my mother's
pocket, first began, has so profoundly shaped my own sense
of community, of what it means to strive to live together in a
compassionate, peaceable and meaningful world, that this
thesis, admittedly yet another story, may, with deepest
gratitude, be said to have been spun on a loom of one's home.

2 CONTENTS 2

INTRODUCTION:	Philosophy as Literature	1
CHAPTER 1:	Locke as Masterful Rhetorician: The Experiential and Experimental Text	10
CHAPTER 2:	Text as <i>Tabula Rasa</i> : The Tactile Metaphor of Mind	45
CHAPTER 3:	Multiple Narrative Voices: Locke as Storyteller and the Dialogic Dynamic	82
CHAPTER 4:	As the Kaleidoscope Turns: Redescribing Rorty Redescribing Locke Redescribing Mind	135
CONCLUSIONS:	Microscope, Telescope, Kaleidoscope: Revisionary Reading and the Cultural Role of Narrative	162
	<i>Works Cited or Consulted</i>	166



2 Introduction 3

PHILOSOPHY AS LITERATURE

What if it turned out that philosophers had *always* been in the business of constructing plausible fictions, even when convinced most firmly that their object was the one, inviolable truth?

Christopher Norris, "Philosophy as a Kind of Narrative"

What is the relation between world and words? Can different sets of words bear different relations to the world? Such questions, intended to render explicit our assumptions about language, inform my exploration of what it means to read a philosophical text as literature. The issue is far from settled. Indeed, what seems to characterize recent assessments of either the validity or ramifications of conflating philosophy and literature is the anxious desire to delimit exactly what constitutes "literary" or "literature"--often enough, "literary" becomes equated with adventitious style while "literature" is synecdochically reduced to a few ostensibly representative texts.¹ But perhaps more striking is the reification of the "constitutive difference" between philosophy and literature--a difference formulated through the relation of word to world. In other words, while philosophy seeks truth, literature, at best, has an uncertain relation to truth and, at worst, embraces fictions. Arthur Danto worries that "[p]hilosophy-as-literature carries implications in excess of the claim that

¹ See, for instance, Arthur C. Danto, "Philosophy as/and/of Literature," in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. Anthony J. Cascardi (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 3-23; Steven Fuller, "When Philosophers Are Forced to Be Literary," in *Literature as Philosophy/Philosophy as Literature*, ed. Donald G. Marshall (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 24-39; Ellen Esrock, "Literature and Philosophy as Narrative Writing," in *Ideas of Order in Literature and Film*, ed. Peter Ruppert (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1980), 18-31.

philosophical texts have at times a degree of literary merit” and immediately sets up his ensuing evaluation of “philosophy-as-literature” against “philosophy-as-truth.”² Stephen Watson locates the difference between philosophy and literature in the implicit claims of a philosophic text to provide order and evaluation: “While philosophy is built upon particular classificatory schemata and strategies--those regarding the methodology for the differentiation and exclusion of the false, the imaginary, the fictional--literature affirms them.”³ Even Ronald Beiner, who likens “philosophy to literary activity in order to elevate the cognitive claims of literature,”⁴ attributes to great literature “descriptive truth-claims” as a model for more ambitious and expansive philosophical theorizing: “In theorizing, then, we tell a story--preferably, a *true* story. (We want to tell stories that are not only interesting or evocative, but also valid, that is, true to the real nature of our experience.)”⁵ What all of these uneasy attempts to reconcile the proposition that we read philosophy as literature presuppose is a conception of philosophic discourse that bears a special relation of truth to the world. This conception of philosophy possessed of a sacrosanct relation to “reality” is the very conception that Richard Rorty seeks to dismantle by his provocative suggestion that philosophy is simply a kind of writing.⁶ That is not to say, however, that philosophy bears *no* relation to the world; rather, Rorty’s argument locates philosophic *texts* on par with all other kinds of *texts*, whose

² Danto, 4-5. Danto seems to require that literature relate to reality in order to make philosophy-as-literature one with philosophy-as-truth. He seems entirely oblivious, however, to his own highly satirical caricature of literary critics as indicative of the rhetorical import of purposeful language usage often termed “literary.”

³ “The Philosopher’s Text,” in *Literature as Philosophy/Philosophy as Literature*, ed. Donald G. Marshall, 42.

⁴ “Philosophical and Narrative Truth: The Theorist as Storyteller,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 91 (1984): 553.

⁵ Beiner, 556.

⁶ See specifically “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida,” in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 90-109; and *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

relation to the world is functional as opposed to foundational. Discerning the relation between word and world, then, turns from accurate correspondence enshrined in the notion of language as medium to the pragmatic concern of dealing effectively with the historically specific complexity of the world. If we accept Rorty's provocative premise that language, instead of accurately reflecting or representing "reality," in fact constitutes what we even consider to be "reality" by structuring how we think about the world, all *texts*, literary, philosophic, and otherwise, bear a relation to the world that is neither foundational nor merely diversionary. Rather, *texts* primarily provide a language with which to understand ourselves and our relation to the world such that alternate descriptions of ourselves become viable bases for action--for how we manifest this understanding in our modes of social organization. It is this conception of the relation of word to world, or *texts* to their social and cultural context, that forms the theoretical framework of my analysis of John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

I think it is important, however, to clarify here that I do not propose to undertake a Rortyan analysis of Locke's *Essay*. Rather, my exploration of the complexity of Locke's *text* will itself be contextualized within Rorty's narrative of the evolution of philosophy and subsequent proposal that philosophy assume a new cultural role to promote more fruitful descriptions of ourselves. That said, my approach to Locke's *Essay* assumes that all texts, philosophic and literary, are rhetorically complex. I might borrow here from Beiner a particularly apt description of the import of a theoretical text's rhetorical structure:

[T]heory always draws power from a rhetorical structure that is not merely supplemental to its logical structure[; ...] the rhetorical

structure (as well as the logical structure) of a theoretical text is constitutive of and internal to the compellingness of the theory.⁷

By examining Locke's philosophic text as literature, then, I propose to analyze aspects of the *Essay* that constitute its rhetorical structure, not as ancillary or superfluous, but as integral to its effectiveness as a *text*. More specifically, my argument that Locke is well aware of the power of the purposive use of language to communicate effectively largely depends on attending to the careful construction of multiple narrative voices in the *Essay*. By examining the interplay of the *Essay*'s rhetorical movements and literal denotation, I further suggest that discerning *how* the text works is as important as *what* the text literally *says* to understanding Locke's wider project contextualizing his attempt to understand human understanding. More to the point, I think that the text rhetorically calls attention to its own textuality by insistently locating Locke *as* author and the reader *as* reader of *this text*, which intimates a possible allegiance between Locke and Rorty in their shared conception of the relation between word and world.

That Locke and Rorty might be aligned along an imaginative continuum may, at first, seem highly improbable considering that Rorty explicitly identifies Locke with the line of thinkers concerned with establishing accurate correspondence between world and word--specifically, in the case of the *Essay*, accurately representing *mind* through language. Moreover, Locke, according to Rorty's history of ideas, perpetuates that conception of philosophy as mediating between "reality" and all other claims to knowledge by virtue of its special understanding of knowledge and mind. Standing in striking contrast to Rorty's historicist approach, Locke's *Essay* has generally been accepted as aspiring to discern and disclose the ahistorical foundations of knowledge. Ian Hacking pointedly articulates this assessment of

⁷ "Philosophical and Narrative Truth: The Theorist as Storyteller," 556-7.

Locke, especially in relation to Rorty: “Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is as nonhistorical a work as we could imagine[. ...] It is about the origins of ideas and the origins of knowledge. [...] It is a perfect example of what Rorty takes to be the core project of modern philosophy (that is, Western philosophy from Descartes to almost now): epistemological foundations.”⁸ By this view, Locke becomes immediately aligned with those thinkers who fallaciously aspire to discover the “right description” of either the external world or our internal essence as human beings. What I would like to suggest, however, is that Locke is poignantly aware of how much of the world eludes our grasp and, subsequently, any description of the world or mind is always metaphorical. Moreover, despite Hacking’s claim that the *Essay* is “as nonhistorical a work as we could imagine,” I think that attending to how Locke’s text functions within its historical context is crucial to understanding Locke and Rorty as involved in a similar rhetorical project of redescription with specifically pragmatic aims. Given the deadlock of intolerance characterizing seventeenth-century sectarian strife, I think that Locke proffers his *Essay* as a useful tool; by providing an alternate vocabulary with which to think about mind, language, and society, the text arguably functions pragmatically to help its contemporary readers cope with the exigencies of that historical moment of crisis. In this light, Locke’s text *enacts* the very cultural role that Rorty proposes for philosophy.

Although Rorty functions in an integral way in this thesis by providing an alternate vocabulary with which to contextualize an alternate reading of Locke’s rhetorical project in the *Essay*, I will neither examine the rhetorical structure of Rorty’s texts nor use an explicitly Rortyan approach in my initial analysis of the *Essay*.

⁸ “Two Kinds of ‘New Historicism’ for Philosophers,” *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 21 (1990): 354.

Rather, my preliminary reading of the *Essay* is more in line with the suggestions Locke himself makes for understanding *St. Paul's Epistles*. Emphasizing the importance of attending to the disposition of the whole, Locke argues that understanding St. Paul's epistles "requires a very attentive reader to observe, and so bring the disjointed members together, as to make up the connexion, and see how the scattered parts of the discourse hang together in a coherent, well-agreeing sense, that makes it all of a piece."⁹ Locke also insists on trying to imaginatively reconstruct the disposition of the readers for whom St. Paul's epistles were originally written:

The matters that St. Paul writ about were certainly things well known to those he writ to, and which they had some peculiar concern in; which made them easily comprehend his meaning, and see the tendency and force of his discourse. But we having now, at this distance, no information of the occasion of his writing, little or no knowledge of the temper and circumstances those he writ to were in, but what is to be gathered out of the epistles themselves; it is not strange that many things in them lie concealed to us, which, no doubt, they who were concerned in the letter understood at first sight.¹⁰

In addition to considering the historical circumstances of the intended audience, proper reading, for Locke, entails close attention paid to the *text*, both as a whole and in its parts. Writing about St. Paul's discursive style in his epistles, Locke might be read as offering commentary on his own style in the *Essay*:

[W]ithout solemnly winding up one argument, and intimating any way that he began another, [he] let his thoughts, which were fully possessed of the matter, run in one continued train, wherein the parts of his discourse were wove one into another: so that it is seldom that the scheme of his discourse makes any gap; and, therefore, without

⁹ *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles*, in *The Works of John Locke* (London, 1823), V8: 6.

¹⁰ *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles*, 4.

breaking in upon the connexion of his language, it is hardly possible to separate his discourse, and give a distinct view of his several arguments, in distinct sections.¹¹

Lotte Mulligan aptly sums up Locke's advice for the proper reading of a text, especially for reading a text out of its historical context:

The reasoning, the inferences, the general import of the argument, the style and the inner coherence--these were all aspects Locke felt should be investigated closely. He was no exponent of simple textualism. Locke seems to have been well aware that 'meaning' was only part of the issue, that understanding what an author was 'doing' when he chose to define his terms in a particular way was an important part of reading the text.¹²

My own reading of the *Essay* derives from attending to the resonance of clusters of particulars while keeping an eye to the disposition of the whole; while arguably any reading must, to some extent, "pick out a text here and there, to make it serve our turn," I have nonetheless aspired to "consider what went before, and what followed after"¹³ to think about how the *Essay*, as a carefully crafted text, functioned as a whole in the *act of reading* amongst its contemporary readership.

To this end, the whole of my thesis consists in the following parts. Chapter 1 attempts to procure initial assent to the view of Locke as a capable and conscious rhetorician as a prelude to my rhetorical reading of the *Essay* as an experiential and experimental text. I am also concerned therein to argue that Locke assiduously constructs a separate and authentic authorial voice in the epistles largely by negotiating a kind of contractual agreement with the reader and dissociating that authorial presence from the *Essay* proper. Chapter 2 is largely concerned with

¹¹ *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles*, 22.

¹² Lotte Mulligan, Judith Richards, and John K. Graham, "A Concern for Understanding: A Case of Locke's Precepts and Practice," in *John Locke: Critical Assessments*, ed. Richard Ashcraft (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 685.

¹³ *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles*, 9.

analyzing the rhetorical import of insistent references to the material reality of the *text* which not only explicate particular arguments but continually locate the reader *as* reader and the author *as* author of *this text*. Identifying the *text* itself as a sophisticated rhetorical device, Chapter 2 further considers the implications of involving the reader experientially in the textual exegesis of mind in light of seventeenth-century natural history collections and experimental narratives. Chapter 3 attempts to identify multiple narrative voices at work in the *Essay*. I propose therein that the dominant mode of narration is that of “storytelling” which works in concert with two other narrative voices that I have termed the authorial “I” and the narrative “I” to implicate the reader in the text’s dialogism. Finally, Chapter 4 delineates the salient features of Rorty’s thought with which to contextualize my alternate rhetorical reading of Locke in the preceding chapters.

My specific intent in this thesis is to attend to the rhetorical complexity of Locke’s *Essay* and to reconstruct imaginatively “the temper and circumstances those he writ to were in”¹⁴ in order to provide an alternate reading of how Locke’s text *functioned* within its historical context; I realize, however, that my very attempt is already in the realm of probability. Nonetheless, aligning myself with Rorty and Locke, I believe that my reading of the *Essay* is meaningful and justifiable without simultaneously claiming that I have discerned and disclosed the “truth” of the text. That is, my reading of the text does not foreclose the possibility of alternate meaningful readings, nor must the number of alternate meaningful readings of the *Essay* be rendered commensurable within one meta-reading. I am more interested, therefore, in thinking about how we read--how we derive meaning from the complexity of texts as possible analogues for the complexity of the world. In this

¹⁴ *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul’s Epistles*, 4.

regard, I find Locke and Rorty strikingly similar in their shared conception that the way in which we make sense of the world is through language--more specifically, through narratives that provide a meaningful sense of the whole in which all of the disparate parts, including ourselves, have a place. With Locke and Rorty, I take a similarly ironist stance in the specific sense that although we can understand that the stories or narratives by which we make sense of the "text" of our lives may be utterly contingent and refer to neither an ahistorical truth nor suprahistorical design, we nonetheless *need* our stories to function in the world. From the perspective of hindsight, we need a conceptual grasp of why we are what we are--which presupposes a narrative form to account for the contingencies underpinning our self-conception. Revision and reordering may, of course, occur; but as Rorty points out, we can only ever have a redescription and a re-redescription. But as Locke, Rorty, and I would argue, we nonetheless need a way of describing ourselves through language in order to individually and collectively define what is most important to our self-conception. Since we act in accordance with our belief systems, I am interested in exploring how we individually and collectively *act* to make a humane, peaceable, and ultimately meaningful world.

Chapter 1

LOCKE AS MASTERFUL RHETORICIAN: THE EXPERIENTIAL AND EXPERIMENTAL TEXT

The view that Locke's eloquent denunciation of eloquence in Book III of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* betrays a naive language theorist, blind to the rhetorical motions of his own text, has enjoyed wide critical acceptance since the publication of Paul de Man's own persuasive essay, "The Epistemology of Metaphor" (1978). De Man argues that one must read Locke "to some extent, against or regardless of his own explicit statements" in order to discern and disclose the constitutive figurality of discourse.¹ Offering an incisive critique of the rhetorical motions of de Man's text, William Walker argues that de Man, in fact, does not deal primarily with the rhetorical movements of Locke's text but with its explicit statements, which de Man reads as such.² What strikes me as curiously disjunctive, however, is that de Man and Walker, both of whom attend to the rhetoric of Locke's text, unproblematically read as a literal and explicit statement Locke's declamation of figurative speech as an abuse of language.³ I would like to suggest that Locke is fully

¹ "The Epistemology of Metaphor," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1979), 14. The essay appeared in *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 13-30.

² *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), esp. 131-155.

³ Despite de Man's praise of Locke as a "scrupulous and superb writer," Locke's denunciation of eloquence is accepted as eloquent and literal, while the disruptive scandal of rhetoric occurs, it seems, somewhere behind Locke's back, with neither his knowledge nor his intention: "And indeed, when Locke then develops his own theory of words and language, what he constructs turns out to be in fact a theory of tropes. Of course, he would be the last man in the world to realize and to acknowledge this" ("The Epistemology of Metaphor," 14). Although Walker does not explicitly endorse a literal reading of Locke's inclusion of figurative speech as an abuse of language, he does indict de Man's reading of Locke largely on de Man's *explicit* reading of *explicit* statements ("De Man on Locke," 133). Considering that Walker's whole project

aware of the figurative power of language and that his ostensible denunciation of the art of rhetoric is actually located within a wider rhetorical project of engaging an active reader in an experiential text. That is, the communicative effectiveness of Locke's exploration of the experience of mind forming ideas about the world derives as much from drawing on the reader's immediate experience of *reading the text* as exhorting the reader to corroborate recorded observations in reference to common experience *outside* of the text. In order, then, to meaningfully decipher Locke's denunciation of rhetoric, we must attend to the rhetorical complexity of the passage itself to see that *how* the passage *performs* complicates *what* the passage ostensibly *says* on a literal level. The space that then opens up between a literal reading and a performative reading of this loud denunciation of rhetoric offers the possibility of yet another level of ironic meaning. I use the term "ironic" here not to imply simply that there is a "true" meaning to be discovered beneath its "false" literal denotation. Rather, I use the term "ironic" in anticipation of Rorty to suggest an awareness of the power of language. Further, I think that by attending to the literal and performative aspects of the text, we cohabit with Locke an alternate place of intimate understanding--a pseudo-external space from which to understand the *Essay* as a text within its wider cultural context.

Given Locke's contention that the chief end of language is communication,⁴ the primary abuse of language inheres in the discrepancy between words in one's

reconsiders Locke's figurative language, specifically the metaphors of mind, and subsequently reconfigures Locke's epistemology, and that Walker devotes an entire chapter to critiquing de Man's influential reading of Locke on figurative language, the absence of analysis or commentary on Locke's famous passage on figurative language constitutes a serious and suspect elision. That Locke's passage on figurative language has generally been accepted as his position statement on the rhetorical use of language is further suggested by Ted Cohen who cites the entire passage, along with a passage from Hobbes's *Leviathan*, as representative of the denunciation of figurative language in Western philosophy ("Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy," in *On Metaphor*, 1-3).

⁴ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975). See II.xviii.7; II.xxviii.2; III.iii.3; III.v.7; III.v.11; III.vi.32; III.ix.6; III.x.13; III.xi.1; III.xi.5. Unless otherwise specified, all citations from the *Essay* will hereafter be parenthetically referenced.

mouth and ideas in one's mind. Indeed, Locke concretizes two common misuses of language--using words without corresponding ideas, and having ideas without corresponding words--by comparing the notion of abstract ideas boundaried by a signifier to the pages of a book bound by a cover:

First, He that hath Words of any Language, without distinct *Ideas* in his Mind, to which he applies them, does, so far as he uses them in Discourse, only make a noise without any Sense or Signification; and how learned soever he may seem by the use of hard Words, or learned Terms, is not much more advanced thereby in Knowledge, than he would be in Learning, who had nothing in his Study but the bare Titles of Books, without possessing the Contents of them. For all such Words, however put into Discourse, according to the right Construction of Grammatical Rules, or the Harmony of well turned Periods, do yet amount to nothing but bare Sounds, and nothing else.

Secondly, He that has complex *Ideas*, without particular names for them, would be in no better a Case than a Bookseller, who had in his Ware-house Volumes, that lay there unbound, and without Titles; which he could therefore make known to others, only by shewing the loose Sheets, and communicate them only by Tale. This Man is hindred in his Discourse, for want of Words to communicate his complex *Ideas*[.] (III.x.26-7)

Clearly Locke recognizes the efficacious value of figurative language to clarify and communicate his conception of the relationship between idea(s) and signifier(s); how, then, can we reconcile Locke's very use of figurative language with his ostensible denunciation of it? I suggest that Locke's eloquent denunciation of eloquence, which has been so often quoted at length as his literal position on figurative language, actually *enacts* the very abuse of language against which Locke warns by misleading the reader, through "the Harmony of well turned Periods," to accept the logical sound of his words rather than question the contradictory moments which obscure and ultimately preclude the articulation of a clearly

formulated position on figurative language.⁵ The statement, for instance, that “Books of Rhetorick which abound in the world, will *instruct* those, who want to be *informed*” stands in ironic contradiction to the earlier distinction between discourses which seek “rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement” (III.x.34), the former of which is the allowable place of such Ornaments borrowed from Wit and Fancy. Indeed, the importance of informing and instructing form the crux of Locke’s warning against the abuse of language: “And therefore however laudable or allowable Oratory may render them in Harangues and popular Addresses, they are certainly, in all Discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided” (III.x.34). The operative word in this sentence is “pretend”; as opposed to discourses that actually do or aspire to genuinely inform or instruct, Locke warns against the use of persuasive rhetoric in discourses that *pretend* to inform or instruct.⁶ Consider Locke’s earlier denunciation of learned ignorance: “Thus learned Ignorance, and this Art of keeping, even inquisitive Men, from true Knowledge, hath been propagated in the World, and hath much perplexed, whilst it *pretended* to inform the Understanding” (III.x.10 emphasis mine).

⁵ Locke’s point about the potentially abusive power of eloquence to mislead has successfully misled traditional readers of this passage to accept, with delight, this eloquent denunciation of eloquence as literal: “Nothing could be more eloquent than this denunciation of eloquence. It is clear that rhetoric is something one can decorously indulge in as long as one knows where it belongs” (de Man, “The Epistemology of Metaphor,” 13). Locke’s ability to entertain in this discourse where, I argue, he seeks “rather Pleasure and Delight,” is further evidenced by the obvious delight Ted Cohen expresses in his apology to the participants at the same symposium for reading this extensive passage which will shortly be read aloud again: “It is, however, a good passage to have more than one look at, and I cannot resist reading it out at a conference where Wayne Booth is present” (“Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy,” 2).

⁶ Locke arguably draws on the usage of “pretend” current in the seventeenth century as suggested by the following excerpts from the *OED*: “To put oneself forward in some character; to profess or claim” (1680); “to allege; now *esp.* to allege or declare with intent to deceive” (1610); “To claim or profess to have; to affect” (1659).

Recalling Locke's pointed use of the image of a book to explicate, by analogy, the relation between words and ideas may help us decipher his seemingly damning repudiation of rhetoric:

But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat[.]
(III.x.34)

Again, the operative phrase is "besides Order and Clearness," which I think provides a way of reconciling the apparent discrepancy between Locke's use and censure of figurative language.⁷ My reading of Locke's position, then, is that the use of rhetoric is both allowable and desirable as a device for effective communication so long as the aim is to bring "order and clearness" to one's ideas for the explicit purpose of instructing, informing, and improving as opposed to entertaining by what amounts to bombastic deception. We can, in fact, still feel the reverberations of Locke's resounding repudiation of those who have usurped a degree of authority by "amusing the Men of Business, and Ignorant, with hard Words, or imploying the Ingenious and Idle in intricate Disputes, about unintelligible Terms, and holding them perpetually entangled in that endless Labyrinth" (III.x.9). Locke's closing remarks which name rhetoric "that powerful instrument of Error and Deceit" and claim that "'tis in vain to find fault with those Arts of Deceiving, wherein Men find pleasure to be Deceived" (III.x.34) throw into critical relief the preceding eloquent denunciation of rhetoric. That so many readers have been delightfully deceived by this passage confirms Locke's point; by challenging us to work through his

⁷ This apparent contradiction is compounded and complicated by the very personification of Eloquence in the midst of condemning the figurative application of words.

labyrinthine prose to observe the contradictory moments which obscure clear meaning, and then formulate our own reasonable thoughts, Locke's text proffers a revisionary conclusion. As opposed to the view of Locke as a naive language theorist oblivious to the figurality of his own language, this ingeniously crafted passage which performatively effects its message of the misleading power of figurative language confirms Locke a master rhetorician; moreover, that this passage itself must be read, to some extent, against its own explicit statement demonstrates Locke's keen awareness of the figurality of his own discourse. The demand for an active and attentive reader who will not passively accept as dogma the literal authority of the text further intimates Locke's wider rhetorical project of engaging the reader in an *experiential* and *experimental* text.



I. THE EXPERIENTIAL AND EXPERIMENTAL TEXT

Since one of the *Essay*'s mantras is the careful use of words to ensure the effective communication of ideas, any attempt to analyze the interplay between its literal denotation and rhetorical performance in order to suggest that the *Essay* is an *experimental* and *experiential* text seems initially obliged to clarify the use of such potentially ambiguous terms. The need for us to be clear on how I will be primarily using the terms "experimental" and "experiential" regarding the rhetoric and textual strategies of the *Essay* seems especially pressing considering that so many derivatives of "experience" are relevant to the *Essay* proper and my own analysis.

As a descriptive account of how we come to formulate ideas about and in the world, the *Essay* draws on human experience in both the natural world of physical objects and the communal world of social intercourse. The narrative development of Locke's exegesis of human understanding largely hinges on relating particular "facts," curiosities, or practices that are observable in the world. While much of the content of the *Essay* points to common experience, shares the particular experiences of the author, or relates, by tale, the more exotic experiences of others in foreign lands, what is explicitly upheld as the measure against which the *Essay's* enquiry after truth ought to be assessed is the reader's own personal experience: "All that I shall say for the Principles I proceed on, is, that I can only *appeal* to Mens own unprejudiced *Experience*, and Observation, whether they be true, or no" (I.iv.25). Equally significant is the authorial abdication of final authority by openly admitting that his own limited range of experience, as opposed to any transcendent vantage point, is foundational to the provisional structure of mind that emerges from the pages of the treatise: "But in the future part of this Discourse, designing to raise an Edifice uniform, and consistent with it self, *as far as my own Experience and Observation will assist me*, I hope, to erect it on such a Basis, that I shall not need to shore it up with props and buttresses, leaning on borrowed or begg'd foundations" (I.iv.25 emphasis mine). All of these variations on experience in the world--whether the social world or the natural world, whether the writer's or the reader's personal experience, other's foreign experience, or common experience--certainly inform the content of the *Essay*; but what I am particularly interested in exploring is how the rhetorical structure of the text implicitly draws on the writer's experience of writing and, concomitantly, the reader's experience of reading *this text* in order to figure forth the very experience of thinking and the very attempt to communicate from one

mind to another as both writer and reader move towards mutual understanding. How to make the unknown known, or the invisible experience of thinking visible, thus becomes one of the rhetorical aspirations of the text. That the intangible *process* of understanding can be made a tangible *object* for mental observation informs the rhetorical strategy of intermingling the text and mind as an *object* of examination. In this vein, the *experiential* aspect of the text that draws on the writer's experience of writing and the reader's experience of reading subserves its *experimental* structure of employing an original, tentative procedure that is undertaken in order to discover something unknown and which is adopted in uncertainty as to whether it will answer the purpose.⁸

What I will explore in this and the following two chapters is the way in which the experience of the author writing and the reader reading are *narratively* presented to enact both the process of understanding itself and the communication of ideas from one mind to another. More specifically, by attending to the construction of multiple narrative voices in the *Essay* and the rhetorical creation of a space of intimacy and immediacy implicitly shared by the author and the reader, I will offer a reading of the *Essay* that hinges on the narrative construction of a dialogue. In addition to analyzing the prefatory negotiation of a contractual agreement between the author and reader, I will examine the creation of a distinct authorial narrator who occupies a pseudo-external space in the epistles. Since the creation of a distinct authorial narrator in the epistles largely hinges on the dissociation of the author proper and the product of the author's thoughts, the *Essay* proper, in Chapter 2, I will explore how Locke uses the *material reality of the text itself* as a

⁸ The related etymology of "experience" and "experiment" is clearly delineated in the *OED* (930); for the purpose of this paper, my use of "experiment" refers to employing a new and tentative method that appeals to experience as the basis of justification.

sophisticated rhetorical device to effectively involve the reader reading *this text* in the exegesis of human understanding. Finally, in Chapter 3, I will attempt to show how the authorial “I” of the epistles acts in concert with both the narrative “I” of the *Essay* proper who articulates the active thoughts of the author’s mind, and yet another third-person narrative voice that tells the story of mind from a shared premise of common experience. What emerges is a rhetorically complex performance of the experience of mind and the process of understanding: one narrative voice, the storyteller, spins a fascinating tale of the origin of mind, language, and society; the narrative “I” figures forth the active attempt to think and work through this story of mind that the mind tells itself, often enacting the meandering and convoluted process of cognitive struggle; and the third authorial “I,” from a pseudo-external vantage point within the text, provides moments of thoughtful reflection on both the content of the *Essay* thus presented and the various changes made to each edition in response to objections raised by different critics. Looking at the *Essay* as an *experiential* text in the specific sense I referred to above, the authorial narrator functions rhetorically by directly addressing the reader, inviting him or her into the text as a welcome guest in his home, and creating a fraternal bond by using the inclusive “we” by which to persuasively procure assent. The reader is thus rhetorically implicated in the exegesis of the mind.

As opposed to a monologic treatise on cognition, the *Essay* arguably functions dialogically. Along with the creation of a space of intimacy and immediacy simultaneously occupied by the author and the reader, by drawing on the author’s experience of *writing* and the reader’s experience of *reading* the text, the rhetorical performance of the text suggests that understanding the *Essay* has as much to do with the experience of the *text* as with any particular claims the text may make about

mind. In other words, the interplay of the multiple levels of narration and the rhetorical bridging of the internal narrative of the *Essay* with the hermeneutical role of the ostensibly external author and reader intimates that the wider interpretive project of understanding the external world and our place therein ought primarily to be modelled on sustained conversation as opposed to foreclosing discussion by divining an antecedently existing truth. In Chapter 4, we will consider the relative importance of discerning the truth of the text and the truth of the world in terms of accurate representation. For the moment, then, let us enter Locke's text to observe therein the complexity of its narratively constructed dialogue.



The rhetorical construction of a dialogue which shapes the experiential reading of the *Essay* hinges on the creation of an authentic and separate authorial narrator in "The Epistle to the Reader." Located between "The Epistle Dedicatory" and twenty-five exhaustive pages constituting the tables of contents, "The Epistle to the Reader" occupies a space which seems to stand outside of the text itself. Indeed, that the authorial signature of "*Your Lordship's Most Humble, and Most Obedient Servant, JOHN LOCKE*" closes "The Epistle Dedicatory," complete with the date and place of composition, reinforces our sense of authorial authenticity.⁹ Before entering the actual text of the *Essay*, then, which stands on the other side of the formal taxonomy of its contents, we seem to be addressed by that same authorial self who signed the preceding dedication. What is perhaps not quite so obvious,

⁹ Peter Nidditch's note that "*Dorset Court 24th of May 1689*" was added to "The Epistle Dedicatory" in the fourth and fifth editions of the *Essay* suggests Locke's attentiveness to such minute details of authenticity.

and I would argue intentionally so, is that we are already in the text per se; consequently, the prefatory remarks by the author to the reader deserve more than a cursory reading. I would like to suggest that the creation of a narrative voice that is ostensibly distinct from the *Essay* proper serves the rhetorical purpose of enabling the “author” to comment directly on the origin, composition, and anticipated reception of his text. More significant to my argument that the *Essay* is an experiential text, the ability of this constructed authorial voice to comment *on* his text directly *to* the reader in the present tense underlies the negotiation of a kind of contractual agreement between author and reader regarding how the text itself ought to be approached. The small space of “The Epistle to the Reader,” then, becomes the place in which the author and the reader initially meet and begin to develop a rapport; and it is this pseudo-external space of intimacy that, I argue, transports author and reader, like a magic carpet, through the *Essay* proper.

Part of Locke’s cultivation of intimacy in “The Epistle to the Reader” derives from how he constructs himself through language as a modest man with whom the reader can sympathize and identify.¹⁰ The rhetorical pose as a self-effacing author enables the empowerment of the reader through the curious abdication of the authority of authorial intent: “*For though it be certain, that there is nothing in this Treatise of the Truth whereof I am not fully persuaded; yet I consider my self as liable to Mistakes, as I can think thee; and know, that this Book must stand or fall with thee, not by any Opinion I have of it, but thy own*” (7). The author and the reader, both of whom stand *outside* of the text, are narratively equated as participants *in* the ensuing textual dialogue. Borrowing the literary convention of addressing the

¹⁰ For a discussion of Locke’s use of the conventional modesty-trope and his attempts to charm the reader, see Rosalie Colie, “The essayist in his *Essay*,” in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John W. Yolton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969), esp. 240-251.

reader, Locke gestures towards an epistolary philosophic discourse which sets up an intimate relationship between the author and the reader by narratively creating a sense of immediacy: “*Reader, I Here put into thy Hands, what has been the diversion of some of my idle and heavy Hours*” (6). This narrative strategy of addressing not the whole world, but *you* who are holding this very book, establishes the kind of intimacy between two minds which, in itself, is perhaps paradigmatic of the model of communication to which Locke aspires in the *Essay*.

Indeed, the narrative contractual relationship is initially negotiated not between the author and the individual reader per se, but between the *thoughts* of the author and the *thoughts* of the individual reader. That is, there is a curious, but I think significant, dissociation of the self that has written this treatise and the thoughts of that self as expressed in language: “*If thou findest little in it new or instructive to thee, thou art not to blame me for it*” (7). The “me” of the epistles clearly occupies a separate space in the text. The narrative “I” of the following *Essay*, then, figures forth the thoughts of the author, but remains distinct from the author, figured through the authorial narrator of the epistles. This opening gambit, the dissociation of the self from the thoughts of that self, will prove a crucial rhetorical manoeuvre to both the construction of multiple narrative voices and the creation of a space of intimate candour shared by author and reader. The careful separation of the self that thinks from those thoughts extends to the reader; that is, the authorial voice claims that his own thoughts as laid out in the *Essay* are intended not for the reader per se, but the reader’s individual thoughts: “*’Tis to them, if they are thy own, that I referr my self*” (7). But the invitation extended to the reader is conditional upon the reader agreeing to set aside the “scraps of begg’d Opinions” in order to

imaginatively venture into the text on the strength of his or her capacity for developing his or her own thoughts in reading:

But if they are taken upon Trust from others, 'tis no great Matter what they are, they not following Truth, but some meaner Consideration: and 'tis not worth while to be concerned, what he says or thinks, who says or thinks only as he is directed by another. If thou judgest for thy self, I know thou wilt judge candidly; and then I shall not be harmed or offended, whatever be thy Censure. (7)

The invitation is not extended, however, to those readers who are prepared to embark from a position of complacent confidence: *"It was not meant for those, that had already mastered this Subject, and made a thorough Acquaintance with their own Understandings"* (7). By accepting the invitation, the reader implicitly aligns himself or herself with the *"few Friends, who acknowledged themselves not to have sufficiently considered it"* (7); thus, mutually acknowledged ignorance becomes the point of departure. The willing reader is thus narratively drawn into the intimacy of the original gathering of *"five or six Friends meeting at my Chamber, [who,] discoursing on a Subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the Difficulties that rose on every side"* (7). Once the agreement to the contractual narrative relationship is tacitly confirmed by the reader still reading, the self-conscious attention drawn to the book in hand heightens the adventurous sense of immediacy:

Some basty and undigested Thoughts, on a Subject I had never before considered, which I set down against our next Meeting, gave the first entrance into this Discourse, which having been thus begun by Chance, was continued by Intreaty; written by incoherent parcels; and, after long intervals of neglect, resum'd again, as my Humour or Occasions permitted; and at last, in a retirement, where an Attendance on my Health gave me leisure, it was brought into that order, thou now seest it. (7 emphasis mine)

The sense of intimacy that is narratively constructed through such direct expressions as “*I Here put into thy Hands*” (6) and “*thou now seest it*” (7) not only invites the reader *into the text* as an equal participant, but such phrases locate author and reader in the present moment by emphasizing the material reality of the text as an object which the reader is holding and seeing.

While such locutions clearly heighten the reader’s awareness of the physicality of the book in hand, I think that there is yet another rhetorical purpose served which subtly shapes the reader’s experience of the ensuing *Essay*. These instances of the text calling attention to itself as a material object, more specifically as *text*, combine with the dissociation of the epistles and the *Essay* proper through the intervening formidable table of contents to substantiate the illusion of a separate authorial voice in the epistles. What other purpose could this mammoth table of contents serve? There is, in fact, not one but two tables of contents preceding the main text of the *Essay*: one lists the headings of the books and chapters, while the second cryptically details the headings of section divisions within each chapter of each book. But does anyone actually *read* these tables of contents? Or, more probably, do we not all simply flip through the pages and pages of imposing, albeit initially alienating and meaningless, taxonomy in order to get to “the text”?¹¹ Moreover, presumably not having yet read the text, are we not somewhat distracted by the formal detailed section summaries within chapter divisions which intimate the complexity and depth of the work we are about to read? What I am suggesting is that the table of contents

¹¹ Peter Nidditch notes that the table of contents and the following table with summaries of sections of chapters were placed after the main text of the *Essay* in the first edition, but preceded the main text in the second through to the fifth edition (15n1). Locke’s movement of the table of contents and the detailed chapter summaries in the later editions lends credence to my argument that this formidable section, albeit part of the formal apparatus of the treatise, is intentionally positioned in such a way as to create physical and psychological distance between the “Epistle” and the *Essay* proper. That Nidditch documents the change in placement in reference to “*the main text of the Essay*” attests to Locke’s successful subtlety through what I argue is a rhetorical technique.

and the detailed chapter section summaries, albeit part of the formal apparatus of a printed text, do not, in fact, inform the reader in any significant way; rather, I think this rhetorical interruption redirects the reader's attention away from the prefatory epistles and repositions the reader at the beginning of the *Essay* proper.

That distance thus created between the prefatory epistles and the main text of the *Essay* interrupts the diachronic flow of the text which enables the authorial narrator of the epistles to comment on the text of the *Essay* from a vantage point seemingly external to it.¹² In the conventionally complimentary dedication, for instance, the authorial narrative "I," identified as John Locke, repeatedly refers to "this treatise." Cast in the role of authorial progeny, the *Essay* ostensibly seeks protection from the Earl of Pembroke as a guardian: "This Treatise, which is grown up under your Lordship's Eye, and has ventured into the World by your Order, does now, by a natural kind of Right, come to your Lordship for that Protection, which you several years since promised it" (3). Casting the author's relationship to his book as parent to child prefigures what I referred to earlier as the dissociation of the authorial "I" that has written this treatise and the narrative "I" of the *Essay* that figures forth the author's thoughts; although clearly acknowledging procreative authorship, the authorial narrator in both epistles carefully separates himself from the product of his thoughts--his mental offspring as it were--by abdicating responsibility for its reception once the text, through publication, ventures into the world. More to my point, this separation between the author and his text by the authorial "I" of "The Epistle Dedicatory" underpins the curious ability of one part of the text, the epistle, to

¹² Locke seems to use for rhetorical effect the common apparatus of a printed text. In the Clarendon edition which I am presently using, for instance, Peter Niddich's prefatory foreword, signed with his initials "P.H.N." and dated January 1978 at Grindleford comments on the following text of the *Essay*, even though it forms part of the very bound text I hold. In a similar vein, both "The Epistle Dedicatory" and "The Epistle to the Reader" occupy a pseudo-external space within the very text which affords a vantage point from which to comment on "the main text" that follows.

comment on another part of the text, the “main text” of the *Essay*, as “this Treatise” in hand. The prefatory comments by the authorial narrator to the Earl of Pembroke about the book locates the main text of the *Essay* in a separate space as a distinct object: “‘Tis not that I think any Name, how great soever, set at the beginning of a Book, will be able to cover the Faults are to be found in it. Things in print must stand or fall by their own Worth, or the Reader’s Fancy” (3). This strategy of calling attention to the material reality of the *Essay* as a separate textual entity accentuates the narratively constructed illusion of immediacy whereby the author is present and proffering the text to its guardian:

This, my Lord, shews what a Present *I here make* to your Lordship; just such as the poor Man does to his Rich and Great Neighbour, by whom the Basket of Flowers, or Fruit, is not ill taken, though he has more plenty of his own growth, and in much greater perfection. Worthless Things receive a Value, when they are made the Offerings of Respect, Esteem, and Gratitude: These you have given me so mighty and peculiar Reasons to have, in the highest degree, for your Lordship, that if they can add a price to what they go along with, proportionable to their own Greatness, I can with Confidence brag, *I here make your Lordship the richest Present*, you ever received.

(4 emphasis mine)

It is as if the author, John Locke, and the patron, the Earl of Pembroke, are immediately *present* in the text and the transaction between them, the offering up of the *Essay*, is *witnessed* by the third-party reader who is neither John Locke nor the Earl of Pembroke. Indeed, the common reader is relegated to the periphery of this exclusive intimacy which, despite the conventional formality of a written dedication, aspires to the unsifted spontaneity of spoken discourse: “You vouchsafe to continue me in some degrees of your Esteem, and allow me a place in your good Thoughts, *I had almost said Friendship*” (5 emphasis mine). Although the common

reader may be privy to this seemingly private exchange, the narrative structure of the dedication reinforces the illusion of the author speaking directly to the patron: the authorial first-person narrator uses “I” no fewer than 19 times (referring to “me” six times and using the possessive “my” once), and speaks to “my Lord” or “your Lordship” 21 times (referring to “you” or “your” another 16 times) all within approximately two pages of text. That Locke clearly uses the convention of the complimentary dedication as a space in which to stage a direct address from the author to the patron about the proffered treatise has two important implications. On the one hand, instead of praising the Earl of Pembroke to the world in either a first-person or third-person narrative voice, the direct address of the first-person authorial narrator to that very patron, with the world watching from the sidelines, gestures towards the intimate friendship existing between them. More than a claim to social status, the direct yet deferential address to the patron prefigures the *courteous* and *conversational* relationship established with the reader in both “The Epistle to the Reader” and the *Essay* proper. On the other hand, by referring to the product of his thoughts, the *Essay* proper, as a gift offered up, and signing the dedication “John Locke,” the authorial narrator creates the persuasive illusion of the author speaking directly from the page to the Earl of Pembroke. It is this same authorial narrator who then speaks directly to the reader in “The Epistle to the Reader.”

What I think is significant to reinforcing our sense of the authenticity of the authorial voice in “The Epistle to the Reader” which is largely contingent upon accepting the *Essay* proper as a separate object, a distinct textual entity, is the way in which the authorial narrator comments upon both the process of composition of the *Essay* and its anticipated reception. By contextualizing the *Essay* within the

parameters of its original composition, a time now passed, and its anticipated reception by the reader, a time in the foreseeable future, the authorial narrator firmly locates himself in the *present* moment:

If thou findest any thing wanting, I shall be glad, that what I have writ, gives thee any Desire, that I should have gone farther: If it seems too much to thee, thou must blame the Subject; for when I first put Pen to Paper, I thought all I should have to say on this Matter, would have been contained in one sheet of Paper; but the farther I went, the larger Prospect I had: New Discoveries led me still on, and so it grew insensibly to the bulk it now appears in. I will not deny, but possibly it might be reduced to a narrower compass than it is; and that some Parts of it might be contracted: the way it has been writ in, by catches, and many long intervals of Interruption, being apt to cause some Repetitions. But to confess the Truth, I am now too lazie, or too busie to make it shorter.
(8)

That Locke spent nearly twenty years composing the *Essay* and subsequently made endless revisions with meticulous care renders suspect any cavalier indifference towards or simple apology for its ostensibly haphazard construction. That this passage remained unchanged throughout all editions of the *Essay* further suggests the necessity of creating and maintaining the immediacy of *time* and *place*, between the *Essay*'s composition and anticipated reception, to the rhetorical pose of this authorial narrator as the author of an unfinished text. Some readers, however, have unquestioningly accepted Locke's proffered apology for the ostensibly haphazard construction of his text: "It is not that Locke was incapable of clearing up these obscurities of thought: he has himself provided what is doubtless the true explanation, namely, that he was either too lazy or too busy to do so."¹³ However, Locke is apologizing not for the obscurity of his thought, but for the bulk of his book. What I am proposing, by contrast, is that the very bulk of the book--its

¹³ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books 1959), 71.

repetitive and meandering structure--is constitutive of the rhetorical enactment of the process of the mind working through its thoughts; the admission of sloth as an excuse for not condensing the *Essay* thus becomes a rhetorical justification for the bulk of the book while opening up the text to endless revision.

More significant than a disclaimer to mitigate anticipated objections, the narrator's admission of the bulk of the text as open to revision functions rhetorically to shape how the reader approaches both the text itself and the whole task of making the very process of understanding an object of inquiry. That is, by openly acknowledging that the text was composed "by catches" with "many long intervals of Interruption," implying that it has not been condensed and organized into authoritative doctrine, the authorial narrator denies the final authority of the printed text. More specifically, by prefacing the *Essay* with a contextualizing narrative of its piecemeal composition, the authorial narrator implicitly rejects the authority traditionally invested in the author as either the instrument of divine revelation or the vehicle for the application of a clear and distinct method. That the *Essay* remains, despite endless revisions, in its bulky form, never reduced to a narrower compass, suggests the contrived nature of the rhetorical pose of the self-effacing narrator: "*I am not ignorant how little I herein consult my own Reputation, when I knowingly let it go with a Fault, so apt to disgust the most judicious, who are always the nicest, Readers* (8). Prefacing the *Essay* with an open admission of its meandering and repetitive structure that constitute the primary fault which the author has ostensibly been "too lazy or too busy" to condense certainly mitigates the mystique of authorial intent. It is, of course, by virtue of the authority of authorship that this authorial narrator can divest himself of his own authority; but the admission of fallibility institutes a new way of approaching the question of knowledge as a

laborious and charitable pursuit whereby the *Essay* is presented as a tentative step forward that ought not to be dismissed out of hand. The very bulk of the book, whose labyrinthine structure demands an assiduous and patient reader, intimates the arduous progression of knowledge--discerning the connections between our ideas about the world "which we by single and slow Steps, and long poring in the dark, hardly at last find out" (IV.iii.6). Both the writing and the reading of the *Essay* constitute this laborious undertaking: the author has taken great pains to compose it, desiring that "*it should be understood by whoever gives himself the Pains to read it*" (9) and charitably not condemned without reading. Imploring the reader to withhold censure of the author based on the novelty of his ideas, the admittedly fallible authorial narrator invites a humane and generous-minded reader to carefully consider the product of his mind. But what is striking about Locke's self-positioning through the authorial voice that speaks directly to the reader is the way in which he carves out for himself a "floating" continuous present moment from which to speak; while changes were made to "The Epistle to the Reader" in subsequent editions, thus locating the text itself in a historical process, the position of the authorial narrator remains firmly grounded in the *present* moment. But it is the *reader's* present moment into which the authorial narrator skilfully inserts himself, thus creating a space of immediate intimacy.

Concerned with analyzing Locke's rhetoric to discern his powerful appeal to so many readers, Rosalie Colie's sensitive reading of Locke's skilful use of the modesty trope lends support to reading his rhetorical motions as the purposive cultivation of intimacy with the reader:

Small wonder that readers, finding themselves so naturally assimilated to the character and mental powers of the author, responded to the *Essay's* hospitality, so unmistakably offered at the work's entrance.

Locke is a man among men, busy, intermittently curious, lazy, concerned for human welfare and for truth, but often the reluctant servant of these high mistresses. Who does not see himself so? Who can fail to be won to an author who continually makes disclaimers for his book, for his industry, for his mental capacity?¹⁴

While I agree with Colie's observation that Locke subtly equates author and reader through his self-presentation as a simple man amongst men, a related point which intimates the kind of space into which the author invites the reader is suggested by Colie's use of the choice word "hospitality." Remembering the originary conversation amongst friends into which the reader is tacitly drawn, Locke appears, in "The Epistle to the Reader," as the welcoming host, inviting the willing reader into his text. In this regard, the space of the *Essay* proper metaphorically mimics the space of Locke's private chamber in which men's presuppositions and vested interests can be left, with their hats and boots, by the door. By the same token, the space of "The Epistle to the Reader" becomes a kind of antechamber to the main text wherein the hospitable author greets the reader and gestures towards the tacit social rules that demarcate the space of the next room, thereby governing the conduct of those gathered therein. The authorial narrator thus not only charms the reader, as Colie has shown, but arguably intimates the conversational propriety of the private drawing-room, instead of the publicly competitive wrangling of scholastic disputation, as the proper intellectual milieu of the *Essay*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Colie, 243-4.

¹⁵ For a suggestive introduction to how Locke proffers a mode of communication that emphasizes personal authority and the expression of personal experience, the very opposite of disputation's highly public and ritualized exchange, see Peter Walmsley, "Civil conversation in Locke's *Essay*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 303 (1992): 411-3. For a more comprehensive and compelling analysis of Locke's conversational rhetoric and condemnation of disputation as indicative of his allegiance to the master-builders of the new science, see Peter Walmsley, "Dispute and Conversation: Probability and the Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke's *Essay*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 381-94.

We need to pause, for a moment, to consider the implications of supplanting the public forum of disputation with the private drawing-room of polite conversation to appreciate its rhetorical import as more than simply offering the reader a comfy armchair. Before continuing, then, let us just remember the last time we were fortunate enough to receive an invitation to dinner in the home of a friend, perhaps a colleague. How profoundly different we feel in that private space, compared with the more usual public space demarcated by, for instance, the university walls. If we are lucky, how much more at our ease we can be in such a private space, sharing a delicious meal and talking candidly on the strength of the implicit trust in the intimate bond to save us from public

censure. We can say things here
that we cannot risk elsewhere,
probably the most
significant of which
is the admission
of self-doubt. It
is this kind of
private space,
where we can
enjoy a certain
freedom from the consequences
of the smallest details of our conversation, that I think
Locke evokes through his hospitable and fallible authorial narrator.

What perhaps strengthens Locke's attempt to procure assent to the familiar intimacy of the *Essay* proper is the probability that the reader is reading alone in a closet, or private room; again, as an experiential text, the *Essay* pulls the reader and the reader's immediate surroundings into its internal dynamic. That the "ideals of candid conversation and learned community pervade the work [*Essay*]"¹⁶ combines with Locke himself speaking so candidly from the pages of the antechamber to create the illusion of just such a private space of candour. The creation, then, of an authorial voice in the epistles that is separate from the narrative voice that figures forth the author's *thoughts* in the *Essay* is crucial to enacting the disclosure of fallibility as a pretext for creating this intimate space of conversational candour. In other words, by carefully separating the self that thinks from the thoughts themselves, the narrator aspires to dismantle the conflation of knowledge and virtue that makes knowledge a personal possession upon which hinges one's salvation or reputation.

It is worth noting here that Locke's use of the new experimental method of natural philosophy to examine the mind as an object hinges on separating the concern for personal salvation from knowledge, a conflation that was integral to the conception of knowledge in the alchemical tradition. In this regard, Locke picks up the project of Francis Bacon (especially *Thoughts and Conclusions*, 1604) which sought to encourage people to stop thinking about knowledge in a spiritual way; in order to change the conception of knowledge from a concern with origins and first principles to a desire to make manifest a hitherto unknown future world of infinite possibility, Bacon's proposed conception of the institutionalization of knowledge as an imperfect, future-oriented, and collective act hinged on making people think

¹⁶ Peter Walmsley, "Locke's Cassowary and the *Ethos* of the *Essay*," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 22 (1992): 261.

about knowledge in a way unrelated to personal concerns. Although I think that Locke similarly aspires to recast the pursuit of natural knowledge as unrelated to personal concerns, I further contend, in anticipation of Rorty's ironist stance, that he wants us to see that we have a personal stake in this vision of knowledge.

Considering the very real ramifications of the conflation of knowledge and virtue in the period, what may initially seem merely the conventional use of the trope of modesty in the epistles takes on a more significant role to the effect of instituting a new form, or forum, of discussion. Richard Ashcraft confirms the personal import of "accurate knowledge" in the seventeenth century wherein issues of religious dogma were "matters of lively disputation among men convinced that the fate of their eternal souls rested upon a proper understanding of the world in which they lived."¹⁷ Compounding the problem of personal salvation hinging on *accurate* knowledge is the similar conflation of knowledge and reputation which so characterized the scholastic method of disputation. Peter Walmsley argues that Locke offers a damning analysis of scholastic disputation throughout the *Essay* because personal interests become irrevocably tied to intellectual positions: "It often happened that the answerer, with no chance to qualify, entrenched himself in his publically declared position, whatever its merits, and fought to protect his intellectual reputation."¹⁸ Offering the thoughts of *one mind* up for collective consideration and discussion thus rhetorically *enacts* an experimental method as an alternative to both oracular privacy and scholastic disputation:

I pretend not to publish this Essay for the Information of Men of large Thoughts and quick Apprehensions; to such Masters of Knowledge I profess my self a Scholar, and therefore warn them before-hand not to

¹⁷ "Faith and knowledge in Locke's philosophy," in *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. John W. Yolton, 194.

¹⁸ "Dispute and Conversation: Probability and the Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke's *Essay*," 383.

expect any thing here, but what being spun out of my own course Thoughts, is fitted to Men of my own size, to whom, perhaps, it will not be unacceptable, that I have taken some Pains, to make plain and familiar to their Thoughts some Truths, which established Prejudice, or the Abstractness of the Ideas themselves, might render difficult. (8)

The prising apart of knowledge and virtue, or knowledge and reputation, thus functions rhetorically to demarcate an alternate kind of space in which a world of consequence does not necessarily hinge on the articulation of somewhat tentative or partially-digested thoughts.

The rhetorical pose of the fallible narrator of an unfinished text becomes part of the justification for the repetitive structure of this bulky book. Because taking the mind itself as the object of examination in order to see “*what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with*” (7) is the putative impetus of the *Essay*, the inadequacy of the traditional philosophic method based on syllogistic logic inheres in its inability to explore unknown areas or formulate conjectural propositions to test the limits of what can be known. Syllogistic logic, rigorously linear and succinct, can only confirm what is already known. As Locke says in Book IV, “*Syllogism, at best, is but the Art of fencing with the little Knowledge we have, without making any Addition to it*” (IV.xvii.6). Under the guise of a fallible and self-effacing narrator, then, Locke introduces a new method, a new tool, with which to explore the as yet unknown limits of human understanding. As opposed to forming an argument that presupposes assent to certain premises, the logic of the *Essay* works by procuring assent to the initial propositions drawn from the experience of all. Even the very genesis of this text is grounded in consensus: “*This I proposed to the Company, who all readily assented; and thereupon it was agreed, that this should be our first Enquiry*” (7). Radically distinct from the rigorous application of one clear and distinct method, the tortuous and repetitive structure of the *Essay* serves, the

authorial narrator claims, a specific purpose: "*I have sometimes dwelt long upon the same Argument, and expressed it different ways, with a quite different Design*" (8). Instead of the illuminating light of reason which necessarily discloses truth through the application of the proper method, the more limited sensory faculty of seeing figures forth the process of human understanding.¹⁹

Locke ascribes precedence to observation as a mode of knowing; accordingly, the human eye becomes a potent metaphor, amongst others, for the mind.²⁰ Understanding, then, becomes a continual *process* of observation, since the objects which the mind observes are three-dimensional:

¹⁹ The conception of knowledge derived from divine revelation or through the rigorous application of a clear and distinct method based on reason arguably aspires to an all-seeing "God's eye-view" that can grasp the real, the totality of existence, within a ubiquitous field of vision. More properly, there would be no "field of vision" for the all-seeing divine eyeball since the periphery would disappear. Locke admits elsewhere that God and angels have a very different perspective; exploring *human* understanding, then, the obviously more limited human faculty of seeing is perhaps a more appropriate metaphor in keeping with the importance, in the method of the new natural philosophy, of experience, specifically measurable experience.

²⁰ Ocular metaphors of mind underpin the conception of knowledge that discloses hidden truth from deceptive reality dating back to Plato. Adding to the weight of the historical usage of sight in philosophic texts, the popular fascination with sight and blindness in the seventeenth century renders the Lockean "eye of the mind" an effective trope in both philosophic and civil discourse. Whether or not Locke is blind, so to speak, to the ocular metaphors which had hitherto shaped philosophic discussions of the mind is purely conjectural; what seems to me a more interesting line of thought is to consider the ways in which Locke harnesses the powerful allusiveness of the metaphor of sight: drawing (perhaps) on the philosophic tradition of ocular metaphors, the topical issue of whether a blind man, if his sight were restored, could distinguish a sphere from a cube by sight which he had known only by touch (see II.ix.8), and the primacy ascribed observation in the new philosophical method of the Royal Society, Locke effectively weaves these different strands together in the *Essay*. Finally, in keeping with my own rhetorical reading of Locke's text, I would argue that the rhetorical complexity of this experimental and experiential text which demands an active and engaged reader plays with the eye of the reader that reads the text--observes this very object. I will return shortly to this point; for now, suffice it to say that the contingency of historical discourses does not necessarily render successive users either unreflective or blind to the figurality of their own discourse. That Locke was aware of the metaphorical, rhetorical, and conceptual power of positing the "eye of the mind" seems tenable; that he was shaped by preceding discourses, made use of existing discourses, and largely shaped the use of future discourses also seems tenable. My point is that we should be wary of the retrospective imputation of blindness or *naïveté* on Locke's use of the "eye of the mind" metaphor. A related point is to consider the ways in which Locke's "eye of the mind" trope has been localized and *made* the central metaphor of his epistemology. Philip Vogt identifies a number of metaphors of mind in the *Essay*, including an eye, a candle, an empty cabinet, a beam of light, a white paper, a siege battery, a mirror, a painting, a landscape, a clock, a fountain, a tomb, a dark room with windows, and a ship (4). See "Seascape with Fog: Metaphor in Locke's *Essay*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 1-18. For a reconsideration of Locke's epistemology based on other metaphors of mind operative in the *Essay*, see Walker, *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy*.

Some Objects had need to be turned on every side; and when the Notion is new, as I confess some of these are to me; or out of the ordinary Road, as I suspect they will appear to others, 'tis not one simple view of it, that will gain it admittance into every Understanding, or fix it there with a clear and lasting Impression. (8)

Taking the understanding of the mind as an *object*, then, the text aspires to observe and record the many sides of *mind* as that mind observes the many sides of the objects of its own observation. In other words, the text aspires to a kind of meta-cognitive performativity through this involuted process of representing mind observing the sides of the mind observing the sides of objects--the ultimate object being *its own mind*.

In this regard, the apology of the self-effacing narrator for the text's haphazard and repetitive structure arguably serves as a pretext for the wider rhetorical project of somehow representing the process of understanding, *and* forcing the reader to *experience* that very process of understanding by turning this *object*, the very *text*, on every side to "*fix it there with a clear and lasting Impression.*" If the limited faculty of seeing figures forth human understanding, however, the corollary to multi-sided objects that must be turned and observed on all sides is the possibility that different individuals simultaneously observe different sides of the same object. Although this implicit uncertainty of whether or not two minds observe the same side of the same object prefigures the difficulty of communication given the complicated relationship between ideas and words, part of the rhetorical justification for the bulk of the book lies in trying to appeal to many different readers.

Comparing men's minds to men's palates, Locke naturalizes difference:

There are few, I believe, who have not observed in themselves or others, That what in one way of proposing was very obscure, another way of

expressing it, has made very clear and intelligible: Though afterward the Mind found little difference in the Phrases, and wondered why one failed to be understood more than the other. But every thing does not hit alike upon every Man's Imagination. We have our Understandings no less different than our Palates; and he that thinks the same Truth shall be equally relished by every one in the same dress, may as well hope to feast every one with the same sort of Cookery: The Meat may be the same, and the Nourishment good, yet every one not be able to receive it with that Seasoning; and it must be dressed another way, if you will have it go down with some, even of strong Constitutions. (8)

In order, then, for Locke's "undigested Thoughts" (7) to nourish men's minds, the particular flavour of his ideas must agree with different mental constitutions. Particularly because his proposed idea, taking the mind as an *object* of inquiry, is new, men's mental palates may not initially relish Locke's strange and savoury fare, a full appreciation of which demands an acquired taste.

Locke's prefatory comparison between men's minds and palates prefigures his exposition of simple ideas derived from sensation, thus rendering mind and body interdependent, while identifying, as *natural*, the perceived difference of external things, like food, in the perceiving individual. This strategy of introducing a new way of thinking by procuring assent to a new "way of talking," such as thinking of the mind as a palate, underlies, I think, the text's rhetorical project that proposes a new way of talking/thinking about how we acquire knowledge about the world. Attentiveness to the language we use given the many abuses of language and the gap between ideas and words does not necessarily lead to more *accurate* descriptions or more precise usage; although improved accuracy and precision in language usage certainly may result, the instability of language cannot finally be rectified simply by linguistic diligence. What I am proposing is that Locke's proposal to think about mind, ideas, and language in such a way that calls for attentiveness to the ways in

which we use language in communicating our ideas offers not a more *accurate* description of the relationship between ideas and words but an *alternate* way of talking about mind, ideas, and language that enables a change in the way we think about thinking and the certainty of knowledge. By comparing men's minds to men's palates, Locke demonstrates the rhetorical import of redescription; moreover, the text's numerous references to food suggest that the savoury bits of Locke's treatise provide "food for thought" while again intimating the kind of private banquet to which the reader is cordially invited.

But Locke does not want to cater to an exclusive élite; rather, the authorial narrator, cloaked in humility, declares authorial intent only in so far as it pertains to the anticipated reception of the book:

My appearing therefore in Print, being on purpose to be as useful as I may, I think it necessary to make, what I have to say, as easie and intelligible to all sorts of Readers as I can. And I had much rather the speculative and quick-sighted should complain of my being in some parts tedious, than that any one, not accustomed to abstract Speculations, or prepossessed with different Notions, should mistake, or not comprehend my meaning. (9)

The authorial narrator thus proffers the text as a tool: "*I publish this Essay with hopes it may be useful to others*" (9). Social utility thus becomes a criterion of assessment of the text's worth as opposed to any inherent "truth" in the text itself; the text as useful *instrument*, or means, thus supplants the text as an end in itself: "*methinks it savours much more of Vanity and Insolence, to publish a Book for any other end.*"²¹

²¹ Following Bacon's dissociation of knowledge and virtue, Locke's assertion of utility as a criterion of assessment echoes the Baconian revaluation of the mechanical arts that made practical knowledge as valuable as contemplative knowledge. Conflating the Greek tradition of contemplative knowledge and the Egyptian tradition of powerful knowledge empowered the reconfiguration of knowledge as a collective act with what the esoteric knowledge practitioners always promised but never delivered: real power to effect change. In this vein, Locke's text functions less as a self-evident treatise of truth than an *instrument* that can be of *use* to its readers.

By positing the text as a tool, Locke further involves the reader by anticipating the assessment of its usefulness. But the statement of authorial intent to be useful combined with both the admission of authorial fallibility and the earlier narrative of the *Essay*'s genesis amongst friends in the chamber enables the authorial narrator to restrict the kind of response that will be most productive:

If I have not the good luck to please, yet no Body ought to be offended with me. I plainly tell all my Readers, except half a dozen, this Treatise was not at first intended for them; and therefore they need not be at the Trouble to be of that number. But yet if any one thinks fit to be angry, and rail at it, he may do it securely: For I shall find some better way of spending my time, than in such kind of Conversation. (9)

While the desire for accessibility informs the attempt to bring philosophy into “*well-bred Company, and polite Conversation*” (10), civility presides over this textual drawing-room, from which social reprobates who would rant and rail are unceremoniously excluded. Alluding to the intimate gathering of friends with whom the reader is tacitly aligned by accepting the invitation into the text, the authorial narrator institutes a more peaceable way of proceeding, encapsulated in the notion of polite conversation amongst friends, as opposed to disputatious railing.²² Indeed, as a guest in a home situated somewhat out of the common road, a foreign land even, the proper reader must both respect and trust the host. In this regard,

²² While Locke certainly encourages critical engagement from readers who are willing to suspend all preconceptions to follow the development of his thoughts in writing (6), the kind of anticipated response he abhors is censure without reading. In “The Epistle Dedicatory,” the authorial narrator hopes that the Earl of Pembroke’s “Approbation of the Design of this Treatise, will at least preserve it from being condemned without reading” (3). Significantly, then, “The Epistle to the Reader” functions largely to persuade the reader to actually read the text. While this may seem an obvious motive, what strikes me as perhaps part of the persuasiveness of the argument of the *Essay* itself is the way in which the authorial narrator subtly makes condemnation signify either the absence of reading or a misreading. Two rhetorical effects are thereby achieved: on the one hand, the implicit assumption that one cannot have read the text and condemn it lends prefatory credence to the persuasiveness of the argument of the *Essay*, while insisting that the text be assessed solely in its own terms; on the other hand, by claiming that the treatise “*was not at first intended for them*” (9) and referring frequently and ambiguously to “them” and “those,” the authorial narrator skilfully manipulates the reader to align him or herself with the narrator by denigrating those unnamed others with whom the reader would, presumably, prefer not to be classified.

taking issue with every point of contention before reading the whole becomes as much a social affront as lambasting the host for serving unfamiliar hors d'oeuvres. Just as you must trust that the host is not feeding you poisoned potatoes because you do not recognize the spice, before deciding if this new fare agrees with you or not, the treatise as a whole must be digested first.

That the *Essay* aims to be useful to so many different readers perhaps puts another pragmatic *spin* on this textual chamber. In addition to denoting a private room, often used for reading, the word “closet” also refers to a cabinet or a side-room for storing utensils. Two possible readings thus emerge. On the one hand, if “The Epistle to the Reader” serves as an antechamber to the main drawing-room of the *Essay*, it could also function as a “closet” by holding the utensils, or cognitive tools, necessary for a useful reading of the text. On the other hand, the *Essay* itself could also be a kind of closet holding the tools with which to build a more useful structure—both of mind and of society. By claiming that the design of the *Essay* aims at truth and usefulness, the authorial narrator posits the text as a tool to facilitate the project of collectively advancing knowledge: the “*Commonwealth of Learning*” (9) certainly suggests a community of individuals united by the common interest of building the store of knowledge. Aligned with the “*Master-Builders*” who “*will leave lasting Monuments to the Admiration of Posterity*” (9), the authorial narrator assumes the seemingly lowly, but nonetheless foundational, role of an “*Under-Labourer in clearing Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way of Knowledge*” (9). The *Essay* thus arguably functions in an *instrumental* role, like a hammer or a chisel, to be used in the service of constructing a new architectonic structure of knowledge. As a tool, then, the *Essay* begs the pragmatic question of “to do what”? Like a tool, the *Essay* defines itself in terms of what it

does, or can do, as opposed to hinging its definition on any originary essence. Imagine how ludicrous a definition of screwdriver would be that concerned itself not with the pragmatic purpose the tool serves--to tighten or loosen screws--but with discerning the complex ideas that constitute screwdriverliness. What is perhaps not quite so obvious is my proposal, drawing from Locke's desire to be useful, that the *Essay* itself, by proffering a new way to think about thinking, entangled as it is with mind, language, and society, functions as a cognitive tool with which to build an ultimately better society.

But in order to collectively build a better structure that will include all, the exclusionary sectarian edifices built with "*unintelligible Terms*" and "*vague and insignificant Forms of Speech*" (10) must be dismantled: "*To break in upon the Sanctuary of Vanity and Ignorance, will be, I suppose, some Service to Humane Understanding*" (10). Locke explicitly proposes the construction of a new philosophical edifice of human understanding in Book I of the *Essay*: "But in the future part of this Discourse, designing to raise an Edifice uniform, and consistent with it self, as far as my own Experience and Observation will assist me, I hope, to erect it on such a Basis, that I shall not need to shore it up with props and buttresses, leaning on borrowed or begg'd foundations" (I.iv.25). In this regard, Locke's *Essay* perhaps can be used as a tool because it provides momentary retreat; that is, by temporarily *occupying* the text, the reader can then use it as a blueprint for building a different and improved society. Peter Walmsley notes Locke's "conviction that the edifice of understanding must be built anew within each mind."²³ Indeed, the *experiential* dimension of the text inheres in such moments when Locke appeals to the reader's own experience to corroborate *his own* observations on his

²³ "Dispute and Conversation: Probability and the Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke's *Essay*," 390.

own mind. For instance, in order to understand the almost imperceptible quickness of the actions of mind, Locke compares them to the actions of body, while urging the reader's independent involvement: "Any one may easily observe this in his own Thoughts, who will take the pains to reflect on them" (II.ix.10). Regarding Locke's appeal to the reader to take himself or herself as an *object* of observation, Rosalie Colie comments in a similar way on the text as blueprint:

This is philosophy not only laicized, but domesticated: grown men are asked to watch in their developing children the growth of mind, intellect, and understanding, by which Locke's hypotheses can be checked in every family. The thinking man is invited to make himself his own subject; a gentle blueprint is given for heightening self-consciousness in such a way as also to assist the common enterprise. A man can observe himself in almost all his mental activities, even those going on while he is asleep; he can become his own epistemological student and critic, with nothing too remote for observation.²⁴

Again, the experiential dimension of the text pulls the reader into the chamber as a temporary occupant who will then make use of the text as a tool, or blueprint, in the world outside of the text.

But what is necessary for this tool/text to be offered, or the invitation into the chamber to be extended, is our sense of authorial authenticity and presence in "The Epistle to the Reader." To this end, after providing a contextualizing narrative of the *Essay*'s composition, and carefully delineating authorial intent only in so far as the motivating desire to be useful to the reader by aspiring to understanding and truth, the authorial narrator maintains the illusion of immediacy by commenting on the revisions to the many editions that have shaped this text in hand. By foregrounding the bookseller's desire that the changes be made known, and by referring to specific

²⁴ Colie, 259.

parts of the following text that have been modified, the authorial narrator continues to construct his distinct presence in the epistle, dissociated from the *Essay* proper and the bookseller. Incorporating the rationale for changing Book 2, chapter 21, ostensibly at the bookseller's request, not only locates the narrator in the *present* moment commenting on changes made, but also enacts the allowable change of opinion without compromising integrity that I think the *Essay* endorses in the pursuit of genuine understanding:

Upon a closer inspection into the working of Men's Minds, and a stricter examination of those motives and views, they are turn'd by, I have found reason somewhat to alter the thoughts I formerly had concerning that, which gives the last determination to the Will in all voluntary action. This I cannot forbear to acknowledge to the World, with as much freedom and readiness, as I at first published, what then seem'd to me to be right, thinking my self more concern'd to quit and renounce any Opinion of my own, than oppose that of another, when Truth appears against it. For 'tis Truth alone I seek, and that will always be welcome to me, when or from whencesoever it comes.

(11)

The ensuing narrative of the number of changes made to subsequent editions of the *Essay* resembles the commentary on the "present text" that prefaces the edition I am using; both, I think, serve a similar function in repositioning the reader in the present moment at the beginning of the *Essay* proper. As readers, we are now ready to "enter the text" proper, a psychological *effect* of Locke's *rhetoric* that subtly elides the fact that we are already knee-deep in the text.

In sum, what I think the negotiation of a contractual agreement with the reader, the rhetorical pose of the self-effacing narrator as the author of an unfinished text, and the extensive commentary on the *Essay*'s composition, anticipated reception, and revisions to editions all primarily serve to create is the illusion of the

author, *present* in the epistles, *proffering* the text to the reader. It as if John Locke himself were standing in front of us, text in outstretched hand, saying “here is my text, the diversion of some of my idle and heavy hours, please read it.” Before analyzing the importance of this apparition to the dialogic structure of the ensuing *Essay* in Chapter 3, I would like to accept Locke’s proffered text and turn this *textual object* round to record some preliminary observations about the material reality of the book in hand.

Chapter 2

TEXT AS *TABULA RASA*: THE TACTILE METAPHOR OF MIND

Taking human understanding as an *object* of inquiry, the *Essay* aspires to observe and record the many sides of the mind as that mind observes the many sides of the objects of its own observation. However, the mind as a mental *object* takes a *tangible form* in the material reality of the very book which forces the reader to *experience* the process of understanding by turning this *object*, the very *text*, on every side to “*fix it there with a clear and lasting Impression.*” The material reality of the *Essay* as a textual object thus itself becomes a sophisticated rhetorical device to effectively involve the reader reading *this text* in the exegesis of human understanding.

The strategy of calling attention to the *Essay* as a physical object in the reader's very hands, which largely created the sense of immediacy in the epistles, recurs throughout the *Essay*. Whereas the instances of the text referring to “this Treatise” in the epistles always point to the *Essay* proper as a separate textual entity, the moments in the *Essay* when the text self-reflexively calls attention to its materiality often make use of the reader's present experience of reading to involve the reader in developing the argument. For instance, the force of Locke's argument that space can exist without matter partly derives from drawing the reader's attention to the material reality of the book and the corporeal reality of his or her own body, both of which are subject to God's power:

No one, I suppose, will deny, that God can put an end to all motion that is in Matter, and fix all the Bodies of the universe in a perfect quiet and rest, and continue them so as long as he pleases. Whoever then will allow, that God can, during such a general rest, annihilate either *this Book, or the Body of him that reads it*, must necessarily admit the possibility of a *Vacuum*.
(II.xiii.21 emphasis mine)

Peter Walmsley astutely comments on the rhetorical effectiveness of such passages which demand an active and engaged reader: "At such moments he [Locke] seems intent on goading the complacent reader into self-consciousness, making him or her consider the full personal consequences of the argument."¹ Heightened self-consciousness of the personal consequences of the argument directly results from the rhetorical prod that reminds the reader of the corporeality of his or her own body by calling attention to the *material reality of the book being read*.

Locke frequently presupposes the reader's immediate experience of holding the book and looking at the white page; using the materiality of the *text*, Locke develops his arguments by persuasively involving the reader. In Book II, for example, Locke appeals to our intuitive understanding of the clear distinctions between numbers such that "two being as distinct from one, as Two hundred; and the *Idea* of Two, as distinct from the *Idea* of Three, as the Magnitude of the whole Earth, is from that of a Mite" (II.xvi.3) gains our ready assent. In order to demonstrate the difficulty of distinguishing simple modes other than number, the rhetorical question directly addresses the reader's experience of looking at the white page:

This is not so in other simple Modes, in which it is not so easie, nor, perhaps, possible for us to distinguish betwixt two approaching *Ideas*, which yet are really different. For who will undertake to find a difference between the white of this Paper, and that of the next degree

¹ "Dispute and Conversation: Probability and the Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke's *Essay*," 390.

to it: Or can form distinct *Ideas* of every the least excess in Extension?
(II.xvi.3)

The white page that supports the printed words, like the mind that receives and retains ideas impressed by experience, becomes at once the immediate object of our observation.

Indeed, the material reality of the white page that literally, figuratively, and textually “stands under” the typeface figures forth that inscrutable substance, the real constitution of things, the unknowable arrangement of insensible corpuscles which accounts for the primary and secondary qualities of all things:²

Our Faculties carry us no farther towards the knowledge and distinction of Substances, than a Collection of those sensible *Ideas*, which we observe in them; which however made with the greatest diligence and exactness, we are capable of, yet is more remote from the true internal Constitution, from which those Qualities flow, than, as I said, a Countryman’s *Idea* is from the inward contrivance of that famous Clock at *Strasburg*, whereof he only sees the outward Figure and Motions. There is not so contemptible a Plant or Animal, that does not confound the most enlarged Understanding. Though the familiar use of Things about us, take off our Wonder; yet it cures not our Ignorance. When we come to examine the Stones, we tread on; or the Iron, we daily handle, we presently find, we know not their Make; and can give no Reason, of the different Qualities we find in them. ‘Tis evident the internal Constitution, whereon their Properties depend, is unknown to us.

(III.vi.9)

Just as indefinable substance, the particular arrangement of insensible corpuscles, mysteriously supports the primary and secondary qualities by which we discern “meaningful” things, such as stones, iron, or pineapples, the white page analogously

² For a discussion of the rhetorical import of Locke’s construction of mind and substance as homologically unknowable, and the consequent function of language as mediation in a telegraphic model of understanding, see Robert Alexander, “Locke on Substance: Standing Under Understanding,” in *History as Diversion: A non-phenomenal approachh to Eighteenth-Century Linguistic Thought*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. McMaster University, 1996. Forthcoming.

supports and organizes the arrangement of typeface characters on the page into meaningful words, meaningful sentences, that constitute *this textual object* we observe. How, then, does the text itself--the material reality of white pages filled with black characters--figure forth the complexity of making the *understanding* an *object* in a world of *objects* to be known? To pursue this line of thought further, the words we perceive on the page become analogous to secondary qualities that are not *in* the object of our observation (the book), but are the result of a *power* in the object to produce in us certain *ideas*: "Such *Qualities*, which in truth are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their *primary Qualities*, *i.e.* by the Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion of their insensible parts, as Colours, Sounds, Tasts, *etc.* These I call *secondary Qualities*" (II.viii.10). Let us simply turn off the lights to see that the black characters distinguished from the white page that enable reading disappear as do the red and white of porphyry:

Let us consider the red and white colours in *Porphyre*: Hinder light but from striking on it, and its Colours Vanish; it no longer produces any such *Ideas* in us: Upon the return of Light, it produces these appearances on us again. Can any one think any real alterations are made in the *Porphyre*, by the presence or absence of Light; and that those *Ideas* of whiteness and redness, are really in *Porphyre* in the light, when 'tis plain *it has no colour in the dark*? It has, indeed, such a Configuration of Particles, both Night and Day, as are apt by the Rays of Light rebounding from some parts of that hard Stone, to produce in us the *Idea* of redness, and from others the *Idea* of whiteness: But whiteness or redness are not in it at any time, but such a texture, that hath the power to produce such a sensation in us. (II.viii.19)

By the same token, then, can anyone think that those *ideas* of white and black, not to mention the ideas *denoted* by the typeface characters, are really *in* the text when "'tis plain *it has no colour in the dark*"? By appealing to our immediate experience of reading--*perceiving* black words formed against a white page--the text implicitly calls

into question its own constitution as an *object* of our observation. The self-reflexive gesture of the text questioning its own potential to be known as an *object* amongst other objects in the world arguably figures forth the complexity of understanding *mind* as an object. Moreover, if the black marks that form the *words* are analogous to the secondary qualities depending on the text's primary qualities, the bulk, figure, texture, and motion of its insensible parts, arguably that which constitutes *the very pages*, what are we to make of Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities:

I hope, I shall be pardoned this little Excursion into Natural Philosophy, it being necessary in our present Enquiry, to distinguish the *primary*, and *real Qualities* of Bodies, which are always in them, (*viz.* Solidity, Extension, Figure, Number, and Motion, or Rest; and are sometimes perceived by us, *viz.* when the Bodies they are in, are big enough singly to be discerned) from those *secondary* and *imputed Qualities*, which are but the Powers of several Combinations of those primary ones, when they operate, without being distinctly discerned; whereby we also may come to know what *Ideas* are, and what are not Resemblances of something really existing in the Bodies, we denominate from them.

(II.viii.22)

If the black characters *depend* on the white page to be discerned, as secondary qualities depend on primary qualities, the particular arrangement of insensible corpuscles that accounts for the real constitution of the white page becomes equally unknowable as the *real constitution* of a fly or an elephant: "We are then quite out of the way, when we think, that Things contain within themselves the Qualities, that appear to us in them: And we in vain search for that Constitution within the Body of a Fly, or an Elephant, upon which depend those Qualities and Powers we observe in them" (IV.vi.11). The white page, or the idea of whiteness, is an elusive concept that the text seeks meaningfully to understand; in this vein, the white page itself becomes an effective rhetorical trope for representing the enigma of substance.

Trying to understand the simple idea of whiteness, ironically articulated again and again through the black characters forming the word against the whiteness of the page, recurs insistently throughout the treatise. Though my own eyes are admittedly liable to blurred perception, scanning the black characters that fill the white pages of the text reveals no fewer than 55 sections in which the word “white” or the *idea* of whiteness are either mentioned or intently explored.³ In Book II, for instance, thinking through the idea of whiteness becomes a way in which to argue that the idea of infinity can only be applied to things that have parts, the addition or subtraction of which results in a perceptible increase or diminution. In ideas of space, duration, and number, Locke argues, the idea of infinity inheres in the ability of mind to envisage the endlessly cumulative repetition of bounded ideas; the repetition of discrete ideas of measurable parts, such as an hour, a day, a year, a foot, or a mile, results in an enlargement, the endless progression of which can be meaningfully grasped by the mind. In order to develop this argument that the idea of infinity cannot intelligibly be applied to all ideas, Locke takes us through the thinking process to recognize the absurdity of the idea of infinite whiteness:

But in other *Ideas* it is not so; for to the largest *Idea* of Extension or Duration, that I at present have, the addition of any the least part makes an increase; but to the perfectest *Idea* I have of the whitest Whiteness, if I add another of a less or equal whiteness, (and of a whiter than I have, I cannot add the *Idea*,) it makes no increase, and enlarges not my *Idea* at all; and therefore the different *Ideas* of Whiteness, *etc.* are called Degrees. For those *Ideas*, that consist of Parts, are capable of being augmented by every addition of the least part; but if you take the *Idea* of White, which one parcel of Snow yielded yesterday to your Sight, and

³ See I.ii.18; I.iii.22; I.iv.3; II.1.1-2; II.i.6; II.ii.1; II.iii.1; II.viii.2-3; II.viii.8; II.viii.16-20; II.viii.23-4; II.xi.3; II.xi.9; II.xiv.14; II.xvi.3; II.xvii.6; II.xix.2; II.xxi.1; II.xxi.73; II.xxiii.10-1; II.xxiii.14; II.xxv.1; II.xxx.2; II.xxxi.2; II.xxxi.12; III.iv.16; III.vi.4; III.viii.1-2; III.ix.9; III.x.10; IV.i.2; IV.i.4; IV.ii.1; IV.ii.5; IV.ii.11-3; IV.iv.4; IV.v.4; IV.vii.4; IV.vii.13; IV.vii.16; IV.vii.19; IV.viii.6; IV.xi.2; IV.xi.7.

another *Idea* of White from another parcel of Snow you see to day, and put them together in your Mind, they embody, as it were, and run into one, and the *Idea* of Whiteness is not at all increased; and if we add a less degree of Whiteness to a greater, we are so far from increasing, that we diminish it.
(II.xvii.6)

Locke uses many different images to instantiate the idea of whiteness: a lily (II.ii.1); a snowball (II.viii.8, II.viii.16); manna (II.viii.16-8); porphyry (II.viii.19); an uncrushed almond (II.viii.20); wax blanchd by the sun (II.viii.23-4); sugar (II.xi.3); milk, chalk, and snow (II.xi.9); sand and pounded glass (II.xxiii.11); a swan (II.xxiii.14). Although these proffered examples appeal to the reader's experience outside of the text, what insistently implicates the reader's experience of reading *this text* is the rhetorical strategy of directing our attention to the white page.

Indeed, the materiality of the white page of the text functions *rhetorically* and *experientially* by subtly persuading the reader to use the *text* as an experimental site to test Locke's claims. Consider, for example, when in Book IV Locke's argument that simple ideas whose modes and differences are not as readily distinguishable as in ideas of quantity turns to an extended dramatization of thinking through the idea of whiteness:

For supposing the Sensation or *Idea* we name *Whiteness*, be produced in us by a certain number of Globules, which having a verticity about their own Centres, strike upon the *Retina* of the Eye, with a certain degree of Rotation, as well as progressive Swiftmess; it will hence easily follow, that the more the superficial parts of any Body are so ordered, as to reflect the greater number of Globules of light, and to give them that proper Rotation, which is fit to produce this Sensation of White in us, the more White will that Body appear, that, from an equal space sends to the *Retina* the greater number of such Corpuscles, with that peculiar sort of Motion. I do not say, that the nature of Light consists in very small round Globules, nor of Whiteness, in such a texture of parts as gives a certain Rotation to these Globules, when it reflects them; for I

am not now treating physically of Light, or Colours. [...] Whether then they be Globules, or no; or whether they have a Verticity about their own Centres, that produce the *Idea* of *Whiteness* in us, this is certain, that the more Particles of Light are reflected from a Body, fitted to give them that peculiar Motion, which produces the Sensation of Whiteness in us; and possibly too, the quicker that peculiar Motion is, the whiter does the Body appear, from which the greater number are reflected, as is evident in the same piece of Paper put in the Sun-beams, in the Shade, and in a dark Hole; in each of which, it will produce in us the *Idea* of Whiteness in far different degrees. (IV.ii.11-2)

Presumably the engaged reader could, or should, test Locke's assertion of the different degrees of whiteness by holding *this* white page, *this text*, in the sun-beams, the shade, or a dark hole.

Similarly, in Book IV, the development of the distinction between intuitive and demonstrative knowledge presupposes a reader's eye looking at the page and reading the words printed there; indeed, that we can distinguish the characters from the page to even read the text at all demonstrates, ironically enough, the unmediated nature of intuitive knowledge as distinguished from demonstrative knowledge:

Another difference between intuitive and demonstrative Knowledge, is, that though in the latter all doubt be removed, when by the Intervention of the intermediate *Ideas*, the Agreement or Disagreement is perceived; yet before the Demonstration there was a doubt, which in intuitive Knowledge cannot happen to the Mind that has its Faculty of Perception left to a degree capable of distinct *Ideas*, no more than it can be a doubt to the Eye, (that can distinctly see White and Black,) Whether this Ink, and this Paper be all of a Colour. If there be Sight in the Eyes, it will at first glimpse, without Hesitation, perceive the Words printed on this Paper, different from the Colour of the Paper: And so if the Mind have the Faculty of distinct Perception, it will perceive the Agreement or Disagreement of those *Ideas* that produce intuitive Knowledge. If the Eyes have lost the Faculty of seeing, or the Mind of perceiving, we in vain enquire after the quickness of Sight in one, or clearness of Perception in the other. (IV.ii.5)

Locke uses our visual perception of black marks on a white page, the apodeictic distinction enabling reading, to figure forth the invisible process of intuitive mental perception.

Indeed, the explicit distinction between the simple ideas of white and black punctuates the pages of the text.⁴ That white is not black instantiates our intuitive perception of the distinction between simple ideas, the cumulative force of which derives from its repetition in different groupings such as: “*That White is not Black, That a Square is not a Circle, That Yellowness is not Sweetness*” (I.ii.18); “Heat and Cold, Light and Darkness, White and Black, Motion and Rest” (II.viii.2); “that *White* is not *Black*, That a *Circle* is not a *Triangle*, That *Three* are more than *Two*, and equal to *One* and *Two*” (IV.ii.1); “*White* or *Black*, *Sweet* or *Bitter*, a *Triangle* or a *Circle*” (IV.vi.4). The clear distinction between the idea of white and the idea of black certainly fulfils its *explanatory* role of instantiating simple ideas and intuitive knowledge, as does, for instance, the idea of sweetness and the idea of bitterness. But the distinction between white and black that recurs throughout the *Essay* arguably serves the *rhetorical* function of calling attention to itself as *text*, as black characters on a white page. In this vein, the self-conscious textuality evoked through the ideas of white and black add another dimension to the development of certain arguments.

Consider, for instance, Locke’s declamation against the willful distortion of meaning through the abuse of words:

But though unlearned Men well enough understood the Words *White* and *Black*, etc. and had constant Notions of the *Ideas* signified by those Words; yet there were Philosophers found, who had learning and *subtlety* enough to prove that *Snow* was *black*; i.e. to prove, that *White* was *Black*.
(III.x.10)

⁴ See I.ii.18; I.iv.3; II.i.6; II.viii.2-3; III.x.10; IV.1.2; IV.ii.1; IV.ii.5; IV.v.4; IV.vii.13; IV.vii.16; IV.vii.19; IV.xi.2; IV.xi.7.

Since Locke argues that such philosophers “perplex and confound the signification of Words” (III.x.10), we may conclude that such artful and subtle practices wrongly focus on the words themselves instead of the ideas for which they stand. If we then look again at the passage in light of the insistent attention called to the ideas of white and black, Locke arguably *demonstrates* the paradoxical use of words. That is, I think the seeming contradiction that “snow is black” or “white is black” ostensibly proven by subtle philosophers is thrown into critical, or *textual*, relief because the very words “snow” and “white” appear as *black* characters on the white page. As *black* characters that obviously denote *white* things, the words call attention to themselves as *words* that point to a reality existing *outside* of the text. Part of Locke’s concern for the proper use of language thus arguably stems from the ambiguity of words as potentially faulty signifiers; that is, the perplexing plausibility that “snow is black” as indicative of black characters on a white page points to a patent falsehood in *words* that would not occur in *nature*. Similarly, consider the implications of Locke’s use of white and black in Book II wherein he delineates the origin of our ideas from experience in the world:

But all that are born into the World being surrounded with Bodies, that perpetually and diversly affect them, variety of *Ideas*, whether care be taken about it or no, are imprinted on the Minds of Children. *Light*, and *Colours*, are busie at hand every where, when the Eye is but open; *Sounds*, and some *tangible Qualities* fail not to solícite their proper Senses, and force an entrance to the Mind; but yet, I think, it will be granted easily, That if a Child were kept in a place, where he never saw any other but Black and White, till he were a Man, he would have no more *Ideas* of Scarlet or Green, than he that from his Childhood never tasted an Oyster, or a Pine-Apple, has of those particular Relishes.

(II.i.6)

Might we then infer from this passage that the “black and white” seen by such a child points to *text* so that Locke’s argument goes beyond establishing the causal

relationship between experience and simple ideas to suggest that *reading text* can never provide an adequate account of the real world existing outside of the text? Although the text may discuss experiences in the world, in order for the text as a collection of signifiers, or black marks, to be meaningful, the reader must live *in* the world proper to corroborate textual claims with his or her own experience. It is based on our experience of living in the world of sunshine and colours and music that we can concede that the claim “the *Idea* of Scarlet was like the sound of a Trumpet” (II.iv.5) makes no meaningful sense. Locke’s awareness of the inability of words to replace or adequately represent external experience perhaps informs his strategy of foregrounding the textuality of his text in order to direct us to consider our own experience:

What Perception is, every one will know better by reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, *etc.* or thinks, *than by any discourse of mine*. Whoever reflects on what passes in his own Mind, cannot miss it: And if he does not reflect, all the *Words in the World*, cannot make him have any notion of it. (II.ix.2 emphasis mine)

That “all the words in the world” cannot make us have any notion of what the words signify certainly applies to Locke’s use of the words “pineapple” or “sweetness” or “red.” In order for such words to be meaningful to us, we must have experience of their denotation outside of the text. In contrast, the peculiarly pointed use of white and black becomes an effective experiential trope by which to draw on our immediate experience of looking at black characters on a white page.

To appreciate the rhetorical effectiveness of Locke’s presupposition of the reader’s experience of observing black characters on a white page, let us momentarily consider just how different our own experience of reading would be if the page were, say, blue. How different would be our experience of reading passages that clearly

presuppose the whiteness of the page under the reader's observation: "For who will undertake to find a difference between the white of this Paper, and that of the next degree to it?" (II.xvi.3) By the same token, consider how suddenly counter-intuitive becomes the appeal to white and black as demonstrative of the difference between intuitive and demonstrative knowledge once we alter the material reality of the text:

Another difference between intuitive and demonstrative Knowledge, is, that though in the latter all doubt be removed, when by the Intervention of the intermediate Ideas, the Agreement or Disagreement is perceived; yet before the Demonstration there was a doubt, which in intuitive Knowledge cannot happen to the Mind that has its Faculty of Perception left to a degree capable of distinct Ideas, no more than it can be a doubt to the Eye, (that can distinctly see White and Black,) Whether this Ink, and this Paper be all of a Colour. (IV.ii.5)

Similarly, consider how our experience of reading the oft-repeated distinction between the simple idea of white and the simple idea of black changes if suddenly the black typeface becomes red:

These are two very different things, and carefully to be distinguished; it being one thing to perceive, and know the Idea of White or Black, and quite another to examine what kind of particles they must be, and how ranged in the Superficies, to make any Object appear White or Black. (II.viii.2)

How much more aware, perhaps, might we be of the experiential use of the material reality of the text if, like the passages *about* whiteness and blackness articulated by black characters on a white page, the passages mentioning blue and red took the form of red characters on a blue page:

But where the difference is so great, as to produce in the Mind clearly distinct Ideas, whose differences can be perfectly retained, there these Ideas of Colours, as we see in different kinds, as Blue and Red, are as capable of Demonstration, as Ideas of Number and Extension. (IV.ii.13)

What happens to our experience of reading if we bring the white page back but alter the colour of the black typeface? Consider Locke's argument that general maxims, as opposed to being innate, amount simply to the discernment of the mind of its particular ideas:

There is nothing more visible, than that the Mind, without the help of any Proof, or Reflection on either of these general Propositions perceives so clearly, and knows so certainly, that the *Idea* of *White*, is the *Idea* of White, and not the *Idea* of Blue; and that the *Idea* of White, when it is in the Mind, is there, and is not absent, that the consideration of these Axioms can add nothing to the Evidence or certainty of its Knowledge.

(IV.vii.4)

To appreciate the import of Locke's masterful use of our perception of the material reality of the text, we ought to recall his equation of mental and visual perception:

And so if the Mind have the Faculty of distinct Perception, it will perceive the Agreement or Disagreement of those *Ideas* that produce intuitive Knowledge. If the Eyes have lost the Faculty of seeing, or the Mind of perceiving, we in vain enquire after the quickness of Sight in one, or clearness of Perception in the other.

(IV.ii.5)

Locke's oft-cited equation of understanding and sight, the Lockean eye of the mind, intimates his purposive strategy of using the reader's experience of reading, his or her visual perception of black marks on a white page, as a sophisticated rhetorical device. By altering the material reality of my own text in the experiential exercises above, I have aspired to defamiliarize the familiarity of black typeface on a white page to suggest how different, indeed counter-intuitive, our experience of reading Locke's text can become in such circumstances. What I think clearly emerges is Locke's involvement of the reader's immediate experience of reading the text by heightening his or her visual perception of the materiality of this textual object.

However, these moments at which the text explicitly calls attention to itself as text, as black characters on a white page, interrupt the narrative unfolding of the argument per se, to force the reader to consider consciously both his or her own act of reading and the text as a material *object* in hand. The discussion of simple modes of space, for instance, is clearly interrupted by three digressive sections dealing with the ambiguous usage of that key term *substance*; while the discussion of our ideas of substance resumes ten chapters (in fact, 120 pages) later, what I find interesting is that this rhetorical interruption culminates in questioning the nature of books. Satirizing the use of the term *substance* without knowing what it is, Locke mocks the circularity of such definitions whereby an intelligent American might be told “That a Pillar was a thing supported by a *Basis*, and a *Basis* something that supported a Pillar” (II.xiii.20). By the same token, Locke ridicules the tautological definition of books in the scenario he creates:

And a Stranger to them would be very liberally instructed in the nature of Books, and the things they contained, if he should be told, that all learned Books consisted of Paper and Letters, and that Letters were things inhering in Paper, and Paper a thing that held forth Letters; a notable way of having clear *Ideas* of Letters and Paper. (II.xiii.20)

Reading a passage about the nature of books consisting in letters and paper certainly calls attention to the very book we hold and the letters on the paper we look at. In fact, *because* the passage mocks this tautological definition, coercing us into the haughty intimacy of scoffing amusement, the potent question that goes unanswered is “what, then, *is* the nature of books?” More specifically, “what is it that constitutes the *essence* of *this treatise in hand*”? What precisely *is* it about this textual *object* we hold that *defines it*? Does *this text* simply amount to the black letters on the white paper? Or, does the text questioning its own textuality not beg the question of “is there

something *outside* of and external to the text, namely the reader involved in the act of reading, which is a necessary part of the whole conception of a text”?

In a similar vein, probably the most explicit instance of the text referring to its own textuality occurs in Book III:

Let any one examine his own Thoughts, and he will find, that as soon as he supposes or speaks of *Essential*, the consideration of some *Species*, or the complex *Idea*, signified by some general name, comes into his Mind: And ‘tis in reference to that, that this or that Quality is said to be *essential*. So that if it be asked, whether it be *essential* to me, or any other particular corporeal Being to have Reason? I say no; no more than it is *essential* to this white thing I write on, to have words in it. But if that particular Being, be to be counted of the sort *Man*, and to have the name *Man* given it, then Reason is *essential* to it, supposing Reason to be a part of the complex *Idea* the name *Man* stands for: as it is *essential* to this thing I write on, to contain words, if I will give it the name *Treatise*, and rank it under that *Species*. (III.vi.4)

The text questions its own constitution and classification in order to *demonstrate performatively* that the constellation of ideas for which a particular name is made to stand does not, thereby, correspond to any real essence, but designates only the *nominal essence*, a function of classification. But surely, as readers, we find these self-reflexive gestures towards the *Essay*’s textuality somewhat unsettling, despite their experiential efficacy to clarify and concretize some abstract concepts. And the interruption, the constant reminder that we as readers occupy a physical space and are holding and observing a physical object that is specifically *text*, occurs far too often throughout the *Essay* for us not to question its rhetorical function.

Some observations made by Walter Benjamin on Brechtian epic theatre may, anachronistically, provide a way of understanding the rhetorical interruption of Locke’s narrative through the insistent reminder that what we are holding and reading is *text*. In a section entitled “The Interruption,” Benjamin says:

The task of the epic theater, according to Brecht, is not so much the development of actions as the representation of conditions. This presentation does not mean reproduction as the theoreticians of Naturalism understood it. Rather, the truly important thing is to discover the conditions of life. (One might say just as well: to alienate [*verfremden*] them.) This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings.⁵

The number of purposive devices, such as placards and captions, used in epic theatre to remind the audience that they are indeed watching a *play* are perhaps analogous to the number of textual interruptions in the *Essay* which remind us that we are holding and reading a *text*.⁶ In this vein, the textual representation of the process of understanding “does not mean reproduction as the theoreticians of Naturalism understood it”—that is, detailed realistic and factual description. Rather, just as epic theatre aspires to “discover the conditions of life” by laying bare its staging mechanism, or (anti)theatrical artifice, the text of the *Essay* perhaps aspires to represent the conditions of its own production by calling attention to its own textuality.

To pursue this line of thought further, let us consider Locke’s opening remarks in the Introduction to the *Essay* regarding the necessary conditions for making the invisible process of understanding a visible object for observation:

The Understanding, like the Eye, whilst it makes us see, and perceive all other Things, takes no notice of it self: And it requires *Art* and Pains to set it at a distance, and make it its own Object. (I.i.1 emphasis mine)

⁵ *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 150.

⁶ For discussions of Brecht’s employment of stage machinery, films, placards, music, and chorus aimed at involving the audience critically as opposed to emotionally, see Peter Brooker, “Key words in Brecht’s theory and practice of theatre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 185-200; Christopher Baugh, “Brecht and stage design,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 235-253; Ronald Gray, *Brecht the Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), esp. 67-89; and Keith A. Dickson, *Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), esp. 228-253.

It is the key word “Art” that deserves our attention here. Let us consider various shades, or degrees, of meaning which coalesce under the signifier “art”:

I. Skill; its display or application.

1. Skill in doing anything as the result of knowledge and practice. (1225)
2. a. Human skill as an agent, human workmanship. Opposed to *nature*. (1386)
b. Artifice, artificial expedient. (1667)
3. a. The learning of the schools. The *trivium*, or one of its subjects, grammar, logic, rhetoric; dialectics. (1305)
b. Scholarship, learning, science. (1588)
c. *Words or terms of art*: words peculiar to, or having a peculiar use in, a particular art or pursuit; technical terms. (1628)
4. Skill in applying the principles of a special science; technical or professional skill. (1300)
5. The application of skill to subjects of taste, as poetry, music, dancing, the drama, oratory, literary composition, and the like. (1620)
6. The application of skill to the arts of imitation and design, *Painting, Engraving, Sculpture, Architecture*; the cultivation of these in its principles, practice, and results; the skilful production of the beautiful in visible forms.
This is the most usual modern sense of *art*, when used without qualification. It does not occur in any English Dictionary before 1880, and seems to have been chiefly used by painters and writers on painting, until the present century.
[However, two quotations prior to 1880 are worth citing here:
1668 J. E[VELYN] (*title*) *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting* demonstrated from the Principles of Art.
1700 DRYDEN *To Kneller* From hence the rudiments of art began, A coal or chalk first imitated man.]

II. Anything wherein skill may be attained or displayed.

7. chiefly in *pl.* Certain branches of learning which are of the nature of intellectual instruments or apparatus for more advanced studies, or for the work of life; their main principles having been already investigated and established, they are in the position of subjects requiring only to be acquired and practised. Applied in the Middle Ages to ‘the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, a course of seven sciences, introduced in the sixth century...the trivium contained *grammar, logic, and rhetoric*; the quadrivium *arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy*’ (Hallam). (1300)

8. a practical application of any science; a body or system of rules serving to facilitate the carrying out of certain principles. (1489)
9. *esp.* An industrial pursuit or employment of a skilled nature: a craft, business, profession. (1393)
10. A pursuit or occupation in which skill is directed towards the gratification of taste or production of what is beautiful. (1597)
11. a. *Industrial, useful arts*: those in which the hands and body are more concerned than the mind.
b. *Fine arts*: those in which the mind and imagination are chiefly concerned.
12. An acquired faculty of any kind; a power of doing anything wherein skill is attainable by study and practice. (1637)
13. Studied conduct or action, especially such as seeks to attain its ends by artificial, indirect, or covert means; address; cunning; artfulness. (1600)
14. An artifice, contrivance, stratagem, wile, trick, cunning device. (1597)⁷

I have cited the many shades of meaning of “art” precisely because I think so many of them inform Locke’s project of setting the understanding at a distance to make it its own object. For instance, the skills acquired through a liberal arts education, covering grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, certainly give shape to much of the *content* of the *Essay*. My own rhetorical reading of the treatise presupposes the application of literary skills used in drama or oratory to philosophical discourse. Likewise, Locke’s own project to represent the process of understanding by following his own thoughts in words presupposes the principles of imitation and design. Like all artistic production, the *Essay* aspires to represent something *outside* of itself, the mind, through imitation–interpretive re-creation. More striking perhaps is that the *Essay*’s textual strategies of appealing to our physical experience outside of the text *and* our tactile experience of holding the very book subtly conflates the distinction, cited in sense 11., between useful arts and fine arts. That is, if useful arts

⁷ All citations have been taken from the *OED*, 117.

are “those in which the hands and body are more concerned than the mind” and fine arts are “those in which the mind and imagination are chiefly concerned,” how does Locke productively complicate that distinction by writing a book that purports to observe the functioning of the mind while employing as a central rhetorical device the self-reflexive gesture of the *text* calling attention to itself *as text* held and read by the reader? Indeed, this textual intervention into the natural process of thinking, of understanding, recognizes that it *is* artificial human workmanship. More to the point, the artifice of textuality is *necessary* to the production of cognition in a visible and tangible form.

What I am suggesting, then, by my own interruption in my own narrative of the rhetorical function of the *Essay*’s self-reflexive textual interruptions is that insistently calling attention to the material reality, or textuality, of the book in hand lays bare its necessary artifice. To see it another way, let us consider Locke’s words that preface the chapter entitled “*Of Infinity*” as indicative of the meta-cognitive aspirations of the whole treatise:

He that would know what kind of *Idea* it is to which we give the name of *Infinity*, cannot do it better, than by considering to what Infinity is by the Mind more immediately attributed, and then how the Mind comes to frame it.
(II.xvii.1)

Before thinking about the particularity of any of our ideas, Locke exhorts us to think about the way our minds *work*--to think about how we think about anything. To preface the chapter on the idea of infinity with a directive to consider “to what Infinity is by the Mind more immediately attributed, and then how the Mind comes to frame it” arguably amounts to thinking about the cognitive conditions that both enable and shape our idea of infinity. To extend this precondition of meta-cognitive thinking to the whole treatise, the ostensible impetus of the whole text is to take not particular

ideas but the very cognitive structure of mind as the object of observation: “It shall suffice to my present Purpose, to consider the *discerning Faculties* of a Man, as they are employ’d about the Objects, which they have to do with” (I.i.2 emphasis mine). Because the text aspires to lay bare the cognitive mechanism of mind as the necessary condition of thought, I suggest that the rhetorical interruptions whereby the text insistently calls attention to itself *as text* metaphorically mimics that very meta-cognitive desire by laying bare the *necessary* artifice of textuality as the condition of possibility for setting the invisible understanding at a distance to make it its own object.

But let us return to the *Essay* proper to observe therein that the corollary to the reader’s eye observing the black characters on the white page is the writer’s awareness of *writing* on the white page. The material reality of the white page becomes the site at which the reader can follow the unfolding thoughts of the narrative “I” that writes. For instance, in delineating simple ideas, as distinct from complex ideas of substance and complex ideas of modes and relations, Locke’s argument that simple ideas are adequate copies of the powers in external things to produce in us particular and unmediated sensations turns, for effect and clarification, to the simple idea of whiteness produced by the very page he looks at as he writes:

Because being intended to express nothing but the power in Things to produce in the Mind such a Sensation, that Sensation, when it is produced, cannot but be the Effect of that Power. So the Paper I write on, having the Power, in the Light, (I speak according to the common Notion of Light,) to produce in me the Sensation, which I call White, it cannot but be the Effect of such a Power, in something without the Mind; since the Mind has not the Power to produce any such *Idea* in it self, and being meant for nothing else but the Effect of such a Power, that simple *Idea* is real and *adequate*: the Sensation of White, in my Mind, being the Effect of that Power, which is in the Paper to produce it,

is perfectly *adequate* to that Power; or else, that Power would produce a different *Idea*.
(II.xxxi.12)

At the risk of what may seem to be redundant citation, I would like us to observe how what perhaps began as using the white page as an experiential trope to use the reader's experience of reading the black marks on white paper to explain difficult concepts (such as a vacuum, the degrees of simple modes other than number, the idea of infinity, intuitive knowledge as distinguished from demonstrative knowledge, nominal essence, and the powers in external objects that effect sensations in the observer) gradually engages the attention of the narrative "I" that writes. The white page becomes the vehicle by which the narrative "I" can figure forth his own present operations, writing this very treatise, as the content of his examination.

By Book IV, what we arrive at in this treatise on cognition would seem to be a starting point: "'Tis past controversy, that we have in us something that thinks, our very Doubts about what it is, confirm the certainty of its being, though we must content our selves in the Ignorance of what kind of *Being* it is" (IV.iii.6). After the exhaustive analytic journey through the mind, and the preceding three books, exploring how the mind forms ideas about the external world, the white page arguably comes to function metaphorically for the narrative "I"'s taking its own self, writing this very treatise, as an object of observation:

'Tis therefore the actual receiving of *Ideas* from without, that gives us notice of the *Existence* of other Things, and makes us know, that something doth exist at that time without us, which causes that *Idea* in us, though perhaps we neither know nor consider how it does it: For it takes not from the certainty of our Senses, and the *Ideas* we receive by them, that we know not the manner wherein they are produced: *v.g.* whilst I write this, I have, by the Paper affecting my Eyes, that *Idea* produced in my Mind, which whatever Object causes, I call *White*; by which I know, that that Quality or Accident (*i.e.* whose appearance

before my Eyes, always causes that *Idea*) doth really exist, and hath a Being without me. And of this, the greatest assurance I can possibly have, and to which my Faculties can attain, is the Testimony of my Eyes, which are the proper and sole Judges of this thing, whose Testimony I have reason to rely on, as so certain, that I can no more doubt, whilst I write this, that I see White and Black, and that something really exists, that causes that Sensation in me, than that I write or move my Hand; which is a Certainty as great, as humane Nature is capable of, concerning the Existence of any thing, but a Man's self alone, and of GOD.
(IV.xi.2)

The above passage, cited from the chapter entitled "*Of our Knowledge of the Existence of other Things*," suggests that for this mind working through and writing out its thoughts on the extent to which external things can be known, the immediate object under observation is the white paper he is writing on. The number of commas which punctuate the text from "And of this,..." until the end suggest a kind of introverted winding down as the thought process slows and finally rests on the hand that writes. Indeed, the writing hand and the white paper it writes on figure forth the mind trying to understand its own immediate action; having thus far aspired to observe and record the many sides of the mind as that mind observes the many sides of the objects of its own observation, the text now tries to observe the many sides of mind (as an object) as that mind takes itself as its own object. In other words, through the figure of the white paper upon which the writing hand marks black characters, the text as text-in-creation *enacts* the desire to grasp the thinking mind thinking:

Thus I see, whilst I write this, I can change the Appearance of the Paper; and by designing the Letters, tell before-hand what new *Idea* it shall exhibit the very next moment, barely by drawing my Pen over it: which will neither appear (let me fancy as much as I will) if my Hand stands still; or though I move my Pen, if my Eyes be shut: Nor when those Characters are once made on the Paper, can I chuse afterwards but see

them as they are; that is, have the *Ideas* of such Letters as I have made.

(IV.xi.7)

The immediacy of the white page marked by black characters, which both the writer and the reader observe, encourages the reader to occupy a vantage point behind the very authorial pen. It is as if the author's undiluted and undigested thoughts are spilling out onto the page as the process of thinking turns its focus on the act of writing.

In this seemingly spontaneous moment of linguistic effusion, the words that sprawl across the paper begin to question the very process by which thought becomes represented in words *pinioned* to the page:

Whence it is manifest, that they are not barely the Sport and Play of my own Imagination, when I find, that the Characters, that were made at the pleasure of my own Thoughts, do not obey them; nor yet cease to be, whenever I shall fancy it, but continue to affect my Senses constantly and regularly, according to the Figures I made them. To which if we will add, that the sight of those shall, from another Man, draw such Sounds, as I before-hand design they shall stand for, there will be little reason left to doubt, that those Words, I write, do really exist without me, when they cause a long series of regular Sounds to affect my Ears, which could not be the effect of my Imagination, nor could my Memory retain them in that order.

(IV.xi.7)

Trying to think through the process of writing, the narrative mind recognizes that once ideas are given form in letters, they take on an independent existence--"those Words, I write, do really exist without me"--and themselves become external objects that "continue to affect my Senses constantly and regularly." The lament that "the Characters, that were made at the pleasure of my own Thoughts, do not obey them; nor yet cease to be, whenever I shall fancy it" recognizes the independent externality of language. It is as if the thinking mind is trying to grasp this externality of language by scrutinizing the words marked on the page by the authorial pen. The words, the

individual characters, become *specimens* for examination: "Nor when those Characters are once made on the Paper, can I chuse afterwards but see them as they are; that is, have the *Ideas* of such Letters as I have made" (IV.xi.7). Here the ideas which the thinking mind contemplates are arguably not the ideas *denoted* by the particular arrangement of letters, but the very *idea of the letters themselves*. Like an inchworm or a spider suddenly crawling across the page, the black characters themselves creep out of the authorial pen to capture the curiosity of their maker.

That the words on the page become *objects* of intense examination evokes Robert Hooke's experiment of actually putting a period under the glass:⁸



[Robert Hooke, MICROGRAPHIA (London: J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1665): Plate 2]

"I observed many both *printed* ones and *written*; and among multitudes I found *few* of them more *round* or *regular* then this which I have delineated [...] but *very many* abundantly more *disfigur'd*."⁹ In addition to describing the sources from which he extracted his period-specimens, Hooke provides extensive details of the irregularities of the periods

⁸ Robert Hooke was the Royal Society's first Curator of Experiments, and Secretary in 1677. Hall, 3.

⁹ Robert Hooke, MICROGRAPHIA: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made By Magnifying Glasses (London: J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1665): 3.

examined under the microscope. As with his other descriptions, Hooke's observations on the period affirm the microscope's power to disclose what had previously remained hidden: "though it appear'd through the *Microscope* gray, like a great splatch of *London* dirt, about three inches over; yet to the *naked eye* it was *black* and no bigger then that in the midst of the Circle A."¹⁰ Similar to Locke examining the *idea* of the *letters* on the page, Hooke informs us that individual *letters* are equally irregular under the glass: "could I have found Room in this Plate to have inserted an O you should have seen that the *letters* were not more distinct then the *points* of Distinction."¹¹ What I find intriguing, however, is that Hooke locates punctuation and letters on par with other minute bodies such as flies and fleas. While Hooke's experiment certainly shows the weakness of the naked eye in discerning minute properties of observable objects, does it not simultaneously, and perhaps unwittingly, foreground the impossibility of making *language* a determinate *object* of examination? Of what possible use is the microscopical observation of the material reality of black marks on the page to our understanding of either the individual word or the whole concept of language by which we even recognize black marks as words?

Locke's passage similarly suggests that language, like mind, is an inscrutable object. Just as the mind takes itself as its own object of inquiry in the *Essay* proper, the words on the page seem to question self-reflexively their own constitution. More than the medium examining the medium, the text seems to question the limits of representing the indeterminacy of language in determinate characters on the page. Language itself becomes an object whose origin and real constitution are ultimately unknowable; we can only know its sensible qualities as figured forth in visible words on the page. In this vein, the text figures forth the very inadequacy of representation

¹⁰ Hooke, 3.

¹¹ Hooke, 3-4.

by gesturing towards the invisible, ineffable, and indeterminate processes of *language* and *understanding* that cannot finally be comprehensively embodied in a determinate form.

If language and mind are thus equated as uncontainable and unrepresentable processes, that the words on the page function as a sophisticated trope again underscores the necessary artifice of textuality enabling the production of cognition in a visible form. In this regard, Locke's comments of the constant succession of ideas in the mind (II.xiv.13-4) suggest, analogously, the diachronic unfolding of words in language. Indeed, since the succession of words mimics the diachronic process of thought, the text literally and figuratively realizes Locke's aspiration to follow his own thoughts in writing. More specifically, the mind trying to understand mind is *figured through* the text trying to understand its own textual artifice--the *text*, as words inadequately representing *language*, itself becomes an effective rhetorical device by which to figure forth that same unrepresentability of *mind*.

Rosalie Colie observes how Locke, as author, dominates many passages in the *Essay* so that he "seems actually to be working out his ideas" and the "mere fact of his writing is part of his perception, part of his thinking."¹² I would add, however, that in such passages the working out of ideas seems not to be laid bare for the implied reader, as elsewhere the position of the reader is more clearly assumed. As readers, we seem to be momentarily forgotten, yet privy to the intensity of a mind wrestling with and working through what it means to write and fill the white page with black marks. Locke no longer seems to be speaking *to us*; rather, we, as readers, seem to occupy the same space as the writer while the text is written, or writes and rewrites itself, with each reading: "Thus I see, whilst I write this, I can change the Appearance of the

¹² Colie, 251-61.

Paper” (IV.xi.7). In this continuous present moment of textual creation, the position of the reader becomes superimposed on that of the author. Not only does the reader then occupy a space within the mind that is *thinking* about writing this treatise as he actually writes it, but if each reading becomes a writing, or, more properly, a rewriting, then the treatise itself becomes a kind of palimpsest.

If the *Essay* itself emerges as the quintessential *tabula rasa*, how much more self-reflexively provocative becomes the dominant metaphor of mind as a white paper:

Let us suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*; How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? (II.i.2)

More specifically, if *book* and *brain* become metaphorically equated, what are we to make of this white thing Locke writes on given that “white Paper receives any Characters” (I.iii.22)? And if “Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a Man’s own mind” (II.i.19), how does the text, as a *tabula rasa*, figure forth the thoughts of a mind taking the process of understanding as an object for observation? As Locke pointedly asks, how can anyone have access to another’s mind: “Can another Man perceive, that I am conscious of any thing” (II.i.19)? Locke candidly admits that his thoughts reflect only *bis own* experience: “I can speak but of what I find in my self” (II.xi.16). Since the white page, like the mind, is blank, without any innate characters antecedently imprinted, the black characters which Locke writes, or imprints, on the white page to record his *own mental experience* are analogous to the impressions which experience makes on the mind. Seen in this light, the *Essay* proper becomes a vehicle by which Locke can present *bis own mind*, the process of his own understanding, as a *specimen* for examination—Locke’s invisible and intangible mind

becomes *textually embodied* in this tactile metaphor. The text itself becomes Locke's cerebral tablet upon which are inscribed the typeface characters that figure forth his observations on the experience of his own mind. And it is these very typeface characters, the font of knowledge as it were, that we read as we actively *observe* the text, as textual *object*, that takes the process of understanding as its object of inquiry. Moreover, these typeface characters, analogous to secondary qualities observable in the text, point to the textual artifice necessary to make the invisible mind visible at all. The authorial narrator of the epistles who proffers the *Essay* to the reader as a separate textual entity thus arguably proffers his own *mind*, figuratively and textually, as an *object* for collective *observation*. The careful dissociation of the authorial self that has written this treatise and the thoughts of that self expressed through the narrative "I" of the *Essay* combine with the self-reflexive trope of the white page as a metaphor of mind to enable Locke's self-presentation as a *specimen* in his own natural history collection.

The detailed taxonomic structure of the *Essay*, framed and supplemented by two preceding tables of contents and the posterior extensive index, suggests the laborious attempt to observe, record, and ultimately classify the operations of mind into a kind of cognitive map. As a mental cartographer, Locke aspires to chart the familiar and unfamiliar terrain of the cognitive landscape, venturing off into unexplored territory and recording the curiosities discovered somewhat out of the common road. The text, as *mind*, thus replicates the taxonomic structure of a natural history collection; in this regard, consider Peter Walmsley's observation that Locke's "model of mind is a metaphysical version of the virtuoso's cabinet of curiosities, a closet where ideas can be ranged in order and stored, readily accessible for personal

inspection or public display.”¹³ What I am suggesting is that the guiding principle of taxonomy employed by natural historians which informs the internal structure of the *Essay* self-reflexively intimates a wider taxonomic circumference within which the *Essay* itself finds a place. In other words, once Locke’s mind has been put under the glass, so to speak, and its observable functions descriptively recorded in the *Essay* proper, the mind as a textual *object* can assume its place on the shelf of the natural historian’s cabinet of curiosities, beside the cassowary and the jars of pickled genitals.¹⁴ In this vein, Locke’s treatise, the literal white paper that textually receives the black characters and metaphorically mimics, or enacts, the process of understanding receiving external impressions from experience, can indeed be classified with the various other experiments conducted by such new natural philosophers who populated the Royal Society.

That the experiential aspects of the *Essay* which draw on the writer’s experience of writing and the reader’s experience of reading subserve the textual experiment of making the mind, or text as *tabula rasa*, the object of observation derives, in part, from the experimental method espoused and employed by the Royal Society.¹⁵ By way of prefatory comment, however, I think we should bear in mind that the words “experience” and “experiment” were in a state of flux, or negotiation, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁶ Before Newton, “experience” and “experiment” were used interchangeably. After Newton, however, there is a clear

¹³ “Locke’s Cassowary and the *Ethos* of the *Essay*,” 259.

¹⁴ For my awareness of this unpalatable pickling, amongst other exotic curiosities, in the Royal Society’s repository, I am much obliged to Peter Walmsley’s “Locke’s Cassowary and the *Ethos* of the *Essay*,” 263.

¹⁵ For an analysis of the weekly meetings of the Royal Society to assess the extent to which they fulfilled the expressed aim of promoting experimental learning, the practice of public experiment in the 17th and 18th centuries, and external views on their experimental method, see Marie Boas Hall, *Promoting Experimental Learning: Experiment and the Royal Society 1660-1727* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁶ For this linguistic distinction, I am grateful to Dr. Barry G. Allen.

distinction in the usage of “experience,” referring simply to whatever happens in a conscious state, and “experiment,” referring to a deliberate intervention into a natural process. Locke’s allegiance with the new natural philosophers and the development of the experimental method suggests his involvement in the gradual separation of these key terms. Although the desire for knowledge of the natural world, derived from and assessed by experience, forms the impetus for conducting experiments, what is worthy of note is that the performance of an experiment comes to involve creating an artificial process whereby the forces impinging on this intervention into an otherwise natural process are controlled. By carefully determining the conditions in such a way as to force the experiment to answer an isolable question, advocates of the new experimental method argued that singular experiments can tell us something potentially useful about the natural world that would not otherwise be observable. To this end, then, experiment and observation become the ways of acquiring practical knowledge about the workings of the world.

In this regard, the Royal Society was defined in 1664 by Henry Oldenburg, one of its first Secretaries, as:

a Corporation of a number of Ingenious and knowing persons, by ye Name of ye Royall Society of London for improving Naturall knowledge, whose dessein it is, by Observations and Experiments to advance ye Contemplations of Nature to Use and Practice.¹⁷

That experiments were actually performed at many of the meetings of the Royal Society indicates that the validity of experiments depended on being replicable in a public space: “The validity of experimental knowledge depended upon multiple witnesses.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Letter to Richard Norwood, mathematical teacher and practitioner in the Bermudas, 6 March 1663/4; Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, vol. ii, 146. Quoted in Hall, *Promoting Experimental Learning: Experiment and the Royal Society 1660-1727*, 9.

¹⁸ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 338.

Because everyone could not directly witness the production of experimental knowledge, the society instituted a new mode of communication designed both to present information with a minimum of distortion and to include a wide readership as witnesses to the performance of discrete experiments:

The technology of virtual witnessing involves the production in a *reader's* mind of such an image of an experimental scene as obviates the necessity for either its direct witness or its replication. Through virtual witnessing the multiplication of witnesses could be, in principle, unlimited. [...] The validation of experiments, and the crediting of their outcomes as matters of fact, necessarily entailed their realization in the laboratory of the mind and the mind's eye.¹⁹

The “prolixity” of descriptions of experiments and the detailed, naturalistic illustrations that went into the society's publications aimed to create the impression of verisimilitude. They were designed to convey not just the *idea* of an experiment but a “vivid impression of the experimental scene.”²⁰ Given the undeniable prolixity of Locke's bulky book, I propose that the *Essay* itself performatively enacts the deliberate textual intervention into the natural process of human understanding to observe and record as many isolable facets of the experience of mind as possible.

Comparable to the Royal Society's literary practice termed “virtual witnessing,” the *Essay* aspires not to convey simply the *idea* of an experiment on mind, but to create a “vivid impression of the experimental scene.” In this regard, we can appreciate Locke's awareness of the artifice of textuality as the necessary precondition for figuring forth the otherwise invisible experience of mind: “it requires *Art* and Pains to set [the understanding] at a distance, and make it its own Object” (I.i.1 emphasis mine). Recalling the position of the reader behind the authorial pen as the

¹⁹ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 60.

²⁰ Shapin and Schaffer, 62.

experiential tropes of the white paper and the writing hand figure forth the desire to grasp the thinking mind thinking, the metaphorical equation of mind and book through the potent image of the *tabula rasa* makes the text as text-in-creation evoke the immediacy and verisimilitude of an experiment on mind performed before our eyes. We become reliable witnesses to the performance of the experiment, imaginatively transported to the weekly meeting space of the Royal Society wherein “[p]roper manners had to be observed in order to preclude disputes about what was being witnessed.”²¹

Because we are witnessing the textual re-creation of the experimental scene, the equivalent of the Royal Society’s literary practice termed “virtual witnessing,” the concern for finding a reliable authority to authenticate the communication of discoveries also shapes the *Essay*’s persuasive argument. Peter Dear points to the authority of the trustworthy reporter of an event experienced first-hand as the new standard of authority adopted by the Royal Society: “The actuality of a discrete event was the central point to be established in any contribution to the cooperative philosophy of the Royal Society.”²² Aiming to persuade readers of the authenticity of experiments, the communication of discoveries were often modelled on a “recipe-like” format: “The reader was given a specific set of instructions for the experimental procedure, which he then could replicate. Generally, however, the virtuosi distrusted recipes unless they were accompanied by trustworthy accounts of actual trials attempted.”²³ Consider Peter Walmsley’s insight that “[l]ike Boyle, [Locke] builds his natural history from detailed narratives of personal experiences, approaching the

²¹ Eamon, 337. For a discussion of the ideal of candid conversation to the proceedings of the Royal Society, and Locke’s allegiance to this ideal of discourse, see also Walmsley, “Dispute and Conversation: Probability and the Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke’s *Essay*.”

²² “*Totius in verba*: Rhetoric and Authority in the Early Royal Society,” *Isis* 76 (1985): 153.

²³ Eamon, 339.

human understanding through experiments with his own powers of ideation.”²⁴ Locke’s admission that his thoughts record observations on his own experience--“I can speak but of what I find in my self” (III.xi.16)--subtly establish him as the text’s reliable authority, for who could have a closer look at the process of one person’s mind than that very person?

Considering Dear’s note that for the explicit purpose of creating verisimilitude, “[a]n experience was linked to a particular time and place,”²⁵ we might recall Locke’s addition of “Dorset Court 24th of May 1689” to “The Epistle Dedicatory” in the later editions of the *Essay*.²⁶ Locating the *Essay* in time and place gives it the proper form of experimental narrative--a discrete event in which Locke was the central participant. Locke also serves as the experimental text’s authority--the narrative “I” taking its own experience as an object of contemplation becomes the reliable guide that leads the reader to think experimentally about his or her own similar experience. For instance, in order to make the reader think about the quickness of the actions of mind that may have never before been noticed because so imperceptible, Locke defamiliarizes the familiar by asking the reader to reconsider everyday experience in a new light: “How frequently do we, in a day, cover our eyes with our eye-lids, without perceiving that we are in the dark?” (II.ix.20). The narrative involvement of the reader presupposes common experience which the reader must bring to fill in the explicit and intentional gaps in the text:

All *compounded Tastes and Smells*, are also Modes made up of these simple *Ideas* of those Senses. But they being such, as generally we have no names for, are less taken notice of, and cannot be set down in

²⁴ “Prince Maurice’s Rational Parrot: Civil Discourse in Locke’s *Essay*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (1995): 416.

²⁵ Dear, 153.

²⁶ See Peter Nidditch’s note, “The Epistle Dedicatory,” 5.

writing; and therefore must be left without enumeration, to the
Thoughts and Experience of my Reader. (II.xviii.5)

Indeed, Locke often appeals to the reader to consider his or her own intangible cognitive experience *outside* of the text to corroborate the text's descriptive report of what has been observed in his experiment on his own mind. For instance, arguing against the existence of innate ideas, Locke carefully refutes the possibility of innate ideas lodged in the memory by defining remembering as bringing forth from the memory any thing with the consciousness that it was known before:

Whenever there is the actual perception of an *Idea* without memory, the *Idea* appears perfectly new and unknown before to the Understanding: Whenever the memory brings any *Idea* into actual view, it is with a consciousness, that it had been there before, and was not wholly a Stranger to the mind. *Whether this be not so, I appeal to every ones observation.* (I.iv.20 emphasis mine)

By appealing to our observation on the workings of our own minds, Locke asks us to replicate, on ourselves, the experiment which he has just textually performed on his own mind: "Just so it is (as every one may experiment in himself)" (IV.vii.4). The persuasiveness of the developing argument thus hinges on subtly forcing the engaged reader to conduct a series of experiments on him or herself. To this end, arguing that thinking is not the essence, but the action, of the soul, Locke delineates degrees of thinking--difference in intention and remission of the mind--to appeal finally to the common experience of sleep as evidence of the retirement of the mind from the senses:

I need not, for this, instance in those, who sleep out whole stormy Nights, without hearing the Thunder, or seeing the Lightning, or feeling the shaking of the House, which are sensible enough to those, who are waking. But in this retirement of the mind from the Senses, it often retains a yet more loose and incoherent manner of *thinking*, which we

call *Dreaming*: And last of all sound Sleep closes the Scene quite, and puts an end to all Appearances. *This I think almost every one has Experience of in himself, and his own Observation without difficulty leads him thus far.* (II.xix.4 emphasis mine)

At some moments, the exhortation to the reader to pause in reading in order to make him or herself an object of observation becomes almost an explicit imperative to understanding the text:

What Perception is, every one will know better by reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, *etc.* or thinks, than by any discourse of mine. Whoever reflects on what passes in his own Mind, cannot miss it: And if he does not reflect, all the Words in the World, cannot make him have any notion of it. (II.ix.2)

Recalling the observation that the text becomes a kind of gentle blueprint by which the reader can make of him or herself an experiment, and thus build the edifice of understanding anew with each reading, the *Essay* further aligns itself with the Royal Society's communication of experimental discoveries by providing, as part of this experimental exegesis of understanding, the "recipe" or procedures by which the reader can, and should, replicate the experiment on him or herself. The experimental structure of the text thus inheres in replicating the experiment of observing the experience of mind by drawing on the writer's experience of writing and the reader's experience of reading *this text*.

Although we will address more comprehensively in Chapter 4 the critique of Locke offered by Richard Rorty, one rather derisive observation by Rorty regarding Locke's metaphor of mind seems particularly relevant to bring this discussion of the materiality of the text to a provisional close. Rorty points to the ambiguity in Locke's account of how we come to form ideas by the way in which "our immaterial tablets are

dented by the material world.”²⁷ The passage with which Rorty takes issue is Locke’s refutation of the claim that what are taken to be universal maxims are stamped on the mind. The passage, which I cite in a slightly fuller context than does Rorty, says:

For, first ‘tis evident, that all *Cbildren*, and *Ideots*, have not the least Apprehension or Thought of them: and the want of that is enough to destroy that universal Assent, which must needs be the necessary concomitant of all innate Truths: it seeming to me near a Contradiction, to say, that there are Truths imprinted on the Soul, which it perceives or understands not; imprinting, if it signify any thing, being nothing else, but the making certain Truths to be perceived. For to imprint any thing on the Mind without the Mind’s perceiving it, seems to me hardly intelligible. (I.ii.5)

Rorty critiques the ambiguity of conflating two meanings of “impression”—the mind’s passive reception of imprints, and the mind’s active perception of those impressions:

It is as if the *tabula rasa* were perpetually under the gaze of the unblinking Eye of the Mind—nothing, as Descartes said, being nearer to the mind than itself. If the metaphor *is* unpacked in this way, however, it becomes obvious that the imprinting is of less interest than the observation of the imprint—all the knowing gets done, so to speak, by the Eye which observes the imprinted tablet, rather than by the tablet itself.²⁸

Rorty’s criticism, seemingly intended to ridicule Locke and his incoherent metaphor of mind, unwittingly lends credence to my own rhetorical reading that Locke’s text consciously draws on the eye of the reader that reads this text—observes this very object. Recalling the provocative self-reflexivity of the metaphorical equation of brain and book through the potent image of the *tabula rasa*, we can see how the text implicates its readers as observers of the very experiment on the experience of mind which it *performs* literally, figuratively, and textually, before our eyes. As Rorty,

²⁷ *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 143.

²⁸ *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 143-4.

ironically enough, says: “all the knowing gets done, so to speak, by the Eye which observes the imprinted tablet, rather than by the tablet itself.” In this vein, I would argue that Rorty is ironically and unquestionably right--the rhetorical effectiveness of Locke’s treatise inheres in the extent to which the eyes of its readers, observing the imprints on this textual *tabula rasa*, perceive therein an explanation of mind that will help us to understand our own understandings. Examining how the black characters are imprinted in particular ways throughout this textual tablet, we will attempt to understand the rhetorical complexity of the *Essay*’s multiple levels of narration and internal dialogism in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

MULTIPLE NARRATIVE VOICES: LOCKE AS STORYTELLER AND THE DIALOGIC DYNAMIC

The repetitive and meandering structure of the *Essay* for which the authorial narrator in “The Epistle to the Reader” apologizes, offering as an excuse its extended and haphazard construction, arguably blurs the recognizable parameters of philosophic discourse. As opposed to the rigorously linear and logical mode of philosophical argument, this more tentative, repetitive, and diffuse way of proceeding not only accounts for the bulk of the book, but also institutes a new method for approaching this enquiry into the understanding and the concomitant advancement of knowledge.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, Locke’s cultivation of intimacy with the reader by approaching the text as an *object* for our examination, as opposed to a dogmatic treatise on cognition, opens the text up to endless revision by presupposing dialogue in response to the text. If the apologetic narrator of “The Epistle to the Reader” can charmingly gloss over the text’s bulk and repetitive structure, the rhetorical freedom thus acquired amounts to the liberty to move within and across different discursive forms. In this regard, Rosalie Colie offers an extensive analysis of the range of rhetorical strategies available to the essayist which were used by Locke to laicize philosophy:

Crisp and aphoristic or loose and rambling, the essayist spoke directly and personally to his readers; in exchange for the frankness with which

the essayist appeared to present his thinking self, he was allowed certain liberties from logical rigour; there was, furthermore, a screen of formality conventionally thin between the essayist and his readers, so that vernacular language and syntax could alternate with passages of remarkable balance and aphoristic detachment.¹

Attentive to Locke's rhetorical style, Colie observes that the essay form which was coming of age in the seventeenth century accounts for the informality and variety of styles employed by Locke in the *Essay*:

One of the interesting things about Locke's *Essay* accounted for by the genre is the range of styles Locke employed in his work, even in its first edition. His *Essay* is an anthological document, somehow managing to accommodate within its irregular boundaries many different tones, from a reduced factual or formulaic style to a loose anecdotal one; passages of extended formal analysis, of words, ideas, and principles, alternate with passages of easy exposition, with pseudo-dialogue, with canny variations upon traditional rhetorical commonplaces, with interior monologues, *pensées*, and self-analyses. Some of the charm, as well as much of the difficulty, of the *Essay* lies in this variety and unevenness; one cannot tell, from one section to the next, what tone the author will take, or how he will direct his readers to conduct themselves in response to him.²

Like Colie, John Dunn identifies in the *Essay* a conscientious balance of tone:

It is optimistic not because it makes extravagant promises of the degree to which human nature can be changed by political design, nor because it exaggerates the extent of human knowledge or minimises the difficulties which men face in regulating their beliefs in a rational manner, but because it considers the workings of men's minds in such simple, sober and unpretentious terms. The optimism is more a matter of tone than of content; but as a tone, it proved exceptionally beguiling.³

¹ Colie, 238.

² Colie, 239.

³ Locke (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 64.

Obviously, tonal variations play an important role in the rhetorical effectiveness of the *Essay*. But Colie recognizes that the folksy style and friendly encouragement from the author do not inform every page of the treatise; in fact, Colie observes, many “long passages of unrelieved exposition and analysis must be got through before one is offered the occasional refreshment of a green thought in a green shade.”⁴ I think that Colie is correct in pointing to the many arduous chapters that complicate any reductive reading of Locke’s rhetorical style as unpretentious and simple. The major part of Book II, Colie points out, comprises long passages of grim impersonality. I think that Colie is also correct in identifying the many different styles employed throughout the *Essay* which comprise its unpredictable tonal variations. Locke’s attentiveness to different modes of discourse other than traditionally logical and linear philosophical argument suggests his keen awareness of the rhetorical import of alternate modes of narration. What Colie’s observations suggest, and what I would like to pursue in this chapter, is Locke’s purposive creation of multiple narrative voices.⁵ More specifically, I suggest that Locke’s self-presentation is complicated by the creation of three narrative voices which I term the “storyteller,” the “narrative I,” and the “authorial I.”

We should briefly recall reading Chapter 1 wherein we explored the rhetorical creation of an authentic authorial voice in both “The Epistle Dedicatory” and “The Epistle to the Reader.” The careful dissociation of the self that wrote this treatise, the author proper, and the thoughts of that same self as expressed in the *Essay* proper, by the narrative “I”, largely hinged on creating the illusion of a pseudo-external space in the text. It is specifically in the space of “The Epistle to the Reader” that I think this

⁴ Colie, 239.

⁵ We can appreciate Locke’s attentiveness to the rhetorical import of shifting narrators in his comments that preface his *Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul’s Epistles*: “the frequent changing of the personage he speaks in renders the sense very uncertain, and is apt to mislead one that has not some clue to guide him; sometimes by the pronoun, I, he means himself; sometimes any Christian; sometimes a Jew, and sometimes any man.” See *The Works of John Locke*, 6.

authentic and separate authorial voice is so assiduously constructed; the preceding “Epistle Dedicatory” lends credence to authorial authenticity while the intervening tables of contents create physical and psychological distance between the epistles and the *Essay* proper. What emerges, as I have argued earlier, is the illusion of the author standing in “The Epistle to the Reader” handing the text over to us, saying “here is my book, the diversion of some of my idle and heavy hours, please read it.” The care with which the authorial narrator both inserts himself into the reader’s *present* moment and dissociates himself from the *Essay*’s composition at some point in the *past*, suggests that the authorial narrator ought to recede as we venture into the text, turning the pages and leaving the author behind in the epistles. But surprisingly, the authorial narrator does not recede as on an ice floe, bidding us adieu; rather, that same authorial voice that negotiated with the reader a narrative contractual agreement based on intimacy and conversational candour can be heard time and again throughout the *Essay* proper, commenting on the text and implicating the reader in a discussion *about* the text.

Since Chapter 1 discussed the creation of an authorial voice in the epistles and Chapter 2 examined, amongst other rhetorical effects, the presentation of the thinking-mind-thinking, this chapter will focus largely on the creation of the *storyteller*. Given my contention that the persuasive power of the *Essay* is greatly indebted to the art of storytelling, I will proffer my own tentative, and necessarily diluted, reading of the main story of the *Essay*, attending to the narrative development of the sequential arguments that constitutes its structural logic and plausible coherence. My analysis of the narrative “I” and the authorial “I” will then constitute a supplementary discussion to suggest that the multiple levels of narration work together to effect the *Essay*’s dialogism.



I. THE STORYTELLER

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience--his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.

An orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers. [...] All this points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers.

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," *Illuminations*

We might initially distinguish the storyteller from the relatively invisible omniscient narrator of rigorously logical philosophic discourse by attending to both the content and the mode of narration. While the more traditional mode of philosophical narration effaces authorial presence to analyze the progressive reasoning process working through *abstract* and *universal* principles, the narrative mode of storytelling firmly locates the storyteller *as narrator* in descriptively relating *particular experiences*. Although both modes of narration are linear, the narrator of philosophical ratiocination seeks to discover necessary causal relations comprising the inner logic of the argument whereas the storyteller aspires to *explain* by organizing the discrete parts into a comprehensive whole.

The explanatory power of storytelling perhaps accounts for the number of narratives related throughout the pages of the *Essay*. The stories that are recounted by the narrator draw on ostensibly real experiences in the world and are woven into the

narrative of the *Essay* constituting its argumentative mode. For instance, consider how Locke interweaves his account of meeting a blind man to illustrate his point that innate ideas are not lodged in the memory:

Suppose a Child had the use of his Eyes till he knows and distinguishes Colours; but then Cataracts shut the Windows, and he is forty or fifty years perfectly in the dark; and in that time perfectly loses all memory of the *Ideas* of colours, he once had. This was the case of a blind Man I once talked with, who lost his sight by the small Pox when he was a Child, and had no more notion of colours, than one born Blind. I ask whether any one can say this Man had then any *Ideas* of colours in his mind, any more than one born Blind? (I.iv.20)

Given the rhetorical importance of *sight* as analogous to *mental perception*, we should hardly be surprised by Locke's relation of similar experiences as reported by others. We can witness Locke, as storyteller, making "it the experience of those who are listening to his tale"⁶ through the inclusion of passages from a letter received from William Molineux regarding how sensory faculties determine perceptive abilities:

To which purpose I shall here insert a Problem of that very Ingenious and Studious promoter of real Knowledge, the Learned and Worthy Mr. *Molineux*, which he was pleased to send me in a Letter some Months since; and it is this: *Suppose a Man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t'other, which is the Cube, which the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quære, Whether by his sight, before he touch'd them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube.* To which the acute and judicious Proposer answers: *Not. For though he has obtain'd the experience of, how a Globe, how a Cube affects his touch; yet he has not yet attained the Experience, that what affects his touch so or so, must affect his sight so or so; Or that a protuberant angle in the Cube, that pressed his hand unequally, shall appear to his eye, as it does in*

⁶ Benjamin, "The Storyteller", *Illuminations*, 87.

the Cube. I agree with this thinking Gent. whom I am proud to call my Friend, in his answer to this his Problem; and am of opinion, that the Blind Man, at first sight, would not be able with certainty to say, which was the Globe, which the Cube, whilst he only saw them: though he could unerringly name them by his touch, and certainly distinguish them by the difference of their Figures felt. (II.ix.8)

Certainly this account of Molineux's letter is qualitatively different from the earlier testimony of an actual blind man who lost his sight due to smallpox; that is, Molineux cannot report his findings based on *his own experience* of having been blind and having tested his own perceptual abilities once his sight was restored. Rather, the experience that Molineux reports to Locke is his *mental experience* of conducting a mental experiment—creating a set of artificial conditions that would not naturally occur in order to answer a specific question. What is certainly interesting, however, is that Molineux's recorded *mental experience* of arriving at a hypothetical answer is literally reproduced in front of our eyes as yet another experiment reminiscent of the Royal Society's literary practices termed "virtual witnessing." But surely as we read this passage we are doing more than witnessing—we *experience* the mental experiment ourselves in the act of reading. The point to which we are narratively led, then, is to decide whether or not we will accept the hypothetical answer Molineux provides in his letter. Locke's assent reinforces the plausibility of Molineux's conclusion that the blind man would not be able to distinguish the cube and sphere by sight alone once his sight was restored: "I agree with this thinking Gent. whom I am proud to call my Friend" (II.ix.8). By hinging acceptance of this hypothetical answer to our desire for inclusion in the inner circle of intimate friends gathered in the chamber of "The Epistle to the Reader," Locke persuasively procures our assent. But Locke is asking us to accept a hypothetical answer to the plausible narrative of Molineux's letter as somehow substantiating *his own* plausible narrative that the use of our sensory faculties

determine our perceptual abilities. In matters of fact, experience verifies truth-claims: “For though great light be insufferable to our Eyes, yet the highest degree of darkness does not at all disease them” (II.vii.4). In matters of probability, however, we can only judge the validity of any assertion based on the explanatory power of a plausible narrative.

However, many experiences related throughout the *Essay* are not so clearly designed to answer a particular question; rather, many stories are told that simply recreate in narrative form the experience of others. But the way in which Locke places these stories as somehow illustrative of the argument he is making suggests a conscious use of *storytelling* as a persuasive form of communication. Consider, for example, the story of Prince Maurice’s conversation with a rational parrot which is related by the storytelling narrator of the *Essay* as *a story* reported to him by another:

His Words are,

“I had a mind to know from *Prince Maurice’s* own Mouth, the account of a common, but much credited Story, that I had heard so often from many others, of an old *Parrot* he had in *Brasil*, during his Government there, that spoke, and asked, and answered common Questions like a reasonable Creature; so that those of his Train there, generally concluded it to be Witchery or Possession; and one of his Chaplains, who lived long afterwards in *Holland*, would never from that time endure a *Parrot*, but said, they all had a Devil in them. I had heard many particulars of this Story, and assevered by People hard to be discredited, which made me ask *Prince Maurice* what there was of it. He said, with his usual plainness, and dryness in talk, there was something true, but a great deal false, of what had been reported. I desired to know of him, what there was of the first; he told me short and coldly, that he had heard of such an old *Parrot* when he came to *Brasil*, and though he believed nothing of it, and ‘twas a good way off, yet he had so much Curiosity as to send for it, that ‘twas a very great and a very old one; and when it came first into the Room where the Prince was, with a great many *Dutch-men* about him, it said presently, *What a company of white Men are here?* They asked it what he thought that Man was, pointing at the Prince? It answered, *Some General or other*; when they brought it close to him, he asked it, *D’ou venes vous?* it answered, *De Marinnan*. The Prince, *A qui estes*

vous? The Parrot, *A un Portugais*. Prince, *Que fais tu la?* Parrot, *Je garde les poulles*. The Prince laughed and said, *Vous gardez les poulles?* The Parrot answered, *Ouy, moy et je scay bien faire*; and made the Chuck four or five times that People use to make to Chickens when they call them. I set down the Words of this worthy Dialogue in *French*, just as Prince *Maurice* said them to me. [...] I could not but tell this odd Story, because it is so much out of the way, and from the first hand, and what may pass for a good one [...]"
(II.xxvii.8)

I have cited this story at length to facilitate our appreciation of the different elements that comprise the art of storytelling. We may perhaps consider some observations made by Walter Benjamin in his chapter entitled "The Storyteller," the work from which this section's epigraphs have been taken, to examine this fabulous story about the rational parrot.

While the story proper is *about* the experience of conversing with a seemingly rational parrot, the art of storytelling arguably hinges more on the *telling* than the content. In this regard, Benjamin comments that "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience."⁷ We might here note that there are, in fact, three levels of storytelling involved in the story of the rational parrot: at the centre is Prince Maurice *telling the story* of his own experience to the unnamed "Author of great note";⁸ secondly, this unnamed author

⁷ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 92.

⁸ Although the story is related by William Temple in his *Memoirs of what past in Christendom, from the War begun 1672 to the Peace concluded 1679* (London: R. Chiswell, 1691), 57-60, Locke does not identify Temple by name in the narrative of the *Essay*. Perhaps this points to the gradual anonymity of the storyteller as stories get passed from mouth to mouth; in other words, that the story is said to be "true" simply becomes another dimension of its *telling*. Significant to our discussion of the rhetorical power of *storytelling* is Barbara Shapiro's comment that beginning with Sir William Temple, the unnamed author of the story of the rational parrot, many critics wanted to win back the general reader to the *easily flowing literary narrative* of "perfect history" and jettison the new document-oriented history with its "unfamiliar technical vocabularies, erudite footnotes, marginal citations, lengthy quotations, and scholarly digressions often [resulting] in less and less readable productions." See *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-*

relates the story in his *Memoirs*; finally, the storytelling narrator of the *Essay* relates the story to us. The immediacy of the dialogue between the parrot and Prince Maurice, to which the narrative ultimately leads, is contextualized within the Prince's account of how "he had heard of such an old *Parrot* when he came to *Brasil*, and though he believed nothing of it, and 'twas a good way off, yet he had so much Curiosity as to send for it." Of course, Prince Maurice's account of the circumstances by which he became acquainted with the infamous parrot is itself contextualized within the unnamed author's account of how he himself heard about the story and came to ask Prince Maurice. Recounting the details of bewildered response to the parrot embellishes the story: "those of his Train there, generally concluded it to be Witchery or Possession; and one of his Chaplains, who lived long afterwards in *Holland*, would never from that time endure a *Parrot*, but said, they all had a Devil in them." Given such attention to circumstantial detail, effective storytelling, like experimental narrative, aims at disinterested verisimilitude: "[...] it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. [...] The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader."⁹ Like experimental narratives which aim to be *replicable*, storytelling is always the art of repeating stories:

There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener, the more completely is it integrated into

Century England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 249. I do realize, with regret and irony, that this point made in this lengthy footnote interrupts the narrative thread of my own discussion above.

⁹ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 89.

his own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later.¹⁰

The authenticity of the story is doubly assured: the original author writes “I set down the Words of this worthy Dialogue in *French*, just as Prince *Maurice* said them to me,” while Locke assures us that “I have taken care that the Reader should have the Story at large in the Authors own Words” (II.xxvii.8). But the content of the story itself is highly improbable and “comes with reminders about the instability of oral tradition, the Prince confessing that his story had been distorted as it passed from mouth to mouth.”¹¹ Granted the *truth* of this story may be highly questionable; but therein lies Benjamin’s distinction between the art of storytelling as a form of communication and that of information which “lays claim to prompt verifiability.”¹² In Benjamin’s distinction between storytelling and information as modes of communication, it is as if the demand for “prompt verifiability” as a criterion of authenticity and subsequent acceptance does not challenge, but simply misses the point of storytelling. That is to say, the value of storytelling has more to do with the *telling* in such a way that the story can be repeated again and again with all of the details intact so as to reach an amplitude that information lacks:

It has seldom been realized that the listener’s naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story.¹³

If the force of storytelling as an effective mode of communication lies in the *telling* as opposed to access to immediate verifiability, we as readers and listeners are relegated to a very uncertain position. We must listen patiently to the narrative unfolding of

¹⁰ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 91.

¹¹ Walmsley, “Prince Maurice’s Rational Parrot: Civil Discourse in Locke’s *Essay*,” 417.

¹² Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 89.

¹³ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 97.

events, including the descriptive rendering of the smallest circumstantial and digressive details, without raising objections or brazenly demanding the *point* of the story because intolerant of being so relentlessly imposed upon. If the listener shows any signs of irritation, the story abruptly ends; rather, the narrative unfolding is immediately truncated and the story remains untold. As a form of communication, the art of storytelling *inheres* in the details so that the amplitude achieved by storytelling, as opposed to information, resides in the cumulative effect of narrated details. A story *cannot* be reduced to a *point*--it must be *told* in its entirety. But as readers and listeners, our range of possible responses to a story becomes severely curtailed. We can either listen or not listen. We can accept the story whole or reject it whole. But we cannot *take issue* with a story. In this vein, the art of storytelling works in much the same way as metaphor.

While I realize that different conceptions of what metaphor *is* and *how* metaphor *works* abound,¹⁴ the connection which I see between storytelling and metaphor concerns the way in which both delimit the possible responses of the reader. The *Essay* brims with stories. Some are related as the experience of the narrator:

I was once in a Meeting of very learned and ingenious Physicians, where by chance there arose a Question, whether any Liquor passed through the Filaments of the Nerves. The Debate having been managed a good while, by variety of Arguments on both sides, I (who had been used to suspect, that the greatest part of Disputes were more about the signification of Words, than a real difference in the Conception of Things) desired, That before they went any farther on in this Dispute, they would first examine, and establish amongst them, what the Word *Liquor* signified. (III.ix.16)

I once saw a Creature, that was the Issue of a Cat and a Rat, and had the plain Marks of both about it; wherein Nature appear'd to have followed

¹⁴ See, for instance, the collection of essays in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks.

the Pattern of neither sort alone, but to have jumbled them both together. (III.vi.23)

Stories relating experiences of others also punctuate the text, such as the narrative of the blind man trying to understand the signification of the word scarlet:

A studious blind Man, who had mightily beat his Head about visible Objects, and made use of the explication of his Books and Friends, to understand those names of Light, and Colours, which often came his way; bragg'd one day, That he now understood what *Scarlet* signified. Upon which his Friend demanding, what *Scarlet* was? the blind Man answered, It was like the Sound of a Trumpet. (III.iv.11)

Consider the many narratives Locke includes to illustrate odd behaviours based on the association of ideas:

A Friend of mine knew one perfectly cured of Madness by a very harsh and offensive Operation. The Gentleman, who was thus recovered, with great sense of Gratitude and Acknowledgement, owned the Cure of all his Life after, as the greatest Obligation he could have received; but whatever Gratitude and Reason suggested to him, he could never bear the sight of the Operator: That Image brought back with it the *Idea* of that Agony which he suffer'd from his Hands, which was too mighty and intolerable for him to endure. (II.xxxiii.14)

Instances of this kind are so plentiful every where, that if I add one more, it is only for the pleasant oddness of it. It is of a young Gentleman, who having learnt to Dance, and that to great Perfection, there happened to stand an old Trunk in the Room where he learnt. The *Idea* of this remarkable piece of Houshold-stuff, had so mixed it self with the turns and steps of all his Dances, that though in that Chamber he could Dance excellently well, yet it was only whilst that Trunk was there, nor could he perform well in any other place, unless that, or some such other Trunk had its due position in the Room. If this Story shall be suspected to be dressed up with some comical Circumstances, a little beyond precise Nature; I answer for my self, that I had it some Years since from a very sober and worthy Man, upon his own knowledge, as I report it. (II.xxxiii.16)

One of Locke's favourite stories, cited several times to illustrate the difference between our *ideas* of substances and their *real constitution*, tells of the countryman looking at the famous clock at Strasburg:

And our *Idea* of any individual *Man* would be as far different from what it now is, as is his, who knows all the Springs and Wheels, and other contrivances within, of the famous Clock at *Strasburg*, from that which a gazing Country-man has of it, who barely sees the motion of the Hand, and hears the Clock strike, and observes only some of its outward appearances.
(III.vi.3)

Reminiscent of the literary practices of the Royal Society, many related narratives link an experience to a specific time and place: "Accounts of other people's experiences were cast in the same way as those reported first hand: the veracity of the report clearly depended on the original experience of a specified person on a particular occasion."¹⁵ Like the story of Prince Maurice's conversation with a rational parrot, narratives of the experience of others are related to us as reported to the narrator:

Monsieur *Menage* furnishes us with an Example worth the taking notice of on this occasion. *When the Abbot of St. Martin, says he, was born, he had so little of the Figure of a Man, that it bespoke him rather a Monster. 'Twas for some time under Deliberation, whether he should be baptized or no. However, he was baptized and declared a Man provisionally [till time should shew what he would prove.] Nature had moulded him so untowardly, that he was called all his Life the Abbot Malotru, i.e. Ill shaped.*
(III.vi.26)

Locke interweaves a vast array of stories into the narrative of the *Essay*, of which the above-cited passages are only a sampling. Recalling our earlier discussion of the necessity of *art* to make the understanding its own object, Locke's emphasis on *sight* as analogous to mental perception and his interspersed reflections on his hand that

¹⁵ Dear, 152.

writes¹⁶ lends credence to my argument that Locke constructs a *storytelling narrator* in light of Benjamin's description of the storyteller as an artisan:

That old co-ordination of the soul, the eye, and the hand [...] is that of the artisan which we encounter wherever the art of storytelling is at home. In fact, one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.¹⁷

Certainly Locke, as the *storyteller*, fashions the raw material of experience related by narratives in such a way that they become an integral part of the argument of the *Essay*. But what are we to make of these stories? How are we to respond to the cumulative weight of narrative renderings? What basis do we have by which to decide whether or not to *believe* the many and varied vignettes presented to us? More specifically, how *relevant* is our belief or disbelief of each story's authenticity to the *telling* of it? I suggest that once we have listened to the narrative unfolding of the sequential events of a story, complete with descriptive circumstantial detail, we can only *accept* or *reject* it whole—we cannot *refute* it.

Storytelling, as a *descriptive* account of experience, does not lay claim to the *accurate* representation of internal essences; rather, storytelling provides an *explanatory* description of phenomena. Similarly, metaphor offers a *way of thinking* that does not lay claim to accurate representation—metaphors cannot be *refuted*; they can only be replaced. Like a compilation of metaphors, then, the cumulative weight of anecdotal vignettes interwoven with the narrative of the *Essay* proper pattern the pages of the treatise. The text becomes almost an album for holding recoverable

¹⁶ For specific references to the *hand* that writes, see IV.x.19; IV.xi.7. For references to reflections on writing this treatise, see II.viii.6; II.xxvii.16; II.xxxi.6; II.xxxi.12; III.vi.4-5; IV.xi.2; IV.xi.9.

¹⁷ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 108.

memories. Similar to a natural history collection, the compilation of expository narratives renders the *Essay* a kind of storehouse or museum for miscellaneous stories of experience in the world.

If we concede that Locke emerges as an effective storyteller who interweaves multiple narrative strands, I would like to suggest that we extend this conception of *storytelling* to the wider unfolding narrative of the *Essay*. In this regard, trying to understand the process of understanding itself becomes a kind of *telling*. Through the narrative voice of the *storyteller*, Locke constructs a plausible narrative of how we come to form *ideas* about the world that convincingly *explains* common experience; the power of storytelling resides in the plausibility of its narrative rendering. What finally matters in the art of storytelling is not prompt verifiability, but the expansive scope of the storyteller's vision, whose skill can interweave the discrete particulars into a comprehensive and beautiful whole. Consider Locke's remarks on his project that close Book I:

But in the future part of this Discourse, designing to raise an Edifice uniform, and consistent with it self, as far as my own Experience and Observation will assist me, I hope, to erect it on such a Basis, that I shall not need to shore it up with props and buttresses, leaning on borrowed or begg'd foundations: Or at least, if mine prove a Castle in the Air, I will endeavour it shall be *all of a piece, and hang together*.

(I.iv.25 emphasis mine)

Locke's desire that his text be "consistent with it self," that "it shall be all of a piece, and hang together," suggests to me the desire to *tell a good story*. Proposing to disclose by reproducing the thoughts of his own mind which we are repeatedly told are "out of the common road," Locke as *storyteller* becomes implicitly aligned with those in the *Essay* more explicitly identified as storytellers: "I could not but tell this odd Story, because it is so much out of the way, and from the first hand, and what may

pass for a good one" (II.xxvii.8). Because Locke proposes to trace *bis own* thoughts in writing, the story which he spins in the pages of the *Essay* is "from the first hand" and, if convincing enough, "may pass for a good one."

Locke's prefatory exhortation for us not to condemn the work without reading the whole can thus be seen as a request for indulgence from the reader to listen patiently to the *whole* narration so that its *telling* can work its magic on us: "the reader must suspend to some extent his own disbeliefs; he must be receptive, open, ready to receive the clues."¹⁸ As Wayne Booth points out, the success of fiction depends on procuring the willingness of the reader, at least provisionally, to *go along with the story*: "any story will be unintelligible unless it includes, however subtly, the amount of telling necessary not only to make us aware of the value system which gives it its meaning but, more important, to make us willing to accept that value system, at least temporarily."¹⁹ To this end, Locke posits as the impetus of his enquiry the desire to understand more comprehensively the limits of our cognitive faculties which God has deigned sufficient to enable us to live virtuous lives:

Men have Reason to be well satisfied with what God hath thought fit for them, since he has given them (as St. *Peter* says,) *πάντα πρὸς ζωὴν καὶ εὐσεβείαν*, Whatsoever is necessary for the Conveniences of Life, and Information of Vertue; and has put within the reach of their Discovery the comfortable Provision for this Life and the Way that leads to a better.
(I.i.5)

The value system in which Locke thus frames his project presupposes divine intention in providing us with faculties adequate to the task of determining that which human beings are capable of knowing *so that* they can decide how they should try to live. In keeping with the prefatory positioning of the text as *fallible*, Locke presupposes that

¹⁸ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 112.

¹⁹ Booth, 112.

our cognitive faculties *are* and *always will be* limited—that our reach will *always* exceed our grasp. However, his implicit rejection of philosophical aspirations towards absolute knowledge is contextualized within the premise that God, the wise contriver of us all, has fitted us with the proper faculties in due proportion to enable us to live productively and virtuously in the world. Within this Christian providential vision, it would be blasphemous to shun God’s gifts simply because human fallibility forecloses our attainment of divine omniscience:

Men may find Matter sufficient to busy their Heads, and employ their Hands with Variety, Delight, and Satisfaction; if they will not boldly quarrel with their own Constitution, and throw away the Blessings their Hands are fill’d with, because they are not big enough to grasp every thing. We shall not have much Reason to complain of the narrowness of our Minds, if we will but employ them about what may be of use to us; for of that they are very capable: And it will be an unpardonable, as well as Childish Peevishness, if we undervalue the Advantages of our Knowledge, and neglect to improve it to the ends for which it was given us, because there are some Things that are set out of the reach of it.

(I.i.5)

Presupposing the divinely-ordained fallibility of human knowledge, Locke offers his enquiry as a corrective to futile wrangling in the dark:

Thus Men, extending their Enquiries beyond their Capacities, and letting their Thoughts wander in those depths, where they can find no sure Footing; ‘tis no Wonder, that they raise Questions, and multiply Disputes, which never coming to any clear Resolution, are proper only to continue and increase their Doubts, and to confirm them at last in perfect Scepticism.

(I.i.7)

Locke is arguably concerned with more than discerning the extent of our cognitive faculties—he is concerned with how people then *act* based on what will always be limited knowledge: “Our Business here is not to know all things, but those which

concern our Conduct” (I.i.6). In a passage that perhaps encapsulates Locke’s desire to dispel fractious sectarian strife, Locke articulates the aspirations of his text:

If by this Enquiry into the Nature of the Understanding, I can discover the Powers thereof; *how far* they reach; to what things they are in any Degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use, to prevail with the busy Mind of Man, to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its Comprehension; to stop, when it is at the utmost Extent of its Tether; and to sit down in a quiet Ignorance of those Things, which, upon Examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our Capacities. (I.i.4)

Presumably Locke procures our assent to his proposal that directing our energies to determining our proper role within a Christian vision of divine providence is a worthy endeavour; securing our agreement with the implicit value system thus becomes, as Booth notes, a precondition for our willingness to suspend our disbelief to go along with the story. As Locke implores, “I must therefore beg a little truce with prejudice, and the forbearance of censure till I have been heard out in the sequel of this Discourse” (I.iii.28). The space that Locke, as *storyteller*, thus carves out for himself becomes the opportunity to convince us through the effective *telling* of a plausible narrative of how we come to hold ideas about the world.

What is common to more traditionally philosophical ratiocination and the narrative mode of *storytelling* that I think Locke consciously employs is that both aspire to provide an *account of origins*. But the task which Locke sets for himself is doubly challenging because he must offer a plausible narrative that not only makes sense of our everyday experience of the world, but also accounts for how we, in the seventeenth century, have arrived at such a state of heated conflict over sectarian differences. As opposed to providing a string of logically linked abstract and universal principles, Locke spins a yarn that is more deeply concerned with reconciling the

dissension that has generated so much bitterness and chaos. But in order to write out a new plausible account of origins, Locke must first clean the *tabula rasa* of any antecedently imprinted characters purporting to serve as the foundations of all knowledge. While the whole of Book I argues against the existence of innate principles engraven on the mind by the finger of God, what is surely the crucial point made repeatedly is that the incontrovertible existence of sectarian strife belies the postulate that both the *idea of God* and the concomitant knowledge of what God commands as a principle of action are innate: “The difference there is amongst Men in their practical Principles, is so evident, that, I think, I need say no more to evince, that it will be impossible to find any innate Moral Rules, by this mark of general assent” (I.iii.14). The absence of consensus regarding how to live to fulfil our Christian role denies innatism: “And, I suppose, there cannot be any thing more ridiculous, than to say, that Children have this practical Principle innate, *That God is to be worshipped*; and yet, that they know not what that Worship of God is, which is their Duty” (I.iv.7).²⁰ But what Locke also uses to counter any claim to innatism is the *explanatory power* of an alternate account of how we acquire knowledge in the world:

It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced Readers of the falseness of this Supposition, *if I should only shew (as I hope I shall in the following Parts of this Discourse) how Men, barely by the Use of their natural Faculties, may attain to all the Knowledge they have*, without the help of any innate Impressions; and may arrive at Certainty, without any such Original Notions or Principles. (I.ii.1 emphasis mine)

The argument that an alternate explanation, or plausible narrative, can replace the prevailing explanation based on innate ideas suggests Locke’s awareness of the *metaphorical* nature of both accounts of origin. The story which Locke proceeds to *tell* in Books II and III regarding the complicated acquisition and communication of

²⁰ See especially I.iii.3; I.iii.14-22; I.iv.7-17.

knowledge ought to be accepted simply because it offers a simpler and plausible account of origins which also explains the radical differences at the heart of heated sectarian strife.

I think it is important here to emphasize how important is Locke's concern to *account for* and provide an *alternative to* fractious sectarian strife as the motivating impetus of the *Essay*. Like experimental narratives, the *Essay*, as I have argued earlier, constitutes a deliberate textual intervention into an otherwise natural process such that the forces impinging on this intervention are controlled. Regarding experiments and the aspiration towards verisimilitude in experimental narratives, we might briefly recall that the creation of an artificial process in such a way as to force the experiment to answer an isolable question presupposes that singular experiments can tell us something potentially useful about the world that would not otherwise be observable. In a similar vein, Molineux's narrative is designed in such a way as to answer the specific question of whether or not a blind man could distinguish a sphere from a cube by sight if his sight were restored. It seems to me that the isolable query which Locke poses as the ostensible origin of the book is "to examine our own Abilities, [to] see, what Objects our Understandings [are], or [are] not fitted to deal with" (Epistle, 7). Concerned with examining "the discerning Faculties of a Man, as they are employ'd about the Objects, which they have to do with" (I.i.2), Locke presents himself as questioning the constitution of mind. Locke's questions might be paraphrased as: "What are our cognitive faculties capable of? Can mind be an object of its own thought? Is it possible to observe mind as a thing in a world of objects?" Although examining the limits of our cognitive faculties is the putative impetus of the *Essay*, I would like to suggest that reading the treatise as a *story* that "contains, openly, or

covertly, something useful”²¹ intimates two *other* isolable questions towards which the narrative is driven—namely, “How is it that we, in the seventeenth century, have arrived at this moment of heated and fractious sectarian conflict?” and “Can we find a way out of this intolerable deadlock of intolerance?” By telling a persuasive story that insistently involves the reader’s assent to common experience, including the experience of reading *this text*, Locke, as storyteller, *rewrites* the cultural story, fashions an intricately-woven tapestry, that aspires to be *useful* “in directing our Thoughts in the search of other Things” (I.i.1). I suggest that the search for “other things” be *read* as a search for an alternate way of *talking* about mind, ideas, and language that enables a change in the way we think about thinking and the certainty of knowledge. Since our belief systems are based on and justified by whatever we hold to be true about the world, and since we act in accordance with our belief systems, changing the way we *talk* about thinking has profound implications for how we individually and collectively *act* to make a humane, peaceable, and ultimately meaningful world.



II. LOCKE’S STORY OF ‘MIND

Considering my earlier claim that the power of a story resides in its *telling*, any attempt to paraphrase or reduce the story told in the *Essay* to a series of points ineluctably robs the full narration of its cumulatively persuasive force. Indeed, the

²¹ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 86.

persuasiveness of Locke's story certainly inheres in the breadth and complexity of its telling. Nonetheless, I will attempt to sketch out Locke's story of the acquisition of ideas and the complicated role of language while fully realizing that my own narrative rendering stands in a metaphorical relation to the full exposition in the *Essay*. Because I cannot here reproduce the scope of Locke's argument, for the purpose of this section concerned with establishing the narrative voice of a storyteller, I will attend to those passages in which I think the rhetoric of storytelling most fully resounds. More specifically, I will attempt to identify the major narrative movements to show that the persuasiveness of Locke's story inheres in relating the parts in a *particular* way--in its *telling*.

It is in Books II and III that the majority of the *Essay*'s anecdotal vignettes occur, which is appropriate because therein unfolds the larger story of the acquisition and communication of ideas. Having argued against the doctrine that original characters are antecedently imprinted on the mind in Book I, Locke begins his alternate story of mind by raising the question of how human beings come to hold ideas. As an account of origins, the story starts by proposing a way of thinking about the original constitution of mind and how ideas first enter it:

Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*; How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From *Experience*: In that, all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives it self. Our Observation employ'd either about *external, sensible Objects*; or about the *internal Operations of our Minds, perceived and reflected on by our selves, is that, which supplies our Understandings with all the materials of thinking*. These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the *Ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring.

(II.i.2)

Since the sequential ordering of the parts of Locke's plausible narrative depends upon our acceptance of this initial metaphor of mind, Locke reiterates this premise throughout the *Essay*:

These two, I say, *viz.* External, Material things, as the Objects of *SENSATION*; and the Operations of our own Minds within, as the Objects of *REFLECTION*, are, to me, the only Originals, from whence all our *Ideas* take their beginnings. (II.i.4)

Part of Locke's persuasive strategy of procuring assent to this plausible explanation of the origin of our ideas inheres in appealing to the reader to simply consider the natural progression of acquiring ideas observable in children:

He that attentively considers the state of a *Child*, at his first coming into the World, will have little reason to think him stored with plenty of *Ideas*, that are to be the matter of his future Knowledge. 'Tis by degrees he comes to be furnished with them. (II.i.6)

Locke models the acquisition of ideas on the *archetypal narrative* of the natural development of a child to adulthood; in this vein, Locke's appeal to our *familiarity* with this progressive *narrative* from innocence to experience early in Book II acts as a kind of prologue to the main story:

Follow a *Child* from its Birth, and observe the alterations that time makes, and you shall find, as the Mind by the Senses comes more and more to be furnished with *Ideas*, it comes to be more and more awake; thinks more, the more it has matter to think on. After some time, it begins to know the Objects, which being most familiar with it, have made lasting Impressions. Thus it comes, by degrees, to know the Persons it daily converses with, and distinguish them from Strangers; which are Instances and Effects of its coming to retain and distinguish the *Ideas* the Senses convey to it: And so we may observe, how the Mind, *by degrees*, improves in these, and *advances* to the Exercise of those other Faculties of *Enlarging*, *Compounding*, and *Abstracting* its

Ideas, and of reasoning about them, and reflecting upon all these, of which I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter.

(II.i.22)

Just as the movement from innocence to experience presupposes temporality and linearity, stories are always embedded in time--the narrative structure itself presupposes a diachronic unfolding. Working within the diachronic structure of narrative, Locke proceeds to tell an *alternate story* of how we come to acquire simple ideas, how complex ideas grow out of simple ideas, and how language complicates the process of adequately representing and communicating ideas to others.

Recalling the presupposition of divine providence that immediately accounts for *why* we have the kind of bodies and cognitive faculties that we do, Locke's story aspires to provide an explanation of *how* we form ideas and come to hold certain beliefs about the world. Throughout, the injunction is to concern ourselves with *human* understanding by attending to what we know about our own experience as opposed to speculating about the possibilities of knowledge that lie beyond the ken of our capabilities. To this end, the formation of simple ideas becomes integrally tied to our human sensory faculties:

This is the Reason why, though we cannot believe it impossible to God, to make a Creature with other Organs, and more ways to convey into the Understanding the notice of Corporeal things, than those five, as they are usually counted, which he has given to Man: Yet I think, it is *not possible*, for any one to *imagine* any other *Qualities* in Bodies, howsoever constituted, whereby they can be taken notice of, besides Sounds, Tastes, Smells, visible and tangible Qualities. And had Mankind been made with but four Senses, the Qualities then, which are the Object of the Fifth Sense, had been as far from our Notice, Imagination, and Conception, as now any *belonging to a Sixth, Seventh, or Eighth Sense*, can possibly be: which, whether yet some other Creatures, in some other Parts of this vast, and stupendious Universe, may not have, will be a great Presumption to deny.

(II.iii.3)

While Locke's account of sensory experience may seem simple, almost simple-minded, one of the first demonstrations of his storytelling virtuosity involves persuading us to think in an entirely different way about our ideas. Indeed, the initial persuasiveness of Locke's story arguably resides in its seeming simplicity.

Locke, however, purposefully complicates any confidence we might have in the certainty of accurate correspondence of our simple sensory ideas by suggesting that the ideas in our minds have an independent existence from the external objects we see, hear, touch, taste, or smell: "Whatsoever the Mind perceives in it self, or is the immediate object of Perception, Thought, or Understanding, that I call *Idea*; and the Power to produce any *Idea* in our mind, I call *Quality* of the Subject wherein that power is" (II.viii.8). Locke carefully separates not only our *ideas* from objects proper, but he sets our ideas at yet another remove by suggesting that our *ideas* correspond to *qualities* that are not properly *in the objects* but are powers that can produce different sensations in us: "Such *Qualities*, which in truth are nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their *primary Qualities*, *i.e.* by the Bulk, Figure, Texture, and Motion of their insensible parts, as Colours, Sounds, Tastes, *etc.* These I call *secondary Qualities*" (II.viii.10). Locke quietly ushers in the corpuscular hypothesis as a way of conceptualizing the constitution of material objects such that the particular arrangement of insensible particles somehow causes objects to have *primary qualities*, such as bulk, figure, texture, and motion, and *secondary qualities*, such as colours, sounds, and tastes. Although Locke provides numerous examples such as wax, snow, fire, or manna to illustrate his claim that our ideas are in *us* as opposed to *in the objects*, what I think is indicative of the power of his persuasive *telling* is how he positions the underlying corpuscular hypothesis as not only explanatory but somehow *growing out of our*

experience. That is, if Locke were to employ the rigorously linear and logical methodology of traditional philosophic discourse, it seems to me that he would be obliged to establish as a *first principle* the notion that all things are constituted by insensible particles in order to then show the *necessary causal relation* between the particular arrangement of these insensible corpuscles and the existence of primary and secondary qualities. But Locke clearly sidesteps this necessity to establish first principles by focusing his inquiry on ideas as they *are in the understanding* which carefully elides the necessity to explain first causes: “These the Understanding, in its view of them, [i.e. ideas of heat, cold, light, darkness] considers all as distinct positive *Ideas*, without taking notice of the Causes that produce them: *which is an enquiry not belonging to the Idea, as it is in the Understanding; but to the nature of the things existing without us*” (II.viii.2 emphasis mine). Indeed, because Locke positions his project as an attempt to understand the *understanding*, not the natural causes of the constitution of external objects, he effectively reverses the logical sequence of philosophical argument in order to *tell* a more persuasive story that moves from concrete experiences to a plausible explanation. By procuring assent to common *experience* as a starting point, the kind of *storytelling* that I think Locke consciously employs, like experimental narrative, effectively institutes a new mode of communication other than logic and dialectic:

For Aristotle, if one began from premises that were certain and proceeded by arguments that were logically correct, one arrived at a demonstration of truth. This was the realm of logic. If one began from plausible but uncertain premises and proceeded by logical argument, one had entered the realm of dialectic.²²

²² Shapiro, 230-1.

By introducing observable *experience* as a verifiable starting point, Locke permutes the modes of argumentation employed in logic and dialectic; that is, he works from *experience* to develop a *logical* narrative to arrive at a *plausible* explanation.

The logic of the *Essay* works by procuring assent to initial propositions drawn from the experience of all. To demonstrate the rhetorical effectiveness of Locke's *telling* that draws on our common experience as opposed to abstract concepts, consider how much we welcome the narrative shift back to that of storytelling from the stilted aridity of what is perhaps mock philosophical discourse:

If it were the design of my present Undertaking, to enquire into the natural Causes and manner of Perception, I should offer this as a reason *why a privative cause might*, in some cases at least, *produce a positive Idea, viz.* That all Sensation being produced in us, only by different degrees and modes of Motion in our animal Spirits, variously agitated by external Objects, the abatement of any former motion, must as necessarily produce a new sensation, as the variation or increase of it; and so introduce a new *Idea*, which depends on a different motion of the animal Spirits in that Organ.

But whether this be so, or no, I will not here determine, but appeal to every one's own Experience, whether the shadow of a Man, though it consists of nothing but the absence of Light (and the more the absence of Light is, the more discernible is the shadow) does not, when a Man looks on it, cause as clear and positive an *Idea* in his mind, as a Man himself, though covered over with clear Sun-shine?

(II.viii.4-5)

Although Locke's use of the corpuscular hypothesis has been subject to derision,²³ I think that Locke interweaves the hypothesis of insensible particles with his *telling* precisely because of its *explanatory* power. In this regard, Peter Alexander argues that Locke finds in the corpuscular hypothesis, with its distinction between primary and

²³ Rorty specifically has effectively mocked Locke's confused thinking that an analogue of Newton's particle mechanics for "inner space" could be used to make mind the subject matter of a science of man--moral philosophy as opposed to natural philosophy. See *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 137.

secondary qualities, a working model by which to construct a plausible and complete account of the natural world and its appearance to us:

Sense experience apparently shows us various different qualities of bodies. Is there any way of separating these qualities into two groups, one as small as possible and the other as large as possible, such that the smaller group can plausibly be made the basis for the explanation of the larger? This is a central question and it is a question addressed to the understanding rather than the senses: *it concerns conceivable explanations rather than qualitative differences in our sensations.*²⁴

Precisely because I think Locke is telling a good story that *explains* our experience of the world, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities that was essential to the corpuscular hypothesis could be offered as a viable and plausible *explanation* of our experience of observable properties in external objects. But the persuasiveness of the argument lies in its *telling* so that our acceptance of the corpuscular hypothesis as a plausible explanation becomes an *effect* of Locke's narrative which elides the fact that it has, in fact, *structured* his narrative. Like Molineux's relation of whether a blind man could distinguish a cube from a sphere by sight if his sight were restored, and experimental narratives generally, the acceptance of a *plausible explanation* designed to answer a *specific question* largely depends on the persuasive arrangement of the narrative's sequential parts. While I think the larger plausible narrative of the *Essay* is designed specifically both to *account for* and *provide an alternative to* fractious sectarian strife, that larger story consists in a number of smaller plausible narratives designed to answer questions such as "how do we form ideas?" "what is the role of language?" "what is the relation between words and thoughts?" Like a compilation of metaphors, or the arrangement of discrete narratives in a particular order, the

²⁴ "Boyle and Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities," in *Locke on Human Understanding*, ed. I.C. Tipton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 68.

persuasive force of the *story* told in the *Essay* resides in the cumulative weight of plausible explanations.

Although I have contrasted the art of storytelling to the rigorously linear and logical method of more traditional philosophical argumentation, the amplitude achieved by a persuasive *telling* certainly hinges on creating an internal logic by setting the discrete parts in a particular sequential order. What I will examine in the remainder of this section concerned with Locke's story of mind is how the discrete experiences of forming simple and complex ideas are arranged in a new way within the *a priori* parameters of divine providence. More specifically, I think Locke's story works holistically to redescribe our conception of language--but we are narratively led through a succession of redescrptions so that Locke's ultimate description of language, including its origin and history, makes sense of the discrete descriptions of cognitive experience that pattern the preceding pages. In keeping with my earlier proposal that Locke consciously equates *language* and *mind* as equally indeterminate, invisible, and ineffable processes whose ultimate *unrepresentability* is figured forth through the inadequacy of words on the page, I think that Locke finds in language a sophisticated trope by which to reify the complexity of our cognitive processes. Locke's story about mind is thus largely a story about language.

What becomes essential to the development of this persuasive story is that we are constitutionally unable to discern the real constitution of *anything*. Consequently, all of our knowledge derives from observable properties. Discerning the real constitution of things would require not simply sharper faculties, but different *kinds* of faculties altogether. But Locke appeals, as he does repeatedly throughout the *Essay*, to the contextualizing value system of divine providence as a kind of consoling explanation for our limited capabilities. Indeed, the *narrative form* presupposes an

account of origins that *simultaneously* posits a point of closure, or purpose, towards which the story is narratively driven. What establishes the parameters of Locke's story, then, is the providential vision that God, the *author* of us all, has provided us with the necessary faculties in due proportion to enable us to function in the world and decide how to live virtuously according to God's command:

The infinite wise Contriver of us, and all things about us, hath fitted our Senses, Faculties, and Organs, to the conveniences of Life, and the Business we have to do here. We are able, by our Senses, to know, and distinguish things; and to examine them so far, as to apply them to our Uses, and several ways to accommodate the Exigences of this Life. We have insight enough into their admirable Contrivances, and wonderful Effects, to admire, and magnify the Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of their Author.
(II.xxiii.12)

Again, the persuasiveness of the *telling* depends on ordering the discrete parts in such a way that what is presupposed as a *given*, divine providence, appears as a plausible *explanation* for what we can concede to be true about our experience; that is, by seeming to grow naturally out of our limited experience, the status of divine providence as a *conclusion* becomes superimposed on, thereby obscuring, its status as a *premise*. Similar to Molineux's narrative, in order to persuasively procure our assent to this plausible explanation, Locke leads us through a number of mental experiments:

If our Sense of Hearing were but 1000 times quicker than it is, how would a perpetual noise distract us. And we should in the quietest Retirement, be less able to sleep or meditate, than in the middle of a Sea-fight. Nay, if that most instructive of our Senses, Seeing, were in any Man 1000, or 100000 times more acute than it is now by the best Microscope, things several millions of times less than the smallest Object of his sight now, would then be visible to his naked Eye, and so he would come nearer to the Discovery of the Texture and Motion of the minute Parts of corporeal things; and in many of them, probably get *Ideas* of their internal Constitutions: But then he would be in a quite

different World from other People: Nothing would appear the same to him, and others: The visible *Ideas* of every thing would be different. So that I doubt, Whether he, and the rest of Men, could discourse concerning the Objects of Sight; or have any Communication about Colours, their appearances being so wholly different.

(II.xxiii.12)

The conclusion, then, that “God has no doubt made us so, as is best for us in our present Condition” (II.xxiii.13) holds powerfully persuasive force if we concede that sharper hearing would preclude rest and microscopical eyes would not help us function in the market. But what is *structurally* significant to the inner logic and persuasive force of the unfolding story is our acceptance of three plausible hypotheses: our *ideas* of things are derived from observable properties; the real constitution of things, the arrangement of insensible particles in which inhere primary and secondary qualities, is *unknowable* to us because we do not possess the *kind* of faculties necessary for such discernment; and God has fitted us with the appropriate faculties in due proportion to enable us to function in the world. By radically destabilizing the correspondence between ideas and things, and denying any possibility of accessing the *real constitution* of anything by which to assess the accuracy of our ideas, Locke sets up his ensuing discussion of complex ideas and language *so that* sectarian differences become understandable in an entirely new way.

Given that simple ideas are the basis of all of our knowledge, the formation of complex ideas out of simple ones seems a logical, even natural, progression: “As simple *Ideas* are observed to exist in several Combinations united together; so the Mind has a power to consider several of them united together, as one *Idea*; and that not only as they are united in external Objects, but as it self has join’d them” (II.xii.1). It is important to the logic of the story that we concede both that complex ideas grow out of simple ideas and that the possible combinations of simple ideas are *infinite*.

Indeed, the formation of complex ideas is posited not simply as a function of mind, but as a *natural* and *necessary* function; arguing again from effect to cause, from the observation that human beings form complex ideas to the plausible explanation that compounding ideas is necessary to facilitate human interaction, Locke anticipates the problems of slippage and ambiguity in language:

That the great Concernment of Men being with men one amongst another, the Knowledge of Men, and their Actions, and the signifying of them to one another, was most necessary; and therefore they made *Ideas* of Actions nicely modified, and gave those complex *Ideas* names, that they might the more easily record, and discourse of those things, they were daily conversant in, without long Ambages and Circumlocutions; and that the things they were continually to give and receive information about, might be the *easier* and *quicker* understood.

(II.xviii.7 emphasis mine)

The ease and efficiency afforded by compounding simple ideas into complex ones certainly seems a plausible explanation for a *necessary* if not altogether *natural* act of mind; however, therein lies the rub. Given the primordial instability of our simple ideas derived from observable properties, our constitutional lack of the proper *kind* of faculties to discern real essences against which to verify those simple ideas, the potentially *infinite* combinations of simple ideas into complex ones, and the *necessity* to compound ideas in order to function, is it any wonder there is such a divergence of opinion in the world? Once we add to that lethal brew Locke's original assertion that men's minds are *naturally* different--"*We have our Understandings no less different than our Palates; and he that thinks the same Truth shall be equally relished by every one in the same dress, may as well hope to feast every one with the same sort of Cookery*"(Epistle, 8)--we increasingly begin to understand *why* and *how* so much controversy abounds.

Although Locke adopts the unaffected pose of spontaneous realization of the connection between *words* and *ideas*, the rhetorical import of his whole story is *predicated* on a specific conception of language. Two passages best demonstrate Locke's attempt to make the problems inherent in language usage complicating the communication of ideas seem epiphanic. The first closes Book II:

...but upon a nearer approach, I find, that there is so close a connexion between *Ideas* and Words; and our abstract *Ideas*, and general Words, have so constant a relation one to another, that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our Knowledge, which all consists in Propositions, without considering, first, the Nature, Use, and Signification of Language; which therefore must be the business of the next Book. (II.xxxiii.19)

The second reiterates the epiphanic moment almost *two thirds* of the way through Book III:

I must confess then, that when I first began this Discourse of the Understanding, and a good while after, I had not the least Thought, that any Consideration of Words was at all necessary to it. But when having passed over the Original and Composition of our *Ideas*, I began to examine the Extent and Certainty of our Knowledge, I found it had so near a connexion with Words, that unless their force and manner of Signification were first well observed, there could be very little said clearly and pertinently concerning Knowledge: which being conversant about Truth, had constantly to do with Propositions. (III.ix.21)

We might take a digressive moment here to consider Locke's comments on words following the second passage cited above as indicative of my wider argument that Locke involves the reader in an *experiential text*. Locke says:

And though *it* terminated in Things, yet it was for the most part so much by the intervention of Words, that *they* seem'd scarce separable from our general Knowledge. At least they interpose themselves so much between *our* Understandings, *and* the Truth, which *it* would

contemplate and apprehend, that like the *Medium* through which visible Objects pass, *their* Obscurity and Disorder does not seldom cast a mist before our Eyes, and impose upon our Understandings.

(III.ix.21 emphasis mine)

Although this passage may seem to communicate clearly that language is nebulous and obfuscating, I would like to suggest that *grammatically* the whole passage is neither *clear* nor *distinct*; rather, the internal ambiguity caused by the structure of the sentences, the pronouns, commas, and tropes render the passage difficult to decipher grammatically.²⁵ Indeed, the whole concept of a *pronoun* suggests the ambiguous referentiality of words. For instance, in the first phrase, “though *it* terminated in Things,” does the *it* refer to *knowledge* or *truth* in the preceding sentence? The personification of words *interposing themselves* seems to structure the complexity of the next sentence. Given the comma after “our Understandings” and the plural of understandings, I would argue that the *grammatical sense* of the two parts *between which* words interpose themselves is not immediately clear. Do words interpose themselves between our understandings? Or do they interpose themselves between our understandings and *the truth*? Or all three? In the next clause, “which *it* would contemplate and apprehend,” if the *it* refers back to *our understandings*, the *it* not only *homogenizes* the plurality (and diversity) of our *understandings* into a grammatical *singular* (which is perhaps part of the point), but the *it* also forces *our understandings* as a singular into a different grammatical relation with *the truth*. That is, *our understandings* and *the truth* are not equal parties in the grammatical relation *between* our understandings *and* the truth if the *it* of the following clause forces *our understandings* into a grammatical *subject position* that “would contemplate and

²⁵ Although Paul de Man has read this passage as pointing to the figurative power of language that makes language nebulous and obfuscating, I think that it is significant that in his citation of the passage, the commas which I have highlighted are omitted while new ones are inserted in spots that generally make the passage read much smoother. See de Man, 12-3.

apprehend *the truth* (as a direct object). In the following extended simile from which we can *infer* that light is compared to language as a *medium*, two more obfuscations arise. The use of the phrase “does not seldom” instead of, say, “often” constitutes the kind of periphrastic construction using a double negative that *actually does* interpose more words than are needed. There is also confusion regarding the referent of *their* in the phrase “their Obscurity and Disorder.” Does the *their* refer to the *visible objects* that pass through the medium, or does it refer to *words*? The referent is certainly *not* clear, as presumably neither the objects nor the words are. Moreover, if the proper referent is *words*, the *their* of “their Obscurity and Disorder” refers back to *they* of the clause “they interpose themselves” which itself refers back to *words* in the previous sentence. My point is simply that deciphering this seemingly clear passage is in fact *grammatically* difficult. The complexity of its grammatical construction *enacts* the ambiguity of language usage; further, deciphering the grammatical complexity of the passage arguably involves the reader in the complicated, labyrinthine process of understanding while intimating the more insidious implications of assuming certainty of the signification of others’ words. Such a rhetorical demonstration demands our attentiveness to how we read all of the other *words*, and the structural function of *language* itself, in the treatise.

Let us then return to our analysis of how Locke’s whole story is *predicated* on a specific conception of language. Like the other narratives we have examined, the rhetorical effectiveness of the *telling* makes its proposed explanation seem discovered, thereby eliding the fact that it has *structured* the narrative. Locke’s suspicion that “the greatest part of Disputes were more about the signification of Words, than a real difference in the Conception of Things” (III.ix.16) implicates language in the unfolding narrative of the acquisition and communication of ideas long before we arrive at Book

III. As early as Book I, Chapter 2, for instance, Locke says: "For Words being but empty sounds, any farther than they are signs of our *Ideas*, we cannot but assent to them, as they correspond to those *Ideas* we have, but no farther than that" (I.ii.23). Similarly, in Book II, Locke's contention that disputes often originate in the ambiguous use of words belies his ostensibly epiphanic moment in Book III:

For I am apt to think, that Men, when they come to examine them, find their simple *Ideas* all generally to agree, though in discourse with one another, they perhaps confound one another with different Names. I imagine, that *Men* who abstract their Thoughts, and do well examine the *Ideas* of their own Minds, *cannot much differ in thinking*; however, they may perplex themselves with words, according to the way of speaking of the several Schools, Sects, they have been bred up in.
(II.xiv.27)

I think that Locke's oft-repeated distinction between *ideas* and *terms*, and his concomitant assertion that futile wrangling amounts to disputation over *words*, creates a kind of *cognitive groove* in the reader so that, arriving at Book III, he or she will not balk at what, in the seventeenth century, is still a highly contentious issue—defining the relation between language and thought.²⁶ But the *structural* significance I am ascribing to Locke's eventual assertion that words are not *naturally connected* to ideas but serve as *signs of ideas* is that the persuasive force of the developing argument hinges on leading up to this conception of language as a system of arbitrary signifiers.

To briefly recap our dire cognitive straits thus far, our simple ideas derived from observable properties are always fallible because we are constitutionally unable to access real essences against which to verify the accuracy of our ideas, the potentially *infinite* combinations of simple ideas into complex ones along with the *necessity* to

²⁶ See Shapiro, esp. "Language, Communication, and Literature," 227-66, and Isabel Rivers, esp. "The conflict of languages in the mid-seventeenth century," in *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), VI: 5-24.

compound ideas in order to function, and the *natural* differences of men's minds all combine to radically destabilize the certainty of our ideas. This calamitous cognitive situation gets worse when we concur with Locke's observation that some kinds of ideas which the mind is capable of forming are not related to any natural phenomena:

But if we attentively consider these *Ideas* I call *mixed Modes*, we are now speaking of, we shall find their Original quite different. *The Mind* often *exercises an active Power in the making these several Combinations*. For it being once furnished with simple *Ideas*, it can put them together in several Compositions, and so make variety of complex *Ideas*, without examining whether they exist so together in Nature.

(II.xxii.2)

Since none of us have immediate and unmediated access to another's mind, the particular combination and arrangement of simple ideas in *mixed modes* becomes, like the particular arrangement of corpuscles constituting material things, unknowable; analogously, then, we can only ever form our own *ideas* of others' *ideas*, especially those for which no standard exists in nature, based on *observable properties*—in short, *words*.

But the spiralling confusion to which we are narratively led hinges on the necessary dissociation of *words* and *ideas* as independent processes. To this end, Locke asserts the existence of complex ideas in the minds of men before language even enters the picture:

For it is evident, that in the beginning of Languages and Societies of Men, several of those complex *Ideas*, which were consequent to the Constitutions established amongst them, must needs have been in the Minds of Men, before they existed any where else; and than many names that stood for such complex *Ideas*, were in use, and so those *Ideas* framed, before the Combinations they stood for, ever existed.

(II.xxii.2)

Although Locke allows that “now that Languages are made” (II.xxii.3) we can try to understand complex ideas such as *murder* or *sacrilege* without having actually witnessed them by explicating the combination of simple ideas collected under the complex one, what is structurally important to our cognitive saga is that the collection of ideas comprising a complex idea is neither self-evident nor fixed. Because particular combinations of ideas are determined by the customs and conveniences of everyday life, those collections of ideas become radically unstable. To procure our assent to this unavoidable tangle of individual complex ideas, Locke points to the observation “*that there are in every Language many particular words, which cannot be rendred by any one single word of another*” (II.xxii.6). Even within the same language, we can never be completely certain of the combination of simple ideas comprising complex ones:

Hence also we may see the Reason, *Why Languages constantly change*, take up new, and lay by old terms. Because change of Customs and Opinions bringing with it new Combinations of *Ideas*, which it is necessary frequently to think on, and talk about, new names, to avoid long descriptions, are annexed to them; and so they become new Species of complex Modes. What a number of different *Ideas* are by this means wrapped up in one short sound. (II.xxii.7)

As Locke narratively erodes any cognitive certainty we might have into constantly shifting sands, the only “*appearance of a constant and lasting existence*” (II.xxii.8) resides in *names*. But the specious constancy of *names* works in conjunction with both the infinite number of possible combinations of simple ideas comprising complex ones and the originary instability of our simple ideas derived from observable properties, as opposed to knowable essences, to render practically any claim to certainty groundless indeed.

That we all derive simple ideas from sensation suggests the possibility of clear communication since words stand for ideas; Locke, however, convincingly leads us to

appreciate how much more complicated is our cognitive condition by attending to the *necessary* function of general terms in language usage:

All Things, that exist, being Particulars, it may perhaps be thought reasonable, that Words, which ought to be conformed to Things, should be so too, I mean in their Signification: but yet we find the quite contrary. The far *greatest part of Words*, that make all Languages, *are general Terms*: which has not been the Effect of Neglect, or Chance, but of Reason, and Necessity. (III.iii.1)

Once again, the persuasive force of Locke's argument derives from appealing to our common human limitations and our observable experience:

First, *It is impossible, that every particular Thing should have a distinct peculiar Name*. 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*. But it is beyond the Power of humane Capacity to frame and retain distinct *Ideas* of all the particular Things we meet with: every Bird, Beast Men saw; every Tree, and Plant, that affected the Senses, could not find a place in the most capacious Understanding. [...] We may easily find a Reason, why Men have never attempted to give Names to each Sheep in their Flock, or Crow that flies over their Heads; much less to call every Leaf of Plants, or Grain of Sand that came in their way, by a peculiar Name.

(III.iii.2)

David B. Paxman asserts that Locke was emphatic that language *required* generalization and abstraction: "even to name different types of cutting is to generalize, since it is impossible to name every particular act of cutting."²⁷ Regarding generalizations within Locke's vision of language usage, Paxman argues that "all

²⁷ "Language and Difference: The Problem of Abstraction in Eighteenth-Century Language Study," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54 (1993): 23.

language uses them but that external reality is not so clearly accessible as to require the same generalizations from everyone. It constrains only as does a field of possibilities.”²⁸

Since the “*greatest part of Words, that make all Languages, are general Terms*” (III.iii.1), and since the referent for general terms comprise an infinite field of possibilities, language usage presupposes radical instability. We can appreciate this necessary and irresolvable complexity precluding certainty through Locke’s careful dissection of the cognitive processes at work in the linguistic practice of organizing complex ideas into *sorts*:

The common Name of Substances, as well as other general Terms, stand for Sorts: which is nothing else but the being made signs of such complex Ideas, wherein several particular Substances do, or might agree, by virtue of which, they are capable to be comprehended in one common Conception, and be signified by one Name. I say, do or might agree: for though there be but one Sun existing in the World, yet the Idea of it being abstracted, so that more Substances (if there were several) might each agree in it; it is as much a Sort, as if there were as many Suns, as there are Stars. [...] ‘tis not impossible, but that in propriety of Speech, that might be a Sun to one, which is a Star to another.

(III.vi.1)

Our cognitive saga might be summarized as follows: our simple ideas derived from observable properties, not knowable essences, can be arranged in infinite combinations to form complex ideas, and from the infinite and changing combinations of ideas comprising complex ideas, specific groupings of ideas common to a number of complex ideas comprise our use of general terms, or sorts. But the specific combination of ideas comprising a *sort* do not in any way refer to anything *essential* about the ideas themselves, but refer to our way of categorizing ideas into manageable

²⁸ Paxman, 23.

cognitive units. Our knowledge, then, derives from the *nominal essence* of ideas ranked under sorts as opposed to directly relating to the *real essence* of any idea, which may be very different but is ultimately inaccessible:

And that the *Species of Things to us, are nothing but the ranking them under distinct Names, according to the complex Ideas in us*; and not according to precise, distinct, real *Essences* in them, is plain from hence; That we find many of the Individuals that are ranked into one Sort, called by one common Name, and so received as being of one *Species*, have yet Qualities depending on their real Constitutions, as far different one from another, as from others, from which they are accounted to differ *specifically*. (III.vi.8)

By building his plausible narrative of the acquisition of ideas and the complicated role of language on successive instabilities which we are *unable* to rectify, Locke leads to the question which suddenly renders ludicrous and futile the heated disputes over sectarian differences:

But, what difference in the internal real Constitution makes a specific difference, it is in vain to enquire; whilst *our measures of Species* be, as the *are, only our abstract* Ideas, which we know; and not that internal Constitution, which makes no part of them. (III.vi.22)

What difference does difference make if none of us can ever know the *truth*? How can we ever act with *certainty* on such *necessarily* partial knowledge of anything? How certain can we be that the main points of contention causing such violent chaos in the name of self-righteous justification do not, in fact, stem from our unwitting clusters of complex ideas into different *sorts*? Given the very real ramifications of the necessary grouping of complex ideas into cognitive bundles signified by a *name*, I think that Locke wants us to view language with both healthy suspicion and vigilant care.

It is important, however, to the logic of the inescapability of our cognitive morass that the problems of ambiguity and uncertainty do not arise simply with the introduction of language, but originate in the formation of our prelinguistic ideas:

Now since Sounds have no natural connexion with our *Ideas*, but have all their signification from the arbitrary imposition of Men, the *doubtfulness* and uncertainty of *their signification*, which is *the imperfection* we here are speaking of, has its cause more in the *Ideas* they stand for, than in any incapacity there is in one Sound, more than in another, to signify any *Idea*: For in that regard, they are all equally perfect.

(III.ix.4)

We might here recall that the different clustering of particular ideas common to complex ideas into *sorts* itself derives from different clusters of simple ideas comprising complex ideas; moreover, because men's minds, like their palates, are *naturally* different, the originary formation of simple ideas based on observable properties *itself* may produce radical differences:

Neither would it carry any Imputation of *Falshood* to our simple *Ideas*, if by the different Structure of our Organs, it were so ordered, That *the same Object should produce in several Men's Minds different* Ideas at the same time; *v.g.* if the *Idea*, that a *Violet* produced in one Man's Mind by his Eyes, were the same that a *Marigold* produced in another Man's, and *vice versâ*. For since this could never be known: because one Man's Mind could not pass into another Man's Body, to perceive, what Appearances were produced by those Organs; neither the *Ideas* hereby, nor the Names, would be at all confounded, or any *Falshood* be in either.

(II.xxxii.15)

Clearly, then, differences in beliefs and problems in communication cannot be wholly isolable to language. However, what further consolidates Locke's explanation of the heated disputes that we, in the seventeenth century, find ourselves enmeshed in is the interweaving of yet another account of origins--the story of language.

I have suggested earlier in Chapter 2 that Locke perhaps finds in *language* a way in which to figure forth on the page the equally invisible, ineffable, and indeterminate *process of mind* that can never be wholly nor adequately represented in its entirety. But the enigma of *language* as a natural phenomenon persists. As an undeniable, arguably *definitive*, dimension of specifically *human* experience, language becomes *the* inscrutable object that resists the penetrating probe of mind. Who can account for language? Who can represent language? Surely we could write or speak words in any language *ad infinitum* without ever capturing, or adequately describing, in any determinate moment what language *is*. Language itself as a phenomenon becomes located on par with mind and world-unknowable in its real constitution as a fluid *process* because it is too expansive to grasp or to represent. In this regard, *words*, text, black marks on the page themselves become *metaphors of language*; each word, or each collection of words, gestures towards something outside of itself—not only to the “thing” in the world, or the abstract collection of ideas in our mind, but simultaneously to *language*. Language itself becomes something non-linguistic *in so far as* it can never be wholly nor adequately represented through *words*. Language, then, like mind and world, is this huge, expansive, ineffable and yet *necessary* part of our existence which cannot ultimately be accounted for. But because language is such a pervasive and significant phenomenon, any attempt to describe the mind examining the objects of the world must somehow account for the inscrutable object of language. Any theory or account of language, however, is always *metaphorical* because of the impossibility of adequately or accurately representing language in its entirety. Arguably always a matter of probability, we can only judge the validity of any account of language based on the *explanatory power* of a plausible narrative.

Before examining the historical narrative of the origin of language that Locke *tells*, we might briefly consider Benjamin's distinction between the writer of history, the historian, and the *teller* of it, the chronicler. Benjamin likens the *chronicler* and the *storyteller* as weavers of narrative strands into the multicoloured fabric of a worldly view:

The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does[. ...] By basing their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation—an inscrutable one—they have from the very start lifted the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.²⁹

Like a storyteller, Locke provides an historical narrative of language that accounts for its origin, its purpose, and how we have arrived at a state of linguistic cacophany. Contextualizing his own account of the origin of language within the larger vision of divine providence, Locke, as storyteller, *tells* a tale reminiscent of the biblical rhetoric used in Genesis:

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

Besides articulate Sounds therefore, it was farther necessary, that he should be *able to use these Sounds, as Signs of internal Conceptions*;

²⁹ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 96.

and to make them stand as marks for the *Ideas* within his own Mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the Thoughts of Men's Minds be conveyed from one to another. (III.i.1)

The plausible explanation which Locke provides to account for language can perhaps be seen as answering the question posed in *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*:

And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? [...]

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? (1 Cor. 14: 7, 9)

Locke elides the question of *what* language *is* by explaining the purpose for which it was *given*--namely, to signify ideas in our minds to enable communication. Locke's account of origins presupposes that human beings are *social* and that the primary way in which we create community is through language:

The Comfort, and Advantage of Society, not being to be had without Communication of Thoughts, it was necessary, that Man should find some external sensible Signs, whereby those invisible *Ideas*, which his thoughts are made up of, might be known to others. For this purpose, nothing was so fit, either for Plenty or Quickness, as those articulate Sounds, which with so much Ease and Variety, he found himself able to make. (III.ii.1)

Although Locke seems to desire a representationalist view of language such that words stand for ideas, thereby promising the possibility of clear communication, this desire is thwarted by subjecting language to history. That language bears the marks of its users informs Locke's historical narration of our descent from a kind of prelapsarian linguistic purity:

Since Languages, in all Countries, have been established long before Sciences. So that they have not been Philosophers, or Logicians, or such

search of the true and precise meaning of Names, these moral Words are, in most Men's mouths, little more than bare Sounds; or when they have any, 'tis for the most part but a very loose and undetermined, and consequently obscure and confused signification. (III.ix.9)

By carefully sketching out this picture of language as arbitrary signifiers for potentially infinite combinations of ideas clustered under a word, Locke provides a new way of understanding heated sectarian disputes as futile wrangling over terms:

Where shall one find any, either *controversial Debate*, or *familiar Discourse*, concerning *Honour, Faith, Grace, Religion, Church*, etc. wherein it is not easy to observe the different Notions Men have of them; which is nothing but this, that they are not agreed in the signification of those Words; nor have in their minds the same complex *Ideas* which they make them stand for: and so all the contests that follow thereupon, are only about the meaning of a Sound.

(III.ix.9)

Sectarian differences, in this light, result from fundamentally incommensurable discourses because the specific terms in men's mouths may refer to entirely different bundles of ideas within each sect's vocabulary. As early as "The Epistle to the Reader," Locke clearly identifies sects as "language-users": "so few are apt to think, they deceive, or are deceived in the Use of Words; or that the Language of the Sect they are of, has any Faults in it, which ought to be examined or corrected" (10). In sum, by radically destabilizing the certainty of the signification of the key terms that seem most important to our self-conception, Locke tells a plausible tale of the formation of ideas which is ineluctably complicated by the very arbitrary nature of language. Moreover, if we can concur with Locke that sects as language-users may never be entirely reconciled within one master vocabulary, that our radical differences in belief derive from *natural* imperfections in language and the divinely-ordained limitations of our cognitive and

sensory faculties, perhaps we can, nonetheless, decide to tolerate each other in order to live peaceably.



III. THE 'NARRATIVE "I," THE AUTHORIAL "I," AND THE READER: THE 'DIALOGIC DYNAMIC

My wider argument thus far has been that the experiential and experimental dimensions of the *Essay*--specifically, the experience of reading *this text*--implicate the reader as an active participant in the textual exegesis of mind. My subsequent proposal that the *Essay* functions dialogically hinges on identifying multiple modes of narration at work in the text; more specifically, I suggest that Locke purposively creates three different narrative voices which I have termed the "storyteller," the "narrative I," and the "authorial I." I think it is important, however, to clarify here that the text's dialogism, for which I am arguing, does not consist in the rhetorical interplay of these multiple narrative voices in the sense that they speak to one another. Rather, my sense of the text's dialogism effected through the construction of multiple narrative voices specifically concerns the reader in two different ways.

First, in order to follow Locke's thoughts in writing, the reader must actively corroborate Locke's observations by consciously thinking of his or her experience both *of the text* and *outside of the text*--the reader is thus *directly* involved in working through the labyrinthine process of cognition. What further intensifies this experiential narrative strategy is the assiduously constructed authorial voice who directly addresses the reader, often in pseudo-dialogue, *about* the text. Indeed, that

the reader seems to occupy a space of intimacy with the author (figured through the authorial narrator) that is simultaneously *in* the text proper and *outside* of the main story of the mind and the narrative “I”’s working through its own thoughts intimates the conscious positioning of the reader *in* the text. To appreciate the rhetorical import of implicating the reader in the textual exegesis by positioning the reader as a participant *in* the text, we might consider the similarity, albeit anachronistic, with the involvement of the audience in Brechtian theatre. To Brecht, “the act of theatre is seen as a dialectic: an active process in which the audience take upon themselves the role of interpretation and in effect become actors.”³⁰ What I find particularly striking about Brecht’s involvement of the audience, however, is that beyond functioning as interpreters, the audience is often positioned, or staged, within the play itself. Consider Benjamin’s remarks on Brecht’s staging of the audience as participants:

The French classical theater made room in the midst of the players for persons of rank, who had their armchairs on the open stage. To us this seems inappropriate. According to the concept of the “dramatic element” with which we are familiar, it seemed inappropriate to attach to the action on the stage a nonparticipating third party as a dispassionate observer or “thinker.” Yet Brecht often had something like that in mind. One can go even further and say that Brecht made an attempt to make the thinker, or even the wise man, the hero of the drama.³¹

In a similar fashion, I think that Locke “stages,” or positions, the reader in the *text* as a kind of “nonparticipating third party”—in the specific sense that although the reader obviously does not have an active voice *in* the text, yet the reader as *observer* (of the text) and *thinker* (about the text—Locke’s mind, and his or her *own* mind) certainly *is* implicated in the text. As an experiential text, the *Essay* pulls the reader and the

³⁰ Baugh, 237. See also Dickson, 246, and Gray, 78.

³¹ “What is Epic Theater?” in *Illuminations*, 149.

reader's immediate surroundings into its internal dynamic; indeed, the idea of "armchairs on the open stage" resonates with the familiar intimacy of the drawing-room which the authorial narrator of "The Epistle to the Reader" so carefully established as the proper milieu of the *Essay*. The *Essay*, itself a kind of textual chamber that metaphorically mimics the original chamber of the text's genesis, becomes the site at which the rhetorical dialogue between the author and the reader takes place. Just as the authorial narrator initially seems to occupy a pseudo-external space in the epistles, the author (figured through the authorial voice) and the reader share a pseudo-external space *in* the text which insistently implicates the author *as* author and the reader *as* reader of *this text*.

On the other hand, I think the text presupposes dialogue *about* the text amongst its readers; that is, the injunction to turn objects around to observe all sides given the fallibility of human perception combines with the sheer prolixity of this very treatise to render the *text* one object in a world of objects, our knowledge of which can never lay claim to certainty. I propose that the bulk of the book, its diffuse and meandering structure, forces us to *experience* the limits of our own understandings. More specifically, I think the text performatively *enacts* its own argument of the radical instability of claims to knowledge; that is, we can never assume that the combination of particular ideas constituting our complex ideas correspond to other combinations subsumed under the same name. We might here recall Locke's image of the bookseller concretizing the idea of complex ideas without particular names:

He that has complex *Ideas*, without particular names for them, would be in no better a Case than a Bookseller, who had in his Ware-house Volumes, that lay there unbound, and without Titles; which he could therefore make known to others, only by shewing the loose Sheets, and communicate them only by Tale. (III.x.26-7)

Considering the self-reflexive image of a *book*, I would like to suggest that the *text* itself becomes *the* complex idea without a corresponding archetype in nature; each *reading* of the text thus stands in a relation of uncertainty to all other readings as to whether the same cluster of particular ideas constitutes each reading. My own reading of the *Essay* arranges particular ideas in a cluster that I would name “toleration.” I realize, however, that my clustering of ideas expressed in the *Essay* is but one possible combination. There are many more sides to this textual object existing outside of the periphery of my own fallible human perception. I suggest, therefore, that the very bulk of the *Essay* forecloses the possibility of an all-seeing “God’s eye-view” that can grasp the totality of the text within a ubiquitous field of vision. Exploring *human* understanding, the text presupposes fallible mental perception, figured through the more limited human faculty of seeing:

For I would fain know what Substance exists that has not something in it, which manifestly baffles our Understandings. Other Spirits, who see and know the Nature and inward Constitution of things, how much must they exceed us in Knowledge? To which if we add larger Comprehension, which enables them at one Glance to see the Connexion and Agreement of very many *Ideas*, and readily supplies to them the intermediate Proofs, which we by single and slow Steps, and long poring in the dark, hardly at last find out. (IV.iii.6)

Surely any reading of the *Essay*, any knowledge of the *text*, based on discerning the connection between its very many ideas, is achieved “by single and slow Steps, and long poring in the dark.” But none of us have access to the “truth” of the text, or of the world, by which to assess the certainty of our ideas about it. But it seems to me that the text is not finally *about* certainty, but about *discussion* of its very many ideas.³²

³² That the text is *about* discussion of its ideas, not about *certainty* that would foreclose discussion, perhaps partly accounts for Locke’s hostile reaction to critics who took issue with the accuracy of particular ideas, thereby missing the point of the whole. Yolton notes, “he [Locke] always shows impatience at the critic’s inability to understand his arguments” and “[i]n his opinion, almost all criticisms brought against him were

The *Essay*'s very complexity thus presupposes dialogue *outside* of the text *about* the text.

As the *Essay* stimulates discussion about the complexity of its many ideas, it imitates the experimental method of the Royal Society. That is, discussion about experiments actually performed at the meetings, or performed elsewhere and descriptively reported, constituted part of the weekly proceedings. Hall notes that "from the showing of experiment, so important in the 1660s, the emphasis gradually shifted to the account and discussion of experiment and observation."³³ As readers who have virtually witnessed Locke's textual experiment on his own mind, not to mention the experiments which we have presumably performed on our own minds, we can engage fellow readers with tolerance and civility in an ongoing conversation about the *text* and our own cognitive processes.

In light of this conversation generated by the *Essay*, I would like to engage Locke's text with those of Richard Rorty in the next chapter to suggest that they are both involved in a similar rhetorical project of redescription with specifically pragmatic aims.

examples of trifling and not worth his time." As an example of Locke's seemingly unwarranted hostility, Yolton cites Locke's 'Answer' to Burnet's *Remarks*: "'If any one find anything in my Essay to be corrected, he may, when he pleases, write against it; and when I think fit I will answer him. For I do not intend my time shall be wasted at the pleasure of every one, who may have a mind to pick holes in my book, and shew his skill in the art of confutation.'" See John W. Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), esp. 1-25.

³³ Hall, 22.

❧ Chapter 4 ❧

AS THE KALEIDOSCOPE TURNS: REDESCRIBING RORTY REDESCRIBING LOCKE REDESCRIBING MIND

Richard Rorty's seminal work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), a text that critiques the foundationalist, metaphysical aspirations of philosophy, tells a provocative and persuasive story about the evolution of philosophy within which Locke unwittingly plays an ensemble role amongst the *dramatis personae*. Rorty locates Locke within a line of philosophers whose thought has been dominated by ocular metaphors that have perpetuated the conception of philosophy as a foundational discipline which can adjudicate all other claims to knowledge by virtue of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and mind. It is specific historical theories of knowledge and mind, Rorty argues, that underpin the notion that philosophy, as a mirror, can assess the validity of all other claims to knowledge by determining the extent to which such claims *accurately represent reality*. Locke's notion of knowledge as mental processes and Descartes's notion of the mind as a separate entity in which processes occur culminate in Kant's notion of philosophy as a tribunal of pure reason which either upholds or denies the claims of the rest of culture. Rorty then argues that Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey have brought us into a period of revolutionary philosophy, breaking free from the Kantian conception of philosophy as *foundational*, by abandoning these invisible theoretical underpinnings--the conceptions of knowledge as accurate representation and mind as the locus of mental processes which makes knowledge possible. By setting aside

the *inherited vocabulary* of the seventeenth century, these revolutionary philosophers moved beyond the notion of philosophy as foundational to view philosophy as *edifying* and *therapeutic*--one way amongst many of expressing ourselves and of coping with the world. Taking a historicist approach, Rorty argues that the conception of philosophy, culminating in Kant, which claims access to the foundations of knowledge attempts to eternalize a certain *language-game*--a specific *vocabulary*. The great gain consequent to this insight, according to Rorty, is that the conception of knowledge as accurate representation becomes optional; like choosing between workable metaphors, we can simply *replace* the notion of knowledge as accurate representation with a more pragmatist conception of knowledge as coping with the historically specific complexity of our world. Rorty eventually proposes a conception of philosophy, developed more fully in his *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (1989), that breaks away from its traditionally foundational role of mirroring the world *accurately* by discerning the essences of all knowable things, thereby providing a *master vocabulary* permitting the commensuration of all discourses. Rorty exhorts us to drop the notion of "essence," especially the notion that the *essence* of a human being is to be a knower of essences. Stripped of its foundational pretensions, philosophy offers but *another way of interpreting* the world with an awareness that *redescribing ourselves* in new ways is the most important thing we can do. Recognizing the historical contingency of the vocabulary we use to describe ourselves mitigates the self-deceptive temptation to think that the vocabulary presently in use has some privileged attachment to reality which makes it *more* than just a further set of descriptions. Instead of being foundational, the description of ourselves offered by philosophy becomes just one more amongst the repertoire of self-descriptions at our disposal.

Philosophy thus assumes an educational, or *edifying*, role because finding new, more interesting, and more fruitful *ways of speaking and thinking* is finally more important and more valuable to us in coping with and making sense of the world than the possession of truths deriving from constructed premises.

I have provided this preliminary overview of Rorty's argument as a prologue to this chapter mainly to identify how Rorty locates Locke within his own narrative of the evolution of philosophy. What I would like to suggest is that Rorty's vision in which philosophy ought primarily to stimulate more fruitful descriptions of ourselves in fact offers a *new vocabulary* with which to understand Locke's *Essay*. My intention is not to argue that Rorty has simply given Locke short shrift; indeed, the plausibility of the wider story Rorty self-consciously spins demands that Locke be *described* as a fairly naïve seeker of truth aspiring to *accurate* knowledge of the mind and the world. Abiding by Rorty's own request to drop the notion of *truth* or *essence*, I am not suggesting that Rorty is *wrong* in his reading of Locke, nor that there necessarily is a final *truth* or *essence* waiting to be discovered in the *Essay*. Rather, I propose that there is an *alternate* way of reading, or *describing*, the rhetorical project of the *Essay* using Rorty's vocabulary as a conceptual tool. What emerges is a plausible redescription of Locke's text as *functioning* within its historical context in the cultural role which Rorty advocates for philosophy. As opposed to providing a story that more *accurately* represents experience, specifically the experience of mind, I see Locke consciously proffering his *text* as a *tool*, the justification of which simply lies in its usefulness to enable an alternate way of *thinking* as a precondition for alternate *actions*. In this vein, Rorty's contemporary redescription of the evolution of philosophy that proposes for philosophy an alternate cultural role perhaps *articulates* more explicitly what Locke's text *enacts*.

Based on my rhetorical reading of the experiential aspects of the *Essay*, the persuasive force of *storytelling* as the dominant mode of narration, and the text's internal dialogism effected through the creation of multiple narrative voices and the concomitant space of intimacy and candour implicating the reader in the textual exegesis, I suggest that Locke and Rorty are involved in a similar project of *redescription* with specifically pragmatic aims.

Because I am primarily concerned with using Rorty's text(s) as a conceptual tool with which to *redescribe*, or offer an alternate understanding of, Locke's *Essay*, I will not here attempt any extended critical analysis of the historical contingency of Rorty's thought. We might enter into a lively conversation discussing the resonance of genealogical strands; for instance, the therapeutic centrality of *redescription* in Rorty's rewriting of philosophy's role itself derives from Wittgenstein's insight that the "talking cure" of Freudian psychoanalysis could be productively applied to philosophy--that is, the relation between how we *talk* about ourselves and how we *think* could enable philosophy to *talk differently* about, and thereby *change*, the questions seemingly most important to its self-conception.¹ I bring this particular strand to our attention simply because I think that many theoretical assumptions underpinning Freudian discourse can be traced back to Locke's text.² While such a conversation linking discursive strands between Locke and Rorty would certainly prove fruitful and could only confirm the historical contingency of discourses from which to draw in refashioning our self-conception, it is not within the immediate

¹ For this connection between Rorty's project of redescription and Wittgenstein's appropriation of the therapeutic *structure* of Freudian psychoanalysis, and for a general overview of Rorty's contextualizing intellectual milieu within the line of American pragmatists, I am indebted to Dr. Barry G. Allen.

² I am specifically thinking here of the interconnections between mind and body; the importance of pleasure and pain as motivating impulses; and the notion underpinning Locke's probabilism that there are dimensions of our existence that are beyond our conscious grasp which, for me, intimates the corollary construction of the concept of the *unconscious*--that there are dimensions of *ourselves* of which we are not immediately cognizant.

purview of this project to comprehensively consider the conceptual lineage extending from Locke to Rorty.

That said, my treatment of Rorty in this chapter will be largely expository with the explicit aim of delineating the salient features of his proposal that philosophy redescribe its cultural role so that we can reconsider Locke's *Essay* in a new context. Although I may peripherally refer to his other texts, I am primarily concerned with describing Rorty's vision of the potential for a liberal utopia espoused in his *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. More specifically, I will examine Rorty's conception of a liberal ironist who recognizes the equally valid but forever incommensurable needs of private irony and public solidarity, and his proposal that philosophy turn away from theory to narrative in a new, non-foundational role that promotes the proliferation of redescrptions in an ongoing conversation amongst incommensurable discourses. In my subsequent application to Locke's *Essay*, the main points of intersection between Rorty and Locke will be: the theory of language as a *tool*, the power of language to *redescribe* given that all descriptions are conceptual metaphors, the cultural function of *narrative* and *conversation*, and a pragmatic concern with how we live and cope with the complexity of our world.



I. THE PRAGMATIST'S PROGRESS: READING RORTY

In his *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, Richard Rorty undertakes a compelling discussion of the potential for a liberal utopia wherein the private and public realms are not forced into a holistic theory, rather are recognized as equally

valid and forever incommensurable. Rorty upholds as an exemplar the *liberal ironist* who acknowledges and responds to the demands of private irony and the public need to recognize and identify with the pain and humiliation of others. Borrowing his description of *liberal* from Judith Shklar,³ Rorty defines liberals as the sort of “people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do.”⁴ In contrast to the person who believes that he or she has discovered the truth of the world, the “right description,” Rorty’s exemplary *ironist* is “the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires—someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance.”⁵ Although fully cognizant of the contingency of his or her whole belief system, the liberal ironist, according to Rorty, also recognizes the importance of a social vision based on human solidarity: “Liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease.”⁶ One of the aspirations of Rorty’s text, however, is to dissuade the traditional philosophical inclination to deify an universal principle, such as rationality, in order to reconcile the private and public realms. Recognizing the incommensurable but equally valid impulses towards private irony and public solidarity, Rorty’s liberal ironist advocates the pragmatic view that different ways of talking, or vocabularies, enable us to achieve specific ends. More to the point, the ability to hold simultaneously two seemingly antithetical agendas, the private and the public, without needing to force them

³ See Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), esp. her discussion of humiliation on p. 37.

⁴ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xv.

⁵ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, xv.

⁶ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, xv.

dialectically into a synthesis, does not preclude the possibility of *action*. Rather than incapacitating schizophrenia, socially responsible volition becomes possible so that we can collectively decide which particular attributes should be central to our self-description as a basis for *action* while fully cognizant of the sheer contingency of those beliefs. Before using Rorty's conception of a liberal ironist to redescribe Locke in the *Essay*, let us consider the structural importance of Rorty's redescription of language. Like Locke, Rorty's persuasive narrative is predicated on a specific conception of language. By attending to the power of redescription, we can appreciate the scope of Rorty's social vision which provides a new context for an alternate reading of Locke's *Essay*.

Redescribing the relation between world and word, Rorty argues that human beings use language to *describe*, not reproduce or reflect, the world. Since the world provides no criteria by which to assess the accuracy or worth of our descriptions of it, *truth* functions as a quality of *language*:

Truth cannot be out there--cannot exist independently of the human mind--because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own--unaided by the describing activities of human beings--cannot.⁷

Because there is no final truth to the world towards which descriptions of it aspire, we can only ever have *different*, but equally valid, descriptions: "The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that."⁸ If we can drop the notion that the external world *corresponds* to our descriptions of it, that "the world splits itself up, on its

⁷ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 5.

⁸ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 6.

own initiative, into sentence-shaped chunks called ‘facts,’”⁹ we can move beyond the concern with *accurate representation* to consider the metaphorical nature of vocabularies as wholes--vocabularies as “language games” which form the cognitive groundwork for our perceptions of the world:

When the notion of “description of the world” is moved from the level of criterion-governed sentences within language games to language games as wholes, games which we do not choose between by reference to criteria, the idea that the world decides which descriptions are true can no longer be given a clear sense. It becomes hard to think that that vocabulary is somehow already out there in the world, waiting for us to discover it.¹⁰

Presupposing that human thought is dependent on, and shaped by, human *language*, Rorty argues that the way we think about ourselves and the world is always contingent upon the vocabulary we have to think with. Moreover, the vocabularies at our disposal are themselves contingent upon historical circumstances, including sheer random chance. Our habits of mind, themselves ineluctably grooved by historically contingent vocabularies, shape our descriptions of the relation between self and world. But the external world, existing in neutrality, never decides the *truth* of one description over another:

[I]f we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth is made rather than found. What is true about this claim is just that *languages* are made rather than found, and that truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences.¹¹

⁹ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 5.

¹⁰ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 5-6.

¹¹ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 7.

By asking us to accept a specific conception of language as solely constitutive of our cognitive processes, Rorty persuasively renders the very notion of truth--of human nature or the external world--a function of an obsolete vocabulary. In the absence of the very idea of truth, all descriptions stand in relation to all other descriptions--indeed, all we can ever have is a redescription and a re-redescription *ad infinitum*.

Rorty self-consciously replaces the familiar understanding of language as a medium with an alternative description of language as a human construction--a *tool*. As tools, then, different descriptions of the neutral world are as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars. Acceptance of an alternate description becomes based on the extent to which it enables us to achieve different goals in the world. Indeed, the creation of a new vocabulary makes possible the formulation of its own purpose: "It is a tool for doing something which could not have been envisaged prior to the development of a particular set of descriptions, those which it itself helps to provide."¹² With redescriptions, we can think in certain ways and do specific things.

To appreciate Rorty's point of the incommensurability of different vocabularies designed, like tools, to serve different purposes, consider our perplexing aporia that results if we think of alternate vocabularies, or descriptions, like bits of a jigsaw puzzle:

To treat them [alternative vocabularies] as pieces of a puzzle is to assume that all vocabularies are dispensable, or reducible to other vocabularies, or capable of being united with all other vocabularies in one grand unified super vocabulary. If we avoid this assumption, we shall not be inclined to ask questions like "What is the place of consciousness in a world of molecules?" "Are colors more mind-dependent than weights?" "What is the place of value in a world of

¹² *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 13.

fact?" "What is the place of intentionality in a world of causation?" "What is the relation between the solid table of common sense and the unsolid table of microphysics?" or "What is the relation of thought to language?" [...] We should restrict ourselves to questions like "Does our use of these words get in the way of our use of those other words?" This is a question about whether our use of tools is inefficient, not a question about whether our beliefs are contradictory.¹³

Rorty offers an alternative perspective by changing the nature of the questions to which we seek answers. Reminiscent of Locke's injunction to weigh our *words*, Rorty suggests that we ought to concern ourselves with specifically pragmatic questions centring on the efficiency of our vocabularies. But the recognition of contingency having shaped the vocabulary with which we think about the world does not foreclose the possibility of more fruitful redescription; neither does it, however, afford us access to any transcendent point from which to fashion new descriptions on a clean slate. Rather, precisely because we can grasp our own contingency, thereby breaking free from the conceptual paradigm that privileges correspondence with something other and eternal, the future opens up to infinite possibilities.

While Rorty's insight that descriptions, like tools, help us achieve specific goals primarily informs my reading of Locke's redescription of mind in the *Essay*, Locke's wider social vision within which that reading makes sense resonates with the private/public split that so characterizes Rorty's conception of a liberal utopia. As much as Rorty advocates not only awareness but vigilant questioning of the historically contingent discourses shaping our self-conception, he cannot finally envisage a culture whose public rhetoric is ironist:

¹³ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 11-2.

I cannot imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them constantly dubious about their own process of socialization. Irony seems inherently a private matter.¹⁴

Although ironism results from an awareness of the power of redescription, it cannot serve the public need for solidarity; moreover, human beings do make sense of themselves through language:

All humans carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. [...] They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively, sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary."¹⁵

What I find insightful about Rorty's articulation of a liberal utopia is his recognition that most people do not want to be redescribed--that there is something potentially very cruel about redescription that is antithetical to liberalism:

The redescribing ironist, by threatening one's final vocabulary, and thus one's ability to make sense of oneself in one's own terms, rather than hers, suggests that one's self and one's world are futile, obsolete, and *powerless*. Redescription often humiliates.¹⁶

By defining liberals as the sort of people who agree that cruelty, specifically humiliation resulting from redescription, is the worst thing people can do to one another, Rorty describes a liberal utopia in which human solidarity "is not a matter of sharing a common truth or a common goal but of sharing a common selfish hope, the hope that one's world--the little things around which one has woven into one's final vocabulary--will not be destroyed."¹⁷ Without legitimating foundations, Rorty's conception of a liberal democratic society justifies itself to itself simply through its

¹⁴ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 87.

¹⁵ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 73.

¹⁶ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 90.

¹⁷ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 92.

desirability--that we, in this particular historical moment, can agree that diminishing cruelty, specifically humiliation, is central to our public self-description:

The social glue holding together the ideal liberal society [...] consists in little more than a *consensus* that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities, and that that goal requires, besides peace and wealth, the standard "bourgeois freedoms."¹⁸

What has been received as either profoundly unsettling or liberating, however, is Rorty's simultaneous dissolution of legitimating foundations and confident assertion of the viability of a self-creating liberal community continually refashioning its self-conception through consensus: "whatever good the ideas of 'objectivity' and 'transcendence' have done for our culture can be attained equally well by the idea of a community which strives after both intersubjective agreement and novelty--a democratic, progressive, pluralist community of the sort of which Dewey dreamt."¹⁹ Ironism, as Rorty defines it, resulting from an awareness of both the power of redescription and the sheer historical contingency underpinning our self-description, informs his social vision to the extent that justification of our self-conception becomes particularized to historical circumstances:

[T]he cash value of a claim to truth is the claim to be able to justify what one says, because justification is always justification to a particular audience in this world rather than to a culture-transcendent tribunal of reason, and because we cannot step outside of our own skins. We cannot separate ourselves from our standards of justification just by turning philosophical, turning to a discussion of justification and truth.²⁰

¹⁸ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 84, emphasis mine.

¹⁹ Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), V1:13.

²⁰ Rorty, "The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism," *Thesis Eleven* 37 (1994): 125.

But what is compelling about Rorty's social vision is his assertion that our awareness of historical contingency does not preclude the possibility of action: "a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance."²¹ Indeed, we still need a workable description of ourselves to make sense of and deal with the historically specific complexity of our world, even though we may realize that those words that are integral to the public rhetoric of liberal democracies are just another text, another set of little human things we incorporate into our final vocabulary.

As opposed to philosophical concepts enabling the commensuration of all discourses, Rorty argues that the "social glue" holding communities together consists of a common vocabulary and common social hopes: "To retain social hopes, members of such a society need to be able to tell themselves a story about how things might get better, and to see no insuperable obstacles to this story's coming true."²² The story at the heart of our public self-description to which we can all agree based on its desirability, then, is of a liberal democracy that makes openness to others a central part of its own self-image:

[I]t is a culture which prides itself on constantly adding on more windows, constantly enlarging its sympathies. It is a form of life which is constantly extending its pseudopods and adapting itself to what it encounters. Its sense of its own moral worth is founded on its tolerance of diversity.²³

Because Rorty's envisaged social utopia encourages the proliferation of redescriptions, ironist theorizing is not well-suited to the task. Ironist theorists

²¹ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 189.

²² *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 86.

²³ Rorty, "On Ethnocentrism," *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, 204.

since Hegel have consistently sought to redefine themselves in their own terms by creating a new language in which one must henceforth be judged: "To try for the sublime is to try not just to create the taste by which one judges oneself, but to make it impossible for anybody else to judge one by any other taste."²⁴ However, the question "And who will rewrite me?" is anathema to ironist theorists who, as *theorists*, aspire to come to terms with and surpass their predecessors:

This quest for the historical sublime--for proximity to some event such as the closing of the gap between subject and object or the advent of the superman or the end of metaphysics--leads Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger to fancy themselves in the role of the "last philosopher." The attempt to be in this position is the attempt to write something which will make it impossible for one to be redescribed except in one's own terms--make it impossible to become an element in anybody else's beautiful pattern, one more little thing.²⁵

What undermines the ironist theorist's redescription is the temptation to think that finding a way to subsume one's predecessors in some way sets one apart from them by having done something different. This claim to be separate from previous thinkers risks "what Heidegger called 'relapsing into metaphysics': 'You are acting as if a redescription of one's predecessors got one in touch with a power other than oneself--something capitalized: Being, Truth, History, Absolute Knowledge, or the Will to Power.'"²⁶

Rorty's solution lies in a gradual turn from theory to narrative: "Such a turn would be emblematic of our having given up the attempt to hold all the sides of our life in a single vision, to describe them with a single vocabulary."²⁷ He upholds Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* as paradigmatic of ironist narrative which

²⁴ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 106.

²⁵ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 106.

²⁶ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 107.

²⁷ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, xvi.

recognizes its own contingency. By turning away from the totalizing impulse of theory to the looser flow of narrative, describing patterns discerned from the perspective of one temporal moment, one can avoid the temptation to set oneself apart from the contingency of one's own selfhood--to claim that one has transcended one's own contingency to get in touch with a higher reality: "Proust had no such temptation. At the end of his life, he saw himself as looking back along a temporal axis, watching colors, sounds, things, and people fall into place from the perspective of his own most recent description of them."²⁸ In his liberal utopia modelled on kaleidoscopic redescription, Rorty proposes a new cultural role for philosophy designed to engage incommensurable discourses as in an ongoing conversation:

To see keeping a conversation going as a sufficient aim of philosophy, to see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately.²⁹

As the promoter, but not the arbiter, of redescriptions, philosophic discourse becomes one amongst many incommensurable voices in what Rorty envisages as an endless proliferation of utopias towards *freedom* rather than a convergence at an already existing *truth*.

My redescription of Locke's rhetorical project in the *Essay* in the next section borrows from Rorty the idea of vocabularies as tools that help us to act and think in specific ways, the concomitant awareness of the power of redescription, and the liberal ironist's conviction that recognition of the sheer contingency underpinning our consensual belief system does not preclude the possibility of action. My argument that Locke's text does not primarily aspire towards truth, in terms of

²⁸ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 107.

²⁹ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 378.

accurate representation, but proposes an alternate description of mind as a precondition for alternate actions, intimates the possibility of reading the *Essay* as enacting the cultural role for philosophy that Rorty proposes.



II. LOCKE AS LIBERAL IRONIST: REDESCRIBING RORTY REDESCRIBING LOCKE REDESCRIBING MIND

Would it not be an insufferable thing for a learned Professor, and that which his Scarlet would blush at, to have his Authority of forty years standing wrought out of hard Rock Greek and Latin, with no small expense of Time and Candle, and confirmed by general Tradition, and a reverend Beard, in an instant overturned by an upstart Novelist? (IV.xx.11)

Redescribing Locke as an early precursor to Rorty requires identifying, amongst other things, Locke's allegiance to specifically pragmatic concerns. Although commonly regarded as the father of empiricism spawning epistemological debates in the philosophical tradition culminating in Kant, Locke may be provisionally extracted from the line of thinkers Rorty characterizes as concerned with accurate representation and relocated along an imaginative continuum with Rorty and his pragmatist forebears.

Surely Locke was a socially pragmatic thinker; as a civil servant, he "devoted much of his life to determining how the imperfect institutions by which we make our way through this twilight of probability might function better."³⁰ Consider, for instance, his extensive research and writing on economic questions regarding

³⁰ Walmsley, "Prince Maurice's Rational Parrot: Civil Discourse in Locke's *Essay*," 414.

national re-coinage or weights and measures.³¹ In all, Locke seeks to facilitate simplicity and convenience in everyday social interaction. Arguably, then, a similar pragmatic ethic informs the writing of the *Essay*. Indeed, by attending to the historical circumstances contextualizing the production and initial reception of Locke's *Essay*, we might concur with such a pragmatist reading of Locke:

For all the cosmopolitanism of his analysis of knowledge, it [the *Essay*] had an immediate effect upon his own contemporaries in England, the nature of which strongly suggests that Locke himself was not unmindful of the relevance of his theory of knowledge to the problems and debates on morality and religion engaged in by his friends and associates. [...] The initial purpose of his thought was not to extend the traditional analyses of the Cartesians or the medievalists: it was more simply to arrive at a way of dealing with important difficulties in normative conduct and theological discussion.³²

As Yolton points out, the motivating impetus for the *Essay* was arguably finding a way to deal with contemporary issues of conduct and theological dispute:

It was his careful extension of his first analysis of knowledge which brought the *Essay* fully into the philosophical tradition. But if one examines the moral and religious context in which Locke was living at the time of his initial reflections, it becomes quite clear that one of the traits of the *Essay* which created such an active interest in Locke's contemporaries was the way in which its philosophical doctrines were almost always directly related to the moral and religious disputes of the day. This relevance gave to Locke's work an immediate importance for his readers. What came to fan the flames of controversy and invective was the solutions he proposed to the traditional disputes.³³

That Locke's proposed solutions themselves became the subject of heated debate perhaps comprised part of his pragmatist project to change the nature of the

³¹ Walmsley, "Prince Maurice's Rational Parrot: Civil Discourse in Locke's *Essay*," 414.

³² Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*, vii-viii.

³³ Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*, viii.

questions to which were sought answers. In any case, that Locke's text became the subject of discussion, impelling the debate forward but in a new direction, suggests that the *Essay* functioned in its historical context in a specifically pragmatist way. That is, Locke's redescription of mind--the process of gaining knowledge, the kinds and limits of this knowledge, and the distinction between knowledge and belief--primarily provided a new vocabulary with which to question any claim to certainty as a viable alternative to endless sectarian strife. The text presupposes dialogue in response to its complexity. But what I would like to suggest renders Locke a liberal ironist in Rorty's sense of the term is that the complexity of the *Essay*'s narration and the foregrounding of the *text* as a sophisticated and experiential rhetorical device infuse the text, this alternate description, with an awareness of its own contingency.

Rorty's presupposition that language shapes thought underlies his claim that "a talent for speaking differently, as opposed to arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change."³⁴ In this vein, I propose that Locke shares with Rorty an awareness of the power of redescription and the concomitant notion that alternate descriptions are like tools that allow us to think and act in new ways not envisaged prior to such redescriptions. Despite Locke's ostensibly representationalist view of language--of words standing for ideas in the mind--I think that Locke consciously proposes a new way of speaking, and thus thinking, about language and thinking that offers a potentially more fruitful self-conception. By creating new habits of mind, Locke becomes aligned with Rorty's ironist:

The ironist's preferred form of argument is dialectical in the sense that she takes the unit of persuasion to be a vocabulary rather than a proposition. Her method is redescription rather than inference. Ironists specialize in redescribing ranges of objects or events in

³⁴ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 7.

partially neologistic jargon, in the hopes of inciting people to adopt and extend that jargon. An ironist hopes that by the time she has finished using old words in new senses, not to mention introducing brand-new words, people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words.³⁵

Arguably the whole *Essay* offers a new vocabulary by slowly piling one on top of the other redescrptions of the various invisible, and presumably never before considered, processes of mind. Similar to a compilation of metaphors, or the amassing of narrative vignettes, the *Essay*'s wider project of redescription works holistically and repetitively to create new cognitive grooves in the reader. As Rorty argues, the emergence of a new vocabulary does not refute the old, but replaces it much as one metaphor acquires preference over another:

The method is to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions. This sort of philosophy does not work piece by piece, analyzing concept after concept, or testing thesis after thesis. Rather, it works holistically and pragmatically. It says things like "try thinking of it this way"--or more specifically, "try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions." It does not pretend to have a better candidate for doing the same old things which we did when we spoke in the old way. Rather, it suggests that we might want to stop doing those things and do something else.³⁶

I propose that Locke's specifically pragmatist aim is to persuade people to stop doing the same things and asking the same questions that have resulted in heated dispute and chaos. The invitation extended to the reader to enter the text and

³⁵ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 78.

³⁶ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 9.

carefully consider its whole narration suggests, to me, the implicit proposal to “try thinking of it this way.” In other words, try thinking of the processes of mind, the formation of ideas, and the complicated function of language “this way” so that questions of the accuracy and certainty of our claims to knowledge as the basis of our self-righteous actions can no longer be meaningfully posed. I think Locke aspires to redescribe the whole conceptual paradigm in which such questions seemed most urgent; further, by redescribing the complexity of our cognitive processes such that we can be certain of so very little *and* that the differences of men’s minds seem as natural as differences of men’s palates, Locke, I think, aspires to render violent actions over sectarian differences as ludicrous as heated disputes about preferring lobster over cheese. But the persuasive force of “thinking of it this way” resides in the cumulative effect of the *Essay*’s narration.

As we discussed at length in Chapter 3, the rhetorical effectiveness of the *Essay* arguably resides in its ensemble narration. The suggestion to “try thinking of it this way” resounds with the storyteller’s implicit appeal to the reader to willingly, if only temporarily, suspend disbelief in order to go along with the story. But as the effectiveness of storytelling resides in the cumulative weight of narrated details, understanding the force of the whole *Essay* has much to do with attending to its parts. More specifically, by attending to the rhetorical construction of multiple narrative voices, I think that we can discern Locke’s ironic stance in Rorty’s specific sense of adhering to a workable belief system while fully cognizant of its contingency. In brief, I think that Locke as storyteller spins a compelling story about the acquisition of ideas, a story whose rhetorical effectiveness is immeasurably augmented by recreating the experience of the thinking “I” working through its thoughts. Constantly appealing to our experience *in* the world and our experience

of reading the *text*, Locke procures our assent to the unfolding narrative by directly involving us as both witnesses and experimenters on our own minds. But what is surely integral to reading the text as *ironic*, in Rorty's sense of awareness of its own contingency, is the creation of a pseudo-external space of intimacy shared by the reader and the assiduously constructed authorial voice. That is, in addition to the many instances of using the reader's immediate experience of holding the book and looking at the white page, the moments when the authorial voice comments on the text's composition or reception combined with those moments when the authorial voice directly addresses the reader, often articulating anticipated responses, insistently reinforces the obvious fact that we are reading a *text*. What I want to suggest is that Locke wants us to listen intently and charitably to his story, agree that it is a potentially *useful* story as an alternative to the intolerable deadlock of intolerance, but also to recognize that it *is a story*--that it is a *text*--not a reproduction of the world, not divine revelation, but a workable *textual metaphor*.

In this regard, the text as *tabula rasa*, the tactile metaphor of mind, embodies an awareness of its own contingency in two significant ways. Making his *own mind* and the very *book* the *objects* of our immediate observation, Locke's textual figuration of his own cognitive processes insistently reminds us that we are reading the thoughts of *one man*. We might here recall Locke's abdication of final authority by openly admitting that his own limited range of experience, as opposed to any transcendent vantage point, is foundational to the provisional structure of mind that emerges from the pages of the treatise. Perhaps more significantly because of its wider implications is the equation of mind and text as a *tabula rasa*. To pursue this line of thought further, we should consider the provocative implications

of mingling the processes of mind and writing--especially in light of the larger story of mind told in the textual *tabula rasa* and the whole process of redescription.

While the *tabula rasa* is a writing surface, we should take particular notice that it is neither a blank nor empty nor clean slate--it is a *scraped* tablet: "a tablet from which the writing has been erased, and which is therefore ready to be written upon again."³⁷ The term *tabula rasa* refers to the original wax tablets used as a surface for writing: "One writes *in*, not *on*, a wax surface, and one erases by rubbing out, hard, the words that have been written. This entails the use of a stylus: an instrument that is sharp on one end, blunt on the other, and very, very sturdy."³⁸ What is significant to our ensuing discussion is that the phrase "to direct the stylus," *stilum ducere*, simultaneously denotes erasure: "since a stylus has opposite ends for opposite purposes, *stilum ducere* can also mean 'erase'."³⁹ In light of these clarifying definitions, let us now turn to consider how the *Essay* as the *tabula rasa* figuring forth Locke's redescription of mind embodies an awareness of its own contingency.

Although Locke used the term *tabula rasa* in an early draft of the *Essay*,⁴⁰ he opts for the metaphor of white paper in the final edition (II.i.2). There are, however, numerous references to wax throughout the *Essay*, most notable, perhaps for evoking the successor image of *white* paper, are the references to wax blanched by the sun. As well, there are moments in which the comparison of mind to wax is explicit:

³⁷ OED, 3218.

³⁸ R.H. Rouse and M.A. Rouse, "The Vocabulary of Wax Tablets," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1 (1990): 15.

³⁹ Rouse and Rouse, 17.

⁴⁰ Yolton notes Locke's use of the phrase in Draft B of the *Essay* and in Locke's early *Essays on the Law of Nature*. See Yolton, *A Locke Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993): 288. Locke also refers specifically to wax regarding a gentleman's son "who being then very little, I considered only as white Paper, or Wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" in *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 265.

If the Organs, or Faculties of Perception, like Wax over-hardned with Cold, will not receive the Impression of the Seal, from the usual impulse wont to imprint it; or, like Wax of a temper too soft, will not hold it well, when well imprinted; or else supposing the Wax of a temper fit, but the Seal not applied with a sufficient force, to make a clear Impression: In any of these cases, the print left by the Seal, will be *obscure*.
(II.xxix.3)

To appreciate the rhetorical import of the analogy of mind and wax, we should recall that the dominant description of mind which Locke seeks to redescribe advocates innatism: "Locke was seeking to introduce a new critical attitude towards all knowledge, its conclusions as well as its base. He thought he had been able to construct a system of knowledge in which appeals to maxims, to innate principles, or to innate ideas were no longer needed."⁴¹ I think it is important to bear in mind how pervasive the theory of innate ideas had been throughout the seventeenth century: "the doctrine of innate knowledge was held, in one form or another, to be necessary for religion and especially for morality from the early years of the century right through to the end and into the beginning of the following century."⁴² Significant for our purpose here is that the theory of innate ideas *presupposes* the metaphor of mind as a *wax tablet* upon which are *impressed* or *imprinted* by God certain ideas and precepts as the foundations of morality. Book I brims with references to characters being stamped on the mind. For instance, one passage explicitly questions the existence of innate ideas imprinted on the minds of children while intimating the metaphorical centrality of *writing*:

Can they receive and assent to adventitious Notions, and be ignorant of those, which are supposed woven into the very Principles of their Being, and imprinted there in indelible Characters, to be the

⁴¹ Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*, 26.

⁴² Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*, 29.

Foundation, and Guide of all their acquired Knowledge, and future Reasonings? This would be, to make Nature take Pains to no Purpose; Or at least, *to write very ill.* (I.ii.25 emphasis mine)

We might here also note that Rorty's critique of Locke's metaphor of mind, discussed earlier in Chapter 2, is based on a citation from Book I arguing against innate ideas *imprinted* on but not perceived by the mind (I.ii.5). What I want to suggest is that Locke's attempt to redescribe the mind embodies an awareness of the contingency of historical discourses from which he must draw. Consider Rorty's argument that a new vocabulary is usually "implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things."⁴³ In application to the *Essay*, then, Locke arguably must *redescribe* the familiar discourse of innatism; however, it would be not only meaningless but impossible for Locke to introduce a wholly new metaphor of mind--he must, therefore, use the old metaphor in a new way. But I think Locke effectively figures forth this awareness of historically contingent discourses through the materiality of the writing tablet--the *text* itself.

Locke's redescription of mind as a white paper self-reflexively mimics the white paper of the text upon which he writes the experiences he has observed in his own mind. Moreover, from a purely practical standpoint, the technological innovation of ink on paper, as opposed to wax tablets, is a necessary precondition for figuring forth the invisible processes of mind in this bulky book.⁴⁴ Recalling, however, my argument that the art of storytelling largely informs the narrative of the *Essay*, what are we to make of this story that Locke's mind spins *about* mind on the

⁴³ *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 9.

⁴⁴ Of interest and relevance to this discussion of paper somehow documenting the movements of mind is John Dunn's note that "one of the peculiarities of Locke's temperament was his extreme reluctance to throw away any papers on which he had written." See Dunn, 1.

white paper, the very metaphor of mind? Does not Locke's rewriting the story of mind on the white paper, the very *textual embodiment of mind*, suggest an awareness of the power of redescription to shape, literally and figuratively, our cognitive processes that Rorty espouses?

To appreciate just how rhetorically complex is Locke's metaphorical equation of *mind* and *text* through the potent image of the *tabula rasa*, we might recall those moments in the text that figure forth the immediacy of the writing itself: "I am alone writing this" (IV.xi.9); "My right Hand writes, whilst my left Hand is still" (IV.x.19); "the Ink, I write with" (II.viii.6). Similar to the extended contemplation of the externality of words on the page flowing out of Locke's pen (IV.xi.7) that I earlier analyzed, Locke's thoughts on consciousness focus on his immediate consciousness of *writing*:

Had I the same consciousness, that I saw the Ark and *Noah's* Flood, as that I saw an overflowing of the *Thames* last Winter, or as that I write now, I could no more doubt that I, that write this now, that saw the *Thames* overflow'd last Winter, and that view'd the Flood at the great Deluge, was the same *self*, place that *self* in what Substance you please, than that I that write this am the same *my self* now whilst I write.

(II.xxvii.16)⁴⁵

The text as text-in-creation that writes and rewrites itself with each reading clearly evokes the image of a palimpsest. But perhaps more compelling is the immediacy of Locke's pen actually writing the treatise as we read--that is, Locke's pen that writes on the cerebral tablet, the *text*, literalizes the cognitive grooves, or furrows, caused by descriptive vocabularies.

⁴⁵ For further reflections on writing this treatise, see II.xxxi.6; II.xxxi.12; III.vi.4-5; IV.xi.2.

Locke's redescription of mind as a white paper thus figures forth the movement from conceiving of innate ideas antecedently imprinted on our minds to the notion that all of our ideas are freshly derived from experience; indeed, every rewriting on the *tabula rasa* is simultaneously an erasure. I think, however, that the text embodies an awareness of its own historical contingency in the metaphorical centrality of the *text as tabula rasa*. That is, the frequent references to wax and the image of continual rewriting intimate the ineradicable writing, or prior descriptions, that can never be finally erased. Like the thwarted aspirations of any account of origins, we can never get back to the original *tabula rasa*--to a time before language or before writing. As Rorty argues, the recognition of contingency having shaped the vocabulary with which we think about the world does not afford us access to any transcendent point from which to fashion new descriptions on a clean slate. We are always already in history and in language. Our stories will *always* be written *on top of*, and *out of*, other stories--writing on top of writing. Our descriptions *always* stand in relation to all prior descriptions. The archetypal narratives that shape our cultural self-conception precede us.

But awareness of the historical contingency of the discourses with which we fashion our self-conception does not preclude the possibility of more fruitful redescription. To this end, Locke reweaves the vocabularies at his disposal--specifically, the vocabulary of innate ideas imprinted on the mind, the vocabulary of Christian divine providence, the vocabulary of primary and secondary qualities central to the whole corpuscular hypothesis, the vocabulary of natural history, and the emerging vocabulary of experimental science--to fashion a new description of mind that will enable us to *act* in different ways. Dealing with the historical complexity of seventeenth-century sectarian strife, Locke emerges in the *Essay* in the role Rorty

ascribes to the liberal ironist. Embodying an awareness of its own historical contingency, the *Essay* nonetheless tells a workable story, proffers an alternate self-description, whose complex idea of toleration implores us to treat each other more charitably, and to refrain from the arrogance of redescribing other people's belief systems.

2 Conclusions 2

MICROSCOPE, TELESCOPE, KALEIDOSCOPE: REVISIONARY READING AND THE CULTURAL ROLE OF NARRATIVE

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves. [...] We are immersed in narrative.

Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*

What implicitly informs my attempt in the preceding chapters to contextualize my rhetorical reading of Locke's *Essay* within Rorty's vocabulary is the question of how we read--how we derive meaning from texts. On the one hand, in keeping with my suggestion that Locke's *Essay* textually figures forth his descriptive observations on his own mind put under the glass, attentiveness to the rhetorical movements of the text perhaps intimates the possibility of expanding our knowledge of the *Essay* by discerning its initially imperceptible dimensions. In this regard, by putting the text under the microscope of close reading--thereby creating an experimental environment in which to ask of the text isolable questions--we might hope to generate a textual phenomenon not readily available to our unassisted perception. On the other hand, by using Rorty's text(s) as an instrument with which to re-examine Locke's *Essay*, we might think that our historical vantage point affords us a certain critical distance from Locke's text and cultural context. Rorty's text(s) would then become a kind of telescope for bringing into sharper focus Locke's *Essay*. In response to both possible interpretations of my project as either a microscopic or

telescopic reading of Locke's *Essay*, I would like to suggest that my revisionary reading that encompasses Locke and Rorty within its purview be modelled more on a kaleidoscope. In other words, I do not propose to have discerned the "truth" of Locke's text either by dissecting selected passages or examining the whole from a speciously objective temporal and spatial vantage point; rather, I think my kaleidoscopic reading arranges particular clusters of ideas that I perceive as patterning the pages of the *Essay* into a coherent and meaningful whole. Rorty, then, functions as one more element, "one more little thing,"¹ in my own redescription and reworking of the particulars of Locke's text.

Indeed, the metaphorical redescription of reading as kaleidoscopic provides a particularly apt way of thinking about the pragmatic project of redescription in which I think Locke and Rorty are similarly involved. That is, the underlying assumption that language shapes our meaningful understanding of ourselves as a basis for action allows for the possibility of alternate descriptions as a precondition for alternate actions. In this regard, Rorty proposes for philosophy a more social role of mediating--not between "reality" and more or less accurate descriptions--but between historical epochs in order to reconcile old and new vocabularies:

Their job is to weave together old beliefs and new beliefs, so that these beliefs can cooperate rather than interfere with one another. Like the engineer or the lawyer, the philosopher is useful in solving particular problems that arise in particular situations--situations in which the language of the past is in conflict with the needs of the future.²

One particular instance of such historical reconciliation that Rorty identifies seems directly relevant to my exploration of Locke's rhetorical project in the *Essay*–

¹ Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, 106.

² "Philosophy and the Future," in *Rorty and Pragmatism*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), 199.

specifically, “the need to reconcile the moral intuitions clothed in the language of Christian theology with the new scientific world-picture that emerged in the seventeenth century.”³ Given the intolerable deadlock of intolerance characterizing seventeenth century sectarian strife, Locke’s *Essay* thus emerges as a more fruitful description of ourselves in relation to each other and to the world. Since the incontrovertible existence of heated dissension belies the postulate of innate moral principles as a reliable guide for proper action, I propose that Locke consciously redescribes the conception of mind as a wax tablet to proffer a revised notion of mind as a white paper. More to the point, Locke reweaves this revised conception of mind with the emerging vocabulary of experimental science to produce the *Essay*, a text that ideationally and methodologically embodies an alternative to fractious sectarian strife. In this regard, despite claims that Locke seeks the ahistorical foundations of all knowledge, Locke, in the *Essay*, emerges as Rorty’s kind of social pragmatist who is keenly aware of historical circumstances--as “the philosopher [who] is useful in solving particular problems that arise in particular situations--situations in which the language of the past is in conflict with the needs of the future.”

But what I find intriguing about dealing with the complexity of *texts* as analogous to the complexity of the world is the ironic awareness that the contingent and metaphorical nature of our narrative renderings does not preclude the necessity of the narrative form, the ordering and re-ordering of particulars, as the way in which we derive meaning. Locke arguably fashions a new *narrative* of our cognitive processes that is predicated on a *narrative* of the origin and history of language. What is unusual about Rorty’s tale, says Christopher Norris, is “the idea that philosophy can *do no more* than make plausible sense of its own prehistory by

³ “Philosophy and the Future,” in *Rorty and Pragmatism*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., 199.

treating it in broadly narrative terms.”⁴ That we must fashion for ourselves a self-description in a final vocabulary, tell ourselves stories of why we are what we are, seems a necessary process for human beings to interpret the events of a life: “The shaping of experience by narrative, indeed the very impulse to tell stories, may suggest primordial, but subliminal, processes underlying even the apparently independent planes of reason or evidence.”⁵ That human beings make sense of the discrete events of lived experience by ordering those particulars in a comprehensive and meaningful whole—a narrative, a story, a reading—points to the central importance of the relation between word and world. By reweaving the strands of historical discourses at his disposal, I think that Locke fashions a new and viable public story, or narrative description, from which all can draw, which simultaneously sanctions the diversity of personal systems of belief. In this wider socially pragmatic vision of humane understanding, Locke’s *Essay*, embodying an awareness of its own *textuality*, points to the world existing outside of the *text*. It is in *that* world of historical circumstance and human interaction that we, in the seventeenth century, ought to modify our intolerant self-conceptions in order to make a peaceable and meaningful world as we find our way through this twilight of probability.

⁴ “Philosophy as a Kind of Narrative: Rorty on Postmodern Liberal Culture,” *Enclitic* 7 (1983): 147.

⁵ Michael Bell, “How Primordial is Narrative?” in *Narrative in Culture: The Uses of Storytelling in the Sciences, Philosophy, and Literature*, ed. Christopher Nash (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 172.

Works Cited or Consulted

- Alexander, Peter. "Boyle and Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities." In *Locke on Human Understanding*. Edited by I.C. Tipton. 62-76.
- Alexander, Robert. "Locke on Substance: Standing Under Understanding." In *History as Diversion: A non-phenomenal approach to Eighteenth-Century Linguistic Thought*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. McMaster University, 1996. Forthcoming.
- Allen, Barry G. Lectures. Philosophy 3D3: Pragmatism. McMaster University. April, 1996.
- , "Pragmatism and the Courtly Muses of Europe." Unpublished paper.
- Arendt, Hannah, ed. *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Ashcraft, Richard. "Faith and knowledge in Locke's philosophy." In *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*. Edited by John W. Yolton. 194-223.
- , ed. *John Locke: Critical Assessments*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Baugh, Christopher. "Brecht and stage design." In *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Edited by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks. 235-53.
- Beiner, Ronald. "Philosophical and Narrative Truth: The Theorist as Storyteller." *Queen's Quarterly*. 91 (1984): 549-59.
- Bell, Michael. "How Primordial is Narrative?" In *Narrative in Culture*. Edited by Christopher Nash. 172-98.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." In *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. 83-109.
- , "What is Epic Theater?" In *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. 147-54.
- Booth, Wayne C. "The Pleasures and Pitfalls of Irony: Or, Why Don't You Say What You Mean?" In *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature*. Edited by Don M. Burks. 1-13.

- . *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd Edition. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Brooker, Peter. "Key words in Brecht's theory and practice of theatre." In *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Edited by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks. 185-200.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Vintage, 1985.
- Burks, Don M., ed. *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1978.
- Cascardi, Anthony J., ed. *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
- Chappell, Vere, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Cohen, Ted. "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy." In *On Metaphor*. Edited by Sheldon Sacks. 1-10.
- Colie, Rosalie. "The essayist in his *Essay*." In *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*. Edited by John W. Yolton. 234-61.
- Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Image Books, 1959.
- Danto, Arthur C. "Philosophy as/and/of Literature." In *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*. Edited by Anthony J. Cascardi. 3-23.
- Dear, Peter. "*Totius in verba*: Rhetoric and Authority in the Early Royal Society." *Isis*. 76 (1985): 145-61.
- de Man, Paul. "The Epistemology of Metaphor." *Critical Inquiry*. 5 (1978): 13-30. Reprinted in *On Metaphor*. Edited by Sheldon Sacks. 11-28.
- Dickson, Keith A. *Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.
- Dunn, John. *Locke*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

- Eamon, William. *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Esrock, Ellen. "Literature and Philosophy as Narrative Writing." In *Ideas of Order in Literature and Film*. Edited by Peter Ruppert. 18-31.
- Fuller, Steven. "When Philosophers Are Forced to Be Literary." In *Literature as Philosophy/Philosophy as Literature*. Edited by Donald G. Marshall. 24-39.
- Gray, Ronald. *Brecht the Dramatist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Gustafson, Donald F. and Bangs L. Tapscott. *Body, Mind, and Method: Essays in Honour of Virgil C. Aldrich*. London: D. Reidel, 1979.
- Hacking, Ian. "Two Kinds of 'New Historicism' for Philosophers." *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation*. 21 (1990): 343-64.
- Hall, Marie Boas. *Promoting Experimental Learning: Experiment and the Royal Society 1660-1727*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Hooke, Robert. *MICROGRAPHIA: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses*. London: J. Martyn and J. Allestry, 1665.
- Jordan, Mark. "A Preface to the Study of Philosophical Genres." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 14 (1981): 199-211.
- Kroll, Richard W. F. *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640-1700*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Levi, Albert William. "Philosophy as Literature: The Dialogue." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 9 (1976): 1-20.
- Locke, John. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- . *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles*. In *The Works of John Locke*. Vol. 8. London, 1823.
- Malachowski, Alan, ed. *Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (and Beyond)*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

- Marshall, Donald G., ed. *Literature as Philosophy/Philosophy as Literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987.
- Mulligan, Lotte, Judith Richards, and John K. Graham. "A Concern for Understanding: A Case of Locke's Precepts and Practice." *Historical Journal*. 25 (1982): 841-57. Reprinted in *John Locke: Critical Assessments*. Edited by Richard Ashcraft. 670-89.
- Mulligan, Lotte. "Robert Boyle, 'Right Reason,' and the Meaning of Metaphor." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 55 (1994): 235-57.
- Nash, Christopher, ed. *Narrative in Culture: The Uses of Storytelling in the Sciences, Philosophy, and Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Norris, Christopher. "Philosophy as a Kind of Narrative: Rorty on Postmodern Liberal Culture." *Enclitic*. 7 (1983): 144-59.
- Patrick, Simon. *A Brief Account of the New Sect of Latitude-Men*. London, 1662.
- Paxman, David B. "Language and Difference: The Problem of Abstraction in Eighteenth-Century Language Study." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 54 (1993): 19-36.
- Rée, Jonathan. *Philosophical Tales: An Essay on Philosophy and Literature*. London and New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Rivers, Isabel. *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Rorty, Richard. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982.
- . "Contemporary Philosophy of Mind." *Synthese*. 53 (November 1982): 323-48.
- . *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- . *Objectivity, relativism, and truth: Philosophical Papers*. Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- . "The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism." *Thesis Eleven*. 37 (1994): 119-26.

- . "The Unnaturalness of Epistemology." In *Body, Mind, and Method: Essays in Honour of Virgil C. Aldrich*. Edited by Donald F. Gustafson and Bangs L. Tapscott. 77-92.
- Rouse, R.H. and M.A. Rouse. "The Vocabulary of Wax Tablets." *Harvard Library Bulletin*. 1 (1990): 12-9.
- Ruppert, Peter, ed. *Ideas of Order in Literature and Film*. Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1980.
- Saatkamp, Herman J., Jr., ed. *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*. Nashville and London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995.
- Sacks, Sheldon, ed. *On Metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Shapin, Steven and Simon Schaffer. *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Shapin, Steven. "Pump and Circumstance: Robert Boyle's Literary Technology." *Social Studies of Science*. 14 (1984): 481-520.
- Shapiro, Barbara. *Probability and Certainty in the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Shklar, Judith. *Ordinary Vices*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Temple, William. *Memoirs of what past in Christendom, from the War begun 1672 to the Peace concluded 1679*. London: R. Chiswell, 1691.
- Thomson, Peter, and Glendyr Sacks, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Tipton, I. C., ed. *Locke on Human Understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Trembath, Paul. "The Rhetoric of Philosophical 'Writing': Emphatic Metaphors in Derrida and Rorty." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 47 (1989): 169-73.
- Vogt, Philip. "Seascape with Fog: Metaphor in Locke's *Essay*." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 54 (1993): 1-18.

- Walker, William. *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Walmsley, Peter. "Civil conversation in Locke's *Essay*." *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*. 303 (1992): 411-13.
- . "Dispute and Conversation: Probability and the Rhetoric of Natural Philosophy in Locke's *Essay*." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 54 (1993): 381-94.
- . "Experimental Essays." Unpublished chapter.
- . "Locke's Cassowary and the *Ethos* of the *Essay*." *Studies in the Eighteenth Century*. 22 (1992): 253-67.
- . "Prince Maurice's Rational Parrot: Civil Discourse in Locke's *Essay*." *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 28 (1995): 413-25.
- Watson, Stephen. "The Philosopher's Text." In *Literature as Philosophy/Philosophy as Literature*. Edited by Donald G. Marshall. 40-66.
- Wood, Neal. "Tabula Rasa, Social Environmentalism, and the 'English Paradigm'." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. 53 (1992): 647-68.
- Yolton, John W. *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.
- , ed. *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- . *Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- . *Locke: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.
- . *A Locke Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- . "Mirrors and Veils, Thoughts and Things: The Epistemological Problematic." In *Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (and Beyond)*. Edited by Alan Malachowski. 58-73.
- . "Phenomenology and Pragmatism." *Philosophical Books*. 22 (July 1981): 129-34.