



OXFORD

LOCKE'S METAPHYSICS

MATTHEW STUART

Locke's Metaphysics

This page intentionally left blank

Locke's Metaphysics

Matthew Stuart

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Matthew Stuart 2013

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First Edition published in 2013

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-964511-4

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

For my father,
Floyd C. Stuart

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

This book attempts to survey, to interpret, and to analyze what Locke has to say about some questions that belong to the province of metaphysics. These include questions about the ultimate categories to which things belong, the most general features of minds and bodies, the distinction between essence and accident, the individuation of bodies and persons, and the nature and scope of volition. They include such questions as whether God exists, whether bodies have colors in the dark, whether any material things have the power of thought, and whether our wills are free. Though I have tried to make this survey of Locke's metaphysics reasonably comprehensive, I have not tried to make it perfectly so. I devote my attention proportionally to the topics to which Locke devotes his. There is a point of diminishing returns in efforts to unearth or to reconstruct a philosopher's views about matters that he or she does not address directly and at some length. Such efforts may display impressive learning about the books a philosopher is likely to have read, about the ideas that were in the air when he or she wrote, but they generate conclusions that must be regarded as highly tentative. That is because the philosophers who demand our attention are precisely those who do not simply absorb influences and transmit them to posterity.

When I told my friend Alison that I was writing a book about Locke's metaphysics, she quipped: "Short book?" She made me laugh, but the notion does persist that Locke is not to be taken quite seriously as a metaphysician. One reason for this may be his own characterization of his goals in the *Essay*. Locke says that he aims "to enquire into the Original, Certainty, and Extent of humane Knowledge; together, with the Grounds and Degrees of Belief, Opinion, and Assent" (I.i.2). I am content to take this at face value, and to say that Locke wrote the book to answer epistemological questions, not metaphysical ones. Still, it cannot be said that he pursued that goal hurriedly, or single-mindedly. He is a brilliant polymath, and his *Essay* is a sprawling, discursive work. When he finds himself in the neighborhood of a metaphysical question, he can rarely resist saying something about it. What he says is nearly always interesting, frequently instructive, and sometimes profound.

Perhaps another reason that some take Locke less seriously as a metaphysician is that they see his theorizing as curtailed by his empiricism. It is true that the *Essay* does not give us untethered speculation. For some of us, that is a point in its favor. On the other hand, it is a mistake to see Locke as a sort of seventeenth-century logical positivist. He does hold that knowledge must ultimately be grounded in simple ideas received through sensation and introspection. Yet he also allows that we have the ideas of quality and essence, of man and person, of will and action—and that we can explore their contents and their relations with one another. I do think that there are serious problems with Locke's theory of ideas, and that he may not have the resources to explain how we get some of the ideas that he thinks we have (Stuart 2008, 2010). The conclusion that I draw from this is that although we laud him as the founder of modern empiricism, there may be more to admire in his metaphysics than in his epistemology.

There may also be those who underrate Locke as a metaphysician because they accept the common image of him as an insightful but unsystematic thinker whose work is rife with inconsistencies. While I do not claim that he can be acquitted on every charge of sloppiness or inconsistency, I do hope to show that Locke's writings on metaphysical topics are freer of inconsistency than many have supposed. He has been accused of bungling the definition of 'quality,' of waffling about secondary qualities, and of offering more than one story about the requirements for free action. Some find tensions in his remarks about solidity, in his thoughts about natural kinds, and in his attitude toward mechanism. In these cases, and more besides, I try to show that Locke can be successfully defended against the charges.

Many of the topics dealt with in the following pages have been discussed by commentators repeatedly, and expansively. Much of this secondary literature is of high quality, and I have learned a great deal from it. Nevertheless, like all of the commentators before me, I add to the pile because I have not been entirely satisfied with the interpretations of others, and because I hope to do better myself. In the pages that follow, I defend new readings of many familiar passages, and try to untangle knots that others have worked on. I have tried to keep the discussion and criticism of other authors to a minimum; but when I have found it useful or necessary to engage with other readings, I have focused my energies on interpretations and arguments that struck me as having a lot going for them. So it is in this business: the colleagues whose work we most admire become our targets!

One benefit of surveying a large swathe of Locke's metaphysics is that this allows us to see connections between the positions he takes, giving us a richer picture of him as a systematic thinker. Thus we will see that Locke's denial that bodies can be co-located (§43) explains why he holds a "chock full" conception of matter on which the empty spaces within a body are not parts of it (§10); that his rejection of essentialism (§23) leads him to embrace relativism about identity (§46); that his relativism about identity equips him to respond to objections to his account of personal identity (§54). Seeing such connections is important. At the same time, I would not exaggerate the degree to which Locke is a systematic metaphysician. Elaborating upon a fragment by the Greek poet Archilochus, Sir Isaiah Berlin distinguished two basic intellectual and artistic types: the hedgehogs, who relate everything to a single organizing principle; and the foxes, who seize upon a great many ideas and objects without attempting to unite them (Berlin, 1953). Berlin calls Plato and Dostoevsky hedgehogs, Aristotle and Shakespeare foxes. As I read him, Locke is more fox than hedgehog.

There are other benefits to taking a broad look at Locke's metaphysics. We learn that certain interpretive avenues that one might have thought were open are in fact closed. So the recognition that Locke repudiates relations (§5) constrains the interpretations that might be given to his suggestion that God is responsible for laws of motion (§36); the recognition that he uses 'real essence' in a nominal-essence-relative sense (§21) helps to undermine the suggestion that he is committed to a Leibnizian view of the relationship between a substance and its features (§34); the recognition that he thinks that a person's past can shrink (§48) shows that he cannot be conceiving of persons as four-dimensional things (§54).

The attempt to take in the whole sweep of Locke's metaphysics also focuses our attention on some chapters in the *Essay* that have received less of it than they deserve. One such chapter is IV.x, whose primary business is to argue for the existence of God. The main argument involves a step so patently fallacious that commentators have been understandably reluctant to dwell long upon it. However, the chapter also contains a number of curious sub-arguments that are well worth sorting out. These include arguments about panpsychism, about the relation between motion and thought, and about the sort of self-regulation required for freedom and rationality. Another chapter that has received less than its due is II.xxi, "*Of Power*." Scholars have paid some attention to Locke's discussions of volition,

voluntariness, freedom, and motivation, but not enough to the evolution of his views over the *Essay*'s several editions. Scholarship has tended to focus on later versions of the chapter; and when the changes have been discussed, the focus has been on the addition of Locke's so-called "doctrine of suspension." I devote a whole chapter to Locke's first edition account, detailing its confusion about the nature of volition, and exploring a difficulty with his account of forbearance. In a separate chapter, I examine the changes he makes in later editions. These include an improved treatment of volition, a new account of motivation, some remarks about suspending desire that amount to commonplace observations rather than a "doctrine," and a muddying of the waters about whether it is possible to forbear willing on an action once it is proposed.

I have undertaken this survey with the primary goal of coming to understand what Locke's metaphysical positions are, and how he supports them with arguments. A secondary objective is to learn some philosophy in the pursuit of the first goal. I do not believe that these two goals are incompatible. We can learn from both the successes and the failures of a great philosopher, but we cannot know what those successes and failures are until we know what the philosopher is saying. I have tried to be charitable in my reading of Locke. I have enough respect for his powers, and enough hard-earned modesty about my own, to think that this is the best way to discover what his views are, and so the best way to learn from his arguments. Still, I have not shied from saying when I find his views untenable, or his arguments unpersuasive. On occasion, I make a suggestion about how a position of his, or an argument of his, might be improved. In these cases, my ambition is to describe a view that is recognizably Lockean in spirit, but that evades a difficulty that I have identified. I have tried to make it very clear when I mean to be offering an interpretation of his words, and when I am describing a line of thought that might be regarded as a friendly amendment.

Locke's writings present us with many interpretive challenges. At times his meaning is unclear. At times he seems to contradict himself. At times he makes claims to which there would seem to be obvious objections. We would like to understand what he means by the words that he chooses to commit to print, and the most important thing that we can do toward that end is to read them closely. When that is not enough, we must draw upon the other things that we know, and work to articulate and defend an interpretation that is better than the others that appear available. Other things

being equal, we should prefer an interpretation that accommodates more of what Locke says, one that assigns to his words meanings that it is more reasonable to think he might have given them, and one that ascribes to him views and arguments that are freer of defects. I have tried to develop interpretations with these desiderata. Of course, I am aware that other things are not always equal, that the desiderata will sometimes pull in different directions, and that such cases are occasions for judgment calls about which reasonable people might disagree.

Brunswick, Maine

Acknowledgments

Work on this book was generously supported by several paid leaves from Bowdoin College, and by a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I'm very grateful to both institutions.

Thanks to the friends and colleagues whose comments and conversation have helped me to better understand Locke's metaphysics: Jenny Ashworth, Jonathan Bennett, Justin Broackes, Vere Chappell, Jill Dieterle, Michael Della Rocca, Don Garrett, Michael Jacovides, Nicholas Jolley, Samuel Levey, Stephen Naculich, Robert Pasnau, Stephen Perkinson, Lewis Powell, David Robb, Todd Ryan, Alison Simmons, Kenneth Winkler, and Douglas Young. I must especially single out Vere Chappell, who has been the ideal senior colleague: friendly, generous, wise, critical, and encouraging. My sincere thanks to Mike Jacovides and Walter Ott, who read the manuscript for Oxford University Press and gave me very helpful comments. Peter Momtchiloff, my editor at OUP, has been remarkably patient and encouraging. Thanks also to John Rogers, who shared his typescript of portions of Draft C of the *Essay*.

My colleagues in the philosophy department at Bowdoin College—Denis Corish, Sarah Conly, Scott Sehon, and Larry Simon—have been unflinchingly supportive throughout the long period of this book's germination. I've also received help from four philosophy department coordinators: Gerlinde Rickel, who set the gold standard, and Kevin Johnson, Emily Briley, and Jean Harrison, who lived up to it admirably. John Bunke combed through the entire manuscript looking for misquotations and incorrect citations, and saved me from many errors.

Some material incorporated here appeared previously in "Locke's Colors," *Philosophical Review* 112 (2003), 57–97 (copyright Cornell University, all rights reserved and reprinted by permission of the publisher, Duke University Press), and in "Revisiting People and Substances," in *Debates in Modern Philosophy*, Antonia Lolordo and Stewart Duncan, eds., London: Routledge, 2012, 186–96. My family and friends have been living with this book for a long time, and I am grateful to them all for their support and encouragement. My daughters, Franny Stuart and Pearl Stuart, deserve special thanks for their patience and their love.

Contents

Abbreviations and Other Conventions

xvi

1	Categories	I
§1	Introduction	I
§2	Modes	4
§3	Substances	7
§4	Mixed Modes	16
§5	Relations	24
2	Qualities	33
§6	Qualities and Powers	34
§7	Qualities in the Drafts	39
§8	Defining Primary Qualities	46
§9	Extension	53
§10	Solidity	55
§11	Other Primary Qualities	65
3	Secondary Qualities	79
§12	Two Kinds of Secondary Qualities	80
§13	Resemblances and Bare Powers	88
§14	Colors	105
§15	Degenerate Powers	117
§16	Apparent Colors	121
§17	Colors and Pains	128
§18	Transient Colors	133
§19	Other Powers	136
4	Essence	141
§20	Real and Nominal Essences	142
§21	Relative and Total Real Essences	148
§22	Workmanship of the Understanding	154
§23	Anti-Essentialism	162
§24	Natural Kinds	172
§25	Perfecting Nominal Essences	183

5	Substratum	199
§26	The Idea of Substance	200
§27	Making the Idea of Substance	207
§28	A Variety of Readings	213
§29	Obscurity	225
§30	Confusedness	233
§31	Problems with the Idea of Substance	239
6	Mind and Matter	245
§32	Immaterial Substances	245
§33	A Case for Dualism	250
§34	Thinking Matter	264
§35	Arbitrary Determinations	280
§36	Voluntarism	286
§37	Mechanism	293
7	Identity	297
§38	Principles of Individuation	298
§39	The Problem of Constitution	306
§40	Matter and Temporal Parts	308
§41	Persons and their Parts	310
§42	The Difficulty About this Relation	313
§43	Against Co-location	318
§44	Women and Masses	322
§45	The Oak and the Horse	326
§46	Essence and Identity	328
§47	Annihilation	334
8	Persons	339
§48	Introducing Persons	340
§49	Persons and Substances	347
§50	The Necessity Claim	352
§51	Remembering and Forgetting	359
§52	The Sufficiency Claim	365
§53	A Fatal Error?	368
§54	Assessing the Simple Memory Theory	378
9	Agency: The First Edition	391
§55	Volition as Preference	392
§56	The Objects of Volition	399
§57	Voluntary Action	403
§58	Freedom and Forbearance	406

§59 Volition and Negative Action	411
§60 A Problem for Locke's Account	418
§61 Freedom of the Will	423
§62 Motivation and Preference	434
10 Agency: The Revised Account	443
§63 Rethinking Volition	444
§64 Rethinking Motivation	451
§65 A Mistake of One Word	457
§66 Suspending Desire	459
§67 Suspension and Indeterminism	467
§68 Suspension and Freedom	473
§69 Motivation and Judgment	476
§70 Forbearance in the Fifth Edition	481
<i>Bibliography</i>	493
<i>Index</i>	507
<i>Index Locorum</i>	517

Abbreviations and Other Conventions

I have adopted the practise of using single quotation marks when *referring* to a word, phrase, or symbol rather than *using* it. I use double quotation marks when using a word or phrase that names an idea or nominal essence. So ‘gold’ names gold, and the nominal essence “gold”—which for Locke is the same thing as the abstract idea associated with ‘gold’—might be “yellow, malleable metal soluble in *aqua regia*.”

Except when it appears in quotations, the symbol ‘§’ refers to sections of this book. I use it in the synopsis that I give at the beginning of each chapter, hoping to equip the reader with signposts to the road ahead. I use it in the text and notes to refer the reader back to earlier discussions or results, or to indicate where a topic will be discussed more fully.

Throughout the text, I use the somewhat awkward ‘persons’ as the plural for ‘person’ in the specifically Lockean sense, that is, the sense in which there is a distinction between a person and a man or a human being.

In the case of articles and single volume works, all references are to page number, unless otherwise specified. In the case of multi-volume works, all references are to volume number and page number, unless otherwise specified.

References to Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are, unless otherwise specified, to the OUP edition edited by P. H. Nidditch, and are given by book, chapter, section, and (when necessary) line.

References to specific early editions of the *Essay* take the form of a book, chapter, and section citation followed by the number of the edition in brackets, e.g., “II.xxi.5 [1st]” for book II, chapter xxi, section 5 in the first (1690) edition.

References to the following works employ these abbreviations:

<i>Works</i>	<i>The Works of John Locke, A New Edition Corrected</i> , 10 vols., London: Printed for Thomas Tegg, 1823. References are to volume number and page number.
<i>Drafts</i>	<i>Drafts for the Essay Concerning Human Understanding and Other Philosophical Writings</i> , Volume 1: Drafts A and B. P. Nidditch and G. A. J. Rogers (eds), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
Draft C	A typescript of Draft C prepared by Professor G. A. J. Rogers for future publication in the Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke.

- Corresp.* *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols., E. S. DeBeer (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–1989. References are to volume number, letter number, and page number.
- CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 vols., J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- CSMK *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3: *The Correspondence*, J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

This page intentionally left blank

I

Categories

§1. The fundamental categories of Locke's ontology are the familiar ones of substance and mode. We must look carefully at how he defines and uses these terms if we are to understand what he means by them. This task is made more difficult because of Locke's carelessness about the distinction between ideas and their objects. §2. His conception of mode is a non-standard one, for it includes events as well as features of things. §3. He conceives of substances as things or stuffs that enjoy ontological independence. Modes are dependent upon substances either because they are ways that substances are, or because they are events that feature substances as constituents. Substances include not only natural things and stuffs, but also artifacts. §4. Locke defines a class of ideas that he calls ideas of "mixed modes." These are complex ideas that represent features or events, and that have more than one type of simple idea as a constituent. Ideas of mixed modes include the ideas of beauty, of theft, and of a rainbow. Locke draws several contrasts between ideas of substances and ideas of mixed modes, and one of these seems to imply that the world does not contain beauty, theft, or rainbows. What he means is not that, but that our ideas of mixed modes do not count as defective if there happens to be nothing in the world answering to them. §5. Locke says that all of our complex ideas can be "reduced under these three Heads. 1. Modes 2. Substances. 3. Relations." He also notes that many features of things depend upon their relations. This suggests that he endorses a three-category ontology. However, though his remarks about relations are spare, he is best understood as denying their existence.

§I Introduction

One of the tasks of metaphysics is to give an account of the most basic constituents of reality. Philosophers have long approached this task by trying to describe the broadest categories into which things fall. In this endeavor,

economy and completeness are the cardinal virtues, the object being to describe the smallest set of categories that suffices to accommodate all there is. Not surprisingly, philosophers have quarreled about the details. They have offered different lists of categories, and different accounts of the features that earn a thing its place in one or another category. Yet as a matter of historical fact, these differences have frequently been worked out within a common framework, an inheritance from Aristotle. This framework involves a commitment to at least two most fundamental categories, substance and accident. A substance is understood to be a particular that is the subject of accidents, and that is characterized by some sort of independence. A substance's accidents are supposed to depend on it for their existence. In the seventeenth century, the ontological framework of substance and accident was an ancient tradition, but still a living one. It found expression in the writings of a diverse array of philosophers and theologians: the Scholastics and Spinoza, the Cartesians and the Cambridge Platonists, Edward Stillingfleet and John Locke.

Though Locke's metaphysics is framed in traditional terms, it would be unwise to suppose that he simply relies upon tradition to supply the meanings for these terms. Few of the best philosophers in the tradition did that. That is one reason why the tradition does not speak with one voice about what are the criteria that something must meet to be counted as a substance, an accident or an essence. While it is surely helpful to have some awareness of historical antecedents, there is no substitute for looking at what a philosopher actually says about what he means by terms of art. It can be just as important to look at the way that he uses them in his reasoning about the basic character of reality—to look at the premises he accepts, the examples he offers, the inferences he makes, the conclusions he draws.

One potential source of trouble as we turn to what Locke actually says is that often he is careless about distinguishing between ideas and their objects. This is particularly true when the topic is modes or ideas of modes, qualities or ideas of qualities. Sometimes this carelessness is merely a matter of his writing 'idea' when he means "quality." He confesses to that habit at II.viii.8, and it has been widely noted by commentators. There are straightforward instances of this in his discussions of substance, as when he says that we do not imagine that "simple *Ideas*" can subsist by themselves, and so "accustom our selves, to suppose some *Substratum*, wherein they do subsist" (II.xxiii.1). Surely what he means is that we do not imagine

that *the qualities in bodies* that give rise to our simple ideas can subsist by themselves, and thus we come to think of these qualities as subsisting in a substratum.

As Jonathan Bennett has shown, Locke is also guilty of more substantive conflations (Bennett 1996). The very passage in which he confesses to sometimes saying “idea” when he means “quality” is muddled in a way that substituting ‘quality’ back for ‘idea’ will not straighten out: he talks about the “*Ideas*” of white, cold, and round “as they are in the Snow-ball” and “as they are Sensations, or Perceptions, in our Understandings” (II.viii.8). He cannot really want to say either that ideas are *both* in the snowball and in our understandings, or that qualities are. Locke also sometimes speaks of modes as though they were ideas. So, for example, he says: “*Modes* I call such complex *Ideas*, which however compounded, contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves, but are considered as Dependences on, or Affections of Substances” (II.xii.4). Here modes are called ideas, but they are also said to be considered as “Dependences on” substances. While he may in fact hold that ideas are “Dependences on” substances—that ideas are dependences upon the minds having those ideas—it seems plain that he means to be telling us that *all* “Dependences on” substances are modes. We might imagine that this is a case of his saying “*Ideas*” where he means “qualities,” except that it is *ideas* that are simple or complex for Locke, not qualities. Thus we have a conflation of modes and ideas of modes rather than a clean ambiguity involving ‘idea.’ Locke’s conflation of qualities and ideas is a minor annoyance in some cases, and a real obstacle to understanding his position in others.

Another challenge is that it can be difficult to tell when Locke’s claims about the nature and content of our ideas are *just* claims about how we think of things, and when they are supposed to convey something about how things are. Consider his announcement at II.xii.3 that all of our complex ideas can be “reduced under these three Heads. 1. *Modes* 2. *Substances*. 3. *Relations*.” Strictly speaking, this is a claim about the classification of our ideas, not a claim about the ultimate categories of being. Yet it is tempting to suppose that he takes our ideas to be reflective of reality in this case—to suppose that mode, substance, and relation are the three fundamental categories of his ontology. To establish whether this is really so will take some work. We will turn to part of that task shortly. For the moment, let us simply note this as one instance of a more general difficulty: it can be hard to tell

when Locke is making a claim about our ideas of things, and when he is trying to say something about how things are.

An examination of the fundamental categories of Locke's ontology does not take us immediately to his most important contributions, but it is a good place to start. It allows us to locate him within a philosophical tradition to which he does belong, and to appreciate when he is reacting against elements of that tradition. So we begin by considering Locke's views about which things count as modes and substances, and why they do. Later in the chapter, we will turn to some questions about the status of mixed modes and relations.

§2 *Modes*

Locke uses a number of general terms to refer to the ways that substances are: 'mode,' 'accident,' 'quality,' 'affection,' 'property,' 'attribute,' and their plurals. We have already seen that he characterizes modes as "Dependences on, or Affections of Substances" (II.xii.4). Even if we set aside the fact that Locke sometimes uses 'mode' to mean "idea of a mode," he gives 'mode' a wider scope than it has in the writings of many philosophers. Modes for him include not only features of substances, but also events. A triumph—that is, a parade celebrating a military victory—counts as a mode for Locke (II.xxii.8), as does a resurrection (III.v.5) and a stabbing (III.v.6).

Locke holds that "all things that exist are only particulars" (III.iii.6), and so is committed to the view that all modes are non-repeatable particulars.¹ That is of course what one should expect of the modes that are events. The second showing of a movie may resemble the first in many respects; but since it occurs at a different time, it is a different event. The same goes for triumphs, resurrections, and stabbings. Simultaneous showings, triumphs, resurrections, or stabbings can also be distinguished by place or participants rather than time of occurrence. Yet Locke also conceives of the modes that are not events as non-repeatable individuals, rather than abstract entities.² Lockean modes that are not events are what are now sometimes called "tropes."³ They are particular instances of features. An example would be the redness of Massachusetts Hall, where this is understood not as a shade

¹ For other statements of the view that only particulars exist, see III.iii.1, 11 and *Works* X, 250.

² This point is made by Armstrong 1997, 25.

³ The term 'trope' was introduced by Donald C. Williams (1953). It has been widely, but not universally, adopted. Keith Campbell favors 'abstract particular' (Campbell 1990), and other authors have invoked such phrases as "concrete properties" or "individual accidents."

that might characterize other brick buildings, but as something peculiar to Massachusetts Hall however similar any other buildings may be in respect of color. Though tropes are particulars, they are distinct from the things they characterize. In the context of Locke's ontology, they figure as ways that substances are rather than as substances themselves.

Locke offers no argument against the existence of abstract objects, but he does make some attempt to show how we can do without them. At II.xi.9 and III.iii, he gives an account of the semantics of general terms that is broadly nominalist in spirit. On that account, a general term is one that can represent more than one particular. A general term can do this because it stands for an abstract idea. For an idea to be abstract is not for it to be a non-particular, but rather for it to be the product of abstraction, a mental operation. In abstraction one selectively attends to one component of a complex idea, removing or leaving out the other components of it (Stuart 2008). The product of abstraction is an idea that is able to represent more than one particular because it represents features common to several particulars without representing those that distinguish them.

When he first introduces the idea of a mode, Locke offers as examples "*Triangle, Gratitude, Murther, etc.*" (II.xii.4). This is an odd list, even after we have made allowance for the conflation of modes and ideas of modes. There is not much difficulty about gratitude and murder being on the list. A murder is a kind of event. '*Gratitude*' might refer either to the property characterizing the mind of a person while she is feeling grateful, or to a mental event, an episode of feeling grateful. It is less clear why '*Triangle*' belongs on the list. To make sense of this, we must observe that '*Gratitude*,' and '*Murther*' are general terms. What Locke has offered us is really a list of kinds of modes, rather than a list of particular modes. Yet it is the members belonging to those kinds that Locke wants to say are dependences on, or affections of, substances. To preserve the parallel, '*Triangle*' should name a kind whose members are dependences on, or affections of, substances. It does this if it refers to the kind whose members are the instances of triangularity in the world (if there are any). It is not beyond the pale that one might use '*triangle*' to name that kind, though one would have expected '*triangularity*' or '*triangular*' to fill that role. Curiously, Locke never uses those terms, despite the fact that he mentions triangles, and discusses our knowledge of them, on dozens of occasions.

Of the terms that Locke uses to refer to the ways that substances are, ‘quality’ is another that figures particularly prominently in his metaphysical theorizing. Locke’s definition of ‘quality’ and his classification of qualities will occupy us for the next two chapters. As for his handling of other terms that designate ways that substances are—‘attribute,’ ‘property,’ ‘affection,’ and ‘accident,’ a quicker survey will suffice.

Locke does not use ‘attribute’ as a noun very often. He makes no attempt at defining this term, and does not say that he means to use it in a specialized sense. In practice, however, he reserves it for only the most basic features of substances, features that are so basic that they are not liable to change.⁴ Locke recognizes three basic kinds of substances: bodies, finite intelligences, and God (II.xxvii.2). He calls extension an attribute of matter (II.xv.4), and he suggests that the power to act may be the “proper attribute” of spirits (II.xxiii.28). Most intriguing is the fact that although he uses ‘attribute’ so rarely, he almost always uses it when he is referring to a feature of God, presumably because none of the features of God are liable to change.⁵

Today we tend to use ‘property’ as a generic, catch-all term for ways that things are. However, there is a long tradition—reaching back to Aristotle through Porphyry—of sometimes reserving ‘property’ (and the terms we translate as ‘property’) for an aspect of a substance that is not essential, but that is possessed by all and only that substance’s conspecifics. At other times, Aristotle uses ‘property’ in a slightly less narrow sense, one on which properties also include essential features.⁶ On either of these narrower senses, the ability to learn grammar is a property of man (*Topics* 102a20), as is the ability to laugh (Porphyry 2003, 12). Locke may sometimes use ‘property’ and ‘properties’ in our wide sense; at other times, he clearly uses it in one or the other of Aristotle’s narrower senses. He may be using it in our wide sense on

⁴ This makes Locke’s use of ‘attribute’ similar in some respects to Descartes’s use of ‘principal attribute’ (*Principles* I, 53 in Descartes 1985, vol.1, 210) and to Spinoza’s use of ‘attribute’ (*Ethics* 1d4 in Spinoza 1985, vol. 1, 408, but also see the discussion in Bennett 1984, 60–6). However, we should not make too much of this. For both Descartes and Spinoza, ‘attribute’ is explicitly introduced in a specialized sense, and the corresponding concept is an important nexus in an elaborate attempt to answer basic questions of ontology. It is not so for Locke.

⁵ See I.iv.15; II.xvii.1; IV.x.6, 12. In this Locke follows Descartes (see *Principles* I, 56, in Descartes 1985, 1:211).

⁶ The transliteration of the Greek term rendered as ‘property’ in these contexts is ‘*idion*.’ Terence Irwin and Gail Fine explain: “Aristotle uses *idion* as a technical term (Latin ‘*proprium*’) for a nonESSENTIAL but necessary property F, belonging to all and only Fs, *Catg.* 3a21, 4a10, *Top.* 102a18–30 (discussed fully in *Top.* v). He also uses the term less strictly, so that it includes essential properties, *APo* 73a7, 75b18, 76a17, *DA* 402a9, *Met.* 1004b11, *EN* 1097b34” (Aristotle 1995, 578). For the same use in Porphyry, see Porphyry 2003, 11–12.

those occasions when he seems to speak of indifferently of a thing's modes, qualities, or properties.⁷ He may also be using 'Properties' in its widest sense when he calls color, weight, and fusibility "Properties" of the parcel of Matter that makes the ring on his finger (III.iii.18). For in that passage the point of characterizing the ring as a parcel of matter is precisely to avoid considering it in relation to an essence that might serve to distinguish its essential from its non-essential features. Yet Locke is clearly using 'Properties' in one of the narrower senses at III.vi.6, where he says that "Properties [belong] only to *Species*, and not to *Individuals*."⁸ He cannot mean to deny that individuals have qualities. Rather, he is saying that it is only in relation to some species that a quality counts as a property in one of the narrow senses. Locke does not call attention to the fact that he uses 'Properties' in different senses, so naturally he does not tell us when he is employing which. Often it does not much matter which sense he intends. When it does matter, we can only look to the context to discover what it is.

Locke does not use 'affection' or 'accident' very often. When he does use these terms, he does not seem to mean anything different than what he means by 'quality.' He calls extension a quality (II.viii.9) and an affection (II.xiii.24). He calls heat and cold sensible qualities (II.i.3; II.xxiii.7), but also affections (II.xxvii.11, 24). He refers to the color white as a "Quality or Accident" (IV.xi.2). One could say such things and yet take the extensions of 'quality,' 'affection,' and 'accident' to be systematically overlapping but non-equivalent. I have found no evidence that Locke is doing that.

§3 *Substances*

Complex ideas can, we are told, be reduced under three heads. The first was "*Modes*," and the second is "*Substances*":

The *Ideas of Substances* are such combinations of simple *Ideas*, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves; in which the supposed, or confused *Idea* of Substance, such as it is, is always the first and chief. Thus if to Substance be joined the simple *Idea* of a certain dull whitish colour, with certain degrees of Weight, Hardness, Ductility, and Fusibility, we have the *Idea* of *Lead*; and a combination of the *Ideas* of a certain sort of Figure, with the powers of Motion, Thought, and Reasoning, joined to Substance, make the ordinary *Idea* of a *Man*. (II.xii.6)

⁷ See, for example, II.xxiii.6, 30.

⁸ Another place that Locke uses 'properties' in this special sense is two sections later, at III.vi.8.

Locke says that ideas of substances are ones that are taken to represent distinct particular things, but his examples suggest a less tidy picture. A man is not a surprising candidate for being a distinct particular thing, but “*Lead*” ought to give us pause. Lead would seem to be a stuff, or a kind of stuff, rather than a distinct particular thing. This is not a singular slip: Locke refers to gold, water, vitriol, bread, and iron as substances.⁹ We could accommodate “*Lead*” as a distinct particular thing by supposing that Locke regards the totality of any kind of stuff as composing a distinct particular thing, and that “*Lead*” refers to such a thing. Another possibility is that when Locke calls lead a substance, what he really means is that each individual, cohering bit of lead is a substance (Odegard 1969).

R. S. Woolhouse goes so far as to suggest that Locke’s ideas of substances are usually not ideas of distinct particular things. He points out that the complex ideas of substances that Locke is most concerned about—the ones that are the focus of his attention in such chapters as “*Of our Complex Ideas of Substances*” (II.xxiii) and “*Of the Names of Substances*” (III.vi)—are ideas of kinds of things. They are general ideas such as “man,” rather than the ideas of particular men. These are ideas of the items that Aristotle in the *Categories* had called secondary substances, rather than ideas of such primary substances as an individual man or an individual horse.¹⁰ Woolhouse concludes that Locke’s “substance-ideas are, in the end, not to be understood as ideas of Aristotelian first substances” (Woolhouse 1983, 98).

Woolhouse is right to point out that Locke is sometimes more concerned with general ideas of kinds of substances than with the ideas of particular continuants. Yet he goes too far when he suggests that Lockean ideas of substances are not ideas of distinct particular things. Locke’s repudiation of abstract objects means that if the idea “man” is to represent anything in the world, it can only represent one or more particulars. What makes it a general idea is just that it represents several particular men, rather than one particular man. So there is still a perfectly straightforward sense in which ideas of kinds of substances “represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves” (II.xii.6). It is just that in these cases the relation of idea to thing is not one-to-one.

The idea of a man is an idea of a substance, Locke tells us. If “Caesar” names a man, then Caesar is a substance on his view, and the idea of Caesar is the

⁹ II.xxiii.3, 6, 9.

¹⁰ Aristotle 1984, *Categories* 2a15–16.

idea of a substance. Let us assume that Locke would also count Cleopatra as a substance, and the idea of Cleopatra as an idea of a substance. His examples of modes include a triumph and beauty. Thus the idea of Caesar's quadruple triumph in 46 BC is the idea of a mode, as is the idea of Cleopatra's beauty. The defining feature of ideas of substances for Locke is that they are ideas whose objects are conceived as subsisting by themselves. The defining feature of ideas of modes, by contrast, is that they are conceived as being dependences on, or affections of, substances. Thus Locke holds that Caesar and Cleopatra do, in some important sense, subsist by themselves. He also holds that Caesar's triumph and Cleopatra's beauty do, in some important sense, depend on substances.

What sort of independence is it that Caesar and Cleopatra are supposed to enjoy, and what sort does Locke mean to deny of Caesar's triumph and Cleopatra's beauty? One candidate for the sort of dependence that modes have on substances is causal dependence. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Locke would regard Caesar's triumph and Cleopatra's beauty as depending on substances that cause them to exist. It is, however, unlikely that he has causal *independence* in mind when he says that such things as Caesar and Cleopatra subsist by themselves. The familiar facts of generation and corruption would seem to entail that men and women are not causally independent, and there is no reason to suppose that Locke thinks otherwise.¹¹

Perhaps it will be suggested that Locke has causal dependence in mind when he says that modes are dependences on substance, but some other, non-causal sort of independence in mind when he says that substances subsist by themselves. There are good reasons for resisting this. One is that it makes a hash of the contrast that Locke draws between modes and substances.

¹¹ One might object that Locke would have taken Caesar and Cleopatra to be at least partly constituted by immaterial souls that were naturally indestructible and hence causally independent. To this, several points of reply are in order, all of which look forward to issues that we will take up in Chapter 8. First, it is "a man" that is said to be a substance, and on the usage that Locke introduces at II.xxvii.6, a man is an organism, and thus the sort of thing that might perish naturally. Second, Locke is officially agnostic about whether or not any human person is even partly constituted by an immaterial soul. Therefore, even if "*a Man*" in II.xii means "a person" he should not be helping himself to the presumption that such things are causally independent because they are partly or wholly constituted by immaterial souls. Third, even if it is Caesar the *person* we are talking about and even if we assume that persons are wholly constituted by immaterial souls, it would not be right to say that Locke would regard Caesar as being causally independent because Caesar is constituted by an unperishable soul. For on the view of personhood that Locke defends in II.xxvii, a person can be destroyed by means that need not involve the destruction of an immaterial soul that constitutes the person.

The suggestion is that at II.xii.4 he is telling us that modes are causally dependent, while at II.xii.6 he is denying that substances are dependent in some non-causal sense. That is like the waiter at an Indian restaurant telling you that the difference between two dishes is that one is hot and the other not, when he means that the first dish is spicy and that the other one is not heated. A second problem for the reading under consideration is that because they are causally dependent on substances, Caesar and Cleopatra would count as modes on this reading even if they also qualify as substances in virtue of some non-causal variety of self-subsistence. Yet it seems clear that Locke means for the categories of substance and mode to be mutually exclusive.

If it is not causal dependence that Locke has in mind when he portrays modes as dependent on substances, and substances as independent, then what sort of dependence is it? The obvious answer—and I think the correct one—is ontological dependence. Modes depend on substances for their existence because their manner of existence requires—not causally, but logically or metaphysically—the existence of certain other things. These other things enjoy a manner of existence that does similarly require the existence of still other things. This conception of the relation between modes or accidents and substances is as old as Aristotle, and in the seventeenth century it was the common property of scholastics and Cartesians, of Spinoza and Robert Boyle.¹² On this conception, a mode is a way that something is, or possibly a way that some things are. The characterization of modes as ontologically dependent derives from the insight that it is impossible for there to be ways things are without there being things that are those ways. From the idea that not everything is a way that something else is, we get the idea that there must be some things that are ontologically independent.

This way of drawing the distinction between substance and mode is schematic, but even so it raises difficulties that Locke ignores. For instance, it seems reasonable to say that features can have features—that the ways things are can themselves be different ways. This means that if the categories of substance and mode are supposed to be mutually exclusive, a substance cannot be understood simply as a bearer of features. One might define substances as things that are not ways of being other things. Modes could be

¹² See Aristotle's *Categories* 1a20–28, 2a13–15 (1984 v.1, 3–4); Eustachius a Sancto Paulo's *Compendium* I.1 (Ariew, Cottingham, and Sorrell 1998, 72); Descartes's *Second Replies* (1985, 2:114) and *Principles* I:56 (CSM, 1:211); Malebranche's *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, Dialogue 1 (1980b, 27); Spinoza's *Ethics* 1d3, 1d5, 1p1 (1985, 408–10); Boyle's *Origin of Forms and Qualities* (1991, 21–2, 57).

said to include ways substances are, but also whatever stands in the ancestral of that relation to a substance.

Another, and possibly more serious, problem with using ontological dependence to distinguish modes and substances concerns the idea that things are more basic than the ways things are. This assumption crops up again and again in the history of philosophy, but it seems vulnerable to a simple objection. Though it is true that a way of being cannot exist without some thing or other being that way, it is just as true that a thing cannot exist without being some way or other. On the face of it, the dependence relations between things and the ways they are would seem to be perfectly symmetrical. A possible response to this would be to say that we need to take greater care in cashing out the notion of ontological dependence. Rather than conceiving of it as mere existential dependence, we should conceive of it as some other non-causal relation, but one that is necessarily asymmetrical. So instead of saying that x is ontologically dependent upon y just in case the existence of x entails the existence of y , we might say that x is ontologically dependent upon y just in case the existence of y explains the existence of x . Or we might say that x is ontologically dependent upon y just in case x depends for its identity upon y .¹³ These are interesting possibilities, though they raise difficulties of their own, including the challenge of explicating the relevant notion of explanatory dependence, or identity dependence, in a satisfactory way. How exactly to characterize the ontological dependence of modes upon substances is something that Locke does not discuss, and it would take us too far afield were we to explore all of the options that might be available to him.

That Locke is thinking of the dependence of modes on substances as ontological, rather than causal, may already be implied by his characterization of modes as “Dependences on, or Affections of Substances” (II.xii.4). An affection of a substance is a way the substance is. One way to read “Dependences on, or Affections of Substances” is as suggesting an equivalence between being a “dependence on” a substance and being an “affection of” a substance. On this reading, all modes are ways substances are. In that case, Locke is saying that even events are ways substances are. This raises a problem: Caesar’s triumph is certainly not a way that Caesar is. Perhaps the suggestion is that Caesar’s triumph is an affection of Caesar and

¹³ These are two possibilities explored in Lowe 2009.

a number of other substances. Yet one might worry that Caesar's triumph could be an affection of a collection of substances only if the collection constitutes a substance, which in the case of Caesar and his retinue seems implausible.¹⁴ Another problem is that events seem to have temporal parts whereas, on the usual way of thinking about them, substances do not. How could a four-dimensional event be a feature of a three-dimensional collective substance?

A better way of understanding the claim that modes are "Dependences on, or Affections of Substances" is to read the two clauses as non-equivalent, but as having overlapping extensions. One can see Locke as attempting to make room for events as dependences on substances without treating events as affections. Being an affection of a substance is one way of being a dependence on a substance, but being an event that has the substance as a constituent is another. This reading avoids both of the difficulties that face the previous one: it is unproblematic that a triumph is a mode, and the category of modes is broad enough to include things with temporal parts. On this reading, the dependence of modes on substances is still ontological dependence. Just as there cannot be ways a thing is without a thing that is those ways, so there cannot be events involving things without there being those things. As the redness of a brick could not exist without the brick, so the brick's breaking a window could not exist without the brick. Caesar's triumph is a dependence on Caesar, and on various other men and horses, because that particular parade could not have occurred without those substances existing then.

On the reading that we have been developing, anything that exhibits the right sort of ontological independence—anything that is a subject of properties without being an event or a property of something else—counts as a substance. In an influential paper, Martha Bolton contends that Locke counts only natural things or stuffs as substances (Bolton 1976, 488). Locke's

¹⁴ One might try to mount a reply on Locke's behalf by pointing to his talk of "*Collective Ideas of Substances*" (II.xxiv), and to the fact that he offers the idea of an army as one of these (II.xii.6). If an army is a substance, then Caesar's triumph could be an affection of Caesar's army. The question is whether Locke counts an army as a substance. Most of the time, he seems to think of collective ideas of substances as ideas of groups of substances, but not as ideas of substances composed of groups of substances. The section heading for II.xii.6—which reads "*Substances Single or Collective*"—could be offered as evidence that armies and flocks of sheep are supposed to be collective *substances*, and not just collective ideas of substances. However, given Locke's carelessness about ideas and their objects, and given his failure to talk of collective substances elsewhere, one cannot have much confidence that "*Substances ... Collective*" is supposed to denote a class of complex ideas rather than a class of items in the world.

substances, according to her, are things or stuffs that figure in laws of nature (Bolton 1976, 511–12). It is true that the examples of substances that Locke offers are nearly always examples of naturally occurring things or stuffs. They are men, horses, stones, gold, lead, and so on. It is also true that though he frequently speaks of “natural Substances,” he tends to speak of artificial *things* rather than of artificial substances.¹⁵ On the other hand, there are several reasons for thinking that artifacts count as substances for Locke. First, there is the fact that not *all* of Locke’s examples of substances belong to natural kinds: at II.xxiii.6 he characterizes bread as a substance. Second, his discussion of “*Collective Ideas of Substances*” seems to imply that artifacts are substances. Collective ideas of substances are so called, Locke says, “because such *Ideas* are made up of many particular Substances considered together” (II.xxiv.1). This is one of the relatively rare occasions on which he conflates substances and ideas of substances. He means, surely, that collective ideas of substances are made up of *ideas* of many particular substances considered together.

Locke’s examples of collective ideas of substances include the idea of an army, the idea of a city, and the idea of a fleet (II.xxiv.2). This is trouble for Bolton’s reading, because although an army may consist solely of men (an unequipped army being perhaps still an army of sorts), collections of men do not make a city, or a fleet. Even a collection of *sailors* does not make a fleet. If the idea of a fleet is a collective idea of substances, then it would seem that a ship must be a substance. If the idea of a city is a collective idea of substances, then some man-made structures are substances. One might resist these conclusions by arguing that an idea counts as a collective idea of substances so long as it includes the ideas of a number of substances, even if it also includes the ideas of a number of non-substantial items. Thus one might contend that the idea of a city is a collective idea of substances because it includes the idea of a number of human inhabitants, even though it also includes the ideas of (allegedly) non-substantial man-made structures. However, this line of argument will succeed only if Locke thinks that it is true by definition that cities and fleets include people. If he thinks that an abandoned city is still a city, and an unmanned fleet still a fleet, then he must be thinking of buildings and ships as substances.

¹⁵ For “natural Substances,” see II.xxi.2; III.iv.1, 3; III.vi.2, 11, 41. For “artificial things,” see II.xxvi.2 and III.vi.40, 41.

A third reason for thinking that artifacts count as substances for Locke—and surely the most important one—is that they seem to satisfy his account of what a substance is. A substance, he tells us at II.xii.6, is something that subsists by itself. We are left to understand what this means by understanding what a substance is not. A substance is not dependent in the way that a mode is. This means that a substance is not related to something else as an affection; it is not a way that something else is. It also means that a substance is not an event that depends for its existence on its constituents. Caesar, his horses, and his soldiers are substances because none of them is either an affection of something else, or an event that has some other thing as a constituent. By this reasoning, houses, ships, and typewriters should qualify as substances.

Bolton denies that artifacts subsist by themselves in the sense that Locke has in mind. According to Bolton, when Locke says that a substance “subsists by itself” he means that “the existence of a substance requires nothing but what is dictated by laws of nature” (Bolton 1976, 511). Substances are self-subsistent because “everything required for their existence is determined by the laws of nature about them” (Bolton 1976, 511). The idea seems to be that a substance’s self-subsistence involves causal independence, but causal independence of a very restricted and unusual sort—a sort that is compatible with an enormous amount of causal dependence. If something is self-subsistent, on Bolton’s reading, then it is free from “extra-legal” causal dependencies: any causal dependency that it does have is captured by some law of nature or other.¹⁶ A typewriter fails to qualify as self-subsistent in the relevant sense because typewriters depend for their existence on typewriter factories and typewriter repairmen, and such things do not figure in any laws of nature. The biggest problem with this reading is that it strays so far from any ordinary understanding of Locke’s phrase ‘subsists by itself’ as to defy credibility, and does so in the absence of direct textual evidence. When Locke talks about things being capable or incapable of subsisting by themselves, he makes no mention of laws of nature. In fact, he has very little to say about laws of nature in any context. A further problem is that since

¹⁶ Bolton seems to think that Lockean self-subsistence also involves ontological independence. At one point she says, “Substances ‘subsist by themselves,’ because they do not require modes or entities of another category in order to exist (although the laws of nature make them dependent on other substances)” (Bolton 1976, 511). Presumably the idea is that both artifacts and natural substances satisfy this requirement, but that artifacts are excluded from the category of substance because of their extra-legal causal dependencies.

presumably God does not figure in any laws of nature, Bolton's reading threatens to exclude from the category of substance anything that depends causally on God for its existence. It thus threatens to yield the result that there are no substances.

At the end of his short chapter on collective ideas of substances, Locke makes a curious observation about the nature of artifacts. He says, "Amongst such kind of collective *Ideas*, are to be counted most part of artificial Things, at least such of them as are made up of distinct Substances" (II.xxiv.3). Strictly speaking, this is a tautology. A collective idea of substances is, by definition, the idea of a number of substances considered together. So in the passage just quoted, Locke is saying that if an artifact is "made up of distinct Substances," then the idea of it is a collective idea of substances. The same could be said of an organism, or of a stone. It is true of anything that *if* it is a conglomeration of substances, then the idea of it is the idea of a number of substances considered together. Yet in singling out artifacts for special mention, Locke seems to intend some contrast between artifacts and other things. The contrast seems to be this: we are more apt to think of the parts of artifacts as being substances—distinct particular things capable of subsisting by themselves—than we are the parts of natural substances. Why might this be? One reason is that in many cases the parts of artifacts are coherent chunks of stuff with their own well defined boundaries; that is less often true of the parts of natural substances. Think of the gears, springs, screws, and so forth that make up a clock, and compare these with the tissues of an animal body. Another, not unrelated, reason that the parts of an artifact might seem more like distinct particular things is that in many cases artifacts can be disassembled and reassembled, whereas—at least in Locke's day—natural substances could not be.

What it is for a substance to subsist by itself is for it not to be ontologically dependent in the ways that modes are. However, the sort of ontological dependence that Locke takes to be definitive of modes is not the only sort of ontological dependence that one might conceive. There is also the dependence of a composite thing on its parts, and (perhaps) the dependence of an ordinary object on the matter out of which it is composed. If freedom from these sorts of ontological dependence were required of substances, then only simple, immaterial things could be substances. Such a conclusion would be too profoundly revisionist for Locke's taste: he would be more apt to look around for another characterization of substance rather than abandon the notion that ordinary physical objects are substances.

§4 *Mixed Modes*

We have seen that Locke departs from tradition in taking the category of modes to include not only features of things, but also events. This is far from being the only complication in his treatment of modes. Another wrinkle is that although he offers ideas of modes, substances, and relations as the three fundamental kinds of complex ideas—and although he evidently takes all ideas of substances¹⁷ and of relations¹⁸ to be complex ideas—he does not think that all ideas of modes are complex ideas. Indeed, it seems that for Locke all—or nearly all—simple ideas are ideas of modes.

At II.iii.1, Locke marks a “*Division of simple Ideas*”¹⁹ into four sorts: those that enter through one sense only, those that enter through more than one sense, those that come from reflection only, and those that are “suggested to the mind *by all the ways of Sensation and Reflection*.” His examples of ideas in the first class include ideas of colors, noises, tastes, and smells, and also the ideas of heat, cold, and solidity (II.iii.1). Ideas in the second class include the ideas of space, extension, figure, rest, and motion (II.v). Those in the third include the ideas of perception and of willing (II.vi.2). Those in the fourth include the ideas of pleasure, pain, power, existence, and unity (II.vii.1). Nearly all of these seem to be ideas of modes. That is, they seem to be ideas

¹⁷ It seems clear that Locke takes all ideas of substances to be complex ideas, but it is hard to find a place where he comes right out and says this. He frequently refers to our “complex ideas of substances,” and takes each of these to be an idea whose parts include several simple ideas plus the “confused *Idea of something to which they belong*” (II.xxiii.3). Yet there being many complex ideas of substances is, strictly speaking, compatible with there also being one or more simple ideas of substances. Perhaps the nearest Locke comes to explicitly ruling that out is at II.xxiii.14, where he says that “*our specifick Ideas of Substances* are...complex and compounded.” Yet even this is an observation about ideas of *kinds* of substances, and leaves open the possibility that the idea of some particular substance is a simple idea. The most likely candidate would be the idea of God, and Locke explicitly ranks that among the complex ideas (see II.xxiii.33–35).

¹⁸ Locke says that ideas of relations are another of the three kinds of complex ideas (II.xii.3, 7 and II.xxxi.14), and again it seems fairly obvious that this means that all ideas of relations are complex ideas. Yet again he does not seem to explicitly rule out the possibility that some ideas of relations are, or might be, simple. He might seem to do so at II.xxv.11, where he says that “all the *Ideas* we have of *Relation*, are made up, as the others are, only of simple *Ideas*.” Yet even this can be disputed. It is not clear what are the “others” to which he refers in this passage. If they are other complex ideas, then the whole remark could be taken as being yet another comment about just those ideas of relations that are complex. If the “others” are *all* other ideas, then Locke must hold that even simple ideas are “made up...of simple *Ideas*” (namely, themselves), again leaving the door open for simple ideas of relations. Further complicating matters is the fact that some commentators see Locke as backing away from his compositionism in later editions of the *Essay*, and as coming to hold that ideas of relations are neither simple nor complex. For criticism of this, see Stuart 2008.

¹⁹ Marginal heading.

whose objects qualify as affections of, or dependences upon, the things that Locke counts as substances (bodies, minds, people). A possible exception is the idea of space. At II.xiii.17, Locke tells us that he cannot say whether space is substance or accident, which seems to leave open the possibility that the idea of space is the idea of a substance. There is also a general reason for thinking that simple ideas must be ideas of modes. They cannot be ideas of substances or relations, since those are all complex ideas. So if simple ideas are ideas of items in Locke's ontology, and if substance, mode, and relation are the three fundamental categories of his ontology, it would seem that simple ideas must be ideas of modes.

Making matters more complicated is Locke's distinction between what he calls ideas of "simple modes" and what he usually calls ideas of "mixed modes" (but occasionally calls ideas of "complex modes"²⁰). This is not, as one might think, a distinction between mode-ideas that do not have parts and those that do. Ideas of simple modes and ideas of mixed modes are all complex ideas. For ideas of simple modes are not simple ideas, but instead ideas that are "only variations, or different combinations of the same simple *Idea*, without the mixture of any other, as a dozen, or score" (II.xii.5). We might say that these are complex ideas that are homogenous. The idea of dozen is the idea of a simple mode because it is a complex idea whose parts are twelve instances of the idea of a unit. The idea of a mixed (or complex) mode, by contrast, is a complex idea whose parts are tokens of different types of simple ideas. As an example of an idea of a mixed mode, Locke offers the idea of beauty, "consisting of a certain composition of Colour and Figure, causing delight in the Beholder" (II.xii.5).

The simple/mixed distinction is one that applies in the first instance to ideas, sorting them by reference to their constituent ideas. If it applies at all to the objects of those ideas—if Locke means to speak of simple modes and of mixed modes as two classes of properties and events—then it applies to

²⁰ See II.xxii.5, 7, 10 and III.vi.45. On one occasion, Locke seems to depart from this usage, and to use the phrase 'complex modes' not to talk about mixed modes but to talk about what he usually calls "simple modes." This comes at II.xv.9. Speaking about the infinitely divisible parts of duration and of space, he says, "But the least Portions of either of them, whereof we have clear and distinct *Ideas*, may perhaps be fittest to be considered by us, as the simple *Ideas* of that kind, out of which our complex modes of Space, Extension, and Duration, are made up, and into which they can again be distinctly resolved." This seems to mean that though space is infinitely divisible, we can (and should) treat our idea of the smallest space of which we have a clear and distinct idea as a simple out of which our ideas of larger spaces are constructed. The implication seems to be that the idea of a large space is made up of a number of tokens of the idea of the smallest space of which we have a clear and distinct idea.

these items in a derivative or secondary way. Whether he uses the simple/mixed distinction in this secondary way is rendered somewhat obscure by his failure to always carefully distinguish ideas and their objects. Very often one can read apparent references to modes as careless talk about ideas of modes. Even if Locke does employ the simple/mixed distinction in this secondary way to non-ideas, it is an epistemological distinction rather than a metaphysical one: it sorts into two classes items that are on the same metaphysical footing.

A further complication involves the locutions ‘mode of’ and ‘modification of.’ Locke uses these phrases in two different ways, without announcing this or even betraying any particular awareness of it. If a mode (or a modification) is an affection of, or dependence upon, a substance, one would expect the claim that something is a mode of x (or a modification of x) to indicate that it is an affection of, or a dependence upon, a thing or substance x . Locke does sometimes use ‘modification of’ this way. Thus at II.xiii.18 he speaks of the possibility that God, spirits, and matter might agree in the “same common nature of *Substance*” and differ only in “a bare different modification of that *Substance*.”²¹ Surprisingly, he never uses ‘mode of’ (or ‘modes of’) this way in the *Essay*. When he says that something is a mode of x , he means that it is a determinate of the determinable x . When the something in question is an idea, what this comes to is that the idea in question is less general than the idea x , and its object is something that falls under that more general idea. Thus at II.xiii.4 Locke says that “[e]ach different distance is a different Modification of Space, and *each Idea of any different distance, or Space, is a simple Mode of this Idea.*” What the first clause amounts to is unclear. It depends upon whether ‘Space’ refers to space or to the idea of space, and it may also depend upon Locke’s conception of space. What the rest of the passage means is that the idea of any particular distance is less general than the idea “a space,” and the former idea represents something that falls under the latter. Locke sometimes uses ‘modification of’ (and ‘modifications of’) in this way too.²²

Locke’s examples of ideas of mixed modes include the ideas of beauty (II.xii.5), theft (II.xii.5), rainbow (II.xviii.4), parricide (II.xxii.4), a triumph (II.xxii.8), fencing (II.xxii.9), drunkenness (II.xxviii.15), courage (II.xxx.4),

²¹ For other examples where ‘modification of x ’ means “affection of x ,” see II.xiii.18; II.xxi.14, ll.27–28; and IV.iii.6.

²² See, for example, II.xiii.1, 5, 9; II.xviii.3; II.xix.1; III.x.11.

and adultery (III.v.5). There is no difficulty about why these count as ideas of mixed modes: each term in the list can be plausibly construed as standing for a kind of property or event, and the ideas of these are not likely candidates for being what Locke calls simple modes. What is worrisome is a strand of argument in the *Essay* that seems to imply that nothing *in rerum natura* answers to these ideas.

Locke draws several contrasts between ideas of substances and ideas of mixed modes. He says that ideas of substances are intended to copy nature in a way that ideas of mixed modes are not (II.xxxi.3). He tells us that ideas of mixed modes are arbitrary in a way that ideas of substances are not (III.iv.17; III.v.3; III.vi.28); that they are the workmanship of the human understanding in a way that ideas of substances are not (III.v.13). He says that real and nominal essences are distinct in the case of substances, but identical in the case of mixed modes (III.x.19). Most important, for our purposes, is the intimation of a further contrast. At times, it looks as though Locke is saying that the world does contain things that answer to our ideas of substances, but that it does not contain anything that answers to our ideas of mixed modes. He says that “*Mixed Modes and Relations* [have] no other *reality*, but what they have in the Minds of Men” (II.xxx.4), and that they have “nothing to represent but themselves” (II.xxxi.3).²³ He observes that ideas of substances “carry with them the Supposition of some real Being, from which they are taken,” and he suggests that ideas of mixed modes do not (III.v.3). He claims that the names of mixed modes “*lead our Thoughts to the Mind, and no farther*” (III.v.12), and he says that they “for the most part, *want Standards in Nature*” (III.ix.7). At least one commentator has read these passages and concluded that Locke holds that “there is nothing, in reality, which corresponds to our ideas of modes” (Conn 2003, 6). To deny that anything *in rerum natura* answers to our ideas of mixed modes would be to deny that there are instances of beauty in the world, that there is drunkenness, that there are cases of parricide. These would be strange and implausible things to say. Fortunately, Locke is not saying them. Although he holds that the reality and the adequacy of ideas of mixed modes is independent of whether anything corresponds to them, he does not hold this because he thinks that nothing corresponds to them.

²³ This is probably a case of his saying “mixed modes” when he means “ideas of mixed modes.” At IV.iv.5, it is clearly the *idea* of a mixed mode that is “not designed to represent anything but it self.”

Locke thinks that what an idea is *for*—and in particular, whether it is supposed to model something external to it—depends upon its maker's intent. This determines the conditions that are necessary for it to be “real” or “adequate.” He calls ideas “real” if they have a “Foundation in Nature” and a “Conformity with the real Being, and Existence of Things, or with their Archetypes”; otherwise they are “*Fantastical or Chimerical*” (II.xxx.1). He calls ideas adequate only if they perfectly represent “those Archetypes, which the Mind supposes them taken from; which it intends them to stand for, and to which it refers them” (II.xxxi.1); otherwise, they are inadequate. Simple ideas are made not by us, but by the operation of external things on us in ways ordained by God. God means for these ideas to allow us to “distinguish the sorts of particular Substances, to discern the states they are in, and so to take them for our Necessities, and apply them to our Uses” (IV. iv.4). To serve this purpose, these ideas need only “answer and agree to those Powers of things, which produce them in our Minds” (II.xxx.2), something that (because of God's power) they cannot fail to do. Simple ideas are therefore incapable of being fantastical or inadequate. Complex ideas, on the other hand, are made by us, and so the conditions that govern their reality and adequacy depend upon our purposes.²⁴ Locke is chiefly concerned with abstract ideas and general names, rather than the ideas and names of particular things or events. He thinks that when we make general ideas of substances, we take external things as their archetypes; but that when we make ideas of mixed modes, we do not. Ideas of mixed modes *are* their own archetypes (II.xxx.4), and they are archetypes “to rank and denominate Things by” (II.xxxi.3).

According to Locke, general ideas of substances are modeled upon external things, and are defective if nothing in the world corresponds to them. If a careless naturalist observes a new species, puts together an abstract idea meant to capture its features, but forms an idea to which no actual living thing corresponds, then his idea is faulty. By contrast, if nothing in the world answers to our ideas of mixed modes, this does not imply that they are defective. If nothing in the world is perfectly triangular, this does not mean that there is anything wrong with our idea of a triangle. If all married people were faithful, this would not mean that there was a problem with our idea of adultery. When Locke says that ideas of mixed modes have “nothing

²⁴ Locke says that we make complex ideas at II.xiii.1 and *Works* IV, 11.

to represent but themselves" (II.xxxi.3), and that they "*want Standards in Nature*" (III.ix.7), he means that extra-mental facts are irrelevant to the reality and the adequacy of these ideas. When he says that mixed modes have "no other *reality*, but what they have in the Minds of Men" (II.xxx.4), he is making a claim about *ideas* of mixed modes, and again it is that their reality and adequacy does not depend upon anything extra-mental.²⁵

Far from thinking that there are no things of the sorts that ideas of mixed modes represent, Locke thinks that in a certain sense there are too many of them. The number of different kinds of features and events that we could frame ideas of, and then name, vastly outstrips the number that we have any reason to talk about. That is why he says that it is to a certain extent arbitrary which ones we do frame general ideas of, and invent names for.²⁶ The choices we make in that regard are relative to, and reflect, our interests. These interests make it worthwhile for us to be able to communicate readily about the killing of a father by his child, and so we have the idea of parricide and the word 'parricide'; they have not led us to fashion an idea of, and designate a term for, the killing of a sheep (III.v.6). Different peoples will have different interests because of their differing circumstances; so different linguistic communities employ not only different words, but to a certain extent different categories. That, Locke says, is why we find that between any two languages there are always some untranslatable terms.²⁷

Why do we not model ideas of mixed modes upon external archetypes as we do ideas of substances? Locke's answer may have to do with the nature of events and features themselves. He says repeatedly that ideas of mixed modes are not modeled upon patterns.²⁸ Occasionally, he expresses himself a bit more fully, saying that they are not modeled upon *standing* patterns.²⁹ He may think that we do not model ideas of mixed modes upon standing patterns because the objects of these ideas are not, in the relevant sense, standing. Locke's substances are continuants that endure through time and that change in orderly ways. They exhibit a stability and a unity that seems independent of

²⁵ That Locke's subject is *ideas* of mixed modes becomes clear when one considers the entire sentence in which the quoted remark appears. It reads: "*Secondly, Mixed Modes and Relations*, having no other *reality*, but what they have in the Minds of Men, there is nothing more required to those kind of *Ideas*, to make them *real*, but that they be so framed, that there be a possibility of existing conformable to them." Here "*Mixed Modes and Relations*" are plainly called kinds of ideas.

²⁶ II.xxii.4; III.v.3, 6, 15.

²⁷ II.xxii.6 and III.v.8.

²⁸ II.xxii.2; III.iv.17; III.v.3, 5, 6.

²⁹ II.xxxi.3; III.xi.15.

us. They can be observed for long stretches, and re-encountered after periods of absence. This allows us to refine and improve our ideas of them, modifying those ideas to more accurately reflect the collections of qualities we find repeatedly and stably co-instantiated. The case of items represented by ideas of mixed modes is different. Locke says that triumphs and apotheoses cannot “exist altogether any where in the things themselves, being Actions that required time to their performance, and so could never all exist together” (II.xxii.8). They cannot “exist altogether any where in the things themselves” because it is their nature to unfold over time—that is, because they have temporal parts that cannot co-exist. Later he makes the point in more picturesque language, saying that actions “perish in their Birth” (III.vi.42). The fleeting nature of events makes them poorly suited to serve as archetypes for ideas. We cannot observe them for sustained periods, cannot re-identify them after periods of absence, and so have little chance to refine our ideas of them.³⁰

In emphasizing the degree to which ideas of mixed modes are supposed to be independent of external models, Locke may seem to overplay his hand. Consider II.xxii.9, where he describes these three ways in which we get complex ideas of mixed modes:

1. By Experience and *Observation* of things themselves. Thus by seeing two Men wrestle, or fence, we get the *Idea* of wrestling or fencing. 2. By *Invention*, or voluntarily putting together of several simple *Ideas* in our own Minds: So he that first invented Printing, or Etching, had an *Idea* of it in his Mind, before it ever existed. 3. Which is the most usual way, by *explaining the names* of Actions we never saw, or Notions we cannot see; and by enumerating, and thereby, as it were, setting up before our Imaginations all those *Ideas* which go to the making them up, and are constituent parts of them.

Here Locke does concede that we can acquire ideas of mixed modes by observing the events they represent; but he also says that we more frequently get them without having observed what they represent. This would seem to sit poorly with the fact that our interests in communicating with one another are dominated by the practical business of negotiating our way

³⁰ Events lack a certain kind of stability and unity because they are not continuants. What of the other items that are represented by ideas of mixed modes, namely property instances? Locke may think that they lack stability and unity for the same reason as events do. He might think that the redness of an apple or the beauty of a woman is not something that literally persists through time. It is hard to see how there could be a fact of the matter concerning whether today's beauty is *the very same* token of beauty as yesterday's, or else a different token of exactly the same type.

through the world, a fact that seems to ensure that most of the mode-ideas that we make represent features and events that frequently recur in our experience.

The solution here is that there are different senses in which an idea might be said to be newly made. An idea is in one sense newly made when it is half of an idea/term pair making its first entrance into a language; it is in another sense newly made when it is half of an idea/term pair that is a fresh addition to some particular speaker's repertoire. At II.xxii.9, Locke is concerned with the expansion of an individual's conceptual and linguistic repertoire. He is making the point that such expansions usually (but not always) happen when others explain to us what ideas are associated with terms that are already being used by other members of our linguistic community. This is clear from a discussion earlier in the chapter, where he says that we commonly get ideas of mixed modes by hearing others explain the meanings of terms already in circulation. "Thus," he says, "a Man may come to have the *Idea* of *Sacrilege*, or *Murther*, by enumerating to him the simple *Ideas* which these words stand for, without ever seeing either of them committed" (II.xxii.3).

Though individuals may acquire ideas of events and properties of which they lack personal experience, we should expect new idea/term pairs to be introduced to a language only when people have reason to think and talk about what the idea/term pairs represent. This is just what we find Locke saying about the expansion of a language. At III.v.7 he tells us that "[t]hough these complex *Ideas* [of mixed modes] be not always copied from Nature, yet they are always...made for the convenience of Communication, which is the chief end of Language." He goes on to note that in making ideas of mixed modes, men have regard only to those combinations of qualities that they have occasion to mention to one another. One chapter later, he goes on to explain that when an individual acquires new ideas of mixed modes by learning more of a language, there is a real sense in which those ideas *do* take other things as their archetypes. They take as their archetypes not events or features in the world, but ideas in the minds of competent speakers of the language. Thus Adam's children, wanting to learn the meanings of words that Adam had introduced to the language, "were obliged to conform the *Ideas*, in their Minds, signified by these Names, to the *Ideas*, that they stood for in other Men's Minds, as to their Patterns and *Archetypes*" (III.vi.45).

§5 *Relations*

We have seen that Locke thinks that all of our complex ideas can be “reduced under these three Heads. 1. *Modes*. 2. *Substances*. 3. *Relations*” (II.xii.3). It is tempting to infer that mode, substance, and relation are also the three basic categories of his ontology. Locke certainly believes that there are substances, and it is equally certain that substance constitutes an ultimate category for him. We have also seen that we need not saddle him with the view that nothing answers to our ideas of modes. Indeed, there is every reason to think that modes constitute another ultimate category for him. Do relations constitute a third? Locke says relatively little about relations. Even in the chapter “*Of Relation*” (II.xxv), he is more interested in discussing the nature and origin of *ideas* of relations, and the role of relative *terms* in language, than he is in discussing the nature of relations themselves.³¹ Still, it is worthwhile to consider what he does say about relations, especially as the topic has received so little attention from commentators.

Locke sometimes lumps ideas of relations in with ideas of mixed modes. This makes for a number of places in which he seems to be denying that there are relations. However, we are now in a position to see that these passages do not really demand such a reading. It is not just mixed modes, but also relations, that are said to have “no other *reality*, but what they have in the Minds of Men” (II.xxx.4). It is not just mixed modes, but also relations, that are said to be “Archetypes without Patterns,” and so to have “nothing to represent but themselves” (II.xxxi.3). Mixed modes and relations are also discussed together in III.v (“*Of the Names of mixed Modes and Relations*”). After telling us that ideas of mixed modes are made by the understanding (III.v.2), that they are made arbitrarily and without patterns (III.v.3), that they can be made prior to the existence of what they represent (III.v.5), and that their names “*lead our Thoughts to the Mind, and no farther*” (III.v.12), Locke observes that what “has been said here of mixed Modes, is with very little difference applicable also to Relations” (III.v.16). These passages do not show that Locke thinks that there are

³¹ When it comes to relations, even those topics that get more of his attention get less of it than we might wish. His explanations of how we make ideas of relations, of what their constituents are, and of how they are related to ideas of relata, are underdeveloped and inadequate. For discussion, see Stuart 2008.

no relations. They show that he thinks that the conditions that govern the adequacy and reality of ideas of relations are like those that govern the adequacy and reality of ideas of mixed modes. He thinks that neither ideas of mixed modes nor ideas of relations are made with the purpose of modeling stable and unified items in the world. Neither ideas of mixed modes nor ideas of relations are reckoned defective if there happens to be nothing answering them.

The question of the ontological status of relations is raised most conspicuously by something that Locke says in the course of explaining how ideas of relations are sometimes clearer than ideas of relata:

Secondly, This farther may be considered concerning *Relation*, That though it be not contained in the real existence of Things, but something extraneous, and superinduced: yet the *Ideas* which relative Words stand for, are often clearer, and more distinct, than of those Substances to which they do belong. (II.xxv.8)

Commentators do not agree about what is being said here. T. H. Green and James Gibson take Locke to be denying that relations are real, although both also say that he finds himself unable to consistently adhere to this view (Green 1885, 35; Gibson 1917, 193–5).³² Jonathan Bennett suggests in passing (in the midst of a discussion about Hume) that Locke may mean that all relations are reducible in a certain sense (Bennett 1971, 253–4). Rae Langton says that Locke is endorsing the view that relations are irreducible in a certain sense (Langton 2000).

If we are to extract from II.xxv.8 a view about the ontology of relations, we must understand what Locke means by ‘contained in the real existence of Things,’ and by ‘extraneous, and superinduced.’ Of the commentators mentioned in the previous paragraph, Langton makes the most serious attempt at explicating these phrases. She looks to Locke’s characterization of primary qualities as “real,” and says that for him “real” qualities—and “real” things generally—are ones that are independent of perceivers and other things (Langton 2000, 79–80). She then declares that she takes Locke’s spatial metaphor—his talk of what is “contained in” the real existence of things—to convey the idea

³² As Green puts it, “Locke was not the man ... to become speechless out of sheer consistency” (Green 1885, 36). Green and Gibson do not agree about Locke’s reasons for denying that relations are real. See Gibson 1917, 193–4.

of supervenience.³³ Putting these together, she concludes that Locke's remark about relations not being "contained in the real existence of Things" means that relations do not supervene on the intrinsic features of things.

Langton's reading is almost directly at odds with the one suggested by Bennett. His suggestion is that when Locke tells us that relations are not "contained in the real existence of Things," he means that they are reducible to the non-relational features of things.³⁴ Bennett does not explain the connection between Locke's language and the view ascribed to him. Perhaps the idea is that if relations are reducible then they would not be "contained in the real existence of Things" because they need not be mentioned in an account of the most basic constituents of reality. An inventory of the world could be complete even if the names of relations do not appear on it. Yet this still makes the connection rather tenuous. Suppose we grant that one who held that relations are reducible might be led to deny that relations are "contained in the real existence of Things." Even so, this does not show that someone who denies that relations are "contained in the real existence of Things" is trying to express the view that relations are reducible.

A sensible way to explore the question of what Locke means when he says that relations are not "contained in the real existence of Things"

³³ The idea of supervenience that she seems to have in mind is what Jaegwon Kim has termed "strong supervenience" (Langton 2000, 78n6). This is a relation between families of properties, A and B: A *strongly supervenes* on B just in case, necessarily, for each x and each property F in A, if x has F, then there is a property G in B such that x has G, and *necessarily* if any y has G, it has F (Kim 1984, 165).

³⁴ The notion of reduction that Bennett has in mind is also close to Kim's notion of strong supervenience. He says that a relation, R, is reducible to non-relational properties of relata just in case: For all x and y, there are non-relational properties F and G such that $(Fx \ \& \ Gy) \rightarrow xRy$ (Bennett 1971, 253). There is a difference between (i) the claim that relations are reducible to non-relational properties in Bennett's sense of 'reducible' and (ii) the claim the relations strongly supervene on non-relational properties in Kim's sense of 'strongly supervene.' Kim's notion has a modal requirement built into it. For relations to strongly supervene on the non-relational properties of things, it must be true not only that things having the non-relational properties they do suffices for their standing in the relations they do; it must be true that their having the non-relational properties they do *necessarily* suffices for their standing in the relations they do. Thus if it were a contingent matter that things having the non-relational properties they do sufficed for their standing in the relations they do, relations would be reducible to non-relational properties but would not strongly supervene upon them. It is hard to see how this difference between (i) and (ii) could matter, since it is hard to see how it could be a contingent matter that things having the non-relational properties they do sufficed for their standing in the relations they do.

is to look at how he uses language like this in other contexts, and then to extrapolate. The phrase ‘the real existence of things’ occurs quite a number of times in the *Essay*, and in each case it seems to refer simply to what there is in the world. The phrase crops up several times in discussions about ideas of mixed modes. When Locke describes one as putting together ideas of mixed modes without first witnessing the events they represent, he says that one is putting together ideas that “were never offered to his Mind by the real existence of things” (II.xxii.3). When he says that ideas of mixed modes are not modeled upon items in the world, he says that we do not “examine them by the real Existence of Things” (III.v.3).³⁵ He also refers to the real existence of things when speaking of the truth and falsity of ideas. Locke distinguishes two senses in which ideas can be true or false, one having to do with “the Conformity they have to the Ideas which other Men have, and commonly signify by the same Name” (II.xxxii.9), and the other being truth or falsehood “in reference to the real Existence of Things” (II.xxxii.13). Several sections later, he says that ideas of substances are false when “they put together simple *Ideas*, which in the real Existence of Things, have no union: as when to the Shape, and Size, that exist together in a Horse, is joined, in the same complex *Idea*, the power of Barking like a Dog” (II.xxxii.18).³⁶ It is not only ideas, but also propositions, that can be true or false. In IV.v (“*Of Truth in general*”), Locke distinguishes mere verbal truth from “real” or “metaphysical” truth, and says that the latter is “nothing but the real Existence of Things, conformable to the *Ideas* to which we have annexed their names” (IV.v.11). Finally, he characterizes external world skepticism as the worry that our experiences happen “without the real Existence of Things affecting us from abroad” (IV.xi.6).

On all of these occasions, Locke seems to be using the expression ‘the real existence of things’ in a most ordinary, straightforward sense. He seems to be referring simply to what exists, or to what exists independently of us. If what belongs to the real existence of things is what exists, or what exists independently of us, then Locke’s claim that

³⁵ See also III.v.6, 14.

³⁶ Locke also says that “he that hath *Ideas* of Substances, disagreeing with the real Existence of Things...hath...*Chimæras*” (III.x.31); and that knowledge of substances is real only if the ideas of those substances are “taken from the real existence of things” (IV.iv.12).

relations do not belong to the real existence of things means that relations do not exist, or that they do not exist independently of us. That this is what he does mean is perhaps most strongly suggested by the linguistic parallel between II.xxv.8 and this passage from the chapter on general terms:

To return to general Words, it is plain, by what has been said, That *General and Universal*, belong not to the real existence of Things; but *are the Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding*, made by it for its own use, and concern only *Signs*, whether Words, or *Ideas* (III.iii.11).

Commentators who discuss this passage are unanimous in taking it to express Locke's repudiation of abstract objects.³⁷ They all take the claim that "*General and Universal*, belong not to the real existence of Things" to mean that there are no general or universal things, or at least that there are none outside the mind. If they are right about that, then surely the claim that relations do not belong to the real existence of things must mean that there are no relations, or at least that there are none independent of our mental activities.

If II.xxv.8 is telling us that there are no relations, or that relations do not belong to the mind-independent world, then neither Langton's reading nor Bennett's speaks to the issue that Locke is addressing there. One could deny that relations supervene upon non-relational features because one thinks that there are no relations; or one could do so because one thinks that relations constitute a separate and ontologically basic category. Langton does not distinguish these two stances, but our reading of II.xxv.8 rules out the second. One could say that relations are reducible to non-relational features as a way of trying to accommodate relations and to give an account of what they are, or else as a way of eliminating them. It is not clear which Bennett has in mind, but our reading of II.xxv.8 rules out the first. Neither Langton's reading nor Bennett's has Locke denying that relations exist, or denying that they belong to the mind-independent world. In this instance, it is the older commentators—Green and Gibson—who have understood Locke better.

³⁷ See, for example, O'Connor 1952, 138–9; Alexander 1985, 257; Guyer 1994, 126; Lowe 1995, 154; Bennett 2001, vol. 2, 17.

There is a reading of Locke on which he holds that relations exist, but that they do not belong to the world as it is independent of us. This is a reading on which he holds that our mental activities bring relations into being. Locke does sometimes suggest that relations obtain because of acts of comparison on our part. He says that “*The nature ... of Relation*, consists in the referring, or comparing two things” (II.xxv.5), and that “*Relation* is a way of comparing, or considering two things together” (II.xxv.7). This might lead one to conclude that he thinks that a relation between two things is “extraneous” to them, and “superinduced” upon them, because it depends for its existence on some subject comparing them. Walter Ott reads Locke this way. He attributes to Locke a view that he calls “foundational conceptualism,” according to which “relations are fully mind-dependent and have no real being,” though “the mind-independent world provides a foundation (and a justification) for us to form the ideas of relations that we do” (Ott 2009, 167). According to Ott, Locke takes relations to be mind-dependent because he holds that relations *are* comparisons (Ott 2009, 167).³⁸ On this view, there are no relations whenever we are not comparing things, though even then things will have the intrinsic features that ground the comparisons we make when we do make comparisons.

If relations were something other than acts of comparing, it would be an utter mystery how acts of comparing could give rise to relations. Ott’s reading avoids saddling Locke with that mystery, but faces difficulties of its own. Here on the desk where I write there is a photograph in which I am standing next to my mother with my arm around her. I am five inches taller than she is. Or at least, that is how I would ordinarily put it. On the view that Ott ascribes to Locke, it would seem that we should say that though

³⁸ Ott also describes Locke as holding a reductionist view of relations according to which “when a proposition of the form aRb is true, it is true *only* in virtue of the non-relational, intrinsic properties of a and b ” (Ott 2009, 149, 159). On the face of it, there is an inconsistency here. If relations are acts of comparing, then propositions asserting that relations hold must be made true by facts about what thinkers do, and not just by other things having the intrinsic features they do. Ott resolves the inconsistency by pulling back on the commitment to Locke being a reductionist. Though he *says* that Locke holds the reductionist view just described, what he seems to mean by this is only that Locke holds that the intrinsic features of relata ground the comparisons we would make if we were to make comparisons (Ott 2009, 165–7).

my mother is five feet six inches tall, and I am five eleven, I am taller than her only when some observer compares us in respect of height. For when there *is* no such relation as the relation “taller than,” I can hardly stand to my mother in that relation. This is a strange result, though admittedly no stranger than the situation we face if we deny that there are relations at all. Indeed, the real difficulty for Ott’s reading is to say how it amounts to anything but a notational variant of the view that Locke does away with relations altogether.

What could it possibly mean to say that relations *are* acts of comparing things? One who denies that relations have any reality (including mind-dependent reality) can say that my mother has the intrinsic feature of being five six, and that I have the intrinsic feature of being five eleven, and that these are the only facts that are needed to ground the truth of anybody’s judgment that I am taller than her. What more is added to this by saying that such a judgment—or the act of comparing that prompts one to make it—*is* the relation “taller than”? In both cases we have two human beings with their intrinsic features, and an observer who compares them in regard to some of those features. In both cases, the intrinsic features of the human beings are all that is needed to account for the truth of the observer’s judgment. The only difference seems to be that on the view Ott ascribes to Locke the name ‘relation’ is bestowed upon a mental event in the life of the observer. What makes this any sort of realism about relations, rather than anti-realism about relations paired with a peculiar use of language?

It is more charitable, but also more plausible, to suppose that when Locke says that “*The nature...of Relation*, consists in the referring, or comparing two things,” he is again being careless about the distinction between ideas and their objects. He does not mean that relations are, or arise from, acts of comparing; he means that *ideas* of relations are, or arise from, acts of comparing. His view is that there are ideas of relations, but no relations.

If there are no relations, what can it mean to say that relations are “extraneous, and superinduced”? ‘Extraneous’ makes only two appearances in the *Essay* besides the one at II.xxv.8, and in both cases what is “extraneous” to something seems to be what is distinct from it or

independent of it.³⁹ Locke speaks of the relative notion “*Father*” being superinduced to a substance or a man (II.xxv.4), and he also speaks of various perfections that God bestows upon matter as being “superinduced” by Him (*Works* IV, 462). In both cases what is “superinduced” seems to be something extra that is added, though it seems likely that different senses of addition are at work. We make ideas of relations through acts of comparison, and we are prone to thinking that items in the world answer these ideas, just as we are prone to thinking that there are abstract objects answering to our abstract ideas. Relations are “extraneous” to and “superinduced” upon the things we compare, because we project our ideas of relations on to the world rather than copying them from it.

Locke’s repudiation of relations is, like his repudiation of abstract objects, a statement of his ontological predilection rather than part of a fully worked-out theory. He does not show how we can get by without the supposition that there are relations in the world, just as he does not show how we can get by without the supposition that there are abstract objects. The want of a Lockean theory of relations is to be felt all the more keenly because on several other occasions he suggests that ideas of relations are more ubiquitous, and relations more important, than we commonly suppose. The chapter on power includes this observation: “*Power includes in it some kind of relation ... as indeed which of our Ideas, of what kind soever, when attentively considered, does not?*” (II.xxi.3). Locke goes on to list other ideas that have ideas of relations as parts. They include ideas of extension, duration, and number (“do they not all contain in them a secret relation of the Parts?”), and perhaps also ideas of such sensible qualities as colors and smells (“what are they but the *Powers* of different Bodies, in relation to our Perception?”).⁴⁰

³⁹ In the chapter on true and false ideas, Locke says that “When-ever the Mind refers any of its *Ideas* to any thing extraneous to them, they are then *capable to be called true or false*” (II.xxxii.4). His point is that ideas can be true or false so long as they represent something other than themselves. Then as Locke is explaining the defining feature of merely probable judgment or belief, as opposed to certain knowledge, he says this: “That which makes me believe, is something extraneous to the thing I believe; something not evidently joined on both sides to, and so not manifestly shewing the Agreement, or Disagreement of those *Ideas*, that are under consideration” (IV.xv.3). His point is that propositions are known with less than perfect certainty whenever our reasons for believing them depend upon something other than our grasp of the propositions themselves.

⁴⁰ A difficulty is that many of these ideas that are supposed to include in them some kind of relation are ones that he elsewhere calls simple (see II.iii.1, marginal heading and II.v).

Two chapters later, he says that “most of the simple *Ideas*, that make up our complex *Ideas* of Substances, when truly considered, are only Powers” (II.xxiii.37).⁴¹ Putting this together with the observation at II.xxi.3, we get the result that most of the constituents of our ideas of substances are ideas that “include” some kind of relation. Then at IV.vi.11 Locke says that we are “wont to consider the Substances we meet with, each of them, as an entire thing by it self;” and that we fail to notice how many of their features depend on their relations to other things. We fail to notice how the color and weight of a sample of gold depend upon its relations to ourselves and to other objects, how animals depend for their lives and motions upon “extrinsecal Causes and Qualities of other Bodies.” For all we know, says Locke, the “great Parts and Wheels” of planetary phenomena may depend upon “Stars, or great Bodies incomprehensibly remote from us.”

We can only presume that Locke does not mean his talk about the ubiquity of ideas of relations to entail the ubiquity of relations; and that when he does seem to highlight the importance and ubiquity of relations or relational features, he is not doing ground-floor metaphysics. Locke must think that whatever truth there is in his own claims about the ubiquity of relations could in principle be captured by claims about substances, events, and instances of monadic features. Locke’s observation that “*Relation* . . . is not contained in the real existence of Things” tells us something about the austere ontology that he finds appealing. Nothing in his writings tells us how to effect the translation from his unrestrained talk of relations and relational features to a more rigorous language befitting that austere ontology.

⁴¹ Again, it is a problem that Locke tells us that many simple ideas are ideas of powers, because at II.xxi.3 he says that ideas of powers contain ideas of relations and he seems to hold that ideas of relations are complex.

Qualities

§6. Locke is usually taken to have defined ‘quality’ so that all qualities are powers to produce ideas in us. However, he is better understood as telling us only that powers are among the qualities of bodies. §7. It has been suggested that the drafts of the Essay show Locke working toward the view that all qualities are powers of a certain sort, but a closer look at the drafts does not bear this out. §8. For Locke, the “primary” qualities of bodies are the ones a thing must have in order to qualify as a body. For him it is a conceptual truth that the primary qualities are inseparable from any body, though there are empirical factors that explain why we have the idea of body that we do. §9. Extension is one feature that something must have if it is to qualify as a body. Locke grants that every extended thing has infinitely many proper spatial parts, but as he understands it, this does not settle the question of whether atomism is true. §10. Solidity is another primary quality, one that confers impenetrability. Locke distinguishes solidity from hardness, and holds that all bodies are equally solid. He can say this because he holds the “chock-full” conception of matter, on which spaces within the confines of bodies are not parts of them. The impenetrability that Locke takes to be a consequence of solidity is not imperviousness to piercing or channeling, but to co-location. §11. There are various sorts of untidiness relating to the other features he includes on lists of primary qualities. There is overlap in the meanings of ‘extension,’ ‘bulk,’ and ‘size.’ “Mobility” is a better candidate for being a primary quality than either motion or “motion or rest.” Number seems to be a primary quality because every body is one thing (and perhaps many things too). Contrary to what some have suggested, Locke also holds that all bodies—even atoms—possess texture.

§6 *Qualities and Powers*

Locke usually reserves the term ‘quality’ for features of *bodies*. At one point, he tells us that “the general term *Quality*, in its ordinary acception” stands only for those features we learn about through a single sensory modality (III.iv.16).¹ On that use of the term, colors, sounds, odors, and flavors would be qualities, but not “Extension, Number, Motion, Pleasure, and Pain, which make impressions on the Mind, and introduce their *Ideas* by more Senses than one.” Clearly that is not how Locke himself uses the term ‘quality,’ since he explicitly includes extension, number, and motion among the qualities of bodies. There is a passage in which he offers what looks like a definition of ‘quality’ as he means to use the term. This is II.viii.8, where he also tries to explain what he means by ‘idea’:

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.

This passage has almost universally been read as saying that all qualities are powers to produce ideas in us. This is problematic, both because this view of qualities is enormously implausible in its own right, and also because it fits poorly with the rest of Locke’s philosophy.

It is natural to think of a body’s powers as dispositional features that might be exercised or not. If that is right, and if all qualities are powers, then it is a mistake to think of dispositional qualities as ultimately grounded in categorical ones. An object might have certain powers because it has certain other powers, or because its parts have certain other powers. The possession of these other powers might in turn be a consequence of the possession of still further powers (and so on), but nowhere along the line are powers grounded in categorical or non-dispositional qualities. This view of things has its modern defenders (Shoemaker 1980; Blackburn 1990), and it may even be one that is imposed upon us by contemporary physics. The trouble with II.viii.8 is that Locke seems to be saying not only that all qualities are powers but that all qualities are *powers to produce ideas*. This makes for a

¹ The distinction goes back to Aristotle, who calls features detected by just one sense “special sensibles,” and those detected by more than one sense “common sensibles” (*De Anima* II 6, 418a7–19). The suggestion that ‘quality’ is ordinarily reserved for special sensibles could either be meant as a claim about ordinary linguistic usage, or as a claim about general philosophical usage. Either way it seems doubtful.

strange and anthropocentric metaphysics, one on which each substance's features are exhausted by its capacities to appear to us one way or another. It also renders enormously implausible any attempt to explain why any body has the powers it does. It is one thing to say that a substance has a capacity that it does because it or its parts have certain other capacities. It is quite another to say that a substance has a capacity to produce certain ideas in us because it or its parts have the capacity to produce other ideas in us. Suppose one wants to explain an object's capacity to trigger the idea of yellow in us. One might hope to do this by citing certain facts about the arrangement of its smaller parts. However, if all qualities are powers to produce sensory ideas in us, then even a body's extension is just its capacity to produce certain visual or tactile impressions in us. The prospects of explaining an object's capacity to produce ideas of colors by citing the capacities of its smaller parts to produce tactile impressions of resistance are dim indeed.

The suggestion that all qualities are powers to produce ideas also fits poorly with other things that Locke says. It makes it difficult to see what is supposed to be the distinction between qualities in general and secondary qualities in particular. For Locke distinguishes secondary qualities as "nothing in the Objects themselves, but Powers to produce various Sensations in us by their *primary Qualities*" (II.viii.10). He singles out secondary qualities as "mere powers" (II.viii.24), "powers barely" (II.viii.24) and "bare powers" (II.xxiii.8). It is hard to see what the contrast is supposed to be if all qualities are powers. There is also at least one passage where Locke explicitly allows that figure and bulk are not powers. At II.xxxi.8 he says, "The simple *Ideas* whereof we make our complex ones of Substances, are all of them (bating only the Figure and Bulk of some sorts) Powers."² Moreover, since he holds that bodies produce ideas in us by causing us to have sensations, the view that all qualities are powers to produce ideas in us seems to entail that particles so small as to be insensible cannot by themselves possess any qualities. Yet Locke quite clearly holds that individually insensible particles do have primary qualities. At II.viii.9, where the notion of primary qualities is introduced, he says that reducing a body to insensible parts by a mill, or pestle, cannot deprive those parts of their primary qualities. Later, he speaks of the

² The *OED* defines 'bating' as meaning "excepting." Locke adds the qualification "of some sorts" because not all sorts of substances have figure and bulk: immaterial substances lack bulk, and God lacks figure.

“primary Qualities of the insensible Parts of Bodies” (IV.iii.12) and even of “insensible *primary Qualities*” (II.viii.23).³

As we have seen, Locke says: “the Power to produce any *Idea* in our mind, I call *Quality* of the Subject wherein that Power is” (II.viii.8). Let us call this the Power/*Quality* passage. Many commentators take this passage to be a gaffe. Reginald Jackson (1929, 71), J. L. Mackie (1976, 12) and Jonathan Bennett (2001, vol. 2, 79) all take this passage to be saying that all qualities are powers, and so dismiss it as not reflecting Locke’s considered position. Other commentators try to save the Power/*Quality* passage, arguing that one or another of the terms in it is being used in a non-standard sense. For example, Martha Bolton and Michael Jacovides argue that primary and secondary qualities are both powers for Locke, but “powers” in different senses (Bolton 2001, 111; Jacovides 2007, 111–13). When Locke calls secondary qualities “powers,” he means that they are dispositions to produce certain sensory ideas in us; but when he calls primary qualities “powers,” he means only that they are the causes of certain sensory ideas in us. On their reading, Locke is not saying that all qualities are dispositions to trigger sensory ideas in us. His mistake in the Power/*Quality* passage is just that of giving the impression that he identifies qualities with powers on some single understanding of ‘power.’⁴

The Power/*Quality* passage might seem to commit Locke to the following pair of propositions:

- (2.1) For all x , if x is a quality, then x is a power to produce an idea in us.
- (2.2) For all x , if x is a power to produce an idea in us, then x is a quality.

John Campbell argues that when Locke says ‘idea’ in II.viii, he should be understood to mean “simple idea” (Campbell 1980, 573). He concludes that the Power/*Quality* passage commits Locke not to (2.1) and (2.2), but to these two propositions:

- (2.3) For all x , if x is a quality, then x is a power to produce a simple idea in us.
- (2.4) For all x , if x is a power to produce a simple idea in us, then x is a quality.

³ The many other passages committing Locke to insensible bodies having qualities include II.viii.10, 15, 24; II.xxi.73, and IV.iii.11.

⁴ Other commentators who attempt to save the Power/*Quality* passage by claiming that he uses one or another of the terms in it in some special sense are John Campbell (1980, 572) and Peter Alexander (1985, 165–6).