CHAPTER 1
Consciousness and Its Objects

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Let us begin with something everyone understands and ask some questions about it. It is to these questions that opposite answers are given—wrong answers and right ones.

When we are sleeping and not dreaming, we are unconscious. When we describe ourselves as unconscious, we are in effect saying that

— we are unaware of whatever is happening in the world around us or even in our own bodies,
— we are apprehending nothing; we are aware of nothing,
— our minds are blank or empty,
— we are experiencing nothing, or are living through an unexperienced interval of time.

To say that we are aware of nothing, or apprehending nothing, is equivalent to saying that we are perceiving[5]
nothing, remembering nothing, imagining nothing, thinking of nothing. We might even add that we are sensing nothing and feeling nothing.

That set of words—perceiving, remembering, imagining, thinking, sensing, and feeling—comes very near to exhausting the acts in which our minds engage when we are awake and conscious. When none of these acts are occurring, our minds are blank and empty. When that is the case, it may also be said that we have no perceptions, memories, images, thoughts, sensations, or feelings.

At first blush, it would appear that much of the foregoing is repetitious. We seem to be saying the same thing over and over again. But that is not the case, as we shall soon see. Among the various statements made above, some lead to right and some to wrong answers to the pivotal question: When we are conscious, what is it that we are conscious of?

Let me put that question in other ways in which it can be asked. What are we aware of? What are we experiencing or having experiences of?

The crucial word in all these questions is the little preposition "of." Grammatically, it calls for an object. What is the object that provides the answer to all these related questions?

Still one more question: When we are conscious, and therefore our minds are not blank and empty, what are they filled with? It has become customary to speak of the stream of consciousness or the flow of thought to describe what successively fills our consciousness or makes up our experience from moment to moment. What does it consist of? In other words, what is the changing content of consciousness?

One answer to the question is given by using the word "idea" for all of the quite different sorts of things that fill our minds when we are conscious. That word has been so used by modern philosophers, notably by John Locke, who introduced the usage. In the Introduction to his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, he told his readers how he intended to use the word "idea," as follows:

Before I proceed on to what I have thought on this subject [human understanding], I must here in the entrance beg pardon of my reader for the frequent use of the word idea, which he will find in the following treatise. It being the term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express . . . whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking . . . I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such ideas in men's minds: every one is conscious of them in himself; and men's words and actions will satisfy him that they are in others.

Locke's use of the word "thinking" as omniscient as his use of the word "idea." He uses "thinking" for all the acts of the mind, just as he uses the word "idea" for all the objects of the mind when it is thinking, or for all the contents of consciousness when we are conscious.

Thus used, the word "thinking" stands for all the mental activities that, when distinguished, go by such names as "perceiving," "remembering," "imagining," "conceiving," "judging," "reasoning"; also "sensing" and "feeling." In the same way, the word "ideas," used in an omniscient fashion, covers a wide variety of items that can also be distinguished from one another: percepts, memories, images, thoughts or concepts, sensations, and feelings.
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It would be unfair to Locke not to state at once that he does differentiate these various items, all of which he groups together under the one word "idea." He also distinguishes the different acts of the mind that bring ideas of all sorts into it, or that produce ideas for the mind to be conscious or aware of.

Let this be granted, but the question still remains whether Locke has distinguished them correctly or not. That in turn leads to the pivotal question with which we are here concerned: What are the objects of the mind when it is conscious of anything? The wrong answer to that question, with all the consequences that follow in its train, is the philosophical mistake with which this chapter deals.

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In the introductory passage of Locke's Essay quoted above, two things are told to the reader.

One is that Locke expects him to agree that he has ideas in his own mind, ideas of which he is conscious.

The other is that the reader will concede that other individuals also have ideas in their own minds, ideas of which they, too, are conscious.

Since no one can be conscious of the ideas in the minds of others, Locke qualifies this second point by saying that, from the way others speak and behave, we infer that they, too, have ideas in their minds, often very like our own.

These two points together introduce a note of fundamental importance. The ideas in my mind are my ideas. The ideas in yours are yours. These possessive pronouns call attention to the fact that the ideas in anyone's mind are subjective: they belong to that one person and to no one else. Just as there are as many human minds in the world as there are individual persons, so there are as many distinct sets of ideas as there are individually distinct minds.

Each person has his own. Only one's own ideas are, according to Locke, the objects of that person's awareness when he or she is conscious. No one can be conscious of another person's ideas. They are never objects of which anyone else is immediately aware. To concede that another individual also has ideas, of which we can have no direct awareness, must always result from an act of inference, based on what others say and do.

If the word "object" applied to ideas as that of which we are aware when we are conscious leads us to think that ideas are objective or have objectivity, then an apparent contradiction confronts us. We appear to be saying opposite things about ideas: on the one hand, that my ideas, being exclusively mine and not yours or anyone else's, are subjective; on the other hand, that my ideas also have objectivity.

We appear compelled to admit that, for any one individual, the ideas in the minds of other individuals are not objects of which he or she can be conscious. Their subjectivity puts them beyond the reach of his or her immediate awareness. In other words, the ideas in a given person's mind are objects for that person alone. They are beyond immediate apprehension for everyone else.

Let us pause for a moment to consider the meaning of the words "objective" and "subjective." We call something objective when it is the same for me, for you, and for anyone else. We call something subjective when it differs from one individual to another and when it is exclusively the possession of one individual and of no one else.

To reinforce this understanding of the distinction between the subjective and the objective, let me introduce
another pair of words: "public" and "private." These two words can be used to divide all our experience into that which is public and that which is private.

An experience is public if it is common to two or more individuals. It may not be actually common to all, but it must at least be potentially common to all. An experience is private if it belongs to one individual alone and cannot possibly be shared directly by anyone else.

Let me illustrate this division of all our experiences into public and private by proposing what I regard as (and what I hope readers will agree are) clear and indisputable examples of each type.

Our bodily feelings, including our emotions or passions, are private. My toothache, heartburn, or anger is something directly experienced by me alone. I can talk to you about it and if you, too, have had such bodily feelings, you can understand what I am talking about. But understanding what I am talking about is one thing; having these experiences yourself is quite another.

You may have had them in the past, and this may help you to understand what I am talking about. But you need not have them at the same time that I am having them in order to understand what I am talking about. In any case, you cannot ever share with me the bodily feelings that I am now having and talking to you about.

In sharp contrast to our bodily feelings, our perceptual experiences are public, not private. When you and I are sitting in the same room with a table between us on which there are glasses and a bottle of wine, you and I are perceptually apprehending the same objects—not our own ideas, but the table between us, the glasses, and the bottle of wine. If I move the table a little, or pour some wine from the bottle into your glass, you and I are sharing the same experience. It is a public experience, as the taste of the wine or the heartburn it causes in me is not.

My perceptions (or percepts) are not identical with yours. Each of us has his own, as each of us has his own bodily feelings. But though my perceptions and yours are in this sense subjective (belonging exclusively to each of us alone), our having them results in our having a common or public experience, as the subjective bodily feelings we have do not.

To use Locke's terminology, both perceptions and bodily feelings are ideas and each of us has his own. But certain subjective ideas, such as bodily feelings, are exclusively subjective. They are objects of consciousness only for the one person who experiences them. Though they may be called objects for this reason, they do not have any objectivity. In contrast, other subjective ideas, such as percepts or perceptions, result in public, not private, experience, for their objects can be directly and simultaneously experienced by two or more individuals.

All ideas are subjective. I have mine; you have yours; and they are never identical or common to us both. They cannot be so, any more than the cells and tissues of your body can be identical or common with the cells and tissues of mine.

It is necessary here to introduce a distinction between ideas and bodily feelings, emotions, and sensations. Unfortunately, Locke fails to observe this distinction. Whatever can be properly called an idea has an object. Perceptions, memories, imaginations, and concepts or thoughts are ideas in this sense of the word, but bodily feelings, emotions,
and sensations are not. We apprehend them directly. They
do not serve as the means whereby we apprehend anything
else.

What I have just said applies also, in rare instances, to
sensations generated by the stimulation of our external sense-
organs, such as the sudden gleam of light we see, the un-
expected loud noise we hear, the strange odor we cannot
identify. These sensations do not enter into our perception
of anything. In contrast, when we are perceiving, we are
directly conscious of something other than our percepts.

What is that something other? The answer is: the table,
wine bottle, and glasses that you and I perceive when we
are sharing the experience that results from our perceptual
activity. Our experience of the table, bottle, and glasses is
a public experience, not a private experience exclusively our
own.

These really existing things are the objects of our per-
ceptual awareness, not the percepts or perceptions that en-
able us to be aware of or to apprehend them. That is why
we can talk to one another about them as things we are
experiencing in common. The table, for example, that is
the perceptual object that we are both apprehending at the
same time is the table that you and I can lift together and
move to another part of the room.

For John Locke, the awareness we have of our own ideas
is entirely a private experience, exclusively our own. This
holds for all those who, in one way or another, adopt his
view of ideas as the objects of our minds when we are con-
scious—objects of which we are immediately aware and that
we directly apprehend. They are in effect saying that all
the ideas that an individual has in his mind when he is
conscious result in private experiences for him, experi-
ences no one else can share. To say this is the philosop-
ical mistake that has such serious consequences in modern
thought.

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Before I point out the consequences of the philosophical
mistake to be found in Locke's view of consciousness and
its ideas, let me expound the opposite view a little further.

To state that view in its own terms will not only sharpen
the issue created by the opposite views, it will also bring
to light certain difficulties inherent in the opposing view.
These need to be resolved.

Objections to the opposing view may already have oc-
curred to readers of the foregoing pages. They may have
noted the difficulties just referred to. They may think that
the opposing view goes too far in the opposite direction and
that it gives rise to consequences as objectionable as those
resulting from Locke's view when that is carried to its logi-
cal conclusions.

It is necessary to remember that the opposing view does
not apply to all ideas, but only to some. Excluded are bodi-
sensations, feelings, emotions, and, in rare instances, sen-
sations generated by stimulation of our external sense-
organs. All these are conceded to be private experiences,

in which we are directly conscious of the pain we feel, the
anger we suffer, or the sudden gleam of light, the unex-
pected loud noise, the strange odor that we cannot identify
and that does not enter into our perception of anything.

All these are objects of immediate experience. They do
not serve as means for apprehending anything else. They
themselves are the objects of our apprehension.

With these exceptions noted, all our other ideas can be
characterized as cognitive—as instruments of cognition. Instead of being themselves objects of apprehension, they are the means by which we apprehend objects that are not ideas.

Those two little words "by which" hold the clue to the difference between Locke's view and the opposite view. For Locke, all ideas are *that which* we apprehend when we are conscious of anything. For the opposing view, some ideas (our cognitive ideas) are *that by which* we apprehend the objects of which we are conscious.

This view is expressed by Thomas Aquinas in a brief passage, comparable to the brief passage in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. I will paraphrase it in order to avoid terminology that might prove baffling to contemporary readers.

In the Treatise of Man, included in Part I of his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas takes up the question whether our ideas (I am here using that term in Locke's omni-comprehensive sense) are *that which* we apprehend when we are conscious, or *that by which* we apprehend objects that are not ideas. With one qualification, to be reserved for later consideration when it becomes more appropriate, the answer he gives is emphatically: *that by which*.

Let me spell this answer out in all its significant details. It means that we experience perceived things, but never the percepts whereby we perceive them. We remember past events or happenings, but we are never aware of the memories by which we remember them. We can be aware of imagined or imaginary objects, but never the images by which we imagine them. We apprehend objects of thought, but never the concepts by which we think of them.

Do you mean to say (readers may ask) that I am never conscious or aware of the memories or images I am able to call to mind, and that I cannot directly examine the concepts or conceptions my mind has been able to form?

The answer to that question, however contrary it may be to our loose habits of speech, is emphatically affirmative. A cognitive idea (including here percepts, memories, images, and concepts) cannot, at one and the same time, be both *that which* we directly apprehend and *that by which* we apprehend something else—some object that is not an idea in our own minds, but unlike our subjective ideas is rather something that can be an object of consideration or of conversation for two or more individuals.

Let us go back for a moment to the table at which you and I are sitting with its bottle of wine and its glasses. We noted earlier that our awareness of these objects was a public or communal experience, one that we both shared. It could not have been that if each of us was aware of nothing but his own perceptual ideas—his own sense perceptions. Its being a communal experience for both of us, one that we shared, depended on our both apprehending the same perceptual objects—the really existing table, bottle, and glasses—not our own quite private perceptions of them.

Subjective differences do enter into our perceptions of something that is one and the same common object for two or more people. They are usually not difficult to account for.

For example, you and I sitting at the same table and looking at the same bottle of wine report differences to one another. I say that the wine appears to have the color of burgundy, and you say that it appears to have the color of claret. After a moment's consideration, we realize that my perceiving it as having the darker shade of red is due to
the fact that I am sitting with my back to the light source and for me the bottle is in a shadow. You are sitting with light from the window falling directly on the bottle.

To take another example: you perceive the glasses on the table as tinted green, and I say that they look gray to me. You, then, ask me whether I am color-blind, and I confess that I forgot to mention that I was.

In spite of such subjective differences in perception, the object perceived remains the same individual thing for the different perceivers—the same bottle, the same glasses. The subjective differences, when noted, whether or not explained, would not cause the perceivers to doubt that they were looking at the same perceptual objects.

However, that might happen in the following instances. If I were to say of the bottle we are both looking at that it is half empty, and you were to say it is filled; or if I were to say it is corked, and you were to say it is uncorked; then we might have some doubts about our talking to one another about the same perceptual object. But it is difficult to imagine such perceptual differences occurring unless extraordinary and abnormal circumstances were at work.

Under ordinary conditions, perceptual experience is an apprehension of perceived objects. This applies also to memories, images, and conceptions. What is true of one type of cognitive idea, our perceptions, is true of all the other types of cognitive ideas—all of them the means, not the objects, of apprehension; that by which, not that which, we apprehend.

There is one important difference between our perceptions and our other cognitive ideas—our memories, images, and conceptions. In the case of the latter, our direct or immediate apprehension of the objects they put before our minds leaves quite open the question whether these objects are or are not really existing things. Here are some examples of how that question arises.

We remember some past event or happening. But we know that our memory can play tricks on us. We may, therefore, be cautious enough to ask whether what we remember really happened in the past as we are remembering it. There are various ways of finding this out. Having recourse to them, we satisfy ourselves that our memory was correct, and so we make the judgment that the event that is the object of our memory did really occur in the past as we remembered it.

It is necessary to note here that there are two separate acts of the mind. The first is an act of simple apprehension—the act whereby we remember a past event. The second is a more complex act of judgment, usually the result of reasoning or of weighing relevant evidence. The judgment may be either affirmative or negative. It may involve our asserting that what we remember did, in fact, really happen in the past, or it may consist in a denial that it did.

Turning from memory to imagination, we find that the question about the real existence of an imagined object arises in a different way. In most cases, the objects of our imagination are objects we construct from our perceptual experiences; for example, a centaur, a mermaid, or a mountain of gold. Because we have ourselves constructed them, we know at once that they are purely imaginary objects and so we do not hesitate for a moment to deny their real existence.

However, we are sometimes called upon to imagine something that can really exist and can be perceived, either by us or by someone else. Then we may, upon reflection,
affirm the real existence of the object we have imagined, but not perceived.

What is true of only some objects of imagination holds true for all objects of thought. For every object of thought that we apprehend by means of our concepts or conceptions, we face the question that calls for a judgment about its existence in reality. In addition to its being an object of thought, which may be a communal or public object that two or more persons can talk about with one another, is it also something that really exists? The object of thought, as we and others apprehend it and discuss it, remains the same whichever way this question is answered.

When, for example, angels are conceived as minds without bodies, they are objects of thought that can be discussed by two individuals, one of whom affirms their real existence and the other of whom denies it. While differing in their judgment on this point, they can still have the same object of thought before their minds and agree, in the light of the conception of angels they share, that angels do not occupy space in the same way that bodies do.

The question about the real existence of perceptual objects does not arise for most of our normal perceptions. Under normal circumstances, when we apprehend objects perceptually we, at the very same instant, make the judgment that asserts their real existence.

To say that I perceive the table at which you and I are sitting amounts to saying that it really exists. If I had the slightest doubt about its real existence, I would not dare to say that I perceive the table. In the case of normal perceptions, the simple act of apprehension is inseparable from the act of judgment that asserts the real existence of the object apprehended.

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Hallucinations and dreams masquerade as perceptions. The person suffering a hallucination believes that he is perceiving what, in fact, he is not perceiving at all, because the object of his abnormal perception does not really exist. So, also, in the case of dreams: while we are dreaming, we suffer the illusion that we are having perceptual experiences.

The dreamer suffers an illusion of the same sort that the person hallucinating suffers. Both are taken in by the counterfeit perceptual experiences, and so they are deceived into believing at the time that these counterfeit perceptual objects really exist. Once awakened, or cured of hallucinosis, the illusion vanishes. Nothing in that experience was real; everything was imagined, not perceived.

The apprehended objects that are present to our minds through the agency of our cognitive ideas are public or communal objects. They are objects for two or more persons, objects that they can talk about with one another. This holds true for objects of thought and of memory and imagination, as well as for objects of perception.

It may be helpful to consider how a number of persons can be considering one and the same object when one of them is perceiving it, another is remembering it, and a third is imagining it. I shall postpone for later consideration (in the next chapter) how two or more persons can discuss the same object of thought. Since one of the three persons is perceiving the object common to all three by different modes of apprehension, we know that the object in question is one that really exists.

Let the physical thing in question be the wallpaper in a
woman's bedroom. The woman is sitting in her bedroom looking at the wallpaper while talking about it on the telephone to her husband. For her the wallpaper is a perceptual object; for him, it is a remembered object. Though the woman and her husband are operating with ideas that are not only numerically distinct but are also distinct in character (one a percept, the other a memory), the two ideas can present the same object to their minds.

Furthermore, if it is one and the same object that both are apprehending, though by different modes of apprehension, then it must also follow that the object being remembered by the husband must be an entity that also really exists, since that same object is an object being perceived by his wife. If that object were not an entity which also really existed, she could not be perceiving it. So far, then, we are able to say that the wallpaper has two modes of existence: real existence on the wall and objective existence as both something perceived and something remembered.

A little later the wife telephones a friend of hers and discusses the wallpaper, asking for advice about putting wallpaper of the identical pattern on the guest-room wall. The friend says that she has never seen the wallpaper in question. The wife then tells her friend that the pattern is the same as that of wallpaper on the friend's bedroom wall, except that the pattern is red on white, not blue on white. At this point the friend says that she can imagine the wallpaper and recommends putting it on the guest-room wall.

For the friend, the wallpaper is neither a perceived nor a remembered object. It is an imagined object. Though an image is different from a percept and a memory, it can nevertheless present the same object to the mind of the friend that is present to the wife through perception and to the husband through memory.

It is thus one and the same object of discourse for all three of them. In addition, because it is an object of perception for one of them, that which is a common object for all three of them, though differently apprehended, must be an entity which also has physical existence on the bedroom wall. This is tantamount to saying that it is quite possible not only to remember but also to imagine an object that also really exists.

If two persons are talking about an object that is an object of memory for both of them, or an object of imagination for both, or an object of memory for one and an object of imagination for the other, the question about whether that common object is an entity which also really exists, which also once existed, or which also may exist in the future, cannot be so easily answered.

Let us consider first the case of two persons, both of whom are remembering the same object. That object may be an entity which now really exists and is, therefore, capable of being perceived by a third person. If that third person is not a party to the conversation, the conversation of the two persons about what at first appears to be a common object of memory requires them to exercise two cautions.

First, they must make a discursive effort to be sure that their numerically distinct memories have the same object. They can do this by asking each other questions about the object being remembered and thus become satisfied, with reasonable assurance, that it is the same object for both of them.
Second, they must not be precipitate in judging whether the remembered object either now really exists or once really existed and no longer does. Assuring themselves that they are both remembering the same object is hardly assurance that the object remembered is an entity that either has or had real existence. They could both be utterly deceived on this score, or be in some degree of error.

If they are not deceived or in error, and if the object that they are commonly remembering once had real existence but no longer really exists, can we say that one and the same entity has existence as an apprehended object and real existence as a thing?

The answer must be negative, since we know that the object being remembered no longer really exists. Nevertheless, it once did really exist. The fact that its two modes of existence are not simultaneous, as they are in the case of perception, does not alter the underlying principle.

What has just been said applies to the case of two persons, both of whom are imaginging the same object. They must exercise the same cautions in order to be sure that the object each is imagining is common to them both; and in order to discuss the question whether that common object may also have real existence at some future time.

Such a discussion, for example, might take place about an invention that they are commonly imagining. If they concur in the judgment that the particular piece of apparatus they have used their imaginations to invent is an imagined object that is also capable of real existence in the future, the principle already stated applies; namely, that the object of their imaginations may at some future time also have real existence as a physical thing.

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The opposing views of consciousness and its objects have now been sufficiently set forth for our present purposes. I have deferred the consideration of certain problems because they can be more appropriately dealt with in the next chapter, where we shall be concerned with opposing views about the human mind.

What remains for treatment here are the consequences of espousing one or the other of the opposing views. Let us first examine the consequences of the philosophical mistake. Then let us see if the view which corrects this mistake enables us to avoid consequences that we find repugnant to reason and to common sense.

Those who hold the mistaken view of ideas as that which each individual directly apprehends—the immediate objects of which each individual is conscious—lock each of us up in the private world of his or her own subjective experience.

It may be thought that, from the experience we have of our own ideas, we can somehow infer the existence of things that are not ideas in our minds—the existence of individuals other than ourselves, and of all the other bodies that, as a matter of common sense, we suppose to be constituents of the physical world.

However, since I can have no direct acquaintance with or immediate awareness of anything that is not an idea in my own mind, it is difficult to see how any attempt to argue for or prove the existence of an external reality can be carried out successfully.

The ultimate consequences to which we are thus led are so drastic and repugnant that the names we attach to them
are in general disrepute. No philosopher of sound mind has ever been willing to embrace or espouse them, even though, starting from Locke's little error in the beginning, Hume discovered that one is inexorably led to conclusions so extreme that common sense would prevent anyone from adopting them.

One of these extreme positions goes by the name of total skepticism concerning the possibility of our having any knowledge of a reality outside of or external to our own minds. The other is called solipsism—the assertion that everything of which I am aware or conscious is a figment of my own mind.

Common sense, in the light of experiences we all have, compels us to reject these conclusions as absurd. We cannot twist our minds into regarding all the conversations we have with other individuals as completely illusory—conversations in which you and I talk with one another about objects that we both experience, objects that we both refer to by the words we use to name them, among them objects that you and I can both handle at the same time that we are talking about them. We are certainly not talking about the ideas in my mind or the ideas in your mind.

Neither Locke nor any of his followers, including even the skeptical David Hume, lacked common sense. They had enough of it to prevent them from adopting the extreme conclusions to which the initial mistaken premise inexorably leads. In fact, Locke, in the opening passage in which he announces his use of the word "idea" to stand for whatever we are conscious of when we are awake, also announces that in the following pages of his Essay he is going to be concerned with the question whence come ideas into our minds.

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Having, in Book I of the Essay, argued against the view that our minds at birth are endowed with innate ideas, Locke goes on in Book II to explain at length how our simplest ideas come into our minds by the action of external physical things on our bodily sense-organs. There is nothing in our minds that does not have its ultimate source in sense-experience. Locke's reiteration of this point reveals his tacit acknowledgment of the existence of Newton's world of bodies in motion, including our own and the bodies that act on us to stimulate our sense-organs.

One might think that rejecting as absurd the conclusions to which the initial mistaken premise inevitably leads would result in a rejection of the premise itself as equally absurd. That is the way a *reductio ad absurdum* argument is supposed to work. When we are shown that we have been led to an absurd conclusion by logically following out the implications of an initial premise, we are expected to respond by rejecting that premise as itself absurd.

That is what should have happened to Locke's initially mistaken premise. But it did not. On the contrary, the philosophical error with which we are here concerned was instead compounded by an effort to avoid its absurd consequences in another way, a way that did not involve rejecting the initial premise as itself absurd.

What was that other way? It consisted in saying that the ideas in our minds, at least some if not all of them, in addition to being the objects of which we are directly and immediately conscious, are also *representations* of things that really exist in the external, physical world. I have stressed the word that compounds the error.

When does one thing deserve to be called the representation of another? Only when we observe some resem-
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... some ideas as representations of realities that cannot be directly apprehended.

The opposite view not only saves us easily from skepticism and solipsism; it also saves us from futile efforts to prove the existence of an external, physical reality.

In our perceptual experiences, we are directly acquainted with the existence of other bodies as well as our own. In addition, all the other objects about which we engage in conversation with one another—the events or happenings we remember, the fictions we can imagine, the objects of conceptual thought as well as the objects of our perceptual experience—all these are public, common, or communal objects that we can communicate with one another about.

We do not—in fact, we cannot—talk to one another about our own ideas—our percepts, our memories, our images, our thoughts or concepts. Our subjective feelings, yes; but not ideas that present objects to us. We are conscious only of the objects apprehended, not of the ideas by which we apprehend them.

The profound difference made by substituting the correct view for the mistaken one can be summed up as follows.

When ideas are treated as the only things with which we have direct acquaintance by our immediate awareness of them as objects apprehended, we are compelled to live in two worlds without any bridge between them.

One is the world of physical reality, in which our own bodies occupy space, move about, and interact with other bodies. Our belief in the existence of this world is a blind and irrational faith.
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The other is the completely private world in which each of us is enclosed—the world in which our only experience is the experience constituted by consciousness of our own ideas. The assumption that individuals other than ourselves also and similarly live in the private worlds of their own conscious experience is as blind a faith as the belief that we all live together in the one world of external physical reality.

When we correct the initial error that generates all these results, we find ourselves living together in the world of physical reality, a world with which we have direct acquaintance in our perceptual experiences. We not only have bodily contact with one another in this world; we also communicate with one another about it when we discuss perceptual objects we can handle together.

That is not the only world in which we live together. We also live in the public world that is constituted by our common experience of objects other than the perceptual objects that are also perceptible physical things. I am here referring to past events or happenings that we remember, imaginary objects as well as things we imagine that may also exist or be capable of real existence, and all objects of thought.

There is still a third world in which we live—the world of our completely private, subjective experience, in which each of us is aware of his or her own bodily sensations, feelings, and emotions—experiences to which we alone are privy.

It would, perhaps, be more accurate and more consonant with common sense to speak of these three realms of experience as three dimensions of one and the same world, not as three separate worlds.

Consciousness and Its Objects

The three dimensions consist of (1) perceptual objects that are really existing things or events, (2) all other objects that may or may not exist, may have existed in the past but no longer exist, and objects that do not exist at present but may exist in the future, and (3) the subjective experiences that exist only for the individual mind that has them. The first two are public; the third, private. In addition, there are the cognitive ideas that have existence in the mind but, being the means whereby we apprehend all the objects we do apprehend, are themselves never apprehended.

Only when we fail to reject the fundamental mistake about consciousness and its ideas that was introduced by Locke, and perhaps by Descartes before him, is it appropriate to speak of the realm of physical reality, on the one hand, and the realm of the mind’s conscious experience, on the other hand, as two separate worlds, the relation between which we cannot satisfactorily explain.

The philosophical mistake, when seen in all its consequences, is both repugnant to reason and to common sense. The correction of that mistake produces the opposite result—a coherent view of consciousness and its objects that involves no inexplicable beliefs and that accords with common sense and common experience.
Words and Meanings

Another fact with which we are all acquainted is that most words have multiple meanings. One and the same word can have a wide variety of meanings. In addition, in the course of time, a word can lose one meaning and gain another—a new meaning.

A dictionary is the reference book we use when we wish to ascertain the various meanings of a particular word. The great dictionaries often give us the history of that word—the meanings it once had, but no longer; the new meanings it has recently acquired.

All of this is familiar to all of us. But we seldom stop to ask how that which at first was a meaningless notation acquired the meaning that turned it into a meaningful word—a unit in the vocabulary of a particular language, something to be found in the dictionary of that language. Where did the meaning or meanings acquired by that meaningless notation come from to turn it into a word?

Looking up the word in the dictionary does not answer that question. What you find when you look up a word is a set of other words that purport to state its meaning or meanings. If in that set of words there are one or two the meanings of which you do not know, you can, of course, look them up. What you will find again is another set of words that state their meanings, and either you will understand the meanings of all these words, or you will have to repeat the process of looking them up. If you knew the meanings of all the words in the dictionary, you would, of course, never resort to using it. But even if you did, the dictionary could not help you to find out how any one of the words it contains acquired meaning in the first place.

Let me be sure this is understood. Consider the person who refers to a dictionary to learn the meaning of the no-
Ten Philosophical Mistakes

For a child to get to the point at which he can move effectively within the circle of a dictionary, some meaningless notations must have become meaningful words for him—and became so without the help of a dictionary. The dictionary, therefore, cannot be the answer to the question of how meaningless marks or sounds become meaningful words.

This is not to dismiss the usefulness of dictionaries. We often learn the meaning of a word that is new and strange by being told in other words that we do understand what that word means. Thus, for example, when a growing child hears the word “kindergarten” for the first time, and asks what it means, he may be quite satisfied with the answer “It is a place where children go to play with one another and to learn.”

If the words in the answer are intelligible to the child, the child is able to add a new word to his vocabulary. A notation that was meaningless to him has become a word by means of a verbal description of the object signified. The answer to the child’s question is like a dictionary defini-

Words and Meanings

This, however, does not suffice as a solution to the problem of how meaningless notations become meaningful words for us. It holds for some words, but it cannot hold for all. We do learn the meaning of some words in our vocabularies by understanding the verbal descriptions of the objects they signify. But if we tried to apply that solution to all words, we would be going around in an endless circle that would defeat our search for a solution to the problem.

In what other way than by verbal descriptions can meaningless notations acquire meaning and become words? The answer is by direct acquaintance with the object that the meaningless notation is used to signify.

The simplest example of this is to be found in our learning the meaning of proper names. Whether or not we remember what we were taught in grammar school about the distinction between proper and common names, all of us know the difference between “George Washington” and “man” as names. The first names a unique, singular person—a one and only. The second names a distinct kind of living organism, a kind that includes only certain living organisms and excludes others. Words that name unique, singular objects are proper names; words that name kinds or classes of objects are common names.

I choce “George Washington” as an example of a proper name to make the point that we can learn the meaning of some proper names only by verbal descriptions. None of us has ever been or can be introduced to George Washington. We can have no direct acquaintance with him. We
know what his proper name means by being told that it signifies the first President of the United States.

The situation is quite different with other proper names—the names of all the persons in our own families or persons we have been introduced to in the course of our experience. The verbal introduction may be as brief as “Let me introduce you to John Smithers.” But it accompanies your direct acquaintance with the object named. That is how “John Smithers” becomes for you the proper name of the person to whom you have been introduced.

So far, so good. But how do meaningless notations become significant common, as contrasted with proper, names by direct acquaintance rather than by means of verbal descriptions? Very much in the same way. The baby is told that the animal in his playroom is a dog or a doggie. This may be repeated a number of times. Soon the baby, pointing at the animal, utters “dog” or “doggie” or something that sounds like that. A significant common name has been added to the baby’s vocabulary.

This will have to be confirmed by another step of learning. The baby may, on another occasion, find itself in the presence of another small animal, this time a cat, and call it a doggie. The error of designation must be corrected. Not all small animals are dogs. When the word “cat” has been added to the baby’s vocabulary as a common name that signifies an object quite distinct from dog—both objects with which the baby has been directly acquainted—the two words not only have meaning for the child, but different meanings.

Have we solved the problem now? Not quite. For in the course of the child’s growth, with his education in school and college, and with all the learning that he acquires through a wide variety of experiences, his vocabulary of common names will be greatly expanded. Those same two objects that, in the nursery, he called cat and dog, he will be able to use other common names for, such as “feline” and “canine,” “Persian” and “poodle,” “mammal,” “quadruped,” “vertebrate,” “domesticated animal,” “pet,” “living organism,” and so on.

If we say that all of these common names acquired their significance through our direct acquaintance with the objects named, we should be sorely puzzled by the question of how the very same object of acquaintance can produce this extraordinary variety of results. If a meaningless notion gets meaning and becomes a word for us by being imposed on an object with which we are directly acquainted, how can one and the same object with which we are directly acquainted give quite distinct meanings to all the common names we use to refer to it?

The problem is further complicated by the fact that not all of the common names we use refer to objects that we perceive through our senses, such as cats and dogs. Not all signify perceptual objects with which we can have direct acquaintance.

What about such common names as “liberty,” “equality,” “justice,” or “electron,” “neutron,” “positron,” or “inflation,” “credit,” “tax shelter,” or “mind,” “spirit,” “thought”? None of these is a perceptual object with which we can have direct acquaintance. How in these cases did what must have been at first meaningless notations get meaning and become useful words for us?

Is the answer that here all meanings were acquired by
verbal description? That answer we have already seen to be unsatisfactory because it sends us around in an endless circle.

Is the answer that here, too, we have direct acquaintance with the objects named, but acquaintance in other ways than through perception, memory, and imagination that ultimately rests on the use of our senses? If so, what is the nature of that direct acquaintance and what is the character of the objects named, with which we are acquainted by means other than the action of our senses leading to perception, imagination, and memory?

We are now confronted with a problem that modern philosophers have failed to solve because of a number of philosophical mistakes that they have made. Two of the three mistakes that I will report in this chapter and shall try to correct are consequences of the mistakes discussed in the two preceding chapters: one the mistake of treating our ideas—our perceptions, memories, imaginations, and conceptions or thoughts—as objects of which we are directly aware or conscious; the other the mistake of reducing all our cognitive powers to that of our senses and failing to distinguish between the senses and the intellect as quite distinct, though interdependent, ways of apprehending objects.

But before I turn to a consideration of the modern failure to solve the problem of how meaningless notations become words through acquiring meaning, I must call attention to one further point that should be familiar to all of us when we consider words and meanings.

A meaningful word, a notation with significance, is a sign. A sign functions by presenting to the mind for its attention an object other than itself. Thus, when I utter the word “dog,” you not only hear the word itself, but hearing the word serves to bring before your mind the object thus named.

Not all signs function in this way, especially signs that are not words. We say that clouds signify rain; that smoke signifies fire; that the ringing of the dinner bell signifies the meal is ready. Such signs, unlike words, are signals, whereas words are usually used not as signals, but as designators—signs that refer to the objects they name.

Words can, of course, function as signals as well as signs. “Fire” cried out in a crowded theatre not only designates the object thus named, but also signifies an imminent danger that calls for action. So, too, the word “dinner” shouted from the farmhouse steps to workers in the field functions exactly like the ringing of the dinner bell.

With one slight exception that need not concern us here, all signs are either signals or designators or both at different times when used with different intentions.

What is common to the signs we have so far considered, which are either signals or designators or both, is that they are themselves objects of which we are perceptually aware as well as instruments that function to bring to mind the objects they signify. Let us, then, call all such signals and designators instrumental signs. Their whole being does not consist in signifying. They have perceptible existence in themselves apart from signifying, but they are also instruments for functioning in that way.

The distinction between signs that are only and always signals and signs that are designators whether or not they are also signals will have a direct bearing, as we shall see, on one difference between the human use of signs and the use of signs by other animals. Another difference will turn
upon the one way in which animals acquire signs that are
designators and the two ways that this happens in the case
of human beings.

We will return to this matter in a later section of this
chapter, but first, and most important, is the consideration
of the problem we have posed about words in human vo-
cabularies that function as signs that are designators. As
we shall find, the solution of that problem will involve the
discovery of another kind of designative sign, one the whole
existence of which consists in signifying.

Like other signs, signs of this special kind present to the
mind objects other than themselves. But unlike other signs,
they themselves are entities of which we have no awareness
whatsoever. They are thus radically distinct from the kind
of signs we have called instrumental signs. Let us call them
pure or formal signs.

The philosophical mistake to which we now turn con-
ists in the neglect of pure or formal signs in the attempt
to explain how meaningless notations get their designative
significance and become words in the vocabularies of or-
dinary human languages.

2

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), di-
vided into four books, John Locke devotes the whole of
the third book to words and their meanings. Having ini-
tially, in the very opening pages of the *Essay*, made the
mistake of regarding ideas as the objects that we directly
apprehend, or of which we are immediately conscious, he
could not avoid a crucial mistake in his effort to explain
how words get their meanings.

He was correct in thinking that meaningless notations
become meaningful words by our voluntarily imposing them
on objects as the names of objects that we apprehend. This,
as we have seen, holds for some words, but not for all—
only for those the meaning of which for us depends upon
our acquaintance with the object named, not for those the
meaning of which for us depends upon verbal descriptions
of the kind we find in dictionaries.

Locke neglected to observe this distinction between
meanings acquired by direct acquaintance and meanings
acquired by verbal description. Nevertheless, he was cor-
rect in thinking that our voluntary imposition of a mean-
ingless notation upon an object apprehended is the way in
which at least some words must acquire their meaning.

His mistake consisted in thinking that ideas are the ob-
jects to which all meaningful words directly refer and to
nothing else. To say this is to say that when an individual
uses words referentially, he is always and only referring to
his own ideas and nothing else. "It is perverting the use of
words," Locke wrote, "and brings unavoidable obscurity
and confusion into their signification, whenever we make
them [words] stand for anything but those ideas we have
in our own minds."

Locke explicitly denied that individuals can use words to
refer to the ideas in the minds of others. He even more
firmly denied that individuals can use words to signify the
things that exist in reality, their qualities or other attrib-
utes, or the events that occur in the world in which they
live. We do not have and cannot have any direct awareness
of such things. The only objects that we directly appre-
prehend are our own ideas.

While being explicit and firm on these two points, Locke
nevertheless realized that this account of how words get
meaning and have referential significance completely defeats the purpose that makes language so important in human life—communication. The ideas each individual has in his or her own mind exist in a domain that is completely private. How can two individuals talk to one another about their ideas, if the words each of them uses refer only to his or her own ideas? Even more perplexing is the fact that two individuals cannot talk to one another about the things or events that really exist or occur in the world in which they both live.

Having said that "words cannot be signs voluntarily imposed on things a man knows not," and having, throughout the *Essay*, maintained that we directly apprehend only our own ideas, not things existing in reality (which, according to Locke, act on our senses and cause us to have ideas), how can he explain our talking to one another about the real world that is constituted by "things a man knows not," i.e., things a man cannot directly apprehend?

The simple truth of the matter is that Locke cannot satisfactorily explain the use of language for the purpose of communication about the real world in which all of us live. The effort he makes to do so involves him in a contradiction as self-defeating as the embarrassment he cannot escape in positing the existence of the physical things that, acting on our senses, are the original causes of the ideas that arise in our minds; for, according to his own tenets, he has no way of apprehending such physical things and no basis for a belief in their existence.

Locke's efforts to explain what for him should be inexplicable involves a second step in his account of the significance of words. Our ideas being representations of the things that exist in reality, they themselves signify the things they represent. Our ideas, in other words, are signs that refer to things, things we ourselves cannot directly apprehend. That being so (though there is no way of explaining how it is so), Locke's second step permits him to say that words, directly signifying our own ideas, indirectly refer to the real things that our ideas signify. Hence we can use words to talk to one another not about our own ideas, but about the real world in which we live.

If, as was argued in Chapter 1, the ideas in our minds are not *that which* we directly apprehend but rather *that by which* we apprehend whatever we do apprehend, all of Locke’s contradictions and embarrassments can be avoided. The objects to which we give names and to which we refer when we use the words that signify them are the objects that we directly apprehend by our ideas, not the ideas by which we apprehend them. This, as we shall presently see, holds true just as much for the intelligible objects of conceptual thought as it does for the sensible objects of perception, memory, and imagination.

Earlier in this chapter, I called attention to the distinction between *instrumental signs* and *formal signs*. Instrumental signs—such as clouds signifying rain or the word "cloud" designating certain visible formations in the sky above—are themselves objects we apprehend as much as are the objects that these signs refer to. But a formal sign is never an object we apprehend. Its whole existence or being consists in the function it performs as a sign, referring to something we do apprehend, something it serves to bring before our minds. It is, as it were, self-effacing in its performance of this function.
TEN PHILOSOPHICAL MISTAKES

The basic truth here, the one that corrects Locke's mistake and provides us with a satisfactory explanation of the meaning of words, is that the ideas in our minds are formal signs. Another way of saying this is that our ideas, as the signs of the objects they enable us to apprehend, are meanings.

Let me repeat this point: our ideas do not have meaning, they do not acquire meaning, they do change, gain, or "lose" meaning. Each of our ideas is a meaning and that is all it is. Mind is the realm in which meanings exist and through which everything else that has meaning acquires meaning, changes meaning, or loses meaning.

The referential meanings that some of our words acquire when meaningless notations take on referential significance derive from their being voluntarily imposed on objects with which we have direct acquaintance. Those objects are the objects meant, signified, referred to, intended, brought before our minds, by the ideas that are their formal signs.

Locke would have us directly apprehend these formal signs (which are completely inapprehensible) and through them indirectly apprehend the things of reality (their representation of which is inexplicable). Accordingly, he mistakenly maintained that our words directly signify our ideas as their object, and through our ideas indirectly signify the things of reality they represent.

The correction of this philosophical error consists in seeing that our ideas are the formal signs we can never apprehend. They enable us to apprehend all the objects we do apprehend. Those words that do not acquire meaning by verbal descriptions of the objects named acquire it by our direct acquaintance with objects that our ideas enable us to apprehend. These are also the objects that our ideas, functioning as formal signs, refer to.

Furthermore, because the words we use have referential meaning as instrumental signs through association with the ideas that function as formal signs, we can use words not only to refer to the objects that we directly apprehend by means of our ideas, but also to arouse those associated ideas in the minds of others so that they have the same objects before their minds. It is in this way that we communicate with one another about objects that are public in the sense that they are objects apprehended by and so are common to two or more individuals.

This is of such great importance for us to understand that it deserves a more detailed exposition, first, with regard to the sensible objects we apprehend by perception, memory, or imagination; and second, with regard to the intelligible objects of conceptual thought. That exposition will be found in the next two sections.

4

The objects apprehended by perception differ in a radical way from the objects apprehended by our memory and our imagination.

The objects of our imagination may or may not exist in reality; they may be objects that do not now exist, yet may come into existence at some future time; they may even be purely fictional objects that do not exist, never have existed, and never will exist in reality.

The objects of our memory—past events that we claim to remember—may not have existed as we remember them.
Our memories can be challenged by others who claim to remember the event differently, or who even deny that what we claim to remember ever really occurred.

In other words, the objects of both our imagination and our memory are objects concerning which a question about their real existence can always be asked. That is not so in the case of perception.

When you or I say that we perceive the table at which we are both sitting, we are also asserting that that table exists in reality. If we are perceiving something, not having a hallucination (which is the very opposite of perceiving), then the object we are perceiving is also something that really exists.

We never should ask whether an object perceived really exists. The only possible question is whether we are in fact perceiving or are suffering a hallucination such as alcoholics suffer when they claim to see pink elephants that are not there.

Except for perceptual apprehension, apprehending an object does not involve the judgment that the object really exists as apprehended, or will exist in the future or did exist in the past. Apprehension and judgment are two distinct and separate acts of the mind, one first, the other second. Apprehensions as such are neither true nor false: they assert nothing. Only judgments make assertions—affirmations or denials—that are either true or false.

What is very special about perception is that, while here apprehension and judgment are distinct, they are also inseparable. To claim that we perceive something is to assert that the perceived object also really exists. If that judgment is false, then what we claim to be a perception is in fact a hallucination.

*This question is answered in detail in Chapter 1 and need not be repeated here. See pp. 19–22, supra.
Kublai Khan in Xanadu) which his imagination has produced. Depending on their powers of imagination, and the assiduity of their efforts, the readers of his work will be able to produce for themselves the same imaginary objects, or at least to achieve close approximations to them, sufficient for the purposes of conversation.

Such conversations take place in manifold forms and myriad instances whenever human beings talk to one another about books they have read. The fact that Captain Ahab or that the singular White Whale does not really exist, and never will exist, does not prevent persons from talking about these objects as common objects of reference, just as they talk about the incumbent President of the United States, or about Abraham Lincoln, or the white horse that George Washington rode, or the crossing of the Delaware at Valley Forge. If it were thought to be impossible for persons to converse about the imaginary objects initially produced by poets and writers of fiction, one would be forced to the contrafactual conclusion that a teacher of literature and his students could never engage in a discussion of a work that all of them have read. One need only think of the countless hours which have been devoted by students, teachers, literary critics, and others to the discussion of the character and actions of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, to dismiss as preposterous even the faintest suggestion that imaginary objects cannot be common objects of discourse.

The mention of Shakespeare’s Hamlet raises for us one final question about objects in the realm of the imaginary. Some of them, like the fictional characters of mythology (e.g., Cerberus or Charon), bear proper names that do not appear in the pages in history; but some, like Hamlet and Julius Caesar, appear in Shakespeare’s plays and also in writings that are usually not regarded as fictional.

The proper name “Hamlet” can be used to refer not only to the character created by Shakespeare, but also to what may be regarded as his prototype in the Historiae Danicae of Saxo Grammaticus, a twelfth-century Danish historian; in addition, if the account of Saxo Grammaticus is reliable, “Hamlet” was the proper name of a singular prince of Denmark, who lived at a certain time and was involved in regicide, usurpation, incest, and all the rest of it.

So, too, “Julius Caesar,” as a proper name, refers to at least three different singular objects: (i) the leading character in a play by Shakespeare, (ii) a historical figure described in one of Plutarch’s Lives, and (iii) the Roman general who lived at a certain time, who conquered Gaul, wrote a history of his battles in that province, crossed the Rubicon, and so on.

If we wish to talk about the character and actions of Julius Caesar as portrayed in the play of that title by Shakespeare, we must identify the imaginary object of our discourse by a definite description of it as “the character of that name in a play by Shakespeare, with the title Julius Caesar, first produced on such a date, etc.” It would be confusion, indeed, if one of two persons who are engaged in a conversation about Julius Caesar used that proper name to refer to Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and the other used it to refer to Plutarch’s Julius Caesar. They might get to the point of making contradictory statements about the apparently common object of their discourse, only to find that they did not have a common object, but were in fact talking about different objects—objects which resembled one another in certain respects, but which differed in others.
That Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is an imaginary object of discourse no one will question. The fact that there are certain resemblances between Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Plutarch's and also between Plutarch's Julius Caesar and Rome's Julius Caesar, who was general, first consul, and dictator in the years 59–44 B.C., does not change the status of Shakespeare's invention. His Julius Caesar is a fiction of the imagination no less than Cerberus and Charon. Are we, by the force of this argument, led to the same conclusion about Plutarch's Julius Caesar and, therefore, about all of the historical personages described by historians and biographers?

Let us turn now from objects of perception, memory, and imagination, which are objects we name when we use words to refer to them, to objects of conceptual thought. We face at once the same problem that we faced before with regard to objects of memory and imagination. Here as there the apprehension of the object is not only distinct from, but also separate from, any judgment we may make about whether the object we are apprehending really exists.

To be more precise, the judgment should not be about whether the apprehended object of conceptual thought really exists, but rather whether one or more particular perceptible, or otherwise detectable, instances of it exist in reality. The reason for this is that the words which name the apprehended objects of conceptual thought are always common names. These are names that signify a kind or class of objects, not a unique singular object that is signified by a proper name.

The only way to ask about the existential reality of a kind or class is to ask whether it is a null class (a class having no existent members at all) or a filled class (a class having one or more particular instances that really exist). In other words, kinds or classes, or what are sometimes called universals, do not really exist as such. All the constituents of reality are particular individuals. If the universals, or kinds of classes, have any reality at all, it lies in some property or attribute that is common to a number of particular instances that are all instances of the same kind or members of the same class.

What has just been said, by the way, explains how the perceptual object that the growing child names by calling it "doggie" can later be named by the educated adult using such words as "canine," "mammal," "quadruped," "vertebrate," "living organism." These other names signify one and the same perceptual object, but one that is conceptually understood in a variety of ways. As Aquinas pointed out, "we can give a name to an object only insofar as we understand it and according to the way we understand it." Since one and the same perceptual object can be conceptually understood in a variety of ways (i.e., can be understood as a particular instance of a variety of different kinds of classes), a whole set of common names can be used to refer to it.

With regard to many of the apprehended objects of conceptual thought that we use common names to signify, we seldom pause to ask the judgmental question about their real existence: Does one or more perceptible or detectable particular instances of the kind or class named really exist?

We would not think to ask it about white swans, but we certainly would if we happened to think about black swans. We would not ask it about dogs and cats, or trees and cows,
but we do ask it or have asked it about black holes, quarks, mesons, and other objects of contemporary theoretical physics, and also about angels, spirits, and other totally nonperceptible objects, yet objects we are able to think about by means of concepts that we form.

The foregoing account of the way we use words to name and refer to objects of conceptual thought brings us face to face once again with another serious philosophical mistake, widely prevalent in modern thought, though not exclusively modern in origin.

It is the error known as nominalism. It consists in the denial of what are sometimes called "abstract ideas," sometimes "general concepts," but which, however named, are ideas that enable us to understand kinds or classes without any reference to particular perceptual instances that may or may not exist.

These are the ideas through the functioning of which the common names in our vocabulary signify and refer to the kinds or classes that they enable us to apprehend as objects of thought. The nominalist's denial that we have such ideas compels him to try to offer another explanation of the meaning or significance of common names or what are sometimes called general terms. I have shown that all his efforts to do so are self-defeating.*

Another mistake about language that follows as a consequence of the failure to distinguish the human intellect from the senses is, strictly speaking, not a philosophical mistake. It is one of which animal psychologists and behavior-ioral scientists are for the most part guilty, though many contemporary philosophers associate themselves with the position taken by students of animal behavior.

In their study of the evidence of animal communication, they seldom if ever note the difference between signs that function merely as signals and signs that function as designators—as names that refer to objects. Almost all of the cries, sounds, gestures, that animals in the wild, and domesticated animals as well, use to express their emotions and desires, serve as signals, not as designators. It is only in the laboratory and under experimental conditions, often with very ingeniously contrived special apparatus, that such higher mammals as chimpanzees and bottle-nosed dolphins appear to be communicating by using words as if they were names, and even to be making sentences by putting them together with some vestige of syntax.

The appearance is then misinterpreted by the scientists as a basis for asserting that the only difference between animal and human language is one of degree, not of kind—a difference in the number of name words in an animal’s vocabulary and a difference in the complexity of the utterances that are taken to be sentences.

This misinterpretation arises from the neglect or ignorance, on the part of the scientists, of the difference between perceptual and conceptual thought. That, in turn, stems from their failure to acknowledge the difference between the senses and the intellect or their denial that the difference exists.

That these differences should not be ignored and cannot be denied would have to be conceded by anyone who looked at the evidence with an unprejudiced eye—by anyone who did not start out with the firm intention of showing that

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*See Section 4 of Chapter 2, supra.
humans and brutes differ only in degree. While there is
evidence that chimpanzees under experimental conditions
do use artificially contrived signs to designate or name
things, the things they name are all perceptual objects. There
is not a single piece of evidence showing their ability to use
signs to designate what is not perceived through their sens-
es or what lies totally beyond the sensible realm and is in-
trinsically imperceptible.

Therein lies the difference between the animal's power
of perceptual thought and the human power of conceptual
thought. There is no doubt that the animal's power of per-
ceptual thought enables it to perform acts of abstraction and
generalization that have a certain similitude to human ab-
straction and generalization.

The animal's behavior manifests different reactions to
objects that are different in kind. But the kinds of things
that animals appear to differentiate are all kinds of which
there are perceptual instances in the animal's experience.
Humans differentiate kinds or classes of which there either
are no perceptual instances in their experience or of which
there cannot be any. This is the distinguishing character-
istic of conceptual thought and the irrefutable evidence of
the presence of intellect in man and of its absence in brutes.

One further observation, if it were made by the animal
psychologists, might open their eyes to the difference in
kind, not degree, between human language and the ac-
quirement by animals of signs that appear to function as
designative names. It involves the distinction, already made,
between a word acquiring its designative meaning through
direct perceptual acquaintance with the object named and
the acquirement of meaning by means of a verbal descrip-
tion, as when a child learns the meaning of the word "kin-
dergarten" by being told that it is a place where children
get together to play and learn.

In all the experimental work done on animals, there is
no instance where a sign that an animal uses gets its mean-
ing from a collocation of other signs that purport to ex-
press its meaning. In every case, a new sign that is
introduced into the animal's vocabulary becomes meaning-
ful through being attached to a perceptual object with which
the animal has direct acquaintance.

If the students of animal behavior had engaged in their
observations and experiments with a recognition of the dif-
ference between perceptual and conceptual thought, and
with an acknowledgment that humans have intellect as well
as senses, whereas animals lack intellects, they would not
be so prone to ignore or deny the difference in kind be-
tween the human and animal use of signs as names or
designators.

Finally, we come to one more philosophical mistake that
has had very serious consequences for the contemporary
philosophy of language. Unlike all the errors noted in the
preceding sections of this chapter, it is not a mistake that
stems from errors discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

This mistake is introduced into modern thought by
Thomas Hobbes in his Leviathan (1651), Chapter 4 of which
is concerned with speech. In the centuries before Hobbes,
the term meaningless had a purely descriptive significance.
It signified that a sound or mark simply lacked meaning;
that it was like the nonsense syllables "glub" and "trish."

Hobbes introduced a dyslogistic use of the term mean-
ingless. For him a word like "angel" or its equivalent phrase
“incorporeal substance” is a meaningless expression because of his espousal of materialism as a metaphysical doctrine, according to which only bodies or material things exist in reality. Since angels or incorporeal substances according to this doctrine do not exist, the words “angel” or “incorporeal substance” must be meaningless. They designate nothing; they refer to nothing.

Hobbes compounds the error he is here making by maintaining that such an expression as “incorporeal substance” is a contradiction in terms and cannot exist. Even if one were to grant him the truth of his materialistic premise that nothing exists except bodies or corporeal substances, it would still not cogently follow that incorporeal substances, or angels, cannot possibly exist. The only conclusion to be drawn from that premise is that angels do not exist, not that they are impossible, because self-contradictory in the same way that the phrase “round square” is self-contradictory.

That, however, is not the main point to be considered. The main point is that Hobbes reduced the designative reference of name words to the one mode of reference which involves a reference to some really existent thing or to a class of things of which there are really existent instances.

If we merely ask the question whether angels do or do not exist, and certainly if we affirm or deny that they do, the word “angel” must have some meaning. If it were totally meaningless, as Hobbes declares, we could not ask the question, or make the affirmation or denial, any more than we could ask whether glub exists or deny that trish does.

The only truly meaningless notations are either nonsense syllables, such as “glub” and “trish,” or a contradiction in terms, such as “round square.” A round square is simply inconceivable or unthinkable. That being so, there can be no idea of it, and no object of thought which we can apprehend. Hence the phrase designates or refers to nothing.

“If a man should speak to me about immaterial substances, or about a free subject, a free will,” Hobbes writes, “I should not say he were in error, but that his words were without meaning; that is to say, absurd.” He goes on to say that statements about things that never have been, “nor can be incident to sense,” are absurd speeches, “taken upon credit, without any signification at all.”

The focal point of Hobbes’ error is the elimination of all designative references that are not also existentially denotative (i.e., references to the really existent). As we observed earlier, except for special proper names and the common names for objects perceived, not hallucinated, all other common names have designative references that are not also existentially denotative. About almost all the objects of memory and imagination that we can name, certainly about all the objects of conceptual thought that we can name, the question whether what is named has existence in reality should be asked.

If such objects, about which that question should be asked, cannot be named by signs that have referential significance, then questions that should be asked simply cannot be asked. The elimination of referential significance that is not also existentially denotative would make it impossible to ask such questions.

The twentieth-century followers of Hobbes, even those who do know that they are elaborating extensively on a point that he mentioned briefly and then dismissed as not worthy of further comment, try to avoid the impossibility just
mentioned by distinguishing between what they call "sense" and "reference."

For them, the only referential significance that name words can have involves existential denotation—reference to the really existent. A relatively small number of special proper names, or their equivalents in phrases that are definite descriptions, such as "the first President of the United States," have such referential significance.

All the rest of the words in our vocabulary have only sense, but not reference. That sense consists in their connotation, which can be expressed in a set of other words. But they refer to nothing at all.

How do these modern linguistic philosophers reach such an absurd conclusion? What is its root or origin? The only explanation, in my judgment, is that it lies in their ignorance of the distinction between formal and instrumental signs and in their consequent failure to understand that the words which become names through direct acquaintance with the objects named refer to whatever objects are signified by the ideas in our mind functioning as formal signs of those objects.

Accordingly, all the words that name the objects of thought, about which we should ask the existential question, do have referential significance. Their designative meaning consists in their reference to such objects, whether or not any instances of them can be perceived because they actually exist in reality. Such words have more than sense, or merely connotative meaning. They have as much referential significance as any correctly used proper name or definite description.

This reductionist error, which consists in reducing referential significance to the one mode of significance that involves a reference to something really existent, lies at the heart of Bertrand Russell's famous theory of descriptions. And what lies at the heart of that error is the mistake of supposing that naming is asserting—that we cannot name something without also asserting that the thing named really exists.

Naming is not asserting, any more than apprehending an object of thought is identical with making the judgment that the object has existence in reality. Apprehending an object and making the judgment that it really exists are inseparable only in the case of veridical perceptions. In every other case, the acts of apprehension and judgment are not only distinct but also quite separate. One act can occur without the other occurring. Hence we can use words to refer to apprehended objects about the existence of which we suspend judgment or ask questions.

As a result of these errors, originating with Hobbes, linguistic philosophy in the twentieth century has abandoned the effort to explain the referential significance of most words in our daily vocabulary—all words that do not have the one mode of referential significance that denotes something really existent (according to whatever metaphysical doctrine may be held about the components of reality).

This has led to the fatuous injunction "Don't look for the meaning; look for the use," as if it were possible to discover the use of a word without first ascertaining its meaning as used, a meaning that it must have had before it was used in order to be used in one certain way rather than another. Language does not control thought, as contemporary linguistic philosophers appear to believe. It is the other way around.

Another possible explanation of the abandonment by
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contemporary linguistic philosophers of any attempt to account for the lexical meanings of most of the words in our daily vocabularies is their awareness of the embarrassments that Locke's attempt to do so could not avoid. Unable to avoid the mistakes made by Locke and unable to give a correct account of the matter because they were ignorant of the insights and distinctions required to do so, they gave the whole thing up as a bad job.

Chapter 4

Knowledge and Opinion

1

All men, Aristotle said, by nature desire to know. It may not be true that, born with that native propensity, all persons in fact continue to nourish it. But certainly there are but few who do not regard knowledge as desirable, as a good to be prized, and a good without limit—the more, the better.

It is generally understood that those who have knowledge about anything are in the possession of the truth about it. Individuals may at times be incorrect in their claim that they do have knowledge, but if they do, then they have some hold on the truth. The phrase "false knowledge" is a contradiction in terms; "true knowledge" is manifestly redundant.

That being understood, the line that divides knowledge from opinion should also be clear. There is nothing self-