THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO LOCKE'S ACCOUNT OF PARTICLES

(*Essay*, III, 7)

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I. *Introduction*

As is well-known, the third book of John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* of 1690 contains his theory of language and meaning. Most typical of that theory is the often repeated thesis that words or names signify nothing immediately but the ideas in the mind of the speaker. Among Locke's commentators, some consider this thesis as being completely general and unrestricted. The most recent, and perhaps the most explicit, defender of this universal scope is Berman (1984); but a similar view has been expressed by Bennett (1971, p. 20), Henze (1971), Kelemen (1976, p. 20), and by philosophers of language who regard Locke as the champion of an ideational theory of meaning: for instance, Alston (1964, pp. 22-25), Harrison (1979, pp. 26-37). Others, however, are of the opinion that Locke acknowledged at least two exceptions to his main thesis, namely, particles (*Essay*, III, 7) and negative or privative words (*Essay*, III, 1, 4). That Berkeley already must have understood Locke as denying that particles stand for ideas is testified by two entries in his *Philosophical Commentaries* (1948, 661, 667). Many recent interpreters have followed his lead; to those mentioned by Berman (1984) one might add Kretzmann (1968, par. III), Land (1974, p. 8), Landesman (1976, p. 24, 34), Woozley (1976, p. 429), and Ashworth (1984, pp. 51-52).

I am firmly convinced that the latter view, according to which Locke admits two exceptions to his principal thesis, is the right one. This conviction is based partly upon evidence that, to my knowledge, has been neglected so far. It consists of some very fundamental distinctions that were widely known and commonly accepted in the scholastic tradition. My strategy will be as follows. Beginning with

particles, I shall first expound some relevant scholastic doctrines. Next, it will be shown that these doctrines were still quite familiar to Locke's contemporaries. Finally, and most importantly, I shall try to make it plausible that the pertinent text in Locke's *Essay* yields the most satisfactory sense if it is read in the light of the traditional views of the matter. After that, the passage about negative and privative words – which Berman (1984) adduces in support of his judgment that there are no exceptions – will be dealt with along the same lines.

II. *Some traditional distinctions concerning particles*

1. Pinborg (1967, p. 50) has drawn attention to a conception of the signification of the eight parts of speech that is found in an unpublished commentary *Super Priscianum maiorem*, written by Robert Kilwardby about 1250, and in many other manuscripts from the middle of the thirteenth century. According to that conception, a part of speech signifies either a *mentis affectus* or a *mentis conceptus*. Interjections are of the first type: they express an affective state or an emotion actually felt by the speaker. Incidentally it may be remarked that ancient grammarians ascribed the same feature to the moods of the verb, which in their opinion have regard to stances or inclinations that belong to the emotional and volitional aspects of the soul. But as a mood of the verb is not a part of speech, this category is not mentioned in Kilwardby's schema.

Of the second type are all other parts of speech; they are associated with the cognitive aspect of the soul, that is, with the faculty that conceives of things by an act of simple apprehension. There are, however, two fundamentally different kinds of parts of speech that have a connection with the mind's power of thinking of things. Nouns and verbs, and also pronouns and participles, signify a thing (*res*) – in a broad sense – straightforwardly; they signify *per modum rei* in that they represent their significate in the form of a thing that is put before the mind. By contrast, prepositions, adverbs, and conjunctions signify *per modum circumstantiae rei*, which means that they perform their semantic function, not in direct relation to a thing, but rather by adding some modification to an act of thinking directly of a thing as it is expressed by a noun or a verb. Such parts of speech operate as it

were in the neighbourhood of those which signify a thing. As it is evident that the difference between the two groups of parts of speech that signify a *mentis conceptus* corresponds to the distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic signs, it is worth-while to have a brief look at that latter distinction.

2. What came to be indicated by the pair 'categorematic/syncategorematic' had its origin in Aristotle's use of the verb *pros-sēmaínein* in connection with the copula 'is' and the quantifiers 'every' and 'no' in *De interpretatione*, 16 b 20, and 20 a 13. As we learn from Priscian (1855-1859, I, p. 54), subsequently all words that signify only in combination with another expression were called *syn-katēgorḗmata*, translated in Latin as *con-significantia*. In contrast with such accessory parts of speech, nouns and verbs, which have a relatively independent meaning, came then to be characterized by the name *categorema* or *categorematicus*. As it was gradually realized that syncategorematic signs are of crucial importance for exhibiting the exact logical form of the sentences in which they occur, from about 1200 onwards several treatises appeared which were dedicated to a thorough examination of their logical behaviour. It is the merit of Braakhuis (1979) to have made this valuable material more readily accessible.

In general, categorematic terms were seen as those words – nouns substantive and adjective, verbs, and also pronouns and participles – which on their own can occupy the place of the subject or the predicate in a categorical proposition. The mental counterparts which such words signify immediately, or to which they are subordinate, were said to belong to the first operation of the mind, that is, to that type of apprehending by which the intellect simply conceives or thinks of a thing, or – in the case of such collective signs as 'army' – of a plurality of things. The ultimate significates of both mental and spoken or written categorematic signs were held to be those items in the world which, as substances or accidents, fall under one of the categories distinguished by Aristotle.

Syncategorematic words, on the other hand, can perform their semantic function only when they are adjoined to one or more categorematic words. While a categorematic word acquires its meaning by being accompanied by a mental act of conceiving of a thing

and thus signifies the thing thought of, the adjoined syncategorematic word expresses a mode or manner in which the thing concerned is apprehended by the mind. The syncategorematic act of the mind that makes the conventional syncategorematic sign meaningful modifies the relationship between the categorematic conception of a thing and its correlate in the world; it determines *how* a thing is conceived of. Correspondently, the spoken or written syncategorematic sign determines *how* the categorematic word to which it is adjoined stands for things in the world. Consequently, a syncategorematic sign has no significate of its own, in the sense of a thing signified by it; the thing signified is provided exclusively by the categorematic word with which it is combined. At the same time, it is evident that the syncategorematic sign, as a typical modifier, needs supplementation by something else on which the act of modifying can be brought to bear. Especially from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards the difference between the signification of a categorematic sign and the signification of a syncategorematic sign was usually brought out through the distinction between *significare aliquid* and *significare aliqualiter*. The signification of a categorematic sign regards an object of thought; in that case it always makes sense to ask '*What* does it signify?'. The signification of a syncategorematic sign is purely adverbial in that it signifies a manner or form of thinking of a thing. It never makes sense to ask 'What does it signify?', but one can ask only '*How* does it signify?' or 'How does it modify the signification of a categorematic sign?'.

Let us look at some examples. If someone meaningfully says 'Socrates is a Greek', he thinks of two things, of Socrates in particular and of Greeks in general, in such a way that the latter concept is predicatively and affirmatively tied to the former concept. The things conceived of are Socrates and Greeks, denoted by categorematic signs. The manner in which these objects are thought of is indicated by the syncategorematic copula. The whole sentence, therefore, signifies how things are. In saying 'Socrates is not a Greek' the speaker is thinking of exactly the same things, but in a different way: predicatively and negatively. The sentence 'Every man is an animal' is made meaningful by the complex thought which consists of a conception of men in general, a conception of animals in general, and a mode of thinking of these two kinds of thing which is such that the

latter concept is predicatively, affirmatively, and universally tied to the former concept. In principle, the same considerations apply to such overt connectives as 'and', 'or', 'if-then', and to such prepositions and adverbs as 'except' and 'only', which may figure in covertly compounded propositions. In the case of both categorical and molecular propositions it is always possible to ask two kinds of question: what are the things the speaker is thinking of, and how does he think of them. Together, the answers determine the way things are thought of and thus the truth-conditions for the various types of proposition. It may even happen that speakers who think of exactly one and the same thing frame quite different propositions about it by varying the mode in which they think of it. The propositions 'God is God', 'God is not God', 'Every God is God', 'No God is God', 'God is God or God is not God' are all about the same object of thought: the thing that may also be conceived of without any complexity, in an act of simple apprehension. The differences are entirely due to the divergent manners in which that one object is thought of; and those modes of thinking are contributed by the syncategorematic elements.

3. So far attention has been called to two divisions in the notion of signification: parts of speech signify either a *mentis affectus* or a *mentis conceptus*, and within the cognitive sphere some signify *per modum rei* or *aliquid* and others *per modum circumstantiae rei* or *aliqualiter*. A third distinction contrasts both interjections and syncategorematic signs with categorematic signs. There are of course differences between interjections and syncategorematic signs. Interjections have a fairly independent meaning; in many cases they are as complete as whole sentences. Syncategorematic signs lack precisely that independence and completeness; by their very nature they stand in need of supplementation. But such differences do not prevent them from sharing a peculiar feature that is absent in categorematic signs. Interjections and syncategorematic signs resemble each other in that both express a certain state in which the speaker's soul – either its irrational or its rational part – actually is, whereas categorematic signs represent a thing which is in the mind only in so far as it is thought of and so becomes the object of a conception.

Some examples will make this clearer. When someone seriously and sincerely utters the interjection *euax* ('hurrah'), he gives expres-

sion to a feeling of exultation that actually and simultaneously affects him and of which *euax* is the commonly recognized mark (*nota*). The same kind of feeling may be signified also by the categorematic word *gaudium* ('joy'). But then it is put before the mind only as a thing conceived of and talked about; it is not necessarily – and perhaps usually not – an affective state in which the speaker himself at the moment of utterance actually is. Similarly, in uttering *utinam* ('o, if only') the speaker expresses a desire which at that moment really affects his soul, while in using the categorematic word *desiderium* he signifies that feeling merely as something conceived of, without necessarily experiencing it in his own soul. In a treatise *De proprietatibus sermonum*, dating from about 1200, the difference between the two cases is stressed by describing the feeling of exultation that is expressed by an interjection as a *forma exercita*, a kind of feeling actually instantiated by the speaker's soul, and the same feeling as it is signified by the word *gaudium* as merely something *apprehensum et cogitatum in anima* (De Rijk, 1967, pp. 708-709).

Now, in treatises concerning syncategorematic signs which appeared in the course of the thirteenth century and have been made accessible by Braakhuis (1979) there is a clear tendency to apply the above-mentioned distinction to syncategorematic signs as well. Without going into the rather complicated details of that development (Cf. Nuchelmans, forthcoming), we may summarize the outcome as follows. In the case of the particle *non*, for instance, it was held that a speaker who seriously utters it thereby expresses an inner state or attitude that he actually has and so performs an effective act of denying or negating. Such an *actus exercitus* can subsequently become the object of a second-order act of reflecting in which it is conceived of as a thing and then signified by such nouns and verbs as *negatio* and *negare*. As an object of reflection, the original act of negating was called *actus conceptus* or *significatus (per modum conceptus)*. Considering things from the side of the speaker, it may be said that in using the particle *non* in order to negate he expresses a mode of thinking negatively which he actually performs, as an *actus exercitus*; therefore, he signifies negation *in actu exercito* or *per modum affectus*, that is, in that specific way in which an inner state or attitude really exemplified by the speaker's mind is conveyed to the

hearer by means of the special mark *non*. If, however, he reflects upon his act of negating and conceives of it as a thing or an action, he has to signify that same act in a different way, called *in actu significato* or *per modum conceptus*, by means of the categorematic words *negatio* or *negare*. Viewed from the angle of the linguistic expressions which the speaker employs as tools, the same difference of signification was also brought out by saying that *non* exercises or performs negation, but does not signify it as something conceived of, whereas *negatio* signifies negation as a thing conceived of, but does not actually negate. A striking example is the sentence *Negatio negat*, which is affirmative in spite of the fact that both the subject-term and the predicate-term signify negation. They signify negation only *per modum conceptus* and therefore cannot exercise any negative power.

The distinction *significare per modum affectus*/*per modum conceptus* or *significare in actu exercito*/*in actu significato* was elaborated for other syncategorematic signs in analogous ways. Just as 'not' may be contrasted with 'negation', so 'is' may be contrasted with 'predication' or 'affirmation', 'every' with 'distribution', 'and' with 'copulation', 'or' with 'disjunction', 'except' with 'exception', and 'only' with 'exclusion' or 'limitation'. Two examples must suffice. As regards predication, such a sentence as 'Man is an animal' was commonly opposed to 'A genus is predicated of a species'. The former sentence is an instance of *praedicatio exercita*, since the copula is actually used to perform an operation of combining affirmatively the concept of man and the concept of animal. In the second sentence, which is an example of *praedicatio significata*, the act effectively performed in the first sentence is only conceived of and accordingly signified by the categorematic word 'predicated'. Further, the whole sentence 'Socrates is running', which as such was held to be a syncategorematic sign, exercises the function of affirming, but does not signify affirmation in the way it would be signified in, for instance, the sentence 'Peter affirms that Socrates is running' (Braakhuis, 1979, I, p. 205).

III. *Reminiscences of the traditional distinctions in Locke's contemporaries*

That the foregoing distinctions with respect to the many-sided notion of signification were still alive in the second half of the seventeenth century is proved by the fact that they reappear under a somewhat modified but clearly recognizable guise in some of Locke's contemporaries. In the widely-read *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* that was published by the Port-Royal authors Arnauld and Lancelot in 1660 the most fundamental division concerning that which goes on in the mind is said to be the distinction between objects of thought and forms or manners of thinking (1660, II, 1). To the latter category belong, first of all, predications or judgments, but also such operations as conjoining and disjoining, and all other movements of the soul, such as desires, commands, and interrogations. It is upon this crucial distinction that the authors base their main division of the parts of speech. A few years later John Wilkins, in *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* of 1668, divided words into integrals, that is, the more principal, such as signify some entire thing or notion, and particles, the less principal, such as consignify and serve to circumstantiate other words with which they are joined (1668, II, 1-2).

Moreover – and that is a point of particular importance – in both treatises interjections and such syncategorematic signs as the copula and connectives are jointly contrasted with words that signify an object of thought or a thing conceived of. That this division is rooted in the old distinction between *significare per modum affectus* and *significare per modum conceptus* is made abundantly clear by the much more explicit treatment of this matter in Arnold Geulincx' *Logica* of 1662, and in his *Dictata ad logicam*. There Geulincx carefully explains what is meant by the word *nota*. It is a mark of an act as performed (*signum actus ut exerciti*), that is, a sign by which we signify some act or state of ourselves – such as affirmation, negation, love, hate – not in abstraction, as when its name is introduced into discourse, but rather as it is here and now performed or felt by us (*signum quo significamus actum aliquem nostrum (ut affirmationem, negationem, amorem, odium etc.) non simpliciter (qualiter etiam est cum nomen suum importatur), sed prout hic et nunc a nobis exerce-*

tur). There are two kinds of such marks: marks of the intellectual part of the soul and marks of the emotional or voluntative part. To the latter group belong also gestures, facial expressions, and modulations of the voice. For the purposes of logic only the marks of the intellectual acts are important; they indicate that the speaker is actually performing an act of affirming, denying, inferring, supposing, assuming, conjoining, disjoining, prescinding, distributing etc. (Geulincx, 1891-1893, I, p. 176, 403-405, 462-463, II, p. 148). Although, as a logician, Geulincx stresses the difference between the two types of mark, yet he leaves no doubt as to the peculiar mode of signifying that is common to them and justifies their being gathered into a separate class of marks of manners of thinking, as opposed to categorematic signs of objects of thought.

That Locke's contemporaries were fully aware of this difference between signification *in actu exercito* and signification *in actu significato* is further confirmed by two remarkable passages in the chapter on the verb (II, 2) that was added to Arnauld and Nicole's *La logique ou l'art de penser* (1662) in the fifth edition of 1683. The authors, who regard the copula as the only genuine verb, characterize its principal function as consisting in being a mark of affirmation. The finite verb indicates that the discourse in which it occurs is the discourse of someone who does not only conceive of things, but passes judgment on them as well. It is precisely in this respect that the copula-element in the finite verb differs from such names as *affirmans* and *affirmatio*. The latter words also signify affirmation, but only in so far as an actual operation of affirming has become, by a mental act of reflecting, an object of thought. Consequently, they do not signal that the speaker performs an act of affirming; what they signify is the act as a thing conceived of. In the sentence *Petrus affirmat*, which is equivalent to *Petrus est affirmans*, there are therefore two affirmations: a performed or produced affirmation, of which the copula is the proper mark, and a conceived affirmation, which is signified by *affirmans* and attributed to Peter. Analogously, the sentence *Nego*, which is equivalent to *Ego sum negans*, contains a performed affirmation and a conceived negation.

IV. *Locke on particles*

In the light of the distinctions outlined above, which were a widely-known and generally accepted component of traditional philosophy of language and were still quite familiar to those who had occasion to discuss the same subject in the second half of the seventeenth century, the answer to the question as to how Locke's chapter 'Of Particles' is to be interpreted becomes almost unmistakable. Far from being ambiguous, the first two sentences state clearly that there are two different kinds of words: words which are names of ideas in the mind, that is, categorematic signs of objects of thought, and other words, which indicate the forms of thinking by which ideas and propositions are connected. Especially the second sentence – 'The mind, in communicating its thought to others, does not only need signs of the *ideas* it has then before it, but others also, to shew or intimate some particular action of its own, at that time, relating to those *ideas*' – contains a description of non-categorematic words that is remarkably similar to Geulincx' characterization of *notae*: *Nota est signum actus ut exerciti, i.e. signum quo significamus actum aliquem nostrum - - - prout hic et nunc a nobis exercetur*. The two features that make those words which signify *in actu exercito* or *per modum affectus* different from categorematic signs of things thought of are precisely that they intimate to the audience that the speaker himself is, at the very moment of utterance, performing a mental act or experiencing a certain feeling with respect to things he has before the mind as objects of thought.

The peculiar mode of signifying that is typical of non-categorematic words has as subject the speaker, the speaker's mind, or the particular word employed. For the relation itself Locke sometimes uses the general verb 'to signify', but also, and strikingly often, 'to show' and 'to intimate'. These latter verbs seem to be exactly right for indicating the way in which the speaker – and thus the word he uses – reveals a mental act or state of his own which he currently performs or experiences. By uttering the appropriate mark the speaker discloses to the hearer what he is effectively doing and how he is feeling. As is to be expected by now, the complements of those verbs belong to two broad categories. First, most of the examples given by Locke concern the performance of those actions of the mind of which syncategore-

matic words are the conventional marks: such familiar items as affirming, denying, limiting, excepting, restricting, opposing, and supposing. But in addition to this rather loosely circumscribed group of actions by which the mind connects ideas and propositions, Locke also mentions the several views, postures, stands, and turns of the mind. These expressions suggest that he was also thinking of such affective states as are commonly revealed by interjections and certain words that accompany wishes, questions, threats, exclamations, and the like. This suggestion is fully confirmed by a passage in *Essay*, II, 1, 4, where Locke explains that he uses the term 'operations' in a large sense, as comprehending not barely the actions of the mind about its ideas, but some sort of passions arising sometimes from them, such as the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought. Moreover, it is not impossible that by the particles which in the last sentence of the chapter are described as constantly having the sense of a whole sentence contained in them Locke means – perhaps *inter alia* – interjections. John Wilkins (1668, III, 2, 2; cf. Michael, 1970, p. 464) had characterized interjections as substitutive particles, because they supply the room of some sentence or complex part of it. However that may be, there is already sufficient evidence that Locke, in his own, rather informal way, adhered to the established doctrine that both syncategorematic words and marks of affective states of the soul signify in a way that is entirely different from the way in which categorematic words signify things conceived of, that is, ideas in the mind or objects of thought.

Some commentators (Kretzmann, 1968, par. III; Land, 1974, p. 8) have brought up the question whether or not Locke considers verbs as belonging to the class of signs for ideas, without apparently feeling able to offer a definite answer to it. It seems to me that the fact that Locke does not discuss verbs as such in the third book of the *Essay* is explained most satisfactorily by the assumption that he follows, among others, the authors of the Port-Royal *Grammar* and *Logic* in regarding the copula as the only genuine verb; and, being a syncategorematic mark of the performance of an act of affirming, the copula is not a sign of an idea. According to Wilkins too, a verb ought to have no distinct place amongst integrals in a philosophical grammar, because it is really no other than an adjective and the copula *sum* affixed to it or contained in it (1668, III, 1, 8).

Particles, then, in so far as they are actually used, are marks of some action, posture, or feeling exemplified by the speaker's mind at the moment of utterance. But this group of words, together with the significance and force they have, may also become an object of study and research, as indeed is the case in the modest chapter devoted to them by Locke. Someone who wants to describe, classify and explain their use and force in language must enter into his own thoughts and observe nicely the several actions and postures of his mind in discoursing. From the second-order vantage-point taken by philosophers and grammarians, the performed acts and felt states of which particles are marks when actually used, are contemplated and examined through acts of reflecting and thus become objects of thought and ideas of reflection. As such, of course, they can no longer be expressed by particles; the appropriate linguistic tools by which they are then mentioned and denoted as things conceived of are those words which are names of ideas in the mind. Accordingly, when Locke calls the operations of our own minds within ideas, as elsewhere he very often does, he is practically always careful to add the restriction that they are ideas only as the objects of reflection. In all probability, he would have deemed it simply preposterous to hold that a speaker could, at the same time and in the very same stance, reveal what is going on in his mind by means of some particle and refer to it, as something conceived of and reflected upon, by the appropriate name; let alone that those two significations are identical. Those commentators who are reluctant to admit that particles are an exception to the principal thesis of Locke's semantics may have been misled by the fact that in *Essay*, III, 7, the author, while also using particles all the time, is primarily concerned with speaking about them and in doing so is forced to employ a terminology that is fit for mentioning and naming that which particles, at the object-level, actually express and bring about. But from the circumstance that the observer of linguistic usage is naturally led to avail himself of a vocabulary that has a signification *in actu significato* and *per modum conceptus* and thus consists of names of ideas of reflection it does not at all follow that the words described have the same signification. For Locke, we may conclude, the signification of 'only' was as different from the signification of 'limitation' as the signification of 'hurrah' differs from that of 'joy'.

V. *Locke on negative names*

Berman (1984) supports his contention that there are no exceptions to the main thesis of Locke's theory of meaning by referring to *Essay*, III, 1, 4, where some remarks are made about such negative or privative names as *nihil*, 'ignorance', and 'barrenness'. It is therefore necessary to have a closer look at that passage, and also at *Essay*, II, 8, 5, where the same subject is touched upon, with as additional examples 'insipid' and 'silence'. But before trying to settle the issue concerning the right interpretation of those passages, it may again be helpful to glance at the way in which such words were handled in the scholastic tradition.

Let us take as an influential representative of that line of thought John Buridan (Cf. Buridanus, 1983, I, q.2, pp. 7-14; Buridanus, 1977, I, p. 25 ff.; Buridanus, 1518, VI, q.6, fol. 37 V b). In accordance with Aristotle, *De anima*, III, 6, 430 a 26, Buridan regards a categorematic concept as simple – in one sense of that word – if it conforms to the following criteria. First, it is, as such, always a concept of something. It cannot be empty or unsatisfied or false in a large sense; there is, has been, will be, or possibly is something corresponding to it in the world of things. Moreover, as far as supposition is concerned, a simple concept stands in a mental proposition for everything conceived of by it. Finally, since it is one likeness of a thing or of more than one thing, the corresponding vocal term does not have a nominal definition. Concepts that do not meet these requirements are complex. But, like many other authors, Buridan goes on to draw a distinction between *complexio distans* and *complexio indistans*. The former type of combination is found in predication and assertion, where a predicate-concept is tied to a subject-concept through the syncategorematic act expressed by the copula, as in 'Man is an animal'. Such propositional complexes are true or false in a strict sense. A *complexio indistans*, on the other hand, is a way of combining concepts into one complex concept without an intervenient copula. Examples are the complex concepts signified by such phrases as *homo albus* and *homo non albus*: the concept of man and the concept of white are either compounded, not predicatively but as determinable and determinant, in an affirmative way, or divided, in a negative way. The speaker who meaningfully and seriously utters those phrases thinks of men in

general and of white in general in such a manner that the two thoughts are non-predicatively and either positively or negatively joined together and come to form a complex conception of all men that are white or of all men that are not white. Two objects of thought coalesce by being apprehended in a certain mode of thinking; and the resulting complex conception differs from a simple concept in that it may either have a correlate in the world or prove to be empty, that is, may be either true or false in a large sense. That means that through such complex conceptions as are signified by *mons aureus* and *homo non risibilis* a person is actually thinking of the objects denoted by the categorematic words for mountains and golden things and for men and beings that are capable of laughing, but that he is doing so in such a manner that the whole construction cannot stand for any thing in the world. While there are mountains and golden things and men and beings that are capable of laughing, there is nothing that would be both a mountain and made of gold and nothing that would be both a man and not capable of laughing. In such cases signification and supposition fall apart: although the complex concept is a natural sign of all things signified by the compounding parts, in the context of a proposition it does not stand for anything.

Now sometimes a complex concept is conventionally signified by a single word. Buridan considers the word *vacuum* as synonymous with the phrase *locus non repletus corpore*. In thinking the complex concept that is made explicit in the corresponding phrase, a speaker is therefore thinking of all places and of all things that are filled and of all bodies (*Significat enim omnia loca et omnia repleta et omnia corpora propter illos terminos 'locus' et 'repletus' et 'corpore'*). But since he conceives of those objects both *modo complexivo (indistanter)* and *modo negativo*, the resulting complex concept is empty and therefore the word *vacuum* cannot stand for any thing in the world (*pro nullo supponit*). As William of Ockham puts it (1974, II, 14), by such an empty term as *vacuum* nothing is signified except what is signified by the several categorematic terms that figure in its nominal definition. The difference between the significations of the separate terms and the import of *vacuum* lies in the peculiar mode of signifying that is included in the meaning of *vacuum*. Whereas the separate terms occurring in the nominal definition signify things for which they can stand in the context of a proposition, in the complex conception that is

associated with *vacuum* the same objects of thought are brought together in such a manner that the word *vacuum* cannot stand for anything. This difference is not caused by any change in the set of objects that are before the mind, but is entirely due to the manner in which those objects are thought of in the complex conception that lends meaning to the word *vacuum*.

Analogously, Ockham holds that such negative and privative words as 'immaterial', 'non-man', and 'blind' signify nothing except what is signified by the positive terms 'material', 'man', and 'able to see'. But although exactly the same things are signified by the positive and the negative term, in the first case they are signified and thought of affirmatively, or positively and constructively, whereas in the second case they are signified and thought of negatively and destructively. In comparison with the group of complex concepts discussed above the only difference lies in the fact that here the complexity is due, not to a *complexio indistans* of two categorematic concepts that are combined as determinable and determinant, but rather to a combination of a categorematic concept and a syncategorematic act (of negating). In the same vein, Buridan states that the word *nihil* includes both the element *non* – a syncategorematic sign – and the element *aliquid*. Someone who uses the word *nihil* thinks of all the things signified by the categorematic sign *aliquid*, but his act of thinking of those things is modified by a simultaneously performed act of negating of which *non* is the proper mark. We might also say that the answer to the question 'What does *nihil* signify?' is 'All entities, past, actual, future, and possible', while the answer to the question 'How does *nihil* signify those things?' is 'In a negative manner'.

It should be noted that in this context simple concepts are contrasted with concepts that are made complex either by a *complexio indistans* or by a *complexio distans* and may therefore be, in a broad sense, false as well as true. From a different angle, both simple and complex concepts that can be subject or predicate of a proposition, at the subpropositional level of simple apprehension, were contrasted with propositional complexes that are true or false in a strict sense.

That the approach favoured by Ockham and Buridan remained attractive to later generations is proved, for instance, by the Spanish logician Ferdinandus Enzinas, who about 1520 wrote a commentary on Peter of Spain's *Summulae*, in which he dwells at considerable

length upon the question as to whether infinite or negative terms are subordinate to incomplex concepts (1520, fol. 3). According to Enzinas, there were two views of the matter: an affirmative answer was given by some *antiqui*, whereas the common opinion defended a negative answer. Adherents of the first view held that such an infinite term as 'non-man' is subordinate to a simple concept that naturally signifies something, while connoting that it is not a man (*dicunt ly 'non homo' subordinari conceptui simplici significanti aliquid connotando illud non esse hominem*). This view seems to be a special case of the doctrine according to which such a word as *album* connotes the abstract property of whiteness and denotes some substance by which that property is exemplified. One of its awkward consequences, however, is that both the notion of being a man and the notion of not being a man are simple concepts on this interpretation; and it is rather unclear how a simple concept of not being a man could be abstracted from the world of concrete things. After discussing such objections and possible replies, Enzinas sets out the common opinion, according to which infinite terms are subordinate to a categorematic concept and a syncategorematic act, and are therefore complex. In the case of 'non-man', for instance, the ingredient 'man' signifies men and the element 'non' signifies negatively. The whole complex signifies men negatively, that is, all things that are not men (*ly 'homo' significat homines et negatio significat abnegative; totum complexum significat homines abnegative, id est, ea quae non sunt homines*). This opinion, defended by Enzinas himself, is in all essential respects identical with the view upheld by Ockham and Buridan. For us, its most important component is the claim that as far as objects of thought are concerned there is no difference between a positive and a negative term. Since the categorematic signs remain the same, there simply cannot be any things conceived of that are signified by the negative term but not by the positive term. The obvious difference between the two kinds of term is entirely accounted for by the syncategorematic act of negating that comes to modify the natural signification of the concept associated with the positive term. And a syncategorematic sign never signifies *aliquid*, but only *aliqualiter*, in this case *abnegative* or negatively.

In the light of the foregoing outline of the predominant traditional elucidation of the meaning of negative names the passages *Essay*, II,

8, 5, and III, 1, 4, lose, I submit, much of the curiousness and peculiarity that is attributed to them even by such able commentators as Kretzmann (1968, par. III) and Ashworth (1984, p. 51). When Locke declares that negative or privative names do not stand directly for positive ideas and that they are not used by men to signify any idea, he actually means, I suggest, that they do not stand for an idea in the same way as the corresponding positive name stands for an idea, and that they are not used by men to signify an idea in the same way as positive names are used to signify an idea. At the same time, Locke is aware that such words cannot be said properly to belong to, or signify no ideas at all; for then they would be perfectly insignificant sounds. The correct explanation of their meaning is that they denote, or relate to, the ideas which are signified by the corresponding positive names, but that additionally they signify their absence. That is to say, negative names are associated with a complex conception that includes, first, a categorematic sign of things, namely the idea that is also signified by the corresponding positive name, and, secondly, a simultaneously performed syncategorematic act of negating that modifies the relationship between the positive idea and things in the world in such a way that the whole conception applies only to those things which do not satisfy the idea associated with the positive name. What Locke wishes to counter is the view that there is, in addition to the ideas signified by positive names, a class of extra ideas that correspond to negative names as such. According to him, the meaningfulness of negative names should rather be accounted for by the circumstance that they are linked to a complex conception that consists in an act of thinking negatively the very same idea as would be the content of the thought that would accompany the positive component of the negative name if that positive part were to stand by itself.

This interpretation is concordant with what Hobbes had observed on negative names, in section 7 of the second chapter of his *Computatio sive logica* of 1655. He describes negative names as those names which are made by adding the negative particle *non* to a positive name. By such negative names we take notice ourselves, and signify to others what we have not thought of (*quid non cogitavimus*); or, as he might have put it less ambiguously, what we have thought of negatively. Furthermore, the brief remarks that Leibniz makes about

our two passages in his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* prove that he read Locke as denying that there are any privative ideas.

It may, then, be concluded that the two passages about negative names are far from corroborating the claim that there are no exceptions to the main thesis of Locke's semantics. In point of fact, those passages make sense only if they are interpreted as dealing with a special case of that peculiar mode of signifying of particles which is opposed to the signification of names in *Essay*, III, 7. At bottom, what Locke says about negative names is simply an application of his general view of the signification of particles.

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