

Abstract

I defend the thesis that Locke was no semantic voluntarist because he consistently placed a normatively thick concept of Common Use at the center of his philosophy of language. He intended this concept to function as the rule for linguistic propriety, and his philosophy had the resources to make it function so. To defend this, I first argue against skeptical interpretations and show that Locke's attitude toward Common Use was pessimistic rather than skeptical. Then I show Lockean Common Use fit the parameters of a regulatory principle for language. The central text for my interpretation is E 3.6.45 where Locke highlighted a reversal of archetypes for people learning an established language versus those creating a language. When learning an established language, people take as their archetypes ideas as they exist in others' minds rather than set up their own ideas as archetypes. This move commits language users to embedding a shared standard in their own minds. I then show how this empowered Locke to effectively block Humpty Dumpty-style speech and banish it from the linguistic community.

Key Words

Locke; language; semantic voluntarism; common use; Humpty Dumpty speech; semantic instability; semantic authority; standing meaning

“There’s glory for you!”
“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course
you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a
nice knock-down argument for you!’”
“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down
argument,’” Alice objected.
“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in a
rather scornful tone, “it means just what I
choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”
“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can
make words mean so many different things.”
“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is
to be master—that’s all.”
—Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass

In *Through the Looking Glass* Lewis Carroll (2010: 83-84) mocked Locke’s philosophy of language. Locke’s main semantic thesis (E 3.2.2: 405) appears to invest speakers with absolute semantic authority over the words they use: *“Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them.”*¹ Of course, in the mouth of such a capricious and lawless speaker as Humpty Dumpty, such authority quickly devolves into semantic arbitrariness and linguistic chaos. The problem runs deeper than poor Alice’s consternation at Humpty’s abuse of the word “glory.” There is the loss of trust in anything that comes from Humpty’s mouth, including even when he is explaining what his idiosyncratic meanings are. As soon as Humpty shows his willingness to abuse words in that way, no one has any reason to believe that by “a nice knock-down argument” he does not mean anything else, or anything at all for that matter. The fundamental problem is that communication becomes

¹ Carroll lifted the example of “glory” as well as the problematic nature of speakers and hearers failing to associate the same idea with the same word straight from Locke. See E 3.9.8: 479 and E 3.10.2: 491. Norman Kretzmann (1968) coined 3.2.2 Locke’s main semantic thesis.

impossible in principle if Humpty Dumpty-style semantic voluntarism is permitted because meta-linguistic skepticism immediately follows.

Humpty Dumpty sets up the question I'd like to start with: "Is semantic voluntarism an accurate and fair charge to level against Locke's philosophy of language?" I'm inclined to think not. If there was anyone in the history of philosophy sensitive to foundational problems with absolute authority, it was Locke. It is not unreasonable to summarize the main thrust of Locke's political philosophy as to preserve the commonwealth and liberties of its citizens by delegitimizing absolute authority, especially absolute authority invested in a single individual. A cornerstone of his political thought was that absolute authority inevitably devolves into arbitrary authority.² Indeed, for Locke the relationship between absolute and arbitrary authority was so tight that throughout the *Two Treatises* he often juxtaposed them to form a single adjective, i.e., "absolute, arbitrary." Distributing political authority across the state and its citizenry preserves the commonwealth better because the risk of capriciousness is significantly lessened when no individual has absolute power. The Humpty Dumpty Problem is a semantic version of this general problem of absolute, arbitrary authority, and it is impossible to believe that Locke would not have noticed the parallels and fretted about its consequences did he truly intend to invest absolute semantic authority in individual speakers. It makes more sense to believe that Locke did not explicitly worry about speakers' absolute, arbitrary semantic authority because he did not see it applying to his philosophy of language.

But then, why did he formulate his main semantic thesis as he did and how does he avoid Humpty Dumptyism? I argue that the way Locke incorporated the concept of Common Use (CU)

² See TT 2.137: 359-60; Halldenius (2003); and Grant (1987).

into his philosophy of language prevented the legitimization of Humpty Dumpty speech because—contrary to appearances in E 3.2.2—semantic authority was never invested in individual speakers. In other words, Locke did not make Humpty Dumpty master of his own words. I argue that this follows from a thick concept of CU, a concept that is normatively loaded with principles grounding interpersonal communication, which Locke intentionally placed at the center of his philosophy of language. Common Use was Locke’s term for what we now often call “ordinary use,” i.e., the ways that speakers ordinarily use words. Today, ordinary use is a purely descriptive concept, but I am arguing that in Locke it was robustly prescriptive (hence its thickness). Locke recognized that speakers have considerable latitude regarding the meanings they adopt in their speech, but he saw that in established languages (which he called “nations,”) that latitude was legitimately constrained by the norms embedded in CU. These normative constraints placed semantic authority in the linguistic community rather than in any individual speaker, I argue.

If we could read the *Essay* with fresh eyes, my argument would be straightforward because the normativity of Locke’s concept of CU is near the surface of the text. But we cannot read it with fresh eyes because there is a long-established, influential skeptical reading of Locke on common use (Guyer 1994; Dawson 2007) distorting our reading. So, my first order of business has to be to engage the skeptical reading.

1. The Skeptical Reading of Common Use

In this section I present the main defenses of the skeptical reading of Locke’s concept of CU. The received skeptical reading is grounded in two works, Paul Guyer’s “Locke’s Philosophy of Language” (1994) and Hannah Dawson’s *Locke, Language and Early-Modern Philosophy* (2007). Let’s begin with Guyer.

According to Guyer, the moral of Locke's account of language is decidedly skeptical: "we can never be quite sure that another means exactly the same thing we do ourselves, or is saying the same thing about an object that we are, and we had better be careful about hastily assuming that he does. But this skeptical consequence . . . is exactly the practical lesson that [Locke] wishes us to learn from his theoretical inquiry" (1994: 121). The problem, says Guyer, is that indirectness in our significations is an "'imperfection' inherent in the very nature of language" (1994: 140). Locke's appeals to CU may help us to blunt its impacts, but it will never enable us to "avoid" the problem: "Locke is too subtle to think that 'common use' can automatically guarantee trouble-free communication of ideas" (1994: 143) and "no easy appeal to 'common use' can evade the imperfection of language" (1994: 144). Guyer's Locke concedes that there may be utility in CU to virtuous speakers, but ultimately its utility is illusory because "there can be no noncircular determination of what common use is" (1994: 143).

Locke may hope that unvirtuous speakers like Humpty Dumpty never appear, but if they do, Guyer's Locke has no grounds for doing anything about it. Guyer's Locke just has to accept the destabilizing effects unvirtuous speakers cause. This is a pretty big risk, however, because such instability threatens to destroy all communicative practices, as we saw above. But the dangers are even greater than just that (and its associated epistemic limitations). The collapse of communicative practices threatens the collapse of the commonwealth itself since successful communication is vital for social cohesion and political unity. Locke would have been well-aware—and keenly sensitive to—these dangers. Given the enormity of these effects and the likelihood the unvirtuous speakers appear, it is surprising that such a "subtle thinker" would not have despaired more at the real prospects of unscrupulous speakers than the limitations of CU. In any case, Guyer's Locke has little choice but to live with such speakers, whether in the

marketplace, the laboratory, or the legislature, and to navigate their semantic spaces as best as he can armed with nothing more than false hope and vain belief in their good intentions.

Dawson offers a more sophisticated defense than Guyer. CU presents nothing but “a web of empty signifiers, hovering indeterminately, except as incarnated in the mouths and ears of particular men.” (Dawson 2007: 219). Dawson contextualizes Locke’s thinking about language into a tradition that is fixated on the problem of “verbal equivocity” (2007: 210), but she sees Locke as ultimately capitulating to it rather than solving it. This capitulation falls out of an internal struggle in Locke’s thinking between the value of communication and the doctrine of signification, which generates a tension across Book Three between the need for a shared language and the reality that signification makes such sharing impossible. In the end, for Dawson’s Locke, the semantic instability of signification wins out.

Dawson identifies four reasons why CU cannot provide Locke with the semantic stability that he requires for communication. The first three have to do with the nature of ideas. Because ideas are “invisible, and hidden from others,” there is no way to verify that speakers and listeners have the same ideas. Moreover, because most ideas are voluntarily formed by individuals, there is even less reason to presume that language users would share ideas, and third, because idea formation is driven by an individual’s experiences and interests, which vary widely, what little reason there is reduced even further. Semantic instability follows from the subjective nature of Lockean ideas. This is Dawson’s crucial move—because each speaker’s ideas differ from everyone else’s, there is no shared standard available that is independent of each individual speaker’s private meaning. In addition, the complex ideas of mixed modes, the significations of moral and institutional words, are especially problematic because there is no external archetype that might lead to any overlaps between individuals’ ideas. Taken together, these four reasons prevent CU

from providing any shared standard between language users. “Given the private, ideational nature of meaning, the semantic contract cannot really get off the ground” because “Common use turns out to be ‘a very uncertain rule which reduces itself the ideas of particular men’” (2007: 235). The loss of CU is devastating because “Communication (in Locke’s sense) and meaning (in ours) are thereby rendered impossible” (2007: 236). Gone is Guyer’s illusory hope, replaced by a whimper of despair:

At the end of the last chapter of his book on language, having written off common use as a suitable remedy for verbal obscurity, Locke makes a final and muted suggestion. He says that individuals “should use the same word constantly in the same sense.” But almost in the same breath he dismisses this final hope. Given the paucity and vulgarity of the words at hand, even the best intentioned speaker will “be forced often to use the same word, in somewhat different senses.” Without an infinitesimal account of the simple ideas that make up his discourse the hearer will be at a loss as to the intended meaning. And so, on this quiet note of despair, when he has run out both of words and of any confidence in their communicativity, ends Locke’s book on language. (2007: 236)

By seeing Locke as trapped between his theoretical commitments and his desires for successful communication (the tension running throughout Book Three), Dawson’s interpretation is especially challenging for defenders of Locke’s philosophy of language because what ultimately drives her interpretation is a particular way of classifying different sections of texts and assigning affective tones to them—genuine and theoretical vs tortured and aspirational—rather than the contents of those texts.

Dawson and Guyer paint Locke’s philosophy of language into a corner from which escape seems difficult. His main semantic thesis and the privacy of ideas appear to make semantic voluntarism inevitable, and CU is rendered impotent. Consequently, Locke cannot provide any guidance for dealing with Humpty Dumpty or admonishing him because CU offers no basis for delegitimizing his speech.

2. A Pessimistic Reading of Common Use

To rebut the skeptical charges against Locke's philosophy of language, defenders need to show that Guyer and Dawson misread Locke or misunderstand how CU constrains speech. The former requires that defenders show Locke's appeals to CU were more robust, sincere, and effective than Dawson and Guyer allowed. The latter requires that they show Locke's CU can accommodate the variability in ideas between language users and the inadequacy of most peoples' ideas without weakening its ability to constrain speech. Turning to these challenges is my next order of business. I argue that the skeptical reading rests on a mischaracterization of Locke's attitude toward CU. What Guyer and Dawson identify as skepticism about CU is better understood as pessimism about the practical application of CU, i.e., accidental issues with the difficulties in implementing and epistemically accessing the regulatory features of CU rather than problems with its metaphysical status and normative force. This difference matters because the skeptic, as Dawson and Guyer maintain, cannot sanction interpersonal communication, yet the pessimist can even though they also acknowledge its difficulties and practical limitations. I argue, pace Guyer and Dawson, that Locke was a pessimist about CU, both personally and theoretically, but not a skeptic.

I'd like to start with some observations about the defenses of the skeptical reading. The skeptical interpretation has a root evidentiary problem—the arguments offered for it do not actually support the skeptical conclusion. Guyer's and Dawson's arguments are non sequiturs because they rest on a crucial conflation. Both conflate what we now call speaker meaning with standing meaning and fail to consider the possibility that Locke had his finger on such a difference despite

not having terminology in which to express it clearly.³ Speaker meaning and standing meaning occur at different semantic levels, speaker meaning is the idea obtaining at the time of a particular utterance whereas standing meaning is the idea timelessly associated with a word's meaning for a linguistic community. Dawson's argument conflates these two levels. She argues that because ideas are private, subjective entities arbitrarily formed by individuals with varying interests and experiences, CU cannot have the unity needed to provide a stable semantic standard. But this argument moves illicitly from claims about speaker meaning (subjectivity, privacy, and variability of ideas associated with particular speech acts) to conclusions about standing meaning (what CU offers as a regulatory principle). For example, the privacy of my idea of justice does not by itself entail that "justice" has no stable English meaning. To bridge this gap Dawson would need to show that standing meanings are nothing more than collections of speaker meanings, in other words that standing meanings reduce to speaker meanings. One might see E 3.11.25 (which Dawson quotes at 2007: 235) as supporting such a reduction: "But common Use, being but a very uncertain Rule, which reduces it self at last to the Ideas of particular Men, proves often but a very variable Standard" (E. 3.11.25: 522). That appearance, however, is a consequence of considering the line out of context, which enables us to imagine Locke was making a metaphysical claim. Reading the

³ The contemporary distinction and terminology are sentential rather than verbal and associated with Grice (1989). There was a similar, word-based distinction in medieval semantics, which I am using the modern terminology to point to in Locke. The distinction was part of medieval signification theory (De Rijk, 1982; Kann 2016). Speaker meaning was viewed as a term's *suppositio* in its propositional contexts, whereas its *significatio* was its standing meaning or the general form of meaning common to all context-dependent versions of speaker meaning. Stephen Read (2002/2023) explains the distinction in this way: "[Supposition] became the leading property of an occurrence of a term in a proposition . . . , distinguishing what in particular was being spoken of on some occasion of utterance by some particular use of a word (supposition), from the word's general property of meaning (signification)." Ashworth (1981; 1984) has convincingly argued that Locke was using some version of medieval semantics when he thought about language. In invoking and attributing the contemporary terminology of "speaker meaning" and "standing meaning," I am not intending to anachronistically import a contemporary distinction that might be useful for disentangling what Locke was saying, but rather I am invoking a more familiar terminology (for us) to highlight a distinction within Locke thinking that is often obscured (for us) by his own and his tradition's terminology.

sentence in context, however, points in a different direction. The whole of E 3.11.24-25 concerns Locke's wish for a dictionary created by a panel of experts to regulate the semantics of natural philosophy. The limitations of such a project that Locke highlighted are entirely practical rather than theoretical (time, expense, effort, the number of experts, etc.). But such a project would be welcomed, he asserts, because it would provide exactly the kind of semantic stability that philosophical discourse wants—clear definitions collectively formed by explicit consensus of a group of experts. In the quoted sentence Locke was contrasting the explicit consent by a panel of semantic experts establishing a philosophical dictionary and the tacit consent of ordinary users currently constituting natural (or an unreformed) CU. Tacit consent is not as perspicuous as his wished-for dictionary would make CU among natural philosophers by “rectify[ing] and settl[ing] our complex Ideas, belonging to each specifick Name” (E 3.11.24: 521). Theoretically, however, there is no difference between the reformed version of CU in which the standing meanings are codified by semantic experts explicitly agreeing on the definitions and the unreformed version of CU in which the tacit consent of all language users determines the standing meanings. Of course, there is an important qualitative difference because of the ways that the differing consents frame the definitions. But that's Locke's real point in the quoted sentence, that definitions explicitly consented to by a body of experts are better than the tacitly consented to definitions of ordinary speakers. It was not an assertion of the metaphysical reduction of CU simpliciter to a collective of speaker meanings, far from it in fact. Guyer commits a similar conflation, though less explicitly. When he claims that “there can be no noncircular determination of what common use is” (1994: 143), he treats CU as if it were nothing more than an aggregate of speaker meanings. But the whole point of setting up CU as a standing meaning, i.e., as a semantic norm that exists prior to and independently of any particular speech acts, is to dissolve this worry about circularity. The standard

exists first (temporally and conceptually); speakers must conform to it or deviate from it, but there is no circularity beneath any appeal to it as a standard for evaluating linguistic behavior.

This conflation of speaker and standing meanings leads to a second, deeper conflation: the conflation of what meanings are with where meanings come from. The question of semantic authority is a question about where do meanings come from or what is the source for a meaning. This is a different question from what are meanings (i.e., thoughts or ideas, things, or uses to cite the main categories). I will grant (for now) that Locke was a linguistic idealist of some sort—“*Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but Ideas*” (E 3.2.2: 405)⁴—but I deny that from linguistic idealism semantic voluntarism simply follows.⁵ The question of what meanings are (i.e. their metaphysical nature) is distinct from what determines which ideas are properly signified by which words (semantic authority). Linguistic idealism is a position answering the first question, but this metaphysical thesis is silent on the question of what determines any particular idea-sound pairing. That second question is what I am claiming Locke’s CU answers. The skeptical interpretations also jump this idealism-voluntarism gap without justification. Reason needs to be given, ideally from within Locke’s traditional theory of signification, that the subjective nature of ideas does in fact lead to semantic voluntarism. These two conflations seem to me to be related. My aim is to show that Locke was not a semantic voluntarist and that the clause from E 3.2.2 that appears to state it is really just a truism about speaker meaning. Locke’s appeals to CU are a deep commitment to the principle that speaker

⁴ I dropped a “the” before “Ideas” for the sake of readability and grammar.

⁵ Another way of seeing the difference between semantic idealism and semantic voluntarism is to recognize that throughout the 20th century, philosophers of language were deeply concerned with semantic voluntarism but not at all concerned with semantic idealism. See Donnellan (1966); Mackay (1968); Putnam (1975); Kripke (1977); and Burge (1979).

meaning ought to be regulated by standing meaning. This is ultimately what is at stake in the debate between skeptical and pessimistic interpretations of CU (sketched below). Seeing that Locke should be understood as pessimistic toward CU rather than skeptical opens the logical space for reading Locke as a semantic anti-individualist.

With these logical gaps now exposed, we can distinguish more clearly between skepticism and pessimism toward CU. The divide centers around the skeptical rejection of CU as a coherent concept and the pessimistic acceptance of CU tempered by acknowledgment of its practical and epistemological limitations and our difficulties applying it. I identify three criteria for distinguishing the two positions.

Criterion	Skepticism	Pessimism
Remedies	Proposes no remedies for semantic instability because the problem is in principle unsolvable	Proposes reforms and remedies for semantic instability despite their difficulty and limited likelihood for they will be adopted
Normativity	Makes (can make) no normative claims about how speakers should or ought to use their words	Issues normative prescriptions regarding use and distinguishes between proper and improper uses of words
Attributions of Blame	Cannot really blame or accuse speakers of linguistic failures because language is inherently broken	Holds speakers accountable for failing to meet linguistic standards

The textual evidence from Book Three consistently shows Locke adopting a pessimistic attitude toward language and CU rather than a skeptical one.

Remedies: Locke proposed a variety of remedies for dealing with the problem of semantic instability. The final chapter of Book Three is entitled “*Of the Remedies of the Foregoing Imperfections and Abuses,*” and, pace Dawson, there is nothing anguished or despairing about it or its ending. What we find in E 3.11 is a series of prescriptions that build on one another to form a systematic whole. The third principle is that speakers “*must* also take care to *apply their Words*, as near as may be, *to such Ideas as common use has annexed them to*” (E 3.11.11: 514).⁶ If CU had no regulatory power, prescriptions appealing to it would be non-sensical. No skeptic would bother to offer any such remedy because none really exists. And to suggest otherwise is to fundamentally misrepresent their own position. All the more when the remedy is presented in such direct and binding terminology as Locke does here: “*must.*” What grounds would a skeptic have for stating such a thing and retaining it across all editions of their text.

Additionally, Locke himself followed this very directive while writing the *Essay*, which would also not make sense were he truly skeptical. A corollary of Locke’s CU rule is that “it is sometimes necessary for the ascertaining the signification of Words, to *declare their Meaning . . .* where a Man uses them in a Sense any way peculiar to himself” (E 3.11.12: 515). Locke’s introduction of “modes” is an especially clear example of this because Locke tied it directly to this semantic rule: “if in this I use the word *Mode*, in somewhat a different sence from its ordinary signification, I beg pardon; it being unavoidable in Discourses, differing from the ordinary receive Notions, either to make new Words, or to use old Words in somewhat a new signification, the latter whereof, in our present case, is perhaps the more tolerable of the two” (E 2.12.4: 165). And it

⁶ This prescription was stable across all four editions of the *Essay* published in Locke’s lifetime, shows no revisions between editions, and displays no indicators of uncertainty. Pace Dawson, this is part of a consistent, cumulative trend across Book Three and indeed the *Essay* as a whole—Locke offered and followed a systematic collection of remedies addressing the problem of semantic instability and communicative failure.

would not help to suggest that he became skeptical later because he does exactly the same thing in the Fourth Edition (1700), the final edition published in his lifetime, when he introduced “determinate” and “determin’d” (E: 13). It seems clear that Locke believed language was redeemable and that he himself had an obligation to follow the strictures for redeeming it in his own language use.

Normativity: Beyond offering remedies, Locke saturated his discussion with strongly normative language involving CU. We’ve just seen above the normatively binding language of the CU principle itself—“must.” Consider also how Locke introduced his remedy for language: “methinks those, *who pretend seriously to search after, or maintain Truth*, should think themselves obliged to study, how they might deliver themselves without Obscurity, Doubtfulness, or Equivocation, to which Men’s Words are naturally liable, if care be not taken” (E 3.11.3: 509). Locke is declaring that users of philosophical language have an obligation to study how to remedy semantic instability. An obligation. That is a normatively strong claim *par excellence*.⁷ The idealized outcome of such a study would be actionable rules and practices, carefully applied, to mitigate natural obscurity, doubtfulness, and equivocation. And of course, such rules were exactly what Locke offered in E 3.11. In the latter part of Book Three, Locke was doing just what he thought all lovers of truth are obliged to do, and he seemed to have been fulfilling that obligation appropriately, pace Guyer and Dawson.

Attributions of Blame: Directly connected to, and expressive of, the normativity related to CU is Locke’s readiness to blame speakers for linguistic abuses and communicative failures.

⁷ In this context, it was simultaneously a dig against “the Schools, and Men of Argument” (E 3.11.3: 509) for shirking this obligation as well as rallying call for people like himself who take the pursuit of truth seriously.

Speakers who refuse to follow the CU language norms are “guilty” of “wilful Faults and Neglects” (E 3.10.1: 490) and “ought to be looked on as an Enemy to Truth and Knowledge” (E 3.11.5; 510). Notice how strong Locke’s language is here: “an Enemy to Truth and Knowledge.” Such strong and pointed language deliberately indicates not just a normative failure, but a defective epistemic character. Only a non-skeptic could say this because for skeptics it’s the CU language norms themselves that are the problem and not the speakers. Pessimists, on the other hand, can coherently hold speakers accountable for failing to meet communicative standards even if they have low expectations for communicative success. Locke repeatedly blames and condemns people for abusing language and not just Schoolmen.⁸ But abusers of language are not the only ones blameworthy; speakers who fail to respect and follow Locke’s CU remedies are criticized: “Men may, if they please, exactly know the *Ideas*, that go to each Composition, and so both use these Words in a certain and undoubted Signification, and perfectly declare, when there is Occasion, what they stand for. This, if well considered, would lay great blame on those who make not their Discourses about moral things very clear and distinct” (E 3.11.15: 516). If Guyer and Dawson were correct, Locke’s criticisms would be grossly unfair. That he frequently made them, and made

⁸ Locke’s critical targets include: Ordinary folk for frequently using “Words without any, or without clear Ideas” (E 3.10.2-3: 490). “[T]his insignificancy in their Words, when they come to Reason concerning either their Tenents or Interests, manifestly fills their Discourse with abundance of empty unintelligible noise and jargon, especially in moral Matters . . . whereby, besides the ease of it, they obtain this advantage, That as in such Discourses they seldom are in the right, so they are as seldom to be convinced, that they are in the wrong” (E 3.10.4: 492). Authors and controversialists for their “Unsteady Application” of words: “’tis plain cheat and abuse, when I make [words] stand sometimes for one thing, and sometimes for another; the wilful doing whereof, can be imputed to nothing but great Folly, or great dishonesty” (E 3.10.5: 492-93). And of course, Schoolmen, Locke’s favorite target, for their “affected Obscurity.” “To this abuse, and the mischiefs of confounding the Significations of Words, Logick, and the liberal Sciences, as they have been handled in the Schools, have given Reputation; and that admired Art of Disputing, hath added much to the natural imperfection of Languages, whilst it has been made use of, and fitted, to perplex the significations of Words” (E 3.10.6: 493-94). Locke’s criticisms drip with irony, but the accusations and blame heaped onto speakers abusing language is quite clear—empty, unintelligible noise and jargon that undermines the rightness of their beliefs; plain cheat stemming from great folly or great dishonesty; and mischiefs perplexing semantics even further than natural.

them forcefully and in no uncertain terms, strongly suggests that he truly believed CU provided a standard for linguistic propriety that speakers could meet, and should be criticized for not meeting.

The textual evidence, briefly sampled above, strongly supports reading Locke as a pessimist about CU and remedying it rather than a skeptic.⁹ The passages highlighted, in their contents and in their presentations, only make sense if Locke's attitude were accepting, yet pessimistic, of CU as a genuine standard for linguistic propriety. Guyer and Dawson perceive notes of "despair" in Locke's words, but such notes are not obvious in the texts themselves. Even their primary proof text for Locke's skeptical despair (E 3.11.27: 524-25) is actually qualifiedly optimistic: "yet the import of the Discourse will, for the most part, if there be no designed fallacy, sufficiently lead candid and intelligent Readers, into the true meaning of it." The pessimistic qualifiers in Locke's conclusion are practical problems—problems with the epistemic virtuousness of language users who might impose designed fallacies—and not skeptical problems with language or semantics itself. In my reading, the final paragraph of Book Three is genuinely hopeful for communicative success, even though Locke's abiding faith in humanity's willingness to follow CU and adopt his linguistic strictures remains guarded.

By reframing Locke's attitude toward CU and the prospects of semantic reform as pessimistic rather than skeptical, we create conceptual space to acknowledge the positive role that CU played in Locke's philosophy of language. My next task is to establish that Locke's concept

⁹ One might want to adopt a weaker reading and suggest that Locke was simply cautious about CU and appealing to it rather than pessimistic. Based on the limited textual evidence I could offer here, that is a reasonable move to make. Because I am arguing against the skeptical interpretation, I have chosen texts that highlight Locke's acceptance of CU and not his pessimistic attitude toward its limitations. A fuller treatment would contrast the pessimistic interpretation from the cautious interpretation as well as the skeptical one and would dive deeply into the texts outlining Locke's concerns about the limitations of CU. I encourage readers to return to the primary text itself and consider what grounds there are for attributing skepticism, pessimism, or caution to Locke's attitude toward CU.

of CU was genuinely thick, i.e., normatively-loaded such that it could in fact function as Locke wanted it to function. This is the latter challenge that Guyer's and Dawson's interpretations pose for defenders of Locke's philosophy of language, showing how Locke's CU can accommodate the variability in ideas between language users and the inadequacy of most peoples' ideas without weakening its ability to constrain speech.

3. Locke's Normatively Thick Concept of Common Use

The paradigmatic statement of what Locke thought CU was occurs at E 3.9.8: "*common Use*, that is the Rule of Propriety." This marks CU as a standard, a normatively thick concept to be used as a measure for linguistic behavior. Locke's commitment to this thick notion of CU spans his philosophical career and the entirety of his corpus. The earliest example occurs in the first section of Draft A of the *Essay* (early 1670). Locke appealed to CU to criticize a child who called gilded cork "gold" in an example of wrong definitions causing semantic errors and disputes: "but if he call it gold he speaks improperly not using the word as other people doe"¹⁰ (DA 1: 2-4). A late example can be found in Locke's 1699 correspondence with Samuel Bold: "the proper Business of a Commentator, is to shew in what Sense [a word] was used . . . , which in the Scripture we have Reason to conclude was most commonly in the ordinary vulgar Sense of the Word" (C 6: 629 [2590]). These texts show that CU was an important theoretical principle within Locke's thinking about language throughout his whole philosophical career. Moreover, both invoked CU as a regulative or normative principle that applies to speech acts: the child's use was deemed improper because they confused the shiny, yellow color of gold with the vulgar definition of the substance gold and the Biblical commentator's use was deemed proper when they invoked the

¹⁰ Locke dropped this criticism of the child when revising this passage to serve as an example of the imperfection of words in the published *Essay* (E 3.9.17: 485-86).

vulgar definitions prevalent in first century Judea rather than the theologically sophisticated definitions concocted later. Moreover, Locke himself was the one asserting these judgments. And finally, CU is being applied to both civil discourse and philosophical discourse in these passages.¹¹ It is clear from these two passages, pace Dawson, that Locke remained personally and theoretically committed to the thick concept of CU before and after any alleged capitulation to verbal equivocity.

From a theoretical standpoint, there are some formal characteristics that CU must possess if it is to be genuinely normative: the standard by which things are judged, the promulgation of that standard to users, and a sanctioning body to enforce the norm by penalizing deviations. In the 17th century, these were recognized as standard conditions that any law or regulatory principle must meet, and Locke himself adopted these conditions for normative principles (E 2.28.4-17: 350-60). How does Locke's thick concept of CU satisfy them? Locke explicitly analyzed CU in terms of two of the three formal conditions in Draft C of the *Essay* (written in late 1685), the standard condition and the sanction condition.

there is another society which is that of ordinary Conversation which since it cannot be kept up without certaine rules that which establishes them there is tacit consent & approbation & that which inforces their observation is . . . laus et viruperium reputation or disgrace. . . . Noe man scapes the punishment of their censure & dislike who offends against the fashon & opinions of the Company he keeps & would recommend himself to. Nor is there one of 10000 who is stiff & insensible enough to beare up under the Constant dislike & Condemnation of his owne club

¹¹ Where philosophical discourse involves a specialized, technical vocabulary, like natural philosophy, the situation for Locke is akin to civil discourse of "several Trades" in which "those few, whose particular Employments do at every turn suggest [specialized ideas] to their Thoughts" coin words "for dispatch sake . . . [yet] by the greatest part of Men of the same Language, are not understood. v.g. *Coltshire*, *Drilling*, *filtration*, *Cohobation*, are words standing for certain complex *Ideas* . . . not generally understood but by Smiths, and Chymists" (E 2.18.7: 225-26). This is the parallel in civic discourse, tacitly consented to, for Locke's dictionary of natural philosophy. It does not matter to the normative logic of CU whether the consent is tacit or explicit nor whether the standing meaning is distributed throughout the whole nation of language users or among a relevant subset. In each case, the thick concept of CU stands as the rule for propriety for speakers of those words. This opens another line of criticism against Guyer's reading of Book Three.

& he must be of a strange & unusual Constitution who can content himself to live in constant disgrace & disrepute with his owne particular society. (DC 2.31.18-19: 248-50)

Note that this is about a form of society—"ordinary Conversation"—which requires "certain rules" established by "tacit consent & approbation" to maintain itself (the standard) which are "inforced" by society "judging and censureing" violators according to "laus et viruperium reputation or disgrace" (the sanction). Locke was keen here (and in E 2.28.10-13: 353-57, the published offspring of the quoted section) to emphasize the severity of the laus et viruperium sanction. But that there is, in Locke's eyes, a body entitled to sanction and discipline offenders is all that his position requires.

But what about the promulgation condition? I would argue that tacit consent entails a degree of promulgation if I only had this passage to base the claim on. Promulgation is part of tacit consent as depicted in the Second Treatise (TT 2.119-22: 347-49). Fortunately for me, however, there is also the passage from E 3.11.25 that states that "a Man cannot be supposed wholly ignorant of the *Ideas*, which are annexed to Words by common Use." This is a clear assertion that CU standing meanings are known (to some degree) by ordinary speakers. This is because of the way that children typically learn a language according to Locke. Child language learning according to Locke involves knowledge of the words and ideas commonly annexed to them, however imperfectly it may often go, and the knowledge that CU plays the regulatory role governing language use. Of the various passages detailing this, E 3.6.45: 467 is the clearest: "These Words, *Kinneah* and *Niough*, by degrees grew into common use; and then the case was somewhat alter'd. *Adam's* children . . . found these two Words, *Kinneah* and *Niough*, in familiar use, could not take them for insignificant sounds: but must needs conclude that they stood for something, for certain *Ideas*, abstract *Ideas*, they being general Names. . . . If therefore they would use the Words, as

Names of Species already establish'd and agreed on, they were obliged to conform the Ideas in their Minds, signified by these Names, to the *Ideas* that they stood for in other Men's Minds, as to their Patterns and *Archetypes*." We are all Adam's children in this respect since we are all born into linguistic communities with languages already established, and we discern this as children while learning a language. So long as people continue to participate in the linguistic community and derive epistemic and non-epistemic goods from that participation, they are members of that linguistic community.

Does this mean that access to CU is perfect and unproblematic? Not at all. Locke is quite clear that determining CU precisely can be difficult, especially for complex technical terms, and following it may be even more difficult. This is why he wished for authoritative dictionaries and why he was pessimistic about the prospects for semantic reform in his lifetime. But imperfect access is not the same as no access, and difficulty in application is not the same as theoretical impossibility. This is the distinction between pessimism and skepticism that I emphasized in Section 2. Locke is pessimistic about how easily and reliably we can determine and follow CU, but he is not skeptical that CU provides genuine normative force.

It is important to notice the shift that occurs when a language becomes established, according to Locke—language learners accept that the archetypes for their ideas are now “the Ideas that [Names] stood for in other Men's Minds.” Locke's clear and explicit announcement that the community's archetypes are the ideas in the minds of other people (N.B., the plural rather than any singular speaker) is the key conceptual move establishing and underwriting CU as a norm and standard for all language users in a community. This happened when a word transitions from an idiolectic expression to an established word in a linguistic community, and such a transition cannot

be mandated or accomplished by a single individual.¹² On my reading, this reversal of the archetypes in the establishment of a language or the incorporation of new words into an already established language is the smoking gun for the thick concept of CU. Just as in the transition from the state of nature to a commonwealth citizens must give up some rights and privileges to the sovereign, so too in the transition to a linguistic community must users give up some rights and privileges to society. The power single-handedly to coin new words in that language and designate the standing meanings of their words when they speak—semantic voluntarism—is what they must give up.

This brings us to the functional dimension of CU. It functions as the anchor for interpersonal communication by providing a shared archetype for all speakers of a language. How does this work for Locke? In particular, what is, metaphysically, the CU standard, the archetype consisting in ideas in other speakers' minds? To be sure, this is a challenging hurdle for the interpretation I am developing, challenging but not impossible. Let's begin by eliminating what it most certainly cannot be. A word's standing meaning (the archetype/CU standard) cannot be an idea in some communal mind, nor can it be an idea in the mind of God. I think we can all agree that both of those options would be decidedly un-Lockean. Nor can it be any definition written in a dictionary or some particular utterance defining the word (even the coiner's original utterance and explanation of it). Many standing meanings pre-date defining them in a dictionary or other text and would be independent of such an artefact in Locke's eyes. Some readers might be attracted to the latter case, however, so something more should be said about it. I don't think it a viable

¹² “[T]he great Augustus himself, in Possession of that Power which ruled the World, acknowledged he could not make a new Latin Word: which was as much as to say, that he could not arbitrarily appoint what Ideas any Sound should be a Sign of, in the Mouths of common Language of his Subjects” (E 3.2.8: 408).

option for Locke for a couple of reasons: a) there is no reason to think that an original coiner of a word provides any definition of it. Indeed, in Locke's own presentation of examples of original coinage of words (E 3.6.44-47: 466-69), he did not indicate that Adam ever defined *Kinneah*, *Niouph*, or *Zahab* for Eve or his children. Adam "makes use of these two new Words, *Kinneah* and *Niouph*" when discoursing with Eve about Adah and denominates the substance presented by his children *Zahab*, but these are compatible with not declaring the definition of his new words. In any case, even if an original coinage was accompanied by an explicit definition, throughout the ages such definitions get lost and no one using an established language has access to those definitions. Whatever role such utterances might play for Locke in the creation of a language, they cannot play the role of a semantic rule sustaining an established language.

What else is possible for Locke? I've already pushed back against the claim that E 3.11.25 justifies a reductive conception of CU. To many readers, that will seem like the only (or the only properly Lockean) option remaining. I'm going to suggest something a bit more nuanced than simply reducing CU standing meaning to a collection of speaker meanings. Standing meanings are like Locke's imperfect ideas,¹³ imperfect ideas preserved in memory during the process of language learning and connected to speaker meanings but not reducible to them—if anything, Lockean speaker meanings ought to be considered an expression or instantiation of these imperfect ideas preserved in memory framed at the time of speaking and framed as an expression of them. As ideas, both exist in the mind of the speaker. But the standing meaning, being imperfect (abstract,

¹³ Imperfection was not part of Locke's official taxonomy of ideas, but it was an adjective he often applied to ideas, often paired with obscurity, inadequacy, or uncertainty. It seems to be the result of abstractness and generality, which is why I am choosing to highlight it here. Lockean standing meanings, in keeping with their connection to the tradition of *significatio*, are indeterminate ideas, i.e. abstract, general ideas.

general, and indeterminate), is simultaneously communal because its content reflects the diversity of other speakers' standing meanings by virtue of its own indeterminacy and imperfection.

Let me explain. Recall Locke's notorious general idea of triangle: "neither Oblique, nor Rectangle, neither Equilateral, Equicrural, nor Scalenon; but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect, that cannot exist; an *Idea* wherein some parts of several different and inconsistent *Ideas* are put together. 'Tis true, the Mind in this imperfect state, has need of such *Ideas*, and makes all the haste to them it can, for the conveniency of Communication, and Enlargement of Knowledge; to both which, it is naturally very much enclined" (E 4.7.9: 596). Notice three features of this passage that are crucial for understanding how Lockean standing meanings work. First, the imperfection of Locke's general idea of triangle arises because it must accommodate all determinate forms of triangularity, it must be "all and none of these at once." Second, Locke explicitly tied this imperfection to communication: "'Tis true, the Mind . . . has need of such Ideas . . . for the conveniency of Communication." Third, imperfect ideas are formed precisely because minds are "naturally very much enclined" toward communication.

Now apply this same structure to standing meanings. Just as the general idea of triangle must be indeterminate enough to accommodate all determinate triangles, so too must standing meaning be indeterminate enough to accommodate the range of determinate speaker meanings that count as proper. This is not some vague analogy; it is the very same process. Standing meanings are the imperfect general ideas that language learners form when learning words. This move is nothing more than an echo of Locke's account of how ideas are made general, i.e., "when they are set up as the Representatives of many particular Things" (E 3.3.11: 414) albeit "very imperfect[ly], since the Composition of those complex Ideas, are, in several Men, very different" (E 3.6.30: 457). It is not a coincidence that Locke's nominal essences of substances share in exactly this kind of

imperfection that general ideas and standing meanings possess, because nominal essences are the CU standing meanings of substance words, and paradigmatic examples of standing meanings. But notice Locke's reference to communication in the quotation about the notorious general idea of triangle—"Tis true, the Mind . . . has need of such Ideas . . . for the conveniency of Communication." Locke's crucial move is this: these imperfect ideas serve as standing meanings precisely because they are formed during language learning by conforming to patterns of use in their linguistic community. Locke maintained that abstraction was a crucial necessary condition for language use: "Those who cannot distinguish, compare, and abstract, would hardly be able to understand, and make use of Language" (E 2.11.12: 160). The role of imperfect ideas as standing meanings reflects and supports that condition for language use. Without imperfect ideas serving as standing meanings for our general words (which most words in a language are), parrots and magpies with their particular sensory ideas could be proper language users. The generality of words requires general ideas and by framing general, i.e., imperfect, ideas to represent the general ideas other people associate with sounds, the language learner is co-creating the language, contributing to CU, and establishing for themselves a basis for framing their own speaker meanings when they speak.

So, metaphysically, there is nothing un-Lockean about CU standing meanings being ideas because they are the imperfect memorial ideas framed during the process of language learning. They are prior to and more basic than the ideas formed in a speech act and serve as the standards for those speaker meanings because they were placed into that role as a constitutive part of learning that language. The social and distributed character of CU standing meanings is grounded in CU being an archetype shared by the entire linguistic community. But the archetype too has its own social and distributed character as an abstract, general idea because it is formed as children learn

a language—not by the children abstracting it *de novo* but by children forming it as the meaning of a word presented to them from multiple sources at a variety of times during their learning process. Adam's children learn the significative sound first and then try to fit their ideas to the meanings others annex to them. The learning process typically involves instruction and correction (E 3.9.9: 479-80), but even in cases of relative neglect language learners have an easy remedy for clearing up confusions they might have, "to ask the meaning of any word we understand not, of him that uses it" (E 3.6.45: 468). Not because the user is the semantic authority or even a semantic expert, but because learners have no other resource available to them. My children can be sent to a dictionary when they are confused about words they encounter, but Adam's children, and those in Locke's day, did not have such resources. Repeating that over and over again was the only method Locke had to approximate CU standing meanings in one's own memory. This is how CU works as a semantic standard for Locke and how we can see the significance of the qualification that the primary significations of words be ideas in the mind of the user. It is a truism that speakers present speaker meanings, but these speaker meanings are gateways to their standing meanings, when the appropriate care, diligence, and industriousness are undertaken to settle one's ideas on the archetypes for linguistic meaning.

To put my point plainly, then: When Locke writes that "*Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them*" (E 3.2.2: 405), he was principally making a claim about speaker meaning, about what happens in an individual speech act. He was not making a claim about semantic authority, about where meanings come from or what makes a speech act proper or improper. Semantic authority derives from CU, which is constituted by the archetypal patterns of the linguistic community. Individual speakers can choose which ideas to express and which words to use in expressing them, but they cannot

unilaterally determine what those words mean. This distributed model of semantic authority is what allows Locke to avoid the collapse into semantic voluntarism. Ideas remain the immediate significations of words, but the propriety of attaching an abstract idea to a particular word is governed by CU. Hence the mandate that speakers “*must* also take care to *apply their Words*, as near as may be, *to such Ideas as common use has annexed them to*” (E 3.11.11: 514). The former describes the metaphysical object of signification; the latter prescribes the norms of linguistic propriety. There is no contradiction because they operate at different levels of analysis.

4. Resolving the Humpty Dumpty Problem

With this thick, normatively-loaded concept of CU now articulated, we can turn to addressing how it resolves the Humpty Dumpty problem. Recall that the Humpty Dumpty problem arises from the apparent commitment to semantic voluntarism in Locke's main semantic thesis. If individual speakers have absolute authority over the meanings of the words they use, if words mean “just what I choose them to mean—neither more nor less,” then nothing prevents Humpty Dumpty from making “glory” mean anything he wants. This leads directly to meta-linguistic skepticism: if anyone can arbitrarily redefine words, how can one trust that when another explains their meaning, they are not redefining those explanatory words as well? Communication becomes impossible in principle because trust in the communicative process has entirely collapsed.

I have argued that Locke’s main semantic thesis was not a pronouncement of semantic voluntarism. So, what can Locke do about Humpty Dumpty? Through his abuse of “glory,” Humpty Dumpty shows himself to be a wilful and dishonest enemy of truth. The whole gamut of penalties that the “*Law of Opinion or Reputation*” allow are available to Locke: “constant Dislike, and Condemnation,” “constant Disgrace and Disrepute,” “constant Dislike and ill Opinion,” and “Contempt and Disgrace” (E 2.28.12: 357). Note the frequency that Locke labels this *viruperium*

“constant.” The parallels in severity and inexorability with the punishments of violations of the natural and civil laws seems intentional. Just as pirates, robbers, and highwaymen enter into a state of war with God and nation, so too does a willful “enemy of Truth and Knowledge” enter into a state of epistemic war with the linguistic community. Chance encounters with such malefactors can never be eliminated, of course, but ordinary language users are entitled to fight back against them, as Alice does, and the community may even go so far as to epistemically and linguistically marginalize and expel a willful enemy.¹⁴

Because Locke can dismiss Humpty as a linguistic malefactor, his mischief becomes an isolated case, a rotten apple, rather than a representative of the failure of language as such. Thus, the meta-linguistic skepticism that threaten all communication does not follow. It does not follow because Humpty’s untrustworthiness is due to his viciousness and not due to language’s inherent instability. Even after Humpty Dumpty, CU is still available to provide shared standing meanings capable of grounding interpersonal communication. Communication only becomes impossible if other speakers follow Humpty’s lead and also remove themselves from the linguistic community. But so long as the community remains together, communication remains possible thanks to grounding of meanings in CU. This resolution of the Humpty Dumpty problems vindicates the pessimistic reading of CU demonstrates its viability against the skeptical challenges.

This brings us back to the parallel with political authority that I drew in the introduction. Just as Locke's political philosophy distributes political authority across institutions and citizens

¹⁴ Modern feminism provides a concept for such extreme forms of marginalization, epistemic silencing. See Dotson (2011) and (2014). There is an even more extreme form emerging from the Spanish literature, *muerte hermenéutica*, which involves the complete annihilation of a person’s epistemic agency. They are denied not only credibility as a testifier, but the resources needed to develop as epistemic agents. See Guerrero-McManus (2023) and Mate (2009).

to prevent the degeneration into arbitrary power, so too does his philosophy of language distribute semantic authority across the linguistic community to prevent the degeneration into semantic arbitrariness. Individual speakers are not sovereign over their words as Humpty claims to be. They participate in a community whose collective practices establish its standards of propriety. Individuals can work within those standards, or they can propose reforms to those standards (as Locke himself did with his recommendations for semantic improvement), but they cannot unilaterally override those standards without committing a wrong.

I began by asking whether semantic voluntarism is a fair charge to level against Locke's philosophy of language. Through engagement with the skeptical interpretations of Guyer and Dawson, analysis of Locke's concept of CU and resolution of the Humpty Dumpty Problem, I have argued that it is not. When we attend carefully to the normative, functional, and social dimensions of Locke's concept of CU, we find a robust regulatory framework that distributes semantic authority across the linguistic community rather than investing it in individual speakers. CU truly operates as "the Rule of Propriety" (E 3.9.8: 479), providing standards for proper speech that are enforced through social censure and promulgated through tacit consent. These standards are grounded in patterns of use, codified as imperfect ideas in language learners, which make them publicly accessible (if imperfectly) to all competent members of the linguistic community. Individual speakers have latitude in how they use words, but that latitude is legitimized only within the constraints established by CU. Violations of those constraints result in impropriety and communicative failure, not legitimate alternative meanings. Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, then, while brilliant satire, fundamentally mischaracterized Locke's position. Far from licensing Humpty's semantic libertinism, Locke's philosophy of language provides grounds for condemning it. The Locke who emerges from careful attention to his concept of CU would not have grinned at

Humpty's declaration of semantic sovereignty; he would have judged Humpty guilty of "wilful Faults and Neglects" (E 3.10.1: 490) and recommended that Humpty "be looked on as an Enemy to Truth and Knowledge" (E 3.11.5: 510). Because properly understood, words do not mean "just what I choose them to mean—neither more nor less." They mean what the community—the collective, normatively-loaded patterns of meaning formation—has determined them to mean. And that makes all the difference between communication and chaos, speech and noise, and discourse and semantic arbitrariness.

Works Cited

- Ashworth, E. J. 1981. "Do Words Signify Ideas or Things? The Scholastic Sources of Locke's Theory of Language." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (1981): 299-326.
- . 1984. "Locke on Language." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (1984): 45-73.
- Burge, Tyler. 1979. "Individualism and the Mental." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (Sept. 1979): 73-121.
- Carroll, Lewis. 2010. *Through the Looking-Glass*. London: Harper Collins.
- Dawson, Hannah. 2007. *Locke, Language and Early-Modern Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Rijk, L. M. 1982. "The Origins of the Theory of the Properties of Terms." In *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Edited by Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump. 159-73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Donnellan, Keith. 1966. "Reference and Definite Descriptions." *The Philosophical Review* 75, no. 3 (July 1966): 281-304.
- Dotson, Kristie. 2011. "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing." *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 236-57.
- . 2014. "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression." *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115-38.
- Grant, Ruth. 1987. *John Locke's Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Grice, Paul. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Guerrero-McManus, Siobhan. 2023. "Prejuicios que silencian: Injusticia Testimonial y Muerte Hermenéutica." *Revista interdisciplinaria de estudios de género de El Colegio de México* 9 (2023): np. <https://doi.org/10.24201/reg.v9i1.1026>.
- Guyer, Paul. 1994. "Locke's Philosophy of Language." In *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*. Edited by Vere Chappell. 115-45. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halldenius, Lena. 2003. "Locke and the Non-Arbitrary." *European Journal of Political Theory* 2, no. 3 (2003): 261-79.
- Kann, Christoph. 2016. "Supposition and Properties of Terms." In *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Logic*. Edited by Catarina Dutilh Novaes and Stephen Read. 220-44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kretzmann, Norman. 1968. "The Main Thesis of Locke's Semantic Theory." *The Philosophical Review* 77, no. 2 (Apr. 1968): 175-96.
- Kripke, Saul. 1977. "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference 1." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (Sept. 1977): 255-76.
- Mackay, Alfred F. 1968. "Mr. Donnellan and Humpty Dumpty on Referring." *The Philosophical Review* 77, no. 2 (Apr. 1968): 197-202.
- Mate, Reyes. 2009. *Medianoche en la historia: Comentarios a las tesis de Walter Benjamin << Sobre el concepto de historia >>*. 2nd edition. Madrid: Trotta.
- Putnam, Hilary. 1975. "The Meaning of 'Meaning'." In *Mind, Language, and Reality*. Volume 2 of *Philosophical Papers*. 215-71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Read, Stephen. 2002/2023. "Medieval Theories: Properties of Terms." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/medieval-terms/>.