UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

The Strict Interpretation of Locke's Theory of Ideas

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Philosophy

by

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2006
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University of California, Irvine
2006
DEDICATION

to

Alan Nelson

Advisor, mentor and friend

“I do not adhere to any opinion because it is an old one, a receiv’d one, a fashionable one, or one that I have spend much time in the study and cultivation of.”

Berkeley *Philosophical Commentaries* A465
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NOTES ABOUT THE TEXT

All citations from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, unless otherwise noted, are to the Nidditch edition, based on the fourth edition of the *Essay*, and the last one published in Locke’s lifetime. Citations are in the standard form of [Book].[chapter].[section] such that IV.iii.6 stands for Book four, chapter three, section 6. Quotations from the first (or other) editions of the *Essay* are reconstructed from the notes to the Nidditch edition. Spelling and punctuation follow Nidditch’s version of the fourth edition, but Locke’s copious use of italics and capitalization has been suppressed.

To minimize unnecessary confusion I have adopted the convention of boldface type to distinguish the mentioning of various simple ideas from the use of similar terms, especially since such mentions often accompany their use. For instance, the function of the word “comparing” differs in these two sentences:

1. Locke notes that comparing is an operation of the mind.
2. In a relation, the simple idea *comparing* annexes to other ideas.

In the first instance, the word is used as a normal participle. The second instance engages in a technical identification of a theoretical entity. The reasons for this convention will become clear by the content of chapter three and by the employment of the convention throughout the text.
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Earlier versions of chapters one through four have been presented at a colloquium at the University of Western Ontario, and at a few Cartesian Circle meetings at UC Irvine. A draft of chapter five has been presented at a colloquium at Claremont Graduate University. Comments and questions from those audiences have found their way into various areas of those chapters, especially those of Lorne Falkenstein, Steven Gamboa, and Benjamin Hill.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Strict Interpretation of Locke’s Theory of Ideas

By

Dwight Kenneth Brown

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Irvine, 2006

Professor Alan Nelson, Co-Chair

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John Locke’s project in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding famously holds that every idea in the understanding either is simple, or else is a complex idea theoretically reducible to simples. Locke then sets out to account for knowledge and opinion according to the variety of ways in which complex ideas are formed out of simple ones. Scholars have long resisted understanding this central element of Locke’s project as successful on its own terms. Two prominent strains of criticism either condemn the project as flawed in its conception, or attempt to reformulate the basic terms of the project. On both sides most scholars think that Locke himself recanted at least some significant aspects of his project. Against these lines of commentary, this dissertation formulates and advances “The Strict Interpretation” of Locke’s theory of ideas—strict by its rigid formulations of theses central to Locke’s overall project held as stable through Locke’s
revisions of the *Essay*. The highly controversial theses of the Strict Interpretation collectively explain Locke’s project in the *Essay* as “compositionalist” in virtue of its consistent reduction of complex ideas to simples.

The Strict Interpretation strives to show how Locke’s core project can succeed on its own terms. Towards this end, the dissertation commences with an analysis of Locke’s account of memory that establishes the central role of reflection in the production of complex ideas. According to the Strict Interpretation, complex ideas consist entirely of “reflective simples” annexed to other ideas. The Strict Interpretation controversially identifies these reflective simples with Locke’s “operations of the mind.” This reconstruction of Locke’s theory of ideas explains some puzzling claims about reflection, such as how in the case of relations the comparing of ideas must produce a complex idea. The Strict Interpretation thus boldly accounts for relations as classes of complex ideas, and likewise accounts for knowledge as a class of relations. By focusing on the knowledge of identity and diversity as the “first acts of the mind” in acquiring its knowledge, the Strict Interpretation also establishes a basis for the valuable goal of unifying Locke’s theory of ideas with his theory of knowledge.
A quick glance at Locke’s project in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* yields the following scheme:

- All knowledge is founded on ideas.
- All ideas have their source in either sensation or reflection, the two ways of experience.
- These ideas occur in experience as simple.
- Complex ideas are formed by operations of the mind that unite the simple ideas from experience.

It follows from this scheme that every idea in the understanding is either simple, or else is a complex idea theoretically reducible to simples. Knowledge is thus accounted for by the variety of ways in which complex ideas are formed out of simple ones.

Scholars have found this strict division of ideas into the simple and the complex to be unacceptable. The inability to find a similarly strict distinction between passivity and activity undermines one potential avenue for distinguishing the simple from the complex.¹ Abstract ideas arise from activity of the mind, but it is not clear how they are composed out of simples.² Relations, such as identity and diversity, cause and effect, right and wrong, also seem to defy any rigid classification into the simple

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¹ See e.g. R. I. Aaron (1971) p. 111n.
and complex. Given such widespread difficulties, there seems to be little hope of maintaining the absolute distinction between the simple and the complex that forms the core of this initial take on Locke’s project.

A long tradition in Locke scholarship, based largely on the work of James Gibson⁴ and R. I. Aaron⁵, understands Locke’s project as aiming for a “compositionalism” that ultimately breaks down. In the face of this traditional line of critical commentary, Michael Ayers preserves Locke’s compositionalism as descriptive of experience, but denies that Locke’s compositionalism has any explanatory purchase.⁶ As such, it is no surprise that Ayers cannot put the compositionalism to much serious use in resolving interpretive difficulties concerning, for instance, the status of relations in Locke’s project. The desire to see Locke as making philosophically adequate sense of such matters as the nature of abstract ideas and relations has led some more recent commentators, such as Nicholas Jolley, to attribute to Locke a weakened form of compositionalism in his theory of ideas.⁷ Jolley entertains what M. A.

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⁴ Gibson puts the point succinctly: “It is evident that the composition theory, strictly interpreted, breaks down even in relation to the complex ideas which are so formed [by compounding and enlarging]” (1917, p. 63) See also pp. 47–50, 63–4.


⁷ Jolley (1999) holds that relations and some abstract ideas are non-complex, pp. 45–54 passim.
Stewart advocates as a friendly amendment to Locke’s project, that simplicity be understood as relative. The thesis that ideas are images, endorsed most notably by Ayers, in effect takes all ideas, even the simple ones, to be relational. But if relations are a mess in Locke, pushing that mess into the deeper levels of the theory only worsens the problem. How could anyone possibly make sense of relations within a compositionalist framework if those problems pollute the foundations of that framework?

Revisions to the Essay have convinced many that Locke himself abandoned the scheme of dividing ideas rigidly into complex ideas derived entirely from simple ideas. Noted by A. C. Fraser and employed as primary evidence by Gibson and Aaron, Locke’s revisions to the fourth edition of the Essay are virtually assumed by others to mark some sort of transition away from absolute compositionalism. But even apart from the proposal of relative simplicity, Jolley also holds that relations and some abstract ideas are non-complex.

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8 Stewart (1980) p. 67, and Jolley (1999) p. 46. Jolley is not pushing the view, but merely noting that it seems consistent with his own proposal that Locke should hold merely a weakened compositionalism. Stewart suggests that some uses of “simple” are relative to a given complex, but that in principle even the relatively simple must be reduced to the absolutely simple. Yet, Stewart also wishes to amend Locke’s view by holding some ideas of relations to be simple. Both of these points will be revisited in Chapter 6.

9 In Locke (1896), edited by A. E. Fraser, see the notes to II.xii, pp. 213–7.


These concerns among Locke scholars raise some basic questions about Locke’s commitment to the strict division of ideas into complex ideas composed entirely out of simple ones:

- Is there no way for Locke to hold an absolute distinction between the simple and the complex?
- Did Locke revise away an exhaustive and exclusive distinction between the simple and the complex?
- Should simplicity be understood as relative?

To all these questions I answer “no.” Though it may not seem so initially, each of these problems vexing Locke scholars concerns the role of reflection in Locke’s theory of ideas. The nature of reflection and how it fits into the scheme of simple and complex ideas in Locke’s theory of ideas is, to say the least, not well covered in the secondary literature. Of those who have let such matters go, at least Jonathan Bennett advertised his omission up front:

Locke makes room for ideas not only of ‘sensation’, but also of ‘reflection’: these are the ideas the mind acquires ‘when it turns its view inward upon itself, and observes its own actions about those ideas it has’ (II.vi.1). These pose some tricky problems of philosophy and exegesis; throughout most of my discussions of Locke I shall silently set them aside. (2002, p. 1)

These remarks close the second paragraph of a volume highly critical of Locke’s arguments, wherein Bennett takes Locke to task for neglecting to make sense of his basic commitments. Bennett at least is quite upfront about omitting what many other commentators simply ignore (though he neglects to properly qualify his criticisms of Locke as premised on such an
omission\textsuperscript{12}. I propose a move in the opposite direction: a systematic study of Locke’s theory of ideas that emphasizes the role of ideas of reflection in an account of how simplicity and complexity function throughout Locke’s theory of ideas and in its applications, primarily concerning knowledge.

This systematic account of Locke’s theory of ideas proceeds as follows. The first stage commences a development of Locke’s account of the nature of reflection as it functions in his theory of ideas. Locke’s discussion of memory and sensation throughout the \textit{Essay} offers a convenient and perspicuous entry point into a general account of reflection. Chapter 2 examines Locke’s account of memory focused on the structure of ideas attributed to memory. The resultant account of the structure of memories serves as the basis of a general account of reflection in Locke’s theory of ideas.

The next stage of the project focuses on the primary result of this initial account of reflection: the formulation of a systematic account of how Locke’s theory of ideas functions. By taking Locke at his word as far as possible in a straightforward reading of relevant passages in the \textit{Essay}, I formulate the simplest set of theses to account for Locke’s stated goals and methods. These theses take decisive, yet controversial stands on a

\textsuperscript{12} For instance, where Jolley ascribes a weakened compositionalism to Locke to accommodate some abstract ideas as non-simple yet free from complexity (p. 48ff), Bennett (2002) finds the conflicts in the view he has attributed to Locke to be fatally irresolvable (p. 26), while failing to see a solution in an account of the activity productive of abstract ideas.
number of longstanding disputes amongst Locke scholars. So, in Chapter 3 each thesis receives some account both of what it means and of how it fits with the rest. As a whole, this body of theses takes the form of a reconstruction of Locke’s theory of ideas. After clarifying what it means for Locke to be committed to this “Strict Interpretation” of his theory of ideas, the rest of the dissertation puts it to some interpretive use.

The account of reflection stated in Chapter 2 fits into this systematic account of Locke’s theory of ideas as part of a strict division among classes of ideas. And so, the next stage of this project proceeds with an examination of some key implications of the Strict Interpretation concerning the extent to which reflection is a source of ideas. Locke’s main claims about reflection as a source of ideas are difficult to manage. Chapter 4 distinguishes modes of reflection from simple ideas whose source is reflection (what I call “reflective simples”). This account of reflection shows how Locke adheres to a rigid distinction between the simple and the complex. Modes of reflection are complex ideas with reflective simples as constituents. Locke’s use of the terms “clear” and “distinct” provide the main textual grounds for this distinction. Chapter 5 turns to the classification of simple ideas offering an account of what serves the function of reflective simples, and why some candidates for being reflective simples should be set aside.
The project then puts the account of reflection to some work concerning Locke’s account of relations. Many commentators have held that for Locke relations either fall outside a scheme of simple and complex ideas, or that some of our ideas of relations are simple ideas. Chapter 6 argues from the Strict Interpretation against such claims. On the Strict Interpretation, all relations are properly classified as complex ideas. The interpretive problems at stake here concern how to make sense of relations as complex ideas. The account of reflection developed through Chapter 5 offers a clear way of making such sense of relations, and thus demonstrates a useful application of the Strict Interpretation.

After showing how relations fit into Locke’s project as complex ideas, the systematic interpretation turns to matters specific to the relations of identity and diversity in Locke’s theory of knowledge. Chapter 7 unites Locke’s theory of ideas with his larger project of accounting for knowledge without appeal to innate principles or ideas. The account of reflection in Chapters 4 and 5, and the account of relations as complex ideas in Chapter 6 find their main application here. By the conclusion of the analysis of knowledge of identity and diversity, a prominent reason for focusing on these relations should be clear: a systematic treatment of any other relation would require a prior determination of identity and diversity. This account of knowledge of identity and diversity shows how
Locke’s theory of knowledge amounts to a special application of his theory of ideas, when properly understood by the Strict Interpretation.

The conclusions concerning knowledge of identity and diversity pave the way for extending the Strict Interpretation to systematic accounts of other prominent areas of interest to Locke scholars. The systematic study of these topics by means of the Strict Interpretation of Locke’s theory of ideas relies on the account of identity and diversity offered in the work provided here. So, the dissertation closes with brief discussions of some further applications of the Strict Interpretation, most notably a brief suggestion of how to account for Locke’s puzzling claims about power. At various stages of this dissertation, the topic at hand may raise issues relevant to these (and other) further applications of the Strict Interpretation. But, they are set aside with the promise that the Strict Interpretation would systematically account for these and many other topics in their due course. The conclusion of the dissertation sketches the main aspects of these further topics.

The presentation of the Strict Interpretation and its applications that follow may meet with firm resistance from readers unaccustomed to such a stark tour de force display of interpretive machinery. In the argument of this dissertation, the grounds for accepting or rejecting the consequences of the Strict Interpretation (no matter how controversial they may be) rest on the explanatory power of the Strict Interpretation as
a whole. This kind of argumentation prods readers to drastically reconsider their longstanding conceptions of Locke’s aims and face their dormant assumptions about what sort of philosopher Locke may be. By raising these concerns so abruptly, the body of theses employed by the Strict Interpretation shall surely seem radical to orthodox Locke scholars.

The Strict Interpretation understands the *Essay* as addressing the scope and content of knowledge, where knowledge is strictly defined as perception of agreement or disagreement of ideas. This means that the Strict Interpretation has nothing explicit to say about knowledge of a world ontologically independent of ideas. The Strict Interpretation nevertheless is not idealistic in the traditional sense, but it does mean that on this interpretation the scope of Locke’s project is more restricted than in traditional interpretations. By understanding the arguments in the *Essay* to be unified by a core set of strict theses, the Strict Interpretation supports an impression of Locke as less interested in meeting the demands of common sense. In light of these concerns, the applications of the Strict Interpretation that comprise the rest of the dissertation regrettably cannot fully make a case sufficient to convince most orthodox Locke scholars that the Strict Interpretation is actually what John Locke himself had in mind as he drafted and edited the various editions of the *Essay*. No set of interpretive theses requiring an appreciable measure of reconsideration of such a prominent thinker as
Locke could ever reasonably be expected to achieve such a lofty goal. Nevertheless the Strict Interpretation does offer a focused reconstruction of Locke’s core project in the *Essay*. The merit of this reconstruction ought, I think, to be found in what it tells us of Locke’s project on its own terms.
CHAPTER 2:
Memory as a Paradigm of Reflection

To begin the systematic account of reflection in Locke’s theory of ideas we shall examine one of the operations of the mind that serves a number of important functions in Locke’s project: memory. In examining the case of memory as an operation of the mind, I aim to show that there is a simple reflective idea of memory, and that this reflective idea functions in the production of a complex idea by a process of annexation to other ideas. This is not to show anything special about memory as opposed to any other sort of reflection. Rather, we shall see that Locke extends the points about memory relevant here to all the sorts of reflection. In this systematic investigation of Locke on memory, we will be focusing only on the basic structure of the ideas at stake in memory. This focus on structure serves to commence a thoroughly compositionalist account of Locke’s theory of ideas with the analysis of reflection at its core.

The first discussion of memory in the Essay occurs in a section added to the second edition of the Essay in Locke’s polemic against innate principles wherein Locke argues that no innate ideas are in the memory. There are many interesting issues about memory raised by this passage,
but I wish to set aside all considerations apart from what Locke here suggests as the structure of a memory:

For to remember is to perceive any thing with memory, or with a consciousness, that it was known or perceived before: without this, whatever idea comes into the mind is new, and not remembred: this consciousness of its having been in the mind before, being that, which distinguishes remembrance from all other ways of thinking. (L.iv.20)

Locke here notes that remembering is to perceive something “with” some consciousness. That consciousness marks the thing perceived as remembered, and without that mark there is no memory. The consciousness that marks the memory as such is that the idea had been known before. Approximately a dozen times throughout the two pages of this section Locke instances perceiving something “with” or “without” such a consciousness as “being a constant, and distinguishing difference between what is, and what is not in the memory, or in the mind,” and so we have in this consciousness a necessary mark of remembrance that distinguishes it from any other way something can be in the mind. This perception is “with” the ideas whenever they are remembered. That perception that is “with” what was remembered is the distinguishing factor between what is remembered and what is not.

These initial remarks precede Locke’s presentation of his theory of ideas in Book II, and so do not employ the stricter vocabulary of the theory of ideas. Later when Locke has already established some of his key
terms and distinctions, he offers some more refined considerations about memory. The following passage is from the first presentation of memory as, along with ‘contemplation,’ one of the two basic ways the mind retains its ideas:

[...] our ideas being nothing, but actual perceptions in the mind, which cease to be any thing, when there is no perception of them, this laying up of our ideas in the repository of the memory, signifies no more but this, that the mind has a power, in many cases to revive perceptions, which it has once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before. And in this sense it is, that our ideas are said to be in our memories, when indeed, they are actually no where, but only there is an ability in the mind, when it will, to revive them again; (II.x.2).

Here, memory signifies a power or ability to do something with our ideas that yields something “annexed” to whatever ideas that power or ability has revived. Such is the proper sense in which we are to think of ideas as being in our memories: the ideas occur again, but now with something else annexed to them that was not previously there in the first occurrence of those revived ideas. This additional component is what sets the memory apart from the initial perception. After some discussion about matters pertaining to fixed and fading memories Locke continues by establishing another of his initial points about memory:

13 It is interesting that Aaron, so keen to find fault with Locke’s compositionalism, disparages Locke’s account of memory without raising any issues about what this “annexing” is supposed to mean (1971, p. 136–9). Such an omission is striking given that Aaron quotes more of the passage than I have.
This farther is to be observed, concerning ideas lodg’d in the memory, and upon occasion revived by the mind, that they are not only (as the word revive imports) none of them new ones; but also that the mind takes notice of them, as of a former impression, and renews its acquaintance with them, as with ideas it had known before. So that though ideas formerly imprinted are not all constantly in view, yet in remembrance they are constantly known to be such, as have been formerly imprinted, i.e. in view, and taken notice of before by the understanding. (II.x.7)

Here, the reviving of ideas in remembrance involves a perception that marks the thing revived as something that is revived. And so, the basic structure of a remembrance is some perception annexed to another perception. That annexed perception marks the other perception as having been perceived before. The annexed perception is also that by which the perception is constantly known to have occurred before. The other perception that is hereby known to have been revived is otherwise indistinguishable from its initial occurrence prior to the reviving. So long as the annexed perception distinctive of remembrance is annexed to its object, that object is known as remembered. These two perceptions, the perception remembered and the annexed perception that is the remembering, constitute the whole remembrance.

From the initial discussion of memory and the later account of it in the chapter on retention, Locke holds the following concerning memory:
TABLE 2.1: MAIN POINTS OF LOCKE’S ACCOUNT OF MEMORY

1. IDEAS ARE NOWHERE WHEN UNPERCEIVED.
2. THE MIND HAS A POWER TO REVIVE IDEAS.
3. THE EXERCISE OF THIS POWER AMOUNTS TO IDEAS, WHICH HAD OCCURRED BEFORE, NOW OCCURRING AGAIN.
4. THE REVIVED OCCURRENCE OF THE IDEAS, WHEN REVIVED, IS ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED BY SOMETHING ELSE.
5. THAT SOMETHING ELSE IS ANOTHER PERCEPTION ANNEXED TO THE REVIVED IDEAS.
6. THIS OTHER ANNEXED PERCEPTION IS THE ONLY DISTINGUISHING FACTOR TO INDICATE THAT THIS POWER HAS BEEN EMPLOYED.
7. ‘REMEMBRANCE’ IS A NAME THAT COVERS THE COMPOSITE OF THE REVIVED IDEA AND THE ANNEXED PERCEPTION THAT DISTINGUISHES THE REMEMBRANCE FROM ANY OTHER SORT OF PERCEPTION.
8. ‘MEMORY’ IS A NAME THAT COVERS THE POWER OR ABILITY TO ANNEX A DISTINCT PERCEPTION TO AN IDEA THAT MARKS THAT IDEA AS REVIVED.

And so, we have in this account of memory a compound identified through its parts: the remembrance includes an idea revived with the remembering annexed to it. The idea revived was perceived before, but without the annexed perception that marks the two as a remembrance. At that initial perception the thing later remembered lacks something contained in the compound perception of remembrance. This difference between an idea with the annexed perception and an idea absent any such annexed perception is, on Locke’s account, manifest to all.

Locke’s discussion of sensation as a “mode” of thinking follows just such a model. Sensation is the origin of most of the ideas revived by the
memory. We have seen how remembrance is to be distinguished from however it is that an idea first occurred: by means of some other perception annexed to the ideas. Locke also identified sensation by distinctness from all the other operations of the mind in virtue of the lack of any annexed perception:

 [...] the perception, which actually accompanies, and is annexed to any impression on the body, made by an external object, being distinct from all other modifications of thinking, furnishes the mind with a distinct idea, which we call sensation; which is, as it were, the actual entrance of any idea into the understanding by the senses. The same idea, when it again recurs without the operation of the like object on the external sensory, is remembrance: If it be sought after by the mind, and with pain and endeavour found, and brought again in view, ’tis recollection: If it be held there long under attentive consideration, ’tis contemplation: (II.xix.1).

Sensation is here distinguished from remembrance, recollection and contemplation. Remembrance we have already accounted for. Recollection is remembrance along with pain and endeavor. Contemplation, alongside memory, is the other of the two basic kinds of retention, and so is another perception annexed to the object of contemplation. Sensation involves some sort of annexing, but to an impression on the body rather than to a perception. Earlier in his first discussion of sensation as one of the ways of experience, Locke characterized sensation as perception of objects external to the mind. This externality when found in contrast to remembrance has been noted as an absence of something included in the
remembrance. Remembrance is one of a type, all of which are likewise distinct from sensation:

These are some few instances of those various modes of thinking, which the mind may observe in itself, and so have as distinct ideas of, as it hath of white and red, a square or a circle. I do not pretend to enumerate them all, nor to treat at large of this set of ideas, which are got from reflection: That would be to make a volume. It suffices to my present purpose to have shewn here, by some few examples, of what sort these ideas are, and how the mind comes by them; especially since I shall have occasion hereafter to treat more at large of reasoning, judging, volition, and knowledge, which are some of the most considerable operations of the mind, and modes of thinking. (II.xix.2)

All such ideas of the sort including remembrance are as distinct from each other, and from sensation, as red, white, square and circle are distinct from each other. Sensation is a perception annexed to an “impression on the body.” The rest are distinct from sensation since they are all perceptions not annexed to impressions on the body. Thus sensation is “furnished into the mind” as a distinct mode of thinking. Each of the modes of thinking besides sensation is distinct from the rest as well. Recollection is distinct from remembrance due to there being additional structural components of recollection beyond what is contained in remembrance, viz. pain and endeavor. Contemplation is one of the basic forms of retention just as memory, and can quite easily be distinguished
from sensation in the same fashion as memory: contemplating\textsuperscript{14} is another annexed perception, but different from the annexed perception that marks a memory. The distinctness of sensation as a mode of thinking depends on the distinctness of other modes of thinking such as remembrance, recollection and contemplation. The distinctness of recollection from remembrance depends on the distinctness of the pain and endeavor from the annexed perception they share in common. The distinctness of contemplation from recollection and from sensation likewise depends on whatever it is that marks it as a contribution to the idea contemplated rather than remembered by a annexed perception specific to memory, and the absence of any such annexed perception in sensation. What we have here in this account of the various modes of thinking are a variety of perceptions, one simple and the rest compound. Each of the compound perceptions is distinct from the others by means of one part of the compound, and the simple is as such distinct from all of the compounds.

The distinction between the structure of memory as complex and sensations as simple underwrites Locke’s account of sensitive knowledge. Sensation is the basis of knowledge concerning the things that affect our senses. The distinctness of sensation from memory assures us (along with

\textsuperscript{14} See the “Notes About the Text” (p. v), for an explanation of the boldface type.
other “concurrent reasons’) of the existence of such things. This difference is again noted as clear to anyone:

[...] there is a manifest difference, between the ideas laid up in my memory; [...] and those which force themselves upon me, and I cannot avoid having. (IV.xi.5)

It seems natural to think of the manifest difference between ideas remembered and ideas sensed as being the very distinctness discussed earlier in the chapter on modes of thinking and in the two discussions of memory: the ideas from reflection are distinct. What is distinct between the contemplated sun of memory and the sun actually looked at is not the object, but the act:

Besides, there is nobody who doth not perceive the difference in himself, between contemplating the Sun, as he hath the idea of it in his memory, and actually looking upon it: Of which two, his perception is so distinct, that few of his ideas are more distinguishable one from another. (IV.xi.5)

That is, the distinction exists between contemplated remembrance and actual looking. There is “nobody who doth not perceive the difference” between these two perceptions, remembering and looking. What is remembered and what is looked at each have something about them that Locke identifies as the basis of their distinctness from each other: the modes of thinking involved, memory and sensation. From II.x.2 the difference is something annexed to a remembrance that is not annexed to a sensation. In distinguishing a memory-perception from a sensation-perception, all those who have such perceptions distinguish ideas gotten
from reflection. That distinguishing idea is part of a composite in the case of remembrance, and only occurs in the formation of that composite. That annexed perception that forms the composite is also an element distinguishable from the other parts of the composite and from other such elements that occur in the formation of other composites. Thus the following is central to Locke’s characterization of the distinction between sensation and memory: *the products of sensation are simple in structure, those of memory complex.*

Locke expresses the distinction between sensation and memory in terms of the way or manner wherein ideas occur in these two modes of thinking. But note that he explains this way or manner of occurring in terms of whether or not something else is present in the occurrence. The complexity of remembrance is the manner wherein the perception was revived by memory. The simplicity of a sensation is the manner wherein the perception occurred. There is nothing more to what distinguishes the remembrance of something from the sensation of that very thing besides what else is annexed to the remembrance, but absent in the sensation. Taking F to be sensed, then remembered, what sets the sensing of F apart from remembering F is not F, but something else, M. That something else, M, is annexed to F in the remembrance, but absent in the sensing of F. In the first occurrence of F in sensation, that M is missing would not be anything to notice. Later upon the remembrance of F, which is M annexed
to F, there would be a basis for noticing the difference between the F-M annex and the solo occurrence of F unannexed to any other perception. That difference is the basis for distinguishing amongst the ways in which F occurs.

Consider the following scheme with a number of elements arranged in various ways.

**TABLE 2.2: SCHEME ONE**

<p>| | | | | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F-M</td>
<td>G-M</td>
<td></td>
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In Scheme One F occurs unannexed, or solo, and occurs annexed to M (as F-M). Some other solo perception, G, is just as distinct from M as from F. So, F and G, each occurring solo, are distinct from each other. And, F-M is distinct from F because M is distinct from F. F-M is also distinct from G-M because F is distinct from G. Now add some more items:
Scheme Two includes other solo items, H and I, each of which is as distinct from the rest as F and G were from each other. Scheme Two also includes another element, N, that occurs only in F-N and H-N. These occurrences of F, G, H, I, M and N can now be classed according to the following circumstances given in Scheme Two:

**TABLE 2.4: CIRCUMSTANCES IN SCHEME TWO**

- SOLO: \{F, G, H, I\}
- SOLO, AND ANNEXED TO M: \{F, G\}
- SOLO, AND ANNEXED TO N: \{F, H\}
- ONLY ANNEXED TO F OR G: \{M\}
- ONLY ANNEXED TO F OR H: \{N\}

From these circumstances, a number of classifications are possible. An initial division of the elements in Scheme Two is clear:
TABLE 2.5: FIRST CLASSIFICATION

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\{M, N\} \\
\{F, G, H, I\}
\end{array}
\]

Two points are clear from this First Classification:

1. By only occurring annexed to others, M and N are thus distinct from F, G, H and I.
2. By occurring solo, regardless of any circumstances of annexation, F, G, H and I are distinct from M and N.

Furthermore, amongst F, G, H and I, another set of classifications are notable:

TABLE 2.6: SECOND CLASSIFICATION

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\{F, G, H\} \\
\{F, G\} \\
\{F, H\} \\
\{I\}
\end{array}
\]

Four points are clear from this Second Classification:

1. F, G and H are distinct from the rest by occurring both solo and annexed to something else.
2. F and G are distinct from the rest by each being annexed to M.
3. F and H are distinct from the rest by each being annexed to N.
4. I is distinct from the rest by only occurring solo.

Scheme Two and its circumstances that allow for the first and second classifications offer a model of the logic of the theoretical structure Locke employs in his discussions of sensation and memory.
Consider how Locke calls attention to some of his classifications. Suppose ‘retaining’ an item so as to notice it at all was, within this scheme, to have either M or N, annexed to it. Furthermore, suppose M is one way of retaining (memory), while N is another (contemplation). F, G and H would be retained, while I was not. In the cases of F, G and H being retained, M and N are the markers of retention. F and G are distinct from M in the occurrence of the remembrances, the F-M and G-M annexed pairs. And likewise, F and H are distinct from N in the contemplations, the F-N and H-N annexed pairs. The basis for putting F, G and H together in one class is the distinction between

- occurring both solo and annexed,

and

- only occurring annexed.

F, G, and H occur both solo and annexed, while M and N only occur annexed. This scheme lays out possibilities for classification. Now, apply this scheme to the distinction between sensation and memory. Sensation as a mode of thinking can be distinguished from memory and contemplation by contrast between what marks memory and contemplation from that to which the marks each are annexed. This is at least what is minimally present in such a distinction.

Of course, in actual cases the ideas at stake are vastly more complicated than this scheme suggests. That is, while we are now musing
about the origins of our knowledge in reading Locke’s *Essay*, our memories and the things we contemplate are not pure, singular, simple entities. And so, this theoretical structure does not of itself capture all that is involved in remembering some event from childhood, for instance. Instead, this scheme establishes initial conditions, and glosses over complications in order to make a focused, theoretical point. So long as we understand when, where and how complications are set aside, we can fill them in to the extent necessary to extend the point to more cases. The scheme indicates what, at minimum, is theoretically necessary to account for a distinction between two classes of ideas. These minimal requirements in the scheme establish the parameters of the account. Distinguishing between sensation and memory amounts to distinguishing between the presence or absence of something with respect to something else common to both cases. In any case of memory there is this additional, annexed perception. This annexed perception is what we distinguish from other perceptions when we notice the manifest difference between sensation and memory. Locke has offered a theoretical structure for identifying the principles at stake when we draw an obvious and manifestly clear distinction. Locke is thus using the cases of memory and sensation to present and employ theoretical principles.

This theoretical structure exhibits an important feature of Locke’s account of reflection: *how* ideas occur is cashed out in terms of *what* ideas
are occurring. Locke characterizes how ideas are occur in memory as being manifestly distinct from how ideas occur in sensation. But, Locke also considers this manner of occurrence as needing some sort of account. The account is in terms of a difference in what ideas are occurring, i.e., in terms of the parts of whatever it is whose manner of occurrence is under question. Memory differs from sensation by the addition of a part. So does contemplation. Some other modes of retention involve additional parts (e.g. recollection involves remembrance, pain and endeavor). I submit that this structural account holds for all the modes of thinking. And so, following Locke’s lead in generalizing from memory to any other of the different kinds of thinking Locke covers under the general sort “reflection,” the various types of reflection each are annexed perceptions distinct from each other. From this account arises a general characterization of the structure of reflective thought:

- Each reflective thought is a compound perception containing an idea that marks the composition-forming power from that on which the power acted.

By such marks each of those compounds is distinct from non-compound perceptions. This structural scheme accounts for differences amongst the ways ideas occur. So, I take Locke as distinguishing between types of reflection as composition-forming and sensations as non-composite. How such composition-forming ideas function in Locke’s theory of ideas, and in the project the theory facilitates—that is my primary concern. It should
now be clear that on the interpretation that follows, Locke’s theory of ideas is a compositionalist program with reflection accounting for the composition.
CHAPTER 3:
The Strict Interpretation of Locke’s Theory of Ideas

I propose an interpretation of Locke’s overall project in the Essay fashioned around the understanding of reflection established by the investigation into memory. As memory is complex in structure, so I take all the ideas formed by reflection likewise to be complex in structure. Reflection is thus distinct from sensation since sensation lacks the complex structure always accompanying reflection. Thus, this interpretation facilitates a compositionalist account of Locke’s overall project that implicates “operations of the mind” in the account of complexity. The compositionalist interpretation I shall employ endeavors to preserve as far as possible the strict and absolute account of Locke’s program we encountered in our quick glance at the Essay. This issues in a set of core theses of a Strict Interpretation of Locke’s theory of ideas and its applications, or what I shall call the “Strict Interpretation.” The core theses of the Strict Interpretation are here laid out in full before we proceed to their individual consideration:
TABLE 3.1: THESES OF THE STRICT INTERPRETATION

<p>| | |</p>
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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>SIMPLE IDEAS FALL INTO THREE BASIC CLASSIFICATIONS ACCORDING TO THEIR SOURCES IN EXPERIENCE.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>ALL IDEAS ARE EITHER SIMPLE OR COMPLEX.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>ALL COMPLEX IDEAS ARE THEORETICALLY COMPLETELY ANALYZABLE INTO ABSOLUTELY SIMPLE IDEAS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>ALL COMPLEX IDEAS ARE PRODUCTS OF OPERATIONS OF THE MIND ON ITS IDEAS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>AN OPERATION OF THE MIND ON ITS IDEAS IS THE PRODUCTION OF A COMPLEX IDEA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>THE PERCEPTION OF AN OPERATION OF THE MIND ON ITS IDEAS IS NOTHING BUT A REFLECTIVE SIMPLE IDEA, WHICH IS A COMPONENT OF THE PRODUCED COMPLEX.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>KNOWLEDGE IS NOTHING BUT THE PERCEPTION OF AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT AMONG OUR IDEAS, AND ONLY OUR IDEAS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>THE EMPLOYMENT OF THESE THESES COMPRISSES LOCKE’S “HISTORICAL PLAIN METHOD.”</td>
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Each of these theses takes a stand on some scholarly controversy or other, so I shall say something in favor of each one. But also, something should be shown in favor of holding all of these theses together. With this in mind I’ll offer some remarks about how this entire interpretation characterizes Locke’s project, and consider some texts that I take to show Locke’s commitment to the account of his theory of ideas I attribute back to him. At this stage we’ll proceed to test this interpretation on some longstanding controversies concerning Locke’s views on relations.
1. **Simple ideas fall into three basic classifications according to their sources in experience.**

   For Locke experience is the only source of all our simple ideas, and simple ideas are the only basic constituents of experience. Traditionally interpreters of Locke focus on two divisions of Locke’s simple ideas according to their sources in experience, viz. sensation and reflection. Surely these are the only two sources of ideas for Locke. Nevertheless, these two sources yield three classes of ideas. Any simple idea finds its source in sensation, or in reflection, or in *both* sensation *and* reflection. I employ the names ‘sensitive simples’ to cover the class of ideas whose source is exclusively sensation, ‘reflective simples’ for ideas whose source is exclusively reflection, and ‘experiential simples’ to cover the class of ideas whose sources are both sensation and reflection.\(^{15}\) Any simple idea falls into one of these three classes. These three basic classifications can each be divided into further classifications according to explanatory necessity. Locke, for instance, divides sensitive simples into those of one sense and those of more than one sense. In II.iii.1, Locke uses this

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\(^{15}\) I adopt this sort of nomenclature on the suggestion of Thomas Lennon. Furthermore, whenever I name a sensitive, reflective or experiential simple idea, I shall mark it with boldface type. See “Notes About the Text” (p. v) for a brief explanation of this convention.
additional division of sensitive simples as a basis for examining simple ideas under *four* classifications:\textsuperscript{16}

1. Simple ideas of one sense,
2. Simple ideas of more than one sense,
3. Simple ideas of reflection
4. Simple ideas of both sensation and reflection.

The Strict Interpretation takes the first two classifications as subordinate to a more general class of simple ideas whose source is sensation alone. Locke explicates subordinate classifications of reflective simples as well: retention and discerning. The basic classifications for the Strict Interpretation focus on sensation and reflection being sources of ideas. Locke clearly employs those two classifications as accounting for ideas from each source alone and also from either source. The Strict Interpretation starts from that basic classification by source. These classifications are examined more closely in Chapter 4.

There is a problem concerning the naming of simple ideas that needs to be faced head on. This problem is the focus of Chapter 4, wherein the Strict Interpretation distinguishes reflective simple ideas from modes of reflection. Modes of reflection are each classes of ideas. These classes of ideas each purport to distinguish simple ideas into types. But, when one formulates such a class, what one does is *think* about a simple idea. In doing so, one formulates a complex idea. Why this is so, and what follows

\textsuperscript{16} O'Connor (1967) follows the fourfold classification (p. 50), but as we shall see, he cannot make adequate sense of Locke's theory of ideas.
from this account will become clear from the account of all the theses of the Strict Interpretation.

2. **All ideas are either simple or complex.**

All ideas divide into two exclusive and exhaustive classes: simple and complex. As Locke claims to offer a system whose primary task is to explain all complex ideas in terms of their simple components, I take it that Locke intends for this division to be absolute and exceptionless. As such, I understand Locke as denying that any ideas fall outside of the classification into the simple and the complex. Put plainly, there are no ideas that are neither simple nor complex, and also no ideas are both simple and complex; for any idea, either it is simple, or else it is complex.\(^\text{17}\)

To take Locke at his word on this point, all the ideas he identifies as simple we must endeavor to preserve as simple in our account of his

\(^{17}\) Here I agree with Thomas Lennon who holds an absolute and exceptionless distinction between the simple and the complex. Lennon (2001) draws the simple/complex distinction in terms of the passive/active distinction (p. 161). While I agree that simplicity/passivity and complexity/activity identify extensionally equivalent classes of ideas, I would analyze passivity and activity in terms of simplicity and complexity. A full treatment of this issue requires an analysis of Locke’s simple idea of power, an inquiry beyond the present constraints of this dissertation. Lennon’s project concerns breaking misconceptions about the ontological status of Locke’s ideas that underlie the inclination to see Locke’s ideas as mediating between the mind and objects of perception. Lennon does not offer any account of the role of reflection in Locke’s theory of ideas, however. And so he does not develop the Strict Interpretation as one way to exploit the simple/complex distinction.
program; and likewise, those ideas he claims to be complex need be reckoned as complex. So in the systematic treatment of Locke’s project, anything Locke says to suggest that an idea (even possibly) falls outside of these rigid divisions stands in need of interpretive treatment to explain what Locke meant such that the idea in question is either properly simple, or else properly complex. If such a clean account of an idea as simple or complex seems out of interpretive reach, then an interpretive distinction or stipulation is in order. These distinctions and stipulations must adhere to the rigid classifications of ideas in terms of the simple and the complex. And, they must find their justification in the importance of their explananda. So, exceedingly few ideas that Locke calls simple can be properly rendered as complex, and vice versa. But, in no way shall an idea fall into both classifications as simple and as complex. Two prime cases well suited for systematic treatment in terms of simplicity and complexity are relations and abstract ideas. Relations are the main topic of the chapters that follow, though a number of significant points about abstract ideas are also made along the way. However, a systematic treatment of abstract ideas is beyond the scope of this dissertation. One difficult case concerning reflection is examined directly in Chapter 4.
3. All complex ideas are theoretically completely analyzable into absolutely simple ideas.

I understand Locke to consider any idea that is at all amenable to description, definition, or analysis in any way whatsoever, to be a complex idea, theoretically reducible into absolutely simple ideas. The function of identifying an idea as complex in Locke’s program is to subject it to just such an analysis that terminates in unanalyzably simple constituents. Locke means for simple ideas to be absolutely simple, and again taking Locke at his word, I hold that he seriously and consistently considers such ideas as being, in the terms of his initial formation of the distinction, “one uniform appearance,” “unmixed,” “uncompounded,” and “not distinguishable into different ideas” (II.ii.1). Simple ideas are, on this view, indescribable, and their names indefinable (III.iv.4). As they occur in the mind, simple ideas are incapable of analysis in terms of any other ideas. This absolute irreducibility holds for all simple ideas, whether sensitive, reflective or experiential.

Many controversies hang on what Locke means when he claims that an idea is simple or uses a term to cover what he seems variously to call simple or complex. Taking Locke at his word about ideas being

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18 This is the point that facilitates Locke’s “historical plain method,” which shall be discussed in due course.
19 E.g. on the case of power, see David Hume’s *Treatise* 1.3.14 (1978) p. 157ff, and *Enquiry* (1975) p. 64. A comprehensive Strict Interpretation account of Locke on power is very much in order. Such an account would
completely and exhaustively divided into complex ideas reducible to irreducibly simple ideas narrows at the outset the scope of answers to such controversies (to say the least). This point receives significant treatment in the distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflection in Chapter 4, and is at the center of the account of relations as complex ideas in Chapter 6.

4. **All complex ideas are products of operations of the mind on its ideas.**

I understand Locke to hold that ideas are complex just in case they are products of operations of the mind on its other ideas. All ideas Locke identifies as complex must be treated as properly complex, that is, as standing in need of an analysis in terms of an ultimate origin in its simple ideas, some of which have as their sources operations of the mind on its other simple ideas. Since I take Locke as holding that complex ideas arise entirely from operations of the mind, any account of a complex idea will include its origin in operations of the mind.

Sensation differs from reflection since sensation is not an operation of the mind on its other ideas. We have already found an interpretive role for this thesis in understanding Locke’s distinction between memory and sensation. Memory is an operation of the mind that yields a complex idea require the work in this dissertation. Some remarks about such an account are offered in the Conclusions to this dissertation.
consisting of a reflective simple annexed to another idea. And so, among all the complex ideas, some of them are products of memory. What we found in Locke’s account of modes of thinking is that the account of memory is a model for all the modes of thinking. They are manifest in either

- complex ideas whose analyses include references to operations of the mind and annexations to other ideas,

or

- simple ideas not annexed to any other ideas.

Sensations are not annexed to other ideas, but are instead annexed to the body. Sensation thus is a mode of thinking distinguished from all other modes of thinking by the structure of ideas. Complex ideas structurally include reflective simples. Non-complex ideas do not. Those non-complex ideas are simple ideas.

And so, the many simple ideas that comprise sensory experience do not all together comprise a complex idea. Neither does any theoretically arbitrarily specified set of sensitive simples comprise a complex idea.20

20 Those who agree with Vere Chappell that some complex ideas are given as complex in sensation run afoul of a point nicely put by J. D. Mabbott that insofar as complex ideas are given, then relations could likewise be given. See Chappell (1994), p. 37, and Mabbott (1973), p. 19-20. Mabbott could have taken this point one devastating step farther that on the same grounds knowledge could be given. Those who hold that complexity can be given are in great pains to explain what Locke is doing in the account of memory given above, or else must face serious challenges in making sense of Locke’s treatment of relations, as shall be shown in Chapter 6.
Instead, many simple ideas not annexed to other ideas constitute many discrete perceptions. Complex ideas that include sensitive simples must be the product of an operation of the mind on those sensitive simples. That operation of the mind on those other ideas must be implicated in the account of the complexity of the idea that includes those other ideas. This thesis plays a significant role in the discussion of relations in Chapter 6.

5. **An operation of the mind on its ideas is the production of a complex idea.**

   Any idea whose occurrence in experience is due to an operation of the mind on its ideas must, as such, be complex. This basic distinction between ideas that occur in the mind due to the mind itself, and ideas that occur in the mind due to no effort or process of the mind is the distinction between the simple and the complex. Coupled with thesis 4, “complex ideas” and “ideas produced by operations of the mind on its ideas” are thus equivalent.\(^2\) Such a position is an easy consequence of the annexation account of reflection employed in the account of memory and sensation. The mind operating on its ideas is no more and no less than the formation of a complex idea by means of annexation to another idea. On this view, the separation or selective attention involved in abstraction

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\(^2\) Jolley (1999) disagrees by allowing some ideas actively produced to be free from complexity, yet also non-simple (p. 45–6, 53–4). Treatment of this position follows in Chapter 6 in the examination of relations as complex ideas.
always yields complex ideas, and never results in an idea devoid of all complexity.

6. **The perception of an operation of the mind on its ideas is nothing but a reflective simple idea, and that reflective simple is a component of the produced complex.**

Just as perception by means of the senses is the occurrence of sensitive simple ideas, perception by means of reflection is the occurrence of reflective simples (i.e. “simple ideas of reflection”). Since reflection is the source of ideas of what Locke calls “the operations of the mind on its ideas,” reflective simples occur in experience along with other simples. How simple ideas occur in experience serves as the occasion for the occurrence of reflective simples, but how (or the way that, or the manner wherein) non-reflective ideas occur in the mind should not be identified with reflection or the occurrence of reflective simples. As the annexation account of reflection shows, the mind’s perception of the manner wherein ideas occur is itself the occurrence of another idea in the mind; that other idea is a reflective simple. Thus, in Locke’s discussions of the various “operations of the mind on its ideas,” the terms ‘perceiving,’ ‘remembering,’ ‘comparing,’ ‘abstracting,’ ‘compounding,’ etc. stand for ideas. They are not merely names for how ideas occur. This point is another of the lessons from the annexation account of reflection: Locke’s claims about the distinction between sensation and memory offer a model
to be extended generally to all modes of thinking. A sensation and a remembrance are not the same thing occurring in two different ways. Instead, the sensation occurs how it does, as simple ideas, as ideas not annexed to any other ideas. A remembrance of that sensation is that very sensitive simple with another perception annexed to it. That perception that marks the remembrance as such is none other than the operation of the mind named “memory” insofar as that operation is perceived by the mind. Perceiving something by memory is nothing but a reflective simple remembering annexed to another idea.

Whatever there is to an operation of the mind that remains unperceived is of no account at all in a remembrance. Only what is perceived can be part of the remembrance. An operation of the mind can only be perceived as an idea occurring in the mind. Memory, when it operates on an idea, is another idea in experience that annexes to the idea subject to the faculty of memory. In its occurrence in experience, remembering is thus a reflective simple idea. So, insofar as the perception of how ideas occur is itself an operation of the mind, there is nothing more to that operation that has any bearing at all on our ideas other than a reflective simple occurring along with other ideas that have occurred in experience. Such is the way that complex ideas are “produced by the mind operating on its ideas”: a reflective simple occurs along with other simples. A complex idea consists of a nameable, unique reflective
simple along with other ideas. The structure of a complex idea indicates the reflective simple implicated in the construction of the complex idea. That is, the structure of a remembrance indicates that it is a product of memory. But, that structure does not define the reflective simple remembering. Each reflective simple is as indefinable, but also as readily distinguishable, as sensitive and experiential simples. Reflective simples can only be indicated, experienced, known, and their resultant complex ideas analyzed. But, as simple ideas, reflective simples cannot be analyzed. Instead analyses terminate with indications of reflective simples (and other simple ideas).

This thesis states in general terms Locke’s use of reflection and operations of the mind throughout the applications of his theory of ideas. And so, within the scope of Locke’s theory of ideas and its uses, there is no distinction between an “operation of the mind” and an "idea of an operation of the mind:” they are one and the same.\textsuperscript{22} In the case of

\textsuperscript{22} Thus the Strict Interpretation rejects the attempts of Mark Kulstad (1984) to find a tendency in Locke to distinguish between operations of the mind, the consciousness of operations of the mind, and contemplation of the operations of the mind. Kulstad identifies the latter two as broader and narrower conceptions of reflection, identifies tension between the two, prefers the narrower conception, yet notes textual support for both. Kulstad lands in this quandary by trying to find Locke to explain what is properly simple in Locke’s theory of ideas. The Strict interpretation rigorously holds only the complex to be explainable, and only to be explained entirely in terms of unexplained simples. Kulstad’s Locke thus falls afool of the distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflection that I develop in Chapter 4.
reflection, perception is of other ideas, but that perception is itself an additional idea beyond the ideas perceived. Or put more generally, “idea of X” and “X taken within the scope of Locke’s theory of ideas” are equivalent. Thus an account of X fully within the scope of the theory of ideas is nothing but the claim that X is simple, or an account of X in terms of other ideas that are simple. Even the case of “something about which I have no idea” is to be analyzed entirely in terms of ideas. Such an idea is complex, and thus includes as constituents, amongst other ideas, reflective simples.

Those inclined to think that the position just now formulated sounds similar to common interpretations of George Berkeley should take note of Berkeley’s resistance to holding that there are any simple ideas of reflection of the sort Locke names and employs under the Strict Interpretation, such as *contemplating, remembering, compounding, enlarging, comparing* and *abstracting*. Since Berkeley holds operations of the mind to be active and all ideas to be passive, such operations are not experienced as being simple ideas themselves. Berkeley thus sharply distinguishes operations of the mind from ideas that result from the activity of such operations.23 The Strict Interpretation takes ideas of reflection to be reflective simple ideas, and these reflective

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simples are operations of the mind. Furthermore, the differences with Berkeley extend beyond the terms of thesis 6 of the Strict Interpretation. Berkeley denies that power, existence, and unity are simple ideas. The Strict Interpretation holds these ideas to be experiential simples, i.e. “simple ideas of both sensation and reflection.” And still further, Berkeley refuses to acknowledge sensitive simples common to multiple sense modalities (e.g. space). As far as the Strict Interpretation is concerned, these differences are sufficient to distinguish Berkeley from the Strict Interpretation of Locke’s theory of ideas.

7. **Knowledge is nothing but the perception of agreement or disagreement among our ideas, and only our ideas.**

Locke defines knowledge as the perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas with other ideas. I hold this definition of

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24 Berkeley considers power and unity to be relations. On power as a relation, see *Philosophical Commentaries* A 461 (p. 358), 493 (p. 363). On unity as a relation, see 545 (p. 371) on all numbers as relations, see *Principles* section 12. Berkeley also indicts existence and unity as abstract ideas. See *Principles* section 13 (p. 93–4), *Philosophical Commentaries* A 552 (p. 372), 671 (p. 376).

25 A fuller outline of the ideas that fit in the Strict Interpretation’s account of simple ideas follows in Chapter 4.

26 Whether spatial qualities can be apprehended both by vision and by touch is a dominant concern throughout Berkeley’s *New Theory of Vision*. Berkeley arguments explicitly target Locke in sections 126–7, 130 (1993, p. 53–5).

27 The Strict Interpretation’s focus on knowledge as being a relation entirely between ideas and only ideas is broadly in agreement with A. D. Woozley (1972) and Lex Newman (2004). A brief discussion of this point follows in Chapter 7.
knowledge to be fully consistent with and reliant upon the above theses about simple and complex ideas. A given instance of knowledge thus consists entirely of some complex idea in the mind. This is the plain and non-controversial sense of Locke’s major theses about the kinds and limits of knowledge. The kinds of knowledge are kinds of perceptions of agreement or disagreement, and thus are to be understood in terms of the reflective simples that distinguish them. That is, knowledge as perception of agreements or disagreements concerning identity, relation, co-existence or necessary connection, or of real existence each require an analysis in terms of the reflective simples involved in making such comparisons. And, the distinctions between intuitive, demonstrative and sensitive perceiving of such agreements and disagreements likewise need an analysis in terms of the reflective simples involved in such perceiving of agreements and disagreements. The limits of knowledge are what one can or has actually perceived in those ways, and thus demands a similarly structured analysis. Judgment by opinion or faith is a presumed but unperceived agreement or disagreement, and such presumptions are

28 The four sorts of agreements or disagreements that set out the kinds of knowledge (IV.i.3).
29 The three different ways of perception of such agreements and disagreements that set apart the degrees of knowledge (IV.ii.1–2, 14).
30 The main limit of which is that our knowledge cannot extend farther than we can perceive agreements or disagreements (IV.iii.2).
31 In this sense stated at IV.xvii.17, the presumption of agreement or disagreement is an act of the mind, and thus would be cashed out in terms
also complex ideas to be explained in terms of their constituent reflective simples. And so, Locke’s epistemological project is here understood as a straightforward extension of his theory of ideas. This is what Locke meant when he identified reason, judging, and knowledge as operations of the mind and modes of thinking upon making his general claims about modes of thinking. This seventh thesis comes to bear on the unification of Locke’s theory of ideas with his theory of knowledge in Chapter 7.

8. **The employment of these theses comprises Locke’s historical plain method.**

The Strict Interpretation holds the central focus of Locke’s project in the Essay to be the offering of a framework for addressing questions of knowledge and judgment by means of and in accordance with explanations in terms of the theory of ideas. Thus Locke’s defensible commitments are held within a program defined by a method of explanation in terms established within his theory of ideas. By interpreting Locke according to the above theses I take very seriously Locke’s claim to account for all knowledge through the “historical plain method” of explanation. Such an explanation would be ‘historical’ since it

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of reflective simples different from those involved in the three degrees of knowledge. Contrary to Gibson (1917 p. 121), I hold this sense of judgment to be in effect throughout the Essay.

32 Recall from the passage quoted above in the discussion of memory and sensation that “I shall have occasion hereafter to treat more at large of reasoning, judging, volition, and knowledge, which are some of the most considerable operations of the mind, and modes of thinking” (II.xix.2).
offers a systematic, theoretical account of the origin of an idea in a mind that has that idea.\textsuperscript{33} The method is ‘plain’ because the history of ideas traces them back to origins common and obvious to all who have similar experiences. Locke’s project is a method insofar as it is incomplete, but includes the principles necessary for it to be completed. Locke takes a small set of rigidly held claims to facilitate the expansion of his project to areas outside the domain of the \textit{Essay}. We saw Locke’s methodological aims in the case of the distinction between sensation and memory. Unless others draw the general principles from the cases Locke provided, Locke’s claims about the modes of thinking would be useless. Locke clearly envisions his points as alleviating him of the burden of filling a volume with material others could formulate at their leisure from his directions. So I maintain that Locke’s commitment to offering a method should incline commentators to try to understand his system as being as broadly applicable as possible with as few basic principles as are necessary to expand the project in the directions Locke indicates. In other words, Locke’s project is systematic.\textsuperscript{34}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{33} In the late seventeenth century, “history” had both a temporal and an atemporal sense in science (see OED entry for “history n.” sense 5). Either sense of “historical” suits the Strict Interpretation.
\textsuperscript{34} O’Connor refuses to see Locke’s project as systematic since he denies that the theory of knowledge fits with the theory of ideas and account of language (1985 p. 217). Gibson and Aaron also deny that Locke’s project is consistent, as has already been noted above.

As I discuss what falls within Locke’s systematic employment of his theory of ideas, and identify other points as falling outside the scope of the Theory of Ideas, I shall refer to Locke’s Historical Plain Method as “HPM.” Here we have a basis for distinguishing between the Strict Interpretation of Locke’s theory of ideas from idealism as an ontological thesis. Within the scope of the HPM, Locke cannot deny the existence of anything of which we lack an idea. To do so Locke would have to violate thesis 7 of the Strict Interpretation in order to formulate knowledge concerning non-ideas. This limitation of the HPM affords us an opportunity to note that the Strict Interpretation’s account of Locke’s theory of ideas does not commit Locke to an ontological thesis of idealism. The HPM subordinates ontology to the theory of knowledge, and the theory of knowledge to the theory of ideas. Thus the theory of knowledge must not accommodate principles whose formulations exceed the bounds of the theory of ideas. The HPM constitutes Locke’s method in the *Essay*: to subject philosophical problems to the limitations of the theory of ideas. The ontological status of what is not an idea cannot be accommodated to the theory of ideas on pains of allowing perception of non-ideas. And so, there can be no answer to such inquiries. This is the promise of the HPM. The role of the Strict Interpretation is to account for Locke’s best shot at fulfilling this promise.
CHAPTER 4:
Reflection and Modes of Reflection

The Strict Interpretation commences with the classification of simple ideas into sensitive, reflective and experiential simples, and posits several controversial theses about complex ideas that rest on further controversial claims about reflection. The first order of business for the Strict Interpretation is to make some sense of the nature and role of reflection in Locke’s theory of ideas. This account of reflection serves as a basis for the account of relations that follows in Chapter 6. First I shall show how the Strict Interpretation distinguishes between reflective simple ideas and modes of reflection as complex ideas, Then, I shall explain further the basic classifications of simple ideas to show how the distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflections sits with some relevant texts.

Ubiquitous Reflective Simples

The theses of the Strict Interpretation imply that reflective simples occur (at least) quite often in experience. On this view, whenever there is any thinking occurring besides sensation, the mind is operating on its ideas. This operation of the mind amounts to reflective simples annexed to other ideas. This is the structure of reflective thought according to Locke’s theory of ideas. Furthermore, these ideas annexed together are distinct
from each other, and together are distinct from all other ideas. But, what if someone complains that experience just doesn’t seem to be like that? When faced with the stark claims about the constituents of experience, a natural reaction of Locke’s readers is to try to find those elements. Since he passes them off as simple, and thus as basic constituents of experience, one might expect that Locke’s positing of these elements should pass a sort of taste-test in the form of a rudimentary introspective inventory of one’s current state of mind. But virtually no one would readily claim that in the current understanding of the words on this page, readily discernible memory elements, for instance, are plainly annexed to the ideas these words excite in the grasp of this sentence. As we have seen in the discussion of memory in Chapter 2, Locke holds that ideas in the mind cannot be there unperceived. So what of those who claim to be unaware of so many reflective simples occurring in their experience?

Locke has considered such matters in the set up and payoff of his consideration of the famous Molyneux problem—that one born blind then made to see could not by sight alone distinguish a cube from a sphere. Many acts of the mind occur without our notice in what we are apt to consider sensation:

[…] the ideas we receive by sensation, are often in grown people alter’d by the judgment, without our taking notice of it. When we set before our eyes a round globe, of any uniform colour, v.g. gold, alabaster, or jet; ’tis certain, that the idea thereby imprinted in our mind, is of a flat circle variously
shadow’d, with several degrees of light and brightness coming to our eyes. But we having by use been accustomed to perceive, what kind of appearance convex bodies are wont to make in us; what alterations are made in the reflections of light, by the difference of the sensible figures of bodies, the judgment presently, by an habitual custom, alters the appearances into their causes: So that from that which is truly variety of shadow or colour, collecting the figure, it makes it pass for a mark of figure, and frames to it self the perception of a convex figure, and an uniform colour; when the idea we receive from thence, is only a plain variously colour’d, as is evident in painting. (II.ix.8)

Locke’s terms “judgment,” “collecting,” “makes it pass,” “frames” all stand for various operations of the mind. However one is to understand the role of these operations in Locke’s theory of ideas, the alteration of “the appearances into their causes” occurs in some way “without our taking notice of it.” So much is by habit. Locke has a straightforward account of how such a view is not in conflict with holding that ideas do not exist unperceived in the mind: habit leaves us with the result while not retaining the process (analogous with the second sense of habitual knowledge, IV.i.9). “Taking notice” involves some sort of retention rather than immediate, continuous perception. The reason why these judgments escape our notice is because the various operations of the mind involved in the judgment “is performed so constantly and so quick” that we scarcely notice after the fact that they have just then occurred (II.ix.9). The quickness of the mind stands in contrast with the operations of the body
in virtue of a great difference in the minimal rates of frequency of occurrence for each kind of idea:

Nor need we wonder, that this is done with so little notice, if we consider, how very quick the actions of the mind are performed: For as itself is thought to take up no space, to have no extension; so its actions seem to require no time, but many of them seem to be crouded into an instant. I speak this in comparison to the actions of the body. Any one may easily observe this in his own thoughts, who will take the pains to reflect on them. (II.ix.10)

The many actions of the mind “seem [...] crouded into an instant” and so are hard to pick out, yet Locke has no scruple against asserting the occurrence of such operations to explain why those who fail to notice the occurrence of such actions from their products are simply mistaken.\footnote{Locke here follows Descartes in explaining sensation in terms of unnoticed habits of judgment. See the Sixth Replies AT 437–8, (1984 p. 295).} Locke’s theory mandates such an assertion.

Locke also notes that what he describes is in some way observable to those “who will take the pains to reflect on” their own thoughts. We should be careful not to take such reflection on our thoughts as constituting the only occurrences of reflective simples in experience. Instead, reflecting on our own thoughts will amount to reflecting on complex ideas that include their own reflective simples. The result Locke hopes for is what he also notes elsewhere that so few of us end up having: clear and distinct ideas of reflection. In making this point Locke again
distinguishes between what we retain of reflection and the constant occurrence of reflective simples in experience:

And hence we see the reason, why ’tis pretty late, before most children get ideas of the operations of their own minds; and some have not any very clear, or perfect ideas of the greatest part of them all their lives: Because, though they pass there continually; yet like floating visions, they make not deep impressions enough, to leave in the mind clear distinct lasting ideas, till the understanding turns inward upon itself, reflects on its own operations, and makes them the objects of its own contemplation. (II.i.8)

Something passes in our minds continuously. For some, what passes leaves deep impressions. In others, sadly, the visions just float through. But for those who have the lasting impressions, those impressions are clear and distinct ideas of operations of the mind. Locke clearly wished to distinguish continually passing traces of operations of the mind from deep lasting impressions of those passing traces.

**Scarce Modes of Reflection**

Those who lack clear, distinct ideas of those operations are not utterly devoid of any idea at all about them, but instead, they merely have obscure notions of the operations of the mind:

[...] the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least some obscure notions of them. No man, can be wholly ignorant of what he does, when he thinks. (II.i.25)

These operations intrude on experience just as bodies do in the production of sensations. But, Locke’s HPM prevents him from offering any
programmatic claims about the nature of the mind and how its ideas are produced. Instead, we have classifications of ideas and explanations in terms of those classifications. Here Locke is noting that reflective simples, as with all simples, occur in experience, but may or may not be retained and discerned in clear and distinct ideas of those operations. The Strict Interpretation cuts through the imagery in these passages and states the distinction rather starkly as between

- reflective simples as they occur in unretained complex ideas,

and

- retained complex ideas that include reflective simples.

The first of these options considers reflective simples as constituents of complex ideas. The role of these reflective simples in their complex ideas is to form the complex by means of annexation. But when formed, these complex ideas may then disappear. The second option concerns complex ideas that are themselves retained. Those complex ideas include their own reflective simples. As with any idea, these complex ideas may occur by means of a farther act of retention. The resultant idea is another complex idea now including as a constituent a reflective simple such as remembering or contemplating. That reflective simple is an idea annexed to the other complex idea, which in turn included its own annexing reflective simple.
As we’ve seen in the discussion of memory and retention in Chapter 2, selecting something out of experience, even for bare contemplation, involves reflective simples, and so the result of such selection is a complex idea. Any additional thinking about that selected idea involves more annexed perceptions, and so the complexity increases. Now, how many operations of the mind are involved in picking something out? Even in a fairly innocuous case of seeing my shoe across the room, there are too many operations of the mind involved to comprehensively enumerate them. But, the operations involved can be named by kind, and these named kinds form the elements of a theoretical model posited to explain what enters into mentally selecting something. In seeing my shoe, I recognize it that it is a shoe, and is mine, as that it is not some other of my shoes. Each of these aspects of the thought involve different comparisons with other things. I remember the shoe and the other things to which I compare it. In addition to these recollections and comparisons, I combine what I see of the leather, laces, and soles together as distinct from what I see of the floor and wall. My thought also involves words. Each of these aspects of the thought involves various operations of the mind. The complexity of the case is mounting, and as of yet we haven’t attempted to parse out simple sensory elements or to consider in fuller detail what details of thought I gloss over by my use of words. Nevertheless, the case admits of some measure of analysis wherein
operations can begin to stand out as elements of a theoretical model of the experience. 36

When Locke points out the parts of complex ideas, he is offering just such a theoretical model. The retained complex ideas that include reflective simples are, properly speaking by means of the terminological classifications within Locke’s theory of ideas, modes of reflection and not reflective simples. Such modes are abstract, general ideas derived from experience through much discerning of the various ideas in experience. Thus these modes of reflection amount to layers of annexed perceptions. 37 Locke is distinguishing two sorts of ideas. First are the reflective simples that occur continually, and thus are had by all who think. These simple ideas, when discerned and retained are elements of complex ideas. These complex ideas are modes of reflection that comprise a class of general ideas. All thinkers have reflective simples as the elements of their thinking. Clear and distinct modes of reflection, on the other hand, are had by very few.

36 These points will be picked up again in Chapter 7 in an account of the thinking involved in “finding” the ideas we have.
37 See Locke’s discussion of the definition of murder for such an instance of complexity layered on complexity in the case of a mixed mode (II.xxviii.14-15). A mixed mode heaps the layers of annexed perceptions onto multiple ideas. A simple mode heaps layers of annexed perceptions onto one simple idea.
Clear and Distinct Ideas

To bring into higher relief the distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflection, consider Locke’s discussion of clear, obscure, distinct and confused ideas. Locke did not consider simple ideas themselves, as such, to be clear or distinct. Instead, ideas are clear or distinct according to how the mind is able to perceive, retain and discern the things of which it has ideas. Any idea, whether simple or complex, may be clear or obscure as it occurs in experience or is, for instance, recalled by memory. Locke’s initial discussion of obscurity is in terms of the causes of obscurity in simple ideas: “either dull organs; or very slight and transient impressions made by the objects; or else a weakness in the memory, not able to retain them as received” (II.xxix.3). In each case, the cause of the obscurity of idea A is not A, but whatever else is responsible for A occurring in experience. If A is a sensitive simple, then the obscurity of A is due to problems concerning its annexation either to the sense organs of the body or to some reflective simple such as remembering. A similar account would hold if A were an experiential simple such as pain, pleasure, power, duration, succession, etc. How the body produces such ideas as impressions on the senses is not at issue, since for any simple idea, providing an account of that process is beyond the scope of the HPM. Locke on occasion freely speculates about what such a process might be. But, such speculations are not grounded fully in the theory of
ideas. They are offered as analogies that relate what can be explained within the HPM to that which cannot.

Consider as an example of this Locke's discussion of impressions in wax from a seal:

If the organs, or faculties of perception, like wax over-hardened with cold, will not receive the impression of the seal, from the usual impulse wont to imprint it; or, like wax of a temper too soft, will not hold it well, when well imprinted; or else supposing the wax of a temper fit, but the seal not applied with a sufficient force, to make a clear impression: In any of these cases the print left by the seal, will be obscure. This, I suppose, needs no application to make it plainer. (II.xxix.3)

This analogy applies both to organs of the body and to faculties of perception, which, since just prior to these lines Locke had mentioned memory, I take to include any of the operations of the mind. Memory and the organs of the body each produce ideas. But, however we conceive of a faculty of memory or of an organ of the body as powers to produce ideas, their effects are perceived only as simple ideas occurring in experience. And, the point about clarity or obscurity of ideas does not require any closure on the status of such powers within the theory of ideas. Clarity and obscurity pertain to the ideas produced no matter what produced them, or how it did so. This analogy of the wax and seal assumes a perceivable contrast between the effects of properly and improperly functioning powers to produce ideas. Dull senses and weak memories are explained by contrast with sharp senses and strong memories through
comparisons of their effects, viz. simple and complex ideas. But, on both sides of these contrasts what are compared are ideas produced from the senses or the memory with other ideas from the senses or memory.

Those objects of comparison, regardless of the nature of their causes, are perceived such as they are, whether clearly or obscurely. The analogy of the wax and seal offers a common account of the causes which holds whether the cause is sensory or reflective. The difference between sensory and reflective causes of the idea is entirely structural: ideas that occur by reflection include structural elements not present in sensitive ideas. Ideas that occur by reflection always include other annexing ideas. Ideas that occur by sensation do not. An idea that occurs by reflection includes reflective simples annexed to it. Being annexed to reflective simples is constitutive of “occurring by reflection.” Lacking such annexing ideas is all there is to being an idea “occurring by sensation.” A consequence of this distinction is that a complex idea occurring by reflection allows other ideas to be implicated in its occurrence, viz. reflective simples. Thus there is something farther to be explained about ideas occurring by reflection. The explanation here amounts to analysis into parts. The elements of that farther explanation, the reflective simples, cannot in turn be themselves explained. They, as simple ideas, just occurred. Reflective simples can be employed to explain other things, but cannot explain themselves.
So, if A is itself a reflective simple, the same considerations hold as for any simples. The cause of the obscurity of A would lie in whatever it is that causes the reflective simple A to occur when it annexes to other ideas. That cause is something apart from the mind, and about which we have no idea, or else the cause is in whatever retentive or discerning faculties are operating on the reflective simple A when we think about A. The former case about causes of initial occurrence in experience relies entirely on speculations about that which produces ideas in us. Such speculations about the origins of reflective simples, just as in the case of sensitive and experiential simples, are beyond the scope of the HPM. Such obscurity, though manifested in experience as an obscure idea in perception, nonetheless has causes that are inexplicable in terms of the theory of ideas. We can employ analogies, but ultimately no truth of the causes of experience can be uncovered within the scope of the materials of that experience. Since this limit is merely a consequence of the theory of ideas and the HPM, the Strict Interpretation understands Locke to acknowledge the ultimate inexplicability concerning the causes of obscurity. The fundamental point is that HPM explanations terminate in simple ideas. Locke holds that explaining the production of simples is for this reason the topic of a different kind of inquiry, and one beyond the scope of the Essay. But the HPM does allow for the theory of ideas to explain obscurity due to failures of discerning or retention. Failures of
discerning or reflection at least allow what is going wrong with A to be explained in terms of whatever reflective simples normally would annex to A, but in this case have not. What can be retained is in this case not retained. What could be discerned is in this case not discerned. The limit of this explanation is the nature and origin of retention beyond the ideas involved in retention, and thus is unknown. But, a failure of retention can be known as such merely by comparing it to successful instances of retention.

The clarity or obscurity of an idea is thus an extrinsic denomination according to how the idea occurs in experience, and not an intrinsic feature of the clear or obscure idea. It is literally the environment of the idea in experience—the other ideas with which it occurs—that is crucial. Intrinsically, the idea just is the sum of its component ideas. Yet, the extrinsic determination of clarity or obscurity is also explained entirely in terms of the theory of ideas through additional layers of complexity beyond the ideas whose clarity or obscurity is in question. Revisit the case of reflective simples that constantly occur in experience annexing to other ideas. These reflective simples fail to leave lasting impressions in some thinkers, while other thinkers have clear, lasting ideas of them. Their obscurity or clarity is due either to causes of the reflective simples that are inaccessible to the HPM, or to failures of retention or discerning of these reflective simples that can be explained within the HPM. But
regardless of the origins of the idea in powers whose nature is beyond the province of the HPM, thinking directly about an idea requires first that it to be set apart from other ideas. The environment of the idea sets the initial conditions for such separation.

This separation can be done distinctly or confusedly, again, regardless of whether the idea itself is simple or complex. The issue concerning distinctness and confusion is not in how it is perceived, but rather in how it is named:

[...] every idea a man has, being visibly what it is, and distinct from all other ideas but itself, that which makes it confused is, when it is such, that it may as well be called by another name, as that which it is expressed by, the difference which keeps the things (to be ranked under those two different names) distinct, and makes some of them belong rather to the one, and some of them to the other of those names, being left out; and so the distinction, which was intended to be kept up by those different names, is quite lost. (II.xxix.6)

This naming involves distinguishing the idea from all other ideas. And so, confusion “concerns always two ideas” (II.xxix.11). As such, what is confused or distinct is “the complex idea [one] annexes to that name” (II.xxix.10). So, whether the reflective simples annexing themselves to other ideas continually in experience are perceived clearly or obscurely, they are what they are. Being simples, they are intrinsically unalterable. This determination that an idea is “distinct from all other ideas but itself” amounts to the baseline according to which Locke explains the factors of
confusion. Being as they are, how ideas are compared with other ideas may involve any number of problems concerning how ideas are named. Those problems with their names involve abstract, general ideas formed out of thinking about particular ideas and putting them into sorts. Such problems involve comparing ideas, but so does the limiting case of perfect success: the distinctness of each idea from all others. Confusion and distinctness each pertain to how one puts a given idea into a sort. It is in this sense, which Locke develops at length shortly after chapter twenty-nine in his theory of language, that modes of reflection can be confused or distinct by criteria pertaining to the nature of complex ideas, and thus regardless of the clarity or obscurity of the reflective simples as they are perceived.

And so, even though reflective simples are ubiquitous in experience that involves thinking, we may nonetheless have obscure notions of them, and may, if at all, only confusedly rank them into sorts. The Strict Interpretation offers a way to see the distinction between reflective simple ideas and modes of reflection as fitting perfectly within a systematically compositionalist theory of ideas: Locke’s announced program of explaining the complex in terms of classes of simple ideas fully accommodates modes of reflection and reflective simples. Modes of reflection are explained in terms of how we think about thinking. Retention and discerning are classes of ideas. Within those classes are subclasses whose constituents
include **contemplating, remembering, comparing, compounding, enlarging** and **abstracting**. These constituents are, as they occur in experience as ways of thinking, each simple ideas. As reflective simples, they occur by annexing to other ideas. And so, each constitutes some way of thinking about another idea. When an idea annexes with an idea that annexes with other ideas, we are thinking about thinking. This is true even if the thinking about thinking is not noticed at the time (as in the case of rapid judgments accompanying sensations) or retained in the memory. Doing so is the entry-point to forming abstract ideas of the different ways in which we think.\(^{38}\)

**Naming the Modes of Reflection**

When we think about reflective simples as constitutive of various ways of thinking, we form complex ideas that constitute named types. The name itself, as a complex of sounds or shapes, is also a complex idea:

> For words being sounds, can produce in us no other simple ideas, than of those very sounds; nor excite any in us, but by that voluntary connexion which is known to be between them, and those simple ideas, which common use has made them signs of. (III.iv.11)

The voluntary connection of that name with the thing named occurs due to operations of the mind, and thus amounts to instances of annexing one idea to another:

\(^{38}\) Here it is not too difficult to see how the Strict Interpretation would hold all abstract ideas to be complex ideas.
The meaning of words, being only the ideas they are made to stand for by him that uses them; the meaning of any term is then shewed, or the word is defined when by other words, the idea it is made the sign of, and annexed to in the mind of the speaker, is as it were represented, or set before the view of another; and thus its signification ascertained [...] (III.iv.6, emphasis added.)

So, a mode of reflection is a complex idea including at least

- the name,
- the thing named, and
- a signification relation between the two.

The name is a complex idea consisting of sounds (or something otherwise sensed). The thing named in the case at hand is a reflective simple. The signification relation is a voluntary connection of that name to the reflective simple. In III.iv.6 Locke characterized that signification relation in terms of an annexation of the name to the thing named. This signification relation holding between ideas and involving “annexation,” thus seems a fitting candidate for analysis in terms of the theory of ideas.

The Strict Interpretation allows for just such a straightforward analysis of this signification relation in terms of Locke’s theory of ideas. Nevertheless, commentators have long resisted such straightforward accounts. And so, the nature of signification for Locke has been a matter of longstanding controversy with no one clearly prevailing account. Prominent contributions from Norman Kretzmann (1968) and E. J.

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39 The points that follow concerning signification are narrow in scope. A broader account of relations is the focus of Chapter 6.
Ashworth (1981, 1984) fail to reduce Locke’s linguistic theory to his theory of ideas, since neither has an account of Locke’s theory of ideas to offer. Recent work by Walter Ott (2004) sets out to rebut the work of Kretzmann and Ashworth, but also cannot accommodate signification within a coherent account of Locke’s theory of ideas that makes robust use of simple ideas of reflection. Ott argues that

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\text{Locke must modify his linguistic thesis [...] [that] ‘all words stand for ideas’ [...] to allow for categorematic words that attain their significance not by signifying a single mental object but rather a complex of ideas and mental acts. (p. 112, emphasis added)}
\]

Ott follows the prevailing opinion amongst Locke scholars by attributing to Locke the position that mental acts are something other than ideas. Thus Ott gives no reasons why he thinks mental acts are not ideas since he expects no challenge to his assumption. Ott then draws extensively on that assumption in critically revising Locke’s main linguistic theses. A comprehensive account of signification is beyond the scope of the present concerns about reflection. Nevertheless the very brief sketch offered here is sufficient to show that on the Strict Interpretation, the theory of ideas provides no immediate pressure for Locke to revise his stated claim that all words stand for ideas. But, we see this point now as arising from the most controversial thesis of the Strict Interpretation:
6. The perception of an operation of the mind on its ideas is nothing but a reflective simple idea, which is a component of the produced complex.

Insofar as mental acts are a class of ideas, the motivation for Ott’s criticism would be obviated.

The Strict Interpretation understands the annexation involved in signification wholly in terms of operations of the mind. As these operations occur, they are, within the scope of the theory of ideas, none other than reflective simples. So, the Strict Interpretation holds the mind operating on its ideas to be, again within the scope of the theory of ideas, nothing more than reflective simples annexing to other ideas. Thinking about thinking so as to form named types of thinking thus amounts to reflective simples annexing to other reflective simples. Naming involves, at the very least, some sort arrangement of abstracting, comparing, contemplating, and remembering, each one of which is an annexation to other ideas. And so, even leaving aside the complexity of the name as an idea employed by the mind in language use, the rest of the idea is complex in virtue of having at least these reflective elements as constituents. So, the naming relation (i.e. signification) is itself a complex of reflective simples. The thing named may be simple or complex, but clearly, a thing ranked into a sort and given a name is, toti, a complex idea. The distinctness or confusedness of an idea is a function of how that named idea compares to some other named idea. This is because
distinctness and clarity depend on how the idea in question is related to the portions of its experiential environment that the mind can also select and name. And so, the resultant complexity of either distinctness or confusion extends beyond the complexity already involved in the mere naming of one thing. This holds even when the distinctness or confusion goes unnoticed. The theoretical possibility of such a relation to experiential environment is the basis for the distinctness or confusion that one should notice, but fails to do so. One makes these determinations about how well others grasp their ideas, or about how one grasps one's own ideas on some other remembered or expected occasion. In either case, one presumes that the ideas at stake are relevantly similar. This presumption is endemic to the use of names. Careful attention to the theory of ideas allows for easy accounts of Locke’s discussions “[...] about the names, and not the ideas” (IV.i.4) to be properly seen as following an analysis of a complex idea into its parts. One part is the name, another is the idea signified by the name. The Strict Interpretation also takes care to analyze signification in terms of ideas.

By accounting for a distinction between reflective simple ideas and modes of reflection as complex ideas, the Strict Interpretation of Locke’s theory of ideas thus fully accommodates the claims about reflection that Locke makes at the outset of presenting his theory of ideas. As we saw in II.i.8, ideas of operations of the mind “pass there continually” in the mind.
The Strict Interpretation understands these ideas to be reflective simples whose occurrence is constitutive of thinking. The reflective simples common to all thinkers are annexed at least to sensitive simples, but are not at first, and may not ever be, annexed to other reflective simples. Loosed from this technical vocabulary of the Strict Interpretation, the point is that though such thinkers may variously think about what they sense, they may nonetheless lack lasting ideas of those ways of thinking. Some thinkers do turn their attention to their own thinking and form variously clear or obscure, distinct or confused ideas of these operations. This process amounts to reflective simples annexing to ideas containing other reflective simples. And so, the result of this thinking about thinking is the voluntary construction of complex ideas.

These complex ideas constitute the putting of given reflective simples into sortal categories by means of whatever operations of the mind are involved in naming something. The thing named is, in this case, a mode of reflection. Such complex ideas are not had until later in life, at least until the processes of naming have been sufficiently developed. Furthermore, depending on what one does recall or select in naming the ways one thinks, such modes of reflection may be variously clear or obscure. And depending on numerous contingencies concerning how such ideas are compared with other ideas, these modes of reflection may be variously distinct or confused. Furthermore, many never even bother to
form such ideas at all, though the materials to form them are constituents of their experience. In this fashion the Strict Interpretation distinguishes between modes of reflection as abstract classes of ideas, and reflective simple ideas as the basic elements of experience apart from the elements that can be sensed.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See the Conclusion of this dissertation for some suggestions of how the Strict Interpretation can employ the structure of this distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflection to shed some light on Locke’s seemingly inconsistent claims about the status of power as a simple idea.
CHAPTER 5: Reflective Simples

In this discussion of reflective simples and modes of reflection I have employed a number of terms for classes of ideas, as well as names of reflective simples. These classifications need some direct consideration. The initial basis for classifying simple ideas is found in the first thesis of the Strict Interpretation:

1. Simple ideas fall into three basic classifications according to their sources in experience. These basic classifications consist entirely and exclusively of simple ideas. The Strict Interpretation rigidly adheres to the distinction between simple and complex ideas;

2. All ideas are either simple or complex. One key interpretive goal of the Strict Interpretation is to preserve the most straightforward reading of Locke’s own explicit statements in the Essay. So, Locke’s claims about an idea being simple initiate the project of determining whether and how to classify that idea as simple. With these considerations in mind, the full outline of simple ideas on the Strict Interpretation is the following:
### TABLE 5.1: THE STRICT INTERPRETATION’S OUTLINE OF SIMPLE IDEAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENSITIVE SIMPLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• OF ONE SENSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>o EYES: DEGREES AND SHADES OF COLORS AND LIGHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o EARS: NOISES, SOUNDS, TONES</td>
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<tr>
<td>o PALATE: TASTES</td>
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<td>o NOSE: SMELLS</td>
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<tr>
<td>o TOUCH: HEAT, COLD, SOLIDITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>• OF MORE THAN ONE SENSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>o SPACE OR EXTENSION</td>
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<tr>
<td>o REST</td>
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<td>o MOTION</td>
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<tr>
<th>REFLECTIVE SIMPLES</th>
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<td>• OF RETENTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>o CONTEMPLATING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o REMEMBERING</td>
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<tr>
<td>• OF DISCERNING</td>
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<tr>
<td>o COMPARING</td>
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<td>o COMPOUNDING</td>
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<td>o ENLARGING</td>
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<td>o ABSTRACTING</td>
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<tr>
<th>EXPERIENTIAL SIMPLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o PLEASURE, OR DELIGHT</td>
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<td>o PAIN, OR UNEASINESS</td>
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<td>o POWER</td>
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<td>o EXISTENCE</td>
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<td>o UNITY</td>
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<td>o SUCCESSION</td>
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<td>o DURATION</td>
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Why these ideas fall into these classes and subclasses, and what it means for these ideas thus classified to be simple are difficult matters of interpretation. Furthermore, there are other ideas Locke calls simple that
are not on this list. So, some careful consideration of these classifications is in order. The aim of this chapter is to formulate the interpretive basis for holding the ideas listed in Table 5.1 as the core list of simple ideas for the Strict Interpretation.

**Sensitive Simples**

The Strict Interpretation commits to the following outline of sensitive simple ideas:

**TABLE 5.2: OUTLINE OF SENSITIVE SIMPLES**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>SENSITIVE SIMPLES</th>
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<td>• OF ONE SENSE</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>• OF MORE THAN ONE SENSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>o SPACE OR EXTENSION</td>
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<td>o REST</td>
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<td>o MOTION</td>
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The list in Table 5.2 is culled mainly from some of the enumerations of simple ideas in II.iii–vi. The sensitive simples divide into two subordinate classes according to their sensitive sources. It is not exhaustive of all possible subordinate classifications or of specific instances of simple ideas. Locke never offers exhaustive lists of instances for his classifications, and
readily allows for alternate classifications. The division between sensitive simples of one sense and those of more than one sense is of great importance to Locke and deserves full treatment by the Strict Interpretation. However, such an account is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Space is a sensitive simple of more than one sense that features prominently in Locke’s account of simple modes. There Locke offers the term extension for any way of considering space. Locke further suggests that figure is a mode of extension. If so, then figure would not itself be simple. But, when listing the sensitive simples of more than one sense in II.v Locke included figure under a heading “of simple ideas of divers senses. Since Locke makes nothing of figure being simple, and instead accounts for figure as a mode of extension, the Strict Interpretation treats figure as a simple mode of space, and therefore not properly as a simple idea. The Strict Interpretation also treats extension as synonymous with space.

Experiential Simples

Locke comes closest to giving an exhaustive list when he considers experiential simples, the simple ideas of both sensation and reflection:

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41 Locke’s lists of the primary qualities of body never find a comprehensive statement, for instance.
TABLE 5.3: OUTLINE OF EXPERIENTIAL SIMPLES

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<tr>
<th>EXPERIENTIAL SIMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td>o PLEASURE, OR DELIGHT</td>
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<td>o PAIN, OR UNEASINESS</td>
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<td>o POWER</td>
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<tr>
<td>o EXISTENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>o UNITY</td>
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<td>o SUCCESSION</td>
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<td>o DURATION</td>
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</table>

All but duration are explicitly named in II.vii. The Strict Interpretation adds **duration** to the list of experiential simples since II.xiv.3–4 identifies **duration** as sharing with **succession** its origin in both sensation and reflection. Except for **existence**, each of these experiential simples receives some degree of focused treatment in Locke’s accounts of simple modes. As we shall see in the next chapter, the status of **power**, **existence**, **unity**, **succession** and **duration** as simple ideas places significant pressure on Locke’s account of relations.

**Reflective Simples**

In compiling lists of simples, the most prominent interpretive work for the Strict Interpretation concerns the identification of the reflective simples. Here the Strict Interpretation follows the naming of operations of the mind in II.x-xi:
TABLE 5.4: OUTLINE OF REFLECTIVE SIMPLES

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<th>REFLECTIVE SIMPLES</th>
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<td>• OF RETENTION</td>
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<td>o CONTEMPLATING</td>
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<td>o REMEMBERING</td>
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<td>• OF DISCERNING</td>
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<td>o ABSTRACTING</td>
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</table>

This outline of reflective simples follows thesis 6 of the Strict Interpretation:

6. The perception of an operation of the mind on its ideas is nothing but a reflective simple idea, which is a component of the produced complex.

By following Locke’s identification of operations of the mind with reflective simples in the chapters on Retention and Discerning, we get the outline in Table 5.4. These operations of the mind figure prominently in Locke’s subsequent discussions of modes, substances and relations. Also, Locke employs them when defining modes of thinking, as we saw in our discussion of memory in Chapter 2 (e.g. recollection is remembering with pain and endeavor). Locke also employs them in his account of the various kinds of knowledge.
**Perception and Volition**

Notable omissions from this list include “perception” and “volition.” Some remarks are in order to account for those omissions, and for the naming of modes of retention and discerning as reflective simples. Locke says precious little about reflective simples. The chapter where one might expect the most direct remarks about reflection is the very brief “Of Simple Ideas of Reflection.” Both sections 1 and 2 are offered here in their entirety (with the section summaries in italics):

1. [Simple ideas of reflection] *Are the operations of the mind about its other ideas.* The mind receiving the ideas, mentioned in the foregoing chapters, from without, when it turns its view inward upon itself, and observes its own actions about those ideas it has, takes from thence other ideas, which are as capable to be the objects of its contemplation, as any of those it received from foreign things.

2. *The idea of perception, and the idea of willing, we have from reflection.* The two great and principal actions of the mind, which are most frequently considered, and which are so frequent, that every one that pleases, may take notice of ’em in himself, are these two:

   Perception, or Thinking, and
   Volition, or Willing.

The power of thinking is called the understanding, and the power of volition is called the will, and these two powers or abilities in the mind are denominated faculties. Of some of the modes of these simple ideas of reflection, such as are Remembrance, Discerning, Reasoning, Judging, Knowledge, Faith, etc. I shall have occasion to speak hereafter. (II.vi.1–2)

---

42 This sentence underwent revision in the second edition of the *Essay*, but the changes are unimportant here. The first edition runs as follows “The power in the mind of producing these actions we denominate faculties, and are called the understanding, and the will.”
Locke starts off well with a section heading that comes close to stating thesis 6 of the Strict Interpretation:

6. The perception of an operation of the mind on its ideas is nothing but a reflective simple idea, which is a component of the produced complex.

So far so good for section 1. Then in section 2 Locke names perception and volition as the “two great and principal actions of the mind,” some of whose modes he then proceeds to list. The list names “remembrance” along with “discerning” as “modes of these simple ideas of reflection.” Several other “modes” then follow: reasoning, judging, knowledge, faith, with “etc.” indicating that Locke clearly wishes for the list to be extended. (The passage from II.xix.2 examined in Chapter 2 above will help a committed reader to expand this list.) A straightforward reading of this passage might thus take perception and volition as the two reflective simples, and all other ideas of reflection listed elsewhere would then be modes of reflection.

Were this to be Locke’s settled position employed clearly at each relevant stage of the Essay, the Strict Interpretation would then feel the burden to accommodate this rather sparse dyad of reflective simples. But, the circumstances are not so straightforward. Locke does not account for modes of reflections in any way besides as named classifications with something simple annexed to a name by a reflective simple. That is, he presents modes of reflection, which amount to named thoughts about
thinking. His purpose for naming these reflective modes is to consider how the mind operates on ideas other than reflective simples, viz. sensitive simples and complex ideas:

[... ] Because observing the faculties of the mind, how they operate about simple ideas, which are usually, in most men's minds much more clear, precise, and distinct, than complex ones, we may the better examine and learn how the mind abstracts, denominates, compares, and exercises its other operations, about those which are complex, wherein we are much more liable to mistake. (II.xi.14)

Locke seeks to provide a clear account of the operations of the mind by examining minimally complex instances of their employment. He can then examine cases wherein the ideas they operate on are much more complex. Locke does not say whether these operations of the mind are properly simple, or whether the operations themselves are properly modes of perception and volition. He just describes the salient features of the circumstances in which they operate without reference to perception or volition. The important point here is that Locke does not employ perception or volition as simple ideas so as to explain other operations of the mind as modes of perception, modes of volition, or modes of both.

Another place where Locke offers what appears to be a scheme that identifies some of the simple ideas named above is at the end of the chapter on Power:

And thus I have, in a short draught, given a view of our original ideas, from whence all the rest are derived, and of which they are made up; which if I would consider, as a
philosopher, and examine on what causes they depend, and of what they are made, I believe they all might be reduced to these very few primary, and original ones, viz.

- Extension,
- Solidity,
- Mobility, or the power of being moved;

which by our senses we receive from body:

- Perceptivity, or the power of perception, or thinking;
- Motivity, or the power of moving;

Which by reflection we receive from our minds. I crave leave to make use of these two new words, to avoid the danger of being mistaken in the use of those which are æquivocal. To which if we add

- Existence,
- Duration,
- Number;

which belong both to the one and the other, we have, perhaps, all the original ideas, on which the rest depend.

(II.xxi.73)

One might take this scheme to identify the barest scheme of simple ideas such that all other ideas are complex:

**TABLE 5.5: THE BAREST SCHEME OF SIMPLES**

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<thead>
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<th>SENSITIVE SIMPLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o EXTENSION</td>
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<tr>
<td>o SOLIDITY</td>
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<td>o MOBILITY</td>
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<tr>
<th>REFLECTIVE SIMPLES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o PERCEPTIVITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>o MOTIVITY (OR VOLITION)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPERIENTIAL SIMPLES</th>
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<td>o EXISTENCE</td>
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<td>o DURATION</td>
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<td>o NUMBER</td>
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If this barest scheme were to list all and only the simple ideas, then pains and pleasures, as well as all sensitive simples of one sense besides solidity (such as colors and sounds) would not be simple, but instead would have to be analyzed as modes. The status of the ideas listed here as simple would be no less controversial than most of the items included in the Strict Interpretation’s outline in Table 5.1. But, Locke does not here present his considerations “as a philosopher” to have set out the simple ideas such that the rest are not simple. Locke’s formulation of this barest scheme has another purpose altogether.

Locke is suggesting that some ideas may be “original” to the others. In the lines that follow the passage above states that the others might be explained by those in the barest scheme of simples:

For by these, I imagine, might be explained the nature of colours, sounds, tastes, smells, and all other ideas we have, [...] (II.xxi.73)

But this suggestion meets some heavy qualifications. These ideas are offered by Locke “as a philosopher” who would enquire into the causes of ideas. Furthermore, such enquiries would be worthwhile if we perceive the causes of our ideas by perceiving the particular situations of the ideas laid out in the barest scheme. Well, we can’t, and so the scheme sits as a product of philosophical speculation. Furthermore, Locke never claims that the other ideas “explained” by those in the barest scheme cannot be
simple. Simplicity and complexity just are not relevant to Locke’s point here.

The issue at stake concerns the limits of the HPM. A few lines later, Locke states that positing the barest scheme of simples as explanatory of the others runs contrary to the design of the Essay:

But my present purpose being only to enquire into the knowledge the mind has of things, by those ideas and appearances, which God has fitted it to receive from them, and how the mind comes by that knowledge, rather than into their causes, or manner of production, I shall not, contrary to the design of this essay, set myself to enquire philosophically into the peculiar constitution of bodies, and the configuration of parts, whereby they have the power to produce in us the ideas of their sensible qualities [...] (II.xxi.73)

The HPM prevents speculation into to the nature of the causes of our ideas—and this is Locke’s point in this section—even when those causes are framed in terms that refer to clear and distinct ideas we have retained and discerned from sensation and reflection. And so, the barest scheme is a pretended metaphysics of ideas Locke offers just to show what he is not up to in his theory of ideas. He is not explaining the causes of the occurrence of our ideas in terms of some privileged set of ideas. He is instead explaining the origins of our knowledge as consisting entirely of ideas whose origins he leaves unexplained. The HPM sets this limit of explanation.

The Strict Interpretation regards perception and volition as abstractions that pertain to classes of ideas. *Perceiving* is not itself a
reflective simple idea that annexes to other ideas. **Perceiving** is instead the occurrence of an idea as determined entirely by its simple constituents. Any simple idea is thus a perception. Locke clearly refers to sensations as perceptions. Each one is itself a perception. A complex idea consists of ideas annexed to a reflective simple. The reflective simple is a perception. Perceiving that involves complex ideas is thus the having of reflective simples, which annex to other ideas. This means that memory is another way of perceiving. Since **remembering** annexes to an idea, perceiving by memory consists of the reflective simple **remembering** annexed to the idea remembered. There is nothing above and beyond the **remembering** and the idea annexed to it that need be posited to account for perceiving by memory.

This identification of perceiving with simple ideas gives some purchase to Locke’s puzzling statement concerning consciousness and personal identity:

> It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will any thing, we know that we do so. Thus it is always as to our present sensations and perceptions: (II.xxvii.9)

The occurrence of a simple idea is a perception. The object of perception is settled entirely by the classification of ideas. Perceiving the aroma of something is nothing more than the occurrence of a sensitive simple from the sense of smell. Consciousness, the topic of Locke’s concern in this
section, just is the having of these ideas. Being conscious of the aroma of something is nothing more than perceiving by smell, which just is the occurrence of a sensitive simple. Locke’s point is to collapse consciousness and perceiving into the occurrence of simple ideas.

The annexation account of reflection carries through to any mode of reflection. Since a reflective simple is implicated in any complex idea, that reflective simple would be the perceiving that is proper to the mind forming the complex idea. In the case of perceiving the smell of a cookie and recognizing that aroma as such, the perceiving is not merely a sensitive simple. In this case judgments accompany sensations. These judgments, as we noted earlier, occur quickly, and are not themselves retained. These judgments are complex ideas, but by the ease with which these judgments arise, we consider their results to be sensed. This mistake can easily be uncovered by the theory of ideas. Perceiving the smell of a cookie as the smell of that kind of thing involves at least memory and some sort of comparison. (In a comprehensive analysis, the perceiving would involve vastly more particular instances of mental operations.) Thus, the perceiving in this case is not strictly sensory, but instead involves the occurrence of a complex idea. That complex idea includes a reflective simple annexed to other ideas. The sensory simples are constituents of those other ideas. But, the perception in a complex idea cannot be prized from the reflective simple. The misappropriation of
the term “sensation” to this complex idea from judgments amounts to just another instance of obscure modes of reflection providing an insufficient basis for distinguishing sensation from the other reflective modes of thinking.

A Strict Interpretation account of volition would yield a similar result, that volition is a general category taking in various other ideas. The main difference for volition concerns the role of the experiential simple idea power. A thorough Strict Interpretation treatment of the role of power in Locke’s theory of ideas is a daunting project, and one well worth the effort, but far exceeds the scope of this dissertation. For now, consider volition to be a general category of complex ideas including the experiential simple power along with modes of reflection. The net effect of this preliminary characterization of volition is that it is not a reflective simple that annexes to other ideas, but is a general category that includes reflective simples and power.

The Strict Interpretation’s Reflective Simples

There is a primary consideration for not including perception and volition in the Strict Interpretation’s outline of reflective simples. Locke does not employ perception and volition as simple ideas in the explanations that make use of his compositionalist theory of ideas. He does make compositional use of the ideas he names as “operations of the
mind” in the chapters on Retention and Discerning. Locke discusses these operations of the mind after the chapters on sensitive simples and just prior to the chapter commencing the discussion of complex ideas. His reasons for doing so offer some strong consideration for holding these to be reflective simples:

[...] Because these very operations of the mind about ideas, receiv’d from sensation, are themselves, when reflected on, another set of ideas, derived from that other source of our knowledge, which I call reflection, and therefore fit to be considered in this place, after the simple ideas of sensation. Of compounding, comparing, abstracting, etc. I have but just spoken, having occasion to treat of them more at large in other places. (II.xi.14)

Here Locke describes the formation of named ideas of these operations by thinking about the operations of the mind. As we have seen above, this thinking about thinking amounts to the construction of a complex idea: a mode of reflection, which is an idea produced by reflection. Locke employs this point again in the passage quoted here. But “mode of X” does not of itself imply whether X is simple or complex. Settling that point requires alternate grounds. In short, whether the Strict Interpretation’s reflective simples, contemplating, remembering, comparing, combining, enlarging and abstracting, are simple or complex is underdetermined by the text. So, their status must be determined on interpretive grounds.

Some sources for such grounds follow in the analysis of relations as complex ideas, and in the account of knowledge of identity and diversity
as the first acts of the mind that render all other knowledge possible.

These analyses adopt the outline of simple ideas discussed above, and worthy of offering again here:

**TABLE 5.6: THE STRICT INTERPRETATION’S OUTLINE OF SIMPLE IDEAS**

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<thead>
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The Strict Interpretation’s grounds for addressing this matter are given in the priority of interpretive theses over the specific determinations of items on a list. Any list given by Locke needs interpretation. The Strict Interpretation provides a clear basis for interpreting such lists, and is flexible enough to adjust to alternate lists if faced with a solid interpretive basis for revising a given list. At present, there is little reason to include perception and volition alongside or in place of the operations of the mind on Table 5.6.

**Conclusions about Reflective Simples and Modes of Reflection**

A fruitful point has arisen from this examination of reflection by means of the Strict Interpretation. In Locke’s theory of ideas, there is a significant difference between

1. the elements of a complex idea historically prior to its complexity,

and

2. the elements of a complex idea analytically indentifiable as constituents of the complex idea.

What is absent from the first, but present in the second is the thinking productive of a complex idea. The Strict Interpretation holds the thinking that produces a complex idea to be a constituent of the resultant idea. That thinking is, on the Strict Interpretation, a reflective simple annexed to another idea. Explanations by means of the analysis of complex ideas
distinguish the elements of those complex ideas. The elements that occurred prior to the complexity can enter into a complex idea, but are not of themselves sufficient to be a complex idea. Other elements are responsible for the complexity of the idea that includes those prior elements. Those additional elements are reflective simples. They are constituents of a complex idea that do not occur prior to its complexity. Thus the complexity of an idea is explained through the identification of reflective simples that are constituents of the idea.

On the Strict Interpretation, relations serve as the main link between Locke’s theory of ideas and theory of knowledge. Showing that relations must be accommodated as complex ideas provides a strong basis for meeting one of Locke’s main goals for the Essay: to nullify the appeal to innate principles as a foundation for knowledge. To meet this goal, knowledge should be analyzed in terms of relations, and relations in terms of complex ideas. The remaining chapters of this dissertation take on this task by focusing on the sort of knowledge most prominently associated with innate knowledge, identity, and accounting for such knowledge within the constraints of the HPM.
CHAPTER 6: Relations as Complex Ideas

I have argued that the Strict Interpretation has the virtue of capturing the proper sense of Locke's own remarks about the status of reflective ideas: reflective simples are ubiquitous in experience, while settled clear and distinct notions of modes of reflection are rare. By the Strict Interpretation we now see more clearly what this position means and why Locke would hold it. Of course, much more needs to be done to complete a comprehensive account of Locke on reflection, and the Strict Interpretation will face additional challenges if it is to be accepted as a general account of Locke's theory of ideas. As another test case to see how well the Strict Interpretation functions, I shall now address some longstanding difficulties concerning Locke's account of relations, and in the process further develop the systematic account of reflection.

Before considering what others have thought of Locke's views on relations, I shall first set out how the Strict Interpretation understands relations. From there we'll have a basis for a critical examination of contrary positions. At key moments in the text, Locke explicitly includes relations in the class of complex ideas. One notable occasion is in the chapter that commences the study of complex ideas where “the last sort of complex ideas, is that we call relation” (II.xii.7). Another occurs upon the
conclusion of the chapters on complex ideas wherein Locke sums up what he has done as follows:

Having shewn the original of our ideas, and taken a view of their several sorts; considered the difference between the simple and the complex; and observed how the complex ones are divided into those of modes, substances, and relations [...] (II.xxix.1)

So we have Locke’s own explicit classification of relations amongst the complex ideas. Locke also repeatedly characterizes relations as founded entirely on our simple ideas. (e.g. II.xxv.8, 9, 11; II.xxvi.6, II.xxviii.1, 18, 19). He also identifies an operation of the mind, comparing, as productive of relations (e.g. II.xxv.1, 5, 7; II.xxvii.1; II.xxviii.1, 18). On the following counts, then, the Strict Interpretation requires relations to be complex ideas:

- Locke explicitly states that relations are founded on simple ideas.
- Locke claims that relations result from an operation of the mind: comparing.

The Strict Interpretation must take Locke’s explicit statements at face value, and then face the challenge of accounting for any apparent deviations from these explicit statements. On the first count, Locke also offers a fairly clear basis for classifying relations as complex ideas: they are founded entirely on our simple ideas. As such, relations are analyzable into those simples, and according to the Strict Interpretation
are thus complex ideas. Locke clearly analyzes relations in terms of their simple constituents in his summation of the chapter on relations:

Having laid down these premises concerning relation in general, I shall now proceed to shew, in some instances, how all the ideas we have of relation, are made up, as the others are, only of simple ideas; and that they all, how refined, or remote from sense soever they seem, terminate at last in simple ideas. (II.xxv.11)

Such “termination” I understand as a sort of analysis of a whole into its parts. This whole, being “made up” of those parts should, most straightforwardly, be complex. Ideas “of” relation are here stated to be analyzed in the same terms as other ideas examined in Book II: as composed of simple ideas.

On the second count, since relations are products of acts of comparing, an operation of the mind, we have farther grounds for the Strict Interpretation to hold relations to be complex:

The nature therefore of relation, consists in the referring, or comparing two things, one to another; from which comparison, one or both comes to be denominated. (II.xxv.5).

Comparing is one of the operations of the mind Locke classifies under the heading of “discerning,” and in doing so he explicitly implicates comparing in the forming of relations

The comparing them one with another, in respect of extent, degrees, time, place, or any other circumstances, is another operation of the mind about its ideas, and is that upon which depends all that large tribe of ideas, comprehended under relation; which of how vast an extent it is, I shall have occasion to consider hereafter. (II.xi.4)
So, on the Strict Interpretation relations are again complex ideas in virtue of being the products of operations of the mind. Thus on the second count as well, the Strict Interpretation holds relations to be complex ideas.

By accounting for relations entirely within the theory of ideas, the Strict Interpretation clearly understands relations and ideas of relations to be one and the same. Many commentators have lamented Locke’s treatment of relations as equivalent to ideas of relations. D. J. O’Connor (1967) openly states his difficulties with such a position: “[t]he implausibility of treating relations as complex ideas is only too patent” (p. 58)—too patent to merit refutation by argument, apparently, since he offers none. Neither does he offer any solutions for the difficulties he attributes to Locke. O’Connor’s views are not atypical. Aaron (1971) assumes that Locke’s account of relations ought to be assessed according to a distinction between relations themselves and ideas of relations. Upon drawing this distinction, Aaron notes “in the language of the Essay, we ought to be dealing with ideas of relations and never with relations themselves.” Yet, Aaron laments that Locke cannot maintain the representationalism he attributes to Locke’s theory of ideas “and continue to talk sensibly about relations.” Instead, Aaron finds that Locke does fail to talk sensibly about relations since they “themselves become ideas, rather than objects of which we have ideas” (p. 180). Upon noting this trouble with distinguishing relations as a class of ideas from ideas of
relations that take non-ideational relations as their objects, Aaron then moves very close to stating a key point of the Strict Interpretation: “[i]n II.xi.7, the idea is even said to be the comparing.” He then quickly backs off: “Locke’s language here is obviously very loose” (p. 180n).

On the Strict Interpretation, there is nothing to lament about Locke’s relations being ideas. Rather, the Strict Interpretation emphasizes Locke’s comprehensive treatment of metaphysical concepts entirely within the scope of his empiricist theory of ideas as distinctive of Locke’s philosophy. On this view, Locke’s language is not loose at all. He means that relations are complex ideas since they are made by the mind through comparing, an operation of the mind that produces complex ideas; and, relations are analyzable back into the simple ideas the mind compared.

As a result of taking Locke at his word on the nature of relations, the Strict Interpretation explains the complexity of relations entirely within the scope of the theory of ideas. A relation is a comparing of two ideas, but without joining the two into an idea of a single thing (e.g. a substance or mode).43 Since relations, substances and modes all are complex, something about them must distinguish each as they are. This distinguishing feature of relations would be some element in the complex idea that is distinctive of relations. Without comparing there is no

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43 II.xii.1, from the part added to the fourth edition of the Essay.
relation. And so, it is comparing that sets relations apart from other complex ideas. Fitting these points—familiar to readers of the Essay, no matter how troublesome to many commentators—to the Strict Interpretation requires there to be something that distinguishes relations from non-relations just as the simple idea remembrance annexed to an idea distinguishes a memory from any other perception. The element without which there is no relation is a reflective simple, viz. the operation of the mind called “comparing.” This reflective simple comparing is annexed to two other ideas, and as such distinguishes a relation from any other complex idea such as a remembrance. Though the ideational structure of a relation consists of the reflective simple idea comparing annexed to other ideas, the different sorts of relations need a similar account of what sets them apart from each other. Something else besides the reflective simple comparing must be included in the complex, relative idea that marks the kind of relation it is. O’Connor and Aaron acknowledge that comparing is, somehow, special to relations. Yet, each resists understanding the role of comparing in Locke’s own preferred terms: as an idea. As a result, their Locke can make little sense of relations, while the Strict Interpretation forestalls their troubles by its perspicuous account of the role of reflective simples in the construction of complex ideas.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} Lennon (2001) also avoids such trouble: “[i]deas of relation and of mode
The distinction between relations and other complex ideas relies on the reflective simple idea **comparing**. Distinctions between various relations need a similar account, but not in terms of reflective simples. Instead, experiential simple ideas⁴⁵ are crucial to distinguishing the various classes of relations. The relative ideas “cause” and “effect” include whatever ideas enter into “produces” and “produced,” which are the marks of cause or effect (II.xxvi.1). I would be inclined to analyze production in terms of **power** and **succession** (at least), both of which are experiential simple ideas. Identity and diversity are other comparisons that include **existence**⁴⁶ and simple modes of time and place (II.xxvii.1), which in turn are analyzable into **duration**, **succession**, and **space** (II.xiii.7, II.xiv.3-4). Moral relations involve the conformity of action to moral rules, and though they are thus extremely complex, the experiential simple ideas are not ideas of something, but *kinds* of ideas’ (p. 170, emphasis his).

Lennon is very sensitive to the need for complex ideas to be understood in terms of operations of the mind, and as in the case of relations, analyzes complex ideas as classes of ideas distinguished primarily by acts of mind. Lennon’s main departure from the Strict Interpretation is his reduction of the class of simple ideas entirely to solidity (1993, stated at p. 288, developed through Chapter 6, but especially section 19). Thus, contrary to the Strict Interpretation, the way acts of mind distinguish classes of complex ideas is not by being themselves absolutely simple constituents of complex ideas. Furthermore, contrary to the Strict Interpretation Lennon also holds that common sensibles, such as space, cannot be simple ideas (1993, p. 294).

⁴⁵ I.e. “simple ideas of both sensation and reflection, as noted above in the discussion of thesis 1 of the Strict Interpretation in Chapter 3: Simple ideas fall into three basic classifications according to their sources in experience.

⁴⁶ Locke equates the ideas of existence and unity (II.vii.7).
pain and pleasure are both essential to the categorization of such relations as moral (II.xxviii.5). Numbers are modes of unity, and employ operations of compounding and enlarging. But modes of number also involve names. Relative quantities include as parts these compounded and enlarged unities. In sum, no matter how hideously complex a relation is, some sort of analysis into simple ideas is theoretically available. Those simple ideas are ultimately the ideas upon which the relation is founded. The reflective simple idea comparing sets a relation apart from any other complex idea such as a remembrance. Other simple ideas within a complex relative idea distinguish various kinds of relations. Relations are thus nothing more than one class of complex ideas distinguished and explained entirely through simple ideas. The other classes of complex ideas, modes (simple and mixed) and substances, deserve a similar treatment. All classes of complex ideas involve some reflective simple annexed to some other ideas. Collapsing operations of the mind into reflective simples renders theoretically perspicuous the complexity of ideas produced by the “workmanship of the understanding.” Explaining a given complex idea in terms of reflective simples and the ideas to which they are annexed is nevertheless instructive. This I take to

47 A comprehensive treatment of substances and modes is beyond the scope of this dissertation, as it would require further development of the work in Chapter 7.
be Locke’s goal in treating the various cases of complex ideas that interest him.

**Locke’s Revisions to the Classification of Ideas**

Those inclined to reject the foundation of the Strict Interpretation might do so by following Gibson and Aaron in holding that relations fall outside of the classification of ideas into the simple and complex. Gibson and Aaron argue that revisions to the fourth edition of the *Essay* evince Locke’s inclination to abandon a compositionalist theory of ideas including a rigid classification of ideas into the simple and the complex. Where Locke had previously divided complex ideas into modes, substances and relations, revisionists argue that Locke added a new classification trumping the old. The new classification places complex ideas as a class alongside the classes of general ideas and of relations as three sorts of ideas that result from operations of the mind. Revisionists take the new classification as exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Thus proponents of the Gibson/Aaron revisionist view reject thesis 2 of the Strict Interpretation:

2. All ideas are either simple or complex.

Taking relations as the key instance of just such an exception to the division of ideas into exclusive and exhaustive classes of the simple and
the complex, those who reject thesis 2 claim that relations are or include ideas that are neither simple nor complex.

Revisionists thus hold that the operation of the mind responsible for relations, viz. comparing, yields something other than a complex idea. And so the denial of thesis 2 leads, in the case of relations, to a denial of thesis 5 of the Strict Interpretation:

5. An operation of the mind on its ideas is the production of a complex idea.

Revisionists consider compounding to be the only operation of the mind that yields a complex idea. Relations result from comparing, another operation of the mind, and so are some sort of idea. But, complexity is not due to any other operation besides compounding, according to revisionists. So, were a relation to be a complex idea, its complexity would be due to some sort of compounding independent of the comparing that made the idea be a relation.

This revisionism suffers from a significant flaw: to push the abandonment of a strict compositionalism based on Locke’s additions to the fourth edition of the Essay, revisionists must offer a strange reading of some plain statements in the immediate vicinity of the revised text. I shall note here a few choice instances. Locke’s own table of contents for chapter II.xii reads as follows: “Of complex ideas. Section 1. Made by the mind out of simple ones. 2. Made voluntarily. 3. Are either modes,
substances, or relations” (p. 21). Locke’s summary of all three sections makes the most natural sense when “complex ideas” serves as the subject.

The entirety of section three is as follows:

Complex ideas, however compounded and decompounded, though their number be infinite, and the variety endless, wherewith they fill, and entertain the thoughts of men; yet, I think, they may be all reduced under these three heads.

1. Modes.
2. Substances.
3. Relations.

Had Locke wished to set the class of complex ideas alongside an exclusive class of relations, why did he not revise this section? Here it is easy to understand Locke to have included relations within a class of complex ideas. The “however” clause and the mention of “endless variety” express Locke’s desire to treat compounding and decompounding as general categories for diverse operations of the mind that cover all the ways the mind may produce any complex idea whatsoever. The results of this endless variety of ways by which we fill and entertain our thoughts produce three kinds of ideas: the three named above including relations. And later in that chapter when it comes time to offer preliminary remarks about relations, Locke introduces them as “[t]he last sort of complex ideas.” He then says of relation as a category of complex ideas that it “consists in the consideration and comparing one idea with another” (II.xii.7). I understand Locke to hold the following positions in sections three and seven:
• Relations are included in the class of complex ideas.
• Relations consist in the operations of considering and comparing of ideas.

To which add the following from section one:

• All complex ideas are made by the operation of combining simple ideas into a compound idea.

The sense of these three claims requires considering and comparing to be instances of combining simple ideas into a compound idea. That is, an account of the nature and production of the relative ideas would start with uncompounded simple ideas and end with a compounded complex idea, and the move from the simple to the complex would employ simple ideas, including the reflective simple ideas considering and comparing.

The revisionist thesis fails on account of how it understands Locke’s list of acts of the mind and the ideas that result from their activity:

• Combining, which makes complex ideas,
• Comparing, which makes relations, and
• Abstracting, which makes general ideas.

In offering this list, Locke did not assert that complex ideas, relations, and general ideas constitute categories exclusive of each other. As noted above, at crucial moments elsewhere in that chapter Locke directly defies any such exclusivity of classes of ideas produced by these three operations when he states that relations are complex ideas. Neither must Locke be understood as asserting that these categories should be exclusive. To think otherwise puts revisionists into the awkward position of claiming
that Locke in his revision of II.xii.1 really meant to set out exclusive categories of ideas, and yet ignored the claims to the contrary elsewhere in that very short chapter, including the section summaries and table of contents which underwent other revisions throughout the successive editions of the *Essay*. Revisionists encumber themselves with the burden to account for Locke’s own account of his amendments to the fourth edition. In the “Epistle to the Reader” for the fourth edition Locke identified a terminological “alteration which it was necessary to mention, because it ran through the whole book, and is of consequence to be rightly understood,” namely a change in many places throughout the text from the language of “clear and distinct” ideas to “determinate and determined” ideas (p. 13).  

This change Locke explains in terms of simple and complex ideas, but notes no farther change to the scheme of explaining the complex in terms of the simple. The revisionist’s Locke thus seems quite absent minded, or perhaps disingenuous—and needlessly so if alternative interpretations of Locke’s revisions are available.

Gibson and Aaron, and all those who on revisionist grounds exclude relations from the domain of complex ideas, thus hold such a thesis in the face of the consequent need to provide drastic interpretive work on other central areas of Locke’s project in order to explain how Locke did not

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48 We shall examine Locke’s distinction between determinate and determined ideas in Chapter 7.
mean both what he seems to have plainly written very shortly after the passage that generated the controversy, and in the opening letter detailing other changes to classifications concerning simple and complex ideas. Numerous other passages that underwent revision in the fourth and fifth editions of the Essay, or are in close proximity of passages undergoing such revision, also refer to relations in terms of simple and complex ideas.\textsuperscript{49} Revisionists are at pains to account for these other changes that don’t reflect how they understand the one change in chapter twelve. Maintenance of revisionism in the face of alternatives put commentators in the unfortunate position of fostering a rather dim impression of Locke as a writer and philosopher. No one would deny Locke’s interest in publishing new editions of his masterwork every few years in light of major and minor amendments to the text and his positions, even those trivial enough that owners of previous editions could just mark those changes in the margins of their original texts. Locke also meticulously revised his detailed table of contents and index to match the revisions. Yet revisionists must also characterize Locke as leaving intact prominent and numerous remnants of a scheme he has rejected as untenable. This from a man who readily acknowledged to his readers the need for significant revisions that entailed changing his positions and

\textsuperscript{49} See, e.g. II.xxv.8, II.xxv.9, II.xxviii.14, the section heading of II.xxviii.18, III.iv.7.
merited admissions of error? I don’t buy it; and if another interpretation can smooth out these revised texts, no one should buy it. Thus the revisionist thesis strikes me as a bad start to understanding Locke’s account of relations. That the class of complex ideas incorporates relations comprised of simple ideas including the reflective simple comparing and considering\(^5\) makes the clearest and easiest sense of these passages. The revisionist thesis of Gibson and Aaron offers no reason to reject thesis 2 of the Strict Interpretation that all ideas are either simple or complex.

The above argument overlaps with the work of other non-revisionist interpreters of Locke, e.g. Stewart (1980) and J. D. Rabb (1974, 1985). The argument from the Strict Interpretation differs from that of other non-revisionists by its uniform account of how ideas of relations are complex in a manner structurally identical to other complex ideas (e.g. modes) whose compound character is easier to grasp. Stewart’s alternative I shall consider shortly. Rabb (1985) offers his own scathing indictment of revisionist interpreters of Locke:

\(^5\) Locke does not identify \textit{considering} as a reflective simple. He nonetheless uses the term liberally when discussing reflection. I take “considering” to be a catch-all term for whatever operations of discerning and retention are involved in picking something out. An analysis of those operations is an account of identity and diversity. All that I say here about relations applies to those relations, including that some determinations of identity and diversity include other determinations of identity and diversity. A fuller theoretical treatment of knowledge of identity and diversity follows in Chapter 7.
I am not willing to rest content with this kind of blatant inconsistency or incoherency in Locke’s Essay. Although it is most certainly not always the case, I suspect that many of the incoherencies attributed to the Essay should more justly be attributed to those particular interpretations of the Essay which profess to discover such inconsistences. (p. 68)

Though I share Rabb’s opinion that revisionists under the spell of a problematic interpretation of Locke are finding tensions of their own manufacture, Rabb unfortunately does not himself offer an alternative that makes sense of the role of reflection in Locke’s overall compositionalist theory of ideas. Rabb attempts to account for relations on compositionalist grounds to the extent that he does consider them to be complex. But, relations are complex only in “an unusual sense” (1974, p. 49) reserved for non-compounded ideas that nonetheless arise from the activity of the mind. Rabb thus asserts a compositionalist statement about the nature of relations, yet he takes back all the effectiveness of the compositionalist account by rendering relations a special case not to be explained in terms of composition (1985, p. 70–81). Rabb thus gives back to the revisionists their claim that Locke cannot account for relations by a uniform compositionalist theory of ideas.

Rabb’s alternative account of complex ideas and of reflection sharply diverges from the Strict Interpretation. In Rabb’s final treatment of relations he withholds his assent from the uniformity of the Strict Interpretation’s account of complexity: there are two accounts of complex
ideas, one according to how they are made, and another according to how they are analyzed. Relations have a common origin as other complex ideas in that they all arise from activity of the mind. But, relations cannot be analyzed into simples, unlike modes and substances. Rabb thus offers no overarching account of complexity that clearly accommodates the distinction between relations on the one hand and both substances and modes on the other. What underlies Rabb’s inability to accommodate relations into a uniform account of complexity is his comprehensive denial of theses 1 and 6 of the Strict Interpretation:

1. Simple ideas fall into three basic classifications according to their sources in experience.
6. The perception of an operation of the mind on its ideas is nothing but a reflective simple idea, which is a component of the produced complex.

Rabb does not understand reflection in terms of reflective simples that are constituents of complex ideas. Furthermore, he confutes the basic classification of simple ideas by taking an experiential simple, power, to be a reflective simple (1985, p. 77–9), yet he understands active power as a relation. Thus his own interpretation has raised a serious difficulty: based on significant textual evidence, and concerted effort not to render Locke’s major claims as inconsistent, relations ought to be understood as complex ideas. Yet, something apparently relational, active power, seems to be classified as simple. Rabb cannot find a way out, and so he leaves this difficulty unresolved.
Rabb certainly is not alone in encountering difficulties accommodating relations into a coherent account of Locke’s theory of ideas. He found himself compelled to attribute to Locke a special class of relations that also are simple ideas. Rabb desired to understand Locke as adhering to an absolute distinction between simple and complex ideas, and to this extent agreed with the thesis 2 of the Strict Interpretation:

2. All ideas are either simple or complex.
Yet, his inability to make sense of Locke’s classifications of simple ideas, and especially reflective simples, led Rabb to admit an overlap between relations and simple ideas. A number of commentators also hold any of a family of overlapping and contrary theses that attribute to Locke some version of what I shall call “relative simplicity.” Now that Rabb has helped us to see that some serious difficulties face those who wish to understand Locke’s account of relations, I shall identify the three main forms of relative simplicity, and then explain how and why the Strict Interpretation rejects them all.

**Simple Relations and Relative Simples.**

Even if the classes of complex ideas include relations, there might be other relative ideas that fit into the classification of simple ideas. Rabb found himself compelled to admit such classes of ideas. Stewart, on the other hand, offers as an amendment to Locke’s theory of ideas two ways of
assimilating relations and simple ideas: some of Locke’s clearly established relations are simple ideas (e.g. identity, cause), and some of Locke’s clearly established simple ideas are relative (e.g. duration, space). Thus the class of complex ideas overlaps with, but does not completely subsume relations. Some relations are complex (e.g. ‘father’ includes both man and cause). The key to this position, though is that the distinction between the simple and the complex cannot of itself offer a basis for understanding where relations fit into Locke’s program, and nothing else in Locke’s theory of ideas can comprehensively place relations entirely into the class of complex ideas.

**Simple Ideas as Images.**

The popular thesis that for Locke ideas are images assumes that simple ideas are relative. Those aligned with Ayers, the main commentator currently espousing such a position, in holding that ideas are images must consider simple ideas to stand in relation to that of which they are images. To attribute as much to simple ideas is to hold that their relation to other things is prior to an act of comparing. Insofar as ‘effect’ is relative for Locke, Ayers’ related thesis that ideas are “blank effects,” if such status as effects is immediately apparent in experience, holds that simple ideas are each apprehended to their perceivers as

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relative to something. Such an account of simple ideas would take these relations to be primitive in the fundamentals of our knowledge. Imagism is thus another form of relative simplicity.

**Analyzable Simple Ideas.**

Others suggest that all or at least some simple ideas are amenable to some sort of further analysis (such as colors into hue, saturation and brightness). If so, simplicity would be relative to a level of composition such that anything simple at one level would be complex relative to another level. In the face of what he takes to be Locke’s slippery use of the term ‘simple,’ Stewart argues that many of the ideas Locke claims to be simple, might instead be only simple relative to some frame of reference, but also composed of something else more simple. Nevertheless, Stewart holds that at bottom anything relatively simple must be composed of something absolutely simple.\(^{52}\) So, Stewart’s main point is that Locke’s use of the word “simple” needs some management, but the concept of absolute simplicity functions at the core of Locke’s theory of ideas. Nevertheless, Jolley drops this last aspect of Stewart's point and suggests that understanding simplicity as nothing but relative might accommodate cases where purported simples seem subject to analysis. Jolley holds such

\(^{52}\) Stewart (1979) pp. 66–7. These arguments are independent of is other claims that some relations are simple and some simple ideas are relational.
a suggestion to be at least consistent with the Gibson/Aaron revisionist thesis, and thus to serve as a possible basis for Locke’s weakened compositionalism.\textsuperscript{53} Jolley considers relative simplicity as a way of allowing for any simple ideas to be analyzable in order to respond to criticism of a sort offered by D. J. O’Connor that Locke’s sloppy use of the term “simple idea” allows for simple ideas to admit of composition.\textsuperscript{54} O’Connor suggests that simple ideas be described “negatively as ideas that are not complex” (p. 48). Assuming that simple ideas are subject to description is the crux of the problem here: simple ideas cannot help but have analyzable parts if they are to be described. Those analyzable parts will be relative to other ideas. And so, simple ideas will be simple only relatively. Although Jolley seriously entertains this sort of view, he falls short of endorsing or explicitly employing it\textsuperscript{55} any farther than as one way of understanding Locke to allow interpretive room for abstract ideas and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item O’Connor (1967) pp. 47–8. See also Berkeley’s succinct formulation of color as analyzable and thus admitting of composition in \textit{Philosophical Commentaries} 664 (1993, p. 385).
\item Although, a good case has been made that Jolley assumes relative simplicity in his account of abstraction. João Paulo Periera (2005) argues that Jolley’s weak compositionalism allows for abstract ideas to be non-complex while also being non-simple. Periera argues that such a denial of absolute simplicity is a tacit endorsement of relative simplicity (p.10–12). Though Periera’s argument is a bit quick, I agree with its essentials. Furthermore, Periera’s argument aims to support a very limited form of the Strict Interpretation, since he had learned it as a student of the author of this dissertation.
\end{enumerate}
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relations to be both non-simple and non-complex.\textsuperscript{56} Analyzable simplicity, no matter what form it takes, thus holds simplicity to be relative, whether to further parts discoverable within the idea or to other ideas.

**Against Relative Simplicity.**

On any of these versions of relative simplicity, relations would defy the Strict Interpretation’s neat and tidy division of ideas into the simple and complex. I take Stewart to offer the most explicit account of relative simplicity, and so I shall direct my main criticisms at his conception of relative simplicity. Since imagism and analyzable simples assume relative simplicity, defeating the latter uncovers the underlying problems with the former views. Some preliminary remarks about Stewart’s argument are thus in order. Consideration of imagism and analyzable simples will follow.

Stewart rejects the Gibson/Aaron revisionist view about relations, yet he also thinks that Locke would face some significant philosophical difficulties if he maintained a strict and absolute compositionalism about relations. The core problem is that some of Locke’s relations seem indistinguishable from simple ideas, and some of Locke’s simple ideas seem to be relations. Yet, Locke considers relations to be constructions of the mind. So, Stewart proposes as a friendly amendment that Locke could

\textsuperscript{56} Bennett (2002) considers the same texts as Jolley, but takes the easier way out by stating that Locke is confused. See pp. 25–6.
alter his account of simple ideas to accommodate simple relations. Locke’s compositive–pacity would then allow complex relations to be built from simple relations. While Stewart offers his position as an amendment to Locke’s project, Imagists interpret Locke as holding that simple ideas just are relative: they are images of something else. Those allowing for analyzable simplices likewise hold simplices to be relative. If these relative analyzable simplices are the foundations of other relations, then analyzable simplices are in the same boat as simple images. The argument for both simple images and analyzable simplices is the view articulated by Stewart that some primitive relations explain other relations. Thus, Stewart’s proposal of simple relations would accommodate both of these other positions, but is more overt in tackling problems about relations as problems concerning Locke’s theory of ideas.57 Thus I focus on Stewart’s account of simple relations as proxy for those who would apply relative simplicity to Locke as a matter of interpretation rather than strictly as a basis for criticism of Locke’s program.

Stewart identifies the “likeliest candidates” for simple relations as “cause, identity, space, duration, etc.” (p. 56). At the beginning of the chapters devoted to each, Locke states that cause and identity are

57 Ayers (1991) discusses relations through study of Locke’s account of relative terms (see, e.g., vol. 2, ch. 8 passim.) Such an account takes Locke’s theory of language to be explanatory of the theory of ideas. In my account I reverse this explanatory priority.
relations. Locke explicitly counts space as a simple idea that we get both by sight and by touch—in short, by sensation (II.xiii.2). Locke does not state that duration is a simple idea. Instead he identifies its source as the same as that of another idea he does explicitly identify as simple: succession (II.vii.9), namely “reflection on the train of ideas, which we find to appear one after another in our own minds” (II.xiv.4). Duration and succession, along with space, are simple ideas which when thought about in various ways give rise to simple modes—complex ideas that are “modifications of any one simple idea” (II.xiii.1). Stewart makes the farther claim that the simple ideas of space and duration are also relations, and were he to make full use of the text, succession would be added to the list. For identity and cause to be simple, they must arise from sensation and/or reflection in a manner similar to that of space, duration and succession. For space, duration and succession to be relations, they would have to find their foundation in operations of the mind just as identity and cause. Finding the foundation of complex ideas in simple ideas from experience is the core aspect of Locke’s project that Stewart wishes to preserve. He just wishes to do so by finding the foundation of complex ideas of some relations in simple ideas of other relations. Stewart’s proposal thus leaves some relations unexplained.

The complexity of the relations cause and identity can be explained by the Strict Interpretation: apart from their relata, the relations of cause
and identity consist (at least) of various operations of the mind and basic, non-relational, experiential simples **power** and **existence**. The relations of cause and identity cannot be purged of the experiential simples **power** or **existence**. Cause without power is nothing; identity without existence is nothing. Neither cause nor identity can be separated from acts of comparing. Stewart calls these relations simple by ignoring the act of comparing, and by collapsing cause into power and identity into existence. But it is Locke’s main claim concerning relations that an idea including various distinct simple ideas is thus a complex idea. The Strict Interpretation holds the act of comparing to be none other than a reflective simple. That reflective simple along with the experiential simple **power** are parts of the relation of cause. The reflective simple **comparing** along with the experiential simple **existence** are likewise constituents of identity. These reflective and experiential simples are elements of the relations in addition to whatever was compared as relata. These reflective and experiential simple ideas themselves occurred only as basic elements of experience, but the combination constitutive of an act of comparing arises from operations of the mind on those simple ideas. Apart from these elements including **comparing**, there is no relating, and so the constituents of a relation are, at least, the simple reflective idea **comparing** and some other ideas to which **comparing** is annexed.

58 Locke equates existence and unity (II.vii.7).
To see in sharper relief what motivated Stewart’s claims, suppose we denote as a “simple relation” any idea whose relational character cannot survive any further analysis into parts that are themselves relative. Suppose such a simple relation to be theoretically possible. That inability to analyze the relation into any more fundamental relations in no way implies that the relation is simple in the same sense as its constituent parts are simple. Those ultimate constituent parts cannot in any way at all be analyzed. The simple for Locke serves in his historical plain method (HPM) to explain the complex only if the simple is absolutely simple. Only simple ideas, as the basic elements of experience, can serve this explanatory function. If relations were simple in this sense, then they would be among the basic constituents of experience—they would be given, and not constructed. But relations cannot be part of the basic materials of thought alongside other simple ideas insofar as relations must be explained in terms of other ideas. Locke needs two separate accounts of relations in order for this proposal to fly. Unfortunately for Stewart, Locke only has one account: relations are founded on an act of comparing and terminate entirely in simple ideas. A full account of relations must offer an interpretation of what that operation ‘comparing’ amounts to. Though Stewart thinks that something else about relations needs to be explained, he does not see the problem as reaching into Locke’s account of operations of the mind. Instead, Stewart
leaves relations unexplained by terminating his account of relations in other relations. The Strict Interpretation explains relations by means of an interpretation of operations of the mind as absolutely simple ideas, and thus faces the explanatory burden Stewart ignores.

So, the significant interpretive problem here concerns whether and how to understand Locke’s compositionalism as an explanatory theory. Ayers understands Locke’s theory of ideas to be a form of “psychological atomism” that should be understood as an attempt to offer a descriptive account of experience, but does not function as an “explanatory hypothesis” (1991, p. 18). I agree that Locke did not purport to explain the underlying causes of thought or perception through any account of “physical considerations” of the nature of the mind (I.i.2)—to do so would clearly violate the HPM by stepping outside the theory of ideas. But, I think Locke did hold the reduction of complex ideas to simple ideas to be genuinely explanatory of our knowledge. What Ayers takes to be the descriptive aspects of the theory of ideas are wholly theoretical on the Strict Interpretation, and that theory gives purchase to Locke’s epistemological claims. So, the Strict Interpretation shares Ayers’ broader commitment to understand Locke in compositionalist terms, but strongly rejects Ayers’ account of the function of the compositionalism in Locke larger project. Thesis 7 of the Strict Interpretation asserts a connection between Locke’s theory of knowledge and theory of ideas:
7. Knowledge is nothing but the perception of agreement or disagreement among our ideas, and only our ideas.

Insofar as perception of agreement or disagreement of ideas amounts to some operation(s) of the mind on its ideas, Locke’s theory of knowledge should be understood as an application of his theory of ideas. The Strict Interpretation understands Locke’s project in just those terms.

In this commitment to compositionalism, the elements of the composition must be Locke’s simple ideas. The nature of these ideas has not been clear for commentators. Stewart insists that Locke’s compositionalism must rest on absolutely simple ideas; he just allowed that some of those simple ideas are relations. Stewart neglected to account for the contribution of comparing as a reflective simple to the relations it generates. Those who agree with Ayers’ understanding of Lockean ideas as images, or who consider all simple ideas to be subject to endless analysis, are worse off than Stewart by their comprehensive commitment to relative simplicity. Stewart faces trouble with a small set of simple relations, but allows for other ideas to be absolutely simple and non-relative. Correcting Stewart’s interpretive difficulties does not require a comprehensive reassessment of his overall account of Locke’s theory of ideas. But, imagism and analyzable simplicity are forms of relative simplicity that (at least potentially) attribute the features of relations to all simple ideas. Were all ideas to be relative, it would seem natural to
apply Locke’s account of relations to simple ideas. Doing so we find that simple ideas, as relatively simple, are thus founded on comparing and terminate in simple ideas. The termination of a relation in simple ideas is no problem if all simple ideas are endlessly analyzable, and if “termination” were allowed to continue endlessly. That would be a perverse notion of termination, though. But being founded on the operation ‘comparing’ would render all simple ideas subject to the power of the mind, a situation Locke plainly rejects (II.i.2). The alternative is that these relatively simple ideas are given as such. But relations given prior to an act of relating would be indistinguishable from innate knowledge. Knowledge is perception of agreement and disagreement of ideas—i.e. amounts to perceiving relations of agreement or disagreement. Each simple idea being a perception, as a perception of a relation each would be an instance of knowledge given in the first moments of experience. These primitive relations given as such in every element of experience would extend our knowledge to every last idea. Locke’s theory of ideas is nothing if it is not a foundation for an alternative to innate knowledge.\(^5\) The HPM, properly understood under the Strict Interpretation, precludes these errors by rendering all knowledge as complex ideas, and all complex ideas as actively constructed. Locke thus

\(^5\) These points will be picked up and developed in Chapter 7 below.
would reject any account of relations as simple on grounds of clear violations of the HPM.

Consider now another side to the problem of a simple idea construed as being relational. From the Strict Interpretation we can see how Locke’s account of a relation such as identity differs from Locke’s treatment of a simple idea some consider to be relational, duration. Locke says “we have no perception of duration, but by considering the train of ideas, that take their turns in our understandings” (II.xiv.4). Relations are, of course, ideas the mind “gets from their comparison one with another” (II.xxv.1). Duration is an idea we get from perception when comparing other things, namely the train of ideas taking their turns in our understandings. Perhaps this sounds to some as if duration, though asserted to be simple, shares its origin with relations: by considering multiple things. If so, duration would be a relation. But that’s not quite so. The ideas we get from the comparison of the parts of that train are modes of duration, and not the simple idea duration. Modes are complex ideas. Those modes of duration are also are relational (i.e. they involve comparing), but the important point here is that they are modes of something perceived that is itself non-relational.

What are added to a simple idea in the modification of that simple idea into of a simple mode are operations of the mind on that simple idea. A relational simple mode is a simple idea considered and compared.
Simple modes are complex ideas insofar as they include as constituents both the simple idea operated on and the reflective simple ideas that distinguish the simple mode both from its core simple idea and from other simple modes of that idea—just as in the case of relations, and following the model found in the case of memory in Chapter 2. At its theoretical limit, a complex idea includes at least one simple idea and the ideas of whatever operations combined that simple idea into a complex idea—understood according to thesis 6 of the Strict Interpretation:

6. The perception of an operation of the mind on its ideas is nothing but a reflective simple idea, which is a component of the produced complex.

What combines ideas into a relation are the operations **considering** and **comparing**. So a relation consists at least of the reflective simple ideas constitutive of **considering** and the reflective simple **comparing**, along with whatever ideas were considered and compared. In that sense a

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I take this point to hold generally for all complex ideas Locke classifies: modes, relations and substances, as well as general ideas. In the problematic case of substances, I would adapt what I say about relations to hold that the supposition of support distinctive of substances is no other than a combination of simple ideas of reflection. And for general ideas, the separating due to the operation of abstraction is a simple constituent of the resulting complex general idea. A comprehensive development of this thesis should cover all the ground Locke lays out in his discussions of complex ideas. I think the first order of business is to make proper sense of the nature of relations generally, then of the most basic of relations: identity and diversity, then cover cause and effect and other relations, substance and general ideas. For now, I offer some remarks about relations in general. I then cover the relations of identity and diversity. I leave for subsequent projects a Strict Interpretation account of supposition of support in terms of the theory of ideas.
relation is a complex idea reducible to its constitutive simple ideas in an explanation of the origin of the idea.

Insofar as the model sketched here for the case of duration is generally applicable to any of the experiential simple ideas Stewart proposed as relational simples, we must reject the proposal that some simple ideas are relational on the following grounds:

- Relations are nothing but complex ideas comprised of reflective simples and other ideas to which those reflective simples are annexed.

The main reflective simple in a relation is comparing. Other reflective simples may be involved in the ideas annexed to comparing. But, the main point here is that a reflective simple and the ideas to which it is annexed are jointly necessary and sufficient for complexity. I submit that this account of relations as complex ideas, following from the Strict Interpretation

- is consistent with the most straightforward reading of the main texts in the Essay on relations,

and

- correctly explains what is problematic about pushing relations into the foundational areas of the theory of ideas.

The Strict Interpretation restores the most prominent distinction in the Essay, simple and complex ideas, to its primary explanatory role. We have seen what the Strict Interpretation can do for the case of relations. I
propose that this interpretation be developed and applied to other difficult areas of interpretation on the grounds that the theory of ideas and its applications as characterized by the Strict Interpretation are the central conceptions behind Locke’s philosophy. Or put more starkly: the Strict Interpretation is what Locke had in mind as he formulated the arguments of the *Essay*. The reduction of relations into their constituent non-relational, simple ideas according to the terms of the Strict Interpretation is, I think, what Locke meant when he spoke of relations as nothing more than the comparing of ideas, and as analytically terminating in simple ideas. The proper emphasis that the Strict Interpretation places on the role of simple ideas of reflection in Locke’s theory of ideas aids our grasp of Locke’s account of how the contributions of the mind on our thought define and limit human understanding.
CHAPTER 7:
Identity and Diversity in Locke’s Theory of Knowledge

It is easy to see the unification of the theory of ideas and the theory of knowledge as Locke’s goal, but commentators have found it difficult or impossible to allow Locke to reach this goal even on his own terms. The purported inconsistency between the theory of knowledge and the theory of ideas finds a rather straightforward statement by O’Connor:

Book IV is generally recognized to be the least successful and the least important part of the Essay. This is partly because of a radical inconsistency between Locke’s account of knowledge in the first three books and that given in the last. [...] The inconsistency between the first three books of the Essay and the last lies in this: Books I, II, and III expound an empiricist account of knowledge in which the sources of our knowledge and therefore its limits are restricted to the materials provided by sensation and reflection. Book IV gives a rationalist account of the way in which these raw materials are brought together and related in the mind. (1985, p. 217)\textsuperscript{61}

O’Connor claims that the account of knowledge Locke had developed in the first three books of the Essay do not support his focused treatment of knowledge in Book IV. On this account of Locke’s philosophy, the goal of the theory of ideas was to provide an empiricist account of the acquisition of the materials of knowledge, yet that empiricism about ideas fails to support or make sense of the main kinds of knowledge Locke examines in

\textsuperscript{61} Here O’Connor restates the summation of his account of Locke’s theory of knowledge from his (1967). See ch. 7 and especially p. 153–7 for the full account.
Book IV. The rationalist theory of knowledge O'Connor attributes to Locke arises from the definition of knowledge as perception of agreement or disagreement, along with intuition as the mode of perception that provides the proper and most restricted sense of knowledge. In its strongest formulation, this conflict between the empiricist and rationalist tendencies that O'Connor attributes to Locke amounts to straightforward incoherency. But O'Connor allows for a weaker account of Locke’s troubles such that the empiricism and rationalism he attributes to Locke are not outright logically inconsistent with each other, but rather “these two strands of thought fit very uncomfortably together” (1985, p. 217).

Understanding Locke’s theory of ideas and theory of knowledge as fundamentally or largely in conflict with each other or as following contrary inclinations by no means originated with O’Connor. Bertrand Russell held such conflicts as emblematic of Locke’s pragmatic resistance to worries about paradox (1945, chapter 13 passim)—a character trait Russell finds quite admirable about the man, and one which also attenuates the propensity for wholesale falsehood of the man’s philosophy. O’Connor’s weaker “uncomfortable fit” between the theory of ideas and the theory of knowledge agrees with Gibson, who found Locke’s theory of

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62 Fraser (1890) notes that Thomas Reid found such trouble arising entirely within the confines of Book IV: “I cannot help thinking that a great part of the fourth book is a refutation of the principles laid down in the first chapter” (quoted by Fraser, p. 165).
knowledge to answer the concerns about innate principles without appeal to the theory of ideas (1917, p. 33). Jolley agrees with O'Connor's account of the contrary tendencies of Locke's theory of ideas and theory of knowledge:

> It is sometimes said that in book 4 of the *Essay* Locke appears most like a rationalist. There is more than a grain of truth in this claim. [...] that is, although he holds that all our ideas are either given in experience or constructed from the data which experience supplies, he does not hold that all our claims to knowledge can be justified by experience. It is also true that, like the rationalists, Locke operates with a strong conception of knowledge such that its paradigm examples are a priori truths. (1999 p. 169)

Jolley considers these contrary tendencies not to render Locke's project incoherent. Instead Jolley resists leaving Locke in a "muddle" (as O'Connor had), but instead holds Locke's "overambitious programme" to have left him unable to explain the rationalist turn of the theory of knowledge (p. 178). The tenor of these lines of criticism is at least that Locke's whole project of the *Essay* does not hang together, and definitely is not systematically unified.

The Strict Interpretation denies that Locke's theory of knowledge is rationalist in tendency or execution. Locke's theory of knowledge ought instead to be properly understood as a systematic application of his wholly empiricist theory of ideas. Holding the theory of knowledge within the

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63 Woolhouse (1994) also accounts for Locke's theory of knowledge as broadly rationalist (p. 149), but does not establish a clear point of conflict between the theory of knowledge and the theory of ideas.
scope of the theory of ideas is the goal of Locke’s historical plain method (HPM). The problems these commentators encounter for their interpretations of Locke’s theory of knowledge arise from misunderstandings about Locke’s theory of ideas, particularly the role of reflection in Locke’s compositionalist account of relations.

We’ve seen that relations arise entirely from occurrent acts of comparing, which, as reflective simples, are annexed to other ideas. Those other ideas must be considered or remembered in order to be compared. **Considering** and **remembering**, as reflective simples, each annex to ideas. And so, relations consist of **comparing** annexed to **considering** or **remembering**, each of which are annexed to other ideas. There is nothing more to the relation than its component reflective simples and the ideas to which they are annexed. Those reflective simples are constitutive of the relation, and so there is no relation prior or posterior to the occurrence of those reflective simples. The compositionalist structure of considerations and remembrances requires the ideas annexed to the reflective simples in them to have occurred before. Otherwise, retention would be indistinguishable from sensation. As such, relations cannot but be constructed after the ideas annexed to the reflective simples that make up the relation. On the Strict Interpretation, any relation is thus historically posterior to the reflective simples necessary to the construction of the relation. Insofar as knowledge reduces entirely to
relations, this feature of relations holds for all knowledge. The promise of accounting for purportedly innate principles by means of an empiricist theory of ideas within the scope of the HPM can thus be fulfilled by the reduction of knowledge to relations.

Upon establishing his basic account of relations, the first relations Locke examines are those of cause and effect. In the first edition of the *Essay* Locke then proceeded to discuss proportional, natural, institutional and moral relations, and in doing so Locke does not bother to state that identity and diversity are relations, nor even mention them when he discusses relations. Nevertheless, Locke does offer sufficient opportunity for anyone to discover their status readily from other of his explicit claims. Consider the four types of agreements and disagreements that constitute our knowledge:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 7.1: FOUR TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>IDENTITY OR DIVERSITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. <strong>RELATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. <strong>CO-EXISTENCE OR NECESSARY CONNECTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>REAL EXISTENCE</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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64E.g., proportional: whiter, bigger, equal (II.xxviii.1); natural: father, brother, countrymen (ii.xxviii.2); institutional: general (military), citizen, patron (II.xxviii.3); moral: moral rules, laws, virtue (II.xxviii.4ff).
When establishing these types of agreements and disagreements as the four kinds of knowledge, Locke distinguishes knowledge of identity from knowledge of relation. But shortly thereafter acknowledges that

[…] identity and co-existence are truly nothing but relations, yet they are such peculiar ways of agreement, or disagreement of our ideas, that they deserve well to be considered as distinct heads, and not under relation in general; since they are so different grounds of affirmation and negation, as will easily appear to any one, who will but reflect on what is said in several places of this essay. (IV.i.7)

Locke also applies the basic criteria for relations to intuitive knowledge of self-evident propositions: “the mind, by an immediate comparing them, finds in those ideas […]” (IV.vii.2). In the first published edition of the *Essay*, Locke treats identity and diversity as relations primarily in his account of knowledge. Locke’s main attention concerning relations in Book II concerned relations other than identity and diversity. Nevertheless, when he comes to direct his attention to identity and diversity in presenting his theory of knowledge, Locke acknowledges the place of identity and diversity in his overall project as relations. In the second edition of the *Essay* Locke added his chapter “Of Identity and Diversity” right after the chapter “Of Cause and Effect and Other Relations.” From that second edition onwards Locke’s readers would find the focused

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65 The portions of these sections quoted here underwent no changes between the editions of the *Essay*. See the notes to these sections on p. 527 and p. 591 of Locke (1979) and the Register of Formal Variants of Locke (1975) p. 789 and p. 795.
treatment of identity and diversity within the sequence of chapters devoted to relations.

The status of identity and diversity as relations is stable in Locke’s discussions of knowledge, he nonetheless sets knowledge of identity and diversity apart from other relations. The “peculiar ways of agreement, or disagreement of our ideas,” and the “different grounds of affirmation and negation” afforded by identity and diversity deserve the careful attention of commentators. The Strict Interpretation accounts for identity and diversity both as bearing features shared by all relations, and as holding features peculiar to themselves. The same holds for relations of cause and effect, moral relations, relations of degree, and any other relation. All relations are complex ideas including the reflective simple comparing. What sets various relations apart from each other are the additional constituents of the relata annexed to comparing. The constituents of the relata in identity and diversity relations are different from those of other relations. So, Locke need only account for the special role for identity and diversity in his theory of knowledge according to those differences.

By its analysis of knowledge in terms of relations, the Strict Interpretation accounts for Locke’s theory of knowledge entirely as an application of his theory of ideas. Recall thesis 7 of the Strict Interpretation:
7. Knowledge is nothing but the perception of agreement or disagreement among our ideas, and only our ideas.

Locke famously defines knowledge as “the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas” (IV.i.2). Despite Locke’s further claims that knowledge is “the perception of the agreement, or disagreement of any two ideas” (IV.ii.15, emphasis added), some controversy has persisted about whether the objects of knowledge need be ideas. The Strict Interpretation understands knowledge to be a relation entirely between ideas and only ideas.

The Strict Interpretation’s account of knowledge is thus broadly in agreement with A. D. Woozley’s main contention against J. D. Yolton. Yolton holds that in the case of knowledge of real existence, knowledge can be a perception of agreement of ideas with things that are not ideas (1970 p. 111ff). Woozley (1972) argues against Yolton on the grounds that no perceived agreement or disagreement could ever consist of anything but ideas (p. 142). The central issue concerns how properly to understand a perceived agreement or disagreement. This line of argument is compatible with the Strict Interpretation by restricting perception to the domain of ideas. But Woozley agrees with Yolton that Locke allows for agreements and disagreements that do not reduce to ideas, while nonetheless enter into some sort of relation to perceived agreements and disagreements. The issue here is whether and how real (i.e. unperceived)
relations serve as a standard for perceived relations. The Strict Interpretation is sharply at odds with such an account of agreements and disagreements. Since agreements and disagreements are relations, they cannot be prized from their constituent ideas. As we have seen since Chapter 3, there is no difference between relations and ideas of relations for Locke. Relations just are nothing more than occurrent mental comparisons. Such comparisons in turn are nothing more than complex ideas consisting of the reflective simple comparing annexed to two ideas. Given the Strict Interpretation account of relations, what needs analysis here is agreement and disagreement as occurrent perceptions. This is merely a straightforward consequence of the analysis of relations in Chapter 6.

The core of Yolton’s view has been maintained by Woolhouse (1994 pp. 154, 168), Ruth Mattern (1978, p. 238–41), and Jolley (1999 p. 187). Against these commentators, the textual arguments of Lex Newman are wholly convincing (2004 p. 276–83). At bottom, Newman’s additional textual support bolsters passages such as IV.ii.15 quoted above. The Strict Interpretation agrees with those who consider Locke’s whole account of

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66 Newman’s proposed account of sensitive knowledge diverges sharply from the Strict Interpretation by incorporating judgment into instances of sensitive knowledge. A full account of sensitive knowledge is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but some initial steps of such an account are made here in the account of determined and determinate ideas that follows.
knowledge as pertaining entirely and only to our ideas. Woolhouse, Mattern, Jolley and Newman are mainly concerned with knowledge of real existence as it pertains to sensitive knowledge. Insofar as real existence is reducible entirely to simple ideas, these concerns do not pertain directly to the matter at hand about the status of Locke’s theory of ideas as rationalist or empiricist. The problem pertains to Locke’s account of knowledge generally, or with respect to purportedly a priori knowledge. Concerning knowledge in general, the nature of the perception in perceiving agreement and disagreement is primarily at stake. And, concerning purportedly a priori knowledge, Locke’s account of maxims is the central focus.

**Perception of Agreement or Disagreement**

From the definition of knowledge as perception of agreement or disagreement of two ideas, Locke argues for limitations to human knowledge both in terms of the ideas perceived, and in terms of the perception of those ideas. Locke distinguishes between perceiving two ideas each entirely on their own and perceiving two ideas in relation to each other. Only in the latter case of perceiving a relation between two ideas can one have knowledge. Perceiving two ideas each on their own consists of two perceptions. Perceiving two ideas in relation to each other

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67 See IV.iii.1–5.
consists of one perception. In this latter case, the one perception is a comparison. Thus the relative simple **comparing** is annexed to the two ideas. The perceiving in the relating of two ideas is the act of comparing. That act, of course, is on the Strict Interpretation a reflective simple. In this fashion, the Strict Interpretation explains the perception of agreement or disagreement in terms of relations. In such an account of knowledge explained through the theory of ideas, the perception of agreement or disagreement amounts to a complex idea. As such, an analysis of this complex idea adheres to the HPM. Knowledge, as a complex idea, consists entirely of simple ideas, some of which must be reflective simples. The reflective simples are the operations of the mind that produced the complex idea. There is nothing more to the complex idea than its simple constituents. An analysis of the complex idea terminates in those simple ideas. So, however it is that the mind perceives agreement or disagreement of two ideas, both that perception and the agreement or disagreement consist entirely of reflective simples annexed to other ideas, either simple or themselves complex.

Locke distinguishes three different ways of perceiving agreements and disagreements. These different ways of perceiving yield three degrees of knowledge:
TABLE 7.2: DEGREES OF KNOWLEDGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. INTUITIVE</th>
<th>PERCEIVING TWO IDEAS THEMSELVES WITHOUT ANY OTHER IDEAS MEDIATING THE PERCEPTION.</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. DEMONSTRATIVE</td>
<td>PERCEIVING TWO IDEAS BY MEANS OF AN ADDITIONAL IDEA MEDIATING THE PERCEPTION OF THE TWO IDEAS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. SENSITIVE</td>
<td>PERCEIVING PARTICULAR EXISTENCE IN SENSATION.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These three ways of perceiving agreements or disagreements each are relations (i.e. **comparing** annexed to two ideas), but as they yield three different degrees of knowledge, they must also each contain something that differentiates each from the other two. Such differences fit the terms of the HPM since they consist in differences in the structure of these three kinds of complex ideas. Thus the differences reduce to the simple ideas constitutive and distinctive of each degree of knowledge. Those distinctive constituents consist entirely of the reflective simples involved in the perception of agreement or disagreement, along with whatever simple constituents are involved in the ideas perceived in these three ways.

Any agreement or disagreement *not* perceived in these three ways is not perceived at all, and thus not known. Any two ideas can be perceived each on their own, while an agreement or disagreement between them is not perceived. When agreements or disagreements are not perceived, but rather “presumed,” the result is judgment, not
knowledge (IV.xiv.4). Degrees of probability and grounds for assent and faith all fall under the province of judgment rather than knowledge. Clearly, the Strict Interpretation must also explain presumption within the scope of the HPM. On this account, a judgment is a complex idea with all the other constraints stated for the case of knowledge but for the perception of agreement or disagreement. Since the agreement or disagreement are not perceived, but instead presumed, that presuming must be analyzed in terms appropriate to the theory of ideas. The difference between knowledge and judgment is either in the relata, or in the relating of the relata or both. That is, what differentiates knowledge from judgment is either in the structure of the complex idea formed by the operations of the mind at stake in perceiving and presuming agreements and disagreements, or in the structure of the ideas perceived and presumed to agree or disagree, or in both. The differences between perceiving and presuming reduce to different arrangements of reflective simples and their annexations to other ideas.

Recall from Chapter 5 that perception is a general class including all occurrences of simple ideas. The reflective simples that comprise an act of perceiving agreement or disagreement constitute the perceiving of that agreement or disagreement. Likewise, presumption would thus, technically, constitute a perception. Distinguishing knowledge from judgment, then, amounts to distinguishing between two perceptions, one
of which includes more, or something else, than the other. In this case presuming an agreement or disagreement includes more or something else than perceiving agreement or disagreement. This difference reduces entirely to the simple ideas in each. The general structure of the difference is that the perceiving in a presumed agreement or disagreement is a perceiving of something else besides that agreement or disagreement. In such a case of judgment, there is no perceived agreement or disagreement. Instead, ideas are put together by activity of the mind, but not in such a way as to constitute an agreement or disagreement. That means that in the case of a judgment, the reflective simples that constitute the annexations for the whole complex idea are not any of the three degrees of knowledge. The reflective simples that annex ideas together into complex judgment-ideas are neither those involved in intuitive, nor in demonstrative, nor in sensitive\textsuperscript{68} perceptions of agreement or disagreement. Nevertheless, the reflective simples involved are some sort of reflective simples annexed to other ideas, just not ones that constitute agreement or disagreement.

\textsuperscript{68} Though a full account of sensitive knowledge from the Strict Interpretation is a worthwhile goal, such a project is beyond the current goals of this dissertation. For now, consider “sensitive perception of agreement or disagreement” to me much more than just the occurrence of a single sensitive simple. It must include reflective simples to be a relation, and it must be a relation to count as knowledge.
This discussion of the difference between knowledge and judgment serves to emphasize the role of reflective simples in Locke’s account of knowledge. The point here is that some analysis in terms of reflective simples would be the basis of a reduction of knowledge to the terms of the theory of ideas. The previous sketch of the distinction between knowledge and judgment was in just such terms of the theory of ideas since reflective simples formed the basis of the distinction. Our main concern is the empirical basis of Locke’s whole theory of knowledge. Some aspects of Locke’s theory of knowledge, controversial as they may be, are not the obstacles to such a reduction of the theory of knowledge to the theory of ideas. The chief area of controversy here centers on intuitive knowledge. In the case of intuitive knowledge perception of agreement or disagreement is immediate. In such a case, the very comparing of the two ideas constitutes either a perception of agreement or a perception of disagreement between the two ideas. Intuition serves as the source of greatest certainty. Such knowledge is self-evident. And so as noted above, it is about the case of intuitive knowledge that Jolley claims that “Locke operates with a strong conception of knowledge such that its paradigm examples are a priori truths” (1999, p. 169). Recall that the line of criticism at stake here alleges that Locke’s theory of knowledge takes a rationalist turn away from his empiricist theory of ideas. Establishing an empirical basis for the absolute certainty of intuitive knowledge would
undercut this line of criticism. So, it is to intuitive knowledge we must turn.

**Intuitive Knowledge**

The project here is to fit Locke’s account of intuitive knowledge into the HPM. Since knowledge consists of relations, intuitive knowledge would undergo an analysis in terms of relations. Locke’s account of maxims offers the proper material for just such a reduction. Maxims are the purportedly *a priori* certainties that incline some commentators to attribute to Locke a quasi-rationalist theory of knowledge. So, the reduction of Locke’s theory of knowledge to his theory of ideas focuses on how maxims reduce to the theory of ideas. Our goal here is to employ the Strict Interpretation to establish an empirical basis for intuitive knowledge. This goal is limited in scope to the formulation of intuitive knowledge of identity and diversity wholly within the HPM as complex ideas of identity and diversity relations. Yet in doing so, the Strict Interpretation must also preserve the special status of intuitive knowledge of identity and diversity within the theory of knowledge. As noted above, Locke distinguishes knowledge of identity and diversity from knowledge of relations generally. That difference must be accommodated, while preserving the foundation of knowledge of identity and diversity entirely on the simple ideas constitutive of experience.
In his account of maxims, Locke explains the special status of intuitive knowledge of identity and diversity for our knowledge. In doing so, Locke also provides the material for the reduction of knowledge of identity to the theory of ideas: as primary instances of thought, upon which all other thought depends. Locke’s formulation of this point commences section 4 of the chapter on maxims. We shall closely examine the first twenty-six lines of this section. Here Locke draws together a number of key points that aid in the reduction of the theory of knowledge to his theory of ideas. Some of these points hinge on key revisions to the *Essay*, so along the way matters pertinent to these revisions will hold some considerable weight in directing the examination of this text.

The section heading expresses Locke’s primary goal for the section: “First, as to identity and diversity, all propositions are equally self-evident.” Towards this goal of rendering all propositions of identity and diversity equally self-evident, Locke opens with a key point:

For, first, the immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of identity, being founded in the mind’s having distinct ideas, this affords us as many self-evident propositions, as we have distinct ideas. (IV.vii.4)

Here we have the key statement that perception of agreement or disagreement of identity is founded on the mind’s having distinct ideas.

Concerning this foundation, Locke continues with the following:

Every one that has any knowledge at all, has as the foundation of it, various and distinct ideas: And it is the first
act of the mind, (without which it can never be capable of any knowledge,) to know every one of its ideas by itself, and distinguish it from others. (IV.vii.4)

But for some trivial typographical modifications, these portions of the passage survive intact through Locke’s revisions to the Essay, and so I consider this discussion to express a rather stable aspect of Locke’s theory of knowledge. Locke here states twice the foundation for intuitive perception of identity and diversity: the mind’s having distinct ideas. But, what is this having of distinct ideas that serves as the foundation of all the other kinds of knowledge? As we saw in Chapter 4, Locke applies the terms “distinct” and “confused” to ideas as they are named and ranked into sorts. We also noted in Chapter 6 that in the “Epistle to the Reader” for the fourth edition of the Essay, Locke informed his readers of a shift to the use the terms “determinate” and “determined” in many instances where he had previously used the terms “clear” and “distinct.” Some remarks about this shift in terminology are in order, since additional remarks in IV.vii.4 concerning those terms underwent revision in the fourth edition of the Essay.
Determinate Ideas

Determinate and determined ideas pertain to the having and the naming of ideas. Locke's two main statements about determinate ideas are as follows: 69

By determinate, when applied to a simple idea, I mean that simple appearance which the mind has in its view, or perceives in itself, when that idea is said to be in it (1975, p. 13, lines 11–13).

This statement about determinate ideas Locke formulates explicitly for "simple appearances," but he also offers another formulation that makes no reference to simplicity:

Some immediate object of the mind, which it perceives and has before it distinct from the sound it uses as a sign of it. (p. 14, lines 1–2)

So, whether or not an idea is associated with a name, an idea as it is in the mind when it is in the mind is thereby determinate. In contrast with Locke's account of clarity, which we examined in Chapter 4, the determinateness of ideas makes no reference to how the idea ought to occur in experience, and so being determinate requires no further comparison with other ideas. Clear ideas are "such as the objects

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69 Locke's initial remarks about determinate and determined ideas on lines 2–10 of p. 13 of the "Epistle to the Reader" are somewhat obscure. In the next three paragraphs Locke readily disentangles his remarks about these denominations. Those more straightforward remarks are quoted in what follows.
themselves, from whence they were taken, did or might,70 in a well-ordered sensation or perception, present them” (II.xxix.2). Clarity, we noted in Chapter 4, is an extrinsic denomination according to how that idea occurs in other circumstances, and not an intrinsic feature of an idea. A determinate idea, however, just is an idea as it occurs without any comparison with anything else. A determinate idea is an idea prior to any comparing of it to something else, and so determination is prior to clarity. Furthermore, even if an idea is named, the idea is determinate apart from its association with that name. So, parts of complex ideas can be determinate insofar as they are as the mind perceives them to be.

Obviously, this technical sense of “determinate” holds for any idea. Locke speaks of “indeterminate” ideas just once in the Essay, and only twice uses the term “undeterminate.” These three occurrences each predate the introduction of “determinate” as a technical term since they are all present in the first edition of the Essay. Nevertheless, these rare occurrences do reasonably accord with what one ought to expect of the negation of “determinate.” In all three cases, the main concern is infinity. The first occurrence concerns the infinity of eternity as duration and number with no given stopping point:

70 The words “or might” were added to the fourth edition.
For in duration, we consider it, as if this line of number were extended both ways to an unconceivable, undeterminate, and infinite length; (II.xvii.10)\textsuperscript{71}

The length of a line measuring eternity is “unconceivable,” and thus would reasonably fail to be determinate in the full technical sense of the term (were we to insist on the point). This just means that there is literally no idea to fill the particular role of a given measure. The measure is thus not determinate in virtue of it not being an idea in those who would perceive such a measure. The words expressing such a measure signify literally nothing, and thus are mere sounds. The second and third occurrences arise only a few sections later in the chapter on infinity and function in a similar point:

So that what lies beyond our positive idea towards infinity, lies in obscurity; and has the indeterminate confusion of a negative idea, wherein I know, I neither do nor can comprehend all I would, it being too large for a finite and narrow capacity: And that cannot but be very far from a positive compleat idea, wherein the greatest part, of what I would comprehend, is left out, under the undeterminate intimation of being still greater. (II.xxvii.15)

The measures for infinite quantities have places for ideas, though no ideas fill those gaps. So, all we are left with in the complex ideas that suffer such gaps are other complex ideas that paper over the gaps. The idea has the structure of a complete idea, but is not complete. And so, that gap is not determinate. There is no idea to serve the function one would

\textsuperscript{71} This use of “undeterminate” occurs in section 128 of Draft B (1990, p. 251).
otherwise expect of a similarly constructed, complete complex idea. The complex idea that suffers the gap is not what is indeterminate. It is what would fill the gap but is not filling the gap that is indeterminate. What is indeterminate is thus not an idea at all.

**Determined Ideas**

A determined idea involves naming, and thus includes in its full formulation those relations involved in linguistic signification. Locke’s main statement about determined ideas is as follows:

> By determined, when applied to a complex idea, I mean such an one as consists of a determinate number of certain simple or less complex ideas, joyn’d in such a proportion and situation, as the mind has before its view, and sees in it self when that idea is present in it, or should be present in it, when a man gives a name to it. (p. 13, lines 13–7).

Determined ideas are sufficient for proper analysis into their constituent parts. Perceiving a determined idea amounts to perceiving all the idea’s parts and the “proportion and situation” between those parts. Locke immediately explicates his use of “should be present” by means of normative considerations about the use of names: few, if any of us communicate with only those words that signify determined ideas. So, we can explain failures of communication in terms of an idea being, to some
degree, “undetermined.” These criteria for determined ideas serve as a standard we should strive towards in our communication:

[...] when any one uses any term, he may have in his mind a determined idea, which he makes it the sign of, and to which he should keep it steadily annexed during that present discourse. Where he does not, or cannot do this, he in vain pretends to clear or distinct ideas: 'Tis plain his are not so: and therefore there can be expected nothing but obscurity and confusion, where such terms are made use of, which have not such a precise determination. (p. 13, lines 25–31)

This annexation of the term to the idea is, on the Strict Interpretation, a reference to reflective simples that account for the naming. An idea is clear or distinct according to the steadiness of that annexation of the name to the determined idea. This steadiness holds both for the idea named and to the name (which, recall, on the Strict Interpretation is also an idea):

[...] this idea thus determined, i.e. which the mind has in it self, and knows, and sees there be determined without any change to that name, and that name determined to that precise idea. (p. 14, lines 2–5)

To support our claims to having clear and distinct ideas, those ideas must be determined, that is, determinate in their composition and steadily annexed to names. Otherwise, we are prone to errors with respect to the use of those names.

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72 This negation Locke used more much frequently than “in-“ and “undetermine.”
So to recap, we now have access to the following terms that pertain to ideas:

**TABLE 7.3: DEFINITIONS OF DETERMINATE, DETERMINED, CLEAR AND DISTINCT IDEAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DETERMINATE</td>
<td>An idea as it is perceived by the mind when it is in the mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DETERMINED</td>
<td>An idea consisting of determinate constituent ideas in proportions or situations the mind can also perceive when the idea is given a name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLEAR</td>
<td>An idea presented to the mind as its sources have or would have presented it in well-ordered sensations or perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTINCT</td>
<td>An idea wherein the mind perceives a difference from all other ideas by a secret, unobserved reference to names.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any idea is determinate in itself since every idea is as it is when it is perceived. An idea is determined, clear, or distinct in relation to other ideas. Ideas are determined by the perceivable proportion or situation of their parts and in relation to their names. These terms we have just examined. “Clear” and “distinct” we can recall from their accounts in Chapter 4. Ideas are clear relative how they are and have (and thus could) be present to the mind. Ideas are distinct in virtue of perceivable differences from all other ideas when an idea is discerned so as to set it apart from others by a name, though the naming is not typically
recognized as naming. That failure of recognition of the secret naming is analyzed in terms of the distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflection. The reflective simples in the naming occur, and thus are perceived as are all ideas. But, those reflective simples are typically not discerned and retained so as to form clear and distinct complex ideas as the modes of reflection involved in the naming. Nevertheless, theoretically, the reflective simples necessary for distinct thought have occurred. The key point here is that distinct ideas must also be determined ideas, though determined ideas need not be distinct.

Maxims and Distinct Ideas

Now return to the passage from the chapter on maxims and take note of Locke’s uses of “distinct:”

For, first, the immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of identity, being founded in the mind’s having distinct ideas, this affords us as many self-evident propositions, as we have distinct ideas. Every one that has any knowledge at all, has as the foundation of it, various and distinct ideas: (IV.vii.4).

Here Locke identifies three functions of distinct ideas:
Function number 2 about self-evident propositions concerns Locke’s main claims about maxims as verbal propositions. Set this point aside for now.

Functions 1 and 3 concern distinct ideas as foundations. These functions are closely related. Locke reiterates these points with a new emphasis in the lines that follow:

And it is the first act of the mind, (without which it can never be capable of any knowledge,) to know every one of its ideas by itself, and distinguish it from others. (IV.vii.4)

Knowing “every one of [ones] ideas by itself, and distinguish[ing] it from others” is here accorded the honor of being the “first act of the mind.” This point Locke here reiterates from his initial statement about knowledge of identity and diversity in IV.i.4. This “first act of the mind [...] to know every one of its ideas by itself and distinguish it from others” is no other than “immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of identity.” To know an idea by itself is to perceive an agreement of identity, and to distinguish an idea from others is to perceive a disagreement of identity with those others. So, this first act of the mind is founded on
having distinct ideas. What does this “founding” amount to if the distinctness of ideas is relational? That distinctness relation cannot be prior to the “first act of the mind” in any way that violates the HPM. And so, distinctness must be posterior to simplicity under the HPM. That means that distinctness is explained in terms of simplicity. How, then, can distinctness be the foundation of all our knowledge without putting relations into that foundation?

As we have seen in the account of relations above, the Strict Interpretation holds relations to “terminate” in simple ideas. Knowledge is relational. Yet, the knowledge upon which all other knowledge depends is founded on a relation. The Strict Interpretation must analyze this “founding” within the scope of the HPM. Relations are complex ideas consisting of nothing but absolutely simple ideas. Some of those absolutely simple ideas are reflective simples that annex to other ideas. Those reflective simples occur at the occasion of their annexation to the other ideas. Those other ideas annexed to the reflective simples precede the occurrence of the reflective simples that annex to them. Those other ideas are either themselves absolutely simple, or are themselves complex ideas. If they are simple, then the account of the complex idea is complete. If they are complex, then the analysis continues to break down the complex ideas into reflective simples and the ideas to which they are annexed. Furthermore, those complex ideas must be complex only due to the
annexation of reflective simples to other ideas. These are the terms of an analysis according to the Strict Interpretation. So, the issue here concerns how the Strict Interpretation can explain intuitive knowledge of identity as founded in the distinctness of ideas, and do so in terms of such annexations. Such an account explains intuitive knowledge and the distinctness of ideas each in terms of complex ideas. Intuitive knowledge of each idea as it is unto itself, and as it is not any other idea, must be the first act of the mind. And, that first act must also require the composition of a relation of distinctness for the ideas intuitively perceived to agree or disagree.

Words and Ideas

Given the terms of this analysis, we need to get straight the sense of priority Locke employs in this discussion of maxims. Locke’s agenda for discussing maxims is to render all intuitive determinations of identity and diversity equally certain, while also holding particular determinations of identity and diversity to be known prior to general principles. For instance, in IV.vii.4\textsuperscript{73} Locke considers “white is not blue” to be potentially as certain as “whatever is, is.” If all the ideas signified by the words in these propositions are equally well determined, then both propositions

\textsuperscript{73} Part of the discussion Locke added to the fourth edition, but I don’t see how any of his additions significantly affect the argument about language and ideas.
will be intuitively perceived as true. But, insofar as one acquires the ideas white and blue and finds occasions for comparing them prior to forming the abstract idea being, the diversity of white and blue will be known prior to the identity of being with being. The way Locke sets out to establish this point is by distinguishing the perception of agreements and disagreements of ideas

- *prior to* the use of words

from such perceptions

- *by means of* the use of words.

If two ideas agree, and we immediately perceive the agreement, annexing words to those ideas just doesn’t help us perceive the agreement any better than we already have. The perception of agreement was immediate, so the attachment of the words is at best useless with respect to the perception of that agreement, and at worst a hindrance that can obscure the ideas in question. Yet, since words can attach to determined ideas, and the parts of determined ideas can be compared with other ideas so as to perceive agreements or disagreements among those parts, stable and fixed significations of words can express intuitive perceptions. And so, maxims—the propositions that express intuitively perceived agreements

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74 These color terms can denote very specific shades or abstract modes covering various shades. The basic point is the same either way.
and disagreements—are certain, insofar as their terms signify determined ideas.

Our primary focus is on the account of the certainty of knowledge expressed in propositions by means of the intuitive perception prior to the formulation of the proposition. Locke distinguishes between verbal and mental propositions:

[..] a mental proposition being nothing but a bare consideration of the ideas, as the are in our minds stripp’d of names, they lose the nature of purely mental propositions, as soon as they are put into words. (IV.v.4)

Locke here distinguishes a determinate part of determined ideas: the thing named apart from the name. Now this consideration can occur after the naming when we come to disregard the name annexed to a determinate idea. But, Locke also holds that such determinate and undetermined ideas are the mental predecessors of words. Locke’s main claims about maxims concern these mental predecessors of our words. The problem is that

[..] it is unavoidable, in treating of mental propositions, to make use of words: and then the instances given of mental propositions, cease immediately to be barely mental, and become verbal. (IV.v.4)

To adequately engage with Locke’s theory of ideas we must keep this problem well in mind. In analyzing complex ideas we posit determinate ideas as predecessors of determined ideas. Yet, in the mind of the one engaging in such analysis the positing of determinate ideas is itself the
formation of determined ideas. So, the determinate ideas formed in the process of a proper analysis adhering to the terms of the theory of ideas are never themselves wholly undetermined. We who reflect philosophically upon the conditions of thought can never escape the higher order thinking involved in such philosophical reflections. Even at a much less sophisticated level, those possessed of literate thought cannot lose their language and still engage in the thinking that involves linguistic ideas.

Locke’s cautionary statements about mental and verbal propositions warn us about the limits of introspection. We must take care to treat the determinate parts of determined ideas as theoretically undetermined. But, introspection can only show one the ideas we have by the means of introspection available to oneself. For those at a level of thinking sufficiently high enough to raise philosophical concerns about knowledge, introspection will inevitably involve the use of language. So, the theoretical formulation of the conditions of knowledge prior to the use of words will end up being framed by means of the use of words. Ideas formulated by means of linguistically inflected introspection cannot but be determined to some degree if the words signify ideas. Recall the distinction between the perception of agreements and disagreements of ideas

- prior to the use of words
from such perceptions

• by means of the use of words.

This distinction can now be formulated using the technical vocabulary we’ve been developing as a distinction between

• determinate undetermined ideas

and

• determinate parts of determined ideas.

Careless or resistant thinkers may refuse to draw or recognize this distinction. They will inevitably confuse some of their determined ideas for simple ideas. This is a fundamental mistake. Since the ideas these resistant thinkers take to be simple are really determined, the simple ideas will appear to be relational or the products of analysis. But, we must be careful not to blame Locke for our neglect of his distinctions.

The Strict Interpretation allows for a method to avoid such difficulties. The simple ideas named by the Strict Interpretation are theoretical entities serving an explanatory function within an analysis. Technically, such theoretical simples are determinate parts of determined ideas. Those determinate parts are posited as theoretically undetermined. By the theory of ideas, their parts were undetermined at some stage prior to the analysis. But within the analysis, ideas cannot be discovered as undetermined. Undetermined ideas cannot function in any analysis. The positing of an undetermined idea is merely the formation of another
complex idea by means of reflective simples annexed to a determinate part of the determined idea. Stripping away a name involves effort of mind. This effort, on the Strict Interpretation, amounts to reflective simples annexed to other ideas. And so, analysis of determined ideas into determinate parts involves the formation of new complex ideas. Reflection cannot recover the simplicity of unreflective experience. The Strict Interpretation renders this basic point rather perspicuous.

Finding the Ideas One Has in Oneself

Locke’s claims about maxims should be seen in the light of these distinctions. Uncovering the foundations of the first act of the mind engages in analyzing determined ideas into their determinate parts and then positing those determinate parts as undetermined. It is in this account that Locke exposes the dependency of his theory of knowledge upon his theory of ideas. Consider the lines that follow from the passage we had been examining from IV.vii.4:

Every one finds in himself, that he knows the ideas he has; that he knows also, when any one is in his understanding, and what it is; and that when more than one are there, he knows them distinctly and unconfusedly one from another.

Here Locke offers some claims about ideas without regard for the association of words with these ideas. Those who “find in” themselves

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75 From “Every” to “has;” was modified for style in the second edition from “This is that which every one finds in himself, that the ideas he has he knows;” (1975 p. 592n).
what they know are thus capable of thinking beyond bare sensation, and thus can discern their ideas. Absent that discerning, the simples are a confused morass. When there are many ideas in the understanding (i.e. mind), we find that we know the many ideas that we have. This process of mind involves reflection. As for those who cannot “find” anything, we who can find ideas in our thought have no way of telling what such unreflective thinkers actually know. But for those of us who can find what is in our understandings, in doing so we know the ideas we have. Thus this “finding” is associated with the “knowing.” For the purposes of analysis, posit this “finding” as a theoretical simple or set of theoretical simples. Until we find a proper place for it in the theory of ideas, we will employ the designation for such posited simples by placing its name in boldface.

The passage continues with a rather general point about perception:

Which always being so, (it being impossible but that he should perceive what he perceives) he can never be in doubt when any idea is in his mind, that it is there, and is that idea it is; and that two distinct ideas, when they are in his mind, are there, and are not one and the same idea. (IV.vii.4)

Locke here repeats a familiar point from the polemic against innate principles:

For if these words (to be in the understanding) have any propriety, they signify to be understood. So that, to be in the understanding, and, not to be understood; to be in the mind,
and, never to be perceived, is all one, as to say any thing is, and is not, in the mind or understanding. (I.i.5)

Locke made this earlier point against the claim that maxims cannot be in the understanding except by being perceived by that mind in whose understanding those maxims are purported to be. Locke’s point about words and signification rests on the more general point about all perception. This more general point applies to all ideas and not just to complex ideas. Being in a mind just is being perceived. Finding precedes all other knowledge, but is not the same as perception. Since finding involves discerning, and discerning amounts to reflection, finding involves the formation of a complex idea. Locke’s points apply to those who think in any way that involves reflection. So long as this thinking follows after the commencement of sensory experience, and is necessary for any other knowledge, Locke can accommodate finding within the HPM.

Stages of Thinking

Locke requires a basic priority of sensation over reflection, as well as a priority of knowledge of identity and diversity for all other knowledge. But these two prioritizations are of different sorts. The priority of sensation over reflection is sequential. The priority of knowledge of identity and diversity over all other knowledge is explanatory. The account of such knowledge must place the finding necessary for all other knowledge at some stage after the initial stage of
experience. But upon doing so, finding can then be simultaneous with the other forms of knowledge. To better grasp these different prioritizations consider different stages of thought according to the complexity involved in each. The first stage theoretically posits the structure of the first instant of experience:

STAGE 1. Sensitive simples occurring unannexed to any other ideas.\(^{76}\)

This stage consists of a vast number of sensitive simples. The appearing and disappearing of these simples may continue indefinitely, and may also undergo wholesale stops and starts. So far at Stage 1 there is no reflective thought. That means the mind possessed of these simple ideas at Stage 1 has no farther idea besides those of bare sensation. Thus there are no relations between the ideas in this primitive sensing mind, since these simple ideas are only had by a being who has not related any of them. By hypothesis, this being cannot yet relate them. If we assert that there are abstract relations that can be posited about such simple ideas, what we are doing is forming relations concerning our own ideas as we formulate the case to ourselves. But the mind whose thought extends no farther than Stage 1 forms no relations of its ideas at all. This mind does

\(^{76}\) Experiential simples raise issues not directly germane to the case at hand. Pain and pleasure do not raise any special concerns here, but what it means for existence, unity, power, succession or duration to occur unannexed or without any reflective thought is far from clear. Addressing these concerns is beyond the scope of the present discussion.
not even remember or contemplate anything. Nevertheless, this mind does perceive what it perceives, and the ideas by which it perceives are in that mind’s primitive understanding. These simple ideas are thus determinate by default. But since there are no relations amongst these ideas, they remain undetermined. So, this mind does not have any finding of these ideas, even though it has them. The first act of mind has not yet occurred at Stage 1.

Stage 2 introduces complex ideas by means of some reflective thought. However, this reflective thought is severely restricted in its structure. This stage occurs at least some moments later than the first instant of Stage 1, but may occur countless many instants later. It may also come and go. But this Stage 2 thought occurs along with Stage 1 thought:

STAGE 1. Sensitive simples occurring unannexed to any other ideas.
STAGE 2. Reflective simples annexed to some sensitive simples.

The presence of reflective simples and their annexations to other simple ideas means that the Stage 2 mind forms primitive complex ideas. This second stage may precede a slip back into the circumstance of Stage 1. If so, then all the reflection of Stage 2 would be lost to that subsequent unreflective stage. That unreflective mind would be unaffected by the moments of reflection that preceded its slip into bare sensation. Its
previous reflective thought would be unrecoverable while its thought persisted at Stage 1. If at a further subsequent stage that mind returns to the conditions of Stage 2, then the reflective thought at this renewed moment of reflection would only consist of reflection on a previous stage of bare sensation. That is because the structure of Stage 2 is so sparse: the reflection only involved annexations to sensitive simples. No complex ideas can be retained or discerned while thought extends merely as far as the conditions of Stage 2.

To extend reflective thought to take in complex ideas as further objects of thought requires at least one further layer of complexity along with Stage 1 and 2 thought:

STAGE 1. Sensitive simples occurring unannexed to any other ideas.
STAGE 2. Reflective simples annexed to some sensitive simples.
STAGE 3. Reflective simples annexed to complex ideas formed at Stage 2.

The further level of complexity of Stage 3 allows for reflective thought concerning the elements of Stage 2. A complex idea formed at the Stage 2 level of thinking is now something that can be annexed to another reflective simple at Stage 3. This extra complexity allows for comparisons that involve memory, for instance, since comparing and remembering each form complex ideas by annexation. Any retention or discerning of an element of Stage 2 thinking would be an instance of Stage 3 thinking. But
this retained Stage 2 thought would not be the Stage 2 thought that occurs at the same moment as an occurrent Stage 3 thought. Instead, the retained Stage 2 thought is revived or maintained from some previous moment of thought. Now from this model allow for higher orders of complexity beyond Stage 3. I wish to focus on only a few aspects of this scheme that help with the problem about knowledge of identity and diversity being the first acts of the mind.

**Distinct Ideas as the Foundation of Knowledge**

The problem at hand concerns how distinctness can be the foundation of all our knowledge without violating the HPM. Putting relations into that foundation would violate the HPM if doing so placed those relations at the first moments of experience. At bottom, the main constraint is that complex ideas cannot be given in experience. And so the distinctness Locke needs relies upon simple ideas, but must not be coeval with their initial occurrence as simple in experience. These simple ideas in their initial occurrence are determinate and undetermined. Any such ideas offer material for comparison. And, all ideas meet this condition. Distinctness is a relation. The comparing constitutive of that relation occurs at a higher stage of thinking than the determinate ideas in the relation (i.e. those annexed to *comparing*). For ideas to be compared in this fashion requires them also to be somehow retained for the
comparison. This retention likewise amounts to remembering or contemplating annexed to the determinate idea. So, which of these reflective simples is “the first act of mind, comparing or some mode of retention? The answer is: at least both. Reflective thought involves multiple operations of the mind simultaneously annexing to the same ideas. Some operations occur simultaneous with others forming Stage 3 complex ideas at an instant. The priority of finding to other reflective thought does not require a sequential priority of determinate reflective simples. That is, Stage 2 thinking need not temporally precede Stage 3 thinking.\textsuperscript{77}

If finding involves simultaneous retention and comparing, then the first act of mind is an act that involves a variety of reflective simples. These reflective simples simultaneously annex to other ideas. The result is an idea with at least a Stage 3 level of complexity: comparing annexed to contemplating which is annexed to something else. I submit that nothing Locke says precludes this account of reflection. Furthermore, this account preserves the crucial sequential priority of sensation over reflection while establishing the explanatory priority of the first act of the

\textsuperscript{77} And likewise for Stage 4 thinking, Stage 5 thinking, etc.. How much complexity a single thought can manage is entirely an empirical matter. But the short answer is that much of what we take for granted in our thinking involves vast amounts of reflective simples of stages far beyond what can be captured in a simple scheme such as that briefly sketched here.
mind over the other forms of knowledge. The constraints Locke places on sequential priority concern only the priority of sensation over reflection. But as for reflection, simultaneous multiple acts forming ideas of multilayered complexity are no problem at all if an interpretation can manage them. This Strict Interpretation places the acts of mind constitutive of finding at a stage of thinking sequentially posterior to Stage 1 bare sensation. It also allows for this finding to be simultaneous with any number of acts of mind that might include finding as a determinate part. On this account, finding would be necessary for those other acts that include it along with some other acts of mind. As such, the analysis of finding would be explanatorily prior to the analysis of that which includes finding. So if knowledge of co-existence, for instance, amounts to a variety of acts of mind including the comparing and retention constitutive of finding, then knowledge of co-existence would require finding. The Strict Interpretation delivers precisely the account Locke wants.

Any perception of agreement or disagreement either is or contains as a determinate part an intuitive perception of identity or diversity. That intuitive perception of identity or diversity is founded on the having of distinct ideas. Distinct ideas are those wherein the mind perceives a
difference from all others by a secret, unobserved reference to names.78

The having of distinct ideas includes forming determined ideas. These determined ideas consist of determinate constituents whose arrangement the mind perceives when giving the idea a name. Locke characterizes the mental predecessors of these names to be the basis for all other knowledge. This holds for any idea whatsoever, whether that idea be formulated linguistically, or involves only the most primitive retention from sensation. In the lines that continue the passage from IV.vii.4 Locke applies this point to pre-linguistic ideas:

So that all such affirmations, and negations, are made without any possibility of doubt, uncertainty, or hesitation, and must necessarily be assented to, as soon as understood; that is, as soon as we have, in our minds, determined ideas, which the terms in the proposition stand for. (IV.vii.4)

Assent occurs simultaneous with the understanding of the affirmations and negations. Locke clarifies what this understanding consists in: having determined ideas signified by the terms in the propositions. But that means that the mere having of those determined ideas apart from their reference to names is the basis of understanding the affirmation or negation. So, Locke provides for us an analysis of understanding a proposition formulated according to the theory of ideas. Understanding a proposition amounts to having determined ideas signified by the terms in a

78 Recall from Chapter 4 that “secret” and “unobserved” mean unretained beyond its initial occurrence.
proposition. Ideas are determined in relation to their determinate parts, and in relation to their names. Both of those relations are, on the Strict Interpretation, *occurrent acts of comparing*. The parts of a proposition stand in the relation to each other of agreement or disagreement, and so the forming of a proposition is another occurrent act of comparing. Those acts of comparing, in their occurrence, taking into account their entire set of constituent simples ideas, constitute the understanding of the proposition. This is what Locke means when he states that the assent of a proposition follows “as soon as [it is] understood; that is, as soon as we have, in our minds, determined ideas.” The having of those determined ideas is the understanding of the proposition whose terms signify those ideas.

Determined ideas include determinate parts in a perceivable arrangement. Having such parts means that the condition whose occurrence in a mind constitutes knowledge of identity is itself a complex idea. As such, the Strict Interpretation posits the reflective elements of the complex idea to be simultaneous with its complexity. But determined ideas involve retention, and so some of their elements precede the complexity of the determined idea. This is how Locke’s account of intuitive knowledge of identity and diversity reduces to his empiricist theory of ideas. Given such an account, there is no need to consider Locke’s account of intuitive knowledge as constituting *a priori* truths. This first act of the
mind is a necessary precondition for any knowledge. Yet this act amounts to its own perception of agreement or disagreement. Thus the first act of the mind upon which all other knowledge depends is itself an instance of knowledge. Knowledge of identity and diversity is founded on the distinctness and variety of ideas present in experience. The distinctness of what is given prior to a determination of identity or diversity is the basis for such determinations. Without such distinctness, there could be no such determinations. Yet, simple ideas themselves are not coeval with perception of agreement or disagreement concerning those simple ideas. The occurrence of simple ideas in experience is a necessary and sequentially prior condition, but not a sufficient condition for intuitive knowledge of identity and diversity. And so identity and diversity are not the same as simplicity. The simplicity of simple ideas is given and not relational. Determinations of sameness and difference must be dependent upon and posterior to the ultimate simplicity of the ideas determined to be the same or different. The Strict Interpretation’s account of determined ideas mediates simplicity and distinctness, and thus preserves Locke’s empiricist theory of knowledge.
Conclusion:  
Further Applications of the Strict Interpretation

The preceding demonstration of the explanatory power of the Strict Interpretation opened up several issues that could not be addressed in this dissertation. I offer here in closing some very brief thoughts on a few further applications of the Strict Interpretation. This list is far from exhaustive, but instead offers additional applications of the Strict Interpretation to areas of study that were referenced in or closely associated with topics discussed in this dissertation.

Simple Modes

Since the Strict Interpretation focuses on the role of reflection in the construction of complex ideas, the natural place to go to flesh out such a view is Locke's discussion of simple modes. Simple modes differ from each other in how one thinks about a given simple idea. So, the role of reflection is potentially quite perspicuous in simple modes. Locke's account of the modes of space and duration/succession also offer an avenue for further development of the relation of identity and diversity within the theory of ideas.
Abstract Ideas

The troubles concerning relations in Locke’s theory of ideas also dog his account of abstract ideas. Both relations and abstract ideas straddle the distinction between simple and complex ideas in most commentators’ accounts of Locke’s theory of ideas. The work offered here in Chapters 6 and 7 can be extended to a full treatment of abstract ideas and their role in Locke’s theory of knowledge—a role that also greatly concerns maxims.

Representationalism and Realism

Because of its heavy emphasis on Locke’s theory of ideas, the question of whether the Strict Interpretation leans towards representationalism or realism is perfectly in order. With care not to entail a violation of the HPM, the Strict Interpretation holds Locke to a restricted form of direct realism. The terms of this commitment need careful development and formulation.

Sensitive Knowledge

Locke sometimes seems to treat sensation itself as constitutive of sensitive knowledge, such as in his claim that “The notice we have by our senses, of the existing of things without us [...] is an assurance that deserves the name of knowledge” (IV.xi.3). Such claims need to be accommodated to an account of sensitive knowledge that is wholly
relational and includes intuitive perception of agreement and disagreement as a determinate part.

**Demonstrative Knowledge**

Demonstration involves sequences of intuitive perceptions. The differences between demonstration and intuition deserve close analysis. Another avenue for scholars to tout Locke’s purported rationalist tendencies concerns the proof of the existence of God. An analysis of demonstrable knowledge would preserve the status of this proof while rendering its conclusion wholly dependent on experience. Locke’s account of morality as capable of demonstration also offers a worthwhile topic of analysis for the Strict Interpretation.

**Supposition and Judgment**

Only the barest outlines of an account of judgment have been offered here in Chapters 5 and 7. Developing Locke’s account of judgment leads directly to his account of faith, and through that channel, his philosophy of religion. Developing such an account also opens up other areas of research including Locke’s philosophy of science. Such an account would have to preserve Locke’s commitment to natural science being incapable of demonstration. The key issue here is the supposition of
support distinctive of Locke’s account of substance. So, an account of judgment would lead to an account of supposition.

Qualities and Substances

Taking the Strict Interpretation into Locke’s account of supposition leads to two of the most widely covered topics in Locke scholarship, qualities and substances. An account of substances would follow the account of relations offered here in Chapter 6. Thus substances would be analyzed as complex ideas. The distinctive element of substances is the supposition of support. This supposition also deserves an analysis in terms of reflective simples. An account of substances cannot go far without entering into Locke’s account of qualities. The Strict Interpretation would analyze qualities in a fashion similar to determined ideas, but now putting special attention on an experiential simple, power.

Power

Since experiential simples have received very little treatment in this dissertation, I shall close with some suggestive remarks about what I consider to be the most important and controversial of Locke’s “simple
ideas of both sensation and reflection,” power.79 Locke includes power in the class of simple ideas (II.vii.8). Later, he opens his chapter on power by acknowledging that power “includes in it some kind of relation,” and then asks “which of our ideas, of what kind soever, when attentively considered, does not?”, which he then follows up by reaffirming that power is a simple idea (II.xxi.3). Still later, Locke recalls that he has classed powers among simple ideas. And then, quite infamously, he observes that “these powers, considered in themselves, are truly complex ideas” (II.xxiii.7). These claims are tough to reconcile, as noted by Mabbott (1973):

Locke concludes that our idea of power may have a place among our simple ideas. This is clearly inconsistent, and the argument in its favour—that all our simple ideas include relations—is mistaken. The motive for this inconsistency is his recognition that [...] [powers are] among the products of any analysis of [...] complex ideas. (p. 37)

Yet, the distinction between reflective simples and modes of reflection exhibits a way of accommodating Locke’s various claims about power and powers. Reflective simples are constituents of modes of reflection, so modes of reflection are complex. But, modes of reflection are none other than reflective simples thought about apart from their occurrence in experience. Modes of reflection are reflective simples considered, attentively, in themselves. This attentive consideration of something in

79 Since power is a simple idea, its mentions as such employ the boldface convention to denote ideas posited as simple
itself consists of reflective simples annexing to some other idea. In the
case of modes of reflection, the reflective simples that constitute attentive
consideration are annexed to another reflective simple. Thus the mode is a
mode of reflection. **Power**, considered attentively, contains a relation. So,
whatever thought is involved in that attentive consideration of **power**
yields, in the resultant idea, an idea containing a relation. Insofar as a
relation is nothing other than a way of thinking about something by
comparing it, then all that is added to **power** to make a complex idea
including a relation are various reflective simples including **comparing**.
Following the model for reflective simples and modes of reflection, **power**
is simple, yet modes of **power** (or modes that include **power** as a
constituent) also include a relation. Insofar as the thinking sufficient to
produce a mode that includes **power** also includes the thinking sufficient
to produce a relation, Locke’s seemingly inconsistent claims about **power**
can fit together. This discussion of power is suggestive of what the Strict
Interpretation can do when applied more widely.
References and Works Cited


