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Locke, *Essay* II. xii; xiii.1-5; xxii.1-5,9; xxiii.1-11,15-20
Substance

Over Chapters i-xi of the *Essay* Locke investigated the sources of our ideas in sensation and reflection and identified the main simple ideas that result from these sources. He also commented in passing on what those ideas do and do not represent, noting most importantly that our type (ii) ideas do not represent qualities in things. Finally, he identified the main operations that the mind performs upon ideas once it has received them and noted that many of the ideas we suppose we immediately perceive are actually constructed by unnoticed mental operations performed upon more primitive, originally perceived ideas. In Chapters xii-xxviii he turned to take on a much more challenging task: that of showing that all of our remaining ideas are either created by mental processing of more primitive ideas originally given through sensory experience or do not in fact exist (instead, though we think we have them, we actually use words without any meaning). Many of these remaining ideas (or purported ideas), including most notably those of substance, essence, power, number, infinity, and God, were ones that had often been supposed to transcend anything that can be known by reference to sensory experience, and to be graspable only by way of innate ideas or a purely intellectual or rational apprehension. They posed the real challenges to Locke's empirist views. He wanted to show that even though these ideas might seem to us to be the objects of an immediate, but purely intellectual apprehension, they are actually produced by operations performed upon more primitive ideas originally given through sensation — or are meaningless words mistaken for real ideas.

QUESTIONS ON THE READING

1. What is the difference between a complex idea and an idea of relation?
2. Identify two different ways in which simple ideas come to be united in complex ones.
3. What is the difference between a substance and a mode?
4. How do we arrive at our ideas of mixed modes?
5. What gives unity to the various simple ideas in a mixed mode and makes them appear as one, single idea rather than an aggregate of distinct ideas?
6. What conclusion do we tend to draw from the fact that different simple ideas are constantly observed to occur together in our experience?
7. What is our notion of pure substance in general an idea of?
8. What is our notion of particular substances an idea of?
9. What is our notion of matter an idea of, and how does it differ from our notion of spirit?
10. What makes one person's idea of a particular kind of substance more perfect than another's?
11. What are the primary ideas we have peculiar to body? to spirit?

NOTES ON THE READING

Locke began this project in Chapter xii of Book II by identifying three main the sorts of derivative ideas: those that arise from enlarging or compounding the ideas we have received from sensory experience, those that arise from comparing these ideas and discerning ways in which they resemble or differ, and those that result from isolating simple ideas from the other ideas in whose company they are commonly given. The first of these operations gives rise to our complex ideas, the second to our ideas of relations, and third to abstract ideas.

Locke went on to divide our complex ideas into ideas of substances and ideas of modes. Somewhat inconsistently, he also identified ideas of relations as a type of complex idea, having previously declared them to be a distinct kind of derivative idea. What he had to say about our ideas of substance is particularly important, so it will be considered first.

The idea of substance is not one that obviously comes to us through sensory experience, which is why those untrained in philosophy often find it very hard to understand. It was forged by ancient Greek philosophers as part of an answer to Parmenides's argument that change is impossible because it involves coming to be out of nothing or passing away into nothing. These philosophers (Aristotle in particular, but also Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Leucippus, and Democritus) responded that change does not actually involve anything as absurd as coming to be out of nothing or passing away into nothing. Even changes of the most fundamental sort like the burning of wood and sprouting of seeds do not involve an actual passing away or coming to be, but merely an alteration in quality of something that persists throughout the change, or a rearrangement of pre-existing parts that come to appear differently to us after the change because of their rearrangement. Thus, the real stuff in wood persists and merely appears as smoke and ash, and the seed merely gathers up the real stuff in earth, air, water, and sunlight and makes it appear in a different way. The real stuff that persists is what the ancients called the substance or substratum or matter, and the qualities or arrangements that change are what they called its accidents or modifications. Of course, in cases like the burning of wood or the sprouting of seeds the change is so radical that is not at all obvious to the senses what stuff persists. But this did not stop the ancients from theorizing that there must be some such thing and that all the features we observe with our senses, being changeable, must therefore be merely qualities of this underlying stuff.

This view naturally led the ancients to the further idea that the qualities our senses reveal to us are merely ways in which the more fundamental substance happens to exist, not things in their own right. Were qualities things in their own right, then when change occurs, these things would pass away into nothing or come into being out of nothing and Parmenides's objections to the intelligibility of change would resurface. Rather than be things in their own right, qualities have to be regarded as merely modifications (or "modes" as the ancients put it) of the more fundamental stuff and hence as things that have no independent existence. This meant treating all qualities the way we treat certain kinds of beauty and ugliness. We think that beauty can often result simply from the manner in which the parts of things are arranged. In this case, beauty is simply a modification or mode of those parts. Were the parts of a beautiful thing rearranged we would not think anything had passed away into nothing. All the parts would still exist; they would simply have changed their manner or mode of arrangement. But the arrangement would no longer be beautiful. When this happens, it is not because there is a thing, beauty, that gets destroyed or passes away into nothing; there are rather things, parts, that change their mode of arrangement. Just as there can be no mode of arrangement apart from something that is arranged, so this sort of beauty is not anything in itself but merely a special mode (of arrangement) that cannot exist apart from something that is arranged. This, the ancients supposed, is the case with all qualities and with everything our senses exhibit to us. They are all just modifications of the more fundamental substance or matter.

As has already been seen, Descartes was able to exploit this traditional and entrenched view to mount a compelling argument for the claim that the idea of substance is in no way acquired through the senses, but is instead discerned by means of a purely intellectual "inspection" or contemplation. In *Meditations* II he had asked us to consider any substance, such as a piece of wax, and had argued

that the only things our senses are able to tell us about this substance are its modes or accidents. It is through the intellect, and not the senses, that we see the wax as a *thing* (something extended, flexible, and mutable) that persists over time and change, rather than simply as a bundle of qualities or modes. Were the wax just a bundle of qualities revealed to us by our senses, the least change in those qualities would lead us to think that the wax no longer exists. If we do not think this, but suppose that the wax persists throughout change, even radical change in all of the qualities revealed to us by our senses, the primary qualities of size and shape as well as the sensible qualities of colour, scent, taste, and temperature, then that is because we discern something more to it with our intellect than what our senses are able to reveal to us.

Locke needed to reply to these sorts of considerations. This is what he did in *Essay* II.xxiii.1, at the outset of his chapter on the idea of substance. Locke's claim there was that we do not get the idea of substance immediately, from some sort of purely intellectual perception with the "eyes" of the mind; we rather obtain it mediately, from a sequence of operations performed upon ideas received through the senses.

Three separate operations appear to be involved in generating the result. First,

> The Mind being, ..., furnished with a great number of ... simple *Ideas*, ..., takes notice also, that a certain number of these simple *Ideas* go constantly together; which [are] presumed to belong to one thing, ... [*Essay* II.xxiii.1]

We observe that various simple ideas tend to regularly occur together in our experience. Whenever I eat an apple, for example, I regularly experience ideas of redness, roundness, a firm, cool, globular feel, a characteristic crack, and a tart taste. It is natural to wonder why these ideas are so regularly bundled together. The answer to this natural question is equally natural. If a number of ideas regularly tend to occur together, this is likely because they are all connected together as parts of one thing. After all, if they were not so connected, it would be extraordinary that the ideas should all so frequently occur together. (Note that in drawing this inference we take the ideas themselves to be parts or qualities of the thing, not effects of it.)

A second operation leads us to move from thinking of the thing as a bundle of connected ideas to thinking of it as a single unit.

> The Mind being, ..., furnished with a great number of ... simple *Ideas*, ..., takes notice also, that a certain number of these simple *Ideas* go constantly together; which being presumed to belong to one thing, and Words being suited to common apprehensions, and made use of for quick dispatch, are called so united in one subject, by one name; which by inadvertency we are apt afterward to talk of and consider as one simple *Idea*, which indeed is a complication of many *Ideas* together; ... [Essay II.xxiii.1]

Having made the observation that various simple ideas are regularly collected together, and having presumed that they are all connected as parts of one thing, we naturally begin to refer to these recurring bundles of simple ideas using a single name. This is not, however, simply something we do because of our "presumption" that there is just one object made up of all the ideas in the collection. Quite independently of that connection, the purposes of life make it important for us to be able to communicate with others regarding regularly occurring bundles of ideas (think of telling or hearing from others where food is to be found, or dangers avoided). It would be simply too cumbersome to refer to these collections of ideas by listing the names of all the simple ideas that go into them. So we make use of single names that refer to all of them. We call one bundle of

ideas “horse,” another “stone,” another “cabbage,” and in this way come by names for all the different sorts of animals, minerals, and vegetables. Those of us who are more sophisticated may even notice recurring bundles of ideas that are harder to discern and that we call “air,” “gas,” “spirit,” “soul” and “mind.” At this point, it does not really matter any more whether we have “presumed” that all of the simple ideas that we get when we see a horse or a stone or an apple make up one thing or not. Because we refer to them using one name, we “inadvertently,” as Locke put it, come to think of the many ideas in terms of the oneness of the name and so attribute a oneness to them in much the same way that we accustom ourselves to injecting an idea of a third dimension into our visual experiences.

A third operation leads us to form the ideas of substance and substratum.

> ... not imagining how these simple *Ideas* can subsist by themselves, we accustom our selves, to suppose some *Substratum*, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *Substance*. [*Essay* II.xxiii.1]

We do not just observe that various simple ideas occur together. We also “imagine” that they cannot occur on their own, or rather, fail to imagine how they could occur on their own. This seems like a dubious claim. Surely I can experience a smell without experiencing a taste or seeing a colour or hearing or feeling anything of the object producing the smell. I can even experience colours apart from shape, as I do in a white-out, during a blizzard, or a red-out, during a dust storm at sunset. So why would Locke have said that we cannot imagine how the simple ideas can occur on their own if we can in fact experience them on their own? Locke offered no explanation. He seems to have taken it to be an obvious belief that we all have, and that we hold to even in the fact of contrary experience. And as a matter of fact we do find something odd about the claim that a colour or a smell or even a shape or a feeling of solidity may exist all on its own. Our very language makes us reluctant to accept this view. We name colours and tastes and shapes using adjectives, like “red,” “salty,” and “square,” and this makes it seem not just false but ungrammatical to say that there is a “red” in the corner or a “salty” in the cupboard, or that we saw a “square” on the way to work. At best, we understand these expressions as elliptical for references to a red *thing*, a salty *thing*, or a square *thing*. That is, we feel the need to attribute the simple idea to some thing or object rather than suppose that it exists independently. It is plausible to suppose that our previously formed notion of the oneness of the various simple ideas has something to do with this. Having once supposed that the various simple ideas that we find collected together in our experience make up one thing, not many things, we start to think of them only in connection with the one that they are supposed to make up, and cease to even imagine that they might exist on their own, the occasional contrary experience notwithstanding.

But if none of the simple ideas considered individually can exist on its own, then it does not seem that simply by collecting them together we should suddenly create something that can exist on its own. A collection of things that cannot exist on their own does not obviously add up to something that can exist on its own — at least, this is what Locke seemed to think. Accordingly, he concluded that we are led to imagine that there is something else that supports these various qualities in existence, even though we cannot form any clear idea of what this thing might be. Since we nonetheless think it must exist we give it a name: we call it “substratum” and insofar as we conceive of the collection of simple ideas that the substratum supports as one thing, rather than a collection of many simple ideas, we call it substance. We think interchangeably of the substance

as some one thing that makes all the different qualities appear, and of the substratum as a container in which the simple ideas inhere.

According to the theory of *Essay* II.viii, our various simple ideas are caused by corresponding secondary qualities or powers in bodies. This makes it tempting to suppose that our idea of substance might actually be the idea of some secondary quality or power in a body in virtue of which it acts on our sense organs to bring about the various simple ideas we experience when we encounter it. But this supposition brings us no closer to understanding the notions of substance or substratum. For secondary qualities, on what Locke considered to be the most plausible theory, are just arrangements of small, solid, shaped and moving parts of the object. But solidity, shape, and motion are themselves three distinct qualities of the small parts of a thing. The same pattern of reasoning that leads us from the thought of the oneness of many simple ideas to the notion that the simple ideas cannot occur on their own but require some substance or substratum to inhere in ought to lead us from the thought of many distinct primary qualities of solidity, shape, and motion to the notion of a substance or substratum in which the solidity, shape, and motion inhere. At one point, Locke made this explicit.

> If anyone should be asked, what is the subject wherein Colour or Weight inheres, he would have nothing to say, but the solid extended parts: And if he were demanded, what is it, that that Solidity and Extension inhere in, he would not be in a much better case, than the *Indian* before mentioned; who, saying that the World was supported by a great Elephant, was asked, what the Elephant rested on; to which his answer was, a great Tortoise: But being again pressed to know what gave support to the broad-back'd Tortoise, replied, something, he knew not what. [Essay II.xxiii.2]

Understood in this way, our idea of substance is not just an idea that results from compounding various other ideas; it is an idea that results from a number of other processes performed upon simple ideas. It arises from the operation of relating ideas on the basis of their perceived coincidence or coexistence, from the operation of naming bundles of related ideas, from the operation of abstracting the idea of oneness, and from the operation of drawing inferences about the causes of the "oneness" of the bundled ideas, and from their apparent inability to occur apart from one another.

Moreover, when it is understood in this way, it starts to look as if substance may actually be nothing more than a meaningless word or an empty fiction. Locke seemed to suggest as much when he observed that the idea of substance is created by "inadvertently" confusing the oneness of the name with the oneness of the bundle of ideas, and that substance itself is "something ... [we] know not what," and something that we "have no distinct Idea of at all ... farther than of certain simple Ideas coexisting together" (*Essay* II.xxiii.2-3). In the eyes of many of his contemporaries, this was tantamount to affirming not just that we have no clear idea of substance, but that we have no idea whatsoever; that there is no such thing as substance, and that when we talk about substance and substances we are using words without meaning.

Locke did not actually mean to endorse this suggestion. His official position was that there is such a thing as substance, and that even though we do not have any clear idea of what it is, we do have a "relative" idea of it. (A relative idea is an idea of something that we know must exist, because its existence is indicated by certain other ideas that we have, but that we cannot further designate or describe other than by reference to the other ideas that relate or point to it. Substance, on this account, is a relative idea that is designated or pointed to by the ideas in the bundle.) However, many of Locke's contemporaries, most notably Edward Stillingfleet, the Bishop of

Worcester, supposed that he did want to deny that there is any such thing as substance or at least suggest that its existence is open to question. And they vociferously criticized Locke for doing so.

In Stillingfleet's eyes, Locke's alleged scepticism about substance had a number of dangerous implications. Among the most serious was that it threatened the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity. According to that doctrine, hammered out in the early centuries of the Christian church for reasons that need not be surveyed here, God is a union of three "persons" in one "substance." In the early centuries, this doctrine had been most famously questioned by Arius, from whose name the Arian heresy originates, and in Locke's day Arianism had been revived by Faustus Socinius and other "Unitarians" in the extreme liberal wing of the Protestant movement. The Socinians and Unitarians viewed the belief in the divinity of Christ himself as nothing more than a "superstition" of the same sort as the generally reviled Catholic belief in Christ's presence in the Eucharist. By questioning our knowledge of substance, and, in the minds of many, its existence, Locke appeared to be calling the doctrine of the Trinity into question, and opening the door to Unitarianism, Socinianism, Arianism, and other highly heterodox views of Christianity. After all, if there is no substance, then the notion of three persons in one substance makes no sense. We are left with just three persons, and a choice between saying just one of the persons is God (hence, denying the divinity of Christ), or saying that all are (hence, denying monotheism). For most Protestant sects of the day (and the Church of England was certainly no exception), this was viewed as tantamount to denying any recognizably "Christian" form of religion.

Locke had no wish to be branded heterodox, and in reply to Stillingfleet's charge that he took "the being of substance to have no other foundation but the fancies of men" (Winkler, 343) he claimed that "it is of the idea alone I [spoke] there, and not of the being of substance" (Winkler, 343), and that "the being of substance is not shaken by what I have said: and if the idea of it should be, yet (the being of things depending not on our ideas) the being of substance would not be at all shaken by my saying, we had but an obscure imperfect idea of it" (Winkler, 343). Already in the *Essay*, he claimed, he had been at pains to observe not merely that there are psychological causes (various operations of the mind) inducing us to form the *idea* of substance, but also that there are solid rational grounds for affirming the *being* of substance itself.

Particular Substances. In addition to forming the idea of substance or substratum in general, we form ideas of particular substances. We arrive at these ideas through observing that different animals, minerals, vegetables and minds are characterized by different collections of simple ideas, and so are supposed to have different primary qualities and powers. Often, the bundle of simple ideas characteristic of a particular animal, mineral, vegetable, or mind will evolve and change over time, implying an evolution in the primary qualities and powers of the thing. Our notions of particular substances are ideas of something that gives rise to just these qualities and no others, and that is responsible for their evolving in just a certain way over time. Again, these are purely relative ideas or notions. While we might have some speculative notion of how it is that the primary qualities of the parts of macroscopic bodies might give them their macroscopic primary qualities and the powers they have to affect us and other things in the ways that they do, we lack microscopical eyes and so have no real idea of the corpuscular constitution that is responsible for the macroscopically observed qualities and ideas. And even were we possessed of microscopical eyes, they would only stave off our ignorance for one step, since we would still have no vision of what it is in each small part that enables it to express the primary qualities it does at the times that it

does. We merely indicate or designate this unknown something by using names like substance, or, more commonly in this context, essence.

This implies that our ideas of specific substances can vary, relative to the person who has them. Some people, who are more attentive and observant, will see more substances in the world than others. Whereas one person will refer to everything that is ponderous, rigid, strongly resistant to division, and brittle as a stone, another person will discriminate between stones, which are not malleable, and metals, which are. Yet another person will distinguish different kinds of metals from one another on the basis of things like their colour and their specific gravity (how heavy a given volume of them is), and so separate yellow, heavy metals, like gold, from lighter, dark metals, like iron. Yet a third person will distinguish between different steels on the basis of qualities like tensile strength, and ductility. So one person will just think "stone" when identifying a substance, another "metal," a third "steel" and a fourth "2040 chrome molybdenum."

Different people may also have different ideas of substances even though they use the same name for these ideas. For a child, and for most people in the street, gold is any yellow, heavy metal. Brass could be gold for all they know. A metallurgist has a more detailed concept of what gold is. But even the metallurgist's concept of gold consists of no more than (a somewhat more expanded) list of simple ideas and complex modes (most notably powers): yellow, heavy, malleable, fixed, fusible, subject to being dissolved in certain chemical solutions, but not others, and so on. Neither the metallurgist nor the person in the street has any concept of what it is in the substance that makes gold express all of these ideas. Their concept just reduces to a more or less extensive collection of simple ideas.

This is revolutionary. Aristotle had maintained that to know a substance is to know the "essential form" that makes it express all the qualities that it has. But Locke said that this sort of knowledge, knowledge of the real essences that make substances what they are, is beyond us, and that all even the most sophisticated person can ever hope to know is the collection of ideas the thing brings about in us. With more care and attention, we can expand upon the list of ideas the thing characteristically causes, and we might be able to explain some of these ideas, like those of colours or temperatures, as effects of others, like the shape, hardness, and motion of insensibly small parts, but, while that enterprise is valuable insofar as it serves to uncover common causes for a variety of different effects, it can only push our ignorance back a step, to the causes of the unity and endurance of the primary qualities of things.

The Substance of the Soul. This helps to explain why Locke's account of substance continued to get him in trouble, despite his claim to have never wanted to cast doubt on the existence of substance or substances. Aside from its implications for the doctrine of the Trinity, Locke's views on substance were taken to have another dangerous implication, and this was not one that he could deny, but was actually concerned to assert. The implication concerns the substance of the soul. At *Essay* II.xxiii.5 Locke wrote that "The same happens concerning the Operations of the Mind, viz. Thinking, Reasoning, Fearing, etc. which we concluding not to subsist of themselves, . . . are apt to think . . . the Actions of some . . . [substratum], which we call Spirit." Just as we suppose that those external sensations that we constantly observe to go together must be caused by some substratum, which supports the qualities corresponding to them, so we suppose that our internal sensations, of thinking, perceiving, willing and the like, are all caused and supported by some spirit. But, Locke concluded (and this is the really dangerous claim as far as his contemporaries were concerned), "We have as clear a notion of the [substratum] of Spirit, as we have of Body" (which is to say that

we have no idea of the substance of the soul at all, but merely a relative notion of some unknown thing in which our thoughts and acts of perceiving and willing inhere).

This was provocative. Descartes had claimed that nothing is more clear and certain than that I exist. But Locke, looking at Descartes's result, was only able to find it to be clear and certain that ideas of reflection exist — that there is thinking, willing, perceiving, remembering, and so on. He allowed that these things can no more exist on their own than can colours, extension or solidity. He even noted that it is legitimate for us to talk about two kinds of substances, matter, or that in which our ideas of solidity and an ability to communicate motion upon impact inhere, and spirit, or that in which our ideas of thought and feeling and an ability to initiate motion by a power of will inhere. But since all that we know are the qualities that inhere in these substances and not the substances themselves, we are in no position to make any claims about the ultimate, inner nature of matter or spirit. In particular, we cannot claim that spirit is immortal, or distinct and separable from the body, or capable of initiating its motions independently of external determination. Indeed, as Locke pointed out in a later part of the *Essay*, IV.iii.6, we cannot even be sure whether the substance in which our ideas of thought and volition inhere is distinct from the substance in which our ideas of solidity and impulse inhere.

In *Essay* II.xxiii Locke tried to put an opposite spin on this point. He spoke as if he were arguing against materialists, who supposed that we have no clear idea of soul, but a very clear idea of body, and he proposed to claim, contrary to them, that the substance and the fundamental characteristics of the soul (such as its ability to move the body) are as clearly known as the substance and the fundamental characteristics of body (such as the cohesion of its parts) — indeed, Locke claimed, body substance is less clearly known insofar as it is involves the perplexities surrounding infinite divisibility (to be discussed further in the chapter on Bayle). But this did little to take the danger out of Locke's account. It appeared to many that, like Hobbes before him, Locke meant to suggest that the soul is material and that there is no afterlife. And to the degree that these implications were less explicit in Locke's work than in Hobbes's, that only made his work all that much more insidiously dangerous.

Modes. According to Locke, in addition to having complex ideas of substances, we also have complex ideas of modes. These ideas can be created either by adding one and the same simple idea to itself an arbitrarily large number of times, in which case the modes are called "simple," or by collecting different simple ideas together, in which case the modes are themselves called "complex."

Complex modes are exemplified by things like beauty, triangularity, health, drunkenness, theft, inquisition, and other features generally thought of as properties or accidents or actions or affections rather than as things.

Simple modes are modifications of some one simple idea. For example, our simple idea of space can be modified by being squashed or inflated, as it were, to generate other simple ideas of figures of various sorts and sizes. Locke's position seems to have been that our original idea of space is always an idea of some specific space, modified in a certain way. Thus, depending on their experience, different people may get different original, simple ideas of space. However, once any of us has received their first idea of a space, however modified, they have the power to spontaneously imagine it to be modified in other ways as well, and so can independently generate ideas of all the other shapes and sizes of spaces.

Our ideas of both complex modes and substances are collections of different simple ideas that have been amalgamated in such a way as to appear as if they are one thing. As was the case with substances, what leads us to treat these modes as one thing is the fact that they are given a single name. But unlike substances, which we think of as being able to exist on their own, simple and complex modes do not include the idea of self-subsistence. This is because, despite the fact that they are referred to by one name, simple and complex modes are most often arbitrarily created by us, so we are aware from the beginning that we are not dealing with something that exists on its own, but only with our own inventions. (We have a similar tendency not to ascribe independent existence to our ideas of relations, only in that case what influences us is that in relations the component simple ideas retain their individuality, so we have no temptation to suppose they make one thing, despite the single name.)

Besides being voluntarily invented by the mind, which has the power to put ideas it has previously received together in any combination whatsoever, modes can also be discovered in experience, which continually presents a number of ideas at one time, and so exhibits various combinations of simple ideas. Finally, complex ideas can be learned from definitions of words. Complex ideas, be they of simple or complex modes or of substances, are always given names, and these names are defined by giving a list of further names: the names of the simple ideas that go into the complex idea. Accordingly, rather than see various simple ideas combined in experience, or combine them in ourselves in imagination, we can merely hear a name for a complex idea being defined, and doing that will lead us to think of the component simple ideas that go into the complex one.

Definability is a special feature of complex ideas. Simple ideas can be named, but since they have no parts, they cannot be defined. This is why, when discussing simple ideas, Locke frequently said that those who have had the requisite experiences would understand what he is talking about, but that nothing can be done for those who have not (other, perhaps, than to show them where to go to get the right experiences). But complex ideas can be defined, and this means that people who have never experienced a certain complex idea can nonetheless be given that idea by means of a definition, as long as they have experienced and learned the names for the simple ideas that go to make up the complex idea.

ESSAY QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. Do a study of the correspondence between Locke and Stillingfleet on the topic of substance. Outline the course of the correspondence and assess the quality of the arguments on either side. Do a review of what other English critics of Locke's views on substance were saying at this time.
2. In his exchanges with Stillingfleet (see Winkler, 341-45) Locke denied ever wanting to suggest that there is no such thing as substance or even ever wanting to suggest that our idea of substance arises simply from a sort of verbal illusion. He claimed instead that the necessity of the existence of substance, and the consequent legitimacy of our idea, is proven by the fact that none of our simple ideas, including those of extension and solidity, can exist on their own. As he put it at II.xxiii.4, "because we cannot conceive, how [the complication or collection of those several simple ideas of sensible qualities that we find united in things such as those we call horse or stone] should subsist alone, nor in one another, we suppose them existing in, and supported by some common subject." Was Locke right about this or might a critic object that a simple idea could very well exist on its own or that two simple

ideas might mutually support one another's existence without needing to inhere in some substance? If he was not right, is there some other good reason for supposing that substance must exist? In answering these questions, consult the views expressed by Hume in Book I, Part iv, Sections 2-4 of his *Treatise of human nature*.