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总主编 ◎ 杨慧林 金 莉

人类理解论


(下)



An Essay Concerning
Human Understanding

[英] 约翰·洛克
(John Locke) ◎ 著
编委会 ◎ 导读



 中国人民大学出版社




人类理解论(下)

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

《人类理解论》于1689年首次出版后反响巨大，好评如潮。此书至1704年洛克去世时共5次修订，5次再版，其中1706年的版本是最终的版本。在1700年被译成法语，1701年译成拉丁文，在18世纪本书已经有近24个版本之多。从那时起（尤其在19世纪）至今，此书先后有36个不同形式的英文版本出现。包括“精简本”、“问答评论本”、“问答教材本”、“浓缩本”、“选编本”和“摘要本”等。

“（人类的）心智始于一张白纸（白板），没有任何文字，没有任何思想。”（The mind begins as “white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas.”）

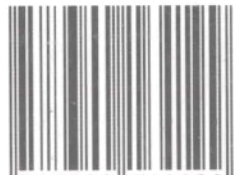
——约翰·洛克

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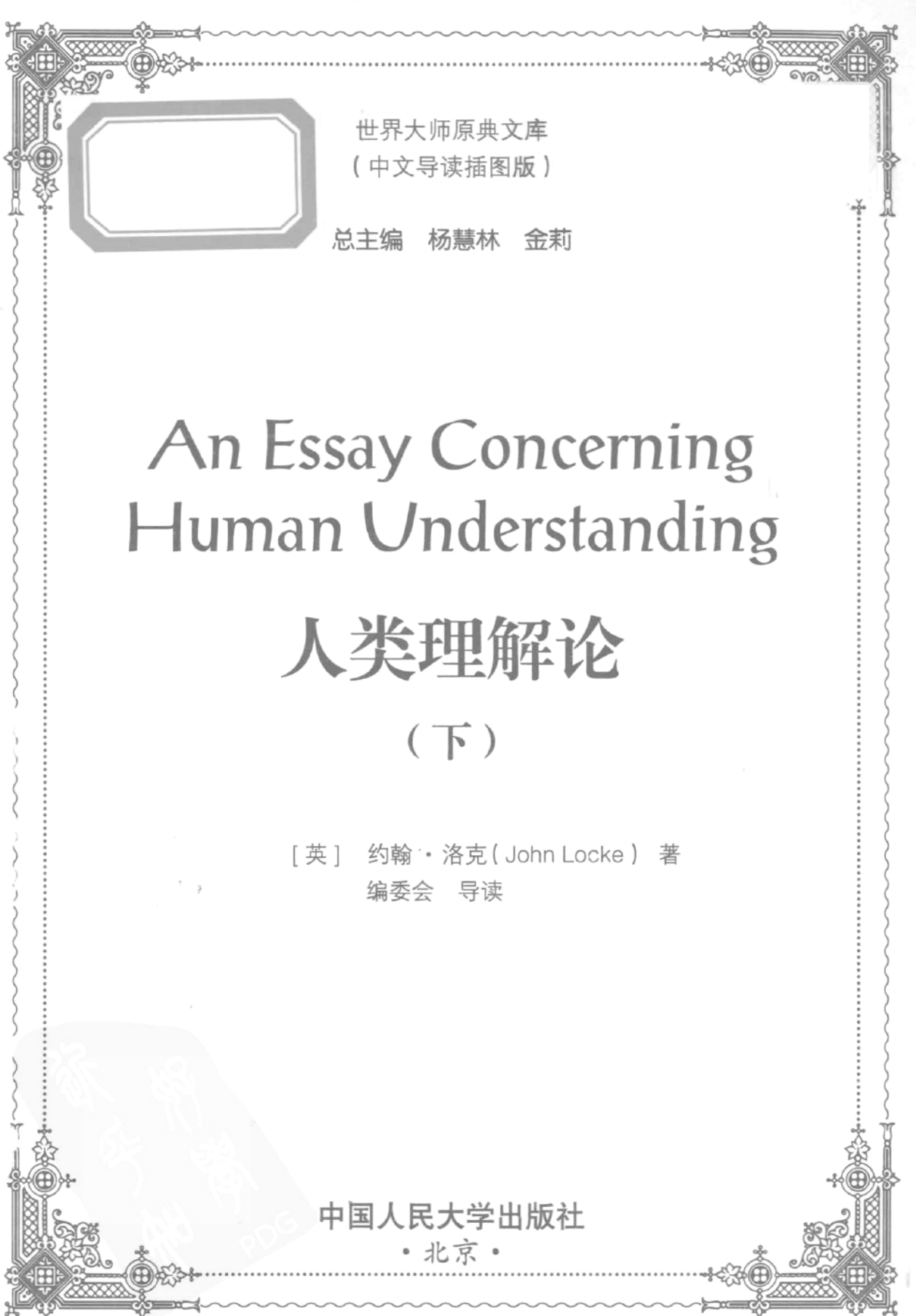
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II



BOOK III: Of Words

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Chapter II Of the Signification of Words

Chapter III Of General Terms

Chapter IV Of the Names of Simple Ideas

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Chapter VI Of the Names of Substances

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Chapter XI Of the Remedies of the foregoing Imperfections and
Abuses

Chapter I

Of Words or Language in General

§1. *Man fitted to form articulate sounds.* God having designed man for a sociable creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kind; but furnished him also with language, which was to be the great instrument, and common tie of society. Man therefore had by nature his organs so fashioned, as to be *fit to frame articulate sounds*, which we call words. But this was not enough to produce language; for parrots, and several other birds, will be taught to make articulate sounds distinct enough, which yet, by no means, are capable of language.

§2. *To make them signs of ideas.* Besides articulate sounds therefore, it was further necessary that he should be *able to use these sounds, as signs of internal conceptions*; and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another.

§3. *To make general signs.* But neither was this sufficient to make words so useful as they ought to be. 'Tis not enough for the perfection of language, that sounds can be made signs of ideas, unless those signs can be so made use of, *as to comprehend several particular things*: for the multiplication of words would have perplexed their use, had every particular thing need of a distinct name to be signified by. To remedy this inconvenience, language had yet a further improvement in the use of general terms, whereby one word was made to mark a multitude of particular existences: which



advantageous use of sounds was obtained only by the difference of the ideas they were made signs of. Those names becoming general, which are made to stand for general ideas, and those remaining particular, where the ideas they are used for are particular.

§4. *To make them signify the absence of positive ideas.* Besides these names which stand for ideas, there be other words which men make use of, not to signify any idea, but the want or absence of some ideas simple or complex, or all ideas together; such as are the *nihil* in Latin, and in English, *ignorance* and *barrenness*. All which negative or privative words, cannot be said properly to belong to, or signify no ideas: for then they would be perfectly insignificant sounds; but they relate to positive ideas, and signify their absence.

§5. *Words ultimately derived from such as signify sensible ideas.* It may also lead us a little towards the original of all our notions and knowledge, if we remark, how great a dependence our words have on common sensible ideas; and how those, which are made use of to stand for actions and notions quite removed from sense, have their rise from thence, and from obvious sensible ideas are transferred to more abstruse significations, and made to stand for ideas that come not under the cognizance of our senses; v.g. to *imagine*, *apprehend*, *comprehend*, *adhere*, *conceive*, *instil*, *disgust*, *disturbance*, *tranquillity*, etc. are all words taken from the operations of sensible things, and applied to certain modes of thinking. *Spirit*, in its primary signification, is *breath*; *angel*, a messenger: and I doubt not but, if we could trace them to their sources, we should find, in all languages, the names, which stand for things that fall not under our senses, to have had their first rise from sensible ideas. By which we may give some kind of guess, what kind of notions they were, and whence derived, which filled their minds, who were the first beginners of languages; and how nature, even in the naming of things, unawares suggested to men the originals and principles of all their knowledge: whilst, to give names, that might make known to others any operations they felt in themselves, or any

other ideas, that came not under their senses, they were fain to borrow words from ordinary known ideas of sensation, by that means to make others the more easily to conceive those operations they experimented in themselves, which made no outward sensible appearances; and then when they had got known and agreed names to, signify those internal operations of their own minds, they were sufficiently furnished to make known by words, all their other ideas; since they could consist of nothing, but either of outward sensible perceptions, or of the inward operations of their minds about them; we having, as has been proved, no ideas at all, but what originally come either from sensible objects without, or what we feel within ourselves, from the inward workings of our own spirits, of which we are conscious to ourselves within.

§6. *Distribution of subjects to be treated of.* But to understand better the use and force of language, as subservient to instruction and knowledge, it will be convenient to consider,

First, To what 'tis that names, in the use of language, are immediately applied.

Secondly, Since all (except proper) names are general, and so stand not particularly for this or that single thing; but for sorts and ranks of things, it will be necessary to consider, in the next place, what the sorts and kinds, or, if you rather like the Latin names, what the species and genera of things are; wherein they consist; and how they come to be made. These being (as they ought) well looked into, we shall the better come to find the right use of words; the natural advantages and defects of language; and the remedies that ought to be used, to avoid the inconveniences of obscurity or uncertainty in the signification of words, without which, 'tis impossible to discourse with any clearness: or order: concerning knowledge: which being conversant about propositions, and those most commonly universal ones, has greater connexion with words, than perhaps is suspected.

These considerations therefore, shall be the matter of the following chapters.

Chapter II

Of the Signification of Words

432 §1. *Words are sensible signs necessary for communication.* Man, though he have great variety of thoughts, and such, from which others, as well as himself, might receive profit and delight; yet they are all within his own breast; invisible, and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made to appear. The comfort, and advantage of society, not being to be had without communication of thoughts, it was necessary, that man should find out some external sensible signs, whereby those invisible ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others. For this purpose, nothing was so fit, either for plenty or quickness, as those articulate sounds, which with so much ease and variety, he found himself able to make. Thus we may conceive how *words*, which were by nature so well adapted to that purpose, came to be made use of by men, as the *signs* of their *ideas*; not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular articulate sounds and certain ideas, for then there would be but one language amongst all men; but by a voluntary imposition, whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea. The use then of words, is to be sensible marks of *ideas*; and the *ideas* they stand for, are their proper and immediate signification.

§2. *Words are the sensible signs of his ideas who uses them.* The use men have of these marks, being either to record their own thoughts for the assistance of their own memory; or, as it were, to bring out their ideas, and lay them before the view of others: *words in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing, but the ideas in*



the mind of him that uses them, how imperfectly soever, or carelessly those ideas are collected from the things, which they are supposed to represent. When a man speaks to another, it is, that he may be understood; and the end of speech is, that those sounds, as marks, may make known his ideas to the hearer. That then which words are the marks of, are the ideas of the speaker: nor can any one apply them, as marks, immediately to anything else, but the ideas, that he himself hath: for this would be to make them signs of his own conceptions, and yet apply them to other ideas; which would be to make them signs, and not signs of his ideas at the same time; and so in effect, to have no signification at all. Words being voluntary signs, they cannot be voluntary signs imposed by him on things he knows not. That would be to make them signs of nothing, sounds without signification. A man cannot make his words the signs either of qualities in things, or of conceptions in the mind of another, whereof he has none in his own. Till he has some ideas of his own, he cannot suppose them to correspond with the conceptions of another man; nor can he use any signs for them: for thus they would be the signs of he knows not what, which is in truth to be the signs of nothing. But when he represents to himself other men's ideas, by some of his own, if he consent to give them the same names, that other men do, 'tis still to his own ideas; to ideas that he has, and not to ideas that he has not.

§3: *Examples of this.* This is so necessary in the use of language, that in this respect, the knowing, and the ignorant; the learned and unlearned, use the words they speak (with any meaning) all alike. They, in every man's mouth, stand for the ideas he has, and which he would express by them. A child having taken notice of nothing in the metal he hears called gold, but the bright shining yellow colour, he applies the word gold only to his own idea of that colour, and nothing else; and therefore calls the same colour in a peacock's tail gold. Another that hath better observed, adds to shining yellow,

great weight: and then the sound gold, when he uses it, stands for a complex idea of a shining yellow and a very weighty substance. Another adds to those qualities, fusibility: and then the word gold to him signifies a body, bright, yellow, fusible, and very heavy. Another adds malleability. Each of these uses equally the word gold, when they have occasion to express the idea, which they have applied it to: but 'tis evident, that each can apply it only to his own idea; nor can he make it stand, as a sign of such a complex idea, as he has not.

§4. *Words often secretly referred, first, to the ideas to in other men's minds.* But though words, as they are used by men, can properly and immediately signify nothing but the ideas, that are in the mind of the speaker; yet they in their thoughts give them a secret reference to two other things.

First, they suppose their words to be marks of the ideas in the minds also of other men, with whom they communicate: for else they should talk in vain, and could not be understood, if the sounds they applied to one idea, were such, as by the hearer, were applied to another, which is to speak two languages. But in this, men stand not usually to examine, whether the idea they, and those they discourse with have in their minds, be the same: but think it enough, that they use the word, as they imagine, in the common acceptation of that language; in which they suppose, that the idea, they make it a sign of, is precisely the same, to which the understanding men of that country apply that name.

§5. *To the reality of things.* Secondly, because men would not be thought to talk *barely* of their own imagination, but of things as really they are; therefore they often suppose the words to stand also for the reality of things. But this relating more particularly to substances, and their names, as perhaps the former does to simple ideas and modes, we shall speak of these two different ways of applying words more at large, when we come to treat of the names of mixed modes,

and substances, in particular: though give me leave here to say, that 'tis a perverting the use of words, and brings unavoidable obscurity and confusion into their signification whenever we make them stand for anything, but those ideas we have in our own minds.

§6. *Words by use readily excite ideas.* Concerning words also 'tis further to be considered:

First, that they being immediately the signs of men's ideas; and, by that means, the instruments whereby men communicate their conceptions, and express to one another those thoughts and imaginations, they have within their own breasts, *there comes by constant use, to be such a connexion between certain sounds, and the ideas they stand for*, that the names heard, almost as readily excite certain ideas, as if the objects themselves, which are apt to produce them, did actually affect the senses. Which is manifestly so in all obvious sensible qualities; and in all substances, that frequently, and familiarly occur to us.

§7. *Words often used without signification.* Secondly, that though the proper and immediate signification of words, are ideas in the mind of the speaker; yet because by familiar use from our cradles, we come to learn certain articulate sounds very perfectly, and have them readily on our tongues, and always at hand in our memories; but yet are not always careful to examine, or settle their significations perfectly; it *often* happens that *men*, even when they would apply themselves to an attentive consideration, do *set their thoughts more on words than things*. Nay, because words are many of them learned before the ideas are known for which they stand: therefore some, not only children, but men, speak several words, no otherwise than parrots do, only because they have learned them, and have been accustomed to those sounds. But so far as words are of use and signification, so far is there a constant connexion between the sound and the idea and a designation, that the one stand for the other: without which application of them, they are nothing but so

much insignificant noise.

§8. *Their signification perfectly arbitrary.* Words by long and familiar use, as has been said, come to excite in men certain ideas, so constantly and readily, that they are apt to suppose a natural connexion between them. But that they *signify* only men's peculiar ideas, and that *by a perfect arbitrary imposition*, is evident, in that they often fail to excite in others (even that use the same language) the same ideas, we take them to be the signs of: and every man has so inviolable a liberty, to make words stand for what ideas he pleases, that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds, that he has, when they use the same words, that he does. And therefore the great Augustus himself, in the possession of that power which ruled the world; acknowledged, he could not make a new Latin word: which was as much as to say, that he could not arbitrarily appoint, what idea any sound should be a sign of, in the mouths and common language of his subjects. 'Tis true, common use, by a tacit consent, appropriates certain sounds to certain ideas in all languages, which so far limits the signification of that sound, that unless a man applies it to the same idea, he does not speak properly: and let me add, that unless a man's words excite the same ideas in the hearer, which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly. But whatever be the consequence of any man's using of words differently, either from their general meaning, or the particular sense of the person to whom he addresses them, this is certain, their signification, in his use of them, is limited to his ideas, and they can be signs of nothing else.

Chapter III

Of General Terms

§1. *The greatest part of words general.* All things, that exist, being particulars, it may perhaps be thought reasonable that words, which ought to be conformed to things, should be so too, I mean in their signification: but yet we find the quite contrary. The far *greatest part of words*, that make all languages, *are general terms*: which has not been the effect of neglect, or chance, but of reason, and necessity.

§2. *For every particular thing to have a name is impossible.* First, 'Tis impossible, that every particular thing should have a distinct peculiar name. For the signification and use of words, depending on that connexion, which the mind makes between its ideas, and the sounds it uses as signs of them, 'tis necessary, in the application of names to things, that the mind should have distinct ideas of the things, and retain also the particular name that belongs to every one, with its peculiar appropriation to that idea. But 'tis beyond the power of human capacity to frame and retain distinct ideas of all the particular things we meet with: every bird, and beast men saw; every tree, and plant, that affected the senses, could not find a place in the most capacious understanding. If it be looked on, as an instance of a prodigious memory, that some generals have been able to call every soldier in their army, by his proper name: we may easily find a reason, why men have never attempted to give names to each sheep in their flock, or crow that flies over their heads; much less to call every leaf of plants, or grain of sand that came in their way, by a peculiar name.