

Nature and the Nature of Sign

—Locke and Harris—

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Preface

Tracing the development of thoughts on language in seventeenth and eighteenth century England, paying special attention to the way each of them grasps the relation between words, ideas and things, we can take a clearer view of the major frameworks and the various pleats of the contemporary thinking. The age was that of both the scientific and the industrial revolutions. Natural philosophy had come to a new stage culminating in Newton's law of universal gravitation. Dramatic innovation in technology was being brought about with the growth of completely new attitude towards nature. These could not have proceeded without being accompanied by a drastic change in the view of nature, which must have deeply affected the philosophical reflections on language of the age.

In this treatise, I shall compare James Harris's philosophy of language with John Locke's. They look similar on the surface, but if we see them against the background of their views of nature, we can understand that one belongs to quite a different sphere of

philosophical thought from that the other does. These two different spheres of thought to which they respectively belong seem to have offered the two ruling frameworks of modern thought which still affect our thinking.

James Harris is generally known as one of the eighteenth century grammarians who established English grammar based on the eight parts of speech. But what he actually did in his major work "Hermes" was more to give universal philosophical foundations to that grammar than to treat it in outline, as is well shown by the subtitle of "Hermes," "A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar." And he devoted the third part of "Hermes" entirely to the consideration of the nature of language.

James Harris was born in 1709, and died in 1780. He was elected to the House of Commons, and played an active part in politics. He was a typical gentleman scholar, and intensively read the classical works of ancient Greece and Rome. While "Hermes" is filled with quotations from those works, he mentioned no name of his contemporaries. But in various parts of "Hermes" we can clearly read his critical attitude towards then prevailing empiricism. The outline of Harris's philosophy of language developed in "Hermes" is as follows.

In the first part of "Hermes," Harris defines speech as a publishing of the energy of the soul. This means that he supposes some mental powers working in speaking activities, and that he is trying to analyse language and give basis to his analysis in relation to these powers. And in the following chapters he actually classifies sentences and then words (parts of speech) according to the kind of energy they publish, and thus characterizes them on the universal bases. This philosophical nature which he gives to his grammar can most clearly be seen in the chapter where he explains the general schema of tense formation as the expression of the formula according to which the intellect (the power of the

mind) recognizes time.

According to what Harris says in the book III of "Hermes," the matter of language is articulate voices, and the form of it meaning or signification. Thus language is a system of articulate voices which have meanings. He then compares words with imitations, and from this comparison concludes that words are symbols, (that is, arbitrary signs in his case), and not symbols of things but symbols of general ideas. And he explains how general ideas are formed by the energies of the mind.

Harris always cites passages from classical works when he tries to authorize his ideas, and he never refers directly to his contemporary thinkers though he sometimes attacks empiricist views which he thinks base things mental entirely upon sense experiences. Apparently he resembles Locke in his view of words being arbitrary signs of ideas. But when we come to such problems as the nature of ideas, especially their relation with things, and the nature of the power of intellect of forming ideas, we find a striking contrast between the views of the two. And this contrast will become sharper if we see it against the background of their views of nature. Their seemingly similar views about sign really are the products of the two very different ways of thinking, the two opposing camps of philosophical thought.

In the next chapter, I shall first examine how Locke's view of nature bears relation to his view of sign.

I. Locke on Nature and Sign

For Locke whose main concern in his "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" was the ability of understanding to acquire knowledge, the problem of nature is, on the one hand, how we form ideas on nature, and how those ideas are related to the real nature, on the other. According to Locke, the materials of our knowledge, that is, the direct objects of our understanding, are not things themselves (accordingly not nature itself), but are the

ideas of things. So what we should do first is to examine the nature of those ideas.

About the word 'idea' Locke says;

It being that term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by phantasm, notion, species, or whatever it is, which the mind can be employ'd about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it.

(Essay, I-I-8)

And about the existence of such ideas he further says;

I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such ideas in men's minds; every one is conscious of them in himself, and men's words and actions will satisfy him, that they are in others.

(Essay, I-I-8)

What is said here about ideas is indeed a very useful simplification of such a complex matter as this.

Then to the question of how the mind comes to be furnished with ideas, he answers in one word, 'from experience' (Essay, II-I-2). This is the natural result of his denial of the existence of innate ideas in the book I of the Essay. This at the same time implies that we should start from experience whenever we discuss the matter of the ability of understanding. This position of Locke's we may call 'empirical idealism.'

Now according to Locke there are two kinds of experience by way of which we possess ideas;

Our observation employ'd either about external sensible objects; or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by our selves, is that, which supplies our under-

standing with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.

(Essay, II-I-2)

First, our senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey into the mind, several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways, wherein those objects do affect them: and thus we come by those ideas, we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities.....

(Essay, II-I-3)

Secondly, the other fountain, from which experience furnisheth the understanding with ideas, is the perception of the operations of our own minds within us; which operations...do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas...and such are perception, thinking,...willing, and all the different actings of our own minds...

(Essay, II-I-4)

The former source Locke calls 'sensation' which is the source of 'most of the ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding.' The latter source he calls 'reflection' which, though be not sense, 'is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal sense.' Of the two it is sensation through which we can get ideas that will constitute our knowledge of external nature. Then what kind of ideas do we have through sensation?

According to Locke there are two kinds of ideas, simple ideas and complex ideas. In relation to an external object, its individual sensible qualities are known as simple ideas, and its substance is known as a complex idea. About the way we come to know the

substance of a thing, Locke explains;

The mind being ...furnished with a great number of the simple ideas conveyed in by the senses, as they are found in exterior things, or by reflection on its own operations, 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; because as I have said, not imagining how these simple ideas can subsist by themselves, we accustom our selves, to suppose some Substratum, where-in they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call substance.

(Essay, II-XXIII-1)

But if substance is this supposed Substratum, it cannot be anything more than what supports a collection of simple ideas which looks like one simple idea but actually is a complex one. So substance can only secondarily be known by and as a complex idea, and the certainty of our knowledge of substance cannot but depend wholly on the certainty of the constituent simple ideas 'conveyed in by the senses' as sensible qualities of a thing. Then the problem of the relation between the contents of our experience of nature and the real external nature will firstly be the problem of the correspondence between ideas and qualities.

Along with the views on qualities then prevailing, common to such thinkers as Gallileo, Descartes and Hobbes, Locke divides qualities into two kinds, primary qualities and secondary qualities. And about these Locke explains;

Whatsoever the mind perceives in it self, or is the immediate

object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call idea; and the power to produce any idea in our mind, I call quality of the subject wherein that power is.

(Essay, II-VIII-8)

Qualities thus considered in bodies are, first such as are utterly inseparable from the body, in what estate soever it be; such as in all the alterations and changes it suffers, all the force can be used upon it, it constantly keeps; and such as sense constantly finds in every particle of matter, which has bulk enough to be perceived, and the mind finds inseparable from every particle of matter, though less than to make it self singly be perceived by our senses. ...These I call original or primary qualities of body, which I think we may observe to produce simple ideas in us, viz. solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number.

(Essay, II-VIII-9)

2dly, such qualities, which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves, but powers to produce various sensation in us by their primary qualities, ..., as colours, sounds, tastes, etc. These I call secondary qualities.

(Essay, II-VII-10)

‘The next thing to be consider’d, is how bodies produce ideas in us, and that is manifestly by impulse, the only way which we can conceive bodies operate in.’ (Essay, II-VIII-11)

If then external objects be not united to our minds, when they produce ideas in it; and yet we perceive these original qualities in such of them as singly fall under our senses, ..., 'tis evident some singly imperceptible bodies come from them to the eyes, and thereby convey to the brain some motions, which produces these ideas, which we have of them in us.

(Essay, II-VIII-12)

After the same manner, that the ideas of these original qualities are produced in us, we may conceive, that the ideas of secondary qualities are also produced, viz. by the operation of insensible particles on our senses. ...Let's suppose at present, that the different motions of figures, bulk, and number of such particles, affecting the several organs of our senses, produce in us those different sensations, which we have from the colours and smells of bodies, ...

(Essay, II-VIII-13)

Thus the ideas of both kinds of qualities were explained as caused by the operations of small unseen particles. This explanation is based on the corpuscular view of nature which Locke learned from Robert Boyle and which was a useful weapon with which to attack Aristotelian views of real quality and substantial form. But as these small particles cannot be perceived, their existence can only be asserted on the ground of 'judgement,' that is, as a hypothesis. According to Locke, judgement is the presuming things to be so without perceiving it (Essay, IV-XIV-4). In the long run this corpuscular hypothesis cannot avoid falling into a dilemma, because it must explain the ideas acquired through senses, the only entrance of our knowledge about nature, as the products of unperceptible things only supposed to exist in nature. In fact this dilemma comes from the very fact that by supposing the ultimate reality of nature as the corpuscular structures Locke takes the position of realism when he tries to bridge things in nature and the ideas whose origin he explains from the position of empirical idealism. And whenever he comes to this dilemma, he conceded the realistic side of his position. This attitude of Locke's necessarily characterizes his view of language.

According to what Locke says in various parts of the Essay,

words are signs of ideas. To him, the fact that a name is given to a certain substance means that a word is connected to a certain complex idea by which is known the substance. For example, the word 'gold' represents a complex idea whose constituent ideas are 'yellow,' 'very heavy,' 'malleable,' etc. This sort of complex idea is a collection of the ideas of the qualities of a thing which are acquired through senses, and is a standard by which to recognize the thing. It is a definition of a species or a genus, and therefore is a standard for classification. So it can be called an essence, and Locke actually calls it a nominal essence as it can be a standard for nomination. But so long as it is an essence to be defined from the position of empirical idealism, there is no means by which to decide whether it is based on the real structure of the thing.

Of course, as we have seen, Locke takes the position of realism when he tries to relate ideas to reality. And from this position gold is supposed to be a corpuscular structure, the real internal unknown constitution of it. This structure is 'the very being of any thing, whereby it is, what it is' (Essay, III-III-15), and is called the real essence. But such real essence, once established, could bring on the same dilemma that faces Locke when he considers the relation between ideas and the qualities of things. Locke concedes that real essences are not known. But what matters here is not whether corpuscular structures are already elucidated or not. Real essences, if found out, that is, brought into perception as ideas, (that is, experienced, and here we change our position of consideration into empirical idealism,) cannot be ascertained as real real essences. They can only become the constituent parts of nominal essences as the qualities of things. What this paradox shows is that we cannot assume ultimate reality on which to found our knowledge so long as we explain ideas as the products of experience.

Now for Locke words are to represent only the nominal essences

of things, and these nominal essences are nothing more than ideas in the mind of the user of those words. Therefore nominal essences are different from person to person, and this means that the definitions of genus and species and the standards of classification are also different from person to person, and that knowledge can never be certain as far as it depends upon words.

Locke fully admits this kind of imperfection of language and the possible abuses of words for this reason, but dare not connect language to something ultimate for certainty. It is this attitude of Locke's that we should regard more in further examining his thought.

II. Harris on Nature and Symbol

The problem of 'nature in "Hermes"' can be considered in its two aspects. One is that of nature in men, that is, human nature, and what matters here is the relation of human nature with speaking activities. The other is that of nature as external things, and what matters then is the relation between those things and the ideas men make about them.

In the first chapter of the book I of "Hermes" Harris says, 'Speech is the joint energie of our best and noblest faculties, (that is to say, of our reason and our social affection) being withal our peculiar ornament and distinction, as men.' And in the same chapter he also argues to the effect that men are 'by nature' social and rational beings. And in the next chapter he further says that a man's speech or discourse is 'a publishing of some energie or motion of his soul,' and classifies sentences according to the powers of the soul expressed in them. From these we can understand that Harris considers reason and social affection as men's internal nature to be expressed in speech, and that he also thinks of this internal nature as the energy of the mind. Then how does Harris relate this view of language of his with what he says about symbols, ideas and things in the book III of "Hermes"?

In the beginning of the book III of "Hermes" he criticizes modern philosophy as it 'almost wholly employs itself about the last order of substance, that is to say, the tangible, corporeal, or concrete,' and implies taking the position to consider mind as the ultimate cause of all, following ancient philosophy which scrutinized things 'rather at their beginning than at their end' ("Hermes" p. 308, n. (b), in the following quotations from "Hermes" only page number will be mentioned.).

According to Harris, if the mind penetrates into the recesses of all things, it separates those elementary principles which, 'being blended together after a more mysterious manner, are united in the minutest part, as much as in the mightiest whole' (p. 307). And he says, 'Matter and Form are among these elements, and deserve perhaps to be esteemed as the principal among them' (p. 307), and applies this schema of matter and form to language, considering articulate voices as the matter or common subject of language, and meaning as the form or peculiar character of it. He then compares language with animal voice, and says that they are common in having meaning, but that while the meaning of animal voice comes from nature, the signification of language is entirely by compact, which reveals his position of considering language to be conventional. He concludes, 'A word may be defined a voice articulate and significant by compact, and language may be defined a system of such voices so significant' (pp. 328-329).

Harris then compares a system of language with the world, and words with individual things in the world, to see if their relation is that between the original and imitations, (that is, pictures or images). And since hardly any of the things in this world have articulate sound as their natural attribute, and yet they all can be exhibited by that medium, he concludes that words are symbols which, according to his definition, are media of exhibition derived from accidents quite arbitrary to things. He thus rejects the pos-

sibility of language imitatively representing the world.

But here we must notice that Harris doesn't consider it a negative fact that words are arbitrary signs, that is, symbols. He asks himself, 'Why in the common intercourse of men with men have imitation been neglected, and symbols preferred, although symbols are only known by habit or institution, while imitations are recognized by a kind of natural intuition?' (p, 332). And he answers that as symbols are not ruled by the natural attributes of things, their formation is easy and speedy, and they can represent things that are not imitable. So it is because words are arbitrary signs that reason can control them more easily, and as means of communication they can more fully be connected with social affection.

Harris further seeks to recognize the connection of language with reason as human nature in the field of semantics, and asks what words are symbols of. And he points out various unreasonable consequences resulting from the supposition that words are the symbols of external individual things perceived by senses, and concludes that words are the symbols of something within, that is, ideas, especially general ideas, not particular ideas. Individual things in the external world can be denoted by adding definitives or articles to general terms, and thus expressing particular ideas. Now there laid between words and the external world as the collection of individual things are ideas. It is the formation of ideas especially general ideas that reason or intellect as human nature works at in its internal energy.

Like Locke, Harris starts his argument on knowledge from discussing the role of sense;

Man's first perceptions are those of the senses, in as much as they commence from his earliest infancy. These perceptions, if not infinite, are at least indefinite, and more fleeting and transient, than the very objects, which they exhibit, because they

not only depend upon the existence of those objects, but because they cannot subsist, without their immediate presence.

(pp. 353-354)

So to retain the fleeting forms of things, we have a faculty, 'called imagination or fancy, which however as to its energies it may be subsequent to sense, yet is truly prior to it both in dignity and use' (p. 354). And when imagination fixes the fluency of sense and thus provides a proper basis for the operation of higher energies, the soul exerts its powers, the powers of reason and intellect.

'Tis then on these permanent phantasms that the human mind first works, and by an energy as spontaneous and familiar to its nature, as the seeing of colours is familiar to the eye, it discerns at once what in many is one; what in things dissimilar and different is similar and the same. By this it comes to behold a kind of superior objects; a new race of perceptions, more comprehensive than those of sense; a race of perceptions, each one of which may be found intire and whole in the separate individuals of an infinite and fleeting multitude, without departing from the unity and permanence of its own nature.

(pp. 360-366)

This is the process by which the mind forms general ideas. Harris thus emphasizes the active nature of imagination and intellection, but so long as he starts the process from sense experience, he could not think of the innateness of ideas themselves. So he considers the power of forming ideas as the internal nature of men which really is the energy of the mind.

And again so long as he starts the process from sense, like Locke he could not ascertain if ideas thus formed express the real essences of external things. So here he asks himself the question

about the ultimate origin of those ideas. And to show and make sure that ideas thus formed by men's intellect correspond to the intelligible forms in external nature, he supposes that nature is designed by the supreme intellectual being, that is, the Deity. Intelligible forms first exist with the Deity as his innate ideas. The Deity designs this world as an intellectual system according to his internal intelligible forms as models. Thus;

May we be allowed then to credit those speculative men, who tells us, "'tis in these permanent and comprehensive forms that the the Deity views at once, without looking abroad, all possible productions both present, past and future—that this great and stupendous view is but a view of himself, where all things lie inveloped in their principles and exemplars, as being essential to the fulness of his universal intellection?" ... We must now say—*Nil est in sensu, quod non prius fuit in intellectu.*

(pp. 389–391)

And since men as images of the Deity are by nature intellectual beings, those general ideas which men form by exerting their intellectual power can correspond to the real essences of the things in nature, which in Harris's case are the intelligible forms which are what make things what they really are according to the design of the Deity.

Harris derives his idea of nature being designed from his observation that things in nature are more exquisite than any works of art. If a clock, for example, is made according to the design by men of it, it is less contrary to reason to think that natural productions which are more exquisite are made by design, than to think that they are made by chance. And once we admit the existence of design, 'we must of necessity admit a mind also, because design implies mind, whenever 'tis to be found' (p. 379). And from here assumed is the existence of the supreme mind, the

Deity.

Of course, from Locke's position, this cannot be called a proof. For Locke, the exquisiteness of nature, if it exists, itself is an idea which we get from our experience, and which cannot have any firm basis, and cannot itself be any firm basis for the supposition of something more fundamental. And if we try to found something upon something ultimate, we cannot avoid falling into a paradox, because we have no means to prove the ultimateness of that something ultimate. This impassable gap between our experience and the reality as the ground for the certainty of our knowledge, Harris easily bridges by supposing a predestinate harmony between human nature and external nature. For Harris each side of nature is an intellectual system whose intellectual existence is guaranteed by the Deity, the supreme intellect. For him, therefore, the power of human intellect whose limit is the main concern of Locke can reach and grasp the ultimate reality.

III. Locke and Harris in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Background

In this chapter I would like to recapitulate what Locke and Harris say on nature and sign, focusing on their understandings of the relation between words, ideas, and things, and compare their views taking their backgrounds into consideration. And to make the matter clearer, I shall first formulate them in relation to Aristotle's "De Interpretatione" which offers the archetype of such a way of understanding language.

According to Aristotle, words are signs of ideas by convention, while ideas are signs of things only when their relation is natural. Both Locke and Harris agree with Aristotle in the former point. Then what about the latter point? Harris does think that the relation between ideas and things is natural because ideas express the forms (therefore the real essences i.e. the very nature) of things. But Harris's concept of symbol includes the idea of

arbitrariness, so ideas are not symbols in his case.

In Locke's case, ideas are signs of things, but the relation between ideas and things depends on the arbitrariness of a speaker's forming of ideas. Therefore ideas do not represent the real essences of things, but only the nominal essences of them which are different from person to person.

Behind the fact that Locke considers words so imperfect is the general distrust in language in seventeenth century England that words only impede the formation of proper knowledge. This distrust perhaps starts from Bacon. In his "Novum Organum" Bacon pointed out four idols which stand in the way of those who intend to construct new science. Of them the most stubborn is the idol of marketplace which is caused by our use of words. Words are useful in communication, but for this very reason we are apt to be subject to them while we believe that they are under the control of our reason. And since words are usually made on the basis of the understandings of common people, the intervention of words on the way to knowledge cannot be anything but an obstruction to the project of new sciences, especially new natural studies. Even if we try to define words more clearly, words used for the definition are themselves incomplete at this stage and therefore useless. Bacon at last asserts that we should go back to examine individual examples and their orders. And this assertion reveals the nature of his inductive method which takes special notice of privileged examples. But in regards to language, the direction he took can only be expressed in such words as 'from words to things,' just as his general attitude could be called 'from magic to science.'

According to Bacon, there are two kinds of idols imposed upon reason about words. One is that caused by the names of things which do not exist. The other is that caused by the names which, though being the names of existing things, are based on incomplete abstractions from them, and therefore have defects in their

definitions. From such distrust in existing languages, Bacon thought of the usefulness of 'real characters' which denote concepts and things directly, hinted by Chinese characters. Most of the ideas of universal language developed in seventeenth century England have this distrust in common, it seems.

What Bacon says about these two idols are discussed more in detail by Locke in the chapter titled "The Abuses of Words" in his "Essay." But to Locke language being imperfect means not merely that existing languages are defective, but that language is intrinsically imperfect. And this view of language of Locke's is the natural result of his consideration on the relation between things and ideas that words signify, which is based on his position of what I call empirical idealism. Locke presents language as something which is essentially imperfect.

Contrary to Locke, Harris thinks of language as perfect, or at least he presents a perfect language as a model for his consideration. What ensures this perfection is the operation (energy) of intellect, in Harris's case. So in the last chapter of "Hermes" he admits that there are languages of different grades according to the degree of intellectual perfection. But to him there exists an ideal language, Greek, and it is this ideal language that should be taken as a model for the philosophical consideration of language.

In Harris's case, if the operation of intellect is perfect, it can grasp the real essences of things. Harris tries to prove this by developing his view of nature. First, the operation of intellect as men's internal nature is an energy of the mind, which, on the ground of the workings of sense and imagination to receive and retain the sensible forms of things in external nature, comes to form general ideas of them by its unifying and collecting power. And this external nature cannot be thought of as otherwise than the product of the design of the Deity, the supreme intellectual being, considering its exquisiteness beyond human works. So the primary causes of things in nature are their intelligible forms

which first exist with the Deity as the models of his design. Quite naturally it is these intelligible forms that human intellect grasps when it forms general ideas of things in external nature. And thus words, if connected to general ideas by compact, can express those intelligible forms, that is, the real essences of external things. And here presented is a model of perfect language which is the natural result of Harris's view of nature.

Harris's attitude to emphasize the active nature of intellect as an energy of the mind is perhaps under the influence of Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) by way of the third earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), his uncle. To them Locke's 'human understanding' seemed to be too passive against sense experience. Thus Cudworth says;

Knowledge is an inward active energy of the mind, not arising from things acting from without. ...Some ideas of the mind proceed not from outward sensible objects, but arise from the inward activity of the mind itself. ...All the ideas of things artificial have something in them that never came from sense. This true of plants and animals.

(A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, IV-I, II)

The eye or sense of a brute, though it have as much passively impressed upon it from without as the soul of a man hath, ... could not comprehend from thence the formal idea and nature of a house or place, which nothing but an active intellectual principle can reach into.

(The True Intellectual System of the Universe, III, p. 594,
from R. L. Brett 'Fancy and Imagination')

And about Locke's denial of the existence of innate ideas, Shaftesbury argues that what should be considered innate are not ideas themselves but the powers of forming ideas.

The question is not about the time the ideas enter'd, or the moment that one body came out of the other: but whether the constitution of man be such, that sooner or later (no matter when) the idea and sense of order, administration, and a God will not infallibly, inevitably, necessarily spring up in him.

(Letters to a Young Man at the University, 1716)

The idea of nature being designed by the Deity could quite commonly be seen among the seventeenth and eighteenth century thoughts of natural religion and deism, though in various forms. The fact that Harris thinks of nature more exquisite than artificial things and takes a clock as an example of the latter, implies that Harris's image of external nature is that of an organism rather than a mechanism. John Ray (1627-1705) thought of nature as an organism, and was under the influence of Cudworth. So in this point also Harris seems to be deeply affected by Cudworth and Shaftesbury. Like Shaftesbury he seems to have succeeded Cudworth's idea of 'plastic nature.' Cudworth uses the term to refer to a principle which he believes is at work in the natural world as an agent of the divine mind. Cudworth considers the world as an intellectual system animated by this principle of 'plastic nature.'

Shaftesbury dreams of the harmony of truth, goodness and beauty, and seeks its ground in nature. About the energy of nature he says,

...every particular nature certainly and constantly produces what is good to itself; unless something foreign disturbs or hinders it. ...Thus nature in the patient struggles to the last, and strives to throw off the distemper. Thus even in these plants we see round us, every particular nature thrives and attains its perfection.
(Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, II, pp. 359-360)

This statement finds an echo in the preface of "Hermes";

The growth of knowledge he (Harris) rather thinks to resemble the growth of fruit; however external causes may in some degree cooperate, 'tis the internal vigour, and the virtue of the tree, that must ripen the juices to their just maturity.

(Hermes, preface, v-vi)

Conclusion

The point where Locke and Harris are most different in their views of nature and language is whether any primary cause or principle is assumed in them.

Locke thoroughly denies the existence of innate principles, and thus shuts out the possibility of setting any primary cause in men. And by asserting that it is impossible to know the real essences of things, he also blocks the way to the assuming of a primary cause in external nature. This posture of Locke's of daring not to assume any primary principle also comes from Bacon. Bacon pondered over the question of whether the primary cause of nature is mechanical or energetic, and concluded that we had better abandon the solution of this kind of problem than worry too much about it, for he thought that the general propositions in the middle of the order of logic are more of use to men. So he went to the study of natural history for the advancement of learning and for the control of nature by men.

Locke denies the possibility of assuming any primary principle on the principle of his empirical idealism, and thus argues that knowledge is intrinsically empirical. Therefore to him natural studies always stay tentative, and words are always imperfect. Locke knows this, and seems rather to think of this affirmatively. For to deduce whatever knowledge from a certain primary principle tends to make knowledge a closed system though apparently certain, while by considering knowledge as essentially tentative

we can keep it always open to innovation and expansion. Locke's view of education confirms this argument of his.

Harris thinks of a sort of mental energy as the primary cause whose substance is the working of intellect. It works both in men and nature, and thus the perfection of ideas men make about nature and therefore of words as the symbols of ideas is predestinately guaranteed. In the background of this view of Harris's are Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, and from him can be drawn a line to the English romantics (especially to Coleridge). And he above all owes much to Greek and Roman classics. But doesn't the development of his thinking show almost a predestined pattern which is common to the speculations starting from some primary principle?

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