This book examines John Locke's claims about the nature and workings of language. Walter Ott proposes a new interpretation of Locke’s thesis that words signify ideas in the mind of the speaker, and argues that rather than employing such notions as sense or reference, Locke relies on an ancient tradition that understands signification as reliable indication. He then uses this interpretation to explain crucial areas of Locke's metaphysics and epistemology, including essence, abstraction, knowledge, and mental representation. His discussion, which is the first book-length treatment of its topic, challenges many of the current orthodox readings of Locke, and will be of interest to historians of philosophy and philosophers of language alike.

WALTER R. OTT is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at East Tennessee State University. He has published in a number of journals including Ancient Philosophy, Dialogue, and Locke Studies / Locke Newsletter.
Contents

Acknowledgements vi
Note on textual references vii

Introduction 1
1 Signs and signification 7
2 Particles and propositions 34
3 Essence and abstraction 53
4 Locke contra the Aristotelians: signification and definition 78
5 Beyond the bounds of sense? 95
6 The reception of Locke’s philosophy of language 114
7 Conclusion 138

Bibliography 150
Index 158
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their help with this book. Two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press provided helpful comments. Hugh LaFollette and Christopher Panza commented on particular chapters. Jorge Secada, Dan Devereux, Harold Langsam, Mitch Green, and others at the University of Virginia commented on earlier versions of one, two, four, five, and six. I had helpful discussions on these issues with Rebecca Hanrahan, Paul Tudico and Michael Pelczar. Finally, Marshie Agee suggested corrections and improvements to the entire manuscript.

Like everyone interested in Locke, I am indebted to Roland Hall, but I am particularly so for his permission to reprint material from my “Locke’s Argument from Signification” (Locke Studies, 2002) in chapter four. Portions of my “Propositional Attitudes in Modern Philosophy” (Dialogue, 2002) appear in chapter two. Part of chapter one appeared in a different form in the Journal of Philosophical Research (2002).

I would also like to thank Hilary Gaskin of Cambridge University Press for her guidance and encouragement. Thanks to Alan D. Robinson for the portrait of Locke, and to Angus and Malcolm for inspiration.
Note on textual references

LOCKE
References to the Essay are to Locke (1975) and follow the standard form: Book, chapter, section: page number. Thus 'III.ix.21: 488' refers to Book III, chapter ix, section 21, page 488.

BERKELEY
All references are to the edition of A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (1949–58). When citing the Principles, the numbers given refer to paragraphs; when citing the Philosophical Commentaries, the reference is to a number entry. When other works are cited, the reference is to the page number of the relevant volume in Luce and Jessop. The following abbreviations have been used in the text:

NTV: New Theory of Vision
PC: Philosophical Commentaries
PI: the published (as opposed to manuscript) introduction to the Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge
P: Part I of the Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge
TD: Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous
ALC: Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher
TVV: The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained