

language which I have described. It is one of the most common errors of discourse to assume that any common expression which we may use always conveys an idea, no matter what the subject of discourse. The true state of the case can, perhaps, best be seen by beginning at the foundation of things, and examining under what conditions language can really convey ideas.

Suppose thrown among us a person of well-developed intellect, but unacquainted with a single language or word that we use. It is absolutely useless to talk to him, because nothing that we say conveys any meaning to his mind. We can supply him no dictionary, because by hypothesis he knows no language to which we have access. How shall we proceed to communicate our ideas to him? Clearly there is but one possible way, namely, through his five senses. Outside of this means of bringing him in contact with us we can have no communication with him. We, therefore, begin by showing him sensible objects, and letting him understand that certain words which we use correspond to those objects. After he has thus acquired a small vocabulary, we make him understand that other terms refer to relations between objects which he can perceive by his senses. Next he learns, by induction, that there are terms which apply not to special objects, but to whole classes of objects. Continuing the same process, he learns that there are certain attributes of objects made known by the manner in which they affect his senses, to which abstract terms are applied. Having learned all this, we can teach him new words by combining words without exhibiting objects already known. Using these words we can proceed yet further, building up, as it were, a complete language. But there is one limit at every step. Every term which we make known to him must depend ultimately upon terms the meaning of which he has learned from their connection with special objects of sense.

To communicate to him a knowledge of words expressive of mental states it is necessary to assume that his own mind is subject to these states as well as our own, and that we can in some way indicate them by our acts. That the former hypothesis is sufficiently well established can be made evident so long as a consistency of different words and ideas is maintained. If no such consistency of meaning on his part were evident, it might indicate that the operations of his mind were so different from ours that no such communication of ideas was possible. Uncertainty in this respect must