

Introduction

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1. *Locke and Classical German Philosophy: A Reconsideration*

The essays collected in this issue investigate the manifold connections between John Locke and the philosophers of the so-called tradition of ‘classical German philosophy’. Some contributions take an explicitly historical-philosophical approach, while others combine historical inquiry with systematic reflection, thereby illustrating how many of the issues at stake continue to possess substantial theoretical significance within contemporary philosophical discourse.

Since the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding* has remained an explicit – albeit often polemical – point of reference for German-speaking philosophers. It is well known that in the ‘History of Pure Reason’, the concluding section of the *First Critique*, the “famous Locke” is presented as the paradigmatic representative of empiricism. In this capacity, Locke becomes a pivotal interlocutor for understanding the genesis of both Kantian and post-Kantian thought.

The enormous influence of Kant’s historiographical categories – most notably the canonical dichotomy between “empiricism” and “rationalism” – has proven to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has provided a useful organizing framework for the history of philosophy; on the other, it risks distorting our understanding of the English empiricists by obscuring or flattening the richness and internal diversity of their positions, as well as the intricate historical and philosophical network that connects this tradition to German thought – and, crucially, to Kant himself.¹ This is particularly evident

¹ For a study on the formation and standardization of the Kantian narrative in the history of philosophy, see Vanzo, “Empiricism and Rationalism”, p. 253. Vanzo himself notes that “according to its critics, the standard narrative has many flaws: among others, paying too much attention to epistemological issues; underestimating the importance of debates in other areas, from natural philosophy to

in the case of Locke who, as several scholars have noted, is too often constrained within the boundaries of the Kantian system and thus cast in a predominantly negative and schematic role in the post-Kantian tradition.²

This issue of *Studi Lockiani* aims to move beyond these historical and theoretical constraints by re-examining Locke's significance as a central interlocutor in the formation and development of classical German philosophy.

2. *Structure of the Issue and Overview of the Contributions*

The reception of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* in German-speaking contexts from the mid-eighteenth century onward constitutes the object of the rigorous reassessment of sources undertaken in the essays that comprise the first section of this issue. Riccardo Pozzo investigates Locke's presence in one of the principal centres of the *Aufklärung* – the University of Halle – focusing in particular on the significance of a course taught there by Georg Friedrich Meier in 1754-55. This engagement with Locke – mediated, to be sure, through the interpretive frameworks of figures such as Wolff and Baumgarten – left a lasting imprint on Meier's later work, especially in his reflections on logic and the philosophy of language. In this way, Locke's role in the philosophical debates of eighteenth-century Germany was further consolidated. It is well known that for many decades Kant himself used Meier's *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre* as the standard textbook for his logic lectures. Through Meier, therefore, Kant indirectly assimilated a number of Lockean ideas. Pozzo's contribution also includes the first English translation of the *Zuschrift* – the programmatic announcement with which Meier introduced his course at the end of September 1754; a text carefully drafted to engage the diverse intellectual currents of the *Aufklärung*. Despite the *Essay's* formal

politics; mistaking empiricists for rationalists, rationalists for empiricists, and authors whose thought combines rationalist and empiricist elements for exponents of only one movement; and creating arbitrary partitions that conceal the degree to which so-called empiricists such as Berkeley and Hume held the same views as so-called rationalists such as Malebranche and Leibniz". See also Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume*, p. 156; Norton, "Myth of British Empiricism", p. 331; Gaukroger, *Collapse of Mechanism*, p. 156; Haakonssen, "Idea of Early Modern Philosophy", pp. 109-14; Clarke, *Descartes' Philosophy of Science*, p. 45 (on Descartes's empiricism); and Bracken, *Berkeley*, p. 259 (on Berkeley's rationalism).

² According to Gaukroger, Locke "has been read almost exclusively in the context of a wholly inappropriate epistemological 'rationalism versus empiricism' distinction, stemming from considerations that only came into play with Kant, and which distort key features of Locke's thought" (*Collapse of Mechanism*, p. 109).

structure as a full-fledged philosophical treatise, its distinctive style – as a “free discourse” rather than a systematic exposition, highly unorthodox for its time – appeared to Meier as one of its chief virtues, insofar as it “allows more freedom of thought to the readers”.

David Del Bianco’s essay examines Johann Heinrich Lambert’s theory of knowledge, tracing Locke’s influence in both the *Neues Organon* (1764) and the later *Architectonic* (1771). Although numerous thinkers of the period engaged with the question of the material content of knowledge, Lambert’s appeal to Locke’s “anatomy” of ideas and his catalogue of “simple concepts” is particularly distinctive. At the same time, Lambert subjects Locke’s strictly empiricist framework to critical scrutiny, emphasizing the indispensable role of a priori knowledge. His attitude toward Locke is therefore marked by a distinct ambivalence: Lockean philosophy is regarded as foundational yet ultimately incomplete. Nonetheless, the distinctive way Lambert draws upon Locke as a point of departure for his own epistemological project offers a compelling example of Locke’s influence on eighteenth-century German thought.

Till Hoepfner’s ambitious contribution concludes the first section. Taking his cue from a broad inquiry – both historical and systematic – into the origin of the content of metaphysical concepts such as ‘substance’ and ‘existence’, Hoepfner begins by examining the works of Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz in their own terms, suggesting that their explanations of metaphysical concepts are ultimately circular. He then argues that Kant’s *Metaphysical Deduction of the Categories*, as presented by the *Critique of Pure Reason*, builds on various insights from his Early Modern predecessors, connecting them in a novel way. In doing so, Hoepfner claims, Kant can avoid the explanatory circle of the Early Moderns. This is primarily due to Kant’s original assimilation of various Lockean insights regarding the origin of concepts. However, in Kant’s hands, this assimilation is decisively shaped and transformed by the mediation of Leibniz’s *Nouveaux Essais*. Accordingly, Hoepfner concludes that Kant’s view of his categories may be fruitfully understood as a “qualified Lockeanism”.

The essays in the second section explore the relationship between Kant’s and Locke’s thought from various perspectives. Benjamin Zonnekeyn and Levi Haeck Gormez focus on Kant’s characterization of Locke’s project as a “physiology of reason”. The authors contend that this label should not be understood merely in a polemical sense, but rather as a crucial key to grasping the genesis of critical philosophy. They analyze the passages in which Kant invokes and employs physiological metaphors, demonstrating how these metaphors play a structural role in shaping his own philosophical project. The metaphor of con-

ducting a “physiology”, they argue, serves a twofold function: on the one hand, Kant employs it in a figurative or transcendental sense (*de jure physiology*) to describe the project of articulating the principles governing the internal organization of the understanding and the genesis of its faculties; on the other hand, in a literal or empirical-anthropological sense (*de facto physiology*), it refers to the analysis – developed in the *Anthropology* – of the concrete processes through which human cognition develops and is cultivated. In both senses, Locke’s influence acts as a decisive conceptual foundation for Kant’s formulation of the critical project.

Maximilian Tegtmeier’s essay traces the development of modern epistemology from Locke to post-Kantian German idealism, uncovering a distinctive line of continuity that runs from Locke, through Hume and Kant, to Hegel – a continuity that takes the form of a progressive “radicalization”. Following John McDowell’s approach to intentionality and knowledge, Tegtmeier argues that Locke’s empiricism already contains, in nuce, both the tension between manifold sensible data and unifying intellectual form, as well as the task of vindicating the concept of an object in general. This tension and task, which become explicit in Hume, are resolved by Kant in the Transcendental Deduction, which is ultimately further radicalized by Hegel.

Raphaël Pierrès, in turn, focuses on the relationship between Locke and Kant from the perspective of educational theory. This original point of view illuminates how their respective epistemological insights are transposed into their philosophies of education. At the same time, Pierrès demonstrates that adopting such an approach helps to deconstruct the traditional narrative of opposition between Locke and Kant – one largely promoted by Kant himself – thereby revealing a relationship that is less sharply antagonistic than is commonly assumed. Pierrès focuses in particular on the notion of *habit* and its role in the *formation* of free and moral agency, showing that the Lockean conception of the child as a *tabula rasa* requires must be corrected: for both Locke and Kant, habit plays an active and formative role in the development of the rational subject.

The essays in the third section of the volume aim to illuminate various facets – not solely epistemological – of Locke’s influence on the thought of post-Kantian German philosophers, notably Fichte and Hegel, or on thinkers who represent alternatives to the mainstream trajectory that Kantian criticism appears to inexorably lead toward classical idealism (e.g., Jacobi). Elena Alessiato contributes to the history of the concept of property by critically engaging with the often tacit yet significant presence of Locke’s ideas in Fichte’s

philosophy. To inquire into the nature of property from a Fichtean standpoint is to examine the sphere in which the individual is permitted to actualize themselves as a rational agent. Since his Jacobin period, Fichte grounds the right to property fundamentally in labor. The Lockean ‘paradigm’ thus assumes a pivotal role in articulating key notions such as the *Naturzustand*, the relationship between the state and civil society, and the scope of individual agency. Fichte appears to appropriate Locke’s conception, integrating it – though often implicitly and in a mediated fashion – into his own framework for understanding the interplay between law, established order, freedom, and authority. By highlighting both its theoretical strengths and limitations, Alessiato identifies Locke’s conception of labor as central to the activity that, for Fichte, is essential to defining personhood itself.

The very notion of personhood, and its radical rethinking, is also the focus of Mattia Megli’s essay, which explores Locke’s presence in Jacobi’s thought. Jacobi critiques Locke’s conception of personal identity as grounded in “a vicious circularity between the reflective structure [...] and the presupposed dimension of being”. This critique unfolds within the broader context of Jacobi’s general rejection of the epistemic paradigm of the *Essay* and its corresponding conception of rationality, both on theoretical and practical levels. From Jacobi’s perspective, Locke’s model of reflective subjectivity must be transcended in favor of a practical and ontological redefinition of personhood: one whose “immediate feeling” cannot be reduced to a merely conscious dimension, but rather constitutes a perception that precedes any reflective identification.

Roberto Morani’s contribution offers a detailed reconstruction of Hegel’s engagement with empiricism throughout his career, with particular emphasis on the figure of Locke. Through a comprehensive examination of Hegel’s writings – from *Faith and Knowledge* to the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* – Morani demonstrates that Hegel’s attitude toward empiricism becomes increasingly nuanced over time, evolving from an initially polemical stance to a recognition of its positive philosophical import. According to Morani, for Hegel, the significance of Locke’s contribution to the history of philosophy lies primarily in his conception of substance. Locke’s critique of the notion of substance inaugurates a new “epoch” of thought – one liberated from the constraints of traditional metaphysics and from the untenable presupposition of an ontological substrate. This, Morani contends, is precisely what Hegel identifies as a genuine new beginning for modernity, with Locke occupying a pivotal position within this transformation.

Camilla Brenni's analysis complements Morani's contribution by examining Hegel's critique of Locke in both the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and Hegel's systematic writings. Brenni demonstrates that Hegel adopts a twofold stance toward Locke: on one hand, a critical and often dismissive judgment of his philosophical insights; on the other, an acknowledgement of Locke's pivotal role in Hegel's account of the history of philosophy – and, consequently, in the broader self-conception of Spirit. From this perspective, Locke becomes for Hegel a paradigmatic figure representing a necessary moment in which modern philosophy takes particularity, finitude, and individuality as its point of departure. Brenni further emphasizes that, in this reading, Hegel overturns the traditional Kantian dichotomy between rationalists and empiricists, organizing the history of philosophy not on epistemological but on ontological grounds. In Hegel's reconstruction, Locke and Leibniz are not opposed but rather share the effort to think individuality and multiplicity against Spinoza's abstract unity. Finally, Brenni explores Hegel's critique of the notion of analysis, showing how, for Hegel, Locke's method falls prey to the limitations inherent in the analytical approach.

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