

Philippe Hamou and Martine Pécharman (eds.), *Locke and Cartesian Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, 277 pp.

The book offers a detailed reconstruction of Locke's relationship to Descartes and Cartesian philosophy, breaking ground with its innovative approach. As Philippe Hamou and Martine Pécharman explain in the Introduction, the volume aims to shift the focus of the comparison between Locke and Descartes from epistemological issues, which were the main concern of previous historiography, to physical, metaphysical and religious matters, so as to shed new light on the complex relation between the two philosophers and foster a better understanding of the epistemological debate engendered by them. Accordingly, the many contributions collected in the book analyse various aspects of Locke's relationship to Descartes, highlighting their disagreement on some crucial issues but also, surprisingly, the essential dependence of the former's position on Cartesian premises. Here I shall summarise only a few ideas in the book, although there are many others of considerable interest to Locke's scholarship.

In the first chapter, John Milton reconstructs the early stages of Locke's encounter with Descartes' works, which he shows to date back to the early sixties. Milton draws attention to some quotations from Descartes's writings in Locke's juvenile papers and to several manuscript notes he probably made in 1660-1661, which reveal he was mainly interested in Descartes' treatment of topics in natural philosophy. This supports the opinion that the conversation mentioned in the Epistle to the Reader with which Locke prefaced the *Essay*, which led to the ideation of the book, centred on natural philosophy, not on ethics, as Patrick Romanell had already suggested some years ago.

Peter Anstey shifts the focus onto Locke's change of attitude towards the Cartesian vortex theory, which was extremely influential in the seventeenth

century. A review of Newton's *Principia* Locke wrote in 1688 shows that he believed that Descartes's theory had been disproved by Newton, although he continued to read Cartesian-inspired cosmogonical writings in the following years and to believe in a vortical explanation of planetary motions. Only in 1697, in his correspondence with Stillingfleet, did Locke come to dismiss any form of vortex theory outright.

James Hill brings Locke's conception of body to the fore and, particularly, the specifically Cartesian element underlying his understanding of hardness and solidity as distinct properties. Hill points out that Locke agreed with Descartes on distinguishing between hardness, a secondary quality depending on bodily sensation, and solidity or impenetrability, a universal property necessarily belonging to all bodies. However, despite this similarity hardness and solidity played a very different role in Locke's and Descartes's physics. Not only did Locke make impenetrability the distinguishing feature between space and body, keeping his distance from Descartes' idea of *res extensa*, but he also described hardness, or cohesion, as utterly inexplicable, in sharp contrast with Descartes. This supported his agnosticism about the essence of matter.

Lisa Downing's essay returns to Locke's conception of impenetrability and space but from a different angle. She shows that Locke's arguments for the distinction between body and extension in the *Essay* were intended as replies to those Descartes had put forward in his correspondence with More, which focused on the impossibility of conceiving extension as penetrable and indivisible. Locke's notion of space was meant to disprove such claims. Downing also remarks that Locke's criticism of Descartes was underpinned by an astute use of the latter's methodology, which was employed to support counterarguments. This is evidence of Locke's being a subtle reader of the French philosopher.

Martha Bolton brings to the fore another similarity between Locke and Descartes, namely their mechanist understanding of matter as a substance that is homogeneous and not divided by species – an idea in contrast with the Aristotelian notion of substance as a union of matter with species determining the form. However, while Descartes believed that the parts of *res extensa* might be regarded as distinct substances, provided that they could be thought of as separate, Locke held that substances are diversified by modes, which individuate and unify their composition in material things. Whereas Locke's focus was on the unity exhibited by sensible things, which he investigated in depth through an analysis of our manner of conceiving it, Descartes offered no systematic account of the unity-making features in material objects.

Matthieu Haumesser shifts the focus from Locke's physics to his concept of existence and the different ways it is applied to ideas and real things in the *Essay*. Haumesser observes that, unlike Descartes, Locke rejected any intellectual reality that would not depend on actual perception, so that the only kind of existence he attributed to ideas was a virtual one. The net result is an ontology very different from Descartes's, not only because it is not based on the notion of substance but also because it makes more room for an "ideal existence".

Philippe Hamou highlights an important element of agreement between Locke and Descartes, their idea of consciousness as awareness of whatever passes in our mind. Both would conceive consciousness as being immediate and intuitive and, therefore, utterly distinct from reflection. The crucial role played by consciousness in *Essay* II.xxvii, devoted to personal identity, shows that Locke sympathized with Descartes for his not omitting it in his account of persisting souls, despite rejecting his idea that the thinking thing is always conscious. Hamou also shows that, contrary to a common view, Locke's target in *Essay* II.xxvii was not so much the Cartesian idea of the self as a substance but rather the disembodiment of the self.

Denis Kambouchner turns attention to another important parallel between Locke's and Descartes's thought, their treatment of the problem of free will. Despite their almost opposite starting points (Locke stuck firmly to the principle that the will is determined by something else, whereas Descartes always maintained the Stoic-Augustinian position that our will always belongs to itself), Kambouchner shows that the view Locke expressed in the *Essay* that the will is determined by the most urgent uneasiness, not by the greatest good, should not be considered as anti-Cartesian. Both Locke and Descartes manifested an acute awareness of the enormous power that passions exert on the will, and of the complexity of the conditions under which our volitions are determined.

The richness and diversity of perspectives in the book is confirmed by the last essays. Catherine Wilson offers an interesting comparison of Descartes's and Locke's stances towards religious and moral issues, individuating a common trait in the association of their "essential religiosity" with the notions of forgiveness and non-judgementalism, whereas Laurent Jaffro focuses on Locke's philosophy of language and on the resemblance between his conception of signification and that employed by Port-Royalists regarding the meaning of syncategorematic terms. Andreas Blank compares Cartesians's and Locke's reservations about the usefulness of maxims, while Nicholas Jolley considers Locke's criticism of Malebranche's argument for the vision in God

and the problems it creates to his own empiricist theory, which would be unable to escape this criticism. In short, the book lives up to the expectations engendered by the Introduction, shedding new light on several aspects of Locke's relationship with Cartesianism.

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