

Introduction

Locke and Occasionalism

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During his stay in France in the second half of the 1670s, Locke had the chance to explore and expand his knowledge not only of the philosophers, but also of the leading contemporary exponents of French humanist and scientific culture. His familiarity with the works of Malebranche also dates to this time. In 1676, Locke did indeed purchase the two volumes of *Recherche de la vérité* in the 1675 edition; nevertheless, his reading notes and the entries in his *Journal* show that his careful reading of the work dates to the early months of 1685, during his sojourn in Holland¹. It was only later again that he decided to focus his attention directly on Malebranche's chief work, finally referring to it in a letter written in March 1695 to his friend Molyneux.

I have also examined P. Malbranche's opinion concerning seeing all things in God, and to my own satisfaction laid open the vanity, and inconsistency, and unintelligibleness of that way of explaining humane understanding. I have gone almost, but not quite, through it, and know not whether I now ever shall finish it, being fully satisfied my self about it².

While preparing the revision of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Locke had considered the expediency of devoting a new

¹ J.R. Harrison and P. Laslett (eds.), *The Library of John Locke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971; J. Lough, "Locke's Reading during his Stay in France (1675-79)", in *The Library* 8 (1953), pp. 229-58; J. Lough, *Locke's Travels in France 1675-9. As Related in his Journals, Correspondence and other Papers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1953; L. Simonutti, "Inspirational Journeys and Trunks of Books: Initial Notes on Locke the Traveller", in *Studi lockiani. Ricerche sull'età moderna*, 1, 2020, pp. 131-162.

² Locke to Molyneux, 8 March 1695, in J. Locke, *Correspondence*, 8 vols., ed. by E.S. De Beer, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1976-89, vol. 5, Letter 1857, p. 287.

chapter in his book to the appraisal and refutation of certain aspects of the thought of Malebranche, especially his conception of the vision in God, which had found new disciples among the English thinkers. However, it seems likely that his reluctance to enter into new controversies, and a certain benevolence towards the author of the *Recherche*, may have restrained him from carrying through this project. Nevertheless, he did collect his reflections about the French philosopher, and in particular about certain chapters of the *Recherche* and the *Eclaircissement X*, in a short, somewhat fragmentary, text that he did not wish to publish since he had not abandoned the project of exploring Malebranche's philosophy further and furnishing a more comprehensive critical analysis of it.

In his last letter to his cousin Peter King, the executor of his will, Locke lifted the ban on the publication of some of his writings, including the aforementioned text on Malebranche. Peter King considered this an important critical contribution countering the mystical-idealist slant that Malebranche had given to Cartesian rationalism in the last quarter of the century, and that had made significant headway in England in the last years of the seventeenth century, fostered by the appearance of English translations of Malebranche's principal works. As a result, King did not hesitate to include this work in the collection of *Posthumous Works* which, together with Anthony Collins, he published in London in 1706³. In this short *Examination of Malebranche's opinion of seeing all things in God* Locke starts his critical reflections by resuming the polemic with John Norris — to whom he was, moreover, bound by friendship — the thinker who had championed Malebranche's thought in England more than any other, sponsoring the translation of his most important works. On the other hand, as soon as the *Essay* appeared, Norris had not hesitated to express his criticism in the short composition titled *Cursory Reflections upon a Book call'd, An*

³ J. Locke, *An Examination of P. Malebranche's Opinion of Our Seeing All Things in God*, in *Posthumous Works of Mr. John Locke*, P. King (ed.), A. and J. Churchill, London, 1706; J. Locke, *Examen de "La Vision en Dieu" de Malebranche*. Introduction, traduction et notes par Jean Pucelle, Vrin, Paris, 1978; J. Locke, *Malebranche e la visione in Dio. Con un commento di Leibniz*, introduction and translation by L. Simonutti, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 1994.

Essay concerning Human Understanding, In a Letter to a Friend (1690). This provoked a brief and belated reply from Locke, only recently published, in which he defended his method of investigation and his own definition of the concept of idea, turning harshly against Norris's theory of the origin and nature of ideas.

The wealth of topics contained in the *Examination of Malebranche's opinion of seeing all things in God*, and, more generally, the numerous repercussions and the breadth of the effects and influence of Locke's reflection on the subject of occasionalism, is not only not limited to these brief comments, but is actually the subject of this entire volume. The aim is to offer an analysis of Locke's stringent critique of the *Recherche* so as to demonstrate the logical-cognitive weakness of Malebranche's statements. Locke countered Malebranche's theory of vision with an explanation that drew on Boyle's corpuscular philosophy and approached the emissionist theory of light that Newton was developing in those very years in his *Opticks* (1704).

Following the appearance of Locke's *Posthumous Works*, around 1708 Leibniz penned some brief observations to focalise certain aspects of Locke's criticism of Malebranche. While he shared Locke's criticisms and doubts about the questions raised by Malebranche's philosophy, the observation point and the replies that he suggests are significantly different. Hence, apropos Malebranche's analogy between space and God as respectively sites of the bodies and of the spirits, or on the traditional question of the relation between the divine simplicity of substance and the variety of ideas, or again on the argument about the idea of the infinite being anterior to that of the finite, Leibniz duly notes the contrast between the complexity of these issues and the incompleteness of the replies provided. However, he stresses that the reason for this is not to be attributed to Malebranche alone, but rather to all philosophical systems, since what this complexity comes up against are the limited cognitive faculties of mankind. These short comments indicate a considerable divergence between Leibniz and Locke in the critical evaluation of Malebranche's work, while at the same time illustrating the constant attention he had paid to Locke's works for over a decade.

The articles collected in this issue are devoted to *Occasionalism: Locke and his contemporaries*. They aim to offer, through an interpretative prism, a detailed analysis of certain pivotal aspects of the philosophy of the modern age and of Locke's own thought.

The contribution of Igor Agostini provides an accurate reconstruction of the controversy between Locke and Malebranche after 1690, the main act of which was the composition in 1693 of the text subsequently published in a partial version in the *Posthumous Works* by Peter King titled *Examination of Malebranche's opinion of seeing all things in God*. This study casts light on the genesis of Locke's critical position towards Malebranche's occasionalism which, well beyond Norris's provocation, touches on topics that had been dear to Locke since the composition of *Draft B*, and subsequently expounded in the *Essay*. Agostini stresses how the destiny of Locke's thought was bound up with the acceptance of occasionalism – as in Gerdil's work – or the criticism of the same on the part of several leading eighteenth-century figures such as Le Clerc and Collins.

Raffaele Carbone's essay analytically examines Malebranche's concept of the relation between God and the creatures, providing an exhaustive contextualisation throughout the entire work of the French thinker. He focuses on the philosophical nexus composed of the need to critically overcome the pagan notion of nature and to confirm the occasionalist concept of the cosmos and divine power. For Malebranche, the reason for the existence of the universe is God's will. As a result, Carbone's illustration of the meaning of the idea of power and of relations between things analysed by Locke in the *Essay* is of particular interest, since these aspects mark the distance separating the two philosophers and underpin Locke's criticism of Malebranche.

The investigation of Leibniz's ambivalent conception of occasionalism provided by Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero is of crucial interest. He explores the influence that Malebranche's ideas had on aspects of Leibniz's metaphysics and his concept of miracles. Through a careful contextualisation of the hypothesis of physical influence within the strand of Cartesian philosophy and a critical analysis of the same, Favaretti Camposampiero brings fully to light the stance of Leibniz's reflec-

tion on occasionalism and its significance for his conception of rethinking causality and divine concurrence.

Simone Guidi's study analyses the unexpected textual strand that traverses the works of Suárez, Arriaga and Gamaches, up to and including La Forge and Cordemoy. He concentrates on the "problem of transduction" that touches on aspects of the occasionalist concept of angelic innatism plausibly of direct influence on modern occasionalism. The contribution analyses forms of late-scholastic angelology through to the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, stressing how these topics are one of the focal points for the legitimisation of a system of thought that sees God as the sole efficient cause, as well as constituting a significant source for the dualism and occasionalism of the seventeenth century.

The essay of Nicholas Jolley offers a detailed examination of the central concept of power in Locke's thought and in the issues inherent to occasionalism. In the *Draft* of the early 1680s Locke had already expressed the need for an in-depth analysis of the notion of power in its relations with the concept of will and the concept of liberty as choice and as action. The chapter devoted to power in the *Essay* was, significantly, one of those most extensively reworked, as a result not only of the epistolary dialogue with Molyneux but also of the exchange with the Dutch liberal theological tradition and with the Remonstrant Philippus van Limborch. Jolley analyses the interpretation of the concept of power, underscoring its importance for unravelling the controversial question of Locke's thinking-matter hypothesis and its affinity to a weak form of materialism.

Steven Nadler addresses a crucial point in the critical reflection on occasionalism that engaged Locke, and Leibniz after him: namely, the notion of miracle which, in Malebranche's definition is the effect of a particular volition of the divine. Nevertheless, Malebranche continued to be cautious in the face of the numerous descriptions of miracles in the Bible, many of which to our eyes do not appear to conflict with the general laws of nature. Nadler provides a detailed analysis of the concept of the "order of nature" and the conditions of possibility of the miraculous events described by Malebranche. He draws attention to the specific features of Malebranchian theodicy and the important differences between

the occasionalist concept and Leibniz's pre-established harmony, albeit with a shared conception of the rationality of God's action. Malebranche's conception of miracles as events necessitated by laws of superior orders exposed him to charges of Spinozism and to the critiques of opponents such as Arnauld and Fenelon.

The article by Mariangela Priarolo offers a reconsideration of occasionalism based on a careful analysis of the concept of power and the powers of nature in Locke's thought. The scholar briefly traces Locke's criticism of Malebranchian occasionalism and of its leading disciple on the other side of the channel, John Norris. Locke's critique takes its cue from the centrality of the notion of the responsibility of each individual for their own actions so as to attain a happy or wretched future life. Starting from the idea of power and experience, Locke criticises Malebranche's system with its ambivalent conception of the power of God over nature. In Locke's eyes, not only is occasionalism a far cry from glorifying God, but it also degrades the capacity for free action and undermines the possibility of the accountability of human actions.

The issue is completed by two notes providing stimulating reflections. Brunello Lotti analyses Mariangela Priarolo's intellectual biography of Malebranche, tracing the most significant aspects and offering a critical discussion of the ambivalent connection between philosophy and religion characterising Malebranche's work. Luisa Simonutti explores some of the most recent contributions on personhood, identity and consciousness in Locke's philosophy and in the continental philosophy of the late seventeenth century. She also provides fresh conceptual material for mapping out a novel concept of consciousness and personal identity.

Finally, this issue of the journal devoted to *Occasionalism: Locke and his Contemporaries* is rounded off by reviews of recent books about Locke and on pertinent topics in the philosophy of the modern age.