

GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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Is it conceivable to say something new about a classic like Locke, in particular about his moral and political philosophy? Although the most reasonable answer to this question, in absolute terms, would be no (that is to say: the critical history of an author of this magnitude contains such a vast quantity of literature and interpretations that it is truly hard to think of something unquestionably new), the opportunity still exists, I believe, to say something fresh, or to offer different perspectives, without resorting to commonplaces. In other words: there are some themes, such as Locke's relation with the tradition of possessive individualism or, of course, his relation with liberalism, that have been so thoroughly dissected that, quite frankly, it is impossible to imagine any wide-sweeping innovations if not in relation to radically divergent interpretations, which as such are never foreseeable (as was the case - not surprisingly controversial - of Strauss's reading). And yet, even in relation to such themes there is still room for unusual reinterpretations, thanks to peculiar points of view. Or, alternatively, it is possible to investigate less common themes, by means of hypotheses regarding roots, relations or consequences other than the most obvious, so that the figure of the philosopher would be enlightened from an unusual angle, revealing unexpected aspects and resources.

The present collection tries to explore this double hypothesis. In this brief introduction I will limit myself to outlining the contents of the essays contained herein, grouping them into different themes, so as to highlight the diverse exegeses present and some of the broad areas of interest.

Brunello Lotti tackles the highly classic question of the law of nature in Locke, offering a deep analysis and demonstrating how it represents a

theme that is not harmonized to other more modern and perhaps more typical instances, which are linked to a new anthropology and to a fundamental political realism, of the political thought of the English author. Deriving to a large extent from a tradition transmitted through Hooker, law of nature meets a series of difficulties that Lotti examines in detail: moreover, as is evident from the conclusion of his contribution, these also go beyond the case of Locke, since the harmonization between the concreteness of the politics and the abstractness of the metaphysical principle is constantly at risk. The theological-political background thus emerges in all its founding significance but also in its problematicity, despite its being called upon to make operative the principles of natural law, which are buried in the depth of the human heart. The law of nature exercises a power that in its way is absolute, but its contents prove inaccessible. Thus Lockean morals and politics reveal, maybe even contrary to the intentions of the English thinker, the characteristic twilight of probability that is perhaps its most significant feature.

At the level of historiographic re-reading, Marco Menon analyzes in turn the well known interpretation given by Leo Strauss of Locke's thought – an interpretation upon which Lotti's reading critically closed. This is, in effect, a classic and controversial chapter of Lockean exegesis in the twentieth century. Menon rapidly runs through its various stages and then tackles the heart of the problem, namely the relation between reason and revelation, which for Strauss, as we know, are dichotomous (albeit in a peculiar sense). Menon's careful analysis concludes in an intermediate position: by accepting, as Strauss affirms, that Locke uses a peculiar art of writing to allude to a theological-political content that cannot be directly asserted; but without implying an adhesion to Hobbes' views. In this way the theses of Locke can be recognized in an intermediate nature that would make them still viable.

Montserrat Herrero competently analyzes, once more, the theme, which is evidently worth re-examining, of the theological sources of Locke's vision. This is not simply a return to the generic role of the religious root: in her investigation Herrero manages to identify in Locke a peculiar theological-political solution (in the explicit Schmittian meaning of the term: in particular regarding the theme of decision, implemented by politics but legitimized by religion), which corroborates the role of the political

magistracy: this explains the particular way, and the limits, of tolerance as formulated by Locke, and turns religion into a public or civil religion.

The analyses focusing on the relation with his theological past, as we might say using a widely imprecise formulation (because it regards not only the *past* and because the question is therefore by no means a residue of Locke's thought but a structural element, even though integrated in a dubious manner) are followed by analyses referring to questions that are more directly political.

Daniel Layman analyzes the problem of consent, identifying in this fundamental aspect of Locke's political thought not only the explicitly thematized dimension, which is voluntary and informed, and which since the time of Hume has been often recognized as aporetic due to the strict provisions that entails, namely voluntariness and information, but another dimension that is not discreet, not deliberate, but implicit, cooperative and participative. This notion of consent is grounded on a thick notion of freedom: Lockean freedom, according to Layman, requires, in fact, that the subject should not depend on the arbitrary will of others. Political participation is elaborated in such a way that Locke, and in particular this revised theory of consent, can, in an instructive and highly original way, be drawn close to Rousseau. Cooperative consent produces a sort of public or collective will that allows one to escape the circle of the dominion of others. The republican reading of Locke that is offered tries, in conclusion, to move Locke away from the traditional individualistic-liberal interpretation, which on the issue in question presents some difficulty, but without totally engaging with the challenging and clearly controversial theories of general will proposed by Rousseau.

Davide Poggi analyzes Locke's philosophy of language and attempts to demonstrate its thoroughly ethical nature: that is, over and above the contents of moral theory expressly proposed, Poggi suggests that in Locke one can find a sort of ethics of communication. The English philosopher's interest in linguistic phenomena fits with the moral and communicative attention which constitutes one of his fundamental aspects. Words are extensively analyzed in the third book of the *Essay*, with the aim of verifying the possibility of a *commonwealth* (which necessitates, above all, a *commonwealth of learning*); and the analysis of communication, fuelled by the typical antirhetoric and antischolastic polemics, is then extended in the direction of a truly demanding vision which presuppose to a certain extent

an anthropology of friendship. Poggi rightly reminds us that the *Essay* arose from a fabric of actual conversations and shared moral problems, without which its reading in exclusively theoretic or epistemological terms will lead to a significant distortion of comprehension. Poggi confirms the view of Locke as a philosopher actively involved in the context of the twilight of probability – and able, therefore, to respond *ante facto* to accusations of solipsism raised several times against him: for instance, by Karl-Otto Apel, himself a leading figure in the ethics of communication.

Still on the topic of the philosophy of language, explored at a progressively wider level, Douglas Casson makes a brilliant and engaging parallel between Locke's interest, at a time of heated debate and widespread public concern on the theme, in the question of money and monetization, which gave rise to the drafting of various pamphlets on the subject, and his epistemological theses. This is a specific topic, but one that has been tackled by other scholars; Casson sees it as a significant exegetical point because the reflection on the risks of monetary fraud or the lack of trust in monetization, is important not only in terms of a protohistory of economic thought, but also offers a convincing analogy for the more general question of social sharing. Shared trust allows the circulation of money and wealth, just as political society becomes possible through language: the epistemological possibility of a shared vocabulary, as well as currency, assumes in Locke an ethical and political value.

Further broadening the moral-political theme, Paola Zanardi takes up Locke's well known thesis on personal identity, but rather than undertaking yet another analysis of its various stages, Zanardi instead focuses on the fortune of the topic in coeval English culture, revealing its receptivity of the ideas proposed by Locke. Some minor figures prove able, sometimes from their own personal experience, to enter in syntony with Locke's provocation: the same syntony, in fact, which is shown, sometimes critically, by some leading thinkers of the time. Fittingly, the author shows how "person" is a concept linked to the sphere of ethics and responsibility.

Raffaele Russo analyzes the classic theme of Locke's scarcely univocal and somewhat blurred relation with the utilitarian tradition, represented in this essay by Benthamian rather than religious utilitarianism, which is more easily relatable to Locke. The Benthamian point of reference, with its radicalism, makes Locke's position emerge more clearly in its irreducible

elements, richer than the later stances. On the other hand, the moral deductivism alluded to by Locke contains a tension with the empirical and hedonistic factors of his thought, aspects that will then coagulate into religious utilitarianism and finally, precisely into Bentham.

Finally, Giuliana Di Biase effectively tackles the theme of the relation of Locke's thought with the passions, to be controlled and dominated in a manner that shows a certain affinity with the stoic approach. The debate on stoicism in modern thought is notoriously important: the work of Locke, although in a desultory fashion and in a way that should be differentiated from more properly Christian motives, shows traces of this, in particular in relation to the sentiment of grief, which lies at the centre of Di Biase's analysis (with an interesting use of materials from letters or from lesser known writings). The stoic as opposed to Christian influence, with regards to the handling of this particular sentiment, is correlated with Locke's medical competence, which leads him to see grief as a true illness and a possible cause of death. His advocacy of detachment seems to give way only on the death of William Molyneux, the friend who acted as a crucial stimulus for some of the best known elaborations of the English philosopher.

In conclusion, it goes without saying that John Locke is a classic of political thought (and obviously not only of that). The uncertain relationship, to use a euphemism, of the classics with the current philosophical debate, which ignores them or, at best (?), exploits them theoretically, is a contemporary problem: actually, more in the so-called continental context than in the analytical, where is allowed a freer approach to the fruition of ideas. But as always, a productive approach to the classics can only be implemented through the reading and analysis of the texts, seeking out their wealth. We believe we have gathered together a series of contributions that demonstrate *in vivo* the possibility and the fruitfulness of such an approach.