

Perspectives on Experience-Based Critical Ontology. A New Interpretation of Lockean Gnoseology

*Perspectivas sobre la ontología crítica basada en la experiencia.
Una nueva interpretación de la Gnoseología de Locke*

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RESUMEN

Comenzando por el análisis del método gnoseológico sugerido por John Locke en su *Essay concerning Human Understanding* y a partir del estudio de contenidos psíquicos tales como *placer/deseo* y *dolor/desasosiego*, así como sobre su lugar en la taxonomía de ideas, intento aquí re-considerar la concepción Lockean de consciencia y de consciencia de sí, buscando arrojar luz sobre algunos aspectos sin precedente, aspectos que parecen dejar lugar para una genuina ontología crítica de la persona humana. Estos resultados, aunque se distancian de la interpretación histórica-filosófica tradicional del pensamiento Lockeano (que se enfoca en Hume y subraya la relación genealógica entre Locke y el empirismo escocés), están en plena sintonía con las tesis tanto del *Essay* como de la correspondencia epistolar entre Locke y Stillingfleet. Es así que las reflexiones de Locke, por virtud a su naturaleza crítica-experimental, pueden ser bastante útiles para el interés actual en el realismo.

Palabras clave: permisibilidad, realismo crítico, gnoseología, ontología, ser/persona, autoconciencia, substancia.

ABSTRACT

Starting from the examination of the gnoseological method suggested by John Locke in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* and from the study of the psychich contents such as *pleasure/delight* and *pain/uneasiness* and their place in the taxonomy of the ideas, I hereby aim to re-consider the Lockean conception of consciousness and self-consciousness, trying to bring some unprecedented aspects to light, aspects which seem to leave an opening for a genuine critical ontology of the human person. These outcomes, although distancing themselves from the traditional historico-philosophical interpretation of the Lockean thought (which focused on Hume and underlined the genealogical relationship between Locke and the Scottish empiricist), are in full consistency with the theses of both the *Essay* and the correspondence between Locke and Stillingfleet. Thus, Locke's reflections, by virtue of their critico-experimental nature, can be rather useful for the present-day revival of realism.

Keywords: affordances, critical realism, gnoseology, ontology, self/person, self-consciousness, substance.

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Introduction: the issue of the “return to reality”

The present international philosophical reflection and, in particular, the Italian theoretical research are characterised by an intense debate on the need to “return to reality”. Maurizio Ferraris (not the only voice, but certainly the most resonant in the Italian context), in his *Manifesto del nuovo realismo* (2012) [*The New Realism Manifesto*], remarks how this definitely anti-constructivist turning point in philosophy is characterised, more generally, by two elements: on the one hand, the centrality of perception (in contrast to the prominent role that had been assigned to the conceptual frameworks as cognitive structures of interpretation of the sense-data); on the other hand, the revival of ontology and the concept of “being” as a mainstay of this discipline (as opposed to the centrality previously given to the phenomenon).¹

However, in order to achieve the aim that the realistic turn of philosophy proposes to itself, meaning to “give a voice to reality”, we must fairly comprehend the meaning of “reality”, “perception” and “being”. Indeed, history of philosophy shows that the purpose of going *zu den Sachen selbst!* (to the things in themselves) has not always given those realistic outcomes that, at first, seemed to promise (I clearly refer to the idealistic drift of Husserl’s phenomenology).

In other words, it is essential that the return to reality should be accomplished with a serious critical approach, ensuring that the concepts of “perception”, “experience” and “reality” do not conceal naïve assumptions of concepts and epistemological paradigms. In this way, we will be able to ensure that the naïvety as freedom from pre-judices and pre-conceptions, too, does not change into the “bad naïvety” of the common sense realism.

The present essay will focus on some aspects of John Locke’s thought, which, while belonging to a philosophical context that is “different” from the present one (and sometimes reflecting the extent and limits of problematisation and conceptualisation of its time), could provide interesting suggestions for what can be defined (in the words of Giuseppe Zamboni, Italian neo-scholastic philosopher) as a “philosophy of the immediate experience and the introspective experimental analysis, without any prejudices in favour of metaphysics nor against it”.²

¹ See FERRARIS, M., *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2012, p. 28.

² ZAMBONI, G., *Il valore scientifico del positivismo di Roberto Ardigò e della sua “conversione”*. *Appunti critici*. Verona: Società Editrice Veronese, 1921, p. 24. My English translation from the *original Italian* text.

1. Towards a concept of “pure” and “whole” experience: the “Historical, plain Method”³

This “utmost experimental science” based on the “immediate observation”⁴ is therefore the science which does not lay other principles as the foundation of its researches than an “immediate” apprehension of everything which is present and manifest insofar as there is a presence and manifestation. It is a redefinition that, since trying to set aside any metaphysical and epistemological paradigm (that is the true meaning of the Lockean supposition that the mind is a white paper),⁵ is “panoptic” and, as such, does not impose limits to the experience, as much as, for example, those who intend to open their eyes and see everything that would possibly be offered to them.

This metaphor of sight (precursor of Husserl’s offering vision) is central in the Lockean conception of *mind* and *understanding* which is exposed in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690¹): in the *incipit* of the *Epistle to the Reader*, both the mind and the understanding are in fact explicitly compared to the eye (“the Understanding, like the Eye, [...] [judges] of Objects, only by its own Sight”).⁶ The whole *Essay* is characterised, with regard to the faculty of perception and the perceiving act, by the use of visual language: how can we deal with the complex issues concerning metaphysics, morals and theology? By means of an act of cleaning out the knowledge field from “some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge”),⁷ which, at the beginning of the *First Book*, is presented as an *itinerarium intra nos, a redire ad se ipsum* which is quite immanent (but which is also able to lead to transcendence), that is a gnoseological insight:

The Understanding, like the Eye, whilst it makes us see, and perceive all other Things, takes no notice of it self: And it requires Art and Pains to set it at distance, and make it its own Object.⁸

The examination of the understanding and its cognitive *faculties* (that Locke explicitly interpreted in a functionalistic sense, namely as *powers* or *abilities*) then results in the analysis of the ideas, which are not the only objects of the human

³ LOCKE, J., *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, with a foreword by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975, I, 1, 2, p. 44. From now on, for quotations, I will simplify the title by *Essay*.

⁴ ZAMBONI, G., *Il valore scientifico del positivismo di Roberto Ardigò e della sua “conversione”*, quot., p. 24. My English translation from the original Italian text.

⁵ Cf. LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 1, 2, p. 104. In an unpublished manuscript, Zamboni shows that he grasped the true meaning of the Lockean expression: “[Locke] does not start neither from the Truth, nor from science, neither from mathematics, nor from logic nor even from physical experience which concerns material bodies: he places himself in a position which is pre-eminent to all the knowledge of the adult man; he aims to start from the data and look for what processes leads to the complex knowledge about the universe and the science” (ZAMBONI, G., *La media della cultura europea prima di Locke*. Manuscript kept at the “Capitolare” Library of Verona, folder LXXVIII, núm. 8, p. 3). My English translation from the original Italian text.

⁶ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., *Epistle to the Reader*, p. 6.

⁷ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., *Epistle to the Reader*, p. 10.

⁸ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, I, 1, 1, p. 43.

understanding (because it might otherwise transform Locke's position into a kind of psychic phenomenalism), but the only immediate object present to the mind.⁹ Let us consider, for example, the following quotation from the *Epistle to the Reader* (a crucial passage for understanding what Locke means by *idea*):

I have [...] in most places chose to put *determinate* or *determined*, instead of *clear* and *distinct*, as more likely to direct Men's thoughts to my meaning in this matter. By those denominations, I mean some object in the Mind, and consequently *determined*, i.e. such as it is there seen and perceived to be. This I think, may fitly be called a *determinate* or *determin'd* Idea, when such as it is at any time objectively in the Mind, and so *determined* there, it is annex'd, and without variation *determined* to a name or articulate sound, which is to be steadily the sign of that very same object of the Mind, or *determinate* Idea. To explain this a little more particularly. By *determinate*, when applied to a *simple Idea*, I mean that simple appearance, which the Mind has in its view, or perceives in it self, when that Idea is said to be in it: By *determined*, when applied to a *complex Idea*, I mean such an one as consists of a determinate number of certain simple or less complex Ideas, joyn'd in such a proportion and situation, as the Mind has before its view, and sees in it self when that Idea is present in it, or should be present in it, when a Man gives a name to it.¹⁰

The fact that Locke speaks about *idea* in terms of *appearance*,¹¹ phenomenon as presenciality is an application of Hobbes' sensualistic vocabulary – freed from all ties with his imagist theory – to the Cartesian conception of *clara perceptio* exposed in the *Principia philosophiae*.¹² It allows to state that for Locke *to be present* in the understanding is an expression which has little to do with cognitive internalism (although the English philosopher did not completely abandon the dualistic contraposition between, on the one hand, outside world and things without and, on the other hand, subject and ideas within): however, as an equivalent of the other

⁹ Together with the mind itself, because by means of the ideas of reflection, the mind is immediately present and manifest to itself; see GIBSON, J., *Locke's Theory of Knowledge*. Cambridge: University Press, 1968, pp. 55-57; AYERS, M., *Locke. Epistemology and Ontology*, vol. II, *Ontology*. London-New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 260, 266-267; BRANDT BOLTON, M., "The Taxonomy of Ideas in Locke's *Essay*", in NEWMAN, L. (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay concerning Human Understanding"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 85-86.

¹⁰ LOCKE, J., *Essay, Epistle to the Reader*, p. 13.

¹¹ About the complexity and the polysemy of *appearance* in Locke's *Essay*, see YOLTON, J.W., *A Locke Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, pp. 12-13; POGGI, D., *Lost and Found in Translation? La gnoseologia dell'Essay lockiano nella traduzione francese di Pierre Coste*. Firenze: Olschki, 2012, pp. 84-88.

¹² See DESCARTES, R., *Principia Philosophiae* (1644¹); in ID., *Œuvres de Descartes*, vol. VIII-1, edited by Ch. Adam and P. Tannery, new edition. Paris: Vrin, 1996, I, 45, p. 22: "Etenim ad perceptionem, cui certum & indubitatum iudicium possit inniti, non modò requiritur ut sit clara, sed etiam ut sit distincta. Claram voco illam, quae menti attendenti praesens & aperta est [my italics]: sicut ea clarè à nobis videri dicimus, quae, oculo intuenti praesentia, satis fortiter & apertè illum movent"; HOBBS, TH., *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth ecclesiasticall and civill*, introduction and notes by J.C.A. Gaskin. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1998² (based on the first edition: London, Crooke, 1651), I, 1, 1-4, p. 3: "CONCERNING the thoughts of man, I will consider them first singly, and afterwards in train, or dependence upon one another. Singly, they are every one a representation or appearance [my italics], of some quality, or other accident of a body without us; which is commonly called an object. Which object worketh on the eyes, ears, and other parts of man's body; and by diversity of working, produceth diversity of appearances [my italics]".

expression *to be present to* the understanding, it rather relates to Augustinian *inhabitation* (from which Brentano's intentional inexistence is then taken). Also Locke does not conceive the presence in the mind as intimacy/belonging of all psychic contents to the same subject (these contents, while they are matter of the perpetual self-ascription of the subject to itself, which is the *self-consciousness*, do not become "subjective" only for such – and if something authentically "subjective" should ever arise, it would be such by virtue of a much more radical involvement of the subject, as examined in more detail in § 3).

The presence and manifestation of the psychic contents, although still influenced on some occasions by the ontologico-physical paradigm, has to be revisited in the light of the rejection of the *physical Consideration of the Mind* (physical as psycho-physical) and the polemic against the ontological interpretation of both ideas and *perception* (another synonym of *idea*, by which Locke draws attention, firstly, to the functional cooperation of the subject in the cognitive acts and to the originality of the mind – in this regard, the study of the role of attention is quite important – and, secondly, to the inseparability of the content of consciousness from the actual exercise of a cognitive function).

It is a twofold polemic: on the one hand, it contrasts the interpretation of the perception as affection/modification of the understanding/mind which comes from the outside world (*impression*: as a physician, Locke cannot completely ignore the seventeenth-century physiology and the role in the perception of what is then called "afferent nervous system", but it does not want to make the physicalistic mistake of those like Thomas Willis, who, in the *Cerebri anatome* [1664], hypostatized the ideas by identifying them with the traces stored in the cerebral cortex's convolutions).¹³ On the other hand, it goes in the opposite direction to Malebranche's thought, referring back to the dispute between the Oratorian Father and Arnauld about the nature of the ideas and the role of God in human perception. This polemical reference emerges when reading the *Essay* in the light of the reflections carried out in the *Examination of P. Malebranche's Opinion* (1693), a minor work that is however important in order to thoroughly understand the meaning of Locke's de-ontologisation of the mind: what does it mean that our soul is modified/affected by God by means of an idea? If we investigate what lies behind Malebranche's metaphorical language, we are faced with the bare nothing:

§ 47. [...] I think now of the figure, colour, and hardness, of a diamond that I saw some time since: in this case I desire to be informed how my mind knows that the thinking on, or the idea of the figure, is not a modification of the mind; but the thinking on, or having an idea of the colour or hardness, is a modification of the mind? It is certain there is some alteration in my mind when I think of a figure which I did

¹³See WILLIS, TH., *Cerebri anatome: cui accessit nervorum descriptio et usus*. Londini: Martyn & Allestry, 1664¹, Cap. X, pp. 121-127; Cap. XV, pp. 186-187; Cap. XVII, pp. 211-212. This text, together with other single volumes and Willis' *Opera omnia*, was part of Locke's private library: see HARRISON, J. – LASLETT, P., *The Library of John Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965¹, p. 265, entry "WILLIS, Thomas".

not think of before, as well as when I think of a colour that I did not think of before. But one, I am told, is seeing it in God, and the other a modification of my mind. But supposing one is seeing in God, is there no alteration in my mind between seeing and not seeing? And is that to be called a modification or no? For when he says seeing a colour, and hearing a sound, is a modification of the mind, what does it signify but an alteration of the mind from not perceiving to perceiving that sound or colour? And so when the mind sees a triangle, which it did not see before, what is this but an alteration of the mind from not seeing, to seeing, whether that figure be seen in God or no?¹⁴

The transition from “there is no X” (the absence of any content) to the “there is X” (the presence of any content), Locke says, it is neither a modification of my intellect nor it can be understood as such by those who want to get out of a “fanciful” psychology (where *wit* and *fancy* are allowed to work freely, without regard to the relationships of agreement/disagreement between ideas provided by the experience)¹⁵ and, thus, to contribute to the Baconian *advancement of learning*.

2. Towards a “whole conception” of the subject: only a “pure cognitive self”?

Now, what I wish to focus on, is the Lockean conception of the subject as *self* or *person*, developed by Locke on the basis of his gnoseological approach: indeed, in my opinion, it is a matter that, although having gone unnoticed by the historians of philosophy, offers some unexpected and quite positive hints concerning the topic of the present essay. Here Locke proves to be “the less systematic”¹⁶ between the modern philosophers (namely, the one who is less interested in building a system; and, therefore, being less interested in its soundness and consistency, is more faithful to what the immediate experience offers).

The comparison with Hume’s solution to the question of the nature of the subject clearly shows the difference between the approaches of the two philosophers with regard to philosophico-gnoseological investigation:¹⁷ according to Hume, what should the self be reduced to? In the *Treatise of Human Nature*, he writes as follows:

¹⁴LOCKE, J., *An Examination of P. Malebranche’s Opinion of Seeing all Things in God*; in ID., *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 8. London: Routledge-Thoemmes Press, 1997, p. 247.

¹⁵About the Lockean criticism against the use of metaphorical language in philosophy, see VOCT, PH., *John Locke and the Rhetoric of Modernity*. Lanham-Boulder-New York-Toronto-Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008, pp. 9-59. Despite these criticisms, Locke does not hesitate to recognize that there is a good use of figurative language which can make intelligible those discourses and ideas that are not part of the reader’s experience. See LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., *Epistle to the Reader*, pp. 8-10; II, 11, 2, pp. 156-157; III, 10, 34, p. 508.

¹⁶ZAMBONI, G., *Corso di gnoseologia pura elementare*, 1.1, *Spazio, tempo, percezione intellettuale*, with an introduction by F.L. Marcolungo and a foreword by G. Giulietti. Milano: IPL, 1990, p. 216.

¹⁷Allegra proposes a careful examination of the Humean theses about the unity and identity of the self: see ALLEGRA, A., *Dopo l’anima. Locke e la discussione sull’identità personale alle origini del pensiero moderno*. Roma: Edizioni Studium, 2005, pp. 183-194.

There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our self; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity. [...] Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of *self*, after the manner it is here explain'd. For from what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd? [...] It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea.¹⁸

The problem is precisely that there is no impression at all of that self, that is the core around which the whole psychic life revolves, since, in fact, the only impressions we have from experience are those individual perceptions, all distinct and independent from each other, constituting a discrete flow by means of association (indeed, we are in a context of psychic atomism). In the *Abstract* of the *Treatise* (anonymously published in 1740), Hume expressly speaks of “composition” of the mind, a corollary to the dismissal of the idea of substance and its value (the Cartesian conception of the *mens* as *substantia* is the clear reference point of this polemic against the metaphysical concepts):

He [read: Hume] asserts, that the soul, as far as we can conceive it, is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions, those of heat and cold, love and anger, thoughts and sensations, all united together, but without any perfect simplicity or identity. *Des Cartes* maintained that thought was the essence of the mind; not this thought or that thought, but thought in general. This seems to be absolutely unintelligible, since everything that exists is particular; and, therefore, it must be our several particular perceptions that compose the mind. I say, *compose* the mind, not *belong* to it. The mind is not a substance, in which the perceptions inhere. That notion is as unintelligible as the *Cartesian*, that thought or perception in general is the essence of the mind. We have no idea of substance of any kind, since we have no idea but what is derived from some impression, and we have no impression of any substance either material or spiritual.¹⁹

When we think about the *self*, we do not find anything more than (in the words of Kant) a *self* “as multicolored, diverse [...] as I have representations of which I am conscious”:²⁰ we are moving towards the positivist conception of consciousness as “abstract framework” in which all the different contents are set by virtue of the fact that they are all “conscious”.

¹⁸HUME, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (1739-1740¹), with an analytical index by L.A. Selby-Bigge (1888¹), second edition revised by P.H. Niddich. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, I, iv, 6, p. 251.

¹⁹HUME, D., *An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), pamphlet hitherto unknown, reprinted with an introduction by J.M. Keynes and P. Sraffa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938, pp. 24-25. Also reprinted in: *Id.*, *The Clarendon Edition of the Works*, vol. 1, critical edition by D.F. Norton and M.J. Norton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, p. 414.

²⁰KANT, I., *KrV* B 134; in *Id.*, *Werke*, III, Akademie-Textausgabe, Unveränderter photomechanischer Abdruck des Textes der von der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 1902 begonnenen Ausgabe von Kants gesammelten Schriften. Berlin: W. de Gruyter & Co., 1968. My quotations are from the following English translation: *Id.*, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 247-248.

This is the Humean “bundle theory”: both the thoroughgoing identity and the sameness of the thinking subject in the course of time are fictitious, due to an outside observer, rather than to the bundle itself. However, this theory then gives rise to Hume’s perplexities (even before those of John Stuart Mill).²¹ Indeed, the philosopher of Edinburgh expresses his deep dissatisfaction in the second part of the *Teatrise’s Appendix* (which mirrors the reflections of a more mature phase than that of the composition of the previous parts of the *Treatise* and its *Abstract*):

When I turn my reflexion on *myself*, I never can perceive this *self* without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive any thing but the perceptions. ‘Tis the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self. [...] So far I seem to be attended with sufficient evidence. But having thus loosen’d all our particular perceptions, when I proceed to explain the principle of connexion, which binds them together, and makes us attribute to them a real simplicity and identity; I am sensible, that my account is very defective, and that nothing but the seeming evidence of the precedent reasonings cou’d have induc’d me to receive it. [...] In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou’d be no difficulty in the case. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding.²²

²¹John S. Mill closely follows Hume, in both the empiricist de-constructive phase and the anti-empiricist doubt, with the difference that Mill’s final admission about the reality of the subject and its ontological status is much stronger than Hume’s. In *A System of Logic*, Mill sets the subject among the “permanent possibilities”, together with the “things” of the outside world: “It is unnecessary to give in the case of mind, as we gave in the case of matter, a particular statement of the sceptical system by which its existence as a Thing in itself, distinct from the series of what are denominated its states, is called in question. But is necessary to remark, that on the inmost nature [...] of the thinking principle, as well as on the inmost nature of matter, we are, and with our faculties must always remain, entirely in the dark. All which we are aware of, even in our own minds, is (in the words of James Mill) a certain “thread of consciousness”, a series of feelings, that is, of sensations, thoughts, emotions, and volitions, more or less numerous complicated” (MILL, J.S., *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive. Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation* [1843¹], edited by J.M. Robson, introduction by R.F. McRae; in *Id.*, *The Collected Works*, vols. VII-VIII. Toronto-Buffalo: University of Toronto Press-Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 63-64). In the *Examination of William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, Mill also observes: “If, therefore, we speak of the Mind as a series of feelings, we are obliged to complete the statement by calling it a series of feelings which is aware of itself as past and future; and we are reduced to the alternative of believing that the Mind, or Ego, is something different from any series of feelings, or possibilities of them, or of accepting the paradox, that something which *ex hypothesi* is but a series of feelings, can be aware of itself as a series” (MILL, J.S., *An Examination of William Hamilton’s Philosophy and of The Principal Philosophical Questions Discussed in his Writings* [1865], edited by J.M. Robson, Introduction by A. Ryan; in *Id.*, *The Collected Works*, quot., vol. IX, 1979, p. 194); “That there is something real in this tie, real as the sensations themselves, and not a mere product of the laws of thought without any fact corresponding to it, I hold to be indubitable. [...] This original element [...] is the Ego, or Self. As such, I ascribe a reality to the Ego – to my own Mind – different from that real existence as a Permanent Possibility, which is the only reality I acknowledge in Matter: and by fair experiential inference from that one Ego, I ascribe the same reality to other Egoes, or Minds” (*ivi*, *Appendix to the two preceding chapters*, pp. 207-208).

²²HUME, D., *Treatise of Human Nature*, quot., *Appendix*, pp. 634-636.

Now, the Lockean conception of the *self* already contains the solution for solving the impasse Hume complains about in the above-quoted passage (in a much more satisfactory way, in my opinion, than Kant's pure transcendental apperception, although the latter is basically based on Lockean conception).²³ Therefore, self-consciousness as self-ascription, that is as attribution of all psychic contents, made by the subject to himself, as his *terminus ad quem*, allows to give to psychic life the continuity and fluidity that the association alone could not provide, since the associative link between perceptions is extrinsic to the contents it links (in fact, while referring to each other, in ordered sequences, every perception remains quite independent).²⁴

If we entirely confined ourselves to this self-consciousness with a bare cognitive value, it would seem that Locke had come to a conception of the subject that is still similar to the Cartesian one, according to which the subject is the great theatre of the stream of consciousness, it is the all-seeing eye which is not involved in the show that is performed in front of it. If this were the case, the Lockean self would be a "pure cognitive self". This conclusion is undoubtedly consistent with the above-mentioned de-ontologisation of the mind and was also achieved through the purification of the concept of perception from every ontological interpretation (as modification).

However, a subject characterised and described in terms of presentiality can only possess a "weak" ontological status: he is certainly *primus* amongst the contents present to him, but his "stay in the world", among many phenomenal complexes, is *inter pares*, that is there is no real heterogeneity that gives a "strong" connotation to the way he "is". "There is" a subject, as well as "there are" all the givennesses (*die Gegebenheiten*): the only real difference is ultimately the fact that there can be presentiality only to him and him alone. It is clear that, in this way, the Humean drift is on the horizon: Locke's self-consciousness dabs only temporarily a deep wound in the side of metaphysics, still being unable to stop that bleeding which, out of metaphor, is the loss of notion of "substance" as the actual determination of being (*ens* as present participle of *esse*) and notion of "subject" (*ego, self*) as the only substance actually perceived. "Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual": what Hume was hoping for in the *Appendix*, remains, at least for now, nothing more than an *utinam*, something to which there is no correspondence that goes beyond the level of abstract

²³ About Kant's apperception as self-ascription of mental states: see STRAWSON, P.F., *The Bounds of Sense*. London: Methuen, 1966, p. 98; WILKERSON, T.E., *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 52; SCRUTON, R., *Kant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 32. About the relationships between Kant's theory of mental unity and Hume's thought (and his predecessors, Leibniz and Locke), see KITCHER, P., *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 91-141.

²⁴ As many authors pointed out, there is a strong analogy between the concept of "life" and that of "consciousness" with regard to the function of unification: see MCCANN, E., "Locke on Identity: Matter, Life, and Consciousness"; in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, n. 69, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 1987, pp. 68-69; Ayers, M., *Locke*, II, *Ontology*, quot., pp. 221, 261; Allegra, A., *Dopo l'anima*, quot., p. 84.

and hypothetical speculation. For these reasons, Zamboni, in his main work, *La persona umana* (1940) [*The Human Person*], observes that the English philosopher continues to assert that the subject has an immediate (intuitive) self-perception as a substantial entity, although “he does not see the relationship between the *self* and the idea of substance”,²⁵ as if it were something about which Locke is intimately and deeply sure, although there is no clear and concrete perception that corresponds to this conviction.

However, we should consider another aspect of the Lockean theory, useful to discern if Zamboni’s opinion is correct, that is, whether the substantiality of the subject is more alleged by Locke or concretely experienced. Undoubtedly, the perception is not an affection/modification or a state of the subject, however, at the same time, it is true that we could perceive something which is an affection or a state of the *self*: something that shows a *real connection* or *inherence* with the subject.²⁶ Locke’s reflections about the psychic contents such as *pleasure* or *delight* and *pain* or *uneasiness*, carried out since 1676 (during his stay in Montpellier), reached these essential outcomes. Let us examine what is meant by those expressions, in the order followed by the English philosopher in Chapters I, VII and XX of the *Second Book*.

In the first chapter of the *Second Book* (§ 4), Locke does not include *passions*, such as *satisfaction* and *uneasiness* among the *ideas of sensation*, but only among those of *reflection*:

Secondly, The other Fountain, from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with *Ideas*, is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Mind* within us, as it is employ’d about the *Ideas* it has got; which Operations, when the Soul comes to reflect on, and consider, do furnish the Understanding with another set of *Ideas*, which could not be had from things without: and such are, *Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*, and all the different actings of our own Minds [...]. This Source of *Ideas*, every Man has wholly in himself [...]. By REFLECTION then, in the following part of this Discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the Mind takes of its own Operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof, there come to be *Ideas* of these Operations in the Understanding. [...] The term *Operations* here, I use in a large sence [my italics], as comprehending not barely the Actions of the Mind about its *Ideas*, but some sort of Passions arising sometimes from them, such as is the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought.²⁷

Afterwards, in Chapter VII, Locke states that, in addition to both the simple ideas provided only by the sensation and those furnished by reflection only, there

²⁵ ZAMBONI, G., *La persona umana. Soggetto autocosciente nell’esperienza integrale. Termine della gnoseologia. Base della metafisica* [1940¹], edition revised and introduced by G. Giulietti. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1983, p. 193. My English translation from the Italian original text.

²⁶ Thus, we can state that Locke proposes a theory of personal identity that goes beyond what Mackie considered as a bare “theory of action appropriation”: see MACKIE, J., *Problems from Locke*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 183.

²⁷ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 1, 4, pp. 105-106.

also are some “simple Ideas, which convey themselves into the Mind, by all the ways of Sensation and Reflection”:²⁸ among the latter, *in primis*, there are the ideas of *pleasure* and *pain* (besides those of existence, unity, power and succession).

The question arising from a comparative examination of the previous passages of the *Essay* is the following: if, as Locke suggests, the ideas of pleasure and pain are furnished by both sensation and reflection, why does he place them only among the ideas of reflection?

Now, by pleasure and pain, Locke means two simple psychic contents that we can understand only by referring to our concrete experience, in which they show to be “whatsoever delights or molests us”,²⁹ without making any distinction between the bare physical level and the psychic one, that is, leaving aside the mind-body opposition which characterised the metaphysical tradition: what Locke aims to carry out is in fact a psychological study conducted with a gnoseological approach, highlighting what emerges, before the mind’s view, about pleasure and pain (then, we can talk about a heuristic of pain, which is a teleologically ordered function, ordered at both the immanent level – anatomical and physiological – and the transcendent one – in line with the Pascalian-Malebranchian thought – but it is something that follows what emerges from the gnoseological examination).³⁰

Ultimately, pleasure and pain (in any intensity they can be present to the mind) cannot be reduced to the concepts of *good* and *evil* (which, on the contrary, are defined looking at them), but to an original “well-being” or “ill-being” (malaise)³¹ of the subject, “whether it arises from the thoughts of our Minds, or any thing operating on our Bodies”.³² From the examination of Locke’s words, a clear distinction emerges: between the *casus*, namely the occasion of their giving to the mind (the perceptions of pleasure and pain can be joined/annexed to something coming from sensation or reflection) and their *origo*, meaning that in which they are strongly rooted. This is a distinction openly expressed at the beginning of Chapter XX (where Locke exposes his taxonomy of the passions) as follows:

By Pleasure and Pain, I must be understood to mean of Body or Mind, as they are commonly distinguished; though *in truth, they be only different Constitutions of the*

²⁸LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 7, 1, p. 128.

²⁹LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 7, 2, p. 128.

³⁰See LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 7, 3-6, pp. 129-131. This gnoseological approach discloses a “static” conception (immanentistic and psychological) of passions such as pleasure and uneasiness that is preeminent to the “dynamic” one (metaphysico-existential) of both Pascal and Malebranche: see DEPRUN, J., *La Philosophie de l’inquiétude en France au XVIII^e siècle*. Paris: Vrin, 1979, pp. 185-194; POGGI, D., *Lost and Found in Translation?*, quot., *Appendix I*, pp. 263-272.

³¹Pierre Coste, the French translator of Locke’s *Essay*, wrote: “État d’un homme qui n’est pas à son aise, le manque d’aise & de tranquillité dans l’Ame” (LOCKE, J., *Essai Philosophique concernant l’Entendement Humain, où l’on montre quelle est l’étendue de nos connoissances certaines, et la manière dont nous y parvenons.*, facs. ed. of the fifth edition [Amsterdam-Leipzig: chez J. Schreuder & P. Mortier, 1755] by É. Naert. Paris: Vrin, 1998, II, 20, 6, p. 177, footnote).

³²LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 7, 2, p. 128.

Mind [my italics], sometimes occasioned by disorder in the body, sometimes by thoughts of the mind.³³

In this passage, by means of the expression “Constitutions of the Mind”, Locke wants to reaffirm that pleasure and uneasiness, whatever the occasion of their rise is, should be considered only as the presence and manifestation to the mind of the “modes of being” (whether well- or ill-) of the mind itself. Paragraph 41 in Chapter XXI dispels all doubts about this interpretation:

[There are] pleasure and pain of the Mind, as well as the Body [...]: Or to speak truly, they are all of the *Mind* [my italics]; though some have their rise in the Mind from Thought, others in the Body from certain modifications of Motion.³⁴

As I said before, these reflections offered in the *Essay* have some interesting precedents in the moral manuscripts dated back to 1676. In particular, in the notes of 16 July 1676, Locke wrote that pleasure and pain “is principally that of the mind, for impressions made on the body, if they reach not the mind, produce neither pain nor pleasure. As the mind is delighted or disturbed, so have we pain or pleasure”.³⁵ Consciously or not, Locke does not set the reader only before the giving of something which is present to the self, but also to the giving of something which is present “in” the subject, intimate and inherent to him (in the strong ontological sense of the term).

If personal identity, the concept of *self/person*, depends on the self-ascription of all the acts and psychic facts in general, the perceptions of pleasure and pain are essential for this kind of ascription, because the subject is “involved” in them and the relationship between the mind and the pleasure/pain is not just bare presentiality. It is not by accident that, where Locke examines the question of identity, on several occasions he proposes the being sensitive of pleasure and pain as preferred examples:³⁶

If the *Soul* doth think in a sleeping Man, without being conscious of it, I ask, whether, during such thinking, it has any Pleasure or Pain, or be capable of Happiness or Misery? I am sure the Man is not, no more than the Bed or Earth he lies on. For to be happy or miserable without being conscious of it, seems to me utterly inconsistent and impossible. [...] For if we take wholly away all Consciousness of our Actions

³³ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 20, 2, p. 229.

³⁴ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 21, 41, p. 258.

³⁵ LOCKE, J., *Ms Locke f1*, p. 333. This manuscript, kept at the Bodleian Library of Oxford, has been published in LOCKE, J., *Essays on the Law of Nature*, Latin text with a translation, introduction and notes, together with transcripts of Locke’s shorthand in his journal for 1676, edited by W. von Leyden. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954, p. 267.

³⁶ In the article *Identité personnelle et conscience chez Locke* (2008), Grigoropoulou observes: “Locke distingue la notion de soi de celle de personne. La notion de soi se définit par l’expérience du plaisir et de la douleur et par la prise de conscience de ceux-ci; cette prise de conscience, à son tour, éveille l’intérêt pour le soi. Par la conscience et en particulier la mémoire, le soi perçoit et s’approprie les expériences passées. Plus précisément, le soi se forme selon un processus qui se fait par étapes lesquelles sont perçues par la conscience qui, elle, se charge d’ordonner les sentiments,

and Sensations, especially of Pleasure and Pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to place personal Identity.³⁷

This every intelligent Being, sensible of Happiness or Misery, must grant, that there is something that is *himself*, that he is concerned for, and would have happy; that this *self* has existed in a continued Duration more than one instant.³⁸

Person, as I take it, is the name for this *self*. [...] This personality extends it *self* beyond present Existence to what is past, only by consciousness, whereby it becomes concerned and accountable, owns and imputes to it *self* past Actions, just upon the same ground, and for the same reason, that it does the present. All which is founded in a *concern* for Happiness the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness, that which is conscious of Pleasure and Pain, desiring, that that *self*, that is conscious, should be happy.³⁹

Furthermore, I believe it can be stated that the changes made by Locke from the first edition of the *Essay* to the second one, concerning the motivations of the human will, are coherent with the previous reflections: indeed, starting from the second edition of the *Essay*, Locke has replaced the judgment culminating in the identification of the *greater good* (which characterised the ethical theses of the first edition of the *Essay*) with the uneasiness felt by the subject (“some [...] Uneasiness a Man is at present under”)⁴⁰ as the *great motive* or “determining of the Will”,⁴¹ since the subject is not “concerned” or involved in this judging act as *bare contemplation* and mere cognitive act (from the point of view of the psychic content, we can state that there is just a “presence” to the self and not “in” him), and, thus, he is not induced to will anything.

In this way, in the eyes of Locke, pleasure and pain are subjective (or, at least, they still seem to be so), such that the thinking subject attributes them to himself not only in a cognitive sense (as spectator of their presence and manifestation), but because they concern his current state and are intrinsically bound to him. This sheds some new light on Locke’s concepts of *person* and *self*, giving them an ontological value. This results in and implies, *a fortiori*, the re-consideration of the idea of “substance”.

les pensées ainsi que les actes. A travers ce processus, le soi est capable de reconnaître *ce qui lui appartient*. Par conséquent, le processus de développement du soi contribue à sa constitution comme personne” (GRIGORPOULOU, V., “Identité personnelle et conscience chez Locke”; in *Philosophia*, núm. 38, Academy of Athens, Athens, 2008, p. 194). Now, I do not think that we can argue (as Grigoropoulou does) that Locke distinguishes so definitely the concepts of self and person (since there are many passages in the *Essay* where the two terms seems to be synonyms: see, for example, LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 27, 26, p. 346): nevertheless, Grigoropoulou’s interpretative hypothesis is quite interesting because it draws the attention to the key role of psychic contents such as pleasure and pain with regard to the personal identity (by virtue of their “subjective” essence).

³⁷ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 1, 11, p. 110.

³⁸ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 27, 25, p. 345.

³⁹ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 27, 26, p. 346.

⁴⁰ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 21, 31, pp. 250-251.

⁴¹ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 21, 29, p. 249.

Let us then focus on the definition of the idea of substance, not as complex idea of “particular substance” (the “distinct particular things subsisting by themselves”,⁴² whether individual or collective), but as “the supposed, or confused Idea of Substance”⁴³ which, in that combination of ideas such as the particular substances, “is always the first and chief [idea]”.⁴⁴ About the idea of substantiality or “Notion of pure Substance in general”,⁴⁵ Locke writes:

§ 1. THE Mind being, as I have declared, furnished with a great number of the simple *Ideas*, conveyed in by the *Senses* [...], or by *Reflection* [...], takes notice also, that a certain number of these simple *Ideas* go constantly together; which being presumed to belong to one thing, [...] are called so united in one subject, by one name; [...] Because, as I have said, not imagining how these simple *Ideas* can subsist by themselves, we accustom our selves, to suppose some *Substratum*, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *Substance*. § 2. So that if any one will examine himself concerning his *Notion of pure substance in general*, he will find he has no other *Idea* of it at all, but only a Supposition of he knows not what support of such Qualities, which are capable of producing simple *Ideas* in us; which Qualities are commonly called Accidents.⁴⁶

As Locke points out in the first *Letter* (1697) to Edward Stillingfleet, archbishop of Worcester, he does not aim neither to deny the existence of the substance, nor to banish the idea of substance from the horizon of the ontological reflection: it is rather a matter of abiding by what is offered by the experience. The idea of substantiality, as unknown support, is therefore quite similar to the ideas of relation:⁴⁷ it arises in the mind as a “go-between” for, on the one hand, a positive content (some concrete quality obtained either from sensation or reflection) and, on the other hand, an X (the idea of “something”) which has to be postulated, since rationally needed, even though generic and un-determined, by the observation that the qualities experienced are intrinsically insufficient to exist in and for themselves. This is rather consistent with what the English thinker suggests in Chapter XXV of the *Essay*, about the ideas of relation, meaning that “though it be not contained in the real existence of Things, but something extraneous, and superinduced: yet the *Ideas* which relative Words stand for, are often clearer, and more distinct, than of those Substances to which they do belong”.⁴⁸ The relationship and the related idea can be clear to the subject, much more than the “extremes” of this relationship might be. In the *Letter* to Stillingfleet, Locke writes as follows:

⁴² LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 12, 6, p. 165.

⁴³ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 12, 6, p. 165.

⁴⁴ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 12, 6, p. 165.

⁴⁵ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 23, 2, p. 295.

⁴⁶ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, II, 23, 1-2, p. 295.

⁴⁷ See GIBSON, J., *Locke's Theory of Knowledge*, quot., pp. 94-95.

⁴⁸ LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 25, 8, p. 322.

All the ideas of all the sensible qualities of a cherry come into my mind by sensation; the ideas of perceiving, thinking, reasoning, knowing, &c. come into my mind by reflection: the ideas of these qualities and actions, or powers, are perceived by the mind to be by themselves inconsistent with existence [...]. Hence the mind perceives their necessary connexion with inherence or being supported; which being a relative idea superadded to the red colour in a cherry, or to thinking in a man, the mind frames the correlative idea of a support. [...] But because a relation cannot be founded in nothing, or be the relation of nothing, and the thing here related as a supporter or support, is not represented to the mind by any clear and distinct idea; therefore the obscure, indistinct, vague idea of thing or something, is all that is left to be the positive idea, which has the relation of a support or substratum to modes or accidents; and that general determined idea of something, is, by the abstraction of the mind, derived also from the simple ideas of sensation and reflection.⁴⁹

According to Locke, “the being of substance”⁵⁰ is not grounded on the custom (this would mean to speak the language of Hume even before Hume himself!): on the contrary, it is the idea of substance that is based “on our accustoming ourselves to suppose some *substratum*”,⁵¹ meaning that the attribution by judgment (even though unreflected) of a *substratum* at the base of the sensitive-imaginative phenomenal complexes is grounded on both the reiterated experience of the insufficiency to exist and the postulation of its *complementum*.

However, is it truly necessary to postulate such integration? Have we not found at least some kind of contents whose being is intimately connected with that one of a *substratum*, so the relationship of inherence is more than rationally required, that is actually experienced? We have to apply to the present discourse the outcomes of the previously-made reflections about the psychic contents of pleasure, pain and their rootedness in the subject, a matter which, although recognized by Locke (perhaps too quietly), was never explicitly thematized: in pleasure and uneasiness, there is the actual emergence of the relationship between the *self* (myself) and the idea of substance by means of which we reach the clarity and distinction whose lack Locke complained of. Thus the application we have done means to go “beyond Locke” (but in a consistent way with the Lockean thought) and is able to give full value to the following words that Locke wrote to Stillingfleet: “I cannot be supposed to question or doubt of the being of substance, till I can question or doubt of my own being”.⁵²

Hence, the Lockean *self*, which seems to be present to itself as well as all psychic contents are present to it (in a barely phenomenal way), acquires an unexpected

⁴⁹ LOCKE, J., *A letter to the Right Reverend Edward, Lord Bishop of Worcester, concerning some Passages relating to Mr. Locke's Essay of Humane Understanding: in a late Discourse of his Lordship in Vindication of the Trinity* (1697); in *Id.*, *Works*, new edition corrected, vol. 4 (of 10). London: Tegg etc., 1823, p. 21 (riprod. anast. in *Id.*, *Works*, vol. 4. Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1963).

⁵⁰ LOCKE, J., *A letter to the Right Reverend Edward...*, p. 18.

⁵¹ LOCKE, J., *A letter to the Right Reverend Edward...*, p. 18.

⁵² LOCKE, J., *A letter to the Right Reverend Edward...*, p. 18.

ontological value: the term *person* ends up meaning the center of the presence and manifestation of all givens; the *Kern* (nucleus) of the inherence of the states (such as pleasure and pain) and the cognitive and volitional acts as well. It's a theory that, reworking Ricoeur's expression "integral cogito", we can denominate as "integral person".⁵³

Conclusions: some critical suggestions for the "new realism"

To conclude, the case of the concept of substance is, in my opinion, similar to that of the *active powers*⁵⁴ and the concept of cause which is closely related: while Locke maintains the parity of both the external sense and the reflection in leading us to the knowledge of the ideas of power and cause, it is through reflection, as the field of self-experience and self-manifestation of the subject, that we find the true psychological genesis of the ontological concepts.

Concerning the idea of substance, it is only by turning the attention to himself that the subject discovers some cases of actual inherence and realisation of thoughts and movements (and here Locke could have reflected better on the acts of the will and on the choice amongst the reasons). These concrete experiences, after being subjected to the abstractive process, provide the conceptual baggage by which we "in-form" the sensitive-imaginative "external" complexes (in this case, the word "postulate" is properly used in relation to the support of the sensible qualities): in this way, we obtain the complex knowledge of the "things of the outside world" ("things" as beings – *entia* – whose knowledge, according to both common sense and natural sciences, should be on the contrary immediate, because the sensitive perception – *aisthesis* – gives a direct contact with them). If, with regard to the knowledge of the outside world, Locke anticipates Hume's criticism against the value of the ideas of substance and cause, it does not mean, however, that he agrees *sic et simpliciter* with his fundamental reasons: on the contrary, he fully supports their well-foundedness, meaning that they are experience based (grounded on the subject, on the examination of the contents which we might properly call "subjective").

The resort to the *affordances*, which seems to be one of the main concepts of the new realism's "naïve ontology" ("naïve" not in the pejorative sense of the term, but in the precise pre-epistemological sense in which Paolo Bozzi, Italian psychologist, assumed this word),⁵⁵ would deserve a thorough examination in the light

⁵³RICOEUR, P., *Philosophie de la volonté*, vol. I, *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*. Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1967, p. 12. To a certain extent, the driving spirit behind both the examinations is the same, namely, to go further than Descartes' conception of the *ego cogitans* and regain the complexity of the subject.

⁵⁴See LOCKE, J., *Essay*, quot., II, 21, 2-5, pp. 234-236.

⁵⁵See BOZZI, P., *Fisica ingenua. Studi di psicologia della percezione* (1990¹). Milano: Garzanti, 1998².

of the critico-experimental method that we have previously described (of which Locke is one of the most representative philosophers).

The theory of *affordances* can be attributed to James Gibson⁵⁶ (even though he refers to the thesis of Kurt Koffka⁵⁷ – his teacher – and to Kurt Lewin’s concept of *Aufforderungscharakter*)⁵⁸ and it becomes part of the examination of the so-called “tertiary” qualities of the physical things. It aims to move away from what Bozzi calls the “explanatory stereotype”, according to which, in the knowledge of the world, everything that is neither a sensation nor a sensory stimulus, is the result of the association and the unconscious attribution (to the sensitive complexes) of both the subject’s emotional-sentimental contents and the response tendencies belonging to him. The theory of *affordances* states that the reality concretely perceived does not only (and not so much) “allow” certain interpretations/reactions, but rather it “affords” and “invites” us to interact with it in a precise way. It is not the product of the cognitive functions, but an intrinsic character of the perception in itself. In *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979), Gibson wrote:

These values are vivid and essential features of the experience itself. Koffka did not believe that a meaning of this sort could be explained as a pale context of memory images or an unconscious set of response tendencies. The postbox “invites” the mailing of a letter, the handle “wants to be grasped”, and things “tell us what to do with them” [...]. Hence, they have what Koffka called “demand character”.⁵⁹

According to Bozzi, the affordance “is neither a subjective character, nor an objective one; [...] it transversally intersects the dichotomy between objective and subjective, or, rather, it helps us to understand the inadequacy of such a dichotomy”.⁶⁰ This thesis presents, in itself, some problematic aspects, which perhaps can be clarified by means of the previously-made reflections about pleasure and uneasiness and their being *simple ideas of both sensation and reflection* and, at the same time, *only constitutions of the mind*. Furthermore, when applied to the notion of “object”, as Ferraris seems to do in his essay *Esistere è resistere* (2012) [*To Exist is to Resist*], this thesis produces much more problematic consequences. Because there is, indeed, a gap between saying, as Ferraris does in the *Manifesto*, that one of the keywords of the “new realism”, namely *ontology*, “simply means: the world has its own laws and enforces them, that is it is not the compliant colony on which the conceptual schemes exercise their own constructive action”⁶¹

⁵⁶GIBSON, J.J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979¹). New York: Psychology Press, 1986², pp. 127-143.

⁵⁷KOFFKA, K., *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. London-New York: Kegan Paul-Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1936.

⁵⁸LEWIN, K., *Vorbemerkungen über die psychischen Kräfte un Energien und über die Struktur der Seele*; in *Psychologische Forschungen*, 7, Berlin, 1926, pp. 294-329.

⁵⁹GIBSON, J.J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, quot., p. 138. Gibson quotes from KOFFKA, K., *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, quot., p. 353.

⁶⁰BOZZI, P., *Fisica ingenua*, quot., p. 106. (My translation from original Italian text).

⁶¹FERRARIS, M., *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*, quot., p. 29. (My translation from original Italian text).

and stating, as Ferraris always does in *Esistere è resistere* [*To Exist is to Resist*], that among the characters by virtue of which the sensitive perception leads “towards the being, meaning, towards what is”, there is the *thingness*, that is:

The notion of “object”, as related to the non-conceptual content, refers to the idea of a world which is organized and has its own characters, to which one can access through bare perception, without any active intervention of the conceptual. It is the sphere of what I call “thingness”. [...] The idea [...] is that, at least in some way, the meanings are in the world, incorporated in the objects, which offer to us some *affordances*.⁶²

And the gap between both positions can not be filled, except by recognising that what is passed off as “immediate” in the *affordances* (for which the reality calls us – almost binding and forcing us – to interpret it in a precise way), is, in fact, “perceptually sudden”, but “gnoseologically mediated” and it conceals a complex process.

In this process, the leading roles are played, on the one hand, by the contents present and manifest to the subject with their structure (whatness or suchness) and a degree of phenomenal being (the “there is” of the presence and manifestation to the subject) and, on the other hand, by the subject who receives them and makes, about these givenness (in an unreflected way), a judging or attributing act of the perceptive nuclei (which then leads to the concepts of *substantia* and *esse*) acquired by means of a perception *alia* with respect to the sensitive one, namely, self-perception. The phenomenal complexes (*in primis* when characterised by “stability”) can certainly “afford” us to make a synthesis on the basis of what belongs to the subject (not only by a purely cognitive point of view, but also by the emotional and sentimental ones, too, that is, by the field of the Lockean reflection), but they cannot suggest to the subject anything that he has not already got in an original way and in that “strong” sense which is required by a true “ontology”.

As I said before, the empirico-rational critical philosophy of Locke, far from being interesting by the bare historico-philosophical point of view, can be rather useful for a new, authentic realism.

⁶²FERRARIS, M., *Essere è resistere*; in AA.VV., *Bentornata realtà*. Torino: Einaudi, 2012, p. 157. (My translation from original Italian text).