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## Locke's image of the world

Han Thomas Adriaenssen

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**Locke's image of the world**, by Michael Jacovides, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. xxiv + 231, £45.00 (hb), ISBN 978-0-19-878986-4

In *Locke's Image of the World*, Michael Jacovides pursues two goals. The first is to show how Locke's work was embedded in the science and natural philosophy of its time. The second is to show, by using Locke as a case study, that our image of the world is often shaped in important ways by the set of assumptions and ideas that inform our perceptual access to it.

To combine these two goals in a single study is ambitious, but Jacovides succeeds in his attempt. He convincingly argues that Locke's theory of perception has its roots in Kepler's discovery of the retinal image and in his own corpuscular theory of matter. And when Locke claims that, for example, action at a distance is inconceivable, the limits of what he can conceive of are in important ways set by his own views on the nature of matter, and his theory of ideas. The general lesson here, according to Jacovides, is that we must resist the tendency to construe claims about what is and is not conceivable as claims about what is and is not objectively possible (203).

One place where Jacovides' two goals come together in a particularly instructive way is in the chapter on primary qualities. According to Locke, all matter is solid. The solidity of matter is that in virtue of which it fills space, and which makes it impenetrable. As evidence for the view that all matter is solid, Locke refers to an experiment run by the Accademia del Cimento, in which a hollow globe of gold was filled with water. As the globe was placed in a press, Locke reports, the gold was found to sweat water. Now taken at face value, this experiment might well be taken to show that water can penetrate gold, and thus that gold lacks solidity (94). Yet this is not the lesson Locke draws from the experiment. For him, what it shows, rather, is that water is just as solid as any other material. As Jacovides points out, for Locke to interpret the Florentine experiment in this way, he must bring to it a number of assumptions.

In particular, he must assume that gold is built up out of corpuscles that are knit together in such a way as to leave open a pattern of interparticular gaps. If he then also assumes that, as the golden sphere is put in the press, the water corpuscles in it are pressed against one another up to a point where further compression would require them to overlap one another, he can interpret the fact that the gold sweats water as a sign that water is as solid as any material, and that it is forced out through the pores of the gold as its constituent parts resist penetration. As Jacovides comments, 'only someone with substantive theoretical commitments would interpret the experiment in that way' (95). Hence, what Locke's discussion of the Florentine experiment goes to show is not only how his work was embedded in the scientific practices of his time, but also that 'the scientific theories we adopt can affect the way we perceive the world' (99).

Throughout the book, Jacovides takes great care to heed the scholastic background to what Locke is doing, and draws attention to some points of continuity between Locke and his predecessors. In general, these contextualizations are helpful. On one occasion, however, I think Jacovides may overstate the continuity between Locke and his scholastic predecessors. According to Jacovides, Locke

retains a number of tenets of the scholastic theory of perception. In particular, he argues that both Locke and the scholastics shared 'a belief in the cognitive importance of resemblance' (152). Moreover, Locke believed that qualities 'can be present in perceivers in a distinctive, mental way', which put him in some kind of agreement with thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas, for whom the objects of cognition have a special kind of being in our cognitive systems (152–7).


One problem with this reading is that, for Aquinas, resemblance appears to have boiled down to formal sameness:  $a$  and  $b$  resemble each other with regard to  $F$  if and only if  $a$  and  $b$  share the same form  $F$ . And not only did Locke reject the ontology of matter and form that underlies this claim, but there is also reason to believe that he was sceptical of the basic idea that resemblance can be boiled down to some kind of sameness. Thus, when the Aristotelian thinker, John Sergeant, defended that view in his *Solid Philosophy* of 1697, Locke wrote down the following comment in the margin of his own copy: 'I cannot but wonder to hear a man soe often repeat what if he were not a Dictator in philosophy would be nonsense, viz That a like is the same' (*Solid Philosophy*, New York, Garland, page 61, emphasis in the original). So even if resemblance is central to Locke's account of cognition, it is not at all clear that resemblance for him meant what it did for Aristotelian scholastics such as Aquinas or their followers.

Indeed, Locke's hostile attitude towards Sergeant here also raises a more general question. In Sergeant, we have one of the most outspoken proponents in Locke's time of the idea that the objects of cognition are present in a special way in the subjects of cognition. Locke, it appears, was hostile towards this idea in Sergeant. Hence, the question arises of how this hostility squares with a reading on which Locke himself was committed to a similar kind of view. Jacovides briefly discusses some of Locke's criticism of Sergeant (167–8). Yet this is a question that remains open.

That said, *Locke's Image of the World* is an extremely rich book that achieves its twofold goal. It casts new light on central themes in Locke, and will prove an important contribution to the literature.

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**The Leibniz-Stahl controversy**, edited by François Duchesneau and Justin E. H. Smith, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2016, lxxxix + 443 pp., \$125.00 (hb), ISBN: 978-0-300-16114-4

*The Leibniz-Stahl Controversy* is the latest addition to the Yale Leibniz Series and is welcomed by historians of philosophy, of science, and of medicine. It holds especial interest for those who specialize on the work of Leibniz and of Stahl,