

## Philippe Hamou rapport de mission NEW YORK

25-26 Février 2011

A la suite d'un appel à communication pour le premier «New York City Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy», diffusé sur les listes de philosophie sur internet, j'ai soumis une proposition de communication en novembre 2010 sur mes travaux actuels sur Locke, la proposition a été retenue. La conférence que j'ai prononcé à New York, à l'université Fordham, a reçu un accueil favorable et a été l'occasion d'échanges fructueux et amicaux, en particulier avec Ohad Nachtomy, Alan Gabbey, Patrick Connolly, et Daniel Garber.

Les deux derniers intervenants prévus le dimanche matin s'étant décommandés, la dernière session a été remplacée par une table ronde autour de la question « history of philosophy today », à laquelle j'ai été convié à participer avec 4 autres intervenants.

Ci-joint

a/ l'abstract de ma communication sur Locke

b/ le programme du workshop

### Locke's magic lantern

#### Reflections on the “train of ideas”, in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

Philippe Hamou (Université Charles de Gaulle ; Lille III)

In this paper, I want to consider an important (although often neglected) feature of Lockean ideas. Lockean ideas are essentially *transitory* beings, whose appearance is a “constant fleeting succession”. Ideas are not static mental entities permanently available for mental scrutiny. As experience (reflection) shows, an idea cannot stand on the mental stage more than a definite unit of time (an ‘instant’), after which it exits the scene and is immediately replaced by another. In chapter II, 14, Locke calls this constant succession a “train”, the “train of ideas”. The expression is perhaps reminiscent of Hobbes phrase for mental discourse, the “train of thoughts”; and it might be considered as a plausible ancestor for our modern “stream of consciousness” – although the Lockean train is conceived much more as an atomized process, with determinate ideas as individual components. As Locke describes it, the train of ideas is strictly coextensive with waking (conscious) time, and it seems to define a *necessary and passive condition* for consciousness. The train goes on in our minds at a certain rate that cannot be changed voluntarily, sped up or slowed down, nor stopped at pleasure, although the train is doomed to cease, temporarily or permanently, with sound sleep or death. The succession of ideas is also necessary in the sense that it is independent from the content of ideas, or the mental operations to which these ideas are submitted. Even attentive contemplation cannot “hold back” the train, and must be construed in a sense that is psychologically compatible with the constant fleeting succession of its object. Finally, as the train requires a constant production of new ideas, it is potentially erratic, fed by the “chiming” of imaginations, vague memories, trivia, when it is not conducted by will or reason.

This set of features gathered from chapter II, 14 (and from some other, less conspicuous, places in the *Essay* and in the posthumous *Conduct of the Understanding*) is worthy of our consideration. For one thing, it allows us to somewhat flesh out the rather shadowy Lockean picture of the

mind - whose “physical consideration”, discarded at the very beginning of the *Essay*, is nevertheless a constant temptation for Locke. In the same chapter 2.14, Locke suggests that ideas may be “*succeeding one another in our Minds at certain distance, not much unlike the Images in the Inside of a Lanthorn, turned round by the beat of the candle*” (2.14.9). This optical/mechanical model is remarkable and can be compared and contrasted with other well known Lockean metaphors of the mind - white paper, mirror, *camera obscura* - all markedly passive images. Here the mind seems animated, or, so to speak, moved from inside. Another important result is expected from this enquiry: it may help us to disentangle certain questions about the continuity of consciousness, memory and personal identity, raised by the famous but puzzling chapter 2.27. In chapter 2.14, Locke says that the idea we have of “the duration of our selves” is taken from the reflection on the train of ideas. Keeping this in mind, one may wonder whether “the same continued consciousness” that, according to Locke in 2.27.26, makes the same “self” or person, should be construed as the “same continued train of ideas”. It may be shown that such construal provides a way to overcome the irritating shortcomings of the “memory” criterion of personal identity, usually attributed to Locke.

New York City Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy

**Friday, February 25, 2011**

**1:30 – 2:30 Opening Session**

1:30 Opening Remarks: **John Drummond**, Fordham University

1:35 **Christia Mercer**, Columbia University: "Leibniz's Activity"

2:30 Coffee Break

**2:45 – 4:15 Kant and Mendelssohn – Chair: Michael Baur**, Fordham University

2:45 **Omri Boehm**, Center for Advanced Study, LMU-Munich, The New School for Social Research: “The Principle of Sufficient Reason, the Ontological Argument and the Is/Ought Distinction”

3:30 **Corey W. Dyck**, University of Western Ontario: "Turning the Game against the Idealist: Mendelssohn's Refutation of Idealism and Kant's Replies"

4:15 Coffee Break

**4:30 – 5:15 Descartes - Chair: John Davenport**, Fordham University

4:30 **Elliot S. Paul**, (Barnard College, Columbia University); Bersoff Faculty Fellow, New York University: “Cartesian Intuition”

5:15 Reception

**Saturday, February 26, 2011**

9:00 Coffee and Bagels

**9:30 – 11:00 Leibniz - Chair: Justin Smith, Institute for Advanced Study**

9:30 **Raphaële Andraut**, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne: “The mind-body problem and the role of the pain: a rereading of the spontaneity of the soul in Leibniz”

10:15 **Lea F. Schweitz**, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago: “Changelings, the Species Problem, and God: A Closer Look at the 'Human' in Leibniz’s *New Essays on Human Understanding*”

11:00 Coffee Break

**11:15 – 12:45 Hume - Chair: TBA**

11:15 **Donald C. Ainslie**, University of Toronto: "Hume's Phenomenology of Sensory Experience: Three Puzzles"

12:00 **Jonathan D. Cottrell**, New York University: ‘Feigned Extension’ and ‘Fictitious Distance’: Reading *Treatise* 1.2.5 in light of Hobbes’s *Concerning Body*

12:45 Lunch

**2:15 – 3:45 Locke and Newton – Chair: Desmond Hogan, Princeton University**

2:15 **Philippe Hamou**, Université Charles de Gaulle; Lille III: “Locke’s magic lantern, Reflections on the “train of ideas”, in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*”

3:00 **Patrick J. Connolly**, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill: “Newton and God’s *Sensorium*”

3:45 Coffee Break

**4:00 – 5:15 Plenary Session – Chair: Dominic Balestra, Fordham University**

4:00 **Daniel Garber**, Princeton University: “Monads and Theology: Reading Leibniz”

5:15 Reception

**Sunday, February 27, 2011**

9:00 Coffee and Bagels

**9:30 – 11:00 Hobbes and Spinoza – Chair: Alan Gabby, Barnard College and Columbia**

University

9:30 **Sandra Field**, Princeton University: “The emergence of Hobbes's political concept of *potentia*”

10:15 **Angelica Nuzzo**, Graduate Center CUNY: “The Power of Substance: *Potentia* and *Potestas* in Spinoza”

11:00 Coffee Break

**11:15 – 12:45 Spinoza – Chair: Martin Lin, Rutgers University**

11:15 **Yitzhak Melamed**, John Hopkins University: “Spinoza on Eternity”

12:00 **John Morrison**, Barnard College, Columbia University: “Spinoza on the Attributes”