

**LOCKE’S COMPATIBILISM:
SUSPENSION OF DESIRE OR SUSPENSION OF DETERMINISM?¹**

forthcoming in Joseph Keim Campbell & Michael O’Rourke, eds.,
Action, Ethics and Responsibility (Topics in Contemporary Philosophy, vol. 7)
(Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009)

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In Book II, chapter xxi of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, on ‘Power’, Locke presents a radical critique of free will. This is the longest chapter in the *Essay*, and it is a difficult one, not least since Locke revised it four times without always taking care to ensure that every part cohered with the rest. My interest is to work out a coherent statement of what would today be termed ‘compatibilism’ from this text – namely, a doctrine which seeks to render free will and determinism compatible. By emphasizing the hedonistic dimension of his argument, according to which we are determined by “the most pressing uneasiness” we feel, I show how a deterministic reading is possible. This was seen by Locke’s favorite and also most radical disciple, the deist Anthony Collins, whose treatise *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (1717) is both a critique of *Essay* II.xxi and a radicalization of its contents. I argue that Collins articulated a form of determinism which recognizes the specificity of action, thanks in large part to the uniquely ‘volitional’ determinism suggested by Locke.

Voluntary opposed to involuntary, not to necessary.
— Locke²

The common notion of liberty is *false*.
— Anthony Collins³

¹ Some of this material is derived from my PhD dissertation, “Locating Mind in the Causal World: Locke, Collins and Enlightened Determinism,” Department of Philosophy, Boston University (2006); it has been presented in different forms in Moscow (Idaho), Montréal, and New York. My thanks to Kenneth Winkler, Justin Steinberg, Meggan Payne, and the anonymous reviewers for helpful criticisms and suggestions.

² Locke (1975), Book II, chapter xxi, § 11. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Locke are from this chapter and are simply given as section (§) numbers.

³ Collins (1717), p. 22.

Naturalistic theories of mind and action are typically considered to be recent arrivals on the philosophical scene, in contrast with theories which insist on a categorical separation between actions and events, such as agent causation, which is typically traced back to Aristotle, and can be found in medieval and early modern thinkers such as Francisco Suarez, Samuel Clarke, the Cambridge Platonists, Kant and Reid, to name but a few. For example, Clarke declares, “When we say, in vulgar speech, that motives or reasons determine a man, ‘tis nothing but a mere figure or metaphor. ‘Tis the man, that freely determines himself to act.”⁴ The more naturalistically oriented species of theories tend to be associated with causal closure arguments derived from early twentieth century physics, notably as mediated through the Vienna Circle. At most, some historical recognition will be given to Hobbes’ determinism and Hume’s compatibilism. In what follows I wish to show that an original form of compatibilism which acknowledges the complexity of mental life was presented by Locke and radicalized by his disciple Anthony Collins, in a way unlike either Hobbes before them or Hume after them. It may be hoped that a dose of conceptually motivated history of philosophy can have a place in contemporary discussions of action, whether it is as a presentation of possible ‘solutions’, unthought-of ‘problems’, or a rejection of the apparent simplicity of either.

In the chapter ‘Of Power’ in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,⁵ Locke uses the logic of ideas to construct a complex deflationary challenge to mainstream notions of freedom as autonomy or as a capacity associated with a distinct faculty called ‘The Will’, understood as entirely separate from the rest of our cognitive functions. In a famous but mysterious formulation, he says there can be no such thing as free will because freedom and will

⁴ Clarke (1717), in Clarke (1738/1978), p. 723.

⁵ Locke (1975), book II, chapter xxi.

are both “powers,” and there can be no such thing as a power of a power. We are free to act or not act, but our actions are determined by our will; we are not free to will or not will:

[T]hat which has the power or not the power to operate, is that alone which is or is not free, and not the power itself. For *freedom, or not freedom, can belong to nothing but what has or has not a power to act* (§ 19, emphasis mine).

Power is, like pleasure or pain, a simple idea of sensation and reflection (II.vii.1; xxi.2; xxii.10).

In his early drafts for the *Essay*, Locke had actually alternated between ‘power’ and ‘will’ as one of the four simple ideas, along with thinking (or perception), pleasure, and pain. He ultimately ends up defining will as power *plus an act of the mind*.⁶ In any case, by stipulating that there cannot be a ‘power of a power’, Locke is ruling out a class of responses to the question ‘Is the will free?’, namely, ones which appeal to divisions within the mind or to higher-order evaluative attitudes.⁷

If Locke had let the matter rest there, he would have contributed an interesting doctrine to the available ‘set’ of compatibilist moral philosophies – ones which recognize the truth of determinism up to a certain point, but consider that this does not rule out the existence of goal-directed, intentional human action, and *a fortiori* action that responds to praise or blame, rewards or punishments, and thus is ‘responsible’.⁸ But in fact, the ‘Power’ chapter is fraught with difficulties, which render it both less coherent and more interesting. It is the longest chapter in the *Essay*, revised significantly for each of the four editions of the book, without earlier versions always being removed, leaving many readers – from Edmund Law, Locke’s editor in the eighteenth century, declaring of Locke that

⁶ “Pleasure, Pain, the Passions.”

⁷ Yaffe (2000), p. 26.

⁸ Of course, the term ‘compatibilism’ is quite broad; thinkers as different as Spinoza and Leibniz (in addition to Locke) can both safely be described as compatibilists. In fact, what it meant to be a compatibilist in the early modern period was less specific than now, if it is the case that compatibilists “typically hold either that free will is compatible with deterministic causal laws at the psychological level, or that even if there are no such laws, every psychological event is still causally determined through being token-identical with some physical event which falls under the laws of physics” (Borst [1992], p. 57).

Tho' he has inserted several Passages in the subsequent Editions, which come near to Liberty, yet he takes in the greatest part of his first passive Scheme, and generally mixes both together. This has occasioned the greatest confusion in the Chapter abovementioned, which cannot but be observ'd by every Reader⁹

to Leibniz and today, Vere Chappell – with the feeling that Locke's account is incoherent or at least inconsistent, something Locke himself apologizes for at the end of the chapter (§ 72).¹⁰

I shall focus on Locke's account and its difficulties, but I shall supplement his account in my final discussion with its revision and deterministically directed critique as put forth by his own closest disciple, the deist Anthony Collins,¹¹ in his *Philosophical Inquiry into Human Liberty* (1717). Locke's account contains at least three distinct 'theories of freedom'; I suggest below that Collins' reading of this situation and reinforcement of one of these theories (the most determinism-friendly one) is the most convincing.

Locke starts out with the intellectualist position that we are 'determined by the Good', the greater Good, which we know through our understanding (II.xxi.29 in the 1st edition); this is a *perfection*. But in response to Molyneux's criticism that

you seem to make all Sins proceed from our Understandings . . . ; and not at all from the Depravity of our Wills. Now it seems harsh to say, that a Man shall be Damn'd, because he understands no better than he does¹²

Locke introduces a new concept in the 2nd edition, as he writes to Molyneux; he now recognizes that "every good, nay every greater good, does not constantly move desire, because it may not

⁹ Law, in King (1731/1739), p. 253f., n. 45.

¹⁰ Locke had acknowledged how much he had revised the chapter in the "Epistle to the Reader": "I have found reason somewhat to alter the thoughts I formerly had concerning that, which gives the last determination to the Will in all voluntary actions" (p. 11).

¹¹ Collins was extremely close to Locke in the last years of his life, and their correspondence is both moving and filled with provocative insights, not least on theological matters. Locke wrote to Collins that "if I were now setting out in the world I should think it my great happiness to have such a companion as you who had a true relish of truth . . . and to whom I might communicate what I thought true freely"; as for strictly intellectual kinship, "I know nobody that understands [my book] so well, nor can give me better light concerning it" (Letters of October 29th, 1703 and April 3^d, 1704 = # 3361, # 3504 in Locke [1976-1989], vol. 8, pp. 97, 263).

¹² Molyneux to Locke, December 22nd 1692, letter 1579 in Locke (1976-1989), vol. 4, pp. 600-601. (James Tully points out that the criticism was first suggested by William King, the Archbishop of Dublin, then relayed by Molyneux, who discussed it at length with Locke; see Tully [1988], p. 47).

make, or may not be taken to make any necessary part of our happiness; for all that we desire is only to be happy.”¹³ He is now focusing on the causal mechanisms of what determines the will and thus moves us to act, in other words, the ‘motivational triggers’ of action; this will turn out to be “uneasiness.”

How could we then seek out the Highest Good? How can we “feel” or “sense” that the Highest Good is in fact, *our* good? Locke originally thought that the Highest Good did play a causal role in our actions, so that our desire would be “regulated” by the “greatness or smallness of the good,”¹⁴ (“the greater Good is that alone which determines the Will” [§ 29]), but he gave up this view starting with the second edition, in which he adds the category of uneasiness: “*good*, the *greater good*, though apprehended and acknowledged to be so, does not determine the will, until our desire, raised proportionately to it, make us uneasy in the want of it” (§ 35). Thus

[Uneasiness] is the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action, which for shortness sake we will call *determining of the Will* (§ 29)

and more explicitly,

what . . . determines the Will in regard to our actions is not . . . the greater good in view: but some (and for the most part the most pressing) *uneasiness* a man is at present under (§ 31, 2nd-5th editions)

As my interest is the emergence of a determinist approach to action, Locke’s addition of a hedonistic motivational psychology is noteworthy as a recognition of determinism, if only a ‘soft determinism’.¹⁵ Whether or not I can rationally judge X (say, a one-month intensive course in classical Greek, in a secluded desert setting) to be a greater good than Y (large amounts of chocolate and other sweets, several glasses of Cognac, a cigar), if obtaining Y removes the

¹³ Letter 1655 (August 23^d 1693), in Locke (1976-1989), vol. 4, p. 722.

¹⁴ Locke, “Pleasure, Pain, the Passions,” in Locke (1997), p. 243.

¹⁵ I.e., not hard determinism, in which “a complete description of the state of the world at any given time and a complete statement of the laws of nature together entail every truth as to what events happen after that time” (Ginet [1990], p. 92). A less fortunate definition of soft determinism is Paul Russell’s ‘compatibilism plus the belief that determinism is true’ (Russell [1995], p. 83 n. 20).

greater pressing uneasiness, I will choose Y. This is Locke's way of addressing weakness of will, confirmed by his quotation of Ovid's "Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor" (I see the better [path], but I choose the worse).¹⁶ But in my view, uneasiness is not just an explanation for ataraxia; it is *Locke's* (2nd-edition) *explanation for action as a whole*, and it is his recognition of 'micro-determinism' at the sub-personal level of action. It's quite possible for me to choose X over Y, in fact, many people do; they simply had a greater pressing uneasiness in that direction. As for responsibility, it is unaffected, since God judges all of our actions at the time of resurrection, in any case.

Locke always rejects the thesis of the autonomy of the will, according to which the will is *self-determining*; he holds that the will *is always determined "by something without itself."*¹⁷ This determination from "without" can either be from the Greater Good (1st edition), the most pressing uneasiness (2nd edition), or an interplay between this uneasiness and the last judgment of the understanding (2nd-5th editions), and since the Good is always defined as happiness (§ 42), and happiness is always defined as pleasure, the 'hedonism' that commentators see appearing in the 2nd edition is not absent from the 1st edition! This is why he denies the liberty of indifference – the absolute equilibrium of Buridan's ass, i.e., the situation in which an agent is free iff, given all conditions for an act A, it can both A and –A, which Leibniz helpfully describes as "indifference of equilibrium"¹⁸ – as directly contradicting his hedonism (§ 48). For Locke, it is both *impossible* to be genuinely indifferent, as we are always being swayed by one uneasiness or

¹⁶ Locke (1975), II.xxi.35 (the quotation is from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 20-21; it is Medea speaking, about killing her children). Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza also quote this passage.

¹⁷ § 29, in the 1st edition only (p. 248n.); in the final edition, this phrase is the entry in the Table of Contents for §§ 25-27. See Vere Chappell's contribution to Sleigh, Chappell and Della Rocca (1998), pp. 1250-1251 and Chappell (1994), p. 201.

¹⁸ Leibniz to Coste, December 19th 1707 (the 'letter on human freedom'), in Leibniz (1989), pp. 194-195.

another, and *not a good idea to be indifferent*, as our ideas of good and evil, translating as they do into pleasure and pain, are ‘in us’ for the purpose of our self-preservation:

our All-wise Maker, suitable to our constitution and frame, and knowing what it is that determines the *Will*, has put into Man the *uneasiness* of hunger and thirst, and other natural desires . . . to move and determine their *Wills*, for the preservation of themselves, and the continuation of their *Species*. . . . We may conclude, that, if the bare contemplation of these good ends to which we are carried by these several *uneasinesses*, had been sufficient to determine the *will*, . . . we should have had in this World little or no pain at all (§ 34)

He also claims that the existence of genuine indifference is an impossibility. It would be useless to be indifferent with regard to the understanding, because our actions would then be like “playing the fool” or better, being a “blind agent”¹⁹; moreover, being determined in our choices by the last judgment of the understanding is a *good idea* in terms of our welfare and self-preservation!

Now, the actions of an agent who is never indifferent, and whose actions are never uncaused, are perfectly compatible with determinism. This overall ‘compatibility’ means, I think, that Locke’s vision of action and freedom can be understood simply as calling attention to our ‘reinforcement’ of certain links in the causal chain, rather than insisting on a quasi-categorical distinction like that between ‘happenings’ and ‘doings’, in which a ‘happening’ is merely a relation between an object and a property, whereas a ‘doing’ expresses a stronger relation.²⁰

However, Locke is about to modify his theory of action – if not, *per se*, of motivation – in an important way, resulting in a new theory of freedom, and in a step away from compatibilism, the very step Collins will challenge. Recall Locke’s second (and crucial) account of what determines the will:

¹⁹ Locke to van Limborch, August 12th 1701, letter 2979 in Locke (1976-1989), p. 408.

²⁰ Gideon Yaffe, in his elegant, thought-provoking but anachronistic work *Liberty Worth the Name* (Yaffe [2000]), suggests the above distinction and appeals to it frequently, but inconsistently. I disagree with Yaffe’s reading of Locke on action, on a fundamental level: Yaffe’s Locke holds that we are determined *by the Good*, whereas Locke as I read him places the emphasis on *determined*.

There being in us a great many *uneasinesses*, always soliciting and ready to determine the *will*, it is natural, as I have said, that the greatest and most pressing should determine the *will* to the next action; and so it does *for the most part, but not always* (§ 47, emphasis mine).

“For the most part, but not always”: this is the sign of the coming modification. Hedonistic determination of our will works most of the time, but not always; sometimes we can simply *stop the mechanism!* I quote Locke’s new statement:

For, the mind having in most cases, as is evident in experience, a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires; and so all, one after another; is at liberty to consider the objects of them, examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty man has; and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness; whilst we precipitate the determination of our *wills*, and engage too soon, before due *Examination*. To prevent this, we have a power to suspend the prosecution of this or that desire; as every one daily may experiment in himself. This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that which is (as I think improperly) called *free-will*. For, during this *suspension* of any desire, before the *will* be determined to action, and the action (which follows that determination) done, we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due *Examination*, we have judged, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness; and it is not a fault, but a perfection of our nature, to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair *Examination* (§ 47).

He confirms that suspension is the “hinge” on which the new theory of freedom “turns” some sections later:

This is the hinge on which turns the *liberty* of intellectual beings, in their constant endeavours after, and a steady prosecution of true felicity,- That they can *suspend* this prosecution in particular cases, till they have looked before them, and informed themselves whether that particular thing which is then proposed or desired lie in the way to their main end, and make a real part of that which is their greatest good. . . . experience showing us, that in most cases, we are able to suspend the present satisfaction of any desire (§ 52).

How did we get to suspension? Not by some casual intuition Locke suddenly remembered, about how we do stop and reflect about different goods frequently. Rather, Locke appeals to his distinction between active powers and passive powers. We know by experience that we have a power to change and a power to receive changes. In the realm of thinking, the power to receive ideas from without is the merely “passive” power, by the exercise of which we are patients and

not agents. But we also have an active power, “to bring into view ideas out of sight, at one’s own choice, and compare which of them one thinks fit” (§ 72). This quote from the end of the chapter, precisely in the portion that was added last, provides the conceptual justification for what may be Locke’s key moral idea, the *suspension of desire*.

This active power applied to the moral realm is the power to suspend the “execution and satisfaction of [our] desires” (§ 47), in other words, the “prosecution” of an action. We are not necessarily compelled to attend to a present (and pressing) uneasiness, because we can reflect on the main source of this uneasiness, in order to know which object of desire we should pursue. This “suspension” of action is “the source of all liberty” ... “which is (as I think improperly) called *Free will*” (*ibid.*). An action can be suspended until the will is determined to action; the will is determined to action by a judgment on which good we pursue. In other words, this ‘moment of freedom’ occurs within a causal scheme in which we “desire, will and act according to the last result of a fair examination” (§ 48); this last result is very reminiscent of the final moment of deliberation which Hobbes compared to the feather which breaks the horse’s back.²¹

A mitigated determinism, but still a determinism, then: we can suspend the mechanism of desire and uneasiness and deliberate on a course of action, that is, we can suspend the “prosecution” of an action, but once a course of action has been chosen, we have to follow it. If we hadn’t noticed that this moment of suspension seems hard to reconcile with the rest of the hedonistic scheme, Collins will call attention to this flaw or inconsistency in Locke’s explanation, and cast doubt on the possibility of our power to somehow *suspend a course of events*, in other words, the possibility that in a causal chain of actions, there might be a moment which is not itself within the causal chain! With his unmistakable clarity and precision, Collins says simply that “*suspending to will*, is itself an *act of willing*; it is willing to defer willing about

²¹ Hobbes (1839-1845), vol. 4, 247 / Hobbes (1999), p. 34. Collins uses the same image (Collins [1717], p. 49).

the matter propos'd"²²; and since Collins does not accept a categorial separation between desire and will, which he finds to be a traditional (Aristotelian) residue in Locke, he will consider any suspension of the will, being "itself an act of willing," to still be determined by the causal mechanism of uneasiness.

Locke has moved from freedom as the power to do what one wills to do or not do, that is, not the freedom to *will* but to *act* (§§ 8, 23), to freedom understood as the ability to suspend desire, to keep it from provoking action (§§ 47, 52). If uneasiness turned out to be the only causal mechanism through which the Good can influence me, then for my actions to not be fully determined by this mechanism, I must be able to suspend the execution of my desires.

Suspension is "the hinge on which turns the *liberty* of intellectual beings, in their constant endeavours after, and a steady prosecution of true felicity" (§ 52). It sounds a lot like a 'second-order freedom' of the sort made popular by Charles Taylor and Harry Frankfurt in contemporary moral philosophy. But the early modern thinker who most prominently defends a doctrine of freedom as a derivative state in relation to more primary voluntary mental states is not Locke, but Leibniz.²³ For Locke, freedom as suspension is still not freedom to will; it is freedom to act in accordance with the will. It's natural to ask whether the suspension doctrine is a departure from determinism or not.²⁴ Indeed, in section 56 of the 'Power' chapter, which he added to the 5th edition, Locke says the following:

Liberty 'tis plain consists in a Power to do, or not to do; to do, or forbear doing, as we will. This cannot be denied. But this seeming to comprehend only the actions of a Man consecutive to volition, it is further inquired,- Whether he be at liberty to will or no? And

²² Collins (1717), p. 39.

²³ Vailati (1990), p. 226, n. 50. See Leibniz (1982), II.xxi.23.

²⁴ Chappell, in Sleight, Chappell and Della Rocca, *op. cit.*, p. 1250. Yaffe (2001, p. 387, n. 2) remarks nicely that suspension is really an idea Locke takes over from the libertarian or incompatibilist position, particularly Malebranche, whereas his initial doctrine of freedom as the absence of constraint on action was more compatibilist, closer to Hobbes. With respect to Collins' critique, this implies that, depending on which edition of the *Essay* one looks at, one finds a more or less determinist Locke; thus one could conceivably construct an alternate Locke who would not be (as) vulnerable to the reductionist 'streamlining' offered by Collins.

to this it has been answered, that, in most cases, a Man is not at Liberty to forbear the act of volition: he must exert an act of his will, whereby the action proposed is made to exist or not to exist. But yet there is a case wherein a Man is at *Liberty in respect of willing*; and that is the choosing of a remote Good as an end to be pursued. Here a Man may suspend the act of his choice from being determined for or against the thing proposed, till he has examined whether it be really of a nature, in itself and consequences, to make him happy, or no (§ 56, emphasis mine).

In sum, Locke's 'Power' chapter contains not one but *three separate doctrines of freedom*:

A: freedom is determination by the Good (1st edition);

B: given the condition of uneasiness, freedom is the suspension of desire (2nd edition); this allows the Good and the understanding to be 'reintroduced';

C: liberty with respect to willing (5th edition), which seems to follow from suspension: once we suspend, we can choose one good over another, and once that choice is made it raises our uneasiness accordingly.

Many commentators, Chappell most prominently, have worried about how to reconcile (A) with (B): how to reconcile a notion of the Good with a hedonistic motivational psychology. My response is that if we recall that the Good always means happiness, itself definable in terms of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and the presence of the afterlife and its potential rewards and punishments *cannot be excluded from hedonistic considerations*, there seems to be almost no difficulties with reconciling these two doctrines. *However*, the situation appears to be different with doctrine (C), liberty "in respect to willing." The idea appears to be blatantly inconsistent with the rest of the chapter. Indeed, it's not just § 56 which presents this difficulty; consider this statement:

Nay, were we determined by anything but the last result of our own Minds, judging of the good or evil of any action, we were not free; the very end of our Freedom being, that we may attain the good we choose (§ 48).

Now, this sentence can be simplified to read:

If our will were determined by something other than X, then it would not be free.

As Yaffe (2001) suggests, this can in turn be rewritten in this way (even if it's simply a matter of denying the antecedent):

If our will is determined by X, it is free.

If only in terms of Locke's own rhetoric in the early sections of the chapter, one cannot help but point out that he had claimed to be dispensing with the notion of free will, for good ... and here he is entertaining a version of it, however revised. What should we make, then, of Locke's apparent insouciance?

The naïvely biographical approach would be to say that Locke first asserted (in a rather orthodox, Scholastic way) that we are determined by the Good; then he was radicalized in a hedonistic direction by reading Gassendi during his stay in Montpellier (indeed, his first essays on pleasure and pain are exactly contemporary with this reading); lastly, frightened by the possible consequences of this doctrine, he jerry-rigs a device by which we are again "free" faced with the various micro-determinisms, whether hedonistic or just plain unconscious.²⁵

In contrast to this approach, I would present a case for the 'enduring' status of determination in his chapter (a more 'determinist' reading of Locke, then) for two reasons, ranked in increasing order of importance:

— suspension is not really the opposite or contrary of uneasiness, as one might think; rather, it *emerges out of uneasiness* (an emergence which would not have been conceivable or allowable for earlier suspension theorists; Locke, in contrast, allows that the stirrings of desire have not only intentional content but reflexive content). Thus it is not a mere grafting on of libertarian elements into a formerly compatibilist view. Because there are multiple stimuli, we

²⁵ One of Leibniz's chief criticisms of Locke's moral psychology is that he leaves out (or is unaware of) the entire unconscious dimension of mental life (see Leibniz [1982], II.xx.6). In fact, in various texts written parallel to the *Essay*, including his correspondence with Jean Le Clerc, Locke shows that he is quite aware of the sub-personal levels of uneasiness.

need to be able to pick and choose between them; or, better put, suspension supervenes on the “multiple conative elements”²⁶ of uneasiness, and is thus not tantamount to ‘indifference’, which is the contrary of uneasiness; it does not reintroduce true divisions in the mind. James Tully uses different language and emphasis to similarly nuance Locke’s shift from determination-by-the-Good to hedonism as a motivational theory:

Locke argues that his first view cannot be true, because if it were everyone who has considered Christianity would be an unfailing Christian in practice. This is so since they would be aware that heaven and hell outweigh all other good and evil, and so they would be motivated to live a Christian life to gain infinite pleasure and avoid infinite pain. Yet it obviously is true that everyone who has considered Christianity is not a practising Christian, therefore the greater good in view does not determine the will.²⁷

— Secondly, Locke never ceases to deny freedom as indifference, which leads him to formulate a new part of his doctrine: the determination of our will by the last judgment of our understanding, is a “perfection of our nature” (§ 47) rather than a “restraint or diminution of freedom” (§ 48). Much like the ‘practical’ argument against indifference in terms of self-preservation, Locke thinks it is a *perfection* to be *determined*:

A man is at liberty to lift up his hand to his head, or let it rest quiet: he is perfectly indifferent in either; and it would be an imperfection in him, if he wanted that power, if he were deprived of that indifferency. But it would be as great an imperfection, if he had the same indifferency, whether he would prefer the lifting up his hand, or its remaining in rest, when it would save his head or eyes from a blow he sees coming: *it is as much a perfection, that desire, or the power of preferring, should be determined by good, as that the power of acting should be determined by the will; and the certainer such determination is, the greater is the perfection* (§ 48, emphasis mine).²⁸

* * *

In sum, Locke has put forth both a powerful critique of mainstream theories of freedom and the will, with his concept of ‘uneasiness’, *and* he seems to have retreated from the

²⁶ Borrowing this expression from Dretske (1988), p. 138.

²⁷ Tully (1988), p. 47.

²⁸ In this sense Locke is closer to Calvinism than, notably, his friend and correspondent Philipp van Limborch, the head of the Remonstrant Arminian congregation in Amsterdam. (Remonstrants or Arminians were followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), who scandalized the Calvinists by claiming that our wills are at least sufficiently free that we can rationally be subjected to persuasion and punishment (hence salvation through works).

(hedonistic) deterministic implications of this concept, with his claim that there are moments when we can suspend all such determination, and be free “with respect to willing.” At the same time, partly due to the theological overtones of his moral philosophy, he thinks it is a *perfection* that we are in fact determined in our actions, and an unavoidable one. Based on the textual complexities and variations in the ‘Power’ chapter of the *Essay*, one could defend different versions of compatibilism in Locke. Namely, one could defend a moral theory in which we are determined by the Good; or one could view Locke as the originator of Frankfurt-style ‘second-order’ freedom (although as I have noted, Leibniz is a better author to pin this doctrine on); lastly, one could focus on Locke’s notion of uneasiness and show how it opens on to a coherent *and psychologically fine-grained* determinism. It is the latter theory that I find most compelling, and it was this approach that was taken by Locke’s radical friend and disciple, Anthony Collins

Collins seized upon Locke’s notion of uneasiness, bolstered it metaphysically with various determinist arguments drawn from Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Bayle (principally an ‘argument from experience’ and an ‘argument from causality’), and challenged any type of ‘suspension’ or ‘liberty with respect to willing’ as being inconsistent with uneasiness. In doing so, he puts forth a powerful and original form of determinism which does not neglect the conceptual and empirical particularities of the world of action, contrary to most discussions in action theory or the philosophy of science, which tend to ignore one another – one may term Collins’ position a ‘volitional determinism’²⁹; he himself speaks of “moral necessity,” taking a term from the incompatibilist, libertarian vocabulary used notably by Samuel Clarke:

I contend only for what is called moral necessity, meaning thereby, that man, who is an intelligent and sensible being, is determined by his reason and his senses; and I deny man

²⁹ I take this term from Chappell’s (1998), p. 86. He uses it to mean the thesis that we are not free in willing; I agree, but extend the term to mean a metaphysical thesis, a variant of determinism which focuses on volitions, and thereby action, and thereby the *mind*, in contrast to a ‘physicalist’ (or ‘Laplacean’) determinism which denies the existence of this level of action, or at least seeks to reduce it to a lower-level explanation.

to be subject to such necessity, as is in clocks, watches and other beings which for want of sensation and intelligence are subject to an absolute, physical or mechanical necessity.³⁰

It is not possible here to go into further details about Collins' doctrine, which significantly anticipates the 'Hume-Mill' thesis (later defended by thinkers such as Moritz Schlick, A.J. Ayer, and J.J.C. Smart³¹) according to which an agent is causally determined by her beliefs, desires and other mental states, in a way which forms an adequate basis for a moral theory. Put differently, even if there are really are 'rationality relations' between beliefs and desires on the one hand and behavior on the other hand, it does not follow that beliefs and desires do not cause behavior³²; this is why our actions are not fully random. Quine, for one, credited Spinoza and Hume with this view:

Like Spinoza, Hume and so many others, I count an act as free insofar as the agent's motives or drives are a link in its causal chain. These motives or drives may themselves be as rigidly determined as you please.³³

But most contemporary scholars and action theorists tend to attribute this view to "Hume and subsequent compatibilists"; my point as regards this historical claim is that Locke actually first lays out the conditions for such a view, and that Collins expresses it in full, a generation before Hume.³⁴

In addition to the 'character-causal' claim, Locke and Collins also make the classic deflationary point that our everyday ways of talking, in which we are not *caused* by the reasons for our action because we *reflected* on these reasons, so that "if a man's behavior is rational, it

³⁰ Collins (1717), Preface, p. iii.

³¹ The 'Hume-Mill' thesis is what van Inwagen (1983) calls 'the *Mind* argument' – because its classic formulation in the twentieth century came primarily in three papers published in *Mind* over two and a half decades, by Hobart (1934), Nowell-Smith (1948) and Smart notably (1961, 1984), in addition to Ayer (1954) and Schlick (1930/1939).

³² Churchland (1986), p. 304.

³³ Quine (1995), p. 199.

³⁴ Dupré (2001), p. 178. The same statement about the 'Hume-Mill thesis' can be found, e.g. in Ginet, in O'Connor, ed. (1995) and Russell (1995). Winkler (1998), § 3, is one of the few scholars who recognizes Collins' anticipation of Hume. For more on Collins' 'volitional determinism' see Wolfe (2007).

cannot be determined by the state of his glands or any other antecedent causal factors,”³⁵ are precisely just *façons de parler* and do not reflect any underlying ‘joints’ of things. They would undoubtedly agree with Daniel Wegner that our experience of free will is “the way our minds portray their operations to us, not their actual operation.”³⁶ In this sense, Lockean-Collinsian volitional determinism could be true even if the universe as a whole is *not* deterministic, e.g. at the quantum level: universal physical determinism plus supervenience of the mental on the physical entails psychological determinism, but the reverse does not hold.³⁷ Contemporary claims that compatibilism is inherently self-contradictory because determinism implies a total lack of control over any part of the universe and its laws, whether made in support of libertarian free will (Van Inwagen) or of determinism (Galen Strawson) are impressive in their metaphysical coherence but, curiously for moral philosophy, seem to ignore the specific features of psychological life which these early modern philosophers took seriously, and which impact directly on moral considerations. They seem to ignore that “even in a deterministic world, not all thieves are kleptomaniacs,” in Saul Smilansky’s evocative phrase.³⁸

I have tried to outline the complexity of Locke’s views on action and indicate how they formed the basis for a new and less-known form of determinism – a uniquely ‘volitional’ determinism which recognizes the specific complexity of mental life, or psychological events, since after all, “determinism alone does not tell us what laws or kinds of laws take human acts as their dependent variables.”³⁹ The shift from the will understood as an autonomous, self-transparent faculty to the will as a ‘power’ is also a kind of ‘psychologization’ (understood as a

³⁵ MacIntyre (1957), p. 35; O’Connor (1995), p. 196.

³⁶ Wegner (2002), p. 96.

³⁷ I owe the latter formulation to an anonymous reviewer.

³⁸ Smilansky (this volume).

³⁹ Goldman (1970), p. 173.

form of naturalization), since the notion of a faculty implies a kind of autonomy and distinction from the natural world, whereas a power is a 'Newtonian' concept, which applies equally to the physical and the psychological realms, as is evident in Locke's various examples.

Both Locke and Collins reject, preemptively, anything like agent causation, or a basic distinction between reasons and causes. Unlike a pure physicalistically driven determinist like Hobbes, they offer a fine-grained account of volitional determinism and other motivational 'pressures'. The suspension of desire is not, then, a suspension of determinism.

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