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Wenchao Li

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Ute Beckmann, Sven Erdner, Esther-Maria Errulat,
Jürgen Herbst, Helena Iwasinski und Simona Noreik

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Locke and Leibniz on Freedom and Necessity

Idan Shimony (Tel Aviv)/Yekutiel Shoham (Tel Aviv)

Locke and Leibniz are often classified as proponents of compatibilist theories of human freedom, since both maintain that freedom is consistent with determinism and that the difference between being and not being free turns on how one is determined.¹ However, we will argue in this paper that their versions of compatibilism are essentially different and that they have significantly distinct commitments to compatibilism. To this end, we will first analyze the definitions and examples for freedom and necessity that Locke and Leibniz present in sections 8–13 of chapter 21 of the *Essay on Human Understanding* and the *Nouveaux essais* respectively,² and then conjecture how Locke and Leibniz would have continued the discussion, if they had had the opportunity to engage in an exchange of opinions. In this way, we believe, one will be in a position to understand why Leibniz thinks that Locke's discussion of freedom "est un des plus prolixes et des plus subtils de son ouvrage."³

¹ See Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett's introduction to their translation of the *Nouveaux essais*: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *New Essays on Human Understanding*, transl. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge 1996 [hereafter NE], pp. xxii–xxiii. See also Vere Chappell: "Locke on the Freedom of the Will," in: Id. (ed.): *Locke*, Oxford 1998, pp. 86–105, here p. 89; Nicholas Jolley: *Locke. His Philosophical Thought*, Oxford 1999, pp. 128–130.

² Locke's chapter and Leibniz's corresponding chapter are the longest chapters of the *Essay* and the *Nouveaux essais*, respectively. It is thus impossible to provide here a complete account of these chapters. References to Locke's *Essay* are to book, chapter, and section numbers in John Locke: *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch, Oxford 1975 [hereafter E].

³ "Letter to Isaac Jacquelot, 28. April 1704", GP III, 473. In addition to the standard abbreviations for Gerhardt's (GP) and the Academy's (A) editions of Leibniz's texts, we use the following abbreviations: AG = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and transl. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis 1989; CJL = *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols., ed. by E. S. de Beer, Oxford 1976–1989; H = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *Theodicy*, transl. by E. M. Huggard and ed. by Austin Farrer, London 1951; L = Id.: *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, transl. and ed. by Leroy E. Loemker, Dordrecht 1969; LA = Id./Antoine Arnauld: *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, ed. and transl. by H. T. Mason, Manchester 1967; Langley = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *New Essays concerning Human Understanding*, transl. by A. G. Langley, London 1896; LC = Id./Simon Clarke: *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. by H. G. Alexander, Manchester 1956; PL = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *Logical Papers*, ed. and transl. by G. H. R. Parkinson, Oxford 1966; PP = Id.: *Philosophical Writings*, ed. by G. H. R. Parkinson, London 1973.

1. Locke on Freedom and Necessity

Locke discusses freedom and necessity in chapter 21 of book 2 of his *Essay*, entitled “of power.” According to Locke, the idea of power is a simple idea, which we receive from sensation and reflection.⁴ Locke opens chapter 21 by explaining how we get this idea: we observe patterns of change inside and outside us and conclude that certain things have the possibility or *power* to generate certain changes in other things.⁵ That which generates change is *active* power, and that which is capable of receiving change is *passive* power.⁶ Corporeal objects mainly give us examples of passive power through their *motion*, while we experience active power by means of the *thinking* of our mind.⁷ Next, Locke claims that will and understanding are active powers of the mind or the agent.⁸ Will is the power of the agent to choose or determine a preferred course of action.⁹ The understanding is the power of the agent to think or perceive. Locke does not object to calling will and understanding *faculties* of the mind, as long as one uses the term properly, that is, as indicating powers of the agent, and not as referring to independent agents working in some kind of autonomy within the mind.¹⁰ Locke implies here that only agents are the possessors of powers, so that one power cannot belong to another.¹¹ In

⁴ E II, 7, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21, 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. Each power has a relation to a certain action and there are only two sorts of actions of which we have ideas, namely, thinking and motion. Motion is related to bodies and, Locke maintains, it is more of a passion than an action. Therefore, corporeal objects provide us with examples of passive power. Thinking is naturally related to the mind and it is through introspection that we see that we can actively initiate movements of our body merely by willing it or thinking about it. Hence, the mind gives us the idea of active power.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Volition* or *willing* is the actual exercise of the will, namely, a determination of a preferred course of action. An action determined in this way is *voluntary*, while an action performed without such deliberation is *involuntary*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 16–19.

particular, freedom, as a power, cannot be ascribed to the will itself but only to the agent.¹²

After remarking briefly that we receive the ideas of freedom and necessity by observing the power in us to begin, avoid, continue, or end actions,¹³ Locke turns to define these ideas.

“[...] the idea of *liberty* is [...] the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferred to the other; where either of them is not in the power of the agent to be produced by him according to his volition, there he is not at liberty, that agent is under *necessity*. So that liberty cannot be, where there is no thought, no volition, no will; but there may be thought, there may be will, there may be volition, where there is no liberty.”¹⁴

At first sight, the definitions of will and freedom seem so close, that one might wonder why Locke distinguishes them as two separate powers of the mind.¹⁵ But there is a difference between them. Will is the power of the agent to prefer or choose a course of action, while freedom is the power of the agent to realize her choices and preferences.¹⁶ Will, then, is a necessary condition of freedom, and freedom may be taken as the power of the agent to do what she wills.¹⁷

Locke's definition emphasizes that thinking is another necessary condition of freedom. By thinking Locke seems to mean here reasoning or rational deliberation, by means of which the preference is determined. Hence, thinking is only indirectly a necessary condition of freedom: it is a necessary condition for willing, which, in turn, is a necessary condition of freedom. The example

¹² Ibid., 14. Locke goes from claiming that it is unintelligible and meaningless to ask whether the will is free (ibid.), to argue for determinism of the will (ibid., 22–25). On this point, see Chappell: “Locke on the Freedom”, p. 92–96.

¹³ E II, 21, 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ See D. J. O'Connor: *John Locke*, New York 1967, p. 115.

¹⁶ See John Yolton: *A Locke Dictionary*, Oxford 1993, p. 129; O'Connor: *John Locke*, p. 115.

¹⁷ See: “Liberty [...] is the power a Man has to do or forbear doing any particular action, according as its doing or forbearance has the actual preference in the mind, which is the same thing as to say, according as he himself *wills* it” (E II, 21, 15). Jolley elucidates the point as follows: “Freedom is, roughly, the power to do what we will, and will in turn is the power to choose one course of action over another from the alternatives which are physically possible for us” (Jolley: *Locke*, p. 125).

of the tennis ball¹⁸ confirms this reading. A tennis ball does not think. Consequently, it has no volition and, therefore, it is not a free agent.

Locke's subsequent examples stress that thinking and willing are not sufficient for freedom. A man falling from a bridge breaking underneath him certainly thinks that it is better not to fall and prefers or wills not to fall. Yet, he is not free, since it is not in his power to prevent his fall (E 2.21.9). Consider further the case of a second man, carried in his sleep into a locked room, where a person he is glad to meet is found. He wakes up and enjoys the company. He *willingly* stays in the room, that is, he prefers staying over leaving the room. His staying is *voluntary*, yet he is not free, since it is not in his power to leave, if he preferred to do so.¹⁹ "Voluntary then is not opposed to necessary, but to involuntary,"²⁰ and furthermore, voluntary is not identical to free.²¹

These two examples reveal another essential component of freedom according to Locke, namely, being able to do otherwise, or as Locke calls it, the *equal* ability to perform or avoid an action²² or *indifference of ability*.²³ The falling man is not free because *he has no choice* but to fall. Similarly, the second man may will to stay in the room with his good friend but he too is not free, since *he has no choice*: whether or not he wants to stay, he cannot leave the locked room. The absence of compulsion or restraint, both external and internal, is vital for freedom.

To sum up, Locke's definition of freedom contains three essential elements: thinking, will, and indifference of ability. Whenever at least one of these elements is missing, there is a state of necessity. A being with no understanding has no will and, therefore, is never free. Such beings are called "necessary agents"²⁴. On the other hand, a rational agent is free if all three conditions of freedom are satisfied and in a state of necessity if not. In particular, a rational agent is under necessity even when she does what she wills, if she is not able to do otherwise, that is, if the third condition of indifference of ability is not satisfied. Finally, understanding, will, and freedom are powers of the agent and thus may be ascribed only to the agent and not to other powers. We

¹⁸ E II, 21, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ The examples discussed above are examples of external actions or "motions of the body". Locke remarks in section 12 that there is complete correspondence between external and mental actions in this context of freedom and necessity.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8; 13.

may say that an agent has an understanding, that she wills something, or that she is free. But it is meaningless to say that freedom thinks, that the understanding wills something, or that the will is free.

2. Leibniz on Freedom and Necessity

In his corresponding chapter, Leibniz omits discussions regarding the source of the relevant ideas and turns directly to considering their content. Leibniz has already stated his general disagreement with Locke about the origin and nature of ideas, so there is no point to repeat it here.²⁵

Regarding will,²⁶ Leibniz does not follow Locke's lead in defining it as the power to set a preference, but rather renders willing or volition as the

“effort or endeavor (*conatus*) to move towards what one finds good and away from what one finds bad, the endeavor arising immediately out of one's awareness of those things.”²⁷

²⁵ In the second book of the *Essay* Locke argues that our *tabula rasa* mind receives all its ideas from experience through sensation and reflection. Leibniz has expressed his dissatisfaction concerning this point ever since his first reflections on the *Essay* from the mid 1690s (see “On Locke's Essay on Human Understanding”; GP V, 15 f. / Langley, 14–16; and “Specimen of Thoughts upon the Second Book”; GP V, 23 / Langley, 23 f. Cf. “Leibniz's review of Pierre Coste's French translation of Locke's *Essay*”; GP V, 37 / Langley, 38. He elaborates on it in the preface to the *Nouveaux Essais*; A VI, 6, 47–53. The crucial point here is that the term “idea” denotes something different for Locke and for Leibniz. Locke conceives it as a mental item actually present in the mind when one perceives and thinks, while for Leibniz it is a pre-requisite, as it were, for coherent thinking (see “What is an Idea”; A VI, 4, 1370f. / L, 207 f.; “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas”, A VI, 4, 588 ff. / L, 292 f.). Accordingly, Leibniz asserts at the beginning of book 2: “In order to keep away from an argument upon which we have already spent too long, let me say in advance, sir, that when you say that ideas come from one or other of those causes [i.e. sensation or reflection], I shall take that to mean the actual perception of the ideas; for I believe I have shown that in so far as they contain something distinct they are in us before we are aware of them” (NE II, 1, 2).

²⁶ We omit here Leibniz's reply concerning the idea of power, since it is less relevant to the general line of argument. In brief, Leibniz regards power as possibility of change, distinguishes between active and passive power, and agrees with Locke that the mind gives us the clearest idea of active power while matter provides examples of passive power (NE II, 21, 1–4).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

Both our inner and outer actions follow from this endeavor, as long as it is not hindered. Leibniz contrasts volition with *appetition*. The latter is an effort or endeavor arising from insensible perceptions, of which we are unaware.²⁸ *Voluntary*, by contrast, may be ascribed only to “actions one can be aware of and can reflect upon when they arise from some consideration of good and bad.”²⁹ Finally, understanding is not merely the power to perceive, but rather a power to actually understand what we perceive, form distinct idea of it, and reflect on it.³⁰

In response to Locke’s definition of freedom, Leibniz presents a series of distinctions.³¹ Freedom is either freedom *in law* or *in fact*. The examples of cases of freedom in law imply that this type of freedom is a right granted to human beings in social and political contexts. Freedom in fact refers to the state or ability of the person herself, irrespective of the political context.³² Freedom in fact is further distinguished into *freedom to act* (i.e. freedom to do what one wills) and *freedom to will* (i.e. the power to will as one should).³³ Leibniz classifies Locke’s freedom as a freedom of action. He remarks briefly that a person is free in this sense if she has the required means and suitable control over her body.

²⁸ Leibniz adds that there are appetitions of which we can be aware, but does not elaborate on this point. The notion of “minute perceptions”, namely insensible perceptions of which we are unaware, stems from the principle of continuity. If one’s mind could be said to be without perceptions during dreamless sleep, and then all of a sudden in possession of perceptions as one wakes up, the principle of continuity would be violated. Hence, one must concede that “noticeable perceptions arise by degrees from ones which are too minute to be noticed” (NE, “Preface”; A VI, 6, 53–57).

²⁹ NE II, 21, 5.

³⁰ The difference between Locke and Leibniz on this point corresponds to their different conceptions of what idea is (see note 11 above).

³¹ NE II, 21, 8. See Appendix 1 below.

³² If we think of freedom in law in terms of social or political right, than freedom in fact may be taken as natural right.

³³ Leibniz agrees with Locke that one cannot properly speak of freedom *of* will, since freedom may be attributed to agents and not to the agent’s powers or faculties. Thus, the customary phrase “freedom of will” has to be understood as meaning “freedom of the agent *to* will”, and when asking whether the will is free “the intention is to ask whether a man is free when he wills” (ibid., 14). In general, Leibniz concurs that it is inappropriate to regard the faculties of the mind as active agents in themselves (ibid., 6).

Leibniz seems more interested in the second type of freedom in fact, namely, freedom to will or the power to will as one should. This type is further distinguished into two subtypes. The one is contrasted with the imperfection of the mind and pertains to the understanding. It involves the ability to restrain the influence of the passions on the will by means of the understanding. The second is contrasted with necessity and pertains to the will:

“[...] it consists in the view that the strongest reasons or impressions which the understanding presents to the will do not prevent the act of the will from being contingent, and do not confer upon it an absolute or (so to speak) metaphysical necessity. It is in this sense that I always say that the understanding can determine the will, in accordance with which perceptions and reasons prevail, in a manner which, although it is certain and infallible, inclines without necessitating.”³⁴

This type of freedom consists in determining the will through the understanding and contains three essential components: spontaneity, intelligence or rational deliberation, and contingency. Spontaneity means self-determination. A free agent consciously determines her will and actively influences her course of action. Second, Leibniz agrees with Locke that intelligence is a necessary condition of freedom and maintains that a free agent determines her will by means of her understanding.³⁵ Finally, Leibniz contends that determining the will by reasons provided by the understanding does not undermine freedom, since it involves contingency rather than necessity.

The notions of “contingency” and “incline without necessitating” require further explication. Necessary is something the opposite of which is logically impossible, and contingent is something the opposite of which is logically possible.³⁶ Locke defines necessity as lack of freedom. Hence, for example, on Locke’s account the motion of a tennis ball is necessary, since it is not

³⁴ Ibid., 8.

³⁵ See: “Aristotle has rightly noted that we are not prepared to call an action “free” unless as well as being spontaneous [*spontanées*] it is also deliberate [*deliberées*]” (ibid., 9). Remnant and Bennett translate here “unconstrained” rather than “spontaneous”, which seems more suitable to the immediate context (discussing the unconstrained motion of a tennis ball). Langley, on the other hand, retains the word “spontaneous”, which fits better with the broader context of Leibniz’s discussion of freedom.

³⁶ See: “A truth is *necessary* when its opposite implies contradiction; and when it is not necessary, it is called *contingent*” (“Letter to Coste, 19 December 1707”; GP III, 400 / AG, 193); “[...] event whose opposite is possible is contingent, event as that whose opposite is impossible

free. For Leibniz, on the other hand, although the motion of the tennis ball is not free, it is not necessary but rather contingent. That the ball moves in a certain way is not a logically necessary truth. It is rather a truth that depends on certain circumstances and the laws of nature in force. Thus, the motion of the tennis ball involves merely *conditional* or *hypothetical* necessity: if the laws of nature were different, it would move in a different manner. Therefore, the opposite case (i.e. other motion) is possible and not contradictory. In the case of a free rational agent, the fact that she determines her will through her understanding does not eliminate her freedom, since the determination does not involve absolute or logical necessity.³⁷ This is so, since the inclination of the will toward a certain option does not cancel the other options, that is, the alternative options do not become contradictory but remain possible. A wise agent choosing an optimal course of action on the basis of intelligent grounds provided by the understanding is not under necessity, since although not chosen, inferior alternative ways are still logically possible and are not cancelled by the choice.

“But good, either true or apparent – in a word, the motive – inclines without necessitating, that is, without imposing an absolute necessity. For when God

is necessary” (“Theodicy”, § 282; GP VI, 284 / H, 299); “[...] we must distinguish between an absolute and a hypothetical necessity. We must also distinguish between a necessity which takes place because the opposite implies a contradiction (which necessity is called logical, metaphysical, or mathematical) and a necessity which is moral, whereby a wise being chooses the best, and every mind follows the strongest inclination” (“Leibniz’s 5th Letter to Clarke”, § 4; LC, 56).

³⁷ Rational agents do not, of course, always act freely. Their will is not determined merely by reasons, but also by dispositions, passions, habits, beliefs, and external impressions (“5th Letter to Clarke”, § 15 / LC, 59. “Letter on Freedom”; PP, 113). They are free to the extent that they take into consideration all these types of motives in order to actively determine their will in a certain way. Willing as one should means being able to satisfactorily take into consideration or weigh all relevant motives. In so far as the will is passively determined by passions and impressions, the agent’s action is not free. To this Leibniz refers when he talks about freedom to will as contrasted with the imperfection of the mind (NE II, 21, 8). On Leibniz’s image of weighing motives on the scales of the balance of reason, see Marcelo Dascal: “The Balance of Reason”, in: Daniel Vanderveken (ed.): *Logic, Thought and Action*, Dordrecht 2005, pp. 27–47. Charlie Dunbar Broad: *Leibniz. An Introduction*, London 1975, p. 30) maintains that “incline without necessitating” means that the reasons do not demonstratively entail the conclusion, but merely give it a probability greater than one-half.

(for instance) chooses the best, what he does not choose, and is inferior in perfection, is nevertheless possible. But if what he chooses was absolutely necessary, any other way would be impossible, which is against the hypothesis. For God chooses among possibles, that is, among many ways none of which implies a contradiction.”³⁸

The distinction between necessary and contingent is crucial for Leibniz, since it is what makes place for freedom in his system. According to Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason, there is no indifference and everything in the world is determined. So if determined meant necessary, there could be no freedom. Thus, he distinguishes between being necessarily determined and being contingently determined.

“[...] determination should not be confused with necessity: there is just as much connection or determination amongst thoughts as amongst motions (since being determined is not at all the same as being forced or pushed in a constraining way)[...] If by ‘necessity’ we understood a man’s being inevitably determined, as could be foreseen by a perfect Mind provided with a complete knowledge of everything going on outside and inside that man, then, since thoughts are as determined as the movements which they represent, it is certain that every free act would be necessary; but we must distinguish what is necessary from what is contingent though determined. Not only are contingent truths not necessary, but the links between them are not always absolutely necessary either; for it must be admitted that when one thing follows from another in the contingent realm, the kind of determining that is involved is not the same as when one thing follows from another in the realm of the necessary. Geometrical and metaphysical ‘followings’ necessitate, but physical and moral ones incline without necessitating. There is even a moral and voluntary element in what is physical, through its relation to God, since the laws of motion are necessitated only by what is best. God chooses freely, even though he is determined to choose the best. But since bodies do not choose for themselves, God having chosen for them, they have come to be called ‘necessary agents’ in common usage. I have no objection to this, provided that no one confounds the necessary with the determined and goes on to suppose that free beings act in an undetermined way – an error which has prevailed in certain minds, and destroys the most important truths, even the fundamental axiom that *nothing happens without reason*.”³⁹

³⁸ “5th Letter to Clarke”, § 8; LC, 57.

³⁹ NE II, 21, 13.

To sum up, unlike Locke, who emphasizes freedom of action, Leibniz is interested in freedom to will (i.e. the ability to will as one should), and in particular, in freedom to will as contrasted with necessity. This type of freedom involves three essential components: spontaneity, rational deliberation, and contingency. The latter is in particular vital for Leibniz, since he allows no indifference and, therefore, must admit a type of determination which is not necessary.⁴⁰

3. *A Hypothetical Continuation of the Discussion*

A hypothetical continuation of the discussion between Locke and Leibniz on freedom and necessity may facilitate a deeper understanding of their positions and differences. Of course, the subject is rich with intricate ideas and subtleties, and discussing them here in full detail is impossible. We will thus focus merely on the determination of the will by the understanding and the ability to do otherwise.

First, it appears that Locke and Leibniz would have acknowledged rather quickly their different emphases. Locke is interested in a type of freedom which can ground moral responsibility and just divine providence, so he emphasizes freedom to act or the ability to do otherwise.⁴¹ Leibniz does not disagree but simply thinks that it is a brute fact or an “axiom” that when an agent wills something and is not hindered, she will act accordingly.⁴² Hence he thinks that the problem of willing as one should is more significant to understanding freedom.

⁴⁰ See: “I have shown that freedom [...] consists in *intelligence*, which involves a clear knowledge of the object of deliberation, in *spontaneity*, whereby we determine, and in *contingency*, that is, in the exclusion of logical or metaphysical necessity. Intelligence is, as it were, the soul of freedom, and the rest is as its body and foundation. The free substance is self-determining and that according to the motive of good perceived by the understanding, which inclines it without compelling it: and all the conditions of freedom are comprised in these few words” (“Theodicy”, § 288; GP VI, 288 / H, 303).

⁴¹ See e.g. E IV, 17, 4.

⁴² NE II, 21, 5.

In this regard too, Locke and Leibniz may seem to agree, at least initially. For whereas Locke stresses indifference of ability, he rejects indifference of will and maintains, in a similar manner to Leibniz, that

“‘tis 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. 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 might attain the good we choose. And therefore every man is put under a necessity by his constitution, as an intelligent being, to be determined in *willing* by his own thought and judgment, what is best for him to do: else he would be under the determination of some other than himself, which is want of liberty.”⁴³

To this Theophilus concisely replies on Leibniz’s behalf that

“Nothing could be more true; those who seek some other kind of freedom do not know what they are asking for.”⁴⁴

It is this agreement which led scholars to conclude that Locke and Leibniz share a compatibilist view regarding freedom. But again, conjecturing how a discussion between the two would have proceeded may draw our attention to substantial differences between their compatibilist positions. We may assume that their discussion would not have stopped at this point of agreement, but continued to the fundamental principles underlying the idea of the determination of the will.

Leibniz’s answer is straightforward. As quoted above, the determination of the will follows from and genuine indifference is ruled out by Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason. Leibniz concedes that in a certain sense freedom may be said to involve indifference. But this indifference merely means the exclusion of logical and physical necessity. That is, it consists in (1) contingency or choice between logically possible alternatives and in (2) the fact that an agent is not necessitated by physical (and psychological) laws to choose one way or another (unlike, e.g., heavy things which are bound by physical

⁴³ E II, 21, 48.

⁴⁴ NE II, 21, 48.

laws to tend downward). In this restricted sense, freedom may be said to include indifference of ability.⁴⁵ But freedom does not involve indifference of equilibrium, namely, an indifference according to which the agent equally inclines toward competing alternatives. Nor does it include some sort of “indifferentistic power” to determine oneself to act without grounds or even against all grounds.⁴⁶

Locke, on the other hand, seems to lack a metaphysical underpinning of the determination of the will by the understanding. Perhaps it is this deficiency that accounts for his claim in §47 that one can suspend judgment, namely, suspend the determination of the will toward a certain end, which is contrary to his general view that an agent is never free not to will one way or another.⁴⁷ This may also explain Locke’s concession to Philippus van Limborch, who challenged Locke’s view regarding the determination of the will. If Locke and Leibniz had engaged in exchange of ideas on the matter, Leibniz would have probably drawn Locke’s attention to the inconsistency in § 47⁴⁸ and may have been instrumental in facing van Limborch’s challenge. Van Limborch writes to Locke that indifference is necessary for freedom:

“Now my opinion is that when a man acts in accordance with right reason he always wills what his understanding judges ought to be done; nevertheless he can also act against reason and determine his will to the contrary; more than that: before his understanding, after a careful examination of the reasons, has judged what ought to be done he can by brute impulse do, not what is in accordance with reason, but what carnal desire dictates. If a man does not have liberty

⁴⁵ See David Blumenfeld: “Freedom, Contingency, and Things Possible in Themselves”, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49/1 (1988), p. 81–101, here 82–83.

⁴⁶ See “Discourse on Metaphysics”, § 30; A VI, 4, 1575 / L, 321 f.; “Letter to Arnauld, 14 July 1686”; A II, 2, 80 / L, 337; “Necessary and Contingent Truths”; A VI, 4, 1520–1521 / PP, 101 f.; “Letter on Freedom”, PP, 113 f.; “On the Radical Origination of Things”, GP, VII 304; L, 488; NE, II, 21, 25; 36; 47; “Letter to Coste, 19 December 1707”, GP III, 401 f.; AG, 194 f.; “Theodicy”, § 46; GP VI, 128 / H, 148 f.; “Leibniz’s 5th Letter to Clarke”, §§16–17; LC, 59 f.

⁴⁷ See E II, 21, 23.

⁴⁸ Leibniz probably would have also questioned Locke’s comment in E IV, 3, 29 to the effect that the laws of nature are to be ascribed to “the arbitrary will and good pleasure of the wise architect,” which implies that God’s freedom does involve indifference of will.

herein to determine himself or not to determine himself, and to suspend his action, I cannot see in what liberty consists.”⁴⁹

In the beginning of the correspondence Locke stands his ground. He rejects van Limborch’s claim and maintains that

“Liberty in no wise consists in the indifferency of a man, but only in the power to act or not to act according as we will.”⁵⁰

But in his subsequent letter van Limborch persists and explains that indifference does not mean that an agent is equally inclined toward different alternatives, for such equilibrium, especially with regard to moral actions, does not exist. It rather means that despite an inclination to one side, an agent can determine herself to the other, and this demonstrates her “dominion” over her actions and hence her freedom.⁵¹ Van Limborch argues that Locke’s definition of freedom is too narrow, since it refers only to action but not to willing.⁵² In a way, van Limborch stresses a similar point to that raised by Leibniz: that action must not be hindered is rather trivial; more important is the role of willing in free actions. Locke appears to eventually come round to van Limborch’s position:⁵³

“[...] in my opinion a man is free in every action, as well of willing as of understanding, if he was able to have abstained from that action of willing or understanding; if not, not. More particularly, as regards the will: there are some cases in which a man is unable not to will, and in all those acts of willing a man is not free because he is unable not to act. In the rest, where he was able to will or not to will, he is free.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ “8 July 1701”, CJL VII, 369 f. See also from the same letter: “Indifferency is that energy of the spirit by which, when all requisites for acting are present, it can act or not act” (ibid., 367). Cf. “Letter of 3 October 1701”, ibid., 453.

⁵⁰ “12 August 1701”, ibid., 409; cf. “Letter of 21 May 1701”, ibid., 328 f.

⁵¹ “3 October 1701”, ibid., 455.

⁵² Ibid., 458 f.

⁵³ Chappell (“Locke on the Freedom of the Will,” p. 102 f.) takes it as evidence that the addition to §56 in the postmortem fifth edition of the *Essay* is a consequence of Locke’s correspondence with van Limborch. The addition reads: “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” (E II, 21, 56). It is in clear contrast with what Locke originally wrote: “A man in respect of that act of *willing*, is under a necessity, and so cannot be free” (ibid., 23) Pierre Coste informed Leibniz on the correspondence between Locke and van Limborch and the resulting additions and corrections to the *Essay* (see “Leibniz’s letter to Coste, 19 December 1707”; GP III, 400 / AG, 193).

⁵⁴ “28 September 1702”, CJL VII, 680.

Again, had Locke and Leibniz engaged in actual exchange of ideas, the outcome of the correspondence with van Limborch might have been different. On the other hand, although Leibniz's metaphysical ideas might have been instrumental to ward off van Limborch's challenge, Locke would have probably enquired whether they allow a form of compatibilism which involves a genuine ability to do otherwise. For even if freedom of action is somewhat trivial as Leibniz appears to suggest, it is still, for Locke, a crucial requirement for freedom. In this regard, Locke would have been particularly concerned with Leibniz's analytic theory of truth and complete concept theory of individual substances.

The problem is that these theories seem to eliminate contingency and hence undermine freedom: they suggest that in true propositions the predicate inheres in the subject, and this, in turn, appears to entail that all true propositions are necessary, since the predicate cannot be denied of the subject without contradiction. Leibniz is clearly aware of the difficulties posed by these theories to his account of freedom.⁵⁵ His response, in brief, is that in necessary and contingent truths the predicate inheres in the subject in different manners.⁵⁶ Inherence generally means that

“the concept of the predicate is *in some way involved* in the concept of the subject” or that there is “*some connection* between subject and predicate.”⁵⁷

In necessary truths, it means that the predicate is actually contained in the content of the subject. Thus, an analysis of the terms of a necessary truth will yield identical propositions, that is to say, propositions displaying the (partial) identity between the subject and the predicate.⁵⁸ In contingent truths, the predicate is not literally contained in the subject. Rather, the content of the subject

⁵⁵ See “On Freedom”; A VI, 4, 1654 / L, 263 f.; “Discourse on Metaphysics”, §13; A VI, 4, 1546.

⁵⁶ See “First Truths”; A VI, 4, 1644 f. / L, 267 f.

⁵⁷ “On Freedom”; A VI, 4, 1654 / L, 264; “On Contingency”; A VI, 4, 1650 / AG, 28. Italics added. See also “Remarks on Arnauld's Letter”; A II, 2, 49 / LA, 47; “Letter to Arnauld, 14. July 1686”; A II, 2, 75, 80 / L, 334; 337.

⁵⁸ See for example “General Inquiries about the Analysis of Concepts and of Truths” § 60; A VI, 4, 776 / PL, 61; “General Inquiries”, § 133; A VI, 4, 776 / PL, 77; “Necessary and Contingent Truths”; A VI, 4, 1515 f. / PP, 96 f.; “On Contingency”; A VI, 4, 1649 f. / AG, 28; “On Freedom”; A VI, 4, 1655 f. / L, 264 f. The following are examples of analyses of necessary truths, resulting in identity propositions. An analysis of the proposition “a triangle is a polygon”

somehow implies that the predicate is appropriately attributed to the subject.⁵⁹ Therefore, an analysis of the terms of a contingent truth cannot yield identical propositions. Such an analysis will result instead in “convergence”, as it were, to the conclusion that the predicate pertains to the subject, in a similar manner to convergence of the series $1, \frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{1}{4} \dots$ to 0, without 0 being included in the series.⁶⁰

Whether Leibniz’s clarification can satisfy Locke’s requirement for substantial meaning of ability to do otherwise remains an open question. Admittedly, the issue is much more complex than this brief answer on Leibniz’s behalf reveals. In particular, we did not go into the details of the complete concept theory of individual substances, which apart from its metaphysical eccentricity, seems to pose the gravest difficulties to the ability to do otherwise.⁶¹

4. Conclusion

In this paper we discussed Locke’s and Leibniz’s views regarding freedom and necessity and tried to conjecture how an actual discourse between them would have evolved. Indeed, a discussion between the two thinkers on these issues probably would have unfolded in diverse ways, not explored in this paper. Nevertheless, the important point here is that examining Locke’s view

will result in the identical proposition “a three-sided polygon *is* a polygon.” An analysis of the proposition “John’s mother is a woman” will result in the identical proposition “the woman who gave birth to John *is* a woman.”

⁵⁹ Leibniz illustrates the point by means of the example of Alexander the Great. By analyzing the concept of Alexander in order to establish contingent propositions regarding Alexander (e.g. that he will conquer Darius and Porus), one does not find in it the relevant predicates themselves (i.e. “conquering Darius and Porus”), but rather “the basis and the reason for all the predicates which can truly be affirmed of it” (“Discourse on Metaphysics”, § 8; A VI, 4, 1540 f. / L, 307 f.). See also: “I mean no other link between subject and predicate than the one existing in the most contingent truths, namely that there is always something to be conceived in the subject which serves to explain why this predicate or event pertains to it, or why this has happened rather than not” (“Remarks on Arnauld’s Letter”; A II, 2, 52 / LA, 50).

⁶⁰ See: “A true contingent proposition cannot be reduced to identical propositions, but is proved by showing that if the analysis is continued further and further, it constantly approaches identical propositions, *but never reaches them*” (“General Inquiries”, § 134, A VI, 4, 776 / PL, 77, italics added). Only God, being able to grasp the infinite, can see the convergence and know contingent truths with certainty.

⁶¹ See Lois Frankel: “Being Able to do Otherwise: Leibniz on Freedom and Contingency,” in: Roger S. Woolhouse (ed.): *Leibniz. Critical Assessments*, vol. IV, London 1994, pp. 284–302.

vis-à-vis Leibniz's and conjecturing a hypothetical continuation of their discussion propose a deeper understanding of their positions and differences. Both share compatibilist view of freedom. Yet their definitions of freedom and their emphases are different. They also differ in their commitments to compatibilism. Locke did not hesitate to modify his view, when challenges suggested that it might undermine moral responsibility. Leibniz, by contrast, adhered to his compatibilism, since it was entrenched in deeper metaphysical doctrines.

Appendix: Leibniz's Classification of Aspects of Freedom

