

# Locke On Liberty And Necessity

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**Abstract.** For John Locke, free will is nonsensical. He contends that mere voluntariness is insufficient for freedom of action. In addition, he points out, all actions, covering “free” actions are causally determined. On the ground of these characteristics of Locke’s account of free will and action, some philosophers conclude that Locke is a compatibilist. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to think that Locke is a libertarian rather than a compatibilist in the Humean sense. Locke denies that a person is born with a predetermined destiny. Moreover, he holds that there is indifference even after an agent decides to do something. And although he rejects the notion of freedom of will, he thoroughly espouses the notion of freedom of man.

**Key Words:** Compatibilism, free will, responsibility, liberty, Locke, necessity.

Locke was a libertarian<sup>1</sup> though his conception of liberty is different from that of many libertarian philosophers such as Peter van Inwagen (1983) and Charles Taylor (1964) who identify freedom with an uncaused action. For Locke, all actions, covering free actions, are necessitated in this or that way. Unlike some libertarians who hold that an action is free if it proceeds from a free will, Locke believes that free will is nonsensical. Besides, he denies that mere voluntariness is sufficient for freedom of action. Based on these features of his account of free will and action, some scholars claim that Locke was a compatibilist<sup>2</sup> rather than a libertarian. Vere Chappell, for instance, argues that Locke’s notion of “necessary” differs from that of some compatibilists such as Hobbes and Hume: “For the latter, ‘necessary’ means ‘causally determined’; and in this sense, they maintain, an action can be necessary and free: this is what makes them compatibilists. For Locke, on the contrary, since ‘necessary’ means ‘not free,’ the same action cannot be both free and necessary” (Chappell 1994: 104). As Chappell points out, for

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Locke freedom is lack of necessity; if we are under necessity, we are not free. Locke also argues that we are free so long as we have ability to do or forbear an action in accordance with the preference of our minds (1975: 236-38). More precisely, with respect to the mind's determination of a preference we are free, according to him (1975: 283). Yet, from this statement, notes Chappell, it does not follow that Locke is an incompatibilist, who holds that free will and action are incompatible with their causal determination, because Locke maintains that all actions are determined in advance. Our freedom is constrained by the determination of the will by the pursuit of happiness for him. As we all aim at happiness, our actions are determined by a desire for an absent good whose absence causes pain in us, i.e. our actions are determined by a present uneasiness. Locke asserts that the present uneasiness alone operates on the will which, in turn, determines voluntary actions (1975: 254-58). As it is under the necessity of this or that uneasiness, the will is not free for him. On the ground of Locke's idea of uneasiness, Chappell seems to conclude that Locke is a compatibilist.

It should be noted, however, that for Locke, there is no absolute determination of an agent's will before the agent's birth. He refuses the idea of the eternal determination of the will by the events occurred in the past. Locke alleges that a person has full moral responsibility for his or her immoral actions, and he explains the moral responsibility of the person in a consistent manner with his account of freedom and necessity. He also admits that there is "indifferency"<sup>3</sup> even after a person decides to do something. Lastly, although he rejects the notion of freedom of will, he thoroughly accepts freedom of man. Together with his "doctrine of suspension,"<sup>4</sup> all these theses suggest that Locke is a libertarian rather than a compatibilist in the Humean sense.<sup>5</sup> To interpret Locke's account of free will from a libertarian viewpoint will not only reveal the true nature of Locke's views but also sharpen the distinctions made between compatibilism and incompatibilism and highlight much confusion about the notions of free will, volition, liberty, and determinism. In what follows, I shall focus on various concepts of freedom and necessity Locke has in mind in describing freedom of man. Then, I will dwell upon his conception of freedom in relation with his notion of the determination of the will by uneasiness. Finally, I shall deal with Locke's view of moral responsibility and argue that his notion of responsibility requires full-fledged free agents.

### **Volition and Necessity**

Locke explains the possibility of having ideas and changing ideas the mind already has by the notion of *power*. He points out that there are two sorts of power: *active* and *passive*. He calls the possibility of any one of the mind's

simple ideas being changed “passive power” and the possibility of making that change “active power.” Fire, for instance, has an active power to melt gold, and gold has a passive power to be melted (1975: 233-34). Locke sees a close connection between power and action, and he lays stress on two sorts of action: *thinking* and *motion*. He then defines “motion” in terms of *passion*. The motion of a ball stroked by a billiard ball is nothing but bare passion, according to him (1975: 235).<sup>6</sup> An object’s movement is mere passion when it receives the motion from an external power.

Locke explicates the notion of *will* in terms of power, as well: It is the power that the mind has in order to let or forbear the consideration of any idea or the motion of the body. He calls the actual exercise of the power that directs or forbears any particular action “volition” or “willing.” Volition is an act of the mind (1975: 248). That is, volition is an *active power* of the mind by means of which one can make modifications on things. Objects lacking minds do not have volitions. Unless a mental act is accompanied by some sort of self-conscious awareness, it does not count as volition. A deliberate choice, for example, requires such awareness; to choose to do something possible to realize requires careful deliberation or some sort of calculation (1975: 240-41). An action consequent upon the command of the mind is called “voluntary.” An action performed without such a command or thought of the mind is called “involuntary” (1975: 236). All actions one performs without reasoning or thinking are involuntary, and all involuntary actions are necessary for him.

Locke defines the notion of *liberty* by appealing once more to the idea of power. It is a power in any agent to do something or to put an end to a particular action in accordance with the determination of the mind. A man is free if he is able to direct his actions according to the preference of his own mind.<sup>7</sup> He maintains that freedom is lack of necessity; if an agent is under necessity, the agent is not free:

... 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 prefer’d 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*. (1975: 237-38)<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, thought, will, and volition are necessary but not sufficient for liberty. An action performed in accordance with the will and volition of an agent might still be under necessity.<sup>9</sup> To make clear his notion of necessity, Locke provides a tennis-ball in comparison with a man falling from a bridge as an example. A tennis ball stroked by a racket is not free because it neither thinks nor has any volition. A man, falling from a bridge—because of the breaking of the bridge—however, has volition despite the fact that he is unable to prevent his falling—not falling is not in his power—and thus he is not free, either (1975: 238). Things that lack freedom are necessary.

In connection with his notions of compulsion and restraint,<sup>10</sup> Locke introduces another concept of necessity, which is distinct from causal necessity that characterizes the movements of a tennis ball and a man falling from a bridge. It is this conception of necessity that plays a crucial role in his account of free will and action:

Where-ever Thought is wholly wanting, or the power to act or forbear according to the direction of Thought, there *Necessity* takes place. This in an agent capable of Volition, when the beginning or continuation of any Action is contrary to that preference of his Mind, is called *Compulsion*; when the hind'ring or stopping any Action is contrary to his Volition, it is called *Restraint*. Agents that have no Thought, no Volition at all, are in every thing *necessary* Agents. (1975: 240)

The sense of necessity that is coincident with freedom rather than with lack of freedom entails acting in accord with the commands of the mind; this necessity is different from the necessity under which agents have no thought and/or volition. That is, the sense of necessity, which arises from following the commands of the mind, is separate from the sense in which “necessity” refers to causal necessity or causal determination of action by external forces in that the former belongs to reason or logical relations among the thoughts of the mind.<sup>11</sup> Having freedom to do or forbear an action amounts to acting in accord with the determination of the mind, which is necessary. A decision following the calculation and deliberation of reason necessarily follows it. Freedom belongs to the agent who has the ability to choose and power to do or forbear an action: “... as far as this Power reaches, of acting, or not acting, by the determination of his own Thought preferring either, so far is a Man free” (1975: 244). An action followed from the thought constituted freely is not free once it is determined; rather, it is necessary:

The reason whereof is very manifest: For it being unavoidable that the Action depending on his *Will*, should exist, or not exist; and its existence, or not existence, following perfectly the

determination, and preference of his Will, he cannot avoid willing the existence, or not existence, of that Action; it is absolutely necessary that he *will* the one, or the other, i.e. *prefer* the one to the other: since one of them must necessarily follow; and that which does follow, follows by the choice and determination of his Mind, that is, by his *willing it*: for if he did not *will* it, it would not be. (1975: 245)

An agent necessarily follows the determination of the mind once to act or not to act is proposed to the mind, and the mind prefers one to the other. Before a decision, the mind is free to prefer this action to that action. But once the mind decides to act in a certain way, there will no longer be freedom of action. In this sense, liberty and necessity coincide, according to Locke. Necessity comes from the determination of the mind; the agent is not free to will or not to will after the will is determined to act in a certain way. But this determination of action or necessity is not opposed to freedom of the agent; rather, it is a condition for actualizing the agent's freedom. Liberty means controlling, deliberating and acting according to the determination of the mind for Locke:

The result of our judgment upon that Examination is what ultimately determines the Man, who could not be *free* if his *will* were determin'd by any thing, but his own *desire* guided by his own *Judgment* ... and to place Liberty in an *indifferency*, antecedent to the Thought and Judgment of the Understanding, seems to me to place Liberty in a state of darkness, wherein we can neither see nor say any thing of it.... (1975: 283)

So liberty, which is an active power of the mind to choose and not to choose a particular course of action, does not mean pure indeterminacy. Liberty coincides with necessity or the determination of the volition in accordance with the mind's choice for Locke. It is the necessity of reason that guides and determines the action of the will. It is not necessity from without, such as an inadvertent movement of one's hand. In other words, it is the necessity arising from the determination of the mind or reason that is coincident with liberty rather than the necessity arising from a cause.

### **Uneasiness and the Determination of the Will**

The motive that determines the will to continue in the same state or action is, Locke propounds, the present satisfaction whereas the motive to change an action is some uneasiness (1975: 249). Gideon Yaffe points to the two sorts of determination of an agent on Locke's account. The first is the determination of an action—the existence or non-existence of an action is

determined by the agent's will. The second is the determination of the agent's will by uneasiness (2000: 38). The doctrine of suspension suggests, however, that Locke has another notion of determination of the will: it is the determination of the will by the mind. This determination, though it involves some uneasiness, is different from the determination of the will directly by a feeling in that it has a thought accompanying the feeling that determines the will. Accordingly, Locke comes to offer a chain of determinations or a hierarchy of the determination of an action (A motive—a desire for the good—determines the thought of the mind, which, in turn, determines the will, and the will leads the agent into action.). There might be discontinuities in this chain, however. A motive might directly determine the will without any direction or control of the mind or thought. And the agent might think and will to act in a certain way but still he or she might not be able to act in that way because of a disease, for instance. Locke seems to be aware of these possibilities. A command of the mind and a motive to act, he says, may conflict with one another. One may will to act in a certain way while desiring to perform another action (1975: 250). This implies that for Locke, there is no uniform mechanism such as one's past and character conjoined with the laws of nature that constantly determines the volition to act or not to act in a certain manner.

Locke defines "desire" in terms of uneasiness. The mind is uneasy for want of some absent good: "For *desire* being nothing but an *uneasiness* in the want of an absent good ..." (1975: 251). Since the desire of an absent good causes pain, all uneasinesses cause pain. Although the judgment of the mind and the uneasiness of the will may conflict, it is uneasiness or the desire for an absent good that determines the will to perform voluntary actions (1975: 252). Until one feels uneasy in the want of an absent good, one's will is not determined by that good even if the good in question is greater than the good one presently feels (1975: 253). One might sacrifice one's health, for instance, which is a greater good, to the present satisfaction of drinking a glass of wine. Thus, causal determination of the will is necessary to move one into action for Locke. It is not pure reason or thought that determines the will; rather the present uneasiness that directs the will to act in a certain way:

If we enquire into the reason of what Experience makes so evident in fact, and examine ... why 'tis *uneasiness* alone operates on the *will*, and determines it in its choice, we shall find, that we being capable but of one determination of the will to one action at once, the present *uneasiness*, that we are under, does naturally determine the will, in order to that happiness which we all aim at in all our actions.... (1975: 254)

The present uneasiness rather than a remote desire determines the will because a distant future good cannot counter-balance the present good. The distant good, even if it is the greatest good, is unable to affect the mind if the will is determined by a strong present uneasiness. The power of logic or the necessity of reasoning about a choice by itself is inadequate to move the will into action. There is need for a cause, which is the feeling of the current uneasiness, in order for the will to exercise its power to perform or forbear a particular action. Yaffe's interpretation of Locke's notion of uneasiness fits quite well to this causal picture:

In the second and later editions, Locke claims that our volitions are caused by "uneasinesses." Uneasinesses are a species of pain, a feeling of dissatisfaction with one's current state. Uneasinesses take objects; an agent feels uneasy because she recognizes that she is lacking something, but this "recognition" needn't be a belief of some sort; uneasinesses are often inarticulate pains crying to be relieved by attainment of some object. (2000: 44)

Unless the mind raises a desire or uneasiness, which is able to counter-balance the present uneasiness, it has no influence on the will to change its action, according to Locke. The agent is under the necessity of the present uneasiness; there seems to be no freedom to do otherwise for the agent:

... any vehement pain of the Body; the ungovernable passion of a Man violently in love; or the impatient desire of revenge, keeps the *will* steady and intent; and the *will* thus determined never lets the Understanding lay by the object, but all the thoughts of the Mind, and powers of the Body are uninterruptedly employ'd that way, by the determinations of the *will*, influenced by that topping *uneasiness*, as long as it lasts.... (1975: 256)

Plainly for Locke, every act of a person is singled out by a current emotion or desire for an absent good. The present uneasiness becomes ineffective only if there is an alternative, stronger uneasiness that directs the will to action.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, one's actions are always determined by this or that desire, and one is not free but to act in accordance with the strongest desire that governs the will. The most urgent uneasiness moves the will and determines one's voluntary actions. He notes: "... the most important and urgent *uneasiness*, we at that time feel, is that, which ordinarily determines the *will* successively, in that train of voluntary actions, which make up our lives" (1975: 258). Briefly, in every case, volition to act seems to be determined by some psychological mechanism for Locke.

It is difficult to see how Locke can maintain the idea of a person's liberty along with this psychological determinism. As Mabbott points out: "But if every act a man does is necessitated by the strength of his uneasiness at the time and if even his 'suspension' and 'examinations' in the search for the true good are necessitated by the desire for true happiness, then he could never have helped doing what he did" (1973: 69). If a person's actions are already determined in this way, are they voluntary? Locke's account is faced with the threat of falling into inconsistency.

It might be urged that Locke's emphasis on the determination of the will by the current uneasiness shows his commitment to compatibilism, which involves determinism. Locke states that: "... Pleasure and Pain are produced in us, by the operation of certain Objects, either on our Minds or our Bodies, and in different degrees: therefore what has an aptness to produce Pleasure in us, is that we call *Good*, and what is apt to produce Pain in us, we call *Evil*..." (1975: 258-59). This amounts to placing the mind and the body on the passive side of power. An agent is thus determined by external objects of pain and pleasure. This implies, however, that the agent has no freedom or active power. If the mind and the body are determined and shaped by pain and pleasure coming from external objects, the mind and the body have no effect to change the will's actions. Locke's libertarianism comes to collapse into determinism, as the power of liberty becomes an empty power, which has no effective force on volition to act.

Nonetheless, such a conclusion would be too hasty to characterize Locke's view of the determination of the will and action. This is because the mind has an active power to raise desires in us for him. After one deliberates and decides about which of one's alternative actions brings the greatest good, one translates one's beliefs about the greatest good into feelings or uneasinesses, which cause certain actions:

... by a due consideration and examining any good proposed, it is in our power, to raise our desires, in a due proportion to the value of that good, whereby in its turn, and place, it may come to work upon the *will*, and be pursued. For good, though appearing, and allowed never so great, yet till it has raised desires in our Minds, and thereby made us *uneasie* in its want, it reaches not our *wills*; we are not within the Sphere of its activity; our *wills* being under the determination only of those *uneasinesses*, which are present to us, which, ... are always solliciting, and ready at hand to give the *will* its next determination. (1975: 262)



The mind has a power to choose a good and make it uneasy for the will. What is unclear in this picture is where the mind's power to produce uneasiness in us stems from. If the mind is purely passive with regard to pain and pleasure, it is obscure how such passive power can create desires in us, which have equal or greater strength than the present uneasiness that determines the will.<sup>13</sup> To the question of how the mind produces pleasures in equal strength to the present uneasiness, Locke's answer is habitual practice: "... 'tis a mistake to think, that Men cannot change the displeasingness, or indifferency, that is in actions, into pleasure and desire, if they will do but what is in their power. A due consideration will do it in some cases; and practice, application, and custom in most" (1975: 280). Through repetition and trials rather than through an already existent causal power beyond the agent's power, a remote good becomes a present good and overcomes the present uneasiness. One can give up smoking for one's health, for instance, by practice and trial. Here lies liberty, which is "a power to act or not to act according as the Mind directs" (1975: 282).<sup>14</sup>

In order to create more space for freedom, Locke has to presume a weaker determination of the will by the present uneasiness than it looks to be. The power of the mind must be greater than the present uneasiness if the mind is to determine the volition to act despite the current uneasiness. It seems that Locke assumes such a power:

... the greatest, and most pressing should determine the *will* to next action; and so it does for the most part, but not always. 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.... This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is (as I think improperly) call'd *Free will*. (1975: 263)

Freedom or the essence of liberty for Locke is embedded in the ability of the mind to suspend any desire and act of the will (True liberty consists not only of acting in accordance with the deliberation or thought of the mind; but also of suspending any present uneasiness. This connotes that the uneasiness that determines the will is not stronger than the power of the mind, which can postpone even the most pressing uneasiness. The will is under a weaker necessity of the current uneasiness than a determinist requires.).

If the mind has a power to suspend any present uneasiness, and in this lies a man's liberty, then Locke turns out to be a libertarian rather than a determinist. A libertarian would say the same thing as Locke does: the mind has a

power to control and direct the will to act in the way it sees appropriate whatever desire the will has. Locke's attribution of active power to the mind in determining the actions of the will suggests that he anticipates the notion of agent-causation.<sup>15</sup> Even if an agent's judgment or reasoning is guided by a desire or a remote good, it is not a causal power determining action until the mind generates a present uneasiness for the relevant desire through habitual practice. The determination of the will by the mind and necessity understood as such fits a libertarian picture rather than a determinist one.

The picture Locke has in mind, nevertheless, seems to be that though sometimes an agent's actions are determined by the agent's own mind, the agent is sometimes under the necessity of internal or external causal forces. That is to say, the mind has a power to suspend even those most urgent uneasinesses, and yet internal or external causal forces often determine the actions of the will. To interpret Locke's compatibilism in this way comes to be congruent with his account of free will and action. As Locke himself points out: "... 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" (1975: 270). Through diligent effort and rational deliberation, an agent controls his or her desires and actions but this is not always possible (Even though the mind can in general control the actions of the will, it is possible that sometimes the will is motivated by forces other than those of the mind.). The power of the mind in determining the will secures the liberty of the agent but it is compatible with the determination of the agent's actions by internal or external causal forces. The question that immediately arises is that if the mind has sometimes a power to suspend even the most pressing uneasiness, why doesn't it enjoy that power always? And if there is no logical-physical barrier for the mind to do so, then there is no place for determinism (Uneasiness determines the will only if the mind allows, and this is just what a libertarian—not a compatibilist—would say.).

A compatibilist interpreter of Locke's account of free will might insist that even if the choice of any particular action is determined by the thought of the mind and the will, we are all determined by the necessity of pursuit of happiness and getting rid of any uneasiness we have. Locke himself states that:

But though this general *Desire* of Happiness operates constantly and invariably, yet the satisfaction of any particular *desire* can be suspended from determining the *will* to any subservient action, till we have maturely examin'd, whether the particular apparent good, which we then desire, makes a part

of our real Happiness, or be consistent or inconsistent with it.  
(1975: 283)

In the sense of the mind's determination of action, we are free; but this freedom is always restricted by the determination of the will to pursue happiness. As a compatibilist, Locke consistently claims, one wants to say, the compatibility of liberty and necessity in this respect.

On Locke's view, the general desire for happiness is not a kind of causal force operating on the acts of the will, however; it is, rather, an aim, which guides practical reason. More specifically, the notion of pursuit of happiness Locke has in mind is some sort of a general goal rather than a causal force that determines the will. His distinction between the greatest good that is unable to determine the volition and the present uneasiness that determines an agent's actions implies that the pursuit of happiness is not a causal power governing the agent's actions out of the agent's control,<sup>16</sup> according to him. The pursuit of happiness is an abstract aim until the mind turns it by its free choice into the present uneasiness of the will. In short, Locke's separation of a future distant good that mind seeks after as the pursuit of happiness from the present uneasiness that determines acts of the will recommends that the two are different notions, and that one should not be conflated with the other. Avoiding pain or satisfying a present desire as a pursuit of happiness must not be regarded as a substitute of the general aim of happiness. Locke's idea of suspension supports this interpretation of his notion of happiness. Depending on its free choice and decision, the mind may or may not turn the distant abstract good into the present uneasiness of the will. Recall that for Locke an agent is free to choose a remote good and make it the present uneasiness of the will despite the causal determination of the will by the current uneasiness. As Colman points out:

Even when the agent ignores the long-term goal of happiness and immediately follows the prompting of uneasiness he is still free; for he might have exerted the power to check the determination of uneasiness and have acted in accord with his judgment of the long-term good and evil of the alternatives before him. (1983: 221)

### **Freedom and Moral Responsibility**

According to Locke, an agent is morally responsible and deserves punishment for his or her wrongdoings because he or she has a power to postpone the determination of the will by some uneasiness. The agent's volition may be determined by internal or external causes but the agent's will has a power to forbear or let an act of volition thus determined for Locke. Accordingly, the agent is responsible for his or her immoral actions because

he or she is capable of preventing them. Moreover, the agent's will is free in deciding on this or that course of action for the sake of a remote good: "... there is a case wherein a Man is at Liberty in respect of *willing*, and that is the chusing of a remote Good as an end to be pursued" (1975: 270). A man's volition might be indeterminate with respect to some remote good now, but he is at liberty to make that good an act of his volition. In other words, a man might spontaneously deliberate about a distant good and make it a present uneasiness for himself. In either way, he is responsible for his actions. In the first case, his will has a power to influence and suspend volition to do evil. In the second case, he is at liberty—unlike the former there is no necessity of the present uneasiness here—to deliberate diligently and then to choose a remote good and make it the present uneasiness of the will. Locke emphasizes the indeterminacy of the will prior to a decision explicitly:

... since the *will* supposes knowledge to guide its choice, all that we can do, is to hold our *wills* undetermined, till we have *examined* the good and evil of what we desire ... whether it shall be upon an hasty and precipitate view, or upon a due and mature *Examination*, is in our power; Experience shewing us, that in most cases we are able to suspend the present satisfaction of any desire. (1975: 267)

As a man is free, he is completely responsible for his misconduct arising from neglect or abuse of the liberty he has and from his miscalculations: "... by a too hasty choice of his own making, he has imposed on himself wrong measures of good and evil.... He has vitiated his own Palate, and must be answerable to himself for the sickness and death that follows from it" (1975: 271).

Even if we prefer the worse to the better because of a cause not within our control, such as the pains of the body from want, disease or injuries, we are still responsible for our actions, according to Locke. The inability to raise in our selves desires strong enough to counter-balance the present uneasiness is no excuse because we are unable to do so due either to not striving at all or to misusing our powers (1975: 272). We often mistakenly opt for the present enjoyment without considering the consequences of our actions in the long run. Also, because of the weakness of the will or narrow insight, we choose to act in accordance with the determination of the present uneasiness. Locke further propounds that: "Add to this, that absent good, or which is the same thing, future pleasure, especially if of a sort which we are unacquainted with, seldom is able to counter-balance any uneasiness, either of pain or desire, which is present" (1975: 277) (We fail to notice where our true happiness

lies because the present uneasiness renders us blind in a way that we are not able to see anything else.). We are too hasty to act in accordance with our present uneasiness and to judge mistakenly what our actual enduring benefit is. Succinctly, due either to ignorance or to precipitancy in judgment, we make mistakes, and we are thoroughly responsible for those mistakes. This is because we have reason or understanding to prevent such mistakes: “To check this Precipitancy, our Understanding and Reason was given us, if we will make a right use of it, to search, and see, and then judge thereupon” (1975: 278). Even if the present uneasiness or passion blurred our clear thinking, we have a power to suspend it and calmly ponder on alternative courses of action: “The being acted by a blind impulse from without, or from within, is little odds. The first therefore and great use of Liberty, is to hinder blind Precipitancy; the principal exercise of Freedom is to stand still, open the eyes, look about, and take a view of the consequence of what we are going to do, as much as the weight of the matter requires” (1975: 279).

Accordingly, for Locke we ought to be held responsible for our actions not only because we have power to postpone the present uneasiness and control our actions, but also because we are able to consider spontaneously and then decide to actualize one of alternative courses of action. But this amounts to calling back a libertarian position rather than a determinist one. To interpret Locke’s account of moral responsibility from a libertarian perspective finds support also from Molyneux challenge to Locke: “[Y]ou seem to make all Sins to proceed from our Understandings, or to be against Conscience; 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 does” (Yaffe 2000: 39). Locke pretends that an agent is responsible for his or her actions because he or she is capable of doing otherwise<sup>17</sup> (Locke’s recognition of the agent’s power as the ultimate source of responsibility implies that he adopts a libertarian approach to free will and action because the agent can overcome any causal power that determines his or her actions, according to Locke. On his view, the agent not only has ability to think indeterminately on the things contrary to his or her natural inclinations but also has power to determine his or her actions in the way his or her mind deems appropriate. If so, it is difficult to say that Locke is a sort of determinist.).

### **Conclusion**

Locke precedes Kant by claiming that an agent is free only if the agent can control his or her passions or present uneasinesses. Without reason or understanding, he says, “Liberty ... would signify nothing” (1975: 278). Freedom is possible with deliberation and the power of the mind to

determine the will. Voluntary actions are constituted by an “act of self-conscious awareness,” which Locke regards as the constitutive of agency or personal identity. If instead of reason, the agent were slave of his or her passions, then it would be difficult to talk about full-fledged agency. Leibniz’s interpretation of Locke’s notions of power and freedom by resorting to Stoics is striking: “... the Stoics said that only the wise man is free; and one’s mind is indeed not free when it is possessed by a great passion, for then one cannot will as one should, i.e. with proper deliberation” (1996: 175). Passions or passive powers are dispositions of a person, which are actualized by external powers. The muscle spasms caused by electricity given to one’s body is an actualized disposition or passive power of the body like melting wax, which has a passion to be melted when contacted with sun-light. Agency associates with active rather than passive power for Locke. An autonomous agent<sup>18</sup> is the one who has an active power to change acts of his or her volition. But having active power is not sufficient for agency; otherwise all things having some sort of active power and animals would count as agents, which is unacceptable. In addition to active power, the agent is able to control his or her volition by the thought of the mind or understanding. As Yaffe emphasizes: “... for Locke, a full-fledged free agent is endowed with two sets of capacities: the capacity to adjust her conduct in accordance with her choices—freedom of action—and the capacity to adjust her choices in accordance with the good—freedom of will, improperly so called” (2000: 118). The mind is able to suspend the present uneasiness not because the mind itself is determined by another uneasiness but because the mind has a power in itself to judge what is good or bad. By reasoning and careful deliberation the mind arrives at a decision as to what the good is and whether to make it the present uneasiness for the will. The mind, in other words, has a power to produce uneasiness in accordance with its sober deliberation and thought. What is determined by uneasiness is the will rather than the mind, to which the power of liberty to do or not to do something belongs. In sum, his conception of liberty and his account of responsibility along with his doctrine of suspension imply that Locke is a libertarian rather than a soft determinist.<sup>19</sup>

### Notes

- 1 By the term “libertarian” I mean someone who holds that we are free and that freedom is incompatible with determinism. A typical libertarian claim is that in all cases of free choice and action, the agent “might choose either way, all past circumstances remaining the same up to the moment of choice.” See Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 127.

- 2 A compatibilist is someone who believes that determinism is compatible with freedom and moral responsibility. Typically a compatibilist holds that an agent could have done otherwise if he or she wanted otherwise despite the fact that his or her desires and wants are determined by past events and laws of nature. See Daniel C. Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1984), pp. 131-52.
- 3 Locke explains the notion of indifference through the operative powers of the man: “I am not nice about Phrases, and therefore consent to say with those that love to speak so, that Liberty is plac’d in indifference; but ’tis is an indifference that remains after the Judgment of the Understanding; yea, even after the determination of the Will: And that is an indifference not of the Man, (for after he has once judg’d which is best, viz. To do, or forbear, he is no longer (indifferent,) but an indifference of the operative Powers of the Man, which remaining equally able to operate, or to forbear operating after, as before the decree of the Will, are in a state, which, if one pleases, may be called indifference; and as far as this indifference reaches, a Man is free, and no farther. v. g. I have the Ability to move my Hand, or to let it rest, that operative Power is indifferent to move, or not to move my Hand: I am then in that respect perfectly free. My Will determines that operative Power to rest, I am yet free because the indifference of that my operative Power to act, or not to act, still remains....” See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2nd ed. Peter H. Nidditch (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 283-84.
- 4 According to Locke’s doctrine of suspension, the mind has a power to suspend the “execution and satisfaction of any of its desires,” and man’s liberty is rooted in this ability of the mind to suspend any present uneasiness. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 263.
- 5 As Chappell emphasizes, for Hume “necessary” means “causally determined” and the same sort of causal necessity inferred from constant conjunction of physical events can be found in human conduct: “... in judging of the actions of men we must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects.... The mind ballances the contrary experiments, and deducting the inferior from the superior.... Even when these contrary experiments are entirely equal, we remove not the notion of causes and necessity; but supposing the usual contrariety proceeds from the operation of contrary and conceal’d causes, we conclude, that the chance or indifference lies only in our judgment on account of our imperfect knowledge, not in the things themselves, which are in every case equally necessary, tho’ to appearance not equally constant or certain.” In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 403-04. According to Hume, even though we feel at liberty ourselves, “a spectator can infer our actions from our motives and character.” This is because certain motives and

actions are constantly conjoined or united like regular conjunction of physical events from which we infer that one event is the cause and the other is the effect. Unlike Hume, for whom “we can never free ourselves from the bonds of necessity”, Locke holds that the mind can suspend the present uneasiness and make the will free from the bond of the necessity of the present uneasiness. In addition, the mind freely judges what is good or bad and has a power to turn a distant future good into a cause of the act of the will for him. Since Locke believes that the mind is free from the bond of necessity that Hume thinks we are all bounded, Locke is a libertarian.

- 6 Unlike some modern compatibilists such as Harry Frankfurt, for Locke passion and love make us slave rather than a full-fledged autonomous person. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 268.
- 7 The question as to whether the will is free is, Locke points out, an improper question. The question must be whether a man is free. As liberty is a power, it cannot be an attribute of the will, which is also a power. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
- 8 Locke deploys and dismisses as absurd the infinite regress argument for freedom of will, which relies on the assumption that if one’s willing an action is to be free, it must follow an act of willing to will. The regress is infinite and vicious as the second act can only be free if it follows another act of the will. The determinist claims that one’s willing is causally conditioned, and thus he prevents the regress. The libertarian, on the other hand, argues that the acts of will are free in that they do not follow any previous event but the will is the first cause. Locke’s position is closer to that of the libertarian’s. As John Colman points out: “... properly free actions are those which are grounded in rational decisions” for Locke. See John Colman, *John Locke’s Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), p. 215.
- 9 Locke’s separation of the freedom of action from the freedom of a man, or improperly will, gives rise to the question as to how an action can be voluntary and yet not to be free. An action might be voluntary but not free if doing it or not doing it does not follow upon the preference of the mind for him. But this leads us into confusion. If voluntariness depends on performing an action in accordance with a command of the mind, then it seems implausible that an action is voluntary, and yet unfree. He seems to hold that actions not caused by volitions are involuntary while claiming that such actions are voluntary. Since Locke defines volition as the exercise of the mind’s power to direct or forbear an action, his idea that there might be necessary volitions seems to be inconsistent with his definition. Locke is aware of this inconsistency, however. The inconsistency is viewed merely as an appearance when Locke’s example of a man who, while sleeping, finds himself in a locked room, with the company of a lovely friend and stays in the room willingly, is recalled. Because not to stay in the room is not within the man’s power, he has no freedom of action. Likewise, a paralytic who wants to



lie in his bed lies voluntarily but at the same time necessarily because he cannot move his body if he wants to do so. He is under necessity as much as the tennis-ball moving by a stroke of a racket. “Voluntary then is not opposed to Necessary; but to Involuntary,” according to Locke. The paralytic might prefer or not to prefer to move his body though he cannot move. Hence, his action—lying in the bed—might be voluntary or involuntary. But in either way his action is not free; it is necessary. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 239.

- 10 When one is forced to do something contrary to one’s preference, one is under compulsion. When one is prevented from doing something, one is under restraint for Locke.
- 11 Locke’s distinction between causal necessity and logical necessity precedes in a sense the distinction Norman Malcolm has made between contingent lawful connections between events and necessary connections between intentions and actions. According to Malcolm, instances of necessary relations between intentions and actions can barely be accounted for by the instances of contingent lawful relations between events in nature, which are ontologically more basic. He concludes that teleological explanations of human action are not spurious and mechanistic explanations of action are inadequate for the understanding of agency. See Norman Malcolm, “The Conceivability of Mechanism,” *Philosophical Review* 77(1968): 45-72. Reprinted in Gary Watson (ed.), *Free will*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 127-49.
- 12 In the first edition, Locke appears to hold that “the greater Good is that alone which determines the Will.” II.XXI.29.
- 13 Mere desire or feeling is not enough to direct volition to act; a strong feeling or passion moves volition to act for Locke. As Jonathan Bennett puts forward: “If there were desires (or beliefs about what would be good) that somehow failed to generate uneasiness, those desires would have no effect on action.” In “Locke’s Philosophy of Mind,” in Vere Chappell (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 97.
- 14 Locke does not clearly state how the mind starts a practice or leads one to do something in the absence of a present desire or uneasiness. A plausible explanation lies in his conception of mind. Since he holds that the mind has an active power to determine action, it is possible for him to regard this active power as a causal power. Through this causal power, mind could initiate or cease an action in accordance with calculations of reason in the direction of a future good. The question then is why does an agent need practice if the mind has an active causal force to determine an action? An answer might be to increase the strength of the reason of one’s action—whether it is desire-based or not—through habit so that one can resist to the power of a counter reason, e.g., present uneasiness, in performing an action.

- 15 Locke notes that “Freedom consists in the dependence of the Existence, or not Existence of any Action, upon our Volition of it, and not in the dependence of any Action, or its contrary, on our preference.” See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 247. That is, what is decisive for an action is one’s volition of it, which is an act of the mind, rather than a definite choice or desire. It follows that an action might be determined independently of one’s preferences. If so, in accordance with one’s knowledge and understanding, one might decide to do or not to do something whatever one’s preferences or desires are.
- 16 In line with Locke’s distinction between avoiding uneasiness as a motivational state and pursuit of happiness as a general abstract aim of a free agent, some agent causation theorists like C. A. Campbell, Randolph Clarke and Timothy O’Connor believe that explicating human action as simply causal consequences of relevant motivational states of the agent is insufficient for accounting freely chosen activity that we impute to human agency, a sort of activity that grounds praising or blaming an action. See C. A. Campbell, *In Defense of Free Will*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967); Randolph Clarke, “Towards a Credible Agent-Causal Account of Free Will,” *Nous* 27 (1993): 191-203; Reprinted in Timothy O’Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 201-15; and Timothy O’Connor, “Indeterminism and Free Agency: Three Recent Views,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993): 499-526.
- 17 For contemporary compatibilists such as Harry Frankfurt, the power to do otherwise as expressed in the principle of alternative possibilities or “could have done otherwise” condition of free will and moral responsibility constitutes a serious obstacle to claiming the compatibility of moral responsibility with causal determination. Frankfurt-style counterexamples purport to show that one is morally responsible for an action even if one could do no other. See Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 66 (1969), p. 835. Against Frankfurt’s contention, it is argued that there still remains a flicker of freedom in the counterexamples to the principle of alternative possibilities. See John Martin Fisher, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 140-154.
- 18 The political implications of Locke’s conception of man as a free, autonomous agent have been interpreted by various scholars in political philosophy from the viewpoint of his libertarianism, which also supports the main thesis of this paper, i.e. Locke is a libertarian,. In “Two Concepts of Liberty” Isaiah Berlin, for instance, notes: “... it is assumed, especially by such libertarians as Locke and Mill in England, and Constant and Tacqueville in France, that there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated; for if it is overstepped, the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development

of his natural faculties which alone makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred." See Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in George Sher and Baruch A. Brody (eds.) *Social and Political Philosophy* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999), pp. 625-26.

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# Locke'in Özgürlük ve Zorunluluk Anlayışı Üzerine

**Dr. Aysel DOĞAN\***

**Özet:** John Locke'a göre özgür irade anlamsızdır. O gönüllü olmasının tek başına bir eylemin özgür olmasını garanti etmeye yetmediğini iddia etmektedir. Buna ek olarak, Locke demektedir ki; bütün eylemler, "özgür" eylemler de dahil, nedensel olarak belirlenmektedir. Locke'ın özgür irade ve eylem kuramının bu özelliklerine dayanarak, bazı filozoflar Locke'ın bir bağdaştırıcı olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır. Ne var ki, Locke'ın Humecu anlamda bir bağdaştırıcı olmaktan çok bir özgürlükçü olduğunu düşünmek için iyi nedenleri vardır. Locke, bir insanın önceden belirlenmiş bir kaderle doğduğunu reddetmektedir. Ayrıca, o bir bireyin bir şey yapmaya karar verdikten sonra bile o şeyi yapıp yapmamak konusunda tarafsız bir durum içerisinde olduğuna inanmaktadır. Ve özgür irade kavramını reddetmesine rağmen, o insanın özgür olduğu düşüncesini tamamen benimsemektedir.

**Anahtar kelime:** Bağdaşçılık, özgür irade , sorumluluk, özgürlük, Locke, zorunluluk.

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## Локк о свободе и потребностях

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**Резюме:** Для Джона Локка, добрая воля бессмысленна. Он утверждает, что простая добровольность недостаточна для свободы действия. Кроме того, он указывает, все действия, обеспечившие денежное покрытие "свободные" действия причинно определены. По причине этих особенностей счета Локк доброй воли и действия, некоторые философы заключают, что Локк- компатибилист. Тем не менее, есть серьезные основания, чтобы думать, что Локк - либертарианец, а не компатибилист в смысле Хумеан. Локк отрицает, что человек рождается с предопределенной судьбой. Кроме того, он считает, что есть безразличие даже после того, как агент решает сделать кое-что. И хотя он отклоняет понятие свободы желания, он полностью поддерживает понятие свободы человека.

**Ключевые Слова:** Компатибилизм, добрая воля, ответственность, свобода, Локк, потребность

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