

Making Sense of Locke's Confession*

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In § 8 of the *Essay*'s chapter on powers, which includes most of what he has to say on the topic of human freedom, Locke gives the following definition:

[...] so far as a Man has a power to think, or not to think; to move, or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a Man *Free*. [...] where-ever doing or not doing, will not equally follow upon the preference of his mind directing it, there he is not *Free* [...]. So that 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 [...]; 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* (E.2.21.8;¹ see also E.2.21.21, 27, 56, and 71).²

In other words:

S acts freely in performing action *a* iff (i) *S* does *a* because *S* wills to do *a*, and (ii) if *S* had not willed to do *a*, *S* would not have done *a* (LoLordo 2012, p. 27).

Or also:

S is free in respect of action *A* iff (i) *S* has the power to do *A* if *S* wills to do *A*, and (ii) *S* has the power to forbear doing *A* if *S* wills to forbear doing *A* (Rickless 2013, p. 39).³

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¹ I cite the *Essay* by book, chapter, and section number. "E.2.21.8" therefore means *Essay*, book 2, chapter 21, § 8.

² For Locke's use of "preference" see Stuart 2013, pp. 394-399 and 445-451. For his use of "necessity" see Chappell 1994a, pp. 88-89.

³ Rickless gives this formulation in the context of a criticism of LoLordo's; for LoLordo's answer see LoLordo 2013, § 2, in which LoLordo also argues that her gloss gives the right result in the case of deviant causal chains – on this issue, see also Lowe 2005, chapter 5, § 3. In her answer to Rickless LoLordo maintains that her formulation and Rickless' end up giving the same verdict. I am not sure about that – it depends, for one, on the details of Rickless' reading of the sentential form "*X has the power to Y if X wills to Y*".

Given such a definition, one would expect Locke to have a certain attitude toward an entire class of problems. Consider, for instance, the following argument – henceforth, the “Impossibility Argument”. A moment ago, I scratched my head. One might think that that was a free act, or – to use a more Lockean turn of phrase – that I was free with respect to that action – “A”, for short.⁴ But God has known that I was going to perform A since the dawn of time.⁵ And knowledge is factive: knowing that p entails the truth of p. Therefore, the proposition that I was going to perform A – “ α ”, for short – was already true, say, 1,000,000 years ago. And this seems to entail that I could not avoid performing A: not performing A would have made α false; but 1,000,000 years ago α was true; therefore (given the quite plausible assumption that a proposition like α , a proposition *about a particular time*, must have the same truth value at all times), not performing A would have changed the past, which is something I cannot do. But if I could not avoid performing A, A was not really a free act. And since, *mutatis mutandis*, the same line of reasoning can be run for any human action, it seems that human freedom is inconsistent with divine foreknowledge. Is such an argument sound? One would expect Locke to deny that it is.⁶ Let us grant, for argument’s sake, that, given God’s foreknowledge, I can never do otherwise than what I actually do. That does not mean that I never do anything because I will to do it (that is: it does not mean that I never meet condition (i) in the first of the above reformulations of Locke’s definition), and it does not mean that it is never the case that had I not willed to do what I actually did, I would not have done it – see condition (ii) in the same reformulation. In other words: it seems that Locke should reject the inference from *I can never do otherwise than what I actually do* to *I never act freely*.

LoLordo’s formulation is framed in terms of conditionals, while Rickless’ is framed in terms of powers ascriptions, and the relation between these constructions is problematic – for a classic discussion, see van Inwagen 1983, pp. 114-120. And if Rickless is willing to embrace some dispositional analysis of powers (something along the lines of the dispositional analysis of abilities of Fara 2008, § 3), then there are the familiar problems posed by finks, masks, and the like – for the problems posed by finks see, e.g., Martin 1994, pp. 143-144; for the concept of a mask see, e.g., Johnston 1992, p. 233. That being said, I suspect that the differences between Rickless’ gloss and LoLordo’s are orthogonal to my topic. In what follows I will use both formulations.

⁴ Note that “A” is the name of an action *performed at a particular time* – it is the name of a token, not a type.

⁵ The argument relies, of course, on the assumption that there is a sense in which God is not outside of time.

⁶ To be clear, I do not take this argument to be an especially good one, for reasons I will sketch in the paper’s second section.

It is therefore rather puzzling to see Locke displaying, in a 1693 letter to Molyneux, a much less confident attitude toward the problem of freedom and foreknowledge:

[...] I own freely to you the weakness of my understanding, that though it be unquestionable that there is omnipotence and omniscience in God our maker, and I cannot have a clearer perception of any thing than that I am free, yet I cannot make freedom in man consistent with omnipotence and omniscience in God, though I am as fully perswaded of both as of any truths I most firmly assent to. And therefore I have long since given off the consideration of that question, resolving all into this short conclusion, That if it be possible for God to make a free agent, then man is free, though I see not the way of it (Locke to William Molyneux, 20 January 1693, pp. 625-626, in De Beer 1979).⁷

This is quite puzzling. That the definition of § 8 makes the move from the lack of alternative possibilities to the lack of freedom illicit is quite apparent, and it is not clear what other route might lead from the assumption of divine foreknowledge to the conclusion that human freedom is an illusion; in fact, Anthony Collins (1717, pp. 83-85), a close friend of Locke's, goes as far as to use divine foreknowledge to argue that the freedom defined in § 8 is the only freedom we enjoy. To be clear, the problem I am calling attention to is not that in the passage just quoted Locke is telling Molyneux that he takes human freedom to be incompatible with God's foreknowledge; if anything, Locke is saying that freedom and foreknowledge *are* compatible – since they are both real (see Chappell 2007, p. 146). The problem is that Locke clearly states *that he does not understand how it is that they are compatible*. How can Locke say this when, given his own definition, divine foreknowledge quite clearly poses no threat to human freedom?

It is worth noting that the problem of making sense of Locke's confession arises for a wide variety of readings of the chapter on powers. Take the so-called "supplementarians". These commentators have argued that definitions such as the one quoted above are just *one component* of Locke's conception of liberty, and that the father of modern empiricism is primarily interested in a notion of full-fledged freedom that goes *beyond* the mere possession of the twofold power of §

⁷ Note that Locke also mentions God's omnipotence. In what follows, I will assume – for simplicity's sake – that whatever problem Locke might have thought God's omnipotence raised, it was independent of the one behind his worries about divine foreknowledge. That being said, a possibility worth taking seriously is that Locke thought that God's omnipotence played a role in answering what may well be regarded as the standard objection to the Impossibility Argument – for which see below.

8.⁸ Gideon Yaffe (2000, p. 54), for instance, argued that Locke's considered view of freedom is that S is free with respect to A if and only if, first, S meets the two requirements of § 8 and, second, either S's volitions are determined by the good or S has the power to bring it about that S's volitions are determined by the good. It should be clear that Locke's confession is no less a problem for this kind of reading than it is for those commentators who believe that the definition of § 8 is a more than adequate formulation of Locke's view. After all, God's foreknowledge does not seem to be incompatible with the idea that my volitions are "determined by the good". Nor does it seem to be incompatible with the idea that I have the power to bring it about that my volitions are so determined – at least as long as this power is conceived along the lines of the definition of § 8.

Given all this, one might start to suspect that the libertarian readers of Locke must be right. These commentators, relying primarily on his remarks about suspension, maintain that Locke identifies freedom with the power to act as "prime movers unmoved" and that passages such as the one of § 8 are self-inflicted misrepresentations of his own view.⁹ This would make sense of Locke's confession, since there at least seems to be an inconsistency between the thesis of divine foreknowledge and the notion that we sometimes act as prime movers unmoved, that we sometimes can do otherwise in an unrestricted sense of "can" – to see that here there at least seems to be a problem, just go through the Impossibility Argument again, this time making sure to read "can" the way a libertarian would.¹⁰

I do not find libertarian readings nearly as misguided as some readers of the *Essay* seem to think they are.¹¹ But I do believe they cannot be right.¹² What

⁸ I take the label "supplementarians" from Rickless 2013, p. 31. A tempting label for those who take the definition of § 8 to be an adequate formulation of Locke's view is "Hobbesians" – see, e.g., Rickless 2011, p. 104 and, of course, Hobbes 1654, § 3. However, whether Hobbes' conception of freedom is or is not the one Locke sketches in § 8 is a controversial matter – see, e.g., Chappell 1999, pp. XVIII-XX. In what follows I will therefore abstain from using this label.

⁹ Schouls 1992, part B is widely regarded as the most fully worked out instance of this interpretive strategy – see in particular pp. 153-154 for Schouls' discussion of the letter to Molyneux. Another prominent advocate of the libertarian reading is Lowe (see, e.g., 2005, pp. 134-135). Nidditch himself embraces the libertarian reading in the foreword to his now standard edition of the *Essay* (Locke 1689, p. IX).

¹⁰ Of course, the libertarian's sense of "can" might be the same as the compatibilist's. I will come back to this issue in the paper's second section.

¹¹ For a useful description of the positive case for the libertarian reading see LoLordo 2012, pp. 53-59.

¹² See, e.g., Davidson 2003, §§ 3-4, LoLordo 2012, pp. 59-62, and Stuart 2013, §§ 66-67. In this connection, it is also important not to be led astray by some of the things Locke

should we do then? Should we settle for the idea that Locke was just unsure – that, *pace* his libertarian readers, the definition of § 8 is at least a key component of the *Essay*'s view of freedom, but that Locke was not sure that what he had written in the *Essay* was correct, that he suspected that maybe freedom does require the power to act as prime movers unmoved (see, e.g., Stuart 2013, pp. 471-472)? I do not think this would be an *unreasonable* position to settle for, but it is no doubt problematic. Locke makes his confession to Molyneux in the context of a discussion of Molyneux's objections to the first-edition version of the chapter on powers. Three further editions were published during Locke's lifetime, while a fifth edition appeared posthumously in 1706, and significant changes to the chapter on powers appear in both the second and fifth editions. If Locke was really so unsure about the view of freedom expounded in the first edition, why do not we find any trace of these worries in the later editions? How can we make sense of this silence, especially given that Locke is usually quite willing to confess his doubts? But more importantly: the context of his confession makes clear that Locke was already worried about the issue of freedom and foreknowledge while he was writing the *Essay*'s first edition; therefore, we should assume that he was already struggling with libertarian impulses during the drafting of the first edition. So the real question is: why do we not find any trace of these worries in the *first* edition?¹³

Can we do better? Perhaps. There is, I think, an interpretive strategy that would deserve a champion – even though, as far as I can see, it has not found one yet. The problem of making sense of Locke's confession arises because it seems so clear that if you accept a definition such as the one of § 8, then arguments along the lines of the Impossibility Argument should not worry you. It is therefore a natural move to approach the issue by trying to show either that the definition of § 8 is a misrepresentation of Locke's view or that Locke was not fully committed to that definition. However, one can also try to question the notion that the Impossibility Argument is an adequate representation of Locke's worries about freedom and foreknowledge and argue that Locke had some other problem in mind. But what could this other problem be? And what is the evidence for thinking that Locke might have worried about it?

1. A Model

What we need is a problem about freedom and foreknowledge which, unlike the Impossibility Argument, cannot be dealt with just by arguing for an analysis such as the one of § 8 – or maybe even *any* analysis of the concept of freedom. In this

says about the concept of an active power; what I take to be the key point concerning these remarks is made very succinctly in Bolton 2008, pp. 113-114.

¹³ Think, e.g., of what Locke says about indifferency in E.2.21.71.

section I will argue that even though Locke never explicitly discusses such a problem about freedom *and foreknowledge*, in the *Essay* he does discuss a problem *concerning freedom* which cannot be solved by means of the definition of § 8. This problem will provide us with a model for making, in the next section, a hypothesis about what Locke might have had in mind when he drafted his confession. It will also provide us with a reason to think that something in the vicinity of the hypothesis of the next section might be right; after all, the fact that Locke's worries about freedom took a certain form in one case seems to be the kind of thing which should raise our degree of confidence in the notion that his worries took that form in other cases, too.¹⁴

In the first edition of the *Essay* Locke expounds a decidedly intellectualist view of motivation.¹⁵ The main idea is that S wills to do A if and only if S believes that A has the highest expected value among the available alternatives.¹⁶ In Locke's terms: what determines the will is the appearance of the greater good. The view is both hedonistic (since Locke analyzes the notion of good in terms of pleasure) and egoistic (since the relevant pleasure is just the agent's), but its most interesting feature is its intellectualism: whenever we will to do the wrong thing, the reason is that our *beliefs* are inaccurate, not a weakness of the *will*.

This intellectualism entails a form of rational determinism. Given that you believe that A is the rational (rational in the prudential sense) thing to do, you cannot avoid willing to do A. Matthew Stuart (2013, p. 439) argues that this determinism should not be conceived in terms of efficient causation because "What is doing the "determining" here is an anticipated feature of *prospective* actions [...]. The determination of the will that Locke has in mind is thus a pull rather than a push". I am not sure about that; it really depends on how thick Stuart's notion of efficient

¹⁴ To be perfectly explicit: I am *not* going to maintain that Locke is *never* interested in problems which, at a certain level of abstraction, have the same character of the Impossibility Argument and, therefore, can be dealt with by means of his definition. In § 22 of the chapter on powers he raises precisely this kind of problem, which he then goes on to specify in two different ways, along the lines of the scholastic distinction between freedom of exercise and freedom of specification – see, e.g., Chappell, Della Rocca, and Sleigh Jr. 1998, pp. 1198-1199 and 1247. My point is just that Locke is also interested in a different kind of problem. That being said, it is worth noting that the way in which Locke uses his definition in these sections heavily depends on the details of the challenge of § 22 and, therefore, his strategy here does not seem to be applicable to other problems – this is true for readings of the text as different as that of Chappell 1994a, pp. 92-96 and that of Rickless 2000, pp. 43-67 and Garrett 2015, § 3.

¹⁵ For a thorough discussion see Stuart 2013, § 62.

¹⁶ That the first-edition account of motivation should be viewed in terms of something like the expected value formula is made clear, I think, by the Pascalian remarks with which Locke criticizes his old view in E.2.21.38.

causation is and on how seriously he takes the push/pull metaphor. As Stuart himself makes clear in his discussion of Locke's misleading remarks about the greater good determining the will, what does the determining here is not a feature of prospective actions *which, as a matter of fact, is anticipated* – what does the determining is *the fact that* a feature of prospective actions *is anticipated*. In other words: what does the determining is your *present belief* that, on average, A will make you happier than the alternatives – not the *future fact* that, on average, A will make you happier than the alternatives. To me, this looks like a push, not a pull. To be clear, I agree that Locke's rational determinism should be conceived in terms of something along the lines of the moral necessity Collins (1717, p. III) describes in the following passage:

[...] *when I affirm necessity; I contend only for what is call'd moral necessity, meaning thereby, that man, who is an intelligent and sensible being, is determin'd by his reason and his senses; and I deny man to be subject to such necessity, as is in clocks, watches, and such other beings, which for want of sensation and intelligence are subject to an absolute, physical, or mechanical necessity.*

My point is just that the distinction between moral and mechanical necessity, as conceived by philosophers like Collins, is not a distinction between a pull and a push. Both necessities are a matter of pushes, of *some kind* of efficient causation – even though, of course, not the kind of efficient causation which occurs when something *literally* pushes something else (see, e.g., Collins 1717, pp. 46-47). The distinction is between “pushes” that involve a *mind* which *reasons* and “pushes” that do not.¹⁷

¹⁷ I hope it is clear that I am not making a general claim about the use of “moral necessity” and cognate *expressions* in the early modern period – as Harris (2005, pp. 55-56) stressed, Collins' use of “moral necessity” is quite idiosyncratic. My point is that Locke's rational determinism should be conceived in terms of the *notion* Collins describes in the quoted passage and, second, that this notion is the notion of a kind of push, not a pull. Some might think that the distinction between pushes that involve a mind and pushes that do not does not cut very deep. That might be true, but if it is true it is because either some kind of physicalism or some kind of epiphenomenalism is true. And Locke (1) was at least a property dualist and (2) was definitely not an epiphenomenalist, even though, of course, he did not think he *understood* mind-body interaction – for Locke's mysterianism about the interaction between *the will* and the body see E.2.23.28 and E.4.3.28, 6.14, 10.19, and 17.10. Therefore, the distinction cuts quite deep at least from the point of view of a philosopher like Locke.

The details of Locke's rational determinism are, anyway, to some extent secondary. The important point is that Locke's first-edition view of motivation entails some kind of rational determinism. And the important question is: what about the revised editions?¹⁸ Well, Locke's mature view of motivation is quite different from that of the first edition.¹⁹ What determines the will is now always an uneasiness:

This *Uneasiness* we may call, as it is, *Desire*; which is an *uneasiness* of the Mind for want of some absent good. All pain of the body of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind, is *uneasiness*: And with this is always join'd Desire, equal to the pain or *uneasiness* felt [...]. For *desire* being nothing but an *uneasiness* in the want of an absent good, in reference to any pain felt, ease is that absent good [...]. Besides this desire of ease from pain, there is another of absent positive good, and here also the desire and *uneasiness* is equal (E.2.21.31).²⁰

In other words: the representation of an absent good sometimes produces an uneasiness, which is what we usually call "desire" (the absent good, which strictly speaking is the object of the representation, can also be said to be the object of the desire); the good in question can be either a positive good or just the removal of another uneasiness (in the latter case, therefore, there are two uneasinesses: the one whose removal we desire and the desire itself); anyway, it is always a desire which motivates us to action. The point of this revision is not that desire takes up the role previously played by the appearance of the good. The idea is, rather, that desire *mediates* the relation between the appearance of the good and the will (see, e.g., E.2.21.33 and 45). In fact, that the appearance of the good keeps playing a role is built into the very definition of a desire as "an uneasiness of the mind for want of some absent good".²¹ However, Locke now thinks that if the representation of an absent good does not produce a desire (or a sufficiently strong desire), there is no motivation. It may therefore happen that even though S believes that A has the highest expected value among the available alternatives, S does not will to

¹⁸ The main reason why I am especially interested in the revised editions is just that the problem I focus on in this section is discussed more thoroughly in those editions. However, one can also make a case that, since Locke's mature view of motivation was developed at least in part as a response to Molyneux's criticisms, the revised editions provide more reliable evidence about what Locke might have had in mind in the letter to Molyneux.

¹⁹ For the core of the view see E.2.21.29-45. For a useful discussion see Stuart 2013, § 64.

²⁰ For a very useful discussion of the concept of uneasiness see Garrett 2015, § 1.

²¹ See also the discussion in Chappell 1994b, p. 204.

do A (see, e.g., E.2.21.35 and 38). Furthermore, sometimes what we desire (or what we desire most) is not what we take to be the greatest good.²² Therefore, it may also happen that S wills to do A even though S believes that A does not have the highest expected value among the available alternatives (see again E.2.21.35). Hence, it seems that Locke's mature view of motivation is not intellectualist at all. And since in the first edition the ground of Locke's rational determinism was his intellectualism, this suggests that rational determinism might not be part of Locke's mature philosophy of action.

That would be too hasty a conclusion. Locke does not believe anymore that the fact that S believes that A has the highest expected value among the available alternatives *guarantees* that S will have a volition to do A; but it is clear that he still thinks that the connection between our judgments and our volitions, albeit mediated, *is extremely strong*. Vere Chappell (1994b, pp. 206-207) rightly calls attention to a passage Locke wrote for the *Essay's* fifth edition. Commenting on the power of suspension (to which I will turn in a moment), Locke writes:

And here we may see how it comes to pass, that a Man may justly incur punishment, *though it be certain that in all the particular actions that he wills, he does, and necessarily does will that, which he then judges to be good. For though his will be always determined by that, which is judg'd good by his Understanding, yet it excuses him not [...]* (E.2.21.56, emphasis mine).

Now, strictly speaking, Locke cannot mean what he is saying here, since that would be inconsistent with his explicit rejection of the notion that the occurrence of a judgment guarantees that of an appropriate volition. However, I take this passage to show quite clearly that Locke never abandoned the idea that our value judgments have the utmost influence on our will.

There is more, though. As we have seen, what determines the will is now always a desire/uneasiness. However, we often have incompatible desires. We would like to get some more sleep, but we do not want to be late for work; we want to finish the book we are reading, but we also feel like going to the movies. In such cases, which desire determines the will? Locke's answer is that most of the time it is the strongest one, but not always. Sometimes we suspend the satisfaction of the strongest desire to ponder our options and get clearer about the real value of the objects of our various desires, sometimes this process will change the strength of some of these desires, and sometimes the net result of these adjust-

²² This is decision-theoretically a bit sloppy, since here it is also relevant how likely we are to succeed in our pursuit of a given good, as well as the cost of pursuing it.

ments is that the desire which *was* the strongest before the start of the process ends up not being satisfied (E.2.21.47).²³ This power to suspend introduces a new dimension into Locke’s rational determinism. It is not just that we have a strong tendency to will the action we *judge* to be the best. We have a power whose exercise tends to make us judge the best action to be that which is *actually* the best – and note also that if the action of suspending is no exception to the thesis that what determines the will is a desire,²⁴ the exercise of this power will be the consequence of a desire to behave rationally. The power to suspend turns the tendency to do what *we take to be* good into a tendency to do what *is* good.

Given all this, it should come as no surprise to see Locke saying that “[...] 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 [...]” (E.2.21.48), nor is it strange that he finds appropriate to draw a parallel between our condition and God’s, who “[...] cannot choose what is not good [...]” (E.2.21.49). We, of course, *can* choose what is not good. And yet, it is true both that we have a strong tendency to choose what we *judge* to be good and that we have a power whose exercise tends to make us judge to be good what is *actually* good.

To me, this looks like a form of rational determinism. But the label does not matter. Let us say that Locke’s mature view is a form of rational *quasi*-determinism. Now, right after his first remarks about suspension Locke writes:

[...] during this *suspension* of any desire [...] we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; [...] and ’tis not a fault, but a perfection of our nature to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair *Examination* (E.2.21.47).

He then goes on to elaborate the point:

This is so far from being a restraint or diminution of *Freedom*, that it is the very improvement and benefit of it: ’tis not an Abridgment, ’tis the end and use of our *Liberty* [...]. A perfect Indifferency in the Mind, not determinable

²³ For discussion see, e.g., Stuart 2013, § 66 and Garrett 2015, § 4 – which, among other things, make clear that, *pace* Leibniz (1765, p. 181), there is no conflict between Locke’s remarks concerning suspension and his answer to the second version of the question *Is the will free?*. On this issue see also Yaffe 2001.

²⁴ For the reasons why one might think that suspending *is* an exception to the thesis that what determines the will is a desire see, e.g., Magri 2000, p. 64, Garrett 2015, § 4, and Stuart 2013, pp. 461-463. For a concise (and in my view quite convincing) defense of the no-exception reading see Rickless 2013, § 7.

by its last judgment of the Good or Evil, that is thought to attend its Choice, would be so far from being an advantage and excellency of any intellectual Nature, that it would be as great an imperfection, as the want of Indifferency to act, or not to act, till determined by the *Will*, would be an imperfection on the other side (E.2.21.48).

And also:

[...] Would any one be a Changeling, because he is less determined, by wise Considerations, than a wise Man? [...] The constant desire of Happiness, and the constraint it puts upon us to act for it, no Body, I think, accounts an abridgment of *Liberty*, or at least an abridgment of *Liberty* to be complain'd of. God Almighty himself is under the necessity of being happy [...] (E.2.21.50).

In these passages Locke is discussing a problem concerning freedom which arises from his remarks about suspension and, more in general, from his rational quasi-determinism. But what exactly is the nature of the problem? The point is that Locke's rational quasi-determinism might make our freedom look like something of little value: why should we regard freedom – which, according to the definition of § 8, is just the ability to do what we want – as something especially valuable when our will is so rigidly determined? Granted, such a (quasi-)determinism does not take away our freedom, but – borrowing Sam Rickless' (2001, p. 249) turn of phrase – it might seem that if we are so (quasi-)determined we are *as good as un-free*. This is the problem. And Locke's answer is that it is not just that his rational quasi-determinism is no threat to the value of our freedom: the fact that our will is so strictly determined is exactly what makes the ability to do what we want valuable. As Don Garrett (2015, § 2) stressed, Locke thinks that “[...] the very end of our Freedom [...]” is that “[...] we might attain the good we chuse” (E.2.21.48), and given such an end having, first, a strong tendency to choose what we judge to be good and, second, a power whose exercise tends to make us judge to be good what is actually good is most definitely nothing “to be complain'd of”.

One thing worth noting is that Locke does not distinguish very clearly the respective roles of the two components of his rational determinism (the tendency to will the action we judge to be the best and the power to suspend) in the dialectic I have just described. He introduces the problem at the end of the section in which he introduces the notion of suspension, by saying that “[...] during this *suspension* of any desire [...] we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; [...] and 'tis not a fault, but a perfection of our nature to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair *Examination*”

(E.2.21.47), which gives the impression that what might be thought to be “a fault of our nature” is the power to suspend. This interpretation, however, does not make much sense; why should the power to “examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do” be regarded as an imperfection? And in fact what follows makes clear that the root of the problem is not suspension: Locke contrasts the allegedly problematic feature of our psychology with “A perfect Indifferency in the Mind, not determinable by its last judgment of the Good or Evil [...]” (E.2.21.48), which strongly suggests that the root of the problem is the fact that we have a strong tendency to will the action we judge to be the best. What suspension does is just add a new dimension to the problem. As I noticed above, the power to suspend turns the tendency to do what *we take to be* good into a tendency to do what *is* good. Therefore, what suspension does is turn a worry concerning our being determined by what *we take to be* good into a worry concerning our being determined by what *is* good.

Likewise, it is important to distinguish the respective roles that the two components of Locke’s rational determinism play in his *answer* to the problem. Locke’s point is that our psychological structure is conducive to happiness. Now, if the relevant feature of our psychology were just the fact that we have a tendency to do what *we take to be* good, the conclusion that our psychological structure is conducive to happiness would not follow: after all, we might be really bad at figuring out what is good. Suspension is an answer to this problem. It turns the tendency to do what *we take to be* good into a tendency to do what *is* good, thereby ensuring that our psychological structure is really conducive to happiness.

The main thing to keep in mind, however, is that the problem Locke discusses in these sections is a problem concerning *the value of the freedom Locke thinks we have*. The point is made somewhat less clear by two features of Locke’s exposition. First, Locke sometimes makes the point that his rational quasi-determinism is no threat to the value of freedom by saying that this kind of determination is neither a “restraint”, nor a “diminution”, nor an “abridgment” of our freedom. Second, Locke keeps switching between the idea that our being determined the way we are is “a perfection of our nature”, “the very improvement and benefit”, and “the end and use” of freedom, and the *prima facie* more metaphysically loaded thesis that it is in suspension that “[...] lies the liberty Man has [...]” and the power to suspend is “[...] the source of all liberty [...]” (E.2.21.47). Now, I take Locke’s statements about determination by reasons not being a diminution of freedom and suspension constituting the source of liberty to be mere notational variants of the corresponding value talk, in terms of which they should be understood. The point can also be put as follows. Locke has two different notions of freedom. Freedom_D is the concept defined in § 8; freedom_N, on the other hand, is a normative concept to be understood in terms of freedom_D and the notion of some-

thing being (especially) valuable. Saying that it is suspension that makes us free_N just means that it is suspension that makes our freedom_D valuable; saying that determination by reasons does not make us unfree_N just means that determination by reasons does not make our freedom_D worthless. I take this reading of Locke's use of "the source of all liberty" etc to be the most consistent with two striking features of the chapter on powers which any interpretation should account for. First, that not only does Locke never explicitly question the adequacy of the definition of § 8, but he keeps giving it even after his remarks about suspension being the source of all liberty (see, e.g., E.2.21.56 and 71), which strongly suggests that all Locke says about freedom should be understood, directly or indirectly, in terms of that concept. Second, that the way Locke tries to show that determination by reasons is not a diminution of freedom etc is by arguing that being so determined is a valuable, in fact somewhat Godlike, feature of a properly functioning human being.²⁵

Now consider again the Impossibility Argument. It is an argument that – relying on an assumption about *the nature* of freedom, namely that freedom requires the ability to do otherwise – tries to establish that we are not free. If the definition of § 8 is correct, freedom does not require the ability to do otherwise and the argument fails. This is why one can try to answer the Impossibility Argument just by arguing for that definition. The problem Locke discusses in the passages quoted above, however, is different. This time there is no disagreement about *the nature* of freedom – nor, for that matter, its reality. The point at issue is *the value* of *that kind of freedom*. The problem, therefore, cannot be dealt with just by arguing for the definition of § 8, which is assumed by both sides to the dispute.

Let us take stock. At the end of last section, I noted that one can try to make sense of Locke's confession by questioning the notion that the Impossibility Argument is an adequate representation of Locke's worries about freedom and foreknowledge; maybe the problem Locke had in mind was one which, unlike the Impossibility Argument, cannot be dealt with just by arguing for an analysis such as the one of § 8. We can now make this suggestion a little more precise: maybe the problem Locke had in mind was, just like the one described in this section, not a problem concerning the nature and reality of a freedom initially conceived quite abstractly but one about the value of the freedom Locke thinks we have.

2. A Hypothesis

Why should Locke have thought divine foreknowledge constituted a threat to the value of human freedom? In this section, I will sketch a possible argument for the idea that divine foreknowledge makes human freedom worthless. I will then say

²⁵ This is, of course, a Leibnizian point (see, e.g., Leibniz 1846, pp. 6-7).

something more about the meaning of phrases like “Our freedom has no value”. Finally, I will try to make clearer my proposal by discussing some possible objections.

Thinking about Locke’s discussion of rational (quasi-)determinism is, once again, useful. So why does Locke believe that rational determinism might be thought to be a threat to the value of freedom? Well, it is no doubt possible that the hedonistic and egoistic components of his theory of motivation play a role here, but it seems clear that the point is that his rational determinism restricts the space of our alternative possibilities. Of course, this restriction does not amount to a complete collapse of this space, since the rational determinism of Locke’s mature view of motivation is not as all-encompassing as that of the first edition.²⁶ And, of course, the idea is not that this restriction might be thought to constitute a diminution of our freedom, since freedom – as defined in § 8 – is compatible with any kind of determinism. That being said, it really does seem that the worry Locke has in mind has to do mainly with such a restriction. Locke’s imaginary opponent contrasts rational determinism with “A perfect Indifferency in the Mind [...]” (E.2.21.48). And when Locke tries to argue for the happiness of the human condition by comparing it to God’s, what he stresses is that “[...] God himself cannot choose what is not good [...]” (E.2.21.49).

It seems therefore plausible that the reason why Locke believes that foreknowledge is a threat to the value of freedom is that foreknowledge restricts the space of our alternative possibilities – and indeed, the first part of the Impossibility Argument seems to show that foreknowledge brings about a complete collapse of this space. If this is correct, the argument behind Locke’s confession is quite similar to the Impossibility Argument. The only difference would be that while the Impossibility Argument starts by establishing that we can never do otherwise and then deduces from this intermediate conclusion that we are not free, in the argument Locke has in mind the role of this lemma is to show that our freedom (conceived along the lines of § 8), though real, is perfectly worthless. In what follows, I will refer to this argument as the “Worthlessness Argument”.

Let us now turn to the issue of the meaning of phrases like “Our freedom has no value”. Consider the following case. Simone goes around saying that if (causal) determinism is true, then life has no meaning. You ask her why. She answers that if determinism is true, then freedom is an illusion. You ask her *why*. She answers that if determinism is true, then given the past and the laws of nature, there is only one possible future. Let us now suppose that you convince her that, actually, the fact that given the past and the laws of nature, there is only one possible fu-

²⁶ This does not mean that Locke does not think that, *taking everything into account*, the space of alternative possibilities does collapse to a point. All it means is that *rational determination* is not enough for the collapse.

ture does not entail that freedom is an illusion; and let us say that you do this by convincing her that freedom must be understood along the lines of the definition of § 8. Does Simone have to conclude that she was wrong and the truth of determinism does not entail that life is meaningless? Well, she definitely *can* conclude that, but it is not that she *has to*. And, in fact, here is Simone's answer: "OK, I should not have said determinism makes (or would make) our lives meaningless because it makes us unfree. So scratch that. I should not have spoken of freedom. My point is just that if determinism is true, then given the past and the laws of nature, there is only one possible future: this is what makes our lives meaningless".²⁷

I do not think that Simone is being unreasonable. The idea that given the remote past and the natural laws, two things we have no control over, there is only one possible future does cast a somewhat disturbing light on our status as agents. Of course, it may be that the right kind of philosophical therapy can cure us of this particular existential angst. But there is a sense in which this does not mean that a person in the grip of such angst is being unreasonable. And, of course, trying to explain why it would be a problem that given the remote past and the natural laws, there is only one possible future is a dangerous exercise. If Locke is right, we cannot say that it would make us *unfree*. Can we at least say that it would make us *unable to do otherwise*, leaving open the possibility that being unable to do otherwise does not entail being unfree? Some philosophers would disagree with that, too – more on this later. Let us say that Simone's angst cannot be traced back to some more primitive existential angst: what she finds disturbing is the idea that given the remote past and the natural laws, there is only one possible future – that's it, end of story. An unanalyzable angst is not necessarily an unreasonable one.

Anyway, Simone has something more to say: "Let us get back to the issue of freedom. I am OK with the idea that, given that being free is just being able to do what you want, determinism does not make us unfree. However, I hope you agree that determinism makes our freedom pretty much worthless". How so, Simone? "Well, determinism does not make it false that, at least sometimes, if I had willed otherwise, I would have done otherwise; however, if determinism is true my willing otherwise is incompatible with the remote past and the natural laws, two things I have no control over. Being free in a deterministic world is somewhat like being incredibly attractive in a world in which all the other people are completely devoid of any charm. Being stuck in such a world does not make it false that if you wanted to date a certain person, you would; however, if you find yourself in

²⁷ Note that – since the fact that if determinism is true, then given the past and the laws of nature, there is only one possible future follows from the very definition of "determinism" (see, e.g., van Inwagen 1983, p. 65) – what Simone is worried about is determinism itself.

this kind of world your wanting to date someone is incompatible with your lack of interest in the available options, something you have no control over. Being free in a deterministic world looks no less pointless than being the most attractive person in a world inhabited by people you find obnoxious. In both cases you have something which would be of great value in the right conditions; but the conditions are the wrong ones”.

Once again, I do not think that Simone is being unreasonable. Maybe she is wrong. Or maybe here there is no right or wrong: she finds being free in a deterministic world worthless, you do not; that’s it, end of story. But she is not being unreasonable. And her worries provide us, I hope, with a model for thinking about someone who believes that other kinds of determination make our freedom worthless. Here is, in particular, the line of reasoning which I am arguing might be behind Locke’s confession. God’s foreknowledge does not make it false that, at least sometimes, if I had willed otherwise, I would have done otherwise. However, it does make me unable to will, and therefore to do, otherwise. And this makes any amount of freedom we may have look rather worthless. Being able to do what you want, being free, would be of great value in the right conditions. But given divine foreknowledge, it looks pointless.

At this point, one might feel the need to point out that, given what he says about rational determinism not being a threat to the value of freedom, the notion that Locke was so worried about the Worthlessness Argument is hard to take seriously. Did not Locke show, in his discussion of rational determinism, that a restriction of the space of alternative possibilities is no threat to the value of freedom? Is the difference between a mere restriction and a complete collapse of this space supposed to be *that* important?

I think that such a need should be resisted, and not because the effect of foreknowledge on the space of alternative possibilities seems to be more radical, but because Locke never argued for the general point that a restriction of the space of alternative possibilities is no threat to the value of freedom. Locke’s arguments were clearly specific to the case of rational determination. His point was that – given, first, that “[...] the very end of our Freedom [...]” is that “[...] we might attain the good we chuse” (E.2.21.48) and, second, that being determined by reasons is conducive to this end – we should not be worried about rational determination. The fact that if I had willed otherwise, I would have acted otherwise has, *prima facie*, at least some value. However, I have a very strong tendency to will what I take to be good, which suspension turns into a very strong tendency to will what *is* good, and whether a certain thing is good or not is something I have no control over. And such a strict dependency of my volitions on something I have no control over seems to make any dependency of my actions on my will rather worthless. But this is a mistake, at least according to Locke. The *prima facie* value

of freedom springs from the fact that freedom seems to be conducive to happiness. And a tendency to will what is good is, of course, conducive to happiness. Therefore, such a tendency not only does not pose any threat to the value of freedom: it enhances it. However, no such happy coincidence exists between the end of freedom and the collapse of the space of alternative possibilities which divine foreknowledge seems to produce. The arguments Locke gives in his discussion of rational determinism have therefore no bearing on the Worthlessness Argument.²⁸

This is not to say that the Worthlessness Argument is especially solid. This argument, just like the Impossibility Argument, assumes the factivity of knowledge (so that if 1,000,000 years ago God already knew that one minute ago I scratched my head, then 1,000,000 years ago it was already true that one minute ago I scratched my head) and the supervenience of truth on reality (so that if I could have avoided scratching my head one minute ago, then I could have rendered false the proposition that one minute ago I scratched my head) to argue that under the assumption of God's foreknowledge the ability to do otherwise entails the ability to change the past: if I could have avoided scratching my head one minute ago, then I could have rendered false the proposition that one minute ago I scratched my head (because of supervenience); but 1,000,000 years ago it was true that one minute ago I scratched my head (because of God's foreknowledge and its factivity); therefore, if I could have avoided scratching my head one minute ago, then I could have changed the past – since I could have rendered false a proposition that 1,000,000 years ago was true. It is then assumed that we do not have the ability to change the past and we draw the conclusion that God's foreknowledge is inconsistent with the idea that we sometimes have the ability to do otherwise. Now, even though the notion of changing the past is not internally inconsistent (see, e.g., Goddu 2003 and van Inwagen 2010), it seems clear that there is a sense in which we do not have the ability to change the past. It seems clear, for example, that I cannot *now* change the fact that *one minute ago* I scratched my head. However, the ability to change the past entailed by the conjunction of the ability to do otherwise and God's foreknowledge is quite different. Its exercise does not involve changing the distribution of matter at some past time. All it involves is changing the past truth value of a proposition *about the present* by changing the distribution of matter *in the present*. And that we lack such an ability is far from

²⁸ Of course, one can try to build for the case of foreknowledge an argument *with the same structure* as the one Locke gives in the case of rational determinism. One could, for instance, push the idea that – given that God is perfectly good – being determined by *God's* foreknowledge must be conducive to happiness. Note, however, that – without a supporting argument for the conclusion that Locke must have been, first, aware of the considerations in question and, second, somewhat confident in their strength – the mere existence of such a parallel argument presents no problem for my reading.

uncontroversial. In fact, one might argue that, given the supervenience of truth on reality, the only way to prove that we lack this ability is by deducing this conclusion from the claim that we can never do otherwise than what we actually do, a strategy which the proponents of the Worthlessness Argument cannot pursue, since the claim in question is the one they are trying to prove by means of the assumption that we cannot change the past (see Merricks 2009, p. 53). Of course, given the plausible assumption that God's foreknowledge is, as it were, counterfactually robust (that were the present different, God's past beliefs would have been different), the conjunction of the ability to do otherwise and God's foreknowledge also entails the ability to change God's past beliefs. However, once again, that we lack such a *sui generis* ability is far from uncontroversial (see Merricks 2009, p. 54).

That being said, the Worthlessness Argument seems to be solid enough not to make the notion that Locke worried about it especially hard to swallow. Of course, some of Locke's contemporaries seem to have been aware of the weaknesses of this line of argument (see, e.g., Hobbes 1654, p. 20). But, by itself, this does not seem to me to constitute much of a problem.

A *prima facie* more serious difficulty has to do with the semantics of "can". In David Lewis' (1976, p. 150) wording, "can" is *equivocal*:²⁹

To say that something can happen means that its happening is compossible with certain facts. *Which* facts? That is determined, but sometimes not determined well enough, by context. An ape can't speak a human language – say, Finnish – but I can. Facts about the anatomy and operation of the ape's larynx and nervous system are not compossible with his speaking Finnish. The corresponding facts about my larynx and nervous system are compossible with my speaking Finnish. But don't take me along to Helsinki as your interpreter: I can't speak Finnish. My speaking Finnish is compossible with the facts considered so far, but not with further facts about my lack of training.

This equivocity of "can" is sometimes regarded as central to the disagreement between compatibilists and incompatibilists.³⁰ Both sides of the dispute agree that freedom requires being able to do otherwise, but – so the story goes – compatibilists and incompatibilists disagree about the relevant sense of "can".

²⁹ More precisely, "can" is context-sensitive. In Angelika Kratzer's (1977) classic analysis, it is indexical, but the recent literature seems to show that, in order to account for certain uses of "can", other kinds of context-sensitivity are necessary as well.

³⁰ A classic example of this tendency is Moore 1912, chapter 6, even though the view I sketch in the text is not quite Moorean.

Incompatibilists believe that when one minute ago I scratched my head, that was a free act only if I could have done otherwise in quite a strong sense, namely only if my doing otherwise was compossible with the state of the world at the previous instant and the laws of nature;³¹ compatibilists think that the relevant sense of “can” is a weaker one and that most past facts – the fact that I willed to scratch my head, or facts about what God knew 1,000,000 years ago – should not be taken into account: what limits our ability to do otherwise (in the sense relevant to freedom) are just compulsive behaviors, locked doors, and the like.³² Now, with this in mind, one might ask in what sense of “can” Locke thinks that divine foreknowledge threatens to make us unable to do otherwise, thereby making our freedom (understood along the lines of the definition of § 8) worthless. It cannot be the compatibilist’s sense, for being able to do otherwise in that sense is clearly compatible with whatever God might have known 1,000,000 years ago. It might therefore seem that the relevant sense has to be the incompatibilist’s. But then, what about passages like the following?

I know that Liberty by some, is placed in an *indifferency* of the Man, antecedent to the determination of his *Will*. I wish they [...] had told us plainly, whether this supposed *indifferency* be antecedent to the Thought and Judgment of the Understanding, as well as to the decree of the *Will*. For it is pretty hard to state it between them; [...] because the determination of the *Will* immediately follows the Judgment of the Understanding; 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; at least it places it in a subject incapable of it, no Agent being allowed capable of Liberty, but in consequence of Thought and Judgment (E.2.21.71).

³¹ If, because of the continuity of the timeline, you find the notion of previous instant suspect, you can define the relevant sense of “can” in terms of compossibility with *the history of the world up to that point* and the laws of nature.

³² The definition Locke gives in § 8 can be seen as a, somewhat rough, attempt to define such a sense of “can”. This is, I think, the point of Locke’s remarks about liberty being “[...] an *indifferency* not of the Man [...] but [...] of the operative Powers of the Man [...]” which “[...] remains after the Judgment of the Understanding; yea, even after the determination of the *Will* [...]” (E.2.21.71).

The indifferency Locke discusses in this passage seems to be the incompatibilist's ability to do otherwise,³³ and Locke seems to be considering where exactly one might want to locate it. He seems to think that there are only two live options.³⁴ The first one is that the indifferency (that moment in which we are not determined by the past and the laws of nature and so we can do otherwise in the incompatibilist's sense) is between "the thought and judgment of the understanding" (my concluding that, say, getting up and going to work is the thing to do) and the relevant volition. He rules out this possibility for a somewhat strange reason, namely that "the determination of the will immediately follows the judgment of the understanding".³⁵ The second option is that the indifferency occurs before the thought and judgment of the understanding. And here Locke argues that this kind of indifferency, which disconnects what should be the final step of a process of deliberation from the reasons that should ground it, would make our freedom worthless – the point is, of course, phrased in terms of freedom_N. It therefore seems that Locke's take on the incompatibilist's ability to do otherwise is that it is either impossible, an option he does not really appear to be that worried about, or detrimental to our freedom. That Locke worried that divine foreknowledge threatens to make us unable to do otherwise in the *incompatibilist's* sense is therefore no more credible than the notion that he did not realize that being able to do otherwise in the *compatibilist's* sense is perfectly consistent with God's foreknowledge. But if Locke cannot be worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and the *incompatibilist's* ability to do otherwise any more than he can be worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and the *compatibilist's* ability to do otherwise, then – so one might think – Locke cannot be worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and the ability to do otherwise, *period*.

The objection is a natural one, but it relies on too hasty a survey of the logical space. Those who take the equivocity of "can" to be central to the compatibilist-incompatibilist divide do not regard the disagreement between the two camps as a

³³ Actually, passages like this one are slightly ambiguous. However, this ambiguity is of no consequence for the point I am making in the text. I will come back to it in a couple of paragraphs.

³⁴ An option Locke does not discuss is that this indifferency should be located after the relevant volition. This, however, does not really look like a *live* option, since it seems that all that a loosening of the connection between volitions and actions can accomplish is make our actions less voluntary, not more free. Of course, Locke grants that liberty can be described as "[...] an *indifferency* that remains [...] after the determination of the *Will* [...]" (E.2.21.71), but the indifferency in question is not the incompatibilist's ability to do otherwise and it does not loosen the connection between volitions and actions in any way.

³⁵ Note that Locke does not even mention the mediation of desire. His intellectualism is as strong as ever.

disagreement about whether, say, causal determinism is or is not compatible with the ability to do otherwise. Compatibilists and incompatibilists agree that causal determinism is compatible with being able to do otherwise in one sense while incompatible in another sense: that most kinds of determination are consistent with the ability to do otherwise is, as it were, built into the compatibilist sense of “can”, in the same way that no kind of determination is consistent with the ability to do otherwise is built into the incompatibilist sense. The disagreement is about which sense of “can” is relevant for our understanding of freedom: which one fits better the linguistic data, or which one makes better sense of our ascriptions of moral responsibility, and so on. However, this is not the only way to characterize the compatibilist-incompatibilist divide – or, anyway, this is not the only disagreement which may be described in terms of compatibilism and incompatibilism. Philosophers like Kadri Vihvelin (2013, chapter 1, § 3) and Peter van Inwagen (2008, p. 333) take compatibilists and incompatibilists to have no disagreement about which sense of “can” is relevant for our understanding of freedom. Vihvelin (2013, pp. 11-12) describes this sense in terms of what she calls “wide abilities”:

When we say, of someone S at a particular time t, that she is able to do something X, we *sometimes* mean something like: “S has *what it takes* to do X: she’s got the necessary skills and the psychological and physical capacity to use those skills”. This is what we mean when we say that a prisoner retains the ability to leave the room, ride a bike, play piano, focus her mind, and so on. But we also sometimes mean something *more* than this, something we might express by saying: “S has what it takes to do X (the skills and the psychological and physical capacity to use those skills) and, *moreover*, she’s got the means and the opportunity and nothing external stands in her way” [...]. I’m going to call the first kind of ability “narrow ability”, and the second “wide ability”. [...] The narrow/wide distinction is a piece of technical terminology, but ordinary English recognizes this distinction, when it uses “ability” in a way that contrasts it with “opportunity”.

Neither the truth of compatibilism nor that of incompatibilism is “built into” this sense of “can”. Vihvelin (see, e.g., 2013, chapter 5) thinks that she has to *argue* that causal determinism does not deprive us of the wide ability to do otherwise, just as van Inwagen (see, e.g., 1983, chapter 3) thinks that he has to *argue* that if determinism is true, then we can never do otherwise in the relevant sense; and both Vihvelin (2013, chapter 2, § 4) and van Inwagen (1983, chapter 2) believe that they have to *argue* that there is no inconsistency between the ability to do otherwise on the one hand and foreknowledge and the like on the other. Therefore, the disagreement between compatibilists and incompatibilists ends up being

precisely a disagreement about whether causal determinism, foreknowledge etc are or are not compatible with the ability to do otherwise. Now, if we keep this in mind, it becomes clear that the objection I sketched in the previous paragraph fails. Locke cannot be worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and the incompatibilist's ability to do otherwise any more than he can be worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and the compatibilist's ability to do otherwise. So far, so good. However, that does not mean that Locke cannot be worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and the ability to do otherwise, period. He might have been worried about the compatibility of foreknowledge and something along the lines of Vihvelin's wide ability to do otherwise. That such an ability is compatible with foreknowledge is not that evident: as I have already stressed, Vihvelin herself thinks that she has to argue for the point. And there is no inconsistency between regarding the possession of this ability as something of value and the idea that the indifference of the incompatibilist is perfectly worthless: these are, after all, two distinct kinds of ability.

This shows that the plausibility of the hypothesis I am describing in this section depends crucially on the viability of another hypothesis. The main reason for considering the notion that Locke worried that divine foreknowledge might be incompatible with the human ability to do otherwise is that in his discussion of rational determinism Locke seems to show some degree of sympathy for the idea that there is some value in the possession of this ability. Therefore, the sense of "can" we use to make sense of Locke's confession must also be consistent with what he says in his discussion of rational determinism. And this means that the plausibility of the hypothesis I am describing in this section depends on the assumption that what Locke says in his discussion of rational determinism can be read with a sense of "can" somewhat akin to Vihvelin's in mind. Now, one might think that such an assumption is inconsistent with a passage I have already quoted. Commenting on his rational determinism and, more in particular, on the power to suspend, Locke writes:

This is so far from being a restraint or diminution of *Freedom*, that it is the very improvement and benefit of it: 'tis not an Abridgment, 'tis the end and use of our *Liberty* [...]. A perfect Indifferency in the Mind, not determinable by its last judgment of the Good or Evil, that is thought to attend its Choice, would be so far from being an advantage and excellency of any intellectual Nature, that it would be as great an imperfection, as the want of Indifferency to act, or not to act, till determined by the *Will*, would be an imperfection on the other side (E.2.21.48).

Here Locke speaks of “a perfect indifferency”, which seems to suggest that the notion of being able to do otherwise he has in mind is not a neutral one (like Vihvelin’s), but rather that of the incompatibilist. “Indifferency”, however, is ambiguous – and usually it is not clear which sense Locke is using. On the one hand, “indifferency” can be used to refer to the incompatibilist’s ability to do otherwise, an *ability* which *requires* a sparkle of indeterminism. However, one can also use the word to talk about the sparkle of indeterminism *itself*. Now, in most cases, this ambiguity is of no consequence,³⁶ but not always. If we read “indifferency” as referring to the sparkle of indeterminism itself, then the quoted passage is perfectly consistent with the notion that what Locke says in his discussion of rational determinism can be read with a neutral sense of “can” in mind. In order to help the reader see that it is so, here is a sketch of what Locke’s discussion of rational determinism looks like when we read “indifferency” the way I am suggesting.

Locke believes that, *in itself*, being able to do otherwise (in a neutral sense akin to Vihvelin’s) is better than not being able to do otherwise. He also believes that the more we are determined by reasons, the less we can do otherwise than what we do. One might therefore think that he is committed to the conclusion that not being determined by reasons is better than being determined by reasons. However, the conclusion does not follow. Locke argues that being determined by reasons is conducive to happiness and that happiness is quite hard to attain without being so determined. His view is therefore that, *all things considered*, being determined by reasons is better than not being determined by reasons. This is why he says that “A perfect Indifferency in the Mind, not determinable by its last judgment of the Good or Evil, that is thought to attend its Choice [...]” (that is: not being determined by reasons) “[...] would be so far from being an advantage and excellency of any intellectual Nature, that it would be as great an imperfection, as the want of Indifferency to act, or not to act, till determined by the *Will*, would be an imperfection on the other side” (E.2.21.48).

That in his discussion of rational determinism Locke shows some sympathy for the idea that there is some value in being able to do otherwise is itself an assumption worth calling attention to. According to the reading I am relying on, Locke

³⁶ A couple of paragraphs ago I quoted what Locke says about the indifferency of the libertarians in § 71, assumed that by “indifferency” he meant the incompatibilist’s ability to do otherwise, and argued that the passage shows that Locke regarded that ability as worthless. But what if we read “indifferency” in the alternative way I described in the text? Well, it really does not matter. If we read the relevant occurrences of “indifferency” in § 71 as referring to the sparkle of indeterminism itself, then the passage I quoted shows that Locke regarded such sparkles of indeterminism as worthless, and this entails that he regarded the incompatibilist’s ability to do otherwise as worthless, too – since this ability definitionally requires sparkles of indeterminism.

thinks that having something along the lines of Vihvelin's wide ability to do otherwise is, *in itself*, better than not having it; but the details matter, and if a restriction of this ability is conducive to happiness, we should embrace it. However, one can read Locke as making a somewhat less subtle point, namely just that being determined by reasons is better than not being determined by reasons. Now, is there any reason to believe that my Locke, rather than the less subtle one, is the real Locke? I am afraid that the answer is no. However, I do not think there is any reason to believe that the real Locke is the less subtle one either. The text is just underdetermined. Hence, even though my assumption is no doubt non-obvious, it does not look especially problematic.

There is one final possible objection I want to briefly discuss. According to the reading I presented, the problem behind Locke's confession is not a problem about the *reality* of freedom, but one about its *value*. Now, if this reading is correct, the language Locke used to confess his worries to Molyneux is rather misleading. He says he "[...] cannot make freedom in man consistent with omnipotence and omniscience in God [...]", and he summarizes his position thus: "[...] if it be possible for God to make a free agent, then man is free, though I see not the way of it" (Locke to William Molyneux, 20 January 1693, pp. 625-626, in De Beer 1979). And this does not look like the language of value; it looks like the language of possibility and reality.

I agree that if the reading I have presented is correct, the language of Locke's confession is misleading. However, this is not a problem for the reading – or, at least, it is not a *new* problem. In my discussion of Locke's remarks about the problem of rational determinism, I called attention to the fact that Locke keeps switching between the idea that being determined by reasons is "the very improvement and benefit" of freedom, and the thesis that this kind of determination is "the source of all liberty". I also argued that the latter kind of statements should be viewed as mere notational variants of statements of the first kind, in terms of which they should be understood. In other words, his discussion of rational determinism seems to show that Locke has two different notions of freedom, a descriptive one, freedom_D, which he defines in § 8, and a normative one, freedom_N, which should be understood in terms of freedom_D and the notion of being valuable. Given this, the notion that in his confession Locke made a point about the value of freedom using a *prima facie* value-free language should not strike us as especially strange: he does that in the *Essay*, too. Of course, that does not make the language of Locke's confession any less misleading. However, it shows that the mere fact that the reading I presented entails that Locke says something misleading is not a problem for this reading.

Of course, there are commentators who read Locke's remarks about suspension and rational determinism in radically different ways (see, e.g., Davidson 2003, §

4, LoLordo 2012, chapter 1, § 7, Schouls 1992, part B, Stuart 2013, § 68, and Yaffe 2000, chapter 1, § 3). That Locke sometimes uses a normative notion of freedom such as the one described above is, therefore, a less than uncontroversial assumption behind my hypothesis. I am not the only one who reads Locke this way (see in particular Rickless 2001, p. 249).³⁷ I also briefly argued for this reading in the previous section, where I noticed that it seems to be the most consistent with, first, the fact that Locke keeps giving the definition of § 8 even after his remarks about suspension being the source of all liberty and, second, the fact that Locke tries to show that determination by reasons is not a diminution of freedom etc by arguing that being so determined is a *valuable* feature of a properly functioning human being. That being said, an adequate defense of this assumption, on whose plausibility the general interpretive strategy I have been championing relies, would require a separate paper, and therefore the argument of this article should be seen as, in a certain sense, a conditional one: *if* it is correct to assume that Locke sometimes uses a normative notion of freedom such as the one described above, *then* here is a way to make sense of Locke's confession.

3. Conclusion

The most discussed of the problems raised by determinism, foreknowledge, and the like are problems concerning the possibility of freedom, or at least the possibility of the freedom required for moral responsibility, either toward God or of a more mundane variety.³⁸ These problems in turn raise a problem in conceptual analysis (which, of course, one may find interesting for reasons unrelated to the issue of the possibility of freedom), namely that of making clear the (relevant) notion of freedom. Some think that conceptual analysis shows that freedom can be understood in terms of the ability to do otherwise; other disagree³⁹ – and, of course, each camp has its more fine-grained disagreements. And if you take one road rather than another, sometimes new problems arise; for instance, if you analyze freedom in terms of a “neutral” notion of being able to do otherwise, you find yourself with the problem of figuring out whether the ability in question is or is not compatible with determinism and/or foreknowledge.

³⁷ Don Garrett shows some sympathy for this reading in Garrett 2015, § 4.

³⁸ There are philosophers who seem to dislike this way of circumscribing the topic of “free will”, in terms of moral responsibility – see, e.g., van Inwagen 2008, note 2. As for myself, I do not see anything wrong with it. Be that as it may, this way of thinking about the problem of free will is still quite popular – see, e.g., Pereboom 2014, pp. 1-3.

³⁹ The standard example is, of course, Frankfurt (1969 and 1971). For a recent criticism of Frankfurt's position, with which I must confess I am extremely sympathetic, see Vihvelin 2013, chapter 4.

But not all the problems raised by determinism etc are problems concerning the possibility of freedom. Here is a rather obvious example. Let us say that conceptual analysis shows that freedom does not have anything to do with the ability to do otherwise. That would show that the problem of figuring out whether the ability in question is or is not compatible with determinism and/or foreknowledge has nothing to do with the issue of the possibility of freedom. It would not, however, *solve* the problem. We would still have a problem revolving around determinism and foreknowledge, an interesting problem it is not irrational to worry about. It is just that the problem would not be one about the possibility of freedom.

In my view, there is little doubt that Locke was somewhat worried about one such problem concerning rational determinism. This is not to say that Locke had no interest in the issue of whether we are free or not. One can definitely make a case that the role of the definition of § 8 is precisely that of showing that freedom is consistent with various kinds of determination by showing, following a strategy characteristic of *eighteenth-century* necessitarianism (see Harris 2005, p. 55), that the only coherent definition of this notion is compatible with the necessitation of human action – even though, of course, one can also make a case that Locke’s interest in providing an analysis of the notion of freedom has nothing to do with determinism, foreknowledge, and the like.⁴⁰ But I believe it is a fact that Locke thought that rational determinism also raises a problem which has nothing to do with the issue of the possibility of freedom, even though he misleadingly described it in terms of liberty. And this problem provides us, I think, with a very attractive model to try to make sense of Locke’s confession.

⁴⁰ After having argued, in book 1, that there are no innate principles in the human mind, in book 2 Locke tries to supplement the arguments of the previous book by focusing on the subsentential components of some allegedly innate principles (see, e.g., E.2.1.1). In particular, Locke says that “If we will trace the progress of our Minds [...] we shall find [...] that even *the most abstruse* Ideas, how remote soever they may seem from Sense, or from any operation of our own Minds, are yet only such, as the Understanding frames to it self, by repeating and joining together *Ideas*, that it had either from Objects of Sense, or from its own operations about them [...]” (E.2.12.8). Now, one can make a case that that of freedom is just one of these “abstruse ideas” on whose origin Locke wants to shed some light, and that the analysis of § 8 should be viewed in the context of this broader project – here it is especially useful to pay close attention to what Locke says in book 1 about some of the topics of book 2: see, e.g., E.1.4.4, 18, and 20.

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