

## REVIEW ARTICLE

*Liberty worth the name: Locke on free agency.* By GIDEON YAFFE. (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000. Pp. xii, 176. £30 or \$49.50, paper £10.50 or \$16.95. ISBN: hb 0-691-04966-1; pb 0-691-05706-0)

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The main purpose of Yaffe's important and valuable book is to provide a careful reconstruction of Locke's views on the nature of action and freedom. In so doing, Yaffe hopes to establish two claims: first, that Locke has been misunderstood, and second, that Locke's considered views, accurately rendered, serve as a resource for answering some pressing questions of contemporary relevance (even if there is little or no evidence that Locke took himself to be providing answers to these questions). If Yaffe is right, Book I, Chapter xxi of Locke's *Essay*, in which these matters are extensively discussed, is of more than mere historical interest, and philosophers of mind and action would be well advised to mine it for clues to solving the problems with which they are currently wrestling.

I do not, in the end, find myself in agreement with Yaffe's interpretation, as I explain below. But the falsity of some of Yaffe's central claims does not detract from the value of his efforts. Regardless of its historical accuracy, his is a philosophically sophisticated and historically well-informed study of an important, but comparatively neglected, part of Locke's *Essay*. And, despite its relative brevity, it is rich enough in content to stimulate and challenge both the more historically and the more philosophically minded scholars of Locke.

The book divides into three chapters. In the first, Yaffe discusses Locke's theory of free agency. His main point is that Locke takes a free agent to possess two distinct capacities: 'the capacity to adjust her conduct in accordance with her choices' and 'the capacity to adjust her choices in accordance with the good' (p. 118). More on this below. The second chapter is devoted to a careful analysis of Locke's theory of action. Yaffe points out that Locke distinguishes between 'action' and 'passion', but that this distinction is not sufficient to capture the difference between what we call 'actions' or 'doings' on the one hand, and mere 'happenings' on the other. Doings, as we understand them, are much closer to what Locke calls 'voluntary actions'. The purpose of the chapter is to explain what Locke means by 'action', 'passion', and 'voluntary', in such a way as to bring out the relevance of Locke's discussion to the 'problem of agency' as we understand it. Along the way, Yaffe discusses Locke's distinction between passive and active powers, as well as his theory of volition, and takes issue with E. J. Lowe's interpretation of Locke's account of voluntary action.<sup>1</sup> The third chapter discusses what Yaffe sees as the connections between Locke's account of freedom and his account of personal identity. Yaffe argues that 'the kinds of capacities that Locke takes to be constitutive of personal identity are closely related to both aspects of full-fledged free agency' (p. 118). Along the way, Yaffe proposes that Locke's theory of agency 'provides a powerful tool for answering [what Yaffe calls] the Where's the Agent Problem' that continues to bedevil causal theories of agency, the problem, namely, that 'no causal theory can serve to capture ... the sense in which agents are *active*—as opposed to *passive*—in the production of their actions' (p. 122).

<sup>1</sup> See E. J. Lowe, 'Necessity and the will in Locke's theory of action', *History of philosophy quarterly* 3 (1986), pp. 149–63.

Although the last two chapters offer much food for thought, I am going to concentrate on the first, longest, and (to my mind) most controversial chapter in the book.

In chapter one, which occupies nearly half the book, Yaffe argues that (much as it would appear otherwise) Locke does not hold a Hobbesian view of free agency. Whereas Hobbes claimed that an agent is free exactly in so far as he possesses freedom of action (roughly, the ability to do what he wills), Yaffe's Locke believes that freedom of action is necessary, but not sufficient, for freedom. In addition to possessing freedom of action, itself 'a kind of perfection in the causal determination of action' (p. 38), a 'full-fledged' free agent (that is, an agent who possesses 'all the senses and sorts of freedom that we are after when we worry about free agency' (p. 19)) possesses a second perfection. As Yaffe puts it, this second perfection is intended as 'an account of the Elusive Something' (p. 38), that is, an account of 'those abilities possessed or conditions satisfied by a full-fledged free agent' (p. 19) over and above freedom of action.

According to Yaffe, Locke's views on the nature of the Elusive Something changed over time. At the time of the first edition of the *Essay*, Locke held that our wills are determined by what appears to us to be the greatest good. But, says Yaffe, 'Locke's first edition account of the Elusive Something was linked to his account of what causally determines us to have the acts of volition that we have' (p. 42) in that he took the Elusive Something to be the condition of one's volitions being determined by (in the sense of tracking) the greatest good. But Locke was criticized by his friend, William Molyneux, for making 'all Sins to proceed from our Understandings, or to be against Conscience; and not at all from the Depravity of our Wills' (p. 39), the reason whereof being that the condition of one's volitions not being determined by the greatest good is the result of one's not knowing (i.e. not understanding) what the greatest good is.

Acknowledging the worth of this criticism, Locke changed his account of what determines our volitions, and, in line with his new account, recognized another ability that, when added to freedom of action, suffices for full-fledged freedom: namely, the power to bring it about that one's volitions are determined by the good. Humans exercise this power by 'suspending the execution and satisfaction' of their desires (II. xxi. 47). Locke's mature view, then, was that a full-fledged free agent possesses freedom of action and is either (i) such that her volitions are determined by the greatest good or (ii) capable of bringing it about that her volitions are so determined (by exercising the power of suspension).

Many of Locke's antecedents and contemporaries thought that freedom of action was not sufficient for free agency. Bishop Bramhall, for instance, criticized Hobbes for failing to acknowledge that freedom *in* action requires 'freedom of the will' or 'free-will' in addition to freedom *of* action (p. 19). Though, on Locke's view, it makes no sense to say that the will is free (since, as he argues, freedom and the will are both powers, and it makes no sense to ascribe a power to a power), and it is often the case that 'agents simply lack freedom of action with respect to their volitions' (and hence are not 'free to will' (p. 28)), Yaffe claims that Locke agrees with Bramhall that the Elusive Something exists and is often (albeit mistakenly) called 'free-will'. Moreover, not only does Yaffe's Locke count it a mistake to take the Elusive Something to be a kind of freedom belonging to *wills*, he also counts it a mistake to take the Elusive Something to be a kind of freedom belonging to *agents* (say, for example, freedom of action with respect to one's volitions). For the first way of possessing the Elusive Something (i.e. being such that one's volitions are determined by the greatest good) is not a kind of freedom at all.

On Yaffe's interpretation, Locke is not merely articulating an interesting and sophisticated alternative to Hobbes's account of

free agency: he is on to something. Yaffe notes that contemporary philosophers of action have argued that victims of addiction, compulsive disorders, indoctrination, and coercion, lack freedom, even though they possess freedom of action (pp. 9–11).<sup>2</sup> These cases suggest that 'there is more to freedom than being the source of one's actions' (p. 11), and part of what makes Locke's account of freedom valuable is that it provides us with one philosophically compelling way of explaining why the subjects in these unfortunate cases are unfree. 'They are unfree', Yaffe's Locke might say, 'because they lack a certain kind of self-transcendence, namely the transcending of (or the capacity to transcend) their "impulses, parochialisms, and peculiarities" (p. 8) in the service of the greatest good'. Understandably, then, Yaffe takes it to be a point in favour of his interpretation that his reconstruction of Locke's theory of freedom provides an interesting answer to a question with which we are still struggling.

On the whole, this is an impressive interpretation of II. xxi, and it would be difficult to imagine a better case for reading the chapter as a search for the Elusive Something than the one Yaffe presents. But, as I will now argue, the evidence that Locke was a Hobbesian overwhelms Yaffe's reasons for claiming the opposite.

Locke begins his discussion of freedom at II. xxi. 8 with an analysis of the idea of liberty, an analysis repeated several times in the chapter (at II. xxi. 10, 12, 15, 16, 21, 23, 24, 27, 50, 56, and 71):

All the Actions, that we have any *Idea* of, reducing themselves, as has been said, to these two, *viz.* Thinking and Motion, so far as a Man has a

<sup>2</sup> See, in particular, Harry Frankfurt, 'Freedom of the will and the concept of a person', *Journal of philosophy* 68 (1971), pp. 5–20, and Susan Wolf, *Freedom within reason* (Oxford 1990).

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*.

He continues:

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, whereby either of them is preferr'd to the other.

Yaffe calls the kind of freedom that Locke thereby defines 'freedom of action', and then claims that, for Locke, freedom of action is not sufficient for full-fledged freedom. As he puts it: 'If, for instance, my volition comes about as a result of, among other things, addiction, phobia, deception, indoctrination, or coercion, then my action will not be *free in all the senses that we imagine possible*, even though I might very well have had freedom of action with respect to it' (emphasis added).

Now it may very well be true that we (that is, you, I, Yaffe, and the rest of our contemporaries) can imagine situations in which persons who possess freedom of action with respect to an action do not in fact possess full-fledged freedom with respect to it. But the real question for the Locke scholar here is not whether there could be actions with respect to which one has Lockian freedom of action but lacks freedom in all the senses that *we* imagine possible, but rather whether there could be actions with respect to which one has Lockian freedom of action but lacks freedom in all the senses that *Locke* imagined possible. Starkly put, the question is whether Locke took there to be an Elusive Something.

By my count, Yaffe's reasons for thinking it likely that Locke took there to be an Elusive Something derive from seven passages, the first three appearing in all editions, the last four in the second and subsequent editions, of the *Essay*. I will now argue that every one of these passages, considered in context, may also be read in a way that is consistent with the attribution

to Locke of Hobbesianism, i.e. the identification of full-fledged freedom with freedom of action, and the consequent refusal to admit the existence of an Elusive Something. Let us consider each passage in turn.

As Yaffe rightly points out, Locke spends part of II. xxi arguing that it makes no sense to ask whether the will is free, since the will and freedom are both abilities and it seems absurd even to suggest that an ability (in this case, a mental faculty) can possess an ability. Yet, in a passage from section 20 (call it 'A'), Locke recognizes that there is no harm in speaking, in a loose and imprecise way, of 'free will' or 'freedom of the will':

[A] Nor do I deny, that those Words, and the like [such as 'free will' or other ways of talking that presuppose that the will is a substance or agent], are to have their place in the common use of Languages, that have made them currant. It looks like too much affectation wholly to lay them by: and Philosophy it self, though it likes not a gaudy dress, yet when it appears in publick, must have so much Complacency, as to be cloathed in the ordinary Fashion and Language of the country, so far as it can consist with Truth and Perspicuity.

Yaffe thinks that this passage reveals more than that 'there is nothing wrong, in certain ordinary contexts, with speaking of freedom of will'. He writes (p. 23):

What [Locke] is realizing is that the term 'freedom of will' really signifies the Elusive Something, and he takes himself to have shown that the Elusive Something is badly described as 'freedom of will', since that phrase just doesn't make literal sense.

Now it may well be that what Yaffe says here is accurate. But I do not think that passage [A] provides any evidence in favour of Yaffe's reading. The most that can be extracted from [A], it seems to me, is that Locke accepts that the term 'freedom of will', when used in a loose and popular sense, signifies *some-*

thing. But whether the term (so used) signifies the *Elusive Something* (i.e. the supposed condition which, when added to freedom of action, suffices for full-fledged freedom), Locke simply does not say.

Locke thinks that the real question at issue ‘when it is disputed, Whether the *will* be free’ is not whether the faculty of the will has the power to act, or not to act, as it pleases, but rather ‘*Whether a Man be free to will*’ (II. xxi. 22). Yaffe finds it ‘instructive to look at the manner in which Locke introduces his discussion of this alternative way of asking whether or not the will is free’ (p. 27). The relevant passage (call it ‘B’) is the first sentence of section 22:

[B] But the inquisitive Mind of Man, willing to shift off from himself, as far as he can, all thoughts of guilt, though it be by putting himself into a worse state, than that of fatal Necessity, is not content with this [that is, freedom of action]: Freedom, unless it reaches farther than this, will not serve the turn: And it passes for a good Plea, that a Man is not free at all, if he be not as free to will, as he is to act, what he wills.

Here is Yaffe’s interpretation of [B]:

Locke does two notable things in this passage. The first is to assert that ‘the inquisitive Mind of Man ... is not content with’ freedom of action; that is, he asserts that when we envision a truly free agent, we imagine a person who has more than just freedom of action, we envision an agent possessing the Elusive Something. But, through his ironic tone, he also foreshadows his rejection of a particular account of the Elusive Something. The claim that he is about to reject is that an agent ‘is not free at all, if he be not as free to will as he is to act what he wills’; that is, he foreshadows his rejection of the claim that the Elusive Something consists in freedom of action with respect to volition.

It might be objected that, contrary to Yaffe’s interpretation, [B] indicates, not that Locke places himself in the company of those

‘inquisitive Minds’ who take (full-fledged) freedom to ‘reach farther than’ freedom of action, but rather precisely the opposite. For Locke describes these ‘inquisitive Minds’ as ‘willing to shift off from [themselves], as far as [they] can, all thoughts of guilt’, and surely this is not a description that Locke would recognize as applying to himself.

In a footnote, Yaffe credits Vere Chappell with raising this (in my view, very nearly decisive) objection (see p. 144). Yaffe responds by arguing that [B] is ‘at least ambiguous’ as between (a) evincing a disparaging attitude toward those who believe that there is an Elusive Something, and (b) evincing a disparaging attitude toward those who believe that there is an Elusive Something *and* that this Elusive Something is freedom of will (in the sense of freedom *to* will). Thus Yaffe takes [B] to leave open the possibility that Locke picked option (b) over option (a), and claims further that ‘the fact that Locke [eventually] presents a positive view that plays the role of an account of the Elusive Something’ suggests that this is precisely how [B] should be read (p. 145).

There are two problems with Yaffe’s response. In the first place, options (a) and (b) are perfectly consistent. For all that Yaffe says, it could also be that Locke takes his own conclusion that the Elusive Something is not to be found in the freedom to will (a conclusion clearly enunciated in [B]) to be evidence for the further conclusion that the Elusive Something is not to be found *at all*. Second, although Yaffe treats it as a ‘fact’ that Locke eventually presents a positive account of the Elusive Something, this is a claim for which Yaffe has yet to argue. So the answer to the question whether [B] supports Yaffe’s interpretation over the Hobbesian alternative depends entirely on the merits of reading the five passages to be discussed below in the way Yaffe suggests. I conclude, therefore, that [B], considered on its own, provides no reason at all for thinking that Locke rejected Hobbesianism.

Yaffe claims (p. 30) that his interpretation provides ‘the tools necessary for interpreting the following puzzling remark’ in section 21 (call it ‘C’):

[C] [H]ow can we think any one freer than to have the power to do what he will? ... [W]e can scarce tell how to imagine any *Being* freer, than to be able to do what he *wills*. So that in respect of Actions, within the reach of such a power in him, a Man seems as free, as ’tis possible for Freedom to make him.

Although he admits that the first two sentences of [C] provide some evidence in favour of the view that Locke was a Hobbesian, Yaffe claims that advocates of this position must dismiss ‘the rather vexing final flourish ... as just an example ... of the unclarity that is so often the product of Locke’s convoluted rhetorical style’. To Yaffe, though, such a dismissal would be both ‘uncharitable’ and ‘unnecessary’ (p. 30). For the last sentence of [C] can be read as saying that ‘if [an agent] has freedom of action she is as free—that is, as close to being a full-fledged free agent—as she can be through the possession of something that is rightly called freedom: she is as free as freedom can make her’. And this is consistent with Yaffe’s interpretation, because from the fact that an agent is ‘as free as freedom can make her’ (in the sense Yaffe suggests) it does not follow that she possesses full-fledged freedom. For it might be that full-fledged freedom requires something over and above freedom of action that is other than any sort of freedom (say, for example, the condition of one’s volitions being determined by the greatest good).

I grant that Yaffe’s interpretation can be made to fit part of the text. But I do not grant that it fits the entire text better than the competition. For those who attribute Hobbesianism to Locke, there is nothing ‘vexing’ in the final sentence of [C], and nothing that requires ‘dismissal’ as an ‘example of unclarity’. Literally understood, the final sentence of [C] says no more than

that an agent who possesses freedom of action is as free as someone who possesses freedom can be, something that follows directly from the Hobbesian claim that there is no more to freedom than freedom of action. The fact that it follows explains Locke’s use of ‘so that’ to introduce the final sentence of [C], for the point of the first two sentences is precisely to underscore the fact that freedom does not extend beyond freedom of action. Unlike the competition, then, Yaffe’s interpretation of the final sentence of [C] does not allow the sentence to follow, in any obvious or clear way, from the first two sentences of [C]. And, in this respect at least, Yaffe’s interpretation is not only no better than the alternative: it is decidedly worse.

The fourth passage to which Yaffe appeals appears in section 48 (call it ‘D’):

[D] [W]ere [our volitions] determined by any thing but the last result of our own Minds, judging of the good or evil of any action, we were not free, the very end of our Freedom being, that we might attain the good we chuse.

Yaffe glosses passage [D] as follows (p. 43):

Locke says here that some form of freedom is lacking in agents whose volitions are not determined appropriately ... Locke cannot be speaking here of freedom of action, for an agent can have freedom of action regardless of what determines her to have the volition that she has. He can only be speaking of some kind of freedom beyond freedom of action...

To understand this gloss fully, it is well to ask what Yaffe means by ‘appropriately’ in saying that, for Locke, ‘some form of freedom is lacking in agents whose volitions are not determined appropriately’. In the passage immediately preceding [D], which Yaffe quotes (p. 43), Locke takes it to be a perfection of agents beyond freedom of action (itself a perfection) ‘*that the power of Preferring should be determined by Good*’. This suggests that,

for Yaffe, the condition of one's volitions being appropriately determined is just the condition of one's volitions being determined by the (greatest) good. This is confirmed by statements Yaffe makes elsewhere. For example, Yaffe says later that 'what Locke has realized between the first and second editions is that there is a way in which an agent can bring it about that her volitions are determined appropriately' (p. 54). Since the point that Yaffe takes Locke to be emphasizing in the second and subsequent editions is that some agents who possess freedom of action become fully free by having the power to bring it about that their volitions are determined by the good (see p. 54), it must be that Yaffe takes 'appropriately determined' to mean 'determined by the (greatest) good'.

Why is any of this significant? The reason is that, on the assumption that Yaffe is using 'appropriately' to mean 'by the (greatest) good', it follows that his gloss of [D], a passage added to the second edition, conflicts with the fact (itself much emphasized by Yaffe) that the second edition of the *Essay* ushered in a new account of the supposed Elusive Something. For the first sentence of Yaffe's gloss now reads as follows: 'Locke says here [namely, in [D]] that some form of freedom is lacking in agents whose volitions are not determined by the (greatest) good'. The problem is that Yaffe also wants to claim that, in the second and subsequent editions, Locke thought it possible for an agent to possess full-fledged freedom even when her volitions are not determined by the (greatest) good, and that this happens when she has the power to bring it about that her volitions are so determined. To put it differently, though [D] is an addition to the second edition in which, by Yaffe's own lights, Locke changed his mind about the conditions of full-fledged free agency, Yaffe's own gloss of [D] represents Locke as holding the first edition view that he later came to reject.

Beyond the fact that Yaffe's gloss of [D] conflicts with other aspects of his interpretation, there is the question whether the

gloss is actually true. As to this, although the first part of [D] does indeed suggest (as Yaffe claims) that (full-fledged) freedom requires that one's volitions be determined by the greatest good, the second part of [D] states, as Locke's *reason* for taking this position, that 'the very end of our Freedom' is 'that we might attain the good we chuse' ('the good we chuse' being, I take it, the greatest good). So the second part of [D] should be read as stating that attaining the greatest good is the *end* of our volitions being determined by the greatest good. But on the most plausible understanding of 'end', as Locke used the term, this reading does not make much sense. For Locke, 'end' connotes (in Aristotelian parlance) 'final', rather than 'efficient', causation: the end of something (in the relevant sense) is its *point* or *purpose*, not its *result* or *effect*. But it would surely be proper to describe attaining the greatest good as the result or effect, and improper to describe it as the point or purpose, of one's volitions being determined by the greatest good.

There is, I believe, a better reading of [D] that makes sense of Locke's teleological use of 'end'. Suppose, contrary to Yaffe's hypothesis, that Locke equated freedom with freedom of action. On this view, one is a free agent exactly in so far as one has freedom of action with respect to one's actions, whether these be actions of the mind (such as volitions) or actions of the body. Now freedom of action with respect to one's volitions is the dual ability to will, or not to will, as one pleases. It follows that one who possesses this sort of freedom has (what Locke elsewhere describes as) the 'power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires' (II. xxi. 47). One might then ask whether there is any purpose or point to having this power of suspension. And to this question Locke provides an explicit answer in section 47, less than a page before the appearance of [D]:

To prevent [all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness; whilst we precipitate the determination of our *wills*, and engage too soon before due *Examination*] we have a power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire...

And the same point is repeated in sections 50 and 56:

That in this state of Ignorance we short-sighted Creatures might not mistake true felicity, we are endowed with a power to suspend any particular desire, and keep it from determining the *will*, and engaging us in action.

[A man has] a Power to suspend his determination: It was given him, that he might examine, and take care of his own Happiness, and look that he were not deceived.

The language here is explicitly teleological: it is *in order to* prevent, it is *so that* we might avoid, the mistakes that get in the way of achieving the greatest good (viz. happiness or true felicity) that we possess the power of suspension, itself a manifestation of our freedom (specifically, freedom of action with respect to our volitions). In other words, 'the very *end* of our freedom' is 'that we might attain the good we chuse'.<sup>3</sup>

'But', Yaffe might well reply, 'if Locke equates full-fledged freedom with freedom of action, why does he suggest in the first part of [D] that those whose volitions are not determined by the last result of their own minds are not free? Isn't it true for Locke, after all, that one can possess freedom of action no matter how one's volitions are determined?' This is a good

<sup>3</sup> In this, Locke agrees with Malebranche, who, in the *Treatise on nature and grace*, writes that 'the power of suspending judgment ... is the principle of our liberty' (Discourse III, Part I, Section 13) and that 'every man who is perfectly reasonable and perfectly free and who desires to be truly happy can and ought, upon the presence of any object which makes him feel pleasure, suspend his love and carefully examine whether this object is the true good' (Discourse III, Part I, Section 12).

question, and my answer to it is this. What Locke is trying to say, albeit somewhat archly and inexactly, in the first part of [D] is that someone whose volitions are determined by anything other than the last result of her own mind (after full examination of the question whether the course of action being considered is consistent with the attainment of happiness), though she may be free, is *as good as* unfree. In other words, someone who does not exercise her power of suspension in order to examine whether the prosecution of her desires conduces to her own happiness *might as well not be free*. For, as Locke would say, the whole *point* of being free is to exercise one's ability to resist one's desires, even if only for a time, in order to determine whether the results of fulfilling them are, on balance, positive or negative.

Yaffe might also dispute my claim that, for Locke, agents having the power of suspension is the result of their having freedom of action with respect to their volitions. For Yaffe claims that II. xxi. 23–5 contain two arguments for the conclusion that 'in a large class of cases, agents simply lack freedom of action with respect to their volitions' (p. 28). I would argue that this claim contains two mistakes. For, first, Locke uses sections 23–4 to argue, not for the claim that agents often lack freedom of action with respect to their individual volitions, but rather for the claim that agents often find themselves in the position of not being free to avoid willing one way or the other (i.e. for or against) a proposed course of action.<sup>4</sup> And, second, Locke uses section 25 to argue *for*, not *against*, the claim that agents are free with respect to their individual volitions. But given that

<sup>4</sup> For a useful and insightful discussion of this argument, see Vere Chappell, 'Locke on the freedom of the will', in *Locke's philosophy: Context and content*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers (Oxford 1994), pp. 101–21.



these two conclusions are defended elsewhere, I will not stop to pursue them further here.<sup>5</sup>

The fifth passage Yaffe tries to use to his advantage appears in section 71 (call it 'E'):

[E] The result of our judgment upon ... 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*.

Concerning this passage, Yaffe asks rhetorically (p. 44):

Again, why should Locke think that any kind of freedom is undermined in an agent whose volitions are determined inappropriately if he also believes that the only sort of freedom is freedom of action?

From which we are to conclude, I take it, that freedom of action is not the only sort of freedom, and that full-fledged freedom requires (in addition to freedom of action) that one's will be 'appropriately determined', i.e. determined by the greatest good.

Now it must be admitted that [E] strongly suggests that (full-fledged) freedom requires more than merely freedom of action. But it is important that [E] be read in context. And the immediate context in which [E] is embedded (namely, section 71, entitled 'Recapitulation') plainly suggests that Locke was a Hobbesian. For Locke states early in section 71 that '*Liberty* is a power to act or not to act according as the Mind directs' and then proceeds to repeat this very claim later in the section: '*Liberty*', he says, 'is placed in ... an *indifferency* of the operative Powers of [a] 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 *indifferency*; and as far as this *indifferency* reaches, a Man is free, and no farther'. Moreover, on the most straightforward reading of the latter passage, Locke is saying that (full-fledged) freedom does not extend beyond 'indifferency of the operative powers', that is, beyond freedom of action.

If we wish to read [E] in a way that brings it into harmony with the rest of the section in which it appears, we should understand Locke to be making a point similar to the one made in [D], namely that, if an agent's will were determined by anything other than her own desire guided by her own judgement, then she would be *as good as* unfree. For even if she were free, she would not be exercising her freedom (or, at least, not exercising it properly). And if the purpose of being free is to attain happiness, then one who does not exercise her freedom (or who does so improperly) is no nearer to fulfilling this purpose than those who lack freedom altogether.

The sixth passage on which Yaffe relies appears in section 47 (call it 'F'—emphasis added):

[F] [T]he mind having in most cases ... a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty Man has; and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness;... To prevent this, we have a power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire... 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*.

Concerning this passage, Yaffe claims that Locke is making two points: first, that there is an Elusive Something, namely 'extra conditions [over and above freedom of action] that an agent

<sup>5</sup> See my 'Locke on the freedom to will', *The Locke newsletter* 31 (2000), pp. 43–67.

must satisfy if she is to be a full-fledged free agent', and second, that the Elusive Something is 'what we (mistakenly) call free will' (p. 52).

I do not wish to argue that Yaffe's reading of [F] cannot be made to fit the text. But I do not believe that Yaffe's is the only plausible reading capable of making sense of [F]. The two points Locke wishes to make, it seems to me, are these: first, that the power of suspension is the 'source of all liberty', 'that in which an agent's liberty lies'; and second, that this power is what the phrase 'free-will' is commonly used to denote. But what does Locke *mean* in saying that the power of suspension is the source of all liberty?

I suggest that the answer to this question is to be found in section 50, ironically the very section from which Yaffe's book derives its title. In that section, Locke claims (via a rhetorical question) that it is not 'worth the Name of *Freedom* to be at liberty to play the Fool, and draw Shame and Misery upon a Man's self'. The point here, I take it, is that though the 'liberty to play the Fool', i.e. the liberty to act in ways likely to produce unhappiness, is a kind of freedom, it is not a kind of freedom 'worth the name'. The reason why this kind of freedom is not worth the name of 'freedom' is the familiar point that one who exercises the freedom to play the fool might as well not be free in any sense. For the purpose of freedom, the reason we have it in the first place, is to avoid foolishness and the unhappiness it causes. Relying on this interpretation of section 50, I propose that [F] be read as claiming, not that the power of suspension is the source of all liberty *whatsoever* (including the liberty to play the fool), but rather that this power is the source of all liberty *worth the name* (in the sense outlined above). I cannot prove that this is what Locke meant to say, but I believe that this suggestion has the advantage of providing part of a coherent framework for understanding Locke's various statements on the nature and worth of liberty in II. xxi.

Finally, Yaffe cites the following passage from section 51 (call it 'G') as 'another piece of evidence' for his interpretation (pp. 56-7):

[G] As therefore the highest perfection of intellectual nature, lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our *liberty*. The stronger ties, we have, to an unalterable pursuit of happiness in general, which is our greatest good, ... the more are we free from any necessary determination of our *will* to any particular action ... till we have duly examin'd, whether it has a tendency to, or be inconsistent with our real happiness...

According to Yaffe, the 'necessary foundation of our *liberty*' discussed in [G] is the Elusive Something, which [G] then characterizes as consisting in 'stronger ties ... to an unalterable pursuit of happiness in general', a condition described as freedom 'from any necessary determination of our will to any particular action', that is, as freedom of will. On Yaffe's view, then, [G] provides evidence for the following claims: first, that there is an Elusive Something; second, that we are wont to describe this Elusive Something as 'freedom of will'; and third, that this Elusive Something often (though, in the end, mistakenly) characterized as a kind of freedom belonging to the will (or to our volitions) is just the condition of possessing stronger ties to an unalterable pursuit of happiness.

Yet again, however, I do not see the need to read [G] as containing any commitment to the existence of an Elusive Something. Locke's first point in [G] is that the 'foundation of our liberty' is 'the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness'. And the relevant form of care, as we have seen, involves the exercise of the power of suspension, for it is the exercise of this power (and no other) that makes it possible for us to learn which course of action is most likely to produce,

and which course of action is least likely to produce, the greatest good. Thus, Locke's first point reduces to the claim that the power of suspension is the 'foundation of our liberty', a claim reminiscent of the first claim extracted from [F], namely that this power is the 'source of all liberty'. And I propose, very simply, that the first part of [G] be read as making precisely the same point as the first part of [F]: that is, that the power of suspension is the 'foundation' of all liberty *worth the name*.

As to the second part of [G], I do not read Locke as claiming that freedom consists (even partly) in 'stronger ties ... to an unalterable pursuit of happiness', where these 'stronger ties' are interpreted as involving determination of volition by happiness or the power to bring about the determination of volition by happiness. Rather, I read him as saying that the volitions of an agent who is strongly tied, in the sense of being strongly *committed*, to pursuing happiness will not be determined to any particular action until she has completed her examination of whether this action will be more or less likely to contribute to her happiness. What makes this possible, of course, is the fact that the agent has the power of suspension.

My main contention, then, is that it is possible (indeed, desirable) to read Locke as articulating, filling in, and deepening Hobbes's analysis of freedom. Like Hobbes, Locke thought that freedom consists in freedom of action, viz. the absence of impediments to the prosecution of our volitions.<sup>6</sup> Locke supplemented this analysis with an account of what determines our volitions and (in the second and subsequent editions) an account

<sup>6</sup> Note that Descartes and Malebranche, by whom Locke was profoundly influenced (even as he disagreed with many of their doctrines), were also Hobbesians (or near-Hobbesians). Consider that Descartes defines 'freedom of choice' as 'our ability to do or not do something' in the Fourth Meditation (AT 7:57), and Malebranche defines 'liberty' as 'the power of loving or not loving particular goods' in the *Treatise on nature and grace* (Discourse III, Part I, Section 3).

of the purpose served by the possession of freedom. Locke changed his mind about what determines our volitions (in response to an objection of Molyneux's), but not his definition of freedom, which remained constant over time. To my mind, Yaffe's mistake is to read passages designed to answer one question ('the Question, what is it determines the Will'—II. xxi. 29) as answering another (the question, what is liberty). In the end, this book, its numerous virtues notwithstanding, does not provide sufficient textual support for the claim that Locke accepted Bramhall's contention that (full-fledged) freedom requires something over and above freedom of action.<sup>7</sup>

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