

Arnauld, Power, and the Fallibility of Infallible Determination

Eric Stencil and Julie Walsh

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Abstract

Antoine Arnauld is well known as a passionate defender of Jansenism, specifically Jansen's view on the relation between freedom and grace. Jansen and, early in his career Arnauld, advance compatibilist views of human freedom. The heart of their theories is that salvation depends on *both* the irresistible grace of God *and* the free acts of created things. Yet, in Arnauld's mature writings, his position on freedom seems to undergo a significant shift. And, by 1689, his account of freedom no longer seems Jansenist. In this paper, we offer an interpretation of Arnauld's mature view on freedom, with a focus on his claim that freedom requires a "power to the opposite." In order to see what he means by this, we look to several under-examined texts in his corpus for clues about how he understands the related topics of "infallible determination," habit, and *primo-primi motus*. We argue that Arnauld's mature view on freedom should be understood as libertarian.

Body of Paper

Antoine Arnauld is well known as a passionate defender of Jansenism, specifically Jansen's view on the relation between freedom and grace. In works like *Seconde apologie pour Jansénius* (1645), Arnauld defends the central elements of the Jansenist view on human freedom, grace, and salvation. Most importantly, Jansen and, early in his career Arnauld, take salvation to depend on *both* the irresistible grace of God *and* the free acts of created things.¹ The view, in short, is that when an agent performs a meritorious act, it

is God who psychologically determines the agent to perform the act. These meritorious acts, while determined by God, are nevertheless taken to be free. This position is thus a kind of compatibilism.²

What is less often noted is that around 1690 Arnauld's position on freedom shifts.³ The essence of this shift is Arnauld's appeal to two claims that seem to be in tension. First, he claims that freedom involves a "power to the opposite." Second, he claims that an agent is free even if she is "infallibly determined" to act as she did from a "vicious habit" or a "perverse desire." It is *prima facie* hard to see how an agent can retain the "power to the opposite" while being infallibly determined to one action. Among the few commentators who have addressed Arnauld's late view, there is interpretative disagreement about how to make these two claims consistent. Elmar Kremer argues that Arnauld's late view is closer to libertarianism than to compatibilism. For Kremer, this view requires that a free agent have a genuine ability to refrain from the action in question (1994, 223-24). Robert Sleight and Cyrille Michon disagree, and argue that Arnauld's late view remains compatibilist. For Sleight, Arnauld thinks that an agent's acting freely is consistent with her being fully caused to will a particular action (1994, 171-74).⁴ On Michon's view, while Arnauld's late view is distinct from Jansenist-style compatibilism due to its requirement of the power to do otherwise, this power seems to be compatible both with an agent being determined by some kind of [238] necessity and having its causal source outside the agent herself (2013, 271-79).⁵ The aim of this paper is to better understand how Arnauld sees the connection between freedom, power, and determination. To do so, we must broaden the scope of textual analysis of Arnauld's writing in the early 1690s beyond that of these commentators.

The text in which Arnauld most fully discusses his mature account of freedom and the one that he himself recommends in several letters, is *Humanae libertatis notio* (hereafter *De Libertate*). It is thus with Arnauld's letters and *De Libertate* that we start our discussion in (1), with an eye to understanding how Arnauld takes the "power to the opposite" and "infallible determination" to be compatible. But while *De Libertate* contains Arnauld's most extended discussion of these elements of his view, this text does not answer all the questions raised by the complicated theory of freedom therein. More precisely, Arnauld's discussion there of habit and the scholastic notion of *primo-primi motus* raises the related questions of how to understand the difference between necessary and non-necessary actions and whether habitual actions or actions caused by perverse desires are to be understood as necessary. To answer them, we must look to several rarely considered texts from the early 1690s where Arnauld addresses these topics.⁶

One such set of texts follows Arnauld's debate with fellow Jansenist and erstwhile collaborator Pierre Nicole concerning general grace—a debate eventually joined by Hilarion Monnier, Gomarus Huygens, and François Lamy. Relying on a key text from this debate, *Écrit du pouvoir physique* (1691) (hereafter *Écrit*) in (2) we develop Arnauld's account of power and argue that "the power to the opposite" requires that other options are psychologically available to the agent. We focus on Arnauld's discussion of various types of impossibility. Arnauld's claim that an agent retains the power to the opposite even when she is infallibly determined to sin from a vicious habit leads us to consider how he understands habit formation in (3) where our key text is *Défense abrégée de l'Écrit géométrique* (1691) (hereafter *Défense*), also from this debate with Nicole. We argue that Arnauld's account of habit allows us to see how acts that are both

in fact infallible—because they are the result of deeply engrained habits, can also be freely done—because the habit does not, in and of itself, entail the action. With Arnauld’s definitions of power and habit in hand, we are in position to turn, in (4), to another of Arnauld’s controversies—against the Jesuits over philosophical sin. We return to the notion of the *primo-primi motus* and its connection to what we call “the moving will” and offer an explanation for why Arnauld refers to them at the end of *De Libertate*. Our key text here is *Nouvelle Hérésie dans la morale, touchant le péché philosophique dénoncée au Pape et aux Évêques, aux Princes et aux Magistrat* (1690) (hereafter *Hérésie*). [239] We conclude, in (5), by arguing that this larger perspective shows that Arnauld’s mature view should be understood as libertarian, contra Sleigh and Michon. Our reading complements and goes beyond Kremer’s by showing the theoretical framework that allows Arnauld to claim what he does about freedom with respect to power, habit and the *primo-primi motus*.

1. “Power to the opposite”

At the outset of the 1690s, Arnauld begins to recommend his little treatise on freedom to his correspondents. In a letter to Du Vaucel⁷ in August 1691, he writes:

I send you the last part of my little book on freedom, of which I sent you the first part the last time I wrote. I only wrote it after having shown in another text, by a large number of passages from Saint Thomas in his *Summa*, that the real position of this saint is: 1) that the true notion of freedom is to say that it is a *potestas, or facultas ad opposita*; which is much better than the word ‘indifference,’ which seems to signal an equal propensity to one side and to the other, and to be contrary to *determination*; by contrast we easily understand that, no matter how determined I am not to go naked into the street, I nevertheless have the power to do it, and that I would do it if I wanted to. (OA 3 364-65)⁸

In another letter of June 1692, Arnauld recommends the same treatise to Vuillaret, saying “I find great advantages in this explanation of liberty” (OA 3 498). He continues, stating five advantages of the Thomistic view, of which one is especially relevant:

[I]t makes sense of why freedom from coercion is not enough to merit and to demerit, but also requires freedom from necessity; since this must be understood [as freedom] from natural necessity whereby the will is determined to one thing: hence it happens that it is not the case that we freely will to be happy, because we are determined to happiness by a natural will. (OA 3 498)

The Latin text to which Arnauld refers in these letters is *De Libertate*, likely penned in 1689 (OA 10 XXIX).⁹ Arnauld’s identification of Aquinas as inspiration for his late view on freedom demands further analysis. Given the ambiguous nature of Aquinas’s position on freedom, such analysis is beyond the scope of our current discussion. We thus bracket the question of the extent of the Thomism found in Arnauld’s late view and focus here on the view itself.¹⁰

In the letter to Du Vaucel, Arnauld indicates that the “power to the opposite” is perfectly consistent with being determined in some sense [240] of determined. Indeed, Arnauld seems to say that while he is determined not to go naked into the street, he nevertheless retains the power to do it. Arnauld rejects the idea that freedom of indifference, understood as having an “equal propensity” to either perform or refrain from performing an action, is necessary for freedom.¹¹ He states that indifference should be contrasted to “determination” and specifically denies that the “power to the opposite” is to be contrasted with “determination.” Yet, it is not immediately clear what exactly Arnauld means by “determined.”

There seem to be two ways to take Arnauld’s use of “determination,” one suggestive of a compatibilist view and one of a libertarian view. On the former reading,

Arnauld uses “determination” to mean “fully caused.” This would suggest that the “power to the opposite” is a counterfactual power of some kind. This power can be thought of as something like Hume’s later account where we understand that some agent could go outside naked had her desires, inclinations, etc. been otherwise. In other words, as Hume puts it, freedom is “*a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may*” (*Enquiry*, section VIII, paragraph 23). On this understanding of *power*, Arnauld would mean that while an agent is fully causally determined to refrain from running naked into the street, had she wanted to, she could have, but only in the counterfactual sense that *if she wanted to*, she could. Another way of putting this point is suggested by Sleigh: an agent can be fully determined to will some volition v, while simultaneously retaining the power to will not-v (1996, 168).¹² So, an agent A has the counterfactual power to will v at T1 even if A is determined to will not-v. The agent retains a counterfactual power because had A wanted to v at T1, A could have willed v; the power itself is grounded in the fact that had the situation been different, A would have acted differently.

On the libertarian reading, Arnauld might be taking “determination” to mean “causally influenced.” “The power to the opposite” would then require that at the very moment of the event in question, both options are psychologically available to the agent.¹³ An action is psychologically available to an agent on this account, only if no matter how much causal push she has, on account of her beliefs and desires, not to go outside naked, it is simultaneously in her power psychologically (that is, factually and not merely counterfactually) to act against her dominant beliefs and desires.¹⁴ On this

understanding of “power to the opposite,” A has the power to will v at T1, just in case at T1, not-v was actually causally and psychologically available to A. On this account of power, which we call a “factual power,” for A to have the power to will not-v, it must be the case that A could actually or in fact will not-v while holding fixed all of the circumstances (character, reasons, beliefs, etc.) at T1. The [241] power is grounded in the fact that holding fixed everything true of the situation in which the agent wills, either volition is open to the agent. Which meaning of *determination* Arnauld intends is not obvious from his correspondence. It will emerge below, however, that we take the indeterminist reading to be correct.

Another wrinkle in the account is Arnauld’s mention of “natural necessity” in the letter to Vuillaret, saying that to act freely is to be free from natural necessity. This at least suggests that other kinds of necessity are perfectly consistent with freedom. To begin to get a better sense of how Arnauld understands the connection between natural necessity, freedom, determination, and the “power to the opposite,” we turn to *De Libertate* itself.

In *De Libertate*, Arnauld writes that in order to freely will some thing T, two requirements must be met: an agent must (a) will T because she wants T, and (b) the agent must *at the same time* have the power to will the opposite; not-T. Arnauld claims that an agent *is not free* (does *not* have the power to will the opposite) when she wills something on account of the “necessity of her nature”—for example when she assents to clear and distinct ideas or when she loves the good in general. It is not psychologically available to any agent to not assent to a clear and distinct idea (when it is so perceived) or to not love the good in general. Yet, Arnauld’s account is complicated by the fact that he

states that an agent *is* free (has the power to will the opposite) even if she is infallibly determined (*quantumvis infallibilis sit determination*) to sin by a vicious habit (*vitioso habitu*) (OA 10 615-16).¹⁵ Central to a proper understanding of Arnauld's account of freedom is what he takes acting with infallible determination to be, and how this is different from acting from natural necessity. To answer this question we must look at the broader context of his view.

De Libertate begins with a definition of the soul as the substance that thinks. Arnauld explains that the soul can be considered in two ways: through itself and through those things that "are attributed to it insofar as it is united to a body" (OA 10 614).¹⁶ The soul in itself possesses two faculties: the understanding and the will. Each of these faculties has its own proper object. The object of the understanding is the true and the object of the will is the good (OA 10 614).¹⁷ So, he argues:

It follows that there are some objects to which the intellect is naturally determined to give its consent; and that there are others to which the will is naturally determined to want and to love. (OA 10 615)¹⁸

For our purposes, Arnauld's comments on the will are most relevant. He tells us that the will is naturally determined to the good.¹⁹ Arnauld explains that if one finds some good that "cannot be understood except as good...the soul is naturally determined to will and love it" (OA 10 [242] 615).²⁰ In other words, if someone conceives of something as entirely good, then one cannot resist loving it.²¹ The will is not free in these cases because it does not have the "power to the opposite" with respect to that thing. Arnauld nuances this claim in the following passage:

The soul wills and loves freely all those things that we do not desire for themselves. To desire to be happy is the only thing that we desire for itself and outside of this love of beatitude in general, we desire nothing for itself, of the

things that we desire in this life with the light and attention of reason. For the only thing to which the soul is naturally determined is to want in general to be happy; and it is by this same desire for beatitude that it is determined to all other objects. (OA 10 615)²²

Here, Arnauld underlines the fact that an agent's desire for happiness is not free—as human beings we are utterly, naturally determined to desire happiness. But every other object of desire is not desired for itself and is thus not something to which we are naturally determined. All other objects of desire, then, fall short of this natural determination. We thus possess the “power to the opposite” with respect to them since it is psychologically available to the agent to refrain from desiring them.

Arnauld continues:

However infallible the determination is by which the will determines itself with the attention of its reason, to objects to which it is not naturally determined, freedom suffers no hindrance, because this infallible determination does not impede that the mind wills because it wills and by that fact itself is the master of its action. (OA 10 615)²³

This is a difficult passage to parse. Arnauld helpfully provides some examples to clarify his use of “infallibly.” He considers two cases where people act “infallibly” and yet still seem to act freely. First, he offers the case of a prince who is in love with a woman for whom he has a passion that he will infallibly satisfy. Second, he describes a cruel and vindictive king who has been offended by one of his subjects. Arnauld claims that this king will infallibly ruin the offending subject (OA 10 616).²⁴ These examples are intended to show that while anyone could predict that the prince will satisfy his lust, or that the king will ruin his subject, no one would claim that the prince does not, at the same time, hold the power to be chaste, or the king, the power to ignore his subject's offense. Arnauld takes these cases as illustrations of agents freely sinning despite their

sins being infallibly determined by a vicious habit or a perverse desire. Presumably, the relevant contrast here is with an action that is determined by a natural determination. Yet, if we are to understand that the prince and king act in the infallible ways that they do while nevertheless retaining the “power to the opposite,” the precise nature of [243] this power remains unclear. Sleigh, for example, suggests that Arnauld is rejecting the claim that an agent can only be free if her actions are not brought about by the determining cause (1996, 170-172).²⁵ On Sleigh’s view, then, Arnauld would endorse the model of counterfactual power. Kremer suggests that Arnauld takes freedom to be consistent with psychological determination, and that he treats “infallible determination” as a matter of degree (2012, 6.5).

There are two *prima facie* reasons for treating “infallible” as a matter of degree.²⁶ First, as noted by Kremer, Arnauld’s language suggests it (2012, 6.5). In the above passage, Arnauld writes “however infallible [*quantumvis infallibilis*],” suggesting that there is an extent to which the infallibility obtains. He uses similar language in the letter to Du Vaucel: “no matter how determined I am not to go naked [*quelque déterminé que*]...” Indeed, given Arnauld’s claim that his mature view is inspired by Aquinas, it is worth noting that Aquinas’s use of *infallibilis* suggests that it is a matter of degree—*infallibilis* is to be taken as something like “liable” but is in no way synonymous with “absolutely” or “categorically.”²⁷

Second, the relationship between natural necessity and infallible determination suggests it. As explained above, Arnauld denies that actions done from natural necessity are free and cites the reason that “the will is determined to one thing.” If being determined by one thing undermines the freedom of the will in the case of natural

necessity, this suggests that in cases of freedom, the will would not be determined to one thing. Recall that to act by natural necessity is for the will to take something as good just in case it cannot understand the thing as anything other than good. But, what does Arnauld mean when he says that the will “cannot understand” something as anything other than good? For, it is possible that the prince who is governed by his lust and the king who is governed by his pride conceive of the objects of their desires under the aspect of the good. The question is whether they are in an epistemic position to understand those objects in some other way. For, if an agent like the king is determined to act according to his pride, it does seem that his will is in fact determined to one thing.

An answer begins to emerge when Arnauld states that the soul acts with freedom only when it acts under conditions where it is simultaneously capable of “two opposing motions, that it is mistress [*maitresse/domina*] of its own action and moves itself by its proper inclination” (OA 10 624).²⁸ Arnauld’s claim that one needs to be able to execute “two opposing motions” in order to be free supports the factual reading of power. On the factual reading, when presented with reasons for action at T1, the will has (at least) the options to v or not-v and can choose either one without any other change in circumstance—it is simultaneously capable [244] of either motion. On the counterfactual reading of power, the will retains the power to two opposing motions in the sense that despite its being determined to one thing, it retains an intrinsic power to will otherwise. In order for the capacity to be realized, circumstances around the event would need to be otherwise.

He continues:

This is why the first movements called *primo-primi*, that are not able to merit or demerit, cannot be used as examples of the actions of the will; because while they

are exempt from constraint, they are not exempt from necessity: for these acts, as long as they are *primo-primi*, are not acts of the will, but belong to the soul insofar as it is united to the body. (OA 10 624)²⁹

This appeal to *primo-primi motus* is intriguing. It indicates that Arnauld is concerned to take a side in the polemic among medieval theologians about the sinfulness of the appetitive faculty and its passions. As Arnauld indicates, these “first movements” are necessary acts that result from the connection of the soul to the body. We can take him to mean that these acts are the passions. Importantly, the movements of the passions do not include an act of will. This is why Arnauld emphasizes that they “cannot be used as examples” of willings. This reference to *primo-primi motus* at least suggests one way to see what Arnauld means by “cannot understand.” He might be stating that reflection on the *primo-primi* is required in order to judge whether an act is free. The judgment that reveals that an object cannot be conceived as wholly good reveals that we have the “power to the opposite” with respect to it. The prince and the king may well be blocked (in some sense) from seeing the difference now that their sinful habits are entrenched. But, one supposes, there was a time when they could and, importantly, that they still could if they tried. It is thus the consent to these first movements that is sinful, not the movements themselves.³⁰

We suggest that the right way to read Arnauld’s view in *De Libertate* is that when he claims that an agent is free only if she has the “power to the opposite” he means that she must be psychologically able to will otherwise with a factual power. Arnauld’s contrast between natural necessity and infallible necessity is primarily a distinction between objects that can be seen as nothing but good, and objects that can be seen as something other than good.³¹ But while primarily a distinction between the objects of the

will, we suggest that a related key difference between natural necessity and infallible necessity has to do with motivation. Volitions determined by natural necessity are psychologically determined; volitions determined by infallible necessity are psychologically motivated, but not determined. One key piece of evidence for this [245] is that when Arnauld discusses infallibility and uses expressions such as “however infallible” he intends that no matter how likely, probable or predictable a volition, it is still in the agent’s power to not will that thing. His discussion of the *primo-primi motus* shows that while the union between soul and body gives rise to many vicious desires that serve as sparks for future volitions, no matter how strong or “infallible” the “first movement,” if the object is anything other than beatitude, an agent is not naturally determined to it.

To defend this reading of *De Libertate*, we first consider Arnauld’s account of the modality of freedom, which allows us to see the kind of power conferred on the “power to the opposite.” We then turn to Arnauld’s account of habit and show that one retains the power to the opposite in cases of entrenched habits. Finally, we address Arnauld’s understanding of the *primo-primi motus* and what we call the “moving will,” and show that no matter how deeply entrenched the body’s habits, the soul retains the ability to refrain from sinning.

2. The Modality of Freedom

In this section and the next, we deal with works that emerge from Arnauld’s debate with Pierre Nicole over general grace (OA 10 XIX-XXIX).³² In the *Écrit*, written in response to Nicole’s *Nature et fondements de la grâce générale*, Arnauld takes issue

with Nicole's definition of physical power (*pouvoir physique*).³³ While physical power and impotence and their relationship to general grace do not concern us here, the discussion reveals an important element of Arnauld's view. We are particularly interested in his description of five ways to understand "impossibility" (OA 10 491).³⁴ He begins with "absolute impossibility:"

1. A triangle can exist without its interior angles summing to 180 degrees.

This is a sort of logical possibility; Arnauld explicitly relates this type of possibility to contradictions. He then gives three examples of "physical/natural" impossibilities:

2. To sit in a hot furnace without being burned.
3. To run with two broken legs.
4. To read without any light.

Here, (2) seems to relate to the impossibility of violating physical laws, (3) to the impossibility of exercising a power when one lacks the physical condition necessary for its use, and (4) to the impossibility of exercising a power when one lacks an external condition necessary for its use. [246]

Finally, Arnauld addresses impossibility with respect to the will:

5. A sage would decide to cut off his nose without having a good reason. (OA 10 491-92)³⁵

Arnauld explains that when the sage refuses to resolve to maim himself, it is inexact to say that he is in a state of impossibility with respect to *power*. Rather, the sage is in a state of impossibility with respect to *willing*. Arnauld writes: "This wise man could resolve, if he wished, to cut off his nose; but he will never want [to do] this, unless he had some particular reason to do so" (OA 10 492).

So, this case does not really illustrate a kind of impossibility, but rather an impotence that is a consequent of a lack of willing or volition on the part of the agent. For Arnauld, then, there cannot be a *physical* impotence in human beings with respect to doing the good—only a *voluntary* impotence. What is noteworthy in this case is that Arnauld *only* claims that it is impossible that the sage would choose to cut off his nose without having a good reason. He does not claim here that the sage could not cut off his nose without *sufficient* reason. This leaves possible the state of affairs where a sage has good reason to cut off his nose and other good reasons not to. The will, while a faculty that works from reasons, has the ability to act on whichever reasons it chooses. It is important that the agent in this example is a wise man. Arnauld seems to want to convey that while the sage retains the power to the opposite, in virtue of being wise he will not will against his good reasons. All agents act from reasons—wise men from good reasons, princes from lascivious reasons, kings from prideful reasons—but they all retain the factual power to act from other synchronic reasons.

Arnauld continues, stating that he agrees with Nicole’s view that even when agents are infallibly determined to follow their dominant desire, they know, by an inner sensation, that they retain the power to do the opposite [*pouvoir de faire le contraire*] (OA 10 497).³⁶ Arnauld concludes that they are in agreement that “the nature of our freedom is to be, as Saint Thomas says, *facultas ad opposita*, and that this definition does not need proof; because each of us is persuaded of it by an inner conviction” (OA 10 497). This means that when we act and simultaneously feel that we could determine ourselves to the opposite, we retain the power to the opposite. When we do not feel that we could determine ourselves the other way, we do not retain this power (OA 10 498).

We fail to retain this power in only one instance: the desire to be happy. There is no sense in which we can desire to be unhappy. [247]

Nevertheless, it sometimes seems as though agents act as though they are mechanically led to act, indicating that they perhaps are not aware of this inner conviction. This happens when they perform actions consistent with predictable behaviors. We thus turn now to Arnauld's discussion of habit.

3. Habit Formation

In Arnauld's initial treatment of Nicole's account of grace, *Écrit géométrique de la grâce générale*, he attacks Nicole's claim that one can receive divine illumination and not be aware of it. Nicole responds directly to this work in a section of *Traité de la grâce générale, Où l'on examine l'Écrit Géométrique contre la grâce générale* (GG 1 74-132). Arnauld in turn responds to Nicole's rebuttal with his *Défense*. Therein, in the midst of a discussion of when thoughts can be *imperceptible* and when they cannot, Arnauld considers habits and habit formation. He writes:

What we do as a result of a long and deeply engrained [*fort confirmée*] habit is done either without thinking or by unconscious thoughts [*pensées imperceptibles*]. If I recite a psalm by heart, and if, having started it, I get distracted, I can continue to the end without thinking about it, or by thinking about it only unconsciously [*n'y pensant qu'imperceptiblement*]. It is the same in all arts; when we do them expertly [*en perfection*] we do them almost without thinking, or only thinking of them in an unconscious way...It is not at all like this when we learn these arts. A child, for example, cannot learn to write if he does not have conscious thoughts of the way to form each character, and it would be ridiculous to imagine that he could know how to form each character by unconscious thoughts. But when he has learned the habit of writing well, he does not think of the formation of each letter, or only thinks of it in an unconscious way. Only if, after being accustomed to writing in a certain way, he wants to disguise his handwriting so that it is unrecognizable and is taken for the hand of someone else, he will no longer be

able to write with only unconscious thoughts, he will certainly need conscious thoughts. (OA 10 547, emphasis ours)³⁷

Arnauld continues with a connection of this general account of habit formation to moral considerations:

In Morals, it is the same thing for dominant passions. Unconscious thoughts can be sufficient when we do no more than follow them: but normally it takes very conscious thoughts to act against this passion. The slightest little thought of a big reward without risk, suffices for a miser to put his will in a state of wanting it. But he would need a very strong and conscious one [namely, thought] to dispose himself to do the very opposite of what misers do. (OA 10 547) [248]

Notice that Arnauld suggests that the formation of moral habits follows the same mechanism as the formation of the habit of writing. In both cases, great effort and attention are needed to behave against habit. We require, according to Arnauld, conscious thought. Arnauld's claim that habitual acts need not always determine action, as in the case of the miser who decides against miserly action, is very important for our analysis of his view of freedom. To see why, we return to the cases from *De Libertate*: the king's habitual cruelty and the prince's habitual indulgence. Arnauld's account of habit reveals that an act that is "infallibly determined" by a vicious habit is not inconsistent with a factual psychological "power to the opposite." When the king acts to ruin his subject, or the prince acts to satisfy his lust, they are acting from habits. As suggested by Arnauld's description of the effort needed to alter one's handwriting, habits do not necessitate action, they simply allow actions to be done with very little thought. Following this line of reasoning, Arnauld would say that it is still in the king's power to reflect on his desire to protect his pride and not ruin his subject. Likewise, it is still in the power of the prince to reflect on his honor and not pursue the object of his desire. The engrained nature of the habit makes acting in these ways extremely likely and highly predictable, but does not

undermine the “power to the opposite.” Just like the letter writer who can, with conscious thought, alter her hand, the king and prince can alter their habits and act against them no matter how strongly the habitual desires are felt. The relation between desires and assenting to action leads directly to our next topic: the “moving will” and *primo-primi motus*.

4. The Moving Will

An interesting feature of Arnauld’s late view is his more philosophical approach to his treatment of grace and freedom. Nevertheless, Arnauld’s primary concern with these subjects remains theological, and he adds important details to his view, namely about an agent’s ability to act against habit, in his engagement with the Jesuits over the appropriate definition of sin. The locus of this debate is philosophical sin. The Jesuits claim that there is a difference between theological and philosophical sin. For theological sin to occur, an agent must do something knowing, at the moment of execution, that the act is against God’s will. This sin deserves eternal damnation. For philosophical sin to occur, an agent must do something knowing, at the moment of execution, that the act is against natural morality, but not that it is against God’s will. This sin deserves moral blame but only finite punishment.³⁸ Arnauld writes five “denunciations” of this view in his *Hérésie*. The denunciations focus on Arnauld’s disagreement with how he interprets this Jesuit principle: that to forget God while sinning is to save oneself from damnation (OA 31 4).³⁹ [249]

In order to see how this discussion relates to Arnauld’s view of freedom, we engage with a real-life example that he uses to illustrate the absurdity of the Jesuit

position. This example tells of a person who sins against God without being consciously aware that they are sinning. It is intended to show that the Jesuit's distinction ought to be rejected in the face of having to describe the behaviors in the example as falling short of impiety.

The example comes from a text of M. l'Abbé de la Trappe from 1690. There, the abbé talks about the death of one of his monks, Dom Muce, a true penitent. Arnauld quotes from the abbé's text, which describes Dom Muce as having lived his life without knowledge or fear of God until he was called to the monastery. He was a cruel soldier, debauched, violent, and guided by his passions. At his lowest point, he became aware of a dim light of good that he did not recognize. He decided to change his habits in order to change his morals [*moeurs*]. He eventually chanced upon a parson who told him of la Trappe monastery. As the story goes, at the description of the monastery, the soldier felt fire pierce his heart. He knew that it was at la Trappe that God wanted him to do penitence for his sins. When he arrived, he freely gave a public confession, committed himself to mortifying his soul and his senses, and passed his time on his knees weeping and feeling the pain of his crimes (OA 31 312).

The Jesuits, according to Arnauld, would have to say that this "grenadier" only committed philosophical sins. So, they would have to say that the abbé was wrong to demand penitence from him because:

Having committed the vast majority [of his crimes] by being carried way by his passions, and by the furious inclination of his bad habits, he [the abbé] is not assured that he [soldier] had enough freedom to commit formal [namely, theological] sins, which are the only kind that God finds blameworthy [les seuls que Dieu impute]." (OA 31 315)

The example of Dom Muce offers a good case to show how the separate elements of Arnauld's view work together. We contend that the various elements of Arnauld's view described above, combined with Arnauld's account of Muce's conversion provide strong evidence for a libertarian reading of Arnauld. Arnauld would say that Muce had formed a habitual way of behaving involving his consent to vicious desires through many years of sinful behavior. As such, he was infallibly determined to act from his bad habits. Despite Muce's upbringing, Arnauld still thinks that he sinned theologically against God. Muce's behavior was still free, he still consented, albeit with, to use Arnauld's terminology, unconscious thought.

In order to see why Arnauld's explanation of Muce's behavior suggests his commitment to indeterminism, note that in this passage, being "carried away" by one's habits is juxtaposed with having "enough freedom to commit formal sins." Even though Muce was carried away by his passions, [250] Arnauld seems to think the light of which Muce became aware was not a new addition to his reasons for acting. As we argued above, Arnauld's discussion of habit suggests that he considers actions done from long engrained habits as done with little thought. Acting against an engrained habit, however, requires conscious thought. Arnauld suggests that after attending to the good Muce willed to act against his bad habit. Muce used his power to the opposite to will against his infallible determination. On our reading, then, Muce retained the factual power to bring conscious thoughts to the fore in order to factually act contrary to his habits and passions throughout all of his deplorable actions. In other words, Muce-as-grendier acted from only the vicious reasons in his constellation of reasons for acting. Muce was continually

consenting to his primo-primi motus and failing to act from other available reasons. This is what makes his sin is damnable.

The model of counterfactual “power to the opposite,” would give a different account of the conversion. On this model, Muce would retain enough freedom to commit theological sin if he retained the power to act if he wished otherwise—his will would be moved if he so wished. But in this case, some other feature of Muce’s situation would need to be altered in order to see his sin as theological, namely, some additional belief, opinion, idea, that determined Muce to act on the good. By contrast, we argue that Muce-as-penitent acted from some non-vicious reason from his constellation of reasons—the dim light of good. Muce exercised his power to the opposite when he chose to act on this reason. On this model, his will was factual or moving. Following this choice, and in an effort to change his habits, he brought conscious thoughts to the fore in his acts of penitence. We suggest that there was no other change in Muce’s character, beliefs, or circumstances that determined him to overcome his vicious habit, rather, he overcame his habit through an act of will. Despite being infallibly determined to continually sin by vicious habits and perverse desires, Muce’s life of sin is a theological sin against God for the very reason that irrespective of all other aspects of his personal history and present situation, he still had the power to the opposite; a power he finally exercised.

5. Conclusion

Arnauld’s most thorough and explicit account of his mature view of freedom occurs in *De Libertate*. We have argued that the account elaborated in this text, in combination with other late texts is consistent with what we have called the factual

account of the power to the opposite. We supported this reading by looking to Arnauld's *Écrit* where he claims that we are free to act otherwise when we are not determined by natural necessity. While the will may require reasons to act, it does not require [251] fully determining reasons. Free acts, for Arnauld, can be determined in the sense of being causally influenced by reasons, or desires, but the will retains the power to choose on which to act. This led us to Arnauld's account of habit which states that an agent is free even if infallibly determined to sin by a vicious habit. We argued that "infallibly" should be interpreted as coming in matters of degree and further established this by looking to Arnauld's *Défense*. There he claims habits are formed or learned through repeated activity and when these habits are forming, they require active and conscious thought. Once habits have been engrained, they "infallibly" determine action because they no longer demand conscious reflection on the action in question. But, agents always retain the power to act against habit. Finally, this led to a consideration of Arnauld's mention of the *primo-primi motus*. We looked to Arnauld's discussion of Dom Muce in *Hérésie* to show that sins committed without conscious thought ought to be considered just as sinful as those that are. The fact that we are not applying conscious thought to our actions does not absolve us from sin. That Arnauld considers Muce's sins to be theological shows that while consent to *primo-primi motus* might become habitual and thus unconscious or subconscious, they are still free.

In his letters, Arnauld is explicit about his preference for the Thomistic account in part because it is better able to account for merit and demerit. On his view, acting free from coercion is not enough. Acts done from "natural necessity whereby the will is determined to one thing" are not free (OA 3 498). This, we argue, is the essence of the

change. Arnauld's early Jansenist view allows free actions to be fully determined, while his mature view requires the power to the opposite—a power that demands that the will not be determined to one thing. Thus, Arnauld's mature view of freedom is libertarian, stipulating that a necessary condition for free action is the factual power to act from more than one reason.⁴⁰

Utah Valley University

Wellesley College

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¹ Arnauld sometime writes as if he was “obligated” to defend Jansen, e.g., the letter to Vuillaret cited below (OA 3 498). The *Seconde apologie pour Jansénius* is in OA 17 1-640.

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² Compatibilism is often attributed to Arnauld’s early view. See, for example, Pyle (2003, 227); Michon (2013, 278). On Jansenism, see Laporte (1951, 88-106); Sedgwick (1977); Nadler (1998); Sleigh (1990, 26-31).

³ Notable exceptions include: Kremer (1994), Sleigh (1996), Laporte (1922, X–XI), and Michon (2013).

⁴ Sleigh gives his conclusion with some hesitation, noting that there are some textual reasons to think that Arnauld cannot be committed to causal compatibilism (1996, 174).

⁵ See also Kilcullen (1988b, 206).

⁶ The three texts we discuss are rarely mentioned by other commentators and have not been treated together. For the mentions, see Kremer (1994, 223, 226); Michon (2013, 275-76).

⁷ For more on Du Vaucel, see Nadler (1988, 574-77).

⁸ See also OA 3 419-20 and Moreau’s discussion at TP 231. The other text to which Arnauld refers is *Disquisitio utrum juxta Sanctam Thomam in Sua Summa amor beatificus sit liber ea libertate quam Theologi vocant a necessitate*, OA 10 625-40, see also TP 283, fn. 24 and Kremer (1994 235, fn. 27). With the exception of text from *Summa Theologica*, all translations from the Latin and from the French are our own.

⁹ See also TP 228.

¹⁰ For some discussion of Arnauld’s Thomism issue, see Sleigh (1990, 29-30); Sleigh (1996, 169-73); Michon (2013). For more on Aquinas’s view see Stump (2003, Chapter 9); Williams (2012).

¹¹ Note that this usage of “freedom of indifference” is also Descartes’s. See Meditation IV, AT VII 57–58/ CSM II 40.

¹² See also Sections I and III in their entirety.

¹³ On this reading Arnauld holds an indeterminism about psychology where prior states do not necessitate future states. This is distinct from freedom of indifference, which obtains only when there are no causal differences between doing and refraining from doing an action prior to the agent’s decision.

¹⁴ In this paper, we focus on psychological availability. Arnauld also seems to hold that physical availability is necessary for freedom. See his *Réflexions philosophiques et théologiques sur le nouveau système de la nature et de la grâce*, OA 39 301, 316. For discussion see Kremer (2012, 6.3) and Sleigh (1996, 173-74).

¹⁵ See also TP 240-41/CA 101. In text citations are provided for the French translation of *De Libertate* that appears in *Œuvres de Messire Antoine Arnauld*. The Latin text of *De Libertate* is available in *Causa Arnaldia* [CA] and a modern edition of both the French and Latin is available in *Textes Philosophiques* [TP]. References to TP and CA will be provided in endnotes.

¹⁶ TP 236-37/CA 99.
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¹⁷ TP 236-39/CA 99-100.

¹⁸ TP 238-39/CA 100.

¹⁹ This is not an uncommon position for the period. Arnauld's noted adversary Nicolas Malebranche, for instance, holds the same view of the will. See Malebranche's *Recherche*, OC I.46-47/LO 5.

²⁰ TP 238-39/CA 101.

²¹ Arnauld seems to echo Descartes in *Meditation* IV, where Descartes states that a "great light" in the intellect gives rise to a "great inclination" of the will (AT IX 47/CSM II 41).

²² TP 238-39/CA 101. Malebranche holds the same view of the relationship between the will and happiness. See *Recherche*, OC I.404-405/LO 211-212.

²³ TP 240-41/CA 101.

²⁴ TP 240-41/CA 101-02.

²⁵ Sleigh calls such causes "quasi-causal-determination," (1996, 170). His account of the relevant passages occurs at 171-72. In Sleigh's terminology, "infallible determination" is "causal determination."

²⁶ See Michon (2013, 272-73, 275), for a different suggestion with respect to Arnauld's use of "infallible."

²⁷ See for reference *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas*. One passage that is of particular significance is *Summa Theologica* 1.2.q.112 art 3, which Arnauld cites in the work he mentions to Du Vaucel. In 1.2.q.112 art 3, Aquinas writes:

As stated above, man's preparation for grace is from God, as mover, and from free choice, as moved. Hence the preparation may be looked at it two ways. First, as it is from free choice, and thus there is no necessity that it should obtain grace, since the gift of grace exceeds every preparation of human power. But, it may be considered, secondly, as it is from God the mover, and thus it has a necessity—

not indeed of coercion, but of infallibility [non quidem coercionis, sed infallibilitatis]—as regards what is ordained to by God, since God’s intention cannot fail....Hence if God intends, while moving, that the one whose heart He moves should attain to grace, he will infallibly [infallibilitatis] attain to it. (IA 677).

See also, Davies (1992, 174-78), *Summa Theologica* Ia. 14 13; and 1a q. 23 a.6.

²⁸ TP 258-59/CA 111.

²⁹ TP 258-59/CA 111.

³⁰ Aquinas seems to take the *primo-primi* to be sinful; Augustine and the Jesuits do not. Arnauld here seems to agree with both Descartes and Malebranche who do not take the passions to be, in themselves, sinful (AT XI 485-86/CSM I 211; *Recherche*, OC I 77-80/LO 19-23). See also Sytsma (2013).

³¹ We thank an anonymous referee for this helpful suggestion.
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³² See also OA 10 455–459; GG III–XVII. For discussion see James, Part 1; Chédozeau (1995); Solère (1996).

³³ See for example, James (1972, Chapter 2). The text is available at GG I 133–261.

³⁴ See also Michon (2013, 276).

³⁵ Paraphrase of 1-5.

³⁶ This is also how Malebranche explains our knowledge of our own freedom (OC III.27/LO 552).

³⁷ In these passages, Arnauld discusses “*pensées imperceptibles*.” It is unlikely that Arnauld is here defending the existence of thoughts that are in no way present in the mind. Rather, he seems to be discussing thoughts that are less perceptible, or are not the

objects of the present attention of the mind. See also *Règles du bon sens*, Article V (TP 118-44/OA 40 170-90). For discussion see Laporte (1922, 215, fn. 21); Solère (1996, 136-39).

³⁸ See Kilcullen (1988a, 16-20).

³⁹ See Kilcullen (1988a, 20-22).

⁴⁰ We thank the anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback on previous versions of this project. Both authors contributed equally to this manuscript.

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