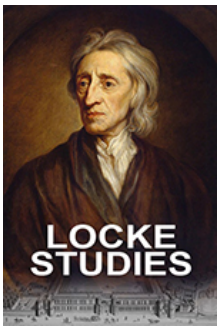
Locke Studies

Locke on Freedom, Moral Agency, and the Space of Reasons

Valtteri Viljanen



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Article abstract

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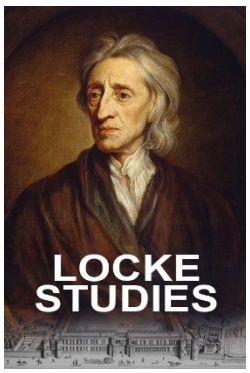

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Locke on Freedom, Moral Agency, and the Space of Reasons

VALTTERI VILJANEN (UNIVERSITY OF TURKU)

Abstract:
This paper argues that what interests Locke most is not whether we are free to suspend desire but the nature of the liberty that suspension grants us, and that Lockean liberty is essentially about deliberation that takes place in what has nowadays come to be called the space of reasons. This allows me to offer a novel and balanced account that carefully designates both causal and rational elements of Locke's theory of moral agency: after having reached a judgment concerning the best course of action, we are to take measures, if need be, so that this cognitive achievement raises the corresponding conative element, namely an uneasiness that determines our will. Locke's ambitious theory aims to incorporate two strong philosophical intuitions widely held incompatible: that our will is free and that impulses affect our choices. The present interpretation thus throws new light on the development of Western moral thought.

Keywords: freedom, deliberation, motivation, moral agency, desire, uneasiness, judgment

1. Introduction

In this essay, I will argue against those—including Nicholas Jolley, Samuel Rickless, and Gideon Yaffe—who hold that Locke is a compatibilist determinist.[1] However, it is also my view that the most avid advocate of the opposing interpretation, Peter Schouls, overemphasizes Locke's "libertarian" tendencies, while E. J. Lowe, who also questions determinist interpretations, assigns too restricted a role to those tendencies.[2] I will attempt to establish that what interests Locke most is *not*—contrary to what is widely believed—whether or not we are free to *suspend* desire but the *nature* of the liberty that suspension grants us. I will argue that the very core of Lockean liberty is best interpreted as something that takes place in what has nowadays come to be called *the space of reasons*, and that acknowledging this offers us a novel and balanced account that carefully discerns both causal and rational elements of Locke's theory of moral agency.

It is well-known that Locke's view seemed unclear to his contemporaries and immediate successors,[3] one commentator even calling Locke, despite his generally high reputation, the most imbecile defender of liberty ever to have existed.[4] Remarkably enough, there are still prominent scholars on both sides of the Atlantic for whom centuries of discussion have done little to emend the situation. J. B. Schneewind begins his article on Locke's moral philosophy as follows:

> Locke's failures are sometimes as significant as his successes. His views on morality are a case in point. He published little on the subject, and what little he did publish raised more problems for his readers than it solved. … Some of his remarks indicate, moreover, that he thought he had a comprehensive ethical theory explaining how reason could show what moral requirements we must satisfy; yet he

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[1] Nicholas Jolley, *Locke: His Philosophical Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 7; Samuel C. Rickless, "Locke on Active Power, Freedom, and Moral Agency," *Locke Studies* 13 (2013); Gideon Yaffe, *Liberty Worth the Name: Locke on Free Agency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[2] Peter A. Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); E. J. Lowe, "Locke: Compatibilist Event-Causalist or Libertarian Substance-Causalist?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68, no. 3 (2004); E. J. Lowe, *Locke* (London: Routledge, 2005), ch. 5.

[3] For a very helpful summary of the early reception of Locke's view, see James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35–40.

[4] The accusation is by William Belsham (1752–1827) and documented, e.g., in Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 38–39.

left his readers to infer what this theory might be from a number of brief, scattered and sometimes puzzling passages.[5]

More recently, Denis Kambouchner has claimed that Locke fails to give us a proper account of how our volitions come to be determined: "Indeed, if the rest of the chapter is concerned with introducing, through the theory of uneasiness, a sort of law governing the determination of our volitions, Locke scarcely sheds any light on the precise mode of this determination."[6] I find these assessments not only incorrect but, to be frank, uncharitable and unfair. I believe that they stem from the fact that Locke wanted to offer a theory that incorporates two strong philosophical intuitions widely held incompatible: that our will is free and that motives or impulses have an effect on our choices.[7] Indeed, I defend the position that, when carefully analyzed and explicated on its own terms, Locke's theory (as presented in the later editions of the *Essay*) is remarkably original, philosophically elaborate, quite consistent, and—most strikingly—modern despite the fact that it may be difficult to situate it within the framework constituted by the opposition between compatibilism and incompatibilism. The present interpretation thus also throws new light on the development of Western moral thought.

2. Innate Inclinations, Basic Powers, and Motives for Action

For all his criticism of innatism, Locke does not deny that we are endowed with *innate inclinations*, namely "a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery" (I.iii.3), the first of which is nowadays widely taken as the ultimate Lockean motive for action.[8] Although these inclinations are modifications of the appetite to good (I.iii.3), left to their own devices they would lead "to the over-turning of all Morality" (I.iii.13). Locke hedonistically defines good and evil in terms of things' aptness to cause pleasure and pain (II.xx.2), which, as we will see in the next section, also crucially affects his understanding of human happiness.

Locke endorses the traditional model of two main powers of the mind: it is endowed with a power of perception, or *understanding*, and a power of

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[5] J. B. Schneewind, "Locke's Moral Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 199–200.

[6] Denis Kambouchner, "Locke and Descartes on Free Will: The Limits of an Antinomy," in *Locke and Cartesian Philosophy*, ed. Philippe Hamou and Martine Pécharman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 155.

[7] Harris, in *Of Liberty and Necessity*, offers an instructive and illuminating account of the way in which these two intuitions—which both were considered, at least by their adherents, self-evident and/or something of which we have direct experience—shaped the eighteenth-century British free will debate.

[8] All in-text citations refer to the Nidditch edition of Locke's *Essay* by book, chapter, and section: John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

volition, or *will* (II.vi.2, II.xxi.5). The Lockean will is a *bidirectional* or *two-way power* "to begin or forbear, continue or put an end to several actions" (II.xxi.7). The initial Lockean sense of freedom is *freedom of action*: to be free to act or abstain from acting according to one's volitions (II.xxi.8, 10).[9] A free agent is able to act as they will.[10] Then again, Locke's original reaction to the question concerning the *freedom of the will* looks like an evasive maneuver. He claims that the question is altogether inappropriate because it rests on a category mistake: both will and freedom are, according to Locke, powers, and powers cannot, he argues, be attributed to powers (but to substances or agents) (II.xxi.14–16). Here he appears to move overly fast and not adequately defend his position.[11] Be that as it may, whether there is more to Lockean freedom than this is a debated issue. Fortunately, there is a way of pressing the question concerning human freedom that seems to be acknowledged by the vast majority of scholars: *what determines the will (as a two-way power)?* Locke's answer to this question changed, or perhaps rather developed, quite substantially from the first to the subsequent editions of the *Essay*. I will set aside the first edition and focus on the later ones, for it is in them that Locke presents the mature and far more ambitious theory of moral action.

The new account builds on a notion that does not appear in the first edition: that of *uneasiness*, which can be physical or mental: "All pain of the body, of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind, is *uneasiness*" (II.xxi.31). The crucial point is that it is precisely uneasiness that determines the will:

> [T]he meaning of the Question, *what determines the Will?* is this, What moves the mind, in every particular instance, to determine its general power of directing, to this or that particular Motion or Rest? And to this I answer, The motive for continuing in the same State or Action, is only the present satisfaction in it; The motive to change is always some *uneasiness*: nothing setting us upon the change of State, or upon any new Action, but some *uneasiness*. This is the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action, which for shortness sake we will call *determining of the Will*[.] (II.xxi.29)

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[9] Here Hobbes's influence is rather evident; see, e.g., Vere Chappell, "Locke on the Freedom of the Will," in *Locke's Philosophy: Content and Context*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 104; Jolley, *Locke*, 129–30; Yaffe, *Liberty Worth the Name*, 13–14.

[10] As Vere Chappell ("Locke on the Freedom of the Will," 103; "Power in Locke's *Essay*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's* Essay concerning Human Understanding, ed. Lex Newman [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 142), Nicholas Jolley (*Locke*, 130), and Matthew Stuart (*Locke's Metaphysics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 408) point out, voluntariness is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of freedom.

[11] See Jolley, *Locke*, 126.

In other words, until we feel mental or physical uneasiness, we are not prompted—there is no ground for volition—to any new action and so we rest content with our prevailing condition. A new robustly causal element thereby makes its entrance to Locke's theory of action. In fact, it can be said that the Lockean will is engaged in *an uneasiness-removal project*: it is through uneasiness that things considered good gain traction on our minds. Even things that we recognize as the greatest good fail to determine our wills and thus motivate us to action if they do not involve uneasiness (II.xxi.35, 45–46).

However, there is hardly a moment in a human being's life without several things causing (at least mild) uneasiness; what determines which uneasiness we set ourselves to remove?[12] According to Locke, the will is directed to actions that in a sense maximize uneasiness-removal: "The most pressing uneasiness naturally determines the will" (II.xxi.40). By *the most pressing* uneasiness he means *the greatest* (evidently *most intense*) of those *present* uneasinesses, the removal of which we judge to be within our reach (II.xxi.40). Pains are generally more pressing than absent goods, for they inevitably cause uneasiness in us whereas absent goods may not (II.xxi.44, 46). The ultimate goal is happiness, which consists of the "utmost pleasure we are capable of" or at least of the absence of pain to the extent that we can be content (II.xxi.42).

3. From Uneasiness to Deliberation

Given that the most pressing uneasiness determines the will, Locke's theory seems quite deterministic (or "necessitarian"). Obviously, in great many cases we can immediately act in a way that efficiently reduces the uneasiness we feel. For instance, if I am starting to feel hungry while idly passing by my favorite Chinese restaurant, I can simply enter it and order my usual serving. There is nothing problematic about these mundane deeds which permeate our lives; and it may well be equally clear what is the morally correct thing to do. But there are, of course, also considerably thornier situations in which it is difficult to discern the best or right way to proceed.

Accordingly (and fortunately), Locke famously introduces in II.xxi.47 a completely new dimension to his view. He begins by restating the position presented thus far: "There being in us a great many *uneasinesses* always solliciting, and ready to determine the *will*, it is natural, as I have said, that the greatest, and most pressing should determine the *will* to the next action"; but then comes the all-important qualification, "and so it does for the most part, but not always" (II.xxi.47).[13] What follows breaks new ground:

[12] See II.xxi.45.

[13] Cf.: "For the most part, an agent simply performs the action that he has the strongest desire to perform" (Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 461). Schouls comments on the phrase "for the most part" as

> For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others. In this lies the liberty Man has; and from not using of it right come 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*. To prevent this we have a power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire, as every one daily may Experiment in himself. 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*. For during this *suspension* of any desire, before the *will* be determined to action, and the action (which follows that determination) done, we have the opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due *Examination*, we have judg'd, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness; 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*. (II.xxi.47)

This passage is as condensed as it is important; it must be read and unpacked with great care, and in the context formed by certain neighboring passages. To begin with, *in most cases* we can suspend acting on our desires,[14] which establishes nothing less than a completely new domain of practical deliberation in which "lies the liberty Man has." The suspension theory has of course traditionally been the object of immense attention, but I think it would still be difficult to overemphasize how dramatically suspension and the domain it opens up alter Locke's theory of freedom and moral motivation. To begin with, somewhat surprisingly but still to my mind quite clearly, Locke thereby introduces (in addition to freedom of action) a freedom that concerns willing that is *not* nonsensical:[15] to will according to "the last result of our Minds" (II.xxi.48), which is a judgment concerning the good formed after we have suspended our desires to properly

follows: "If Locke's account of motivation were purely mechanistic, it would always be 'the most pressing' desire which would win over other desires and thus determine the will" (*Reasoned Freedom*, 134).

[14] Understandably, suspension and deliberation would seem to require at least some time, that is, that we are not required to act immediately: "[T]here is a case wherein a Man is at Liberty in respect of *willing*, and that is *the chusing of a remote Good* as an end to be pursued. Here a Man may suspend the act of his choice" (II.xxi.56, the latter emphasis added). On the historical context of the notion of suspension, see Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 31n20.

[15] It should nevertheless be noted that Locke still finds the expression "free will" inaccurate, strictly speaking.

examine the available options.[16] Here Locke appears as a "libertarian," which, given the aforementioned deterministic tendencies, is precisely the reason why his account has been found so confusing, or even nonsensical.

Most importantly, the suspension theory transfers us into what has later come to be called *the space of practical reasons* of which only rudiments can be found in the first edition view of moral judgment it is designed to revise.[17] It also diverges from the traditionally dominant Peripatetic view. For Aristotle, the practical syllogism structures practical reason. In it, a particular case is recognized as an instance of a general principle, leading to a specific action as a conclusion. For the scholastics, the God-given and eternal natural law forms the principled basis of guiding morality. Moreover, their discussions revolve around not only the different types of causes—final, formal, and efficient—but also around the distinction between potentiality and actuality in the two major faculties, intellect and will.[18] All this results in a moral decision-making framework quite different from that of Locke.

Standardly, the idea of a (logical or practical) space of reasons is seen to emerge with Kant;[19] but the fact—which has, as far as I know, thus far been neglected—is that Locke introduces such a space with his claim that by suspending their desires, a moral agent enters a special domain of practical deliberation in which they can rationally examine their desires to discover the ones that lead to true happiness. The decisive point is that on the

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[16] Should one worry whether "in this" in the passage "[i]n this lies the liberty Man has" (II.xxi.47) refers to *power to suspend* instead of deliberation, it should be noted that because the passage comes *right after* the preliminary characterization of deliberative examination, it would be quite misleading of Locke to refer by "in this" to suspension, which occurs much earlier and does *not* mention liberty. The same applies to "it" in the subsequent "from not using of it right." A couple of sections later, Locke states that suspension is "the hinge on which" our liberty turns (II.xxi.52); suspension is thus not freedom itself but something that *grants us access* to freedom. This is not to downplay the importance of suspension; quite the opposite, it is a necessary condition of freedom, for precisely suspension opens up a domain in which we can freely deliberate. Still, *freedom itself* lies in acting "according to the last result of a fair *Examination*" (II.xxi.47, Locke's emphasis).

[17] I find it quite likely that one important route via which Locke became acquainted with this conception, as well as with the notion of suspending one's will, was Bramhall's contribution to the well-known Bramhall–Hobbes controversy; see John Bramhall, *A Defence of True Liberty*, in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ed. Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), §§ 7–8, 11, 20, 28, 30. While it is clear that Bramhall defends the view that freedom is about being determined not "naturally" but "morally," the meaning of "moral determination" remains vague. By contrast, Locke develops a related idea into an ingeniously original and elaborate theory of what moral agency is essentially about—moreover, a theory expressed in his groundbreaking "experimental" style unencumbered with scholastic distinctions.

[18] For informative accounts, see, e.g., Daniel Westberg, *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Anthony Celano, "Medieval Theories of Practical Reason," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2022).

[19] See, e.g., Henry E. Allison, *Kant's* Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: *A Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 308; Allison explicitly refers to Wilfrid Sellars and John McDowell.

present interpretation, precisely *operating in the space of reasons is*, to borrow Yaffe's memorable expression, "the Elusive Something" beyond freedom of action that a full-fledged free Lockean agent possesses.[20] Indeed, acknowledging this allows us to see that it is here that lies the fabled liberty worth the name:

> Is it worth the Name of *Freedom* to be at liberty to play the Fool, and draw Shame and Misery upon a Man's self? If to break loose from the conduct of Reason, and to want that restraint of Examination and Judgment, which keeps us from chusing or doing the worse, be *Liberty*, true Liberty, mad Men and Fools are the only Freemen[.] . . . That . . . 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. This is *standing still*, where we are not sufficiently assured of the way: Examination is *consulting a guide*. The determination of the *will* upon enquiry is *following the direction of that Guide*: And he that has a power to act, or not to act according as such determination directs, is a *free Agent*[.] (II.xxi.50)

"The conduct of reason" as consulting a guide, or deliberative examination taking place in the space of reasons, thus forms the very core of true human freedom; the fundamental layer of moral agency thus quite clearly seems to be rational, not causal, for it has to do with forming the correct *judgment* concerning the good. I will soon discuss a certainly extremely important but still quite another matter, namely that we are also to ensure that our will in fact is, or comes to be, determined according to that judgment, which involves a causal component (that is, an uneasiness). This means that, for Locke, moral agency requires that, whenever needed, our action comes to be *mediated* by free and rational judgments, made in the state of suspense, that latch onto what is truly good.[21] It is thus quite consistent of Locke to state that *in examination lies the locus and source of moral responsibility*: "If the neglect or abuse of the Liberty [a Man] had, to examine what would really and truly make for his Happiness, misleads him, the miscarriages that follow on it, *must be imputed to his own election*" (II.xxi.56, emphasis added). I have not been able to locate passages in which Locke would conflate reasons and causes; perhaps there

[20] It should be kept in mind that Yaffe (*Liberty Worth the Name*, 55, 58) famously does *not* think that the Elusive Something lies in deliberation, but in being tied to the good, regardless of how that happens.

[21] As noted above, the desire for happiness is the ultimate Lockean motive for action. Given that desire does not necessarily lead away from morality, deliberation is not strictly speaking a necessary condition for morally right action: *it is possible to act morally on the natural desires we happen to have, without deliberation*. However, as we will see below, Locke also thinks that we are eventually bound to fail morally without adequate deliberation, and he describes several ways in which this may happen. Fully fledged moral agency is, in practice, simply not possible without deliberative examination.

are some that may be taken to suggest otherwise.[22] What I want to claim is that the central textual evidence is most naturally read as making an adequate distinction between reasons and causes, and that Locke quite consistently affirms that deliberation takes place in the space of reasons, not of causes, albeit without using this terminology. Most importantly, he is explicitly concerned with correct judgments, which he situates in a wealth of subtly described doxastic elements that can be rationally evaluated.

To further defend and elaborate the present interpretation, I would like to make the following three points. First, the passages above do not mention a feature that figures prominently in Lockean practical deliberation: moral laws (or rules).[23] Although they receive a relatively brief treatment, it is clear that they not only offer criteria for our judgments of right and wrong to the extent that Locke states that "*[m]orally Good and Evil* … is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law" (II.xxviii.5) but also—given that they always come with their own kinds of rewards and punishments—have a key role to play in motivating us to act morally. There are three basic types of moral laws: *the divine law*, *the civil law*, and *the law of opinion* or reputation; "[b]y the Relation they bear to the first of these, Men judge whether their Actions are Sins, or Duties; by the second, whether they be Criminal, or Innocent; and by the third, whether they be Vertues or Vices" (II.xxviii.7). On the present interpretation, there is nothing odd in invoking moral rules; assessing how different potential courses of action relate to rules is something to be done in the space of practical reasons. However, we should bear in mind that here the theological aspect of Locke's final moral philosophy makes its presence felt: precisely the divine law is the most prominent of the three types of moral laws.[24]

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[22] For instance, when Locke says that happiness or absent good has been "jostled out" until "Contemplation has brought it nearer to our Mind" (II.xxi.45), is he not talking in causal terms? It all boils down to how one understands the nature of contemplation and what Locke means by something being brought "nearer to our Mind." Now here is a way to understand the issue in non-causal terms: contemplation is a process that takes place in a justificatory context; when, after having considered the issue at hand from all sides, we form a judgment concerning the genuine good, it is cognitively present to us in a manner it was not earlier. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for raising this point. For more on II.xxi.45, see the next section.

[23] It should be noted that Wilfrid Sellars—who introduced 'the space of reasons'—merely mentions *justification*: "[I]n characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing,* we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956], 298–299). In many ways, Locke's theory of freedom involves a much more substantive view of justification. Given that Kant scholars see the space of practical reason as largely building on *principles*, a subclass of which are moral rules, it squares well with the interpretation that Locke's account also incorporates this element of practical justification.

[24] See II.xxviii.8.

Second, Locke has a laudably nuanced view of how multifaceted an affair deliberation is. First, he emphasizes the *balancing* involved: "Judging is, as it were, balancing an account, and determining on which side the odds lies" (II.xxi.67). Second, he goes through a number of factors that may make us misjudge the situation.[25] We may make hasty choices (II.xxi.56), and "our narrow souls" (II.xxi.64) tend to downplay the future consequences of our actions and overemphasize present discomforts and pleasures (II.xxi.63–66): "This is the way we usually impose on ourselves, in respect of bare Pleasure and Pain, or the true degrees of Happiness or Misery: The future loses its just proportion, and what is present, obtains the preference as the greater" (II.xxi.63). Moreover, we may fail to take into account possible courses of action: "He that judges without informing himself to the utmost he is capable, cannot acquit him of *judging amiss*" (II.xxi.67). Finally, our socio-cultural context ("Fashion and the common Opinion …, and education and custom") can instill deleterious habits and values in us (II.xxi.69).[26]

Finally, an arguably weighty piece of evidence: Locke not only consistently describes deliberation in justificatory terms; in the fourth book of the *Essay*, he famously argues that moral truths are *rationally demonstrable* and *as certain as* mathematical truths.[27] When elaborating this view, Locke unwaveringly talks not only about *reasoning*, *demonstrating*, and *proving* but also about finding *necessary consequences* between our ideas.[28] He also states that morality is a science (IV.xii.11) and dedicates a full chapter (IV.xvii) to reason in which he discusses *proceeding rationally* and *making right inferences* when forming judgments concerning moral truths (IV.xvii.4). He even gives an example of how we can infer, via a logical chain of ideas, from the proposition "Men shall be punished" the conclusion "Men can determine themselves" (IV.xvii.4); indeed, he ends the chapter by telling us that *reason directs* us in moral matters (IV.xvii.24).[29] In the very final chapter of the *Essay*, Locke declares that one of his main goals has been to show "that which man himself ought to do, as a rational and voluntary Agent" (IV.xxi.1), thereby equating rationality and voluntariness. There is nothing confused about Locke's

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[25] Most of these remarks can already be found in the first edition of the *Essay*; there is thus a notable continuity between different editions as far as factors contributing to misjudgement are concerned. It seems that Locke found this part of the first edition to be quite consistent with the suspension-and-deliberation theory.

[26] For a recent discussion of the way in which habits may cloud our judgment, see Matthew A. Leisinger, "Liberty and Suspension in Locke's *Essay*," *Locke Studies* 21 (2021).

[27] For unequivocal declarations of this, see IV.iv.7, IV.iv.9, IV.xii.8.

[28] See, e.g., IV.iii.20.

[29] Here is Locke's illustration of the actual chain of ideas: "*Men shall be punished,—God the punisher,—just Punishment,—the Punished guilty—could have done otherwise—Freedom—self-determination*" (IV.xvii.4).

position here, and it shows that he is acutely aware that such domains as mathematics and ethics are decidedly about rational demonstration. Like doing mathematics, finding moral truths is about definitions and inferences made by a rational creature: we believe that we should φ *because of certain reasons*. What could be a clearer example of—to use Sellars's original expression— "justifying, and being able to justify" one's moral beliefs?[30] It certainly seems that any attempt to reduce a phenomenon like this or mathematical reasoning to causality misses the very essence of the phenomenon.

4. From Judgment to the Determination of the Will

We have seen that we are naturally set to remove the most pressing of the uneasinesses we feel, and one may wonder, what kind of effect, if any, can rational deliberation have on this. Despite the oft-repeated claims to the contrary, Locke has delightfully *much* to say about this, and it would be difficult to exaggerate how profoundly a person's engagement in deliberation alters the dynamics of their moral psychology. Recall that *the greatest apparent good often fails to motivate us*: "For good, though appearing, and allowed never so great, yet till it has raised desires in our Minds, and thereby made us *uneasie* in its want, it reaches not our *wills*" (II.xxi.46). Now one might think that judgment adds little to this picture: even if we judge something to be the greater (or the greatest) good, the judgment fails to motivate us if the (absent) good does not make us uneasy—as II.xxi.37 and 46 make clear, only a *present* uneasiness can determine our will by countering other uneasinesses.[31] But, and this is crucial, the practically rational agent of the second edition does have resources to motivate themselves appropriately:

> But the forbearance of a too hasty compliance with our desires, the moderation and restraint of our Passions, so that our Understandings may be *free* to examine, and reason unbiassed give its judgment, being that, whereon a right direction of our conduct to true Happiness depends; 'tis in this we should employ our chief care and endeavours. In this we should take pains to suit the relish of our Minds to the true intrinsick good or ill, that is in things; and not permit an allow'd or supposed possible great and weighty good to slip out of our thoughts, without leaving any relish, any desire of it self there, till, by a due consideration of its true worth, *we have formed appetites in our Minds suitable to it, and made our selves uneasie* in the want of it, or in the fear of losing it. (II.xxi.53, the latter emphasis added)

[30] Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," 299.

[31] Here I agree with Yaffe: "The will is affected only by present pleasure and pain" (*Liberty Worth the Name*, 48).

> Here a Man may suspend the act of his choice from being determined for or against the thing proposed, till he has examined, whether it be really of a nature in it self and consequences to make him happy, or no. For *when he has once chosen it, and thereby it is become a part of his Happiness, it raises desire*, and that proportionably gives him *uneasiness,* which determines his *will,* and sets him at work in pursuit of his choice on all occasions that offer. (II.xxi.56, the first emphasis added)

We are thus not operating with a pregiven set of desires alone: upon examination, if necessary, we can *raise in ourselves desires* involving uneasiness for the good we judge the greatest.[32] This is how rational inspection of our lives in the space of practical deliberation can gain all-important causal traction on our will so that it comes to be determined precisely by what we judge to be the greatest good. Locke says that "repeated Contemplation" can bring an "absent good" "nearer to our Mind," give "some relish of it," and raise "in us some desire" strong enough to overcome other desires (II.xxi.45). To give a simple example of this, let us say that I have decided that participating in a Locke conference accords best with my true happiness. While fretting about a not-quite-finished talk I am to give the next day, my merry neighbor calls me, invites me over to relax, watch the game, and have a few beers. No doubt this would alleviate my present stress, but when considering the suggestion, I remember that my neighbor is a fairly heavy drinker and that after the previous game night I woke up unpleasantly hung over. The idea of this happening on a stressful conference day promptly raises all kinds of uneasinesses, even a mild feeling of panic; thus, I decline the offer, finish my talk, and the next day present it to the best of my abilities (after which I hopefully feel contentment). This, I take it, is an example of how we can "raise a desire" or "change the agreeableness or disagreeableness of things" (II.xxi.69), to which Locke dedicates a separate section.[33] Here he outlines something that decidedly differs from just wanting, and then trying, to remove what at first

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[32] Of course, it might not be necessary to *raise* a desire: given that the desire for true happiness is our most fundamental motivating factor, when we understand that a certain course of action will lead to true happiness, it seems obvious that we are inclined to feel uneasy about refraining from it; see also Tito Magri, "Locke, Suspension of Desire, and the Remote Good," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2000): 67. But then again, Locke is quite clear that we are usually experiencing a number of pains pressing enough for us to be naturally set to remove them instead of the uneasiness we may feel for the absent greatest good (see II.xxi.44–45).

[33] As the reference to "repeated contemplation" suggests, in II.xxi.69 Locke is most concerned about forming correct habits so that we come to see something we originally considered displeasing as conducive to our happiness. In the first edition, Locke still claims that it is not in anyone's "choice, whether he will, or will not be better pleased with one thing than another" (II.xxi.28), so he appears to have changed his mind on the issue. See also Chappell, "Locke on the Freedom of the Will," 115; Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 30.

sight feels as the most pressing uneasiness, which we are prone to do on impulse.[34]

To summarize: uneasinesses and their concomitant desires are causally potent entities that determine our will in a certain inevitable manner; in this, Locke agrees with the "necessitarians." But he also introduces an original and elaborate view of a domain of freedom, corresponding to what the "libertarians" are keen to emphasize: a space of practical reasoning. While deliberating in that space, we can cognitively alter the relative pressingness (or intensity) of different factors so that the one we judge the greatest good comes to be *felt* as the one that causes most uneasiness in us and thereby determines our will according to our best judgment.

The theory of suspension and deliberation is novel enough to have raised worries of being inconsistent with the first edition theory of freedom. It may be that Locke himself was not completely aware of all the implications of the above-quoted passages;[35] my impression is that the new theory started as an elaboration of the one presented in the first edition,[36] but evolved into something that Locke himself considered fundamentally different from the older position.[37] Be that as it may, to try to make his position consistent by suggesting, as Jolley does, that "Locke may wish to point out that among the causal antecedents of human action may be processes of reasoning and deliberating" does not, I think, adequately capture the suspension theory and the new view of moral motivation it involves.[38] In fact, there is a prevalent tendency in the literature to understand even the second edition deliberation theory in causal terms: Yaffe assumes the crux of the issue to lie in what "causally determines an agent to choose as she does,"[39] while Matthew Stuart states that "[u]neasiness determines the will by determining the last judgment of the understanding."[40] But it should be clear by now that uneasiness does *not* determine the last judgment—if anything, the last judgment determines, or

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[34] See II.xxi.67.

[35] Cf. Chappell, "Locke on the Freedom of the Will," 119.

[36] According to that theory we simply always act on the greatest apparent good.

[37] Here I find II.xxi.72 especially revealing: there Locke says that "now as a Lover of Truth and not a Worshipper of my own Doctrines, I own some change of my Opinion, which I think I have discover'd ground for. … I have … not been asham'd to publish what a severer enquiry has suggested. It is not impossible, that some may think my former notions right, and some … these later; and some neither." The final sentence suggests that Locke views the "former" and the "later" notions not only different but also at least to some extent incompatible. See, however, Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 460–61.

[38] Jolley, *Locke*, 133.

[39] Yaffe, *Liberty Worth the Name*, 44. Later on the same page, Yaffe says that the issue concerns "causal determination."

[40] Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 480.

rather raises, uneasiness—and that Locke never explicitly says that the determination of our *judgment* is a *causal* affair. To repeat, this is not to deny that uneasinesses as causal entities have a crucial role to play in Locke's new theory: according to it, determining the will requires a causally potent entity, which also means that judgments reached by rational deliberation cannot become effective and determine the will without corresponding uneasinesses. But it seems equally clear that the primary element of the process, deliberation, is not a causal affair.

Locke shows some signs of acknowledging that passions can distort the clear mind that successful deliberation requires;[41] but he rather optimistically thinks that apart from extreme cases—such as being tortured—in which the deliberation process is halted altogether,[42] we can keep our passionate side in check,[43] form the correct judgment concerning our true good, and act accordingly: "Nor let any one say, he cannot govern his Passions, nor hinder them from breaking out, and carrying him into action; for what he can do before a Prince, or a great Man, he can do alone, or in the presence of God, if he will" (II.xxi.53). Locke's striking confidence concerning our control over passions arguably encourages him to view the formation of practical judgment as something that can be, if needed, insulated from the world of human desires.

Thus, on the present interpretation, Locke's key point concerning moral motivation is that when we have reached the judgment concerning the best course of action, we are to take measures, if need be, so that this cognitive achievement raises the corresponding conative element: an uneasiness that determines our will, whereby we really do act according to the right judgment. This means that upon "a severer enquiry" (II.xxi.72), Locke comes to be acutely aware of the fact that, to have an effect on our conduct, our cognitive efforts must become conatively efficacious. But still, this is something fundamentally different from action determined in the space of causes by the relative intensity of the uneasiness of the desires we happen to experience.[44] It is thus not Kant but Locke who first introduces to modern

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[41] See, e.g., II.xxi.64, 67.

[42] Extremely strong passions—at least excruciating pain—can also keep us from raising the required desire (II.xxi.57).

[43] Here he might well be influenced by the rationalist Descartes who closes the first part of *The Passions of the Soul* by contending that "[e]ven those who have the weakest souls could acquire absolute mastery over all their passions if we employed sufficient ingenuity in training and guiding them" (*The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* I, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985], 348).

[44] Chappell claims that "Locke thought that all actions have causes, including the free ones. … Locke's freedom is not contra-causal" ("Locke on the Freedom of the Will," 101). Now strictly speaking this is not untrue: there must be a cause, namely an uneasiness of a desire, for our will to become determined in a certain way—without corresponding uneasiness, even the best of our judgments remain otiose. But still, this is far from the whole story: the most important layer in free moral motivation is formed by judgments made in the space of reasons, which then have to be, or become, causally efficacious through corresponding desires. I very much like the way Matthew Leisinger puts it: "When all goes well, our actions and volitions

thought the idea that what is nowadays called the space of practical reasons is the proper domain of human freedom.

5. Source of Suspension and Lockean Agnosticism

Thus far I have deliberately set aside the traditionally vexing question concerning whether we are free to suspend desire. I have done so in order to focus on what, as I see it, the mature Locke regards as the very core of freedom and about which he develops a clearly discernible view. However, even though the question concerning the source of suspension is not central for my argument, I wish to end by making a number of observations on it, mainly because, as I see it, the topic reveals something quite important about Locke's mindset.

Concerning the freedom of suspension, the textual evidence is not only quite limited but also somewhat mixed, which is no doubt the reason why scholars so strongly disagree on the issue.[45] The following passage would seem to indicate that suspension is *not* something we can choose:

> Whatever necessity determines to the pursuit of real Bliss, the same necessity, with the same force establishes *suspense, deliberation*, and scrutiny of each successive desire, whether the satisfaction of it, does not interfere with our true happiness, and mislead us from it. (II.xxi.52)

However, Locke also describes suspension of desires as a power at our disposal: the agent "had a power to suspend his determination: *it was given him*" (II.xxi.56, emphasis added). Moreover, "we have a power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire" (II.xxi.47), and Locke states that whether our judgment "shall be upon a due and mature *Examination*, is in our power" (II.xxi.52). It is difficult to say if there is a considered line of thought behind these contentions; Locke gives the impression that we are free to choose when exactly to suspend acting on our desires—that is, that in most situations we have a two-way power to suspend or not—but that we are generally thrust to suspension when struggling to find out what will make us happy. Of the interpretations presented in the literature, I find the

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are determined by our desires, our desires are shaped by our judgments, and our judgments are informed by our reason" ("Liberty and Suspension in Locke's *Essay*," 46).

[45] To mention positions that appear diametrically opposed: according to Schouls (*Reasoned Freedom*, 145–54), suspension is one facet of our unconditioned freedom, whereas Julie Walsh ("Locke and the Power to Suspend Desire," *Locke Studies* 14 [2014]) argues that it is a passive result of our desires. The most neutral positions are those of Antonia LoLordo, who suggests that Locke might simply "not know what, if anything, causes suspension" (*Locke's Moral Man* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 59), and Don Garrett, who thinks that not specifying "what, if anything, determines the will to suspend" is a "notable lacuna" in Locke's theory ("Liberty and Suspension in Locke's Theory of the Will," in *A Companion to Locke*, ed. Matthew Stuart [Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016], 277).

one by Shelley Weinberg most helpful.[46] She correctly points out that, according to Locke, we are concerned for our true—or long-term—happiness; this, Weinberg argues, moves "the will to suspend desire."[47] Particularly important is the claim that Locke's writings on education reveal that he thinks that our power to suspend desire comes in degrees and that we can be *educated* to become *stronger* in resisting acting on present pleasures and pains so that what we do is determined by rational deliberation.[48] In fact, Weinberg's account suggests a kind of conflict-of-forces view of suspension in which short-term and long-term pleasures and pains battle for the determination of our will; the task is to develop strength of mind to suspend desire to make an informed and rational choice on which pleasures and pains it is, all things considered, best to act. Be this as it may, it should be borne in mind that what some scholars have called Locke's libertarianism is not (*pace* Lowe) really about the undetermined power to suspend one's desires but about deliberation that takes place in the space of reasons opened up by suspension.[49] In fact and rather strikingly, even if suspension were something *passively* triggered by contrary desires, as Julie Walsh has argued, this would *not*, as far as I can see, take away the freedom involved in the deliberation itself.[50]

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[46] Shelley Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 200–4.

[47] *Consciousness in Locke*, 204; see also Magri, "Locke, Suspension of Desire, and the Remote Good," 67–69. However, it should be noted that, to my knowledge, Locke does not say in II.xxi that *the will* would be responsible for suspension of desire—although, as Yaffe (*Liberty Worth the Name*, 148n31) points out, in a different context (IV.xx.15) Locke says that suspension is (often) a voluntary action. In fact, given that Locke classifies both our will and our ability to suspend desire as powers and famously declares that no power is attributed to another power but only to an agent (II.xxi.16), he may not be entitled to say that the will (which is a power) has the power to suspend desire. Moreover, the following line of thought by LoLordo deserves serious attention: "We do not suspend because we will or desire to suspend. Suspension precedes the determination of will by desire …[.] Rather, when we suspend, what we are doing is putting on hold the process whereby desires normally determine volitions. … Given the point of suspension, as Locke understands it, suspension should not be determined by desire" (*Locke's Moral Man*, 49). However, there might be a way of giving a deflationary reading of suspension so that it reduces simply to forbearing to act on the most pressing desire, even though it is not quite clear to me why such forbearance would necessarily lead to *deliberation* (see Rickless, "Locke on Active Power, Freedom, and Moral Agency"; Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 465).

[48] Weinberg, *Consciousness in Locke*, 209–14. Also, Schouls (*Reasoned Freedom*, 180–82, 207–14) and LoLordo (*Locke's Moral Man*, 42–43, 123–24) emphasize the importance of education for learning to suspend and rationally scrutinize one's desires.

[49] "It seems to me, in fact, that Locke, in appealing to our alleged power of 'suspension,' is ultimately falling back on a 'libertarian' conception of 'free will'" (Lowe, "Locke: Compatibilist Event-Causalist or Libertarian Substance-Causalist?" 692; see also Lowe, *Locke*, 135).

[50] Walsh ("Locke and the Power to Suspend Desire," 121n1) insists that we must rule out a possibility Chappell (in "Locke on the Freedom of the Will") entertains, namely that "suspension is the result of an undetermined power." It should be noted that Walsh's position is also opposed to those of Schouls, according to whom in suspending "we exercise our freedom" (*Reasoned Freedom*, 148), and Stuart, who claims that "Locke thinks of suspension as a voluntary activity, rather than as something that happens to a person unbidden" (*Locke's Metaphysics*, 462). Interestingly, Walsh's and Weinberg's accounts seem to be

If the resulting view does not seem easy to place within the framework constituted by the distinction between compatibilism and incompatibilism, this only resonates with the recently growing tendency to consider Locke to be—deliberately or not—agnostic with regard to the question concerning freedom and determinism. Stuart ends his discussion with the general assessment that "[a]ll told, there is little evidence that Locke took himself to have offered a solution to the problem of freedom and determinism,"[51] whereas Antonia LoLordo points out that it is possible to see Locke "as agnostic about whether the actions of the will in general are necessitated."[52] Here she seems to be influenced by James Harris, who argues that "Locke intended his account of liberty to be entirely neutral with respect to the grand questions surrounding human volition and action."[53] Also Don Garrett concludes his discussion in a notably cautious fashion, stating that Locke cannot be said to either deny or defend causal determinism.[54] As I have already indicated, my own sense is that Locke attempts to offer a reconciliatory view that incorporates both practical-rational ("libertarian") and conative-causal ("necessitarian") elements to combine the insights of both approaches—and, to my mind, succeeds in his endeavor admirably well.

6. Conclusion

On the interpretation I have defended in this essay, the essence of Locke's theory of moral agency is formed by deliberation taking place in the space of reasons leading to a practical judgment tracking the true good. The theory is not structurally theological, but it is theological in substance: even though the Lockean account of suspension and deliberation is compatible with a host of moral principles, for Locke the divine law gives the ultimate

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combinable: whether or not we suspend desire may be causally determined by the relative strength of short-term pleasures and pains, long-term pleasures and pains, and our mindset formed through education and experience. Perhaps Locke's idea is that even though often in the heat of the moment we can be said to be passive in the sense that all the relevant factors are what they are and play their part accordingly, by such means as education and habituation we can actively prepare ourselves in advance so that long-term instead of short-term pleasures and pains have the greater effect on us, which then leads us to suspend desire, if only time allows.

[51] Stuart, *Locke's Metaphysics*, 472. As Stuart (*Locke's Metaphysics*, 470–73) helpfully observes, Locke explicitly confesses that he simply does not know how to reconcile divine omniscience (which would seem to make human actions atemporally determined to be what they are) with human freedom; see also Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 21n4.

[52] LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man*, 60.

[53] Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 21.

[54] Garrett, "Liberty and Suspension in Locke's Theory of the Will," 277.

criteria for moral action and guarantees that his position does not collapse into any flat-footed hedonism.[55]

To conclude, Locke's notion of freedom of overt action should not be forgotten; full-fledged moral agency presupposes the availability of two major elements, namely the deliberative process and freedom of action.[56] More precisely, the elements are: (1a) suspending acting on the most pressing desire; (1b) by weighing different morally relevant elements, deliberatively forming a judgment concerning the good that brings us true happiness; (1c) if need be, raising the corresponding desire so that the will comes to be determined according to our considered judgment; and (2) being free to act or refrain from acting according to the determination of one's will. It is a theory of moral agency that combines rational and causal elements in a subtle and compelling fashion. But perhaps the most intriguing suggestion of the present interpretation is that it might well be that with Locke's efforts to advance a satisfactory theory of moral agency, the space of reasons as the space of freedom is introduced in a notably modern fashion to Western philosophical thought.[57]

[55] Here I believe I agree with Yaffe (*Liberty Worth the Name*, 70): "Locke does think of determination of volition by the good as resting on knowledge of natural law, knowledge that is usually obtained only through supernatural means. But there is nothing in his theory of freedom that strictly requires this view." Locke's contemporaries seemed to be alive to, and unhappy about, this fact; see LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man*, 24.

[56] As Garrett puts it, "to suspend and deliberate … concerns a stage of free judgment that *precedes* free action" ("Liberty and Suspension in Locke's Theory of the Will," 277).

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