LOCKE ON ACTIVE POWER, FREEDOM, AND MORAL AGENCY

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Despite his own efforts to clarify his thoughts on the matter through various editions of the *Essay*, there is little agreement among scholars about how best to understand Locke's theory of moral agency, and his account of freedom in particular. Although some think that Locke adopts a Hobbesian theory of freedom of action, as the ability to do or not do as one wills, while jettisoning the Hobbesian conception of the will as the faculty of desire, a growing number of commentators believe that Locke departs more radically from Hobbes by supplementing a Hobbesian (or quasi-Hobbesian) conception of free action with an account of "full-fledged" free agency grounded in the very particular ability to suspend the prosecution of our desires.[1] The most recent sustained effort in this direction has been very ably defended by Antonia LoLordo, and my aim in this paper is to examine and criticize her case for the "supplementarian" conception of free agency in *Locke's Moral Man*.

The basic elements of LoLordo's reconstruction are these:

(1) There are two kinds of powers (or abilities): active powers and passive powers. In the early editions of the *Essay*, "the idea of active power is typically the idea of the capacity to [make a] change", while in later editions "it tends to be the idea of the underlying source of that capacity" (31).

(2) "Active power [in the 'source' sense] is unique to spirits" (33), where "to be a spirit is to think and have the power to produce motion by thought" (107), and is in fact "simply their will" (33). Therefore, "the exercise of active power is simply volition" (33), where volition is the sort of mental act that causes the sorts of actions (whether these be actions of the mind—thoughts—or actions of the body—motions) that are called 'voluntary' (27).

(3) An agent S "acts freely in performing action *a* [i.e., possesses freedom of action with respect to *a*] iff (i) S does *a* because S wills to do *a* [i.e., S's doing *a* is voluntary], and (ii) if S had not willed to do *a*, S would not have done *a*" (27). Thus: "[L]iberty is an active power just by virtue of will being an active power. The extra element that makes an action free as well as voluntary—that if the agent had willed otherwise she would have done otherwise—imports no new activity" (33).

(4) Mere possession of active power (or will, or freedom of action) does not distinguish those who are moral agents from those who are not, for "animals possess active power" (38), and hence have wills and consequently freedom of action (under certain circumstances), without being moral agents (38, 41).

(5) There are "two different notions of liberty" (51), namely, freedom of action and "the sort of full-fledged free agency that derives from having the capacity to suspend the prosecution of one's most pressing desires and deliberate about the best course of action" (63).

(6) Thus: What distinguishes beings who are moral agents from beings who are not is full-fledged free agency, rather than freedom of action.

(7) Suspension of desire-prosecution cannot be voluntary: "We do not suspend because we will or desire to suspend. Suspension precedes the determination of will by desire" (49). The proper attitude towards what causes suspension is agnosticism: the most plausible conclusion is that "Locke simply does not know what, if anything, causes suspension. He clearly thinks he knows what *ought* to move us to suspend, but there is little reason to think he claims to know whether—or by what—we are causally necessitated to suspend." (59)

(8) Thus: An account of the metaphysical basis of desire-suspension (and hence of the metaphysical ground of moral agency), as traditionally conceived, though perhaps not vacuous or impossible, is *unnecessary* for ethics/politics (1, 134).

I contend that every one of these eight theses is false. Instead, I will argue that in the later editions of the *Essay* Locke conceives of active power not as the underlying source of the capacity to make changes, but as the capacity to make changes by one's own power (rather than by the power of another); that active power is not unique to spirits and should not be identified with the will, which is merely one among many active powers; that Locke's conception of freedom of action is merely the ability to do as one wills (which he takes to include the ability to forbear what one wills to forbear); that he isn't concerned with providing necessary and sufficient conditions for acting freely or for free actions, and that freedom of action, properly conceived, includes neither a voluntariness condition nor a counterfactual condition; that although (non-human) animals have many active powers, they do not possess wills or freedom of action, and hence animals provide

no reason to think that something in addition to freedom of action is required for moral agency; that there is indeed only one notion of liberty, namely freedom of action, and that the ability to suspend is merely a species of this freedom; that what distinguishes beings who are moral agents from beings who are not is freedom of action generally, which includes the power to suspend; that suspension of desire can, and indeed must, be voluntary, and that what causes such suspension is the volition to suspend, itself usually determined by uneasiness at the thought of not suspending; and that although Locke may indeed be agnostic about the metaphysical grounds of moral agency, he is not thoroughly agnostic about all metaphysical aspects of his theory of freedom.

Let me now consider each thesis in turn.

1. I agree with LoLordo that Locke thinks of power in general as the capacity to change or be changed, and that Locke's views about the nature of active power changed from the early editions to the later editions of the *Essay*. But I deny that Locke's later conception of active power is as the underlying source of change. LoLordo rests her case for this claim mostly on Mattern (1980), who argues that whereas in the early editions of the *Essay* Locke officially defines active power as the ability to make change, in the later editions Locke officially defines active power as the capacity to do something by one's own *choice* (71). On this interpretation, mere bodies (such as billiard balls) possess active power according to the early definition, but do not possess active power according to the late definition.[2] In the early editions, Mattern argues, Locke claims that human beings acquire an obscure, imperfect, and inadequate idea of active power from the observation of bodies (see E II.xxi.4: 234-36 and E II.xxiii.28: 311-12).[3] But in the later

editions, if Locke had addressed the point directly, "he would have denied that we get any idea of active power at all [by observing motion transfer]" (1980, 71).

Mattern rests the entirety of her case for this interpretation on a single passage (from E II.xxi.72: 285-86) added to the fourth edition of the *Essay* in 1700. But this passage does not say what Mattern thinks it says. Locke there does not say that bodies do not possess active powers. He says, instead, that "**there are instances** of [Motion], which, upon due consideration, will be found rather *Passions* than *Actions*", because "**in these instances**, the substance that hath motion…receives the impression whereby it is put into that *Action* purely from without" (E II.xxi.72: 285—boldface added). In other words, *some* bodies *on some occasions* do not possess active powers even though they are thought to possess such powers. But it does not follow from this that *no* bodies possess active powers. Indeed, Locke goes on to say that "**[s]ometimes** the Substance…puts it self into *Action* by its own Power, and this is properly *Active Power*" (E II.xxi.72: 285—boldface added). Locke's main point is that "the *Active Power* of motion is in no substance which cannot begin motion in it self, or in another substance when at rest" (E II.xxi.72: 286). And what he seems to be saying is that we are sometimes mistaken, but also possibly sometimes right, in thinking that bodies possess active powers. It is clear that Locke takes the mere communication of motion (as in the case of billiard ball collisions) to be an exercise of something other than active power. But whether bodies of themselves can cause themselves or other bodies to move without merely communicating motion that they have received from other bodies is something that Locke leaves entirely open.

In 1696, four years before the publication of the fourth edition of the *Essay*, Locke published his *Reply to the Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter*, which was the third and longest of three open letters to Edward Stillingfleet. In this letter (parts of which I discuss at greater length below), Locke emphasizes the fact that God has the power to superadd powers to matter (and not merely to spirit), including the power of "spontaneous or self-motion" (W4: 464). He writes: "God creates an extended solid substance, without the superadding any thing else to it, and so we may consider it at rest: to some parts of it he superadds motion...: other parts of it he frames into plants…: to other parts he adds sense and spontaneous motion" (W4: 460). He goes on to say that although material substances cannot have the power of self-motion "from themselves" and we cannot conceive how such a power can be in material substances, there is "no reason to deny Omnipotency to be able to give a power of self-motion to a material substance, if he pleases, as well as to an immaterial" (W4: 465). These passages very strongly suggest that Locke thinks that some bodies have the power to move themselves (as opposed to the power of being moved by other bodies or other minds), even if they do not have this power *from themselves*, i.e., by their own nature.

With these passages in mind, we may come to see it as no accident that some of Locke's examples of active powers attributed to inanimate bodies throughout the *Essay* (examples that Locke did not remove in the later editions, despite the fact that they are quite salient in the early editions) are not analyzable as cases of mere motion transfer. The Sun, we are told, "has a *power* to blanch Wax" (E II.xxi.1: 233; E II.xxiii.10: 301), and a load-stone (magnet) has "the power of drawing Iron" (E II.xxiii.7: 299, E II.xxiii.9: 300-1). And, indeed, as Locke was well aware, when a body is simply dropped from a

height, it will fall to earth because of gravitational attraction, despite not having been (in any intelligible way) impelled to move, and when amber is rubbed it will, while itself at rest, attract hair and other light bodies that are not already in motion. In none of these cases does the substance possessing the relevant active power move (whether by borrowed motion or otherwise). In providing these examples, then, Locke may well be pointing to the very real possibility that some bodies under some circumstances have the ability to cause, without merely communicating, motion or change in other bodies.

LoLordo (32-33) briefly discusses a few more passages that she thinks support the view that Locke in the later editions of the *Essay* takes active power not to be present in bodies. First, she quotes from a passage in which Locke claims that we acquire "but a very obscure *Idea* of an *active Power* of moving in Body, whilst we observe it only to transfer, but not produce any motion" (E II.xxi.4: 235), and notes that Locke elsewhere contrasts "the power of *communication of Motion by impulse*" with "the power of *exciting Motion by Thought*" (E II.xxiii.28: 311). She concludes from these passages that "bodies can provide the idea of transmitting power but not the idea of generating it" (33).[4] But this is not accurate. Even in the case of billiard-ball collisions, bodies *can* provide us with the idea of generating motion. Locke's point at E II.xxi.4 and E II.xxiii.28 is that the idea we acquire from the observation of billiard-ball collisions and their ilk is obscure, not that it is non-existent.

Next, LoLordo notes that Locke says that the idea of "*Mobility*, or the Power of being moved" is received "by our Senses…from Body", and the idea of "*Motivity*, of the Power of moving" is received "by reflection…from our Minds" (E II.xxi.73: 286). This *might* be read to suggest that the idea of motivity is *not* acquired from sense perception.

But it is possible that Locke is simply being conservative and careful in not explicitly saying that the idea of motivity is acquired through the senses. Certainly the passage does not explicitly *state* that such an idea *could not be acquired* by sense, and it would be surprising if it did, given that it appears in the early editions of the *Essay*.

Finally, LoLordo quotes Locke as saying that "[*t*]*he primary* Ideas *we have peculiar to Body*, as contradistinguished to Spirit, *are the cohesion of solid*, and consequently separable *parts*, *and a power of communicating Motion by impulse*", while "[*t*]*he* Ideas *we have* belonging, and *peculiar to Spirit*, *are Thinking*, *and Will*, or a power of putting Body into motion by Thought" (E II.xxiii.17-18: 306). But this passage does not say that bodies do not have active power to move themselves or other bodies. All that Locke claims here is that the idea of body includes, whereas the idea of spirit does not include, the ideas of cohesion and of communicating motion by impulse; and that the idea of spirit includes, whereas the idea of body does not include, the ideas of thinking and of putting body into motion by thought. The fact that the idea of body does not include the idea of putting body into motion *by thought* does not entail that the idea of body does not include the idea of putting body into motion, period; and even if it *did*, it would not follow that bodies themselves do not have a power that is not included in their nominal essence. Indeed, this is a quite general point: the fact that the nominal essence of a book does not include the idea that it can be used as a paperweight does not entail that a book itself cannot be used as a paperweight.

2. LoLordo argues that, for Locke (at least in the later editions of the *Essay*), active power is unique to spirits, that it is their will, and that the exercise of active power is

simply volition. In saying this, she (self-consciously) echoes Mattern's claim that "active power is now defined as a capacity to do something by one's own choice" (1980, 71). I suggested above that Locke allows for the possibility (indeed, the actuality) that some inanimate bodies possess active powers inasmuch as they are capable of producing motion in other bodies without borrowing their motion from some external cause. If this is correct, then, *pace* LoLordo and Mattern, active powers are not unique to spirits and cannot be identified with their wills.

LoLordo claims that E II.xxiii.18 "suggests…that the active power of spirits is simply their will". This is roughly right, but LoLordo goes further, claiming that the idea of active power and the idea of will, though not identical, are co-extensive: "all exercises of active powers are volitions, and all volitions are the exercise of active power" (34). The passage she thinks establishes this result is the same one on which Mattern relies to make the same point, namely E II.xxi.72. There Locke writes: "But when I turn my Eyes another way, or remove my Body out of the Sun-beams, I am properly active; because of my own choice, by a power within my self, I put my self into that Motion. Such an *Action* is the product of *Active Power*" (E II.xxi.72: 286). But this passage says no more than that the ability to make parts of my body move by choice is an active power. What the passage conspicuously does *not* say is the converse claim that every active power is an ability to make one's body move by choice, or that all exercises of active power are volitions. And, indeed, as I have argued, some exercises of active power (such as the exercise of a load-stone's active power to move iron filings, or the exercise of the sun's active power to blanch wax) are quite clearly not volitions.

3. LoLordo claims that Locke's account of freedom of action is that S acts freely in performing action *a* iff (i) S does *a* because S wills to do *a*, and (ii) if S had not willed to do *a*, S would not have done *a* (27). She adds that she means "condition (ii) to capture Locke's talk of a power to *forbear*" (27, n. 2). Now the first thing to notice about Locke's account of freedom of action is that it does not purport to analyze what it is for an agent to act freely. What Locke says, as LoLordo notices, is that "so far as a Man has a power to think, or not to think; to move, or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far as a Man *Free*" (E II.xxi.8: 237). This account of freedom reappears in several places in E II.xxi. Here are some examples:

> So that the *Idea* of *Liberty*, is the *Idea* of a Power in any Agent to do or forbear any particular Action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferr'd to the other. (E II.xxi.8: 237)

> *Liberty is not an* Idea *belonging to Volition*, or preferring; but to the Person having the Power of doing, or forbearing to do, according as the Mind shall chuse or direct. (E II.xxi.10: 238)

> But as soon as the Mind regains the power to stop or continue, begin or forbear any of these Motions of the Body without, or Thoughts within, according as it thinks fit to preferr either to the other, we then consider the Man as a *free Agent* again. (E II.xxi.12: 240)

> *Liberty*…is the power a Man has to do or forbear doing any particular Action, according as its doing or forbearance has the actual preference in the Mind, which is the same thing as to say, according as he himself *wills* it. (E II.xxi.15: 241)
>
> So far as any one can, by the direction or choice of his Mind, preferring the existence of any Action, to the non-existence of that Action, and, *vice versa*, make it to exist, or not exist, so far he is *free*. (E II.xxi.21: 244)
>
> In this then consists Freedom, (*viz*.) in our being able to act, or not to act, according as we shall chuse, or *will*. (E II.xxi.27: 248)
>
> Liberty 'tis plain consists in a Power to do, or not to do; to do, or forbear doing as we *will*. (E II.xxi.56: 270)
>
> *Liberty* is a power to act or not to act according as the Mind directs. (E II.xxi.71: 282)

In saying these things, Locke is not providing necessary or sufficient conditions for *acting freely*. What Locke is doing is defining what it is for a man, person, or agent to be free. It may be that there is a way to extract necessary and sufficient conditions for acting freely from Locke's necessary and sufficient conditions for an agent's being free, but the extraction does not lie on the surface of the text and is clearly not among Locke's concerns.[5]

Beyond the general conditions for an agent's being free, namely having the ability to do or not do as one wills, Locke also provides more particular conditions for an agent's being free *in respect of* a particular action or omission. Consider the following passages:

> A Man's Heart beats, and the Blood circulates, which 'tis not in his Power by any Thought or Volition to stop; and therefore **in respect of these Motions**, where rest depends not on his choice, nor would follow the determination of his Mind, if it should preferr it, he is not a *free Agent*. (E II.xxi.11: 239—boldface added)

> For if I can, by a thought, directing the motion of my Finger, make it move, when it was at rest, or *vice versa*, 'tis evident that **in respect of that**, I am free. (E II.xxi.21: 244—boldface added)

> I have the Ability to move my Hand, or to let it rest…: I am then **in that respect** perfectly free. (E II.xxi.71: 284—boldface added)

Here it is plain what the conditions for an agent S's being free in respect of action A are:

> S is free in respect of action A iff (i) S has the power to do A if S wills to do A, and (ii) S has the power to forbear doing A if S wills to forbear doing A.

Locke here presupposes as part of (i) and (ii) that S has a will, i.e., a power "to order the consideration of any *Idea*, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any

part of the body to its rest, and *vice versa* in any particular instance" (E II.xxi.5: 236). For Locke claims that a tennis ball's not being free in respect of its motion or rest derives from the fact that it does not have the power to think or will (E II.xxi.9: 238). But notice that to say that S cannot be free (with respect to any action) unless S has a will is not to say that S cannot do *a* freely unless *a* is voluntary (i.e., unless S does *a* because S wills to do *a*). There is therefore no more than superficial similarity between what Locke says about the tennis ball and what LoLordo says about the conditions for acting freely.

LoLordo glosses an agent's power to forbear doing *a* in counterfactual terms. As she sees it, S has the power to forbear doing *a* iff if S had not willed to do *a*, S would not have done *a*.[6] Interestingly, the counterfactual gloss never appears in Locke's text. The reason, I believe, is that Locke would not endorse, and indeed would oppose, such a gloss. As LoLordo notices (27, n. 2), Locke explicitly counts "*holding one's peace*" as a forbearance (E II.xxi.28: 248). Imagine, then, that Sally is a compulsive speaker, but suppose further that if Sally had not willed to speak, God would have glued her lips shut. According to LoLordo's Locke, Sally has the power to hold her peace iff she would not have spoken if she had not willed to speak. Thus, in the Sally example, LoLordo's Locke would say that Sally has the power to hold her peace. Not only is this counterintuitive, but it does not fit what Locke says. He writes: "if I can, by a…thought of my Mind, preferring one to the other, produce either words, or silence, I am at liberty to speak, or hold my peace" (E II.xxi.21: 244). In other words, Locke is saying that Sally is free with respect to the action of holding her peace (or with respect to the action of speaking) if (i) she can produce silence if she wills to produce silence, and (ii) she can speak if she wills to speak. As Locke sees it, to determine whether Sally is free to hold her peace, we need

to ask, not whether Sally would have failed to speak if she had not willed to speak, but rather whether Sally is able to forbear speaking if she wills to forbear speaking.

LoLordo claims that, for Locke, the active power of a spirit is its will. Faced with the problem that a spirit's liberty, which is distinct from its will, also appears to be an active power, LoLordo counters as follows: "Locke is being at worst slightly careless here, for liberty is an active power just by virtue of will being an active power. The extra [counterfactual] element that makes an action free as well as voluntary…imports no new activity" (33). Most of this just strikes me as confused. It is true, as LoLordo says, that for Locke the will of a spirit is an active power, for it is a power to issue a mental order to the mind or body (E II.xxi.5: 236). But, as I've argued, it is a mistake for LoLordo to suggest that her analysis of acting freely is an analysis of Locke's freedom or liberty of action. So her conclusion that, for Locke, liberty is an active power just by virtue of will being an active power doesn't follow. The truth, I believe, is that Locke's freedom of action is a combination of two conditional active powers (the power to act in accordance with one's volition to act + the power to forbear acting in accordance with one's volition to so forbear), each of which is completely distinct from (and does not in any way result from) the will.[7] It is therefore misleading to suggest that, at bottom, the only real active power of a spirit is its *will*. Under ordinary circumstances, a spirit also has the power to initiate thought (without borrowing anything from without), and this appears to be an active power if anything is.

4. LoLordo is ultimately interested in the necessary and sufficient conditions for counting as a moral agent. Much of her discussion of active power, will, and freedom is designed

to establish that, on Locke's view, none of these three features distinguishes moral agents from non-moral agents, for "animals possess active power" (38), and hence have wills and consequently freedom of action, without being moral agents (38, 41). I agree with LoLordo that Locke takes animals to possess active power, for he takes them to have the ability to move their bodies (and other bodies too) without relying on borrowed motion to do so. But LoLordo errs in supposing that Locke takes animals to have will (or freedom), for there is strong textual evidence that this is something Locke denies. The relevant textual evidence comes from an extended discussion of superaddition in Locke's third letter to Stillingfleet.

In the relevant passage, Locke is criticizing those (including, presumably, Stillingfleet) who think that God can superadd to matter *some* properties not already contained in the essence of matter, but that God *cannot* superadd to matter thought, reason, and volition. The passage is noteworthy because it reveals what kinds of properties Locke thinks would need to be added to mere matter to get plants, animals, and, if such were possible, material spirits:

> God creates an extended solid substance, without the superadding any thing else to it, and so we may consider it at rest: to some parts of it he superadds motion, but it has still the essence of matter: other parts of it he frames into plants, with all the excellencies of vegetation, life, and beauty, which are to be found in a rose or a peach-tree, &c. above the essence of matter in general, but it is still but matter: to other parts he adds sense and spontaneous motion, and those other properties that are to be found in an elephant. Hitherto it is not doubted but the power of

> God may go, and that the properties of a rose, a peach, or an elephant, superadded to matter, change not the properties of matter; but matter is in these things matter still. But if one venture to go one step further, and say, God may give to matter thought, reason, and volition, as well as sense and spontaneous motion, there are men ready presently to limit the power of the omnipotent Creator, and tell us he cannot do it; because it destroys the essence, "changes the essential properties of matter." (W4: 460)

It is clear from this passage both that Locke takes animals, such as elephants, to possess sense and spontaneous motion (i.e., the power to move themselves without relying on borrowed external motion) and that animals lack those properties in addition to sense and spontaneous motion that would be needed to turn them into material spirits, namely thought, reason, and importantly, volition. In Locke's universe, then, animals have sense and spontaneous motion, but no will or volition. When animals move themselves, then, it is not by thought or volition, but rather by instinct, as when a spider spins its web, a bee dances, or a dog buries a bone. In none of these cases does Locke envisage the animal giving its body the mental order to excrete, shimmy, or dig.

In his inimitable attempt to pound Stillingfleet into submission by repetition *ad nauseam*, Locke then goes over the very same points, spinning each part in greater detail. First, he argues that after creating bare extended solid substance, God superadds motion to it in order to make the planets revolve around remote centres and to make either matter move in crooked lines or matter attract matter, all without destroying the essence of matter (W4: 461). He then moves on to "the vegetable part of creation", which "is not

doubted to be wholly material" (W4: 461), and yet which is acknowledged to contain "excellencies and operations", presumably superadded by God again without destruction of matter's essence. Moving "one step farther", Locke considers "the animal world", to account for which Locke supposes that God superadds to matter "life, sense, and spontaneous motion", and, for the continued existence of species, the "power of propagation" (W4: 462). Locke then moves "one degree farther", considering the possibility of God's superadding to matter the power to think or will (engage in "voluntary motion") (W4: 463). Here again, Locke supposes that although animals are alive and possess the faculty of sensation in addition to the powers of self-motion and propagation, they do not possess the faculty of thinking or willing. Locke therefore does not take the active power of self-motion to be sufficient for the power of willing, and presupposes that animals do not have wills. It follows, then, that animals do not possess freedom of action either, given that, as his example of the tennis ball is designed to show, Locke takes the possession of a will to be necessary for the possession of freedom of action. Importantly, all of this leaves room for an interpretive possibility that LoLordo rejects, namely that having a will or possessing freedom of action is, by Locke's lights, sufficient for moral agency. Indeed, this strikes me as the default interpretation.

5. LoLordo agrees with Yaffe (2000) in thinking that Locke works with "two different notions of liberty" (51), namely, freedom of action and "the sort of full-fledged free agency that derives from having the capacity to suspend the prosecution of one's most pressing desires and deliberate about the best course of action" (63). Where LoLordo differs from Yaffe is with respect to the content of full-fledged free agency: for Yaffe

such agency is a form of self-transcendence, in which the agent's volitions are determined by the good (or the agent has the power to bring it about that her volitions are determined by the good), whereas for LoLordo such agency is a form of self-determination, in which the agent's volitions are determined (i.e., made determinate) by the agent's reason (48).[8] In what follows, I explain why the ability to suspend the prosecution of one's desires is not, as LoLordo thinks, "the third and final power [over and above will and freedom] discussed in 2.21" (42).

LoLordo, like Yaffe, points to passages in which Locke writes that the power to suspend is "the great inlet, and exercise of all the *liberty* Men have" (E II.xxi.52: 267) and "the source of all liberty" (E II.xxi.47: 263), that in such a power "lies the liberty Man has" (E II.xxi.47: 263). The fact that Locke describes the power to suspend as an "exercise" of human liberty might suggest that he takes it to be no more than an *instance* of freedom of action: just as I am free with respect to walking, or sitting still, or thinking of elephants, so I am free with respect to suspending the prosecution of my desires. This is my view of what is going on in the central sections of E II.xxi in which Locke discusses the doctrine of suspension. Not so for LoLordo. For her, the power to suspend is clearly not an instance of freedom of action, given that "[i]t seems obvious that beings can meet the 2.21.8 conditions for acting freely even if they do not possess the ability to suspend and deliberate", for "all 2.21.8 requires for an action to be free is for it to be caused by a volition, and for it to be the case that if the agent had willed differently she would have acted differently" (43).[9] But here LoLordo is being led astray by her mistaken belief that Locke uses E II.xxi.8 to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for acting freely. As I've already argued, Locke does nothing of the sort.

In fact the power to suspend is just a special case of liberty of action. First, Locke quite explicitly thinks of actions as encompassing both acts of mind (thoughts and volitions) and acts of body (motion): "All the Actions, that we have any *Idea* of, reducing themselves…to these two, *viz*. Thinking and Motion…" (E II.xxi.8: 237). Second, Locke writes that the power to suspend is the power to "keep [any particular desire] from determining the *will*, and engaging us in action" (E II.xxi.50: 266), that it is the power to "stop [desires] from determining [one's will] to any action", "to hold [one's will] undetermined" (E II.xxi.52: 267), and to "hinder [one's passions] from breaking out, and carrying [one] into action" (E II.xxi.53: 268). Interestingly, Locke compares suspension to "*standing still*, where we are not sufficiently assured of the way" (E II.xxi.50: 266), and, as we have seen, standing still is for Locke a paradigm of forbearance. The most straightforward way to make sense of all this is to suppose that Locke thinks of suspension as forbearing willing to do what one's most pressing desire is pushing one to do. As such, suspension is the forbearance of an act of mind, and hence counts as a mental (rather than bodily) action under Locke's loose conception of action (E II.xxi.28: 248). Metaphysically, freedom in respect of suspending one's desires is no different in kind from freedom in respect of forbearing to daydream or draw an inference.

Why, then, does Locke describe the power to suspend as "the source of all liberty" and as the "great inlet, and exercise of all the *liberty* Men have"? The answer lies in statements about the power of suspension in nearby passages that LoLordo does not quote. Locke writes that the power to suspend is "the hinge on which turns the *liberty* of intellectual Beings in their constant endeavours after, and a steady prosecution of true felicity" (E II.xxi.52: 266-67), that "to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a

fair *Examination*" is "the end and use of our *Liberty*" (E II.xxi.47-48: 264), that "the care of our selves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our *liberty*" (E II.xxi.51: 266), and that the power to suspend "was given [to human beings], that [they] might examine, and take care of [their] own Happiness, and look that [they] were not deceived" (E II.xxi.56: 271). Locke's main point here is that the *point* or *function* of the power of suspension is the attainment of happiness (namely, pleasure and the absence of pain), which is less likely to be achieved "whilst we precipitate the determination of our *wills*, and engage too soon before due *Examination*" (E II.xxi.47: 263). For the forbearance to will gives us room to consider whether the course of action our most pressing desire is impelling us to take will produce a greater overall balance of pleasure and pain than any available alternative. Someone who allows herself to be driven by her most pressing desires may well be free, Locke says, but does not have freedom worth the name: for it is not "worth the name of *Freedom* to be at liberty to play the Fool, and draw Shame and Misery upon [oneself]" (E II.xxi.50: 265). When one exercises the power of suspension, then, one not only *exercises* one's freedom not to will to do what one's desires recommend, one also increases the likelihood of achieving the end, use, and foundation of our liberty, which is the avoidance of misery and the acquisition of pleasure.

6. There is therefore no reason to suppose, with LoLordo, that what distinguishes moral agents from non-moral agents is the power to suspend, thought of as an active power distinct from both will and freedom of action. As far as I can see, there is no reason to deny that for Locke moral agents are just free agents, that is, agents who are able to do as

they will. Such agents have the power to suspend, among other powers that are instances of freedom of action. But there is nothing (metaphysically) special about the power of suspension that differentiates it from freedom of mental action more generally: the former is no more than an instance of the latter.

7. It is an interesting question whether Locke thinks that the suspension of desire itself can be voluntary. LoLordo thinks that Locke's answer is that it can't be. Her reason is this: "Suspension precedes the determination of will by desire—by *any* desire: 'during this *suspension* of any desire, before the *will* be determined to action' (2.21.47). Rather, when we suspend, what we are doing is putting on hold the process whereby desires normally determine volitions" (49). This interpretation strikes me as an overreading of the passage from E II.xxi.47. Locke's point in the context may be captured as follows. Every human agent is buffeted by desires, the most pressing of which at any time pushes her to a particular action (say, eating the piece of chocolate cake in front of her). In such a case, she typically has the power to suspend the prosecution of the most pressing desire *to act in a particular way* (the desire to eat the piece of cake), in order to consider whether it would be better for her on the whole *to act in that particular way* (to eat the piece of cake). So when Locke says that suspension precedes the determination of will by *any* desire, he means that suspension precedes the determination of will by any desire *to act in such-and-such particular way*: he does *not* mean that suspension precedes the determination of will by *any desire*, *period*.

If we do not overread the passage from E II.xxi.47, we see that it leaves room for the possibility that suspension of the prosecution of a desire to do *a* is a voluntary act of

mind (really, a voluntary forbearance to will) that can be determined (i.e., made determinate) by a desire, namely the desire *to suspend* (rather than the desire *to do a*). In the typical case, in keeping with common sense, Locke would be saying that suspension occurs because one wills to suspend, and that one wills to suspend because one desires to suspend, and that one desires to suspend because one is uneasy at the thought that the hasty prosecution of one's most pressing desire may lead to a notably suboptimal outcome. And indeed there is textual evidence that Locke understands suspension to be the kind of mental act that can be (and often is) voluntary. Locke writes: "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" (E II.xxi.53: 268—underlining added). Here Locke says that in most cases human beings have the power to prevent their passions from carrying them into action, i.e., have the power to suspend the prosecution of their most pressing desires, and that this is something that they can do *if they will it*. This statement does not make sense unless it is presupposed that human beings can (and often do) will to suspend. In this respect, suspension, which is a forbearance to will, is really no different from any other mental act or forbearance. I have the ability to forbear obsessing by willing to forbear obsessing, to forbear replaying a popular tune in my head by willing to forbear replaying it, and so on. Similarly, I have the ability to forbear willing to eat the piece of chocolate cake, by willing to wait before choosing whether to eat that piece of cake.[10]

If suspension is not the kind of mental action that can be willed, then, give Locke's account of freedom of action, we cannot be free with respect to the act of suspending. But if Sally does not have the power to suspend or not suspend, as she wills,

then it seems wrong to criticize her for her failure to suspend. And yet Locke is highly critical of human beings' failures to suspend. He writes that "when we have [suspended in order to engage in examination of the potential consequences of our actions], we have done our duty" (E II.xxi.52: 267), that "we may see how it comes to pass, that a Man may justly incur punishment, though it be certain that in all the particular actions that he *wills*, he does, and necessarily does will that, which he then judges to be good", for "though his *will* be always determined by that, which is judg'd good by his Understanding, yet it excuses him not: Because, by a too hasty choice of his own making, he has imposed on himself wrong measures of good and evil…He has vitiated his own Palate, and must be answerable to himself for the sickness and death that follows from it" (E II.xxi.56: 270-71). It follows that Locke is committed to the view that whether humans suspend or not is a matter of choice: for if an agent's failure to suspend is something that happens regardless of her choices, then it seems wrong to criticize her for her failure to suspend.

8. LoLordo concludes from her claim that Locke is agnostic about the causes of suspension that his account of freedom does not require commitment to any metaphysical theses about its basis, or about the relative of virtues of libertarianism or necessitarianism. Because, as I have argued, Locke is not actually agnostic about what moves us to suspend, LoLordo's conclusion does not follow. What we *can* say about Locke's account of freedom is that, like Hobbes's, it is compatible with necessitarianism. For even if all of our actions are causally necessitated, we are still free to act as long as we have the ability to do as we will. And we have such an ability as long as we are not subject to compulsions or restraints (E II.xxi.13: 240), such as locked rooms (E II.xxi.10: 238),

convulsions (E II.xxi.11: 239), paralysis (E II.xxi.11: 239), torture (E II.xxi.12: 239-40), or chains (E II.xxi.50: 266). This is not agnosticism, but straightforward (and metaphysical) compatibilism.

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NOTES

[1] See Rickless (2000; 2001) and Garrett (forthcoming) for the (broadly) Hobbesian reading; and Yaffe (2000), Lowe (2005), Chappell (2007), LoLordo (2012), and Stuart (forthcoming), for "supplementarian" readings.

[2] See also Chappell (2007, 132-33), who claims that "Locke suggests that no body is ever able to produce motion in itself, and hence that no body is possessed of any active power at all."

[3] The idea of active power is obscure and inadequate because (it is at least possible that) bodies do not really *make* change, but merely *communicate* motion that they have received from without.

Passages from Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are cited with an "E", followed by Book (in Roman capitals), Chapter (in Roman lower case), and Section (in Arabic numerals), a colon, and then the relevant page number(s) from the standard edition by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Passages from elsewhere in Locke's corpus are cited from *The Works of John Locke*, new edition, corrected, 10 vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823) with a "W", followed by a colon and the relevant page number(s).

[4] I assume that by "transmitting power" here, LoLordo means "transmitting motion".

[5] Thus I disagree with Chappell (2007, 142), who writes that "there is no reason not to apply 'free' to particular actions as well: a free action is just one with respect to which an agent is free."

[6] Lowe (2005, 130) relies on counterfactuals even more heavily. As Lowe sees it, "one is free…to raise one's arm…just in case *both* (1) if one were to will to raise one's arm, one's arm would rise as a consequence *and* (2) if one were to will to forbear to raise one's arm, one's arm would fail to rise as a consequence".

[7] See also Chappell (2007, 142), who calls it a "two-way power".

[8] Elsewhere I argue that Yaffe's interpretation of Locke is mistaken (see Rickless (2001)). Locke works with a single conception of freedom that does not change throughout the five editions of the *Essay*. This is the conception of freedom encapsulated in the definition of freedom of action described above, namely the ability to do or not do as one wills.

[9] Note that there is a significant difference between saying, as LoLordo does here and at 33, "If the agent **had willed not to *a*** then she would not have done *a*", and saying, as LoLordo does at 27, "If the agent **had not willed to *a*** then she would not have done *a*".

[10] All of this raises an infinite regress problem for Locke. If I suspend willing to eat the cake because I will to suspend prosecution of my desire to eat the cake, and I will to so suspend because I desire to will to so suspend, and yet I have the ability to suspend the prosecution of any of my desires (*including the desire to will to so suspend*) by willing, then it seems that I have the ability to will to suspend the desire to will to suspend the desire to eat the cake. And we are off and running. But that is a problem for Locke, not a problem for Locke interpretation. For a similar worry, see Lowe (2005, 134-35).