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Locke's Diagnosis of Akrasia Revisited

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Matthew Leisinger (2020) argues that previous interpretations of John Locke's account of akrasia (or weakness of will) are mistaken and offers a new interpretation in their place. In this essay, we aim to recapitulate part of this debate, defend a previously articulated interpretation by responding to Leisinger's criticisms of it, and explain why Leisinger's own interpretation faces textual and philosophical problems that are serious enough to disqualify it as an accurate reconstruction of Locke's views. In so doing, we aim to shed further light on Locke's views on the various ways in which humans are prone to err in their pursuit of happiness.

1. Locke on Akrasia: The Interpretive Problem

In a recent article in these pages, Matthew Leisinger argues that previous interpretations of John Locke's account of akrasia (or weakness of will) are mistaken and offers a new interpretation in their place. In this essay, we aim to recapitulate part of this debate and defend our own previously articulated interpretation by responding to Leisinger's criticisms of it. In doing so, we explain how a friendly amendment to our view allows it to evade Leisinger's most problematic objection. We then explain why Leisinger's own interpretation faces tex-

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tual and philosophical problems that are serious enough to disqualify it as an accurate reconstruction of Locke's views. Overall, we aim to shed further light on Locke's understanding of the various ways in which humans are prone to err in the pursuit of happiness.

It is now well known that in the first edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke had difficulty accounting for the possibility of akrasia because he claimed that one's will is always determined by one's judgment of the greatest good (E1II.xxi.29: 248–51).[1] Thus, for example, on this view, if Layla sees that she can do A and judges that it would be best for her to do A, then she will choose to do A (and then do A unless she is prevented from doing A). But this account of what determines the will does not make room for akrasia, which involves choosing to act (and often acting) contrary to what one judges to be best. After the first edition of the *Essay* was published, Locke came under pressure from his friend William Molyneux to recognize that at least some sins do not 'proceed from our understandings' but rather from 'the depravity of our wills' (1979: letter 1579, 601). To make room for this, Locke changes tack and, in the second and subsequent editions of the *Essay*, argues that the will is not determined by the (perceived) greater good, but rather ('for the most part') by the 'greatest, and most pressing' uneasiness (or pain at the thought of an absent good) (EII.xxi.47: 263). This new account of the will's determination makes room for akrasia, inasmuch as it seems possible for the greatest uneasiness to determine the will contrary to one's judgment of what would be best. Thus, says Locke, we can understand how it can happen that Ovid's Medea in Book VII of *Metamorphoses* can describe her irrational love for Jason in the following terms: *Video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor* [I see and approve the better, but I follow the worse] (EII.xxi.35: 254). And we can understand how, despite seeing and acknowledging the greater good (which involves 'health and plenty, and perhaps…the joys of another life'), a drunkard might be driven to the tavern by 'habitual thirst after his Cups' and 'the returns of *uneasiness* to miss his Companions' (EII.xxi.35: 253). Ovid's Medea and Locke's drunkard are akratic, and Locke's new account makes room for weakness of will that 'Experience makes so evident in fact' (EII.xxi.36: 254).

So far, so good. But Locke's account of akrasia appears to clash with another commitment of his, which is that 'every Man is put under a necessity by his constitution, as an intelligent Being, to be determined in *willing* by his own Thought

1. All references to Locke's *Essay* are taken from the following edition: Locke, John. 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press. The shorthand is the following: E for *Essay* (assume editions 2–5 unless otherwise specified, in which case E1, E2, etc.), capital Roman numerals for Book, lower case Roman numerals for Chapter, and Arabic numerals for Section, and then the page numbers of the Nidditch edition. For example, EII.xxi.31: 251 refers to Essay (editions 2–5), Book 2, Chapter 21, Section 31, on page 251.

and Judgment, what is best for him to do: else he would be under the determination of some other than himself, which is want of Liberty' (E5II.xxi.48: 264; see also EII.xxi.71: 283). What this means is that Locke cannot say that what most immediately determines the will in a case of akrasia is pleasure or pain or emotion or some other non-cognitive (i.e., affective or conative, or affective-conative) state. What determines the will most immediately is 'the last determination of the Judgment' (EII.xii.52: 267; see also EII.xxi.56: 270–1). But if the last determination of the judgment of what is best determines the will, then it becomes difficult to understand how, on Locke's view, a person could will contrary to their own best judgment. Even if uneasiness is motivationally efficacious on the will in some sense, it still seems to be judgment that has the last word.

Even worse, it is unclear whether Locke's appeal to uneasiness introduces a genuine non-intellectualist element in his moral psychology at all, for Locke insists that it is not just any uneasiness that determines the will but only *desire*, which is specifically '*uneasiness* in the want of some absent good' (EII.xii.31: 251). While all pain of body or mind is uneasiness according to Locke, this is only motivationally efficacious because with it 'is always join'd Desire, equal to the pain or *uneasiness* felt; and…scarce distinguishable from it' (EII.xxi.31: 251). Desire, as we just saw, is the want of an absent good, and 'in reference to any pain felt, ease is that absent good' EII.xxi.31: 251). But this appears to shut the door to any robust account of akrasia, for desire must arise from a *judgment* of absent good. In fact, Locke later adds that we all necessarily desire happiness (EII.xxi.39: 257), and that what we take our happiness to consist in is a matter of judgment: 'yet all good, even seen, and confessed to be so, does not necessarily move every particular Man's *desire*; but only that part, or so much of it, as is consider'd and taken to make a necessary part of his happiness' (EII.xxi.43: 259). Thus, although uneasiness most immediately determines the will for Locke, judgment seems to ultimately pull the strings. And if this is right, then it is not at all clear how our will might conflict with our judgment of what is best.

2. Our Interpretation

Various commentators have offered interpretations of Locke that purport to solve this problem on his behalf in a way that derives textual support from, or at least maintains consistency with, his writings. In Moauro and Rickless (2019), we argued (against proposals defended by Vailati 1990 and Glauser 2014) that Locke distinguishes between judgments of present happiness and judgments of future happiness, and that this distinction is central to his understanding of akrasia. This is because these judgments are related to the will in different ways. More specifically, we argued that for Locke, the will is *directly* determined only

by one's judgment of present happiness, although it can happen that it is determined *indirectly* by one's judgment of future happiness when one takes things judged necessary to one's future happiness to also be necessary for one's present happiness. Call this the *Indirect Influence Thesis* (IIT). Thus, even if our wills are always determined by judgments of present happiness, they are not always determined by judgments of future happiness. We believe *this* is what Locke understands akrasia to be: weakness of will occurs not when there is a discrepancy between the will and one's judgment of what is best, or one's judgment of happiness *tout court*, or one's judgment of present happiness, but when there is a discrepancy between the will and one's judgment of future happiness.

On our view, this conception of what akrasia is informs Locke's recommendations to avoid it. To draw one's will towards one's future happiness, one needs to contemplate it in such a way as to raise an uneasiness at the thought of missing out on it, thereby raising a desire that can outcompete the desire for what is judged necessary for one's present happiness. Locke's drunkard, then, is akratic because he wills and acts in accordance with what he takes to be necessary for his present happiness (namely, going to the tavern and spending money on carousing with his friends) contrary to what he perceives and acknowledges to be necessary for his future happiness (which is to abstain from excessive spending on excessive inebriation). To solve this problem, Locke's view is arguably that the drunkard needs to exercise an important aspect of his liberty, which is to '*suspend* the execution and satisfaction' of his immediate desires (for drink and companionship), and, having now given himself room to think, to 'examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil' attendant on his various options. And, 'by a due consideration' of the true worth of health and wealth, make himself 'uneasie in the want of [them], or in the fear of losing [them]' and thereby form 'appetites in [his mind] suitable to [them]' (EII.xxi.47: 263; EII.xxi.53: 268). If the drunkard does not do this, he may be held to account for a sin that proceeds from the depravity of his will rather than from a defect in his understanding.[2]

But our view has recently come under fire in an article by Matthew Leisinger, even though, as he acknowledges, 'Moauro and Rickless's interpretation offers

2. As an anonymous reviewer notes, Locke's example of the drunkard occurs much earlier in the chapter than his discussion of the suspension of desire. Yet in the paragraph immediately preceding the discussion, Locke recommends the contemplation of absent good to one whose circumstances very much resemble the drunkard's: '[f]or the removing of the pains we feel, and are at present pressed with, being the getting out of misery, and consequently the first thing to be done in order to happiness, absent good, though thought on, confessed, and appearing to be good, not making any part of this unhappiness in its absence, is jostled out, to make way for the removal of those *uneasinesses* we feel, till due, and repeated Contemplation has brought it nearer to our Mind, given some relish of it, and raised in us some desire' (EII.xxi.45: 262—underlining added). And of course, contemplation of absent good is the main benefit of suspending one's desires.

a promising explanation of Locke's drunkard' and 'enjoys some independent textual support' (2020: 6). Leisinger criticizes our interpretation and then offers an alternative interpretation of his own, according to which 'akrasia is a form of irrationality' that occurs when 'an agent wills to pursue what they themselves judge to be a lesser good rather than a greater good because they judge the lesser good to be more important for their happiness than the greater good (or because they do not judge the greater good to be necessary for their happiness in the first place)' (2020: 9). Our aim in the remainder of this essay is to consider and address Leisinger's criticisms of our interpretation, and then evaluate Leisinger's own proposal. Ultimately, we recognize that Leisinger points out a weakness of our account—namely, IIT. But we think that a friendly amendment to our account that dispenses with IIT is able to overcome all of Leisinger's objections. This amended view strikes us as the best interpretation of Locke's conception of akrasia.

3. Leisinger's Criticisms of Our Interpretation

Leisinger offers three separate criticisms of our view. The first is a 'textual objection', and the other two are philosophical objections, with one posing a 'deeper problem' than the other (2020: 6–8). In fact, we believe it is the 'less' problematic objection that proves to be more troublesome for our view, so we address it separately in the next section. In this section, we address Leisinger's two other objections, which we believe our view can overcome without any further modifications.

We begin with the textual objection. In our previous essay, we argued that our view finds textual support in various places, but in particular at EII.xxi.37. There, Locke writes:

> Another reason why 'tis *uneasiness* alone determines the will, may be this. Because that alone is present, and 'tis against the nature of things, that what is absent should operate, where it is not. It may be said, that absent good may by contemplation be brought home to the mind, and made present. The *Idea* of it indeed may be in the mind, and view'd as present there: but nothing will be in the mind as a present good, able to counter-balance the removal of any *uneasiness*, which we are under, till it raises our desire, and the *uneasiness* of that has the prevalency in determining the *will*. (EII.xxi.37: 254–55)

We argued in particular that this passage supports the following reading:

> Since Locke believes that the present uneasiness of desire alone determines the will, any judgement of absent good can be motivationally efficacious only insofar as it can be considered a *present* good. The judgements that raise our desires and thereby determine the will, it would seem, are judgements of present happiness alone. (2019: 8)

Leisinger replies that we have misread the passage as involving an invalid inference from the assumption that the present uneasiness of desire alone determines the will to the conclusion that only judgments of present happiness raise desire and determine the will.[3] Instead, Leisinger claims that 'Locke's point in this passage is that, given the principle of no-action-at-a-temporal-distance, absent goods cannot determine the will by themselves precisely because they are *absent* and not *present*. He concludes that the will must be determined not by the absent goods themselves but by the present uneasiness of desire for those absent goods' (2020: 7).

Leisinger's reply strikes us as decisive and well worth pointing out. But, of course, the fact that EII.xxi.37 does not support our interpretation does not imply that the interpretation itself is mistaken. In fact, we can appeal to passages other than EII.xxi.37 for support. Leisinger himself (2020: 11) cites one:

> For in this narrow scantling of capacity, which we are accustomed to, and sensible of here, wherein we enjoy but one pleasure at once, which, when all uneasiness is away, is, whilst it lasts, sufficient to make us think our selves happy, 'tis not all remote, and even apparent good, that affects us. Because the indolency and enjoyment we have, sufficing for our *present Happiness*, we desire not to venture the change: Since we judge that we are happy already, being content, and that is enough. For who is content is happy. But as soon as any new uneasiness comes in, this Happiness is disturb'd, and we are set afresh on work in the pursuit of Happiness. (EII.xxi.59: 273, emphasis added)

Here Locke tells us that we are often satisfied with our *present* pleasure, judging that it suffices for our 'present Happiness', and hence find ourselves unmotivated to pursue a 'remote, and even apparent good'. On our view, this illustrates

3. Leisinger says that the conclusion of our reconstruction of Locke's argument is that 'only judgments of present *good* raise desire and determine the will' (2020: 7, emphasis added). But our version of the conclusion uses 'happiness' in place of 'good'. In the interest of charity, we have restated Leisinger's objection in a way that remains accurate to our reconstruction. Nothing of substance will turn on this issue, but it should be flagged in the interest of accuracy.

Locke's claim that our desires are moved by judgments of present happiness, and not always by judgments of future happiness.[4]

At most, we suppose that Leisinger could argue that every passage that we cite in defense of our interpretation does not in fact support it. But it would still not follow from this that our interpretation should be rejected, for it might still be the best interpretation consistent with the entirety of the textual evidence. To determine this, one would need to compare our reading to other readings to discover which (if any) of them is textually and philosophically superior to the rest. We will provide just such an assessment at the end of this essay after considering the relative disadvantages of Leisinger's interpretation.

We now come to the second of Leisinger's objections to our interpretation, which he characterizes as a 'deeper problem' for the view (note that this is actually the third objection in Leisinger's essay). This supposed problem is that our view does not represent akrasia as a failure of rationality. Leisinger illustrates this point with the help of Locke's drunkard example:

> One consequence of Moauro and Rickless's interpretation is that the drunkard is not guilty of any mistake. He judges, correctly, that abstinence is necessary for his future happiness. And he also judges, correctly, that ease from the very real pain of his thirst is necessary for his present happiness. The drunkard acts akratically, therefore, not because he has made some false judgment but rather because he has made two true judgments that, due to the structure of human motivation, tragically lead him to act contrary to his own greater good and future happiness. This is a startling consequence. On this view, what the drunkard needs to do to avoid akrasia is not to correct his judgments (since his judgments are not actually incorrect) but rather to find some way to take pleasure in those actions that will, in fact, conduce to his future happiness…In this sense, it turns out that akrasia is not a failure of rationality but a failure of taste. (2020: 7–8)

4. The same reading arguably applies to a passage in section 44 of EII.xxi: '[b]ut yet in full view of [the difference between the state of eternal durable joys in the afterlife and the state of the pittance of honor, riches, or pleasure that they pursue in their current lives], satisfied of the possibility of a perfect, secure, and lasting happiness in a future State, and under a clear conviction, that it is not to be had here, whilst they bound their happiness within some little enjoyment, or aim of this life, and exclude the joys of Heaven from making any necessary part of it, [many people's] desires are not moved by this greater apparent good, nor their *wills* determin'd to any action, or endeavour for its attainment' (EII.xxi.44: 261). On our interpretation, section 44 says that there is an important difference between a 'full view' (or judgment) of one's perfect and lasting future happiness in the afterlife and the 'bounding' (or judgment) of one's own imperfect and temporary present happiness as consisting of 'some little enjoyment,' that the judgment of one's future happiness does not always move one's desires, but that one's desires *are* moved by what one considers to be a necessary part of one's happiness in the here and now.

We find this criticism odd.

First, if the way to avoid some phenomenon is to correct one's judgments, then, on any plausible understanding of weakness of will, that phenomenon is *not* akrasia. Akrasia is a problem concerning the relation between the will and the understanding, not a problem with the understanding itself. Akrasia is a form of weakness of will, not a form of weakness of understanding. The akratic agent does not need to understand better than she does; she needs to change her motivational state so as to will and then do what she recognizes to be the best thing on the whole. So, we do not find our view 'startling' as an account of akrasia.

Second, the word 'rationality' is ambiguous: the word can refer to theoretical rationality or to practical rationality. When one believes something one knows to be false, one is *theoretically* irrational: one has mutually inconsistent beliefs. But when one does (or chooses to do) something that one knows to be worse than what one knows or believes one could otherwise do (or choose to do), one is *practically* irrational. So, our interpretation can fully capture Leisinger's (reasonable) intuition that akrasia is a failure of rationality, not by viewing akrasia as a failure of theoretical rationality but rather as a failure of practical rationality.

Third, and finally, there is no reason to think that our interpretation treats akrasia primarily as a failure of *taste*. It is true that the problem with akrasia, on our view, is *related to* the fact that the relevant agents do not take sufficient pleasure in actions that conduce to their future happiness. It is partly because akratic agents do not take sufficient pleasure in these actions that they are insufficiently motivated to pursue their future happiness. So, in that sense, the problem with akrasia is *related to* a failure of taste. But the *nature* of the problem with akrasia is not that akratic agents take insufficient pleasure in actions that conduce to their future happiness. The problem is one of *motivational failure* or *insufficiency*: the akratic agent is insufficiently motivated to do what is best, which is to pursue their future happiness.

On the whole, then, even though our interpretation does not receive strong support from one particular passage of Locke's *Essay*, it is, as far as Leisinger argues, supported by other parts of, and at least consistent with, the text of the *Essay*. In addition, our view accommodates and explains the intuition that akrasia is primarily a failure of rationality, rather than a failure of taste.

4. An Amendment to Our Interpretation

We turn now to the second of Leisinger's two philosophical objections to our interpretation, which we find more forceful. Leisinger worries that the view of human motivation that we attribute to Locke is 'extraordinarily myopic', inas-

much as it denies 'that we can at least sometimes be motivated to act directly in the pursuit of future happiness' (2020: 7). To illustrate how myopic the attributed view is, Leisinger uses the following 'massage example':

> Suppose that I am considering whether to book a massage for tomorrow afternoon. On Moauro and Rickless's interpretation, while I may judge that the massage is necessary for my future happiness, Locke insists that this judgment by itself cannot generate desire and, consequently, cannot motivate me to book the massage. If I am to act in pursuit of my future happiness, it is not enough that I merely anticipate the future pleasure of the massage. Instead, I must take pleasure in *the present act of booking it*. It is only if I judge that booking a massage is necessary for my present happiness that I can desire to undertake the means towards what I already judge to be necessary for my future happiness. (2020: 7)

Leisinger's thought here is that Locke was too good of a philosopher to insist on such a myopic account of motivation: he, like all reasonable people, would surely recognize that it can (and often does) happen that judgments of future happiness, and not just judgments of present happiness, generate desires that move people to act.

We believe this objection indeed points to a problem for our view—at least in the view's original form. However, we also believe that a friendly amendment to our view allows it to overcome the objection. More specifically, we give up IIT—the thesis that for Locke only judgments of present happiness are able to move the will directly. Recall that, in our previous essay, we proposed IIT as the explanation for why judgments of present happiness and judgments of future happiness influence the will differently, which on our view is Locke's ultimate diagnosis of akrasia. Crucially, we hold onto this second point—Locke does distinguish between judgments of present happiness and judgments of future happiness, and he believes these judgments affect the will in different ways. This is why we see the abandonment of IIT as a friendly amendment to our interpretation, and not an entirely new view. In the rest of the section, we first describe our reasons for giving up IIT and then propose a replacement for it.

To get started, it will be useful to distinguish between two versions of Leisinger's objection, one weaker and the other stronger. We believe the weaker version, which we consider first, does not pose a problem for our view. It is the second, stronger version that proves to be problematic, and an occasion for a friendly amendment to our interpretation.

The first version of Leisinger's objection might be called the 'myopia objection'. This is the objection that, on our reading of it, Locke's moral psychology would make human agents so temporally narrow in their interests as to be unbe-

lievable. But we do not think this is fair to our view—even in its unamended form. In Moauro and Rickless (2019), we argued that for Locke raising desire and motivating action must derive from a judgment of present happiness. This is an implication of IIT. As applied to the massage example, Leisinger takes our view to imply that the only way for the agent of the case to be moved to book a massage is to take pleasure in the present act of booking it, as if he were thinking "oh oh oh, I'm picking up the phone, that's so pleasant—and now I'm dialing, that's pleasant too—and now I hear a voice on the other end: nirvana!" Now we do not think that we need to deny that this sort of pleasure-taking could ever occur. But we also do not think that this is how we *must* analyze the motivational situation in the massage example. What is needed for the requisite motivation, on our previous account of Locke's view, is that the agent judge that booking the massage is necessary for his present happiness.

How might this work? Here is how. The prospective massage client—call him Matt—begins with anticipation of the future pleasure involved in getting a massage and an accompanying judgment that the massage is necessary for his future happiness. This judgment then makes Matt uneasy *in the present* at the thought of not getting a massage in the future. In a final act, Matt judges that this uneasiness should be removed, and that the only way to do so is to book a massage in the future. It is true, of course, that on the unamended version of our view, a judgment of future happiness does not determine the will *directly*, but rather motivates by prompting a judgment of present happiness (in the way of removing a present uneasiness) that directly determines the will. But the fact that human motivation regarding the future is *indirect* does not entail that it is *myopic*: the motivational story that we could offer as an analysis of the massage example in defense of our interpretation *begins* with the agent looking at the future and making a judgment about what is necessary for his future happiness.[5]

Having replied to the first version of Leisinger's objection, we can now consider a stronger version of it. We can think of this as the objection of 'one desire too many.'[6] To fully appreciate this second version of the objection, we have to briefly lay out some groundwork. Consider once more the massage example. As we said above, the agent in the example, Matt, begins with an anticipation of the future pleasure of the massage and an accompanying judgment that the

5. Note that we are assuming that the massage case is *not* an example of akratic behavior, and that Leisinger does not intend it to work as such. On our interpretation, as we understand it, non-akratic agents judge that X is necessary for their future happiness, and this then makes them sufficiently uneasy in the here and now at the thought of not having X in the future that they form a present strong desire for X. In *akratic* agents, the judgment that X is necessary for their future happiness does not make them sufficiently uneasy in a way that results in the formation of a strong desire for X.

6. We owe this phrase to an anonymous reviewer, whose generous comments and detailed knowledge of the debate helped us formulate this stronger version of the objection.

massage is necessary for his future happiness. On our unamended view, Matt only books the massage when he becomes uneasy *in the present* at the thought of missing out on it, since he judges that this uneasiness is incompatible with his present happiness. This is an implication of IIT—again, the thesis that judgments of present happiness alone move the will, and that judgments of future happiness can move the will only indirectly when they become relevant to a judgment of present happiness.

So far, so good. But now we can ask: where does the uneasiness at the thought of missing out on the massage come from? As we note in our first essay, Locke distinguishes between two kinds of uneasiness, which we labeled *noncognitive* and *cognitive* based on their differing etiology. Noncognitive uneasiness consists in pains of the mind or body, to which are joined a desire to be free of them: '[a]ll pain of the body of what sort soever, and disquiet of the mind, is *uneasiness*: And with this is always join'd Desire, equal to the pain or *uneasiness* felt; and is scarce distinguishable from it. For *desire* being nothing but an *uneasiness* in the want of an absent good, in reference to any pain felt, ease is that absent good' (EII.xxi.31: 251). Cognitive uneasiness, on the other hand, is '*uneasiness* in the want of an absent good'—i.e., desire itself: '[b]esides this desire of ease from pain, there is another of absent positive good, and here also the desire and *uneasiness* is equal. As much as we desire any absent good, so much are we in pain for it' (EII.xxi.31: 251). So, uneasiness can be either a noncognitive pain of mind or body, or a desire for some absent good, which is based on an idea that represents absent good, and so is cognitive.

Two points are worth stressing about cognitive uneasiness, or desire. First, as we saw in section 1, cognitive uneasiness results from a *judgment of happiness*: 'yet all good, even seen, and confessed to be so, does not necessarily move every particular Man's *desire*; but only that part, or so much of it, as is consider'd, and taken to make a necessary part of his happiness' (EII.xxi.43: 259, underlining added). And second, for Locke, desire alone is able to move the will to act: 'that which immediately determines the *Will*, from time to time, to every voluntary Action, is the *uneasiness* of *desire*, fixed on some absent good' (EII.xxi.33: 252). So, even when we experience noncognitive uneasiness of present pain, it is only when this uneasiness raises a further uneasiness of desire that is based on a judgment of happiness—the judgment that we cannot be presently happy unless we remove the pain—that the will can be moved to order an action.

Returning to the example, recall that on our account Matt must raise in himself an uneasiness at the thought of missing out on a future massage in order to move his will to book the massage in the present. Now for Locke this uneasiness must be either noncognitive or cognitive. But it cannot be noncognitive, for it is not identical with a *present* pain of mind or body. It is instead connected to an idea of what may or may not happen in the future. It therefore has to be

cognitive. But for that very reason, it must *also* be a desire—a desire for a future massage, which Matt fears he might miss out on unless he acts in the present. It is here that the 'too many desires' objection comes into focus. For if we admit that Matt's judgment of future happiness produces a desire, then why not also say that this desire itself moves him to act? Why should we require that this desire give rise in him to a *further* desire based on a *further* judgment of (present) happiness before it moves Matt's will? This is not a problem of myopia but of multiplying moral psychological entities beyond necessity. There seems to be no reason for Locke to deny that judgments of future happiness can raise desires in us, and so no reason for him to insist that judgments of present happiness alone determine the will.

In response to this version of the objection, we concede that our reading should abandon the claim that, for Locke, only judgments of present happiness (and not also judgments of future happiness) can be motivationally efficacious on the will. That is, we abandon IIT. We now believe that for Locke, judgments of future happiness can move the will on their own—independently of judgments of present happiness. Yet even if this is a significant change, we also believe that it remains faithful to the overall aims of our original reading. For our original reading insists that for Locke the phenomenon of akrasia arises from a discrepancy between the way our present judgments of happiness and our future judgments of happiness relate to our will. That is, our reading continues to attribute to Locke the following three claims: (a) there are two kinds of uneasiness, non-cognitive and cognitive; (b) these are correlated with two kinds of time-indexed judgments of happiness, present and future; and (c) the differential ways these judgments are related to the will give rise to the phenomenon of akrasia. For Locke, akrasia arises because our psychology is temporally structured such that our judgments of what in the present would make us happy have greater sway on our wills than do our judgments of what is required for our future happiness.

But if it is not IIT that explains this difference between judgments of present happiness and of future happiness, then what does? Here is Locke on the question:

> This, I think, any one may observe in himself, and others, that the *greater visible good* does not always raise Men's *desires* in proportion to the greatness, it appears, and is acknowledged to have: Though every little trouble moves us, and sets us on work to get rid of it. The reason whereof is evident from the nature of our *happiness* and *misery* it self. All present pain, whatever it be, makes a part of our present *misery*: But all absent good does not at any time make a necessary part of our present *happiness*, nor the absence of it make a part of our *misery*. (EII.xxi.44: 260)

Locke claims that absent, or future, good sometimes fails to raise in us a desire whose strength matches the acknowledged greatness of the good itself. The second part of the passage may appear to suggest that this results from IIT: absent good is not always part of our *present* happiness as the presence of pain is part of our present misery. But Locke makes clear in the first part of the passage that the difference here is a matter of *degree*, not kind: judgments of absent good deemed necessary for future happiness do raise desires in us, but not *in proportion* to the acknowledged greatness of those goods. This helps explain how akrasia is possible. When the absent goods judged necessary for future happiness are greater than the present goods judged necessary for present happiness, but they *fail to give rise to cognitive uneasiness whose strength matches their greatness*, our wills are determined against our judgment of greater good.

But this explanation seems to introduce even more questions. Why can there be a mismatch between the acknowledged greatness of a good and our desire for it? And why do such mismatches concern only judgments of future happiness, not judgments of present happiness? Here Locke is less helpful. His explanation seems to be that since future goods are *absent*, it is possible to desire them less intensely than we ourselves would deem appropriate, or even not to desire them at all:

> As much as we desire any absent good, so much are we in pain for it. But here all absent good does not, according to the greatness it has, or is acknowledg'd to have, cause pain equal to that greatness; as all pain causes desire equal to itself: Because the absence of good is not always a pain, as the presence of pain is. And therefore absent good may be looked on, and considered without *desire*. (EII.xxi.31: 251)

The contrast with present pains is instructive. For Locke, our desires to escape present pains cannot fail to match those pains in strength, and this is because those pains are *present*. By contrast, since there is no present sensation (no pleasure or pain) accompanying a judgment of future happiness, the strength of a desire to which the judgment leads need not match the intensity of the good being represented (it is worth recalling here that Locke analyses good and evil in terms of pleasure and pain, cf. EII.xxi.42). There is nothing in the mind save for the judgment itself, and so nothing that might move the will to order an action, until the judgment elicits a desire.

This difference between judgments of present happiness and judgments of future happiness is reflected in Locke's recommendations for how to counteract akrasia:

> absent good, though thought on, confessed, and appearing to be good, not making any part of this unhappiness in its absence, is jostled out, to make way for the removal of those *uneasinesses* we feel, till due, and repeated Contemplation has brought it nearer to our Mind, given some relish of it, and raised in us some desire; which then beginning to make a part of our present *uneasiness*, stands upon fair terms with the rest, to be satisfied, and so according to its greatness, and pressure, comes in turn to determine the *will*. (EII.xxi.45: 262).

A judgment of absent, or future, good is motivationally inert on its own. It has no influence on the will, which is determined by successive pains of the mind and body, 'those *uneasinesses* we feel'. It is only through repeated contemplation, which gives us time to 'relish' the future good, that our judgment can have, as it were, the elbow room to generate a desire for the good in question.[7] This desire is able to then contend for influence on the will with our other desires, occasioned by the noncognitive uneasinesses of mental and physical pain. In short, Locke would not tell the akratic person to reconsider his situation and settle on better value judgments, or to address a theoretical inconsistency in his value beliefs (more on this in the next section). Rather, Locke would advise him to make room for his existing value judgments to produce an appropriately strong desire.

Of course, combating akrasia is not merely a matter of cultivating desires for those goods we deem necessary to future happiness. It is also a matter of ensuring that the *strength* of these desires matches the importance of the goods. The story of the drunkard offers a very good example of this crucial difference. The drunkard 'sees, and acknowledges [the greater good], and in the intervals of his drinking hours, will take resolutions to pursue [it]' (EII.xxi.35: 253). He clearly forms a desire to pursue the great future good of abstinence. But the strength of this desire does not match the greatness of the good at which it aims. And so it happens that it is swamped by the (noncognitive) uneasiness associated with the lack of drink: 'the returns of *uneasiness* to miss his Companions; the habitual thirst after his Cups, at the usual time, drives him to the Tavern, though he has in his view the loss of health and plenty, and perhaps of the joys of another life' (EII.xxi.35: 253). Because the drunkard's judgment of future happiness produces an uneasiness weaker than the acknowledged goodness of abstinence, it is overcome by uneasinesses of the moment, which are for *goods acknowledged as lesser*. This is how we think Locke explains episodes of akrasia.

7. For the importance of 'relish' to Locke's account of akrasia, which Leisinger overlooks, see Moauro and Rickless (2019: 10–11).

5. Leisinger's Interpretation

Now that we have responded to Leisinger's objections to our account, in part by amending it, it is time to assess Leisinger's own interpretation of Lockean akrasia. We believe that Leisinger's account runs into several serious issues. As previously noted, Leisinger claims that '[a]krasia is what happens when an agent wills to pursue what they themselves judge to be a lesser good rather than a greater good because they judge the lesser good to be more important for their happiness than the greater good (or because they do not judge the greater good to be necessary for their happiness in the first place)' (2020: 9). Leisinger illustrates this view with the following account of Locke's drunkard example:

> the drunkard is irrational. Recall that Locke takes happiness to consist in pleasure and the absence of pain and that he takes an object to be good for an agent only insofar as it brings that agent more pleasure or less pain (EII.xxi.41–2). Given these definitions, it is hard to see how a lesser good (something that brings less pleasure) could possibly be more important for an agent's happiness (their overall pleasure) than a greater good (something that brings more pleasure)…Therefore, since the drunkard judges that abstinence is his greater good, he ought rationally to judge that abstinence is more important for his happiness than ease from thirst. The drunkard does not form the latter judgment, however. Instead, he forms the contrary judgment that ease from thirst is more important for his happiness than abstinence. It follows, I claim, that the drunkard is irrational. Indeed, it appears to follow not merely that he is irrational but that he is inconsistent: he judges both that abstinence is his greater good and that ease from thirst is more important for his happiness than abstinence even though, given the significance of the terms 'good' and 'happiness', the truth of the latter judgment entails the falsity of the former. (2020: 9)

On Leisinger's interpretation, then, Locke understands the drunkard, and akratic agents more generally, to be *theoretically* irrational, in the sense that they endorse propositions that they know to be mutually inconsistent. The drunkard, in particular, endorses the following propositions:

(P) Abstinence is my greater good (i.e., a greater good for me than ease from thirst).
(Q) Ease from thirst is more important for my happiness than abstinence.

But the drunkard knows that the ideas of goodness and happiness are connected in such a way that the following is true *by definition*:

(R) If X is a greater good for me than Y, then X is more important for my happiness than Y.

And, again, the drunkard surely knows that the relation of *being more important than* is obviously asymmetric:

(S) If X is more important to my happiness than Y, then Y is not more important for my happiness than X.

As Leisinger notes, Q entails not-P (or, equivalently, P entails not-Q). The inference is simple and clear. For the conjunction of P and R immediately entails that abstinence is more important for my happiness than ease from thirst, which, conjoined with S, entails that ease from thirst is not more important for my happiness than abstinence, which is just not-Q. But, as Leisinger also notes, it is not merely true that the drunkard endorses two mutually inconsistent propositions: *the drunkard himself* is (not merely irrational but) inconsistent.

We find that this account of the drunkard's moral psychology seriously strains credibility. Of course, theoretical irrationality does happen. Human beings sometimes endorse propositions that are mutually inconsistent. But this is because they *do not realize* that the propositions are inconsistent. Thus, it can often happen that S endorses the conjunction of P and Q even though P entails not-Q; but this happens only when S does not understand that P entails not-Q. Were S to see that P and Q are inconsistent, S would cease to endorse the conjunction of P and Q. So it defies believability to describe the drunkard as someone who accepts that abstinence is a greater good than ease from thirst while at the same time accepting that ease from thirst is more important for his happiness than abstinence. For, as long as the drunkard understands these propositions, he must understand that the first simply *means* the same as the negation of the second. And this means that the drunkard endorses propositions that he *knows to be* mutually inconsistent. This is incoherent, at least on the assumption that the drunkard has not lost his mind. It would be impossible to conceive of the drunkard as a thinking being, were Leisinger's description true of him. But even if it were possible for thinking beings to endorse propositions they know to be mutually inconsistent, it is psychologically implausible *in the extreme* to suppose that this is what happens in all (or simply paradigmatic) cases of akrasia. Leisinger's interpretation, then, foists on Locke an account of akrasia that is either philosophically incoherent or highly psychologically implausible. As

Leisinger reads Locke, akrasia is such a deep form of irrationality as to be virtually beyond comprehension.[8]

In addition to offering an interpretation of Locke's conception of the nature of akrasia, Leisinger provides an account of what, on Locke's view, *causes* akrasia. Consistent with his interpretation of the nature of Lockean akrasia, Leisinger claims that, for Locke, 'akrasia is caused by a range of cognitive biases that systematically distort our judgments about what is necessary for our happiness' (2020: 12). More generally, 'the fundamental cause of [the erroneous judgments that define akrasia], Locke explains, is "*the weak and narrow Constitution of our Minds*"' (2020: 10, quoting EII.xxi.64: 276).

As Leisinger sees it, 'Locke discusses at least three ways in which the narrowness of our minds tends to distort our judgments about what is necessary for our happiness' (2020: 10). The first is a 'kind of future-discounting' in which 'we tend irrationally to judge that the immediate gratification of present pleasure is necessary for our happiness even when we ourselves judge that it does not constitute our greater good' (2020: 10). The second involves a privileging of 'the removal of pain over the acquisition of pleasure' (2020: 10). This happens 'because our minds are so constituted that even the slightest pain tends to leave us unable to enjoy even those pleasures that we actually possess' (2020: 11). The result is cognitive error: 'we judge that the removal of a small present pain is necessary for our happiness despite also judging that the greater good lies in tolerating that pain for the sake of greater pleasures' (2020: 11). And the third happens when 'the narrowness of our minds tends to distort our judgments about what is necessary for our happiness by disposing us to rest satisfied with lesser pleasures even when greater pleasures are attainable' (2020: 11).

Now it is true that, as Leisinger notes, Locke spends sections 57–68 of EII.xxi discussing 'the wrong judgments Men make of future Good and Evil, whereby their desires are misled' (EII.xxi.58: 272), as well as their causes (see the headings of EII.xxi.64–5: 276 and EII.xxi.67: 278). However, as we will now argue, akrasia is not what the first two causes of mistaken judgment are designed to explain, and the third cause of mistaken judgment actually supports our reading *rather than* Leisinger's.

8. Note that if R or S were not obvious by definition (i.e., true by virtue of the meaning of their terms), it *would* be psychologically plausible to suppose that the drunkard endorses both P and Q. But this is because it would be psychologically plausible to suppose that the drunkard does not see that R and S are true, and hence does not see that P entails not-Q. But, to use Locke's terminology, R and S are 'trifling' propositions, that is, propositions that 'add no Light to our Understandings, [and] bring no increase to our Knowledge' (EIV.viii.1: 609). And this is why it is psychologically implausible to suppose that the drunkard does not know that R and S are true, and hence why it is psychologically implausible to suppose that the drunkard endorses both P and Q.

Consider what Leisinger describes as the first way in which we come to make wrong judgments of future good and evil: future-discounting. Leisinger quotes part of what Locke says about this issue (2020: 10). We will quote the passage somewhat more fully:

> But though present Pleasure and Pain shew their difference and degrees so plainly, as not to leave room for mistake; yet *when we compare present Pleasure or Pain with future*, (which is usually the case in the most important determinations of the Will) *we often make wrong Judgments* of them, taking our measures of them in different positions of distance. Objects, near our view, are apt to be thought greater, than those of a larger size, that are more remote: And so it is with Pleasures and Pains, the present is apt to carry it, and those at a distance have the disadvantage in the Comparison. Thus most Men, like spend-thrift Heirs, are apt to judge a little in Hand better than a great deal to come; and so for small Matters in Possession, part with great ones in Reversion. (EII.xxi.63: 275)

One might have thought that Locke's main point here is to emphasize that we are prone to the kind of future-discounting that involves 'simply underestimating future pleasures and pains in comparison with present ones', as Leisinger puts it. But, according to Leisinger, this would be a mistake:

> On the contrary, Locke's point is that we are 'apt to judge a little in Hand better than a great deal to come', suggesting that we tend to prefer lesser present pleasures over *what we ourselves judge to be* greater future pleasures (and likewise *mutatis mutandis* for present and future pains). Locke thus appears to have in mind cases of akrasia. (2020: 10)

Leisinger's interpretation of Locke's discussion of future-discounting at EII.xxi.63, however, strikes us as mistaken. Locke's main point is not that 'we tend to prefer lesser present pleasures over *what we ourselves judge to be* greater future pleasures', but rather that we tend to prefer what are in fact lesser present pleasures over what *are in fact* greater future pleasures *when and because we see the present pleasures as greater than they actually are*. That is the whole point of Locke's comparison with what vision tells us about objects that are near versus objects that are far away: even though nearby objects are small, we judge them to be larger than what are actually larger objects at a significant distance from us, precisely because the distant objects *seem* smaller to us. Applying the analogy to the case of temporally close versus temporally distant pleasures, Locke's point is that even though temporally proximate pleasures are small, we judge them to

be larger than what are actually larger pleasures in the distant future, precisely because those future pleasures *seem* smaller to us. This is exactly what discounting the future amounts to.

In support of his interpretation of this passage, Leisinger puts a great deal of emphasis on Locke's statement that 'most Men…are apt to judge a little in Hand better than a great deal to come'. Leisinger reads this sentence as meaning that most humans are apt to judge a little in hand better than *what they see as being* a great deal to come. This is why he says that Locke's point here is that 'we tend to prefer lesser present pleasures over *what we ourselves judge to be* greater future pleasures'. But the relevant sentence is ambiguous. Although, taken out of context, the sentence *could* be read in the way that Leisinger reads it, it *could also* be read as meaning that most humans are apt to judge a little in hand better than *what is actually* a great deal to come. And the context of Locke's discussion strongly suggests that it is the latter reading, rather than Leisinger's, that captures his intended meaning. The sentence appears immediately after Locke's statement that '[o]bjects, near our view, are apt to be thought greater, than those of a larger size, that are more remote'. Clearly, Locke's point here is not that spatially proximate objects are apt to be judged greater than spatially remote objects that *we judge to be* of a larger size. This would be incoherent. Instead, Locke means that spatially proximate objects are apt to be judged greater than spatially remote objects that *are actually* of a larger size. And the reason for this, of course, is that, because of how our visual system functions, spatially proximate objects (which take up more of our visual field) *appear to be larger* than spatially distant objects (which take up less of our visual field), even though the spatially distant objects are in fact larger than the spatially proximate ones.

What is the relevance of all this? As we have argued, Locke means EII.xxi.63 to make the now-familiar point that we humans are prone to classical, run-of-the-mill future discounting. We judge what are actually greater future pleasures to be smaller than present pleasures because the present pleasures *seem larger* to us. As a result of this, we prefer the present pleasures to the future pleasures, and we choose to pursue the former over the latter. This mistake *is* a kind of cognitive failure, *but it is not Lockean akrasia*. Akrasia, for Locke, involves preferring and choosing what is actually worse over what is actually better, *not because the worse is seen to be better, but despite the fact that the worse is seen to be worse*.

To illustrate, let us imagine two different drunkards, D1 and D2. D1 is Locke's drunkard: he chooses to go to the tavern despite knowing full well that, should he continue doing so, he will derive less pleasure and more pain than he would from abstaining. D1 is akratic. Now contrast D1 with D2. Unlike D1, D2 chooses to go to the tavern because he really (honest to goodness) believes that he will derive great pleasure from the carousing and suffer little or no negative

consequences, whether to his health or to his wallet, as a result. If those negative consequences are, in fact, much greater than D2 supposes, then D2 is a future-discounter. D2 has made a *factual error*, and suffers as a result, but what he suffers is not the result of *akrasia*. Such factual errors are not, in and of themselves irrational, though they can be caused by forms of motivated irrationality (as when a strong desire for X causes one not to pay attention to any evidence that X will produce negative consequences, and as a result one comes to believe that X will not produce negative consequences). Thus, even on Leisinger's recounting, future-discounting does not produce intrinsic irrationality, and therefore, since akrasia is a form of intrinsic irrationality, cannot count as a cause of akrasia.

Let us now turn to the second way in which, according to Leisinger's reading of Locke, we come to form mistaken judgments about future good and evil, namely, by privileging the removal of pain over the acquisition of pleasure (2020: 10). We do this, on Leisinger's reading, 'because our minds are so constituted that even the slightest pain tends to leave us unable to enjoy even those pleasures that we actually possess' (2020: 11). As a result, we suffer 'a (perhaps non-paradigmatic) kind of akrasia, in which we judge that the removal of a small present pain is necessary for our happiness despite also judging that the greater good lies in tolerating that pain for the sake of greater pleasures' (2020: 11).

Leisinger's textual evidence for this second cause of what he takes to be a 'perhaps non-paradigmatic' form of akrasia is EII.xxi.64. In that section, Locke indeed focuses on situations in which 'Pain possesses us' in such a way that 'a little of it extinguishes all our Pleasures' (EII.xxi.64: 276). But Locke does not conceive of this section as disconnected or separate from the immediately preceding section, which, as we have seen, is devoted to discussion of the phenomenon of future-discounting. For, as the headings of the relevant sections indicate, Locke thinks of EII.xxi.63 as presenting '[*a*] *more particular account of wrong judgments* [*i*]*n comparing present and future*' (EII.xxi.61–62: 274, heading; EII.xxi.63: 275, heading), and then describes sections 64 and 65 as presenting the '[*c*]*auses of this*' (EII.xxi.64–65: 276, heading), i.e., as presenting the causes of wrong judgments in comparing present and future. So, in section 64, Locke does not mean to be describing a way of forming wrong judgments of future good and evil that is distinct from future-discounting. His aim, in sections 64 and 65, is to explain the causes of future-discounting itself. As he says at the beginning of section 64: "[*t*]*he cause of our judging amiss*, when we compare our present Pleasure or Pain with future, seems to me to be *the weak and narrow Constitution of our Minds*" (EII.xxi.64: 276).

What does Locke mean by this? The answer is that Locke thinks that we discount the future when our minds are possessed by pain in such a way as to 'fill[] our narrow Souls, and so take[] up the whole Mind', as a result of which 'we passionately think' that '[n]othing…can exceed, or almost equal, the uneasiness that

sits so heavy upon us', and this thereby 'lessens in our Thoughts, what is future' (EII.xxi.64: 276–7). As Locke sees it, the human mind is narrow, in the sense that even a small amount of present pain fills it in such a way as to make it think that this pain is 'of all other the worst', and hence that no future pain could possibly be greater (EII.xxi.64: 277). This is why, on Locke's view, we see present pain, no matter how small it may be in reality, as larger than any future pain we can think of, no matter how large that pain may be in reality. And thus we prioritize getting rid of the present pain over avoiding the future pain, even though the future pain is actually greater. But this phenomenon is not a form of akrasia, paradigmatic or not. Locke is simply explaining how the weak and narrow constitution of our minds is responsible for the fact that we discount the future, especially when it comes to pains. And, as we have already argued, discounting the future is not itself a form of akrasia at all.

The third way in which, as Leisinger sees it, Locke thinks that 'the narrowness of our minds tends to distort our judgments about what is necessary for our happiness' is 'by disposing us to rest satisfied with lesser pleasures even when greater pleasures are attainable' (2020: 11). Appealing to one of the passages on which we rest our interpretation, namely section 44 of EII.xxi, Leisinger notes that Locke is interested in cases in which people, in full view of the future joys of heaven, 'nevertheless will[] to pursue lesser, worldly pleasures instead' (2020: 11) (see note 4 for the full passage). Leisinger sees these sorts of cases as instances of akrasia, and we entirely agree. And citing another passage that we believe supports our interpretation, namely section 59, Leisinger argues that Locke provides two complementary explanations of the akratic behavior of the agents of section 44. The first is that 'we tend to satisfy ourselves with lesser pleasures simply because "we desire not to venture the change" (II.xxi.59)', and the reason why we do not wish to venture the change is that 'we do not wish to suffer the pain necessary to achieve greater pleasures', as Locke notes at the end of EII.xxi.68 (2020: 11). The second is that we have a 'tendency to focus on present rather than future happiness: "we judge that we are happy already" because small present pleasures "[suffice] for our present Happiness" (II.xxi.59)' (2020: 11). The result is that 'we tend not to concern ourselves with the augmentation of our happiness' (2020: 12).

We have already argued that the passages Leisinger cites to support an account of the third kind of cause that is supposed to explain the formation of mistaken judgments that lie at the heart of akrasia actually support our interpretation. The question is whether these passages also support Leisinger's interpretation. Recall Leisinger's analysis of the inconsistency in judgments that lies at the heart of the drunkard's akrasia. Leisinger thinks that the drunkard judges both P and Q even though P (along with obvious analytic truths) entails not-Q:

(P) Abstinence is my greater good (i.e., a greater good for me than ease from thirst).
(Q) Ease from thirst is more important for my happiness than abstinence.

Let us now transpose Leisinger's explanation of the drunkard's akrasia to the case of the agents of section 44. On Leisinger's account, these agents would, we presume, judge both P* and Q* (even though P* (along with obvious analytic truths) entails not-Q*:

(P*) Eternal pleasure in a future state is my greater good.
(Q*) Current pleasure is more important for my happiness than eternal pleasure in a future state.

Now we have already argued that a state of affairs in which the drunkard judges both P and Q in full knowledge that P entails not-Q is incoherent or at least psychologically extremely implausible. This should be even more obvious in the case of the section 44 agents, who, according to Leisinger, judge that their current pleasures, which they fully acknowledge are significantly inferior to the everlasting and boundless pleasures of heaven, are nevertheless more important for their happiness than heavenly bliss. This should strike us as even more unbelievable than Leisinger's reading of Locke's account of the drunkard's akrasia. Indeed, as we have already seen, if section 59 supports any interpretation of Locke's views on akrasia, it is ours. For, as Leisinger himself notes, the judgment made by the agents of section 44 is that current mean pleasures (such as the pleasures of honor or wealth) are sufficient for their '*present* Happiness' (EII.xxi.59: 273, emphasis added), and it is in large part for this reason that they 'desire not to venture the change', even though they recognize that the pleasures of a future life are immeasurably greater.

On balance, then, some of the passages Leisinger cites in support of his interpretation of Locke's account of the causes of akrasia give an account of (classical, run-of-the-mill) future-discounting and its causes, rather than akrasia, and the rest of the passages actually undermine Leisinger's own account of the nature of akrasia while at the same time providing additional support for our interpretation. Assuming that previous interpretations, such as those defended by Vailati and Glauser, have not accurately captured Locke's conception of the nature of akrasia, we conclude that our reading remains the best interpretation on offer. The Lockean akratic is a person who, despite judging that present goods making a part of his present happiness (e.g., the pleasures of carousing, or the pleasures of honor and wealth) are inferior to future goods making a part of his future happiness, decides to pursue the former goods over the latter. This happens because the desires arising from judgments of future happiness are normally weaker

than the acknowledged greatness of the goods at which they aim. The result is that the Lockean akratic, like Ovid's tragic and unfortunate Medea, follows the worse while at the same time seeing and approving the better.[9,10]

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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9. What about Locke's claim that 'every Man is put under a necessity by his constitution, as an intelligent Being, to be determined in *willing* by his own Thought and Judgment' (EII.xxi.48: 264)? We believe this is neither a judgment of present happiness nor of future happiness, but rather a *third* judgment relevant to Locke's moral psychology. Crucially, this is not a value judgment to the effect that some object or state of affairs is good but rather a pragmatic judgment about *how best to pursue what is good*. It is this judgment that, for Locke, immediately precipitates an act of willing: '[b]ut we being in this World beset with sundry *uneasinesses*, distracted with different *desires*, the next enquiry will naturally be, which of them has the precedency in determining the *will* to the next action? and to that the answer is, that ordinarily, which is the most pressing of those, that are judged capable of being removed' (EII.xxi.40: 257, underlining added; see also 1982, letter 2979: 410–411). But this does not create any problems for Locke's account of akrasia, for this last judgment is only a function of the strength of an agent's desires at the time of action (see 2019: fn. 7). It does not introduce a new intellectualist element in the picture.

10. We are very grateful to the editors, and we would also like to extend special thanks to two anonymous reviewers for very detailed and constructive comments that led us to amend the view defended in Moauro and Rickless (2019).

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