

RESEARCH

Does Locke Have an Akrasia Problem?

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Starting in the second edition of the *Essay*, Locke becomes interested in the phenomenon of akrasia, or weakness of will. As he conceives it, akrasia occurs when we will something contrary to what we acknowledge to be our greater good. This commitment represents an important shift from the first edition of the *Essay*, where Locke argues that the will is always determined by a judgement of our greater good. But traces of the first-edition view are present even in the second edition, so much so that it is unclear whether Locke is entitled to an explanation of akrasia at all. In this essay, we propose a new interpretation of Locke's account of akrasia, one that mediates between his seemingly conflicting commitments. We believe that this interpretation represents an improvement over past interpretations, which make Locke's conception of akrasia too weak to do the work he intends for it. Moreover, getting Locke's account of akrasia right allows us to gain clarity on his view of the will, a subtle and ultimately quite plausible part of his moral psychology.

Keywords: Locke; akrasia; irrationality; judgement; action

Locke famously subjected Chapter xxi of the *Essay* to extensive revision following changes in his account of the will. In the first edition, he identifies the will with desire, and argues that it is determined solely by an evaluative judgement.¹ Starting in the second edition, though, he identifies the will with the power to command an action, and argues that it is determined only by uneasiness—an affective-cum-conative phenomenon perhaps identical with pain or desire, but *not* with judgement. These are important modifications, ones that Locke would not have made without good reasons. Among these was the necessity to account for cases of weakness of will or *akrasia*, that is, cases in which what we will conflicts with an evaluative judgement we make. Indeed, the modifications seem designed in part to help explain how cases of akrasia are possible. If the will were determined solely by evaluative judgements, it would be unclear how the two could conflict. If instead it were determined by uneasiness, then such a conflict would be conceivable.²

Other elements of Locke's second-edition view, however, seem to tell against this picture. Indeed, Locke continues to grant judgment an important role in the determination of the will, one that seems to *rule out* the possibility of akrasia. He writes 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, what is best for him to do: else he would be under the determination of some other than himself, which is want of liberty' (E5.II.xxi.48:264).³ Even worse, he suggests that all errors of practical reason result from errors in judgement: 'tis impossible

¹ We use 'evaluative judgement', here and throughout the essay, as a general term to capture the various kinds of judgement of value that play a role in Locke's moral psychology. As we will see, these include judgements of good and evil as well as judgements of present and future happiness.

² Interpretations of Locke's account of akrasia do not abound in the secondary literature. Some commentators mention Locke's account of akrasia but do not explain it—see Magri (2000: 60) and LoLordo (2012: 48). Other commentators discuss related issues without mentioning akrasia, e.g., Yaffe (2000: 39–42) and Lowe (2005: 136). Yet other commentators do not mention akrasia but argue that, even after the second edition, it is judgement of good and evil that plays the preeminent role in the determination of the will—see Sleigh, Chappell, and Della Rocca (1998: 1252–54) and Stuart (2013: 476–80).

³ All references to Locke's *Essay* are taken from the following edition: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). 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 (e.g., II for book 2), lower case Roman numerals for chapter (e.g., xxi for chapter 21), Arabic numerals for section (e.g., 31 for section 31), and then the page numbers of the Nidditch edition. For example, E.II.xxi.31:251 refers to Essay (editions 2–5) book 2, chapter 21, Section 31, on page 251.

any one should willingly put into his own draught any bitter ingredient, or leave out any thing in his power, that would tend to his satisfaction, and the compleating of his Happiness, but only by a *wrong Judgment*' (E.II.xxi.62:275). Despite the modifications to the first edition, then, Locke does not seem to leave enough room between the will and evaluative judgements for there to be conflict between the two.

In this essay, we propose a new interpretation of Locke's account of akrasia that solves this puzzle. In the first section, we present and motivate the puzzle. In the second section, we consider and criticise two alternate interpretations that attempt to avoid the puzzle by distinguishing between different kinds of evaluative judgements. Though such accounts are correct to note the complexity in Locke's account of judgement, we believe that they render Locke's account of akrasia too weak to do the work he intended for it. In the third section, we present our interpretation. Its key feature is a distinction Locke draws between judgements of present happiness, which are sensitive to the myriad pains and wants we experience in the moment, and judgements of future happiness, which are sensitive solely to considerations of our greater good. Though for Locke the will is always determined by a judgement of present happiness, it is not always swayed by judgements of future happiness. Akrasia occurs when a judgement of present happiness determines the will contrary to a judgement of future happiness—of our greater good.

1. The Puzzle of Akrasia

In the first edition of the *Essay*, Locke defends an account of the will that is clearly indebted to Hobbes.⁴ He claims that the will is the power of '*preferring* the doing of anything, to the not doing of it' (E.II.xxi.28:248). What we will is simply what we want. Locke further agrees with Hobbes that the will is determined by prior deliberation. Against Hobbes's appetitive conception of deliberation, though, he holds that deliberation must be understood in terms of a judgement of good or evil: 'For the cause of every less degree of Pain, as well as every greater degree of Pleasure, has the nature of Good, and *vice versâ*, and is that which determines our Choice, and challenges our Preference. *Good* then, *the greater Good is that alone which determines the Will*' (E.II.xxi.29:250–51). We can call this account *intellectualist*, since it posits that the will is determined by judgements of the greater good. Indeed, it seems on this account that any error in willing must result from an error of understanding; when we pursue the wrong thing, or fail to pursue the right one, we must have made a mistaken judgement about our own good.

Locke's correspondent William Molyneux points out this implication of the account and raises a theological concern related to it: 'you seem to make all sins proceed from our understandings, or to be against conscience, and not at all from the depravity of our wills [so that] a man shall be damned because he understands no better than he does' (Correspondence 4: #1579, 601).⁵ Molyneux's objection appears to be that Locke has no way to account for vices of the will itself. It seems that Locke took the objection seriously, since beginning in the second edition he commits himself to explaining how our will might conflict with an evaluative judgement. He writes that Ovid's verse *Video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor* ['I see and approve of the better, but I follow the worse'], a classic expression of akratic behavior, is 'allowed for true, and made good by constant Experience' (E.II.xxi.35:254). He also argues that the sins of a sincere Christian cannot be attributed to defects in her understanding, because if her will were determined solely by a judgement of her greater good, he does not see how 'it could ever get loose from the infinite eternal Joys of Heaven, once propos'd and consider'd as possible' (E.II.xxi.38:255).

Locke makes two changes to his account of the will related to this new commitment. First, he abandons the desiderative conception of the will. From the second edition onwards, he argues that the will is the power to *command* an action or an omission, rather than to desire or prefer it: '*Volition* is nothing, but that particular determination of the mind, whereby, barely by a thought, the mind endeavours to give rise, continuation, or stop to any Action, which it takes to be in its power' (E.II.xxi.30:250). It seems that Locke's recognition of cases in which will and desire come apart convinced him to make this change. For example, he describes the case of a gouty man who desires to remove his pains the quick and easy way without, however, willing it: '[though he] desires to be eased too of the pain of his Feet or Hands, [since] he apprehends, that the removal of the pain may translate the noxious humour to a more vital part, his will is never determin'd to any one Action, that may serve to remove this pain' (E.II.xxi.30:250).

⁴ For an overview of some of the various accounts of the will in mid-seventeenth century Britain, see Rickless (2013).

⁵ All references to Locke's correspondence are taken from *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982). The shorthand is the following: the volume is indicated by the first number, the number of the letter is preceded by a '#', and the page is indicated by the last number. For example, Correspondence 4: #1579, 601 refers to the fourth volume, letter 1579 on page 601.

The second change concerns Locke's account of what determines the will. The will is not determined by a judgement of the good, he writes, but by 'some (and for the most part the most pressing) *uneasiness* a Man is at present under' (E.II.xxi.31:250–51). Locke explicitly states that he reached this conclusion 'upon a stricter enquiry' into the view that the will is determined by the greater good (E.II.xxi.35:253). It seems likely that this enquiry concerned the possibility of akrasia. Locke does not so clearly define uneasiness, but he describes it as a non-cognitive phenomenon closely associated with pain and desire: 'All 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' (E.II.xxi.31:251). Judgements of our greater good can have only an *indirect* influence on the will, when they raise a desire for the judged good: '*good*, the *greater good*, though apprehended and acknowledged to be so, does not determine the *will*, until our desire, raised proportionably to it, makes us *uneasy* in the want of it' (E.II.xxi.35:253).

With his new view of the will in place, Locke attempts to explain cases in which it seems that it is the will, and not the understanding, that leads to error. To illustrate such cases, Locke tells the story of a drunkard who fights his urges to drink:

[L]et a Drunkard see, that his Health decays, his Estate wastes [...] yet 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 [...]. 'Tis not for want of viewing the greater good: for he sees and acknowledges it, and in the intervals of his drinking hours, will take resolutions to pursue the greater good; but when the *uneasiness* to miss his accustomed delight returns, the greater acknowledged good loses its hold, and the present *uneasiness* determines the *will* to the accustomed action; which thereby gets stronger footing to prevail against the next occasion, though he at the same time makes secret promises to himself, that he will do so no more; this is the last time he will act against the attainment of those greater goods. (E.II.xxi.35:253–54)

The drunkard recognises that his drinking habit is deleterious and that he should avoid going to the tavern, so much so that in moments of clarity he makes resolutions to stay away from it. Yet an uneasiness at the lack of drink somehow overrides his resolutions, and he finds himself walking to the tavern even as he makes 'secret promises to himself' that this time will be the last.

What can account for the discrepancy between the drunkard's 'greater acknowledged good' and what he wills to do? Locke seems to have two answers to this question. First, he distinguishes between two kinds of absent good: absent *positive* good and *ease*. Ease is the absent good we desire when we are in pain. Since the pain is something we currently experience, Locke argues, the strength of the desire to be rid of it matches its intensity, and so the goodness of the ease itself. But absent positive goods are not correlated to present pains, so our desire for them need not match their judged degree of goodness: 'all absent good does not, according to the greatness it has, or is acknowledg'd to have, cause pain equal to that greatness [...]: 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*' (E.II.xxi.31:251). Locke seems to reason from the closeness of uneasiness, pain, and desire to the conclusion that when we are not already in pain, our evaluative judgements need not raise in us a matching desire. In such cases, we can judge that something is a great absent good without desiring it, and so without willing to pursue it.

The second answer Locke offers lies in his account of happiness. Locke specifies that he holds a hedonistic view of the good—we call 'good' what is apt to produce pleasure in us—and defines happiness in terms of it: '*Happiness* then in its full extent is the utmost Pleasure we are capable of, and *Misery* the utmost Pain: And the lowest degree of what can be called *Happiness*, is so much ease from all Pain, and so much present Pleasure, as without which any one cannot be content' (E4–5.II.xxi.42:258). Crucially, Locke claims that we desire *only* the good that we take to be part of our happiness: '*Happiness*, under this view, everyone constantly pursues, and *desires* what makes any part of it: Other things, acknowledged to be good, he can look upon without *desire*; pass by, and be content without' (E.II.xxi.43:259). This is important because Locke does not consider all good things to be part of our happiness. For example, some goods can be in competition with attaining others (E.II.xxi.42:259–60). Since it is happiness we desire, only the absence of goods that we take to be part of our happiness can make us uneasy.

Both of these answers, new in the second edition of the *Essay*, seem to provide Locke with the tools for an account of akrasia, since they make room for the possibility that a judgement of our greater good fails to move our will. But elsewhere in the second and subsequent editions Locke appears to retain key elements

of his first-edition intellectualist views. For example, he seems to claim that our will is determined *solely* by our judgment, writing that it is ‘impossible any one should willingly put into his own draught any bitter ingredient, or leave out any thing in his power, that would tend to his satisfaction, and the compleating of his Happiness, but only by a *wrong Judgment*’ (E.II.xxi.62:275). As if to underscore this point, he adds in the fifth edition of the *Essay* 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, what is best for him to do: else he would be under the determination of some other than himself, which is want of Liberty’ (E5.II.xxi.48:264). It appears, then, that Locke is not prepared to abandon the idea that the will must be determined by a judgement, and that cases of practical irrationality are due to errors of the understanding.

These seemingly intellectualist remarks appear to be reinforced by the role that Locke carves out in his moral psychology for desire. Desire is not, for Locke, an uneasiness like any other, but the *only* kind of uneasiness that determines the will: ‘that which immediately determines the *Will*, from time to time, to every voluntary Action, is the *uneasiness* of *desire*, fixed on some absent good, either negative, as indolency to one in pain; or positive, as enjoyment of pleasure’ (E.II.xxi.33:252). But as we saw, we desire only what we take to be part of our happiness. So it seems that, in every case, our will is *ultimately* determined by a judgement of what makes a part of our happiness: ‘I am sure, where-ever there is *uneasiness* there is *desire*: For we constantly desire happiness; and whatever we feel of *uneasiness*, so much, ‘tis certain, we want of happiness’ (E.II.xxi.39:257). Again, though uneasiness alone immediately determines the will, it seems to be our evaluative judgements that pull the strings.

These traces of intellectualism in Locke’s second-edition view constitute a serious problem for his account of akrasia: there does not seem to be enough room between our judged greater good and our will for genuine conflict between the two to be possible. Let’s review the evidence for this claim. Locke writes that we can willingly do something inconsistent with our happiness only if we make a wrong judgement. For this to be consistent with his view that uneasiness alone determines the will, it must be the case that our uneasiness is, in turn, determined only by our evaluative judgements. Indeed, Locke says that our evaluative judgements influence our uneasiness via desire, and that desire *alone* influences the will. To remove any ambiguity, as noted above, Locke adds in the fifth edition of the *Essay* that all human beings are determined in their wills by their thought and judgement. But if all of this is right, how could Locke *also* claim that the will can conflict with what we acknowledge to be our greater good? How could he admit cases of akrasia?

Consider again the story of the drunkard, which Locke takes to be paradigmatic of akrasia. The drunkard is driven to the tavern by an uneasiness at the lack of drink that conflicts with his judgement that his greater good requires sobriety. What analysis could Locke provide of the uneasiness that urges the drunkard to go to the tavern? If we experience uneasiness only when we judge that something necessary to our happiness is lacking, as Locke seems to hold, then we would have to say that the drunkard considers drink to be a necessary part of his happiness. But this flies in the face of how Locke describes the case. Though the drunkard acknowledges that he should cut back his drinking, his ‘accustomed delight’ gradually displaces the influence of this judgement on his will. As he heads to the tavern, he makes ‘secret promises’ that this will be the last time. The drunkard clearly knows it would be best for him—for his happiness—to stay at home.

It seems that Locke has boxed himself into a corner. On the one hand, he is interested in providing an explanation of akrasia, a species of practical irrationality in which our will comes into conflict with what we judge to be our greater good. On the other hand, he maintains that our judgements alone determine the will, if indirectly, and explicitly states that it is impossible for our will to come into conflict with what we consider to be part of our happiness. Though it is clear that Locke wishes to explain the drunkard’s behaviour, it is not obvious that his new account of the will allows him to do so. Some of its features seem still too intellectualist.

2. Two Unsatisfying Solutions to the Puzzle

Ezio Vailati and Richard Glauser, separately and in different ways, have tried to explain how Locke might account for cases of akrasia consistently with his intellectualist commitments. Their explanations rest on a distinction that Locke draws between three kinds of judgements: judgements of goodness, judgements of happiness, and last judgements. We have already seen that Locke distinguishes between the first two kinds of judgements; we can judge something to be a great good, but we do not desire it until we *also* judge it to be necessary for our happiness. Distinct from both of these is a judgement that directly precedes an act of willing, which Locke refers to in his correspondence with Philip van Limborch: ‘an action of willing this or that always follows a judgement of the understanding by which a man judges this to be better for here or now’

(Correspondence, 7: #2979, 410).⁶ According to Glauser, this last judgement is not directly about goods, but 'about what is to be done here and now in order to attain them' (Glauser 2014: 499).⁷

Vailati and Glauser both construe Lockean akrasia as a conflict between the will and a judgement of goodness. As the tripartite distinction shows, however, this does not entail that the will can conflict with *all* kinds of judgement. Indeed, Glauser argues that it is impossible for the will and a judgement of happiness to come into conflict, and that cases of akrasia arise from a tension between a judgement of goodness and a judgement of happiness. This might explain how Locke can account for akrasia within an intellectualist view of the will. But we find that the two interpretations cannot satisfyingly explain the case of the drunkard, and so do not capture Locke's conception of akrasia. In short, the account of akrasia they attribute to Locke fails to meet the desiderata that Locke himself sets out for it. As we argue in section 3, a proper understanding of Locke's conception of akrasia requires a *further* distinction between two different kinds of judgements of happiness: a judgement of present happiness and a judgement of future happiness. It is a conflict between *these* two kinds of judgement that explains akrasia, according to Locke.

2.1. Against Vailati's interpretation

Vailati (1990) claims that, for Locke, akrasia consists in a discrepancy between the judged greatness of an absent good and the strength of the uneasiness we experience at its absence. He argues that this is made possible by a difference, and potential conflict, between two species of motivation. While the motivation for willing to *change* a course of action is always some uneasiness, according to Locke, the motivation for willing to *continue* an ongoing action is a present satisfaction with it: 'The motive, for continuing in the same State or Action, is only the present satisfaction in it; The motive to change, is always some *uneasiness*: nothing setting us upon the change of State, or upon any new Action, but some *uneasiness*' (E.II.xxi.29:249). It seems clear from this passage that Locke recognises some difference between why we continue in a course of action and why we initiate a new one. Vailati explains this difference by arguing that present satisfaction and uneasiness are two different determinants of the will.

This claim bears directly on the question of akrasia. According to Vailati (1990: 215), Locke believes that thinking about a great absent good normally arouses uneasiness in us, but also that this process may sometimes be obstructed by our satisfaction with our current state:

We may contemplate *in absentia* what we judge a very great good, but if we are at ease, satisfied with our present state, our will is little, if at all, moved. This is how weakness of will is possible. Although the drunkard contemplates the good of having his health and wealth restored and values it more than what he finds in spirits and drunken company, the uneasiness generated by the lack of the former is less acute than that generated by the lack of the latter.

The akratic person experiences less uneasiness at the absence of a judged good than she should, given how much she values it. Locke's explanation for this, according to Vailati, is that her present satisfaction somehow dulls any uneasiness associated with contemplation of absent goods. Her current satisfaction thus keeps her will steady in its present course of action.

But there are two significant problems with this interpretation. First, despite Vailati's claim to the contrary, it cannot be applied to the case of the drunkard. Vailati would have to say that the drunkard's present satisfaction with drinking prevents his will from being moved by the consideration of the absent good of health. But the drunkard is *not* presently satisfied with his addiction. Making his way to the tavern, he 'at the same time makes secret promises to himself, that he will do so no more; this is the last time he will act against the attainment of those greater goods' (E.II.xxi.35:254). There is no present satisfaction to play the role that Vailati describes. Indeed, the case of the drunkard is structurally unlike those in which Vailati thinks

⁶ For more on last judgements in Locke's moral psychology, see Glauser (2003) and Walsh (2018). See also Stuart (2013: 478–79).

⁷ Locke warns van Limborch not to confuse 'last judgement of the understanding with mature and right judgement' and specifies that he is speaking 'of that judgment which in every volition immediately precedes Volition which is in reality the last judgement, whether it has been well pondered and recast by mature deliberation, or is extemporaneous and sprung from a sudden impulse; and equally determines the will, whether or not it is in accordance with reason' (Correspondence 7: #2979, 411). The last judgement, then, should not be identified with a judgment of goodness or of happiness. Locke also writes that when we experience a number of desires at once, it is usually the most pressing desire of those that we *judge* capable of being removed that determines the will (E.II.xxi.40:257). The last judgment of the understanding thus mediates between what we desire—its associated judgment of happiness—and what we will.

there can be akrasia. As Locke describes the case, the drunkard's course of action does not remain constant but is *changed* by a new uneasiness: 'when the *uneasiness* to miss his accustomed delight returns, the greater acknowledged good loses its hold, and the present *uneasiness* determines the *will* to the accustomed action' (E.II.xxi.35:253–54). Vailati's interpretation could not apply in principle.

The second problem with Vailati's interpretation is that it does not explain *why* some judgements of goodness fail to move our will. Indeed, a state of present satisfaction does not seem to amount to anything more than the absence of uneasiness for Locke. Throughout Chapter xxi, Locke consistently argues that uneasiness *alone* determines the will. In the only section where he brings up present satisfaction, he still calls uneasiness 'the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action' (E.II.xxi.29:249). Given the central role that uneasiness plays in Locke's moral psychology, and the fact that he provides no account of present satisfaction as a *positive* phenomenon, it is reasonable to think that present satisfaction just is a lack of uneasiness. So present satisfaction cannot *explain* the absence of uneasiness, as Vailati seems to think. All Vailati can say to explain akratic behaviour is that evaluative judgements do not always raise uneasiness.⁸

2.2. Against Glauser's interpretation

Like Vailati, Glauser (2014) claims that Lockean akrasia consists in a discrepancy between the strength of our desires for an absent good and the judged greatness of the good itself. But Glauser does more than Vailati to explain how this discrepancy might arise. What determines it, for Glauser (2014: 497), is a conflict between a judgement of goodness and a judgement of happiness:

It is one thing to judge a certain good to be very great, it is quite another to judge that good to be a necessary part of our happiness. [...] if a desire for a great absent positive good is inappropriately weak with regard to the first (presumably true) judgement about that good, it is in our power, according to Locke, to make the desire appropriate by heightening it. This can be accomplished by further rational deliberation just in case our deliberation reaches the conclusion expressed by the second judgement: that the good is conducive to— or constitutive of—our happiness.

As we noted above, judgements of goodness differ from judgements of happiness, and it is only the latter that raise desires. In cases of akrasia, according to Glauser, the strength of our desires does not match a judgement of goodness, presumably because we (mistakenly) judge that the good in question is not necessary for our happiness. But we may use the power to suspend the influence of desires on our wills (cf. E.II.xxi.47:263; 52:266–67), which gives us time to deliberate about whether a judged absent good is also part of our happiness. If it is, Glauser argues, then this second judgement of happiness 'heightens' our desire for it to match its judged greatness.⁹

Glauser might describe the drunkard case as follows. The drunkard correctly judges that abstinence is a great good, but he has not yet raised in himself a desire for the good that matches its greatness. This, presumably, is because he has not yet realised how central to his happiness abstinence really is. It would behoove the drunkard to suspend the prosecution of his desires and, by arriving at a (correct) judgement that abstinence is necessary for his happiness, raise in himself a desire to stay away from the tavern. Because he fails to do this, the returning uneasiness for drink proves to be stronger than the uneasiness for abstinence, and the drunkard correctly judges that going to the tavern will help him to remove the first uneasiness. It is important for Glauser (2014: 498) that the judgement the drunkard makes after suspending his desires is a judgement of *happiness*: 'when we are victims of akrasia, the judgements to which our

⁸ Though it does not help us with Locke's view of akrasia, Vailati's analysis may help explain another kind of practical irrationality that interests Locke: 'Convince a Man never so much, that plenty has its advantages over poverty; make him see and own, that the handsome conveniences of life are better than nasty penury: yet as long as he is content with the latter, and finds no *uneasiness* in it, he moves not; his *will* never is determin'd to any action, that shall bring him out of it' (E.II.xxi.35:253). In this case, the man ignores his greater acknowledged good despite lacking any contrary uneasiness. But even here, it would be too quick to conclude that present satisfaction plays an active role; it might be a lack of adequate *contemplation* of the greater good that accounts for the lack of a related desire. So even for this alternate form of practical irrationality, Vailati's analysis remains, at best, underspecified.

⁹ The initial discrepancy between desire and a judgement of goodness need not be considered irrational; it is happiness that matters to us, not goodness. Indeed, Locke writes that there is an important asymmetry in practical reason between eliminating present pain and obtaining absent goods (E.II.xxi.36:254). Furthermore, if all absent goods made a part of our happiness, 'we should be constantly and infinitely miserable; there being infinite degrees of happiness, which are not in our possession' (E.II.xxi.44:260–61). Thus, Glauser (2014: 494) himself writes that 'the discrepancy between judgment about, and desire for, absent positive goods [is] quite rational and thus, to some extent, hardly avoidable.' Indeed, he claims that Locke retains an 'important intellectualist streak' (Glauser 2014: 495) from the first edition of the *Essay*.

desires are inappropriate are not “all-things-considered” judgements. They cannot be, since our desires can be heightened by better judgement and by understanding that the goods in question are part of the happiness we desire.’ According to Glauser, Locke believes the drunkard’s problem is that he has not understood that abstinence is a necessary part of the happiness he desires.

Glauser’s interpretation of Lockean akrasia rests on the claim that those who behave akratically fail to judge that some absent good makes a necessary part of their happiness. We believe that this claim is mistaken; the drunkard *does* judge abstinence to be part of his happiness, but the uneasiness for drink proves to be too strong for him to remain motivated to pursue it. Consider again the description that Locke offers of the drunkard: “Tis not for want of viewing the greater good: for he sees and acknowledges it, and in the intervals of his drinking hours, will take resolutions to pursue the greater good; but when the *uneasiness* to miss his accustomed delight returns, the greater acknowledged good loses its hold, and the present *uneasiness* determines the *will* to the accustomed action’ (E.II.xxi.35:253–54, underlines ours). The drunkard not only ‘sees and acknowledges’ the good of abstinence but, as the underlined portions of the passage show, he is initially motivated to pursue it. This suggests that he has a *desire* to maintain abstinence. And since desires are based on judgements of happiness, it seems that the drunkard judges abstinence to be a part of his happiness. Unfortunately, the uneasiness he experiences at the lack of drink is so strong that ‘the greater acknowledged good loses its hold’, and he heads back to the tavern.

The underlying problem with Glauser’s interpretation, and with Vailati’s, is that it cannot account for cases in which an uneasiness overrides the motivational pull of a preexisting judgement of happiness. In a passage that seems to fill out his description of the drunkard, Locke writes that some uneasiness ‘come[s] from causes not in our power, such as are often the pains of the Body from want, disease, or outward injuries, as the rack, *etc.* which when present, and violent, operate for the most part forcibly on the *will*, and turn the courses of Men’s lives from Virtue, Piety, and Religion, and what before they judged to lead to happiness’ (E.II.xxi.57:271–72, underline ours). Locke confirms that he has cases of akrasia in mind here with a remark that closes the paragraph: ‘and therefore there is great reason for us to pray *Lead us not into Temptation*’ (E.II.xxi.57:272). Locke states explicitly here what was implied in his description of the drunkard case: it is not the *lack* of a judgement of happiness that leads to akratic behavior, but the *weakness* of the motivation this judgement produces relative to powerful uneasinesses. This is why some uneasiness seems to ‘operate for the most part forcibly on the *will*’, and to ‘turn the courses of Men’s lives’ from the path they were previously following, the path that they believed would lead to happiness. Thus, the conflict that underlies cases of akrasia cannot be one between a judgement of goodness and a judgement of happiness, as Glauser argues.

3. An Account of Lockean Akrasia

We seem to be back at square one. The intellectualist features of Locke’s account of the will seem to be in tension with his conception of akrasia. We have argued that two solutions to this puzzle are unsatisfying because they fail to fully explain the drunkard’s behavior. In this section, we propose a new solution to the puzzle, one that mediates between Locke’s intellectualist commitments and the second-edition changes to his account of the will. The solution turns on drawing a further distinction in judgement between judgements of *present* happiness and judgements of *future* happiness. We believe there is textual evidence that Locke conceived of judgements of happiness as temporally indexed in this way, and that this feature allowed for him to explain akratic action. For Locke, our wills are determined by judgements of present happiness via desire, and can be indirectly determined by judgements of future happiness only when, via custom and habit, we begin to take pleasure in—or as Locke says, ‘relish’—actions conducive to future happiness, thereby making them a part of our present happiness. Akratic behavior occurs when we judge that something is necessary for our future happiness but, because custom and habit have made it the case that it is not part of our present happiness, we will something contrary to it.

We have seen that Glauser underscores the importance of Locke’s distinction between a judgement of goodness and a judgement of happiness. Missing from Glauser’s analysis of this distinction, though, is a *temporal* element that Locke alludes to on many occasions in Chapter xxi. In §44, for example, Locke explains the discrepancy between the judged greatness of a good and the intensity of our desire for it in terms of our *present* happiness or misery:

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. (E.II.xxi.44:260, underlines ours)

What seems important for Locke here is not whether a judged absent good is necessary for our happiness in general, but whether it is necessary for our happiness *right now*. Because great absent goods are not always necessary for our current happiness, we do not always desire them: 'All *uneasiness* therefore being removed, a moderate portion of good serves at present to content Men; and some few degrees of Pleasure in a succession of ordinary Enjoyments make up a happiness, wherein they can be satisfied' (E.II.xxi.44:261, underline ours).

The temporal element in Locke's conception of evaluative judgements leads to an important contrast. Though judgements concerning our present happiness are in themselves motivationally efficacious for Locke, judgements concerning our *future* happiness need not be. He makes this clear towards the end of §44, the same section quoted above:

But yet in full view of this difference, 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, their desires are not moved by this greater apparent good, nor their *wills* determin'd to any action, or endeavour for its attainment. (E.II.xxi.44:261, underline ours)

In this passage, Locke considers the case of Christians who, though cognisant of the great eternal rewards of heaven, neglect what is necessary for their salvation. To explain such cases, he contrasts two different kinds of judgements of happiness. Sincere believers may judge that the joys of heaven are central to 'happiness in a future State', but this judgement does not move their desires while their happiness extends only to 'some little enjoyment, or aim of this life'. In light of what Locke writes earlier in the same passage, it is plausible to interpret this contrast in temporal terms: sincere believers can judge that the joys of heaven are necessary for their future happiness, but not for their present happiness. Until they make these joys a necessary part of their present happiness, and not simply of their future happiness, Locke thinks that they will not desire them.

This motivational asymmetry between judgements of present happiness and judgements of future happiness seems to be one of the main effects of Locke's shift, beginning in the second edition of the *Essay*, to the view that uneasiness alone determines the will. He writes in §37 that when it comes to willing an action, uneasiness 'alone is present, and 'tis against the nature of things, that what is absent should operate, where it is not' (E.II.xxi.37:254–55, underline ours). Recall that for Locke all pain, including uneasiness, makes a part of our present misery. The removal of all uneasiness is thus necessary for our present happiness. Furthermore, any consideration of absent goods, including goods we judge to be necessary for our future happiness, only influences the will once its pursuit is considered as a *present good*: 'It may be said, that absent good may by contemplation be brought home to the mind, and made present. [...] 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 desires, and the *uneasiness* of that has the prevalency in determining the *will*' (E.II.xxi.37:254–55, underlines ours).¹⁰ 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.

Finally, Locke seems to think that the motivational asymmetry between judgements of present happiness and judgements of future happiness is what makes akrasia possible. This is because he believes that the discrepancy between will and judgement constitutive of akrasia concerns our judgements of *future* happiness. In §57, Locke attempts to 'account for the various and contrary ways Men take, though all aim at being happy' by considering 'whence the various uneasinesses, that determine the will in the preference of each voluntary action, have their rise' (E.II.xxi.57:271). It is in this context that, as we have seen before, he draws our attention to uneasinesses that 'come from causes not in our power [...] which when present, and violent, operate for the most part forcibly on the *will*, and turn the courses of Men's lives from Virtue, Piety, and Religion, and what before they judged to lead to happiness' (E.II.xxi.57:271–72). When one is under the influence of such uneasinesses, Locke continues, he may be unable 'by the contemplation of remote, and future good, to raise in himself desires of them strong enough to counter-balance the uneasiness, he feels

¹⁰ See also §46: 'For good, though appearing, and allowed never so great, yet till it has raised desires in our Minds, and thereby made us *uneasie* in its want, it reaches not our *wills*; we are not within the Sphere of its activity; our *wills* being under the determination only of those *uneasinesses*, which are present to us' (E.II.xxi.46:262, underline ours).

in those bodily torments; and to keep his *will* steady in the choice of those actions, which lead to future Happiness' (E.II.xxi.57:272, underlines ours). In cases like these, which we believe are paradigmatic of akrasia for Locke, one makes the means necessary to secure her future happiness a part of her present happiness, but not enough so to override the motivational pull exerted by uneasiness that draws her will away from the path to future happiness.

At this point, we might ask *why* the motivational asymmetry between judgements of present happiness and of future happiness gives rise to akrasia. Why does Locke suppose that this asymmetry can lead to a *conflict* between what we will and what we judge to be necessary to secure our future happiness? The answer to this question, we believe, lies in a distinction that Locke draws between two kinds of uneasiness. As we have seen in §57 itself, some uneasinesses 'come from causes not in our power' and 'operate for the most part forcibly on the *will*' (E.II.xxi.57:271). By contrast, other uneasinesses 'arise from our desires of absent good; which desires always bear proportion to, and depend on the judgment we make, and the relish we have of any absent good' (E.II.xxi.57:272). Locke seems to contrast these two kinds of uneasiness on the basis of their *etiology*; the first kind of uneasiness arises from 'causes not in our power'—hunger, disease, and injury—but the second kind arises from an evaluative judgement. We might label these *noncognitive-uneasiness* and *cognitive-uneasiness*, respectively, to underscore this difference.

The contrast between noncognitive- and cognitive-uneasiness is evident in Locke's definitions of uneasiness and desire, which he gives in §31:

This *Uneasiness* we may call, as it is, *Desire*; which is an *uneasiness* of the Mind for want of some absent good. All 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 [...]. Besides this desire of ease from pain, there is also another of absent positive good, and here also the desire and *uneasiness* is equal. (E.II.xxi.31:251)

Since it is based on a judgement of absent good, desire is a cognitive-uneasiness. But Locke also writes that all pain is uneasiness, and that pain is always joined to a desire proportional to and 'scarce distinguishable from it.' Though both pain and desires are uneasinesses and always joined together, they are distinct. In other words, uneasiness associated with pain is always accompanied by but *distinct from* uneasiness associated with desire. This entails that pain is a kind of uneasiness that does not arise from any evaluative judgement, which we called above noncognitive-uneasiness. Thus, although noncognitive-uneasiness influences the will only because we *judge* that its removal is necessary for our present happiness, and so desire to eliminate it, it is not *produced* by a judgement, as desires are. Its etiology is noncognitive.

For Locke, cases of akratic behavior occur when noncognitive-uneasiness determines the will contrary to what we judge to be necessary for our future happiness. This conflict is possible because noncognitive-uneasiness does not arise from any judgement of happiness, as cognitive-uneasiness does. As Locke explains in §57, under the influence of noncognitive-uneasiness (mediated by a judgement of present happiness) we can neglect what leads to our recognised future happiness. He also seems to make this point in §38:

But though the greatest allowed, even everlasting unspeakable good, which has sometimes moved, and affected the mind, does not steadfastly hold the *will*, yet we see any very great, and prevailing *uneasiness*, having once laid hold on the *will*, lets it not go; by which we may be convinced, what it is that determines the *will*. Thus any vehement pain of the Body; the ungovernable passion of a Man violently in love; or the impatient desire of revenge, keeps the *will* steady and intent; and the *will* thus determined never lets the Understanding lay by the object. (E.II.xxi.38:256)

Locke explains here why the greater recognised good does not 'steadfastly hold the will', as in §57, by referring to the pernicious influence of a certain kind of uneasiness. He again closely associates this uneasiness with 'pain of the Body' and remarks that such uneasiness does not allow a person to properly exercise her understanding. As in §57, it is uneasiness associated with pain and opposed to the understanding—noncognitive-uneasiness—that determines the will counter to an evaluative judgement, which we believe is a judgement of future happiness.

Read through our interpretation of Locke's conception of akrasia, passages §38 and §57 illuminate the case of the drunkard. Indeed, the two passages mirror Locke's account of the drunkard both in structure and terminology. Recall that the drunkard has his greater good in view, but that 'when the *uneasiness* to miss his accustomed delight returns, the greater acknowledged good loses its hold, and the present *uneasiness*

determines the *will* to the accustomed action' (E.II.xxi.35:253–54). The drunkard's acknowledged good 'loses its hold', or as Locke puts it in §38 'does not stedfastly hold the will' (E.II.xxi.38:256, underline ours). It is clear from this that the drunkard judges sobriety to be a necessary part of his future happiness, and to some extent has made the steps he judges necessary to secure his future happiness (abstinence) to be a part of his present happiness. But the uneasiness of withdrawal—a noncognitive-uneasiness—proves to be too strong, and determines his will despite his 'secret promises' that this will be his last trip to the tavern. As Locke writes in the §57 passage, to which we draw attention once again, this uneasiness seems to 'operate for the most part forcibly on the *will*, and turn the courses of Men's lives from Virtue, Piety, and Religion, and what before they judged to lead to happiness' (E.II.xxi.57:271–72). The drunkard judges correctly that for the sake of his present happiness he must remove the pangs of withdrawal, but he at the same time judges that doing so would compromise his future happiness. Thus, the phenomenon that Locke discusses in §57 and §38 matches exactly the drunkard's behaviour.

It might be objected that our interpretation does not adequately account for the power to suspend the influence of our desires on our will, and for the role that Locke carves out for this power in avoiding practical irrationality.¹¹ Locke writes that 'the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others' (E.II.xxi.47:263). This power, he continues, gives us 'opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due *Examination*, we have judg'd, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness' (E.II.xxi.47:263–64). It seems that our power to suspend the influence of our desires on the will is properly used, for Locke, to give us time to make a better judgement of what is necessary for our happiness. Presumably, exercising this power is what Locke would advise the drunkard to do before giving into his desires. But if this is right, some may argue, then Locke must think that the failure that leads the drunkard to the tavern is one of *judgement*, and so the drunkard cannot, when he heads for the tavern, also judge that doing so is inconsistent with future happiness.

In reply, we do not deny that, according to Locke, the power to suspend the prosecution of our desires can allow us to make a judgement of happiness. We simply deny that Locke believes such a judgement is, in every case, sufficient to determine the will. This is because when it comes to our future happiness, our will is influenced not only by judgement but also by what Locke calls the '*relish*' we have for absent good. In an important passage in §57, Locke seems to draw a *contrast* between judgement and relish, suggesting that the latter is not simply a product of the understanding: 'Other *uneasinesses* arise from our desires of absent good; which desires always bear proportion to, and depend on the judgment we make, and the relish we have of any absent good; in both which we are apt to be variously misled, and that by our own fault' (E.II.xxi.57:272). The way Locke organises the following sections bears out our interpretation. In §58, Locke writes that '[i]n the first place, I shall consider the wrong judgments Men make of future Good and Evil, whereby their desires are misled' (E.II.xxi.58:272). This is what he does in §§58–68. Notably, he discusses judgements of happiness: 'Their aptness therefore to conclude, that they can be happy without it, is one great occasion, that Men often are not raised to the desire of the greatest absent *good*' (E.II.xxi.60:273). Locke includes judgements of happiness among failures of judgement, and not of relish, suggesting that the latter can be an independent source of practical irrationality.¹²

Locke seems to confirm this when he turns to relish in §69. Relish is simply the pleasure or displeasure we take in a particular thing or action, and as such is motivationally efficacious: 'Bread or Tobacco may be neglected, where they are shewn to be useful to health, because of an indifferency or disrelish to them; reason and consideration at first recommends, and begins their trial, and use finds, or custom makes them pleasant' (E.II.xxi.69:280). Though we may judge bread and tobacco to be healthy, in other words, we might avoid them because they do not please us. Some might suggest, as Glauser (2014: 496–97) does, that

¹¹ We would like to thank an anonymous referee for pressing us to address this objection.

¹² The restricted focus on judgement in §§58–68 also provides some important context to Locke's remark that it is impossible for anyone to 'willingly put into his own draught any bitter ingredient, or leave out any thing in his power, that would tend to his satisfaction, and the completing of his Happiness, but only by a *wrong Judgment*' (E.II.xxi.62:275). Prefacing this remark is the following statement of intent: 'But to account more particularly for the Misery, that Men often bring on themselves, notwithstanding that they do all in earnest pursue Happiness, we must consider, how *Things* come to be *represented* to our desires, under deceitful appearances: and that is by the Judgment pronouncing wrongly concerning them' (E.II.xxi.61:274, underlines ours). Far from holding that practical irrationality arises from errors of judgement alone, Locke is interested here, we believe, in a narrower question: how can we do the wrong thing even when we are guided, via desire, by a judgement of our greater good? The answer is that we can judge the goodness of something wrongly, for a variety of psychological reasons including future discounting.

judgements of future happiness alter our relishes, so that once we make such a judgement it is impossible for our wills to be contrary to it. Perhaps this is why Locke considers our power to suspend our desires so important. But, Locke explains, our relishes are shaped at least in part by *social influences and habits*, not judgement: 'Fashion and the common Opinion having settled wrong Notions, and education and custom ill habits, the just values of things are misplaced, and the palates of Men corrupted' (E.II.xxi.69:281). And even if judgements affect our relishes, they are not sufficient on their own to determine them: 'any action is rendered more or less pleasing, only by the contemplation of the end [...]: But the pleasure of the action itself is best acquir'd, or increased, by use and practice' (E.II.xxi.69:280). 'Contemplation of the end' may be necessary to change what we take pleasure in, and so what we will, but it is clearly not sufficient—in order to maintain the course charted by judgment, we must build up good customs and habits.¹³

Locke's discussion of relish thus provides greater texture to his account of the power to suspend desires, and the influence of judgement on the will. But we believe it also provides direct support for our interpretation of his conception of akrasia. Indeed, Locke appears to consider relish in terms of the distinction between present and future happiness: 'The eating of a well-season'd dish, suited to a Man's palate, may move the Mind by the delight it self, that accompanies the eating, without reference to any other end: To which the consideration of the pleasure there is in health and strength (to which that meat is subservient) may add a new Gusto, able to make us swallow an ill relish'd potion' (E.II.xxi.69:280). Locke seems interested here in the contrast between whether some thing or action is necessary for our future happiness and whether we relish it, that is, whether it is pleasant *right now*. We have already seen how this contrast is possible: our present happiness is beholden to noncognitive-uneasinesses that arise independently of any evaluative judgements. But relish can explain why with ill-custom or habit we may reinforce persistent noncognitive-uneasinesses, or even introduce new ones. The particular relish we might have, developed over time, for actions that remove these uneasinesses may determine our will via a judgement of present happiness in a way that conflicts with a judgement of future happiness.

By incorporating Locke's concept of relish into our interpretation, we can shed even more light on the case of the drunkard. The drunkard correctly judges that his future happiness requires abstinence, but his relishes do not (yet) reflect this judgement. As we saw, Locke considers custom and habit to be necessary to reshape our relishes to be in line with our future happiness. And it is precisely to his ill-customs and habits that Locke attributes the drunkard's weakness of will: though the drunkard understands how deleterious his drinking is, 'the habitual thirst after his Cups, at the usual time, drives him to the Tavern', and while his resolutions to quit drinking are efficacious for a short while, 'when the uneasiness to miss his accustomed delight returns, the greater acknowledged good loses its hold' (E.II.xxi.35:253–54 underlines ours). The drunkard's failure does not result from judgement, but from his deleterious relishes reinforced by entrenched custom and habit. It is thus not sufficient for the drunkard to suspend his desires and contemplate the happiness that lies on the path of abstinence; he must change what he currently takes pleasure in by radically reshaping his customs and habits. For his considerations of future happiness to be motivationally efficacious, Locke might say, he must make his future happiness part of his present happiness.

4. Concluding Remarks

We have presented and defended what we take to be the best interpretation of Locke's account of akrasia. We believe the interpretation represents an improvement over the results of past efforts in several ways. First, it explains how Locke may defend a robust conception of akrasia while retaining an important role for evaluative judgements in the determination of the will. This is a significant result in light of Locke's aim, starting in the second edition, to provide an account of errors in action that does *not* rely on errors of judgement, as in the cases of the sincere Christian and of the drunkard. Second, it allows us to understand exactly which aspects of Locke's intellectualism remain after the first edition. The phenomenon of uneasiness and the power to suspend the influence of our desires are important additions to Locke's moral psychology,

¹³ Corneanu (2011: 154–60) provides an illuminating account of the role that habit and practice play for Locke in the cultivation of the intellectual virtues, such as attention and the love of truth. Corneanu explains how for Locke judging and assenting involve skills that can by dishabituation be lost. Since erroneous judgement can lead to harmful volitions, habit and practice associated with the intellectual virtues prove to be pivotal to practical reasoning. We would highlight, in this account, that habits and practices can *also* shape the will by influencing what we take pleasure in. As Corneanu (2011: 149) writes: 'blindness to the relevant proofs is in this case due to the "want of will" to see them, which, Locke says, is a result of laziness, aversion for study, or fear of having prejudices refuted. Such people resist the labor of finding and examining proofs owing to this general flawed disposition, and they "take upon trust" the convenient or fashionable opinion.'

but they do not completely steal the show from the understanding. What results from these additions is a complex, and quite plausible, picture on which what we will is determined by an intricate relation among cognitive, conative, and affective factors. While we are not perfectly rational beings who will only what we deem necessary for our greater good, according to Locke, neither are we beings helplessly dragged left and right by affects and passions that lie outside our control.¹⁴

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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