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Absential Suspension: Malebranche and Locke on Human Freedom

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This paper treats a heretofore-unnoticed concept in the history of the philosophical discussion of human freedom, a kind of freedom that is not defined solely in terms of the causal power of the agent. Instead, the exercise of freedom essentially involves the *non-occurrence* of something.

That being free involves the *non-occurrence*, that is, the *absence*, of an act may seem counterintuitive. With the exception of those specifically treated in this paper, philosophers tend to think of freedom as intimately involved with volition, the judging or deciding activity of the will that votes in favor of or against a proposed action. However, there are two thinkers who endorse a view where *not* willing constitutes human freedom. Our analysis focuses on the views of Malebranche and Locke. Both invoke a notion dubbed here as ‘absential suspension.’ On this view, freedom is associated not with the power of volition, but rather with this kind of suspension.

Keywords: Malebranche; Locke; Freedom; Suspension; Power

1. Introduction

In this paper, we treat a heretofore-unnoticed concept in the history of the philosophical discussion of human freedom: a kind of freedom that is not defined solely in terms of the causal power of the agent. Instead, the exercise of freedom, as we explain more fully below, essentially involves the *non-occurrence* of something.

That being free involves the *non-occurrence*, that is, the *absence*, of an act may seem counterintuitive. Philosophers, and others, tend to think of freedom as intimately involved with volition, the judging or deciding activity of the will that votes in favor of or against a proposed action. Our analysis focuses on the views of Nicolas Malebranche and John Locke, who we argue endorse a view where *not* willing constitutes human freedom. Both defend a notion that we will call ‘absential suspension.’¹ On this view, freedom is not associated with the power to will, but rather with another power—the power to suspend.

The concept of suspension has a long philosophical history which includes the skeptical *epoché*, the suspension employed by Descartes in *Meditations* I and the case of Buridan’s ass. The Buridan’s ass case is instructive. An ass sits before two stacks of hay. The qualities of the stacks that would otherwise be sufficient to attract the animal are identical. With no relevant difference between the stacks, the animal sits unmoved before them. Though unable to move to one or the other, the poor donkey is nonetheless biting at the bit to satisfy its hunger. Its state is one of dynamic tension; removing one stack immediately produces a pell-mell rush to the other. If the animal has a will, it never stops operating during the whole experiment.

¹ Our usage of ‘absential,’ here, is a neologism in the discussion of the metaphysics of freedom. There is, however, a precedent in the field of Biological Anthropology. In *Incomplete Nature: How the Mind Emerged from Matter*, Terrence Deacon, Professor of Biological Anthropology, Neuroscience, and Linguistics at UC Berkeley, writes that when he refers to an absential feature, he means ‘to denote phenomena whose existence is determined with respect to an essential absence ... this paradoxical intrinsic quality of existing with respect to something missing, separate, and possibly nonexistent is irrelevant when it comes to inanimate things, but *it is a defining property of life and mind*’ (2012: 3). Nowhere does he discuss freedom, however. *Grosso modo*, we see absence as the defining property of freedom for the two most important figures on this topic in early modern philosophy.

The situation is like that described by Descartes in *Meditations* I. Precisely in an effort to halt precipitate, fallible judgment, Descartes contrives equally compelling alternatives to each of his previous beliefs. Without some extra-narrative relief, Buridan's ass would remain paralyzed. Descartes releases the paralysis only when with the *cogito* he finds a judgment to which there is no countervailing alternative. Meanwhile, as with the ass, the will remains operative, equally drawn to each of the alternatives to the extent to which it appears true. Moreover, since Descartes identifies will and freedom, the whole procedure is, for him, conducted not only voluntarily, but freely as well.

Our treatment of suspension as an *absence* of volition is importantly different from these accounts. The power to suspend, on the account elaborated by Malebranche and Locke, is a power that is passively experienced by human beings, not unlike the passive power to perceive.² The power is *absential* because its exercise is the absence of something else, namely, a volition. Before willing that some proposed action should be done or not, one can suspend judgment and deliberate how to respond. (In fact, as we shall soon propose, suspension and deliberation are ontologically the same thing.)

Consequently, for Malebranche and Locke will and freedom are not the same. Freedom is exercised when and, strictly speaking, only when volition is absent. From their perspective, Descartes might be acting voluntarily in deploying his method of doubt, but he does not have the freedom necessary to use the will in a way that maximizes happiness. What Descartes is saddled with is a mechanical shift of willing from one perceived good to another. What they introduce instead is a suspension of willing altogether, for only then is deliberation possible. For them, the will is not paralyzed but completely absent.

On this account, as on most accounts, freedom is a good thing; on this account one can also see *why* it is. For both Malebranche and Locke, we always judge and act according to the perceived greater balance, if there is one, between pleasure and pain involved in the two choices of acting and refusing to act. But without suspension and deliberation, one would never be able, except after the fact, to weigh the present balance against others that might now be available or, especially, against future balances. In other words, without freedom understood in terms of suspension, one would likely be the slave of present passions, without circumspection or foresight. Deliberation opens when suspension occurs. For, when one wills, one cannot simultaneously deliberate about alternatives; when one is deliberating, one cannot be willing. Thus, the absence of willing is required for deliberation.

We shall try to show that the identification of suspension and deliberation makes the best sense of the relevant texts of both Malebranche and Locke and the overall thrust of their arguments. One might worry though, if this is their view it seems to be a non-starter. We think independently of the historical texts, there is also a plausibility to what might initially seem an implausible identity claim. How so?

The etymological root of deliberation refers to a balance (think of the astrological sign for Libra).³ What one does is weigh options, one against another. Introspectively, or phenomenologically as we might say, all that one ever deliberates about is how to will, or what decision to make, or what to do. So, we might further say, phenomenology recapitulates etymology.⁴ And on the other side, one only ever suspends willing in order to deliberate. Barring cases of interruption or distraction, why else would one hesitate when presented with a choice *yea* or *no* except to deliberate about the choice. Nor does postponing a decision due to other more pressing business contradict this claim; a postponed decision is nothing other than a suspended decision still under deliberation. In particular, *bona fide* deliberation is different from stalling, for example, in order to avoid responsibility for a decision one way or other. (Such stalling is not suspension of volition, but decision on a different question.) So the connection between suspension and deliberation is closer than recapitulation. For one suspends if and only if one deliberates.

How do absential suspension and deliberation stand ontologically to each another? As we authors see it, they are identical. Neither of them is itself an act of will. If suspension were a volition, the whole account would be self-defeating as a ground for circumspection. The two concepts are introduced to show as a matter of fact how we can stand outside of the hurly-burly of competing transient desires in order to evaluate their long-term prospects. But if suspension were a volition, it would be just another competitor in the fray. On the other hand, deliberation is a state of passive perception, that is, a state that excludes volition. While one is deliberating what to do, that is, how to will, one cannot at that point already be willing. We therefore

² See Locke, 2.21.72; 286. More on this analogy below.

³ From the Latin noun of action *deliberare*; de- + liberare, altered from *librare*: 'to balance, make level' (see OED, definition 1 for 'Deliberation'; and the Online Etymology Dictionary <https://www.etymonline.com>).

⁴ With hat tip to Quine and Haeckel.

propose that, for Malebranche and Locke, deliberation just is the absence of volition, that is, its suspension. In describing what happens when we act freely, it can be useful to distinguish between suspension as the absence of volition and deliberation as the weighing of options. But we see these descriptions as characterizations of two faces of the same coin. There are not two acts, or even two states, first suspension and then deliberation. There is only the one state. (Even phenomenologically, this seems right.) It should be noted too that just as not every cessation of volition is absential suspension (falling asleep, for example), so not every deliberation need be absential suspension, either. Only deliberation about how to will qualifies. But their identity seems just sufficient to secure the circumspection that freedom understood in this way was supposed to explain.

Nor is there any need to distinguish two things. Ontologically, there is only one thing (or, more precisely, one absence where there could be something of a certain sort, namely a volition). As Descartes and many others in the period would have put it, there is only a distinction of reason between suspending and deliberating. Considered under the aspect simply of an absence of volition, it is suspension; considered under the aspect of a passive, cognitive state it is deliberation. Not incidentally, the ontological real identity of suspension and deliberation underlines why suspension cannot be a volition. Suspension is not a matter of willing but of deliberating on how to will.

Tracing the employment of the concept of absential suspension through Malebranche and Locke allows us to make good sense of their treatments of human freedom. In Sections 2 and 3 we defend our reading of Malebranche and Locke, respectively, as developing theories of human freedom that are constituted by absential suspension. In so doing, we indicate how their systems avoid charges of inconsistency leveled against each of them in recent literature on their views. For Malebranche, one charge might be called the Occasionalist Inconsistency Objection: human freedom is *prima facie* incompatible with his causal system, occasionalism, which states that God is the only real cause. This charge leads to another, which might be called the Ontological Mystery Objection, that Malebranche leaves suspension without an ontological ground. For Locke, the charge is that his doctrine of suspension, introduced into the second edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter *Essay*) is incompatible with views that he expressed in the first edition and maintained in all later ones. This Suspension Inconsistency Objection has remained the thorniest problem in discussions of Locke's views on freedom. We argue that the tensions for both thinkers dissolve with an appreciation of the role of absential suspension in their systems. In Section 4, by way of summary and conclusion, we raise the question of earlier sources for the concept of absential suspension.

2. Malebranche

The power to suspend one's judgment and the volition with respect to the object appears in Malebranche's system in 1677 with the third edition of *De la recherche de la vérité* (*Search after Truth*, hereafter *Search*).⁵ Thereafter, it is a central feature of his discussions of human freedom.⁶ This power is introduced into his system in order to explain the mechanism by which the mind can turn away from a particular good that demands its attention.

Malebranche defines the will as 'an impression or natural impulse,' continually impressed on us by God and with an orientation toward the 'general and indeterminate good' (OC I.46/LO 5). The will's ultimate satisfaction, which constitutes our happiness, is to be found only in God.

Given the nature of the will, it is impossible to will something that we do not take to be a good, that is, something we perceive as lacking value. This is because such willing would amount to willing against our desire to be happy, which is impossible.⁷ Malebranche is also concerned to secure a place for freedom. Despite the fact that we cannot will anything that is not perceived as good, we nevertheless have freedom in a morally relevant sense. As Malebranche initially puts it, freedom is nothing more than the mind's power to turn the will 'toward objects that please us so that our natural inclinations are made to settle upon some particular object' (OC I.46/LO 5).

⁵ The LO translation of the *Search* sometimes ignores the cognate term and infelicitously renders *suspendre* as *withhold*, a rather different notion. Only what has already started can be suspended, but what has not yet started can be withheld. Malebranche importantly means the former. See OC II.14/LO 268; OC III.20/LO 549; OC III.28/LO 553; OC III.31/LO 554; OC III.32/LO 555.

⁶ Suspension is deployed in *Traité de la nature et de la grâce* (OC V; 1680, hereafter: *Traité*); *Réponse à la dissertation* (OC VI/VII; and elsewhere in the polemic with Arnauld); *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques* (OC X; 1683); *Traité de morale* (OC XI; 1684); *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur la religion* (OC XII; 1688); *Réflexions sur la prémotion physique* (OC XVI; 1712).

⁷ See also *Traité*, OC V.139–40/R 188–89; *Méditations chrétiennes et métaphysiques*, OC X.66.

The language of 'settling' on a particular good is revealing. For the heart of this model of freedom is the mind's ability to suspend its judgment and love with respect to a particular good.⁸ Malebranche describes this suspension as an avoidance of repose with some particular good, about which more below. He illustrates the way he understands the relationship between freedom and suspension by way of example. He writes,

[1] A person represents some honor to himself as a good that he might hope for; [2] the will immediately wills this good; that is, the impression toward the indeterminate and universal good that the mind is continuously receiving conveys it toward this honor. [3] But as this honor is not the universal good, and is not considered as the universal good by a clear and distinct perception of the mind, for the mind never sees clearly what is not universal, the impression that we have toward the universal good is not entirely brought to rest by this particular good. [5] The mind tends to proceed still further; [4] it does not necessarily and indomitably love this honor, and [6] it is free with regard to it. (OC I.48/LO 5; enumeration added)

With this mechanism, Malebranche outlines how he understands the experience of desire for a finite, terrestrial object:

1. We perceive the object, honor, as an apparent good. In other words, we perceive the honor *as* good, that is, for this hedonist, as promising pleasure.⁹
2. Given the nature of the human will, as an impression towards the good in general, it is immediately conveyed toward the finite thing perceived as good. That is, the will desires it.
3. Because the object perceived as good is finite, the will cannot be satisfied with it, which means that the good offered by honor is insufficient to arrest the impression of the will. Such an arrest can only occur when the will perceives the universal good—God.
4. Because the will is not arrested by the honor, its love is not necessary, as it would be in the event that it desires God.¹⁰
5. Because the will is not irresistibly moved toward the honor, it can 'proceed further,' that is, it is able to recognize the insufficiency of the honor and not be arrested by it. In other words, we can always, in principle, move beyond our desire for something other than God.
6. The will is free with respect to the honor and, by extension, all finite objects perceived as good.

This mechanism in place, Malebranche then proceeds to describe how he understands the process that unfolds across steps 4 and 5:

Now its [the mind's] *freedom* consists in the fact that [1] not being fully convinced that this honor contains all the good it is capable of loving, [2] it can suspend its judgment and love, and then ... [3] by its union with the universal being, or the being that contains all good, it can think about other things and consequently love other goods. [4] Finally, it can compare all goods, love them according to order to the extent to which they ought to be loved, [5] and relate them all to that which contains all goods and which, being alone capable of fulfilling our total capacity of loving, is alone worthy of limiting our love. (OC I.48/LO 5–6; original emphasis, enumeration added)

Malebranche explains step 4, that the will is not necessarily arrested by the finite good because such a good is, by definition, not the universal good:

1. The mind fails to clearly and distinctly perceive the finite good as the universal good. It is thus convinced that the finite good does not contain the true good.

⁸ Malebranche states that what is being suspended is the judgment that such a thing is worthy of our love. The temptation to love the thing in question is not what is suspended. Malebranche thus unequivocally rejects freedom of indifference, which he understands as the ability to will or not will, 'or even of willing the contrary of what our natural inclinations carry us toward' (OC I.47/LO 5). This interpretation of Malebranche is contra Kremer, who states that Malebranche in fact holds freedom of indifference (2003: 190, 204).

⁹ Hedonism is the linchpin of Malebranche's *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (OC XIV, esp. pp. 9ff.).

¹⁰ This is what Malebranche elsewhere refers to as a kind of restlessness, *inquiétude*, that pushes the will to 'go farther' when it is in the presence of a particular good because this kind of good 'does not fill up the whole capacity of the soul' (OC V.121/R 173). See also *Search*, OC III.41/LO 560; OC II.16/LO 269; OC II.450/LO 527; OC I.405/LO 212.

2. It is in virtue of this conviction, that the finite good is not the true good, that the mind is able to suspend its judgment and love.

Step 5 above, that the will can 'go further' is explained by the next part of the passage:

3. When the mind has suspended its judgment and love, that is, when no volition either in favor or against the merit of the finite good has occurred, it is able to think of other things. This ability to think of other things is grounded in Malebranche's theory of perception, according to which ideas of things other than those presently perceived are also available to us in God.¹¹
4. When the mind thinks about goods other than the one initially under consideration, in this case honor, it is able to compare the goods against one another and evaluate their relative merit and lovability.
5. Once in this process of comparing goods, the mind is, ultimately, able to compare any of the goods under consideration against the true good, God. The result of this ultimate comparison of any finite good against the true good is the knowledge that God alone is to be loved.

The mind's freedom, as Malebranche states at the outset of this part of the passage, consists in the fact that (i) our minds are such that they remain unsatisfied in the presence of a merely finite good, and (ii) we are able to suspend. Freedom then, is constituted by the nature of the will and the power to suspend. And with suspension comes deliberation, which, for Malebranche, takes the form of comparison of ideas. While we are deliberating, our judgment and love of the perceived object is and must be suspended; volition is absent. To deliberate about the relative merit of perceived goods is to compare them against each other and, ultimately, against the true good, God. For Malebranche, the deliberative process of comparing goods results in a judgment, for example, 'the perceived good of honor is not the true good.'

In the presence of a presently perceived particular good, then, the mind can either consent to it, or suspend its judgment with respect to it. First, let us consider what Malebranche says about consenting. When we consent to such goods, we rest, an 'act that does nothing and makes the general cause [i.e., the real cause, God] do nothing.' When we sin, Malebranche writes, 'we produce in ourselves no new modification at all' (OC III.25/LO 551). In short, we do nothing, and by doing nothing the will allows itself to be carried toward the perceived good. This is something we allow by failing to act in a way that would prevent this from happening. The act of consent is like a balance pan; when we consent by allowing the will to rest with what it is drawn to, it is always to the greatest good (whether real or apparent). As Malebranche puts it, when the will decides (*se détermine*) to consent, that is, when it ceases examining the various motives 'enticing' it, it must will, in his metaphor, the 'heaviest' motive (OC XVI.47). Consenting now seems like a second-order volition—willing to will. Against this interpretation would be the worry that a vicious regress of volitions looms; moreover, Malebranche gives no indication of such higher-ordered volitions. The most plausible account would be to take consent to be the decision itself. That is, one decides to consent just by consenting, which is to say, by doing nothing. Think, for instance, of remaining silent. Of this, more below.

Let us now turn to what Malebranche says about suspending. When we suspend, he argues, we also do nothing. Here, in contrast to consenting, the situation is not like a balance pan. Recognizing that what is presented to the will is not going to satisfy it, we suspend desire and turn to something else. Because the will is a blind power, it requires a new representation to consider, which is furnished by the intellect. The intellect represents something new to it by what Malebranche calls the *natural prayer*.¹² By way of the natural prayer, we 'actually and freely' will 'to think of things other than the false goods that tempt us' (OC III.25/LO 551).

But Malebranche is careful to stress that this actual and free willing to think of other things does not constitute *doing* anything in the efficient causal sense. Malebranche holds that because the mind 'participates in, and is joined to, Sovereign Reason' the truth is revealed to it 'to the extent that' such a mind 'attends to and beseeches it [truth]' (OC III.39/LO 559). The mind's desire for truth just is the natural prayer, which, in turn, operates as an occasional cause, that is, the occasion for God's revealing ideas to the mind.¹³ It is, Malebranche writes, 'a natural law that ideas are all the more present to the mind as the will more fervently desires them' (OC III.39/LO 559). As merely an occasional cause, the natural prayer does not produce anything.

¹¹ For discussion of Malebranche's theory of ideas, see, for instance, Rodis-Lewis (1963: ch. 4); Schmaltz (2003); Pyle (2003: ch. 3).

¹² See *Search*, OC III.19/LO 548; OC III.39–40/LO 559; *Conversations chrétiennes*, OC IV.11–12; *Traité*, OC V.170–71. The concept of 'attention' is important for Malebranche's notion of the natural prayer. For discussion, see Greenberg (2008) and (2015); Rodis-Lewis (1963: 238–44); Robinet (1965: 423–27).

¹³ See also *Traité*, OC V.102/R 155; *Traité de morale*, OC XI.60/W 76.

Nor is it the case that by describing the willing as ‘free’ Malebranche opens the door to a libertarian, Molinist freedom of indifference that would be active. He explicitly and permanently rejected that interpretation at the outset of the *Search*'s first edition, opting instead for a compatibilist freedom from constraint (OC I.47/LO 5).

Once the mind is thinking about other goods, it can compare them—indeed, must compare them. As indicated in the example of honor above, the mind compares ideas of goods in order to see their relative merit and lovability. In short, Malebranche thinks that the mind is in the business of determining how the objects of its desire stand to its true good. This comparison eventually leads to the realization that no finite good is or ever will be fully satisfactory, that only God can satisfy our capacity for love, and thus that it is only God who ought to limit our love (OC I.48/LO 5–6). Under these (ideal) conditions, one emerges from the state of suspension by judging God to be the true good, our only source of happiness, and solely worthy of our love.¹⁴ In short, we follow the natural impulse to love God.

For Malebranche, when we search for truth, we seek to perceive the relations between things. In the event that we perceive such a relation with perfect evidence, we acquire certainty, which can occur even in this life (OC I.52/LO 8). When we search for goodness, two relations are involved: a relation between things and also a relation, of agreement, with us. Because of this second relation with us, deliberation is (theoretically) always open-ended even if (practically) we must sometimes make a (fallible) decision (OC I.52/LO 8). It ends only in the next life, with the Beatific Vision. In both cases, however, the key lies with what is *perceived*, which determines what is willed. Suspension, that is, the absence of volition, for Malebranche, is what allows for deliberation about these relations. Indeed, it seems, we cannot deliberate about these relations *without* being in a state of suspension. For, we cannot consider and deliberate about these relations if we have already determined their truth value. Thus, in the case of an occurrent perception of an apparent good, if we have consented to the perceived value of that good, then no further comparison of judgment can be made about it; its value has been adjudicated. When we go with the flow of our terrestrial inclinations to the good, we tacitly judge the value of the goods to which we consent. The absence of consent indicates that the value of the good in question is not yet decided; deliberation is needed. It is only with the absence of consent—suspension—that deliberation can occur. The relationship expressed here between suspension and deliberation is best explained, it seems, by their ontological *identity*. In any case, we suspend in order to deliberate, and we deliberate only if we have not yet decided on the question at hand.

We can now see the contrast between consenting and suspending for Malebranche. He notes that suspension often emerges, independently of any intent to examine motives, just from the ‘continual variety of our thoughts and motives’ (OC XVI.48). For example, sometimes undecidable alternatives just happen along. In no case, however, is the difference between consent and suspension an act of the will, for the will is that which is consented to or suspended. Instead, it seems more plausible to take suspension to be the invocation of freedom, occurring just when consent is redirected to and by an alternative object of desire. Once again, the will does nothing, merely carried along for the ride, so to speak. Meanwhile, consent itself would be characterized only negatively as the non-occurrence of suspension, in which case the will rests with what is presently perceived as desirable. In both cases, of consenting and suspending, we bring about an absence. (The two absences are, however, deliberate, free, and relevant to reward and punishment, unlike being drawn to the object, which is unavoidable.) As the occasionalist Malebranche is happy to put it, we do nothing real (*rien de physique*); only God as the one true cause brings about something real, which is to say that, while we are morally (*moralement*) responsible for consenting or suspending consent, God creates and sustains the volition which is consented to or suspended.¹⁵

Before moving to consider how this interpretation of suspension helps to resolve certain objections against Malebranche’s view, we must ask why someone might desire to perceive an idea other than the one they presently perceive. In other words, how does Malebranche explain the difference between the person who does not rest with a presently perceived good and the person who does, or even why one person might rest in one instance of perceiving a particular good, but not another? To begin, Malebranche states that when the natural prayer occurs, it is because we are attending to our ideas. In fact, attention just is another name for the natural prayer (OC XI.60/W 76). In these instances, we are praying for enlightenment from God. How does this happen? Malebranche seems to think that the natural prayer occurs automatically in the event that we see a desired, perceived good as insufficient to fulfill our desire for the good in general.

¹⁴ Malebranche notes that not everyone can suspend equally well in the same situations. Suspension seems to depend on previous experiences, natural dispositions, habits, etc. See *Traité*, OC V.126–27/R 177–78; see also *Traité de morale*, OC XI.73/W 85.

¹⁵ See OC XVI.39–44.

To see such a good as insufficient is to pray for enlightenment, a prayer that serves as an occasional cause for God's revealing other ideas to us, which, in turn, provide a comparison class of goods against which the initially perceived good is judged.

To distinguish between who suspends consent to a particular good and who does not, and to explain why we might suspend to a particular good at one time, but not another, we must distinguish between who attends and who does not; why we attend at one moment and not another. This means that we must distinguish between instances of seeing a particular good as insufficient and instances of not seeing such a good as insufficient. That is, what explains *how* we perceive particular goods? Malebranche states that sometimes, divine grace is enough to get us to see things as they really are; but this is very rare (OC XI.151/W 138). More often, the explanation is extremely ordinary: we had the good luck of being raised by parents, teachers, and communities who educated us to perceive things in the right way.¹⁶ Such an education allows for the development of the habit of attending. Those who have such a habit will pray for enlightenment when they are attracted to a particular good. But even they who have the strongest habit of this kind are liable to have their judgment clouded by strong emotion, distraction, fatigue, hunger, etc., which can override the habit (OC XI.153/W 143). This explains why we might suspend judgment of the value of an object one day, but rest with it the next.

This interpretation of the ontology of consent and suspension provides a way to resolve the Occasionalist Inconsistency Objection, levelled against Malebranche by many commentators. Andrew Pyle, for instance, argues that Malebranche's system 'falls into inconsistency' because 'if they [acts of consent and suspension] serve as reliable, lawlike occasional causes of modifications that are 'physically real' in Malebranche's sense, it is hard to see how he can consistently maintain that they contain in themselves "rien de physique"' (2003: 232).¹⁷ Sean Greenberg (2015) offers a promising response to Pyle that is in line with our discussion here. Greenberg states that Pyle is mistaken in thinking that 'our acts must themselves be the cause of our dispositions' (2015: 181). Indeed, given occasionalism, it just cannot be the case that our consent or suspension causes anything real or physical. But Greenberg goes on to note that a different worry might be driving Pyle's objection. This worry, which we have labelled the Ontological Mystery Objection, is that Malebranche has not told his reader exactly 'what an act of consent or the suspension of consent is' (2015: 181). Ontologically, Greenberg continues, the only place for suspension and consent in Malebranche's substance-mode ontology is to classify them as modes; but this would upset Malebranche's commitment to occasionalism because these acts would be part of the realm of the physical, not the moral. He concludes that when it comes to the ontology of suspension and consent, 'no Malebranchean answer is possible' and that the ontological status of these acts is something of a 'mystery' (2015: 181–82). Taking suspension as the non-occurrence of volition, and consent as the non-occurrence of suspension, as we have suggested, solves this mystery. If suspension were a volition, it would be a mode. But suspension is not a volition, it is the absence of volition, and so it is not a mode.

Non-occurrences, which is to say, lacks of something, both fit comfortably in a substance-mode ontology and offer no conflict with occasionalism. Because the contribution on the part of the human being is an absence, we are able to preserve the view that God does all the work, and we do 'nothing.' These non-occurrences are not part of the physical world, but they are a part of the moral world; we are morally, but not causally, responsible for them. There would indeed be a mystery involved in making ontological sense of something physical that is neither a substance nor a mode in a substance-mode ontology. Recognizing suspension as a non-occurrence, and thus outside the physical realm and substance-mode ontology, allows us to relieve Malebranche of the charge of leaving a mystery.

One final question must be raised of Malebranche here: if freedom is the power to consent or suspend consent, why is the essence of freedom just suspension rather than consent, or both consent and suspension together? A thought experiment, or some counter-factual reasoning of the sort that Malebranche himself deployed, will help. From the outset of the *Search*, Malebranche takes an intellectualist stand by viewing understanding as essential to the mind in a way that will is not. God could not have created a mind without

¹⁶ Malebranche outlines directions for such rearing in *Traité de morale*, OC XI.234–45/W 194–97. See also *Search*, OC I.256–66/LO 125–30.

¹⁷ For Malebranche, the *physical* is the domain of facts, expressed categorically, as opposed to the *moral*, which is the domain of values, expressed modally. On the objection, see also Sleigh, Chappell & Della Rocca (1998: 1243–44); Kremer (2003: 214). Schmaltz (1996: 228) does not directly raise this objection but suggests that nothing precludes it. Using the moral/physical distinction, Dreyfus (1958: 222–23) argues that this difficulty can be resolved. But the consistency of her account is impaired by her failure to clearly separate consent/suspension from attention (as Greenberg [2015: 45 n. 30] points out) and both these powers from freedom itself (Dreyfus 1958: 381).

intellect, but He could have created a mind without will (one that, perhaps, simply enjoyed the Beatific Vision, for example). Moreover, will depends on intellect. Will is an intentional but blind power. It requires an object, such that to will without willing something is not to will at all; but the object of its willing can come only from the intellect's representation of it. So, continuing the thought experiment, we ask, could God have created a mind with a will capable only of consent? Again, the answer is yes. But such a mind would not be free, for it would consent to every perceived good, without the possibility of *not* consenting to it, which Malebranche from the outset takes to be a condition for freedom. To be free, the ability to suspend consent is required. But for Malebranche, we can say no to some attraction only by saying yes to some other attraction; for the desire for good that is the will is inextinguishable. It cannot be quieted or arrested; it can only be diverted. Freedom is something different. It is the absence not of the will, which is inextinguishable, but of a particular exercise of the will. So, while freedom presupposes consent, which presupposes intellect, it is suspension that is the essence of freedom. Or in Locke's terms, it is the 'source,' the 'hinge,' the 'great inlet' of freedom (2.21.47; 263, 2.21.52; 266, 2.21.52; 267). Crucially, Locke, to whom we now turn, also distinguishes freedom from the will.

3. Locke

In the *Essay*, Locke writes that, put simply, will is a binary power of preference, yea or nay—in his example, the mind can 'prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and *vice versa*' (2.21.5; 236). We can will to move or, to use Locke's term, *forbear* to move by remaining at rest. As his language of preference suggests, Locke's view of volition, like Malebranche's, is hedonist. Our preferences reflect our perception of the relative good or evil of the objects in our environment; we have a positive preference for those that promise pleasure and a negative preference for those that do not.¹⁸ It is important to note that for Locke forbearance in this case is not just an absence of volition. On the contrary, forbearing to move is no less a volition than choosing to move. A power without the ability to forbear would not be a will; it would not be able to prefer, to choose, to select, to opt, which for Locke is the essence of will. Thus the importance of Locke's *vice versa* above.

Although Locke later describes the agent possessed of this binary power of will as *indifferent* in its exercise, one way or the other (2.21.48; 264), in so doing, he does not think of the will as having libertarian freedom.¹⁹ That is, he does not mean that the agent is capable of willing one way or the other under the same circumstances. For the will is always determined, ultimately if not immediately, by perception of good in some sense. Instead, freedom is the agent's power 'to do or forbear any Action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is prefer'd to the other' (2.21.8; 237). The agent is free only when able *to do* what is willed, but also, *not to do* what is forborne. So, neither the prisoner enjoying a cell-mate's company (2.21.10; 238), nor the unhappy sufferer of St Vitus's dance in its steps (2.21.11; 239) is free.

So far, so good for the first edition version of Locke's chapter "Of Power." In the penultimate section of the second edition, however, he reports having made a 'severer enquiry,' leading to 'some change of my Opinion' (2.21.72; 284–85). The previous section explains how the enquiry came about, and summarily indicates the resulting changes he made. He says that 'from the beginning' he feared having made 'some mistake' in what he said about freedom, which a 'very judicious Friend' also suspected, though without saying what it was. Then, in a 'stricter review' of the chapter he discovered a 'very easy, and scarce observable slip I had made, in putting one seemingly indifferent word for another.' The errant word is 'thing,' the proper word is 'action.' The discovery 'open'd to me the present view,' (2.21.71; 282) that of the second edition, which he then summarizes.²⁰ The summary is important because Locke is expressly addressing the differences between the first two editions. Will and freedom remain as powers. But now, it is no longer perceived good, happiness conceived as the maximally consistent set of desires weighted according to intensity, duration, fecundity, etc. that moves the will. Instead, it is the *uneasiness* that is the unsatisfied *desire* for absent happiness that does so.²¹ As he had explained in a previous section, in the first edition he had taken for granted the general supposition that to know the good is to do the good. Then, 'upon stricter inquiry,' he was moved by what might be called the Medea problem, from Ovid: 'I see the better and judge it as such, and I follow the worse'

¹⁸ For discussion of Locke's hedonism, see Stuart (2013: 434–59).

¹⁹ Locke emphasizes the point again in the fifth edition at 2.21.71; 283–84.

²⁰ For the slip, see Walsh (2010).

²¹ Locke sometimes writes as though desire should be identified with uneasiness ('This *Uneasiness* we may call, as it is, *Desire*; which is an *uneasiness* of the Mind for want of some absent good.... For *desire* being nothing but an uneasiness in the want of an absent good, in reference to any pain felt ...' [2.21.31; 251]), and sometimes as though desire accompanies uneasiness ('That which in the train of our voluntary actions determines the *Will* to any change of operations, is some present uneasiness, which is, or at least is always accompanied with that of *Desire*' [2.21.71; 283]).

(2.21.35; 252–54; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 20–21). This inquiry led him to the need for *deliberation* about how best to arrive at happiness, and for *suspension* of volition in order to deliberate. Not just for the thesis of this paper, but explicitly for Locke himself, the power to suspend is crucial; he calls it, once again, the ‘source’ of freedom, the ‘hinge’ of freedom, and the ‘great inlet’ of freedom.

The correction of another linguistic error yields the final alteration of interest here in the second edition. Locke says that in the first edition he used terms for volition that also signified desire. But now it becomes important to distinguish the two, as is easily done by introspection. In fact, they can be contrary in the same instance, willing and thus doing the contrary of what we desire, or conversely. However,

... the Will [is] often confounded with several of the Affections, especially *Desire*; and one put for the other, and that by Men, who would not willingly be thought, not to have had very distinct notions of things, and not to have writ very clearly about them. This, I imagine, has been no small occasion of obscurity and mistake in this matter; and therefore is, as much as may be, to be avoided. (2.21.30; 249–50)

In a marginal note to his French translation of the *Essay*, Locke’s consultant Pierre Coste identifies the perpetrator of the occasioned obscurity as Malebranche (Locke 1972: 193). The identification is corroborated by Locke’s ironical language. Malebranche was a self-styled purveyor of Cartesian clear and distinct ideas. And his occasionalism was read by many as evidence of his enthusiasm—all that is real both in our thoughts and in our volitions comes directly from God as their only real cause. So described, Malebranche’s view almost reads as a definition of the literal sense of the term *enthusiasm*: ‘having God within.’ That there is a connection to Malebranche is made clear in the second edition, where Locke appeals repeatedly to *uneasiness*. His use of the term is rather idiosyncratic.²² In a footnote, Coste remarks that he has no exact French equivalent and translates it as *inquiétude*, the term used no less frequently by Malebranche for the state of mind playing the same role in his system (Locke 1972: 193, n.1).

The ‘judicious friend’ who reinforced Locke’s misgiving about his initial treatment of will and freedom was almost certainly William Molyneux, who, in the same period leading up to the second edition (on sale in May 1694), not only exchanged letters with Locke about “Of Power,” but also urged Locke to include a chapter attacking the perceived religious enthusiasm of Malebranche.²³ Locke complied and also produced two posthumous texts aimed primarily at the *Search*’s theory of seeing all things in God. Returning to the reading of this work that he began at least as early as 1677,²⁴ Locke undoubtedly also read Malebranche on will and freedom, and would naturally have made a connection between the two topics of enthusiasm on the one hand, and the will and freedom on the other. Certainly, there is a connection. Unless there is a distinction between desire or uneasiness and volition, then there is no room for deliberation, and all action is impulsive: we will everything that we desire. It doesn’t follow that one who fails to distinguish volition and desire will act and reason as if there were no distinction, but it is more likely they will, especially given the case of Malebranche and his follower John Norris as judged by Locke.²⁵ The irony is that the block against enthusiasm is also to be found in Malebranche, though as Locke sees it ineffectually employed by him. If Malebranche exemplifies the disease (the impulsiveness of enthusiasm resulting from confusion of volition and desire) he also supplies the antidote (suspension, which enables deliberation once volition and desire are distinguished).

And, indeed, Locke’s description of the role played by suspension in human freedom is strikingly similar to Malebranche’s. He writes,

[1] The mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires, [2] 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. [3] In this lies the liberty Man has; [4] and from the not using of it right comes all that variety of mistakes, errors, and faults which we run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our endeavours after happiness; whilst we precipitate

²² The OED would seem to make his the first treatment of it as a count noun.

²³ The letters, from summer 1693, are found at Locke (1976: vol. 4, 700, 716). Further evidence that the judicious friend is Molyneux is suggested by Locke’s use of the adjective ‘judicious’ to refer to Molyneux by name in 2.9.8; 145–46. Another possible candidate for the judicious friend is Philippus van Limborch, with whom Locke discussed human freedom in 1701–1702. But because Limborch could not read English, his first contact with the *Essay* was only in 1700, when the French edition was published (Stuart 2013: 448). It is thus unlikely that Limborch inspired changes in the lead-up to the second edition’s publication six years earlier.

²⁴ See Woolhouse (2007: 197–99).

²⁵ In correspondence, Locke and Molyneux agreed that Norris, ‘The Malebranche of England,’ was, because of what they perceived as his enthusiasm, unhinged (Locke 1976: vol. 6, 41).

the determination of our *wills*, and engage too soon before due *Examination*. To prevent this we have a power to *suspend* the prosecution of this or that desire, as every one daily may Experiment in himself. [5] This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is (as I think improperly) call'd *Free will*. [6] For during this *suspension* of any desire, before the *will* be determined to action, and the action (which follows that determination) done, we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge, of the good or evil of what we are going to do; [7] 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; [8] and 'tis not a fault, but a perfection of our nature to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair *Examination*. (2.21.47; 263–64; enumeration added)

Parsing the passage, we generate the following claims:

1. By experience we know that we can suspend, that is, refrain from judging yea or nay on a particular desire.
2. When judgment is suspended, the mind deliberates. It can consider the desired object and compare it against other objects. Presumably, the comparison is important because it allows the mind to better understand the relative merit of the desired object.
3. Freedom consists in 1 and 2—the mind's ability to suspend together with the ability to compare the desired object with other objects and thus deliberate about the relative merit of the object.²⁶
4. Not using the power to suspend and deliberate correctly leads to misery because it means that we judge the merits of the objects of our desires before really considering them properly.²⁷
5. Freedom consists in the power to suspend and to examine the good or evil of the actions required for the pursuit the objects of our desires. (Reiteration of 3)
6. Freedom consists in the power to suspend and examine because when suspension is established, we are able to deliberate. (Reiteration of 2)
7. When we have completed our deliberation, and assessed our proposed actions from all possible angles, we have discharged our duty and done everything we can to attain our ultimate goal of happiness. (Articulation of connection between deliberation and responsibility)
8. The fact that we are determined by the results of our deliberations is a good thing, not a fault.

From this passage, it is clear that Locke takes suspension and deliberation to be intimately connected. Earlier, the power to suspend was likened to Locke's conception of the passive power of perception. It can now be ventured that suspension just is that power. For, ontologically, just as for Malebranche, it looks as if suspension and deliberation are the same thing.²⁸ Recall that above we proposed that there is only a distinction of reason between them. Suspension is not a matter of willing but of deliberating on how to will. (This is why in the text cited above Locke says that only 'improperly' is 'the source of all liberty,' i.e., the power of suspension, 'call'd *Free Will*.') In fact, suspension occurs insofar as alternative ways of willing are being compared. Such comparison is for Locke a matter of perception (involving the complex idea of relation, 2.25.1; 319), which for him is always passive (2.21.72; 286). This is Locke's version of Malebranche's natural prayer.

For Malebranche, what Locke calls reason, the power of inference, is a passive power of perception: '... there is no difference between a simple perception, a judgment, and an inference' (OC I.49/LO 7). The distinction lies entirely on the side of the object: a simple thing, a relation between things, and a relation between the relations of things. But what about Locke? What he says in an important section of the *Essay* suggests a contradiction of our thesis: '... to be able to bring into view *Ideas* out of sight, at one's own choice, and to compare which of them one thinks fit, this is an *Active Power*' (2.21.72; 286). The context and other considerations suggest otherwise, however. The context is his view that despite the surface grammar, perception is a passive power. His remark is intended as a clarifying limitation of the view. And what is that? He explains: when I open my eyes I am passive and cannot avoid seeing what I see. 'But when I turn my Eyes another way, or remove my Body out of the Sunbeams, I am properly active' (2.21.72; 286). So I am active when calling up from memory ideas in order to compare them. But notice that it is the recalling, not the perception of the ideas as comparable, that is active. This is precisely how Locke describes attempting to

²⁶ OED; Definition 12. *fig.* of To lie: h. *to lie in*: to consist in, to have its ground or basis in.

²⁷ Note that Locke's use of 'experiment' here ought to be read as 'experience.' See OED; Definition 1. Experiment, v.: 1. *trans.* To have experience of; to experience; to feel, suffer. *Obs.* All examples from the 15th–18th centuries.

²⁸ Contra, for instance, Weinberg (2016: 196), who takes suspension and deliberation to be a two-step process.

remember something. He writes, 'The Mind very often sets it self on work in search of some hidden *Idea*, and turns, as it were, the Eye of the Soul upon it' (2.10.7; 152). The revived (sic) perception itself, however, remains passive. But what of the comparison? Once again, there can be an enabling action, for example setting two balls on a balance in order to compare their weight. But the equality of their weight is something that we (passively) perceive. If the eye of our soul had found them already balanced, then the passive notice of their equal weight would have been sufficient for the comparison. More generally, we do not wish to preclude behaving actively in order to enable deliberation, for example, by gathering further information. We wish to say only that the deliberation itself, the weighing of one option against another, is not something we actively do; it is a passive perception, the only kind there is for Locke.

Critics from his time to ours have raised the Suspension Inconsistency Objection: that Locke's doctrine of suspension introduced into the second edition is incompatible with views that he expressed in the first edition and maintained in all later ones. Notably, Chappell (1994) in a seminal paper argued that Lockean suspension 'undermines' the argument in each of 2.21.23 and 2.21.25. In the first, Locke argues that when an action that he can do is proposed to him to be done, a man must either will to do it or will not to do it. So, if a silent man is invited to speak, he must choose either to do so and thus speak, or not to do so and thus remain silent. He is not free not to choose. Chappell's criticism is that suspension provides him with a third possibility, which, though a volition itself, is not willing what is proposed or forbearing to do so.

In the second text, Locke considers the question whether the man is free to will which of the two constrained options he pleases, moving or forbearing to move. 'This Question,' he says, 'carries the absurdity of it so manifestly in it self, that one might thereby sufficiently be convinced, that Liberty concerns not the will' (2.21.25; 247).²⁹ Chappell mistakenly takes the absurdity just mentioned to attach to the positive *answer* to the question that some give it, namely such libertarians as the Arminians; for that answer, as Locke argues, commits them to an infinite regress of volitions.³⁰ Chappell thinks that for Locke the question itself is not 'unintelligible' and in fact is answerable in the negative (1994: 108). And why? Once again, it is because suspension offers a volition providing a third option, but once again with unhappy consequences for Locke's view. For according to Chappell, one could will to suspend and then will to lift the suspension, and thus in effect will to will.³¹ This would be just the view that Locke had subjected to the infinite regress.

Moreover, there is a text that Locke inserted into the fifth edition that, according to Chappell, upsets *both* texts. Here is the insertion quoted more fully than is usually done:

... in most cases a Man is not at Liberty to forbear the act of volition; he must exert an act of his *will*, whereby the action proposed, is made to exist, or not to exist. But yet there is a case wherein a Man is at Liberty in respect of *willing*, and that is the chusing of a remote Good as an end to be pursued. Here a Man may suspend the act of his choice from being determined for or against the thing proposed, till he has examined, whether it be really of a nature in it self and consequences to make him happy, or no. For when he has once chosen it, and thereby it is become a part of his Happiness, it raises desire, and that proportionably gives him *uneasiness*, which determines his *will*, and sets him at work in pursuit of his choice on all occasions that offer. And here we may see how it comes to pass, that a Man may justly incur punishment, though it be certain that in all the particular actions that he *wills*, he does, and necessarily does will that, which he then judges to be good. For though his *will* be always determined by that, which is judg'd good by his Understanding, yet it excuses him not: Because, by a too hasty choice of his own making, he has imposed on himself wrong measures of good and evil. ... He has vitiated his own Palate, ... (2.21.56; 270–71)

As Chappell reads this passage, Locke here concedes that we are not constrained to will yea or nay; instead, by suspending we can will *not* to will yea or nay, being able thereby to will whether we will. Clearly, the linchpin of Chappell's criticism is the view of suspension as an act of will. But nowhere does Locke say in this text, or any other, that suspension is an act of will, or that it directly results from an act of will. For him,

²⁹ Locke is silent here on what *does* concern the will. Presumably, it is the proposed act or its forbearance, specifically, whether the agent is capable of them.

³⁰ Mistakenly, because immediately following the quoted sentence Locke illustrates the absurdity of the question as follows: 'For [sic] to ask, whether a Man be at liberty to will either Motion or Rest; Speaking or Silence; which he pleases, is to ask, whether a Man can *will*, what he *wills*; or be pleased with what he is pleased with. A Question that needs no answer; ...'.

³¹ Stuart alludes to a version of this case, calling it 'a bit mind boggling' (2013: 409, n. 7). For further discussion of 2.21.23 and 2.21.25, see Rickless (2000).

suspension is not an act of will; it is precisely the *absence* of any act of will. In terms of power, the topic of Locke's chapter, suspension is a *passive* power, like that of gold to be melted, the example with which he begins the chapter, except that suspension is the power not to undergo something, namely volition.³² With that understood, Chappell's criticisms collapse. Suspension is not a volition that is an alternative to willing or forbearing, nor can it be construed as a volition in an infinite regress of volitions.

Most recently, Matthew Stuart (2013) has defended Locke against Chappell's criticisms, notably with respect to the omnibus argument based on the fifth edition text above. But in doing so he seems to assume along with Chappell that suspension is an act of will. Indeed, he seems to assume that suspension is simply an act of forbearance (2013: 483). In any case, Stuart believes that Locke makes no such concession of the sort that Chappell sees, but that Locke still has a pair of unanswered questions: 1) How can choosing a remote good be an instance of willing something? For only actions and thoughts are allowed by Locke as objects of willing. 2) How can that be a situation, perhaps uniquely, in which one can forbear willing?

Stuart deals with both questions by underlining Locke's text as a reply to the libertarian van Limborch, to whom Locke conceded nothing of substance, and sought only a nominal agreement. So, Stuart's answer to the first question is that only in a loose and popular sense can an end be willed as a 'kind of rearrangement of one's cognitive furniture' (2013: 490). And he thinks that, similarly, the answer to the second question is that since in a strict sense we can will only a thought or action that would begin immediately, it is only in a loose and popular sense that one can will at all about some future occurrence. There is more to Stuart's account, of course, but it ends with a citation of Locke's apology to van Limborch for any unclarity he should find: 'please make allowances for uncertain health, which renders me more languid and less fit for writing' (2013: 492). Yet it is hard to believe that Locke, who was led to the fundamental distinction in this theory between will and desire by the putative unclarity in Malebranche's view, should have, however sick he might have been, not only sent by way of palliation of van Limborch, but publish by way of clarification, a text that he knows to be less than precise. There must be a better account.

So, what might Locke be saying? Here, as elsewhere in the *Essay*, Locke's main concern is a forensic one. In the passage quoted above, he wants to say that there is an intelligible sense in which we can in fact be free to will. And that is, as Chappell holds, the choice of the remote good.³³ On this view, an inveterate miser is responsible for not giving to charity because he in effect made that choice when, in the mistaken belief that money would make him happy, he chose money as his remote good. He should have been more careful in making such a choice. But as to the choice of remote value, it, *like every other choice* for Locke, is determined by uneasiness at the lack of happiness. Chappell's mistake, as we see it, is the groundless assumption that this choice must be of a different sort, namely, libertarian in nature, which upsets the whole view. As we see it, for Locke, the only difference between the choice of a remote good and the choice of an immediate good is that the former can be mistaken and the latter cannot; we cannot err in our judgment of immediate pleasures, only remote ones. There is thus nothing particularly special about §56 that threatens the consistency of Locke's discussion. His view is that, *ceteris paribus*, we should always suspend and deliberate before willing yea or nay to anything.³⁴ The difference between willing a remote good and willing an immediate good is that the former, as Locke says, 'becomes part' of our happiness (2.21.56; 270). This means that it becomes part of the constellation of goods that we take to be required for our happiness, and, as such, imposes uneasiness upon us as a function of our desire to attain that happiness. But to make this choice, in order to appropriately track what will actually make us happy, requires, ideally at least, the *absence* of willing anything. Anything less is a form of slavery.

How does Locke think we can detect what will make us truly happy? Following Shelley Weinberg, we argue that Locke holds that human beings have natural motivation towards 'real Bliss' (2016: 185, 201–2). Locke writes,

Whatever necessity determines to the pursuit of real Bliss, the same necessity, with the same force establishes *suspence, deliberation*, and scrutiny of each successive desire, whether the satisfaction of it, does not interfere with our true happiness, and mislead us from it. (2.21.52; 267)

³² See Walsh (2014) for discussion of suspension as a passive power. Though not Locke's, a better example of such a power would be that of fixedness, which is a power not to undergo something, like the power not to be consumed by fire.

³³ It is with what he says about this choice that, according to Chappell, Locke gives up his 'volitional determinism' in favor of a libertarian view (1994: 118).

³⁴ Stuart (2013: 491) seems to take the choice of ultimate value to be the volition that is said to be free and suspension to be its forbearance. Only on that assumption need Locke be speaking loosely.

The force that drives us to seek true happiness ('real Bliss') is the same force that establishes suspension.³⁵ We suggest that Locke's use of 'force' here is deliberate; there is an internal impulse within us to seek a state of easiness (that is, an absence of uneasiness). We also take Locke's use of 'establish' here as deliberate; we do not will to suspend, but rather suspension is established by the aforementioned force.³⁶ In what sense might that impulse also be the force that establishes suspension? One answer is that if the impulse fails to be satisfied by the promise of pleasure offered by an immediate good, it triggers suspension and deliberation. On this model, the role played by this 'force' is symmetrical to the role of Malebranche's will: a restless impulse that leads us toward things that we take to cause us pleasure but is not satisfied with anything less than the true good. Our ability to establish suspension, for Locke, is 'the great inlet, and exercise of all the liberty Men have, are capable of, or can be useful to them.' For, by stopping desires 'from determining their wills to any action, till they have duly and fairly examin'd the good and evil of it,' they are able to do their duty, 'and all that is in our power; and indeed all that needs. For, since the will supposes knowledge to guide its choice, all that we can do, is to hold our wills undetermined, till we have examin'd the good and evil of what we desire' (2.21.52; 267). For Locke, as for Malebranche, we are free when our choices are informed by rational deliberation.³⁷

Notice here that Locke is not suggesting that we have the power to will to directly stop our desires. In a moment of uneasiness over our desiring some object, we cannot simply will to desire it no longer. Instead, the process of stopping a desire from determining the will is indirect. Our choice of remote goods reflects what we value; what we consider good and evil. This choice, in turn, establishes suspension and deliberation when we are uneasy for proximate goods that appear to be in tension with the remote goods we have chosen—we compare the proximate good with our remote goods to perceive whether the former reflects the value we have assigned to the latter. To deliberate is to stop present desires from determining the will. Whether we deliberate or not about a proximate good for which we are uneasy depends on the remote goods we have chosen for ourselves.³⁸

For Locke, volition and freedom are both powers, the first a power of preference, the second a power to act according to preference. Stones have neither power; we humans have both. Now consider two scenarios, on the first, there is a being with volition but no freedom. Such a condition would be so utterly undesirable, according to Locke, that God would never create an intellectual being with it. For such a being would act,

³⁵ This suggestion allows us to move beyond LoLordo's claim that, perhaps, Locke simply 'does not know what, if anything, causes suspension' (2012: 59). LoLordo's exchange with Rickless is also of interest on this point. In her "Reply to Rickless," she reiterates her view that Locke is silent, and perhaps deliberately so, on the question of what causes suspension. LoLordo's interpretation of Locke on the mechanism of suspension is in accordance with her broader view that Locke deliberately articulates an account of moral agency that is neutral with respect to libertarianism and (compatibilist) necessitarianism (2013: 64).

³⁶ On this point we disagree with Weinberg (2016: 212), who understands suspension to be a volition.

³⁷ In his exchange with LoLordo, Rickless (2013: 51) asserts that suspending is 'a voluntary act of mind' that can be determined by the desire to suspend. Rickless's central piece of textual evidence for this claim is the final sentence of 2.21.53: 'Nor let any one say, he cannot govern his Passions, nor hinder them from breaking out, and carrying him into action; for what he can do before a Prince, or a great Man, he can do alone, or in the presence of God, if he will' (268). Rickless writes of this phrase that, 'Here Locke says that in most cases human beings have the power to prevent their passions from carrying them into action, i.e., have the power to suspend the prosecution of their most pressing desires, and that this is something that they can do *if they will it*. This statement does not make sense unless it is presupposed that human beings can (and often do) will to suspend' (2013: 51–52). Rickless's interpretation can stand only when taking this phrase in isolation. For, the entirety of 2.21.53 is concerned with the question of governing the passions. Such governance, Locke tells us, is effectuated not by simply willing to suspend the prosecution of a desire, but rather by an indirect model involving taking 'pains to suit the relish of our Minds to the true intrinsic good or ill, that is in things; and not permit an allow'd or supposed possible great and weighty good to slip out of our thoughts, without leaving any relish, any desire of it self there, till, by a due consideration of its true worth, we have formed appetites in our Minds suitable to it, and made our selves uneasy in the want of it, or in the fear of losing it' (268). Taking pains to make sure that we appropriately value the things that we perceive is not the same as simply willing to forbear the prosecution of a desire. Locke juxtaposes the ability to govern one's passions before a prince or a great man to being able to do so alone, or in the presence of God. What is the difference between these cases? In the former, because we assign high value to being composed before a prince, our desire to be calm outweighs any desire motivated by the passion in question. In the latter case, we have not assigned a high value on being composed when alone, or in the presence of God. In order to will to be composed in these latter cases, we must first place a high value on such composure. Nowhere does Locke assert that we are able to do this by baldly willing to do so, but rather, as he tells us, by taking pains to suit the relish of our mind to the good of such composure. Thus, the 'if he will' at the end of 2.21.53 ought to be read as 'if his preference, informed by the value he has placed on such governance of the passions, is determined that way; in other words, if he will.'

³⁸ It is worth distinguishing the comparison of suspension to two other ways that Locke describes comparison. In suspension, we suspend because two ideas are brought into comparison in the mind: I perceive the cake as good. The prosecution of that desire is suspended because a comparison is generated between that idea and the idea of a previously chosen remote good: health. This comparison is relevantly different from the process of demonstrative reasoning, which includes putting propositions in order (4.17.3; 669) and from the comparison involved in 'setting' simple ideas 'by one another' in order to generate a complex idea (2.12.1; 163). The latter two comparisons are arguably active, involving volition, the former comparison in our view is certainly not.

catastrophically, on every desire as it appeared. The second scenario would pose a being with freedom but no volition. But there can be no such being, because freedom has to do with the ability to act according to the power of preference, which is volition. Thus Locke can say, as he does, that the concern to satisfy our ultimate preferences, in which happiness consists, is ‘the necessary foundation of our *liberty*.’ (2.21.51; 266)

To distinguish the second scenario from the first, we must be able to suspend volition so as to determine what is most preferable, if not ultimately so, then at least under the circumstances. In short, we must be able to deliberate, and deliberation must be in the absence of volition, which necessity is secured only if deliberation and suspension are one and the same.

Above, we raised the question of how, on Malebranche’s system, we can explain why one person suspends and another consents, or why one person suspends consent for a particular good at one time but consents to it at another time. It is time to put these same questions to Locke. Why does someone suspend on Locke’s view? It seems that, as for Malebranche, on Locke’s system suspension occurs in the event that a good is perceived as insufficient in value. Why, on Locke’s view, would someone be dissatisfied with a perceived good? As we argued above, the dissatisfaction with a perceived good derives from a mismatch between that good and a remote good that we have set for ourselves. The question now, for Locke, is what explains the differences in choices of remote goods? Again, Locke’s response is the same as Malebranche’s—one’s choice of remote goods will come down to contingent features of each person—upbringing, education, community, in short, the entire constellation of one’s previous experiences. As Locke notes, circumstance has some of us find happiness in riches and glory; for others, happiness is found in cheese and lobsters (2.21.55; 269). Knowledge derived from experience informs the way we value things, and thus our choices of remote goods.³⁹ And, like Malebranche, Locke holds that rational deliberation can be interrupted or even eliminated altogether. This can happen in cases of ‘ungovernable passion,’ like that of someone ‘violently in love’ or with ‘the impatient desire of revenge’ (2.21.38; 256), or in cases of pain, disease, or injury (2.21.57; 271). The presence of such passions or pains explains why we might fail to suspend desire of an object that we had previously perceived as inconsistent with a chosen remote good.

4. Conclusion

Both Malebranche and Locke think of the will in dynamical terms as a motivating desire. They also think of the will as necessarily determined by the perception of good, which they both understand in hedonistic terms. In short, we are always and only moved by what we think will give us pleasure or happiness. By itself, however, the will does not maximize our happiness over the long term, opting as it does for every perceived instance of it. We need to be circumspect in the desires that we satisfy. So both Malebranche and Locke introduce a notion of freedom in this regard that enables circumspection.

As we authors see it, two concepts are centrally needed for understanding their notion of freedom. One is *absential suspension*. This is a mental state from which all volition is absent. It is not, however, a psychological void, as dreamless sleep might be. Instead, it is also described, by the second concept, as *deliberation*, the comparative consideration of goods alternative to the one the attraction to which initiates suspension. For both Malebranche and Locke, this deliberation is a passive cognitive state. The realization that one good is greater than another presents itself to us; it is not something that we *do* (even if putting ourselves in a position to be acted upon in this way can be something that we do, involving the will). The perception of the relative value of things is no more active, involving the will, than the perception of their color.

Our interpretation of Malebranche and Locke on freedom upsets a standard reading of the line of influence from the medieval through to the early modern period. According to *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Aquinas is the common source for our authors.⁴⁰ But however we might make sense of Aquinas’s notoriously abstruse view of human freedom, nowhere in his discussion do we find the concept of suspension as absential.⁴¹ The concept is also missing from Malebranche’s two most plausible sources,

³⁹ It is no coincidence that the effort to instill in children the appropriate tools for searching for truth and valuing goods, and thus attaining true happiness, is a central project of Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. See also Weinberg (2016: 209).

⁴⁰ According to Sleigh, Chappell & Della Rocca in the *Cambridge History*, ‘This account [that is, Aquinas’s account] of the radical nature of freedom of exercise became a staple in seventeenth-century thought. Thus, both for Locke and Leibniz the presumed ability of the human agent to avert the mind, and thereby suspend the decision-making process, was often presented as the inner bastion of human freedom’ (1998: 1199). Not only for Leibniz and Locke, but also for Malebranche (Sleigh, Chappell & Della Rocca 1998: 1238).

⁴¹ According to Aquinas (1947), the soul has two kinds of power that ground two kinds of freedom. One kind is called specification (or contrariety). Here one makes a choice of one from two or more presented alternatives. The choice is necessitated by the perceived goodness of the alternatives. So freedom of specification would seem to be a matter of spontaneity. The other kind of freedom

Descartes and Augustine.⁴² Likewise, it is nowhere to be found in Locke's two most plausible sources, Cudworth and Hobbes.⁴³

A final thought. Absential suspension is central to the views of Malebranche and Locke on freedom. The concept is not to be found in their likely sources. Possibly, each discovered it independently of the other. Almost certainly, Locke found it in Malebranche, especially since he also seems clearly influenced by him on other important issues related to freedom.⁴⁴ It is Malebranche who has the priority claim, although Locke's use of it will perhaps be found by some to be the more interesting. In any case, the centrality of the concept and its intrinsic interest stand.⁴⁵

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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is of execution (or contradiction). It would seem to be a matter of indifference in the sense of being without necessitation. Here one makes a choice between any of the above and none of them by way of not making that choice. Exactly how the latter choice is described is crucial but unobvious. What seems clear in any case is that the two options in exercising freedom of execution are both choices, volitions, positive acts rather than just one of these and its absence. (See II, I, q.10, a.2., resp.)

⁴² For Descartes, suspension is not something essential to freedom but its *lowest* grade, and it is not an absence, but a dynamical standoff of equally impelling but opposite reasons (*Meditations* I, AT VII, 21–22/CSM II, 14–15). As for Augustine, will is delight (*delectatio*); here, one might think of the will as satisfaction of desire. As for Descartes, will and free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) are one and the same thing. Often, however, we are unable to do the good that we will. Freedom (*libertas*) is the further power to do what is chosen; in particular, when the use of the will is good. Grace is what enables us to do the good that we have chosen to do; concupiscence enables the bad use of the will. The will is always determined by the greater strength of one or the other. See Gilson (1960: 157–64). It is possible that Malebranche could have picked up the concept from Paolo Pomponazzi, who writes, 'When the will suspends such an act [of willing], the will does not will to suspend the act such that willing means something positive; in fact, the will is entirely idle' (1957: 264). But while Malebranche cites Pomponazzi's *De immortalitate* in the *Search* (OC I.292–93/LO 145), there is no evidence that he read *De fato*. And even if he did, he would not have found in *De fato* the fortress-like development of the concept of absential suspension that we find in the *Search* and in the *Essay*.

⁴³ Stephen Darwall (1995: ch. 6, esp. 163–175) argues the case that Cudworth is the major forebear of Locke's theory of the will. See also Broad's critique of this case. Broad (2006) offers a compelling discussion of the possibility of Lady Masham's 'Cudworth-inspired' view of freedom having an impact on Locke during his revisions in preparation of the second edition of the *Essay*. However, Broad's conclusion is that we might, at best, adopt an attitude of 'cautious skepticism toward speculative claims about Masham's influence on Locke' (2006: 509). Despite similarities between Masham/Cudworth and Locke on the importance of human freedom for self-determination and moral responsibility, neither in Cudworth nor in Masham do we find a discussion of absential suspension. The word 'suspension,' absential or otherwise, does not occur anywhere in Hobbes's discussion of freedom. Even in Bramhall, Hobbes's interlocutor on these issues, there is no absential suspension. He is a libertarian for whom suspension is an act of will (Hobbes 1840: vol. 5, 295).

⁴⁴ Some few commentators have noticed *en passant* a connection between Malebranche and Locke on freedom. See Kremer (2003: 216, n. 19); Riley (2003: 255–56); Yaffe (2000: 149, n. 34). It would seem that the only sustained treatment of the two authors on freedom is Vienne (1991) who notes the shared doctrine of suspension, but does not treat the ontology of this power. We know that Locke was familiar with the *Search* soon after its publication, for in July 1677, James Tyrell wrote to request that Locke buy a copy of the *Search* for him (1976: vol. 1, no. 343). Locke's library included several editions of *Search*: 1675, 1677–78, 1678–79 (1976: vol. 1, no. 343, editor's note 5, 497).

⁴⁵ The authors would like to thank Alison McIntyre, Michael Hickson, Aaron Garrett, and anonymous referees for their valuable feedback.

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