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Recommended citation:

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LAZY LETHARGY AND FULLNESS OF JOY:  
LOCKE ON DESIRE AND HAPPINESS

HANS LOTTENBACH

In a remarkable passage of Chapter III of Book I of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke writes:

Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These indeed are innate practical Principles, which (as practical Principles ought) do continue constantly to operate and influence all our Actions, without ceasing: These may be observ’d in all Persons and all Ages, steady and universal. (67)

Only in Book II does Locke explain what this universal desire of happiness is. This explanation appears in the context of an account of the ‘Fountains of Knowledge’ (104), an account of the origin of ideas. It thus often seems that in discussing desire Locke is discussing the origin of an idea. But this appearance is misleading. Locke can only be understood if the place of feelings (feelings like pleasure, pain, or desire) in his general account of the faculties of the mind is properly determined. I shall argue that in the Essay Locke distinguishes desiring both from perceiving ideas (the operation of the faculty of the understanding) and from willing (the operation of the faculty of the will), i.e. that he is, at least implicitly, committed to the existence of a *faculty of feeling* (Section I). This will clarify what is actually implied in his claim that ‘All Men desire Happiness, that’s past doubt’ (279) (Section II). Perhaps surprisingly, Locke will appear in the company of philosophers who thought that we can

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2 For pleasure and pain I shall use the term ‘feelings’ rather than ‘sensations’; in the *Essay*, sensation is one of the sources of ideas, and thus belongs to the faculty of the understanding.
desire happiness and search after it only because we somehow know it, and that we know it only because we somehow already have it.³

I

Locke proposes three main theses about desire and happiness:

1. Desire is uneasiness.
2. We constantly desire happiness.
3. Happiness is the utmost pleasure.

More precisely, Locke defines desire as the ‘uneasiness a Man finds in himself upon the absence of any thing, whose present enjoyment carries the Idea of Delight with it’ (230).⁴ That we constantly desire happiness⁵ means that we remain uneasy as long as we are not happy. Since happiness is the utmost pleasure,⁶ we are constantly uneasy in the absence of it. What is the utmost pleasure? Locke quotes St Paul (1 Cor. 2: 9): ‘’tis what Eye hath not seen, Ear hath not heard, nor hath it entred into the Heart of Man to conceive’ (258). Utmost pleasure is the enjoyment of God: ‘With him is fullness of Joy, and Pleasure for evermore’ (258, quoting Psalm 16: 11). Locke appears to agree with no other than Augustine: inquietum

³ Paraphrasing a remark of one of these philosophers from the seventeenth century: we would not seek happiness unless we had already found it (Pascal, Pensée 553 (Brunschvicg)).

⁴ See also 251.

⁵ This is stated many times in Book II of the Essay: 257, 259, 265, 274–5, 279, 283. (See also Locke’s essay Of Ethic in General (in John Locke, Political Essays, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 298–9.)

⁶ See 258.
est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te." Our uneasiness comes to ease and rest only in the utmost pleasure: fruitio dei, the enjoyment of God. But Locke offers a qualification: happiness admits of degrees. Only ‘in its full extent’ is it the ‘utmost Pleasure we are capable of’, while ‘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’ (258). But, as will become clear, Locke denies that such low-degree contentment is ever without uneasiness.

According to Locke’s definition, desire does not seem to presuppose some knowledge or idea of what is desired. Desire is not defined as the uneasiness upon the absence of anything the idea of whose present enjoyment carries the idea of delight with it. That we constantly desire happiness does not presuppose that we have an idea of happiness. By his ‘Historical, plain Method’ (44) Locke tries to make sense of the beginning of desire. At first desire appears to be blind: we do not desire and pursue happiness because we somehow know what it is. It is because we pursue it, that we come to know it, although—in this life—not to its full extent. Our uneasiness is originally without direction: first, we are uneasy; second, the uneasiness spurs us to some action; third, under favourable circumstances the action happens to hit upon what

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8 Happiness is in the ‘enjoyment of him, with whom there is fullness of joy’ (130); some other relevant passages can be found at 261, 271, 273–4, 277, 281–2.

9 See Section II of this paper.

10 ‘Uneasiness determines the Will’ (250); it is the ‘spring of Action’ (252).
removes the uneasiness and makes us content. Through experience we may come to correlate the uneasiness, that which removes it, and the ensuing contentment. Consider a long-forgotten episode: I’m uneasy. I scream. I’m fed. I’m content. After more such episodes I will come to know what I am uneasy about, i.e. what I desire: the happiness of being fed and satiated. Another example: the city-dweller finds himself in the country and is uneasy. It happens that he returns to Paris and feels better. Sequences of events of this kind will teach him that his unease in the country is the desire to get back to the pleasures of the city.\footnote{Baudelaire returns to Paris. He feels somewhat better, but he is still uneasy, and irremediably so.}

What exactly is uneasiness? How is it related to the perception of ideas? How can it operate constantly? According to the \textit{Essay}, uneasiness is simply pain. Locke explains as follows what he means by ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’:

\begin{quote}
\textit{By Pleasure and Pain, I would be understood to signifie, whatsoever delights or molests us; … Whether we call it Satisfaction, Delight, Pleasure, Happiness, etc. on the one side; or Uneasiness, Trouble, Pain, Torment, Anguish, Misery, etc. on the other, they are still but different degrees of the same thing.} (128f)
\end{quote}

Pleasure or pain is joined to (or accompanies) the perception of ideas, be it perception of ideas of sensation or of ideas of reflection:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Delight, or Uneasiness, one or other of them join themselves to almost all our Ideas, both of Sensation and Reflection: And there is scarce any affection of our Senses from without, any retired thought of our Mind within, which is not able to produce in us pleasure or pain.} (128)\footnote{‘For as in the Body, there is Sensation barely in it self, or accompanied with \textit{Pain} or \textit{Pleasure}; so the Thought, or Perception of the Mind is simply so, or else accompanied also with \textit{Pleasure} or \textit{Pain}, Delight or Trouble, call it how you please’ (229). In the very first chapter of Book II Locke already points to ‘the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought’ (106). (Other relevant remarks are to be found at 110 and 537.)}
\end{quote}
How are we to understand the accompaniment of experience (sensation and reflection) by pleasure or pain? Here are two readings of Locke’s intent:

(I) The *idea* of pleasure or pain is attached to almost every *idea* (of sensation or reflection).

(II) Pleasure or pain is attached to almost all *perception* of ideas (of sensation or reflection).

(I) seems closer to Locke’s assertions that pleasure or pain is ‘join[ed] to several Thoughts’ (129) or ‘annexed to so many other *Ideas*’ (131). That Locke often writes that pleasure and pain are *joined* or *annexed* to ideas seems to fit well with his tendency to write that pleasure and pain are themselves ideas—simple ideas, to be more precise. As an idea pleasure or pain would then seem to be another ‘Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks’ (47). At one point Locke even writes that ‘God hath scattered up and down several degrees of Pleasure and Pain, in all the things that environ and affect us’ (130). For example, to the idea of the taste of a piece of the revolting manna would be attached an idea of pain.

It is noteworthy, however, that in Chapter VII of Book II of the *Essay* the supposed simple ideas of pleasure and pain are introduced in rather unexpected company:

There be other simple *Ideas*, which convey themselves into the Mind, by all the ways of Sensation and Reflection, *viz.*

*Pleasure*, or *Delight*, and its opposite.

*Pain*, or *Uneasiness*.

*Power*.

*Existence*.

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13 In Chapter VII of Book II pleasure and pain are introduced as among the ‘simple *Ideas*, which convey themselves into the Mind, by all the ways of Sensation and Reflection’ (128).

14 The laxative, rather than the ‘Manna in Heaven’ that ‘will suit every one’s Palate’ (277).
What appears common to these notions is that they accompany all our perceptual life. In the case of the notions of existence and unity this is so because they ‘are suggested to the Understanding, by every Object without, and every Idea within’ (131); in other terms, they are attached to every idea of sensation or reflection. In the case of the notion of pleasure or pain Locke insists that at any time of perceiving a degree of pain or uneasiness is attached to some idea of sensation or reflection. (Otherwise we would not be constantly in a state of desire.) The case of the notion of power is somewhat less straightforward, but no matter the intricacies of his account of power, Locke seems to maintain that to every idea is attached a notion of power: ideas received ‘by the impression of outward Objects on the Senses’ (233) (or by the ‘internal Sensation’ (162) of reflection) are accompanied by the notion of passive power, whereas ideas occurring ‘by the Determination of its [the mind’s] own choice’ (233) are accompanied by the notion of active power.\textsuperscript{15}

It must be asked, however, whether certain simple ideas can accompany all or almost all ideas and be joined, annexed, or attached to them?\textsuperscript{16} How is this relation of companionship to be understood? And what or who brings it about? Locke considers simple ideas the materials of all knowledge and compares them to building blocks.\textsuperscript{17} Now, it is easy to understand how a brick can be joined to another or several others. It is less easy to conceive a brick directly attached to most or all other bricks of a building; and it

\textsuperscript{15} Here we can leave open the question of whether we have the notion of power from the very beginning of our perceptual life. Questions about our power over motions of our \textit{bodies} are not our concern here.

\textsuperscript{16} Locke appears to use these terms interchangeably.

\textsuperscript{17} Simple ideas ‘furnish the Materials of all that various Knowledge’ (132), and just as with building materials all we can do with them is ‘either to unite them together, or to set them by one another, or wholly separate them’ (164) (that is, by combination, relation, and abstraction).
seems quite impossible to make sense of the notion of a brick joined to some or all bricks in all buildings; not to mention the utter absurdity of a brick attached to itself. But if the notions of pleasure or pain, existence, unity, and power were simple ideas and thus belonged to the materials of knowledge, they would be like the brick joined to some or all bricks in all buildings. Moreover, since the ideas of existence and unity are supposed to accompany every idea, they must, strictly speaking, be attached to themselves. Perhaps Locke means only that each ‘building’ of knowledge contains, as it were, some existence brick, some unity brick, some power brick, and some brick of uneasiness. But he does not restrict his claim to complex ideas; the accompaniment in question is supposed to apply to every idea. Locke cannot mean that whenever a ‘knowledge builder’ picks up, say, some simple idea of colour he has to accommodate three or four other simple ideas that come with it. Moreover, it will be difficult to explain why these other simple ideas will not drag along more ideas: will not this idea of existence be accompanied by this idea of unity? And so on. (At least the many simple ideas of existence and unity would also be indistinguishable: if someone asks what distinguishes this simple idea of unity from that, Locke cannot ‘send him to his Senses to inform him’ (126).)

If the accompaniment is a relation of one (simple idea) over many (ideas) the supposedly simple ideas of unity, existence, power, and pleasure or pain are general or universal. In fact, Locke claims about the idea of unity that it is not only the simplest, but also the most universal idea:

It has no shadow of Variety or Composition in it: every Object our Senses are employed about; every Idea in our Understandings; every Thought of our

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18 One might, of course, reply that the idea of existence accompanies every idea except itself. But then, of all ideas, the idea of existence would be the only one we do not perceive as existing.

19 It may also be pointed out that in chapter XXIII of Book II Locke ridicules the view that in some complex ideas there is, as it were, a substance brick.
Minds brings this *Idea* along with it. And therefore it is the most intimate to our Thoughts, as well as it is, in its Agreement to all other things, the most universal *Idea* we have. (205)

According to Locke, all ideas are ‘particular in their Existence’ (414) and become general or universal only by ‘a relation, that by the mind of Man is added to them’ (414). All relations are ‘extraneous, and superinduced’ (322) and thus all universals (and—in Locke’s term—all *generals*) are made; they are ‘the Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding’ (412). But, for Locke, the accompaniment of all ideas by the supposed simple ideas of unity, existence, and, perhaps, passive or active power is not the product of what he calls an *operation of the mind*. Neither is the steady accompaniment of ideas by pleasure or pain. In contrast to perceiving a *complex idea* of relation, which requires the use of my active power, I am passive in perceiving the accompaniment of my ideas by the notions of unity, existence, and pleasure or pain. It is, after all, not me, but the ‘infinite Wise Author of our being’ who has been ‘pleased to join to several Thoughts, and several Sensations, a perception of Delight’ (129). Thus, in perceiving unity, existence, power, and pleasure or pain I perceive *universals* or *generals* whose relation to all or some ideas belongs to their nature (or is instituted by God). Since universality or generality do not belong to ideas by their nature, I do not perceive an *idea* in my perception of delight or uneasiness. (It is also noteworthy that in

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20 Locke is, of course, particularly interested in the universal or general *representation* or *signification* of ideas. He argues that this relation is added to them by an operation of the mind that includes *abstraction*. But signification is not the only possible general or universal relation of ideas.

21 See 414.

22 In the order of the *Essay* the account of this accompaniment comes *before* that of the operations of the mind.

23 In the phrase ‘a perception of Delight’ the ‘of’ may be taken materially rather than objectively, so that Locke is referring to a *delightful perception* rather than to a perception
the passages about the accompaniment of experience by pleasure or pain Locke generally says neither that ideas of pleasure or pain are joined to ideas nor that ideas of pleasure or pain are joined to the perception of ideas.\(^{24}\)

As a matter of fact, in the very first statement of his claim about the accompaniment of ideas by pleasure or pain, Locke does not call pleasure and pain simple ideas, but ‘Operations of our own Minds within’ (105) where

the term Operations here, I use in a large sence, as comprehending not barely the Actions of the Mind about its Ideas, but some sort of Passions arising sometimes from them, such as is the satisfaction or uneasiness arising from any thought. (105–6)

Just as the operation of perception is not the idea of perception, the operation of pleasure is not the idea of pleasure. In reflection I can, of course, get the idea of perception, an idea that will itself be perceived. Similarly, I can acquire the idea of a pleasure whose perception might itself be either a pleasure or a pain. The simple ideas obtained from reflection on operations of the mind can also become the materials for the complex ideas that Locke calls modes of thinking (226) and modes of pleasure and pain (229).\(^{25}\) (That

of the idea of delight. Thomas M. Lennon shows how important it is for the interpretation of Locke to give attention to the many meanings of ‘of’ (Thomas Lennon, ‘Locke and the Logic of Ideas’, History of Philosophy Quarterly, 18 (2001), 155–76.) In a Cartesian context the question would be this: does the idea of pleasure or pain contain objective reality? (Consider also the curious (and little discussed) passage in the Sixth Meditation (AT VII, 76) where Descartes says that the sensations of pain or pleasure are to be distinguished from distress of mind or delight, and that there is no intelligible, i.e. necessary, connection between them.)

\(^{24}\) The exception is the already partially quoted passage at 130–1.

\(^{25}\) Locke uses ‘mode’ in two senses: in the first sense (‘in somewhat a different sence from its ordinary signification’ (165)) it means one of the three kinds of complex ideas (the others being substance and relation); in the second it means a way of being of the mind or of an operation of the mind (e.g. perceiving rather than feeling pain). Modes in the second sense can be observed in reflection; modes in the first sense are not observed, but made by
he distinguishes these modes is a further sign that he does not take pleasure or pain to be the perception of an idea. The accompaniment of perception by pleasure or pain appears thus to be the accompaniment of one operation employed about ideas (perception) by another not so employed (feeling pleasure or pain). This suggests interpretation (II) of Locke’s claim in question. It will become clear that the claim can also be universalized: the operation of pleasure or pain is attached to all perception of ideas.

What, then, does Locke mean when he says that one operation accompanies (or is attached, joined, or annexed to) another? According to the Essay, such accompaniment occurs in many ways: perception accompanies impression; pleasure or pain accompanies perception; and volition accompanies pain (uneasiness). The relation of accompaniment is here also a relation of determination: impression determines what ideas I perceive; perception determines what I feel (pleasure or pain); and pain (uneasiness) determines what I will.

But, for Locke, there is another kind of accompaniment: the ‘reflex Act of Perception’ (338), i.e. consciousness, accompanies all perception of ideas, pleasure or pain, and volition. In Locke’s

the act of the mind Locke calls combination (163–4). In Chapters XIX and XX of Book II of the Essay this ambiguity remains quite unresolved.

26 This seems to go against Locke’s claim that ‘where-ever there is Sense, or Perception, there some Idea is actually produced, and present in the Understanding’ (144). Thus any perception of pain would be the perception of an idea. But the context of this assertion is a discussion of sensation. Locke is only concerned to point out that complete sensation (sensation that does not terminate in an impression on the body) must include the perception of an idea of sensation. Whether pain is the product of sensation (in Locke’s sense of this term) is a different question.

27 Perception ‘actually accompanies, and is annexed to any impression on the Body’ (226).

28 ‘The will seldom orders any action, nor is there any voluntary action performed, without some desire accompanying it’ (256–7).

29 Consciousness ‘always accompanies thinking’ (335). Since the self, the ‘conscious thinking thing’ (341), by consciousness ‘owns all the Actions of that thing’ (341, my
equivocal terms, perception of ideas is itself *perceived*: ‘It being impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive’ (335). But the reflex act of perception, i.e. consciousness or self-consciousness, is not itself the perception of an idea of reflection. If it were, it would have to be accompanied by another reflex act (since, by hypothesis, any perception of an idea is so accompanied). As the perception of an idea this reflex act would in turn be accompanied by yet another such act. And so on. In my reflex act of perception I do not perceive the ideas of my perception, pleasure or pain, and volition; rather, I am immediately present to myself as perceiving ideas, feeling pleasure or pain, or willing things. Moreover, these operations belong to one and the same reflex act. They are *my* operations precisely because they all are united to *my* one reflex act of perception.

My consciousness thus accompanies my operations in a different way from that in which my pleasure or pain accompanies my perception of ideas. The accompaniment by my reflex act of perception is *essential* to my operations. In seventeenth-century terms one could say that my reflex act accompanies my operations as their *cause of being*. Now, my operations are themselves modified: I perceive this or that idea, I feel pleasure or pain. Any co-existence, succession, or flow of perceptions and feelings is present to me only because each of the co-existing or succeeding perceptions or feelings, or any part of the flow of perception or pleasure or pain, is united to my reflex act of perception. In this way it can also become present to me that my operation of pleasure or

emphasis), it accompanies not only *perception*, but also the actions of *volition* and *feeling pleasure or pain*.

30 Locke uses ‘consciousness’ and ‘self-consciousness’ (341) interchangeably.

31 Locke gives almost no hints how the reflexivity of the reflex act of perception, i.e. the reflexivity of consciousness, is to be understood.

32 Consciousness is ‘inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it’ (335).
pain accompanies my operation of perception of ideas, and that I have determinable powers of perception and pleasure or pain. In this accompaniment my perception of ideas is not the cause of being of my pleasure or pain; but, in so far as it determines what I feel, it could be called its cause of becoming.

Locke calls the self ‘that conscious thinking thing, … which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern’d for it self’ (341). The very being of the self is consciousness, the reflex act of perception of its own being: ‘consciousness always accompanies thinking, and ’tis that, that makes every one to be, what he calls self’ (335). Consciousness is thus immediate perception of existence, unity, power, and pleasure or pain. Furthermore, the being of the self is being in succession: ‘a train of Ideas, which constantly succeed one another’ (182) is immediately present to my self. This consciousness of succession is immediate ‘for if we look immediately into our selves, … we shall find our Ideas always … passing in train, one going, and another coming, without intermission’ (131). I am, I exist in a constant succession of ways of relating myself to objects; that is, I exist in a constant succession of perceptions of ideas. But I also exist in a constant succession of ways of relating myself to myself; that is, I exist in a constant succession of feelings of pleasure or pain. Thus,

33 One might ask how exactly Locke’s notion of the self is related to his notion of the mind.

34 It appears now that reflection on aspects of consciousness is the origin of the ideas of existence, unity, power, and pleasure or pain.

35 We can also reflect on this succession, but ‘to look immediately into ourselves’ and to ‘reflect on what is observable there’ (131) are to be distinguished. Reflection, which produces an idea of reflection, is not an immediate look. Similarly, when we ‘find’ ideas ‘to appear one after another’ (182), this finding is not the product of reflection. In reflection we form the idea of succession from the ‘train of Ideas’ (182) already found in consciousness.

36 ‘Whilst we receive successively several Ideas in our Minds, we know that we do exist’ (182).
any perception of an idea is to me part of my operation of thinking (which includes, or can include, the perception of other ideas), and any pleasure or any pain is to me part of my operation of feeling pleasure or pain (which includes, or can include, other pleasures or pains).  

In an important passage early in Book II of the Essay Locke presents the following distinction:

The two great and principal Actions of the Mind, ... are these two:  

Perception, or Thinking, and  
Volition, or Willing.  

The Power of Thinking is called the Understanding, and the Power of Volition is called the Will, and these two Powers or Abilities in the Mind are denominated Faculties. (128)

This corresponds to his later distinction between ‘Perceptivity, or the Power of perception, or thinking’ and ‘Motivity, or the Power of moving’ (286). There he calls perceptivity a ‘Passive Power, or Capacity’ (286), such that strictly speaking its actualizations cannot be called actions of the mind. Only motivity is an active power, which in minds is exercised in actions of the mind. Now, feeling pleasure or pain is certainly one of the principal actions of the mind of a self ‘capable of Happiness and Misery’ and ‘concerned for it self’ (341). Yet, as I have argued, it cannot be understood as an act

37 Analogously, any vital motion belonging to the ‘one Common Life’ (331) of a brute animal is always part of an ongoing operation. A motion of inhalation, for instance, is part of the action of breathing. Moreover, the action of breathing accompanies other such actions (for example the pumping of blood).

38 Note that when Locke calls the power of thinking or perception the understanding, he uses ‘understanding’ in a narrow sense. In a wide sense ‘understanding’ (as used in the very title of the Essay) refers to the sum-total of mental powers (‘survey’d’ (46) in the Essay): perceptivity, motivity, and—as I shall argue—affectivity.

39 Perceptivity is a passive power because it is receptivity, a ‘Power to receive Ideas’ (286). In the very first chapter of Book II of the Essay Locke already insists that in sensation and reflection ‘the Understanding is meerly passive’ and ‘cannot avoid the Perception of those Ideas [of sensation or reflection]’ (118).
of perceptivity, i.e. the perception of an idea. As will become evident, Locke does not attribute it to the power of motivity, either. It must therefore be the actualization of another power. This faculty I shall call affectivity or (the power of) feeling.\footnote{There is a faculty/act ambiguity in ‘feeling’ (just as in the French ‘sentiment’ and the German ‘Gefühl’). I shall use ‘feeling’ both for the faculty (as the term is used in the title of a once famous novel: The Man of Feeling) and for its act. The context should make things clear. (An early hint of a tripartite division of faculties in the Essay is a passage near the beginning of Book II where Locke ascribes to the soul ‘Thinking, Enjoyments, and Concerns’ (110)).}

Affectivity or the faculty of feeling stands—as it were—in between the faculties of understanding and will: we determine our will to motion or thought by the act of our feeling, i.e. the uneasiness that accompanies the act of the understanding, i.e. the perception of ideas. Locke insists on distinguishing will and desire:

Whence it is evident, that desiring and willing are two distinct Acts of the mind; and consequently that the Will, which is but the power of Volition, is much more distinct from Desire. (250)

For Locke, ‘the reason why the will and desire are so often confounded’ (257) is simply the fact that volition is always accompanied by the uneasiness of desire. But what is true of willing and desiring also applies to desiring and thinking: they are distinct acts of the mind and belong to different faculties. In a curious passage Locke imagines what our state would be if we lacked feelings of pleasure or pain:

And so we should neither stir our Bodies, nor employ our Minds; but let our Thoughts (if I may so call it) run a drift, without any direction or design; and suffer the Ideas of our Minds, like unregarded shadows, to make their appearances there, as it happen’d, without attending to them. In which state Man, however furnished with the faculties of Understanding and Will, would
be a very idle unactive Creature, and pass his time only in a lazy lethargick Dream. (129)\(^{41}\)

In this state the will would be an unused \textit{bare faculty}\(^{42}\) since the understanding alone would not be sufficient to determine it. This implies that without a faculty of feeling distinct from both the will and the understanding we could not be the active creatures we are. (In general, Locke claims that ‘the Idea in the mind of whatever good, is there only like other Ideas, the object of bare unactive speculation; but operates not on the will, nor sets us on work’ (255). If, like Berkeley,\(^ {43}\) he thinks that \textit{all} ideas are only the objects of such ‘unactive speculation,’ he cannot hold that pleasure and pain are ideas. At any rate, when he contrasts the ‘unactive’ perception of the idea of some good with the uneasiness that ‘sets us on work,’ he never describes the uneasiness as the perception of an idea.)

Is affectivity an active or a passive power? In so far as we are ‘sensible … of Pleasure and Pain’ (341), in so far as we receive the modifications of pleasure or pain, we are as passive as in perception.\(^ {44}\) But in pleasure or pain we do not receive ideas. Pleasure and pain are \textit{feelings}; they belong to ‘some sort of Passions

\(^{41}\) The passage recalls Hobbes’s account of one sort of ‘Trayne of Thoughts’: ‘The first is \textit{Unguided, without Designe}, and inconstant; Wherein there is no Passionate Thought, to govern and direct those that follow, to it self, as the end and scope of some desire, or other passion’ (\textit{Leviathan}, I. iii; in Thomas Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 95).

\(^{42}\) According to Leibniz, talk about a \textit{will} in such a state would be unintelligible. For Leibniz’s complaints about Locke using the incomprehensible notion of a \textit{bare faculty} or \textit{bare power}, see his \textit{New Essays on Human Understanding}, 2.1.2 and 4.3.6; in G. W. Leibniz, \textit{New Essays on Human Understanding}, trans. and ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), 110 and 379.


\(^{44}\) ‘For in bare naked \textit{Perception}, the Mind is, for the most part, only passive; and what it perceives, it cannot avoid perceiving’ (143).
arising sometimes from them [ideas or—more precisely—perceptions of ideas]’ (106). As a matter of fact, ‘satisfaction or uneasiness’ is such a passion that may be ‘arising from any thought’ (106). We can say that Locke distinguishes two forms of sensibility: perceptivity, actualized in the perception of ideas of sensation and reflection from experience; and affectivity, actualized in feelings from self-affection. Reflection (or ‘internal Sensation’ (162)) might also be called self-affection; but it is essential to distinguish between the ‘Fountains’ (104) of the perception of ideas and the fountain of feeling. (It seems that in the self-affection of reflection one part of the self (the self perceiving an idea of sensation) affects another (the self perceiving an idea of perceiving an idea of sensation), whereas in the self-affection of feeling the whole self affects the whole self.) In so far as affectivity is a faculty of self-affection, it might also be considered an active power, although it should not be confused with the active power of motivity: The motivity of the mind (its will) is exercised in moving bodies and ‘moving’ thoughts (for instance, in bringing ‘into view Ideas out of sight, at one’s own choice, and to compare which of them one thinks fit’ (286) and similar operations requiring voluntary attention), whereas the affectivity of the mind (the self) is actualized in the self affecting itself.

45 These passions belong to the ‘Operations of our own Minds within’ (105), and—in a broad sense—can even be called actions.

46 When Locke uses the term ‘sensibility,’ he usually means the susceptibility to pleasure or pain: ‘he who made us … will restore us to the like state of Sensibility in another World, and make us capable there to receive the Retribution he has designed to Men’ (542). What makes us capable of receiving retribution is the capacity of feeling pleasure or pain.

47 Again, Locke gives no further explanation of this reflexivity. (Is the whole affecting itself a simple whole? Is it like an organic whole?)

48 Although Locke for the most part seems to assume that ‘Pleasure or Pain follows upon the application of certain Objects to us, whose Existence we perceive’ (537, my emphasis), it is so far an open question whether self-affection necessarily requires the perception of ideas.
II

What are the consequences of all this for Locke’s account of desire and happiness? That desire is uneasiness, i.e. pain, implies that in desire the self is conscious of its operation of feeling. At least in this life, desire is constant because no moment of the operation of feeling is ever without uneasiness. Locke writes: ‘we finding imperfection, dissatisfaction, and want of complete happiness, in all the Enjoyments which the Creatures can afford us, might be led to seek it in the enjoyment of him, with whom there is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore’ (130). Now, in the uneasiness of desire I feel myself as someone who could be pleased (either to the full extent or to a lesser degree): in consciousness I am ‘sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery’ (341, my emphases). In the uneasiness of desire I also feel myself concerned for myself: ‘Happiness and Misery, being that, for which every one is concerned for himself’ (341f). In concern for myself I am not only ‘conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness and Misery’, but I also feel misery as my imperfect, happiness as my perfect being—if indeed I ever come to feel happiness. That nobody is ‘feeling pain, that he wishes not to be eased of’ (251) requires that everybody feel he could and should be happy: ‘A concern for Happiness’ is ‘the unavoidable concomitant of consciousness, that which is conscious of Pleasure and Pain, desiring, that that self, that is conscious, should be happy’ (346).

49 In this life even in joy we remain uneasy: ‘the present moment not being our eternity, whatever our enjoyment be, we look beyond the present, and desire goes with our foresight’ (257). Hobbes, too, claims that ‘there is no such a thing as perpetuall Tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire’ (Leviathan, I. vi; ed. Macpherson, 129–30). But for Hobbes this means that a notion like that of the utmost pleasure is ‘as incomprehensible’ to us ‘as the word of School-Men Beatificall Vision is unintelligible’ (Leviathan, I. vi; ed. Macpherson, 130).
Does this consciousness of uneasiness as *imperfection* or *want* presuppose some consciousness of happiness? Some consciousness of *actual* happiness? For how could I feel my imperfect being unless there were in me some consciousness of my more perfect being which enables me to recognize my defect by comparison?\(^{50}\) This consciousness of my more perfect being, the *standard* or *measure* of my *feeling*, cannot be the perception of an idea of happiness (in Locke’s sense of ‘idea’). Locke obviously assumes that we have some idea of happiness, a complex idea we form by the mental operations of *enlarging* and *abstraction* applied to simple ideas of pleasures received in reflection.\(^{51}\) But the measure of feeling is *happiness*, rather than some *idea* of happiness. I cannot recognize that my uneasiness is an imperfection by comparing it with an idea of happiness, especially an abstract idea.\(^{52}\) In order to feel uneasiness it cannot be necessary that I have already reflected on my feelings and started forming more or less elaborate abstract ideas or thoughts about happiness.\(^{53}\)

\(^{50}\) I am, of course, paraphrasing a passage from Descartes’s *Third Meditation* (AT 45–6).

\(^{51}\) According to Locke the operation of *enlarging* as applied to ideas is a kind of *composition*: ‘Under this [operation] of Composition, may be reckon’d also that of ENLARGING; wherein though the Composition does not so much appear as in more complex ones, yet it is nevertheless a putting several Ideas together, though of the same kind’ (158). To talk about an *enlarged idea* is thus to talk about a *complex idea* (or a complex of ideas).

\(^{52}\) The perception of the idea of happiness may itself be accompanied by pleasure. But obviously *this* pleasure cannot be the measure of feeling. Locke reports that in reflection he found ‘that the expectation of eternal and incomprehensible happiness in another world is that also which carries a constant pleasure with it’ (‘Thus I Think’, in *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 297).

\(^{53}\) Jean-Jacques Rousseau will accuse philosophers of assuming that in order to live I need to be a ‘very great reasoner and a profound metaphysician’ (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Preface; in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes* III, eds. Marcel Raymond and Bernard Gagnebin (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 125). Scandalously, he claims that for us ‘the state of reflection is a state against nature’ (*Oeuvres complètes*, III, 138). But *reflection* (as understood by Locke) certainly cannot be our *beginning* in life (in...
Moreover, the measure of my feeling cannot be an idea derived from what it is supposed to measure: In first forming the idea of happiness I would have to start with reflection on feelings which I do not yet recognize as feelings of imperfection or perfection, uneasiness or satisfaction (since—by hypothesis—I do not yet have their measure). Whatever idea I would form in this way would be neither the idea of happiness nor that of misery. This is not to deny that there could be reflective ideas of happiness and misery, but they would have to be derived from feelings of pleasure and pain already recognized as feelings of perfection and imperfection.

It is also worth pointing out that in forming ideas of pleasure or happiness via reflection I can go astray. The products of reflection (‘properly enough … call’d internal Sense’ (105)) are simple ideas of reflection whose agreement with the reality of things is as questionable as that of simple ideas of sensation. Even if simple ideas of reflection, like simple ideas of sensation, ‘are not fictions of our Fancies’ (564), because they are produced by causes in ‘the reality of Things’ (563), nothing is thereby established about whether they resemble them in any way. Strange as it may sound, the idea of my uneasiness might misrepresent my real feeling. Similarly, my complex idea of my happiness, which—in Locke’s oddly Malebranchean terms—is not its own archetype, might misrepresent my state of feeling. Nothing in Locke’s way of ideas rules out that my complex reflective ideas can be like the ‘Reveries of a crazy Brain’ (563).

perceiving, feeling, and willing).

54 The enlarged and abstract idea obtained in this way might be called the idea of more feeling. Perhaps we are here at the origin of some form of utilitarianism.

55 A complex idea that is its own archetype is ‘not designed to represent any thing but it self’ and therefore never ‘capable of a wrong representation’ (564).

56 This is almost never noticed in Locke commentary. (For an exception see Martha Brandt Bolton, ‘The Taxonomy of Ideas in Locke’s Essay’, in The Cambridge Companion to Locke’s ‘Essay Concerning Human Understanding’, ed. Lex Newman (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 85–6.) (It is remarkable that in his chapter on the reality of knowledge Locke
For Locke, what then could be the consciousness that enables me to recognize my uneasiness as a defect in my being if it is not the perception of a reflective idea? On page 618 (!) of the Essay Locke writes that ‘nothing can be more evident to us, than our own Existence’, and that ‘we have an intuitive Knowledge of our own Existence, and an internal infallible Perception that we are’. 57 This is neither the perception of an idea of sensation nor of reflection. We know our existence not by having an idea of it, but by ‘that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking’ (335). 58 But, according to Locke, it is not essential to consciousness that it be modified by perceptions of ideas. That consciousness is in-separable from thinking does not imply that thinking is inseparable from consciousness. 59 (Notoriously, Locke rejects the ‘Opinion, that the

considers neither simple ideas of reflection nor complex ideas made of them that may be ‘supposed Copies’ (568) of operations of the mind.) Moreover, according to Locke, these reflective reveries or ‘Fancies’ (563) will not be harmless: someone who is mistaken in his thoughts about his happiness has gone astray in ‘his own Thought and Judgment, what is best for him to do’ (264). More dramatically: ‘He has vitiated his own Palate, and must be answerable to himself for the sickness and death that follows from it’ (271).

57 Locke hints at this intuitive knowledge in an important passage from Book II: ‘Every act of sensation, when duly considered, gives us an equal view of both parts of nature, the Corporeal and Spiritual. For whilst I know, by seeing or hearing, etc. that there is some Corporeal Being without me, the Object of that sensation, I do more certainly know, that there is some Spiritual Being within me, that sees and hears’ (306).

58 On this point Locke agrees with Malebranche: ‘We do not know it [the soul] at all by its idea: … we know it by consciousness [conscience]’ (Recherche de la Vérité, III. II. vii. §IV; in Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche, tome I, 451). (That for Locke the intuition of our own existence just is consciousness is further supported by some of his remarks on Descartes’s proof of the existence of God: ‘our own existence is known to us by certainty yet higher than our senses can give us of the existence of other things, and that is internal perception, a self-consciousness, or intuition’ (Lord Peter King, The Life of John Locke (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1830), vol. II, 138–9.) It is beyond the scope of this essay to address the question of how intuitive knowledge of my existence can be ‘the Perception of the Agreement or Disagreement of two Ideas’ (525). Under any interpretation, it will be difficult to understand the notions of myself and my existence as (simple) ideas derived from experience.

59 To prevent misunderstandings: ‘thinking’ is here used in Locke’s sense (as referring to the perception of ideas or sensation or reflection). In a Cartesian context the claim
Soul always thinks’ (108); he denies ‘that actual thinking is as inseparable from the soul, as actual Extension is from the Body’ (108). It is also not essential that our affectivity be determined by the perception of ideas. After all, Locke thinks that we are ‘intended for a State of Happiness’ (277) which is nothing but ‘the enjoyment of him, with whom there is fullness of joy’ (130, quoting Ps. 16: 11). However consciousness is to be characterized in this state (and Locke is too modest to speculate much about this), it is not a thinking consciousness, and its act of affectivity, the fullness of joy, is not determined by the perception of ideas of sensation or reflection.

The state of fullness of joy can be compared to the state (already briefly considered above) in which ‘Man, however furnished with the faculties of Understanding and Will, would be a very idle unactive Creature, and pass his time only in a lazy lethargick Dream’ (129), a state I shall simply call lazy lethargy. In both states faculties we find in this life are supposed to be absent (or only bare faculties). It might seem that in lazy lethargy there is neither affectivity nor motivity, whereas in fullness of joy there is only affectivity. But this needs to be qualified. In fullness of joy there might be a form of perceptivity distinct from that actualized in the perception of ideas of sensation or reflection (some immediate vision of God) and a form of will distinct from the will determined by the uneasiness accompanying perceptions of ideas of sensation would appear to be nonsense.

60 Locke very charmingly confesses that he has ‘one of those dull Souls, that doth not perceive it self always to contemplate Ideas’ (108). In these passages we might substitute ‘consciousness’ for ‘soul.’ Locke had better not say that the soul may (sometimes) be only a bare faculty. As Leibniz points out correctly, this would make the soul belong to ‘mere fictions, unknown to nature, and obtainable only by abstraction’ (G. W. Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding, 2.1.2; trans. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, 110). Less politely, the soul would (sometimes) be nothing (and Locke in his dullness would be dead).
or reflection (some will willing what it already has \(^{61}\)). Similarly, nothing in Locke’s description of lazy lethargy rules out that in this state there might be a feeling or a will independent of any perception of ideas.

How could one make sense of feeling or willing in lazy lethargy? Lazy lethargy could be my state, my existence, or my life only if my preservation depended in no way on my being conscious of any pleasure or pain arising from my thoughts. (In this respect it would, of course, be similar to the fullness of joy.) But, again, my feeling could be determined by something different from my thoughts. What could that be? In lazy lethargy there appears to be a possible source of feeling: my very existence, my life. I am conscious of it and feel no lack or imperfection in it. About lazy lethargy one can’t help asking: wouldn’t it be sweet? If indeed it is pleasant or happy, it is so through an immediate self-affection without any detour via the perception of ideas. Therefore, such pleasure would be in no way affected by their changes and be as permanent as my existence. It might even be said to determine my will. In lazy lethargy I would be a ‘very idle unactive Creature’ (129) only because I would not at all be concerned for things appearing in the perception of ideas and thus would do nothing about them. Still, I would be concerned for myself, for the existence and life of which I am conscious. That I already have it does not rule out that I will it. My will which would will nothing that appears in perception, i.e. nothing different from my existence, would then be a will that wills itself.\(^{62}\)

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\(^{62}\) Locke seems to recognize that there could be a will when there is no uneasiness at all: ‘When a Man is perfectly content with the State he is in, which is when he is perfectly without any uneasiness, what industry, what action, what Will is there left, but to continue in it?’ (252). He presents this, however, as a fact of which ‘every Man’s observation will satisfy him’ (252), and thereby contradicts his claim that in this life we never find ourselves perfectly without uneasiness.

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Is this more than idle speculation, a lazy dream? To return to our main topic, Locke needs to explain how the uneasiness of desire can be the consciousness of imperfection: by what consciousness of happiness do I measure my feeling? Since it cannot be the perception of an idea, it must be a more immediate consciousness. What could it be? Locke’s hints about fullness of joy and lazy lethargy suggest an answer: the measure of my feeling is the happy consciousness of existence.

Locke begins Book II of the Essay, i.e. his ‘true History of the first beginnings of Humane Knowledge’ (162), with the phrase ‘Every Man being conscious to himself, That he thinks’ (104, my emphasis). Indeed, if originally I were not conscious to myself (in a reflex act of perception of my being), I could not come to perceive ideas; and if originally I were not feeling happiness, I could not come to feel uneasiness on the occasion of the perception of ideas. Speaking historically, one might say that, according to Locke, I could not have become uneasy unless I had been happy before, or, more lyrically, unless I had been born happy.63

In structural rather than historical terms, uneasiness, as the feeling of imperfection, is a feeling of a difference: the difference between my imperfect and perfect being. How can I feel this difference? Locke claims we are conscious of difference by an operation of the mind he calls discerning: it is by discerning that ‘the Mind … perceives two Ideas to be the same, or different’ (156). He points out that ‘it is the first act of the Mind, (without which, it can never be capable of any Knowledge,) to know every one of its Ideas by it self, and distinguish it from others’ (592). Since earlier in the Essay (in the main discussion of operations of the mind) perceiving is called the first act of the mind ‘about our Ideas’ (143), discerning must—strictly speaking—be a way of perceiving ideas,

63 Here it is perhaps not superfluous to point out that when Locke asks the question ‘at what time a Man has first any Ideas’ (108) he is not asking the question: ‘at what time does a man first become conscious?’
i.e. distinct perceiving.\textsuperscript{64} In distinct perception I am immediately conscious that the idea I perceive is \textit{not} another one I perceive or did perceive (and could perceive again).\textsuperscript{65} This consciousness is immediate since I do not need to form an idea of difference in order to perceive distinctly. Now, some form of discerning must apply not only to the perception of ideas, but also to feeling. In uneasiness it is immediately present to me that in my operation of feeling my current degree of pleasure is \textit{not} the utmost pleasure I actually felt (and could feel again), the pleasure in my existence lacking nothing.

According to Locke, that \textit{in this life} we constantly desire happiness is a consequence of the fact that our relation to the \textit{objects} of \textit{this world}, i.e. the perception of ideas, constantly produces some uneasiness (a consciousness of reduced pleasure). In other terms: the desire for happiness is a consequence of our affectivity being sensibly affected (where this may include being affected by the internal sense of reflection). In response to the question of why this should be so, Locke tells us to admire ‘the Wisdom and Goodness of our Maker, who designing the preservation of our Being, has annexed Pain to the application of many things to our Bodies, to warn us of the harm that they will do’ (129f). But the preservation of our sensible existence is not all the design of our Maker. ‘The want of complete happiness, in all the Enjoyments which the Creatures can afford us’ (130), i.e. the uneasiness that in varying degrees accompanies all our perception of \textit{ideas}, is an indication that our happiness does not lie in \textit{thought} or \textit{knowledge}. In a notorious passage Locke writes:

\textsuperscript{64} Locke ascribes the task of \textit{noticing} bodily impressions by means of the perception of an idea both to the ‘discerning Faculty’ (132) and to the faculty of perception (143). (Since his full discussion of \textit{noticing} is in the chapter on the faculty of \textit{perception}, the earlier passage may be interpreted as emphasizing an important \textit{aspect} or \textit{mode} of perception.)

\textsuperscript{65} A perceiver ‘can never be in doubt when any \textit{Idea} is in his Mind, that it is there, and is that \textit{Idea} it is; and that two distinct \textit{Ideas}, when they are in his Mind, are there, and are not one and the same \textit{Idea}’ (592). For ideas, one way of \textit{being in the mind}, is, of course, \textit{succession}. 

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For since the Things, the Mind contemplates, are none of them, *besides it self* [my emphasis], present to the Understanding, ’tis necessary that something else, as a Sign or Representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it: And these are *Ideas.* (720f)

To say that I am not satisfied in *thought* is thus to say that I am not satisfied with the presence of *ideas.* I can be satisfied only by the presence of *things.* In the *fullness of joy* I would be satisfied by the presence of God. But even an inkling of this possibility presupposes an actual satisfaction in the presence of another ‘thing’: my own existence.

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66 We do not need to take a position on the endlessly debated question of what exactly Locke means by ‘representation’ and ‘presence to the mind.’ It suffices here to point out that any answer must take into account that for Locke there are two distinct forms of presence to the mind: one somehow involving *ideas* or *appearances* (287), the other not. (That we are satisfied only in the presence of *things* means that we are satisfied only by *truth*—even if putting it this way might add too much *unction* to the claim. Locke for his part says that truth is ‘that which all Mankind either do, or pretend to search after’ (574). He proceeds, however, to assert that ‘*Truth* then seems to me, in the proper import of the Word, to signify nothing but the joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with another’ (574). It may be doubted that all mankind searches, or pretends to search, after *that.*)

67 This actual pleasure in one’s own existence could be called—in a term that would horrify Augustine—*fruitio sui.* As a matter of fact, in a great work known to Locke it is so called: ‘it is certain that without *Consciousness …* nothing can be Happy (since it could not have any *Fruition of it self*)’ (Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Royston, 1678), 847). (On Cudworth and British accounts of consciousness in the seventeenth century see Udo Thiel, *Lockes Theorie der personalen Identität* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983), 67–104.)

I would like to thank Orsolya Schreiner, Jennifer Nagel, Gavin Lawrence, Stephen Engstrom, and Sergio Tenenbaum for comments on drafts of this paper.