

When we carefully compare these two passages, we perceive, that in the former he has considered the Will as the agent or subject itself; although it is obviously an abstract term, merely denoting a particular state. He appears to be thoroughly aware of this in the second passage, in which he regards it only as a power or predicable—a quality or attribute of the agent or subject. In the first passage he has ascribed so much power to volition, as to make it the very cause of motion and rest in bodies; while in the second he reduces it to its abstract condition, and treats it as a mere attribute or quality—absolutely incapable of any action or causality whatever.

It is probable that this mistake, in making volition or thought the cause of the alternate motion and rest of the right and left hands, may have arisen from the consideration of the action being the consequence, or immediately following the desire to move either of the hands, which is, in reality, taking an effect for a cause. For thought or volition, being mere predicables, or abilities, can have no power to cause either motion or rest in bodies; for thought or volition are simply the abstract names of those states or conditions which have themselves been produced in the human mind by something antecedent. Therefore to affirm that thought or will can have power to cause either motion or rest in bodies, is, in effect, to say (in the language of Locke already quoted) that one power or ability has another power or ability—which is an affirmation too grossly absurd to need an answer; for who does not see that powers belong only to agents, and are attributes of substances, and not of powers themselves.

Locke saw clearly enough that thought and volition are merely abstract terms, denominating states of consciousness, the result of previous impressions. This is, indeed, the irresistible inference to be drawn from the whole of his first book: there is nothing in the intellect which has not previously been in the senses. It is also equally true that he likewise thought he saw daily and hourly instances of facts which clearly indicated the opposite of this, as in the example given