
SCEPTICAL DELIBERATIONS

BY

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Abstract: Suppose I am a leeway sceptic: I think that, whenever I face a choice between two courses of action, I lack true alternatives. Can my practical deliberation be rational? Call this the *Deliberation Question*. This paper has three aims in tackling it. Its constructive aim is to provide a unified account of practical deliberation. Its corrective aim is to amend the way that philosophers have recently framed the Deliberation Question. Finally, its disputative aim is to argue that leeway sceptics cannot deliberate entirely rationally about what to do because of the connection between deliberating and deciding.

1. Introduction

Suppose that Cate deliberates about whether to award the *Palme d'Or* to *The Wild Pear Tree* or to *Shoplifters*. The first contains exceptional shots, but the acting of the second is superior. She finds it hard to choose. Now imagine Cate comes to believe that one of the films is ineligible (perhaps not knowing which) or that she is not on the jury. In a sense, she can no longer deliberate rationally about which film to award the prize to.

Suppose instead that Cate comes to believe she has no free will in one sense of the term. More precisely, she thinks she lacks *leeway*, that is, the ability and opportunity to choose amongst real alternatives. At no point, Cate thinks she could have truly said 'I could have done otherwise'.¹ Being a leeway sceptic, can she still deliberate rationally about what to do? Call this the *Deliberation Question*.

The Deliberation Question raises controversy, which has been expressed in different terms. We can simplify the literature by splitting it into two camps. Alexander of Aphrodisias (*De Fato*), A.C. MacIntyre (1957), Richard Taylor (1966), Hector Castañeda (1975), Peter van Inwagen (1983),

Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 101 (2020) 383–408 DOI: 10.1111/papq.12321

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E.J. Coffman and Warfield (2005), John Searle (2007) and Yishai Cohen give a *negative* answer to the Deliberation Question. Cate's leeway scepticism is a barrier to her deliberating rationally. On the other side of the aisle, Bruce Waller (1985), Tomis Kapitan (1986), Philip Pettit (1989), Randolph Clarke (1992), Dana Nelkin (2004, 2011), Karen Nielsen (2011) and Derk Pereboom (2008, 2014) give, in effect, a *positive* answer to the Deliberation Question.² Accordingly, while Cate is irrational in deliberating if she believes she is not on the jury or that one film is ineligible, her leeway scepticism is no impediment to her rational deliberation.

The Deliberation Question is important because there are strong reasons for being a leeway sceptic,³ as the free will debate has long demonstrated, and for valuing rationality, as epistemologists have often maintained.⁴ Accordingly, we should not be surprised to see that sympathy for leeway scepticism is more prevalent amongst those who think that sceptics can deliberate rationally.

In order to make progress on the Deliberation Question, we need to be clear on what practical deliberation consists in. Thus, my first goal in this paper is constructive: in Section 2, I offer a unified account of practical deliberation. It is *rational* in that it is subject to rational requirements. It is *decisional* in that it aims at issuing decisions. It is finally *provisional* in that it is typically run on practical assumptions, not just on beliefs. These three properties interact.

We can use this account to revisit the Deliberation Question. Accordingly, my second goal is corrective: in Section 3, I amend the way that philosophers have approached it. In the last century, philosophers⁵ asked whether good deliberation required *belief in leeway*. More recently, philosophers turned to whether good deliberation is incompatible with a *belief in determinism*.⁶ These two questions must be answered negatively, but for mainly insubstantial reasons. The important question is rather whether rational deliberation requires *the lack of a belief in the lack of leeway*.

The answer, which relies on substantial reasons, is that rational deliberation does so require and so that leeway sceptics cannot fully deliberate rationally. My third goal is disputative: in Section 4, I champion an argument for this. Here it is, in a nutshell. To deliberate rationally about several courses of action, we must be able to decide in favour of one of them. But, to rationally decide in favour of a course of action, we must not believe that we cannot pursue it. This, I think, implies that the leeway sceptic is barred from rationally deciding in typical deliberation. She can only introspect or theorise. This argument raises objections, three of which I address in Section 5.

Before I start, let me insist that the three main parts of my paper are linked and yet independent. Someone may adopt my account of deliberation and my way of framing the Deliberation Question even if, in the end, my disputative argument falls short of convincing her that leeway sceptics

cannot deliberate rationally. This paper invites her to ask the Deliberation Question afresh.

2. *Construction: A unified account of practical deliberation*

Practical deliberation is the activity of deciding what to do on the basis of reasons. I explore in turn three properties of deliberation: it is decisional, rational and provisional.

2.1. A DECISIONAL ACTIVITY

Practical deliberation is *decisional*: its aim is to make a decision (see Taylor 1966, p. 168) or at least to produce an action via a decision (see Nelkin 2011, p. 168). Other philosophers agree in different words. They claim that deliberation is a form of reasoning or active thought whose aim is to form ‘an intention to do something’ (Clarke 1992, p. 107), or to make ‘a commitment to a course of action’ (Watson 2003, pp. 175–176). Practical deliberation is thus a conative activity whose aim is a decision (and ultimately an action) rather than a cognitive activity whose aim is a belief.⁷ That is not to deny that practical deliberation includes the identification or at least the weighing of reasons.⁸ But once we have figured out the reasons supporting each course of action, we need to weigh them and make a decision. In J. L. Austin’s colourful words,

Deliberation is not just *any* kind of thinking prior to action [...]. Ways and means are a matter for the planning staff; decision is a matter for the commander. (1979, p. 286)

This becomes especially clear in cases of irresolvable dilemmas, where we have no commensurable reason to favour one option over another (see Sartre 1946). There, the ‘planning staff’ is helpless. Theoretical deliberation might be over, but practical deliberation will not end before a decision is made.

The Deliberation Question concerns only practical deliberation, for there is nothing objectionable with the thought of someone deliberating theoretically, say about how long it would take to take the train from Geneva to Venice, while thinking that there is only one good answer to the question.

There are fundamentally three questions concerning one’s future conduct one can deliberate about: shall I Φ or Ψ ? Should I Φ or Ψ ? Will I Φ or Ψ ? We can associate different kinds of deliberative activities to these questions. The first question concerns primarily *practical* deliberation – in answering it, we make a decision. The second and the third concern primarily *theoretical* deliberation – in answering such questions, we form a belief. But these activities are linked: we typically ask the second in order to answer the first. Yet the fact that practical deliberation involves theoretical reasoning does not

make practical deliberation a kind of theoretical reasoning (see Watson 2003, p. 176).

2.2. A RATIONAL ACTIVITY

Like theoretical deliberation, practical deliberation is a *rational* activity: it is subject to norms of rationality.⁹ The exact specification of these norms is controversial (as we shall see in Section 3.2), but individual cases are usually clear. We could not, for instance, deliberate rationally about whether to spend the weekend on the Moon or on Mars.

It is interesting to ask what kind of irrationality is at stake in clear cases. Instrumental rationality must be partly concerned: it is *pointless* to deliberate about whether to go to the Moon or to Mars. But it seems that there is something more going on. Even if deliberation can have a positive effect on my life or on my conduct, this can simply be in virtue of the fact that being irrational is sometimes beneficial. Deliberating about whether to accept a job that I was not offered might put me in a good mood. It might even cause me to get the job. Take the Kavka-like case (1983, pp. 33–34) where an eccentric Dean tells me that if I deliberate about whether to accept a tenure-track job I was not offered, he will offer it to me. Some irrationality clearly remains as I proceed. The Dean has asked me in effect to be irrational in exchange for one of my ends. It seems then that, just like there seems to be such a thing as effective but irrational beliefs, there is such a thing as effective but irrational deliberation.¹⁰

One way to capture the irrationality I have in mind is to emphasise the difference between the irrationality *to* deliberate and the irrationality *in* deliberating.¹¹ The first might simply be instrumental: it is rational *to* deliberate when it is a good means-to-end activity. The second form of irrationality, irrationality *in deliberating*, is different. Deliberating well does not mean that it is useful to deliberate, and vice versa. Compare it being rational to play Monopoly (whether to initiate, pursue or finish a game) with playing Monopoly rationally.

What is irrational deliberation in this second sense? Here, I think that we have three options. We may first give it an *epistemic* reading (see van Inwagen 1983, pp. 155–160). Suppose that prior to deliberating about whether to go to Mars or to the Moon to spend the weekend, I believe it is impossible for me to travel in a spaceship in the foreseeable future. In deliberating, it seems likely that I will form some beliefs, such as the belief that I can in fact get on a spaceship by Friday. This would lead me to hold contradictory beliefs. I might instead abandon, for no reason, my belief that I cannot travel in a spaceship in the foreseeable future. In either case, I would clearly be epistemically irrational.

Second, we can give irrational deliberation an *activity-specific* reading. Without forming any new beliefs, I might become guilty of deliberative

irrationality. I somehow fail to follow the norms of deliberation. Here, we can use the distinction between right and wrong kinds of reasons.¹² In deliberating about whether to accept a job I am not offered, I respond to the wrong kind of reasons that is, the fact that an eccentric Dean wants me to deliberate.

Third, we can claim that (very) irrational deliberation is no longer deliberation. Perhaps I simply cannot deliberate about whether to accept the job. I might be merely daydreaming or deliberating about a different question.

We do not need to take a stance on which of the three answers is the best. In fact, each might be correct in some cases and incorrect in others. An irrational deliberator is perhaps sometimes not truly deliberating; at other times, she makes deliberative or epistemic mistakes. We can be oecumenical because our question is what is required for *rational deliberation*, not for deliberation or for rationality.¹³

One last point on the rationality that I am interested in. Whether it is epistemic or activity specific, rationality can be described as more or less substantive. We find in the literature a variety of views of rationality, ranging from structural requirements like coherence (see e.g. Broome 2013) to the more substantive requirement that one responds to reasons (see e.g. Kiesewetter 2017). We should note that even on substantive views, it must sometimes be rational for someone to reach a false conclusion, if only because she had misleading evidence. Similarly, practical deliberation involving false beliefs can be rational. Galen of Pergamon's deliberation whether to use bloodletting on a patient was not *de facto* irrational because his belief that bloodletting could be effective was false.

Decision making also has some rational constraints. I cannot rationally decide to go to the Moon this weekend any more than I can deliberate about whether to spend my weekend there. Now, because deliberation is a decisional activity, constraints on decision making are somehow inherited by deliberation. What I can decide influences what I can deliberate about. The decisional nature of deliberation interacts with its rational nature.

2.3. A PROVISIONAL ACTIVITY

Deliberation is rational and decisional. Whether it is rational depends on the relationship between one's deliberation and one's resulting decision. This raises a new question: what can we decide rationally? The answer depends, in turn, on the relationship between one's decision and one's action.

To better understand this relation, we should first note that our decisions are frustrated all the time. Thus, many of our decisions are conditional. 'If I work well today, I will come to the pub later', 'I will pick up the vegetable box, *on the condition that* it does not rain', and so forth are our daily bread. Some of our decisions are unconditional, however. We feel the need to add

conditions when we think that the link between our decision and our action would otherwise be too weak, perhaps too weak to make a promise.

An overreaction to this phenomenon is to claim that, truly, we should severely circumscribe our decisions (and perhaps our promises) to what is under our strict control. It is in this spirit that Stoics like Cleanthes and Chrysippus located human agency in a realm that humans presumably had full control over; walking, they say, really happens in the soul.¹⁴ In accordance with this suggestion, it only makes sense to make decisions about these mental actions. Decisions, to use a different terminology, should only be about *attempts*. I shall ‘soul-walk’ or ‘attempt to walk’ and hope that this makes me walk. And so, when you invite me for dinner, I should really only promise to try. But even this radical proposal assumes, problematically, that we fully control something that we do not. Having decided to *try to run*, I can fail because I fall asleep or forget, just as I can fail to *run* because my ankle is strained. For most Φ , it is simply easier to try to Φ than to Φ .

In a similar spirit, we might limit our rational decisions to the realm of what we know. I do not *know* I will be well next weekend, so I will only accept your invitation conditionally. This, again, seems like an overreaction.

A more moderate reaction, which has been implicit in much of the literature on free will and deliberation,¹⁵ is that it is some reasonable *belief* that matter to deliberation. It is not irrational of me to accept your invitation if I believe reasonably that I will not be sick next weekend.

But even this moderate suggestion is not quite right. What directly constrains our deliberation is not our beliefs, but what we can *assume practically*, which I call *provisions*.¹⁶ James decides to take Oxford Street rather than Divinity Street to go to work. He might not *believe* (although he certainly has some credence) that it is accessible. But he has assumed that these options are open in deliberating. Differently put, he commits to using these provisions as premises in practical reasoning.¹⁶ And this is reasonable because he has no reason to believe that they are blocked. My suggestion, then, is not that beliefs are irrelevant to deliberation but that they are indirectly relevant. What I (reasonably) believe limits what I can assume; and what I can assume limits what I can decide rationally and so what I can deliberate about rationally.

Upon closer examination, most of our decisions are constrained by provisions that is propositions we do not *believe* but which we assume for practical purposes to be true. We more or less always decide ‘*insha’Allah*’ (if God wills).¹⁸ For instance, I have no belief about the year of my death. But I certainly can make the provision that I will still be alive in twenty years. Most of my long-term decisions, including important ones such as that of having children, implicitly rely on this provision.¹⁹ To be clear, this is not to say that all our decisions are conditional. In my terminology, ‘*S* decides to Φ if *A* (i.e. having *merely supposed* that *A*)’ is very different from ‘*S* decides to Φ provided that *A* (i.e. having *practically assumed* that *A*)’.

It is no surprise then that there are constraints on provisions. James can decide to take Oxford Street (provided implicitly that it is accessible). But he cannot decide to buy a yacht (provided implicitly that he wins the lottery). It is not just that James will buy a yacht *insha'Allah*; it is that he will only buy a yacht if he is very lucky. But assuming this would be irrational. This is why deliberating about whether to buy a yacht would be irrational for James. The provisional nature of deliberation interacts with its decisional and rational nature.

In sum, practical deliberation has three main properties. First, it is decisional: it aims at making a decision rather than forming a belief. Second, it is rational: it is an activity, which is subject to normative constraints of rationality. Third, it is provisional: in deliberating, we form practical assumptions, and whether we deliberate rationally directly depends on what we assume and only indirectly on what we believe. These three properties interact. What we can assume in deciding is constrained by norms of rationality. And whether it is rational to deliberate in some circumstances depends on what it is rational to decide and assume. These interactions unify the account.

3. Correction: The deliberation question

We can now use this unified account to clarify the debate about practical deliberation and free will. In Section 3.1, I argue that the interesting question to ask is *not* whether determinists can deliberate rationally. The interesting question is the Deliberation Question, whether *leeway sceptics* can deliberate rationally. After examining the two main responses to this question in Section 3.2, I show, in Section 3.3, that both sides have made some minor mistakes.

3.1. DETERMINISM OR LEEWAY? A CORRECTION FROM RATIONALITY

Several philosophers have asked²⁰: can *determinists* deliberate? Deliberation incompatibilists answer 'no' while deliberation compatibilists answer 'yes'. This, however, is not the right question to ask, for its (positive) answer turns on insubstantial reasons. This is my first correction to the dialectic.

Believing in determinism is certainly compatible with rational deliberation. This is simply because a subject can rationally believe in compatibilism that is the thesis that determinism is compatible with the ability and opportunity to choose amongst real alternatives. If some determinists cannot rationally deliberate, it is only in virtue of the combination of determinism and of a further belief, namely a belief in incompatibilism.

In fact, even if compatibilism were false, it would not follow that determinists could not deliberate rationally. For a belief in compatibilism,

whether true or not, can be rational.²¹ As we have seen in Section 2.2, rationality might be related to structural requirements like coherence or substantive requirements like responsiveness to reasons. On both views of rationality, one can rationally arrive at a false conclusion.

This can dispel some confusion in the literature. In defining deliberation compatibilism, Pereboom takes as a starting point (2008, p. 288; 2014, p. 106) that it is 'evident' that if determinism is true, leeway scepticism is true. And Cohen (2018, p. 87) stipulates that the relevant form of rationality implies having a true belief about the compatibility question between determinism and leeway. As I have argued, these assumptions are mistaken. Moreover, they are unnecessary.

We can circumnavigate the concept of determinism altogether by asking the Deliberation Question: can leeway sceptics deliberate? *This* is the substantial question. It cannot be dissolved because of the reasonableness of compatibilism, for leeway sceptics are not compatibilists. And it captures the heart of the underlying problem that Pereboom's and Cohen's questions were driving at. It tackles the paradoxical nature of choosing where there is no option.

Why have philosophers erred on this? I suspect that the vocabulary of 'compatibilism' has a disproportionate appeal. But the main culprit seems to be Harry Frankfurt's long-lasting influence. After witnessing his attack on the view that responsibility requires alternatives, many philosophers have neglected the concept of leeway. Regardless of whether it is a requirement of responsibility, leeway can be an ingredient of good deliberation.

3.2. AN ANTINOMY ABOUT SCEPTICAL DELIBERATION

Is a belief in leeway necessary for rational deliberation? To answer this question, philosophers have considered cases of irrational deliberation and tried to diagnose the source of this irrationality. This reveals principles which then can be used to determine whether leeway sceptics can deliberate rationally. We consider these cases and principles before we turn to a second amendment to the Deliberation Question in Section 3.3.

Take again Cate. If she believes she is not on the Cannes jury, she cannot rationally deliberate about, which film *to award the Palme d'or to* (although she can deliberate about other questions). The same goes in all kinds of situations: if Cate believes that *The Wild Pear Tree* is not eligible for the prize; if she believes that she is incapable of writing down her vote; or if she believes that whatever she decides, she will vote impulsively for the first one.

Why cannot Cate rationally deliberate about which movie to vote for in each of these cases? An immediately attractive explanation is the following principle:

Specific Disbelief²²: If S deliberates rationally about whether to Φ or Ψ , then S does not believe that she cannot Φ and S does not believe that she cannot Ψ .²³

A few clarifications, which will also apply to future principles, are in order. First, Φ and Ψ are incompatible actions or omissions. Second, specific disbelief is a doxastic requirement on deliberation. The limits on rational deliberation come from what the agent believes or does not believe. Third, by ‘ S can Φ ’, I mean that S has the ability and opportunity to Φ .

Specific Disbelief gives us the right verdict that, in all the cases, Cate does not deliberate rationally. In the first two cases, she believes that she lacks an opportunity; in the third and fourth that she lacks an ability. It also allows that leeway sceptics deliberate rationally. They do not know which of their options is specifically closed; it will only be revealed to them once they have decided.

Cate’s example was mainly for us to try our hand. Consider the more important following example, inspired by cases raised by Taylor (1966, pp. 177–178) and van Inwagen (1983, p. 153):

Cinema: Beau wants to go to the cinema. He deliberates about whether to see *Isle of Dogs* or *The Square*. He then learns that one of the two is no longer showing, but he does not know which one. He keeps deliberating as if he had not learnt anything.

Specific disbelief does not explain Beau’s irrationality. Yet he is clearly irrational. This is an intuition that almost all participants to the debate have registered about structurally identical cases.²⁴

Of course, Beau can deliberate about other questions. He can deliberate about what he shall *try* first. He can deliberate about what he thinks he will *end up doing*. He might be painfully aware of how much he tends to follow the film critiques out of snobbery and thus suspect that he will pick *The Square*. He can deliberate about what he *would* pick, *were both options available*, which is akin to daydreaming. He can also try to figure out which of the movie is in fact showing. But Beau is irrational if he deliberates about *whether to see Isle of Dogs or The Square*.

How should we explain Beau’s irrationality? A common proposal²⁵ is the Belief about Opportunity and Ability Thesis (BOAT):

BOAT If S deliberates rationally about whether to Φ or Ψ , then S believes that she can Φ and that she can Ψ .

If BOAT were true, the leeway sceptics could not rationally deliberate. In deliberating, they would be irrational either by making an epistemic or

deliberative mistake; alternatively, they would merely be daydreaming (see Section 2.2).

Those who think that sceptics can deliberate grant that Beau is irrational in deliberating. But they want to explain this without invoking BOAT. Some have rephrased BOAT as a principle about *epistemic availability*.²⁶ For *S* to deliberate about whether to Φ or Ψ , *S* must believe that each is compatible with what she knows. So, because Φ and Ψ are exclusive, sceptical deliberators must not yet believe or be certain either that they will Φ or that they will Ψ . Because sceptics – like any of us – are mostly ignorant or uncertain about what they will do prior to deliberating, this requirement sits well with them. However, like *Specific Disbelief*, this principle does not explain Beau's irrationality. Going to see *The Square* and going to see *Isle of Dogs* are both compatible with what he knows. This is now explicitly conceded by those who think sceptics can deliberate rationally (see Nelkin 2011, p. 130; McKenna and Pereboom 2016, pp. 297–298).

Instead, we can explain Beau's irrationality differently, by using the notion of deliberative efficacy. He knows (or should know) that, in an important sense,²⁷ his deliberation is futile and yet he deliberates. Therein lies the irrationality; not in his belief that he lacks abilities or opportunities.

This approach is pursued by Clarke (1992, p. 103), Nelkin (2004, p. 223) and Pereboom (2008, 2014). But, as they each acknowledge, we need to refine the efficacy requirement. Take again our eccentric Dean. If he told me that he would give me a thousand pounds (or a job) if I deliberated about whether to accept a job he had not offered, my deliberation would be efficacious. But it would be irrational (see Section 2.2). Hence, to deliberate rationally, I must believe that my deliberation is causally efficacious *in the right way*. This yields a principle like the following²⁸:

Deliberative
Efficacy:

In order to rationally deliberate about whether to do A_1 or A_2 , where A_1 and A_2 are distinct [and incompatible] actions, an agent must believe that if as a result of her deliberating about whether to do A_1 or A_2 she were to judge that it would be best to do A_1 , then under normal conditions, she would also, on the basis of this deliberation, do A_1 ; and similarly for A_2 . (Pereboom 2008, p. 299)

This explains Beau's irrationality. He does not (and could not) believe that were he to choose to watch one film he would. (We should perhaps replace 'having judged an option to be best' with 'having chosen an option'. This is to cover cases where we cannot judge that an option is best, perhaps because our options are equally good, even though we must choose.)

Bottom line, we have a case for the view that leeway sceptics can deliberate rationally and a case for the view that they cannot. They can if the right

explanation of Beau's irrationality is, with Deliberative Efficacy, that he does not believe that his deliberation is efficacious. They cannot, if the right explanation of Beau's irrationality is, with BOAT, that he does not believe he can go see each movie. This is the antinomy.

3.3. BELIEF OR DISBELIEF? A CORRECTION FROM PROVISION

Yet the antinomy needs to be marginally corrected. For neither BOAT nor Deliberative Efficacy is true strictly speaking. Correspondingly, the substantial question is not whether rational deliberation requires a *belief in leeway*, but whether it requires a *disbelief in the lack of leeway*. This is my second correction to the dialectic.

Consider again James, who wonders whether to take Oxford Street or Divinity Street to go to work. He does not believe that any is blocked or available; he simply assumes, reasonably, that they are available for the purpose of practical deliberation, hoping for the best. This is rational. But BOAT tells us that James should have a *belief* that both streets are open, which he lacks. And Deliberative Efficacy tells us that James should have a *belief* that his choice will be efficacious, which he also lacks. Thus, both BOAT and Deliberative Efficacy give us the wrong verdict, that is that James' deliberation is irrational.

In our two principles, we can replace 'believes' with 'practically assumes'.²⁹ The limit with this strategy is that then we must answer another question: what can we assume, provided that we believe such and such? We can give a partial answer to this question. If *S* believes (reasonably) that *p*, $\neg p$ should not be amongst *S*'s practical assumptions. This means that we can have doxastic constraints, but that they should be negative.

We should replace BOAT with a principle about disbelief:

DOAT: If *S* deliberates rationally about whether to Φ or Ψ , then *S* does *not* believe that <she cannot either Φ or Ψ (not knowing which)>.³⁰

Or, differently put, to deliberate rationally, one must lack the belief that one lacks alternatives. Contrary to BOAT, DOAT respects the provisional character of practical deliberation. It also allows leeway *agnostics* to deliberate rationally.³¹

We should replace Deliberative Efficacy in the same way:

Deliberative Non-
Inefficacy: If *S* deliberates rationally about whether to Φ or Ψ , then *S* does *not* believe that, under normal circumstances, if she were to decide to Φ , she would *not* or that, if she were to decide to Ψ , she would *not*.

In order to deliberate rationally, an agent must *fail* to believe that her deliberation is *inefficacious* in a sense. Contrary to Deliberative Efficacy, Deliberative Non-Inefficacy respects the provisional character of deliberation.

Let us recap. We used our unified account of practical deliberation (Section 2) to correct the dialectic about free will and deliberation (Section 3). We saw that the substantial question is not whether determinists can deliberate or even whether deliberators must believe in leeway, but whether *leeway sceptics* can deliberate rationally. That is the Deliberation Question. We must now choose one of its antinomic answers.

4. Disputation: An argument from decision

Here is finally my answer to the Deliberation Question: leeway sceptics are barred from rational deliberation, at least most of the time. How can we defend this?

Our starting point, DOAT, is quite weak. It credibly explains Beau's irrationality and it implies that the leeway sceptic cannot deliberate rationally. But, as we have just seen, DOAT has an appealing explanatory competitor, Deliberative Non-Inefficacy, which does *not* imply that leeway sceptics cannot deliberate rationally. Of course, we could in principle accept both principles because they encode necessary conditions on the same object.³² Yet, as things stand, DOAT is mainly appealing as an explanatory principle. So, if Deliberative Non-Inefficacy leaves no irrationality to be explained, we have little reason to grant DOAT.³³

And yet it is hard to imagine a counterexample to DOAT.³⁴ We should not disregard this difficulty. It invites us to find an argument for DOAT or indeed for the direct conclusion that leeway sceptics cannot deliberate rationally. Here is mine:

First Premise: If a leeway sceptic deliberates rationally about whether to Φ or Ψ , she can rationally decide to Φ or to Ψ .

Second Premise: If she can rationally decide to Φ or Ψ , she does not believe that she cannot either Φ or Ψ (not knowing which) – *unless 'can' is a conditional (or dispositional) notion.*

Third Premise: *If 'can' is a conditional (or dispositional) notion, leeway scepticism is false.* Therefore, leeway sceptics cannot deliberate rationally, *unless leeway scepticism is false.*³⁵

Most of the action occurs in the Second Premise and so I shall focus on it. If we drop the italicised part, we get an argument for DOAT. If *S* deliberates

about whether to Φ or Ψ , then S must *not* believe that <she cannot either Φ or Ψ (not knowing which)>. For, if she so believes, S cannot rationally decide to Φ or Ψ (First Premise), which in turn bars her from rational deliberation (Second Premise).

4.1. AIMING AT A DECISION

The First Premise mentions the leeway sceptic. In reality, it rests on the more general idea that we deliberate rationally about two options only when it is rational for us to decide in favour of (at least) one of them. I cannot rationally deliberate about whether to master Russian or Japanese this weekend because I cannot rationally decide to either. For deliberation is a decisional activity. (We can draw an analogy with theoretical deliberation, which is presumably a doxastic and rational activity. If a believer ponders two propositions that are relevantly flawed – perhaps one proposition is unbelievable and the other one is unreasonable – the deliberation is itself flawed.)

What if the practical deliberator cannot rationally decide to Φ or to Ψ but is unaware of this? Perhaps she can deliberate rationally about what to do, *contra* the First Premise. We can imagine Sophie deliberating about which of her children to save and who, at some point in the deliberation, realises that she will literally be incapable of deciding. This does not make her previous deliberation irrational because when she weighed reasons; she could reasonably assume that she could decide.³⁶

I do not want to push back against this suspicion. For I think that it simply invites an amendment, which is inconsequential for our purpose. We can restrict the argument to the circumstances in which deliberators should be aware of their inability to decide. An agent who deliberates in the reasonable ignorance of her inability to rationally decide to Φ or to Ψ might do it rationally. This amendment is inconsequential because the sceptic should know – at least upon reading this paper! – that she cannot decide to Φ or to Ψ , qua my Second Premise. Remember that the crux of my argument is my Second Premise.

4.2. A CONSTRAINT ON DECISIONS

My Second Premise targets the sceptic's capacity to decide. To give it some plausibility, let us start with a simpler principle. Once we have established it, we can show that we should endorse the Second Premise for similar reasons. Here is the principle:

Realistic Decision:	To rationally decide to Φ , one must practically assume that one can Φ – and so one must not believe that one cannot Φ .
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So, we cannot rationally decide to Φ if we believe we cannot Φ – or, to use a classic phrase, ‘we cannot intend to do the impossible’ (see Hampshire 1960).³⁷ This principle is immediately intuitive; permit me to argue for it anyway.

Imagine the following. I decide that ‘I shall swim this afternoon, though I cannot’ or I promise that ‘I cannot help you, but I promise I will.’³⁸ This decision and this promise are irrational or otherwise odd. They remind us of Moore-paradoxical assertions or thoughts like, ‘It’s raining but I don’t know it is.’ While the expressed propositions are not contradictions, there is something wrong with their utterance, wherever the wrongness lies.

Why are this decision and this promise infelicitous? They do not fulfil their role. Take Moore-paradoxical assertions. They might be infelicitous because the normal role of beliefs is to connect us to the world, which is only achieved well with knowledge. The beliefs that we assert are ‘botched’ beliefs, which explains the infelicity. Of course, this explanation is more controversial than the judgement that Moore-paradoxical assertions are infelicitous. But it confirms our judgement. In turn, this supports a general norm, namely the knowledge norm of assertion: one should not assert an unknown proposition.³⁹

We can adopt a similar strategy with decisions and promises. What is their role? First, imagine someone who fails to make decisions in her life. This is perhaps impossible, unless the imagined person is permanently unconscious. But we can imagine someone whose decisions play a relatively minor role in her life. This person never decides anything *in advance*. She lets the events unfold and she allows her immediate desires to guide her on the spot. In a word, she never plans anything. Now, imagine someone who fails to make promises in her life. This person leads a possible but miserable life. She must be exceptionally lonely, for she cannot coordinate with other people. She can communicate her desire to see her friend tomorrow at 10:00, but unless there is a promise to meet, this kind of desire is doomed to often remain frustrated.

So, *planning* (or coordination with others or with oneself) is a key role of decision – and promise – making. This explains why ‘I shall swim this afternoon, though I cannot’ and ‘I can’t help you, but I promise I will’ are infelicitous. The plan that they recommend is imaginary. And so a third party who receives such a promise should remain unmoved. The infelicitous character of these assertions in turn supports a general norm on decision making, namely *Realistic Decision*, to rationally decide to Φ , one must not believe that one cannot Φ .

Once we have accepted *Realistic Decision*, we should accept the second premise, which targets the sceptic more specifically:

Second Premise: If she can rationally decide to Φ or Ψ , she does not believe that she cannot Φ or Ψ not knowing which – unless ‘can’ is a conditional or dispositional notion.

Why? Consider thoughts similar to ‘I shall Φ although I can’t.’ Take, first that ‘I shall Φ , although it is very unlikely that I can’ and ‘I sure believe I can’t Φ , but I shall.’ These decisions are almost as unreasonable as the first. The same goes for the kind of proposition relevant to cases like we have seen earlier: ‘I either cannot Φ or Ψ , I don’t know which, but I shall Φ ’. We can justify these additional judgements of infelicity. We make decisions, or promises, to coordinate or plan. But a plan involving courses of action one believes or knows to be improbable is hardly a good plan.

This raises the question of where to draw the line. A subject who considers a hundred options, knowing that only one is blocked, but not knowing which, can be rational. But she cannot be rational if she is in the reverse case, where she knows only one of the hundred options is within reach. I take it that the two-option case is more like the latter. (If I’m wrong, then strangely enough perhaps the sceptic is only barred from rational deliberation involving sufficiently many options.)

At any rate the leeway sceptic is in trouble. To illustrate, let us compare her deliberation with that of an irrational character that we have previously encountered. Beau deliberates about what to go see. He believes that he cannot go see one of the two films he is considering. He cannot rationally decide to go see *Isle of Dogs* because he believes that either *Isle of Dogs* or *The Square* is not showing, not knowing which. The same goes for *The Square*. This is confirmed by the fact that it would infelicitous for Beau to say in the circumstances, ‘I shall see *The Square*’ or ‘I promise to go see *Isle of Dogs*’. Such a decision or promise would fail to adequately contribute to a good plan.

Now, take Skye. She deliberates about whether to go for a run or for a swim. Being a serious leeway sceptic, she believes that she cannot do one of these things, not knowing which. Skye cannot rationally decide to run, so long as she believes that she cannot either run or swim not knowing which. The same applies for swimming. And so, until she learns what she will do, she cannot rationally deliberate about what to do.

Skye’s case is slightly different from Beau’s case. For it seems that Skye could rationally decide or promise to go for a run and plan accordingly. But why? Simply because, unlike Beau, Skye can reasonably predict that she will in fact go. From this prediction, she believes, in accordance with her scepticism, that she can go for a run (and that she cannot go for a swim). Let us instead suppose that Skye has *not* changed her beliefs about what she will do. She does not predict what she will do – and thus what she can do because she is a leeway sceptic. The possibility that she cannot run remains too vivid to decide or promise to run. So, if Skye’s decision or promise is rational, and thus different from Beau’s, it is only because she has changed her beliefs about what she *will* do.

The sceptic might insist that this not a problem because Skye will always adjust her beliefs about what she will do after making decisions. She will

avoid Beau's kind of irrationality. I agree that Skye is more rational than Beau, but on closer examination, we see some defect in her deliberation.

Consider the timing of Skye's deliberation. If she deliberates practically, then at $t1$, she decides to Φ ; at $t2$, she *might* form the belief that she will Φ ; and at $t3$ that she can Φ . At $t3$, Skye is fine: her decision to Φ aligns with her belief that she can. But between $t1$ and $t2$, there is a gap where she has decided to do something which, from her viewpoint, she still likely cannot. That is not to say that she cannot or should not decide to run. But there is something wrong with her decision making.

This gap widens when Skye is not confident about her decision. Imagine that she decides (or promises) to visit her mother in a fortnight, although she suspects that she will not and so, according to her scepticism, cannot. Her suspicions persist for a week; thus, for a week, Skye maintains a decision to Φ while suspecting that she cannot Φ . This is problematic. By contrast, a nonsceptic can make and maintain the same decision rationally because his suspicion that he *will not* fulfil his promise does not contradict his firm belief (or reasonable provision) that he *can* fulfil his promise.

The lesson is this. Sceptical deliberation almost necessarily involves short moments of irrationality. But even if sceptics disregard these cases, perhaps because of their length, they are stuck with other cases, that is cases where they suspect that they will not in fact act in accordance with their decision. Leeway sceptics must believe that their decisions are almost set in stone, or else deliberate irrationally.

This suggests that the sceptic is forced to blur the line between theoretical and practical deliberation. Answering the questions 'what shall I do?' and 'what will I do?' are distinct on two counts. First, it is perfectly intelligible and rational for me to decide to do something in spite of the fact that I suspect that I will fail. But the sceptic cannot do this rationally. For her rational decision must imply prediction. Second, it is perfectly intelligible and rational to predict that I will do something without deciding to do it. Perhaps I find it regretful that I will act in this way. Or perhaps I am not ready to decide to do it because I have yet to identify the right reason to act (like a chess novice who has been instructed to castle, who knows that this is what he will do, but who first wants to see why this is a good move before deciding⁴⁰). Because the leeway sceptic believes that she has only one path, there might be little point in trying to resist something she has predicted she will do and thus cannot avoid.

4.3. EFFICACY AND THE THIRD PREMISE

It is tempting for the leeway sceptic to object to Realistic Decision and to my Second Premise that all I have done is postpone the problem. For I have used contentious norms of decision making instead of contentious norms of deliberation (like DOAT). In so doing, I have invited the same response:

whether a decision is rational does not depend on beliefs about what one can do, but only on beliefs about efficacy. Decisions like ‘I shall Φ , although I cannot’ are infelicitous precisely because they are not sufficiently efficacious decisions. Beau’s decision to go see one film is not sufficiently efficacious and so he is irrational. But Skye’s decision is sufficiently efficacious and so she is rational.

This is a tempting line, but it is not as promising as it looks for the leeway sceptic. Consider how she understands an efficacious decision. I take it she will more or less repeat what she said about efficacious *deliberation* (see Section 2.3).⁴¹ A deliberator considering Φ and Ψ and who respects the efficacy requirement on *deliberation* assumes that if she decides to Φ , she will Φ (in normal circumstances) and similarly for Ψ . A decision maker who is about to decide to Φ and who respects the efficacy requirement on *decision making* assumes that if she decides to Φ , she will Φ (in normal circumstances).

The efficacy requirement on decision making looks like one reading of *Realistic Decision*. It looks like it claims that someone can only decide rationally to Φ if one assumes that *she can Φ* , that is that *if she decides to Φ , she will Φ* (in normal circumstances). In a word, an endorsement of the efficacy requirement on decision making likely involves an endorsement of the conditional account of ‘can’.

Two more clues make me think that *Efficacious Decision* involves an endorsement of the conditional account of ‘can’. The first touches on the specification of ‘normal circumstances’. In Sections 2.2 and 3.2, we saw that an eccentric Dean could ask me to deliberate about whether to accept a job I had not been offered and give it to me if I so deliberated. This time, the eccentric Dean could ask me instead to *decide* to accept the job. The Dean is a fink: he makes sure that the conditional ‘if I decide to accept the job, I will’ is true, even though I lack the ability or opportunity to accept the job. Anyone familiar with the debates about the conditional of ‘can’ will recognise standard difficulties with the account (see e.g. Vihvelin 2013).

The second clue touches on the paradoxical decisions we have worked on. The leeway sceptic explained the infelicity of ‘I shall Φ although I *cannot*’ using the concept of inefficacy, and she defined inefficacy in terms of a conditional. It seems, yet again like she is reading ‘I cannot’ as the negation of a conditional and so ‘can’ as a conditional. She is endorsing the conditional account of ‘can’.

A conditional account of ‘can’ might be a good account. But this cannot help the leeway sceptic defeating my Second Premise. For remember its proviso:

Second Premise: If she can rationally decide to Φ or Ψ , the sceptic does not believe that she cannot do Φ or Ψ not knowing which – *unless ‘can’ is a conditional (or dispositional) notion.*

If we follow this proviso, then the third premise becomes relevant:

Third Premise: If 'can' is a conditional (or dispositional) notion, leeway scepticism is false.

The Third Premise is true because sometimes there are actions that we do not perform – and so cannot perform, according to leeway scepticism – that still satisfy the relevant conditionals. I wrote this paper. If I had decided to refrain from writing it, I would have so refrained (under normal circumstances). On the conditional account of 'can', I could have done otherwise than I did. But leeway scepticism claims that I lack the ability to do otherwise. So, if the conditional account of 'can' is correct, leeway scepticism is false. This concludes my presentation of my main argument for the irrationality of sceptical deliberations.

5. *Three objections*

5.1. EQUIVOCATION

Cannot the leeway sceptic simply use two senses of 'can', a conditional sense and a nonconditional sense?⁴² She could deny the existence of the nonconditional 'can' and maintain that it is irrelevant to deliberation and decision making. And she could accept the existence of the conditional 'can' and maintain that sense of 'can' is relevant to deliberation.⁴³ Accordingly, my argument equivocates that 'can' does not refer to the same concept in the second and third premises.

First, this objection is ad hoc. It is ad hoc for leeway sceptics to use different accounts of 'can' depending on whether they work on deliberation or on responsibility and freedom. We need a justification for such a variation.

Second, the sense of 'can' relevant to freedom and responsibility is in fact the same as the sense relevant to deliberation. Why? Because it is in deliberating and in pursuing its aim – decision or choice – that we most paradigmatically exercise our freedom or responsibility (if we ever do). If the 'can' of deliberation were clearly conditional, this would be a strong reason not to be a leeway sceptic.

To illustrate, consider how belief in *unfreedom* can constrain deliberation. 'I am not free to swim this afternoon, but I shall' is just as paradoxical as the paradoxical decisions we considered earlier.⁴⁴ Throughout the paper, the reader could replace can claims with freedom claims and get equally plausible arguments.

5.2. THE ALTERNATIVE DELIBERATION OBJECTION

In a similar spirit, the leeway sceptic might argue that there are other forms of deliberation, which I have not shown she cannot engage in and which can replace practical deliberation. But the prospects are gloomy.

First, the leeway sceptic cannot replace deliberation about what to do with deliberation about what to *try to do*. This is because she believes not only that no one can ever *do* otherwise but also that no one can ever *try* to do otherwise (unless one has in fact tried). Nonsceptics typically believe that there is an asymmetry between *trying to act*, which we can almost always do, and *acting*, which we often cannot do. (It is this asymmetry that I argued in Section 2.3 the Stoics overplay.) For the leeway sceptic, there is no such asymmetry. It follows that my main argument applies to deliberation about trying (replace ‘ Φ ’ with ‘try to Ψ ’ in Section 4).

Second, the leeway sceptic cannot replace practical deliberation with conditional deliberation, that is deliberation which is premised on *mere suppositions*. She can engage in conditional deliberation because it does not have the same strict rational requirements. And so she can, if she wants, suppose that she has leeway just like I can suppose that I will win the lottery. But this is not enough for practical purposes. To use Michael Bratman’s example (1992, p. 9), the supposition that I have a million dollars and the conclusion that if I did, I would invest it, will not – and should not – lead me to call my broker. So how is the sceptic supposed to use her supposition that she can Φ ? Suppositions, it seems, are insufficient for practical deliberation and thus for planning. They endow the sceptic not with plans but with dreams.

Third, the sceptic cannot replace practical deliberation with theoretical deliberation. Exploring this idea, Tony Honoré wrote (1999, p. 159), about sceptical deliberation:

We should [...] come to reinterpret the experiences we call ‘making up our minds’; and ‘reaching a decision’. We should come to think of them more like ‘becoming aware of our intention’.

This is insufficient. Sometimes, we simply do not have an intention; we need to form it, not find it inside us. In Ronald Dworkin’s words, ‘You cannot lift yourself above yourself just to watch how you choose. You must choose.’ (2011, p. 223).⁴⁵

As we have seen, theoretical deliberation involves more than introspection: it also involves asking the question: ‘what should I do?’ This is more promising than mere introspection (see Nielsen 2011). But this activity is insufficient, for it does not deal adequately with irresolvable dilemmas. When we have options that we cannot weigh properly against each other, we sometimes must abandon theoretical deliberation and make a decision. Like any of us, the sceptic needs her ‘inner commander’ (see Section 2.1).

5.3. THE RATIONAL IRRATIONALITY OBJECTION

A third and last objection is that there are independent counterexamples to DOAT such as the following:

If, like the rock climber Aron Ralston, I find that my hand is stuck under a boulder in the Utah Canyons, and I determine, after days of waiting for help, that my only means of survival is cutting off the hand with a pocket knife, I will probably doubt whether I have the courage and resilience to execute the plan. But given what will happen if I don't, it would be irrational of me not to entertain this possibility, despite my doubts about my ability to follow through. (Nielsen 2011, pp. 413–14)

This is a good putative counterexample to BOAT: deliberation does not strictly require a belief that our options are available.⁴⁶ For it to be a real counterexample to DOAT, we need to add that, in Nielsen's example, she in fact *believes* that she cannot cut off her own hand.

A similar kind of counterexample, namely a case of desperate action, was raised by those argued in the 60s that we can in fact 'intend to do the impossible' (against *Realistic Decision*). We might think that it is possible that a lifeguard intends to save a swimmer he believes to be dead (Thalberg 1962, p. 54) or that a prisoner intends to resist torture even though he is convinced that he cannot (Anscombe 1963, p. 94). The thought is that if the prisoner succeeded in resisting torture or if the lifeguard succeeded in saving the man, this resisting and this saving would have been intentional. So, the lifeguard could intend to save the man and the prisoner could intend to resist torture. In terms of decisions: the lifeguard has decided to bring the swimmer back to life and the prisoner has decided to resist; they succeed, and so their action is deliberate.

I have three answers to the alleged counterexamples. The first is to re-describe the action that the subject decides in favour of. This is Stuart Hampshire's solution (1960, p. 134): all that the prisoner could decide is to resist torture as long as possible. Then, it happens to be longer than he thought. This means that his action of resisting until the torturer stops was deliberate, but under a different description. Similarly, when deliberating about what to do, Nielsen might provisionally entertain a different kind of possibility such as 'make just *this* small cut.' This solution is elegant, but it might not apply easily to cases like that of the lifeguard (see Thalberg 1962, p. 54).

A second response uses the notion of pragmatic encroachment and admits that the subjects in the counterexamples are rational.⁴⁷ In fact, the stakes are very high in all the putative counterexamples; and they must be. We could insist that we cannot decide or deliberate rationally to do what we believe (rationally) to be impossible. But it is irrational to believe that these options are impossible because the stakes affect what we can rationally believe. In a similar vein, Bratman (1992) has argued that what we can reasonably *assume* for the purpose of deliberation is directly sensitive to stakes and so that

there *are* exceptions to DOAT. However, to accept stake sensitivity of assumptions is not to accept that anything goes when stakes are high. For instance, when stuck on the rock face of a mountain, I still cannot rationally assume that I can jump to the other side of the valley (even if, unbeknownst to me, a gust of wind would carry me slowly to the other side if I jumped). And so the sceptic remains, except perhaps when rock climbing, a generally irrational deliberator.

A third response, anticipated by our discussion of rationality in Section 2, claims that the putative counterexamples feature ‘rational irrationality’. We can admit that in such cases, there *is* a rational decision, intention or deliberation but that they are irrational in another sense. That is, we could insist that Anscombe, Nielsen and Thalberg play instrumental rationality against another kind of rationality. The lifeguard, the prisoner and the hiker might be in fact rational *to* decide or *to* deliberate as they do and yet irrational *in* deciding or *in* deliberating. As we have discussed in Section 2, this latter kind of rationality could be epistemic or deliberative. Differently put, the counterexample might invoke the wrong kind of reasons – instrumental reasons – weighing in favour of some decisions. In general, we would happily become dunces of ‘theoretical’ or ‘internal’ rationality in order to be heroes of instrumental rationality. But it is only in these heroic or high-stake cases that we can even begin to imagine what it would be like to decide to do what we think is impossible or to deliberate about it.

This raises a connected objection. The leeway sceptic could insist that she does not care about making epistemic or deliberative mistakes – she only cares about instrumental rationality. I can only address this worry very briefly because it touches on general issues about the normativity of rationality.

Let me first insist that leeway sceptics *should* deliberate because it is a good means-to-end device.⁴⁸ And they *do* deliberate, which shows that they have more sense than doctrinal coherence. Because it would be irrational to stop deliberating completely, the only way to be adequately rational is to reject leeway scepticism or to suspend judgement.

Now, whether it matters to be rational or not depends more generally on whether we should care about respecting epistemic norms or constitutive norms of the activities that we engage in. There is a tradition, personified in William James (1912), according to which it does because we are *passionate* about rationality – we desire it and we should balance this desire with others. If this is right, then the sceptic has a cause for regret. (We sometimes see this passion for rationality in leeway sceptics when they insist that free will is *but* an illusion.) There is also a tradition, personified in W. K. Clifford (1877), according to which these norms matter on their own and perhaps so much that they are properly ethical. If, however, these norms do *not* matter for their own sake, it does not follow that they do not matter instrumentally here. Perhaps in disregarding DOAT, leeway sceptics will

acquire bad deliberative habits which will cause them further troubles. Let me leave this stone unturned.

6. Conclusion

I had three aims. My constructive aim was to present a fresh and unified account of deliberation (Section 2). My corrective aim was to correct the setup of the Deliberation Question (Section 3). My disputative aim was to argue that leeway sceptics cannot deliberate rationally (Sections 4–5). Again, it is likely that my account and correction is more convincing than my disputative argument.

But I think I have mounted a case for the latter that deserves some consideration. Leeway sceptics must figure out what to do next. If their doctrine is true and I am right, then, as Castañeda claimed, the world is in a sense ‘ugly’ (1975, p. 134): we are forced to choose between a false belief and an irrational practice.⁴⁹

Being myself sympathetic to leeway scepticism, I want to suggest two alternatives. The first is for the leeway sceptic to claim that we can rationally decide to do what we believe we cannot do. But then she will have to explain the outlandishness of assertions like ‘I shall swim, though I cannot.’ This strikes me as a lost cause, but then again perhaps it is possible to rationally decide to win a lost cause.

The second alternative is to do what I have hinted at in Section 5.3, namely to argue that rationality does not matter as much as we think. Taking this last route is a dangerous game for the leeway sceptic. Once she accepts that rationality can be disregarded here, she is naturally led to a more general pragmatism. But then, it seems that I can legitimately ask her: ‘my belief that I can choose amongst real alternatives makes me happy, so why should I take leeway scepticism seriously?’

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NOTES

¹ Leeway sceptics can deny the existence of all abilities, of the ability to do otherwise, or of the opportunity to do otherwise. For a useful discussion, see Vihvelin (2013, p. 13).

² This is a simplification since not everyone tackles the deliberation question explicitly. To take the most complicated case, Nelkin (2004, 2011, chap. 6) argues that rational deliberators are

committed to the view that they can make a difference in deliberating, but she claims that this is perhaps best captured by using a conditional analysis of ‘can’. Additionally, she argues that rational deliberators are committed to a sense of freedom understood as responsibility or accountability and that this is a problem for free will sceptics (2011, chap. 7). I classify her as in effect leaving off the hook the leeway sceptic qua leeway sceptic.

³ The term is unusual, but there are many *leeway sceptics*. Such are free will sceptics who think either that free will *is* leeway (perhaps hard determinists like Holbach and Spinoza) or that it *implies* leeway (Levy 2011; Pereboom 2014), but also free will believers who are happy to concede that we lack leeway because free will is, in their view, unrelated to leeway (Fischer 1994; Dennett 2015).

⁴ See for example Broome (2013) and Kiesewetter (2017).

⁵ See for example Taylor (1966) and van Inwagen (1983).

⁶ See for example Nelkin (2011) and Pereboom (2014).

⁷ It is contentious whether the *conclusion* of practical reasoning is action (Aristotle, *On The Soul*, 433a13–20), intention (Broome 2013), or belief (Raz 1999). I leave this aside.

⁸ See Clarke (1992, pp. 107–108), Watson (2003, p. 176), Pereboom (2008, p. 291). Coffman and Warfield (2005, p. 28) exclude the weighing of reasons from practical deliberation to distinguish it more sharply from theoretical deliberation.

⁹ Dana Nelkin (2011, pp. 156–157) makes a similar point in terms of reasons: the point of deliberation, she suggests, is to decide and ultimately to act on the basis of good reasons.

¹⁰ The eccentric Dean is a fink.

¹¹ This is not the distinction between *starting* and *maintaining* deliberation, which I ignore.

¹² See e.g. Kelly (2003), Hieronymi (2005), Schroeder (2007), and Nolfi (2018).

¹³ Even Coffman and Warfield, who want to focus on the requirements of deliberation *simpliciter*, eventually slip to rational deliberation (2005, 43–44).

¹⁴ See *Moral Letters to Lucilius* (113, 23).

¹⁵ See Section 3. An exception is Castañeda (1975, 134–135), whose view places constraints on deliberation in terms of assumptions rather than beliefs.

¹⁶ Bratman (1992) and Cohen (1989) call the relevant attitude ‘acceptance’.

¹⁷ This is one of Cohen’s way of distinguishing acceptance from belief (1989, 368).

¹⁸ Thanks to John Hyman for this insightful suggestion.

¹⁹ Bratman (1992, 8) discusses this kind of example.

²⁰ See Taylor (1966, 181–84), Waller (1985, 48), Nelkin (2004, 215–18), Pereboom (2008, 288–89), Henden (2010, 313), Nielsen (2011, 283–84), and Cohen (2018, 87).

²¹ See Coffman and Warfield (2005, 29) for a similar point. If anything, it is a belief in *libertarianism* that might not be fully rational; see Chevarie-Cossette (Forthcoming).

²² ‘Disbelief’ here (as in the OED) means absence of belief, not belief of a negation.

²³ See Pettit (1989) and Nielsen (2011, 410).

²⁴ Taylor (1966, 177–78), van Inwagen (1983, 154; 2017, 184), Waller (1985, 49), Kapitan (1986, 247), Clarke (1992, 104, and note 8), Nelkin (2004, 219), and Pereboom (2008, 297) all agree about this judgement. One exception is Nielsen (2011, 410).

²⁵ See e.g. Taylor (1966, 170–84), van Inwagen (1983, 160), Coffman and Warfield (2005), and Henden (2010) for slightly different versions.

²⁶ See e.g. Dennett (2015, 118–26) and Kapitan (1986, 1996).

²⁷ It might still be important for accidental reasons that they deliberate, for instance to cultivate good character.

²⁸ See also Kapitan (1986, 247, 1996, 437), Clarke (1992, 103), and Nelkin (2004, 2011).

²⁹ Bratman (1992, 12–13) makes a similar proposal regarding efficacy.

³⁰ *S* does not infringe DOAT automatically in virtue of believing (truly) that she can only do Φ or Ψ *since they are exclusive*. This would involve a *de re/de dicto* confusion like claiming that I could not do otherwise because I ‘cannot do what I do not’.

³¹ As Bratman (1992, 8) thinks is plausible.

³² In fact, some (see e.g. Taylor 1966, 171; Pereboom 300–302) believe that we need several such conditions.

³³ Nelkin (2004, 220) makes this point.

³⁴ Coffman and Warfield (2005, 42) make this point.

³⁵ This implies that the leeway sceptic is condemned to irrationality, for it is irrational to openly believe a proposition that they know they believe either falsely or irrationally (Chevarie-Cossette 2019a, 68–69).

³⁶ Thanks to Dana Nelkin for this helpful objection.

³⁷ Hampshire and others discussed, as I will, whether an agent may intend to perform an action she believes she *cannot* perform. Whether an agent may intend to perform an action which she believes is *metaphysically impossible* is a different question, one which depends on whether subjects can Φ when Φ ing is metaphysically impossible (see Spencer 2017) or not (see Nguyen 2020) and on whether, more generally, ‘can’ is a kind of possibility (see Kenny 1976; van Inwagen 2017, chap. 14).

³⁸ This does not work for the sense of ‘can’ (or ‘free’) which is sensitive to obligations (see Hyman 2015, chap. 4). There is nothing paradoxical about: ‘I shall Φ but I cannot, i.e. it is prohibited.’

³⁹ This explanation draws heavily on Williamson (2000).

⁴⁰ See Waller (1985, 50), Cowan (1969, 59), Clarke (1992, 108), and Pereboom (2008, 293).

⁴¹ I believe the same problems will arise if we give it a *dispositional* reading, which Nelkin considers (2011, sect. 6).

⁴² See Dennett (2015), who agrees, and Kenny (1976) and van Inwagen (2017, chaps 10, 13), who do not.

⁴³ On multiple occasions (2004, 225, 228, 233), Nelkin points out that the kind of alternatives relevant to rational deliberation might differ from the kind of alternatives relevant to freedom. Yet, Nelkin’s concluding remarks suggest that our view on deliberation and on freedom should be linked.

⁴⁴ But see note 36.

⁴⁵ For a rare opposition to this claim, see Blackmore (2013).

⁴⁶ For a similar case, see James (1912, 96–97).

⁴⁷ See e.g. Hawthorne (2004).

⁴⁸ See Dennett (2015, 114).

⁴⁹ This is a situation that those who think that it is self-defeating to believe in free will scepticism *even if it is true* contemplate. For a discussion see Chevarie-Cossette (2019b).

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