DELIBERATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SKEPTICISM*

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No one is responsible for their conduct because free will is an illusion, say some skeptics. Even when it seems that we have several options, we only have one. Hence, says the free will skeptic, we should reform our practices which involve responsibility attributions, such as punishment and blame. How seriously should we take this doctrine? Is it one that we could live by? One thorn in the side of the skeptic concerns deliberation. When we deliberate about what to do—what film to go see, whom to befriend, which doctrine to follow—we must presume that our options are open to us. But then, every time that skeptics deliberate, they presume something which is incompatible with their doctrine, i.e. that they have several options. In a word, skeptics cannot deliberate *qua* skeptics. Some philosophers have responded that deliberators don't have to presume that their options are open; they only have to presume that their choice will be efficacious. I argue that this proposal uses resources which, if they are available and successful, can be employed to refute skepticism. The upshot is that free will skeptics are pushing for a doctrine that is either false or in tension with deliberation.

[p. 239]

1. Introduction

Some views are too far-fetched to be true. This might for instance include *cultural relativism*, the view that every moral truth is relative to one's group; and *external-world skepticism*, the view that knowledge of the external world is impossible to attain. Philosophers still attempt to find decisive refutations of these views, which would show that they are incoherent or groundless.

Sometimes, however, the far-fetched views are coherent and supported by arguments. In these cases, philosophers might adopt a more dogmatic attitude to them. They might say,

> I know that I have hands.
>
> If I know that I have hands, I know there is an external world.
>
> So, I know there is an external world.
>
> … and so there must be a mistake in skeptical arguments.[1]

or,

> Genital mutilation is wrong, whatever others might think.
>
> If something is wrong whatever others might think, cultural relativism is false.
>
> So, cultural relativism is false.
>
> … and so there must be a mistake in relativist arguments.[2]

These responses are dogmatic since they are clearly not intended at convincing the other side. In fact, it would be unreasonable for a skeptic or a relativist to be moved by them, unless they had previously misunderstood the consequences of their views. These responses are also dogmatic insofar as their proponent refuse to seriously entertain the possibility that relativism or skepticism be true: she who would entertain this possibility would also (temporarily) suspend her belief about her hands or about mutilation.

We'd rather refute a view than take a dogmatic line against it. But sometimes at the end of the day (that is, after having shown why the view we are targeting rests on resistible [p. 240] arguments), we must be dogmatic in this way. If we don't, we run the risk of leading two lives (like Hume the naturalist and Hume the skeptic): one practical life where we rely on our knowledge and moral beliefs that we take to be objective; and one theoretical life where we refuse to reject any view that we cannot prove to be false.[3]

Still, it's a cautious policy to keep the dogmatic response for truly far-fetched philosophical views. It is hard to say precisely what they are, but we can give a tentative answer. A view might be truly far-fetched because it completely runs contrary to common sense or observation. But a view might also be far-fetched because it cannot be stably adhered to; we might

have to presume that it is false when engaging in valuable and inescapable human activities.[4] It seems that one cannot, for instance, be an external-world skeptic while deliberating about what to do next: when we deliberate, we try to make the best of what we know. Similarly, it seems impossible to adhere to cultural relativism while deliberating about moral issues with people who don't share our values: by the relativist's lights, they are not part of our community, and so are governed by different moral truths.[5]

This chapter concerns a different form of skepticism, but one that may have similar problems, namely *responsibility septicism*. This is the view that we cannot be morally responsible (henceforth "responsible") for our conduct. Accordingly, holding others responsible, for instance by punishing them, is always *unfitting* (but perhaps not *unjustified* since it might have great benefits). For the responsibility skeptic, it is also unfitting to display reactive attitudes such as resentment and guilt. Responsibility skepticism – by contrast with external-world skepticism, and not unlike cultural relativism – has been defended by several contemporary philosophers and popular figures. It is endorsed for many different reasons, which we should not confuse. Some believe that there are no moral properties or relations and so no moral responsibility. Others think that there are no persons and so that there is *no one* to be responsible for anything. But most serious versions of responsibility skepticism – the ones it would be less appropriate to dogmatically reject – are premised on doubts about *free will*, the power to choose freely.[6]

Our question is then the following. Given that responsibility skepticism is a coherent doctrine, can it guide the life of human beings in their numerous activities such as moral engagement and deliberation? Differently put, is the truth of the skeptical doctrine not just a live possibility, but one that we can live with? If not, we might expect the non-skeptic to say something like:

> The Myanmar Junta is responsible for atrocities against civilians.
>
> If the Myanmar Junta is morally responsible for atrocities against civilians, responsibility exists.
>
> So, responsibility exists.[7]
>
> . . . and so there must be a mistake in skeptical arguments.

That is, if the responsibility skeptic cannot show that her doctrine is livable, she can expect a dogmatic response.

How could the skeptic protest? She cannot simply complain that this is dogmatic, for, as we have said, it is reasonable to be dogmatic against far-fetched views. To lodge a complaint against dogmatism, the skeptic must show that her doctrine is *not* far-fetched, that it can be stably adhered to. She does not need to establish that she can be an engaged skeptic at every instant, but it won't be enough to show that she can be a skeptic in the classroom.[8]

As things stand, most prominent skeptics have claimed that their doctrine is livable. For instance, over the years, the Derk Pereboom has argued that we could "live without free will", by explaining in remarkable detail how to excise responsibility from our morality [p. 241] system without damaging it, how to replace some of our emotional reactions like blame while preserving our interpersonal relationships, and how to reform our criminal justice system on the model of quarantine. This is the kind of skeptic that I have in mind in this paper.

Our question has an important psychological aspect – could we be happy skeptics? – which I shall not attend to here. But it has other aspects that require the attention of the philosopher of action. Just like the external-world skeptic and the cultural relativist, the responsibility skeptic has a difficult challenge to meet which concerns deliberation. I turn to it now.

2. Free will skepticism and practical deliberation

There is something strange with someone who claims, at once, that she can never decide freely and yet who engages extensively in decision-making. There seems to be a tension between skepticism and deliberation.

But what skepticism exactly are we talking about? Responsibility skepticism comes, as we have briefly seen, in different flavours. The view that concerns us in this chapter says that we are not responsible *because we lack the power to choose freely, namely free will*. Responsibility skepticism per se is not in tension with deliberation. A child might, without any incoherence, ask herself what to do even if she realizes that she cannot be held responsible. Instead, deliberation is in tension with free will skepticism. More specifically, deliberation is in tension with the view that we don't have true alternatives or options – that we lack, in philosophical speak, the *ability to do otherwise* or *leeway*.[9] The skeptic might believe that she has no leeway on the grounds that determinism is true, but determinism is not the crux of the matter.[10] What matters is that our skeptic thinks that she always has at most one option and yet that she deliberates as if she had several.

What sort of deliberation is problematic for the free will skeptic? The literature on the question carefully distinguishes two kinds.[11] *Theoretical deliberation* is the activity of trying to figure out the answer to a factual question, by reasoning (rather than by guessing or trying to recall). At the end of successful theoretical deliberation, we identify an answer to our question and form a belief about it. *Practical deliberation* is the activity of trying to figure out what to do, by reasoning. At the end of successful practical deliberation, we identify a course of action and make a decision to act. Consider some difficult cases, to clarify the distinction. To decide what to do next (including what to investigate next) is practical, whereas to try to predict what one will do next is theoretical. To decide whether to write down an answer on an exam sheet is practical, whereas to wonder what answer is the right one is theoretical. These examples show that practical and theoretical deliberations are mutually dependent activities: to determine what to do, we must answer some factual questions; and often in the course of answering a factual question, we deliberate about what to investigate first.[12]

The present challenge concerns practical deliberation, not theoretical deliberation. There is no tension in believing that whatever we do is unavoidable and still trying to figure out the truth about a subject matter. Suppose that we ask whether people have duties to themselves, or whether seaside towns in Britain have a bright future, or whether modus ponens is a valid rule of inference. To deliberate about such matters, we don't need to presume that the answers that we consider are open to us – that each is *believable*. We might know that, as soon as we understand our options, we will see that all are incoherent but one. By contrast, when we deliberate *about what to do*, it seems that we must presume that each option that we consider is open to us. If, on my way to the cinema, I deliberate about whether to go see *The Fabelmans* or a retrospective of *Blade Runner*, I cannot at the same time believe that one Simon-Pierre Chevarie-Cossette 242 of them is not showing. I can at best deliberate (theoretically) about which I should or would go see *if* they were both available[13]; I can deliberate about which of the movies is the best.

Before we assess whether skeptics can engage in practical deliberation, we must consider an objection. What if all our deliberation consists in trying to figure out the answer to a factual question? When I ask whether to go see *Blade Runner* or *The Fabelmans*, I do ask myself questions such as: "which is more entertaining?" "do I feel like being thrilled or touched?" etc. But perhaps that is *all* I do. Or rather, as Aristotle seems to have thought, maybe all I ask when I conduct practical deliberation is *what is the best means to reach my end?* But if that is the case, practical deliberation is just a

subset of what I have called "theoretical deliberation": practical deliberation ends with a belief about what the best means to my end is. There is, in a word, no deep distinction between practical and theoretical deliberation; since skeptics have no problem with theoretical deliberation, they have no problem with practical deliberation either. So goes the objection.[14]

Surely, it might be replied, there are moments where theoretical deliberation is over –I have found the best means to my end – and yet I deliberate. I am, as we might say, *on the fence*, trying to decide. So, practical deliberation cannot be reduced to theoretical deliberation; it must include an *executive part*. As J. L. Austin put it, "ways and means are a matter for the planning staff; decision is a matter for the commander" (1979: 286).[15]

I am no longer convinced that this answer decisively establishes that practical deliberation is a distinct activity. For, when I'm on the fence, I might simply (1) be rerunning the theoretical deliberation in the hope that I find a better answer; or (2) display indecisiveness, which is not a rational activity worthy of the name "practical deliberation." True, one can deliberate about what to do without arriving at a decision – only the "planning staff" does its job – but it does not follow that there is a kind of deliberation, distinct from theoretical deliberation, whose aim is to form a decision.

I think the right answer to the objection is instead that even if practical deliberation consisted in identifying the best means to our end, it would be closed to the skeptic.

This is because to identify the best means to our end, we must restrict these means that we consider to those available to us – or to those that we believe to be such. Otherwise, it seems that we are engaged in a different activity. Suppose, for instance, that my aim is to reach Australia from Europe next week and that I deliberate about the best means to get there. If I seriously consider an option like "flying a military jet," I am not truly engaging in practical deliberation. The assertion "the best way to get to Australia is to fly a military jet" might be true, but it is irrelevant to me. Inaccessible means to reach my end should not be part of my practical deliberation, although they might be part of other activities, such as daydreaming or *what-iffing* – deliberation about what I should do if things were different (for instance, if I were a member of the Royal Airforce). So, it seems that whatever conception of practical deliberation we accept,[16] we must presume that our options – or the means to our end that we consider – are open to us.[17] (To follow the literature on the question, in what follows I shall stick to the view that practical deliberation is the activity of deciding what to do).

A last comment before we assess whether the skeptic can meet the challenge. She might of course insist that her view is true but that she can't adhere to it while she deliberates.[18] But remember: that is *not* the kind of skeptic that we are focused on; nor is it the kind of skeptic that is so influential in the free will literature. Our skeptic is a highly practical person who exhorts us to reform our ways by enacting her doctrine: we must abandon some attitudes (blame) and practices (punishment). Our skeptic carefully tries to save a livable system of morality that is compatible with the excision of responsibility from it.[19] She [p. 243] would not suggest either that we eliminate practical deliberation and just rely on old habits since she wants us to change many of these habits.[20]

3. Can the skeptic deliberate qua skeptic?

Having specified the sort of skeptic and deliberation that are in tension, let us examine this tension. Can skeptics deliberate? Of course they can, for they do. Can skeptics deliberate *rationally*? Again, they can, for they can abandon their doctrine (perhaps irrationally), and then deliberate rationally.[21] What is less clear is whether skeptics can deliberate rationally *while holding on to their doctrine*. In a word, can skeptics deliberate qua skeptics?

To make up our mind, we'll need to consider two cases. Take:

> CINEMA **1:** I want to go see *The Fabelmans* or *Blade Runner*.
> Yet, I know that *Blade Runner* is not showing.

In this situation, I can deliberate about which film I should see *if they were both showing*; or I could deliberate about which film is the best. But I cannot deliberate about which film to go see (at least not rationally). Why? One simple explanation is:

> DELIBERATIVE OPENNESS: To deliberate about whether to Φ
> or Ψ (where Φ and Ψ are incompatible options), one must
> presume that Φing is an available option and that Ψing is
> an available option.

It seems quite natural to say in fact that if I deliberate about two options, I must presume, though not necessarily believe,[22] that each is open. Yet, if Deliberative Openness is true, skeptics cannot deliberate qua skeptics – they must (silently) renege their doctrine whenever they deliberate. For their view entails that, for any two incompatible options, one is unavailable. When they deliberate, they then presume the truth a proposition which is incoherent with their doctrine.

The skeptic must then find an alternative principle, one that explains why deliberation is ruled out in cinema 1, but not in the skeptic's life. She might accept:

> DELIBERATIVE EPISTEMIC OPENNESS: To deliberate about whether to Φ or Ψ, one's evidence must not strongly suggest that Φing is unavailable and one's evidence must not strongly suggest that Ψing is unavailable.[23]

This principle explains why deliberation is ruled out in cinema 1 (I know that *Blade Runner* is not showing), but not in the skeptic's life (the skeptic typically does not know the result of her deliberation in advance[24]).

How should we decide between our two explanatory principles? We need to consider a second case:

> CINEMA **2:** I want to go see *The Fabelmans* or *Blade Runner*. I know that one of them is not showing *but I don't know which*.

Again, I cannot deliberate about which film to go see. Yet, if I deliberate, I do not infringe deliberative epistemic openness: my evidence does not suggest that *The Fabelmans* is [p. 244] not showing, and it does not suggest that *Blade Runner* is not showing.[25] By contrast, if I deliberate, I infringe deliberative openness. I can't presume that each film is showing and yet I deliberate. A case like cinema 2 therefore shows the superiority of deliberative openness over its epistemicised counterpart. It then makes a strong case for the view that skeptics cannot deliberate qua skeptics.[26]

The skeptic must explain what sets her apart from me when I deliberate in cinema 2. She might insist that her deliberation is, contrary to mine, efficacious. I know that my deliberation is not efficacious because I know that whatever I decide, I'll end up going to see the movie that is in fact showing. By contrast, the skeptic will execute *whichever option she opts for*. That is, *if* she decides to Φ, she will Φ; and if she decides to Ψ, she will Ψ. Thus, the skeptic has a substitute for deliberative openness:

> DELIBERATIVE EFFICACY: To deliberate about whether to Φ or Ψ, one must presume that the deliberation is efficacious, that is if one decided to Φ, one would Φ and if one decided to Ψ, one would Ψ.[27]

Of course, both the movie that I will go see and the option that the skeptic will decide on (if her doctrine is right) are already settled before the deliberation. But that's the end of the analogy, says the skeptic. That some event is settled does not rule out the efficacy of a process causing it. That the extinction of dinosaurs was already settled during the big bang did not

preclude the collision of the meteorite from being efficacious. That the skeptic's decision was already settled during the big bang did not preclude her deliberation from being efficacious. But that *Blade Runner* was not showing *did* preclude my deliberation from being efficacious in the cinema cases.

4. Skeptics cannot deliberate qua skeptics

The deliberative efficacy response might seem decisive: it seems to allow skeptics to identify cases of bad deliberation without inculpating themselves. Yet I believe the response fails. Consider first some problematic cases for deliberative efficacy. The principle is too strong – it wrongly excludes some fine deliberation. Suppose that while playing golf, I deliberate about whether to hole it from the left or from the right. Typically, I'd presume that I *can* do each. To be a coherent skeptic, the suggestion goes, I should instead presume that *if I decided to hole it from the right, I'd do it*, and the same for the left. But that's too strong a requirement. Even if I am a good golf player, I might think that there is a high chance that I fail. It might be precisely because I don't presume that I will succeed that I don't engage in betting, for instance.

 One[28] might object that it would be irrational to deliberate in this way: if I can't presume that I will hole the ball from the right if I decide to, I should only deliberate about whether to *hit* it from the right. But what if I am trying to hit it so hard that I can't even presume that *if I decide to hit the ball from the right I will*, since I will probably miss the ball*? Presumably, the objector would say that I should only deliberate about whether to *try to hit the ball* from the right. This seems too strict. But regardless, the problem will reappear in cases where one doubts whether one will try. I can clearly deliberate about whether to call my mother tomorrow, even if – forgetful as I am – I can't even presume that if I decide to, I will try. A similar problem applies to predicted weakness of will. If I deliberate about whether to stop smoking, so long as I presume that I *can* stop (that I have the ability and opportunity [p. 245] to stop), my deliberation can be rational. I should not have to presume that were I to decide to stop smoking, I would.

 Deliberative efficacy is also too weak. Suppose that I deliberate about whether to eat some red sugar balls, but that I have a phobia (of which I am aware) about everything that conjures the image of red cells. I know I cannot decide to eat a sugar ball, and yet I deliberate about whether to eat it or not. My deliberation respects deliberative efficacy (since I presume that if I decided to eat a sugar ball I would), and yet it seems irrational.[29] The skeptic needs to integrate in deliberative efficacy the requirement that the deliberator presume that she can decide to Φ and that she can decide to Ψ.

Of course, this precise formulation is not available to the skeptic, since skepticism implies that we can never do, and a fortiori *decide* to do, otherwise. Finding the right formulation is a tall order. We don't want to say that a deliberator must presume that *if she decided to decide, she would*. That's absurd: we very rarely decide to decide. We don't want to say that she must presume that *if she found a conclusive reason in favor of Φ, she would decide to Φ*, for this does not take care of the numerous cases where one decides to Φ in the absence of a decisive reason.

At this point, the reader might have a strong sensation of déjà vu. That's because the previous cases are exactly the ones we find in a different debate in the free will literature, namely the debate about whether we can reduce "cans" to "ifs". The idea is simple. Some philosophers (such as Moore) have claimed that to say that I can do A *just is* to say that *if I want to do A, I will do A*. If this conditional analysis of "can" is correct (or something close to it), then free will is saved. For, often, had I chosen to do otherwise, I would have. That's uncontroversial, whether determinism is true or not. And so, if the conditional analysis is correct, I often could have done otherwise, *pace* skepticism.

Now, skeptics and non-skeptics have challenged the conditional analysis of "can" with the cases that we saw previously. The conditional analysis of "can" is too strong: "Consider the case where I miss a very short putt and kick myself because I could have holed it. It is not that I should have holed it if I had tried: I did try, and missed" (Austin 1979: 218). And the conditional analysis is too weak:

> Suppose that I am offered a bowl of candy and in the bowl are small round red sugar balls. I do not choose to take one of the red sugar balls because I have a pathological aversion to such candy… [I]f I had chosen to take the red sugar ball, I would have taken one, but, not so choosing, I am utterly unable to touch one. (Lehrer 1968: 32)

It is because of examples like these that the conditional analysis has often been taken to fail.

If the conditional analysis is instead successful (or if it is repaired[30]), then we *can* sometimes do otherwise: free will skepticism is therefore false. So, it is important for the free will skeptic that the conditional analysis fails. And yet, for the skeptic to be able to secure deliberative efficacy, it seems that, in effect, the analysis must succeed; a response to problematic cases for deliberative efficacy provides a response to counterexamples to the conditional analysis and vice versa. Suppose, for instance, that we try to

immune deliberative efficacy from the golf example by asking that a deliberator presume that she would Φ *in several close possible worlds* where she decides to Φ. This amendment will immune the conditional analysis from the golf example as well: the fact that Austin missed his putt is compatible with the fact that *he would succeed in several close possible worlds where he decides to putt.* [p. 246]

In a word, the skeptic is trapped. Either we can capture "can" with conditionals or we cannot. If we can, then free will skepticism is false (and responsibility skepticism is groundless): the truth of the conditional analysis rules out skepticism. If we cannot capture "can" with conditionals, then the skeptic loses deliberative efficacy: the cases that threaten the analysis threaten the principle. But this means that the skeptic has no alternative to deliberative openness and must concede that she cannot deliberate qua skeptic. We should not be surprised. We should have expected that the concept of "can" involved in free will (the power to choose) be the same as the one involved in deliberation (the activity of deciding).

Our skeptic might look for alternatives to deliberative efficacy, but this will be difficult. ₃₁ Take for instance the principle that one must rule out courses of action that, in all likelihood, won't be pursued. This rules out some cases of good deliberation. Suppose that Mike is akratic about bribery; he has accepted bribes his whole career as a police officer. So when he once again deliberates about whether to wet his beak, he thinks with good reason that he is unlikely to do the right thing. But suppose he ends up refusing a bribe. According to the considered principle, Mike's deliberation was problematic. This is wrong. Since Mike *can* refuse the bribe, refusing it can feature in the list of options to consider. That's what the much better deliberative openness tells us.

If our skeptic cannot find a way out (for instance, by changing the reason why she rejects responsibility), she might insist that her view is true even if it is impossible to maintain when deliberating. Or she might argue that the irrationality involved in her deliberation is unimportant.₃₂ Both these responses make skepticism less appealing as a doctrine. And they make it more reasonable to take a dogmatic line against skepticism.

5. Conclusion

Is responsibility skepticism a livable doctrine? The skeptic must meet several challenges before we can deliver a positive answer. One says that if we lose responsibility, we lose obligations and rights. Another says that if we lose responsibility, we lose deep relationships and love. Skeptics have

spent considerable time dealing with these challenges. By some lights, they have succeeded.[33]

It is a different challenge that I have examined in this chapter, one that has received insufficient attention.[34] Can responsibility skeptics (those who premise their view on free will skepticism) deliberate qua skeptics? To decide, we have looked at principles that might govern deliberation. We need them to capture the irrationality or impossibility of deliberating about options that we believe are out of our reach. The simplest way to do so is to maintain that when we deliberate, we must presume our options to be open (deliberative openness). If that's right, the free will skeptic who engages in rational deliberation must presume that she has several options – a presumption that is incoherent with her doctrine.

There are alternatives to this principle, in particular the principle according to which when we deliberate, we must presume that, for each option, *if* we chose it, we would act accordingly (deliberative efficacy). But this leads the skeptic to a dilemma. For this new principle makes a dangerous use of conditionals to capture something like freedom. Can we define freedom with conditionals? If we can't, the deliberative principle looks bad: cases that undermine the conditional analysis of freedom will also undermine the deliberative principle. If, however, we can define freedom with conditionals, and overcome the troubling cases, what looks bad is not the deliberative principle but skepticism itself. For if freedom can be defined with conditionals, there is no question that we are free. [p. 247]

This result gives rise to a rather unfortunate dialectic. The responsibility skeptic is unlikely to change her doctrine in response. I have not, after all, given her any reason for thinking that we *are* sometimes free and responsible for our actions. And yet, I have given some reasons to the responsibility believer not to take skepticism too seriously. He could say for instance:

> The Myanmar Junta is morally responsible for atrocities against civilians.
>
> If the Myanmar Junta is morally responsible for some atrocities against civilians, responsibility exists.
>
> So, responsibility exists… and so there must be a mistake in the skeptical arguments.

When the skeptic accuses him of being dogmatic, the believer can now respond that dogmatism is acceptable on some occasions. It is acceptable when launched against views that are unlivable. Perhaps in the end the moral responsibility skeptic should not so heavily premise her view on troublesome claims about free will.

Notes

1 See, e.g., Moore (1939).

2 See, e.g., Dworkin (1996).

3 Kenta Sekine rightly points out that flat-earthers find themselves in this sort of situation.

4 See Strawson (1962) for this kind of consideration against responsibility skepticism.

5 See Williams (1972: 34–39), for an important discussion.

6 See, e.g., Strawson (1994), Caruso (2013), and Pereboom (2014). A notable exception is Waller (2011, chap. 3), who argues that we lack responsibility but have free will.

7 For a similar argument about free will, see Lycan (2019, chap. 4).

8 Otherwise, as Kenta Sekine remarks, the requirement would discredit too many doctrines such as anticapitalism or Christianity.

9 Although they often think that we cannot do otherwise (see, e.g., Pereboom 2014, chap. 6), many contemporary skeptics typically refrain from explicitly premising their denial of responsibility on this. Why? They often take their main compatibilist adversary to be the semi-compatibilist, who believes that we can be responsible even if we lack leeway. If my argument in the next section is right, the skeptic and semi-compatibilist should be careful not to endorse, whether as a basis or a consequence of their theory the view that we lack leeway.

10 Contrary to what many have assumed (Cohen 2018: 87; Henden 2010; Nelkin 2004: 215–218; Nielsen 2011: 283–284; Pereboom 2008: 288–289; Taylor 1966: 181–184; Waller 1985: 48), the deliberation challenge should not concern the *determinist* in general. For the soft determinist, who believes that determinism is compatible with the ability to do otherwise, has no problem regarding deliberation: she can accept deliberative openness (see § 3).

11 See, e.g., Taylor (1966: 168), Clarke (1992: 107), Nelkin (2011: 168).

12 Clarke (1992: 107–108), Pereboom (2008: 291), and Watson (2003: 176) include the identification or weighing of reasons in practical deliberation.

13 Note that whereas we can deliberate about what to do, it is infelicitous to say that we deliberate about *what to do* if things *were* different.

14 Nielsen (2011) forcefully argues in this way. I thank John Hyman and the *Roots of responsibility Group* for presenting it to me afresh.

15 This kind of consideration has led some, including my past self (Chevarie-Cossette 2020), to accept the distinction between practical and theoretical deliberation. [p. 248]

16 Might there be better ways to separate practical deliberation from daydreaming? Might one say that that practical deliberation concerns options which are *probably available* to one? No: a skeptic could then not deliberate when too many options are considered. See also § 4.

17 This is what Aristotle seems to have endorsed in fact. See NE VI 5, 1140a.

18 She would be in the company of some error theorists (e.g., Streumer 2017) and, to some extent, some consequentialists (e.g., Parfit 1986, chap. 1).

19 See, e.g., Pereboom (2001, 2014, 2021), Waller (2011, 2014).

20 One exception to this is Blackmore (2013).

21 Contra what I defend in (Chevarie-Cossette 2020).

22 I can deliberate about whether to take Oxford Street or Divinity Street even if I don't believe that each is available – I might have no firm opinion on the matter. Still, I must

presume that they are available. The principle could also be phrased in terms of the *absence of a belief* that the options are *unavailable* (see Clarke 1992; Chevarie-Cossette 2020: 387–389).

23 See Kapitan (1996: 437) and Dennett (2015: 118–126).

24 Clarke (1992) and Cowan (1969) argue against deliberative epistemic openness: we can sometimes deliberate even when we know what we will decide because we want to decide *for the right reason* or *autonomously* (as when we deliberate after receiving a recommendation from a trusted friend). If that is right, the skeptic might be in hot water in these cases – for she deliberates with the full knowledge that she *cannot* pick a particular option.

25 This is explicitly recognized by several foes of deliberative openness (McKenna & Pereboom 2016: 297–298; Nelkin 2011: 130).

26 The original case was presented by Taylor (1966: 177–178). An early discussion can also be found in van Inwagen (1983: 154).

27 See Nelkin (2004: 223, 2011, chaps. 6–7) and Pereboom (2008, 2014, chap. 5). Clarke (1992: 103) presents a similar principle, but one that features the notion of ability, and as such is not skeptic friendly.

28 I thank Patrick Todd for raising this issue.

29 True, in this case I don't respect deliberative epistemic openness (which can be combined with deliberative efficacy). But we can change the case: I know that I have a mental block that makes me incapable of deciding to Φ or Ψ, not knowing which.

30 Vihvelin (2013, chap. 6) proposes an interesting attempt.

31 Skeptics might also look for a non-conditional analysis of efficacy (see Nelkin 2004: 226–232). But a similar problem emerges: if, for instance, we can capture good deliberation with the idea of a causal nexus, why can't we use this notion to capture free will, as compatibilists sometimes do?

32 Nielsen (2011: 413–414) discusses a case where it seems rational to decide to do something we think we can't do: when Aron Ralston cut his own hand stuck under a boulder to save himself. This case is a good reminder that it can be instrumentally rational to engage in irrational deliberation (see Chevarie-Cossette 2020: 402–404).

33 For the challenges, see respectively Haji (2012) and Strawson (1962). For the responses, see Waller (2011, chap. 10), Pereboom (2014, chaps. 7–8), Sommers (2007), Caruso (2018, sec. 3.2–3.3).

34 Or perhaps it has received *the wrong kind of attention*, as it was wrongly seen as a challenge for the *determinist*. See note 10.

Further reading For early occurrences of the deliberation challenge (and other practical challenges to free will skepticism), see Richard Taylor's *Action and Purpose* (Prentice-Hall), 168*ff*. and Peter van Inwagen's *Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 153*ff*. Randolph Clarke's "Deliberation and Beliefs About One's Abilities" (1992), who champions the opposite view, is a model of clarity. Dana Nelkin's excellent book *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) contains two further important chapters on the matter. See also Derk Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) for a remarkable attempt to show that free will skepticism is *not* in fact far-fetched and that it is compatible with good deliberation. [p. 249]

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