

Deliberative Alternatives¹

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I. Introduction

There are powerful skeptical challenges to the idea that we are free. And yet, it seems simply impossible for us to shake the sense that we really are free. Some are convinced that the skeptical challenges are insurmountable and resign themselves to living under an illusion, while others argue that the challenges can be met. Even among those who believe that our sense of ourselves as free is at least roughly accurate, there are deep differences of opinion concerning what freedom requires. On the one hand, there are “libertarians” about freedom, those who believe both that we are free and that freedom requires the falsity of determinism. On the other hand, there are “compatibilists”, those who believe that freedom is compatible with determinism.

While there is an impressive variety of arguments and motivations available on all sides of the debate over freedom, our inescapable *sense* of ourselves as free has played a recurrent and key role in the debate, sometimes explicit and sometimes not. In this paper, I explore one way that our self-conception has been used by libertarians against compatibilists, and I argue that the reasoning employed is not convincing. The libertarian appeal to our self-conception hinges on locating in each of us an essential commitment to indeterminism, or, more cautiously, a commitment to something that, with the addition of a few plausible (if not self-evident) premises, entails indeterminism. The idea, then, is that we are “natural” indeterminists, seeing our actions as undetermined (or, again, more cautiously, as having qualities that, upon reflection, we can recognize entail the falsity of determinism). By itself, this is not an argument to the effect that we are correct in

believing that our actions are undetermined, or to the effect that freedom requires indeterminism. But if we are in fact natural indeterminists when it comes to our own actions, then that fact serves as important motivation for libertarianism, especially if our supposed natural indeterminism *captures* our unshakeable sense of freedom.

Kant famously located our sense of freedom in our nature as rational agents, claiming that we must act under the “idea of freedom.”² This has suggested to many that:

(R) Rational deliberators, in virtue of their very nature as rational deliberators, must represent themselves as free.³

How exactly we should understand this claim is a matter of great controversy. But one popular way of cashing it out is in terms of the feeling that one has a variety of alternatives from which to choose. In other words,

(DA) Rational deliberators must believe, in virtue of their nature as rational deliberators, that they have alternatives from which to choose.

(I call the thesis “DA” or “Deliberative Alternatives”.) This idea is a very natural and appealing one. When you are deliberating, you are trying to decide what to do, and you consider a set of alternatives from which you select one. In selecting one alternative from two or more, you make your decision.

It is useful to consider particular episodes of deliberation; for example, deliberation about whether to take a new job or stay at the old one, about whether to go to graduate school in philosophy or go to law school, or about whether to order a salad or an appetizer. In cases like these, it seems that there are alternatives from which you are attempting to choose. And having alternatives sounds like having freedom of a sort.

(DA) thus provides one understanding of the Kantian claim about freedom. As I have argued elsewhere, it is not the only way to understand this Kantian claim.⁴ But it is also a

widely accepted and plausible claim in its own right. Further, even by itself it has been used to support the idea that we are natural indeterminists about our future actions, and for this reason alone it deserves serious consideration.

Before we can begin to evaluate it, however, we need to know how to understand “alternatives” in this context. The most widely held view, I believe, is that the alternatives one considers in deliberation are believed to be genuine alternatives in the sense that each is consistent with prior conditions together with the laws of nature. Having alternatives in this sense is incompatible with causal determinism. The reason is that causal determinism allows that there is only one possibility consistent with the past and laws of nature. But in deliberating, on this view, we must assume that we have more than one such possibility from which to choose. More formally,

- (I) Rational deliberators who deliberate about an action A must believe, in virtue of their nature as rational deliberators, that there exist no conditions that render either A or not-A inevitable.⁵

(I call this thesis “I” or “the Indeterministic Thesis”.) There are many ways to put this point, and we find it in a variety of places.

Some have claimed to find something like it in the work of Aristotle, including passages such as the following:

“...about other [things] not only existence and non-existence is possible, but also human deliberation; these are things the doing and not doing of which is in our power.” (Aristotle, EE 1226a, 26-27)⁶

And much more recently, Peter Van Inwagen posed this challenge:

“To deliberate is to try to decide between (or, it may be, among) various incompatible courses of action...when one deliberates, one’s behaviour manifests a belief that what one is deliberating about is possible...It would seem to follow from that conclusion, a proposition as near to being uncontroversial as any philosophically interesting proposition could be, that either Holbach [a

determinist] never deliberated or else he believed in the case of some pairs of incompatible courses of action that each was within his power.” (Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 154-56).⁷

John Searle assumes that a commitment to causal indeterminism is part of our very experience as deliberators:

“...the gap is that feature of our conscious decision-making and acting where we sense alternative future decisions and actions as causally open to us...” (Searle, *Rational Agency*, 62).

The Indeterministic Thesis clearly has a natural appeal. Yet, as I argue in what follows, we have very good reason to reject it.

Before assessing the thesis, it is worth reflecting on its significance. An example will help. Timothy O’Connor begins his recent book, *Persons and Causes*, with a description of a piece of deliberation that is worth pondering:

“Shall I join my children on the floor, and await instructions about my role in their pretend play? Shall I return to my work instead?...I would describe how making this decision seemed to me as follows: each of the options I considered (and perhaps some others) was open to me, such that I could have chosen it, just then. Put differently, it was entirely up to me to decide the matter, and I did so in a particular way, all the while being conscious that I might have chosen differently.” (O’Connor, *Persons and Causes*, 3)

This passage begins an argument that determinism is incompatible with our ordinary view of things, including our view of ourselves as free. Thus, implicit in O’Connor’s view of his own deliberation is something like the Indeterministic Thesis and, in turn, the Kantian claim that as deliberators we must take ourselves to be free. And indeed this understanding of the Kantian claim lends itself to the view that we are natural incompatibilists about freedom and determinism. O’Connor is not alone in suggesting that the incompatibilist position is highly motivated by, if not strongly supported by, our experience, as rational deliberators, of what seems to be free choice.⁸

In the next section, I begin exploring our commitments concerning our deliberative alternatives by setting out the case for the Indeterministic Thesis. Given the plausibility of Deliberative Alternatives in the first place, the strongest case against the Indeterministic Thesis includes as a part a defense of alternative interpretations of Deliberative Alternatives.⁹ In sections III-VI, I distinguish and discuss four main families of alternative interpretations, which I call “epistemic versions,” “counterfactual versions,” “abstraction versions,” and “nexus versions”. I believe that all have something to offer, but that all face serious challenges, as well. As a version of Deliberative Alternatives each makes a claim to offer a necessary condition on deliberation, and in some cases it is offered as the *only* belief constraint that is needed for deliberation.

In this paper, I draw two kinds of conclusions—one methodological and one substantive. First, while it would be nice if a single belief constraint could provide a necessary and sufficient condition for deliberation and could do all the work that the indeterministic thesis does, there are good reasons not to expect such tidiness. It is possible that no single belief constraint by itself tells the whole story about deliberative alternatives; that is, it is possible that none provides a true sufficient condition for deliberating about an alternative, and thus none by itself obviates the need for the indeterministic belief constraint.¹⁰ I also explore the possibility that the conditions offered are not in fact necessary for deliberating about an alternative, either, and suggest that, despite appearances, they need not be in order to form part of the case against the Indeterministic Thesis. Perhaps there is no one condition or even a conjunction of some set of the necessary conditions on offer that tells the whole story. Yet, as I argue, even this may not be unwelcome; for deliberation is a cognitively sophisticated and complex

activity, and so perhaps it should not come as a surprise that no single, simple, belief can succeed in accounting for all of its qualities.

At the same time, I draw a more substantive conclusion as well: what I call the “abstraction view” and the “nexus view” have to this point been underdeveloped, and they should be taken seriously as competitors to the indeterministic belief constraint. The “nexus” view, in particular, has the resources to account for much, if not all, of the data that the Indeterministic Thesis claims to explain.

Finally, while finding alternative belief constraints on deliberation is an important part of the case against the Indeterministic Thesis, and also important in its own right, there are also other reasons to question it, and I bring these out in sections II and VII.

II. The Indeterministic Thesis

Let us begin by looking at one kind of direct argument in favor of the Indeterministic Thesis: an argument by examples. Van Inwagen is one who takes this general sort of approach, and I suspect that reflection on examples in general is what accounts for much of the appeal of the Indeterministic Thesis. Consider the following case: while you were sleeping, you were injected with some sort of paralyzing drug, such as curare.¹¹ It seems that you can deliberate about whether to get out of bed, as long as you don't know what has happened. But once you discover the paralysis, and realize that it is impossible to move, getting up is no longer a live alternative about which to deliberate. It seems that a natural explanation of this deliberative failure is that once you learn of your paralysis, you no longer believe that getting up is causally open to you.

And this suggests that in order to deliberate about something, you must believe it is causally possible.

Turn next to Van Inwagen's much-discussed "two door" case: imagine that you are in a room with two doors and believe one of the doors to be unlocked and the other to be locked and impassable, though you have no idea which is which. Then see if you can imagine yourself deliberating about which door to leave by.¹² If you have trouble with this task, your difficulty will be natural, according to Van Inwagen, for it looks as though what prevents you from deliberating is your belief that only one thing is causally open to you to do. This is a powerful thought-experiment. But the argument for the Indeterministic Thesis that appeals to it is successful only if there are no plausible alternative explanations for your difficulty in deliberating here. So a full assessment of this argument will require an examination of alternative accounts.

In the meantime, one might be tempted to reject the Indeterministic Thesis outright on the following grounds: "There have been plenty of determinists who deliberate, so surely one need not presuppose that one's actions are not determined in order to deliberate."¹³ This sounds like a strong argument, but alas, there is a possible reply that promises to extend the debate. Van Inwagen avails himself of a variant of this reply, and it is implicit in the quoted passage above: "Of course, there are determinists who have deliberated. But they must thereby be holders of contradictory beliefs."¹⁴

At this point, the dialectic can take a number of turns, but a natural way to proceed is to suggest that *if* there is a way of accounting for deliberation and its failure without attributing contradictory beliefs to otherwise rational people, we should do so. The question that faces us, then, is again whether there is an alternative way of

accounting for the data. In earlier work, I suggested that attributing to all rational deliberators beliefs entailing indeterminism must rest on a mistaken view of the point of rational deliberation. There I suggested that the aim of deliberation is to find and adopt good reasons for acting, and to decide and act on the basis of those reasons; the aim of deliberation is *not* the aim of actualizing one of multiple indeterministic possibilities. In fact, I argued, when we focus on this reason-centered aim of deliberation, we can generate a plausible understanding of the Kantian claim that deliberators must take themselves to be free that makes no obvious use of alternatives at all.¹⁵

Yet, even if Deliberative Alternatives is not the best way of making sense of the Kantian claim concerning our sense of freedom, it would be good to have a plausible understanding of Deliberative Alternatives by itself that does not commit all rational deliberators to indeterminism. For even if we can offer a point to deliberation in the absence of indeterminism, it is fair for others to demand an account of what deliberative alternatives are; and, in particular, of how they are proscribed, if not by their being limited to those scenarios that we believe are causally open to us. So it seems that we must explore alternative accounts of deliberative alternatives after all.

It is important to note at the outset that the Indeterministic Thesis itself has variants worthy of consideration. For example, according to a “negative” variant of the thesis, we need have no particular beliefs about our abilities to perform alternative actions; rather, for each alternative, we must *lack* the belief that we are unable to perform it.¹⁶ In addition to its appealing simplicity, this negative variant has the advantage of requiring less of deliberators. But it cannot by itself account for the Two Door case. For it seems that given the description of my situation facing the two doors, I do not believe

of either that I cannot perform it. And yet I cannot deliberate about which to open, despite fulfilling the negative condition. Thus, this negative variant of the Indeterministic Thesis does not have the explanatory power of the thesis itself.¹⁷

Let us turn, then, to a different family of alternative accounts: epistemic versions of Deliberative Alternatives.

III. Epistemic Versions

A natural suggestion as to how to understand deliberative alternatives is that they are epistemic possibilities. In particular, they are alternatives, or open possibilities, relative to what we know.¹⁸ More precisely,

(K) Rational deliberators must believe, in virtue of their nature as rational deliberators, that they have multiple alternatives from which to choose, where those alternatives are each consistent with what they know.

(K) (or the “Knowledge Thesis”) seems plausible; when you think about deliberating about what to do with your life, for example, you don’t know how it is all going to turn out. And this seems important. Could you deliberate about what to do with your life or even what to order for lunch if you already knew how you were going to decide and act?

Perhaps surprisingly, I think that reflection suggests that the answer is not obvious. Consider, for example, a situation in which you are engaged in a long-anticipated activity (e.g., watching an overtime period of a championship basketball game, attending a concert, taking a once-in-a-lifetime trek). You receive a call from a friend who desperately needs to talk to someone about the sudden and unexpected death of a family member. In the past, you have always deliberated about what to do in situations of this sort and have always resolved things in favor of talking to your friend;

indeed, this is the kind of person you are. Based on these considerations, and perhaps others, you know you will decide the same way today. However, you haven't deliberated and decided to do so yet. But you can and do.

Or take an example of Clarke's:

Imagine that Edna is trying to decide where to spend her vacation this year. She mentions this fact to her friend Ed, who, as it happens, is in possession of information that Edna does not yet have. Ed knows that Edna will soon learn that she can, with less expense than she had expected, visit her friend Eddy in Edinburgh. And given what Ed knows about Edna and her other options, he knows that after she learns of this opportunity, she will eventually decide to take it. However, Ed is a playful fellow, and he doesn't tell Edna all of this. He tells her only that he knows that she will eventually learn something that will persuade her to spend her vacation with Eddy in Edinburgh.

...[Edna] knows, let us suppose, that whenever Ed says anything of this sort, he is right. She believes then, with justification, that she will spend her vacation in Edinburgh.¹⁹

Can Edna deliberate about where to go on her vacation? It seems so.

I find it plausible that these cases are counterexamples to (K). But if you find these examples hard to evaluate, it might be because "knowledge" is a notoriously difficult concept. How much justification do we need for knowledge, for example?

One reaction to this worry is to avoid it, and, so, avoid apparent counterexamples, as well, by moving from "knowledge" to "certainty":

(C) Rational deliberators must believe, in virtue of their nature as rational deliberators, that they have multiple alternatives from which to choose, where those alternatives are each consistent with what they are certain of.

This seems to help when it comes to the examples. Perhaps you are not certain of what you are going to decide while you are on the phone with your friend; perhaps Edna is not certain of Ed's conclusion, even if both know what she will do.

There are several challenges facing (C), however. One is unique to it: it purchases immunity from counterexamples at the price of a loss of explanatory power.

The reason is that we are certain of very little. As a result, as far as (C) allows, there is a very large number of things that can count as deliberative alternatives. And, yet, there are circumstances in which we seem *unable* to deliberate in certain situations, precisely because we lack deliberative alternatives. (C) does not have the resources to explain these, since it rules out so little in the way of deliberative alternatives. For example: we seem to be unable to deliberate about whether to jump out of window from a high floor and float on the air currents, despite perhaps lacking certainty about whether this is possible (perhaps we do not rule out a “miracle” or even a perfect sequence of wind gusts). Thus, even if (C) provides a correct condition, it does not capture the whole story of what it is to be a deliberative alternative.

Responding to this sort of worry, Derk Pereboom has proposed an epistemic condition that seems to avoid the problems of both the belief constraint that appeals to knowledge (K) and the belief constraint that appeals to certainty (C).²⁰ The basic idea is that we can deliberate when we have alternatives that are open relative to what we consider “settled”, or relative to what we disregard doubts about. More precisely,

(S) In order to deliberate, the agent must believe that she might -- in an epistemic sense -- make any one of a number of alternative decisions, where those alternatives are each consistent with what the agent regards as settled, that is, consistent with any proposition about which she has no doubts, and with any proposition about which she disregards any doubts she might have for the purposes of deliberation in the present context.

This “Settledness Thesis” (or “S” for short) avoids any worries about the nature of knowledge that threaten to undermine (K), and, since we seem to regard more things as settled than we are actually certain of, it avoids the relative lack of explanatory power provided by (C). It is worth noting that this view also focuses on decisions, rather than

actions, as occupying the central role of deliberative alternatives. The objects of deliberation are decisions about acting, then, not actions.

However, even this suggestion has limitations. First, it is not entirely obvious that (S) avoids the counterexamples that threaten (K). Avoiding them would seem to require saying that in the case in which your friend calls while you are watching the game, you do entertain doubts about how you will decide, and this is why you have the relevant alternatives to consider. But I am not sure that we would have to say this about every such case.

Further, even if (S) avoids the original counterexamples to (K), and it offers a correct and informative condition on deliberation, it does not follow that it captures all there is that makes something a deliberative alternative.²¹ That is, (S) may not provide a sufficient condition for being a deliberative alternative either. For there might be cases in which we are unable to deliberate, and it seems to have something to do with lacking deliberative alternatives, despite the fact that the condition in (S) appears to be met.

Defenders of the Indeterministic Thesis can always agree that some epistemic condition(s) are correct, without their being sufficient. For, by themselves, they don't rule out a commitment to indeterminism as an additional condition. So consider the following case:

Suppose that I am deliberating about whom to vote for in the upcoming presidential election—Bush, Kerry, or Nader, say. Suppose further that voting for each (and deciding to vote for each) is consistent with all that I regard as settled (suppose I've just emerged from the jungle if you like!). But now I learn that an evil neuroscientist is going to take things into his own hands, and make me decide to vote for the candidate he

favors on election day. Can I deliberate about which decision to make? Presumably not. But why not? It seems important that in the case I see any potential deliberation of mine as cut off from my decision. If I don't think that my deliberation will be efficacious, then it seems that I can't deliberate—even if in some important epistemic sense it is open to me to decide to vote for any of the three candidates. To be genuinely open *for me*, it seems I must think that my deliberation will be connected to my decision in the right way. What I think is not captured here is the idea of efficacy between deliberation and decision. (I can, of course, decide who is the best candidate, who has the best ideas, etc. But in doing this, I am not doing anything relevantly different from deciding what I should propose as my next executive order were I president of the United States, for example. Perhaps unfortunately, I cannot actually deliberate about what presidential order to issue or even which to decide to issue, despite the fact that I can think about which one would be best.)

Now it might seem that the Indeterministic Thesis is well-poised to handle this sort of case all by itself. The reason I can't deliberate in the voting case, a defender of the Indeterministic Thesis might say, is that I don't think it is causally open to me to decide to vote for more than one candidate. But, as we will see, there are ways of capturing the idea of deliberative efficacy other than by the Indeterministic Thesis.²²

Van Inwagen's 2-door case reveals a different, albeit related, limitation of (S). While it seems that I can deliberate about which door to decide *to try* and even which door handle to decide to jiggle, if I know one of them to be locked and impassible, it also seems that I cannot deliberate about which door *to open*--or even which door to *decide* to open. Why is this? It looks like on the view under consideration, the answer must be

because the scenarios of deciding to open door A and of deciding to open door B are inconsistent with propositions about which one disregards any doubts for the purpose of deliberation. If so, what are the relevant propositions? I do not see any obvious answer here, since opening door A is consistent with what I don't entertain doubts about, and so is opening B.

Fortunately for those who wish to resist the Indeterministic Thesis, it is a more powerful tool than is actually needed here. The problem is not that we require both alternatives to be causally undetermined; the problem here is that we lack a commitment to our "decisional efficacy" (as contrasted with deliberative efficacy). Whereas earlier our concern was with the relation between deliberation and decision, here the concern is with the relation between decision and action. To put it crudely as a first pass: if I do not believe my decision will issue in action, I cannot deliberate.²³

It is true that the Indeterministic Thesis appears to be in good position to capture the idea of both kinds of efficacy. Deliberative alternatives are viewed as not causally determined by the past; it seems up to you at the moment of decision to make one decision actual on the basis of your deliberation. Notice, though, that even the Indeterministic Thesis might need elaboration to bring out this point. It is not mere contingency of outcomes that is at stake; it seems that it must be possible in some sense for the agent to bring them about in the right way, whatever that may be.²⁴ But we need not resort to the Indeterministic Thesis to capture the idea of efficacy. The remaining families of views attempt to capture the idea of both deliberative and decisional efficacy while also avoiding the other worries with epistemic versions that we have seen.²⁵

IV. Counterfactual Versions

The so-called “conditional analysis” of freedom says that the ability to do otherwise that constitutes freedom is understood as follows: you can do otherwise if and only if you would do otherwise, if you so chose. This understanding of freedom has been widely dismissed on the grounds that these two phrases—the ability to do otherwise and the ability to do otherwise if you so chose—are not equivalent.²⁶ But we are not now focusing on what freedom is. We are exploring what it takes for something to be a genuine deliberative alternative for you; something you can deliberate about. So even if we reject the conditional analysis as an account of freedom, it is worth considering whether it has something to offer when it comes to deliberative alternatives.

And a natural suggestion that captures the idea of deliberative efficacy is captured by “CF” for “Counterfactual Thesis”:

(CF) In order to deliberate, an agent must believe that there are at least two distinct actions, A and B, such that the agent believes that were she to choose to A, she would A, and were she to choose to B, she would B.²⁷

Now the Counterfactual Thesis nicely captures a causal relation between choosing to A and A’ing. This is one way of capturing the idea of decisional efficacy discussed above.

(CF) helps explain why we can’t deliberate in Van Inwagen’s 2-door case, without recourse to the Indeterministic Thesis.²⁸ For in that case, we don’t believe that were we to choose B, we would B, for example. In other words, we don’t believe that in the 2-door case, we have the right kind of decisional efficacy.

But, alas, there is a problem here that can be brought out by means of another example we considered earlier. Suppose that I believe that were I to choose to vote for Nader, I would; were I to choose to vote for Bush, I would; and were I to choose to vote

for Kerry, I would. Still, it seems that this is not sufficient for deliberating about whether to vote for Nader, Bush, or Kerry if I believe that someone else will cause me to vote in a certain way, despite my deliberation. For we seem to want not only decisional efficacy here, but also deliberative efficacy. Can we supplement the Counterfactual Thesis in order to capture this?

Clarke considers the proposal that we should invoke a series of conditionals: An agent must believe that if she so decides, she can A (B); if she finds better reason, she can decide to A (B); and if there is better reason to A (B), she can find it.²⁹

Adding clauses to bring out explicitly the idea of deliberative efficacy, we get something like this:

(CF') In order to deliberate, an agent must believe that there are at least two distinct actions, A and B, such that (i) were she to choose to A (B), she can A (B) on that basis, (ii) if she finds better reason to do A (B), she can decide to A (B) and (iii) if there is better reason to A (B), she can find it.

Now I think that something like (CF') might be on the right track as a necessary condition on deliberation, although there may be reasons for thinking it too strong.³⁰ But even if it, or some suitably modified version of it, captures a necessary condition on deliberation, it isn't clear that it captures all there is to the idea of deliberative alternatives. Could there be situations in which (CF') is met, despite the fact that we seem to lack genuine deliberative alternatives? Could I believe, for example, that were there good reasons for me to fly out of the window, I could find them, and decide and act on those reasons, without my taking flying out of the window to be a genuine deliberative alternative? If so, then while (CF') might give an informative necessary condition on being a deliberative alternative, it does not seem to tell the whole story. More seems

needed.³¹ And it might seem that the next family of views captures the more that is needed.³²

V. Abstraction Views:

Yet another sort of view begins with the idea that deliberators are committed to the efficacy of their deliberation in so far as they take it that nothing outside the process of deliberation, such as compulsive desires or intervening neuroscientists, will cause one alternative to be actualized over the others. More formally,

(A) In order to deliberate, an agent must believe that for two alternative actions A and B, nothing independent of the process of deliberation makes choosing or doing A impossible and that nothing independent of the process of deliberation makes choosing or doing B impossible.³³

I call this “the Abstraction Thesis” because the deliberator abstracts from the process of deliberation and finds that nothing else will cause her to act in a particular way. Nothing will do an end-run around the deliberative process, so to speak.³⁴ Even if I believe determinism to be true, I can still believe that it will operate only through my deliberation, and so not see it as a factor of the kind that compulsive desires or intervening neuroscientists are. This nicely captures the idea of deliberative and decisional efficacy, while also appearing not to presuppose anything like the Indeterministic Thesis. In fact, intuitively, it seems to do very well at capturing the differences we find between the 2-door case and the simple case in which we believe determinism to be true. We cannot deliberate in the 2-door case because we lack the belief that nothing outside our deliberation prevents us from deciding and opening door A; and the same for deciding and opening door B. But in the deterministic case, we think

deliberation can be the deciding factor as between, say, going to dinner or going to a movie. Deliberation, even if determined, is the deciding factor.

However, once again, I think a defender of the Indeterministic Thesis can ask whether the Abstraction Thesis tells the whole story of what it is to be a deliberative alternative. One problem is this: If deliberation results in a decision and a consequent action, then it thereby closes off all other possible actions. But not all conceivable actions were closed off just in virtue of a decision being made in favor of an alternative. Presumably some other conceivable actions were not genuine deliberative alternatives from the start. For example, suppose I am deliberating about what to do tonight, and I decide to go out to dinner and go. It seems absolutely clear that nothing outside of my deliberation makes my decision and action impossible. And suppose that in deciding to go out to dinner, I decided not to go to a movie. It is not unreasonable to think that nothing outside of my deliberation made my going to a movie impossible. It was because I chose to go out to dinner after all, that I did not choose to go to a movie. But if this is right, how does it differ from a third scenario: my flying to the moon for dinner? That seems not to be a genuine deliberative alternative, so we need it to be the case that, from my point of view at least, something outside my deliberation makes this impossible. And this, too, seems reasonable. Flying to the moon is impossible because I lack any means—including the relevant abilities—to get to the moon tonight. That has nothing to do with my deliberation. But now why can't we say that something similar is true of going to a movie here on earth, if determinism is true? Why don't I also lack the ability to go to a movie?

While the Indeterministic Thesis may appear to have the upper hand here, the defender of the Abstraction Thesis is not without resources. One way of responding is to say that there is a difference between causal determinism and other sorts of obstacles. Further, the difference is one that reflects our earlier observation that avowed determinists have deliberated among alternatives without apparent difficulty, while other factors seem to undermine the possibility of proposed actions as counting as genuine deliberative alternatives.

To return to our example, it might be claimed that the two kinds of factors—my lack of any possible means and abilities on the one hand, and the past and laws of nature on the other—prevent me in different ways from, say, getting to a restaurant. In the moon case, for example, what I lack is a general capacity and any kind of plan, however inchoate to reach the moon; in the dinner and movie cases, I have all the general capacities I need and I could conceive of a plan, simple as it might be, to get to each destination, and so on.

This is one way of distinguishing between the moon and the earthly case; and one way of saying why deliberation is the decisive factor in whether I go to dinner or a movie, but not in whether I go to the moon. For something outside of deliberation prevents me—in the relevant sense—from going to the moon, but not—again, in the relevant sense—from going to a movie instead of dinner. Admittedly, this is vague. And, importantly, the defender of the Indeterministic Thesis will wonder why this sense of “prevent” in “something outside of deliberation prevents” should be favored over the sense of “prevent” according to which anything that makes something causally impossible prevents.

It is important at this point to say something about where the dialectic has taken us. This way of defending the Abstraction Thesis has included an appeal to a difference between obstacles that deprive one of one's general capacities and of one's ability to conceive a plan to achieve a goal on the one hand and other sorts of obstacles, including determinism, on the other. Some opponents of the Abstraction Thesis will argue that the difference between the two sorts of obstacles is simply not relevant to deliberation.

Yet defenders of the Abstraction Thesis need not leave matters here. First, they can emphasize that even if the difference between the two kinds of obstacles is unimportant for *freedom*, it is, nevertheless, important for deliberation. Thus, we must resist the temptation to work backwards from intuitions about what freedom requires to a decision about what deliberation requires. Second, when the Abstraction Thesis is supplemented in this way with a distinction between different kinds of obstacles, it offers an alternative to the Indeterministic Thesis, and thereby provides a way of avoiding attributing outright inconsistency to deliberating determinists.³⁵ Whether or not the Abstraction Thesis can be supplemented in a convincing way, it is important to take a close look at the motivating idea behind it. It seems that the Abstraction Thesis is an attempt to capture a fundamental aspect of our conception of ourselves as deliberators. Thus, even if the particular attempt were to fail to convince, we still have reason to pursue its motivating idea. The suggestions in the next section attempt to capture that idea.

VI. Nexus Views

So a real opportunity is an occasion where a self-controller “faces”—is informed about—a situation in which the outcome of its subsequent “deliberation” will be a

decisive (as we say) factor. In such a situation more than one alternative is “possible” so far as the agent or self-controller is concerned; that is, the critical nexus passes through its deliberation. (Dennett 1984, 118).

The view contained in this passage is easy to overlook because it is often not clearly distinguished from one of the previous families of views. The basic idea is to make absolutely central the idea of deliberative efficacy, and suggest that alternative actions are genuine deliberative alternatives for an agent when she believes that only her own deliberation will determine which of the two (or more) alternatives is actualized. More formally,

(N) Rational deliberators must believe, in virtue of their nature as rational deliberators, that they have multiple alternatives from which to choose, where their deliberation is the critical nexus (or decisive factor) among those alternatives.

There is something very attractive about this idea. For example, when we turn to the two-door case, we can understand the idea that the person in the room simply does not see her deliberation as determining which of the doors is opened. And this seems a natural explanation of why one cannot deliberate in this case. But, as always, we need to look at the details.

Let us begin by taking a closer look at Dennett’s claim. He seems to equate the idea of “the critical nexus passing through deliberation” with the idea that more than one alternative is possible for the deliberator. But it isn’t at all obvious how these two ideas are connected. Perhaps the idea of efficacy is one thing, and the idea of alternatives another thing altogether.

It seems natural to say that deliberation is the critical nexus between, say, my going to dinner or a movie. At the same time, in order for the idea of a critical nexus to

explain deliberative failures, it must be the case that my deliberation is not seen as the nexus among *all* logically possible alternatives. For example, it cannot be that, as a deliberator, I see my deliberation as the nexus between my walking to dinner at a restaurant around the corner and my flying to the moon for dinner. But if determinism is true, and I can only do one thing (given the past and laws of nature), what is there to distinguish between the action I am determined not to take here on earth and my flying to the moon? Both are equally precluded by the actual past state of the world (and the laws of nature). Why does my deliberation get to be the critical nexus between my two earthly alternatives about which I deliberate, and not between an earthly alternative and going to the moon, about which I cannot deliberate?

Again, the Indeterministic Thesis has a natural way of distinguishing the cases: what matters is whether it is causally open to you to deliberate and decide and go to dinner or a movie. And if we do not assume the truth of determinism, it appears to be causally open to you to go to a movie, but not for you to go the moon. However, if we do assume causal determinism, then we cannot distinguish between alternatives that are genuine nodes on the nexus and those that are not. We cannot see deliberation as the decisive factor, or “critical nexus”.

As appealing as it might be at first glance, this reasoning is too hasty. It is possible to provide an answer, and, not surprisingly, doing so requires some development of the idea of a critical nexus. The motivating idea encapsulated by the nexus view is that deliberation is the “difference maker”; that is, your deliberation is what will explain why you do what you do, rather than something else. Crucially, this idea can be very naturally captured in ways that make no appeal to indeterminism.

To begin, we can learn a great deal from other contexts in which the notions of explanation and of difference-making arise. The first thing to note is that there are many such contexts, most notably in scientific explanation. It seems clear that many of our demands for explanation have the form: “why did X happen rather than Y?” Answers to these questions are commonly known as contrastive explanations, and these are pervasive in our everyday experiences.³⁶ We ask questions like, “why did Bush win the election rather than Dukakis?” and “why was the photon absorbed rather than transmitted?”³⁷ We suppose that there is an answer to each, an answer that explains why one thing happened rather than another. Interestingly, asking such questions does not presuppose the truth of indeterminism. (If anything, asking such questions would appear to presuppose the truth of *determinism*; it is *more* controversial that contrastive explanation is possible if both alternatives are undetermined than if they are determined.³⁸)

At the same time, it seems that certain demands for contrastive explanation are legitimate, while others are not. For example, it seems sensible to ask why Bush won the election rather than Dukakis, but not why Bush won the election rather than there never having been life on earth. In other words, some alternatives can participate together in genuine contrastive explanations, while some cannot. There is some controversy about how to distinguish the ones that can from the ones that cannot, and several criteria have been offered in the case of scientific explanation.³⁹ I discuss one in particular below, but it is important to note at the outset that, despite the controversy over the details, none of the main proposals on offer draws the distinction in terms of determined and undetermined alternatives.

My proposal is that when we deliberate, we take our deliberation to be the difference maker (or explanatory nexus) among the alternatives we consider.⁴⁰ Thus, we should understand “critical nexus” as “*explanatory nexus*”, that is, as what explains why we do one thing rather than another. Making this detail explicit, we get “the Explanatory Nexus Thesis”:

(EN) Rational deliberators must believe, in virtue of their nature as rational deliberators, that they have multiple alternatives from which to choose, where their deliberation is the *explanatory nexus* among those alternatives.

Fulfilling this condition does not mean that we rational deliberators have access to a clear criterion that distinguishes the scenarios for which our deliberation is the explanatory nexus and those for which it is not. Our notion of being a difference maker is probably quite unspecific, in fact. What we learn from discussions of contrastive scientific explanation is simply that a commitment to our deliberation being a difference-maker among a range of alternatives does not in turn require a commitment to indeterminism. And at the same time, we can see that there is room for the idea that our deliberation cannot be a difference-maker with respect to just any logically possible alternative, just as we find in the case of scientific explanation. This means that we have a model from scientific explanation that allows us to conceive of our deliberation as the difference-maker among the alternatives we consider in deliberation, and not among others. A commitment to this conception of our deliberation can then help us understand why, say, I can deliberate about whether to order an appetizer or a salad, while I cannot deliberate about whether or not to fly to the moon for dinner. The reason is that I conceive of my deliberation as capable of explaining why I order an appetizer instead of a salad, but not of why I go to a restaurant rather than the moon.

It will be useful to examine a particular suggestion about how to distinguish these sorts of cases in the context of scientific explanation. Eric Barnes suggests a criterion for evaluating “the sensibility of a why question.”⁴¹ To understand the criterion, we need just a bit of terminology. In a question of the form, “Why did P happen rather than Q?”, the “fact” is what actually occurs, represented by P, whereas the “foil” is an alternative that does not occur, represented by Q. Barnes’ proposal is that if the fact and foil can be viewed as culminating outcomes of some single type of natural causal process, then a question contrasting the fact and foil is sensible. If the fact and foil cannot be so viewed, then a question contrasting them is not sensible. In other words:

A class of propositions C is a contrast class just in case the propositions of C each describe culminating events of a single type of natural causal process.⁴²

Thus, “why did Lewis go to Oxford rather than Monash at time T?” is sensible, because both alternatives can be assumed to be possible outcomes of a single type of natural causal process (namely, deliberation), whereas, “why did Lewis go to Oxford rather than sneezing in a Monash museum shortly after T?” is not, because both alternatives are not assumed to be outcomes of a single type of natural causal process.

The question naturally arises: “what counts as ‘same type of natural causal process’?” To this, there are a variety of possible answers. Barnes considers two very general sorts: according to the first, there is some objective feature that distinguishes natural types from contrived ones, and, according to the second, there is not an objective feature of this kind, in which case the possibility of sensible contrastive explanations depends on our preferences “to think of the world in terms of certain causal processes rather than others.”⁴³ Fortunately, I do not believe it is necessary to decide between these for our purpose here, namely, that of recognizing a coherent model of contrastive

explanation that makes sense of our intuitions about cases without presupposing that being identified as a difference-maker entails that the alternatives in question are causally undetermined.⁴⁴ No matter how we resolve the question of whether natural process types are “objective” in some sense, the model of contrastive explanation on offer treats the cases in an intuitive way—when it comes to deliberation as explanation and (other) scientific explanation. At the same time, it does so without any commitment, explicit or implicit, to indeterminism.⁴⁵

An additional advantage for this suggestion is that it explains the appeal of other suggestions, such as the counterfactual belief constraints. Using counterfactuals is a well-known way of capturing explanatory claims, and it is easy to see how they might be used to try to cash out the idea of an explanatory nexus or difference-maker. However, seeing the Counterfactual Thesis as motivated by this independent idea of an explanatory nexus allows us to pursue the motivating idea while freeing us from the difficulties surrounding counterfactual claims. In a similar way, the Explanatory Nexus Thesis explains the appeal of the Abstraction Thesis. The motivating idea behind this latter view, too, is the idea that it is deliberation that is the decisive factor in determining one of a certain range of alternatives.

Equally importantly, the Indeterministic Thesis could itself be confused with the idea that we must believe our deliberation is a difference-maker among our deliberative alternatives. It might be seen as one way, but, as we have now seen, certainly not the only way, of capturing that idea.

VII. Conclusion

Each of the four families of suggested belief constraints on deliberation has something to offer. The explanatory nexus view, while providing a strong motivating idea behind the Counterfactual and Abstraction theses, is also a view worthy of development in other directions. Here I hope to have shown that there is a fruitful model for it in a kind of explanation that is both pervasive in our experience and central to our understanding of the world. While it may not account for all of the data that the Indeterministic Thesis does, it can go a long way in accounting for the central cases used to support the Indeterministic Thesis.

Notably, none of the belief constraints in the last four families considered requires a commitment, either implicit or explicit, to indeterminism, while each of them has the ability to account for at least some of the intuitions that the Indeterministic Thesis claims to explain. Perhaps no one of them can account for all of the data that the Indeterministic Thesis can. At the same time, even the Indeterministic Thesis may require supplementation in order to account for all deliberative failures.

There is also independent reason to resist the temptation to select a single simple rationalizing belief for deliberation. Given the complexity of the activity of deliberation, it should not be too surprising to find that a number of different commitments, perhaps operating in different situations, explain the possibility of deliberation. Take an activity that in some ways seems simpler—walking to the door. It might be that my walking to the door requires me to believe that the floor will not disappear under me (or at least that it requires my not believing that it will, or my not being certain that it will). But under other circumstances, perhaps I could consistently believe that the floor will disappear, as long as I also believe that gravity will temporarily be suspended at that moment. And we

can imagine a variety of other combinations of belief that would make my walking to the door possible.⁴⁶

The fact that it is not obvious just how “strong” or “weak” a belief constraint within a certain family should be is an interesting datum that also supports the idea that more than one belief (or lack thereof) can explain deliberative failure in different situations.⁴⁷ Perhaps, as in other cases in which we are trying to do something, how much we value the outcome can affect whether we are able even to try.⁴⁸ In sum, there is independent reason to think that a variety of beliefs could explain deliberative failures and successes in different circumstances. At the same time, there being a variety of beliefs that operate under different conditions is consistent with there being minimal belief constraints that obtain in all cases of deliberation.

Where does this leave us? It is true that providing alternative explanations for the data does not refute the Indeterministic Thesis. At the same time, since there is independent reason to reject the thesis (in the form of apparently rational and thoughtful deliberating determinists among others), the alternatives contribute to the case against it. To the extent that they are plausible in themselves, are rationalized by the nature of deliberation (at least in certain circumstances), and can account for the appeal of the Indeterministic Thesis, they constitute a very strong case. I believe that each of the four families of views discussed offers belief constraints that are as plausible as the Indeterministic Thesis, and that the explanatory nexus constraint in particular, as well as all collectively, have the resources to explain at least much of the appeal of the Indeterministic Thesis. Finally, when we focus on deliberation itself, there appears to be no clearer rationale for the Indeterministic Thesis than for any of the others. Even if

freedom were to require indeterminism, deliberation could have a point without it. It could be the difference-maker among a variety of salient alternatives, it could resolve our commitments in our own minds, and it could successfully result in our adoption of a decision on the basis of good reasons, our acting on that basis. Thus, there is very good reason to reject the Indeterministic Thesis, and to continue to pursue fruitful alternative ways of understanding our deliberative alternatives. The more of a positive picture of our deliberative alternatives we can construct in this way, the less hold the Indeterministic Thesis can have on us, and, in turn, the less motivation there is for libertarianism about freedom.

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² “Now I claim that we must necessarily attribute to every rational being who has a will also the idea of freedom, under which only can such a being act.” (Kant 1785/1981, GW 448).

³ I do not claim that this is a correct interpretation of Kant, but I focus on it here because it has been taken to be an attractive and influential claim in its own right.

⁴ Nelkin (2004).

⁵ This is taken from R. Taylor (1964).

⁶ Although it first appears that Aristotle is claiming that we cannot deliberate unless each of two alternatives *is* within our power, Aristotle qualifies his claim elsewhere so that he makes the weaker claim that we cannot deliberate unless we *believe* each of our deliberative alternatives is within our power. See, for example, Aristotle 1984b, 1941 [EE 1225b, 34-36] and 1984, 1942 [EE 1226a, 25-26]. Interpreters divide as to whether Aristotle here claims that deliberators are committed to causal indeterminism. For an interpretation on which Aristotle does make this claim, see Sorabji (1980), and for an interpretation on which Aristotle does not, see Fine (1981). I discuss these passages briefly in Nelkin (2004) notes 4 and 16.

⁷ For Van Inwagen, having two alternatives each within one’s power, together with plausible assumptions, entails the falsity of determinism. But one need not believe that determinism is false by believing that one has two alternatives each within one’s power. Nevertheless, if the inference follows from a few self-evident steps, then there is at least rational pressure to adopt the conclusion of indeterminism when one recognizes one’s commitment as a rational deliberator. This provides reason for saying that on this view, at least *reflective* deliberators are natural indeterminists.

⁸ See, for example, Reid (1788/1983, 344), Chisholm (1964/1982, 31), Campbell (1957, 158-179), and Taylor (1983, 23-50).

⁹ See, for some examples of this strategy, Bok (1998), Clarke (1992), Fischer (forthcoming), Kapitan (1986), and Pettit (1989).

¹⁰ Some advocates of alternative interpretations are explicit about not taking a single condition to be sufficient. Kapitan (1986) is an admirable example.

¹¹ See Thomas (unpublished).

¹² Van Inwagen (1983, 154).

¹³ One might argue that the concept of “indeterminism” does not appear in the content of (I), and so deliberators do not necessarily have an explicit commitment to indeterminism if (I) is true. While this might very well be true, I take it that (I) is usually understood in such a way that one’s being able to do more than one mutually incompatible thing entails (with the help of a few easy inferences) indeterminism. Thus, at least determinists who have been made aware of the implications of the beliefs they have in virtue of being deliberators would be in danger of inconsistency. Further, insofar as they are *rational*, they would be under pressure to recognize the implications of their beliefs.

¹⁴ Other sorts of purported counterexamples to (I) can be treated in the same way. For a survey and criticism of other attempts at providing counterexamples to (I), see Coffman and Warfield (2005). While I am unable to discuss their paper in detail here, I hope to have the opportunity to do so in the future. For brief reflections, see notes 25 and 32 below.

¹⁵ See Nelkin (2004).

¹⁶ See Pettit (1989), for example, for this suggestion.

¹⁷ Coffman and Warfield (2005) criticize this variant on other grounds, namely, that it is false (37-38).

¹⁸ “He has not yet decided what to do” entails “He does not yet know what he will do”. (Hampshire and Hart (1958)); “The concept of a decision does not allow the possibility of a person’s knowing what his decision will be before he makes it.” (Ginet (1962)); “One cannot deliberate about what he is going to do, even though this may be something that is up to him, at the same time, knowing what he is going to do.” (Taylor (1964)). See also Dennett (1984, 113), Pereboom (1995, 32-33), and Fischer (forthcoming) for example.

¹⁹ Clarke (1992, 108). For other counterexamples, see Canfield (1962) and Stocker (1968).

²⁰ In correspondence. For a different attempt to improve on (K), see Pereboom (2001) which appeals to a “doxastic” condition initially presented by Kapitan (1986); call it “B” for “Belief”: (B) an agent presumes that his \emptyset ing is an open alternative for him *only if* he presumes that if S is any set of his beliefs then his \emptyset -ing is contingent relative to S. (240). Kapitan adopts this condition after rejecting something like (K), on the basis of the following example. We can imagine that Kapitan’s flying to Copenhagen tomorrow is actually contingent relative to what he knows, because some unforeseen emergency will call him to Copenhagen. Yet he cannot deliberate about doing so. Kapitan concludes that what is preventing the deliberation in this case is that he believes he will not fly to Copenhagen tomorrow. While I think that Kapitan is right to raise questions about (K), the Copenhagen example does not inevitably lead us to (B). Further, there is good reason to think (B) is false. For example, consider again the case in which your friend calls while you are engaged in a long anticipated activity. You might believe that you will talk to your friend in the end (and might even have excellent evidence for that conclusion), but it seems clear that you can deliberate about whether to do so.

²¹ In correspondence, Pereboom suggests that (S) is the condition of openness, while additional conditions such as the causal efficacy of deliberation can help account for the two-door case. See also Kapitan (1986) who advocates both an assumption of contingency (understood as doxastic contingency, a cousin of (S) as described in note 20 above) and a separate assumption of efficacy (understood along the lines of the conditional analyses conditions discussed in the next section).

²² One might try to build this idea of efficacy into an epistemic version as follows:

(S') In order to deliberate, the agent must believe that for some incompatible actions, A and B, deciding to A *on the basis of one's deliberation* and deciding to B *on the basis of one's deliberation* are both possible in the relevant epistemic sense (namely, where both alternatives are each consistent with what the agent regards as settled, that is, consistency with any proposition about which she has no doubts, and with any proposition about which she disregards any doubts she might have for the purposes of deliberation in the present context).

The basic idea is that the alternatives that must be epistemically open include my decision's being connected to my deliberation in the right way. Now this incorporates an idea of deliberative efficacy. But there is reason to think that (S') does not fully capture the notion of deliberative efficacy. Suppose that the case is the same as before, but although I believe that the neuroscientist is planning to intervene in my voting, I also know that there is a significant chance that he will be waylaid. Is having a doubt about whether I could decide on the basis of deliberation enough to allow for genuine deliberation about what to decide here? Must I have the further independent belief that my deliberation *will* be efficacious? Or at least lack the belief that it won't? If I can't deliberate about what to decide even in this revised voting case, despite meeting the condition, (S'), then it seems that an additional condition must be met in order to have genuine deliberative alternatives.

²³ We could try to add, as we did in note 22, a clause incorporating decisional efficacy:

(S'') In order to deliberate, the agent must believe that for some incompatible actions A and B, deciding to A *and doing A* on the basis of one's deliberation and deciding to B *and doing B* on the basis of one's deliberation are both possible in the relevant epistemic sense (namely, where both alternatives are each consistent with what the agent regards as settled, that is, consistent with any proposition about which she has no doubts, and with any proposition about which she disregards any doubts she might have for the purposes of deliberation in the present context).

But the suggestion will not succeed in explaining our reaction to the 2-door case. For it does not seem inconsistent with propositions about which I disregard doubts that I deliberate and decide to open door A on the basis of my deliberation. And the same goes for deliberating and deciding to open door B. Thus, if this epistemic version provided a sufficient condition for deliberation, deciding to open door A and deciding to open door

B count as deliberative alternatives. But intuitively it seems that they are not, and precisely for that reason, I cannot deliberate in the case.

²⁴ Further questions might be raised here. For example, suppose that one believes that getting out of bed, say, is causally open—that is, it is not causally necessitated that one won't get out of bed, and yet one also believes that the odds of one's getting out of bed are .01. Do beliefs about one's chances make a difference to whether one can deliberate? If one is tempted by the indeterministic belief constraint, should one also be tempted by constraints concerning probabilities? Further, imagine a situation in which someone believes that, in a sense, everything is causally open, because God could reset the universe in any way at any time. Presumably, that would not make everything a deliberative alternative. So it would seem that even for one who is tempted by the indeterministic belief constraint, more would be needed to explain failures of deliberation.

²⁵ Coffman and Warfield (2005) offer a distinct objection to any epistemic belief constraint on deliberation, namely, that it requires too much in the way of cognitive sophistication. For example, they point out that it would seem to require that deliberators have the concept of consistency and also have concepts of their own epistemic states, while deliberation itself requires no such conceptual capacities. One line of response would point to the sophistication required to be a deliberator in the first place, and conclude that whatever level of sophistication is required for deliberation itself is more than adequate for the concepts of consistency and epistemic states. Coffman and Warfield would reject this, however, since they insist on a fairly “narrow” construal of deliberation as the trying to choose what to do among an incompatible set of actions, and doing so after reasons have been weighed and evaluated (28). On the basis of the narrowness of their construal of deliberation, they argue that non-human animals and other hypothetical beings without such sophistication could in principle deliberate. While I believe that Coffman and Warfield are right to press discussants of these issues to be clear about the nature of deliberation, I also believe that whatever its nature, it must require a fair amount of sophistication and perhaps more that Coffman and Warfield would admit. One reason is that Coffman and Warfield, like many other parties to the debate, favor an alternative belief constraint that they believe captures our sense of freedom. On my understanding of the significance of the thesis that we have a sense of our own freedom, it is not a sense of ourselves that we share with (most) non-human animals. I have not attempted to resolve the question of how much cognitive sophistication is required to be a deliberator in the relevant sense; I hope only to have sketched in outline one line of reply to Coffman and Warfield's objection.

²⁶ See, for example, Chisholm (1964/1982, 26-27).

²⁷ See, for example, Kapitan (1986, 234), Bok (1998, 114), and Fischer (forthcoming) for related suggestions. For a variant, see Clarke (1992, 104): In order to deliberate, one must believe that if one so decides, one *can* A (B). As we will see below, this is only one part of Clarke's suggestion, and his entire proposal is tentative in the sense that he thinks it is right, *if* there are any positive attitude constraints on deliberation that concern abilities at all.

Velleman (1989) suggests that our feeling of freedom and of the openness of the future is the belief that, within a certain range, whatever we decide to do, we will do.

Since decisions are, in Velleman's view, self-fulfilling predictions, this means that within a range we (rightly) take it that whatever we predict will come true. While Velleman calls this experience of openness an experience of "epistemic freedom", I believe that it bears a closer resemblance to the belief captured in the conditional analyses views than to what I call the "epistemic" version of Deliberative Alternatives. One major difference between Velleman's view and the one discussed in the text is Velleman's claim that decisions are self-fulfilling predictions.

²⁸ As Kapitan (1986), Clarke (1992), and Bok (1998) have pointed out.

²⁹ Clarke (1992, 104). Clarke (2003) affirms this position, writing that beliefs of this conditional kind suffice for deliberation. He adds, however, that the impression of the future being open in a way inconsistent with determinism is "so deeply a part of our nature, or our second nature, that it seems unlikely that, even with diligent practice, we could shake it on a consistent basis." (9)

³⁰ One might try a more cautious "negative version of (CF)", according to which what is necessary is not that one has the attitudes described in clauses (i)-(iii), but rather that one lacks attitudes to the contrary. However, a negative version will not by itself explain our deliberative failure in the 2-door case. We might also wonder whether a probabilistic version of (CF') is more plausible, as is entertained by Kapitan (1986). Would it be sufficient to believe that were you to decide to perform action A you *probably* would A, and that were you to decide to perform action B you *probably* would B? In my view, it is far from obvious how a defender of a conditional analysis belief constraint should answer this question.

³¹ One might try to combine this suggestion with some version of the epistemic belief constraint. Interestingly, Clarke, who offers what is perhaps the most subtle version of a counterfactual account, rejects a variety of versions of the epistemic belief constraint. Bok accepts an epistemic belief constraint in the form of (K), and seems to suggest at one point that it entails (CF): "But if it is in principle impossible for an agent to know, before making a choice, what she will choose to do, then no conceivable correction of her beliefs could allow her to narrow the set of actions that she regards as alternatives beyond those that she would perform if she chose to perform them." (108). I do not believe this inference is justified. For even if I cannot know whether I will do A or B, I could consistently rule out C as an alternative, even where I believe that I would do C were I to choose to do C. Further, I have offered reasons for thinking that (K) is not correct as it stands. Setting these worries aside, though, the idea of recognizing more than one type of belief constraint on deliberation that can explain deliberative failures strikes me as a very fruitful step in the right direction. As noted, Kapitan (1986) takes this step quite explicitly. Fischer (forthcoming) also accepts both an epistemic condition and a counterfactual one. I return to this general strategy in section VII.

³² See Coffman and Warfield (2005) for an objection to a conditional analysis belief constraint similar in its general strategy to the one they offer for epistemic belief constraints. They claim that deliberation itself does not require the cognitive sophistication that is required by the counterfactual belief constraints. Therefore, such constraints, which require facility with counterfactual reasoning, must not apply to deliberators. Here again, a possible reply would begin with the premise that deliberation itself is sufficiently cognitively sophisticated that at least a crude understanding of

counterfactuals (of the form, “if I were to do x, then y”) should be expected of deliberators.

³³ This is derived from Thomas (unpublished): “When a deliberating determinist believes that alternative actions A and B are possible, then, she believes that nothing independent of the process of deliberation makes choosing or doing A impossible and nothing independent of deliberation makes choosing or doing B impossible.” (unpublished, 9). While I think this view can be found in various places (including the work of Daniel Dennett (1984) and Hilary Bok (1998), George Thomas is one of the few who isolate it and distinguish it from the other sorts of criteria. While Bok offers a variety of suggestions, she seems also to endorse the abstraction view when she writes: “Compatibilists must therefore explain why the conception of possibility that is relevant to freedom of the will should define our possibilities in abstraction from any information at all; why it should abstract, in particular, from information about the course of deliberation and the outcome of our choices, but not from information about any other kind of event...” (1998, 103).

³⁴ Compare Clarke (1992, 109).

³⁵ In Nelkin (in-preparation), I explore another way of supporting and supplementing the Abstraction Thesis, namely, by appealing to the literature concerning belief constraints on trying, acting intentionally, and intending. For example, one plausible and relatively uncontroversial belief constraint on all three of these activities is that one see one’s action as of a kind designed to bring about one’s end (whether or not one also believes that it is possible to do so). See Ludwig (1992). A similar belief constraint on deliberation would seem plausible as well, especially since forming and acting on intentions is part of the aim of deliberation. In particular, it is plausible one cannot deliberate about things that one cannot conceive of a plan for achieving. This constraint would help account for the deliberative failure in the case of flying to the moon described above.

³⁶ See, for example, Van Frassen (1980).

³⁷ Barnes (1993, 36) and Hitchcock (1999, 586) respectively.

³⁸ See Lewis (1986/1993, 197-98) for a defense of the claim that contrastive why-questions cannot be answered in the indeterministic case. See Hitchcock (1999) and Percival (2000) for responses. Nagel (1986) also suggests that contrastive why-questions cannot be answered in the indeterministic case and concludes that this is a special problem for those who hold libertarian views of free will. He suggests that in order to be free, our actions must be undetermined, but, at the same time, we must be able to give contrastive explanations of why we adopt certain reasons for doing what we actually do rather than reasons for doing otherwise. See Clarke (1996) for one response to Nagel.

³⁹ See Lipton (1990/1993, especially 217-18), for example. Also, see Barnes (1993) for a helpful survey of several suggested criteria, in addition to his own favored one, which I discuss below.

⁴⁰ This might be overstated. More cautious formulations include the following: As deliberators, we must take it that our deliberation *can* be the difference maker, or as deliberators, we must take it that that our deliberation is the kind of thing that could be the difference maker.

⁴¹ Barnes (1993, 50).

⁴² Barnes (1993, 50).

⁴³ Barnes (1993, 50).

⁴⁴ While I leave this and other deep and important questions unaddressed here, I believe that answering them has interesting implications for our commitments as deliberators, and I explore these in Nelkin (in-preparation).

⁴⁵ While the account in the text is of contrastive explanation, there have been several recent attempts to construe causation itself as a contrastive relation (see, for example, Maslen (2004), Northcott (in preparation), Schaffer (forthcoming) and Woodward (2003)). Parallel issues arise for this sort of account, including what constraints there are on legitimate contrasts. See, for example, Northcott (in preparation).

⁴⁶ When it comes to purposeful, goal-directed activity, there may be commitments that must be present in every instance of that kind of activity, such as commitment to one's having a certain purpose or goal. Applied to rational deliberation, this means that one must have a commitment to one's goal in deliberating. Just what that is, in the case of rational deliberation is a question I discuss in some detail in Nelkin (2004).

⁴⁷ Recall that there are variations of each. How strong should the epistemic component be in the epistemic versions? Should the counterfactual belief constraints be understood probabilistically?

⁴⁸ See, for example, Ludwig (1992). In his view, we can try to do something we believe impossible, as long we see our action as designed to meet our end and we attach some value to that end.