"Deliberation as Inquiry: Aristotle's Alternative to the Presumption of Open Alternatives"

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Would it be rational to deliberate if we believed in determinism? An influential argument suggests that deliberation is rational only if we do not believe in determinism. Common to all versions of determinism is the implication that there are no alternatives to the way the world will actually turn out, antecedent conditions being what they are. If we believe that determinism is true, we therefore believe that there is only one course of action that is actually open to us at any time. It would seem, then, that believing in determinism undermines our ability to deliberate rationally and to think of ourselves as rational agents. As Peter van Inwagen illustrates the point, deliberating in light of a commitment to determinism is like deliberating over which of two doors by which to leave a room when one knows that one is locked. I can of course dart across the room and throw myself against one of them, but this is random guessing, not deliberation. For as van Inwagen sees it, “to deliberate is to try to
decide between various incompatible courses of action,” and this presupposes that we believe of each of the options under consideration that it is actually open to us.¹

It is not frequently noted that the roots of deliberation incompatibilism run deep. In the late second and early third centuries AD, the Aristotle commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias defended a view close to van Inwagen’s in his attempt to refute Stoic universal fate determinism. In the treatise De fato, Alexander maintains that deliberation

is carried out on the assumption that we have the power also to do the opposite of what we in fact do [hôs exousian echonti tou prattein kai ta antikeimena] . . . . For concerning each of the things that fall under the deliberation the deliberator’s enquiry is “whether this or the opposite should be done by me”—even if he says that all things come to be in accordance with fate. (De fato 12, 180.20–23)²

To Alexander’s mind, determinists simply cannot live their determinism—try as they might. He is convinced that Aristotle’s theory of deliberation (bouleusis) shows us why.³ Contemporary philosophers follow in Alexander’s footsteps when they attribute the comparative model of deliberation underlying Alexander’s position to Aristotle. In their view, deliberation essentially consists in weighing incompatible courses of action. This activity is rational only if we believe that we have the power also to do the opposite of what we in fact do.⁴


2. Translations from Alexander of Aphrodisias are based on Robert Sharples, Alexander of Aphrodisias On Fate (London: Duckworth, 1983). I have occasionally modified Sharples’s translation, for instance rendering ‘to eph’ hēmin’ as ‘what is up to us’ rather than ‘responsibility’. Aristotle’s notion of what is up to us has both a past-directed and a future-directed sense, and Sharples’s ‘responsibility’ captures the latter poorly.

3. In the dedicatory preface to De fato (164.3–165.13), Alexander states that “this book contains the opinion concerning fate and what is up to us held by Aristotle, of whose philosophical teaching I am the principal exponent.” His discussion of deliberation in De fato 11–12 proceeds from a paraphrase of Aristotle’s description of the objects of deliberation in Nicomachean Ethics 3, 1112a23–33 (178.28–179.5). See also his Ethica problemata 160.19–21.

Alexander’s claim notwithstanding, at least one prominent Aristotle scholar has failed to discern anything like Alexander’s comparative model in Aristotle’s model of deliberation. In Aristotle’s Ethical Theory, W. F. R. Hardie expends a fair amount of energy in the chapter “Choice and the Origination of Action” in an effort to establish what, exactly, Aristotle takes deliberation to be. On the standard model, deliberation consists in comparing alternatives with a view to making a decision. But Hardie struggles to find evidence in Aristotle’s discussion of deliberation in Nicomachean Ethics (EN) 3, 3 that making a decision essentially involves making a choice between alternatives. He first considers the proposal that the comparison is implicit rather than explicit: “in deliberation as described by Aristotle, the agent need not envisage alternative means for reaching [his] end. Thus it would seem that, in his choice [prohairesis] of one thing in preference to others, the rejection of alternatives may be unconscious.” Like Ross, Hardie thinks that Aristotle’s quasi-etymological explanation of prohairesis as ‘pro heterôn haireson’ (EN 3, 2,1112a17) entails that the action we desire as a result of deliberation is

6. Hardie leaves Aristotle’s term ‘prohairesis’ transliterated; I will use ‘decision’. The term is notoriously difficult to translate. David Charles follows Ross and renders ‘prohairesis’ as ‘preferential choice’ in his Aristotle’s Philosophy of Action (London: Duckworth, 1984). Anthony Kenny, Aristotle’s Theory of the Will (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979) reverts to ‘purposive choice’ or simply ‘choice’. Kenny apologetically defends his translation in a note: “‘Purposive choice’ seems to me the least misleading translation of prohairesis. Its clumsiness reflects the fact that no natural English concept corresponds to Aristotle’s. I shall sometimes abbreviate to ‘purpose’ or ‘choice’” (69). Sarah Broadie, Ethics with Aristotle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), settles for ‘rational choice’ (78), while Richard Sorabji suggests ‘deliberate choice’ in Necessity, Cause and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle’s Theory (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980). The translations ‘preferential choice’ or ‘purposive choice’ strike me as unfortunate, insofar as both foreclose the question of what the force of ‘pro’ really is by narrowing down the range of available interpretations to one. ‘Rational choice’ resonates too much with the contemporary ‘rational choice theory’, which Aristotle’s theory certainly is not. ‘Deliberate choice’ is better, especially since Aristotle defines prohairesis as ‘orexis bouleutike’ (1113a11), but the translation mutes many of Aristotle’s observations in the sections on decision and deliberation (EN 3, 2 and 3). T. H. Irwin uses the neutral ‘decision’ in his translation of the Nicomachean Ethics and is followed by Sarah Broadie and Christopher Rowe, Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). In The Development of Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Irwin abandons ‘decision’ for ‘election’, following the Latin translation, but he gives no rationale for the change. The fact that both Irwin and Broadie keep changing their mind about the appropriate translation is testament to the trickiness of the term.
chosen “in preference to” or “over” alternative courses of action. 8 He rejects the proposal of Joachim, 9 followed by Gauthier and Jolif, 10 that ‘pro’ has temporal force. 11 By elimination, Hardie infers that Aristotle must have thought that decision requires comparison of alternatives—even if the comparison happens “unconsciously.”

Still, he finds this hard to square with Aristotle’s description of deliberation. For on Aristotle’s model, deliberation “is indeed addressed to the question, not whether to seek a certain end, but how to achieve it.” 12 “Deliberation, according to Aristotle’s account in [EN] III, 3, is a process of thinking, comparable with analysis in mathematics, which starts from a desired end and works back to the discovery of a means by which it can be achieved. Hence, in the words of the [Eudemian Ethics], prohairesis is ‘of something and for the sake of something’ (B, II, 2, 1227b 36–7; 1228a2–3)” (Hardie, Aristotle’s Ethical Theory, 162). If the aim of deliberation is to trace the principle of the act “back to us,” and in particular to an act that we can do (EN 3, 3, 1112a31–32), and the deliberator’s thought process is akin to the geometer’s analysis of a diagram (EN 3, 3, 1112b21–22), where does comparison enter the picture? And if comparison need not enter the picture at all in order for a deliberative process to be complete, why should we believe that Aristotelian deliberation issues in a “preferential choice”? Hardie’s best explanation is that, “as one acting with care and deliberation, [the agent] will be aware that, in adopting the means to his desired end, he is rejecting other steps which would lead to other ends” (Hardie, Aristotle’s Ethical Theory, 168). But this

8. W. D. Ross, Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), note ad 1111b5: “the etymological meaning is ‘preferential choice’.”


11. Though Joachim’s proposal is as plausible as Ross’s on linguistic grounds, the temporal reading leaves Aristotle stating the obvious, namely, that the adoption of the means comes before the attainment of the end, and we don’t need etymology to prove that. Irwin follows Joachim and Gauthier and Jolif in his comment ad loc., like Gauthier and Jolif taking Aristotle’s prior remark that “what is decided is what has been previously deliberated (to probelouleumenon)” to support the temporal reading. This is not the only way to interpret Aristotle’s remark, however. As I argue below, the temporal and preferential alternatives are not exhaustive. In addition to these, ‘pro’ may connote that we deliberate for the sake of some end, just as we choose an act for the sake of an end that we have laid down.

remark highlights the strain that adopting Ross’s ‘preferential’ reading of ‘pro’ places on Hardie’s account of Aristotelian deliberation. If Hardie is right, Aristotle wishes to emphasize that we deliberate and decide between alternatives, not by carefully weighing one course of action against another in light of some end that we have in fact adopted, but by comparing the act we decide to do to an act that we would have decided to do had our end been different. This, I take it, is not how we normally conceive of deliberation. Nor does it seem to capture what we have in mind when we think that deliberation essentially involves comparing alternative means to the same end. The charitable thing to say is that Hardie ends his discussion in puzzlement.

I shall argue that Hardie is puzzled because the model of deliberation he wants to attribute to Aristotle is nowhere to be found in the text he analyzes (EN 3, 3). Nor, I shall hold, can the model find support in Aristotle’s model of good deliberation (euboulia) in EN 6. Aristotle’s account of excellence of deliberation and decision is not an account of how we come to prefer one act over another, quite simply because Aristotle does not take comparison to be required for deliberation. As a consequence, he does not hold that we must believe that there are at least two courses of action available to us in order to deliberate rationally.

But this invites the question: where did the incompatibilist interpretation come from? The aim of the present study is to reexamine Aristotle’s theory of deliberation and to explain how deliberation incompatibilism arose in the late second or early third century AD through Alexander’s influential but creative appropriation of Aristotle’s theory. Alexander’s conception of deliberation as a process that involves the weighing of alternate courses of action was later adopted by Thomas Aquinas, who makes the comparison (collatio) of alternatives an integral part of deliberation in his defense of Aristotle in the Summa (ST 1a q83 a1).13 The view that deliberation essentially involves weighing of alterna-

13. Aquinas explicitly treats this comparison as a comparison between alternate courses of action in ST 1a q83 a1. He writes, “Human beings have free choice [liberum arbitrium]: otherwise counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would be in vain. In order to make this evident, we must observe that some things act without judgment [judicium]; as a stone moves downwards; and in like manner all things which lack knowledge. And some act from judgment, but not a free judgment; as brute animals. For the sheep, seeing the wolf, judges it a thing to be shunned, from a natural and not a free judgment, because it judges, not from comparison [non ex collatione], but from natural instinct. And the same thing is to be said of any judgment of brute animals. But a human being acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive
tives is now ubiquitous. Both inside and outside Aristotle scholarship, it is treated as a starting point of discussion rather than a view in need of argument in its own right.14 Despite the fact that scholars reflexively describe Aristotelian deliberation as a process of weighing alternate courses of action, a closer examination reveals that there is scant evidence to support this model in Aristotle’s discussion of deliberation in the *Ethics*. Nor can the model find support in Aristotle’s description of deliberation elsewhere in the corpus.15 Such an absence of evidence in favor of the comparative model is particularly evident in Aquinas, who distinguishes between *electio* (his translation of *prohairesis*) and *consensus* (the act by which we approve of a course of action as conducive to our end), and argues that when we approve of only one course of action as conducive to our end, consent and election do not differ in reality, but only in definition, “and so we call it consent insofar as we approve of doing that thing, but election insofar as we prefer it to those that we do not approve of.” Translation based on The *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, literally translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New Impression (London: Burns Oats & Washbourne, 1920). For a discussion of deliberation, consent, and election in Aquinas, see Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. 1, sec. 252, 459–60. For a discussion of Aquinas’s reading of Aristotle’s theory of deliberation that does not address the provenance of his claim about comparison (*collatio*), see Terence Irwin, “The Scope of Deliberation: A Conflict in Aquinas,” *Review of Metaphysics* 44, no. 1 (1990): 21–42. It is contested whether Aquinas was an incompatibilist, and if so, what kind. Eleonore Stump defends an incompatibilist reading in “Aquinas’s Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will,” *Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997): 576–97. Irwin expresses reservations in *The Development of Ethics*, vol. 1, sec. 270, 491.

14. For explicit endorsements of the comparative model of deliberation, see van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 65; Michael Bratman, “Practical Reasoning and Acceptance in a Context,” in his *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16; Tomis Kapitan, “Deliberation and the Presumption of Open Alternatives,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 36, no. 14 (1986): 230; Derk Pereboom, “A Compatibilist Account of the Epistemic Conditions on Rational Deliberation,” *Journal of Ethics* 12, no. 3–4 (2008): 291. A particularly clear elaboration of the comparative model can be found in the work of Storrs McCall, “How to Make a Decision,” www.mcgill.ca/philosophy/faculty/mccall/decision. McCall maintains that Aristotle divides the process of deliberation (*bouleusis*) into three stages, *choice-set formation*, *evaluation*, and *choice*, but McCall ultimately identifies deliberation with weighing options. It follows that deliberation is impossible where the choice set is empty or has only one member. If we instead treat the heuristic process that McCall calls “choice-set formation” as deliberative in its own right, we may deliberate even before discovering that the choice set is empty or that it has only one member.

15. Aristotle’s account of deliberation in the *Eudemian Ethics* 2, 10 does not differ substantially from that of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 3, 3, and so I shall mainly confine my discussion to the latter. I will quote the translation of T. H. Irwin, *Aristotle*: 388
of a standard model of deliberation may perhaps be deemed inconstant, but I will show how Aristotle in fact presents a clear alternative to the standard model of deliberation that forms the point of departure for almost all discussion of deliberation today.

Much has been written about Alexander’s libertarian account of human responsibility and its tenuous relationship to Aristotle’s account of the voluntary, the involuntary, and decision in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 3. Much less—in fact next to nothing—has been written about Alexander’s defense of deliberation incompatibilism, its relationship to contemporary defenses of the same view, and its putative Aristotelian origins. Though scholarly consensus nowadays favors the view that Aristotle’s theory of moral responsibility does not rely on libertarian assumptions (*pace* Alexander), much work still remains to be done to show that Aristotle’s theory of deliberation does not entail incompatibilism. If Aristotle treats the preconditions of rational deliberation along Alexander’s and van Inwagen’s lines, then we will be forced to conclude that he is, after all, a libertarian, even if we find reasons to reject this inference in the case of moral responsibility. But I shall argue that he does not, and that revisiting his theory of deliberation can provide a valuable corrective to

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assumptions that are taken for granted in the contemporary debate between deliberation compatibilists and deliberation incompatibilists.

**Deliberation Incompatibilism and Compatibilism**

Contemporary deliberation compatibilists (inter alios Tomis Kapitan, Derk Pereboom, and Philip Pettit) are all prepared to grant that in order to deliberate rationally, we must presume that more than one alternative course of action is open to us. Their disagreement with deliberation incompatibilists is not over whether we should accept the presumption of open alternatives as a constraint on the rationality of deliberation; their disagreement concerns how we should cash out the presumption—as a belief in the availability of each option under consideration or as a presumption that each option under consideration isn’t closed.\(^{18}\) Aristotle’s account of deliberation as a process of inquiry (ζήτησις, *EN* 3, 1112b21–23) reveals that he fails to share the belief that the presumption of open alternatives is a constraint on the rationality of deliberation. To Aristotle’s mind, it is possible to deliberate rationally about what to do even without presuming that there is more than one alternative available.

Before I expand and defend my interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of deliberation, it will be helpful to define deliberation incompatibilism and deliberation compatibilism more precisely. In “A Compatibilist Account of the Epistemic Conditions on Rational Deliberation,” Derk Pereboom defines deliberation incompatibilism as the view that

S’s deliberating and being rational is incompatible with S’s believing that her actions are causally determined (by causal antecedents beyond her control).

By contrast, he defines deliberation compatibilism as the view that

S’s deliberating and being rational is compatible with S’s believing that her actions are causally determined (by causal antecedents beyond her control).\textsuperscript{19}

Pereboom’s definitions exclusively concern the compatibility of causal determinism and rational deliberation, and therefore have limited application. But his definitions may easily be modified to include logical versions of determinism, or versions of determinism that sidestep the notion of causality altogether by replacing reference to ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ with talk of ‘antecedent conditions’ and ‘consequences’. What matters for the rationality of deliberation is, ultimately, whether someone who believes that everything that happens has sufficient conditions for its coming to be may still deliberate rationally without compromising his or her determinism, not the exact nature of these conditions. These considerations recommend two modified, inclusive versions of Pereboom’s definitions, versions that I will presuppose throughout the article.

Deliberation Incompatibilism (inclusive definition): S’s deliberating and being rational is incompatible with S’s believing that her actions have sufficient antecedent conditions for their coming to be (conditions that are beyond her control).

Deliberation Compatibilism (inclusive definition): S’s deliberating and being rational is compatible with S’s believing that her actions have sufficient antecedent conditions for their coming to be (conditions that are beyond her control).

My inclusive definitions of deliberation incompatibilism and compatibilism omit any reference to the historically volatile concept of a “cause.” As is well known, different ancient schools adhered to different theories of causality, and their theories in turn diverge from contemporary accounts of causal relations.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, many fatalists both then and now derive their conclusions not from physical premises but from premises based on logical principles; witness the role played by the Principle of Bivalence in ancient and modern arguments from past truth to necessity.\textsuperscript{21} The structure of arguments for or against deliberation

\textsuperscript{19} Pereboom, “A Compatibilist Account,” 288.


\textsuperscript{21} For the ancient discussion of fatalism, see especially Aristotle’s De interpretatione 9 and Cicero’s De fato 17–22. For a modern revival of fatalism, see the work of Richard Taylor.
incompatibilism seems neutral on these issues, however. It is hard to find any sharp lines drawn between different ways to support the contention that everything that happens has sufficient antecedent conditions in the ancient literature, and insofar as this, ultimately, is the contention at the heart of the contemporary debate between deliberation compatibilists and incompatibilists, I shall presuppose the inclusive definitions throughout.

Deliberation incompatibilists typically invoke some future-directed version of the Principle of Alternate Possibilities in support of their view that belief in determinism undermines rational agency. While the Principle of Alternate Possibilities in its canonical form articulates conditions for responsibility for past acts, we may capture the idea behind van Inwagen’s deliberation incompatibilism by articulating a future-directed Principle of Alternate Possibilities that applies specifically to deliberation:

PAP Deliberation: I can deliberate rationally only if, for some number of options $\geq 2$, I believe that each of the options under consideration is open to me.

Indeed, van Inwagen states that “all philosophers who have thought about deliberation agree on one point: one cannot deliberate about whether to perform a certain act unless one believes that it is possible for one to perform it” (An Essay on Free Will, 154). If I believe that determinism is true, I believe that at any time, only one course of action is open to me. But if I deliberate about what to do, then my deliberating activity manifests a belief that there is more than one possibility open to me. These beliefs are incompatible, so deliberation is only rational if we do not believe in determinism. As van Inwagen puts it, “anyone who denies the existence of free will must, inevitably, contradict himself with monotonous regularity” (An Essay on Free Will, 160). Every deliberate word he utters and every deliberate act he undertakes betrays his belief in an open future.

We may think of the future as open as far as we know, however, without committing ourselves to indeterminism. There’s a difference between recognizing the epistemic possibility that I may do A or that I may do B, and recognizing the metaphysical possibility that both acts are open to me, all things being equal.22 If we recognize the difference be-

tween epistemic and metaphysical possibility, it will be easier to show that van Inwagen’s explanation of the presumption of open alternatives places too strong a requirement on the epistemic commitments of the rationally deliberating agent. Van Inwagen’s argument for deliberation incompatibilism has been criticized by Philip Pettit, who maintains that the rationality of deliberation does not hinge on a belief in the availability of more than one course of action. Rather, as Pettit has urged, what is required for rational deliberation is that we do not believe of any of the options under consideration that it is impossible. Pettit concedes that we deliberate rationally only if we presume that there are open alternatives, but the presumption of open alternatives does not force us to accept PAP deliberation, for we may rationally consider various incompatible courses of action as long as we fail to believe that any of them is blocked. With Pettit, we can formulate van Inwagen’s principle of rational deliberation symbolically to better appreciate the difference between the two ways of cashing out the presumption of open alternatives. Let the options for action be described as ‘O1, O2 . . . On’, where each option is a proposition of the form ‘I do A’. Let ‘B’ stand for ‘I believe’. Van Inwagen holds that for any option Oi and for any world where I deliberate rationally about Oi, at that world, the following principle of belief is true:

B Poss Oi; i.e., B Not Nec Not Oi

Pettit objects that van Inwagen has confused this principle with one that differs only in the placement of the negation. For in order to deliberate rationally, I need not believe that any of the options under consideration is possible for me. Instead, for any option Oi I must fail to believe that it is necessarily the case that not Oi; in other words, I must fail to believe that the negation of Oi is necessary:

B Poss Oi; i.e., B Not Nec Not Oi

Philosophy 29, no 1 (2005): 27. The difference between epistemic possibility (possibility for all we know) and metaphysical possibility (“real” possibility) can be brought out by considering Goldbach’s conjecture, the conjecture that every even integer greater than two can be expressed as the sum of two primes. There is as yet no proof of the conjecture, and a skilled mathematician may therefore state that it is possible that the conjecture is true, and it is possible that it is false. Still, she may insist, without contradicting herself, that if the conjecture is true, then it is necessarily true (it could not possibly be false), and if it is false, then it is necessarily false (it could not possibly be true). In the first case, she is talking about possibility for all she knows (epistemic possibility), in the second she is talking about real possibility (metaphysical possibility). The example is from Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity, rev. ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1981), 36–37.

As Pettit points out, there is a crucial difference between believing that I can act in a certain way and not believing that I cannot act in a certain way. The latter is compatible with suspending judgment about the possibility or impossibility of that course of action. A determinist may consistently suspend judgment about the possibility or impossibility of any of the options under consideration while remaining a committed determinist. All that is required for rational deliberation is a failure to believe of each option under consideration that it will necessarily not be realized. If I believe that a certain act is not open to me given the past and the laws of nature, then I cannot consistently deliberate about whether to choose that course of action. That would be like deliberating over whether to leave by a locked door. But if it is possible as far as I know that I undertake a certain action—I don’t believe that it is impossible—then that option remains a live option as far as my deliberation is concerned.24 The determinist, then, can deliberate rationally although she thinks of her options collectively as having only one member that can actually be realized (given the past and the laws of nature), provided that she fails to think of any of the options under consideration that it is something she cannot do.

We may formulate deliberation incompatibilism as the conjunction of two claims, where the first provides the motivation for the second:

(i) In order to deliberate, I must weigh different courses of action.
(ii) In order to deliberate rationally, for some number of options \( \geq 2 \), I must believe that each of the options under consideration is open to me.

Deliberation compatibilists reject (ii), but since they accept (i), they are led to replace (ii) with

24. One might object that Oi’s being possible ‘as far as I know’ differs from Oi’s not being contradicted by anything I (explicitly) believe. I think this objection misses the force of the colloquial expression ‘as far as I know’, which is usually used interchangeably with ‘as far as I can tell’. This is how I will use the expression in this article. In his discussion of akrasia in EN 7, 3, Aristotle observes that “some people’s convictions about what they believe are no weaker than other people’s convictions about what they know” (EN 7, 3, 1146b30–32). It is my own conviction that matters for the rationality of deliberation, not whether Oi is compatible with what I know or with what I merely believe.
(iii) In order to deliberate rationally, for some number of actions \( \geq 2 \), I must fail to believe that any of the options under consideration is closed to me.

(ii) and (iii) are different ways of cashing out the presumption of open alternatives. The disagreement between deliberation compatibilists and incompatibilists, then, concerns how the presumption of open alternatives should be cashed out, not whether deliberation consists in the weighing of alternatives. They do not differ in accepting the presumption of open alternatives as a necessary condition for rational deliberation. Aristotle, by contrast, does not accept (i), and therefore places an even weaker restriction on rational deliberation than (iii), namely,

(iv) In order to deliberate rationally, I must fail to believe that any of the options under consideration is closed to me.

This condition is compatible with a view of deliberation as a process of inquiry by which we seek to identify means—in an inclusive sense to be specified below—to ends that we desire. It is therefore compatible with a model of deliberation that does not make the weighing of alternate courses of action a necessary constituent of deliberation, and consequently with a model of deliberation that does not identify deliberation with such weighing. Call this model of deliberation as inquiry the *heuristic* model of deliberation.\(^25\) In what follows I will defend a heuristic interpretation of Aristotle’s model of deliberation and explain how it provides an alternative account of conditions of rational deliberation that reveals why Aristotle does not share Alexander’s deliberation incompatibilism, despite the fact that Alexander takes himself to articulate an essentially Aristotelian insight.

Introducing contemporary terms like ‘compatibilism’ and ‘incompatibilism’ when discussing ancient philosophical theories invites a charge of anachronism. It is frequently noted that Aristotle lacks a clear conception of causal determinism. His teleological causal scheme seems ill suited to deal with questions arising from a theory of causality that dispenses with formal and final causes and gives efficient causes pride of place. As a consequence, it makes little sense to ask whether Aristotle

\(^{25}\) The heuristic model construes deliberation as a process of inquiry that seeks to discover causes of ends that have been laid down. The name is apt since Aristotle describes discovery (*heuriskein*) as the end of inquiry (*zētēsis*) (for instance at *Post. An.* 89b36).
defends a compatibilist or an incompatibilist theory of agency or deliberation, for, the objection goes, he could not clearly answer the question “compatibility of what” as he could not clearly articulate determinism from within his causal framework.\textsuperscript{26} If the purpose of this argument is to prevent us from rashly supposing that every contemporary debate has a counterpart in the ancient world, it is of course entirely to the point. But excessive fear of anachronism can stifle philosophical inquiry, preventing us from articulating the philosophical assumptions we nevertheless bring to bear on past texts. Insofar as we inevitably read Aristotle through lenses colored by subsequent developments in the history of philosophy, we can never read Aristotle as his contemporaries read him, and so we should perhaps not try. Furthermore, Alexander of Aphrodisias treats it as a fait accompli that he can attack Stoic soft determinists from an Aristotelian vantage point, and this means that there is at least prima facie reasons for thinking that Aristotle’s theory can be brought to bear on the debate between deliberation incompatibilists and deliberation compatibilists.

To avoid misunderstandings: I shall not be maintaining that Aristotle \textit{endorses} deliberation compatibilism or actively argues for it. His endorsement is, if anything, implicit, a position we can attribute to him on the basis of what he says. He is a deliberation compatibilist only insofar as his account of deliberation and decision is in fact compatible with determinism. Perhaps Aristotle would have been astonished to find that his theory can be interpreted in such a way. But in the absence of any explicit endorsement of views that entail deliberation incompatibilism, and the presence of evidence that supports deliberation compatibilism, I shall argue that we are free to infer that Aristotle was an implicit deliberation compatibilist.

\textbf{Deliberation as Inquiry}

To deliberate is to try to decide what to do. That much is uncontroversial. But there are many ways to try to decide what to do—I could toss a coin, ask my guru for advice and accept whatever advice I receive, or do the first thing that comes to mind, without any further reflection. None of these methods qualify as deliberation since they lack the element of practical thought that is integral to deliberation. In order to deliberate I must exercise my capacity for practical reason.

Most authors follow Alexander and van Inwagen in holding that in order to deliberate, we must weigh the pros and cons of at least two incompatible courses of action. Deliberation is, ultimately, a process of weighing one’s options in order to decide between them (hence the root of the Latin ‘deliberare’, which refers to a process of weighing). Minimally, then, a deliberator must always weigh one option against another, even if that option is not itself an action, but inaction: she decides between options. This conviction is common ground for incompatibilist and compatibilists in the contemporary debate over deliberation, but it is not a conviction that Aristotle shares. Aristotle’s Greek contains no etymological link to a process of weighing: the noun ‘bouleusis’ (deliberation) refers in the first instance to what goes on in a legislative or political body, the boule, which in Athens was identical to the Council or Senate of five hundred created by Cleisthenes. But although the Greek term does not suggest an intrinsic relationship between deliberation and weighing alternatives, the procedure employed in the Athenian Assembly and in law courts implicitly does. The jurors take counsel when they examine the case at hand with a view to reaching a verdict, and in each case, the decision is made when the jurors cast their votes on either side of a question that can be answered by ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The jurors, then, must weigh these alternatives in their minds and reach a decision on the basis of the available evidence. But not all deliberation concerns a proposal already articulated, answerable by a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (acquit or find the defendant guilty). When members of a political body take counsel, their primary task is to determine what steps should be taken to achieve the city’s aims: defending the city from attack or attacking the enemy, building a fleet or strengthening fortifications. The question is, “How should we proceed in order to secure victory?”; “How should we strengthen our alliances?”; “How can we repel the Persians, the Spartans, or the Macedonians?” These ‘How’-questions cannot be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’—they require the council members to identify an expedient course of action. But even in the case of political deliberation, eventually a vote for or against a proposal will be required. Aristotle notes that “when no is up to us, so is yes” (EN 3, 5, 1113b8), thus emphasizing that we exert rational control over our impulses (see for instance 1114a32), but he does not take our ability to desist or persist as proof that deliberation essentially consists in weighing the pros and cons of incompatible courses of action. Had Aristotle’s characterization of deliberation in EN 3, 3 (1112a18–1113a14) taken its inspiration from the political or forensic model of deliberation, we should expect him to treat the process of
weighing evidence for or against incompatible courses of action as essential to deliberation. In fact, he does not. Aristotle’s model of deliberation is, as we shall see, geometrical analysis.\(^{27}\)

Aristotle presents his account of deliberation as inquiry in *EN* 3, 3. His initial characterization of deliberation as a search (\(\text{zeptēsis}\)) for acts that promote our ends (\(\text{ta pros ta telē}\)) has prompted some critics to accuse him of conflating technical means-ends deliberation with rational deliberation full stop. This conflation would reduce the excellent deliberation of the virtuous agent to the means-ends calculations of an artisan or the strategic planning of a general.\(^{28}\) Insofar as Aristotle’s real interest in the *Ethics* lies not in the technical cleverness (\(\text{deinotēs}\)) of an artisan, but in the deliberative excellence (\(\text{euboulia}\)) of a prudent person (\(\text{ho phronimos}\)), we should interpret Aristotle’s description of deliberation in *EN* 3, 3 so that it supports rather than contradicts his description of *euboulia* in *EN* 6.

Before I address the questions raised by Aristotle’s claim that we deliberate about means, not ends, consider Aristotle’s description of the deliberative process as a search for acts that are up to us (\(\text{eph’hēmin}\)) in *EN* 3, 3. The description reveals that Aristotle construes deliberation as a type of inquiry whereby we uncover causal pathways that lead from the desired end back to us, that is, to an act that appears to be in our power:

We deliberate not about ends, but about what promotes ends [\(\text{ta pros ta telē}\)]. A doctor, for instance, does not deliberate about whether he will cure, or an orator about whether he will persuade, or a politician about whether he will produce good order, or any other [expert] about the end [that his science aims at]. Rather, we lay down the end [\(\text{alla themenoi to telos}\)], and then examine the ways and means to achieve it [\(\text{to pōs kai dia tinōn estai}\)]. If it appears that any of several [possible] means will reach it [\(\text{kai dia pleionōn men phainomenou ginestei}\)], we examine which of them will reach it most easily and most finely; and if only one [possible] means reaches it [\(\text{di’henos de}\)], we examine how that means will reach it, and how the means itself is reached, until we come to the first cause, the last thing

\(^{27}\) Though Aristotle discusses excellent deliberation (\(\text{euboulia}\)) at length in book 6, what he has to say about the *nature* of deliberation in book 6 merely supplements his earlier remarks in book 3.

to be discovered. For a deliberator would seem to inquire and analyze in the way described, as though analyzing a diagram. [The comparison is apt, since], apparently, all deliberation is inquiry, though not all inquiry—in mathematics, for instance—is deliberation. And the last thing [found] in the analysis would seem to be the first that comes into being. If we encounter an impossible step [καὶ ἂν ἀδυνατοὶ ἐνυχθῶσιν]—for instance, we need money but cannot raise it—we desist; but if the action appears possible, we undertake it. What is possible is what we could achieve through our agency [δυνάτα τε ἡ ἡμῶν γενοῖται] [including what our friends could achieve for us]; for what our friends achieve is, in a way, achieved through our agency, since the principle is in us. [In crafts] we sometimes look for instruments, sometimes [for the way] to use them; so also in other cases we sometimes look for the means to the end, sometimes for the proper use of the means, or for the means to that proper use. (EN 3, 3, 1112b11–31)

This description is interesting for a number of reasons. Note, first, the initial ‘ifs’: Aristotle allows that we may identify only one way to promote our end, while still having deliberated successfully. We may even discover that there is nothing at all we can do to promote our end. In such cases, we do not choose to refrain by comparing it to some act that we could have undertaken to promote our end—we haven’t uncovered any. Nor does ‘desisting’ figure among the alternatives we consider all along since our initial deliberation was directed at finding means to an end that was laid down. When we come up short we are not—explicitly or implicitly—preferring one alternative to another. Therefore, Aristotle cannot treat comparing alternate courses of action as essential to any process of deliberation, for if he did, then the agent who merely uncovers one path to her goal or who discovers that there is nothing she can do to secure her end will be deemed, counterintuitively, not to have deliberated at all.

One might object that Aristotle accepts the presumption of open alternatives since he accepts that the agent may desist. In the contemporary debate, the assumption of a choice between acting and refraining is a paradigmatic sort of presumption of open alternatives, if not the paradigmatic sort.29 I believe this is due in part to a mistaken conception of what it means to be committed to an end. Aristotle certainly recognizes that there are cases where “I could do nothing” could figure as an alternative in deliberation, especially where the end is a trivial one. But whenever

29. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for driving home the importance of this point.
the end is one the agent would not willingly abandon, since it reflects a commitment she considers irrevocable, “I could do nothing” is not an alternative in her deliberation. Nor is desisting an object of choice when she is brought up short. In such cases, the agent desists because she is forced to, not because she thinks that there are reasons counting in its favor. Consequently, refraining is not always a deliberative option on Aristotle’s model. While the agent may always think, “perhaps I will end up desisting,” she may not always think, “perhaps I could desist” or “perhaps I should desist.”

It follows that Aristotle does not accept that

(i) In order to deliberate, I must weigh different courses of action, or that

(ii) In order to deliberate rationally, for some number of options \( \geq 2 \), I must believe that each of the options under consideration is open to me.

Nor does Aristotle accept the compatibilists’ version of the presumption of open alternatives as a constraint on rational deliberation:

(iii) In order to deliberate rationally, for some number of actions \( \geq 2 \), I must fail to believe that any of the options under consideration is closed to me.

Part of the problem with (ii) or (iii) is that the deliberator may start her deliberation without any presumptions about the number of pathways that lead to her goal. She may initially think that a path is open but later discover that a necessary precondition for one of the steps is blocked. She cannot know this in advance since she cannot know, ahead of deliberating, whether all of the intermediate steps leading from the end back to her are in fact open to her. We should therefore avoid treating all practical problems as if they were structurally akin to moral dilemmas, problems that have two prima facie equally compelling (or un compelling) solutions, where the deliberator’s task is to determine which alternative reaches the end “most easily and most finely.” Van Inwagen treats deliberation as the solution to dilemmas when he states that “serious deliberation . . . [occurs when] one is choosing between alternatives and it does not seem to one (once all the purely factual questions have been settled) that the reasons that favor either alternative are clearly stronger.”30 But

not all practical problems have more than one solution. Some don’t have a solution at all, but this is something we discover in the course of deliberating, not something that precludes us from deliberating in the first place.

Interestingly, Aristotle compares the deliberator to a geometrician in the process of constructing a complex figure. In aiming to construct a complex figure, the geometrician first identifies its smallest parts and then constructs these. Ultimately, she is able to construct the entire complex figure by breaking it down and constructing its simple constituents step by step. In a similar way, the deliberator seeks to bring the principle of the desired end back to herself by breaking down the intermediate means-ends steps until she reaches an act that is up to her. She is, essentially, engaged in uncovering a chain of causes that leads from the desired end back to an act that she can undertake. This kind of causal mapping is illustrated in the *Metaphysics* Z, 1032b6–10 and b16–22, where Aristotle imagines the deliberation of a physician who aims to cure a patient:

What is healthy comes into being when the producer has had the following sort of thought: since health is this, then if something is to be healthy, it must have this (for instance, a uniform condition of the body), and if it is to have this, it must have heat. This is how he thinks at each stage, until he leads the process back to the last thing, which is what he can produce himself; and then the motion from here on toward health is called a production. . . . Production is the motion that proceeds from the last stage in thinking. Each of the other things—those in between—comes to be in the same way. I mean, for instance, that if this [body] is to be healthy, its bodily condition must be made uniform. What then, is it to be made uniform? This. [The body] will have this if it is warmed. What is it to be warmed? This. But this is potentially present. And now he has reached what is up to himself.


32. Both deliberative and theoretical inquiry seeks to uncover causes (*aitiai*), namely, causes that explain what something is or how it comes to be. In theoretical inquiry, the inquirer seeks a middle term that is genuinely explanatory of some fact, “for the middle term is the cause [*aitia*], and in all cases that is sought.” Post. An. 90a7. In practical inquiry, the inquirer seeks a particular kind of cause, namely an act that is conducive to her end and up to her. Aristotle emphasizes that “the deliberating part of the soul is that which observes a cause of some sort.” *Eudemian Ethics* 2, 10 1226b25–26.

Nowhere in the process of mapping out the causal chains that lead back from the end—health—to an act that is up to him does Aristotle’s doctor pause to consider alternative means to the same end. This is not to say that he couldn’t—Aristotle later mentions ‘rubbing’ as a source of heat in patients, but surely there are others (hot baths, warm blankets, and so on). At most, deliberation on the Aristotelian model would require weighing action against inaction if we determine that the act required for some reason exacts a price too steep relative to the goal (for instance, if we ask for a truce, we will come across as cowards or if we rub the psoriasis patient’s skin, he may start to bleed). Taking no action at all could count as an “alternative” course of action. But Aristotle never suggests that in order to deliberate we must of necessity weigh action against inaction or action against action.

Had Aristotle required such weighing of alternatives, he would furthermore have jeopardized his account of virtue. The good deliberator reaches the right conclusion about how she should act through the right middle term: she knows what she should do and why (EN 6, 9, 1142b17–27). If she discovers that the only way to act bravely is to stand her ground and fight, she would reveal a flawed character if she then proceeded to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of brave action (“standing her ground”) against the advantages and disadvantages of cowardly action (“running away”). The reasons that prima facie support her running away are such that they never make this an alternative for her. The brave person realizes that she could save her skin by taking flight, but running away is never a deliberative option for her, since she wishes for her end because it is fine (kalon). And she would never abandon this end. Importantly, this does not mean that deliberation is immune to normative considerations—that Aristotelian agents are precluded from deliberating about the worth of pursuing a specific end, or the worth of undertaking a specific course of action. But at times we realize that there is only one course of action that will promote the right end, and in such cases, considering alternative courses of action would be a sign of a flawed character. A virtuous agent would never ask, “But should I do this or rather the opposite?” when she has determined that there is only one possible way to act appropriately under the circumstances. When Alexander claims that “the deliberator’s enquiry is ‘whether this or the opposite should be done by me,’” he would be hard pressed to find textual support for his view in the Nicomachean Ethics.
Does Aristotle’s Heuristic Model Entail Instrumentalism?

In the examples I have adduced, the value of the end is taken for granted. We may therefore wonder whether Aristotle sacrifices comparison as an essential component of deliberation at a high price, for it appears to leave him with an instrumentalist account of deliberation. If ends are beyond deliberation, then how do we determine which ends to pursue, and how can we determine when a means exacts too steep a price relative to the end?

The impression that Aristotle defends a narrowly instrumentalist account of practical reasoning arises (1) from his description of deliberation as a way to identify means that promote our ends (τὰ πρὸς τὰ τελές) in conjunction with (2) his claim that we do not deliberate about ends, only means, and finally (3) the illustrative reference to doctors, orators, and politicians. Reflection reveals that this appearance is misleading, however. Orators qua orators do not deliberate about whether to persuade. Persuasion is the end that is constitutive of their craft. Still, orators may certainly deliberate about whether they should persuade the audience of this or that, or whether they should do it this way or that. They may even deliberate about whether they should be orators in the first place. Aristotle’s point, then, is not that all ends qua ends are beyond rational scrutiny, or that this kind of scrutiny cannot lead us to modify our preferences and the strength of our desires. Rather, he emphasizes that in any processes of rational deliberation some end must remain fixed (“we lay down the end”) since deliberation essentially consists in a thought process by which we attempt to trace a chain of causes that leads back from the end we desire to some act that we can perform. This is the import of Aristotle’s often quoted and frequently misunderstood claim that “we deliberate not about ends, but about what promotes ends” (περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὰ τελές, EN 3, 3, 1112b12). The end is “laid down” as a hypothesis, not in the sense that we suspend judgment about the desirability of the end, but in the sense that we do not question the value of the end within the context of this piece of deliberation.

But if deliberation concerns what is ‘πρὸς’ the end, how can Aristotle accommodate deliberation about ends? The short answer is that the preposition ‘πρὸς’ picks out both instrumental and noninstrumental means. Thus, virtuous acts can be instrumental in producing certain ends that may be specified independently of those acts, such as victory or health, but they may also be constituents of the good life—means that cannot be specified without ipso facto specifying parts of the end that we seek. Insofar as Aristotle defines the happy life as a life of activity in
accordance with virtue, he must believe that we can deliberate about acts that constitute an end (“constitutive means”), not only acts that are instrumental in bringing the end about (“instrumental means”), acts that are not themselves parts of the desired end. He is not an instrumentalist about practical reason.34

The only end that is never open to deliberation is happiness—formally construed. Aristotle treats it as a brute fact about human nature that we all wish to be happy (EN 3, 4, 1113a23–24; EN 3, 2, 1111b28–30; EN 1, 4, 1095a14–21). This desire for happiness is foundational vis-à-vis all rational motivation; it is a first principle that explains everything we do when we act in our capacity as rational beings. Still, happiness as the “highest good” is a purely formal end—different agents have different conceptions of its nature. The mere fact that we by nature desire to be happy therefore does not void the need to determine what happiness essentially is. As Aristotle puts it in the famous archer analogy, whoever knows what the highest good is will be more able to hit the right mark, “like archers who have a target to aim at” (EN 1, 2, 1094a23–24). And knowing what the highest good is and how to promote it in specific circumstances is the function of the unqualifiedly good deliberator.

It follows that Aristotelian deliberation can take two forms. It can be a process of specifying what our end consists in, or a process of specifying what means will produce the end instrumentally. If we are excellent deliberators, specification of the nature of the end will precede attempts to specify how to causally produce it (see also Metaphysics Z, 1032b23–1033a2).

Aristotle thinks that judgments about better and worse are needed in order to determine what kinds of activities constitute the happy life since we will want to consider all reasonable candidates before we make up our mind (see, for instance, *EN* 1, 5). That is why Aristotle describes the prudent person as the one who knows “what sorts of things promote living well in general” (*EN* 6, 5, 1140a28). Deliberating well is the function of the prudent person, and the aim of the unqualifiedly good deliberator (*ho haplós euboulos*) “accords with rational calculation [*logismos*] in pursuit of the best good for a human being [*tou aristou anthrōpōi*] that is achievable in action” (*EN* 6, 7, 1141b12–14). But although deliberating about the nature of happiness requires us to consider alternatives, deliberation about constituents of some subordinate end does not. When I determine that in order to play Beethoven’s Piano Sonata no. 17 in D Minor I must play each of its three movements, I have specified constituents of my end. When I determine that in order to play the sonata I must procure an instrument, hire a teacher, and practice diligently, perhaps for years, I am identifying means that are instrumentally necessary to bring the end about. If I am a prudent person, I will consider whether learning to play the sonata is the best thing I could do with my time—perhaps there are less self-indulgent ways to lead a life in accord with virtue. An unqualifiedly good deliberator—the person who possesses the deliberative virtues, and chief among them *phronēsis*—is someone who can give a general account of the highest good for a human being and who simultaneously possesses the ability to determine how to promote that life in her particular circumstances. Aristotle’s insistence that we “deliberate not about ends, but about means” should not, then, lead us to conclude that he thinks ends are beyond rational determination. Nor does it mean that we are precluded from comparing the value of different ends—Aristotle emphasizes that a prudent person will compare the goodness of her ends correctly, insofar as she has formed a true conception of “what sorts of things promote living well in general” (*EN* 6, 5, 1140a28). But Aristotle never suggests that agents who deliberate about what they should do *here and now* must of necessity weigh alternative courses of action. Consequently, they need not believe—or even presume—that there are alternate courses of action open to them here and now in order to deliberate rationally.35

35. Aristotle’s claim that the unqualifiedly good deliberator must know what the best life for a human being consists in means that she will have compared alternative lives as candidates for *eudaimonia*. Indeed, this is the task that preoccupies Aristotle in book 1 of
Once we recognize that Aristotle identifies two types of deliberation as necessary for *euboulia*, we will furthermore be able to explain an otherwise curious vacillation in Aristotle’s description of *prohairesis*. Aristotle occasionally treats the object of decision as a general policy in life, reflecting the agent’s conception of happiness. But more frequently in the *EN*, he treats particular actions as the object of decision.

John M. Cooper and Richard Sorabji have argued that the object of an Aristotelian decision is captured by “the premise of the good” in an Aristotelian practical syllogism, not by the conclusion, and thus a decision is for a general policy (“avoid heavy waters,” “dry meat is good for every human being”), not a particular act.36 In the first pages of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle does treat the agent’s conception of the good as an object of decision. He states that “everyone able to live according to his own decision [ἐν κατὰ τὴν υπό του ἑαυτοῦ προιαίρεσιν] should set before him some target of fine living [τὸ καλὸς ἡν], be it honor or reputation, or wealth or cultivation, looking toward which he does every action that he does” (*EE* 1214b7–9). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he likewise maintains that friends share the same *hairesein* (*EN* 9, 4, 1166a7) — presumably referring to their shared conception of the good, not their individual decisions. But as Aristotle underscores, adopting the right general conception of happiness is insufficient for prudence. The prudent person “will also acquire knowledge about particulars, since it is concerned with action and action is about particulars” (*EN* 6, 7, 1141b15–17). And it is this type of deliberation—deliberation about what acts we should perform in particular circumstances—that is the focus of Aristotle’s discussion of deliberation and decision in *EN* 3. Hardie is therefore on the right track when he

36. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, 21–33 and 47–48; Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause, and Blame*, 239; also his *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 310–11. Cooper observes that since we do not deliberate about objects of perception, deliberation ends with the decision to perform a type of action, a type that is not specified with reference to particular circumstances. The implementation of the decision is due to perception (“This is dry meat,” “The loaf is cooked”). Cooper’s account makes it easy to explain how we can decide how to act on a later occasion, but it faces considerable obstacles of its own.
states, with reference to Aristotle’s discussion of *prohairesis* in *EN* 3 and *De anima* 406b24–25, that “the term refers to something which happens in a man, or in the mind of a man, immediately before, or when, he acts.” But though this sense of *prohairesis* as the efficient cause of action (*hothen hê kinesis*, 1139a31) is the focal sense in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle occasionally uses the term to denote a man’s general preference in life—his *prohairesis tou biou*—a desire for a certain kind of life (see also 6, 12, 1144a22–23). In this respect, a *prohairesis* may be of an end. The agent’s conception of happiness justifies her individual decisions. Abandoning a particular decision informed by her conception of happiness is abandoning (at least temporarily) her view of the good, and abandoning her view of the good is abandoning the particular decisions to which it would have given rise since these decisions will no longer be explicable with reference to the agent’s conception of the best life. The “why” has changed.

We may construe these different kinds of deliberation and decision as answers to different questions, the first “How should I live my life?” and the second “What should I do?” It is the latter question that guides Aristotle’s inquiry into deliberation and decision in *EN* 3 and that determines the shape that his answers take. But that does not mean that the first is not an object of deliberation and decision. Just as unqualifiedly good deliberators must have both the right general conception of happiness and the right perception of particulars, explaining their individual actions through the right “middle term,” they must also have made the

37. Hardie, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*, 161. Hardie’s description of the immediate relationship between decision and action must be supplemented by an account of how we can decide how to act on a later occasion. Though I cannot here defend my own answer to this question, I believe Aristotle can treat such decisions as conditional: the agent decides that “when conditions C obtain, I will do A,” where ‘C’ stands for specific circumstances rather than circumstances that can be reiterated. When Aristotle states (in *De motu animalium* 700a22; 34 and *EN* 7, 3, 1147a28) that the agent acts ‘*euthus*’ (‘immediately’) when he has put together the major and minor premise, he may simply mean to point out that the act is immediate in the sense that nothing more is required (the motivational state he has in virtue of having put together the premises is sufficient to cause him to act).

38. Not just any desire that arises as a result of deliberation counts as a *prohairesis* on Aristotle’s score: an acratic agent, who acts contrary to his decision, may nevertheless be skillful in calculating means to the satisfaction of his nonrational desires (see also *EN* 7, 7, 1150a19–27; 6, 9, 1142b19–21). But he does not, for all that, decide to indulge his desires, for he does not deem this end to be good in light of his life overall. Only deliberation that proceeds from a wish—a rational endorsement of an end as good—can result in a decision.
right decision about what kind of life they should lead and the right decision in their particular circumstances. That is why Aristotle says that virtue is a “hexis prohairesítikê,” a state that decides (EN 2, 6, 1106b36). For “the virtues are decisions of some kind, or require decision” (EN 2, 5, 1106a3–4). And it is presumably why he underlines that “it is by deciding [tô prohairesisthai] on good or bad [t’agatha è ta kaka] that we are people of a certain character [poioi tines esmen]” (EN 3, 1112a2).

This allows us better to explain Aristotle’s puzzling explanation of prohairesis as what is chosen ‘pro’ other things. Aristotle most likely did not intend the ‘pro’ to be interpreted in one way to the exclusion of others (that is, either temporally or preferentially). The polyvalence of ‘pro’ lends itself to Aristotle’s purposes: The agent’s decision to undertake an act expresses her preference for a certain kind of life, and it results from deliberation that proceeds from her conception of this life as a principle. She furthermore chooses the act for the sake of, or ‘pro’, specific ends. In addition to the temporal and the preferential sense, then, ‘pro’ may signify that in defense of which, or, more generally, for the sake of which, something is done. In explaining a prohairesis as what is “pro heterôn haireton,” Aristotle wants us to hear all three senses.

Aristotle on “Openness to Deliberation”

I have maintained that Aristotle’s heuristic model of deliberation diverges from the standard model that forms the point of departure of contemporary debates over deliberation compatibilism and incompatibilism. But I also wish to show that Aristotle’s model has several advantages over the standard model, insofar as it better captures what we in fact take deliberation about action to be.

I have already noted that Aristotle’s model seems better positioned to explain the deliberations of the virtuous agent than the weighing model. In addition, the heuristic model is better suited to explain why deliberation with a view to “satisficing” desires rather than “optimizing” outcomes is a kind of deliberation. If deliberation essentially involves comparing alternative courses of action, then there won’t be any deliberation with a view to finding an option that works. In everyday

39. This is a use of ‘pro’ that is evident in expressions such as ‘stênai pro Troôn’: standing in front of, and hence in defense of, the Trojans. Latin uses ‘pro’ in a similar sense in expressions such as ‘pro bono’ (an abbreviation of ‘pro bono publico’, for the common good).
situations, we frequently rest satisfied with identifying a course of action that works without considering alternatives. There may be alternatives, but the cost of surveying alternatives isn’t offset by the gains of ranking them. If I want what is optimal from the point of view of my life as a whole, I had better not embark on deliberations about what brand of flour or what brand of olive oil is optimal every time I enter a store. If I tried to obtain complete information, I would starve to death in the supermarket aisle. Nor, in attempting to be witty (an Aristotelian virtue), should I deliberate until I have identified the perfect joke, for while I am busy searching for the perfect joke, the moment will have passed. What is best from the point of view of my life as a whole may be finding something that works, and frequently we can find what works without considering alternative courses of action. Paradoxically, perhaps, attempting to find the optimal in each and every case will fail to promote the best life—a life of virtue. Defenders of the weighing model might object that comparing two alternatives is not the same as explicitly surveying all conceivable alternatives with a view to choosing the optimal and that they, too, can account for “satisficing” deliberation. Still, this response works only up to a point: finding the best of two alternatives is not the same as finding an alternative that works. In deliberating, we frequently do the latter.

Aristotle’s model furthermore allows us to explain why “abortive” deliberative inquiries are still deliberative. When I decide, after carefully surveying every conceivable option, that there is nothing I can do to promote my end, it seems strange to insist that I haven’t deliberated, just as it seems strange to insist that a scientist who fails to uncover the cause of a disease has failed to conduct research at all. Even result-less inquiries are inquiries, and even deliberations that fail to find an act that promotes our end are instances of deliberation.

I therefore believe Aristotle quite reasonably replaces the deliberation incompatibilist’s (iii) above with:

40. For a discussion of ‘satisficing’, see Michael Slote, Beyond Optimizing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Aristotle is frequently thought to posit that a decision results from (or ‘is’) an all-things-considered judgment about what to do (see, for instance, Sarah Brodie’s remarks in her introduction to Broadie and Rowe, Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, 42). This is true insofar as a decision reflects the agent’s conception of the best life. But it is misleading if by this we mean that the Aristotelian agent must survey and compare all available courses of action before she makes any individual decision. If this were required, Aristotle’s virtuous agent would suffer from a bad case of practical paralysis.
In order to deliberate rationally, I must fail to believe that any of the options under consideration is closed to me.\(^41\)

All the same, one may still wonder whether Aristotle in fact is committed to (iv) in virtue of what he says about deliberation. For perhaps he thinks that in order to consider a course of action in the context of deliberation, I must positively believe that it is open to me? This interpretation would seem to be suggested by something Aristotle says immediately before he broaches the subject of deliberative rationality—and irrationality—in EN 3, 3. This proposal runs up against considerable textual obstacles, however. In his discussion of excellent deliberation in book 6, Aristotle maintains that everything about which one has belief is already determined (ho\(\upsilon\)ristai \(\epsilon\)d\(\epsilon\)), whereas what one deliberates about is not yet determined (6, 10, 1142b11–12). Deliberation involves thought; that is why it is not yet assertion (phasis), and hence not yet belief (doxa): “For belief is not inquiry, but already an assertion; but in deliberating, either well or badly, we inquire for something and rationally calculate about it” (1142b13–15). One of the things we seek to establish through deliberation is whether a course of action is open to us. Therefore, having beliefs about this cannot be a precondition for rational deliberation; it is rather something we seek to determine through deliberation.

That Aristotle is interested in identifying criteria for rational deliberation emerges from the question that opens his discussion in EN 3, 3. Aristotle asks:

Do we deliberate about everything, and is everything open to deliberation? Or is there no deliberation about some things? By ‘open to deliberation’ [bouleuton], presumably, we should mean that someone with some sense, not some fool or madman [tis elithios \(\epsilon\)mainomenos], might deliberate about. (1112a18–21)

Aristotle has already described the object of decision as “what we think can come about through our agency” (hosa oietai genesthai an di’ hautou) (EN 3, 2, 1111b26–27). In general, the objects of deliberation are those that reasonable people would deliberate about. It would therefore be a mistake to treat the deliberations of fools and madmen as evidence for

\(^{41}\) Aristotle would therefore reject the widespread intuition that deliberation is impossible in van Inwagen’s closed-door example. If I am facing two doors, and I know that one of them is closed (but not which one), I may attempt to find out which one that is, and this inquiry would count as deliberation provided that I want to leave the room (my aim is practical).
the conclusion that there is no limit to what one might rationally deliberate about. Deliberation concerns things that we ourselves, as individual agents, may conceivably be the cause.42

Aristotle’s statement that deliberation and decision concerns “what we think can come about through our agency” has been read as a sign that he endorses a van Inwagenesque conception of the presumption of open alternatives: in order to treat an action as a deliberative alternative, I must positively believe that the act is up to me. This is how Dana Nelkin interprets Aristotle in “The Sense of Freedom,” where she writes that Aristotle thinks that deliberation requires the belief in indeterminism (as opposed to indeterminism). Nelkin’s concern is to show that Aristotle’s condition for rational deliberation is epistemic rather than metaphysical, which strikes me as exactly right, but she concludes on the basis of Aristotle’s reference to belief that his epistemic condition is indeterminist. Some reflection reveals that this cannot be Aristotle’s view, however.

Aristotle explains what he means by “what we think can come about through our agency” in EN 3, 3 by contrasting things open to deliberation and decision with things that are necessary (ex anankés), impossible, or not up to us because they result from nature (phasis) or chance (tuchē). The class of things that “we believe can come about through our agency” is the class that remains once we have subtracted the class of things that we are confident cannot come about through our agency, either because they cannot come about at all (they are impossible) or because they cannot come about through us (because they happen by necessity, nature, or fortune). Consequently, we should take Aristotle’s position to be that we can deliberate about an action provided we are not confident that it will or won’t come about independently of our efforts. The contrast between ta prohaireta and ta aprohaireta is exhaustive. Either something belongs to the class of things that can come about through our deliberation and decision or it belongs to the class of things that cannot, and the last class consists of things we are convinced we cannot cause through our own agency. That is why Aristotle, having

42. Reasonable people occasionally deliberate “in ignorance” about things that aren’t up to them (EE 2, 10, 1226a25–26), but in their case the mistake is an honest one, not the result of some grand delusion about their causal powers. Aristotle’s fools and madmen typically deliberate about impossibilities such as how to make the sides of a triangle commensurate with the diagonal (EN 3, 3, 1112a24–26). They furthermore deliberate about human affairs they clearly cannot influence, such as “the affairs of the Indians.” EE 2, 10, 1226b29; see also EN 1112a28–29.
surveyed nature, necessity, and fortune as causes, states that “we deliberate about what is up to us, that is to say, the actions we can do, and this is what is left” (*tuta de kai esti loipa*) (*EN* 3, 3, 1112a31, my emphasis). Consequently, the class of things that we may (rationally) deliberate about is the class of things that lack the feature that is common to the other causes; it is the class of things that we are *not* convinced will or won’t happen independently of our efforts.43

Had Aristotle contrasted *ta prohaireta* and *ta aprohaireta* as (a) what we are confident cannot come about through us and (b) what we positively believe can come about through us, his contrast would not have been exhaustive as intended. For he would then be left with an awkward third class, namely, the class of things that we neither believe can come about through our agency, nor are confident cannot come about through our agency (that is, the class of things that *for all we know* can come about through our agency, though we don’t positively believe that we can be their cause). Even apart from worries about the compatibility or incompatibility of deliberation and determinism, this is a class that he in fact includes among things that are open to deliberation (see also *EN* 3, 1112b26). And reasonably so: it appears that we deliberate most of all in cases where it is not clear to us what alternatives are available.44

43. It is important to be clear that Aristotle does not use ‘necessary’ or ‘natural’ as synonyms for ‘causally necessitated’, as Nelkin presumes. For all Aristotle has said here or elsewhere, all events, whether necessary, natural, fortunate, or caused by decision, may have sufficient reasons for their coming to be. Aristotle treats as necessary such events as the rising of the stars, or an eclipse, as well as mathematical relations. An eclipse necessarily takes place when the sun and the moon are positioned thus-and-thus relative to the earth since this is what an eclipse essentially is. Nothing could prevent an eclipse from occurring given this alignment, and it therefore happens in every case (*aei*). The natural, by contrast, concerns what happens usually (*hos epi to polu*), or, as we might say, normally. Droughts normally set in when it is summer, rain normally in winter. *EN* 3, 3, 1112a27; *Physics* 198b34–199a3; *Metaphysics* E 2, 1026b30–36. Natural and necessary properties or events are outside our sphere of influence; they are not susceptible to human intervention. Nor can we intend fortunate coincidences. Fortunate coincidences are unintended (‘coincidental’) results of human agency. If I happen to find a treasure while I am digging in my garden, it is not because I dug with the intention of finding a treasure, nor do treasures normally crop up while one is busy digging in the garden. There is no *per se* causal relationship between my decision and the discovery. It would therefore be irrational to decide to plant turnips for the sake of finding a treasure, or to consider this an option in one’s deliberation.

44. It follows that Aristotle’s remark at *EN* 3, 2, 1111b26–27, Nelkin’s prime piece of evidence, does not after all contradict Aristotle’s claim in 6, 10, 1142b14–15 that deliberation is not yet belief. The compatibilist interpretation furthermore explains Aristotle’s remark in *EE* 2, 10, 1226a25–26 that no one would deliberate about things
Aristotle’s analysis therefore requires that we ascribe to him the Pettitian view that we may deliberate about a course of action as long as we can be its cause for all we know. An act is up to us and a possible object of rational deliberation provided that we fail to believe that we cannot do it. If our failure to believe that it is impossible is due to a failure to appreciate something obvious, as in the case of madmen and fools, deliberation is still irrational, but not because it contradicts our conviction that we cannot do what we consider doing. Rather, it is irrational because our beliefs (or absence thereof) are themselves irrational. This allows a much wider range of actions to enter the agent’s deliberation than on the standard model. And this is only to be expected in light of Aristotle’s description of deliberation as a heuristic process where we can consider an act as a possible means to our end and later come to realize, as a result of further deliberation, that the act is not one we can do.

By calling an act “up to us,” then, Aristotle does not mean to suggest that we deliberate only about acts that we in fact are capable of performing. I may, after all, make mistakes in surveying my alternatives. Nor does he mean to suggest that we deliberate only about acts that we positively believe we can perform. Belief, according to Aristotle, entails confidence (pistis) (De anima 3, 3, 428a20–21), but deliberators caught between a rock and a hard place may have a very strong urge to figure out what to do without having confidence that any of the actions that they consider are ones that they would in fact be able to perform, should they try. I may consider as an option an act that I’m strongly inclined to believe I cannot perform, but that nevertheless strikes me as my best option—indeed my only option—under the circumstances. If, like the rock climber Aron Ralston, I find that my hand is stuck under a boulder in the Utah Canyons, and I determine, after days of waiting for help, that my only means of survival is cutting off the hand with a pocket knife, I will probably doubt whether I have the courage and resilience to execute the plan. But given what will happen if I don’t, it would be irrational of

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that are not up to us except in ignorance. Aristotle is not committed to the view that we deliberate irrationally if we fail to believe that things that aren’t up to us aren’t up to us. Indeed, the compatibilist interpretation seems to make the best sense of his remark in EN 3, 3, 1112b25–27 that we continue to consider an option as long as it doesn’t appear (phainetai) impossible for us to undertake it.

me not to entertain this possibility, despite my doubts about my ability to follow through.\textsuperscript{46}

**The Open Question, Unclear Outcome, and Causal Efficacy Requirements**

Deliberation incompatibilists like van Inwagen typically focus on (ii) as a necessary condition for rational deliberation. They devote less attention to further necessary or jointly sufficient conditions. Aristotle does not consider his alternative “openness for all we know” requirement (iv) as a sufficient condition for deliberative rationality. He adds three further conditions when he remarks,

\begin{quote}
Deliberation concerns what is usually [one way rather than another] \textit{[en tois ho\acute{s} epi to polu]}, where the outcome is unclear \textit{[adélois de pòs apobéstai]} and the right way to act is undefined \textit{[kai en hois adioriston]} (\textit{EN} 3, 3, 1112b8–9)
\end{quote}

Call these the “open question” requirement, the “unclear outcome” requirement, and the “causal efficacy” requirement.

**The “Open Question” Requirement:**

Aristotle points out that in order to deliberate rationally, it must be an open question how to attain the end. If there is no question about how something should be done because it is defined once and for all, then we do not deliberate about how to do it. The scribe need not deliberate about how to write an ‘a’, for this is defined once and for all and does not vary with circumstances (\textit{EN} 3, 3, 1112b4). There is an objective, context-independent standard that settles the issue, and we need not search for an answer that we already possess. Doctors, by contrast, must deliberate about how to heal their patient since the appropriate means will vary from case to case, depending on what disease afflicts the patient. Aristotle therefore adds a further restriction on rational deliberation: we deliberate “about what results through our agency, but in different ways on different occasions” (\textit{EN} 3, 3, 1112b4).

\textsuperscript{46.} This would be an extreme example of a “mixed” act: voluntary under the circumstances, but not choiceworthy apart from the end. Aristotle’s example is the captain who jettisons his cargo in a storm in order to save himself and the crew. “No one willingly throws his cargo overboard without qualification,” Aristotle observes, “but to save himself and the crew, anyone with any sense would.” \textit{EN} 3, 1, 1110a10–12.
The “Unclear Outcome” Requirement:

Aristotle does not explain what he means when he states that the outcome must be unclear. But he apparently intends to emphasize that we do not deliberate about how to act if we are convinced that the outcome will occur no matter what we do. If I am falling from a ten-storied building, it would be futile to deliberate about how to avoid my premature death: the outcome is clear. As Aristotle puts it in a different context (*De interpretatione* 9, 18b33–34), we must fail to think that our acting or not acting won’t make a difference to the outcome. Significantly, it is not a consequence of the principle of sufficient reason that certain outcomes will occur no matter what we do. Therefore, Aristotle’s requirement that the outcome be unclear is not equivalent to a requirement that the outcome lack a sufficient reason for its coming to be. What he means to emphasize, rather, is that it cannot be beyond doubt that it will (or won’t) occur no matter what steps we take.

The “Causal Efficacy” Requirement:

The final requirement that Aristotle introduces—that deliberation concerns what is “usually” (*hôs epi to polu*) one way rather than another—is puzzling on the face of it. Exactly what does Aristotle have in mind? He cannot mean to suggest that we deliberate rationally only about actions that as a matter of statistical frequency are usually preferred by agents (“nine out of ten deliberators caught under boulders decide to use a pocket knife”). Instead, I propose that we should read the reference to what is “usually” one way rather than another to refer, in Aristotle’s technical terminology, to causes that stand in a *per-se* relationship to the desired effect (see also *Physics* 2, 8, 198b33–199a8). Rational deliberators don’t consider means that (obviously) lack the power to produce the desired result in their particular circumstances. In other words (and again taking into account that the deliberator’s options may be severely limited), I don’t entertain a course of action as a possibility if I am convinced that it won’t produce the desired result under the circumstances. By using the phrase ‘*hôs epi to polu*’, then, Aristotle emphasizes that our actions as causes must have a noncoincidental relationship to the desired effect. It may be that through some wayward causal chain, an act of mine may in fact end up producing the desired result (by wiggling my toes, or whistling loudly, I inadvertently set off an avalanche that removes the boulder from my hand). But unless I could reasonably foresee that my act will have this desired effect, I should not treat wiggling my toes as an
option in deliberation. Again, depending on the severity of my situation, I may place the bar on what counts as a foreseeable effect high or low. But there is a point at which the probabilities I ascribe to a certain effect’s occurring as a result of a certain act are so low that I am no longer deliberating about what to do but rather trying out anything in the hope that through some grand coincidence, it will work. The end point on this sliding scale is magical thinking. And as Aristotle quite reasonably underlines, magical thinking is not rational deliberation.47

These restrictions on the rationality of deliberation are all context independent. Still, Aristotle appears to recognize that deliberation can be more or less rational, depending on the specifics of the agent’s circumstances—who is contemplating doing what, for what end, and how. Depending on the plausibility of the agent’s assumptions about the causal relationship between means and ends as well as the plausibility of her assumption that undertaking the act is not impossible for her, and depending on the graveness of her predicament, we may deem her contemplation of an option as either rational or irrational. If I think I may be able to save myself from falling by growing wings or through telekinesis, then I would presumably belong in the “fools and madmen” category. As far as we know, this isn’t up to any human being. If I think I may be able to save myself from dying in the Utah Canyons by reaching for my pocketknife, then I may be deluded, but my considering this option in deliberation is not for that reason irrational. My predicament being what it is, it is only rational to leave no stone unturned in the search for salvation.

47. Aristotle does not distinguish between the causal efficacy of the act in producing the result and the causal efficacy of decision in producing an act. These are arguably different considerations. If I suffer from softness (malakia), an aversion to pain that Aristotle thinks is widespread among women and Scythian kings (EN 7, 7, 1150b14–16), then I may have reason to doubt whether I’ll have the strength of mind to follow through with the act even if I judge it to be likely to produce the desired result. If the agent has reason to suspect that akrasia may prevent her from acting on her decision, it may still be rational of her to deliberate provided that she doesn’t rule out that her decision will be efficacious in producing the action. For akrasia, as Aristotle understands it, is a trait that we attribute to an agent because she is more prone to abandon her decision than what is usual, not because she is incapable of acting in accordance with her decision. The affliction (pathos) of the akratēs is not like growing “hot or distressed or hungry” (EN 3, 5, 1113b29), where persuasion will not stop it from happening to us. Instead, Aristotle suggests that whoever “rouses her rational calculation” is less likely to be overcome by her feelings (EN 7, 7, 1150b24–26). It would therefore be irrational by Aristotle’s standards to deliberate about whether to grow hungry or not, but not irrational to deliberate about whether to do something that causes a great deal of pain, even if one knows that one has succumbed to pain on earlier occasions.
There may be a tenuous relationship between the proposed means and the desired end, or between the act and the agent’s resolve. But sometimes tenuous is as good as it gets.

Aristotle’s conditions for rational deliberation in EN 3, 3 should therefore be considered as minimal, context-independent conditions that must be supplemented on a case-by-case basis, depending on the agent’s predicament and the strength and negotiability of her commitment to her end.

Let ‘S’ stand for any minimally rational agent with some end, ‘φ’ for any action, ‘t’ for the time of deliberation, and ‘C’ for the circumstances in which S would act. We can then define the minimal conditions that an act must satisfy in order to be a deliberative option for S at t:

φing is a deliberative option for S at t if and only if:

1. S fails to believe at t that φing is impossible for her in C (and this is not the result of mad or foolish delusion).
2. S fails to believe at t that the right way to act in C is defined independently of the circumstances.
3. S fails to believe at t that the result she desires will (or won’t) obtain in C regardless of how she acts.
4. S fails to believe at t that φing would not causally produce the result that she desires in C.

If the agent recognizes many ways of promoting her end, then we may think that (2) is too weak; what the agent fails to believe is that the right way to act in C is defined context-independently. If this failure is due to stupidity—she does not recognize the obvious—then we may again call her irrational. But again, these are minimal requirements that any option must satisfy. Whether an option is a reasonable deliberative option for an agent is a further question.48

Alexander of Aphrodisias’s Lazy Argument: A Proposal

I initially promised that I would explain why Alexander of Aphrodisias was moved to interpret Aristotle’s theory of deliberation along incompatibilist lines. A full examination of this question would require us to read

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48. Could Aristotle’s agent deliberate rationally about whether to give up something she values highly in exchange for some trivial good? I believe Aristotle’s requirement that a deliberative option be ‘pros’ some end that she considers conducive to happiness precludes this possibility, though an adequate defense of this claim will have to wait.
Alexander’s treatise in light of his polemic against Stoic soft determinism, an investigation that would take us too far afield. Let me nevertheless point to two Aristotelian texts that may have inspired Alexander to develop his argument for deliberation incompatibilism.

The first is Aristotle’s thorny discussion of future contingents in *De interpretatione* 9. In the course of laying out the fatalist’s position and its counterintuitive entailments, Aristotle remarks,

> These and others like them are the absurd consequences if in every affirmation and negation (either about universals spoken of universally or about particulars) it is necessary that one of the opposites be true and the other false, and nothing happens as chance has it, but all things are and happen from necessity. Hence, there would be no need to deliberate or to take trouble, thinking that if we do this, that will be, and if we do not, it will not be [hôste oute bouleuesthai deoi an oute pragmateuethai, hôs ean men todi poièsômen, estai todi, ean de mê todi, ouk estai]. (De interpretatione 9, 18b26–33)

Briefly put, fatalism is the view that since everything that happens happens necessarily, there is no way for us to affect or control what occurs.\(^49\) In particular, there is no need to deliberate or make efforts to influence the course of events since what will happen, will happen, independently of what we do. Aristotle goes on to reject the “absurd consequence,” but exactly how he responds to the fatalist’s argument has been the subject of deep and prolonged controversy.

On the interpretation I favor, Aristotle rejects the fatalist’s argument by showing that it rests on a modal fallacy.\(^50\) It simply does not follow from the principle of bivalence, the fatalist’s main premise, that if p, then necessarily p, and if not-p, then necessarily not-p, as the fatalist presupposes. To think that it does is to commit a fallacy of division. Aristotle says as much at 19a29–30: “One cannot divide [dielonta] [the contradictories]

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49. See, for instance, T. H. Irwin and Gail Fine, *Aristotle: Selections* (Indianapolis: Hackett: 1995), 17, n. 15. (All translations from *De interpretatione* are from this volume.) Christopher Shields presents a narrower definition in his *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 2007). As Shields defines it, fatalism is the view that “since whatever is true is necessary, and since it is pointless to deliberate about what necessarily will or will not be, it is pointless to deliberate about the future” (182). Shields’s definition highlights the logical premise of the fatalist’s argument, but it also makes futilism about deliberation part of the definition of fatalism rather than a consequence of fatalism.

and say that one or the other is necessary.” In a similar vein, although it is true that necessarily (if p, then p), we cannot validly infer the necessity of the consequent (p) from p and the necessity of the conditional, nor can we validly infer the necessity of not-p from necessarily (if not-p, then not-p) and not-p. Aristotle thus reveals the fatalist’s fallacy by distinguishing between unconditional (‘haplōs’) and conditional necessity. The fatalist has not proven that accepting the principle of bivalence forces us to accept that everything that happens, is unconditionally necessary, so that our actions make no difference to the outcome.

If this is Aristotle’s main response to the fatalist, then it reveals that he is aware of a distinction that later proved pivotal in the Stoic Chrysippus’s attempt to show that the truth of determinism is compatible with human agency. This is the distinction between an outcome’s having sufficient conditions for its coming to be and its being determined to happen independently of any causal antecedents. It is only in the latter case that our actions make no difference to the outcome.51 I want to suggest that Alexander, in relying on a familiar, but arguably incorrect interpretation of the passage, fails to appreciate the distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity at the heart of Aristotle’s response. Historically, Aristotle has been thought to respond to the fatalist’s argument by either rejecting bivalence for “future contingents,” statements about particular future states of affairs, or by arguing that though it is true that necessarily, for every statement (p or not-p), neither p nor not-p are “definitely” true before the fact. Future-tense propositions about particular states of affairs are not “yet” or not “definitely” true or false. This is the view defended by Boethius and Ammonius—Quine dismisses it as “Aristotle’s fantasy.”52 Richard Gaskin suggests that the view originated in Alexander of Aphrodisias’s now lost commentary on De interpretatione and was transmitted via Porphyry.53 If this is correct, we have additional reason to suppose that Alexander overlooks the importance of Aristotle’s distinction between conditional and unconditional necessity for his response to the fatalist. As a result, Alexander infers that Aristotle thinks deliberation is incompatible with determinism, whereas

Aristotle—correctly—observes that it is incompatible with the absolute necessity posited by the fatalist.  

In closing, let me briefly consider a second source of Alexander’s influential incompatibilist reading of Aristotle’s theory of deliberation. In *Metaphysics* 9, 5, Aristotle observes that rational capacities are capacities for contraries and remarks that, if rational capacities were necessarily actualized whenever the agent and the thing acted on meet, “each would act in contrary ways at the same time, which is impossible” (1048a9–10). Alexander is keen to emphasize that human agents have the power to choose the contrary. He infers that “not everything we choose has causes laid down beforehand, on account of which it is not possible for us not to choose it” (*De fato* 12, 180.27–29). But even if this were true, it does not follow that deliberation necessarily involves comparing alternative courses of action on the assumption that one is free to choose either one. And it is highly doubtful whether Aristotle in fact believes that our capacity for contraries is a capacity to choose either one of two incompatible courses of actions, all things being equal. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle maintains that it is our decision (*prohairesis*) that determines how we act (1048a11), and he infers that “when the agent has an overriding desire for one alternative, this is how it will act, whenever it is in conditions suitable for its capacity and meets the thing that is acted on” (1048a11–13). But insofar as our decision (the “overriding desire”) isn’t just a preference for this course of action over that but rather a desire that reflects our conception of the good life, we would have to be able to change our most fundamental commitments at will in order to be able to act contrary to our present convictions about what we ought to do, at least when there is only one course of action that promises to promote our end.

54. Alexander is not alone in thinking that Aristotle believes determinism entails the futility of deliberation. In *Necessity, Cause, and Blame*, Richard Sorabji remarks that Aristotle in this passage “argues against determinism that it is incompatible with the efficacy of effort or deliberation (*Int.* 9, 18b31–3, 19a7–8)” (245). He notes that although Aristotle was wrong to think that this particular argument against determinism is sound, it nevertheless proved influential: one of the famous named arguments of antiquity, the Lazy Argument, takes its cue from Aristotle. In “From Necessity to Fate—A Fallacy?” Sarah Broadie likewise infers that Aristotle accepts the Lazy Argument, and this prompts her to wonder “whether the Lazy Argument, or something like it, might not have genuine force after all” (24). If I am right, Aristotle does not endorse the Lazy Argument. Broadie’s proposed rationale is therefore an answer in search of a question.
This, I take it, is not something that Aristotle ever contemplates, and we should therefore avoid attributing to him the view that the rational capacity that underlies our ability to deliberate rationally is a capacity for deciding between two incompatible courses of action, all things being equal.\textsuperscript{55} Rational agents have the capacity to influence the strength of their desires through deliberation; we are not compelled to act on our immediate desires. That is why we have the capacity to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’. To maintain that deliberation presupposes a belief in our ability to choose either one of two incompatible actions \textit{all things being equal} is to read more into Aristotle than his text can plausibly support.

I have argued that Aristotle’s position aligns with views defended by deliberation compatibilists rather than deliberation incompatibilists. I have furthermore maintained that his heuristic model of deliberation (\textit{bouleusis}) is superior to the comparative model of deliberation that dominates contemporary discussions of practical reasoning. Aristotle’s model captures essential features of practical deliberation, whereas the comparative model artificially restricts deliberation to an act of comparing alternatives.

\textsuperscript{55} Susanne Bobzien defends a nonlibertarian account of Aristotle’s claim that rational capacities are for contraries in “The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem.” I agree with her analysis in broad outline.