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Free Will, Genuine Alternatives and Predictability

Laura Hagen
Claremont McKenna College

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE
FREE WILL, GENUINE ALTERNATIVES AND PREDICTABILITY

SUBMITTED TO
PROFESSOR AMY KIND
AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS
BY
LAURA HAGEN

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This thesis would have not been possible (metaphysically or epistemically) without the guidance of my ever-patient reader, Amy Kind, or the moral support and encouragement of my de-facto editor and friend, Sara Stern.

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Introduction

One of the most central aspects of the free will debate is whether we can still have free will if determinism is true. To frame this question appropriately we first need to define determinism and what it means to have free will. Philosophers generally agree about how to define the thesis of determinism: determinism is the claim that every event that occurs can be explained by the conjunction of past events and laws of nature. The concept of free will is more controversial to define. This is because one can have either a deflationary or inflationary account of free will.¹ Generally, deflated accounts of free will only require that we are, in some sense, the source of our actions. Philosophers can be inflationary or deflationary in respect to what it means to be the source of our actions. An inflationary account of being the source of our actions is that to be a source, we must be the ultimate source, or the only cause of our actions. Conversely, some argue that we can achieve partial source by doing the actions we reflectively endorse, and this enough sourcehood to have free will. An inflated account of free will not only requires a sense of sourcehood, but also that we have alternative possibilities, or that we have the freedom to choose our desired action among other alternative actions.

Since there are so many possible conceptions of free will, it is also difficult to decipher how the truth of determinism impacts free will. Incompatibilists believe that the proper conception of free will is necessarily incompatible with determinism. Conversely, compatibilists believe that the proper conception of free will is compatible with determinism. However, both incompatibilists and compatibilists support their respective

¹The idea that different aspects of free will can be inflationary or deflationary was presented to me by Jim Kreines. He presented this framework to my Senior Seminar class in Fall 2010.

conclusion for a variety of reasons. For instance, Peter Van Inwagen argued for incompatibilism by claiming that determinism necessarily prevents us from having genuine alternatives. Other philosophers such as Derk Pereboom have gone further to say that determinism also necessarily prevents us from being the sources of our actions in meaningful ways.

Since Van Inwagen, most compatibilists have conceded that determinism is incompatible with alternative possibilities. They have instead tried to show that free will does not require alternate possibilities. They claim instead that a deflated sense of sourcehood or ownership over our actions is enough to have free will. However, Hilary Bok takes a much different approach. She argues that Van Inwagen only shows that we can't have alternate possibilities in a metaphysical sense. That is, if we explain how the world is, it is such where there is only one possible set of events that can occur. However, we can still have genuine alternatives in an epistemic sense. She argues that since we cannot know which alternatives are metaphysically possible, we still have reason to regard our future as open. This is the case because either cannot know what we will do in the future or cannot use our foreknowledge to limit our epistemic alternatives.

In a sense, Bok account is inflationary in that she requires both alternative possibilities and sourcehood for free will. However, she is deflationary in what those requirements entail. To be an alternative possibility she only requires that our future be epistemically open, rather than metaphysically. To be the source of our actions, Bok believes that we must be able to, "attain some critical distance from (our various

motivations or desires that we act on) and choose which to endorse.”² This is deflationary in that while her version of sourcehood requires a level of reflective endorsement, it does not require us to be the ultimate source of our actions in a causal sense.

Her specific argument involves three distinct steps. First she argues that existence of a dialectical stalemate between compatibilists and incompatibilists shows that conditional possibility is a coherent way to think about possibility. Second, she argues that conditional possibility is necessary for practical reasoning, and that practical reasoning requires that we have multiple epistemic alternatives. Finally, Bok argues the truth of determinism and the existence of foreknowledge cannot interfere with our practical reasoning or epistemic alternatives. Therefore, it is rational to see these alternatives as genuine.

Through evaluating Bok’s argument, I hope to shed light on the overall question of whether we can have free will if determinism is true. In the first two chapters I will fully explain and break down Bok’s argument for genuine epistemic alternatives. In chapter three I will evaluate the success of Bok’s arguments. Specifically, I will offer a variety of intuitive examples to show that epistemic unpredictability is not enough to make our alternatives genuine. I will then use more examples to consider the relative importance of unpredictability and endorsement to free will.

² Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 162.

Chapter One: Dialectical Stalemates

Bok's first argument for the existence of conditional possibility rests on her claim that incompatibilists and compatibilists have reached a "dialectical stalemate." She believes that philosophers are using different meanings of what is to say that an action is "possible" and that this discrepancy is the main issue dividing the two camps. Furthermore, she says that because there is a dialectical stalemate, incompatibilists and compatibilists should abandon appealing to intuitive examples to directly defeat their opponents' arguments. This is a fairly drastic departure from previous work on free will and therefore deserves serious consideration. In order to decipher Bok's proposed stalemate, I will examine three issues: (1) the definition of a dialectical stalemate (2) whether there is a dialectical stalemate in this case and (3) what is the appropriate philosophical method to adopt in the face of a dialectical stalemate.

Definition of Stalemate

Often times a philosopher will support a view by offering examples or intuitions that support certain underlying principles, and then use those underlying principles to defend some major claim. However, there are times when an opponent can use the same intuitive examples to support a different underlying principle that does not support that same major claim. According to John Martin Fischer, who originally came up with the concept, a dialectical stalemate occurs when there are two competing principles where the only difference is that one is more deflated than the other, and there is no clear way to

decisively affirm or reject either.³ Therefore, to show that there is a dialectal stalemate, one must show that either (1) the proponent of the claim cannot use an example to establish the stronger principle without presupposing that principle or the overall claim and (2) and the opponent cannot refute the stronger principle without presupposing their own weaker principle or altered major claim.

Bok echoes this definition by saying that a dialectical stalemate is a situation where “proponents of opposing views can explain our intuitions about various examples using different principles, and in which any example which seems to support one principle over the other can legitimately be rejected on the grounds that it presupposes the view it is meant to support.”⁴ In both definitions, there are two main claims about what qualifies as a dialectical stalemate. The first is that there must be multiple ways to explain our intuitions based on different principles. The second, more complicated assertion is that there is no way to directly defeat one view using the other because each view follows necessarily from their basic assumptions. These two criteria will become important in evaluating whether Bok has found a genuine dialectical stalemate in the case of the free will debate.

After defining dialectical stalemates, it is easy to see why we might have them in the free will debate; oftentimes incompatibilism and compatibilism are separated by whether their proponents inflate or deflate concepts and requirements related to free will, such as control, sourcehood, possibility, and others. Because of this, there can be many situations where there are sets of principles where one is more deflated than the other. We

³ Fisher, *Metaphysics of Free Will*, 85.

⁴ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 135.

need to be able to sort out dialectical stalemates in order to figure out what exactly it means to have free will, and consequently shed light on the relationship between free will and determinism.

Does a Dialectical Stalemate Apply?

Bok's proposed dialectical stalemate occurs between incompatibilists and compatibilist using different notions of possibility as underlying principles. The major claim Bok argues can be undermined is Van Inwagen's argument for incompatibilism.

Van Inwagen claims that:

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us.⁵

Bok argues that this claim hinges on a certain sense of possibility, namely, what is possible for the agent to do in fact, or possibility *tout court*. Bok would say that Van Inwagen's claim is supported by the underlying principle of possibility *tout court*. However, Bok argues that a weaker principle, conditional possibility, is consistent with all of Van Inwagen's examples supporting the principle of possibility *tout court* yet opposes Van Inwagen's incompatibilist claim. Furthermore, Bok argues that even though conditional possibility can undermine Van Inwagen's examples, there is no way to decisively establish conditional possibility as right based on intuition alone.

In order for this case to fit the definition of a dialectical stalemate, Bok must first show that these two versions of possibility provide multiple ways to explain our

⁵ Van Inwagen, *An Argument For Incompatibilism*, 39.

intuitions, especially as they relate to Van Inwagen's examples. Then she must show that there is no way for one version to directly defeat the other because they necessarily follow from presupposed assumptions. Before examining whether Bok's dialectical stalemate is genuine, it would be helpful to give a fuller account of each version of possibility.

Possibility *Tout court*

Bok defines possibility *tout court* as what is possible when one considers every fact pertaining to a certain situation - namely, states of the universe, events of the past, and any other relevant information as to whether an event is possible. This inflated sense of possibility takes into account what causes our action. If determinism is true, there can only ever be one possibility. For instance, while a snow cone could melt in a conditional sense, if events of the past make it so that particular snow cone will always be in a sub-zero climate, then that snow cone melting is not possible using possibility *tout court*. It seems clear that possibility *tout court* is an underlying principle of Van Inwagen's claim. He argues we cannot do anything outside of what the conjunction of laws of nature and events in the past cause us to do. This sense of "can" implicitly uses the underlying principle of possibility *tout court*, or that possibilities are necessarily limited by events of the past.

Conditional Possibility

Bok's conditional possibility captures what is possible in a broad sense because it only takes into account the laws of nature, but ignores states of the universe and events of the past. For instance, to say it is possible for a snow cone to melt is to say that at any

given time any snow cone always has a chance of melting regardless of the state of the universe or events of the past. Even if the snow cone was in the south pole, and the events of the past made it such that the world was about to enter an ice age, it would still be possible that the snow could melt in a conditional sense because we choose to ignore certain facts about the state of the universe and the events of the past. Conversely, it is not conditionally possible for the snow cone to turn into a kitten, start talking, or grow wings. This is because none of these qualities could be attributed to a snow cone in any scenario if our current laws of nature obtain. Therefore, there would be no way to ignore coherent possibilities to the point where the snow cone could take on any those qualities because a snow cone could not ever take on those qualities at all.

Now that I have sketched Bok's concepts of two different types of possibility, we need to consider whether they match the requirements for a dialectical stalemate. The first criterion is that they must provide multiple ways to explain our intuitions about free will. Bok believes they do because the different notions of possibility themselves result from two separate mixed intuitions about free will; (1) If I perform an action because I choose to do so, then I perform it freely and (2) If I perform an action because something else causes me to do so, then I do not perform it freely. She then points out that determinism implies that the actions we normally call "free" are caused by choices which are themselves caused, ultimately by external causes, and therefore our intuitions inherently give us both reasons to affirm and deny that we perform actions freely.⁶

⁶ Bok *Freedom and Practical Reason*

The second criterion is that there is no way to directly defeat one view using the other because each view follows necessarily from each of their basic assumptions. As a matter of definition, conditional probability abstracts events of the past so that they cannot be used to narrow down one's possible alternatives. Therefore, the only criteria we can use to narrow possibilities are the laws of nature. When we use the principle of conditional possibility, we are able to use the criteria that the aforementioned snow cone is capable of melting or freezing, but we reject the idea of using any other information we learn, including events of the past, to provide more detailed circumstances. This could be information that the snow cone has been sitting in the South Pole for the past ten years or that all signs up until now suggest we are entering an ice age.

Since all of Van Inwagen's examples support the principle of possibility that necessarily considers all relevant information, there will not be an example that fits Van Inwagen's principle but not the principle of conditional possibility. The compatibilist can simply abstract the unwanted information away to refute his claims. In this sense, Van Inwagen cannot defeat conditional possibility *directly*, or by using examples that support his overall incompatibilist claim. Furthermore, while the principle of conditional possibility will work to undermine Van Inwagen's arguments, it cannot defeat Van Inwagen's overall claim about incompatibilism without presupposing conditional probability.

What does a Dialectical Stalemate Imply?

In the sense I describe above, it seems that Bok may have indeed reached a dialectical stalemate. However, what a dialectical stalemate actually entails is more

modest than it may initially imply. It simply means that specific formulations of arguments cannot be formulated as to force us to accept the overall claim, that determinism is incompatible over its counterclaim. However, it seems like there are other options available, such as arguing as to which supporting principle to use, or finding a different principle to support the overall claim that avoids the stalemate altogether. So which option should we take? To figure it out, it would be helpful to ask the question - what is the appropriate course of action in the face of a dialectical stalemate?

One option which Fischer suggests is to fundamentally restructure the argument to make each position clearer, or to “exhibit the structure of the problem in such a way that the competing positions are naturally associated with competing “intuitive pictures”⁷ Notice that Fischer does not recommend we abandon our intuitions, but rather emphasizes them further by more precisely assigning them to competing claims. However, Bok believes this would be unhelpful, and instead prescribes that:

... we should abandon the attempt to convince our opponents that intuitions, examples, or ordinary language decisively favor our view, not only because such arguments are unlikely to convince them, but because the fact that we have reached a dialectical stalemate shows that such arguments are unsound. Instead we should admit that there are several apparently legitimate ways of using the contested terms... and that we will probably not find any example which will decisively show that one way of using these terms is right. Having made this concession, we should then proceed to ask what reasons we have to use the contested terms in either of these legitimate ways in the cases under discussion⁸

So where does this leave Bok? In a favorable reading of her intentions Bok is saying that we simply should not aim for decisiveness. Furthermore, Bok’s claim still allows both incompatibilist and compatibilist reasons to argue directly over which

⁷ Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 86.

⁸ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 136-137.

conception of possibility to adopt. However, it is important to recognize that the existence of a dialectical stalemate does not inherently necessitate examining what reasons we have to accept each principle. It is rather one strategy among many that may serve to make the position of accepting a certain principle of possibility more plausible.

A broader lesson to take away is that when debating free will, like many philosophical problems, the goal is not to find a decisive answer. Instead, many philosophers precisely define what holding a particular view entails, and then make one view seem more or less appealing by considering those refinements. Fischer states this idea well, saying that, “Wisdom in philosophy consists partly in recognizing that one should not expect decisive arguments in most contexts.”⁹ With this in mind, I will move on to examine Bok’s further arguments for accepting the principle of conditional probability knowing that it is only one piece that can help use to more precisely grasp and untangle the larger issue what it means for an action to be possible.

⁹ Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, 85.

Chapter 2: Genuine Alternatives from an Epistemic Perspective

Through her discussion dialectical stalemates, Bok shows there are two coherent and competing conceptions of possibility. Possibility *tout court* supports the overall claim that determinism is incompatible with a person having genuine alternatives while conditional possibility does not. Now that she has shown there is no fatal flaw by which one can directly defeat the other, she must present different reasons for why we should adopt one conception rather than the other.

If, as Bok argues, there is truly a dialectical stalemate, then conditional possibility is a coherent way to interpret what we mean when say we *can* perform a certain action. In a sense, Bok uses the dialectical stalemate to get conditional possibility on the table, and show it is a legitimate alternative to possibility *tout court*. Now she must go onto show why conditional possibility is relevant to free will. She will do this by attempting to show that the alternatives we having using conditional possibility are genuine. Finally, Bok must show why conditional possibility is *more* relevant to free will than possibility *tout court*. To do this, she must show why the alternatives that stem from using conditional possibility are more relevant to free will than the one inevitable alternative provided by possibility *tout court*.

In this chapter I will lay out Bok's view, as well as some basic responses other philosophers have made against her view. I will then go on to present my own evaluative judgments in chapter three.

The Genuine Alternatives Worry

The first and most basic question that Bok faces is why we should ever use conditional possibility at all. For as Bok says, “From the fact that we have decided to ignore some feature of her situation, it does not follow that that feature has ceased to exist; nor does the fact that we have chosen to disregard the ways in which it limits her options imply that those limitations no longer constrain her.”¹⁰

This worry gets at the heart of the incompatibilist intuition: even though there appear to be multiple options available to us at any given time, the truth of determinism entails that these options are an illusion. Even if we can abstract information to get back to that illusion, the abstraction in itself does not really help us, because there is no good reason to believe that our options are genuine. Bok disagrees with this intuition, and therefore her goal is to show that rather than just having an illusion of free will under determinism, we actually have it in some meaningful sense that requires genuine alternatives. With this in mind, I will outline Bok’s account of how conditional possibility can provide us with genuine alternatives.

Theoretical Reasoning (Possibility *Tout court*) and Practical Reasoning (Conditional Possibility)

In order to build an account of how conditional possibility matters to free will, Bok first claims that conditional possibility and possibility *tout court* are each fundamental to different types of reasoning: practical reasoning and theoretical reasoning. The difference between theoretical and practical reasoning, and why they require

¹⁰ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 138.

different senses of possibility, is they ask fundamentally different questions that can only be answered using their respective types of possibility.

When we use theoretical reasoning, it is to answer the question, what is the world like? We seek to explain events from a metaphysical perspective. So when we look at alternate possibilities from this perspective, we would ask, based on what we know about the past and laws of nature, what are all the different alternatives the world could take? When we use practical reasoning, we ask what we have most reason to do: what options do *I* have in front of me at this moment? This *requires* us to form a set of possible actions (in the conditional sense) and then deliberate about which we have most reason to perform.

In the change from theoretical to practical reasoning, the question shifts from a third person, explanatory perspective to a first person, deliberative perspective. In terms of discovering the different alternatives for actions, asking the question of what we have reason to do is, at least initially, an epistemic one, because we ask ourselves, what options do I know I have? Then we can go on to deliberate which of those epistemic options we have the most reason to choose.

After distinguishing between theoretical and practical reasoning, we see that, in addition to different types of possibility, the stalemate also entails different “modes” in which we reason. This is implied, Bok believes, by the inherent and exclusive link between each sense of possibility and their respective mode of reasoning. Theoretical reasoning takes a metaphysical view of the world, where as practical reasoning requires an epistemic view. Just like with the original stalemate, the key to Bok’s argument is that

there is no way for one form of reasoning to directly defeat the other. Specifically, this requires that it is impossible to use theoretical reasoning to answer the question “What do I have most reason to do?” That is, we can’t answer epistemic questions about our actions from a metaphysical perspective. Bok will attempt to show this through a thought experiment later, but first it will be helpful to look at the general incompatibilist reply to give a fuller picture of what each side believes is the relationship between epistemic questions and metaphysical explanations .

Incompatibilist Response

Many incompatibilists argue against the claim that it is impossible to answer epistemic questions using metaphysical explanations. We have the most reason to do what we are in fact going to do, so we can answer the question of what we have most reason to do through theoretical reasoning. This means that we cannot deliberate, but that is simply because deliberation is also incompatible with determinism. Deliberation requires that you need to genuinely believe you could do some action A or some action B while you deliberate. To illustrate this, Van Inwagen gives an example of a person who is sitting in a room with two doors and knows one of them is locked. It doesn’t make sense to deliberate as to which door to leave through, because no matter which you decide, you will only be able to leave through one, no matter how much you deliberate.¹¹ Since you can’t actually do both and only one option is actually open, then in order to deliberate you must either be ignorant or contradict yourself. To this type of incompatibilist, if

¹¹ Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 154.

determinism is true, we do in fact make ourselves ignorant to the fact of determinism whenever we deliberate.

To incompatibilists, deliberation must result in a metaphysically free choice in order to be coherent and meaningful. However, compatibilists would not concede this. Fischer proposes that deliberation is a process, rather than a mechanism for free choice. All he requires for deliberation is “that I have an interest in figuring out what I have sufficient reason to choose, and that I do not know which course of action I will in fact choose to take (and take).”¹² According to Fischer, deliberation can be compatible with determinism because there is an epistemic gap that exists between our current knowledge and the outcome of deliberation. Even if we know that our decisions are determined solely by existing psychological causes operating on us, “it does not follow that I know what decision I will make and what action I will perform.”¹³ Essentially, as long as we don’t know what we are determined, we can still decide which door *to choose* to open, which is enough to save deliberation from being incompatible with determinism.

Notice that Bok’s argument makes a stronger claim. While Fischer simply claims that deliberation is coherent as long as we do not know *which* alternative is genuine, Bok claims that we have reason to regard *all* alternatives as genuine. Fischer believes that deliberation is coherent because we don’t know our own metaphysical explanations; that is, we don’t have access to foreknowledge. If we did gain access to foreknowledge about our future through theoretical reasoning, then that knowledge would render deliberation useless and compromise our freedom. In this case, Fischer says “My view is the opposite

¹² Fischer, *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, 326.

¹³ Fischer, *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, 7.

of the famous Biblical contention that the truth shall make us free. But this is really not surprising: if I genuinely knew all my future choices and behavior, then it would seem to me that I could just sit back and let the future unroll.”¹⁴ However, Bok believes that even we had perfect theoretical reasoning skills, we either could not have foreknowledge or we couldn’t use that foreknowledge in deciding how to act. Therefore, it could never be the case that we could “just sit back and let the future unroll.”

Pocket Oracle

Since Bok claims that it is *impossible* to use theoretical reasoning to answer epistemic questions regarding our own actions, then she needs to account for foreknowledge made possible by determinism. To do this, she presents a thought experiment involving a “Pocket Oracle.”¹⁵ The Pocket Oracle is an infallible predictor that uses theoretical reasoning to calculate our future actions based on past events and the laws of nature. Therefore, anything that the Pocket Oracle tells you will happen is guaranteed to actually happen. The Pocket Oracle acts as a way for us to consider the impact of determinism on deliberation. Bok shows that even with a Pocket Oracle, not only is deliberation possible, but necessary because there is no way the Pocket Oracle can predict our actions if our actions depend on that prediction. To illustrate this, Bok asks to imagine a case where we are about to flip a coin, and ask the Pocket Oracle whether we are going to choose heads or tails. She claims:

In either case, the Pocket Oracle would know what I would do if it predicted that I would choose heads and what I would do if it predicted I would choose tails. But because, in both cases, what I do depends on what prediction it makes, these different predictions

¹⁴ Fischer, *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, 26.

¹⁵ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 146.

would not converge on a single action, and the Pocket Oracle would be unable to make any prediction at all.¹⁶

It is easy to see her logic at work when the owner of the Pocket Oracle, Mr. Unpredictable, wants more than anything to be unpredictable. Therefore, the Pocket Oracle knows that if it predicts he will choose heads, he will instead choose tails, and vice versa. The possible predictions, namely that Mr. Unpredictable will choose heads or tails, do not converge on a single action. Furthermore, there is no way that the Pocket Oracle can be correct in its prediction. It is necessary for the Pocket Oracle to stay silent to preserve its infallibility.

The more complicated case is when the owner of the Pocket Oracle is Mr. Obedient. Instead of doing the opposite of the Pocket Oracle, Mr. Obedient knows the Pocket Oracle is infallible, and therefore does whatever it tells him to do, because that is the one inevitable course of action. So if the Pocket Oracle predicted he will choose heads, he will do so, and vice versa. Since there are multiple possible actions, predictions also cannot converge on a single action in this case. However, it seems that the Pocket Oracle could get around this. For instance, it could calculate what Mr. Obedient would have done had he never asked the Pocket Oracle, and use that as its prediction.

One possible response to this is that even in the case of Mr. Obedient, the Pocket Oracle is no longer simply predicting an action, but causing it. So while that could still lead to an infallible prediction, there is a sense in which its actual predictive power is compromised. The Pocket Oracle would have to do more to predict Mr. Obedient actions; it would actually choose the action Mr. Obedient will take. The resulting outcome would

¹⁶ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 146.

say more about Mr. Obedient's dependence on the Pocket Oracle than the actual predictability of his actions. Also, we naturally assume that determinism implies there is always only one possible action anybody could ever perform. Since the Pocket Oracle could choose from different actions that Mr. Obedient performs in itself is further evidence that genuine alternatives can exist even if determinism is true.

The only way the Pocket Oracle can reveal its prediction to you before you deliberate is if the outcome of your deliberation does not depend on that prediction. Bok believes this could be true in cases of local fatalism, temptation and indifference to the prediction.¹⁷ Cases of local fatalism are those where the outcome of your actions is already decided independent of your deliberation. For instance, if you climbed a mountain and unluckily an avalanche swept you off your feet, then deliberation about whether to go left or right as you ride the wave of snow is futile. All possible paths you could take lead to one possible outcome, and that is to tumble down. In a sense, this is like Van Inwagen's example of a locked door because even if you could still deliberate about which door to choose, if you leave, it must be through the open door. Yet even in that case, you could still decide whether to leave or stay in the room infinitely. In this way, it is not quite the same type of local fatalism as when you are already falling down a mountain and the only possible outcome is to continue to tumble.

In cases of temptation, the Pocket Oracle will still be able to predict your action as long as it knows that no matter which action you reflectively endorse after deliberation, you will still give in to your temptation. Consider the Cookie Monster, who has an

¹⁷ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 147.

incurable weak spot for cookies. No matter what, if a cookie is in front of him he cannot help but eat it. Sometimes he may deliberate and decide that since it's after dinner and he hasn't had a treat all day, that he should have a cookie. However imagine things got so bad that health groups everywhere started calling for Cookie Monster to lose his job on Sesame Street if he didn't start setting a better example for kids. After this, Cookie Monster deliberated and decided that eating cookies was not worth the social ridicule and losing his job, and so he would stop. However, it could still be the case that the next time he saw a cookie, his overwhelming desire for sweets intervened and he ate it, even if at no point before, during, or after eating it he would have endorsed that action through practical reasoning. This is similar to the local fatalism case in that the outcome is inevitable, but different in the fact that the inevitability is a result of giving into temptation, rather than being a victim of circumstance.

The third and most interesting case where the Pocket Oracle can make a prediction is if the subject of the oracle is indifferent to the prediction. Some contest that this would be impossible - one cannot coherently deliberate if he already knows the outcome of that deliberation. Also, it seems like simple fact that you know what you are going to do could have significance, even if it doesn't directly impact your deliberation. This is a subtle yet very important issue that I will discuss below and further examine in chapter three.

Implications of the Pocket Oracle

Since we cannot predict our own actions, or our foreknowledge cannot factor into choosing our actions, the epistemic gap between our current knowledge and the

outcome of our deliberation is necessary and not just an evidential claim. This means that even the ability to predict the future infallibly could not threaten the fact that we will always have multiple epistemic alternatives. Because of this, it makes it more reasonable to use conditional possibility and consider all of the options available under that conception as genuine. Essentially the claim Bok makes using the Pocket Oracle is that our actions can only be determined if we do not know what they are actually determined to be or if we can choose independently of the determined knowledge. And since we cannot know or use the knowledge of what our actions are determined to be, then we can hold all of our alternatives as legitimate when we deliberate. This is different than Fisher's view, which may allow that deliberation could become irrelevant if we did indeed have a perfectly knowledgeable Pocket Oracle.

Implications for Free Will

By showing that we do have genuine *epistemic* alternatives, Bok believes we *must* consider ourselves free in situations requiring an epistemic perspective, namely, when we are using practical reasoning to decide which action we should perform. If we care about free will in terms of our freedom to choose which actions we want to perform, then it makes most sense consider the epistemic perspective, and therefore conditional possibility, more relevant to free will. And because the epistemic perspective is more relevant, and we have genuine epistemic alternatives, we should consider our wills free. So what does this mean for metaphysical alternatives? According to Bok's view, in terms of choosing our actions, they are a trivial fact, but even her fellow compatibilists seem

hesitant to discount the importance of metaphysical alternatives. For instance, Fischer rejects Bok's notion that deliberation implies genuine alternatives:

When we engage in practical reasoning, either we do in fact believe that we are not causally determined or we do not so believe. If we do, then it is obvious that a belief we have from the practical perspective can come into direct conflict with a belief we could have from the theoretical perspective. But it is a central feature of Bok's approach that the two perspectives cannot conflict in this way; the claim that the two perspectives cannot conflict is essential for Bok's project of showing freedom to be compatible with causal determinism¹⁸.

Fischer believes that suspending judgment about casual determinism under practical reasoning results in an awkward and unnecessary "compartmentalization" of the question of determinism. This is because Fischer rejects Bok's claim that epistemic genuineness is enough for us to have genuine alternatives. Fisher believes that since genuine epistemic alternatives are not enough to give us the type of genuine alternatives required for free will, then the compartmentalization that's required to show epistemic alternatives are genuine is unnecessary.

Fischer argues the simple fact that we know we are determined, and therefore only have one metaphysical choice of action, is enough to undermine the genuineness of our alternatives. This represents a more broad view on the nature of what it is to have genuine alternatives. The point of requiring genuine alternatives for free will stems from the belief that our actions should be in some sense unpredictable. Bok's requirements for genuine alternatives implicitly only entail *epistemic* unpredictability, and not unpredictability in from an objective, metaphysical perspective. So is this unpredictability enough? Or do we indeed require a higher standard of unpredictability to consider our

¹⁸ Fischer, *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, 10.

alternatives genuine? This question will be the focus of the next chapter, where I will use intuitive examples to examine exactly what role predictability plays having free will.

Chapter 3: Foreknowledge and Predictability in the Free Will Debate

In this chapter I will present a series of thought experiments that will help us consider whether Bok's succeeds in showing that having genuine alternatives is compatible with determinism. The first issue is to consider the actual impact that foreknowledge would have on our deliberation and actions. Bok's argument is that role of foreknowledge is uninteresting because it would ever dispel the need for practical reasoning. Therefore we will always have reason to use conditional probability and regard our conditional alternatives as genuine. If foreknowledge affects the outcome of our deliberation at all, then the Pocket Oracle's possible prediction could not converge on a single action and that infallible foreknowledge would not be possible at all. But if our foreknowledge does not affect our deliberation, then it is as if (during our deliberation) we do not have that foreknowledge at all, and makes it analogous to the case where we cannot have infallible foreknowledge to begin with. I will first try to show that nearly all cases involving free will fall into the second category. I will then go onto to argue that even if foreknowledge would not affect our deliberation, it could have another effect that compromises the genuineness of our alternatives, even under Bok's definition. My argument is similar to Fischer's argument against Bok, but I will aim to demonstrate this exact effect through intuitive examples.

The second issue I want to explore is the relative importance of Bok's two requirements for freedom: (1) we can choose our actions from genuine alternatives and (2) we have the capacity to ability to reflectively and critically endorse the action we

choose to take.¹⁹ Bok's argument focuses on showing that (1) is compatible with determinism through practical reasoning. However, if I succeed in showing that (1) fails, it becomes important to ask which of these two requirements are *more* important to determining whether we have freedom. Is just having (2) enough to have freedom in even *some* sense? And if we had to define freedom based on either (1) or (2), which would we choose? This question brings us back to the stalemate that Bok had wanted so badly to avoid, but the light she sheds on the role of deliberation and predictability could more precisely describe what holding a compatibilist or incompatibilist view of free will actually amounts to.

Predictability of Choices Relating to Free Will

My first argument aims to show that foreknowledge of actions more relevant to the will would be predictable by the Pocket Oracle because those actions are more closely tied to what we value than lesser motivations. To do this, I first need to explain what it means for an action to be relevant to the will at all, and then explain why certain actions are more or less relevant to the will. Finally, I need to show why actions that are more relevant to our will are more likely to be predictable for a Pocket Oracle.

1. What does it mean for an action to be relevant to the will?

To answer this question, I will draw on Bok's own definition of freedom. Bok's account is modeled in part on the hierarchical motivation structure outlined in different

¹⁹ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 161-162.

forms by Harry Frankfurt and Gary Watson²⁰. She gives her own twist of what this entails by saying that freedom of the will consists in “our ability to determine our conduct through practical reasoning.”²¹ When we base our actions on the results of our practical reasoning, I take the process to be as follows: (a) My actions depend on my choices. (b) My choices depend on my reasons. (c) My reasons depend on the conjunction of my values and information about what would best maximize those values. In this tripartite conception, I am enfolding Gary Watson’s notion of exercising the will, namely, “the capacity to translate (one’s) values into actions”²² into what it means to use practical reasoning. In order to reason efficiently, we must have some basic system of what separates good reasons from bad reasons, which are inevitably rooted in some basic set of values I adopt in order to base my judgments.

I take values to be the things I reflectively take to make life the most worth living, so that the result of maximizing them continuously for my entire life would lead me to conclude, if I were to reflect upon it on my deathbed, that I had lived the best life possible. This makes it so when we act according to our values, or highest wants, that we act with a sense of reflective purpose. (a), (b) and (c) do not always hold all of our actions. Take (a)- if a doctor hits me in the knee with a mallet, I kick my knee out. Most would call this an action, but it doesn’t seem to be based on a choice at all²³.

²⁰ Frankfurt’s hierarchy is that there are first order desires and second order desires, where first order desires are lower wants than our second order ones. He gives a complete account of this in *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person* (Full citation in references section). Watson’s hierarchy is based on a separation between reasoned values and wants of the “appetite.” This account is in his essay, *Free Agency* (full citation is also in the References section).

²¹ Bok, *Freedom and Practical Reason*, 162 (footnote).

²² Watson, *Free Agency*, 347.

²³ Some philosophers believe that intention is necessarily tied into the definition of action. In this case, (a) and (b) would simply collapse into one, and would read (a) My actions depend on my reasons.

Furthermore, our choices don't have to depend on our reasons; it could be that you are a "lazy coin-flipper" and for every decision you make, you flip a coin because you are too lazy or indecisive to complete the process of practical reasoning. Conversely, there could be a practical coin-flipper, who believes that there are certain scenarios where the only rational way to make a fair decision is to use chance. One good example of a practical coin flipper is Harvey Dent, the noble Gotham City District Attorney. To see this, consider an exchange between the Joker and Dent from *The Dark Knight*:

Joker: Introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent of chaos. And you know the thing about chaos...it's fair.
 Dent: You live, you die. (Referencing the different sides of the coin)
 Joker: Now you're talking.²⁴

From that point on, Dent decided whether to kill people based on a coin-flip. However, this was not because he was too lazy to deliberate over whom to kill, but rather, as a result of the reflective judgment that he would rather ensure fairness through chaos.

Lastly, your reason for choosing does not always have to be a result of the calculation of how to maximize the expression of your values, as (c) suggests. One reason is that there are many situations where your values are minimally relevant to the choice and subsequent action you take. For instance, if I am deciding whether to get out of bed or press the snooze button, it is unclear that my deepest-held-values play a definitive role determining whether I get up now or five minutes from now. There are plenty of other factors - how sleepy I am, how much time I have before my next commitment, etc., that don't have any correlation to values or beliefs formed through reflective consideration. Another example is if somebody holds out a platter and offers you a cookie, it is hard to

²⁴ The Dark Night, DVD, 2004.

see how choosing to take the cookie on the left rather than the one on the right reflects any values whatsoever.

2. Why are certain actions more or less relevant to the will?

I take the situations where one goes through the process I laid out earlier to be more relevant to the will. This is because we use this process to carefully determine the decisions that are most important to us. There are some choices which we consider to be more important than others - who to marry, which career to go into, whether to have kids, where to live, etc, are more important than decisions like should I wear a v-neck shirt or crew-neck shirt today, or should I get out of bed now or five minutes from now.

It does not have to be a hard line between the two categories, for we can value things to varying degrees, and what actions we impart our value on varies from person to person. But the reason why we judge things more seriously is based on whether we want to impart our will onto our actions.

3. Why are more relevant actions predictable?

To consider why actions relevant to the will are more predictable than those that aren't, consider an example where we directly compare a relevant and non-relevant act; a coin flip and a marriage proposal.

Coin Flipping vs. Marriage

In an example such as coin flipping, the extent of the effect of the prediction is the additional information that we will choose heads. However, that information can now

influence our decision - because if we value being unpredictable in any marginal sense, then the additional information prompts a change in what reasons we have to call heads, and therefore our actions are divergent.

Now consider the case of who you want to marry. If the reason you want to marry him or her is because you believe it would lead to the happiest possible life, and you value happiness above else, including unpredictability, then the Pocket Oracle gave you that information ten minutes before you popped the question, you wouldn't value unpredictability enough for it to change what you have most reason to do. Being predictable would minimally affect your deliberation in that it would be one reason against marrying your love, but it would not be enough to change the outcome of your decision. Furthermore, it doesn't seem like you would marry somebody because the Pocket Oracle prediction made it seem inevitable. It's hard to envision a scenario where you see the name the Pocket Oracle predicts, look your future spouse up on Facebook and message them for their ring size. It seems like for a decision that important, there is value in actually deliberating about why you want to marry them that is distinct for deciding that you will. After all, "the Pocket Oracle said so" would make terrible vows.

Marriage Further Considered: *The Bachelor* Example

Consider the show *The Bachelor*. In this show, Billy the Bachelor values love enough to stop his life to find the girl of his dreams and risk public humiliation and rejection, meets twenty-five eligible women. After slowly narrowing it down to two women through a series of dates, he chooses one to propose to. If we consider possibility in a conditional sense, then Billy has twenty five possibilities of who to propose to

(assume he indeed proposes). Using conditional possibility would lead us to ignore relevant fact, like, for example, the personalities of the women or who Billy is attracted to. Ignoring these facts, combined with the fact that Billy must choose from the women actually on the show, then at the beginning of the show it is conditionally possible for Billy to choose any of the twenty five women. However, according to determinism, he only has one metaphysical possibility, namely, the woman he will actually propose to. Let's call her Betty. Now consider how the Bachelor would react if before he even looked at any of the women, he was able to acquire Bok's Pocket Oracle, and asked it which women he would eventually ask to marry him. So the million dollar question becomes - if the Pocket Oracle gives him a name, how will he use that information going on the show?

It seems implausible that the infallibility of the Oracle would lead him to call the producers, cancel the show, and immediately propose to Betty when he first meets her. Similarly, most men who know "she's the one" don't propose immediately, because there is value in going through the courting process. Furthermore, even though he knows he is going to propose to her, she still has to say yes. However it is worth considering what the point of waiting would be if you knew that the oracle was truly infallible.

A more important point to think about is how is foreknowledge would affect the process of getting to know Betty. The moment Billy meets her, he will pay extra attention. Maybe the Pocket Oracle will make him feel in love, or enhance his feelings around her. Or maybe it will make him pay less attention to the other women. This seems plausible to a certain extent, but it still seems that there will be an underlying sense

of curiosity - if this is the woman I going to propose to, I want to know what she's like. At this point, it seems Billy would get to know Betty. Maybe he's start talking to her and discover on the first date that she shares your inexplicable obsession with yo-yos, then you talk more on the second date and discover that you want the same things in life - to live near the beach and have three kids and a Labrador puppy. It seems at this point your reaction might be, "How did the Pocket Oracle know?! She is the woman of my dreams!" Even though the Pocket Oracle might have affected the process, it seems like this reaction shows that she is not the woman of his dreams *because* of the Pocket Oracle, but rather that she simply is, in fact, the woman of his dreams, and the Pocket Oracle predicted it. Furthermore, once the Bachelor confirms the Pocket Oracle's inference that he would fall in love with who it predicted, he would propose to her, because it is what he has most reason to do even considering that proposing would confirm what determinism tells us is true- that his actions are predictable and he only did have one metaphysical option.

I am not arguing that the Bachelor will necessarily react this way, or that it is necessarily the case that Pocket Oracle would not affect his decision because he values love and marriage. I am simply arguing that it seems plausible in certain situations to think that foreknowledge may not matter if your values aligned to the point where your reasons to marry somebody transcend the influence of the Pocket Oracle. I argue that this is more likely in situations where deeply held values are a bigger factor in why we have reason to act.

To further show why our deliberation can render foreknowledge irrelevant to our choices, I will present a more concrete example that deals with deliberation in the face of foreknowledge. Since there are few relatable examples of genuine foreknowledge from real life, I will temporarily delve into the world of Harry Potter, where the existence of prophecies and charged decisions about whether to align with good or evil provide an ideal setting to think through these issues more carefully.

Is the Connection Between Values and Free Will Legitimate in the Face of Actual Foreknowledge?

A central feature of the Harry Potter series revolves around a prophecy that names Harry as the “Chosen One” destined to fight against Lord Voldemort to protect all that is good in the Wizarding World. To help think about this in terms of Bok’s example, instead of receiving a prophecy, let’s imagine that Harry Potter had a pocket oracle. Knowing that Voldemort was gaining power, he asked, what will happen between me and Voldemort? The Pocket Oracle responds, “You will try to kill Voldemort.” What would Harry’s reaction be? It seems he would have the same response as he did when he discovers the terms of the prophecy - complaining to his headmaster, Albus Dumbledore: “It all comes down to the same thing, doesn’t it? I’ve got to try to kill him.” At which time, Dumbledore would ask the same question, “Imagine, please, just for a moment that you never heard that prophecy! How would you feel about Voldemort now? Think!”

Even in the face of a seemingly infallible prophecy, Dumbledore tries to get Harry to undertake the process of practical reasoning in order to find out what he has the most reasons to do based on his values, desires, and information about the different factors

involved in his deliberation. And even though he knows the outcome, he is able to go through the process:

Harry watched Dumbledore striding up and down in front of him, and thought. He thought of his mother, his father, and Sirius. He thought of Cedric Diggory. He thought of all the terrible deeds he knew Lord Voldemort had done. A flame seemed to leap inside his chest, searing his throat. ‘I’d want him finished,’ said Harry quietly. ‘And I’d want to do it.’²⁵

While this passage doesn’t explicitly say that Harry went through a rational process of weighing reasons and deliberating, it seems reasonable to infer that Harry went through some process of deliberation in considering whether he would rather actively hunt Voldemort or not. Furthermore, Harry does not seem to think that what is important is his ability to choose from genuine alternatives, but rather what matters is his ability to *endorse* his actions through deliberation:

“It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high. Some people, perhaps, would say that there was little to choose between the two ways, but Dumbledore knows- *and so do I*, thought Harry, with a rush of fierce pride, *and so did my parents*- that there was all the difference in the world.”²⁶

In this example, the disappointment and powerlessness that Harry felt after his fate was handed down to him was reversed by regaining a sense of ownership over his actions after going through a process of deliberation and discovering that his future action coincided with his convictions. Furthermore, it seems that, Pocket Oracle or not, Harry would have tried to kill Voldemort. That is why the Pocket Oracle could make the prediction in the first place, because regardless of whether Harry knew he was going to

²⁵ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 511.

²⁶ Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 512.

try to kill Voldemort or not beforehand, he would have decided to take that action, simply because he valued loyalty to his parents, and promoting good by eradicating all evil that he could. Overall, Harry's sentiment seems plausible - it is reasonable to think that if we were to face a similar sense of foreknowledge or inevitability, that the "ownership" we feel would still make a difference. And the fact that we can only take ownership over actions we reflectively endorse, and that endorsement is a result of our deeply held values, means that unless Harry considered being unpredictable to be more important than his other values at stake, he would choose the same course of action regardless of having foreknowledge of what that action would be. This implies that at least one purpose of deliberation is not only to decide what actions we take, but what actions we should endorse - that is which actions, based on our values, do we have most reason to perform, and even when we know what action we will take, we still have other reasons to undertake a deliberative process.

Book of Your Life

However, it is worth questioning whether this sense of ownership would always be enough to make "all the difference in the world." To push this question, we will now consider a more extreme case of foreknowledge. In this scenario, we will examine a situation where, instead of there being one instance of foreknowledge, you come into contact with wealth of foreknowledge. Imagine that one day you receive your own biography. It chronicles your life from the day you were born through the day that you will die. You look at the publisher date, and it is ten years before you were born. In curiosity you read it up until you get to present day, and then stop.

At this point I can format the example in two ways. The first is to assume that next chapters in the book were written under the assumption that you would never read it. According to Bok, these would have to be fallible predictions, because it assumes that your actions won't depend on the prediction. Since you could read the chapters about your future then act based on those predictions, you could render those predictions false. The second way to format the example is to require the predictions in the book to be infallible. In this case, it could only predict actions that don't depend on your having foreknowledge of what those actions will be. Essentially, depending on how we set up the example, the next chapters of the book could contain either fallible predictions of what we would have done under the assumption that we were never intended to see the book, or contain only infallible predictions and work like the Pocket Oracle. I will consider each of these possibilities separately.

Let's first consider the scenario is if the book contains predictions about your future under the assumption that you would not see the book. According to Bok, this type of prediction would be necessarily infallible. Therefore, knowledge of your own prediction would provide an increased sense of freedom in that you see a possible path but realize it isn't necessary. However, an incompatibilist would argue that's not due to free will but rather the fallibility of the prediction. This aside, it seems reasonable that if you got this type of book, you would want to try to prove it wrong - whether to assert your freedom or just to test the limits of the book's fallibility. However, an interesting question to ask is if you did get the urge to prove the prediction's fallibility, what actions would you defy? In most cases, you would do little things, like raising your hand at a certain time, not asking a question in class, etc. But for major decisions, like who you are

going to marry, or whether you are going to attempt to eradicate evil by hunting villains, would you consider changing those, even if the actions the book as written down are the ones that you do in fact have the most reason to do? Again, when it comes to more important decisions that are based on values, we are more likely to sacrifice our unpredictability in order to do act based on what we most highly value.

Your Life Spark Notes

The previous example suggests that doing what we want is more important than being unpredictable, but is this really always the case? To think about this question, consider the second possible ending to the book, where it continues to be infallible. Then it becomes like Bok's Pocket Oracle - the only things that would be left in the book are the predictions that converge on a single action, namely, where the result won't depend on the knowledge you gain from the book. So what actions would be left? They would be the actions where even given its unpredictability, he would still have the most reasons take a certain action. So in a way, this book is "Your Life Spark Notes;" it contains most important decisions you will face in your life, along with providing the outcomes of those decisions. The reason it can predict these decisions is because the strength of your values overcomes your need to feel unpredictable, so you will perform those actions regardless of whether you know of them in advance.

According to the conclusion inferred by the one-prophecy scenario introduced earlier, it seems under the doctrine that only requires alternatives in a conditional sense and endorsement through deliberation, you could still go through your own process of deliberation at every sentence do see if it is what in fact you would do. In a version of

compatibilism with a deflated sense of sourcehood, you should still be considered free. This is because your decisions about which action to take depended on your own deliberation and that deliberation allowed you to impart your values onto your actions. But after a while, this exercise would become merely academic, and it doesn't seem like the satisfaction of deliberating might not be enough to make you feel free in a meaningful way. To consider what this would actually be like, consider another analogy.

Life as a Math Assignment

Another way to think about this problem is that deliberating with foreknowledge would be like double checking the answer key to your math homework - you go through the steps and find your own answer, and could even have different possibilities of what the answer could be since you don't use the answer key while you are working out the problem. It seems like you would still get satisfaction from knowing the problem in a way you didn't before - you wouldn't just know the answer, but have a thorough understanding the problem and solution from going through of the steps necessary to get to that answer. And if you are a math enthusiast, you could still derive immense satisfaction just from doing the problem itself.

However, what if you had a magic calculator that infallibly told you the right answer? Hypothetically you should still do the problems to get the full understanding, but for the average semi-slacking calculus student, if he knew that the answer key was in fact infallible, and showing his work was not required, why do the work if it all ended the same anyway? Even for the math enthusiasts, it seems like there would be another kind of satisfaction - or at the very least excitement - lost in the sense that you already know

where your problem solving will lead. For the majority of people, problem solving for its own sake just isn't as fun as problem solving to discover something you hadn't previously known. Similarly, even if you are philosopher and derive immense satisfaction from weighing reasons and making sound practical judgments and decisions, it still seems like being unpredictable is still important to maintaining a sense of freedom and meaning in our lives.

Implications of the Examples

The purpose of these examples is to expose our intuitions about free will by pulling apart the two components we think are required to have free will: predictability and doing what we want. By directly pitting the two against each other we can test what is *more* important to free will; having alternate possibilities or carrying out our convictions. I have attempted to show through the *Bachelor* and Harry Potter examples that in a case where we have only very limited foreknowledge, it seems that we value doing what we want to do and endorsing our actions over being predictable. However, as seen in the Your Life Spark Notes, the more times we must come face to face with our predictions, the more the knowledge of our own predictability takes a toll on our sense of meaning and freedom our lives possess. From this I conclude that while foreknowledge doesn't always play a role in figuring out what you have the most reasons to do, it still seems to affect our sense of freedom. In particular, it does so by limiting the idea that our alternatives are genuine. I believe this supports the intuition that our alternatives are more closely tied to our sense of possibility *tout court*, rather than the conditional possibility we use while we deliberate. If we have infallible knowledge of what we were going to

do, even if we had reason to deliberate and abstract that foreknowledge away, it would still not entail that we regarded our future as open to ourselves because we would in fact know our only available alternative even if that information didn't impact the outcome of our deliberation. Bok argues that if our foreknowledge doesn't affect our deliberation, then it wouldn't affect the genuineness of our epistemic alternatives. However, I argue that just because the epistemic alternatives are genuine in that we necessarily have them when we deliberate, it does not follow that they are genuine *enough* to meet the requirement for free will. To be free, we intuitively require some sense of unpredictability. This is why Bok's account initially seems plausible; if a perfect Pocket Oracle cannot predict our actions, then we intuitively feel we gain back a sense of freedom. However, if we do have foreknowledge, or if we simply know that our actions are indeed predictable, then even if we do not use that knowledge in our deliberation, its mere existence still undermines our freedom.

If I am incorrect, and even our actions more closely related to our values are less predictable than I take them to be, it would mean that infallible prediction would be impossible in more cases. However, it is worth asking whether, if this were the case, would Bok have a stronger argument for why we should accept her argument for a deflated notion of what it means to be a genuine alternative? The answer rests on the difference between knowing the fact that our action is determined, against knowing what that act actually amounts to. If we cannot know that act, maybe we have more reason to regard our future as open *to us*. However the compatibilist must still recognize that regardless of whether we can fully realize it or not, if determinism is true then our actions

are fundamentally predictable in at least some sense, and most of us do intuitively believe unpredictability is related to free will in an important way.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to show why Bok is mistaken in deflating the notion of a genuine alternative to only require multiple epistemic options rather than multiple metaphysical options. In the first two chapters, I explained Bok's justifications for considering epistemic options genuine. First, she used the concept of a dialectical stalemate to show that conditional possibility is a viable alternative to possibility *tout court*. Next, she argued that each type of possibility was necessarily and exclusively attaches to two separate modes of reasoning: possibility *tout court* is used for theoretical reasoning and conditional possibility is used for practical reasoning. Finally, she argued that we can *only* use practical reasoning to determine our actions and therefore alternatives resulting from conditional possibility are genuine and provide us with free will.

In response, I have offered a variety of intuitive examples to undermine Bok's deflated definition of genuine alternatives. First, I used *The Bachelor* and Harry Potter examples to show that, especially in decisions most relevant to our wills, we are much more predictable than Bok might have us believe. I then went on to use the examples of Your Life Spark Notes and Life as a Math Assignment to show why metaphysical alternatives are more relevant to free will than epistemic possibilities.

Ultimately, my conception of free will requires that for alternatives to be genuine, they must be alternatives in a metaphysical sense. Since metaphysical alternatives are incompatible with determinism, I must conclude that we do not have free will and therefore endorse incompatibilism. However, as shown in the Harry Potter example, even

when we know that we only have one metaphysical alternative (and by my definition that our will is not free) we can extract a special type of meaning from being able endorse our actions, even if that meaning does not quite amount to freedom.

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