Reasons, determinism and the ability to do otherwise

It has been argued that in a deterministic universe, no one has any reason to do anything. Firstly, it is argued that an agent cannot have reason to do anything unless she can do otherwise; secondly, that the relevant 'can' is incompatibilist. I show that the argument from action-guidance is the only real argument for an alternative possibilities requirement for reasons, and that a plausible interpretation of action-guidance implies a compatibilist 'can'.

1. Arguments for an alternative possibilities requirement for reasons

It has been argued that reasons for action are incompatible with determinism (Haji 2012; Streumer 2007. Streumer does not take a definitive stand on the incompatibilist issue, but seems to lean heavily in that direction in his 2007 paper). Similar arguments have been used to support the thesis that obligations are incompatible with determinism (Haji 2002; Broad 1952 pp. 195-217). It has furthermore been argued that the incompatibility of obligations and determinism *follow* from the incompatibility of reasons and determinism, since we *ought* to do what we have *most reason* to do (Haji 2012; Streumer 2007; Vranas 2007). Possibly 'right', 'wrong' and other deontic judgements stand and fall together with reasons as well (Haji 2012). In this paper, I will mostly write about reasons, occasionally about obligations, but always under the assumption that they stand and fall together, and that we ought to do what we have most reason to do. I will often omit 'for action' after 'reasons', but what I discuss throughout is incompatibilism about reasons for action (rather than, e.g., reasons for belief) and determinism. I furthermore, following Ishtiyaque Haji and Bart Streumer, use 'reason' in a 'pro tanto' sense (i.e., a reason to A could in principle be outweighed by a stronger reason to B), so that statements about having *a* reason to A, *most* reason to A and so on makes sense.

Reason incompatibilism is argued for in two steps: firstly, it is argued that reasons require alternative possibilities; secondly, that the relevant 'can' is incompatibilist. I will argue that even if the first step in the argument is successful, the second one fails.

Beginning with the first step, Streumer argues that the best explanation as to why tables and chairs do not have reasons for action is that tables and chairs *cannot* act, and 'reason' implies 'can' (Streumer 2007 p. 362). Streumer anticipates the objection that we might just as well explain why tables and chairs lack reasons for action by invoking the fact that they are not rational and do not understand reasons. He responds that if rationality sufficed for having

reasons for action, a completely paralyzed person might have reasons to perform bodily actions, and this is clearly not the case (ibid pp. 363-365). Streumer further argues that it seems crazy to suggest that I have a reason to prevent the crusades from taking place. The craziness of this suggestion is best explained, according to Streumer, by the fact that 'reason' implies 'can' (ibid pp. 358-362). Streumer calls these arguments *the argument from tables and chairs* and *the argument from crazy reasons* respectively, but I think it is clear that we actually have *one* argument here rather than two (see also Heuer 2010 p. 240). It seems crazy to suggest that a completely paralyzed person has a reason to perform bodily actions, and it seems crazy to suggest that I have a reason to prevent the crusades, because 'reason' implies 'can'. Other philosophers have also pointed out the sheer intuitive obviousness of us not having reason to or being obligated to do what we cannot do (Haji 2012 pp. 20-222; Broad 1952 pp. 195-217; Vranas 2007 p. 185). Haji furthermore writes that reasons to perform a specific act must belong to some agents only. There cannot be free-floating reasons that do not belong to anyone, nor can reasons belong to all agents everywhere. Presumably, reasons to perform a specific act belong to those and only those agents who *can* do it (Haji 2012 p. 22). Finally, reasons play an important part in practical deliberation and guide our actions. They would not be able to fill this function unless restricted by what we can do (Haji 2012 p. 22; Streumer 2007 pp. 365-368. See also Howard-Snyder 2006).

Haji further argues that 'reason' does not only imply 'can', but also 'can abstain from' (Haji 2012 pp. 43-51). This seems intuitively plausible. If a cake with sugar frosting is hopelessly out of reach for a diabetic anyway (e.g., placed on a really high shelf and there is nothing to step on), it does sound strange to say that she ought not to eat it, and a supposed reason not to eat would have no part to play in her deliberation (Haji 2002 p. 29). I will assume in this paper that insofar as 'reason' implies 'can', it implies 'can abstain from' as well. I will use the abbreviation APR for the thesis that reasons have an *alternative possibilities requirement*. However, if it were the case that determinism merely precluded us from having reason to do otherwise, whereas it was compatible with us having reason to do what we actually do, the implications for practical reason and morality would still be disastrous (e.g., Hitler had no reason to abstain from arranging the holocaust).

We have seen a number of arguments *for* APR; the argument from crazy reasons, the argument from no free-floating reasons, and the argument from action-guidance. The philosophical literature also contains a number of arguments against APR and its cousin, the

ought implies can principle.[1] If APR can be successfully refuted, determinism does not threaten reasons for action. Likewise, if the consequence argument and other arguments to the effect that agents cannot do otherwise under determinism can be successfully refuted, APR does not lead us to reason incompatibilism. My purpose in this paper, however, is not to engage the consequence argument or other arguments for the impossibility of doing otherwise under determinism, nor to engage the bulk of arguments against APR (although I will briefly consider one counter argument in section 4). I will assume, for the sake of discussion, that APR is true, and that there is at least *some* sense in which we cannot do otherwise under determinism. I will grant all this to the reason incompatibilists, and show that there are *still* strong arguments for reason compatibilism.

It is recognized by everyone in the debate that APR alone does not take us all the way to reason incompatibilism; for that, we also need an incompatibilist interpretation of the 'can' relevant to APR. In the next section I will look at the arguments given for an incompatibilist 'can'.

2. Arguments for an incompatibilist 'can'

There are two arguments for an incompatibilist interpretation of 'can'. Neither conclusively proves that the 'can' of APR is incompatibilist, but in the absence of good counter arguments, they still have force.

Firstly, we may consider one kind of obstacle after another that stops me from acting – say, stops me from saving a child drowning in the sea. Suppose, for instance, that I have been attacked and tied to a tree. It is still logically possible that I save the child, there is some possible world where I do, but it is clear that I cannot do so in the reason-relevant sense. Suppose next that my attacker did not tie me up, but struck me unconscious instead. This is a different kind of obstacle to saving the child, but it seems equally relevant – I still cannot save her in the reason-relevant sense. Now suppose that I have a truly irresistible fear of the sea – whenever I approach the sea, I panic and completely lose control over myself. In this scenario,

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[1] See Vranas 2007 for a discussion of some of the counter arguments, including Frankfurt examples. Some people have the intuition that Jones in a standard Frankfurt case has an obligation to and/or reasons to abstain from murder, despite the counterfactual intervener ensuring that it is inevitable that Jones will murder Smith. Others have the intuition that Jones cannot really have such obligations or reasons, at least not in an *objective* sense, although he might rationally *believe* that he has them insofar as he is unaware of the counterfactual intervener. My own intuitions tend towards the latter view, but regardless of which set of intuitions that track the truth here, I will grant the reason incompatibilists, for the sake of argument, that APR is true, so that Jones lacks (objective) reasons to abstain from murder in a Frankfurt case.

too, I cannot save the child in the reason-relevant sense. These obstacles are of very different kinds, but they all imply that I cannot save the child. Why would not the same be true if the past and the laws of nature have determined that I do not to save her? Unless we can find a good argument as to why the past and the laws of nature are relevantly different from all these other obstacles, we may assume that the reason-relevant 'can' is incompatibilist. Secondly, we may assume that the 'can' is incompatibilist because there does not seem to be a plausible compatibilist interpretation available. A conditional interpretation, according to which I can save the child iff I would save her if I chose to save her, fails for familiar reasons – it implies that I *can* save her when I am unconscious or paralyzed with fear (Streumer 2007 pp. 356-357; Broad 1952 pp. 199-200; Haji 2002 pp. 21-24 and 65-70; 2012 pp. 125-126).[2]

In order to refute these arguments we have to provide a plausible compatibilist interpretation of 'can', with intuitively plausible implications for what agents can and cannot do, that does not make an *arbitrary* distinction between on the one hand being determined not to save the child by the past and the laws of nature and on the other hand being prevented from doing so by other factors.

James Hobbs suggests an interpretation of 'can' according to which I can do something when I have the necessary abilities and an opportunity to exercise them. Hobbs argues that when we excuse an agent for failing to perform an action that would normally be obligatory on the grounds that she could not do it, it is either because she lacked the necessary physical ability, know-how or skills, or because she lacked an opportunity to exercise them. Hobbs exemplifies what he means by 'opportunity' by saying that a person with the ability to run a four-minute mile has an opportunity to exercise this ability when she is on Earth, in normal gravity, with normal atmosphere, is adequately healthy and rested, has adequate footwear and so on, and nothing physically restrains her. When an agent has the ability and opportunity to X, she *can* X in the reason and obligation relevant sense. It is, however, irrelevant whether the agent lacked the will or motivation to X. Thus, according to Hobbs analysis, in cases where the agent is determined by the past and the laws of nature not to run a four-minute mile because it is determined that she simply does not want to do that right now (but she does have adequate footwear, is rested and so on), she still counts as having both the ability and the opportunity to do so – she still *can* run the four-minute mile in the reason relevant sense.

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[2] If I am unconscious, it can still be true that I would save her if I chose to do so; if I so chose, I would have been awake. Likewise, in the phobia scenario, it may be true that I would save her if I chose to do so, because if I so chose, I would have been less scared.

I believe that Hobbs' compatibilist interpretation of 'can' ultimately fails to satisfy both desiderata. Firstly, it implies, implausibly, that an agent can have a reason to resist a literally irresistible urge or desire. Hobbs argues that agents intuitively can have such reasons, because kleptomaniacs intuitively ought not to steal (Hobbs 2013 pp. 58-64). I do not find this argument convincing. I agree with Peter Vranas that when we judge that kleptomaniacs ought not to steal, it is because we do not imagine that their urge to steal is literally irresistible (Vranas 2007 pp. 183-184). Secondly, it seems arbitrary to merely state that although ill health, lack of footwear and a large variety of other factors take away the opportunity to exercise one's ability to run a four-minute mile, being determined by the past and the laws of nature not to run does not. An incompatibilist might agree that people *normally say* that an agent has the opportunity to show off her ability to run a four-minute mile when she is in the circumstances described by Hobbs, but add that people talk this way because they implicitly assume that we are *not* determined to do what we do by the past and the laws of nature.[3]

I will argue for a compatibilist 'can' by a different route. Firstly, I will argue that there is actually only one good argument for APR; the argument from action-guidance. Secondly, I will argue that a plausible interpretation of what it means for reasons to be action-guiding implies that the agent need only have alternative possibilities in a compatibilist sense. Finally, I suggest that there is no plausible alternative analysis of action-guidance that supports incompatibilism.

3. The argument from action-guidance

Section 1 of this paper contains a number of arguments for APR. I already noted that what Streumer labels *the argument from tables and chairs* and *the argument from crazy reasons* is actually one single argument. Haji's argument from no free-floating reasons is distinct from the argument from crazy reasons, but does not really do much on its own. It is possible to think of different explanations than APR as to why reasons belong to certain agents. Michael Zimmerman writes that agents sometimes have moral reasons to do what they cannot do, if doing the thing in question would be most *fitting* (2007 pp. 329-330). Zimmerman's example is of a person, John, who watches the news and sees a child being rescued from a burning

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[3] In fairness to Hobbs, he does suggest that there might be a more demanding kind of 'ought', connected to blameworthiness, which his 'ought' is not. He might thus not be discussing the same thing as Haji and Streumer do. Derk Pereboom (2014 pp. 139-141) suggests that Hobbs' 'can' is the one relevant for the 'ought' of axiological recommendation, whereas another sense of 'ought' requires incompatibilist alternative possibilities.

building. John has a moral reason, according to Zimmerman, to respond positively to the rescue of the child, even if he cannot do so because he cannot help feeling completely unmoved. Zimmerman seems to conceive of this fittingness as a relationship that holds between an action and one or more particular agents (for instance, John and others who hear about the rescue has a reason to respond positively). If so, some kind of fittingness relationship between agents and reasons might explain, as well as APR does, why some people only have reason to perform a particular action. I think it is clear, however, that If I tell a friend that I think she has a reason to A, and she explains to me why she *cannot* A, it would often seem strange to insist that she still has this reason. There may be contexts where it seems natural to talk about having a reason to do something that would in some sense be fitting even if one cannot do it; still, much of our reason talk seems to be action-guiding, and therefore imply alternative possibilities. Regardless of whether there are other kinds of practical reasons as well, I will focus on the action-guiding ones.

At this point, we seem to be left with two arguments for APR; *the argument from crazy reasons* and *the argument from action-guidance*. However, I will argue that this is one argument rather than two. *Why* does it seem crazy to suggest that a person living today has a reason to stop the crusades? Or, to use one of Haji's examples, *why* does it seem crazy to suggest that a Canadian in his home country has a reason to save a child drowning in Australia that he does not even know about (Haji 2012 pp. 20-21)? The answer is that these supposed reasons cannot guide these agents' actions. Let us imagine that the Canadian have psychic powers allowing him to detect the presence of drowning children all over the globe, and furthermore pull them out of the water via telekinesis. In this fanciful version of the scenario, it makes perfect sense to say that the Canadian has a reason to save the drowning child in Australia – because this reason can now guide his actions. We have also seen, in Zimmerman's examples, that it does not always seem crazy to suggest that someone has a reason to do something that she cannot do. If we use the word 'reason' in a *non*-action-guiding way, to indicate that a certain action would have been fitting if it had occurred regardless of whether it was possible for it to occur or not, it does not seem crazy. The intuition that it would be *crazy* to suggest that someone has a reason to do what she cannot do is not a brute one, but depends on the action-guiding function of reasons for action.

The argument from action-guidance – reasons cannot guide our actions if they tell us to do the impossible or the inevitable – is thus *the* argument for APR. I consider it a good argument – but I will argue that it gives us reason to accept a *compatibilist* version of APR.

4. Reasons as action-guiding

Haji and Streumer write that reasons play an important part in practical deliberation and guide our actions, and therefore require alternative possibilities (Haji 2012 p. 22; Streumer 2007 p. 365), but the idea that reasons have this action-guiding function can be interpreted in different ways. In this section, I will discuss several ways of understanding the action-guiding function of reasons, and their implications for APR.

One way to interpret the claim that reasons play an important part in practical deliberation and guide our actions is that we *think* about reasons when making up our minds, and these thoughts frequently *cause* us to act. I might, for instance, deliberate about whether to take the bus or the car to work. I think to myself that going by car is more comfortable, whereas taking the bus is better for the environment. These thoughts cause me to decide to take the bus, and this decision in turn causes me to actually take the bus. However, if we understand action-guidance in this causal way, it provides no argument for APR. It is possible that I deliberate, decide and act in the way described above even if I *cannot* take my car because it is, unbeknownst to me, broken. It might not be psychologically possible, or at least not rational, for me to deliberate about whether to take the bus or the car unless I *believe* that both options are possible, but I need not actually *have* alternative possibilities open to me.

At this point in the dialectic, it might be suggested that rather than frantically looking for an interpretation of action-guidance according to which the action-guiding function of reasons support APR, we should abandon APR and replace it with a belief condition. We might say that I only have pro tanto reasons to take the car as well as the bus if I *believe,* or perhaps *rationally* believe, that I can do either, but whether I actually can or not is irrelevant. Derk Pereboom argues along these lines against the thesis that there is an alternative possibilities requirement for obligations. If I do not yet know whether another agent will do X or not, if both her doing X and her not doing it are consistent with my beliefs, it can be *rational* to tell her that she ought to do X. Plausibly, Pereboom writes, such 'ought' statements are sometimes not only rational, but *true* – even if the world is deterministic, and no one can do otherwise. We therefore have reason to reject the alternative possibilities requirement (Pereboom 2001 pp. 147-148). It should be noted, too, that this proposed belief condition, sufficiently qualified, might explain why it seems crazy to suggest, e.g., that I have

a reason to go back in time and prevent the crusades from happening, just as well as APR does. I *know* that I cannot go back in time and prevent the crusades.[4]

Haji responds to Pereboom that he is interested in *objective* reasons and obligations, not the subjective ones that Pereboom seems to discuss. Suppose that (normative, and not just motivating) reasons are subjective in the Humean sense that I have a reason to A iff I desire X and believe that A:ing is the best way to get X. If so, reasons are quite trivially compatible with determinism. It is clearly possible that I have this desire and belief even if the universe is deterministic. However, we often talk about reasons and obligations in a more objective sense as well. Objective reasons and obligations depend on what the world is really like and what really is desirable or valuable, not only on what agents believe or desire to do (Haji 2002 p. 76; Haji 2012 pp. 14-17; see also Vranas 2007 p. 169). In the bus/car example above, I might consider reasons for going by bus or taking the car respectively, but once I discover that my car was broken, I might conclude that my entire deliberation had been *mistaken.* Facts that would have spoken in favour of taking the car if it had worked become moot as reasons if I *cannot* take the car. Likewise, the fact that the bus is more environmentally friendly than the car seems irrelevant if I cannot take the car anyway. In this more objective sense of reason, it is possible for agents to be radically mistaken about what they have reason to do. The reason incompatibilist worry is that we are *always* mistaken when we think that we have reason to do something if the world is deterministic. The problem facing the reason incompatibilist at this point in the dialectic is to explain in what way *objective* reasons are action-guiding. Unless reasons are action-guiding we have no argument for APR, and without APR, no argument for reason incompatibilism.

However, we do often talk about reasons and obligations in a way that is simultaneously objective and action-guiding. Let us return to the drowning child example to illustrate: Suppose that I see a child about to drown in the sea, and believe that I ought to dive in, swim

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[4] Streumer (forthcoming) argues that APR cannot be replaced by a belief condition. His supposed counter example involves a man who believes that he is Napoleon, but yet has no reason to try to win the battle at Waterloo. Even if this man's belief is justified, Streumer argues, because he has been given a drug that gives him realistic hallucinations according to which he is Napoleon, he lacks a reason to try to win the battle at Waterloo. I do not believe that this is a very convincing counter example. It is highly controversial whether hallucinations caused by ingesting a drug can justify one's belief, for instance. I suspect that it is possible to come up with a convincing belief condition that can handle the crusades case and similar cases (perhaps by invoking, as Streumer does later in the same paper when discussing Frankfurt cases, what people *should* have believed in a certain situation), but doing so is not part of the purpose of this paper. After all, I agree with Haji that a belief condition is not plausible anyway for *objective* reasons.

out and save her. Because I am scared of the sea (although my fear is not as great as to be literally irresistible) I do not. I call for help, but the child drowns before help arrives. Afterwards, I feel terribly guilty, and decide to talk to my friend Bill about my feelings. Bill firstly tells me that I really *should* be ashamed of myself; as far as I knew I could have saved her, but I chickened out. In philosophical terms, Bill tells me that I am blameworthy for acting from a bad character and/or for violating a *subjective* obligation (Haji 2002 pp. 194-196; Vranas 2006 p. 193). However, Bill tries to console me as well. He says that although I *thought* that I ought to have saved her, I could not actually have done so. Had I tried to, I would certainly have drowned as well, due to some very strong currents. In philosophical terms, Bill argues that I did not violate any *objective* obligations. The way he talks about obligation here seems to be, in some way, action-guiding. His claim is not that it would not have been fitting if I had (impossibly) saved the child, but that a supposed reason or obligation to save the child could not have guided me to do so, and therefore does not exist. The question is how to understand the conception of action-guidance in play here. Unless we get a clearer picture of what it means for objective reasons and obligations to be action-guiding, we cannot answer in what sense they require alternative possibilities. I will provide such a picture in the next section.

5. *Objective* reasons and action-guidance

The argument for APR is that reasons are action-guiding. The reasons we discuss are objective ones; they do not depend on our beliefs and desires. Since an agent can have an objective reason to do X despite not desiring to X or knowing about X, the action-guiding function of this reason must consist in something other than it actually figuring in the agent's decision-making process. Furthermore, we have seen already that reasons can play a part in this process and cause an agent to act even if she lacks alternative possibilities. Objective reasons must thus be action-guiding in a different sense. In this section, I will present two proposals for how to understand the action-guiding function of objective reasons, which imply that having reasons for action requires alternative possibilities, but only in a compatibilist sense. I do not say that these are the only possible ways to understand the action-guiding function of objective reasons, nor do I claim to have proven once and for all that no incompatibilist-friendly alternative can be found. These are, however, *plausible* ways of understanding how objective reasons could be action-guiding, and I *challenge* the reason incompatibilist to come up with an alternative version that yields incompatibilism. For reasons that will be clear towards the end of this section, I doubt that this can be done.

Objective reasons may not *actually* play a part in our deliberations about what to do – but perhaps they *ideally* do so? Streumer (forthcoming) suggests as much, when he writes that there are reasons of which we are not aware, but they are still reasons for us in virtue of the fact that they *would* affect our deliberation *if* we were aware of them. My first suggestion is therefore as follows: X constitutes an objective reason for agent P to do action A in situation S, iff an idealized version of P would take X into consideration in favour of A when deciding what to do in S. (X can thus constitute a pro tanto reason for P to do A even if idealized P would think that Y is *more* important than X, and ultimately decides to do B because of Y.)[5]

How does an idealized version of P differ from the actual P? Well, it should be uncontroversial that idealized P differs in *at least* this respect: She has every true factual belief relevant to the decision at hand, and no false ones. Ideally, decisions are based on actual facts rather than false beliefs. Now, whether certain facts are or are not relevant is a normative question. In the bus/car example used earlier, it is relevant that cars destroy the environment only if saving the environment is desirable. We might therefore, to some extent, disagree about which facts the idealized agent must know about. If my car was broken is, however, obviously relevant for my decision. It is the kind of fact that *any* rational agent choosing her means of transport would want to know, regardless of her values, and thus something that an idealized version of me would definitely have known.

It might be objected that this way of analysing the action-guiding function of objective reasons is a non-starter, since it could not account for the fact that we sometimes have objective reasons to gather more information. This objection is similar to Robert Johnson's (2003) argument against some versions of virtue ethics: If an action A in situation S is right only if a fully virtuous agent acting in character would do A in S, it follows that various self-improvement regimes are not morally right. This is counter-intuitive. I cannot, in this paper, delve too deeply into this problem, but I believe that it is solvable. I do not characterize an idealized agent is omniscient, but as having every belief relevant *to the decision at hand*. If I am to decide whether to go to Small-town University or City University, all kinds of facts

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[5] This suggestion might remind some readers of Michael Smith's famous analysis of moral reasons (1994 pp. 151-181). However, Smith's theory is a theory of meta-ethics, of the nature of the reasons themselves. He writes that facts about what is desirable for us to do are *constituted* by facts about what we would advise ourselves to do if we were fully rational. I take no stand in this debate. For the purposes of this paper, reasons might just as well be some kind of queer Platonic entities floating about in the metaphysical ether, or facts that we might use to justify our behaviour to other rational agents, or something else.

about these universities are relevant, and would be believed by an idealized version of me. However, if I am to decide whether to make up my mind right now or gather more information about the respective universities, the facts relevant to *this* decision includes facts about my limited knowledge about Small-town U and City U. I might not fully appreciate the extent of my ignorance, but an idealized version of me deciding whether to gather more information or not would do so; if my ignorance is deep, it counts in favour of gathering more information. Now, Johnson (ibid pp. 826-828) objects to an adviser version of virtue ethics as well, since virtue does not imply that one has sufficient knowledge of other people and their situations in order to give proper advice. This is not, however, a problem for the ideal adviser account of action-guidance that I will move on to later in this section – an *ideal,* rather than merely virtuous, adviser presumably has such knowledge.

We thus imagine, at least for the time being, that an objective reason to A is something an idealized version of the agent would consider in favour of A when deciding what to do, and furthermore, that this idealized agent differs from the actual one in having every true belief relevant to the decision at hand and no false ones. This difference between idealized agents and actual ones suffices to show both that objective reasons, if we interpret their action-guiding function in this sense, require alternative possibilities, and that they do so in a *compatibilist* sense. I will use four slightly different scenarios to illustrate why that is.

Cora's neighbour Sue has fallen ill, and needs to go to the hospital. Since Cora and Sue live far out in the countryside, an ambulance would take quite some time to arrive. If Cora were to drive Sue to the hospital in her car, Sue would get there quicker than if she calls an ambulance, since the ambulance would first have to drive from the city to Sue's place and then all the way back again. Cora thinks to herself that she has a reason to call an ambulance, which is that driving Sue will be burdensome, and another reason to drive Sue, which is that Sue will get to the hospital faster if she does so and this will be better for Sue. Suppose further that Cora's car has, unbeknownst to Cora, broken down, and there are no other cars available. An idealized version of Cora is stipulated to know this. Idealized Cora would thus not take the swiftness of driving into account when deciding what to do; she will simply call an ambulance. In this situation, Cora does not have an objective reason to drive Sue to the hospital, because she cannot actually do so. Likewise, the fact that calling an ambulance is less burdensome than driving does not constitute an objective pro tanto reason to call, since

this fact plays no part in idealized Cora's decision.[6] She knows that she cannot drive anyway, and so it does not matter to her how calling compares to driving.

Suppose next that Cora has access to a fully functional car, but she does not know how to drive. Therefore, she does not take the fact that driving would, hypothetically, have been quicker, into account when deciding what to do. She simply calls an ambulance. An idealized version of her would do the same. In this situation, too, Cora lacks an objective reason to drive Sue to the hospital. This seems right; as Vranas points out, having an objective reason to do something does not require that I know *that* I can do it, but I must know *how* to do it (Vranas 2007 p. 170). These are different kinds of knowledge – although it is necessary to know *that*, e.g., the pedal to the right is the gas pedal and the wheel steers the car in order to know *how* to drive, knowing how to do it requires *more* than knowing a set of facts – it requires skill, which is not reducible to mere knowledge of facts. Idealized Cora therefore lacks an objective reason to drive Sue.

Imagine next that Cora has a pathological fear of hospitals, and therefore does not consider driving Sue. What would idealized Cora do? That depends on how we conceptualize an idealized agent more precisely. For the time being, I will continue to focus merely on beliefs, and an idealized agent as someone who has all true factual beliefs relevant to her current situation and no false ones. If idealized Cora suffers from the same fear as actual Cora, has only true beliefs and reasons rationally about what to do *given* her fears, she might not see the swiftness of driving as a reason to do so; not if an attempt to drive would result in her losing control of her car due to her debilitating fear. Then again, depending on precisely how extreme her fear is, she might consider the psychological difficulty of driving to the hospital one more reason not to do so, while there are also reasons *for* this alternative. All this seems intuitively right; a phobia can take away my reasons for doing X due to me being unable to do X if the phobia is *extreme enough*, but not otherwise.

So far, my proposed analysis of what it means for objective reasons to be action-guiding yields intuitively plausible results about what Cora has objective reasons to do in her situation. We see, as well, that this analysis of action-guidance lends support to APR. In the first scenario, Cora *believed* that she had alternative possibilities, but this did not suffice for her having objective reasons. It must be the case that she really has alternative possibilities open

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[6] This is, of course, compatible with Cora still having reasons to call an ambulance rather than doing nothing at all. For the sake of simplicity I merely discuss the two options of calling and driving.

to her. But alternatives in what sense? Compatibilist or incompatibilist? Let us move on to a deterministic scenario to find out.

Suppose that Cora wants nothing more than to get Sue to hospital as quickly as possible, but mistakenly believes that her car has broken down. Cora therefore calls an ambulance instead. This takes place in a deterministic universe. Cora is thus *determined* by the distant past and the laws of nature to call an ambulance, and one of the proximate causes is her false belief. We might be tempted to say that idealized Cora, knowing that she is so determined, will simply make the call without taking the swiftness of driving into account. However, remember that actual Cora is determined to call in part by her *false belief*. Since idealized Cora lacks falls beliefs, idealized Cora is *not* so determined. Idealized Cora, knowing that her car is fully functional and wanting to get Sue to the hospital as quickly as possible, would drive Sue, because driving is faster and a better option for Sue. Thus, the fact that driving is faster and a better option for Sue constitutes an objective reason for Cora to drive, even though this is a deterministic scenario, and even though actual Cora is determined by the past and the laws of nature to call an ambulance instead. According to this interpretation of the action-guiding function of objective reasons, we can thus have objective reasons to do otherwise than we were determined to do, at least when one of the determining causes was a false belief.

Is this too quick? After all, if we assume that the universe is deterministic, an idealized version of the agent operating in the same universe will have her actions determined by the past and the laws of nature as well. I said that although actual Cora, in the last scenario above, was determined to call an ambulance, it is a mistake to assume that idealized Cora would know that she is so determined and go make the call without considering the swiftness of driving first, because idealized Cora would *not* be determined to call. However, if idealized Cora also operates in a deterministic universe, she will be as determined to drive Sue (by her true beliefs and her desire to get Sue as quickly as possible to the hospital) as actual Cora is to make the call. Now, does idealized Cora know that she is determined to drive? She is, after all, stipulated to have every true belief relevant to the decision at hand. Is it not relevant, in this situation, that her beliefs and desires, and, more distantly, the past and the laws of nature, determine her to act as she does? If so, idealized Cora would already know, before any deliberation, what she is about to do – drive rather than call. If she already knows what she is about to do, will she really *decide* what to do? And if she does not decide what to do – can she really consider any facts in favour of calling and driving respectively?

These are complicated questions. It is far from obvious that 'Cora is determined by the past and the laws of nature to drive Sue to the hospital' is a fact relevant to her decision in the same way as 'the car is fully functional' is, and thus not obvious that idealized Cora knows this. Furthermore, even if idealized Cora knows that she is determined to drive Sue, this is not obviously a problem. Perhaps it is immediately obvious to idealized Cora that she will drive Sue rather than calling an ambulance, because she knows that she cares more about her neighbour's wellbeing than about her own comfort. If this is immediately obvious to her, she will not deliberate back and forth about what to do, but she will still make a decision of sorts, a decision based on certain facts. Someone might insist that an agent who already knows what she will be caused to do will not make decisions, but merely apathetically act out what she knows will happen anyway. I doubt, however, that the picture of an idealized Cora who merely drives Sue because she knows that this is what she is determined to do is coherent. If Cora's concern for Sue's wellbeing is not what causes her to decide to drive, then what are the proximate causes of this action? Even if she is determined by the past and the laws of nature to act as she does, there must be more proximate causes right before action. We cannot merely say that she is caused to do this by her knowing that she is caused to do this without circularity. Furthermore, an apathetic agent hardly seems *ideal*; thus, we should not picture idealized Cora in this way. Our first conclusion about idealized Cora was thus correct; she would consider both the easiness of calling and the swiftness of driving, and decide to drive, since she cares more about Sue's wellbeing, and thus more about getting to the hospital quickly, than she cares about her own comfort. Despite living in a deterministic universe, she can either call or drive in the *reason-relevant sense* of 'can'.

If we accept that X constitutes an objective reason for agent P to do action A in situation S, iff an idealized version of P would take X into consideration in favour of A when deciding what to do, objective reasons thus require alternative possibilities. It is not, for instance, sufficient that Cora *believes* that she can either call an ambulance or drive Sue if her car is actually broken. However, objective reasons can exist under determinism. Cora had an objective reason to drive Sue to the hospital in the deterministic scenario where she was caused to call an ambulance by her false belief about her car.

So far, I have only discussed an idealized agent as someone who has every true factual belief relevant to her decision-making and no false ones. However, we might further suggest that an

ideal agent has all the correct motivating desires, and no incorrect ones.[7] This paper is not the place to discuss whether motivating desires are 'correct' when they would be embraced by fully rational agents, conform to mind-independent moral and prudential values or something else. Let us just stipulate that for Cora, a correct motivating desire would cause her to get Sue to the hospital as fast as possible. Suppose now that Cora is determined by the past and the laws of nature to call an ambulance instead of driving Sue, and one of the proximate causes of her calling an ambulance is her lack of motivation to drive. Cora is simply too lazy and too little concerned with Sue's wellbeing to embark on a long and burdensome drive. But an idealized version of Cora would *not* be determined to call an ambulance, because idealized Cora would be less lazy and more concerned about Sue. Even though actual Cora is determined in part by her laziness to call an ambulance, idealized Cora would take the swiftness of driving into account in favour of driving, and do so. Thus, Cora still has an objective reason to drive Sue rather than call an ambulance. It is important to note, however, that we get all the way to compatibilism even if we *only* focus on beliefs, and how idealized agents have only true ones.

Things become a bit more complicated if we replace the idealized version of the agent with an ideal adviser. Suppose that X constitutes an objective reason for agent P to do action A in situation S, iff an ideal adviser would take X into consideration in favour of A when advising P about what to do in S.

   We get the same result as before in the scenario in which Cora's false belief that her car had broken down was one of the proximate causes of her calling an ambulance. Our imagined ideal adviser would, of course, tell Cora that her car is fine and that she ought to drive because driving is faster and therefore better for Sue. Cora thus has an objective reason to drive Sue. However, in a scenario where Cora already has true beliefs as well as correct motivating desires and is determined to drive Sue, the ideal adviser seems a bit superfluous. Arguably, an ideal adviser would still *confirm* to Cora that she is doing the right thing in this scenario,

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[7] If an idealized agent has correct motivating desires, does this mean that an idealized version of Cora cannot have debilitating phobias, and that Cora can therefore have an objective reason to drive Sue to the hospital after all even if her hospital phobia is ever so extreme? This is a complicated question. If an agent can have an objective reason to do what she has a truly irresistible phobia against doing, this is a bit counter intuitive, but does not really hurt my main objective in this article, which is to argue for reason compatibilism. I do not think that we must embrace this conclusion, however. We might distinguish motivating desires from the kind of emotions – desires if you will – that has an external feel to them, that seems to push or pull you but not really *motivate*, such as extreme phobias.

based on the facts that calling is easier for Cora, driving is swifter and better for Sue, and Sue's wellbeing is ultimately more important than Cora's comfort. We might therefore argue that these facts constitute objective reasons for her, even if we go by an ideal adviser account. The trickiest scenario for the ideal adviser version of objective reasons to handle might be the one where Cora is determined to call an ambulance because she is too lazy and too little concerned with Sue's wellbeing to drive her. If we imagine the best possible adviser encountering someone who is too lazy to be moved by any pleas to the effect that she should get into the car and drive her neighbour, we might conclude that the adviser would not bother to say anything at all. After all, what would be the point of giving advice that will not be listened to? We might thus conclude that on an ideal adviser account of objective reasons, lazy Cora, if she is only lazy enough, lacks reason to drive Sue. This is prima facie counter intuitive. If objective reasons are independent, not only of the agent's beliefs, but also of her motivating desires, surely the right result must be that Cora has an objective reason to drive Sue even in a scenario where she is lazy? But perhaps this intuition can be squared with the ideal adviser analysis of action-guiding objecting reasons if we imagine that the adviser does not only have correct desires herself but is extremely persuasive as well, capable of making even lazy agents see the light. We might imagine that this capacity is simply part of what it means to be an *ideal* adviser. And perhaps it is not so counter intuitive after all to assume that Cora lacks reason to drive if she suffers from an *extreme*, almost debilitating laziness? Alternatively, we might interpret the ideal adviser as less of a literal adviser attempting to persuade the advisee, and more of an ideally knowledgeable and correctly motivated person who simply tells the agent what it would make sense for her to do in this situation. In any case, regardless of any desire-related problems for the ideal adviser account, the fact remains that an ideal adviser account as well as an idealized agent account of action guidance imply compatibilism. The fact that both the idealized agent and the ideal adviser knows all the relevant facts – and *that* should be uncontroversial – implies that an agent can have a reason to do otherwise than what she is determined to do, in situations where there are no external obstacles to her doing otherwise, and where she is determined in part by false beliefs. This holds regardless of how we handle cases with agents who are determined to do what they do by laziness or otherwise incorrect motivating desires.

To sum up: If X constitutes an objective reason for agent P to do action A in situation S iff an idealized version of P would take X into consideration in favour of A when deciding what to do in S, or iff an ideal adviser would take X into consideration in favour of A when advising P

about what to do in S, APR follows – that is, reasons have an alternative possibilities requirement – but only in a *compatibilist* sense.

The reason incompatibilist might therefore want to reject an analysis of action-guidance in terms of idealized agents or advisers, and find a more incompatibilist friendly alternative. However, I do not believe that such an alternative can be found. Arguing that reasons are action-guiding when thoughts about said reasons cause us to act is a non-starter; we are not always aware of what we have objective reasons to do, and in any case, thoughts about reasons can cause us to act even if determinism is true. If we, on the other hand, loosen up the connection between reason and action too much, and do not even rely on what ideal agents would do or ideal advisers tell them to do, it will be hard to get the analysis to support APR. If we believe that an agent has a reason to X when X would be fitting, desirable, good and so on – why would the reason imply alternative possibilities? It can be true that it *would have* been fitting *if* I had saved the drowning child, even if I could in fact not do so. The reason incompatibilist might instead want to reject the argument from action-guidance altogether, and look for different arguments for APR. Sadly for the incompatibilist, the argument from action-guidance is *the* argument for APR. As I have already argued, *the argument from crazy reasons* does not really do much on its own. The intuition that certain reasons are crazy is not a brute one, but depends on us imagining those reasons as action-guiding. Imagine, instead, that objective reasons are *not* action-guiding – not in any sense whatsoever. They do not actually guide our actions, and they do not ideally do so either. If I have an objective reason to X, this *only* means that if I were to do X, this would be desirable, fine, fitting or the like. If we try to keep this non-action-guiding sense of reasons in mind, does it really seem crazy to say that I have a reason to stop the crusades from happening? Or that a completely paralyzed person might have reasons to perform various actions? I do not think so.[8] We need *the argument from action-guidance* in order to arrive at APR, which is in turn needed to argue for reason incompatibilism. However, it is hard to imagine an interpretation of action-guidance according to which reasons can only guide actions when we have alternative possibilities open to us in an incompatibilist sense.

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[8] If it still seems crazy, one might try to invoke something like Zimmerman's fittingness relation, and say that the right kind of fit does not hold, after all, between me and the action of preventing the crusades, or the paralyzed person and bodily actions, while arguing that his example of John and the rescue of the child still shows that 'reason' does not imply 'can', when 'reason' is used in a non-action-guiding sense.

6. Action-guidance and 'can'

In section 2, I presented two arguments for believing that the 'can' relevant to APR is incompatibilist: there is supposedly no plausible compatibilist interpretation of 'can', and it seems arbitrary to distinguish determination by the past and the laws of nature from all other kinds of obstacles when we consider what an agent can and cannot do. We now see that both these arguments can be refuted. We have seen that there is, after all, a relevant difference between an agent being determined by her factual beliefs and motivating desires to act the way she does and her being determined in other ways. It can be true that an idealized version of the agent would do otherwise, or an ideal adviser would advise her to do otherwise, even if she is determined to act as she does by her factual beliefs and her motivating desires. However, when external obstacles, a lack of know-how or, possibly, extremely strong compulsive urges, forces her to take a particular option, there is not much to decide or advise about. Furthermore, a plausible compatibilist interpretation of 'can' naturally falls out of the previous discussions:

> An agent *can* A in the reason-relevant sense if and only if nothing independent of her motivating desires and factual beliefs relevant to her current decision makes her A-ing impossible.[9]

According to this analysis of 'can', it is sometimes the case that agents can do otherwise under determinism. Even if the past and the laws of nature determine her not to A, they may determine her *through* her factual beliefs and motivating desires, and thus not be independent of them. Cora *can* drive Sue to the hospital (although she does not know that she can) when she mistakenly believes that her car is broken; the past and the laws of nature have determined her to call an ambulance, but they do so in part through her false belief. Cora *cannot* drive Sue when her car really is broken; the broken car is completely independent of her beliefs and desires. If Cora does not know how to drive, this lack of know-how is also independent of her motivating desires and factual beliefs relevant to her decision about what to do in *this* situation (although her not knowing how to drive might have been caused by earlier beliefs

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[9] Alternatively, we might replace 'impossible' with 'unlikely'. It seems fairly plausible that an agent who is not particularly skilled at basketball cannot have an objective reason to throw the ball through the hoop, although she might have an objective reason to do her best and try. Something independent of her motivating desires and relevant factual beliefs, namely her inferior basketball skills, makes her throwing the ball through the hoop *unlikely,* if not impossible. However, whether we choose 'impossible' or 'unlikely' makes no difference for the compatibilism issue.

and desires that made her decide against taking driving lessons). Unlike a classic conditional analysis of 'can', this analysis also implies that Cora cannot drive Sue if someone has struck her unconscious.

There is still some vagueness in this definition; for instance, where exactly to draw the line between motivating desires and other kinds of desires? Plausibly, desires are motivating both when the agent regards them as reasons for action and when she akratically gives in to them, whereas literally irresistible desires that completely bypass the agent's decision-making capacities are not motivating in the relevant sense. Still, there might exist a grey area here, and cases where it is indeterminate whether an agent can A or not. There might be grey areas concerning beliefs as well; it might be unclear whether certain beliefs fall into the category of 'factual beliefs relevant to the current decision' or not. Still, I believe that the interpretation of 'can' suggested above is clear enough to prove that the claim that there is no plausible compatibilist interpretation of the reason-relevant 'can' is false.

My analysis of 'can' is admittedly not particularly original. It is mostly reminiscent of a condition for rational deliberation suggested by Dana Nelkin, inspired by George Thomas and Hilary Bok:[10]

> In order to deliberate, an agent must believe that for two alternative actions A and B, nothing independent of the process of deliberation makes choosing or doing A impossible and nothing independent of the process of deliberation makes choosing or doing B impossible (Nelkin 2004 p. 226).

Besides Nelkin, Thomas and Bok, there are of course a variety of philosophers who have suggested ways to analyse 'can' where we are allowed to abstract away from certain determining factors when considering what the agent can and cannot do. The originality of my proposal lies not in the analysis itself, but in what motivates it. It is not merely argued for by appeal to compatibilist intuitions or ordinary language; it naturally follows if we conceive of objective reasons as action-guiding in the sense that decisions or advice are ideally based on them. A reason incompatibilist might deny that objective reasons are action-guiding in this sense, but will have a hard time coming up with an alternative conception of action-guidance that supports APR and an *incompatibilist* 'can'.

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[10] Nelkin does not ultimately endorse precisely this condition.

7. Conclusion

At the end of the day, reason incompatibilists seem to be caught in dilemmas. The first dilemma is whether to conceive of objective reasons as action-guiding or not. If they are not action-guiding, us having reason to do something will presumably be analysed in terms of fittingness, or something along these lines. However, if reasons are not action-guiding, they do not require alternative possibilities, and are therefore compatible with determinism. The reason incompatibilist must thus assume that reasons are action-guiding. But if reasons *are* action-guiding, a new dilemma arises; how should we understand action-guidance? If reasons being action-guiding merely means that we sometimes think of them when we try to make up our minds and that these thoughts cause us to act, they can obviously guide action even if determinism is true. The reason incompatibilist must thus understand action-guidance differently. A plausible alternative for objective reasons is presented in this paper; decisions or advice are *ideally,* even if not actually, based on them. However, I have shown that although objective reasons, if we understand their action-guiding function in this way, require alternative possibilities, they do so only in a compatibilist sense. The reason incompatibilist is thus presented with the following burden; present an analysis of what it means that reasons are action-guiding that does not merely support an alternative possibilities requirement for reasons, but also an incompatibilist interpretation of the relevant 'can'. Although I have not *proven* that it is impossible to meet this burden, I doubt that it can be done.

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