Deciding Decision-Making Away

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When faced with a hard decision, we can and sometimes should decide decision-making away, for instance by flipping a coin. At first, this strategy might look suspect: it seems that conforming with the verdict of a coin flip and φ-ing as a result involves making the decision to φ. To address this worry, we inquire into the psychological structures that make deciding decision-making away possible. Our main contention is that it involves conditional intentions: you form the intention to φ if the coin lands heads and ψ otherwise. We then rely on the nature of the conditional intentions involved to argue that we do not make the decision to φ when the coin flip tells us to φ. We conclude by exploring the normative status of deciding decision-making away. Not only is it often permissible, whether the choice situation is mundane or life-defining, deciding decision-making away may sometimes be required, for example, to promote equality in shared agency or fairness in distribution.

1. Introduction

Imagine that because of dire socio-economic conditions, and despite your ecologist sensibility, you work for a company that heavily relies on fossil fuels. As your contract is about to end, your employer offers to renew it. The decision you face is hard: accepting the renewal would mean remaining tied to a company that contributes to global warming; refusing it would expose you to unemployment.

Hard decisions pervade our lives. Some of these decisions, although hard, are ultimately mundane. We might have to choose between desserts at a restaurant, or movies to watch on a Friday night. Others are life-defining. We might have to choose between career paths or places to live. Moreover, our non-ideal social world (that is, our often conflictual and oppressive social world) burdens us with an extra batch of hard decisions.[1] Workers deprived of social safety nets, as in the example

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[1] Tessman (2014) argues that under non-ideal conditions, moral dilemmas (arguably a prominent sort of hard decision) occur in a patterned manner.

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above, are faced with all sorts of dilemmas (such as unemployment versus complicity in climate disaster). French people in Nazi-occupied France might have had to choose between taking up arms in the French Liberation Army and providing care to ageing parents, as in Sartre's ([1946]2007) classic example.

Making hard decisions often comes with psychological and ethical costs. We might fear making the wrong choice and worry proleptically about the feelings of regret we would experience. We might feel overwhelmed in the face of too many alternatives. Processing information about the alternatives might involve significant cognitive effort. We might not even know where to start if we are in the dark about our preferences. Making hard decisions, moreover, might cause decision fatigue, that is, it might deteriorate our ability to make further decisions—which might fan the flames of our decisional anxiety (Chen et al. 2018). In addition to these psychological costs, agents faced with hard decisions might incur ethical costs. After settling on one horn of a moral dilemma, we might be appropriately held responsible for the decision made—and therefore be laid open to blame, as well as our own feelings of guilt. For all these reasons, hard decisions are a burden to us.

Ordinary decision-making practices and the psychology literature suggest approaches to hard decisions meant to reduce this burden. One approach is to try not to obsess about making the right choice and instead adopt a 'get on with it' mindset, one according to which what matters is not so much the choice ultimately made as the fact that something (rather than nothing) gets done (Chen et al. 2018). Another approach is to 'sleep on it' or trust our gut rather than consciously contemplate every alternative and try to settle on the right one (Dijksterhuis et al. 2006). Given that deliberation, as commonly conceived, is a largely conscious mental process aimed at weighing various options (Salomone-Sehr and Morton 2022), this last approach encourages us, in effect, to rely less (if at all) on deliberation when making hard decisions.

In this paper, we argue that there is a further and more radical approach to lifting the burden of hard decisions. When faced with a decision we'd rather not make, we might let the world choose for us rather than choosing ourselves. In a slogan: we might decide decision-making away. We might let a coin flip decide between lemon sorbet or apple pie (Chang 2017). Or we might let the person selling tickets at the movie theatre choose for us between a horror movie or a romcom.

However ordinary, deciding decision-making away might seem suspect, for it might seem that going along with the verdict of a coin

flip and (say) ordering lemon sorbet implies, contrary to what was just suggested, deciding to have lemon sorbet. This would mean that deciding decision-making away ultimately always involves self-delusion. To address this worry and establish, accordingly, that it is possible to successfully decide decision-making away, we inquire into the psychological structures that make it so.

Our main contention is that deciding decision-making away involves conditional intentions (Edgington 1995; Ferrero 2009; Ludwig 2016; Rachar 2024): you form the intention to order lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads, and apple pie otherwise. Unpacking this claim and explaining how conditional intentions enable us to decide decision-making away is this paper's main task.

In exploring deciding decision-making away, we pursue two broader goals.

First, we illuminate an aspect of less than full agency. A substantial part of our practical lives, while being agential, is only agential to a degree: we might succumb to weakness of the will, or we might go through the motions rather than engage in fully intentional conduct. By establishing the psychological viability of deciding decision-making away, we shed light on a neglected possibility, namely, that some of our actions need not trace back to the decision to perform them but rather to the dodging of decision-making. Relatedly, this paper provides insight into agency exercised under non-ideal circumstances. As hinted above, our non-ideal social world forces a whole range of hard decisions on us—decisions that we might avoid by deciding decision-making away.

Second, although our focus is on how deciding decision-making away might contribute to reducing the burden of hard decisions, our discussion will reveal that deciding decision-making away is useful in other contexts too. When a collection of agents is faced with a range of competing alternatives, it is sometimes important that none of these agents imposes their will on the others by deciding for the group. Under such circumstances, deciding decision-making away can help agents settle on a shared course of behaviour while guaranteeing that they each individually exert the same amount of decision-making power—namely, none. Additionally, we will suggest that deciding decision-making away is valuable in strategic interactions, a useful tool for achieving equality in distribution, and helpful for avoiding cognitive biases.

Enough with the preview. Given that, as we will argue, conditional intentions are crucially involved in the psychological mechanism that

underlies deciding decision-making away, we first provide a primer about such intentions.

2. Conditional intentions: a primer

Deciding decision-making away depends on the formation of a particular kind of conditional intention—one that the literature on conditional intentions has not fully recognized. In senses to be explained, the conditions on these intentions are *internal* and *elective*, but not directly *reason-providing*. These properties are best introduced through a series of distinctions between kinds of conditional intention.

The first distinction is between externally and internally conditional intentions (Cartwright 1990). An externally conditional intention is conditioned on features of the world that must be satisfied for the intention to be formed in the first place. Such intentions are expressible by sentences of the form 'If *C*, I intend to φ'. These expressions amount to predictions about what the agent will intend under some condition, but the condition does not qualify what the agent intends. For example, an agent who says 'If I become more conservative as I age, I will vote Republican' is not announcing a commitment they have, but is expressing what they think likely about intentions they'll have in the future. By contrast, an internal condition does qualify what the agent intends. Such intentions are expressible by sentences of the form 'I intend to (φ if *C*)'.[2] Having an intention like this doesn't depend on the condition obtaining. For example, a wedding planner who says in advance of the day, 'I intend to move the ceremony inside if the weather is bad' is announcing a commitment they currently have, even though the condition does not obtain. We'll argue in the next section that deciding decision-making away involves internally rather than externally conditional intentions.

Another relevant distinction is between internally conditional intentions that are enabling and those that are elective (Ferrero 2009; Ludwig 2016). An enabling condition is something that needs to be in place for the action to be possible. For example, unsure about the status of the slated demolition, you may intend to work at the library if it is still there. An elective condition, by contrast, is a restriction an agent places on what it will take for the intention to be enacted successfully. For example, you may intend to work at the library if your neighbour is

[2] We will sometimes call the condition expressed by the subordinate clause of statements of this form the 'antecedent' or 'condition', although, as explained below, we should not think of conditional intentions as intentions to make a conditional true.

practising drums. Elective conditions therefore engage the intender's agency in a different manner from enabling conditions. The next section provides a recipe for deciding decision-making away that relies on elective conditions.

There are some general features of internally conditional intentions that are important for the subsequent discussion. First, internally conditional intentions are not intentions to make material conditionals true. Understanding internally conditional intentions this way would entail that there are two different ways of satisfying them: φ-ing when C obtains and making it the case that C can no longer obtain. But this is a mistake. A nurse who has an intention expressible by 'I intend to change the patient's drip tomorrow, if they are alive' cannot satisfy their intention by killing the patient.[3] It follows that there is only one way of carrying out a conditional intention, namely, φ-ing when C obtains. When C doesn't and won't obtain, the agent doesn't succeed at what they are conditionally pursuing. Instead, their conditional intention is *moot*. Second, while an agent with a conditional intention to φ is committed to φ-ing in a smaller set of circumstances than an agent with an unconditional intention to φ, that doesn't entail anything about how committed they are when the condition obtains. The first agent may see φ-ing when C obtains as one of their life's most important projects, while the second sees φ-ing as something they currently intend to do but could change their mind about easily. Finally, conditional intentions without satisfied antecedents are not without force. They still have the causal and rational powers characteristic of intention even when the agent is not yet aware of the status of the antecedent, perhaps because the antecedent is about some future occurrence (Bratman 1987). For example, an agent who doesn't yet take the condition on their intention to obtain is rationally required not to behave in ways that would make performing the action impossible in the event that the condition does come to obtain, and they will tend to comply with that requirement (Ferrero 2009).

It is usually assumed that elective conditions are seen by the agent to be reason-providing.[4] That is, the obtaining of the condition is seen by the agent to give them reason to do something they might not otherwise do (as was the case in the example with the neighbour practising drums). But this does not appear to be the case when we, say, flip a coin

[3] This example is inspired by Edgington (1995).

[4] Ludwig, for example, argues that reason-providingness follows from his conception of conditional intentions as commitments to contingency plans (2016, p. 48).

to decide between desserts. It's at least not obvious how a coin landing heads is seen by the agent to provide, by itself, a consideration in favour of eating lemon sorbet. Indeed, we will suggest that it doesn't. Deciding decision-making away is not only a phenomenon that has yet to be the direct target of philosophical reflection, but it also reveals a potential shortcoming in existing philosophical accounts of conditional intention—they fail to recognize the existence of internal, elective, but non-reason-providing conditional intentions.

3. A recipe for deciding-decision making away

We now have the required background to state our main claim: deciding decision-making away involves internally conditional intentions whose condition is elective but not reason-providing—reason-neutral conditional intentions, in short.

More specifically, here is how you typically proceed when deciding decision-making way in the face of n alternatives $\varphi_1, \ldots, \varphi_n$:

1. For each alternative φ_i, you form a conditional intention with content (φ_i if C_j), where:
   (a) Each condition C_j is a state of affairs which you do not take to provide, by itself, a reason in favour of any of $\varphi_1, \ldots, \varphi_n$;
   (b) Conditions $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ are arbitrarily assigned (in a one-to-one and onto manner) to alternatives $\varphi_1, \ldots, \varphi_n$;
   (c) $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ is a partition of the probability space; and
   (d) You take each of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ to be equiprobable.
2. Once you know which of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ obtains (call it C_*), you go on to enact the conditional intention to (φ_* if C_*), and thus proceed to φ_*.

Less abstractly, when you'd rather not decide between lemon sorbet and apple pie, you might flip a coin and then act in accordance with the coin's verdict. Were you to do that, you would let the coin decide which dessert to go for, and so you would decide decision-making away.[5]

[5] Our recipe involves a conjunction of conditional intentions, one for each of the alternatives. Another candidate recipe would involve a single intention whose conjunctive content might be (φ_1 if C_1, ... and φ_n if C_n). (This is the intention that, per the Agglomeration Principle, it should be possible and rational to form if one has the conjunction of intentions involved in our recipe.) There are further complexities. A particularly indecisive agent might form a plan involving deciding decision-making away at multiple stages. (Movie theatre or restaurant? If movie theatre, horror movie or romcom? And if restaurant, Italian or Thai?) The content of

The conditional intentions involved in this recipe are not externally, but internally conditional. What you do in Step 1 is not a matter of predicting what you will intend (unlike externally conditional intentions) but of committing yourself now to some future action under a particular condition. To see this, imagine that in the coin-flipping scenario, someone asks you why you are flipping a coin. When you respond that you intend to order lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads and apple pie otherwise, you are not expressing a prediction about what you will turn out to intend depending on the coin flip. Rather, you are expressing a commitment you currently have—a commitment that is qualified by whether or not the coin will land heads.

Moreover, flipping a coin to decide between desserts is not a way of figuring out what is necessary for performing some action. It is consistent with the laws of nature that you eat lemon sorbet if the coin lands tails rather than heads. That shows the conditions on the intentions in Step 1 are not, in core cases at least, enabling, but elective. But they are not elective conditions that, as standardly thought, provide a reason for the action with which they are associated. A coin landing heads isn't itself a consideration favouring eating a particular dessert. So, the conditions need not be directly reason-providing. And that explains why it doesn't matter which conditions are assigned to which actions. You could equally assign any $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ to any $\varphi_1, \ldots, \varphi_n$, because none of the conditions are enabling for any of the actions, and none directly reason-providing either.

A few further remarks about the above recipe for deciding decision-making away are in order.

That one of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ materializes is something that might occur before or after we form all the relevant conditional intentions. You might first form the conditional intention to order lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads, and apple pie otherwise, and then proceed to flip the coin. Alternatively, you might flip the coin, keep the outcome hidden from view, form the relevant conditional intentions, and then find out which way the coin landed. This shows that what matters is

such an intention might have a nested structure (namely, if heads then movie theatre, and if heads again then romcom, but if tails, then horror movie, and so on.) Alternatively, the agent could form a conjunction of conditional intentions, where the conditions could be represented by ordered pairs of heads and tails—(heads, heads), (heads, tails), and so on—and the alternatives are watching a horror movie, watching a romantic comedy, going to a Thai restaurant, and going to an Italian restaurant. In what follows, we set aside these complexities (helpfully brought to our attention by a referee) and stick to conjunctions of conditional intentions.

not so much the timing of the occurrence of one of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ as the timing of you finding out which of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ obtains.

Similarly, what matters is not so much that $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ are objectively equiprobable as one's subjective belief that they are. Suppose you are planning to have a coin flip to decide between lemon sorbet and apple pie. Given the available evidence, you believe the coin you are about to flip is fair. Unbeknownst to you, however, the coin in question is in fact unbalanced—so much so that it always lands heads when flipped. Had you known this, using this coin would not seem to allow for deciding decision-making away, for conditionalizing your intention to have lemon sorbet on an event that you know to be certain to occur would amount to deciding in favour of lemon sorbet. As assumed, however, you do not know the coin is unbalanced. Given your (mistaken) belief in the fairness of the coin, you can flip that coin in order to decide decision-making away—even though the coin in question is rigged in favour of lemon sorbet. This shows that what matters is not objective but subjective equiprobability. As in the above paragraph, what matters to deciding decision-making away is the agent's epistemic perspective.

As the foregoing example suggests, one straightforward way of following the recipe for deciding decision-making away is to use a formal chance mechanism (such as a coin flip). However, the recipe is perfectly compatible with a far more informal conditionalizing of our intentions on reason-neutral states of affairs. For instance, you might go and watch the movie that, when you show up at the movie theatre, starts first.

Our recipe provides sufficient conditions for deciding decision-making away. (Whether such conditions are indeed sufficient is something we will check in the next section.) We should pause to notice that it is possible to relax some of the assumptions built into that recipe and still get sufficient conditions for deciding decision-making away.

Consider a case in which the probability that none of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ occurs (more formally, the probability of the complement of $\bigcup_{j=1}^{n} C_j$) is non-zero—in which case $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ would not be a partition of the probability space (contrary to condition 1c). Given that in the recipe under consideration, you form conditional intentions only for each of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$, it follows that, in the event that none of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ occurs, you have no intention to guide your conduct. But this, by itself, need not preclude deciding decision-making away. It might well be that one of $C_1, \ldots, C_n$ occurs, and when that happens, your conduct ends up decided for you.

Finally, there is one related phenomenon which, despite initial appearances, does not amount to deciding decision-making away. Sometimes people flip a coin in cases of indecision, but not with an eye to leaving things up to the coin. Instead, they aim to reveal something to themselves about their own preferences based on whether they are pleased or disappointed with the result. This use of a coin flip is not an application of our recipe, because it doesn't involve the formation of conditional intentions to follow through on the results. The aim is epistemic rather than practical. The agent wants to learn something new about themselves in order to engage in a more informed decision-making process, rather than to avoid that process altogether.

So far, we have asserted that the foregoing recipe is sufficient for deciding decision-making away. But is it really? You might worry that, once it is known that C_* has occurred, going on to enact alternative φ_* actually involves the decision to φ_*. If that were so, decision-making would not be decided away. It is the next section's job to take care of this serious worry.

4. The viability of deciding decision-making away

Our recipe enables us to decide decision-making away, that is, to go for one of the alternatives without making the decision to enact any alternative. To explain how that is possible, we invoke an important fact about conditional intentions. This fact follows from a standard feature of intentions. As usually conceived, intentions settle on a course of action. This entails that when the time comes to enact the intention to φ (and assuming reconsidering that intention is not in order), you don't reopen the practical question of what to do and decide again in favour of φ; rather, you treat φ as an already settled course of action. When applied to conditional intentions, this line of reasoning says:

> NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION If the time comes to enact your intention to (φ if C), absent special circumstances, you tend not to and are rationally required not to reopen the practical question of what to do and decide again in favour of (φ if C); rather, you treat the question whether to (φ if C) as already settled.

Here is how NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION allows for the possibility of deciding decision-making away. Deciding is determining one's will in the face of the question 'What am I going to do?' And determining one's will involves forming an intention that settles this question. Two points of clarification are in order. First, determining

one's will often includes deliberation, but it need not. You can make up your mind on the spot without weighing reasons, for example, when you make a spontaneous or rash decision. Second, not all intentions are the product of decisions. Sometimes you simply find yourself with an intention. In such cases, your mind is made up without you having made it up.

Consider now Step 1 of the recipe. You answer a practical question at that stage in so far as you form intentions about what to do, but your answer isn't to φ_1, …, or φ_n in particular. Indeed, you don't know which of φ_1, …, φ_n you're going to do, because all the intentions are conditional. What you decide is not to go for one alternative or another but to let the world determine the alternative you'll enact—and no more.

Turn to Step 2. When the coin lands heads, your intention to (order apple pie if the coin lands tails) is made moot (see § 2.). The only intention left to enact is therefore the intention to (go for lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads). Per NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION, the enactment of that intention does not involve reconsidering what to do. Rather, you treat (ordering lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads) as an already settled course of action. So, the new information gained at Step 2 doesn't constitute a decision. At no point in our recipe, therefore, do you decide to order lemon sorbet. There is an answer to the question 'What am I going to do?' with respect to the options—namely, order lemon sorbet—but it's one you discover rather than make yourself.

But consider this worry. We suggested earlier that deciding is determining one's will. One might think that any intentional action is itself a determination of the will. After all, when doing something intentionally, that which you do surely counts as your answer to the question 'What am I going to do?' This line of reasoning leads to a potentially damaging objection. Suppose that the coin lands heads and that you order lemon sorbet accordingly. In this scenario, ordering lemon sorbet is, no doubt, an intentional action. If it were thereby a determination of the will and thereby a decision, then you would decide to order lemon sorbet by virtue of ordering sorbet intentionally. That would mean that, despite our claims to the contrary, flipping a coin does not make it possible to decide decision-making away.

As we see it, however, it would be a mistake in general to construe an intentional action as a decision (except, one might think, in the special case when the act in question is decision-making). Suppose I decide to go for a run and proceed to do so. My intentional running is not a decision, but the object of a decision—the decision to go for a run.

One reason it seems odd to count my intentional running itself as a decision is the all-too-familiar possibility of making decisions that we end up not enacting. I might never head out the door to go for my run because my phone rings. In such cases, advocates of the intentional action as decision view have two options. They might agree with the straightforward description of such cases, and say that the agent made a decision to go for a run that they didn't enact. But then they would have to argue that in the case where the decision to go for a run is enacted, there really are two decisions: the decision to go for a run and the intentional running itself. This view strikes us as incorrect. For the intentional action of running to count as a decision, there would have to be something left to decide—which is not the case, given that the decision to go for a run has already been made. The other option is to claim that, despite appearances, my abandoned run does not involve a decision to go for a run; because I never made it out the door, no decision to go for a run was made in the first place. But this revisionist picture is implausible. I clearly made a decision by forming the intention to go for a run, and that much is true regardless of whether I end up enacting that intention. Either way, we think it is a mistake to treat intentional actions as decisions (except, perhaps, the act of deciding).

Here is another worry. Kirk Ludwig believes that when *C* obtains, your conditional intention to (φ if *C*) gives way to an unconditional intention, namely, the intention to φ (2016, pp. 56– 7). If he is right, it might seem that the transition from the conditional intention to (φ if *C*) to the unconditional intention to φ involves a decision to φ, since it involves the formation of an unconditional intention to φ.

Assume Ludwig is correct that conditional intentions transition to unconditional intentions when the condition obtains,[6] it is not the case that when the coin lands heads and your conditional intention to (order lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads) gives way to an unconditional intention to order lemon sorbet, you reopen the practical question of whether to order lemon sorbet or apple pie, and ultimately decide in favour of lemon sorbet. Were you to do that, you would fail to treat (order lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads) as a settled course of action, undermining your conditional intention's status as an intention in the first place as per NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION. Therefore, when your conditional intention to (order lemon sorbet if the coin lands heads) gives way to the unconditional intention to order lemon sorbet, that transition does not involve the decision to order lemon

[6] Though consult Ferrero (2015) for persuasive counter-arguments.

sorbet over apple pie; to the extent that your conditional intention is indeed an intention, the formation of the unconditional intention amounts to committing yourself to a course of action that has been settled on, not by you, but by the coin.

The constraint placed by NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION on how conditional intentions issue in action comes out in the way Ludwig conceives of the transition from conditional to unconditional intentions. He suggests that when a conditional intention gives way to an unconditional intention, the process is analogous to what happens when a prior intention gives way to an intention-in-action (Ludwig 2016, p. 56). If that transition amounted to making a decision, we would decide twice any time we enacted a standard prior intention: once when forming the prior intention, and once when the prior intention gives way to an intention-in-action. But this can't be right, given that the standard transition from a prior intention to an intention-in-action does not involve reopening the practical question of what to do. The transition from a prior intention to an intention-in-action does not, therefore, involve decision-making.[7] So, on Ludwig's conception of the transition from conditional intention to unconditional intention, that transition also doesn't involve decision-making—and that is as it should be for his conception to be in line with NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION.

At this point, you might worry that the foregoing discussion proves too much. NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION, after all, is a general fact about conditional intentions. Our discussion may suggest that whenever we enact a conditional intention upon finding out that the condition obtains, we decide decision-making away. But that sounds odd.

In response, it will be helpful to consider an ordinary conditional intention, say, the conditional intention to go to the beach if the sun is out. What NO REOPENING OF THE PRACTICAL QUESTION shows is that, when the sun is indeed out and you go on to enact your intention, your going to the beach does not involve reopening the question of whether to go to the beach. This, however, does not mean that you have decided decision-making away. In forming the conditional intention to go to the beach if the sun is out, your aim is not to let the world decide for you; rather it is to rationally plan your conduct so that it adjusts to uncertain circumstances. Granted, given your conditional

[7] This line of thinking coheres with our earlier claim that not every formation of intention amounts to a decision.

intention, your going to the beach or not is not something that, strictly speaking, you decide: that the sun comes out or not is ultimately what determines your conduct. This, however, is just the reflection of aiming to rationally adjust your conduct to uncertain circumstances that lie beyond your control. A noteworthy consequence of having this aim is that the choice of which antecedent your intentions are conditionalized upon is not arbitrary. It is not arbitrary that you intend to go to the beach if it is sunny and stay home otherwise, so these conditional intentions fail to satisfy conditions (1a) and (1b) of our recipe (see §3). This suggests that, unlike (1c), conditions (1a) and (1b) are necessary, at least as part of this set of sufficient conditions.

By contrast, when using our recipe, your aim is not to rationally adjust your conduct to uncertain circumstances, but to let the world decide for you—an aim that explains why the choice of which antecedents your intentions are conditionalized upon is arbitrary (as in condition 1b). Moreover, compare what happens if you know what circumstance will obtain. If you know the sun will be out in the regular conditional intention case, you simply intend to go to the beach and your aim of rationally adjusting your conduct to circumstances is achieved. But in the dessert scenario, if you know that the coin will land heads, the coin flip is useless: knowing this would prevent you from achieving your aim of avoiding making a decision about which dessert to order.

It follows from the arguments of this section that, when using our recipe, going along with the verdict of a coin and ordering lemon sorbet does not involve making the decision to order lemon sorbet. It is possible, therefore, to decide decision-making away successfully.

5. Interlude: reason-neutrality again

There is a complication regarding the way in which the conditional intentions in deciding decision-making away involve reason-neutral conditions. In many cases, while the condition by itself doesn't provide a consideration favouring the course of action you settle on, you do have a reason to act rather than not. But then, once you have settled on the procedure meant to select some course of action or other, the reason you had for using it gives you reason to act in accordance with the outcome of that procedure. A defender of the idea that antecedents of elective conditional intentions provide reasons for action could then develop a 'conjunctive' response: the antecedent alone doesn't provide a reason, but it does when taken together with the reason the agent had for deciding decision-making away.

It still doesn't follow that all elective conditions involved in deciding decision-making away are conjunctively reason-providing. Sometimes there isn't reason to decide decision-making away, and so there is no reason with which the antecedent could combine. For example, deciding decision-making away is ill-advised in cases where the agent has a most-preferred alternative. And it is ill-advised when further deliberation is likely to reveal a best alternative at not too great a cost. When either of these two things is the case, the antecedents don't provide reasons for the associated actions, even conjunctively.

But it might be that the agent takes the antecedent to provide a reason conjunctively because they are mistaken about the advisability of deciding decision-making away. We think, however, that even this is unlikely to be true in all cases. Sometimes, even by the agent's own lights, there isn't reason to decide decision-making away, and yet they do so anyway. An agent who is suffering under the pressure of making a decision may fall back on deciding decision-making away even when they think further deliberation would be best, all things considered. Depending on where one comes down on the guise of the good, an agent may even resort to deciding decision-making away while viewing it as entirely worthless or go for it out of a sense of frivolous playfulness, all while thinking there is no particular reason for doing so. In so far as weakness of the will or acting under the guise of something other than the good is possible, it seems possible to form conditional intentions in deciding decision-making away where the condition isn't a reason for the associated action even by the agent's own lights.

A further possibility arises from the thought that acts of the will can generate new reasons under certain conditions (Chang 2013).[8] It could then be that the conditional commitments involved in deciding decision-making away create the reasons that make it rational. This possibility is intriguing because the case for positing will-based reasons is strongest in situations that make deciding decision-making away attractive, namely, those in which our other reasons have 'run out'. And if there are such reasons produced by the conditional commitment, they could combine with the actually satisfied elective condition to constitute a reason for the action in the consequent, even when deciding decision-making away was not the thing the agent initially had most reason to do. That is, will-based reasons create a second way for elective conditions to be conjunctively reason-providing, one that doesn't require that deciding decision-making away was rational in the first place.

[8] Thanks to a referee for raising this possibility.

Various points in this dialectic rely on controversial positions in the philosophy of action and practical reason. Stepping back, regardless of one's stance on these issues, deciding decision-making away involves, at the very least, an important subclass of elective conditions: those that do not directly or independently provide a reason for their associated actions. And when they provide reasons, it is only in conjunction with the reasons for which one decides decision-making away in the first place or the reason created by the commitment of which they are a part. The conditional intentions we form when enacting the recipe therefore complicate standard taxonomies of conditional intentions.

This discussion also raises the question: when do we have reason to decide decision-making away?

6. The advisability of deciding decision-making away

6.1 When is it acceptable?

This final section ventures a few thoughts about the normative status of deciding decision-making away. Our overall view is permissive: we believe that in a wide range of cases, there is nothing inherently wrong (to wit, irrational, rash, imprudent, unethical, or the like) in deciding decision-making away. To be sure, our permissiveness only goes so far. There are obvious cases where deciding decision-making away is ill-advised, for instance when (as noted above) you know you prefer one alternative to the others, or when further deliberation could improve your decision at little cost. If we set aside these cases, however, deciding decision-making away is often perfectly fine.

First, consider relatively mundane (but nevertheless potentially hard) decisions, such as the decision between lemon sorbet and apple pie. You might not know which dessert you prefer, and rightly suspect that further deliberation will not reveal much about your preferences. Alternatively, you might be indifferent between lemon sorbet and apple pie, and undecided about which to select. Or lemon sorbet and apple pie might simply be incomparable, and accordingly no preference relation might hold between them (not even the relation of indifference). Or perhaps lemon sorbet and apple pie are, as Ruth Chang (2017) would put it, on a par: despite there being comparable evaluative differences between lemon sorbet and apple pie, these differences do not favour one dessert over the other. Whatever the reason the decision between desserts is hard, it is clearly fine to not want to make it and to decide decision-making away; letting a coin flip decide between desserts flouts no legal standard, no ethical rule, and no requirement

of practical rationality. In these cases, it seems, the rationality of deciding decision-making is determined by the expected value of further deliberation compared to that of having a decision made for you. No doubt some effort is required to execute the recipe, but that may be outweighed by the corresponding reduction of the burden of agency. The choice of what alternative to assign to what outcome of the choice mechanism may be much easier than the choice of what to do.

Let us now turn to life-defining choice situations. Going back to Sartre's ([1946]2007) example, imagine you are caught in a harrowing dilemma between taking up arms in the French Liberation Army or taking care of your ageing mother in Nazi-occupied France. Or in a different (and less dramatic) example, imagine you are in college and have to choose between two career paths. Here too we argue that there is nothing wrong in deciding decision-making away—assuming you rightly suspect that the balance of reasons does not favour one alternative over the other or that further deliberation will not improve your decision at not too great a cost.

You might think our view is too permissive. It is a widespread idea that life-defining decisions must be made in the first person rather than decided away. Many think there is value in deciding for ourselves in so far as first-personal decision-making is required for steering the course of our own lives authentically and responsibly (Sartre [1946]2007; Moran 2001; Paul 2014). While we agree that authentic decision-making is valuable, we nevertheless think such decision-making might at times be too much of a burden—one that deciding decision-making away can lessen.[9] Additionally, it might be argued that when the

[9] Unlike the reasons we canvass in the next subsection, the consideration that deciding decision-making away would lessen the agential burden of decision-making provides a pragmatic reason in favour of it, one grounded in the agent's benefit. Some may think this reason feels like a reason of the wrong kind. We see at least two ways to understand that feeling. On the first, the concern is about reasons for action, namely, the action of enacting the strategy (see Schroeder 2010, pp. 32–5 for the claim that there can be reasons of the wrong kind for action, and Hieronymi 2013, pp. 117–18 for a denial). The intuition here might be that reasons for employing a particular decision-making strategy should be based on whether that strategy results in correct decisions, and the pragmatic reason is not a reason like that. On the second, the concern is about the intentions one forms when deciding decision-making away. Here the intuition might be that reasons for forming an intention should be based on the properties of the course of action in its content, and reducing an agential burden does not seem to be based on the properties of lemon sorbet if heads and apple pie otherwise. We think the following point goes some way towards answering both concerns. It is part of our job as agents to use our practical energy wisely, and lessening the agential burden adverts exactly to that. Pragmatic reasons of this sort do not, therefore, strike us as reasons of the wrong kind in the context of action and intention. Take deciding to dodge decision-making. As we've argued, it's a tool for avoiding the costs of

reasons we have underdetermine what to do, the action we ultimately embark on will be, in some sense, random—a fact we might more authentically embrace if we let chance decide for us than if we decide ourselves. Authenticity, then, might actually favour deciding decision-making away rather than deciding for ourselves.

We should note that deciding decision-making away does not entail that we are uncommitted to the course of action that the world has chosen for us. Quite the contrary. Once we find out that C_* obtains, all of our conditional intentions are made moot, except of course our conditional intention to (φ_* if C_*). We are therefore committed to (φ_* if C_*). From this, it follows in turn that deciding life decisions away does not entail a—potentially irresponsible—lack of commitment to the life-defining courses of action chosen for us by the world. Returning to Sartre's example, were you to decide decision-making away and end up taking care of your mother, the fact that the world chose this course of action for you does not entail that you are a fickle, irresponsible carer.

Overall, there is nothing inherently wrong with deciding decision-making away—even when the decisions in question are important life decisions.

6.2 When is it required?

We have suggested that, in a range of cases, deciding decision-making away is permissible, and the rationality of doing so arguably comes down to the regular processes of calculating expected value or weighing reasons with the costs and benefits of deliberation included. But could it be that at times we face a rational, moral, or political requirement to decide decision-making away?[10] We think so.

There are situations in which our interests are best served if others are unable to predict what we will do. Consider an example of such a situation: Death in Damascus (Ahmed 2014). Imagine Death works from an appointment book stating time and place based on predictions about where a person will be. A person dies if and only if the book correctly states the city a person is in at the specified time. Death is a

decision-making, and as such, in some circumstances, it helps us achieve the aim of managing our agential resources responsibly. The same goes for the second version of the concern. Intentions in general are often thought to be tools for managing our capacities for practical thought (see Bratman 1987). If that's right, reasons that concern the distribution of agential burdens can be reasons of the right kind for forming them. We thank an anonymous referee for inviting us to clarify our thinking about this issue.

[10] These considerations could serve as reasons for the conjunctive response from §5.

reliable predictor. Imagine now you know an appointment has been inscribed for you; the city is either Aleppo or Damascus. Should you stay in Damascus or ride to Aleppo? This is no doubt a hard decision. One way to proceed would be to flip a coin. If heads, you go to Aleppo; if tails, Damascus.[11]

Much, of course, depends on how Death makes their predictions. Imagine further that Death can predict whether the agent will decide decision-making away, but is no better than anyone else at predicting the result of a coin flip. Deciding decision-making away in this situation maximizes your chance of survival. Simply deciding more or less ensures your death, while flipping a coin brings your chances up to 1/2.

While this is a fantastical example, the lesson generalizes. Maximizing our benefits in many strategic interactions may hinge on inducing uncertainty in others, something that we can do by deciding decision-making away (Zollman 2022). Take poker. Playing poker well requires occasionally betting without a strong hand. But leaving the choice of when to bluff up to one's own decision-making processes opens up the possibility of other, perhaps more expert, players being able to read those processes and detect a pattern in one's betting. Since having another player know when you are going to bluff greatly decreases your chances of winning, you should avoid it. For some, then, the rational way to make decisions about when to bluff is to decide them away.

Let us now consider cases where deciding decision-making away might be morally required. Sometimes it's important to us that our joint projects respect the equality of all involved. Deciding decision-making away offers a mechanism for promoting that value. Take a small-scale case of shared agency: deciding where to go for dinner. It may be that each of us has a unique most preferred option but none of us should impose our individual will on the others by settling on their own favourite. One way to proceed would be to create a set of options acceptable to all and then to decide decision-making away collectively, allowing the world to pick our destination. That is, we could form conditional shared intentions and use a chance mechanism to determine the one we pursue together. Indeed, in so far as relational equality is a value in shared agency and deciding decision-making

[11] As nicely observed by a copy editor from Oxford University Press, what decision theorists have labelled 'Death in Damascus' is a verson of an old fable, adapted by Somerset Maugham in the story 'Appointment in Samarra' and central to the John O'Hara novel of the same name.

away is the best way to achieve it, there are cases where deciding decision-making away in the creation and execution of a joint plan is the right thing to do.

Another kind of case in which deciding decision-making away can be valuable involves scarce resources. Take a school board that has more applications for speciality programmes than available spaces. One way to apportion admissions offers would be to decide decision-making away by developing a lottery system. A well-functioning lottery system that guides the intention-formation process of the members of the admissions committee will follow the steps of our recipe closely. By removing barriers to access to these coveted programmes based on circumstances one might think should not bear on student selection—geographical location, privileged cultural background, high socio-economic status—deciding decision-making away may be the best way to ensure that an outcome is fair.

Many of these examples involve collective decisions, but similar considerations may favour deciding decision-making away in the individual case as well. Take a hiring process where the decision is made by an individual rather than a collective. When two or more candidates are similarly ranked on all the relevant inputs, one possibility is that the search-runner picks randomly among them. We agree with Ullmann-Margalit and Morgenbesser ([1977]2017) that individuals can act as arbitrary picking machines when options are balanced. Yet it may be preferable to flip a coin rather than allow the search-runner to pick. Social psychologists have suggested that our decisions are often influenced by biases, unreliable heuristics, or irrelevant information—that is, things that should be excluded from a fair decision-making process. Thus, given that the psychology involved in picking is not reliably fair, deciding decision-making away may be the best option for ensuring fairness when choosing from similarly ranked applicants.

Deciding decision-making away, then, is not just an acceptable tool to relieve us of the burden of agency when faced with hard decisions; in certain circumstances, it may be required in order to serve important values such as rationality, equality and fairness.

7. Conclusion

When faced with decisions we'd rather not make, we can decide decision-making away. Deciding decision-making away involves forming conditional intentions for each of the available options, where the conditions are internal to the intentions and provide no independent

reason in favour of any of the available options. The world then determines which of those intentions we will enact. Since carrying out that intention does not reintroduce a decision in favour of the corresponding option, deciding decision-making away need not involve any self-delusion. Quite the opposite: deciding decision-making away is rational and ethically permissible in a wide range of cases—and, sometimes, might even be required.[12]

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