Hilary Bok, “Freedom and Practical Reason”

I. Possibility (130-140)

A. How does Bok distinguish theoretical from practical reasoning? How might this distinction be relevant to the debate about freedom and determinism? (130-131)

B. How does Bok distinguish a general sense of possibility from what he calls “possibility tout court”? (131-133)

C. How does Bok argue that typical ways of trying to resolve the question of which sense of possibility to use in speaking of freedom have only led to a “dialectical stalemate”? How do the two exchanges between compatibilists and libertarians he rehearses illustrate this dialectical stalemate? (133-136)

D. How does Bok suggest we should proceed to break the dialectical stalemate between compatibilists and libertarians? (136-138)

E. What are the three libertarian objections to a compatibilist understanding of freedom which compatibilists must answer? (138-140)

II. Theoretical and Practical Conceptions of Possibility (140-144)

A. Why is possibility tout court “central to theoretical reasoning”? (140-142)

B. Why is the sense of possibility that must be used in practical reasoning one that enables us “to define the set of alternatives among which we can choose”? (142-143)

C. What is the criteria Bok proposes for an action to be considered among my alternatives? (143-144)

III. The Tale of the Amazing Pocket Oracle or Why Possibility Tout Court is not the Relevant Sense of Possibility for our Practical Deliberations (144-151)

A. Why will the pocket oracle have trouble predicting my behavior if it tells me in advance what I am going to do? (146)

B. The pocket oracle could predict my behavior if my decision is independent of its prediction. How do the first two ways in which this can happen not threaten my practical reasoning? (147)

C. Why is it that the pocket oracle can predict the behavior of a fatalist? But why
does Bok believe fatalism is not a generally rational response to the pocket oracle? (148-149)

D. Why, if we are not fatalists, is our possibility tout court not relevant to our practical deliberations, whether we know or do not know what that possibility is? (149-151)

IV. Genuine Possibilities: the Case of the Locked and Unlocked Doors (152-156)

A. How does van Inwagen argue that deliberation requires the belief that our alternatives are possibilities tout court? How does his story about the room with two doors (one locked, the other unlocked) help him to make his case? (152-154)

B. What dis-analogies does Bok find between cases of ordinary choice and choosing which door to use to leave van Inwagen’s room? How does Bok modify van Inwagen’s story of the room to make it more analogous to cases of ordinary choice? (154-155)

C. How does Bok argue that deliberation does not depend on my choice being undetermined? (155)

V. Does our Belief that we Choose among Alternatives Reflect only our Epistemic Limitations? (156-161)

A. In what way does deliberation presuppose, rightly, that our own actions “depend on us”? (157-158)

B. How is it relevant to Bok’s point to note that deliberation is not an attempt to predict my behavior, but to decide “which action we have reason to perform”? (158-159)

C. How does Bok’s argument so far enable him to answer two of the three libertarian objections to compatibilism discussed earlier in the paper? (159-160)

VI. Freedom (161-166)

A. How does Bok define freedom? (164)

B. Why is Bok’s argument not well understood as an argument that we must believe we are free, in a libertarian sense, when we are deciding what to do? (164)