ON MONDAY you are offered a large sum of money to intend on Tuesday to drink toxin on Wednesday. The toxin will make you ill if you drink it, but you only have to intend to drink it in order to receive the money. Obviously, it is desirable for you to intend to drink the toxin, yet this fact seems incapable of moving you to so intend. Why is this so? Does your inability to win the money reflect a flaw in your rationality?

Michael Bratman has pointed out that when one deliberates about the future, one’s focus is on what to do in the future, not on what to intend now, although a judgment about what to do later does lead to an intention now about what to do later (1987, 103). Understanding why this is so is the key to solving the toxin puzzle.

1. Practical deliberation

Before looking for an explanation of the phenomenon that Bratman describes, we need a more precise characterization of it. First of all, it is not true that any deliberation we engage in about the future is about what to do in the future; we also deliberate about what will be the case in the future. This latter kind of deliberation concludes in a future-directed belief rather than a future-directed intention. I will call deliberation that concludes in a belief doxastic deliberation and deliberation that concludes in an intention practical deliberation. Bratman’s claim, then, is about practical deliberation: deliberation that concludes in an intention now for later is about what to do in the future.

We can generalize this claim. Any deliberation that concludes in an intention to A — any instance of practical deliberation — is about

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Aiming to arrive at an intention with respect to A-ing via deliberation thus requires that you determine whether to A. Initiating deliberation by asking yourself the question whether to intend to A makes this aim explicit, though the question may also be implicit in deliberation that nevertheless aims to settle it, by concluding with the formation of an intention. We thus can put Bratman’s point this way:

In order to settle the deliberative question whether to intend to A an agent must settle the question whether to A. Normally you can arrive at an intention to A just by answering the question whether to A, which itself normally can be answered by considering whether A-ing is desirable. You cannot, however, arrive at an intention to A just by answering the question whether it is desirable to intend to A. The correct account of intention should explain these facts.

3. In the case in which practical deliberation leads to an immediate action—where we talk about intention-in-action—it might be argued that there is no difference between intending to A and A-ing. At the very least, it seems that when one is deliberating about an immediate action, one cannot view one’s intention as preceding one’s action, and thus one cannot think that there is a step involved between one’s intention and one’s action that requires one to execute the intention. If this is so, then for the purposes of deliberation, the agent cannot think of his intending to A and his action of A-ing as distinct events. From his deliberative point of view it thus would make no sense to distinguish considerations favoring intending to A from considerations favoring A-ing.

4. What is the nature of this fact about our practical deliberations? Is it merely a contingent psychological fact about creatures like us that our deliberations whether to intend to A can only be settled by determining whether to A, or is it a fact that applies to practical deliberation as such? As we shall see, I favor the latter interpretation, but I don’t think that this interpretation is a deliverance of the phenomenology of practical deliberation itself. As far as our experience is concerned, all we know is that our deliberations are constrained in this way. Therefore, I will leave it open for now that, for all we know, the fact that the deliberative question whether to intend to A can only be settled by answering the question whether to A is merely a contingent fact about our own practical deliberations; that is, for all we know, there are creatures who can arrive at an intention to A just by answering the question whether it would be desirable to so intend.

5. In cases of deliberation about immediate action, an agent may be able to

Although an agent cannot arrive at an intention to A just by deliberating about whether it is desirable to so intend, such considerations nonetheless might causally induce such an intention. After all, wishful thinking sometimes does influence what people intend to do. An explanation of the facts about practical deliberation described by Bratman thus must be compatible with the causal influence of such processes.

Elsewhere I have argued that the hypothesis that the concept of belief includes a standard of correctness best explains the fact that deliberation whether to believe that p (where p stands for an arbitrary proposition) can only be concluded by answering the question whether it is the case that p (i.e., whether p). In this paper, I will argue that the hypothesis that the concept of intention includes a standard of correctness best explains the fact that in order to conclude deliberation whether to intend to A one must answer the question whether to A.

In the next section (section 2) I discuss some doubts about whether my description of practical deliberation is accurate. In section 3, I argue that the deliberative question whether to A is the normative question whether one ought to A, not the descriptive question whether one in fact will A. In sections 4 and 5, I examine two alternative explanations of why deliberation that concludes in intention is directed at this question, turning to my own hypothesis in section 6. Finally (section 7) I apply my hypothesis to solving the toxin puzzle.

2. Is it really like that?

Practical deliberation is directed at the question what to intend in the sense that it is undertaken with the aim of issuing or not issuing in an intention. That deliberation about whether to A or whether p does aim to arrive at intention or belief becomes clear upon comparison with non-arrive at the intention to A by determining that it is desirable to intend to A, but, as I said in note 3, in such cases intending to A and A-ing are not distinct events from the agent’s point of view, and thus, from his point of view, determining that it is desirable to intend to A would be equivalent to determining that it is desirable to A.

deliberative reasoning about the same questions. One can consider whether to A or whether p in the spirit of idly wondering, without aiming to make up one’s mind — in which case, one isn’t deliberating whether to intend to A or whether to believe that p. Idly wondering whether to A or whether p is different from trying to make up one’s mind whether to A or whether p in that one doesn’t feel required either to come to a conclusion or to accept whatever conclusion one happens to arrive at. The latter constitutes such deliberation despite skipping the deliberative question whether to intend to A or whether to believe that p because it is reasoning aimed at issuing or not issuing in an intention or belief. Adequate accounts of the concepts of belief and intention ought to allow us to understand why deliberation that aims to arrive at a belief whether p starts directly with the question whether p, and deliberation that aims to arrive at an intention whether to A starts directly with the question whether to A.

There is a sense in which the question whether to A, not the question whether to intend to A, is the focus of practical deliberation. One normally needn’t explicitly ask oneself whether to intend to A, since that question can only be answered by deliberating whether to A. Explicitly asking oneself whether to intend to A thus is almost always deliberatively idle. If one wants to answer that question, one might as well just start one’s deliberation with the question whether to A. Asking oneself whether to A, however, cannot be settled by asking the different question whether to intend to A, since the latter question can itself only be answered by deliberating whether to A. Asking oneself what to do thus is indispensable for practical deliberation, whereas asking oneself what to intend is not. The fact that one does not explicitly need to ask oneself the latter question does not mean that practical deliberation does not settle it, however. Similarly, asking whether to believe that p is deliberatively idle. The only way to settle that question is by deliberating whether p, so one might as well start one’s doxastic deliberation with that question. This does not show that one does not settle the question what to believe in doxastic deliberation; it just shows that one needn’t explicitly ask that question in order to settle it.

There are at least two reasons for doubting that practical deliberation settles the question what to intend. First of all, it might be argued that given a proper understanding of that question, settling it cannot issue in an intention. The question what to intend can either mean what shall I intend or what ought I to intend. If it means the former, then the answer must be of the form ‘I shall (or shall not) intend to …’, which is the expression of a second-order intention, not the first-order intention that is at issue in the question. If the question what to intend instead is interpreted as the question what ought I intend, the answer must be of the form ‘I ought (or ought not) to intend to …’, which is the expression of a normative judgment, not an intention. Either way, settling the question what to intend fails to issue in the intention at issue. Practical deliberation, though, can and often does issue in an intention; therefore it is incorrect to describe it as settling that question.

I agree (and will argue later) that the answer to the deliberative question whether to intend to A is a normative judgment and that a normative judgment is not identical with an intention. However, the normative judgment that I ought to A normally leads directly to the intention to A. Certainly no further question needs to be considered before deliberation can conclude in the intention. Deliberation that aims to conclude in an intention whether to A thus can proceed by settling the question whether I ought to A.

But I claimed a moment ago that practical deliberation aims to settle the question whether to intend to A. How can I now claim that such deliberation proceeds by settling the question whether I ought to A? My reply is that one can settle one question by settling another, if the answer to the latter question determines the answer to the former. For example, if act consequentialism were the correct moral theory then the question whether A-ing is morally right would be settled by answering the question whether A-ing maximizes overall (expected) value. Similarly, if the answer to the question whether to A determines the answer to the question whether to intend to A, one can settle the latter.

7. Thanks to John Broome for raising this objection.
question by settling the former. I thus see no problem with claiming that the deliberative question whether to intend to A can be settled by a judgment that I ought to A and that deliberation that settles this latter question normally concludes in an intention.

A second reason for doubting that practical deliberation settles the question what to intend is the following line of thought. We can deliberate only about those things that are under our voluntary control. Intentions, unlike actions, are not under voluntary control. Practical deliberation thus is about what action to perform — what to do — not what to intend. It is only by mistakenly thinking of our intentions as actions that we are led to believe that we can deliberate about what to intend. Alternatively, it is only in those abnormal cases in which our intentions are under our voluntary control, and thus are action-like in the relevant way, that we can deliberate about what to intend.

I agree that intentions are not actions; rather, they are the vehicles by which we exercise voluntary control over our actions. Our voluntary control over our actions therefore cannot in turn depend on our exercising the same kind of control over these vehicles, on pain of setting off a vicious regress. I also agree that practical deliberation is directed at the question what to do, or equivalently, what action to perform, albeit as a way of settling the question what to intend. But I deny the premise that one can deliberate only about those things over which one has voluntary control. The fact that we do not exercise voluntary control over our intentions does not entail that we cannot deliberate about what to intend. Deliberating about what to intend in the sense I have in mind just is aiming to arrive at a decision about what to do by way of reasoning. This is something all of us do from time to time, and thus is something we obviously are capable of doing.®

Of course, if the question what to intend were in competition with the question what to do, then the fact that practical deliberation is aimed at settling the question what to do would entail that it does not settle the question what to intend. But the questions what to do and what to intend are clearly compatible, since the way to settle the latter is by settling the former. If settling the question what to do settles what to intend, then why not say that practical deliberation is directed equally at settling both questions? After all, any practical deliberation that successfully settles the question what to do thereby has settled the question what to intend.

There is a sense in which intention rather than action is the focus of practical deliberation, which comes out most clearly in cases of future directed practical deliberation. In deliberating whether to see a movie tomorrow, I do not think that I will arrive at an action at the conclusion of my deliberation. How could I? Going to the movie tomorrow is not itself something that is the product of my current deliberation. What I hope to achieve by my deliberation is a plan, or intention, that I will execute tomorrow by either going or not going to a movie. As I said earlier, what makes my reasoning an instance of practical deliberation is not that it is initiated by a deliberative question, but that it proceeds with the aim of concluding in an intention. This is the sense in which I deliberate about whether to intend to go to a movie tomorrow.

Even in present-directed practical deliberation, sometimes all that one can accomplish by way of deliberation is an intention to act. Whether one is able to execute one’s intention in action may not itself be a product of one’s deliberation. As John Broome puts it, action usually requires both reasoning ability and physical ability.® Failure to do something that one intends to do need not involve a failure of one’s deliberative capacities, although it may involve a failure of some other capacities. If I intend to raise my arm now to ask a question but my arm suddenly becomes paralyzed or I become paralyzed by fear, my deliberation has not failed, although I have.

I have claimed that practical deliberation settles the question

8. Nor does the fact that we exercise voluntary control over our actions but not our intentions entail that we cannot exercise a different kind of control over the latter. When we arrive at an intention by way of practical deliberation, we exercise our rational powers and thus exert rational control over the formation of that intention, just as we do when we arrive at a belief by way of doxastic deliberation.

9. Broome (2002), 85. One may also need to exercise further non-reasoning mental capacities in order to carry out an intention on a given occasion. For example, one may need to overcome fear to carry out an intention to perform a dangerous action.
whether to intend to A by settling the question whether to A, and this latter question is settled (in part) by considerations relating to the desirability of A-ing, not considerations related to the desirability of intending to A. But it might be objected that one focuses on the desirability of A-ing in an attempt to determine whether it is desirable to intend to A. After all, in order to determine whether it is desirable to intend to A, one must determine whether the consequences of intending to A are desirable. A-ing is by far the most significant consequence of intending to A; therefore determining whether A-ing is desirable is crucial to determining whether intending to A is desirable.  

The preceding discussion points to an aspect of the phenomenology of practical deliberation that this objection overlooks. When we engage in practical deliberation with an aim to arriving at an intention with respect to an action, our attention immediately centers on the question whether to perform that action. There is no inferential step between the question whether to intend to A and whether to A; the former question immediately gives way to the latter. This is why we can skip the question whether to intend to A and start right in with the question whether to A and yet be recognizably deliberating about what to intend (as opposed to idly wondering whether to A without aiming to make up our minds). But if the question whether to intend to A were the question whether intending to A is desirable, there would be an inferential step between the question whether to intend to A and whether to A, bridged by the premise that the desirability of intending to A is determined by the desirability of A-ing. Even this premise wouldn’t be sufficient to bridge the gap, though, because in determining the expected value (and thus desirability) of intending to A one would need to discount the desirability of A-ing by the probability that one’s intention would be executed. This is not an accurate description of what occurs in practical deliberation. We don’t adjust our reasons for intending to do something by the probability that the intention will be carried out; we determine our reasons for intending directly by determining our reasons for action.  

There is one way that the desirability of an intention can influence practical deliberation. As Joseph Raz points out, there are cases in which one cannot intend to A without A-ing, or at least in which A-ing makes it easier to have the intention. For example, it may be that given that I am not paralyzed, I cannot intend to raise my hand right now without raising it. If someone were to make it desirable for me to intend to raise my arm now by offering me money to so intend, this inducement would give me a reason to raise my arm now, since raising my arm is desirable as a way to have the intention to raise it. Thus, when performing an action is a way of having the intention, or would make having the intention easier, the desirability of intending the action can make the action intended desirable. This does not mean that in such cases the question whether to A is supplanted by the question whether it would be desirable to intend to A; it is only by contributing to settling the former question that the answer to the latter question influences practical deliberation.  

This concludes my defense of the characterization of practical deliberation I gave in section 1. I realize that I have only canvassed some of the reasons that one might have for resisting this characterization. I hope, though, that it will be granted that what I have said is at least true of paradigmatic cases of practical deliberation, and I do not believe that we possess an adequate explanation of even these cases. This is the situation that this paper aims to remedy. Only once we have

10. Thanks to Niko Kolodny for raising this objection.

11. Even if the phenomenology of practical deliberation does not support the hypothesis that we determine whether an action is desirable in order to determine whether intending to do it is desirable, it may be thought that such a hypothesis is extensionally equivalent to the one that I opt for later, in that it delivers the same verdicts about which intentions we have most reason to adopt. In the Appendix I argue that this is not so—that there are cases in which the two hypotheses diverge in their verdicts about what we have most reason to intend.

12. Raz (ms), 16–17.
an adequate explanation of paradigmatic cases of practical deliberation about which we have clear and stable intuitions will be in a position to attempt to assess and explain cases about which we have unclear and fragile intuitions.

3. ‘What to do?’ ≠ ‘What will I do?’

Some philosophers claim that intending to A involves believing that one will A. If this were true, would it explain why practical deliberation starts with the question whether to A? No. Presumably, it is by interpreting the question whether to intend to A as the question whether to believe that one will A that a doxastic theory of intention attempts to shed light on the nature of practical deliberation. But the question whether to believe that one will A, asked in an attempt to arrive at a prediction about what one will do, can only be settled by answering the question whether one will A, not whether to A. These are very different questions, and very different kinds of considerations are relevant to answering them. The answer to the practical question whether to A is determined by reasons that show A-ing to be desirable; the answer to the predictive question whether one will A is determined by evidence for the proposition that one will A. The binge alcoholic may have good evidence on Wednesday that he will go on a bender over the weekend — his addiction has gotten the better of him the past several weekends after all — without having any reason to think that it is desirable to do so.13


14. Anscombe (2000), 6, makes essentially this point, but in terms of the reasons by which a speaker justifies the description that he gives to express his intention:

We might attempt to make the distinction out by saying: an expression of intention is a description of something future in which the speaker is some sort of agent, which description he justifies (if he does justify it) by reasons for acting, sc. Reasons why it would be useful or attractive if the description came true, not by evidence that it is true.

15. See Bratman (1981), 255, for a similar example.

Have I have begged the question against this doxastic view of intention by implicitly assuming that the question whether to A is identical to the normative question whether one ought to A? All I have shown, it might be claimed, is that this normative question cannot be answered by settling the predictive question whether one will A. From this we only can conclude that if the question whether to A is identical to the question whether one ought to A, it cannot be settled by determining whether one will A. But those who claim that intending to A involves predicting that one will A deny the antecedent of this conditional; that is, they deny that the question whether to A is a normative question. I thus cannot assume such an equivalence, which I would need to do in order to draw the conclusion that the question whether to A is not settled by determining whether one will A, without begging the question against them.

While I do believe that the question what to do is best interpreted as a normative question, my objection does not depend on this claim. All I need is one of the points about practical deliberation with which we began: normally one can arrive at an intention to A by determining that it is desirable to A. If the question whether to A were equivalent to the predictive question whether one will A, only evidence that one will A could settle it. The desirability of A-ing is not evidence that one will A. Thus, were the two questions identical, it would not be possible to arrive at an intention to A by determining that it would be desirable to A. But we know from our own experience of practical deliberation that it is possible to arrive at an intention to A by determining that it would be desirable to A. Therefore the question whether to A is not identical to the predictive question whether one will A.

Some philosophers who hold a doxastic account of intention, though, think that intending to A involves the self-fulfilling belief that one will A. This version of the doxastic account of intention may be able to explain why one can arrive at an intention to A by determining that A-ing is desirable. What it cannot explain is why one must

determine that $A$-ing is desirable in order to deliberatively arrive at an intention to $A$—why, for example, one cannot arrive at an intention to $A$ just by determining that it is desirable to so intend. Self-fulfilling beliefs, just like ordinary beliefs, are capable of truth or falsity, but unlike ordinary beliefs, they needn’t be based on prior evidence, since they cause their own truth. If one conceives of oneself as deliberating whether to believe that one will $A$, where one understands this to be a self-fulfilling belief, one is not seeking a prediction about what one will do and thus needn’t be guided by prior evidence that one will $A$. In fact, it would seem that one is free to answer the question whether to believe that one will $A$ on whatever basis one likes. After all, no matter how one forms the belief, one knows that it will be true. Therefore one would be free to believe that one will $A$ on the ground that $A$-ing is desirable. But this freedom would also include the freedom to believe that one will $A$ on the ground that it is desirable to believe that one will $A$. Were the deliberative question whether to intend to $A$ identical to the question whether to adopt the self-fulfilling belief that one will $A$, one thus could arrive at an intention to $A$ just by determining that it is desirable to so intend and without considering evidence as to whether one will $A$. But we know from our own experience of practical deliberation that it is not possible (for us) to arrive at an intention to $A$ just by determining that it is desirable to so intend. Therefore the question whether to intend to $A$ is not identical to the question whether to adopt the self-fulfilling belief that one will $A$.

Recall the facts about practical deliberation that we are trying to explain: normally we can arrive at an intention to $A$ by determining that $A$-ing is desirable, but we cannot arrive at an intention to $A$ just by determining that it is desirable to intend to $A$. I have not argued that intending to $A$ does not entail the belief that one will $A$. Rather, I have argued that even if true, this claim cannot account for these facts. It can explain one fact or the other, depending upon how the “belief” involved in intention is interpreted, but no single interpretation of it can explain both facts at once. If we interpret the belief as self-fulfilling, then we can explain why the intention in which it is implicated can be formed by answering the question whether $A$-ing is desirable, but we can’t explain why it cannot also be formed by answering the question whether intending to $A$ is desirable. If we don’t interpret the belief as self-fulfilling, then we cannot explain why we can form an intention by answering the former question.

Interpreting the question whether to $A$ instead as the normative question whether one ought to $A$, or equivalently, whether $A$-ing is the thing to do, would accommodate both these facts. Determining that $A$-ing is desirable clearly bears on whether one ought to $A$, even if other considerations also bear on this question, whereas determining that intending to $A$ is desirable does nothing by itself to settle the question whether $A$-ing is the thing to do. (After all, no evaluation of $A$-ing is mentioned in the claim that intending to $A$ is desirable.)

Don’t Buridan’s Ass cases, though, show that the question what to do is distinct from the question what should I do? In such cases one is faced with at least two equally desirable options; thus there is no fact about which action one ought to perform. Setting the question what to do therefore must be settled on some other basis.

Remember, the question what to do whose interpretation we are seeking is one that is answered by reasoning. Therefore, Buridan’s Ass cases show that this question is not identical to the question what should I do only if choosing one equally desirable option over another is the conclusion of reasoning. But this is not so. In these cases one just picks between the equally desirable options; one’s choice between them is not based on any reasons that favor one action over the other. We can call picking one equally desirable option over another settling what to do if we like, but remember, the explanandum that’s on the table is our inability to engage in a particular kind of reasoning, that which concludes in an intention on the basis of considerations about what would be desirable to intend. My point is that when aiming to form an intention on the basis of reasons, we must be seeking reasons for doing rather than reasons for intending. It isn’t relevant that we aren’t always demanding reasons for doing when we aim at forming an intention, if the reason is that we sometimes aren’t demanding any reasons at all.
I thus suggest that the question whether to A is best interpreted not as the doxastic question whether one will A, but as the normative question whether one ought to A. Accordingly, from this point forward I will treat the locutions ‘whether to A’, ‘whether one ought to A’, and ‘whether A-ing is the thing to do’ synonymously. Also, for ease of exposition, from this point forward I will be making the simplifying assumption that the desirability of an action is the only normative factor that determines whether one ought to do it.\(^17\)

4. The aim of intention: the dispositional interpretation

Before turning to my own hypothesis about why settling the deliberative question whether to intend to A requires settling the question whether to A (interpreted now as the normative question whether A-ing is the thing to do), it will be helpful to see why two closely related hypotheses cannot adequately explain why this is so. Understanding where these hypotheses go wrong will put us in a position to construct a better explanation.

Just as we say that belief aims at truth, we might say that intention aims at to-be-doneness. One way of interpreting this metaphor in the case of belief is to say that belief is a state of mind that is regulated for truth, in the sense that the belief that p tends to be formed, revised, and extinguished in response to evidence of p’s truth. According to such a view, the dispositions that make belief responsive to evidence of truth distinguish belief from other cognitive states. In this sense, truth-directedness might be thought to be constitutive of belief.\(^18\)

Furthermore, the truth-directed nature of belief appears to explain why the deliberative question whether to believe that p can be settled only by settling the question whether p. If being regulated for truth is a conceptual fact about belief, then anyone who deliberates about whether to believe that p recognizes that his deliberation can potentially produce the envisioned attitude — that is, a belief that p — only by regulating that attitude for truth. Thus, the only way to deliberate about whether to believe that p is to deliberate about whether p.\(^19\)

Similarly, one might interpret the metaphor that intention aims at to-be-doneness by saying that intention is a state of mind that is regulated for to-be-doneness, in the sense that an intention to A tends to be formed, revised, and extinguished in response to reasons that A-ing would be desirable. According to such a view, these dispositions that make intentions responsive to the desirability of their objects distinguish intentions from other motivating propositional attitudes. In this sense, aiming at to-be-doneness might be thought to be constitutive of intention.

Furthermore, the fact that intention is regulated for to-be-doneness appears to explain why the deliberative question whether to intend to A requires settling the question whether to A. If being regulated for to-be-doneness is a conceptual fact about intention, then anyone who deliberates about whether to intend to A recognizes that his deliberation can potentially produce the envisioned attitude — that is, the intention to A — only by regulating it in accordance with the desirability of A-ing. But to determine that A-ing would be most desirable, and therefore that one ought to A, just is to settle the question whether to A. Thus the only way to deliberate about whether to intend to A is to deliberate about whether to A.\(^20\)

\(^{17}\) For those bothered that this assumption expresses a prejudice in favor of a particular normative theory of practical reasons, when I speak of the desirability of an action please interpret me as referring to those features of an action, whatever they are, that make it worth doing.

\(^{18}\) See Velleman (2000a) for a statement and defense of this view.

\(^{19}\) If this were the only way in which belief aims at the truth, then the aim of belief would have been naturalized. After all, the dispositions involved in regulating a state for truth presumably are naturalistic, causal features of our psychologies; and the properties that make beliefs true are themselves natural properties, at least if we stick to beliefs with empirical content.

\(^{20}\) Notice that, unlike the analogous way of explicating the aim of belief, this way of explicating the aim of intention would not give us a naturalistic account of that aim. According to this account, the dispositions constitutive of intention would be dispositions to form, revise, and extinguish intentions in light of a norm—whether the action intended is desirable (or to-be-done). Thus, on such an account, there is no way to specify the dispositions constitutive of intention without mentioning a normative concept, desirability. Unless there
I will now argue that this account of the aim of intention cannot adequately explain the way that the desirability of an action governs practical deliberation. Later I will suggest an alternative way in which the aim of intention might be incorporated into an account of the concept of intention, one that does justice to the phenomenology of practical deliberation. My argument that the above account of intention’s aim cannot adequately capture the way that an action’s desirability governs practical deliberation parallels the argument I have given elsewhere that the analogous account of belief’s aim cannot adequately capture the way that truth governs doxastic deliberation.21 I thus begin by summarizing the latter argument.

The deliberative question whether to believe that \( p \) can be settled only by settling the question whether \( p \). This, as I have said, is a fact about the phenomenology of doxastic deliberation. But it is also a widely recognized fact that non-evidential processes occasionally influence what we believe; accusations of wishful thinking are a common enough occurrence. When wishful thinking induces one to believe that \( p \), the perceived desirability of believing that \( p \) causes one to hold that belief. The desirability of believing that \( p \), however, cannot have an acknowledged influence in doxastic deliberation, because the desirability of a belief by itself does nothing to indicate whether the content of the belief is true. An adequate account of belief must respect these facts. This means that whatever explanation we give of the truth-governed nature of doxastic deliberation must not generalize in such a way as to rule out the causal impact of other, non-evidential processes on beliefs.

The dispositional account of belief’s truth-directedness cannot accomplish this task. Being regulated for truth consists in responsiveness to evidence. The belief that \( p \) tends to be formed in response to evidence of \( p \)’s truth, to be reinforced by additional evidence of it, and to be extinguished by evidence against it. A crucial question is how

is some naturalistic account of this normative concept, the aim of intention will not have been naturalized.

judging that it would be undesirable to act on it, peer pressure might nonetheless induce one into adopting an intention to do something one thinks it is undesirable to do. One might even be able to intentionally induce a desirable intention to perform an undesirable action by various means; if one were living in more pharmacologically advanced times, taking a pill might do the trick. The correct explanation of the fact that settling the question whether to intend to A requires determining whether A-ing is desirable thus must not generalize in such a way as to rule out the influence on intentions of processes that are insensitive to the desirability of what is intended.

The dispositional account of intention’s aim cannot accomplish this task. The desirability-tracking dispositions that the account claims to be constitutive of intention operate in all contexts of intention-formation. The only way that the account can explain the way that the desirability of actions govern practical deliberation thus is by requiring that the desirability of actions govern in this way all processes that induce the intention to perform them. For example, one might interpret the desirability-tracking dispositions constitutive of intention to be so strong as to rule out the influence of any other considerations on the formation of intentions. While this might account for the fact that the desirability of an action plays an overriding role in practical deliberation, it would imply the false claim that other considerations could never causally influence what we intend to do. One might instead interpret the desirability-tracking dispositions constitutive of intention to be weak enough to allow for the influence of competing considerations over our intentions, but then one would not have accounted for the fact that considerations relevant to determining whether to perform an action dominate other considerations in practical deliberation. For when one deliberates whether to intend to A, this question not only gives way to the question whether to A but takes precedence of any other, competing question, such as whether intending to A would be in one’s interest. Yet if intention only was required to be weakly regulated for the desirability of its object, then the potential outcome of deliberation could be envisioned as an intention to A so long as the desirability of A-ing were treated as relevant to that outcome, without necessarily being treated as having priority over opposing considerations: the question whether to A would not crowd out competing questions.

Either the dispositional interpretation of the aim of intention is false or it fails to explain why the deliberative question whether to intend to A can only be settled by settling the question whether to A. The dispositional account might capture one of the relations that intention has to the desirability of its object, but it does not capture the relation that they bear to one another in practical deliberation.

5. Intentions as normative judgments

Obviously, there is a very close connection between settling the question whether to A and intending to A, as there is between settling the question whether p and believing that p. Why not just say that the relation is one of identity?22 This is the other hypothesis that I will examine before turning to my own.

If intending to A just is settling the question whether to A in the affirmative, by forming a judgment that one ought to A, then we can easily explain why only considerations that bear on the desirability of A-ing can be reasons for intending to A.23 Considerations bearing on the desirability of intending to A don’t bear on whether A-ing is desirable and thus cannot constitute reasons for the judgment that is constitutive of intending to A. Similarly, if believing that p just is settling the question whether p by forming a judgment that p, then we have an explanation for why the desirability of believing that p cannot be a reason for believing that p. The desirability of believing that p does not

22. See Davidson (1980a), 99–102, for a statement and defense of this view.

23. Pamela Hieronymi, in her excellent paper “The Wrong Kind of Reasons” (2005), claims that answering the question whether to A in the affirmative amounts to intending to A. However, she does not think that this question is identical to the question whether one ought to A, nor does she suggest any other question that is identical to it. As far as I can see, she thus has no explanation of why the desirability of an action is even relevant to answering the question whether to do it.
bear on the question whether \(p\), and thus cannot constitute a reason for the judgment that constitutes believing that \(p\).

However, believing that \(p\) and intending to \(A\) cannot be identical to answering these questions. First, at least in the case of intention (but I also think in the case of belief), one can intend to \(A\) even though one thinks that one ought not to \(A\). This is what happens in cases of one type of akrasia.\(^{24}\) Akratic intentions are genuine intentions, not merely powerful impulses that cause one’s behavior without the participation of any of one’s rational capacities. One determines how to execute one’s akratic intentions, and in doing so one exercises one’s instrumental rationality. This is reflected by the fact that, as Jay Wallace (2001, 1) points out, we assess how intelligently people carry out even those intentions whose ends they think they ought not to pursue:

[I]t seems undeniable that agents can display a kind of instrumental rationality in the pursuit of ends that they do not themselves endorse, when for instance they are in the grip of akrasia. People sometimes exhibit great intelligence and skill in executing plans that they view as dubious or questionable — think, for instance, of the extraordinary talent many of us display at procrastinating when it comes to tasks that we regard as worthy but difficult.

The fact that our judgments about what we ought to do don’t always lead us to intend to do those things does not mean that any further reasoning is required to mediate the transition from judging that we ought to \(A\) to intending to \(A\). Normally, making a judgment about what we ought to do directly leads us to intend to do it, but sometimes this is not so. We don’t always intend to do what our reasoning dictates, but this doesn’t mean that there are further considerations that are relevant to determining what to intend. Nor does it mean that there is some further psychological factor present that explains why we form an intention on the basis of our judgment about what to do in non-akratic cases; all that is required is that there be an absence of interfering factors that would prevent the normal transition from judgment to intention.

Second, one can believe that \(p\) or intend to \(A\) without having settled any question at all. Trying to settle a question (\(i.e.,\) deliberation) is an activity that we engage in sometimes when we form beliefs and intentions, but certainly not always. For example, when forming a perceptual belief one does not normally engage in deliberation at all. Usually, it is only when we have reasons to doubt the accuracy of our senses that we deliberate about whether the way that things appear to us is really the way that they are. Similarly, when a desire for something and a belief about how to get it leads to the formation of an intention one doesn’t normally deliberate about whether the action intended is desirable. This question usually arises only when we experience conflicting desires pulling us in different directions. Furthermore, we attribute beliefs and intentions to others in order to explain their behavior or other mental states of theirs, without implying that the subjects of our attributions normatively endorse these states (or their objects) or are even aware of them, and therefore, without implying that these states constitute answers that subjects have arrived at to questions that they have attempted to settle.\(^{25}\) As theorists we thus should not introduce such an endorsement or awareness into our account of the nature of these states.

6. The aim of intention: the normative interpretation

So how to explain the fact that in order to answer the deliberative question \(\text{whether to intend to } A\) one must determine whether \(\text{one ought to } A\) in a way that does not commit us to either the false claim that only the desirability of \(A\)-ing can causally determine whether one intends to \(A\), or that intending to \(A\) just is settling the question \(\text{whether}\)

\(^{24}\) The other type of akrasia occurs when one fails to do what one intends to do. For example, one intends to take the rollercoaster when one is next at the fair, but when the time comes one is too paralyzed by fear to follow through on this intention.

\(^{25}\) See Velleman (2000b) for a nice example of a case of acting on an intention that one is unaware of having.
to A? Unsurprisingly, my answer is similar to the answer I have given elsewhere to the corresponding question: How to explain the fact that the deliberative question *whether to believe that p* can be settled only by determining *whether p*? I will briefly rehearse that explanation, which will give us a blueprint for our explanation of the role of the desirability of an action in practical deliberation.

Recall that the problem with the dispositional view of belief’s truth-directedness is that it fails to account for the unique way that truth governs one particular belief-forming process, doxastic deliberation. In order to explain this fact, I thus think we need to look to what is special about doxastic deliberation. Once we focus on this question, one thing that jumps out is that unlike other belief-forming processes, doxastic deliberation involves the subject’s application of the concept of belief. After all, one cannot deliberate about what to believe, which entails either explicitly asking oneself *what to believe* or at least implicitly asking this question in virtue of aiming to form a belief, unless one employs the concept of belief. But one can certainly form beliefs by other means (e.g., perception) without employing the concept of belief. My hypothesis is that the concept of belief contains a standard of correctness, to the effect that a belief is correct if and only if it is true. Thus, when one deliberates *whether to believe that p*, one is deliberating about an attitude for which one already applies this standard. Applying this standard constrains one to reason with an eye solely to *whether p*.

This explanation of the role of truth in doxastic deliberation, unlike the one implied by the strong dispositional interpretation of belief’s truth-directedness, avoids over-generalizing the role of truth in belief-formation. While other belief-forming processes might be regulated to a certain extent by truth-seeking dispositions, only in doxastic deliberation — the belief-forming process framed either explicitly or implicitly by the question *whether to believe that p* — is an agent required to apply belief’s standard of correctness — truth — to the exclusion of other competing standards. This explanation thus accounts for why

truth exclusively governs doxastic deliberation while leaving room for the possibility that beliefs brought about by non-deliberative processes have non-evidential causes.

In order to explain the way that the desirability of an action governs practical deliberation, I think we should likewise focus on what is unique about practical deliberation. Once we focus on this question, one thing that jumps out is that unlike other processes of intention-formation, practical deliberation involves the subject’s application of the concept of intention. After all, one cannot deliberate about *what to intend*, which entails either explicitly asking oneself *what to intend* or at least implicitly asking this question in virtue of aiming to form an intention, without employing the concept of intention. But one can certainly arrive at an intention by other means without ever asking this question or even aiming to form an intention. My hypothesis is that the concept of intention includes a standard of correctness. Just as classifying an attitude as a belief entails applying to it the standard of being correct if and only if its content is true, likewise classifying an attitude as an intention entails applying to it the standard of being correct if and only if it is not the case that one ought not to perform the action that is its object. When one deliberates whether to intend to A, one thus is deliberating about an attitude for which one already applies this standard. The way to apply this standard is by determining whether one ought to A, since if A ought to be done, then all other incompatible actions are ones that it would be incorrect to perform. If one concludes that one ought to A, then one’s acceptance of the norm for intention, combined with this judgment, will normally lead to an intention to A. Things can go awry, and one can fail to intend to A.


27. This formulation of the standard of correctness allows decisions in Buridan’s Ass cases. Although suspension of belief is rationally required when one’s evidence equally supports two opposing hypotheses, suspension of action is not required when one is faced with two equally desirable options; one is rationally permitted to pick either one. The standard of correctness is met by either act because it is not the case that either act is such that one ought not to perform it.

28. This explanation relies on a very weak form of internalism about normative thought. The relevant form of internalism does not require a positive disposition to obey any norm that one applies; what it requires is the lack of a
even though one has settled the question *whether A-ing is the thing to do*, but it does not follow that there is another step that one must perform between judging that *A-ing is the thing to do* and intending to *A*.29

Some philosophers have claimed that deliberating about what to do involves applying a norm implicit in the concept of action.30 How is this view related to my own? I want to remain agnostic about whether there is a norm implicit in the concept of action that sets the standard for correct deliberation about what to do, or whether the norm for action is to be determined by substantive normative inquiry. My claim is that deliberating about what to intend cannot involve applying a different norm from that which one accepts for action, however one’s acceptance of the norm for action is determined.

It may appear, though, that my hypothesis rules out at least one basic and uncontroversial norm for action. Whenever you do something intentionally, there is something you are trying or aiming to do—something you are intending to do. If you do what you aimed to do, then there is a sense in which your action is a success. You kick the ball with the aim of scoring a goal. If the ball goes into the net, your action is a success, otherwise not. Doesn’t the aim, or intention, thus set the standard of correctness for action? If so, the standard of disposition to obey a different norm instead. One cannot genuinely apply the norm of action to an attitude while simultaneously trying to make it conform to some other, unrelated norm. This form of internalism does not rule out obedience to additional norms compatible with the one applied. One can aim to arrive as quickly as possible at an intention with respect to A-ing—in which case, one will deliberate in accordance with a norm of speed as well as the norm of action.

Beliefs and intentions are mental attitudes, whereas judgments are mental acts. When we are rational, our attitudes conform to our judgments, but when we are not they may not. That our judgments conform to our attitudes may not be something that we have control over, but it is still a failure of our rationality if our attitudes fail to conform to our judgments. After all, in arriving at a judgment that *p* we are attempting to fix a belief *whether p* by way of reasoning. If we fail to believe that *p* upon arriving the judgment that *p*, then our reasoning has failed to determine what we believe. In these sorts of cases we are apt to say that some irrational condition (*i.e.*, an addiction or phobia) had a dominant hand in determining what we believe.

30. See, e.g., Davidson (1980b), Velleman (2000c), and Korsgaard (ms).

31. Thanks to Tom Smith for raising this objection.
correct if and only if it is not the case that one ought not to \( A \), explains the role of the desirability of \( A \)-ing in deliberating whether to intend to \( A \) without falsely attributing this role to other intention-forming processes. It is not the fact that an intention to \( A \) is regulated by dispositions that track the desirability of \( A \)-ing that explains why the desirability of \( A \)-ing is the dominant consideration relevant to determining the intention to \( A \) in practical deliberation. As I argued earlier, if intentions are regulated by these dispositions, they are everywhere so regulated. Therefore, such dispositions cannot explain the unique role that the desirability of an intention’s object has in one particular intention-forming process, practical deliberation. However, if it were a conceptual truth that an intention is an attitude that is correct if and only if it is not the case that one ought not to perform the action that is its object, this would explain the unique role that the desirability of \( A \)-ing has in practical deliberation. While other intention-forming processes might be regulated to a certain extent by dispositions that track the object of the intention’s desirability, only in practical deliberation – the intention-forming process framed either explicitly or implicitly by the question whether to intend to \( A \) – does an agent exercise the concept of intention and thus apply the norm that is contained in this concept. It is the application of this norm in practical deliberation that is responsible for the fact that the desirability of an action must be the focus of one’s deliberation about whether to intend to do it. Since this norm is not applied in other intention-forming processes, intentions arrived at by means of non-deliberative processes are capable of being dominantly influenced by factors unrelated to the desirability of an action. My hypothesis thus explains why the desirability of an action governs practical deliberation while allowing that intentions arrived at in non-deliberative ways can be dominantly influenced by other considerations.

Unlike the hypothesis that intending to \( A \) is identical to judging that one ought to \( A \), my hypothesis does not have the false implication that one cannot have intentions that one is unaware of or whose object one does not normatively endorse. Not only is intending to \( A \) not identical to judging that one ought to \( A \), but intending to \( A \) needn’t even be based on the judgment that one ought to \( A \). Whether an intention is based upon such a judgment depends upon whether practical deliberation has had a hand in determining the intention. The real connection between intending to \( A \) and the desirability of \( A \)-ing is a conceptual, normative one. It is a conceptual truth that intending to \( A \) is an attitude that is correct if and only if it is not the case that \( A \)-ing ought not to be done. This holds true for all intentions, even those that are not themselves based upon judgments about the desirability of their objects. This is why intentions that we become aware of fall under the guidance of these judgments. Recognizing an attitude of ours as an intention to \( A \) rather than, for example, a wish to \( A \), requires us to apply intention’s norm of correctness to it. If we find that we intend to do something that we don’t endorse doing, this typically undermines the intention or at least alienates us from it.\(^{32} \)

### 7. The toxin puzzle

I am now in a position to address our questions about the toxin case. Because settling the deliberative question \( \text{whether to intend to A} \) requires answering the question \( \text{whether to A} \), the fact that you would be given a desirable amount of money for intending to take the toxin cannot influence you in practical deliberation whether to intend to take the toxin.\(^{33} \) The offer being made to you makes it desirable to intend to take the toxin, but it does not make taking the toxin desirable, since you would receive the money for intending to take the toxin, not for taking it. Therefore the fact that you would receive this money for intending to take the toxin cannot help answer the question \( \text{whether to take the toxin} \) which you must answer in order to settle your practical

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32. This might explain why intentions whose objects we don’t endorse often need to exert their influence below the level of our conscious awareness.

33. I realize that not everyone accepts that one cannot intend to take the toxin on the basis of the judgment that it would be desirable to so intend. In order to give a fully satisfying solution to the toxin puzzle, I thus would need to give a plausible explanation of why one might mistakenly believe that it is possible to take the toxin on such a basis.
deliberation whether to intend to take the toxin. Until you have answered the question whether you ought to take the toxin, the desirability of intending to take the toxin cannot play any role in your practical deliberation. But what can this tell us about whether you have reasons to intend to take the toxin?

According to my hypothesis, the question whether to intend to A gives way to the question whether to A because the concept of intention contains the standard of correctness: intending to A is correct if and only if it is not the case that one ought not to A. Practical deliberation, in virtue of being framed by a question that contains the concept of intention — whether to intend to A — is governed by this norm of correctness. Similarly, the question whether to believe that p gives way to the question whether p because the concept of belief contains the standard of correctness that believing that p is correct if and only if p. Doxastic deliberation, in virtue of being framed by a question that contains the concept of belief — whether to believe that p — is governed by this norm of correctness.

34. In fact, even if you were offered the money merely to desire to take the toxin you couldn’t win the money. It might be thought that, unlike with intentions, this is due to the fact that desires are not under our deliberative control. But this is not true of all of our desires. With respect to desires devoid of a phenomenological aspect, we can deliberate about what to desire. For example, upon turning the television channel to a basketball game between the Suns and Pistons — two teams that I like — I may wonder which team to root for. This, though, is really just a way of asking myself which team I want to win. After all, rooting for a team is the manifestation of a desire. I figure out which team I want to win by determining which outcome is more desirable from my point of view. If I decide that it would be more desirable, from my point of view, if the Suns win, then I normally come to desire that the Suns win. Judging that it would be desirable to desire that the Suns win because everyone around me is a Suns’ fan and I want to fit in, though, will not move me to desire that the Suns win (although I might fake it so that I can fit in). Of course, peer pressure often coercively induces such desires, just not by way of deliberation. These facts suggest that just as the concept of intention includes a standard of correctness, so too the concept of (non-phenomenological) desire includes a norm of correctness. Desires may be caused by their own desirability, but their desirability does not make them correct according to the standard built into the concept of desire that is applied in deliberation about what to desire. In future work I plan to investigate to what extent the type of hypothesis I have argued for with respect to belief and intention applies to desire and other psychological concepts.

The conception of deliberation that emerges is this: deliberation is reasoning aimed at issuing in some result in accordance with norms for results of that kind. Deliberating whether to φ is reasoning aimed at issuing or not issuing in φ-ing, in accordance with norms for φ-ing. Deliberating whether to φ is not merely one among other causal routes to securing results of kind φ; it is the most explicit route by which we are guided by the application of norms in reaching results of kind φ. Deliberation whether to φ thus is precisely the place to look if we want to understand what can be a reason to φ, and not just a mere cause of φ. We uncover what sorts of considerations can be reasons to φ by seeing which norms are applied in deliberating whether to φ.

The constitutive norm for intention is this: intending to A is correct if and only if it is not the case that A-ing ought not to be done. Considerations that show A-ing to be desirable thus are reasons for intending to A and reasons that show A-ing to be undesirable are reasons against intending to A. The money you are offered makes intending to take the toxin desirable, but it does not make intending to take the toxin correct according to the norm of correctness that governs intention, because it does not indicate any way in which taking the toxin is desirable. It may be possible for the offer to rationally influence you to intend to take the toxin if you have already determined that it is desirable to take it, but according to the original description of the case you lack any such reason to think that taking the toxin is desirable.

35. Because the norm of correctness that guides practical deliberation is contained in the concept of intention, it applies to any attitude that we (correctly) conceive of as an intention. This means that the norm applies even to those intentions of ours that are not currently the subject of our practical deliberation and those intentions that we attribute to others. One cannot conceive of an attitude as an intention to A without committing oneself to assessing it in accordance with the standard that it is correct if and only if it is not the case that A-ing ought not to be done. For example, if one were to negatively evaluate someone else’s intention not to take the toxin on the ground of its undesirability, one would be applying a standard to this attitude that conflicted with the standard that one was already committed to applying to the attitude by conceiving of it as an intention. My point is not that one cannot judge whether an intention is desirable, but that one cannot use this judgment as the normative standard for assessing its rational credentials or for impugning the rationality of someone who is unable to adopt it.
You may come to desire to intend to take the toxin upon being offered the money, and this desire might cause you to so intend, either directly by means of wishful thinking or indirectly by means of some intention-inducing action. In neither case, however, would the desirability of this intention have caused your intention in the way that a reason can cause an intention, because in neither case would you have been moved to intend to take the toxin on the basis of your recognition that the norm(s) for such an intention had been met. Your inability to intend to take the toxin on the ground that it is desirable to so intend thus does not reflect a rational failure on your part.\textsuperscript{37,38}

36. Might you reason like this: Should I take the toxin? Intending to take the toxin is desirable. I cannot intend to take the toxin unless I take the toxin. Therefore I ought to take the toxin. The problem with this line of reasoning is that it is not true that you cannot intend to take the toxin unless you take the toxin, and you know this. Furthermore, if the toxin were lethal (and you knew this), this kind of reasoning would not allow you to conclude that taking the toxin is desirable, and so it would not yield the intention to take the toxin.

37. If the cognitivist account of intention is correct, there may be an additional reason why you cannot intend to take the toxin. If intending to take the toxin involves believing that you will take the toxin, then only judgments that can move you to believe that you will take the toxin can move you to so intend. And the judgment that it would be desirable to intend to take the toxin cannot move one to believe that one will take the toxin, although it may imply that it would be desirable to believe it and thus move one to take steps to induce the belief.

38. Earlier versions of this paper were presented to a graduate seminar at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, a workshop on Normativity and Reasons at the University of Fribourg, the 2006 OSU/Maribor/Rijeka Conference on Regulating Attitudes with Reasons, and the Philosophy departments of Tufts University, MIT, and The Ohio State University. For helpful discussion I would like to thank Jennifer Acker, Stephanie Beardman, Jim Bell, Macalaster Bell, Davor Bodrozic, Michael Bratman, John Broome, Fabian Dorsch, Pascal Engel, Matt Evans, Dan Farrell, Jyl Gentzler, Allan Gibbard, Elizabeth Harman, James Harold, Pamela Hieronymi, Don Hubin, Nadeem Hussain, Dan Jacobson, Mark Kalderon, Niko Kolodny, Uri Leibowitz, David Owens, Casey Perin, Andrew Reisner, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, Matthew Silverstein, Tom Smith, Sigrun Svavarsdottir, Seana Shiffrin, Sharon Street, David Velleman, and two anonymous referees for the Philosophers’ Imprint.

How Action Governs Intention

Appendix: An extensionally equivalent hypothesis?

It may be instructive to compare my treatment of the toxin case with one derived from the hypothesis that I rejected earlier on phenomenological grounds, that the deliberative question \textit{whether to intend to} \textit{A} is answered by determining whether intending to \textit{A} is desirable. According to this hypothesis, having judged that intending to take the toxin is more desirable than not intending to take it, one would be in a position to rationally adopt an intention to take the toxin. The problem, of course, is that while one may judge that it is desirable to intend to take the toxin, one is not able to adopt this intention just on the basis of this judgment. A defender of this hypothesis could bite the bullet and claim that a fully rational agent would intend to take the toxin, and thus that those of us who cannot arrive at such an intention are irrational. But there is another option available to the defender of this hypothesis. As discussed earlier, many philosophers have suggested that one cannot intend to do something unless one believes that one will do it if one intends to do it. If this is so—and I haven’t given any reason to think it isn’t—it might be argued that the reason that one cannot form the intention to take the toxin is that it would be doxastically irrational to believe that one will take the toxin if one so intends. The defender of the hypothesis that reasons for intending are considerations that show an intention to be desirable thus need not convict us of irrationality because we are unable to adopt the intention to take the toxin. Nor need he accept that the toxin case shows that practical reasoning is about something other than the desirability of an intention. In any circumstance in which it is doxastically rational to form the belief that one will do something if one intends to do so (and because one so intends), he would claim that one’s practical reasoning can arrive at an intention just by determining that it would be desirable to so intend.\textsuperscript{39}

This version of the hypothesis that I earlier rejected may seem to be extensionally equivalent to my own, but there are in fact cases in

39. Thanks to Niko Kolodny for suggesting this hypothesis.
which their verdicts diverge. This is because one might possess reasons for believing that one will A if one so intends that do not bear
on whether A-ing would be worth doing. One may know that one is
resolute—that one tends to carry out one’s intentions and rarely re-
considers them. Or, more fancifully, one may know that if one intends
to A, one will be causally induced to believe that A-ing is worth doing
and therefore that it is likely that one will carry out the intention if one
forms it. In any of these cases, it is rational to believe that one will A
if one intends to A, and thus according to the alternative hypothesis now
being considered it is rational to intend to A as long as it is desirable
to so intend. But even if all these conditions are met, A-ing itself may
not be worth doing. For example, one may have reason to believe that
if one adopts the intention to take the toxin one’s irrational desire to
be a strong willed person will move one to carry out the intention or
that one will be hypnotized into believing that one ought to take the
toxin, but these reasons don’t bear on whether one really ought to take
the toxin. According to my hypothesis, as opposed to the alternative, it
may be rational to believe that one will take the toxin if one intends to
do so and to believe that it is desirable to intend to take the toxin, but
nonetheless it is irrational to intend to take the toxin, because one is
not in a position to judge that it is desirable to take the toxin, which is
the standard of correctness for deliberation about whether to intend
to take the toxin.

Finally, instead of (or in addition to) claiming that one cannot in-
tend to A unless one believes that one will A if one so intends, it might
be suggested that one cannot intend to A unless one believes that it
would be rational to execute the intention—that one ought to execute
the intention A. According to this hypothesis, deliberating whether to
intend to A involves answering two different questions: (1) whether in-
tending to A is desirable, and (2) whether one ought to execute the inten-
tion to A if one adopts it. Although knowing that if one adopts the intention
to take the toxin one will be induced by hypnosis to believe that one
ought to take it makes it rational to believe that one will take the toxin
if one so intends, this knowledge does not make it rational to now
judge that one ought to execute such an intention. According to this
hypothesis, one thus cannot rationally arrive at an intention to take
the toxin even under these conditions.

The claim that one cannot intend to A unless one believes that one
ought to execute the intention if one adopts it is too strong, though, be-
cause it implausibly rules out cases of akasra in which one intends to
do something that one judges one ought not to do even if one adopts
the intention to do it. A smoking addict may judge that he ought not to
smoke, and judge that this would be true even if he adopts the inten-
tion to smoke. Nonetheless, he may end up adopting and executing
an intention to smoke. A more plausible version of the claim is that
one cannot rationally arrive at an intention unless one judges that one
ought to execute the intention if one has adopted it. 40 It might even
appear that this claim can be derived from my own hypothesis. 41 After
all, executing an intention, as opposed to merely adopting it, is per-
forming the action intended. Deliberating about whether one ought
to execute an intention to A thus would appear just to be deliberating
about whether one ought to A, and judging that one ought to execute
an intention to A would appear just to be judging that one ought to A.
According to my hypothesis, deliberating whether to intend to A re-
quires applying the norm contained in the concept of intention—that
intending to A is correct only if one ought to A—to one’s reasoning.
One thus cannot arrive at an intention to A by way of practical reason-
ing unless one at least implicitly judges that one ought to A. And this
might seem equivalent to saying that one cannot rationally arrive at an
intention to A unless one at least implicitly judges that one ought to
execute the intention to A.

The question whether one ought to execute an intention to
A—whether one ought to A if one adopts an intention to A—however
is not identical to the question that frames practical deliberation,
which is whether one ought to A tout court. One’s actual intentions,

41. Michael Bratman suggested something like this to me.
not hypothetical ones, help to determine the answer to this question. If intentions are reasons for action, there will be cases in which the answer to the question whether to A tout court will differ from the answer to the question whether to A if one adopts the intention to A. It may be that one ought to perform an action (in part) because one has already adopted an intention to do it, but that one wouldn’t have sufficient reason to perform it if one had not already adopted the intention. In the toxin case, it might be argued that one ought to take the toxin if one has adopted the intention to take it, even though one has no reason to take the toxin antecedently to adopting the intention. If the rationality of intending to take the toxin were determined by both the desirability of intending to take it and the desirability of taking the toxin if one adopts the intention to take it, then it would be rational to adopt the intention to take the toxin. But according to my hypothesis, if it is not the case that one ought to take the toxin before one has adopted the intention, then, even if, were one to adopt the intention to take the toxin one would have sufficient reason to take it, it is not rational to adopt the intention. While admittedly it is only in very unusual cases that my hypothesis gives a different verdict than this last alternative, their possibility is sufficient to show that the hypotheses are not extensionally equivalent.

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