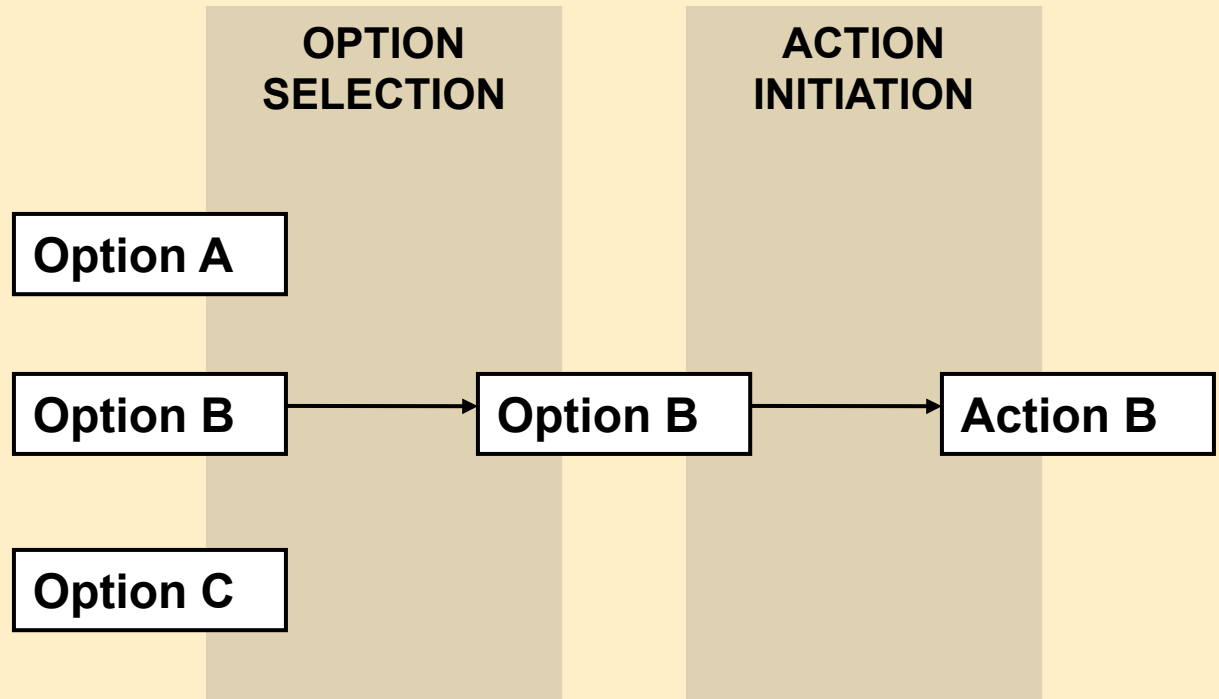


# The things I could do...

Annemarie Kalis,  
Utrecht University



# Traditional stage model of decision-making



# Why talk about options?

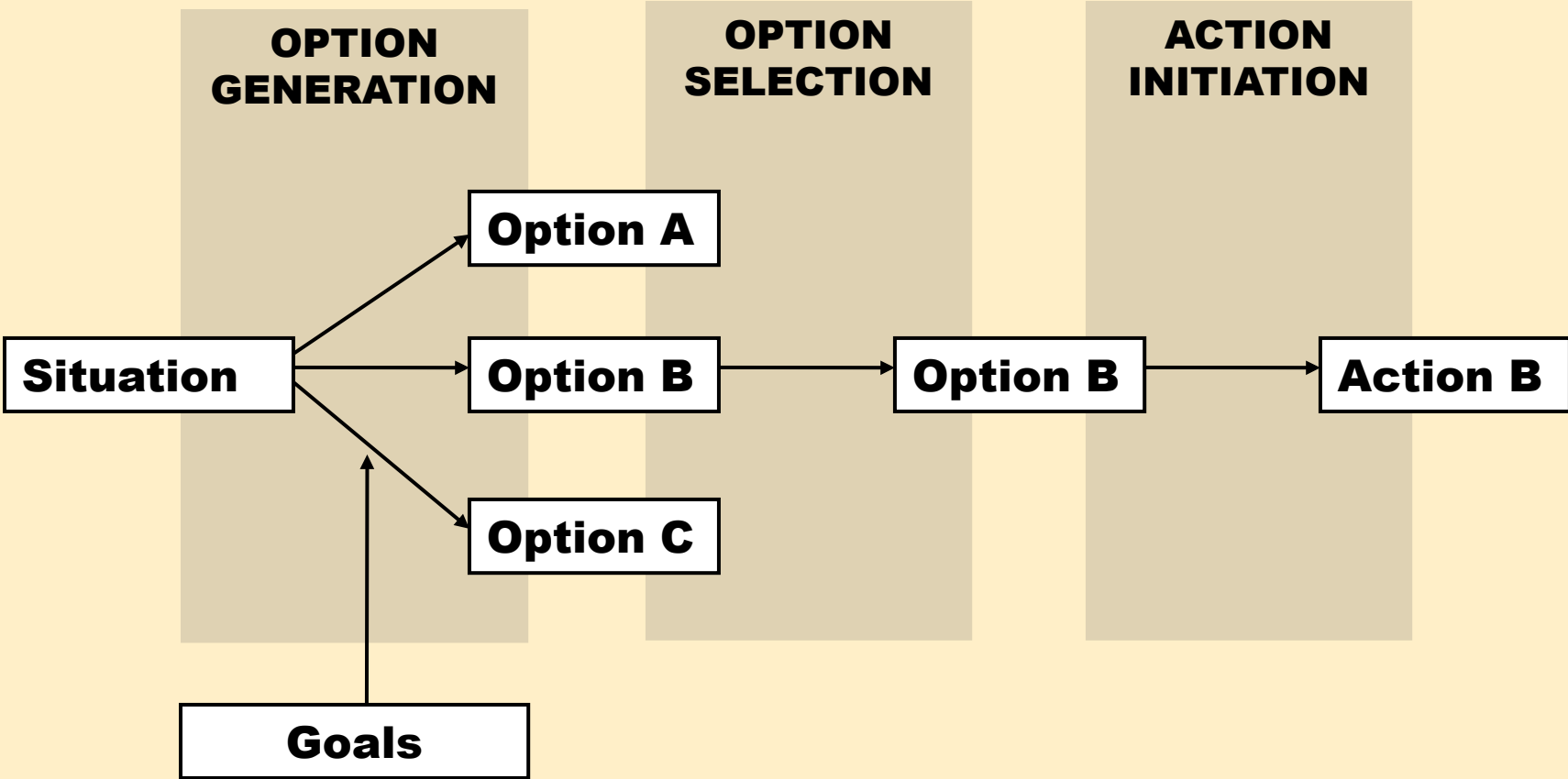


The usual research setting



A common real-life setting

# Option generation as a predecisional stage



# Why focus on options?

Focus on a **first-person perspective** on agency & decision-making

Thus the question I focus on is not: What is possible?

but:

What do I **see** as possible?

# Why focus on options?

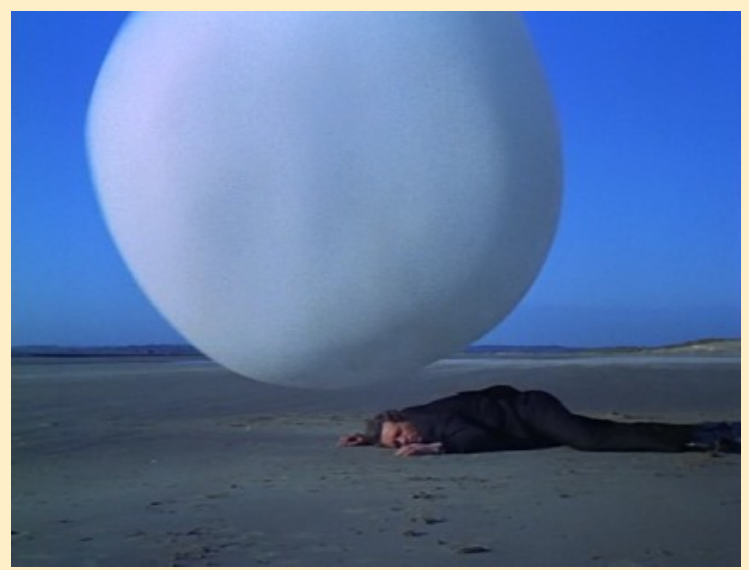
Seeing options is an important part of our understanding of freedom and agency...

Imagine a world where you would always have to choose between externally provided options!

# Why focus on options?



# Why focus on options?





# What are options for action?

I have an option, or sth is an option for me, iff I am in a certain kind of mental state

Take an action description such as 'leaving the room'...

Options are action descriptions featuring in an intentional attitude of the form:

*I consider 'leaving the room' to be a candidate for action*

# What are options for action?

What is needed in order for this to be the case?

In order for me to consider 'leaving the room' as a candidate for action:

- 1) I must believe that 'leaving the room' is actually possible
- 2) And I must believe that 'leaving the room' is a means to some goal of mine

# Conscious state..?

In order for 'leaving the room' to be an option for me, do I need to be consciously aware of it as an option?

- Given what I said above, this is the question: are the beliefs required for having an option, necessarily conscious?
- When you define having options as being part of a first-person perspective on agency & decision-making, options are necessarily conscious
- From a psychological perspective this might be different: non-conscious decision-making...

# 'Option individuation'?

Can building a house be an option for me right now?



# Options and goals



“C6 seems an option...”

“Ah, but now I see it will lead to defeat in ten moves!”

“So C6 is not an option after all”

# Summing up

The intentional attitude of having X as an option, or X being an option for me, thus consists in a combination of two beliefs:

- 1) I believe X is actually possible, and
- 2) I believe X is a means to some goal of mine

# How do we generate options?

So what is needed to come up with options? How do we acquire the required beliefs?

A. When we already have a goal in mind, coming up with options is determining an adequate means-end structure. What are adequate means, and which of these means are available to me?

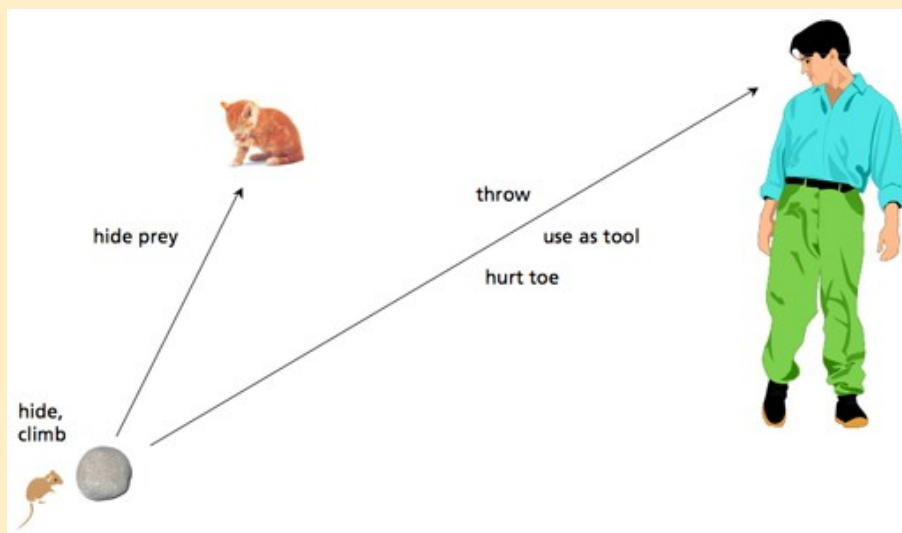
B. But often, we first have to determine what our goals are, and which of our goals to currently pursue...

# How do we generate options?





# Related notion: affordances



Agent-environment interactions (Gibson 1977; Norman 1999)

# How we generate options

What kind of mental processes are involved?

- Perception?
- Memory?
- Creativity / imagination?
- Problem solving skills?

Claim: there is something particular about these processes...

# Something strange...

## *Option generation*

I try to remember what I did last time  
I find a new solution  
I get this idea  
I see a way out

# Something strange...

## *Option generation*

I try to remember what I did last time  
I find a new solution  
I get this idea  
I see a way out

## *Option selection & action initiation....*

I decide to go left  
I choose the red wine  
I plan my journey  
I form the intention to lose weight

# Something strange...

The processes playing a role in option generation all involve some 'letting it happen':

→ you do not know what option you are generating, whereas you always know what option you are selecting, or what action you are initiating (practical knowledge!)

→ note: the difference does not lie in certainty of success



# Something strange...

On the model I proposed, generating options amounts to acquiring beliefs....

This is something you cannot do intentionally!

Although: you can intentionally do things that might result in beliefs being acquired



# Something strange...

Claim: generating options is not something you can do intentionally

Although: you can intentionally do things that might result in options being generated



# Options and agency

What does this mean for agency?

**A paradox:** although option generation plays an important role in our understanding of freedom and agency, generating options is not something you can intentionally do.

This means that we have only limited and indirect control over the options we have!



# Options and agency

Implications for responsibility?

An extreme case: what if someone sees only options that we consider morally objectionable?

*My neighbour made too much noise, therefore I had to decide between shooting him or putting his house on fire*



# Conclusions

