

from the doors that should be left open—and because they drive us crazy.

SUPPOSE YOU'VE CLOSED so many of your doors that you have just two left. I wish I could say that your choices are easier now, but often they are not. In fact, choosing between two things that are similarly attractive is one of the most difficult decisions we can make. This is a situation not just of keeping options open for too long, but of being indecisive to the point of paying for our indecision in the end. Let me use the following story to explain.

A hungry donkey approaches a barn one day looking for hay and discovers two haystacks of identical size at the two opposite sides of the barn. The donkey stands in the middle of the barn between the two haystacks, not knowing which to select. Hours go by, but he still can't make up his mind. Unable to decide, the donkey eventually dies of starvation.*

This story is hypothetical, of course, and casts unfair aspersions on the intelligence of donkeys. A better example might be the U.S. Congress. Congress frequently gridlocks itself, not necessarily with regard to the big picture of particular legislation—the restoration of the nation's aging highways, immigration, improving federal protection of endangered species, etc.—but with regard to the details. Often, to a reasonable person, the party lines on these issues are the equivalent of the two bales of hay. Despite this, or because of it, Congress is frequently left stuck in the middle. Wouldn't a quick decision have been better for everybody?

* The French logician and philosopher Jean Buridan's commentaries on Aristotle's theory of action were the impetus of this story, known as "Buridan's ass."