

IN DEFENCE OF THE ARGUMENT FOR EMOTIONAL ASSENT

Abstract: This paper defends the argument that the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions can only be explained by understanding emotions as yielding a distinctly non-judgmental assent. The four premises of the argument are identified and the three controversial premises are defended against recent rejoinders. Particular attention is given to defending the argument from theorists who advocate that (non-assentist) perceptualist models either adequately explain the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions or show that recalcitrant emotions are not, in fact, irrational.

When things go well our judgments and our emotions align. That is, when things go well we *fear* walking down the dark alley only if, given the chance, we would also *judge* that it is a dangerous route to take. But it is not uncommon to experience tension between emotions and judgments rather than alignment. Sam may fear Fido the dog *even while* judging that in his advanced age and toothless state, the old pooch could not possibly threaten him. While Sam repudiates the notion that Fido is dangerous in his judgment, his emotion remains *recalcitrant* in the face of this judgment.

Intuitively, the tension here between the judgment and the recalcitrant emotion constitutes an *irrational conflict*. Someone whose judgments and emotions diverge in such a way is expected, from the viewpoint of rationality, to bring their emotions into line with their judgments (or maybe, in some cases, vice versa). Someone who

responded to recalcitrant emotion with nonchalance, feeling no normative pressure to change his or her mental states would be hard to make sense of.

This talk, however, of “alignment” and “tension” is purposefully vague, for different theories of emotion disagree on what exactly is going on when judgments and emotions stand in irrational conflict. Does this irrational conflict consist in a conflict within the subject’s own view on the world, or a conflict between a subject’s sources of motivation, or a conflict between a subject’s knowledge and their consumption of attention, or something else? That different theories offer different explanations of the irrational conflict provides a way to *adjudicate* between them. For a theory of emotion to be adequate it must explain why conflicts between one’s judgments and one’s emotions are irrational. More stringently, a theory must explain why these irrational conflicts yield the exact *degree* and *kind* of irrationality that they do.

In this paper I defend the argument that only one kind of theory of emotion could meet this test for adequacy: the kind that understands emotions as yielding a distinctly emotional, *non-judgmental* assent. Thus, I defend the argument originally advanced by Bennett Helm (2001, p. 41-46) against rival judgmentalist theories and perceptualist theories. The “emotional assent” theory retains features from its competitor accounts. The proponent of emotional assent is happy to agree with perceptualists that the intentionality of emotions – their mind-to-world direction of fit and representational contents – can be located within the affective qualia of emotions and need not be relegated to a conceptually separable judgment: “shudders and chills may be about some state of affairs...” as Greenspan put it (1988 p. 3). But the proponent of emotional assent hangs on to the judgmentalist’s insight that emotions

contribute to the subject's sincere view of the world. One cannot so easily disassociate from emotions and the actions they motivate just by repudiating them through judgment. Yet, against both views, the proponent of emotional assent holds that modelling emotions too closely on other mental states inevitably mishandles the phenomenon, failing to respect the unique place of emotions in the taxonomy of the mind.

Below, I lay out the argument for emotional assent in premise-by-premise form. Note that from here on, unless stated otherwise, whenever I refer to "the irrational conflict", I will be referring to the irrational conflict between judgment and recalcitrant emotion.

The Argument for Emotional Assent

Premise (1): The irrational conflict is not incoherence between judgments.

Premise (2): If emotions yielded judgmental assent, then the irrational conflict would be incoherence between judgments.

Sub-conclusion: Emotions do not yield judgmental assent.

Premise (3): If emotions did not yield assent of any kind, then there would be no irrational conflict.

Premise (4): There is irrational conflict.

Sub-conclusion: Emotions yield assent of some kind.

Conclusion: Emotions yield some kind of non-judgmental assent.

The strategy of the argument is to show that judgmentalist theories impute too much irrationality to the irrational conflict (full-blown incoherence between judgments) and that non-assentist (perceptualist) theories impute too little (they do not allow for any irrationality at all.) The only solution is to say that emotions yield some kind of non-judgmental assent – distinctly *emotional* assent. Since the conclusion logically follows from the two sub-conclusions and the two sub-conclusions logically follow from their premises, denial of the conclusion requires denial of one of the four premises.

Premise (1) is presently uncontroversial. If the irrational conflict involves a conflict between two contradictory judgments, then presumably one of the judgments – the one associated with the emotion – is held *unconsciously*. After all, from the subject's perspective, she is "intellectually" unified in repudiating her emotion. She is not conscious of being in two minds about the situation, as far as her intellectual judgments go. However, to attribute to a subject a conflicting, unconscious judgment is to violate a principle of charity in interpreting her. For we normally attribute mental states in a way that respects the fact that people are for the most part rational. Attributing an unconscious judgment not only introduces incoherence within the subject's intellectual perspective on the world, it also renders the subject significantly lacking in self-knowledge. Independent of an insistence that the incoherent-judgment thesis must be true, it seems we lack motivation for attributing subjects with such pronounced irrationality, at least while alternative theses are available (Greenspan, 1981).

My defence of the argument will thus concentrate on a defence of the remaining three premises, with particular focus on (3) and (4) – those premises attacked by presently popular non-assentist accounts: perceptualist accounts of one form or another. Overall, I conclude that attempts to deny the premises of the argument have failed. The argument remains undefeated and so, all else being equal, we have good reason to understand emotions as yielding distinctly emotional assent.

Of course, it may be thought that all else is *not* equal. Emotional assent has itself received much criticism as an explanation of the irrational conflict (Benjabi 2013, Brady 2009, Döring 2008, Döring 2009, Döring 2015). I would spell out the concept of emotional assent a little differently than does Helm, and I believe these criticisms can all be met on my account. But I will not be able to make that case here. I will be content to show that there is undefeated *motivation* for believing that emotional assent explains the irrational conflict, even if (contrary to what I believe) such an explanation turns out to face its own substantive difficulties.

PREMISE (2)

Judgmentalist theories, obviously enough, hold that emotions involve judgments. On such theories, when Sam fears Fido the dog such fear either is *numerically identical* to, or includes as a *constituent component*, a judgment such as that “Fido is dangerous”. Although such judgments may have special features (such as, say, always being accompanied by desires, as on certain cognitivist theories) these judgments are not essentially different from those one could make in a dispassionate state. That is, the judgment Sam supposedly makes in fearing Fido is not essentially different from

the sort Sam might reflectively make of Fido while he is away from him in his study. Indeed, part of the motivation behind judgmentalist accounts is that they promise to model emotions on a mental state – judgment – that we supposedly already have a strong theoretical grasp of. And the fact that judgmentalist accounts are *assentist* accounts falls out from the fact that judgments are taken to be paradigmatic instances of assent. It is through judgment that we most clearly articulate and endorse a particular view of the world as our own.

On a judgmentalist account, then, the irrational conflict appears to be a conflict between two different judgments of how the world is: one judgment that is dispassionate and another judgment that is involved in the emotion. But it is hard to see how the irrational conflict does not boil down to incoherency between judgments on this view. If I judge that Fido is harmless, yet fear and avoid him, then it seems that the judgment involved in the fear is that Fido is *not*, in fact, harmless. At the very least, if we stipulate a case in which I recalcitrantly fear Fido, yet I am happy for others to play with him, it seems hard to imagine that the judgment behind the fear is not going to form an inconsistent set with the other judgments I make about Fido being harmless (and me not being at any special risk from him). Note as well that if a judgmentalist wanted to avoid attributing incoherent judgments, she could instead attribute two different judgments that do *not* contradict. But then the challenge would be to explain how the *irrationality* of the conflict does not drop out of the picture all together. *Prima facie* there is nothing irrational about holding *compatible* judgments together.

Benjabi (2013) employs Davidson's (1980) distinction between an "all things considered" judgment and an "all-out" judgment to try and offer a truly *irrational* conflict between judgments that does not amount to incoherence. These two types of judgment take the following logical forms:

All things considered: Relative to *e* (the evidence, i.e., the set of *all* considerations), *a* is better than *b*.

All-out: *a* is better than *b*. (Benjabi, 2013, p. 589)

Note that these two judgments can both be true at the same time even when *a* and *b* across the two judgments refer to different, even incompatible actions. For instance, Sarah can make the all-things-considered judgment that it is better not to buy a new pair of shoes (compared to saving money) *relative to her considerations* that she needs the money for her tuition fees, that people criticise her for having too many shoes already, and so on. And Sarah can *also* make the all-out judgment that buying the new pair of shoes *is* better than saving her money *simpliciter*. The idea is that no amount of weighing whether she should buy the shoes *relative* to considerations could ever take Sarah to an *absolute*, consideration-less, all-out judgment that one action is better than the other. Because, then, there is no way to derive an all-out judgment from an all-things-considered judgment, one's all-things-considered judgments can never *contradict* or be *incoherent* with one's all-out judgments. Despite this, Sarah would supposedly still be irrational *to act* on her all-out judgment rather than her all-things-considered judgment because it is irrational to act against a judgment one arrives at via reflectively weighing considerations.

Applied to emotion, the story of the irrational conflict would then go like this: in reflectively judging that Fido is harmless, one is making an *all-things-considered* judgment that Fido is harmless *considering* his old age, toothless state, etc. But when one *fears* Fido that fear involves an *all-out* judgment that Fido is dangerous *simpliciter*. The problem with this story is that the tension between these two judgments is only truly irrational if the emotion *moves one to act*. There is no irrationality, recall, between *the views of the world* these judgments put forward: that these judgments are compatible is a motivation for the account. Like Sarah buying the shoes, one is only irrational when one's fear of Fido *moves one* to, say, run away from him.

Benjabi does not think this is a significant limitation of the account: "given that most recalcitrant emotions indeed motivate action ... this restriction is not too onerous, hence Davidson's solution is apt for the core phenomenon of recalcitrant emotions" (2013, p. 590). This, however, just sounds like a concession that the account cannot cover all the relevant cases. Even if most recalcitrant emotions move one to act, not all of them do and irrational conflict still seems to arise in such cases. Suppose Lizzie gets up from the table and accidentally knocks it, spilling tea on to my lap. I immediately feel *very* annoyed and feel motivated to remark on her clumsiness. I reflectively judge, however, that it is a trivial accident unworthy of bothering me to this degree. Despite this judgment, I cannot shake my annoyance. I manage to resist its pull, though; I keep my mouth shut and simply dab at the spilt tea with my napkin. Surely even if I later praise my self-control faced with temptation, I will still consider myself irrational for having felt so annoyed in the first place. No doubt it would have

been *more* irrational to *act* on my emotion, but I am not wholly rationally blameless just because I resisted such action.

Such cases of recalcitrant emotion that do not result in action are not extraordinary. They are not at the limits of intelligibility, such that we can bracket them off from more ordinary phenomena and forgive a theory that does not try to take stock of them. They are mundane, familiar experiences. I contend, then, that Benjabi's solution fails to show that a judgmentalist account can understand the irrational conflict outside of attributing incoherence between judgments.

There are, so far as I can see, no other attempts in the recent literature to deny our second premise. All else being equal we have good reason to hold it as true.

PREMISE (3)

The most promising non-assentist accounts of emotion are perceptual accounts. Even theorists who disagree with perceptual accounts of emotion concede that they have many attractive qualities (Helm, 2015; Salmela, 2011). Firstly, there are enough similarities between emotion and sense perception to tempt a theorist to model the former on the latter, independently of the motivation to account for the irrational conflict. Like sense perceptions, emotions have an intentionality that is *about the world* – emotions represent the world in certain ways, which can be held to standards of correctness. Moreover emotions, like sense perceptions, have a particular phenomenology – there is a particular way that it is like to experience them. And emotions, like sense perceptions, offer their construals of the world passively, in

response to the world. Secondly, when it comes to understanding the irrational conflict, these similarities between emotion and sense perception seem to offer the strengths of judgmentalism without its weaknesses (nor the weaknesses of other alternatives to judgmentalism).

Like the judgmentalist, the perceptualist can hold that an emotion involves a *representation* of how the world is – one that can conflict with a representation given in judgment. But unlike the judgmentalist, the perceptualist does not have to hold that the representation given in emotion genuinely yields the subject's own view of the world. While one normally assents to the deliverances of one's perceptions, one can withdraw assent to a perception when it represents the world in a way one judges is false. Other non-assentists (those who hold, say, that emotions are a particular kind of desire or felt bodily sensation) can also hold that emotions do not yield the subject's view of the world, but the perceptualist does not have to pay the price of those views: she does not have to do injustice to the phenomenology of emotions by saying that they fail to offer any representation of the world at all.

On a perceptualist account, then, a recalcitrant emotion is analogous to a recalcitrant *visual illusion*. When faced with the Müller-Lyer illusion, the two lines *appear* to be different lengths. But when one learns and so judges that they are, in fact, the same length, one withdraws assent from this appearance. The appearance remains present – one cannot stop seeing the lines, wrongly, as different lengths – but the appearance cannot make a claim to being the subject's own view of how the lines are. Likewise, so the story goes, when one fears Fido but judges that he is harmless, the fear is like a recalcitrant illusion of Fido's dangerousness. The fear represents Fido as dangerous,

but having judged that that representation gets the world wrong, assent is withdrawn from it. Fido continues to appear, wrongly, as dangerous in the emotion, but that way of representing Fido has no claim to be the subject's actual view of the world.

The problem with this story, picking up Helm's (2001, pp. 42-45) critique, is that it dissolves the irrational conflict it was supposed to explain. That is, there is an important disanalogy between recalcitrant visual illusions and recalcitrant emotions. There is nothing irrational about, say, seeing two lines as different lengths when one judges that they are identical. But there *is* something irrational about fearing Fido when one judges that he is harmless. *Prima facie*, then, if recalcitrant emotions were a kind of perceptual illusion, they would behave like visual illusions and there would be no irrational conflict. If the non-assentist wants to dispel this *prima facie* impression, she needs to explain this dissimilarity between emotion and visual perception as surface only, one that fails to threaten their more fundamental *similarity* as perceptions lacking assent (on pain of ceasing to offer a non-assentist account.)

Numerous attempts to do this – to offer an explanation of the dissimilarity between emotion and sense perception while retaining their non-assentist, perceptual similarities – can be found in the recent literature. All of them have received some criticism or other. Below I survey each explanation and, where I agree with the criticisms mounted against it, I offer some way to try and modify the explanation to save it. I argue that modification still cannot save the explanation. Where I disagree with the criticism mounted against an explanation, I offer my own criticism that more successfully hits the target. Thus, all the explanations surveyed are shown to fail.

Tappolet's Explanation

Tappolet (2012) argues that the relevant difference between emotions and sense perceptions is not that the former involve assent and the latter do not, rather emotions enjoy a comparatively greater degree of “plasticity”. That is, although we may not be able to directly control and thus change the contents of a particular occurring emotion, we can exercise indirect control over our emotions through gradually changing our emotional dispositions. We can be expected to train ourselves in new emotional habits so that, say, particular occurrences of anger decrease in frequency. Comparatively, we can exercise far less control over our habits of sense perception. It is this greater degree of control over our emotional dispositions that supposedly explains how we can be rationally *to blame* for recalcitrant emotions.

Helm (2015) objects that the explanation does not appeal to anything specific about the *conflict* between judgment and recalcitrant emotion to explain the irrationality. Consider that emotions can be irrational without being recalcitrant; an emotion can be *unwarranted* even if no contrary judgment is brought to bear on it and even if the emotion disappears when a judgment *is* brought to bear on it:

If I leap beyond available evidence and get angry at my department chair without warrant, there is something wrong with the accuracy of my emotional response – it is unwarranted – even if that anger dissipates when I judge correctly that she has not offended me. (2015, p. 421).

The anger in the above case is irrational because it gets the evaluative facts wrong – it represents a personal offence as having occurred when it has not, and the anger is irrational despite not conflicting with a contrary judgment. If the anger *were* to recalcitrantly persist against a contrary judgment, then it would be *additionally* irrational. On either case, though, whether the unwarranted anger were to be recalcitrant against a judgment or not, the anger would emerge from an emotional disposition that is plastic. So on either case, Tappolet's explanation of the irrationality would apply. The objection seems to be, then, that Tappolet's explanation is not discriminate enough – it is missing some feature that it requires in order to be an explanation of the irrational conflict in particular.

I agree that Tappolet's explanation is underdeveloped but more needs to be said to demonstrate that. Tappolet could reply to Helm that she never intended the plasticity of emotional dispositions to be taken as a *sufficient* condition for irrationality in emotions. After all, emotions that are perfectly *warranted* and *non-recalcitrant* also emerge from dispositions that are plastic, and it would be uncharitable to suppose that she would attribute irrationality to even *these* emotions. Rather, her account takes it as a given that there are *other* features of irrational emotions that, *in combination* with plasticity, are sufficient for irrationality. And these other features are also possessed by sensory perceptions. Unwarranted emotions, like inaccurate visual experiences, have contents that incorrectly represent the world. It is just that this is only a *rational fault* for the emotions, given that emotions emerge from a plastic disposition. And unwarranted *recalcitrant* emotions, like incorrect and *recalcitrant* visual experiences, have contents that conflict with the content of a judgment. This is only a *rational fault* for the emotions – an *additional* one over and above the rational fault of having

incorrect representational contents – given their plasticity. There is thus no obvious lack in Tappolet's account.

Depending, however, on how one views the relationship between norms and the possibility of being *blameworthy* for violating them, the plasticity of emotional dispositions might drop out of the explanation of irrationality in emotions altogether. Consider a murderer who is let off the hook because of clinical insanity. On one way to read this case, the murderer truly did violate a moral norm. What he did was immoral. It is just that he has an *excuse* that exempts him from *blame* for his moral failing – the excuse that he had no *control* over his actions. Or suppose some extremely vulnerable people are subtly manipulated into the irrational beliefs of a cult. Perhaps we maintain that the beliefs of these people violate rational norms while denying that they are personally *to blame* for holding them (such blame is better directed at the manipulators). These people may have been too vulnerable to have sufficient *control* over their beliefs. To read these cases in this way is to hold that the faculties that give us control over our actions or mental states are necessary for being *blameworthy* for violating norms (moral or rational), but they are not necessary for the norms themselves to exist or apply. Moreover, to read these cases in this way is to render it implausible that possessing functioning faculties of control is even *sufficient* for the norms themselves to exist or apply. For, all else being equal, it seems unparsimonious to suppose that the explanation of why a norm applies to one people group *differs* from the explanation of why that *same* norm applies to another. It is more theoretically elegant to posit just one explanation across *both* the group that possesses functioning faculties of control and the group that does not. All this is to say, then, that perhaps the plasticity of emotional dispositions explains how we have

the kind of control needed to be *held responsible* for when our emotions violate rational norms, but plasticity does not enter the explanation of why these rational norms themselves exist in the first place.

If that were the case, then Tappolet would have to explain why there are rational norms applicable to recalcitrant emotions without appealing to plasticity. She would have to appeal only to those *other* features of emotions identified above – those features shared with sensory perceptions. Unwarranted emotions (like inaccurate visual experiences) have contents that *incorrectly* represent the world. So perhaps Tappolet can say that there is a rational norm according to which representational contents ought to *correctly* represent the world. And unwarranted *recalcitrant* emotions (like incorrect and *recalcitrant* visual experiences) have contents that *conflict* with the content of a judgment. So, similarly, perhaps Tappolet can say that there is a rational norm according to which the contents of a subject's judgments and other representations ought to be *consistent*.

But, to take the latter putative norm, it seems like it would only really apply to representational contents that are *assented* to. It is irrational to have inconsistency among one's *beliefs*. But as Tappolet affirms, “there is no irrationality at all involved in thinking of something as fearsome, or construing something as fearsome while judging that it is not fearsome (2012, p. 210).” That is, the *attitude* toward the content matters – merely, say, *thinking* that *p* has differing (and far laxer) rational requirements than *believing or assenting* that *p*. So without appeal to assent or any other further explanation, it is mysterious as to why there would be a rational requirement for emotions to cohere with judgments.

Of course, this problem emerges on the particular view about the relationship between norms and the possibility of being blameworthy for violating them that I have just assumed for the sake of argument – the view that the application of a norm is wholly independent of an individual’s faculties of control. But Tappolet can claim that her account is premised on the rejection of that view. Clearly, she holds that the features that recalcitrant emotions have in common with recalcitrant visual experiences only explain the irrational conflict in *conjunction* with plasticity and the control it affords. Even so, as already established, it is not irrational, all by itself, to have some representational states that conflict with judgment. It is just as rationally permissible to, say, *think* the negations of my judgments (perhaps for the sake of exploring alternative hypotheses), as it is to think of propositions consistent with them. But then why would having *control* over these representational states suddenly make those with contents that conflict with judgment, and only those, irrational? Indeed, I in fact *have* some control over which thoughts appear in my mind but I have no requirement to make my thoughts cohere with my judgments.ⁱ At the very least, Tappolet needs to say more to explain how plasticity actually *illuminates* and *explains* the irrational conflict.

Tappolet argues in the same paper that emotions have *non-propositional* contents, so perhaps this feature of emotions should be added to her explanation of the irrational conflict? If so, it is not clear what help it will be. If the representational content of an emotion is not assented to in having the emotion, it is not clear why that content is required to cohere with judgment, whatever *type* of content it is. Again, at the very least, Tappolet needs to say more to explain how this putative feature of emotions

contributes to an *explanation* of the irrational conflict. Without further detail, Tappolet's account is too underdeveloped to aid the non-assentist.

Roberts' Explanation

Roberts (2003, pp. 91-93) argues that the relevant difference between emotions and visual perceptions is that emotions, unlike visual perceptions, involve a "*concern-based construal*". Previously Helm (2001, pp. 42-45) had criticised Roberts's account on the understanding that this appeal to concern was an appeal *merely* to the *motivational* effects that emotions have. Roberts (2003, p. 92), however, denies this; rather the power of recalcitrant fear to rationally disturb the subject "also and necessarily [resides] in its perceptual or affective character: that the phobic object is personally upsetting because it *appears threatening*." What he to appeals to, then, are the *evaluative contents* of emotion. It is the fact that emotions construe their objects as *important* in certain respects (importantly threatening, importantly unfortunate etc.) that explains their ability to stand in irrational conflict. As the objects of emotion appear personally concerning it is supposedly hard for the subject to disassociate from them – it would be like surrendering a part of themselves. Contrastingly, mere sense perceptions lack such personal salience.

Roberts's account, however, seem more like a statement of the obvious features of the perceptualist view rather than an attempt to show how hitherto neglected features of it save the view. For *of course* a perceptualist account will credit emotional construals with evaluative content – that is precisely what makes these construals distinctly *emotional* rather than sensory. What we need, though, is some explanation of how

construing a situation ϕ -wise, without in any way regarding that construal as true, can *irrationally* conflict with one's judgment about what *is* true. Without the construal genuinely yielding the subject's view on the world, it is hard to make sense of this 'difficulty to disassociate' outside of, say, the construal's ability to intrigue and captivate the subject. This is close to Brady's explanation, which I argue against below. Otherwise, Roberts might appeal to the motivational effects of these construals. But that would land him back in the grip of Helm's earlier criticisms. Emotions provide *reasons* for action but a mental state that does not yield the subject's own view cannot provide even bad reasons (Helm, 2001, pp. 42-45). I contend, then, that Roberts's explanation fails.

Brady's Explanation

Brady argues that the relevant difference between emotions and visual perceptions is that emotions, unlike visual perceptions, "capture and consume attention" (2007, p. 297). The idea is that emotions perceive evaluative properties in the environment like danger, insult, loss etc. but they do not stop there; they also remain fixed on those properties and lock one's attention on to them. Tappolet (2012) and Benjabi (2013) both offer similar doubts that this supposed difference between emotion and visual illusion can explain why the former and not the latter can be involved in irrational conflict. They argue that visual illusions can, in fact, capture and consume our attention. Seeing a stick appear bent while submerged in water may focus our attention on it and its strange shape. We may even remain focussed on the stick, intrigued by the illusion itself. But none of this would be irrational.

This, however, seems to misunderstand Brady's explanation. It is not the mere fact that emotions capture and consume attention that explains the possibility of irrational conflict, it is that they capture and consume attention *for a particular purpose*. "The *point* of attentional capture and consumption," Brady (2007, p. 281) explains, "...[is] to enable the subject to determine for himself whether or not something has the significance that he perceives it as having...." In other words, emotions affect attention in the way that they do *so that* the subject can then judge the evaluative situation. Irrationality attends recalcitrant emotion, then, because attention is directed toward a situation one has already made a judgment about. The case of the intriguing stick in water is disanalogous because attention in that case does not issue from some cognitive system built with a particular purpose that can be thwarted. It is, rather, employed voluntarily by the subject herself for any purpose she chooses.

A similar misunderstanding seems to attend Helm's (2015) criticism. He takes it that Brady thinks irrationality attends just any "waste" of attentional resources and counters with the example of spending excess attentional resources watching re-runs of a banal TV show – something clearly not *irrational*. But again, Brady's claim is that it is irrational to waste attentional resources when those resources are *for a purpose that has already been fulfilled*. The attentional resources one "wastes" re-watching a TV show presumably only have whatever purpose the subject chooses, such as for entertainment, and this purpose is not fulfilled prior to the TV viewing.

The real problem with Brady's account is that emotions that *align* with judgment would also count as irrational. Suppose I know and judge that walking down the dark alley, in this part of town, is dangerous. As I approach it, I feel afraid and my

attention locks on to the alley – my fear construing it as dangerous. My fear, in this case, aligns with my judgment – both represent the dark alley as dangerous. But on Brady’s account this is an irrational waste of attentional resources. For I *already* made a correct judgment about the evaluative situation: I knew that the alley was dangerous. The purpose of the emotion was already fulfilled before having it. Clearly, however, my fear in this case is *not* irrational.

Brady might reply, however, that the point of attentional capture and consumption is not just to help the subject yield a correct judgment about the evaluative situation, it is also to help them attend in detail to the salient features of the situation. So it is not that one’s fear of the dark alley is solely to help one judge that the alley is dangerous it is also to mobilise one to attend to its fear-worthy features – the moving shadows in the bushes, the sounds of hushed talking etc. There is clearly something right about this. Emotions allow us a *passive* receptivity to the world, which summon our attention when things of importance to us occur.ⁱⁱ This is a good thing given that if we *always* had to *actively* and *volitionally* cast our attention toward things of importance, we would be cognitively overloaded. This does not entail, however, that we can *never* actively and volitionally direct our attention to things of salience – we don’t *always* need our emotions to do that. Suppose I know, before arriving at the dark alley, that it is dangerous. Moreover, I arrive consciously prepared to be on the look out for salient signals of danger and I successfully execute this vigilance as I traverse the alley. On Brady’s account, if I also feel fear while doing this then that fear will be irrational: the purpose of the emotion is already fulfilled by my active and conscious judgment and deployment of attention. But that is clearly wrong, such fear is not irrational (it may even be rationally *called for*.)

In a later paper, Brady (2009) modifies the explanation of irrational conflict: emotions, but not visual illusions, *incline* one to assent to their construals. In the same way that fear primes one to, say, run away from its target, it also primes one to assent to its construal of the target as dangerous. It is doubtful, however, that mere *inclination* to assent can explain the irrational conflict. Helm gives the example of a coin toss: "...it is tempting to believe, after witnessing a string of 10 coin flips all coming up heads, that the next coin flip will more likely be tails, and yet it would seem that we are not irrational so long as we do not give in to this temptation" (2015, pp. 423-424). If we are not irrational for being merely inclined to assent that the next coin flip will come up tails, why would be irrational for being merely inclined to accept some inaccurate emotional construal?

Brady might reply that we *are*, in fact, irrational in the coin toss case. After all, we might think that what explains our temptation to believe the next coin will come up tails is that we are *irrationally prone* to the gambler's fallacy. Suppose we encountered an alien species that never struggled against the gambler's fallacy – their intuition never got in the way of them getting their probabilities right. Suppose we lined up some members of our species besides members of their species and gave them probabilistic puzzles to solve. Each individual, whether human or alien, arrives at the correct answer for each puzzle, yet some humans do so only after resisting the deliverances of their intuition. It might seem that, in some sense, the members of our species are more irrational than the members of theirs, just by virtue of ours having to combat their intuitions.

It is doubtful, though, that any sense in which we can attribute greater irrationality to our species would help in explaining the irrational conflict. For it seems like what we are saying in the above case, when we press for specifics, is not that the members of our species are *themselves* more irrational as *persons* but, rather, that they are equipped with *cognitive systems* which are more irrational, compared to the aliens (regarding probability). In fact, pushed further, it might be more accurate to say that these systems are *unreliable* rather than strictly irrational. But in the case of recalcitrant emotion, it is the *person* who is irrational. I regard *myself* as irrational for feeling annoyed that Lizzie knocked the table and spilt the tea. Brady, then, has failed to provide a non-assentist explanation of why irrational conflict attends recalcitrant emotion but not recalcitrant visual illusions.

Tappolet, Roberts and Brady all offer inadequate non-assentist explanations of why recalcitrant emotions, but not recalcitrant visual illusions, can stand in irrational conflict. As things stand, then, the most promising non-assentist account – the perceptual account – is unable to explain the irrational conflict. That the most promising non-assentist account fails is enough to cast doubt on the adequacy of the non-assentist project as a whole. But very likely, there are generalizable lessons here about the difficulties attending non-assentist accounts. As Brady (2009, p. 416) admits: “...it is not obviously irrational for one to see or construe or think of a situation as thus-and-so whilst believing that it is not thus-and-so... *Merely* construing or seeing one’s situation as thus-and-so, when one judges that it is not thus-and-so, seems insufficient for one to be subject to a charge of irrationality.” The difficulties of explaining why a mere perception or mere construal can stand in *irrational* conflict with a judgment, however, cannot be overcome, as Brady would have it, by saying

these perceptions/construals *incline* one to assent. It would seem that one would need to go further and say that emotions *actually yield* assent. All else being equal, it is reasonable to conclude that our third premise is correct: if emotions did not involve any assent, there would be no irrational conflict.

PREMISE (4)

Up to this point it has been assumed that there *is* an irrational conflict attending judgment and recalcitrant emotion. This final premise, then, has been taken as uncontroversial, indeed, the very datum that needs explaining. Döring (2014), however, denies that it is true. Döring claims that the idea that the subject is irrational when judgments and recalcitrant emotions conflict is based on a “wrong intuition”. If she is right, then non-assentists can accept the conditional premise defended above without worry. For the consequent of that conditional would be *true* - their accounts would yield the *right* result: that there is *no* irrational conflict. In order to show the inadequacy of non-assentist accounts, then, I will defend this premise against Döring’s counter-argument, which I reconstruct below:

Döring’s Argument for No Irrational Conflict

- (1) If S judges that her emotion is wrong, then S’s emotion does not yield her view of the world.
- (2) If S’s emotion does not yield her view of the world, then conflict between S’s judgment and emotion is not a conflict within S herself.

(3) If the conflict between S's judgment and emotion is not a conflict within S herself, then S is not herself irrational (all else being equal).

(4) *Conclusion:* Therefore, if S judges that her emotion is wrong, then S is not herself irrational (all else being equal).

According to Döring, judging that an emotion is mistaken is sufficient to, in a sense, disassociate from it: the emotion no longer has any claim to yield the subject's own point of view. But that means that any conflict that the emotion is involved in is not "internal" to the subject. So the subject is not herself irrational. As Döring (2014, p. 134) puts it "when an emotion fails to pass the tribunal of deliberation, we withdraw our confidence in it... The subject does not contradict *himself* because he only regards his judgment to be true [emphasis added]." Since, then, only the subject's judgment yields the subject's point of view, if the judgment is not irrational then the subject cannot be either.

Of course, Döring does not deny that in the case of recalcitrant emotion there is *some* irrationality lurking in the neighbourhood, for she needs to explain how it is that the (supposedly mistaken) intuition of irrational conflict arises. Her explanation is that irrationality genuinely arises when, despite judging that an emotion is mistaken, one allows that emotion to move one to act: "...*action* is irrational - not the *emotion itself*" (Döring, 2014, p. 135). This, recall, was also what Benjabi said about the irrational conflict and it faces the same problem. That is, irrationality clearly attends recalcitrant emotion even when the emotion does not move one to act. I can rationally blame myself for annoyance even when I resist the temptation to verbally lash out.

Döring, then, has an unaccounted for phenomenon – the irrationality that attends such action-less recalcitrant emotions. Moreover, *prima facie* this irrationality seems attributable to the subject herself. I blame *myself* for my annoyance. The conclusion of Döring’s argument above, however, is that no such phenomenon exists. Are the premises of the argument really jointly compelling enough to lead us to that conclusion? I say they are not, for the first premise of the argument, after all, *just is* an assertion of the non-assentist position. To say that a judgment is sufficient to determine a subject’s view of the world *just is* to deny that emotions involve assent and so contribute to the subject’s view of the world. We are thus without motivation for denying the phenomenon independent of a question-begging insistence that a non-assentist account must be correct.

Without any reason to be so attached to a non-assentist position, though, it is better to see the conclusion of the argument – the denial of the irrational conflict – as a *reductio* of its assumptions. That is, given that the phenomenon of irrational conflict exists, the argument is unsound and one of Döring’s premises must be false. I contend, of course, that it is the first – non-assentist – premise.

In a more recent paper, Döring (2015) seems to *acknowledge* that there are cases of conflict between emotion and judgment that strike us as irrational even when the emotion does not lead the subject to act (or to adopt conflicting judgments). But Döring now claims that what our intuition is sensing, in such cases, is not a genuine *irrational* conflict but instead a conflict in what she calls “agential identity”. Following Helm, Döring grants that emotions have some connection to our individual

cares. While some emotions have connections to fairly “low-level” cares, others have connections to cares that constitute one’s identity as a particular person. My feeling, say, of pride at having a paper well received might be part and parcel of my caring about philosophy as part of “who I am”. When judgments conflict with emotions connected to such strong cares, the subject experiences a conflict within her own sense of self. Although the subject is not irrational in experiencing such a conflict, the depth of personal tension the subject experiences is, supposedly, easily misconstrued as irrationality.

Even granting, however, that in cases of such conflicts in identity, our intuitions can be successfully articulated without attributing irrationality to the subject, there are still cases of conflict that *do not* involve such deep cares. And in these cases our intuitions still seem to be that the subject is irrational. Consider again the case of my feeling highly annoyed at Lizzie spilling tea on my lap, despite my judging that it was a trivial accident. We can safely imagine that having a dry lap is not central to my identity. We can also imagine, by stipulation, that though I care about not being overly irritable, my sense of self is not dependent on it. I may reprimand myself for getting annoyed without being *ashamed* of getting annoyed. Despite these stipulations in the case, it seems that the intuition remains that I was irrational in getting annoyed. As such, Döring still fails to account for all the relevant phenomena. And, once more, if it is Döring’s commitment to non-assentist theories that leads her to deny the reality of the phenomena, it is better to abandon that commitment. Döring, then, has not defeated our fourth premise. We still have good reason to believe that the irrational conflict is real.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the premises of the argument for emotional assent are well motivated and that recent attempts to deny the premises have failed. As such, all else being equal, we have good reason to accept the premises. On judgmentalist accounts, the irrational conflict would be incoherence between judgments but it is not that. On non-assentist accounts, the irrational conflict would not exist but it does exist. Therefore we are entitled to derive the argument's sub-conclusions: neither judgmentalist accounts nor non-assentist accounts are correct. That is, emotions do *not* involve judgmental assent *but* they *do* involve assent of some kind. The overall conclusion then follows: emotions involve some kind of non-judgmental assent, or otherwise put: distinctly *emotional assent*.

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NOTES

Many thanks to Vince Vitale, Max Baker-Hyatt, Wes Skolits, and Ju-In Christine Lee for their helpful comments and proof-reading.

ⁱ Helm (2015) objects that we even have a relevant kind of control over *perceptual experiences* but space does not permit detailed examination of this objection here.

ⁱⁱ This fact about emotion also features in Helm's explanation of the relationship between emotion and 'import' (Helm 2001, pp. 71-74.)

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