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The irrationality of recalcitrant emotions

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Abstract A recalcitrant emotion is one which conflicts with evaluative judgement. (A standard example is where someone is afraid of flying despite believing that it poses little or no danger.) The phenomenon of emotional recalcitrance raises an important problem for theories of emotion, namely to explain the sense in which recalcitrant emotions involve rational conflict. In this paper I argue that existing 'neojudgementalist' accounts of emotions fail to provide plausible explanations of the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions, and develop and defend my own neojudgementalist account. On my view, recalcitrant emotions are irrational insofar as they incline the subject to accept an evaluative construal that the subject has already rejected.

Keywords Emotions · Recalcitrance · Judgementalism · Neojudgementalism · Rationality · Attention

A recalcitrant emotion is one that is said to conflict with or run counter to evaluative judgement. In particular, a recalcitrant emotion is one that persists "despite the agent's making a judgement that is in tension with it… A recalcitrant bout of fear, for example, is one where the agent is afraid of something despite believing that it poses little or no danger."[1] In addition to fear, there are clear cases of recalcitrant anger, guilt, jealousy, and shame.

The phenomenon of emotional recalcitrance raises an important problem for theories of emotion, which is to explain the sense in which recalcitrant emotions involve *rational* conflict or tension. For we have an intuitive sense that there is

[1] D'Arms and Jacobson (2003, p. 129).

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something wrong, from the standpoint of rationality, when fear persists in the face of a subject's judgement that she is in little or no danger. In such a situation, we think that the subject should either stop being afraid, or should change her evaluative judgement. If she does not, then it seems as though the subject is violating some *normative* principle governing the relation between emotions and evaluations. A condition of adequacy on a theory of emotion is that it should be capable of capturing such normative principles, and thus capable of explaining just why it is that emotions are irrational when they violate such principles.

In this paper I argue that a 'neojudgementalist' account of the emotions can explain the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions, by appeal to the idea that emotional feelings prime or incline one to accept an evaluative construal. In Sect. 1 I argue that judgementalism is implausible on the grounds that it imputes too much irrationality to those suffering from recalcitrant emotions, whilst simple versions of neojudgementalism are implausible because they fail to impute enough irrationality to subjects of emotional recalcitrance. In Sect. 2 I consider, and reject, two recent neojudgementalist attempts to explain the sense in which recalcitrant emotions involve rational conflict. And in Sects. 3–5 I propose, develop and defend my own neojudgementalist explanation.

1 Judgementalism and neojudgementalism

It is widely accepted that there are close links between emotions and evaluative judgements. Thus, when a subject judges that she is in danger, then this usually suffices for her to feel fear; and when she realises that her situation is actually safe, then typically her fear will disappear. *Judgementalism* is a theory which proposes a very close link between emotions and evaluative judgements, by claiming that emotions simply are—or embody—such judgements. On a judgementalist account, to fear x is (at least in part) to judge that x is dangerous; to feel guilty about x is to judge that x represents a (moral) wrong on one's part; and so on for other emotions such as anger, grief, joy, and shame.[2]

However, judgementalism is committed to an implausible account of the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions. Since subjects who suffer from recalcitrant emotions do not consciously assent to the judgement that is supposedly constitutive of their emotion, judgementalists must maintain that the relevant judgement is unconsciously held. This is criticisable on two counts: first, it imputes too much irrationality to the subject of emotional recalcitrance; second, it violates a principle of logical charity in our ascription of mental states. On the first count, judgementalism implies that someone who suffers from recalcitrant fear, let us say, displays an incoherent evaluative profile with respect to the question of whether some object is dangerous. But as Bennett Helm has written, "conflicts between emotions and judgements do not verge on incoherence, for they are readily

[2] Proponents of judgementalism include Solomon (1977); Lyons (1980); Marks (1982); and Nussbaum (2001).

intelligible and happen all too often."[3] On the second count, Patricia Greenspan has argued that positing the existence of unconscious evaluative judgements is a "last resort from the standpoint of explanation." This is because we can assume "that the agent is functioning quite rationally in general, so that our ascription of beliefs to him ought to be governed by the principle of 'logical charity.' We need some special reason…for attributing to him an unacknowledged judgement in conflict with those he acknowledges."[4] Since the only reason the judgementalist seems to provide for this attribution stems from their adherence to the judgementalist theory, their explanation of recalcitrant emotions is undermined.[5]

In light of this, theorists of emotion have sought to accommodate or recognize the close links between emotions and evaluations, but in a way which allows emotions and evaluative judgements to diverge or come apart. One attempt to do so, which is increasingly prominent in the literature, is to maintain that emotions involve, not evaluative judgements, but evaluative *perceptions* or *feelings* or *construals* or *thoughts*. Such attitudes represent the attempt to accommodate the link between emotions and evaluations within "a broader evaluative view, allowing for propositional attitudes that are weaker than strict belief: states of mind, like *imagining* that danger looms, that involve entertaining a predicative thought without assent."[6] On this 'neojudgementalist' view, the subject of an emotional experience construes or thinks of an object in an evaluative way; this constitutes an evaluative 'take' on the situation which falls short of fully-fledged evaluative judgement.[7]

Now it is not easy to explain the nature of such evaluative construals or thoughts. Nevertheless, there are examples which help to illustrate the *kind* of thing involved in evaluative construal. Thus, I might construe a duck-rabbit figure as a duck at one time and as a rabbit at another; I might see a face in terms of another, as when I see my father's face reflected in my own; I can think of a chimpanzee in human terms; I can have the impression that the person behind me in the queue is standing too close; and so on.[8] These examples suggest that construals can involve a number of different elements gathered from perception, imagination, conception, and thought. Thus, construals "have an immediacy reminiscent of sense perception. They are impressions, ways things appear to the subject…they are experiences."[9] But they are not identical with sense perceptions: to see my father's face reflected in mine isn't literally to have a visual sensation of its being that way. Moreover, to think of a chimpanzee in human terms owes as much to imagination and conceptual thought as it does to perception. On this account, construals are "a hard-to-specify structure of

[3] Helm (2001, p. 42).

[4] Greenspan (1988, p. 18).

[5] This argument has been widely accepted. For a dissenting voice in the judgementalist camp, see Nussbaum (2001).

[6] Greenspan (1988, p. 3).

[7] I prefer the term 'neojudgementalist' to D'Arms and Jacobson's 'quasijudgementalist.' The 'neojudgementalist' camp includes de Sousa (1991), Roberts (2003), Greenspan (1988), Stocker and Hegeman (1996), and Calhoun (1984), amongst others.

[8] These kinds of example are due to Roberts (2003, pp. 70–74).

[9] Roberts (2003, p. 75).

percept, concept, image, and thought." Although hard-to-specify, this should not make them mysterious; for they share this feature with "most of our experiences, as well as most of our unconscious states of mind."[10]

Even if the precise nature and structure of construals is hard to specify, it appears that neojudgementalism represents an improvement on judgementalism. To see this, note that neojudgementalists can allow for the intelligibility of conflict between emotions and evaluative judgements, on the grounds that construals are evaluations but are *not* evaluative beliefs. The fact that x appears to me as Φ, or that I see x as Φ, or construe x as Φ, or think of x as Φ, does not entail that I believe that x is Φ or judge that x is Φ. In order for me to believe that x is Φ, I need to *assent* to the appearance, *endorse* the way things seem, *accept* the construal.[11] Applying this to recalcitrant emotions, neojudgementalists can maintain that it is perfectly intelligible for me to construe x as dangerous (say), whilst believing that x not dangerous; they can therefore allow for the existence of recalcitrant emotions without implying that those experiencing a bout of recalcitrant emotion display an incoherent evaluative profile, and without violating a principle of charity in ascribing mental states.

But neojudgementalism suffers from its own failings. Whereas judgementalism imputes too much irrationality to someone experiencing recalcitrant emotion, neojudgementalism fails to impute enough. After all, 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. For example, it is not irrational for me to have the impression that my cat can understand what I'm saying to her, or to construe a gesture as rude, whilst believing that my cat cannot understand me, or and that the gesture was not rude. *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 neojudgementalist thus owes us an explanation of how and why evaluative construals can rationally conflict with evaluative judgements in cases of recalcitrant emotion. Failing this, neojudgementalism does not seem to mark an improvement, from the standpoint of explanatory adequacy, over judgementalism. How might the neojudgementalist respond?

2 Two possible solutions: Roberts and Helm

In the previous section we saw that judgementalism imputes too much irrationality to subjects suffering from recalcitrant emotions, whilst neojudgementalism doesn't impute enough. We thus seem, as Helm puts it, to face "a choice between two unsatisfactory alternatives: either we must be judgementalists and accept an overly strong conception of rational conflict between emotion and judgement, or we must be anti-judgementalists and give up hope of accounting for such conflict."[12] In this section I'll consider two recent attempts to steer a middle course between these options.

[10] Ibid., p. 77.

[11] See Roberts (2003, p. 84). See also Nussbaum (op. cit.).

[12] Helm (2001, p. 45).

2.1 Roberts

Robert C. Roberts argues that construals, though necessary for emotion, are not sufficient. In addition, the subject's construal or thought must impinge upon his or her *concerns* in order for the experience to be an emotional experience. Thus, emotional experience involves more than merely thinking of one's situation as thus-and-so; it involves caring about the situation so construed. In this way, a case of recalcitrant emotional experience differs from the kind of non-emotional and arational 'clash' between construal and judgement that we considered in the previous section, and that we also find in some cases of visual illusion.

For Roberts, it is this which grounds a difference in rationality between recalcitrant (or 'phobic') emotions and mere construals. He writes: "Why is the knowing phobic's state of mind irrational, but not that of the knowing subject of an optical illusion? I say it is because the knowing phobic feels torn between his judgement and his emotion in a way that the knowing stick-viewer does not feel torn between his judgement and his visual experience. The latter is complacent and normal, taking the illusion in stride; the former is in trouble and goes to a therapist. Where does the trouble [for the phobic] come from? It comes from the fact that, unlike the impression of the stick, the impression of the phobic is a *concern*-based construal. The fear has a personal depth and life-disrupting motivational power that the illusion lacks. The bent stick is, at most, puzzling; the fear is personally compelling. This means that when the subject dissociates from his fear by denying its propositional content, it is like denying a part of himself, whereas denying his visual impression is not."[13]

In this passage Roberts highlights a number of differences between recalcitrant emotions and visual illusions, grounded in the fact that emotions are concern-based construals, and which are supposed to underlie the difference in rationality between emotions and illusions. Of particular importance are the claims that emotions possess a "life-disrupting motivational power" that visual illusions lack, and that the subject of a recalcitrant emotion denies "a part of himself" whereas the subject of a visual illusion does not. The question is, however, whether these differences are sufficient to explain the relevant difference in rationality. It seems to me that they are not; I'll consider them in turn.

Roberts claims that because recalcitrant emotions are concern-based construals, they possess a personal depth and a life-disrupting motivational power which is a source of "trouble" for the subject of such emotions. But whilst it is true that concern-based construals can possess such power and can to this extent differ from visual illusions, it is not clear why this counts as an adequate explanation of the irrationality of *recalcitrant* emotions. This is because *non*-recalcitrant instances of grief, anger and fear can also possess personal depth and life-disrupting motivational power, and yet do not count as irrational. (Think of the motivational life of someone who is *devastated* by genuine grief, for instance.) So the fact that an emotion has personal depth and life-disrupting motivational power does not necessarily mean that the emotion is irrational. Perhaps, then, the suggestion is that

[13] Roberts (2003, p. 92). See also Greenspan (1988, pp. 4–5).

recalcitrant emotions involve a particularly *irrational* form of disruption to our motivational lives, and that this is the real source of trouble for the subject of such emotions. But even if this is true, it merely shifts the explanatory burden: what now needs to be explained is what makes this form of disruption irrational. In the absence of a further story here, it is difficult to see how we can explain the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions simply by appeal to life-disrupting motivational force.

Roberts's second suggestion is more promising, since it highlights a distinctive feature of *recalcitrant* emotions—namely, the fact that they involve a clash between an emotional appearance and an evaluative judgement. Roberts holds that in such cases the subject dissociates from his emotion, and that this is "like denying a part of himself." This is because emotions are concern-based construals, and a subject's concerns and interests are part of who he is. Since visual illusions do not impinge upon one's concerns, they do not involve this form of dissociation or denial. However, whilst it is also true that emotions are often "personally compelling" in a way that visual illusions are not, it is not obvious that there is anything *irrational* about denying a part of oneself. Clearly, the concern or interest upon which my emotional response impinges might be a part of myself that I *ought to* deny, at least in my present circumstances. If I'm a bank manager, for instance, I ought to dissociate from my desire to steal the bank's money, and thus ought to deny the part of myself that has avaricious feelings when I consider how much money there is in the bank vault. Such a denial would only have the appearance of irrationality if I somehow both *identify with* and at the same time *dissociate myself from* the relevant concerns and feelings. Here my desire or concern would be a part of myself, not simply in terms of being one of my desires, but in terms of being a desire or concern that I *endorse*. But recalcitrant emotions need not involve such endorsement: I might feel ashamed at my son's poor performance on the football field, without in any way endorsing the competitive urge which generates this emotional response. So this second suggestion also leaves us with an explanatory gap: we need to know why, exactly, denying a part of oneself counts as irrational.

Roberts is right to stress that emotions, unlike visual illusions, are related to our concerns and interests; and he is right to point out that this fact underlies a number of differences between recalcitrant emotions and visual illusions. But it is not clear how or why these differences underlie a difference in rationality between recalcitrant emotions and visual illusions. In the absence of further explanatory work, therefore, it is not clear how the appeal to an element of concern helps the neojudgementalist to avoid our problem.

2.2 Helm

Bennett Helm maintains that we can only explain the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions if emotions involve *something like* the assent involved in fully-fledged evaluative judgement. He thus claims that "emotions must be understood as a kind of assent if we are to make sense of rational conflict with judgement at all."[14]

[14] Helm (2001, p. 45).

However, emotions cannot involve the same kind of assent as we find in fully-fledged evaluative judgements, for otherwise the problems facing judgementalism would reoccur.[15] Helm's solution is to deny that all assent is judgemental assent; instead, he wants us to embrace the idea of a distinctively emotional kind of assent, which he terms *disclosive assent*, and which is "implicit in the idea that emotions are evaluative feelings: being pleased or pained by things being thus and so is a kind of acceptance that things really are that way, an acceptance that falls short of full-blown judgement."[16]

But why is it that being pleased or pained by x constitutes a kind of assent to x being thus and so? After all, I might feel pleasure when I fantasize that I've won the lottery, or feel pain when I imagine what it would be like to lose a loved one, without this seeming to constitute my assenting, in any sense, to these thoughts or construals. Helm's explanation involves the idea that emotions essentially involve rational *commitments*.[17] For instance, forward-looking emotions rationally commit one to having appropriate backward-looking emotions: fear that the dog will attack me rationally commits me to being relieved when it does not; hope that I win the lottery rationally commits me to feeling joy when my numbers come up. In particular, Helm thinks that emotions involve a *focal commitment*: this is a commitment to the value or worthiness of the object which is the focus of the emotion, and is a commitment which makes sense of *transitional* and other specific commitments. Thus, it is because I am committed to the value of bodily integrity that I fear that the dog will bite, and feel relieved when it does not; it is because I regard a financial windfall as worthwhile that I hope to win the lottery, and feel delighted when I do. Each emotion therefore involves a commitment to a "broad pattern" of emotions, as a result of a commitment to the value of the focus of that emotion. Now this commitment is experienced by the subject as an evaluative feeling, wherein the value or import of the emotional object "impresses itself upon" the subject.[18] For Helm, this passive experience of value or import in emotion just is emotional or disclosive assent: to experience a commitment to a focal value just is to assent in an emotional way to things being evaluatively thus and so.[19] Emotions therefore involve assent to things being thus and so, insofar as they essentially involve rational commitments; but this assent nevertheless falls short of the cognitive assent characteristic of evaluative judgements.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that emotions do involve a commitment to some focal value, which grounds commitment to a broad pattern of other emotional responses. Thus, in the previous example, fear of the dog essentially involves a commitment to bodily integrity, which grounds commitments to other emotional responses: hoping that the dog won't bite, feeling relieved when it doesn't bite, etc. Let us also assume, for the sake of argument, that being thus

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Helm (2001, Chap. 3, esp. pp. 67–71).

[18] Ibid., p. 80.

[19] For Helm, emotions involve assent to how things are, which is "a commitment to things being that way, where this is a commitment to…having the other felt evaluations." pp. 70, 152.

committed constitutes a kind of assent which falls short of cognitive assent. It does not follow from this, however, that Helm can explain the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions in terms of a clash between emotional assent and judgemental assent. This is because we have good grounds to doubt that there is such a broad pattern of rational commitments in the case of *recalcitrant* emotions. Suppose that I am committed to the value of bodily integrity. This commitment plausibly grounds certain others, namely the commitment to feel fear when bodily integrity is *in fact* threatened, or to feel relief when a *genuine* threat has passed, etc. But it is implausible to suppose that this commitment rationally grounds a commitment to feel fear with respect to an object that one *knows* is not dangerous, even if this object *appears* in some sense dangerous. A commitment to a certain focal value only plausibly grounds commitments to certain appropriate emotional responses if these emotional responses are themselves *warranted*, at least from the subject's own perspective. By the same token, it seems false to claim that a *recalcitrant* forward-looking emotion rationally commits me to having the appropriate backward-looking emotion: if I am clearly aware that a certain dog is harmless but I am nevertheless scared that it will bite me, it seems false to claim that I am nevertheless rationally required to feel relieved when the dog doesn't bite me.[20] If this is the case, then we can doubt that recalcitrant fear necessarily involves a rational commitment to a pattern of emotional responses. So even if we can understand emotional or disclosive assent in terms of rational commitments, we cannot appeal to this kind of assent in order to explain the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions. Helm's explanation thus fails.

3 Emotions as inclinations to assent

We have seen that emotions must involve more than mere evaluative construals if they are to come into rational conflict with evaluative beliefs. For Helm, this means that emotions must involve something like (but something falling short of) judgemental assent. But we have also seen that Helm's attempt to explicate a specifically emotional kind of assent, by appeal to rational commitments, fails. It seems to me that a better option for the neojudgementalist at this point is to deny that emotions necessarily involve a kind of assent, and maintain instead that they necessarily involve something suitably related to assent. In this way, the neojudgementalist can maintain a close link between emotions and evaluative judgement, whilst avoiding a collapse into judgementalism. Let me explain.

It is clear that emotional experience is typically passive: to say this is to say, with Helm, that when we feel an emotion the import of our situation impresses or thrusts itself upon us. Now there is a way to interpret this claim which is compatible with a neojudgementalist explanation of recalcitrant emotions. On this interpretation, to say that the import of a situation impresses itself upon S is

[20] Indeed, from the standpoint of rationality, the fact that I would feel relieved in this case makes matters worse, since I would now experience *two* instances of recalcitrant emotion instead of one.

to say, roughly, that S is *inclined* to assent to or endorse this view of the situation. In other words, when S experiences an emotion she is subject to some kind of *pressure* to accept the relevant appearance; she *leans towards* accepting the evaluative thought, is *tempted by* this way of seeing the evaluative situation, is *moved* to endorse her evaluative construal. On this view, both the evaluative construal and the inclination to accept the construal are necessary constituents of emotions, rather than being related effects or typical accompaniments of emotions. Now this falls short of judgementalism, since it is perfectly possible for S to be inclined to assent to some construal without assenting to the construal (and indeed, whilst rejecting this evaluative picture of her situation). This account of the emotions therefore allows for the possibility of recalcitrant emotions without imputing any incoherence to S's evaluative system. But being inclined to assent to an evaluation is subject to *rational* appraisal in a way that merely entertaining or imagining an evaluation is not. If so, we have the means of explaining why recalcitrant emotions involve rational conflict, and so differ from cases where a subject merely entertains evaluative thoughts.

In order to make this picture plausible, we first need to say something about what it is to be inclined towards accepting a proposition or construal. Obvious models here are provided by desire and belief. Desire is *the* motivational state, and we can be inclined to accept a proposition as a result of some desire that would thereby be satisfied. (To be inclined in this way is to feel conative pressure to assent to the relevant propositions.) But a subject can be also inclined to believe a proposition p on the grounds of one or more other propositions that she *believes*, and that she thinks constitute evidence for the truth of p. (To be inclined in this way is to feel cognitive pressure to assent.) However, neither of these models is adequate as an account of how a subject is *emotionally* inclined to accept an evaluative proposition. I want to suggest that the inclining or motivating element in emotional experience is something more closely related to emotional *feelings*. On this view, the inclination to assent to a construal of one's situation as dangerous is closely linked with feelings of fear, the inclination to assent to the thought that one's partner is unfaithful is closely linked with feelings of jealousy, and similarly for cases of recalcitrant guilt, shame, and anger. In the following section I'll support this account of emotional inclination by arguing that (i) emotions involve increased attention to and sensitivity to emotional objects, which can be *experienced* by the subject as emotional feelings; and that (ii) a subject who is additionally sensitive to emotional objects is emotionally inclined to accept the relevant evaluative construal.[21]

[21] The account which follows can be understood as a form of *processing mode theory* of emotions, according to which emotions involve "systematic changes in faculties of attention, memory, and reasoning." Prinz (2004, p. 10). In some respects it is similar to the account proposed by Calhoun (1984). Calhoun regards emotions as "cognitive sets, interpretative frameworks, patterns of attention" (p. 340) which constitute a subject's seeing the world in a particular evaluative way. But Calhoun (like other neojudgementalists) fails to explain the *irrationality* of recalcitrant emotions, since she fails to explain how seeing the world in an evaluative way can *rationally* conflict with evaluative belief.

4 Attention and inclination

It is widely accepted that emotions constitute reactions to objects and events which are significant to us. It is also uncontroversial to suppose that the basic role of emotions is to enable us to respond to such important matters in the right way. In order to fulfil this role, emotions have two subsidiary functions: (a) they *alert us* to the presence of significant objects or events in our environment, and thereafter facilitate cognitive processing of such objects and events; and (b) they enable us to *act appropriately* with respect to these objects or events. Let us take these in turn.

(a) Emotions alert us to significant matters by capturing and directing our *attention* on to important objects and events. As Aaron Ben Ze'ev puts it, "like burglar alarms going off when an intruder appears, emotions signal that something needs attention."[22] The need for capture and direction of attentional focus stems from the fact that human beings are presented with vast amounts of information about the state of the world and the state of themselves, only some of which will be important to them. Given that human beings have limited mental resources, they thus face a problem of efficiently locating or identifying which information in their environment is important. Our emotional systems, at least in part, are thought to have evolved in order to solve this problem, and they do so by capturing and focusing the subject's attention.[23] In other words, important or significant events in our environment need "preferential perceptual processing", and "[o]ne means of achieving this is by emotion enhancing attention, leading to increased detection of emotional events."[24]

This general picture is supported by empirical evidence which indicates that emotions improve our capacities for detecting and analysing important stimuli. With respect to detection, evidence indicates that subjects perform better on visual search tasks—that is, the time taken for subjects to detect a particular target *decreases*—when the target of their search is an emotional target, such as a face expressing positive or negative emotion, a snake, or a spider.[25] This suggests that emotions increase the speed at which we can identify and attend to significant events in our environment. This is especially true for subjects suffering from anxiety or phobia.[26]

But emotions do not simply enhance speed of identification; they also function to enhance the *quality* of a subject's representation of her emotional situation, by focusing attention onto important events and by keeping attention focused there. This results in an increased *sensitivity* to emotionally-relevant features in the subject's environment. Thus, when we are afraid we are additionally sensitive to signs and indications of danger; when we are jealous, we are additionally sensitive to signs of infidelity; when we are angry, we are especially sensitive to transgressions; and similarly for other central cases of emotion. Emotions thus function to enhance a subject's evaluative construal of her situation, by making her

[22] Ben Ze'ev (2000, p. 13).

[23] For this line, see for instance Vuilleumier et al. (2003, p. 419).

[24] Dolan (2002, p. 1191).

[25] Dolan (op. cit.)

[26] See Vuilleumier et al. (2003, p. 420).

additionally focused on and sensitive to features which constitute *reasons* for that construal.

The view that emotions involve persistent attentional focus, and that this leads to enhanced processing of emotional stimuli, is also supported by empirical evidence, and in particular by evidence indicating that emotions involve increased *cortical arousal*. Thus, Joseph LeDoux writes that "It has long been believed that the difference between being awake and alert, on the one hand, and drowsy or asleep on the other is related to the arousal level of the cortex. When you are alert and paying attention to something important, your cortex is aroused. When you are drowsy and not focusing on anything, the cortex is in the unaroused state."[27] For LeDoux, "Emotional reactions are typically accompanied by intense cortical arousal… This high level of arousal is, in part, the explanation for why it is hard to concentrate on other things and work efficiently when you are in an emotional state."[28] Now increased arousal is (in part) a matter of increased sensitivity of cells in the cortical and thalamic regions, and this results in increased processing of emotional stimuli. LeDoux continues: "While much of the cortex is potentially hypersensitive to inputs during arousal, the systems that are processing information are able to make the most use of this effect. For example, if arousal is triggered by the sight of a snake, the neurons that are actively involved in processing the snake, retrieving long-term memories about snakes, and creating working memory representations of the snake are going to be especially affected by arousal. Other neurons are inactive at this point and don't reap the benefits."[29] Moreover, additional sensitivity of cells in the cortical and thalamic regions results in a 'feedback loop' of arousal, since sensitivity of such cells triggers further arousal of the amygdala, which is the area of the brain which initially activates arousal systems in response to emotional stimuli. As a result, "arousal locks you into whatever emotional state you are in when arousal occurs."[30]

This explains the sense in which emotions do not simply direct attention onto important objects or events; instead, emotionally significant objects and events capture and *consume* attention, which is to say that such objects and events hold sway over us, making it very difficult for us to disengage our attention and shift focus elsewhere. Emotions such as fear and anger and jealousy stay with us; they are not simply short-term interruptions to our mental life, but persist and dominate that life. We *remain* focused on danger, infidelity, and slights; guilt and shame *stay* with us; sorrow *persists*. But the point of such attentional capture and consumption is not to detect significant events or objects; detection of such objects and events takes place *before* attention is captured and consumed. Instead, as we have seen, attentional capture and consumption serves to enhance our representation of emotional objects: emotions involve the mobilization and direction of attentional mechanisms in order to "provoke a more detailed stimulus analysis [and] enhance

[27] LeDoux (1996, p. 287).

[28] Ibid., p. 289.

[29] Ibid., pp. 287–288.

[30] Ibid., p. 290.

the representation of the relevant stimuli."[31] The persistence of cortical arousal, and thus of attentional focus, serves to facilitate evaluation of our emotional situation.

(b) The second function of emotions is to enable us to act appropriately once we have been alerted to the presence of significant objects or events. The idea that emotions have this function also has considerable empirical support. For instance, when faced with danger often the appropriate behavioural responses is to stop moving, i.e., to 'freeze.' In order to facilitate this kind of response, and to prepare the subject for subsequent 'fight or flight' behaviour, the subject's autonomic nervous system induces a host of cardiovascular, visceral, and hormonal changes.[32] Emotions thus prepare and facilitate appropriate behavioural responses to significant events in the subject's environment. Whereas changes to attentional capacities can be regarded as the mobilization of a subject's *cognitive* resources in response to emotional stimuli, the collection of visceral changes discussed here can be regarded as the mobilization of a subject's *motivational* resources as a result of encountering emotionally significant objects and events.

At the end of the previous section I made the claims that (i) emotions involve increased attention to and sensitivity to emotional objects, which can be *experienced* by the subject as emotional feelings; and (ii) a subject who is additionally sensitive to emotional objects is emotionally inclined to accept the relevant evaluative construal. We now have the grounds to support the first claim. This is because emotional feelings are constituted, at least in part, by the subject's awareness of the mobilization of cognitive and motivational resources which are triggered by important or significant events.[33] Think, for instance, of how it *feels* to be afraid when waking in the middle of the night in an empty house after hearing noise downstairs. In such a situation one's emotional experience is of fixed attention and bodily changes: one is aware that one's senses are on 'red alert' as one strains to hear other anomalous noises, looks around for signs of movement, for possible weapons, for escape routes. The mobilization of cognitive resources in such a case constitutes a subject's being additionally sensitive to signs of danger, and this additional sensitivity is something that the subject can experience. (Such feelings are typically accompanied by awareness of visceral and hormonal changes as well, such as cessation of breathing, rapid heartbeat, sweating palms, tingling scalp, and muscle tension.) The phenomenology of fear thus supports the view that emotions involve increased attention and increased sensitivity (alongside visceral and hormonal changes), which are experienced by the subject of the emotion as emotional feelings.

The account of the role and function of emotions developed in this section also supports my second claim, namely that a subject who is additionally sensitive to emotional objects is emotionally inclined to accept the relevant evaluative construal. To see this, note that a standard way of understanding the mobilization of

[31] Vuilleumier et al. (2003).

[32] LeDoux (1996, p. 290).

[33] I say 'in part' in order to accommodate the feelings of pleasure or pain which are typically central to emotional experience, and which plausibly account for emotional 'valence,' i.e., the fact that emotions strike us as positive or negative.

motivational resources is in terms of a subject's becoming *prepared* for a specific behavioural response, of their becoming *primed* or *readied* to act in a certain way. Thus, the mobilization of motivational resources in fear constitutes the subject's being primed for 'fight-or-flight' behaviour; the mobilization of resources in anger constitutes the subject's being primed for a characteristic response to insult; and so on.[34] Being primed to act in this way is, on my view, a matter of the subject's being *emotionally inclined* towards the appropriate behaviour. The mobilization of motivational resources which are triggered by an emotional object thus constitutes an emotional inclination to act.

I propose that we can say something similar about the mobilization of a subject's cognitive resources in emotional experience. That is, just as motivational resources incline a subject to the appropriate behaviour, the mobilization of *cognitive* resources primes or inclines a subject to endorse the relevant evaluative construal. The capture and consumption of attention thus constitutes an emotional inclination to believe. For instance, the mobilization of cognitive resources in fear, which we can interpret as the subject's additional sensitivity to signs or indications of danger, constitutes the subject's being emotionally inclined to endorse her construal of her situation as one which involves danger.[35] For an agent to be focused on, attentive and alert to signs or evidence of danger—to be 'on the look out' for indications which support her construal of the situation as dangerous—simply *is* for her to be primed or inclined to believe that she is in danger on the basis of such indications. This is what it is to be emotionally inclined to accept an evaluative construal. As a result, we can say that emotions involve an inclination to believe, no less than an inclination to act.

An initial objection to this analogy between inclinations to act and to believe is that a mobilization of cognitive resources no more inclines a subject to accept an evaluative construal than it inclines him to reject it. For increased attention in a case of fear might convince a subject that the feared object is *not* dangerous, in which case increased attention will lead him to reject his construal of the object as dangerous. In light of this, it would beg the question to describe the mobilization of cognitive resources in terms of readiness to assent to, rather than readiness to reject, the evaluative construal. But this objection is unconvincing, for a couple of reasons. First, we cannot infer, from the fact that increased attention leads the subject to reject his construal of some object as dangerous, that he was never inclined to accept that construal, or that he is not at present still inclined to accept that construal. For the same form of argument would tell against the eminently plausible claim that emotions incline subjects to the appropriate *behavioural* responses. There is no necessity, after all, that a subject will behave appropriately when he is afraid. Here too increased attention might convince the subject that he is in fact safe, in which case he will typically not display fear behaviour. But we should not infer from this that a fearful subject was not inclined towards or primed for the appropriate fear

[34] Indeed, some theorists *define* emotions in terms of tendencies to act. See Frijda (1986).

[35] To say that one is primed to assent to a construal of the situation as dangerous does not mean that one *wants* to assent to this; perhaps one fervently desires *not* to hear additional sounds of a burglar when one is afraid. But the fact that one is looking out for danger signs—instead of burying one's head under the pillow—means that one is responsive to evidence rather than basic inclination or desire in these cases.

behaviour; indeed, since fear can be recalcitrant and the mobilization of motivational resources can persist, the subject can remain primed for behaviour even when he is convinced of his safety. By the same token we should not infer, from the fact that a subject sometimes rejects an evaluative construal, that they were not inclined to accept the construal in the first place.

A second reason is supplied by the 'epistemology' of emotional experience. Peter Goldie has argued that emotional experience typically begins with an evaluative construal allied with a particular feeling, and that the emotional subject then tries to make his 'epistemic landscape' cohere with his construal and feeling by seeking out reasons that justify them. He writes: "The feeling directed toward the object of the emotion, and the related perception of the object as having the [evaluative] property, tend to be idées fixes to which reason has to cohere. The phenomenon is a familiar one: when we are afraid, we tend unknowingly to seek out features of the object of our fear that will justify the fear."[36] As a matter of psychological fact, therefore, emotional subjects seek to confirm, rather than disconfirm, their evaluative construals. Emotions involve inclinations to believe, rather than disbelieve.

If all of this is correct, then on my account a subject's epistemic and motivational situation when she experiences an emotion can be described as follows. First, some element in S's environment triggers her emotion. This involves the mobilization of cognitive and motivational resources, in the form of the capture and consumption of attention, allied with behavioural orientation. In order to trigger the mobilization of such capacities, the element in question will be one that is important or significant for S. As a result, S's representation of the element will be an evaluative representation. In the case of fear, S will construe the object as dangerous; in the case of jealousy, S will construe her situation as involving defection or infidelity; and so on for the other central cases of emotion. S's emotional feelings consist, in part, of her awareness of this mobilization. These cognitive and motivational changes incline S to certain responses: on the practical side, S will be primed to act accordingly in light of her evaluative construal—in the case of fear, to fight or flee. On the epistemic side, S will be primed to assent to this construal. Emotions thus incline one towards action and belief. But note that S need not act or believe as a result of these inclinations: sometimes a subject will construe her situation in evaluative terms—it will seem to her that she is in danger, or that her partner is being unfaithful—but will merely *remain* primed to act and assent accordingly. This fact is central to an attempt to understand recalcitrant emotions, as I'll now explain.

5 The irrationality of recalcitrant emotions

In this section I'll argue that neojudgementalism can provide a plausible explanation of the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions, based upon the picture of emotional inclination that I outlined in the previous sections.

[36] Goldie (2004, p. 99).

On my account, emotional experience involves the mobilization of cognitive and practical resources which prime a subject to act on and assent to an evaluative construal of her situation. This means that, when emotional experience is recalcitrant, the subject is primed to act on and assent to an evaluative construal, but does not act on or assent to that construal: instead, she endorses a different, and opposing, evaluative take on her situation. Thus, in a recalcitrant bout of fear, S is primed to act on and assent to her construal of her situation as dangerous, but does not act on or assent to this construal, believing instead that her situation is *not* dangerous. It seems to me that the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions can be explained on two dimensions: (a) being primed to act and believe has significant practical and cognitive costs, which render recalcitrant emotions problematic; and (b) being primed to assent to a construal in light of a conflicting evaluative belief violates a substantive epistemic norm. Let us take these in turn.

(a) Being primed to act and believe in the face of a conflicting evaluative judgement has significant costs. On the practical side, recalcitrant fear involves S's being primed for fight-or-flight behaviour in a situation where there is no need for such behaviour, at least from S's own perspective. In such cases S expends effort—both psychological and physiological—in being prepared to do something that is, by her own lights, pointless, since she is not in danger. Such mobilization is thus, at least from S's perspective, a *waste* of her limited motivational resources: it is akin to S's preparing for a race that she sees no need to run.[37] Moreover, the fact that effort is wasted here might mean that it is not utilized elsewhere: recalcitrant emotions can interfere with a subject's pursuit of her other short- and long-term goals, either by distracting the subject so that she fails to pay adequate attention to such goals, or by sapping her motivational energies so that she cannot respond appropriately to them.[38]

Recalcitrant emotions also involve significant cognitive costs. Insofar as emotions involve mobilization of cognitive capacities to do with attention, memory, and reasoning, then recalcitrant emotions will again involve a waste of limited resources. For instance, when S experiences a recalcitrant episode of fear, she will expend effort in focusing on and paying attention to the object that she construes as dangerous, remaining sensitive to evidence and signs of danger in her environment, whilst believing that she is *not* in danger. From S's perspective, such focused attention and increased sensitivity is a pointless waste of limited cognitive resources: this is because the function of focused attention and increased sensitivity is to enhance the subject's perception of emotional stimuli, and thereby to enable her to determine for herself whether or not the subject of her emotion has the significance that she (initially) construes it as having. But then the persistence of attention and sensitivity will be pointless in a situation where the subject has *already* determined the significance of the object, and formed the appropriate

[37] This is to be distinguished from a case where mobilization is prudent. It might be prudent for me to mobilize cognitive and motivational resources to buy house insurance, even though I believe that my house won't burn down. But here mobilization is aimed at the legitimate goal of financial security, and hence is not wasteful. In cases of recalcitrant emotion, however, resources are mobilized even though the legitimate goal has been *achieved*.

[38] See Bach (1994).

evaluative belief. In a case where S has already determined that she is safe, there is no *need* for her to remain sensitive to signs of danger and the possibility of threat. Recalcitrant emotions therefore involve the mobilization of cognitive resources in the service of a question that has, by the subject's own lights, already been answered. And here too the fact that S wastes cognitive resources might mean that she fails to pay attention to something that she *should* pay attention to. So when S suffers recalcitrant fear, she is attentive to things that don't require attention, and (possibly) inattentive to things that do.

(b) Given the picture developed in the previous section, we can conclude that recalcitrant emotions are irrational in another sense, which goes to the heart of our intuition that they violate normative principles governing the relation between emotions and evaluations. We have seen that the mobilization of cognitive resources involved when S is afraid constitutes her being inclined to assent to a construal of her situation as dangerous. In a case of recalcitrant fear, S continues to be so inclined even though she has determined that she is safe and a result judges that she is not in danger. If so, however, recalcitrant emotions such as fear would appear to be *epistemically irrational*: for it is epistemically irrational to be inclined to assent to something that one has determined to be false. Moreover, the way in which S is emotionally inclined to accept her construal of her situation as dangerous adds another level of epistemic irrationality. When S experiences recalcitrant fear, not only is she inclined to accept something that she regards as false, but she remains emotionally inclined to do this despite being aware that there are *no good reasons* to accept this construal. (In determining that she is safe, S has *already* determined that her reasons favour this evaluation of her circumstances rather than her emotional construal.[39]) But it is epistemically irrational to be inclined to accept some emotional construal without good reason.[40] As a result, S's recalcitrant fear is epistemically irrational not only in virtue of *what* it inclines her to believe (i.e., something false), but also in virtue of *how* it inclines her to believe (i.e., on the basis of no good reason).

The fact that emotions involve the capture and consumption of attentional resources indicates a third way in which recalcitrant emotions are epistemically irrational. We saw at the end of the previous section that persistent emotional feelings and construals "tend to be idées fixes to which reason has to cohere."[41] As a result, emotional subjects typically seek out reasons and considerations which justify or support their emotional feelings and construals. But this can lead to epistemic problems, as Goldie recognizes. For subjects who seek to justify their emotional construals might be inclined to 'invent' reasons, at least in situations where no genuine reasons can be found. This suggests that the subject of *recalcitrant* emotion is liable to experience another irrational inclination—namely,

[39] This is why S's inclination to assent to her construal in a case of recalcitrant emotion is *unlike* the case where S is inclined to change her mind as a result of new reasons or information.

[40] Consider, to illustrate, what we would say to someone who *changed his mind* on the question of whether or not he was in danger purely as a result of his inclination to accept his emotional construal. This would be a paradigmatic case of an irrational change in belief, insofar as the relevant inclination is unsupported by reasons.

[41] Goldie (2004, p. 99).

the inclination to 'invent' reasons in support of her emotional construal, despite believing that there *are* no genuine reasons in favour of that construal. So not only is the subject of recalcitrant emotion inclined to believe something false, and inclined to believe this on the basis of no good reason; she is also inclined to invent reasons when she knows that there are none to be found. If so, then recalcitrant emotions are epistemically irrational on a number of counts.

If this is correct, then my version of neojudgementalism can avoid the problems which face both judgementalism and other neojudgementalist accounts. I can therefore can steer a middle path between imputing too much irrationality to the subject of recalcitrant emotions, and imputing too little. Unlike the judgementalist, I am not committed to the view that recalcitrant emotions involve contradictory judgements. This is because I maintain that emotions involve the *inclination* to assent to an evaluative construal, rather than assent itself. Nevertheless, as I have argued in this section, I can explain how such an inclination can be problematic from the rational point of view. Unlike other neojudgementalist theories, my account can explain how recalcitrant emotions differ in rationality from cases where subjects merely imagine or entertain evaluative thoughts, i.e., the cases of 'arational construals' encountered at the end of Sect. 1. For arational construals do not involve the mobilization of cognitive and motivational resources, and as a result do not incur the practical, cognitive, and epistemic costs borne by recalcitrant emotions. Thus, visual illusions do not capture and consume the subject's attention in anything like the way that attention is captured and consumed by emotional objects; although novel non-emotional stimuli can generate arousal, this level of arousal "dissipates almost immediately," whereas it is "prolonged in the presence of emotional stimuli."[42] Because of this, we are *not* inclined to endorse visual illusions or other arational construals, and we do not seek out considerations which would support them. In other words, the 'epistemology' of visual illusions and other arational construals does not support the view that in these cases we have an inclination to accept something that we judge to be false. It is for these reasons that arational construals fail to be troubling from the rational perspective.[43]

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[42] LeDoux (op. cit., p. 290).

[43] This does not mean that someone—for instance, someone studying the science of perception—couldn't *be* extremely attentive to visual illusions. Nevertheless, such attentional focus would seem to be under the subject's control, and hence very different from kind of involuntary attentional persistence involved in recalcitrant emotional response. So there is a difference between visual illusions and recalcitrant emotions at the level of attentional capture and consumption. On my view, this explains why emotions incline us to accept evaluative construals, whilst illusions do not incline us to form perceptual beliefs.

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