Concerning Judgements and Rationality:

An inquiry into Nomy Arpaly's criticism of Michael Smith

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1.0: Introduction:

Let's assume that I have a finite set of money with me when I leave the comforts of my home and enter the dread of winter. This will provide me with a finite set of wares. But what wares should I purchase? Should I go for the short-term satisfaction of a night at the local pub, perhaps? Or the more subtle satisfaction of a good, warm, coat, which might not have the same sharp, instant palpable feeling of satisfaction that a few lager and a good meal with my friends might provide, but a more enduring one as it keeps me warm all those long winter months that plague my nation. What should be my aim?

If I ask my friends, they might initially scoff at such a query, wondering why I would ever entertain the notion of a coat when the money could be spent on a night of intoxicated adventures. They ask me if I do not want to meet a young woman and experience the pleasure and passion of love.

I would now sigh and nod my head, 'Yes, granted, I do want that.'

'And...', they continue, 'Is it not true that you have met similar women, in this very pub we so often frequent?' I nod in compliance once again. It is, after-all, an excellent meeting spot. 'Then it is settled!', they triumphantly proclaim. 'We shall see you at the place-to-be, this evening!'

Perhaps I do not feel entirely swayed by my friends pathos-laden appeal. I might instead present the dilemma – for I do still have a partial desire for a new coat, despite my friends rousing speech – before my mother. And my mother, her judgement guided by conventional and parental wisdom, would without a doubt take the opposite side of the argument. 'A good coat will keep you warm for years, a nights drinking only but a few hours' she replies. 'Besides, you have not considered the time lost next day, when you are reeling from a hang-over. Do you not have a paper of some sort to write?'

Within all probability, I concede that losing that much time would be hassle, and mumble something about how I really should be writing right now.

'Then it is settled. Buy the coat, and save yourself the trouble of suffering the cold winter without it, and the hangover to boot. Besides, the notion of meeting a suitable partner this evening is a mere probability. The protection and warmth of a coat is a certainty. Thus, it's only rational you should purchase it', she concludes. 'Rational?', I frown.

I'm sure we've all heard it. One party claims that something is rational, while another disagrees. In everyday life, the mundane use of the word seems to be somewhat vague, often easily
interchanged with the phrase 'the smart thing to do'. But given my conflicting desires, what is 'the smart thing to do'? What is rational to do?

My mother would have me buy the coat, and not gamble my money on the off chance that I meet a woman at the pub and fall in love. Still, I have met lovely women there before, and had I not gambled those nights, I probably never would have. My friends would have me drinking the night away with them, hoping to experiencing love, lust, merriment and passion. But my friends aren't students, and they fail to acknowledge that I place a great deal of merriment and passion in my work, and that my work is done properly. And I do loathe the cold. The 'smart thing' then is not always that obvious, once we start breaking down reasons and counter-reasons for acting. Even so, I have many reasons, so which should be given most consideration, which should I prefer? Simply that which appears to be right now be what I prefer acting upon? Should I manage to sort out my conflicting wants and come to a clear and concise judgement on what I should act on, does that mean that my judgement is necessarily rational in itself?

It depends on your view of Rationality, I would say.

### 1.1: Outlining

This paper is dedicated to the arguments put forth by Michael Smith in his work *The Moral Problem*¹, which deals with practical rationality, normative reasons, and the implications of such reasons on the system of rationality which Smith defends. The implications and criticism will largely be provided by Nomy Arpaly, taken from the article *On Acting Rationally Against One's best judgement*, as printed in full in her book *Unprincipled Virtue*².

In my introduction, I described a problem: What is rational to do? In this paper, I will first discuss Smith's view on this issue. Smith tries to solve the question by applying a formula of practical rationality (Discussed in 2.1) that appeals to what one would believe one should want to desire if one were fully rational (Introduced in 1.2). In order to do this, he will lean heavily on his theory of normative reasons, based in part on the work provided by Bernard Williams in his famous article *External and Internal Reasons*³, (Discussed in 1.2-1.3 and given a full explanation in 2.0), which in turn rests on a notion of rationality as coherence between beliefs and desires (though as we shall see, this coherence is at odds with Arpaly's view of it). I will in a brisk yet hopefully detailed fashion deal with both his theory and formula, and give comments where it is due.

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¹ Smith, *The Moral Problem*  
² Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*  
³ Williams, *Moral Luck*, p101-114
Arpaly, on the other hand, claims that Smith's theory of practical rationality is conflicting with what he aims to achieve with it. In particular, it lies in conflict with 'best judgements', and *Akrasia*. Arpaly will claim (in 3.0-3.3) that counter to what Smith intents, his formulation is too narrow in its demands of coherence, and indeed creates more incoherence than coherence, when looking at the big picture that includes all of one's beliefs and desires. Arpaly will in turn argue that *Akrasia*, something that has so far almost universally been considered a sign of irrationality, may not be irrational at all, if we see practical rationality from her point of view. But to do this, Arpaly claims, we might have to accept that deliberation isn't a necessary part of practical rationality (4.0-4.2). I will argue that Arpaly has in general a more compelling argument than Smith, and that what is necessary for rationality might not be active deliberation, but passive deliberation (4.3).

As this paper progresses, I will explain these concepts all of these concepts in more detail, although all the implications of certain formulations, arguments or concepts might not at first be apparent, and not show their full strength – or flaws – until later on.

But first, I think the reader would benefit from some background. What is a normative reason? What is practical rationality and what is full rationality? And who is this William's character?

1.2: A Brief Explanation of Reasons:6

Consider next one of Williams' examples. Suppose that, by taking a certain medicine, someone could protect his health against some illness in the future. According to Internalists, if this person did not care about his future, and this indifference would survive any amount of informed and rational deliberation, he would have no reason to take this medicine. Most Externalists would disagree. On their view, we all have reasons to protect our health and to prevent our own future suffering. And these reasons do not depend on whether, after informed and rational deliberation, we could care about these things.6

In a brief yet concise quote, Derek Parfit sums up normative reasons, and a simplistic but adequate distinction between Externalists and Internalists. A normative reason, as compared to a motivational reason, is justificatory. A justificatory reasons is a reason we appeal to when we seek to justify a certain belief, action or desire. A motivational reason is explanatory, which in turn only needs to explain why we believe, act or desire, not justify (though a normative reason, being justificatory,

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4 Commonly known as 'weakness of will'. *Akrasia* is when someone acts or behaves in such a fashion that runs counter for any reason they are aware of for them to do such. Imagine if you and I get to pick a prize at a game-show, one being a large cash-prize, and the other a small sum. We both agree, after sound deliberation, that there is no conceivable reason for taking the smaller sum over the larger sum. If I then pick the larger sum, and you the smaller, you are being *akratic*.

5 Given the vast size of this branch of philosophy, the limited space in this article, and that this is a precursor to set the playing-field for the actual subject to which this article is concerned, this section is not only going to be brief and rudimentary, but very brief, and very rudimentary.

6 Parfit, *Reasons and Motivations*
might very well be an explanatory reason). In the example, the man is taking medicine, and is motivated by avoiding illness, and this explains his reason for taking the medicine, as well as justify his action, as he seeks to stay healthy and his action will lead to health. However, if a nefarious friend fooled him into taking ineffective medicine that did nothing at all, this would be an explanatory reason for him taking the medicine, he being motivated by his belief that the medicine is good for him, but not a justifying reason, as this medicine does not in fact provide him with the benefit of health. Now, an Externalist would argue that we can have certain reasons, no matter if they would under any circumstances function as motivational. No matter if the sick man ever would feel motivated, on any level, to take said medicine, he still has a reason for taking it, because some reasons do not depend upon whether we are motivated by them or not. For instance, an Externalist could argue that we all have a reason to care about our health.

Internalist would argue that a normative reason is only a reason if it under some circumstances is also explanatory of our actions. If the sick man would under no circumstances be motivated into taking the medicine, it can not be said that he has a normative reason for taking said medicine.

As Parfit mentions, this example is from Bernard Williams, a famous Internalist, who argues that a normative reason for acting depends upon what you would desire, were you fully rational. However, this reason is still considered Internal, as it still hinges upon that I under a certain circumstance (full rationality) would be motivated by it in some fashion. If I were not be motivated by it, even if I were fully rational, then it can not count as a reason, no matter what.

1.3: Platitudes Concerning Rationality:

Before we delve any deeper, I'd like to take a chance to make short, simple explanation about what in general it is that we will be talking about. Rationality, when we talk about it in ever-day conversation, is almost always about means and ends. If I for example deliberate in order to reach a conclusion about what I should spend my money on, then said conclusion is an end. Not an end in itself, though, as this end serves as a mean to achieve some other end, most likely 'what will make me overall happier' or perhaps 'more fulfilled as a human being'. A humans means and ends can often be seen as, pardon the phrasing, endless. Stanford Encyclopedia calls this instrumental rationality, and gives this explanation:

Instrumental rationality, in its most basic form, instructs agents to take those means that are necessary in relation to their given ends.7

There is another form of rationality which converges with this commonly held platitude of rationality, though: Practical rationality. Instrumental rationality deals with efficiency of achieving one's ends through a certain set of means. The most efficient way is thus the most rational way. Practical rationality, however, deals not with efficiency (though at time the line between Instrumental and Practical blurs with certain models of rationality), but with our ends themselves. It asks us to justify why we have certain ends, instead of others ends. The classic Humean model of rationality provides an account for both, and is the one which I believe have mostly influenced our platitudes about rationality. According to this model, rationality is simply acting in accordance to what you desire to do, and having the presence of mind to know what desire is to be thought of as a means to an end, and what desire is an end in itself.

For instance, I might have a desire to buy a coat, but such a desire might only be there because I in fact have a deeper desire to stay warm. So the rational act to do might not be to buy this coat, but to invest in something cheaper and warmer, so that the left-over money might be spent to fulfil another desire. If asked to justify why we have certain ends, and if it is practically rational to have them, the Humean model would simply answer that I have them because I desire them, and whatever desires I have are practically rational in themselves. Such an answer might not seem very convincing, which have prompted other replies to the question.

Williams and Smith, for instance, instead argues for practical rationality by appealing to reasons about what you should desire, compared to what you actually desire right now. According to them, practical rationality is about having the proper desires, and acting in accordance. What you should desire, loosely expressed, is what you believe your fully rational self would desire in a certain situation. If you then have a desire to match this belief, a desire that matches the desire you believe your fully rational self would have in such a situation, you are rational.

When Williams and Smith then talk about rationality, it does not matter what you want to do, or the pro's an con's of a situation, but what you ought to do, and what you ought to do is what you have a normative reason for doing, and you have such a reason if you are fully rational. However, please do not take this as ignoring an agents actual wishes or desires, for when I create a belief about what I would desire to do, were I fully rational, I am in fact basing my decision on what my fully rational self would desire on what I imagine my desires would be, were I fully rational.

2.0: Williams' & Smith's Take on Full Rationality

Practical rationality is thus born out of full rationality, according to Williams' and Smith. However, what exactly one needs to be fully rational is going to take some explanation. Williams stipulates three conditions for full rationality, which will later on be borrowed by Smith:

1. The agent must have no false beliefs
2. The agent must have all relevant true beliefs
3. The agent must deliberate correctly.

Given that each condition is optimally fulfilled, one is fully rational. Even though quite lengthy, I deem the following detailed explanation of each condition necessary for a proper understanding of the arguments put forth later on in this paper.

The first and second claim are rather straight-forward and commonly accepted; One can not be fully rational if one has a desire to $\Phi$, if $\Phi$:ing is based on something untrue. This is rather simple to imagine: Would we call someone fully rational if they still suffered delusions about what they wanted or why they wanted it? As Williams say (and in turn borrowed later by Smith): "Suppose an agent desires to mix some stuff from a bottle and drink it. However he has this desire only because he desires a gin and tonic, and believes that the content of the bottle contains gin, where in fact it contains petrol. As Williams points out, 'it just seems very odd to say that he has a desire to drink this stuff, and natural to say that he has no desire to drink it, although he thinks that he has'..." If he were fully rational, if he had no false beliefs, then he would not have this desire (Granted, he might have a desire to drink petrol that is separate from the desire to drink what he believes is gin, even if he were fully rational, but working from the assumption that he desires to drink gin and not petrol, he would not have a desire to drink from that specific bottle). The second condition is similar to the first, in that it deals with information that might not always be accessible to the agent. If an agent has a desire to drink gin and tonic, and does not know that a second bottle stashed in the back of the refrigerator contains the very mix of liquids he wishes to consume, we can say that the agent has a reason to $\Phi$, even though he does not know it. If she had all relevant true beliefs, she would desire to drink from this bottle.

8 $\Phi$ is the Greek letter of Phi. It is used by Williams, and in turn by Smith, and so by me, to denote a possible action, desire or belief. 'To $\Phi$' could mean 'To desire to eat bananas', 'to believe that the moon is made out of cheese', or 'To drive a small, panzer vehicle through the wall of a building'. Insert your own preferred meaning.

9 Smith, The Moral Problem, p156

10 I find Condition (1) to be largely redundant in most scenarios. Having (2) “All relevant true beliefs” would in fact negate the possibility of the agent acting on any “false beliefs”. If I held all the relevant true beliefs, not only would I know that one flask contains petrol while the other Gin & Tonic, it would also be impossible for me to at the same time hold any false beliefs about them, or anything remotely relevant about them, since then, I would not be holding all the relevant true beliefs. However, in the spirit of “covering all one's bases”, I assume that Condition (1) is necessary to protect an agent from error on some rare occasion.
So far, Smith and Williams are in agreement about the necessary conditions for full rationality. However, Smith has quite a difference take on the third. It is here that Smith first brings up his notion about *Systematic Justification*. Williams' thoughts concerning the third condition is solely on imagination, and how one can use it to create new desires. In fact, in the way Williams uses the term, “imagination” is here largely the same thing as “deliberation”.

What Williams mean is that with imagination, one can picture a set of conditions, and then follow the path to what conclusion they would lead to. One can then compare said conclusion with already held beliefs and desires, and discern if said conclusion would be desirable. This sounds akin to, if not necessarily identical with, deliberation, does it not?

While imagination asks us to consider the consequences of certain actions, desires of beliefs, it does not, and this is Smith's main issue, ask us to consider the consequences on a system of beliefs. It asks us if the consequences are coherent with one or a few beliefs or desires, but not necessarily if it is coherent with our entire set of desires or beliefs.

Here's an example; You are unsure if you should run for political office, as it might conflict with time spent with your family. You use your imagination, picturing how it would be like to work in politics, drawing upon the knowledge you have about working in such a field.

Provided that said knowledge is accurate, you can now decide if working in this field would in fact conflict with spending time with your family, and if so, if this a is strong enough merit for you to forgo your political career. But there might be other reasons for going into politics, reasons not covered by this imagination. You might have any number of desires (desire of wealth, power, importance, etc.) that would be served by you entering the political arena, that still aren't covered by the process of imagination which Williams describes. Smith, having noted this, instead wishes to consider the former mentioned Justification, what he calls “the most important form of deliberation”.

...Williams is right, I think, that deliberation can both produce new and destroy old undesired desires but he is wrong that the only, or the most important, way in which this happens I via the exercise of the imagination. For by far the most important way in which we create new and destroy old undesired desires

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11 This is one possible reading of Williams' work. Another is simply that Williams meant exactly what Smith would later suggest, and that once on has used his Imagination to discover the end of some mean, where he also compliant with Condition (1) and (2), he would realize all the effects this would have on his person as a whole. E.g. Said man running for office would come to see, where he in possession of all Relevant Truths and having no False Beliefs, that not only would he have enough or not enough time to spend with his family, but it would also fulfill or fail to fulfill his other desires. There is no reason to assume that a person who has fulfilled (1) and (2) would be so narrow-minded. On this reading, a person who uses his imagination correctly, and possesses (1) and (2), would inevitably start some process of *Systematic Justification*. This would render Smith's point moot.
when we deliberate is by trying to find out whether our desires are *systematically justifiable*.\(^\text{12}\)

What Smith means by *Systematically Justifiable* is a Rawlsian coherence-system of beliefs, a Reflective Equilibrium\(^\text{13}\). As Smith explains it quite eloquently, I shall resort to quoting him again:

...Suppose we take a whole host of desires for specific and general things; Desires that are in fact not derived from any desire for something more general. We could ask ourselves if we wouldn't get a more systematically justifiable set of desires by adding to this whole host of specific and general desires another general desire, or a more general desire still, a desire that, in turn, justifies and explains the more specific desires that we have...For we may properly regard the unity of a set of desires as a virtue, a virtue that in turn makes for the rationality of the set as a whole. For exhibiting unity is partially constitutive of having a systematically justifiable, and so rationally preferable, set of desires, just as exhibiting unity is partially constitutive of having, and so rationally preferable, set of beliefs.\(^\text{14}\)

A standard Rawlsian coherences-system, akin to a house of cards. Some cards are larger, some cards are smaller, and some cards support more cards than others. But in order to have a more stable house, some cards should be replaced, removed, or rearranged. In such a fashion, we deliberate about our desires and beliefs, and create a more unified and coherent system. Smith, however, claims that as we work to establish a more solid and rational system of beliefs, it will in turn create a more solid and rational system of desires. After I remove two cards in my house concerning a belief, the foundation of a desire-card might loosen, and warrant replacement. In Smith's system, both beliefs and desires influence each other on a grand scale, both sets of desires and beliefs need to be coherent in order to be optimally rational, and it is with this process of reason that we create such a system.

### 2.1: Smith and Practical Rationality:

Now that we now know Smith's take on full rationality and normative reasons, we can understand his theory of practical rationality. It must be said that while this paper is concerned with Smith's theory concerning PR\(^\text{15}\), PR for Smith is part of the bigger picture, as PR for Smith is also about morality. To have a moral belief is to have a belief about what one ought to do, and what one ought to do, as previously stated, is based on what normative reasons one have, which in turn is what one's

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12 Ibid, p158-159  
13 As put forth by John Rawls in his magnum opus, *Theory of Justice*.  
14 Ibid, p159  
15 Practical rationality/Practically rational. This abbreviation will be used continuously throughout the paper from this point.
FR self would want one to desire in a given situation\(^{16}\). To be PR is simply to have a matching desire to act (or perhaps not, this is discussed in 3.2) with what one believes one has normative reasons to do.

In *The Moral Problem*, Smith provides his formulation of PR:

\[\text{C2: If an agent believes that she has normative reason to } \Phi \text{ then she rationally should desire to } \Phi\]\(^{17}\)

Translated, this becomes: If an agent believes that, were she optimally compliant with all three conditions of of the FR-system put forth by Smith, she would have a normative reason to \(\Phi\) (drive a tank, perhaps). She is also committed to believing that her now imperfect self (‘everyday rational'-self), should have a desire to \(\Phi\) if she is to be rational. This is the literal translation, but please note that while not explicitly stated in in C2, this formulation is to be taken as an Advisory-formulation of PR, and not a Exemplary-formulation. The difference, put simply, is not that I should have a desire to \(\Phi\) in C because my FR-self has such a desire, but I should \(\Phi\) if my FR-self would advice me to \(\Phi\) in C.\(^{18}\)

For example: When deciding on what to spend my money on, the coat or the bar, I ask myself what my fully rational self would want me to desire (instead of what my FR-self would desire, as would be the Exemplary-formulation), and if I believe my FR-self would desire me to go drinking, then it is PR of me to have a desire to match that belief, i.e. a desire to go drinking instead of spend the money on a new coat. If I instead have a belief of what my FR-self would desire me to do, but no desire to match it (I do not have a desire to go drinking), then I would be irrational.

This formulation does have a weakness, though. What if my beliefs and desires, my imperfectly rational self, are in no way related to my FR-self? What if, should I be FR, I become someone so unlike me that there is scarcely any resemblance? In a reply to another philosopher, Smith addresses this issue with a slightly altered C2 (which I will call RC2, though not specifically named so by Smith). The formulation is as following:

\[\text{RC2: An agent who believes she should } \Phi \text{ in C is committed to believing that if she were fully rational, she would desire that, were she her actual imperfectly rational self, she would } \Phi \text{ in C.}\]

So, with this formulation, what is Practically Rational for me to do is what I believe my fully

\(^{16}\) Fully rational. This abbreviation will be used continuously throughout the paper from this point.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p148

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p151

\(^{19}\) Not actual quote by Smith, but a paraphrasing, and taken directly from *Unprincipled Virtue*, p184
rational self would want me to desire in my situation ('In C'), were she me ('her actual, imperfectly rational self') in C. As Arpaly will point out in 3.2, this formulation still has a most crippling weakness, which will soon become apparent, but will have to wait until Arpaly is properly introduced.

3.0: Arpaly Explains her Opening Position.

...one rarely challenges the claim that acting against one’s best judgment is never rational. Most often, it is simply assumed to be true...In this article I will argue that if we aim purely at providing an account of rationality, without any view to creating a rational agent’s manual, we have to accept the conclusion that acting against one’s best judgment can sometimes be rational. Or rather, to be more precise, I would like to argue that sometimes, an agent is more rational for acting against her best judgment than she would be if she acted in accordance with her best judgment.²⁰

This is then the core of Arpaly's article, her thesis. And this is also what the rest of this paper will be dedicated to unravelling. At first, it might only seem tangentially related to Smith, but this worry will soon put to rest. Arpaly here mentions two things of importance. (1) To act against one's best judgement, that is to act against a decision one has made after one has taken all relevant information one has access to and deliberated, is considered by most philosophers²¹ to be irrational, no matter what. (2) Her argument is concerning PR, not FR. If one wishes to provide a guide ('rational agent's manual') or way to measure PR, then (1) is not necessarily true. More specifically, it is not necessarily true for a theory based upon rationality as coherence, such as Smith's RC2.

That said, we shall soon head deeper into the mire of Arpaly's arguments. First, a short section about what 'acting against one's best judgement' actually entails, and if it is at all possible without Akrasia.

3.1: Acting Against your best judgement and Akrasia:

Let's say you and I engage in a game of chess. You quickly settle for a strategy of attack, thinking it will give you an early upper hand, while I on the other hand stay on the defensive. As we play, I ask you why you chose you current strategy. You reply that given consideration to our previous games, my personality, current form, mood, etc, you judged that this was the best approach. I smile and take another one of your pieces, and since the game has gone poorly for you, I reply “Maybe

²⁰ Arpaly, Unprincipled Virtue, p36.
²¹ Notable exceptions, as provided by Arpaly, are Harry Frankfurt, Robert Audi and Alison McIntyre. Ibid, p37.
you shouldn't act according to your best judgement”. You realize that your current strategy isn't a mean to reach the end you desire (winning you the game), and that you really shouldn't act according to your best judgement. Thus you change you approach.

However, what you have just done, is nothing but formed another judgement, one that you now consider to be the 'best judgement'. We have all heard some proclaim 'I do this against my better judgement', or similar. Within all likelihood, they really haven't formed a best judgement at all (they have not deliberated sufficiently), but is acting out of prima-facie reasons, or they are just indirectly stating that 'what I am about to do might go horribly wrong'. In fact, I would argue that given this understanding of 'best judgement' it seems impossible to act against it, if it comes about via deliberation, unless you consider cases of weakness of will. Ultimately, a 'best judgement' is just an instantiation of instrumental rationality, and I would like to define it as 'what I decide I should do, given the reasons at hand, to most efficiently reach a given end'. This then is why 'acting against one's best judgement' is normally considered always to be irrational, since it can only come about via Akrasia, which is, as noted, considered irrational per near universal consensus.23

3.2: Rationality as Coherence

That covered, we now turn fully to Arpaly and her arguments. Arpaly begins with C2 (as she herself points out in Unprincipled Virtue she is aware of RC2 but the new formulation is not crucial to her argumentation) and its implications for the irrationality of acting against one's best judgement.

It is not hard to see a connection between Smith’s C2 and the claim that it is always irrational to act against one’s best judgement. According to him, it is irrational not to desire to do what one believes would be rational for one to do. If Smith is right, a person who believes she should give money to the Tapir Preservation Fund (TPF) in circumstances C and fails to do so because she has no desire whatsoever to give to the TPF in C is acting irrationally.24

If we believe that our FR-selves would want us to Φ, but we fail to do so because we have no desire to Φ, we are clearly irrational, according to Smith. Arpaly, however, means that if PR is about coherence between beliefs and desires, then such a statement creates implications that not only is it

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22 Literary “at first face”. Means that something is considered briefly or just for its values, reasons or facts that seem self-evident without further reflection on the issue.

23 It has been pointed out to me that this would make the concept of acting according to one's best judgement only trivially true, as whatever you decide on, given ample time to deliberate, must per definition be one's best judgement in that given situation. I must concede that this is the case, and though I lament having to reduce any concept to triviality where as it might otherwise be more useful were it not, it is the only proper course of action given the premises at hand.

24 Ibid, 38.
sometimes PR to act against ones best judgement (to be akratic), but it might sometimes be more rational to act in this way than not to, even if we accept that Akrasia always is irrational.

How is this so? Well, for Smith, PR does not come in degrees. One is rational by having coherence between his belief about what her FR self would want us to desire, were we our actual imperfect self in a given situation, and our actual imperfect self having a desire to match that belief in said situation. If one does not, one is simply irrational. However, if the main point of PR is to be coherent, and not just desiring what one is advised to desire, then this form of coherence is far too narrow. Instead, we should be coherent with all our beliefs and desires that we hold. And this means that sometimes, by being akratic, we are more coherent than if we are not. For Arpaly then, PR can come in degrees. One can be lesser, or greater, PR. The main dispute between Arpaly and Smith, as I have come to understand it, thus boils down to different interpretations of the meaning of 'coherence'. Is this 'Narrow' form of coherence, that concerns itself with one belief and one desire, as represented by Smith, what should matter for PR, or is it the 'Wider' form, which is concerned with all beliefs and all desires, as represented by Arpaly?

Let us return to my conundrum concerning what I should rationally do: Coat or alcohol? According to Smith then, either I make the rational choice (whatever that might be), by acting in accordance with my belief of what my rational self would want me to desire, were he me in that situation, or I am irrational. On Arpaly's view, however, what is rational for me to do is what is more coherent with my beliefs and desires overall. If I make a choice that does not in fact align with most of my beliefs and desires, I will be less rational, but not strictly irrational. While it might sound trivial, it's a vital distinction.

To make her point, Arpaly must first deal with the problem of belief and rationality. Read RC2 again. It seems strange to chalk up measuring PR to what in essence is my belief of what I would desire, were I FR. What if my belief should in fact be unfounded? Couldn't I be mistaken, and severely so, about what I would believe I would desire, or believe I would believe, were I FR? Especially so if my imperfect PR self is highly irrational to begin with (That is, if my 'everyday' self were to have very incoherent beliefs and desires, thus low systematic justification, and perhaps also base many of these on false assumptions and knowledge).

Arpaly continues with summarizing the 'scattered replies' that Smith has made to another philosopher, James Dreier, where he addresses the notion of people that believe they have a Normative Reason for acting, such as perhaps the belief of a Neo-Nazi might hold about exterminating all of the 'lesser races' 25. If such a man believes it is morally right (what he ought to

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25 Arpaly, Unprincipled Virtue, p40
do) to bring about genocide, because he believes that this is what his FR-self would desire, were his FR-self his imperfectly rational self in his situation, then he is also PR if he holds a desire to match it. Calling such people either rational or moral seems to go against many of our intuitions about both rationality and morality.

Smith agrees that this man can clearly not be fully rational, because he has a false belief about what he would desire and he lacks all relevant true beliefs (as it is unlikely that his thoughts about 'lesser races' are true, and that his general beliefs and desires are very coherent), were he FR, but it is still PR to have a belief that Φ is rational, and a desire to act upon it, than to have belief that Φ is rational and no desire to match it (no desire to act on Φ). E.g. A man who holds a belief about genocide being morally right (because his FR-self would desire that his imperfect self desired it in his situation) is PR if his actual, imperfect self holds a desire to commit genocide. This is, Smith claims, because all else being equal, such a man would have a more coherent set of desires and beliefs were he to act, than were he not to.

To have a belief that it would be rational for you to become a hermit and a desire to become a hermit is to have a more coherent psychology than someone who has the belief that it would be rational for her to become a hermit and no desire to match her belief or a desire not to become a hermit. 26

Smith is here leaning on the notion of Akasria always being irrational, deeming (Narrow)-Coherence of Beliefs and Desires to be what makes a man PR or not. The above-mentioned Neo-Nazi is in fact for all intents and purposes PR. Now many of us would protest. Surely, this can not be called 'rational' on any level.

Smith disagrees. Rationality (that is, PR), he claims, is falsely thought of as 'always coming up with the right answer'. This is not so. PR is about being as (Narrowly)-coherent as possible, and RC2 exists to judge if, when presented with a situation to Φ or not, we are rational or not.

Remember the 'crippling weakness' I mentioned in 2.1? This would be it. I would say that If this critique stands, it would damage the notion of RC2 to be held as a 'Rational Agents Manual', to be in any possible way a guide to PR. Even if Smith were to reply that this is not a guide, but a summary of what PR is, then it could be trivialized as 'whatever you believe PR is for you, is PR for you', as PR ultimately hinges upon belief upon how one would be in a state of FR, and nothing else. While it is necessary to base Smith's model on belief, since FR is epistemologically inaccessible to us in our imperfect state of mind, this still does not help to avoid the inevitable conclusion that PR for an agent is arbitrary and a guesswork.

26 Arpaly, paraphrasing Smith. Ibid, p40
Compare this with, for instance, the previously mentioned Humean model. A Humean model of PR gives (1) a satisfactory guide to PR (by deliberating upon what one most desires, and how to reach it), (2) a description of PR (PR is acting in accordance with your desires), and (3), if you apply even the most basic of coherence-systems on the model, a normative explanation of PR (What you should desire is that which is most coherent with all your desires, with weak desires sacrificed for stronger desires, so that overall your desires are optimally fulfilled). Smith's PR answers (1), how to guide us, by appealing to beliefs. (2), what PR is, by saying it is having a desire to match your belief, and (3), what we should desire, by referring to what we believe we would desire, were we FR. I ask the reader to consider this summary, and then ask herself: When we ask questions about what is rational to do or desire, do we really wish an answer that seems altogether rest upon epistemic uncertainty and the fluctuating belief of an agent when she considers some possible state of her rationally perfect self?

As we will see throughout this paper, I think Nomy Arpaly does indeed seem to defend such a Humean model, or at least a model which (1)-(3) can be applied in the same fashion as the Humean and come off better than Smith. I will go through this with more detail in 4.3.

I would also argue that there is another unforeseen weakness in this formulation, that appears to be a result of vagueness (the scourge of philosophical inquiries). While RC2 gives you a belief of what would be rational to desire, it says nothing about it being a sufficiently motivational desire. Compare the following positions:

(1) Belief that X is right in C – Desire to X in C.
(2) Belief that X is right in C – Intent upon Acting on Desire to X in C
(3) Belief that X is right in C – Acting upon Desire to X in C.

It is clear that (3) is the strongest position of the three, but both C2 and RC2 leave it unclear which of the positions is necessarily to have in order to be PR. For instance, say that I have a belief that my FR-self would desire me to go drinking, were he me, and in order to be PR, I must also have a desire to match this belief. Let's assume that I have such a matching desire. However, is this desire strong enough to motivate me into action? Is it overruling the other desire I have to buy the coat? RC2 only claims that to be rational, I must have a matching desire to my belief, but it says nothing about said desires strength. RC2 does seem to be phrased in a much stronger fashion than C2, using “would Φ in C”, but it still leaves it vague if the actual desire to Φ in C is strong enough cause her to Φ. If (1) is sufficient for PR, then we would almost certainly have narrow coherence within all sorts of situations that we otherwise never would have. All that is required is that I recognize what I believe my FR self would advice me to do in a situation, and that I have some sort of desire to match it, even if it just an inkling of a desire, before acting or letting myself be
influenced by a stronger desire. As long as said desire isn't fully snuffed out, I am still to be considered PR. I can have a belief that it is PR to join the army, and a desire to join the army, but at the same time hold a stronger desire to not join the army, and not joining the army, without becoming irrational, since irrationality according to Smith is simply a matter of narrow coherence between desires and beliefs. Should we on the other hand settle for (2), then we would be irrational any time we do not form an intent on acting on what we believe our FR-self would advice us to do, ruling out such situations were I can be rational without having any intent on acting on my desire. (3) is, I would say, far too strong, as it would make us irrational if we are kept from acting (say, by someone subduing us), or have the inability to act (being crippled at birth). The formulation in itself seems to fly in the face of the widely accepted Kantian maxim 'Ought implies can'. Out of the three, (2) seems to me to be how we should understand Smith's formulation.

Let us continue with Arpaly's arguments; Arpaly begs us to consider a student named Sam. Under normal circumstances, Sam is an exemplary student. Sam has deep rooted desires to be one. However, he has an exam coming up in two weeks, and he realizes to his horror that he knows not nearly enough to pass the exam. He has spent far too much time with his friends, and his studies have suffered for it. Sam panics, and in his panic, he decides on the following: He is to become a hermit, completely forsaking his friends and loved ones, for the sake of focusing wholly and utterly on his studies. He imagines that, given enough focus, he can learn enough to pass the exam.

What Sam fails to understand is that social isolation brings about the worst in him. He becomes deeply depressed, seeing no meaning in life or any activities at all. This has happened to Sam before, but at the moment of his panic, he can't recall that it had. So, given Sam's dispositions, he would actually become a worse student were he to isolate himself, than if he were not to. Sam also has an even deeper (“more general”, to use Rawlsian terms) desire to be happy, deeper so than to be an exemplary student, or to pass his exam and become a doctor. On the whole of it, Sam would be less coherent with all his beliefs and desires were he to act on his belief and desire to become a hermit, than were he not to. If Sam were to be struck with Akrasia and be too weak-willed to follow up on his judgement to become a hermit, he would be, on the whole of it, more coherent.

If we are to understand Smith as someone who considers Narrow-Coherence to be what makes one PR, then we must accept that Sam here is irrational. But then the the powerful critique about RC2 would stand as true: PR would ultimately hinge upon our belief about what we would desire, were we fully rational, a belief that can change considerable from day to day, making PR seem slightly arbitrary. Not only that, but it does seem odd that Smith would argue that Sam here is clearly irrational because he is less coherent when he acts against his best judgement and does not become a hermit. Narrowly, he is more coherent, but on all the whole of it, he is far less coherent.
with more beliefs and desires. If RC2 is to be taken as true, because rationality is a matter of coherence between beliefs and desires, then why should we not consider Wider-Coherence instead of Narrow-Coherence? I find this problematic.

If we, for sake of argument, assume that Smith would claim that acting on a false belief about what one would desire if one were FR in C is practically irrational, this would means that RC2 does not provide a formulation for what is PR or not, but that we need to look further than this, and that PR does come in degrees. We would need to adopt some form of Wider-Coherence. But, if PR is concerned with wider-coherence, then an akratic action can be more PR if it is more widely coherent, even if not fully rational. And from this, it seems that one really can rationally act against ones best judgement. But Smith does not in fact believe this, so the question ultimately becomes: What is more important, Narrow or Wide-coherence?

3.3: The Problem Concerning Akrasia

Arpaly paraphrases a reply from Smith which is meant to respond to the problem concerning people like Sam, who has a false belief about what his FR-self would desire that his imperfect self would do in this situation. If Smith can successfully defuse why we can call such people like Sam, or the man who believes the government is experimenting on his cat as PR, he might be able to strengthen his position.

To his original claim that it is always rational to desire what one believes one would desire if one were rational, Smith could add “provided that the belief itself was formed in response to evidential considerations, rather than irrationally, as the result of the intervention of self-deception, delusion, depression, etc.”

If these peoples beliefs are created by a 'clouded judgement' of some sort, then they are irrational because of that, and RC2 holds. If they weren't irrational to begin with (due to fear, lunacy, depression or similar) they wouldn't have such crazy notions about what their fully rational-self would want them to desire if they were their own imperfectly rational self in their situation, and thus not just every belief about FR can be the foundation PR. Now, please note that we have added another claim to what being PR is about. Not only must you follow RC2, but RC2 must be based on

27 Arpaly paraphrases Smith as saying 'he admits that they cannot be fully rational [People like Sam who hold a false belief about what their FR-selves would desire in C] even if their desires match their belief, but he maintains that given their false beliefs that Φ-ing would be rational for them than not Φ-ing' Given this, it would be Practically Rational for Sam to become a hermit, but not fully rational. Ibid, p40.

28 Ibid, p43.
a belief that is in itself not caused by irrational influences. Furthermore, how exactly can we tell whether-or-not a mental state should be deemed to cause irrationality?

It might seem to one, in the spirit of *The Moral Problem*, that ruling out irrational best judgments, irrational beliefs about what one would want if one were rational, is as easy as ruling out a few obvious cases—cases where depression, fatigue, stress, or other such factors intervened in the agent’s belief formation. To the factors that Smith mentions as irrational it seems easy to adjust a few more: fear, as in Sam’s case, low self-esteem, and the other usual suspects...But this is not the right way to picture things29

Once again, Arpaly ask us to picture the student Sam, and his irrational decision to become a hermit. Arpaly now introduces another character, Paul. Paul is, like Sam, a student who procrastinates too much. He too has been struck with sudden realization of the oncoming exams and the insufficient time available for him to study accordingly. Like Sam, Paul becomes inefficient and gloomy if separated from friends and family. But, unlike Sam, Paul does not form the belief that he should become a hermit. Instead, he judges that the best course of action would be to dedicate three hours a day to his studies.

Yet, Paul made this decision while under the same duress as Sam. How come Paul came to the correct 'rational' decision, while Sam did not?30 If we are to accept Smith's objection that decisions must respond to evidential considerations rather than the influence of a certain mental states, Arpaly retorts, then we must accept that Paul is as rational and/or irrational as Sam. Of course, this is not something we would like to admit.

Of all the arguments made so far, I find this one to be the most effective in its overall scope and persuasion, and a quite brilliant response to Smith's purposed solution. For instance, what would happen if Sam or Paul would have formed their judgements while influenced by, say, felicity? Or serenity? Are these too to be considered 'irrational influences'? As it stands, I am hard pressed to come up with any state of mind that does not influence or otherwise distort our judgement in some fashion, and I invite the reader to engage in this exercise too. What Smith's claim concerning the influence of mental states upon rationality then becomes is something far more trivial. It would appear that a mental state is considered to be an irrational influence when it helps to form a judgement that we consider irrational from PR as Coherence point-of-view (both Narrow and Wide). Or, as Arpaly succinctly puts it;

29 Ibid, p44.  
30 For this scenario, we are to assume that both Sam and Paul have vastly the same beliefs and dispositions, as an argument might otherwise be made that while it may appear that they are facing the same situation, it is in fact the lack of a certain set of desires and beliefs which causes Sam to form an irrational judgement while Paul do not. In real life, this may very well be the case, but it is not relevant for the point being made in the argument.
Whatever it is that caused Sam to be irrational, to reach a conclusion so much at odds with his own beliefs, is not of the essence: whatever made him irrational, be it anxiety, guilt, fatigue, a nefarious neurosurgeon, or his purely intellectual limitations, did so not simply by its existence but rather by the fact that it disrupted the path from Sam’s evidence to a warranted conclusion. Smith can then not use ‘irrational influences’ to explain away the strange or mad beliefs an agent might have about their FR-self.

If we instead support Araply's view of PR, where PR is a matter of Wide-coherence, then it is not impossible to be akratic like Sam (having a belief and best judgement about what one rationally should do, but no desire to match it), but still be PR, for when Sam is akratik, he violates the Narrow-coherence of RC2 (he has the belief, but no desire), but with this violation he can at times act in accordance with Wide-Coherence. By being akratic, he is incoherent in a minor way, but overall more coherent. To put it the form of an analogy: By inadvertently taking a step back instead of a step forward on the game-board of rationality, he gets boosted five steps forward. Akrasia might therefore often be a clear sign of irrationality, but given the Wide view of rationality, it's to considered merely as a heuristic tool. An akratic person will more often than not make irrational actions, this we can conclude without further debate. It does not follow, however, that such a person will be irrational per necessity, as according to this view, rationality is about being as coherent as possible in the big picture.

3.4: Conclusions About RC2: To Walk the Narrow Road or Not?

In the beginning of this paper, I asked which purchase, a night on the town or a warm winter-coat, it would be rational I should spend my hard-gained earnings on. Smith would claim that if I were committed to believing that my FR-self would want me to desire buying the coat (or drinking), were he my actual imperfect self in my situation, then whatever I believe is then the PR for me to do, and I should desire to do it, because it makes me more coherent. Both Arpaly and I have pointed out the arbitrary nature of an answer which relies on a belief about what one should want oneself desire, were one fully rational. In return, the question has also been raised that if rationality is a matter of coherence, then the Narrow road does not seem to represent coherence of beliefs and desires nearly as well as the Wide road. If we chose to walk the Narrow road, our discussion ends here. Arpaly has nothing more to say about RC2 and Narrow-coherence, and for the moment, neither have I. I will return to the issue later on (in 4.2), but before that, let's assume that we do indeed decide to walk the Wide road, as this is where Arpaly's article leads us. In less poetic terms, the discussion

31 Ibid, p45.
from now on is solely concerned with Wide-coherence, Akrasia and the demand of proper
deliberation placed as a condition upon PR (see 4.0) This is because Arpaly must now defend her
thoughts on Akrasia and Wide-coherence, and as her work is not yet done, neither is mine.

4.0: Wide-Coherence and Proper Deliberation

In order to defend the view of Wide-coherence, Arpaly must first avoid a counter-argument. Those
opposing this view, the men and women whom, while still claiming that Practical Rationality as
Wide Coherence is a sufficient explanation for PR, might still disagree about Akrasia, claiming that
when I am akratic I am still irrational per definition. Not a lesser degree of PR, but irrational.
Everything is not rational, no matter what, just because the big picture becomes more coherent, they
would claim. Even if an action caused by Akrasia might better cohere with a wider set of beliefs
and desires than an action that is not caused by it, I am still irrational. Why? Because if I deliberate
upon what to do, reach a best judgement, and then do not act accordingly (without getting new
information or deliberating again, and thus just creating a new best judgement) I am breaking a
condition demanded of PR, and thus I am in fact irrational. And even if we accept that Akrasia is
not a necessary a sign of irrationality, that I can be rational even if struck by weakness of will in
face of my best judgement, then when I act against my best judgement (like Sam does), I still act
without proper deliberation, without giving due consideration and deliberating upon my reasons.

4.1: Acting on Hidden Motives

This reply seems to hold some merit. Sam is irrational per necessity because he is not following
proper procedures demanded of rationality. He does not follow his best judgement, and is thus
irrational per definition. How does Arpaly respond to it?

When Sam deliberated and reached the conclusion that he should become a hermit, there were many
reasons not to do so which he overlooked reasons which were, given Sam’s overall beliefs and desires,
overwhelming reasons not to become a hermit. All these reasons were given by the nature of Sam’s overt
psychology—they were not hidden from him in some black box of the unconscious, but were simply
overlooked in his deliberations at the time, his vision of himself being clouded due to his fear of exams
and such like. In failing to become a hermit Sam might, unbeknownst to him, be acting for the very same
reasons which he overlooked in his deliberation. His visceral reluctance to abide by his decision, which
he himself perceives as weakness or laziness, was (let us imagine) in fact the result or the embodiment of
an awareness, inaccessible at the moment to his deliberation, of all the things that are, given his beliefs
and desires, overwhelmingly wrong with becoming a hermit. Far from being the result of fatigue, major
depression, or some general lack of self-control conditions equally likely to prevent him from following
through with a good decision as with a bad one – Sam’s lack of motivation was a response to the badness of his decision or, rather, to the same factors which make his decision bad... And this is the way in which I would like to argue that Sam would be considerably less rational (or more irrational) if he were to follow his best judgment that he should become a hermit... 32

Arpaly appears to dance around the issue, claiming that even if Sam is akratic, it is not what matters. For while he has formed a best judgement to become a hermit and failed to act upon it, his failure is not due to some “result of fatigue, major depression or lack of self-control”, but due to him actually acting on other reasons, reason which for him make more sense, but were simply overlooked at the time of his deliberation.

This, however, is not a proper answer to the claim made by the opposition. The opposition has demanded that the condition of Akrasia not be broken. Sam clearly acts against his best judgement, without forming a new best judgement, so he is still irrational. Arpaly's solution is to avoid the issue: She rejects the condition of Akrasia, arguing that what matters is that we are responsive to the right kind of reasons, and that if we are, we can not be irrational per definition, even if we are struck by Akrasia. I have already explained why (3.3) on the view of Wide-Coherence this is so, and later (4.3) I will argue that Wide-Coherence and being responsive to the right kind of reasons, which Arpaly means (explained below) is what makes us rational, are in fact the same. But if we are to accept that it is reason-responsiveness that matters for PR, we must accept that in some situations (like in Sam's case when he does not become a hermit), we can be rational without deliberating.

When Sam does not become a hermit, not only does he acts against his best judgement (and thus he is akratik), but he acts without deliberating, and this is something few are willing to accept as rational. He clearly has deliberated upon becoming a hermit, but then does something completely different, without further deliberation, yet comes off as rational. To solve this, Arpaly boldly rejects deliberation itself as a necessary demand for rationality, and she has a plethora of arguments to back it up. Sam does not need to deliberate to be PR, and even if he does deliberate, his inability or unwillingness to follow through with his best judgement does not make him irrational. What Sam needs is to be responsive to the right kind of reasons. In the following chapter, I will explain Arpaly's thoughts on deliberation itself, and her arguments for why we can't demand it to be a necessary part of rational thought or action. Following this, I will summarize Arpaly's theory of reason-responsiveness and wide-coherence as I understand it.

4.2: Rationality without Deliberation

'Deliberation, why must we take that as a necessary component of rationality?' Arpaly asks.33

To some of us, this might seem like a strange question, for deliberation has been closely intertwined with rationality since the beginning of the discourse on rationality. With our current use and understanding of the word 'rationality' within philosophy, can we readily apply it to something that excludes deliberation? Arpaly means that we can.

In order to save space, I will list those arguments I find most important or persuasive, as Arpaly has many examples listed in her article. To lay the groundwork for her argument, Arpaly first asks us thus to consider a special set of actions; fast actions. Within this set belongs any sort of actions to which we might casually call 'instinctive'. They are not primal, preprogrammed responses – such as when I with haste jerk my hand off a hot stove, that I by mistake had taken for cool when deciding to lean upon it – but the kind of reliable 'background knowledge' of a pattern that we have come taking for granted, almost like a flowchart that we know by heart. What matters is not that I deliberate upon an action, but that I act for good reasons (which I take to mean 'the right kind of reasons').

A suitable example (borrowed directly from Arpaly) would be tennis. When playing tennis, the player does not deliberate upon which action to take as he sends the ball flying across the court towards the opponents side, or when scrambling to catch a smash-serve, as there would be no time for deliberation. The player simply acts. Now, if we should insist on our demand that all actions need to be deliberated upon if they are to called rational, Arpaly reasons, then we could neither call a perfect play upon the court rational (as in 'that move was brilliant!'), nor could we call a poor one irrational ('What the hell were you thinking there?'), as we do not assume that a player can deliberate during an intensive and hectic match. Conversation is a similarly fast-paced situation where one does always have time to deliberate. A comedian of wit and tact can yet act for good reasons, by trusting her instincts, without deliberating upon them.

In a similar case, Arpaly continues, we frequently judge people to be rational when forming certain types of beliefs, and be motivated by them, even though there is no deliberation involved34. Should I hear the honking of a car-horn somewhere behind me when I am walking down the street late at night, it seems rational of me to assume that there is indeed a car approaching from the rear, and I should rapidly steer my steps towards the pavement. In a similar case, should I see three men in identical suits and ties exit a car, I need not deliberate upon the fact that I have just seen three

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33 Paraphrasing Arpaly. Ibid, p51.
34 Ibid, p53.
men and suits exit a car, to call that belief rational. There is no reason, given ordinary circumstances, to assume anything unusual or erroneous about my perception, so why should we hold my belief that my perception is true as irrational because I did not deliberate upon it being true or not?

Arpaly also highlights another situation where we do not demand deliberation in order to consider something rational: Deliberation itself. If we are to demand that all rational actions be caused by deliberation, then one can question whether or not deliberation itself is rational. When I decide upon what to do with my money, I start to deliberate, but the cause of said deliberation is not deliberation itself, but something else (a sudden realization that I must think further upon this, perhaps), and so my deliberation cannot be rational, because it was not a result of a previous deliberation. And so it goes on, *ad infinitum*.

Lastly, Arpaly introduces the concept of *dawning* to illustrate her point that people may come to rational conclusions without deliberation. She refers to the classic novel *Candide*, where in the naïve main-character is forced to come to terms with a brutal and uncaring world that is much at conflict with his expectations of it, a view laid down by his teacher Pangloss (in a beautiful parody of Gottfried Leibniz). Counter to how it appears to be, Pangloss proclaims, the world is in fact “the best of all possible worlds”. In the novel, Candide does not deliberate upon the teachings of Pangloss being false, but it is something that slowly comes to him over the course of extended travels and facing new evidence. Whenever asked if he still believes that the world is 'the best of all possible worlds', Candide still replies that this must be the case, citing numerous different arguments.

Yet slowly, after many encounters and situations which erode his previously held beliefs little by little, he realized when asked the same question one day that he does not in fact believe this to be the best of all possible worlds, and he has not for some time. This realization as 'dawned' upon him, and even though it has not come to him via a process of active deliberation, it seems rational, and is be founded on good reasons. Sam, even if he does not deliberate when he acts against his judgement to become a hermit, he acts for good reasons, although reasons unknown to him. If Sam brings up on

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35 Infinite regress is always a major issue within philosophy, and should be avoided whenever possible, but the truth is that such a thing can not always be done. Like a three-year-old asking 'why?' over and over again, at some point, we must answer 'because'. Yet I think Arpaly here willfully misrepresenting a problem to make a grander point (that not all rational actions require deliberation). All systems are based on axioms – an assumption we take for granted because otherwise we could not use said system for our intended purposes -- and rationality is no different. Claiming that 'not all that is rational need to be caused by deliberation, for then deliberation can not be rational' is a non-issue, as the issue resides outside the system and is made invalid by an axiom, the axiom saying that rationality begins with deliberation, and deliberation in itself needs not to be caused by deliberation to be considered rational. Arpaly might challenge the existence of such an axiom, arguing that her theory can explain things better and with less unfounded assumptions (like this axiom), but ultimately, an axiom must always be placed *somewhere*
a later occasion, perhaps at a gathering of friends, that he wanted to become a hermit, but was too weak-willed to act upon his decision, it might dawn upon him that he actually did not have very good reasons at all to become a hermit, and he reaches this without any kind of deliberation at all. After listing her arguments, Arpaly make a summary statement:

(1) A theory of rationality should not assume that there is something special about an agent's best judgement. An agent's best judgement is just another belief, and something to conflict with one's best judgement is nothing more dramatic than ordinary inconsistency of beliefs, or between beliefs and desires. (2) When discussing beliefs, one should count all the beliefs an agent actually has, not only the beliefs that she knows she has at the time of deliberation... (3) It may well be that for an agent to have reason to Φ, Φ-ing should be a good practical conclusion from his beliefs and desires; but it is not necessary for him to be able to actually reach this conclusion by deliberation... In other words, for one to have a reason, one does not need to believe, or be disposed to believing, that one has a reason. Finally, (4) for an agent to be acting for a (good) reason R, she does not need to know that she is acting for (good) reason R...

4.3: 'Responsive to the right reasons' is Wide-Coherence

Given her arguments for rationality being possible without deliberation, and the summary quote at the end of the last chapter, how are we to understand Arpaly's full stance on rationality? Is rationality coherence, or is it being responsive to the right kind of reasons? On my reading of her, I would say that she means that being responsive to the right kind of reasons is being responsive to reasons that in turn are generated by a system of wider-coherence, to which I think (2) and (3) is a good indicator of. The 'right kind of reasons' are, as I understand them, those more general, deep seated beliefs and desires (remember the Rawlsian Coherence-system from 2.0), compared to those of lesser importance. What makes Sam irrational is that when he reasons to become a hermit so that he can study, he is acting on a less important reason than he should (to pass the test and become a doctor). If he were to act on this reason, he would be acting from the wrong kind of reason, for there are more important reasons for Sam (to be happy), which will not be fulfilled if he acts from the reason that he should study. If Sam would be PR, he would be responsive to the right kind of reasons, the right kind of reasons being those that are most important in your system of wider-coherence of beliefs and desires. If we accept that reason-responsiveness is what makes someone rational, and that what matters is that we are as coherent as possible, then there is no need to say that Akrasia is per definition irrational.

Now, is this understanding of PR superior Smith's? I would say it is. Firstly, it eliminates the

factor of belief as foundation for PR (as explained in 2.1 and 3.2), the foundation of RC2 which risks turning PR slightly arbitrary. Secondly, it better represents rationality as coherence (as argued for in 3.2), and gives clear and comprehensive arguments for why we should take account of all an agents beliefs and desires. Thirdly, it helps us explain those odd situations were people deliberating from very poor reasons are to be considered rational in their actions, where as the very same people who deliberate from poor reasons but do not follow through with their mad schemes are considered irrational. As noted in 3.2, I find Arpaly's model to be a well-functioning application of the Humean model, but with her own twist. To be PR revolves around our actual desires, and how we structure them. Just like the Humean model, we are to take into account all our desires, and sort them according to strength. When we add a coherence system, we are thus responsive to reasons when we are responsive to stronger, more general, more coherent desires.

Still, while one might feel that her system is superior, one can still be reluctant in accepting a system of rationality that does not demand deliberation as necessary component in rational action. In response to this, I would claim that perhaps we are unsure about what we mean when we demand that an action must be deliberated upon. Most understandings of what it means to perform a rational action seem to demand that we actively and with intent deliberate upon an issue, but then many common actions would be either irrational or non-rational, as we rarely do this in everyday life. Instead, I propose we make a distinction between active deliberation, and passive deliberation, were passive is to be taken as sufficient for PR.

4.4: Why Passive Deliberation is Sufficient for Practical Rationality

I'd like to take the time to explain further why this distinction is necessary. Mainly, it's to save us the trouble of having to battle our intuitions, were we to accept a reason-responsive system such as Arpaly's, where we are forced to abandon the long held tenet that deliberation is a necessary part of deliberation. The statement that rationality does not demand deliberation is counter-intuitive, I would say, I feel that this will be the hardest bit to swallow for many that otherwise think that Arpaly might very well be onto something. In my eyes, PR is reason-responsiveness as understood by wider-coherence, and Akrasia is not a necessary sign of irrationality. If we accept my distinction of passive and active deliberation, we would not need to abandon deliberation to accept reason-responsiveness, but merely abandon our demand that deliberation always be thought of as active, and we might convince others to relinquish their doubts of reason-responsiveness as wider-coherence.

To make my point, I'd like to use the same arguments as listed above, were Arpaly claims that
these illustrations exemplify actions or situations which we would like to call rational, but sadly can not if deliberation is to be a mandated condition of rationality. I argue that these instances are examples of deliberation after-all. Not active deliberation, but passive, which is quite adequate.

As I see it, the question concerning fast actions and conversations is whether or not we are to consider these 'instincts' (making a quick and witty retort, or intuitively responding to a smash-serve from your tennis opponent) as deliberative or not. I would argue that in at least some fashion, they are.

Consider the tennis player, for example. In order for him to become a good tennis-player, and I assume that he is not some sort of savant in the area of tennis, he must have played dozens upon dozens of matches. In every match, he makes an error of one kind or another. He moves to the left instead of the right when his opponent serves his ball, or he counters the serve with a play that lands in the net instead of in the opposing players court. For every error, said player will learn. He will have enough time to think 'Hm, the body-language of opposing player signals that he will serve the ball towards the left, not the right', or 'angling my hand when countering will net the ball, not send it clear over'. Granted, this might take a significant amount of time for a less skilled player, but eventually, any decent player will be able to adjust his muscle-control accordingly, and predict how his opponent will respond, and what is a feint and what is not. Holding true for all of them is that they all learn from experience, seeing the result of one set of and noting accordingly if the result was beneficial or not.

This process is, in essence, deliberation. If Φ in C (playing a certain kind of ball in response to a certain kind of move by the opponent) causes a result that makes my overall coherent desires less optimally achieved (as said kind of response causes me to lose points in the game, which runs counter to my overall desires), I should not Φ in C. Now, imagine a sufficiently experienced tennis-player, who has already mapped out most of the 'in case of A, respond with B, unless C and D also happens, to which Y is the appropriate response, but only if also..', and so on. When she now appears to act on 'instinct', what she is in fact doing is following a pre-set algorithm of deliberated actions and responses, what I to call passive deliberation. I say that it is not the presence of active deliberation that makes a decision rational or not, but that the decision is itself is based on sufficiently deliberated information that the agent can draw upon and make use of. If a situation is similar enough to another situation, one that we have already deliberated upon, then further active deliberation would gain us nothing, yet my action can still be considered rational. If I have blocked the same kick in a martial-arts tournament hundreds of times, and know full well what said block leaves me vulnerable to, and what counter-attacks I can perform, then it can be called a rational action without the presence of active deliberation.
This very same reason applies to when I 'instinctively' form the epistemological belief that there are indeed three men in identical suits exiting a car down the street. I have had enough similar experiences in my life to assume correctly that this is the case. My brain will instantly tell me 'conditions A-P are met, this follows the usual algorithms, carry on', and I need not deliberate further. My only active part is a lightning-fast question in deliberating whether or not what I see is indeed true, and it happens so fast that I take no note of it, because everything falls within the usual parameters.

If, however, this is not the case, and what I see do not match any pre-laid pattern, my active deliberation will be engaged. If the three men I see suddenly take off their faces and exchange them with each-other with nightmarish glee, I might very well pause and consider if what I see is real or not, simply because it does not match previously deliberated upon information. Just as a computer who has run the same process a thousand times before need not attribute nearly the same amount of processing-power as the first time it ran the procedure, so does an agent not need to actively deliberate to be called rational, as long as a situation is similar enough to a previous one.

In the case of *dawning*, then, I would say that this is indeed deliberation. Whenever Candide takes note of a new set of circumstances that conflicts with his world-view, he does indeed deliberate upon it, but the deliberation is only concerned with one set of circumstances, and not the whole assortment of them weighted against each-other. For example, when Candide takes notice of one horrible situation that goes against his view of the world, he only deliberates quickly, measuring this situation alone against all the arguments for his world view. Naturally, he explains this away as either an anomaly or fitting with his current paradigm after-all. However, when enough anomalies have been encountered, and Candide is asked if he still considers the world to be 'the best of all possible worlds', he responds that he does not, because when he now thinks about it, he takes into account all the anomalies encountered in comparison with his held views, instead of just a few at a time. A pattern of deliberation has been created, made up of all the previous instances of rapid deliberation, which is more convincing and coherent than the previous deliberated upon belief (that the world is the best of all possible worlds). What Candide does when he is asked to deliberate this final time is simply to access this pattern.

If we accept my understand of the issue as correct, Student Sam can be described as deliberating sufficiently as it is. Even though he does actively deliberate upon the issue of whether or not to become a hermit, and though he suffers from *Akrasia* when he does not act in accordance with his best judgement, Sam's action can still be considered to be based on deliberation. He is rational because his brain, unbeknownst of him, has accessed the far larger sum of coherent, considered reasons that he has deliberated on before, and that his mind reaches for within him without him
actively knowing it. He is acting on passive deliberation, not active. Sam has has gone through such situations before, for the reasons are “not locked into his unconscious, but overlooked”, and as mentioned earlier by Arpaly. He does know what social isolation does to him (it makes him depressed and unproductive), and so it would not be unduly to reason that he has deliberated upon this issue before, and it has created a coherent set of beliefs and ideas in him to respond to just such a situation, just like Candide has created such a set when provided with sufficient data anomalies to override his previous set. If we do not assume that deliberation must largely be an active process – Sitting down with a cup of tea and thinking hard about all one's options – but can function if it is based upon sufficient previously deliberated-upon-data, then people like Sam meet the challenge about rationality necessitating deliberation.

Now, this is not to say that all instances of Akrasia are instances of passive deliberation 'taking the wheel', or that we can have passive deliberation in every situation. As I have noted, passive deliberation requires previously deliberated upon situations and a pre-existing 'pattern' in our brain for which our mind to rely on. Mental states can affect our deliberation, and this can cause Akrasia. But it is not the Akrasia which makes us irrational, but that we act for the wrong reasons. If I form the best judgement to Φ in C, but out of fear I do not Φ, then I am akratik for acting against my best judgement, but irrational for I am acting out of the wrong reason (fear) than out of the right reason (my best judgement). In this specific C, there is no passive deliberation for which I can rest my reason to act upon, there is just fear. Please do remember that as explained in 3.3, any mental state can cause us to act for bad reasons, not just the 'bad' ones. There are some which tend to cause us to act for the wrong reasons more frequently, but these can not, as Smith attempts, be explained away with one broad generalization, as they do not cause us to 'miss the mark' per necessity. Similarly, I do not expect my formulation of Passive Deliberation to cover all possible scenarios. A following postulation can still be made wherein (1) there is a man which has a best judgement (to go drinking), and (2) he is struck by Akrasia (he doesn't go drinking), yet (3) unwittingly acts on good reasons (he has a job-interview this evening and drinking would ruin it) but (4) has no passive deliberation to combine with such good reasons (he completely and utterly forgot about his interview, and have not deliberated sufficiently upon it to create a passive deliberation-pattern). This man has acted for good reasons, but without deliberation, thus not meeting the challenge about rationality and deliberation. A possible answer to this might be that this man might just be lucky, and since he does not know about his interview, he isn't acting out of good reasons at all, but is acting out of the wrong one (whatever created the Akrasia). I do nonetheless concede that the reader or others might very well create a scenario where the challenge of reason-responsiveness and deliberation can not be met, even with passive deliberation.
Finally, the reader might now ask himself if these passive deliberations yield a 'best judgement' in the terms described by Arpaly throughout her paper, and I would have to say that they do not, at least not without trivializing 'best judgement' even further. What is a best judgement? It's a process of deciding upon what course of action holds most merit, given the reasons at hand. But said reasons must actually be 'at hand', we must be consciously aware of them to make a judgement. Granted, I might, like Sam, be struck by Akrasia and act on my passive deliberation. But even though said passive deliberation is more reason-responsive, it is still not a judgement as we understand it. I take it as a conceptual necessity that a judgement is made by an active deliberation, born from a certain set of premises, much like a syllogism, to reach a conclusion. If certain reasons are not part of the syllogism, the judge not being aware of them, they do not get to count as part of the judgement. If we were to allow passive deliberation to generate best judgements, then 'best judgement' would no longer mean 'what I decide I should do, given the reasons at hand, to most efficiently reach a given end', but 'that which moves me into action, as long as it is caused by some form of deliberation'. The agents conscious part of a judgement would be completely nullified, and it would be impossible to tell when someone really is acting in accordance with or against their best judgement (even for the agent, who might be unable to tell if it is Akrasia or a best judgement).

5.0: Endnotes: What about my dilemma?

To tie the end to the beginning, I should try to answer, as best I can, the question posed. Ultimately, it is up to each and everyone of us to decide what theory of rationality we wish to abide (unless we consider Meta-theories about what is rational to deem a rational theory, but that's a story for another time), and so there is no clear answer. Smith's theory would provide me with a simple explanation to what is rational to do, but it does not take the bigger picture into consideration. Arpaly's theory, which I deemed to be superior (4.2), allows more flexibility within rationality, allowing it to better match our intuitions about rationality, but it lacks the clear-cut simplicity of Smith's.

If I were to be placed in the situation as I described it, I would prefer to look at the reasons I have now, and weigh them against each-other to find out which would most likely lead me to an end which in turn I both desire and creates a minimal of undesirable side-effects. I could of course pick a choice that I in the end do not have the right reasons for taking, making the procedure of choosing rational, but the choice irrational, or at least not optimally rational. I am, though, only human, and we can not expect humans to always make the rational choice. Should I still act against what I think is the correct decision, I might either be akratik and acting out of the wrong reasons, or akratik and
acting out of the right reasons. The wrong reasons might be such things as fear, guilt, shame, or perhaps ecstasy and joy. The right reasons might be all the reasons I have overlooked in my active deliberation, but of which I have a pre-established pattern in my mind, and thus my action corresponds with my passive deliberation, or perhaps my formulation of passive deliberation does not cover all cases, and I act out of the right reasons without deliberating upon it at all.

No matter the specifics of what results in my action, I agree with Arpaly: What makes a human rational is that she acts for the right reasons.

6.0: Bibliography


