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# AKRASIA AND THE PROBLEM OF THE UNITY OF REASON

*Derek Baker*

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## *Abstract*

Joseph Raz and Sergio Tenenbaum argue that the Guise of the Good thesis explains both the possibility of practical reason and its unity with theoretical reason, something Humean psychological theories may be unable to do. This paper will argue, however, that Raz and Tenenbaum face a dilemma: either the version of the Guise of the Good they offer is too strong to allow for weakness of will, or it will lose its theoretical advantage in preserving the unity of reason.<sup>1</sup>

The Guise of the Good thesis—also called ‘the Scholastic view’—is a commitment to a necessary truth about the nature of intentional action:

GUISE: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent has an attitude that presents reason in favour of *X*ing.

Joseph Raz and Sergio Tenenbaum have argued that the thesis has substantial explanatory power.<sup>2</sup> Anyone who pursues worthless ends must do so because he is mistaken about what he ought to do. We can explain why the pursuit of such ends is contrary to reason by reference to the inaccuracy of one’s practical attitudes;<sup>3</sup> hence, practical and theoretical reason will turn out to be species of the same thing. And Michael Smith, while rejecting GUISE, seems to allow that if it were true it would provide an easy explanation of the possibility of reasons for and against intrinsic desires.<sup>4</sup>

I will argue, however, that only a very strong version of GUISE has this theoretical advantage, and this form is unable to account for akrasia. Weaker forms of GUISE can account for akrasia, but at the cost of recreating the problems explaining the unity of reason that plague the rival theory, psychological Humeanism.

Three points of clarification should be made about GUISE. First, ‘attitude’ is a placeholder for some psychological act to be specified (in section 2). We will see that different versions of Scholasticism offer different specifications. Second, this paper will talk about the attitudes in question as presenting reasons, but this is consistent either with thinking that these reasons are normatively fundamental, or explained by another normative category,

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<sup>2</sup> See Raz, ‘Explaining Normativity: On Rationality and the Justification of Reason’, *Ratio (new series)* 12:4 (1999), pp. 354-79; and Tenenbaum, *Appearances of the Good: an Essay on Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Note that none of this rules out the possibility of *justifiably* making a mistake because of misleading evidence. It is simply to point out that motives can easily be criticized as mistaken on the Scholastic picture; and so it is fairly obvious that on such a view at least one kind of consideration, that the motivating state is mistaken or accurate, can serve as a reason bearing on one’s intrinsic motives.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, ‘A Constitutivist Theory of Reasons: Its Promise and Parts’, *Law, Ethics, and Philosophy* 1 (2013).

such as values. Again, specific versions of Scholasticism will differ on these points. Third, the verb ‘presents’ is left deliberately vague. There are two ways in which the attitudes can be thought of as presenting their object as favoured by reasons, to be discussed in section 1.1.

Humean Psychology is the denial of GUISE. It holds that representational states and motivation can vary independently.<sup>5</sup> Stated more precisely, it is:

HUMEAN: Possibly, an agent intentionally performs action *X*, and that agent has no attitude presenting reason in favour of *X*ing.

Versions of HUMEAN again differ on specifics—on the psychological states responsible for intentional action and representing, for example. Confusingly, within debates on these specifics, ‘Humean’ is often used to name the belief-desire model, which some of the theories that count as Humean for my purposes deny.<sup>6</sup> For this discussion, ‘Humean Psychology’ will be, as I said, the denial of GUISE, and hence the thesis that motives and representations of value can vary independently.

HUMEAN seems like it will entail one of four things about practical reason, best illustrated by first considering three rival interpretations of Hume, and then Michael Smith’s argument for internalism (or later constitutivism) about reasons for action. A brief presentation of these views will help illuminate explanatory potential of GUISE.

### 1. Understanding Humeanism and Scholasticism

We can start with Christine Korsgaard, who understands Hume to be an error-theorist about practical reason.<sup>7</sup> If motives vary independently of our judgments and beliefs, then two people could want totally different things despite having the same judgments about how things are in the world, drawing the same inferences from the same starting points, interpreting the evidence in the same way—in other words, despite absolutely no differences in what is ordinarily called ‘reasoning’.

But this suggests, to Korsgaard’s Hume at least, that ‘practical reason’ is an oxymoron. Reason is about determining how the world is, a wholly theoretical matter. Practical matters are matters of what to do, something determined by motives free of rational control.

The second interpretation of Hume is as an instrumentalist (this is the orthodox reading). Here, the thought is, there is a class of facts about how the world is that will also be seen by an agent as facts about what to do—facts about the causal consequences of actions, and hence which actions are most likely to promote her desires.

Both of the above readings agree that for Hume reason is always theoretical reason. On the instrumentalist interpretation, practical (i.e. instrumental) reason *reduces* to theoretical reason, whereas Korsgaard understands the consequence to be eliminativist.

Kieran Setiya, on the other hand, reads Hume as having a robust notion of practical reason—he simply regards practical reason as wholly distinct from the theoretical.

...[T]here is a sense in which Hume *is* a sceptic about practical reason... But the sense is limited: he is a sceptic about practical reason... only on a *rationalist* account of what it must be. For Hume, ethical rationalism is the attempt to model practical on theoretical reason, and it comes in the end to a

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Smith, ‘The Humean Theory of Motivation’, *Mind* 96:381 (1987), pp. 36-61.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Richard Holton, *Willing, Wanting, Waiting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Korsgaard, ‘The Normativity of Instrumental Reason’, in *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 27-68.

confusion of the two. When this confusion is cleared away, Hume finds it misleading, rather than helpful, to apply the term ‘reason’ in ethics at all...<sup>8</sup>

According to Setiya, reasons for action should be explained (and are, for Hume) in terms of virtues, or good dispositions of practical thinking. Setiya’s interpretation shows that a psychological Humean need not embrace a minimalist picture of practical reason. It also shows that there is substantial theoretical pressure to do so. Notice that Setiya’s Hume offers an explicitly disjunctive theory of reason. Practical reason is not like theoretical reason, and this raises the question of why we think that these are instances of the same thing at all, rather than two very different kinds of normative requirement (and corresponding capacities for meeting these requirements) that by an accident of language happen to share a name.

This leaves the normative significance of practical reason obscure. We want, for example, to call immoral behaviour ‘contrary to reason’, to show that morality has an objectivity and normative status it would otherwise lack. But if we preserve the unreasonableness of immorality by accepting a disjunctive account of reason, then we do so at the apparent cost of undermining the extra normative import the charge of ‘unreasonableness’ was supposed to bring. The non-instrumentalist is preserving her right to the word at the risk of giving up its substance, of turning the word into simply another pejorative.<sup>9</sup>

This problem is not simply due to idiosyncrasies of Setiya’s Hume, either. Any position combining a robust picture of practical reason with a Humean psychology will risk incurring them. A reasons-first view, for example, might tell us that both practical and theoretical reason involve responding to *reasons*.<sup>10</sup> Thus it may seem to avoid the problem of disjunction.

But in fact it just pushes the problem back a level. What makes reasons for action and reasons for belief into a single, unitary class? They govern different kinds of psychological states, if we accept HUMEAN. The responses they demand are different: one describable as coming to certain conclusions, and the other involving making certain choices or coming to have certain concerns. So what makes them instances of the same kind of thing? Given the commitment to primitivism about reasons definitive of such views, it is unclear how they could provide an answer.<sup>11</sup>

This leads to Michael Smith’s reasons’ constitutivism, which attempts to explain how there can be a unified notion of reason governing both belief and desire, given that ‘desires ... do not purport to represent things to be the way they are, [and] they aren’t the sort of psychological state which can be true or false’ (*ibid.*, p. 12). From this, it *may* follow that desires are ‘not the sort of state for which there can be reasons’ (*ibid.*).

Smith points out that primitivist views about reasons seem to leave us with the problem of disjunction indicated above. To explain how reasons are a unified class, he appeals to the idea of an ideal agent, an agent with the beliefs and desires that would allow her to carry out the processes of agency—making choices, plans, and performing actions—as well as possible. Smith takes it that in the realm of beliefs this will require omniscience. In the realm of desires things are much more complicated, but Smith describes the agent as

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<sup>8</sup> Setiya, *Reasons without Rationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> For examples of this objection see Bernard Williams, ‘Internal and External Reasons’, in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-13; and Donald Hubin, ‘What’s Special About Humeanism?’ *Noûs* 33:1 (1999) pp. 30-45.

<sup>10</sup> T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Again, see Smith, ‘A Constitutivist Theory’.

possessing a number of desires, which are constitutive of rationality, desires to preserve and maintain her own rational capacities and those of others (suggesting a roughly Kantian ethic).

The two kinds of reasons thus have the following unity:

...[A]n agent's beliefs should have as their contents the contents of the knowledge of that agent's idealized counterpart... [A]n agent's desires should have as their contents the contents of the desires of the agent's idealized counterpart. (*Ibid.*, 19.)

Smith, by the way, is not endorsing the epistemic principle that one should always believe what is true (as his full discussion makes clear). Rather, both epistemic reasons and practical reasons can be explained by appeal to the attitudes one's ideal counterpart would have. This common explanatory basis provides the unity of the two classes of reason.

So the psychological Humean seems committed to one of the following: minimalism about practical reason, a disjunctive theory of reason, or a difficult and complicated explanatory project. This should make the attraction of Scholastic psychology clear. It gives us a non-minimalist account of practical reason, in a way that makes clear the unity of practical reason with theoretical.

Raz straightforwardly states this advantage to the Guise of the Good:

...[S]ince we desire only what we think of as worth desiring, our desires are among our responses to perceived reasons. ...The reasoning ability and other capacities which make people rational in forming beliefs about scientific matters, or about the weather, or anything else which can be said not to be in itself normative, are the same abilities which make people rational in the way they adopt and maintain goals. Therefore, there is only one kind of rationality. ('Explaining Normativity', pp. 360-1.)

And Tenenbaum presents the ease with which we can explain certain forms of rational criticism as the primary advantage of Scholasticism:

A scholastic view has a quite uncomplicated way of making room for the possibility of this kind of error [of pursuing a worthless end]. ...Our desires express our *stances* toward the good, but there is no guarantee that these stances can serve as appropriate ground for a correct judgment that their objects are good. (*Appearances*, pp. 5-6.)

He goes on to state that

The scholastic view... conceives of our rational faculties as a unified whole. They are the same rational faculties employed in two different endeavours: theoretical inquiry and practical inquiry. The inquiries are distinguished not by different cognitive faculties but by their formal ends: the truth in the case of theoretical reason and the good in the case of practical reason. (*Ibid.*, p. 6.)

So the Guise of the Good offers an explanation of how *actions* can be 'contrary to reason' without equivocation about the meaning of 'reason'—and it does this without the complexities of idealized counterparts or desires constitutive of rationality.

### 1.1. A Further Complication

It is worth discussing a further complication, the sense in which the motivating attitude *presents* an action as supported by reasons or *presents* its objects as good. Mark Schroeder points out that there are two ways in which motives might present their objects as good (or otherwise normatively favoured).<sup>12</sup> *Good* might be part of the content of each motive. Alternately, the analogy between the good and the truth might be closer. If I believe that it is raining, the content of my perceptual experience is not *that it is true that it is raining*. Small children and animal can have beliefs about rain without having the concept of truth. Rather, truth sets the standard of correctness for beliefs.

Schroeder argues that advocates of GUISE face a dilemma here. If *good* must be part of the content of our motives, animals and small children could not have motives. But those psychological Humeans who accept non-minimalist pictures of practical reason (e.g., Setiya, Smith) could agree that *good*, or some other normative notion, sets standards of correctness for our motives.<sup>13</sup> If GUISE is reformulated as a claim about standards of correctness, it is not a psychological thesis, but a normative one.

Tenenbaum, however, offers a third option.<sup>14</sup> He points out that while *truth* is not part of the content of standard beliefs, the connection between beliefs and the truth is much tighter than simply setting a standard of correctness. To believe a content is to hold that content true in some hard to specify but intuitive sense. We can illustrate this with a variation on Moore's paradox; a man asserts 'I believe it is raining but it is false that it is raining.' We do not simply regard the man as believing incorrectly. His statement is scarcely intelligible; we have a hard time understanding the sense in which he might have the belief (*ibid*). Tenenbaum's position is that motives are linked to the good in the same manner.

One difficulty should be noted. While it seems correct that beliefs present their objects as true, exactly how we should make theoretical sense of this relation to truth is unclear. This unclarity call into question the dialectical superiority of GUISE over HUMEAN. Tenenbaum, recall, claims that Scholastics can provide an easy explanation of why choosing to pursue worthless ends is irrational. But his explanation, ultimately, is that they stand in a certain relation to the good, a relation we do not understand very well and of which there is only one other example. This objection is hardly decisive, but the ambitions of the Scholastic project demand further illumination of the relation motives are supposed to stand in to the good.<sup>15</sup>

In any case, we can now say more about the sense in which motives are supposed to present their objects as normatively favoured. 'Presents' cannot mean simply that it aims at. Psychological Humeans who reject instrumentalism can say as much. It must mean either that the attitude *represents* the object as normatively favoured; or that the attitude, while it does not represent a normative fact, has the tight link with reasons or goodness that beliefs have with truth.

These latter views are distinct, but the target of this paper is a pair of theoretical ambitions that can be combined with either. The first is the aim of explaining why choosing worthless ends is mistaken by appeal to something very much like inaccuracy, if not inaccuracy itself. The second is the aim of using GUISE to explain the unity of reason. These ambitions make akrasia difficult for the Guise of the Good, on either understanding of 'presents'.

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<sup>12</sup> Schroeder, 'How Does the Good Appear to Us?' *Social Theory and Practice* 34:1 (2008), pp. 119-30.

<sup>13</sup> Smith explicitly embraces this interpretation of 'desire aims at the good' in 'A Constitutivist Theory', p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Tenenbaum, 'Appearing Good: A Reply to Schroeder', *Social Theory and Practice* 34:1 (2008), pp. 131-8. Thanks to the referee for calling this argument to my attention.

<sup>15</sup> For an example of further development of the idea, see Karl Schafer, 'Perception and the Rational Force of Desire', *The Journal of Philosophy* 110:5 (2013), pp. 258-81.

## 2. Four Versions of the Guise of the Good

There are two placeholders in our statement of the Guise of the Good: *attitude* and *reason*.

The most obvious attitude would be a judgment. This judgment is either a belief that there is reason in favour of the act, which is also presumably identical to an intention to perform that act; or it is simply an intention to perform the act that *presents* (in the sense put forward by Tenenbaum) its object as favoured.<sup>16</sup> But a number of advocates of the Guise have argued that desires should be thought of as closer to perceptual states.<sup>17</sup> The rational corrigibility of perceptual states is limited: I can know that the way I perceive some optical illusion is inaccurate, but the illusion persists. By analogy, desires can persist despite my considered judgment that their object is not worthy of pursuit.

We can name the resulting positions Intellectualism and Perceptualism:

INTELLECTUALISM: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent has a *judgment* that presents reason in favour of *X*ing.

PERCEPTUALISM: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent has a *judgment or quasi-perceptual experience* that presents reason in favour of *X*ing.

Perceptualism is a disjunction of necessary conditions on motivation, because the Perceptualist presumably will wish to say that we sometimes resist our temptations.<sup>18</sup> Note that for an account to qualify as Perceptualist on these definitions, the quasi-perceivings must be capable of motivating independently of a belief. Tenenbaum, for example, allows that there are such quasi-perceivings, but identifies the motivating state with an intention, which is a normative judgment (which may be evidentially based on the quasi-perceivings). His view does not count as Perceptualist.

The Guise of the Good can also come in a strong or a weak form:

STRONG GUISE: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent has an attitude presenting *sufficient* reason in favour of *X*ing.

WEAK GUISE: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent has an attitude presenting *some* reason in favour of *X*ing.

The strong and weak thesis can both be combined with Intellectualism and Perceptualism, giving four species of the Guise of the Good. I will consider each of these in turn.

### 2.1. Strong Intellectualism

STRONG INTELLECTUALISM: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent *has a judgment* that presents *sufficient reason* in favour of *X*ing.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘According to the scholastic view, what the agent judges to be good is the agent’s intention in action’ (Tenenbaum, *Appearances*, p. 52).

<sup>17</sup> For examples of Perceptualism, see Mark Johnston, ‘The Authority of Affect’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63:1 (2001), pp. 181-214; and Graham Oddie, *Value, Reality, and Desires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> But in Oddie, *Value*, the possibility of motivation by judgment seems to be ruled out. It is unclear how Oddie would account for continent behaviour.

Strong Intellectualism holds that agents only act on judgments presenting their action as justified. When they act contrary to how they ought, it is because of an inaccurate assessment of what the world is like. This thesis can straightforwardly explain substantive practical requirements in a manner compatible with reason's unity. It also risks ruling out the possibility of akrasia.<sup>19</sup>

Davidson's theory of weakness of will is an attempt to reconcile akrasia with Strong Intellectualism. Davidson argues that we can make room for akrasia by distinguishing between a judgment about what is best all-things-considered and a judgment about what is unconditionally best. It is the latter, he thinks, that finds expression in action. Akrasia occurs when an agent judges that some option is inferior all-things-considered but also judges it to be the best unconditionally, leading her to act against her all-things-considered judgment.<sup>20</sup>

Gary Watson offers the clearest objections to Davidson's theory. It is not obvious that there is any distinction between an all-things-considered judgment and an unqualified judgment. Intuitively, what I ought to do all-things-considered is just what I ought to do. Unless the difference is clarified no real reason has been offered to think that our actions could not deviate from the unconditional judgment as much as they can deviate from the all-things-considered.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, what Davidson says to elucidate the distinction suggests that our actions could come apart from both judgments:

One potential confusion is quickly set aside. '*a* is better than *b*, all things (viz. all truths, moral and otherwise) considered' surely does entail '*a* is better than *b*', and we do not want to explain incontinence as a simple logical blunder. The phrase 'all things considered' must, of course, refer only to things known, believed, or held by the agent, the sum of his relevant principles, opinions, attitudes, and desires. Setting this straight may, however, seem only to emphasize the real difficulty. We want now to ask: how is it possible for a man to judge that *a* is better than *b* on the grounds that *r*, and yet not judge that *a* is better than *b*, when *r* is the sum of all that seems relevant to him?  
(*Ibid.*, p. 40)

In other words, the all-things-considered judgment is a judgment about what one ought to do given one's *evidence*, or something very similar.<sup>22</sup> The akratic, according to Davidson, thinks that he should not perform some action *given his evidence*, but also thinks that he should (unconditionally) perform the action, and does. Or, at the very least, he judges that it would be unreasonable, given the considerations he regards as relevant, to judge that he ought *simpliciter* to X, but still judges that he ought *simpliciter* to X. In either case, it is a conflict between what he judges that he ought to judge about what he ought to do and what he actually judges that he ought to do.

Imagine a philosopher who finds himself dumbfounded by Peter Singer. He thinks the argument that he should give most of his money to charity is overwhelmingly strong, that that

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<sup>19</sup> Strong Intellectualism may thus be identical to *Socratic* Intellectualism. See Heda Segvic, 'No One Errs Willingly: the Meaning of Socratic Intellectualism', in S. Abhel-Rappe and R. Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 171-85; and Matthew Evans, 'A Partisan's Guide to Socratic Intellectualism', in S. Tenenbaum (ed.) *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 6-33.

<sup>20</sup> Davidson, 'How Is Weakness of Will Possible?' in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 21-42.

<sup>21</sup> Watson, 'Skepticism about Weakness of Will', *The Philosophical Review* 86:3 (1977), pp. 316-39, at p. 319.

<sup>22</sup> I assume that in this discussion claims about which action is best can be replaced with claims about what I ought to do.



conclusion is clearly the most evidentially-favoured position. In other words he thinks, given his evidence, that he ought to give most of his money to charity. But he continues to think that he ought to spend his money on his own child.<sup>23</sup> This is someone who regards his conviction as unreasonable, as something he can give no rational support for. But it remains his conviction. (That is guaranteed by saying it is what he thinks he ought, unconditionally, to do.)

This character, while irrational, is not practically akratic in the normal sense (he may be theoretically akratic, since he believes contrary to his acknowledged evidence). He would be practically akratic, however, if he continued to believe that spending the money on his child was best, but spent it on himself instead. It seems that an agent could be like this too. He could regard his conviction as unreasonable, but still hold it, and betray it. But as Watson points out, Davidson is committed to denying this.<sup>24</sup>

But is the character really conceivable? Perhaps he does not find Singer's arguments convincing, and we are imagining a character self-deceived on this point. Or perhaps he does not really believe he ought to put his children first; again, we are imagining a character who has deceived himself into thinking he has such a conviction.<sup>25</sup> In many cases, one of these interpretations is more plausible. They attribute one irrationality to the character in question rather than two. But we can fill in details in such a way that it becomes more plausible that he suffers from two instances of akrasia rather than self-deception.

Imagine that his behaviour is clearly in line with accepting the premises of Singer's arguments. In general he at least appears willing to accept counterintuitive utilitarian conclusions on the basis of these kinds of arguments—he claims to think his government should make aid to impoverished countries a priority over aid to its own citizens, and is willing to dedicate money, time, and votes to (apparently) promote that end; he does also appear to sacrifice his own interests on occasions for the sake of net happiness. He does typically put his child's welfare before his own; the selfish behaviour happens episodically, but is relatively rare. Imagine finally that he has feelings of unease about his apparent normative conviction, and he has feelings of guilt about his selfish choice. At some point in adding on these details, we reach the point where double-akrasia looks like an overall more rational state than the baroque form of self-deception that would be the alternative. It is worth considering arguments against psychological egoism here: the egoist can reinterpret plausible counterexamples indefinitely, but at some point reinterpretations seem too ornate to be believable.

Tenenbaum offers his own refinement and defence of the Davidsonian account of Weakness of Will. His argument is directed at convincing the reader that *theoretical* akrasia is possible—that it is possible to believe contrary to what one believes is justified.<sup>26</sup> While he makes a very compelling and insightful case in favour of that, the real objection to the Davidsonian account is not that it asks us to believe in theoretical akrasia, but that some cases of practical akrasia do not resemble it. Our examples showed we can imagine 'double-akrasia' in the practical case; but this does not seem possible in the theoretical, since it would require that the agent have a judgment which she regards not only as contrary to the evidence, but *false*.

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<sup>23</sup> We are assuming in this case that Singer's arguments and the philosopher's convictions are about what one ought *simpliciter* to do, rather than what one ought *morally* to do. If necessary, we can simply add that the philosopher in question believes moral requirements are always overriding, since some people do believe that. Thanks to the referee for calling my attention to this point.

<sup>24</sup> For a similar point and example, see Michael Bratman, 'Practical Reasoning and Weakness of Will', *Noûs* 13:2 (1979), pp. 153-71.

<sup>25</sup> Thanks to the referee for calling my attention to these points.

<sup>26</sup> Tenenbaum, 'The Judgment of a Weak Will', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59:4 (1999), pp. 879-911.

Can Tenenbaum's conjecture that motives *present* rather than *represent* their objects as good help here? This misplaces the problem, which is not with the content of the attitudes, or the nature of the presenting-relation, but with the Davidsonian understanding of akrasia. Tenenbaum says that on his account, that the akratic 'acted in a way she knew to be irrational' (*ibid.*, p. 905). But this turns out to be *equivalent* to the claim that 'she accepted the all-out judgment she knew she should not have accepted' (*ibid.*).<sup>27</sup>

Someone in the latter state of mind is only acting in a way she knows to be irrational in a very indirect sense. She regards her action as rational—her judgment about the action presents it as the thing to do. Her problem is not that she thinks she should do something else; rather, she thinks it would be more rational *to have a different opinion on what she ought to do*. The akratic agent, for Tenenbaum, still acts against a higher-order judgment, rather than against a judgment directly about the action: she judges that she should accept the judgment presenting X as the best course of action, but accepts the judgment presenting Y as best instead, and acts on that.<sup>28</sup> The case of the agent who is doubly akratic, however, shows that we need the possibility of a gap between the second judgment and action.

## 2.2. Strong Perceptualism

**STRONG PERCEPTUALISM:** Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action X, then that agent *has a judgment or perceiving* that presents *sufficient reason* in favour of Xing.

Strong Perceptualism tells us that if an agent performs an action, she must either have judged that she ought to do it, or quasi-perceived it as something that ought to be done. This theory allows for akrasia: an agent can judge that something ought not to be done, but still do it, thanks to a quasi-perception of the act as supported by sufficient reason.

According to Strong Perceptualism, it is possible for an agent to judge some evil act wrong, but pursue it anyway thanks to a quasi-perceptual state that presents it as justified. So wrongdoing despite completely accurate beliefs about what the world is like is possible; akrasia is possible.

Unfortunately, the theory does not allow us to assimilate practical reason to theoretical. The akratic admittedly suffers from a quasi-perceptual state presenting the action as justified, but it is mysterious how this state could be irrational or contrary to reason, if the rational standing of quasi-perceivings is supposed to resemble that of perception. A quasi-perceptual state that survives the agent's considered opinion is supposed to be analogous to a persistent optical illusion: the Mueller-Lyer lines look to be different sizes despite my knowledge that they aren't. A person is not subject to rational criticism in virtue of experiencing a persistent optical illusion. Assuming my beliefs are accurate and evidentially supported, there is no theoretical failing in *seeing* the lines as differently sized; there is no failing of reason. (Keep in mind, the Perceptualist account of akrasia is that I act on a quasi-perceiving that is contrary

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<sup>27</sup> Tenenbaum makes the same claim in *Appearances*, p. 280.

<sup>28</sup> Could Tenenbaum allow that normative beliefs are sometimes directly about the action itself—that is, allow that the akratic intends X and believes that she ought not X? This account of what akrasia is would make the practical akratic analogous to someone who continues to believe that p while simultaneously believing that p is false. This undermines any analogy between practical and theoretical akrasia (the theoretical akratic believes p while believing p contrary to the evidence); it also overstates the practical akratic's incoherence. Note that Tenenbaum explicitly identifies normative beliefs as in some sense higher-order, both in the passage quoted above, and in *Appearances*, p. 74: '...the belief "X is good" is the same as the belief "I ought to hold X to be good." ...It seems that... the belief expresses my theoretical views of how practical reason should be conducted, whereas the intention expresses the outcome of my reasoning practically...' Thanks to the referee for raising this point.

to my normative belief. If my normative belief were to change to match the quasi-perceiving, that *could* be an irrationality, and analogous to a theoretical one, but it would not be akrasia.)

If we wish to call the akratic irrational using the Strong Perceptualist model, we will have to commit ourselves to requirements of reason that have no theoretical analogue. We must accept something similar to the following, for example:

ENKRASIA: An agent ought to choose *X* only if she has a *judgment* (not a quasi-perception) presenting sufficient reason in favour of *Xing*.

Or:

SEE-THE-WORLD-ARIGHT: An agent ought to have accurate quasi-perceivings.

Either norm would go beyond the requirements of theoretical reason. The first is distinctively practical. The second, as we saw, stipulates that the norms governing quasi-perceivings exceed those governing regular perceivings.

The Strong Perceptualist can allow that practical reason presents requirements that go beyond the norms of practical reason, and simply accept that as brute. In other words, she can embrace a disjunctive account of practical reason. Alternately, she can offer an explanatory story that shows both theoretical reason and practical reason—despite the distinctive requirements of the latter—to make up a unity. But these are exactly the sorts of options that Humeans can and do pursue.

### 2.3. *Weak Intellectualism*

WEAK INTELLECTUALISM: Necessarily, if an agent intentionally performs action *X*, then that agent has a *judgment* that presents *some reason* in favour of *Xing*.

Weak Intellectualism offers a different explanation of akrasia: the agent judged some reason in favour of the akratic action, judged it to be unjustified nonetheless, but still performed the action. Akrasia happens when agents pursue objects of some, but inferior, value over the superior.

Weak Intellectualism is committed to its own independent variation thesis: *degree* of motivation varies independently of *degree* of value represented. If HUMEAN makes it hard to explain why pursuit of the worthless is contrary to reason, Weak Intellectualism makes it hard to explain why choosing the inferior over the superior is contrary to reason. The Humean tells us that a person who decides to spend his life counting blades of grass might well have completely accurate beliefs about the world. But according to Weak Perceptualism, an agent can choose an inferior option over a superior one (the pleasure of watching bad TV over the longer-term pleasures of good health, for example), despite completely accurate attitudes.

Again, if we wish to rationally criticize the agent who knowingly prefers the inferior to the superior, we will need to postulate a norm of reason that she has violated. For example:

ENKRASIA: An agent ought to choose *X* only if she believes there to be sufficient reason in favour of *Xing*.

But the difficulties with this have been discussed.

I will skip a detailed discussion of Weak Perceptualism, which will merely combine the explanatory liabilities of Strong Perceptualism and Weak Intellectualism.

### 3. Conclusion

It is well known that akrasia is problematic for Scholastic views. What the argument here shows is that, at least for those Scholastics who want their theory to explain the unity of reason, the problem with akrasia is much deeper than previously acknowledged. Humeans have a hard time accounting for the unity of reason because they are committed to an independent variation thesis. But the natural way for a Scholastic to account for akrasia is to introduce some degree of independent variation. All this does, though, is recreate the problem facing the Humean, undermining the explanatory advantage GUISE was supposed to possess. Scholastics need an account of akrasia that does not rely on independent variation, but the difficulties facing the Davidson-Tenenbaum account leave it unclear how this could work.

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