
Article:
Armitage, E. (2025) Preparing for the worst: the irrationality of emotionally recalcitrant reasoning. The Southern Journal of Philosophy, 63 (4). pp. 501-516. ISSN: 0038-4283

https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12620

DOI: 10.1111/sjp.12620

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Southern Journal of Philosophy

Preparing for the worst: The irrationality of emotionally recalcitrant reasoning

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Abstract

The question of what exactly is irrational about recalcitrant emotions—those that occur in tension or conflict with our beliefs—has been widely debated. Sabine Döring claims that such irrationality only emerges if we act on our recalcitrant emotion or engage in emotion-relevant reasoning in light of it. I here provide an account that acts as an extension to the latter part of this claim by considering in more depth the question of what is irrational about that reasoning, i.e., *emotionally recalcitrant reasoning*. In doing so, I offer a somewhat alternative explanation to Döring's as to the form of irrationality involved. Where Döring argues that emotionally recalcitrant reasoning involves epistemic irrationality by way of conflicting judgments that are involved, I argue that our engagement in this reasoning is, in fact, practically irrational. This is because, I claim, it involves us "accepting"—treating as true—propositions that we do not believe to be true, in the absence of the kind of reasons that would usually rationalize doing so. Doing so constitutes a form of practical, rather than epistemic, irrationality. This is a conclusion I arrive at through a consideration of the nature of the reasoning our emotions in general tend to motivate.

Emotional recalcitrance is where an emotion occurs in conflict with a belief or judgment and does not subside despite your efforts to rationalize or reason against it. If, for example, you experience fear of flying whilst sitting on an airplane despite wholeheartedly believing that you are completely safe, your fear is recalcitrant. Much of the discussion surrounding recalcitrant emotions has been concerned with determining the respect(s) in which the agent who experiences one is irrational (e.g., Brady, 2009; Döring, 2015; Helm, 2015; Majeed, 2022). This will be my focus here. More specifically, I want to offer an account that focuses on the irrationality of the cognitions—particularly the *reasoning*—that these emotions motivate.

The claim that recalcitrant emotions can lead to irrationality by influencing our reasoning has been put forth by Sabine Döring (2015). I want to propose an extension to Döring's view by examining what exactly it is that makes this reasoning irrational. This is something not discussed at length in her account. My proposal, in rough, is as follows: we're irrational when we engage in the reasoning motivated by a recalcitrant emotion insofar as that engagement involves us "accepting" propositions we do not believe to be true in the absence of the kind of reasons that usually rationalize doing so.

The article will go as follows. I'll begin by considering two notable accounts of the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions, namely those given by Michael Brady (2009) and Sabine Döring (2015). I'll then proceed to develop my own, which as stated can be understood as an extension to Döring's claim that we're irrational when we allow a recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning. I'll do this in the following way: first, I'll provide an outline of the kind of reasoning that our emotions in general tend to motivate, claiming that typically this is practical reasoning aimed at determining how to act in emotion-relevant ways. Then I'll give an account of *acceptances*; these are key attitudes at play within practical reasoning. In doing so I'll shed light on a requirement of rationality that acceptances are subject to. With these accounts in place, I'll then argue that the practical reasoning motivated by recalcitrant emotions involves acceptances that fail to satisfy the requirement I've identified. This thereby makes us irrational in engaging in that reasoning. I'll then consider and deal with some possible responses. Consequently, it should become clear how recalcitrant emotions can influence our reasoning in a way that involves irrationality.[1]

1 | BRADY AND DÖRING ON THE IRRATIONALITY OF RECALCITRANT EMOTIONS

As stated, recalcitrant emotions are those that occur in conflict with a belief or judgment: a fear of flying despite believing flying is safe, for instance. They are, according to Helm (2001), "readily intelligible and happen all too often," and often occur and persist despite our recognition that they are misplaced, as well as our attempts to suppress them. Moreover, there seems to be something irrational about the agent when they experience one.

The original motivation behind debates surrounding this apparent irrationality is the consensus that it cannot be explained by appealing to any cognitivist account of emotion, i.e., the view that emotions are reducible to beliefs or judgments. If cognitivist explanations of emotional recalcitrance were accurate, then in experiencing recalcitrant fear, for example, we would both judge, or believe, that there *is* something to be afraid of and there *is not* something to be afraid of. The irrationality of recalcitrant emotions would thus be explained by a conflict in the agent's beliefs or judgments.

This explanation is widely regarded to be implausible, primarily because it attributes too great a degree of irrationality to the agent (Brady, 2009; D'Arms & Jacobson, 2003; Deonna & Teroni, 2012; Döring, 2015; Greenspan, 1988; Narr, 2018). Many argue that simply experiencing a recalcitrant emotion cannot involve the same degree of irrationality as conflicting beliefs or judgments, giving us reason to reject the cognitivist view. As Döring (2015) states, "['the emotion theorists'] sense is that recalcitrant emotions are irrational, but not as irrational as recalcitrant judgments would be." Further, according to Greenspan (1988), attributing conflicting beliefs or judgments to the emotionally recalcitrant agent violates Davidson's (1984) "principle of charity," which states that when explaining an agent's conduct or attitudes we must offer an explanation that preserves as much rationality in that agent as possible. So, the

[1]I'll mainly focus on the emotion of fear here because it offers a simple illustration of emotional recalcitrance; my account, however, is entirely general.

consensus is that the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions cannot be explained in cognitivist terms.[2] The challenge that emerges is explaining how experiencing a recalcitrant emotion involves irrationality in other ways.

Brady (2009) takes up this challenge, situating his account in response not only to the widespread rejection of cognitivism, but also to the inadequacies of many subsequent "neocognitivist" accounts (e.g., see Roberts, 2003) in explaining the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions.[3] These neocognitivist accounts tend to describe emotions in terms that fall short of beliefs or judgments; in terms of "evaluative construals," for example, where our being afraid of or frustrated about something involves us simply *construing* our situation as fearful or frustrating, rather than necessarily believing it to be so. The view is that this allows for a more plausible and charitable explanation of the kind of irrationality involved in cases of recalcitrant emotion. Yet Brady disagrees, stating that "merely construing or seeing one's situation as thus-and-so, when one judges that it is not thus-and-so, seems insufficient for one to be subject to a charge of irrationality" (2009). That is, where cognitivist accounts attribute *too much* irrationality to the emotionally recalcitrant agent, hitherto neocognitivist accounts "fail to impute enough" according to Brady. They do not adequately identify what it is about experiencing a recalcitrant emotion that makes the agent irrational, if not a conflict in belief or judgment.

Brady's own neocognitivist account purports to avoid these issues. On his view, when in the grip of an emotion, the motivational tendencies of that emotion "prime" us to act in ways that correspond with our emotion's evaluative content, and we become "inclined" to believe that this content accurately reflects our environment through being in a state of sensitivity to emotion-relevant environmental stimuli. For example, when we're afraid, our emotional state inclines us to engage in "fight or flight" behavior and inclines us to believe that we're in danger through being "on the lookout" for environmental threats. Yet where that emotional state is recalcitrant, i.e., in conflict with our beliefs, this emotional inclination involves irrationality for Brady. We are practically irrational because an unnecessary cost is incurred on our motivational and attentional resources; in being primed for emotional-relevant action, we are potentially allocating these resources *away* from the pursuit of our actual goals, akin to "preparing for a race that we see no need to run." And we are epistemically irrational because *without good reason* we're inclined to believe an emotional appraisal that we've already deemed to be false. This thereby suggests that simply experiencing a recalcitrant emotion makes us irrational through how it inclines us toward irrational actions or beliefs.

Yet despite Brady's robust characterization of emotion, it could be argued that his account still does not identify any clear form of irrationality in recalcitrant emotions - just like the literature it is a response to. As both Helm (2015) and Benbaji (2013) suggest, the claim that we're irrational in being merely inclined to act or believe in such a way is disputable. One might suggest that the conditions for irrationality Brady posits seem rather strong, and being merely inclined toward irrational actions or beliefs does not imply that one is irrational. Indeed, presumably such inclinations are rather common, and we would not think that we're irrational whenever we experience one. I may feel an inclination to put my hand in the flames whilst watching the campfire—presumably such a behavior would be irrational, and yet we would not think I'm irrational in briefly being inclined toward that behavior. We would arguably have to allow for significantly widespread irrationality in accepting such rationality conditions.

[2]The fact that cognitivism cannot seem to account for recalcitrant emotions is often taken to be proof against cognitivism in general.

[3]Brady actually uses the term "neojudgmentalist," however the terms "cognitivism" and "judgmentalism" are interchangeable. Judgmentalism is just more specific to debates on emotional recalcitrance.

Moreover, it could be argued that being inclined toward irrational actions and beliefs, and yet *refraining* from acting or believing—as Brady allows the emotionally recalcitrant agent does—would make us a candidate for rational praise, rather than criticism. We might very well be exhibiting all-things-considered rationality through "resisting" such an inclination. When experiencing recalcitrant fear of flying, for example, we might say that I'm wholly rational in resisting my inclination to believe, or act in ways demanded by, my emotional appraisal of danger. Indeed, it seems I could be credited with rationality rather than irrationality for boarding the plane despite my recalcitrant fear. Or suppose I strain to focus my attention on my book in an attempt to distract myself and alleviate my recalcitrant fear; am I irrational? It seems not. My conduct is aligned with my belief that I'm completely safe. If anything, I've distanced myself from my fear and I'm being quite rational in spite of it.

We thus have reason to think that the irrationality of the actions or beliefs we're inclined toward is not something we find in that mere inclination toward them, and therefore that recalcitrant emotions cannot be irrational simply by inclining us in such a way. Of course, as Brady identifies, to adjust one's beliefs or to act on the inclination generated by our recalcitrant emotion would certainly be irrational. But an implicit premise of Brady's argument is that the emergence of irrationality does not hinge on us doing these things. Being merely inclined toward doing so is sufficient for irrationality on his view.

Like the neocognitivist accounts he presents his own in response to, it thus seems that Brady's account does not manage to attribute any clear form of irrationality to the emotionally recalcitrant agent simply virtue of their emotional experience alone. This is telling, since it is a proposed antidote to accounts that also do not. Crucially, what this would suggest is that there is, in fact, no clear rational violation in simply experiencing a recalcitrant emotion. Those accounts that have rejected cognitivism and attempted to explain this irrationality in other ways—such as Brady's and the other neocognitivists he responds to—do not seem to adequately identify anything irrational *about* the agent in such cases. Whilst it may seem obvious that experiencing a recalcitrant emotion makes us irrational by virtue of that emotional experience alone, the fact that no accounts seem to have been successful in delineating that irrationality appears to be proof against this.[4]

Döring's (2015) account starts from this view, denying that there is anything inherently irrational about experiencing a recalcitrant emotion.[5] Indeed, she goes as far to say that "from the standpoint of rationality, it would be counterproductive to put subjects under the obligation that their emotional experiences and evaluative judgments must always fit together." For Döring, when we experience a recalcitrant emotion, we're irrational if and only if we allow that emotion to influence us in certain ways, specifically our actions, our reasoning, or both.

Allowing our recalcitrant emotion to influence our actions, Döring claims, would make us akratic, i.e., we would be acting contrary to how we believe we ought to. This would entail practical irrationality. For example, in experiencing recalcitrant fear of flying before setting off on a flight, abandoning my plans to take a longer, more expensive train journey out of fear would make me akratic. My action runs contrary to my belief that taking the flight is the course of action I should pursue. Allowing a recalcitrant emotion to influence our *reasoning*, on the other hand, would involve making a judgment that corresponds with that emotion on Döring's view, which itself conflicts with a judgment we've already made. This would thereby mean we have conflicting judgments. For example, in experiencing the same recalcitrant fear of flying before boarding the plane, allowing my fear to influence my reasoning would involve me making some corresponding judgment such as "I'm in danger," which would conflict with

[4]See D'Arms and Jacobson (2003) for further discussion of the insufficiency of neocognitivist accounts.

[5]For further arguments in support of this view, see Döring (2014).

my judgment that I'm *not* in danger. This conflict in judgments would make me epistemically irrational. Thus, for Döring, recalcitrant emotions involve irrationality specifically when our actions or reasoning are influenced by that emotion.[6]

Döring's account is not dissimilar to Brady's. Both suggest that the experience of a recalcitrant emotion can involve practical and epistemic irrationality, namely through our acting or believing/judging in accordance with that emotion. However, where Brady suggests that we're irrational by merely being inclined toward these, an inclination built into the emotional experience itself, Döring says when we experience a recalcitrant emotion irrationality only emerges in those action or beliefs/judgments themselves. So Döring denies that there is anything inherently irrational about experiencing a recalcitrant emotion, putting specific conditions in place for irrationality to emerge. Through doing so, her account aims to identify clear loci of irrationality in ways previous accounts are unable to.

Whilst sympathetic with Döring's view, I propose that elaborating some of her claims will allow for a clearer picture of how recalcitrant emotions can lead to irrationality in the ways she suggests. I agree with Döring that recalcitrant emotions can lead to practical irrationality through motivating akratic action. I'll not be focused on this element here. Rather, I want to focus on her claim that irrationality emerges when we engage in the kind of reasoning that our recalcitrant emotions motivate. Call this *emotionally recalcitrant reasoning*.

As stated, on Döring's view allowing a recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning "would be . . . to make a corresponding evaluative judgment, and possibly to draw inferences from that judgment." This judgment conflicts with one we've already made, thereby making us epistemically irrational. Yet Döring does not offer any explanation as to *how* emotionally recalcitrant reasoning involves making the kind of corresponding judgment she posits. Little elaboration is given on the character of that reasoning, or where and how this judgment might figure within it. I therefore want to provide an account that elaborates her core idea that there is something irrational about this reasoning by showing precisely how such irrationality emerges when we engage in it.

As we'll see, however, my account will provide an alternative explanation to Döring's. That is, I'll not show how the irrationality of emotionally recalcitrant reasoning comes from any kind of judgments we might make as part of that reasoning. This is because allowing a recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning does not always involve making any kind of corresponding judgment. Whilst making such a judgment is certainly possible, and we would certainly be irrational if we did, such a judgment does not necessarily follow from engaging in that reasoning. If, for example, my recalcitrant fear of flying causes me to engage in reasoning about what to do in the event of a plane crash, it is by no means necessary that I thereby judge that I'm in danger, as Döring seems to be proposing. As such, her account of what makes emotionally recalcitrant reasoning irrational only serves to capture a select few cases. We thus want an explanation that captures exactly what is irrational about that reasoning in another way, one that applies to as many cases as possible. This, I propose, will be possible through a deeper consideration of the character of the reasoning our emotions motivate in general.

2 | EMOTIONAL REASONING

The claim that emotions motivate cognitions is uncontroversial. For Baumeister et al. (2007), emotions are "saturated with cognition," and Clore (1994) states that emotional experiences involve "not only distinctive feelings but also distinctive thoughts." In other words, the

[6]Döring uses "judgment" and "belief" interchangeably.

overall experience of emotions typically involves us thinking in certain ways. And often those cognitions will comprise modes of emotion-relevant reasoning. An explanation for this can be derived from the fact that, as we saw in Brady's account earlier, our emotions are closely connected with our behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007; Clore, 1994; Frijda, 1986, 1994; Scarantino, 2017; Tappolet, 2009). That is, emotions motivate us to act in ways that are pertinent to our emotional appraisals, having what are known as specific "action tendencies" (Frijda, 1986). For example, when we're afraid, our fear will involve an appraisal of the stimulus as dangerous or threatening and generate a motivation to act appropriately: running away, perhaps.

Some of these actions will be quick and reflexive, such as recoiling in fear of a snake. But, as recent research has suggested is significantly more prevalent, in most cases emotional actions are mediated by cognitive regulation processes, i.e., a calculation of the most optimal course of action (see Moors, 2017; Moors et al., 2017; Moors & Fischer, 2019). This means that, when circumstances allow and demand it, conscious cognitive processes are often the intermediary between our emotions and the behaviors they motivate. This allows us to work out the best way of acting in correspondence with the appraisal our emotion gives, taking into account the pertinent features of the situation, determining available courses of action, and weighing the utilities of the possible outcomes of those actions.[7]

If, for example, you hear glass smashing in the night and experience fear, you will likely begin attempting to determine the safest and most efficient way of escaping or confronting the apparent intruder. Or, if angry at your friend for missing your birthday, you may attempt to work out the best way of confronting them. Emotions thus often motivate *reasoning* about how to act in accordance with them: in Schwarz and Clore's (2007) words, these cognitive processes are "tuned to meet the situational requirements signaled by our feelings." Importantly, this has adaptive value since it allows us to determine the most effective ways of responding to our environment. Indeed, the cognitive capacity to deliberate about how to act in response to an emotional stimulus, where possible and necessary, is a feature that to some degree separates humans from other animals (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Given the close connection between our emotions and actions, then, when our emotions motivate cognitions, those cognitions will often take the form of reasoning that is specifically practical in nature. Emotions motivate us to act in emotion-relevant ways, and therefore motivate us to work out how to act in emotion-relevant ways. Therefore, presumably when we talk—as Döring does—of the reasoning our emotions motivate, we talk mainly about practical reasoning, or reasoning as to what course of action to pursue.

This is true of recalcitrant emotions. They too will often motivate practical reasoning aimed at determining how to act in emotion-relevant ways. To use Greenspan's (1988) often-cited example, suppose at your friend's house you encounter their old, toothless dog Fido. Despite believing Fido poses no danger to you, you feel afraid of him. Your fear is recalcitrant. In experiencing this fear, you will likely be motivated to engage in reasoning aimed at determining how to act in fear-relevant ways: how to avoid an encounter with Fido, or possibly what to do should Fido approach you. Your recalcitrant emotion has motivated this practical reasoning. Or, again, suppose you are on a flight experiencing recalcitrant fear of flying. In such a

[7]There is evidence to suggest that cognitive regulation processes for emotional actions can occur at the subpersonal level (Moors et al., 2017; Moors & Fischer, 2019). This would mean no conscious cognitive processes take place at all in some cases. Indeed, emotions may not necessarily motivate action at all—we may freeze in the face of danger, for instance (Baumeister et al., 2007). Thus, it is crucial to note here that I purposefully use conditional qualifiers such as "often" when discussing how emotions motivate the kind of cognitions I go on to highlight. This is because I'm making no claims of necessity here; I'm happy to concede that there will be cases of emotional action that are not mediated by conscious cognition. I'm just not concerned with these cases here. Remember, as per Döring's view, I'm specifically concerned with cases where recalcitrant emotions *do* motivate conscious cognitions; reasoning, more precisely. And, as I'll go on to argue, it is when we engage in this reasoning that the irrationality I'm identifying emerges in cases of recalcitrant emotion.

scenario your fear may motivate reasoning aimed at determining what course of action to take in the event of a plane crash, recalling the flight attendant's instructions and taking note of the best route to the nearest emergency exit. As we can see, we find the same engagement with practical reasoning that is typical of our emotional responses in cases where our emotion is recalcitrant.

I want to propose that we're irrational when we engage in the practical reasoning motivated by recalcitrant emotions. In the next section I'll begin shedding light on this claim by taking a closer look at the attitudes we take as part of our practical reasoning—"acceptances"—and the requirements of rationality these are subject to. Ultimately, I'll argue that the acceptances involved in emotionally recalcitrant reasoning fail these requirements, and it is precisely *this* that is irrational about that reasoning.

3 | ACCEPTANCES

3.1 | The nature of acceptances

For Cohen, acceptances are characterized as follows:

> . . . to accept the proposition . . . that *p* is to treat it as given that *p*. More precisely, to accept that *p* is to have or adopt a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that *p*—i.e., of including that proposition or rule among one's premises for deciding what to do or think in a particular context. (Cohen, 1992)

So, accepting *p* is to treat *p* as true for the purposes of practical or theoretical reasoning. For example, when deliberating about when to get the bus to the train station, I may accept that there will be traffic enroute. This leads me to form the intention to take an early bus that allows plenty of time to get there. I do not believe there will be traffic; I merely *accept* it as true that there is for the purposes of my deliberation. We can understand acceptances as "treating *p* as true" or "holding *p* to be true" as part of our reasoning or conduct.

Acceptances are often compared with beliefs since they are attitudes we take toward *p* that involve treating *p* as true. And yet, they differ in many important respects. According to Engel (1998), beliefs are aimed at truth, are context independent, and are shaped by evidence, whereas acceptances are aimed at pragmatic utility rather than truth, are context dependent, and are not directly shaped by evidence. So, where beliefs are dispositional attitudes that aim at truth, acceptances are attitudes we take toward *p* for the purposes of working something out; usually how to act. We typically accept propositions in circumstances where it is relevant to do so for pragmatic purposes, usually during practical reasoning. Indeed, as Bratman (1992) claims, the capacity to accept propositions is necessary for effective practical deliberation. On his view, acceptances are attitudes that form "part of the cognitive background" of practical reasoning.[8]

Take an example given by Bratman to illustrate: suppose I'm planning a major construction project. Depending on my budget, I can either do the work all at once or in two stages: one half now and the other half in three months. I'm deliberating about which option to take, although I'm not sure whether I presently have the money to complete the project in one go since I can only get an estimated range of the possible costs from the contractors.

[8]Importantly, Bratman (1992) says that the attitudes we take toward *p* as part of our practical reasoning are acceptances *rather* than beliefs/judgments. Assuming that recalcitrant emotions motivate practical reasoning as I've shown, then this supports my earlier claim that allowing our recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning will not necessarily amount to us making any kind of corresponding judgment.

Under these circumstances, it seems prudent to err on the side of caution and treat it as true that the costs will be at the top of the ranges given by each contractor. I can thus work out from this whether to do the project at once or split it into two stages based on calculations I make based on my acceptance. In this case, I *accept*— treat it as true—that the prices will be as high as they possibly can be for the contractors, allowing me to deliberate and plan with suitable caution.[9]

Importantly, this case illustrates that it is possible—and indeed often necessary—to accept propositions that we do not believe to be true (Bratman, 1992; Cohen, 1992; Engel, 1998; Lehrer, 1979). It makes sense for me to accept that the costs will be at the top of the estimated ranges, although I do not believe this. So, when circumstances require it, one can reasonably accept—treat as true—a proposition one does not believe. Indeed, many of our acceptances will be able to be described as such. Another case that illustrates this is given by Cohen (1992): a lawyer may accept her client's innocence despite believing they are guilty. The evidence may be overwhelmingly stacked toward this. Yet it is necessary for the lawyer to treat as true the proposition "my client is innocent" for the purpose of allowing her to fulfill her professional role effectively. Again, this demonstrates how the propositions we accept can often be ones that we do not believe to be true.

For Bratman (1992), we're permitted to accept propositions—particularly those that we do not believe—as part of our reasoning in the "appropriate context." This is because, he claims, acceptances are context-relevant in a way that beliefs are not. They do not carry with them the same commitment to truth that beliefs do. That is, an acceptance that p is not normatively regulated by the truth or falsity of p in the way a belief that p is.[10] This means that a conflict between an acceptance and belief is not necessarily problematic—or indeed irrational—in the way that a direct conflict of beliefs would be. The examples we've seen involve acceptances that are appropriate to their context in this respect. It is appropriate for me to accept that the costs will be at the top of the range for each contractor since the context demands that I should proceed with relative caution, for example, even if I do not necessarily believe that the costs will be that high. But a corollary of this claim is that there are acceptances that are *not* appropriate in this way. What, then, about the context in which we accept a proposition determines whether doing so is appropriate or justified?

3.2 | Requirements of rationality

As both Cohen (1992) and Bratman (1992) argue, the justification we have for accepting a proposition as true is given by the reasons we have to do so. What determines whether an acceptance is appropriate are thus the features of the context that supply such reasons.

These reasons may be epistemic or practical. If we accept a proposition that we believe true, then we will ordinarily have an automatic epistemic reason for this acceptance: our reasons for accepting the proposition would just be our reasons for believing it. But as we've

[9]As an anonymous reviewer has pointed out, cases like this might incline us to think that taking an attitude of acceptance toward a proposition is simply to assume it to be true, perhaps for some "just in case" reason. However, as Cohen (1992) emphasizes, acceptances are different from assumptions, since the former stand much closer to beliefs than assumptions do. When we accept that p, he states, we take p to be true as if we genuinely believed it to be true, and we will consequently act and reason as if we genuinely take p to be true. Assuming that p, however, whilst also describable in similar terms, does not involve this same kind of doxastic commitment: unlike acceptances, Cohen claims, assumptions are "entirely makeshift maneuvers, even within their particular context." This means assumptions are essentially a weaker and more malleable sense of "acting as if p were true" than acceptance. The conditions under which we accept that p or assume that p therefore differ: we might, for instance, assume p to be the case in order to test the truth of p. This would not be so whilst accepting p, since in acting as if p were true we would be acting as if the truth of p were already established. For further discussion on this distinction, see Cohen (1992), where he also discusses the distinction between acceptances and *pre*sumptions, suppositions, and hypotheses.

[10]See Shah and Velleman (2005) for further discussion of this distinction.

seen, we often accept propositions that we do not believe true. It is these cases I'm concerned with here. And since we typically find acceptances within practical reasoning, the most likely reason we will have for accepting a proposition we do not believe will be a practical one, as we find in Cohen's lawyer case and Bratman's construction case. In these cases, there are practical considerations that make it appropriate to treat as true a proposition we do not believe. Such practical reasons, as Cohen (1992) suggests, may be (although are not limited to) "ethical, professional, prudential, religious, aesthetic or pragmatic" reasons, and will vary from context to context.

So, what determines whether it is appropriate to accept a proposition we do not believe is whether or not we have a reason for that acceptance. In most cases, this will be a practical reason. If we have no practical reasons, then we may have epistemic reasons.[11] But in the absence of any such reasons for doing so, it follows that we have no justification for accepting such a proposition. Without having any kind of practical motivation or epistemic support for treating *p* as true, we have no reasons that justify accepting *p* as true. I propose that to treat something as true in the absence of a justifying reason is irrational.

To illustrate this, consider the following claim made by Engel (1998):

> It would be very strange, and indeed to some extent irrational, to go out with an umbrella on one of these sunny autumn days that we enjoy in Hong Kong, when all the weather forecasts predict dry, sunny days. . . . It is said that Schopenhauer always insisted, when he sat in a house, to be seated close to the door, in case of fire. That may have proved to be prudent, but it might better be described as a case of mania.

Engel here gives examples of behaviors that arise out of acceptances that lack justification. Taking an umbrella out with me in Hong Kong, in the context as Engel describes it, involves me accepting that there is a chance of rain that makes taking an umbrella out the thing to do. My taking an umbrella out is something I do through acting out of this acceptance. But there are no practical or epistemic considerations that can be treated as reasons for treating this as true; indeed, such an acceptance arguably goes against the mandate of the available reasons, given the sunny forecast. It is this lack of supporting reasons for my acceptance that is the locus of irrationality here. By the same token, presumably Schopenhauer had no reasons to accept that there is any real danger of a fire, all things being equal. By treating it as true that there is some danger, or at least some danger that makes sitting next to the door the thing to do, his acceptance is irrational.

What Engel is illustrating with these cases is not necessarily the irrationality of the behavior exhibited—we can construct cases in which acting in such ways may be totally rational—but rather the irrationality of the acceptances these behaviors arise from. Such acceptances are irrational because they are not supported by any epistemic or practical reasons. Being supported by such reasons can therefore be understood as a rational requirement that acceptances are subject to.

Why is there such a rational requirement? For Cohen (1992), it is the fact that acceptances are something we *do* that puts such a requirement in place, since in accepting something as true within a piece of reasoning we're performing what he says is a "mental act." We're doing something in treating *p* as true. This means, like any action, an acceptance is rational when it

[11]Cases where we have an epistemic reason to accept something we do not believe would be odd, since having such reasons will ordinarily mean that we believe the proposition to be true. But this will not always be the case. I may, for example, find evidence that my partner is having an affair, but find myself prevented from believing this due to my trust in them. I remain firm in my unjustified belief that my partner is faithful. I may, however, be able to *accept* that they are having an affair when reasoning about how to approach the situation, which I'm epistemically justified in doing.

is appropriately sensitive to the mandate of available reasons. This distinguishes acceptances from beliefs, which are not mental acts. Cohen therefore claims that "people are held responsible and accountable for what they accept or fail to accept, not for what they believe or what they fail to believe. For example, a person may be culpable for not accepting the obvious, but not for not believing it." So, to accept a proposition without a justifying reason would essentially be to act despite having no good reasons to. This is irrational.

This view is shared by Ullmann-Margalit and Margalit (1992), who suggest that the rational constraints we tend to assume apply to our beliefs should, in fact, apply only to our acceptances, given that acceptances are "doings," unlike beliefs. Again, this makes us rationally responsible for them in a way that we're not with respect to our beliefs. Crucially, these considerations suggest that acceptances are subject to rational appraisal along an axis of specifically *practical* rationality, as opposed to the epistemic rationality that our beliefs are sensitive to. And this puts them under the requirement that there is either a practical or epistemic reason that justifies them.

Thus, speaking broadly, we can claim that it is rational to accept *p* as part of one's reasoning *iff there is a practical or epistemic reason that justifies doing so*.[12] I'll now show how the practical reasoning that recalcitrant emotions motivate involves acceptances that fail to meet this requirement. We're therefore irrational in engaging in that reasoning.

4 | THE IRRATIONALITY OF EMOTIONALLY RECALCITRANT REASONING

4.1 | Acceptances in emotionally recalcitrant reasoning

I propose that when we allow a recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning, that reasoning involves accepting propositions that we do not believe to be true *in the absence of any reason that justifies doing so*. On the view outlined in the previous section, this is irrational. This means that, as per Döring's core claim, engaging in emotionally recalcitrant reasoning involves irrationality. However, this irrationality occurs not necessarily because this engagement involves us making conflicting judgments, as Döring claims, but rather because it involves acceptances that fail to satisfy a requirement of rationality they are subject to.

As we've seen, emotions motivate practical reasoning. This reasoning is often the intermediary between our emotions and the actions they motivate. This is also true of recalcitrant emotions. When experiencing recalcitrant fear of Fido for example, we will be motivated to engage in practical reasoning aimed at determining how to act in emotion-relevant ways: how to avoid an encounter with Fido perhaps, or what to do if he approaches us. As we saw in the last section, practical reasoning involves acceptances. So, in engaging in this reasoning it will be necessary for us to accept propositions relevant to this reasoning, such as "Fido is dangerous," or "Fido poses a threat to me." We treat these propositions as true in engaging in the reasoning our recalcitrant fear of Fido motivates.

Similarly, in the case of recalcitrant fear of flying, when deliberating about how to act in the event of a plane crash, for example, we must accept propositions such as "there is a danger of the plane crashing" or, merely, "I am in danger." Insofar as the reasoning we engage in is practical reasoning, for Bratman (1992) acceptances like these are necessary for planning and

[12]This rational requirement further distinguishes acceptances from other nearby propositional attitudes like assumption and presumption, since Cohen (1992) makes clear that we need reasons for the acceptances in a way that we do not for the assumptions or presumptions: "a presumption is typically what you may take for granted about a particular issue, in default of reasons against so doing so. But for acceptance that p to be justifiable you normally need to have reasons in favor of it." This emphasizes the distinction mentioned earlier (see note 9).

deliberating in such a way, forming the "cognitive background" of our deliberation. To not do so would mean we're unable to engage in such deliberation. And since the emotion motivating this reasoning is recalcitrant, the propositions we accept are ones that we do not believe. As we've seen, there is nothing inherently irrational about accepting propositions we do not believe, so long as we have a reason that justifies doing so. The problem with emotionally recalcitrant reasoning is that it involves acceptances of propositions that we do not believe without any such reasons. And this is irrational.

There are no epistemic reasons for such acceptances, since, for example, we believe that Fido is not dangerous or that the plane will not crash. Insofar as these background beliefs are justified, the recalcitrance of our emotion would seem to rule out there being epistemic reasons for such acceptances (though we'll look at some less ordinary cases shortly). More notably, however, given that the fear motivating our reasoning is recalcitrant, meaning the appraisal it gives is at odds with our belief that we're completely safe, we have no practical reasons to accept the propositions within the reasoning it motivates. Whereas in cases of "appropriate" fear we believe there is some danger we need to avoid, and we thus have a practical reason to accept relevant propositions in our reasoning about how to act, in cases of recalcitrant fear we have no such practical reason, since we believe there simply is no danger to avoid or defend ourselves against.[13] That is, there are no practical considerations that can be treated as reasons to accept—to treat it as true—that Fido poses a threat to us or that we're in danger whilst sitting on the plane. And yet this is exactly what we do in engaging in that reasoning. So, when a recalcitrant emotion motivates practical reasoning, it is the recalcitrance of that emotion that means the acceptances at play within that reasoning have no reasons supporting them. The lack of reasons for those acceptances is inherited from the recalcitrance of the motivating emotion.

This picture becomes clearer if we compare with a case of appropriate, "non-recalcitrant" fear, i.e., fear that aligns with our beliefs about the world. Take the example given earlier: you hear a noise downstairs in the night, experience fear, and begin reasoning about how to escape or confront the apparent intruder. In engaging in this practical reasoning, it is necessary to accept propositions such "there is an intruder" or "I am in danger." But here you have both an epistemic and a practical reason for such an acceptance: the noise is strongly suggestive of an intruder's presence, giving you an epistemic reason, and the necessity to avoid the danger posed by the intruder means you have a practical reason. There are thus epistemic and practical considerations that can be treated as reasons for accepting that there is an intruder, meaning you are rationally permitted to accept this here. This aligns with our sense that there is nothing problematic about the reasoning motivated by your fear in such a scenario.

As stated, this is not true when we engage in the practical reasoning motivated by a recalcitrant emotion. We have neither an epistemic nor a practical reason to accept the relevant propositions involved. And we have no such reasons precisely because the emotion motivating that reasoning is recalcitrant, i.e., at odds with how we take the world to be. Ultimately, I contend that this is the respect in which we're irrational when we allow a recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning. Our recalcitrant emotions motivate us to engage in practical reasoning that involves acceptances that are not supported by reasons. They thereby fail to satisfy the requirement of rationality I identified earlier.

Of course, the kind of reasoning I identify may not be specific to emotional recalcitrance. This means that my claims about what makes emotionally recalcitrant reasoning irrational may very well apply to cases further afield, where no recalcitrant emotion is involved. Some forms of intrusive thought, for instance, may involve engaging in reasoning where we accept

[13]This assumes internalism about practical reasons. But this is a background assumption common to much of the debate on emotional recalcitrance.

certain propositions without sufficient reason. But I'm happy to yield this. Remember, in line with Döring's view, the aim was not to show what is irrational about recalcitrant emotions in and of themselves. Rather, I wanted to shed light on Döring's claim that a form of irrationality emerges in the reasoning that our recalcitrant emotions can lead to. There is thus no demand that this reasoning is exclusively motivated by emotional recalcitrance. Nor is there a demand that the form of irrationality I've identified is exclusive to cases of emotional recalcitrance. Rather, I've simply identified a form of irrational reasoning that happens to be the kind of reasoning that recalcitrant emotions generally motivate. It is quite plausible that this reasoning may be found elsewhere too.

The account I've given, then, is as follows. The acceptances that are involved in emotionally recalcitrant reasoning have neither epistemic nor practical justification. This is precisely because the emotion motivating that reasoning is at odds with how we take the world to be. Through accepting the propositions we do in engaging in that reasoning, we are irrational. I've thus offered an extension to Döring's account by showing precisely what is irrational about allowing a recalcitrant emotion to influence our reasoning. Yet where Döring suggests that engaging in this reasoning is irrational because it involves us making a judgment that corresponds with our recalcitrant emotion, I've suggested that this reasoning is irrational because it involves us accepting propositions as true without justification.

This is a conclusion reached by considering the kind of reasoning emotions in general motivate. As we've seen, emotions tend to motivate practical reasoning specifically, aimed at determining how to act. And practical reasoning generally involves us taking attitudes of acceptance, rather than making judgments. It is these acceptances that are the loci of irrationality in emotionally recalcitrant reasoning. Moreover, since acceptances are taken to be mental acts we perform, what makes emotionally recalcitrant reasoning irrational is not what we believe or judge when engaged with it, but rather what we're *doing* when engaged with it. Thus, emotionally recalcitrant reasoning is not necessarily epistemically irrational as Döring claims. Rather, it is more accurately characterized as *practically* irrational. I'll now consider some possible objections to this account.

4.2 | Objections

In order to bolster my account, it seems necessary to think about how we might put pressure on it. We can do this by looking at how we might find justification for the acceptances in our emotionally recalcitrant reasoning along either the practical or epistemic axis. Let us consider the practical axis first.

We can imagine cases where we appear to have practical reasons for the acceptances within our emotionally recalcitrant reasoning. For example, suppose Fido's owner is having a dinner party that I'm attending. At the party, I experience my usual recalcitrant fear of Fido and deliberate about how to avoid him, which, as stated, involves accepting propositions such as "Fido is dangerous." I've argued that to do so is irrational given the absence of reasons for such acceptances. However, suppose I recognize that engaging in this reasoning makes me feel more at ease in Fido's presence. When I try to suppress this reasoning, I feel more anxious. I've therefore identified a practical reason for engaging in this reasoning and so for accepting that Fido is dangerous, even though I believe he is harmless: doing so allows me to enjoy the party. Do I thereby have a practical reason for such acceptances, one which renders them rational?

According to the account I've given, we must concede the rationality of this reasoning. Engaging in it allows me to enjoy the party, and so I have a practical reason for treating it as true that Fido is dangerous as part of that engagement. This acceptance is therefore rational on my account. But here I would respond that given the nature of this reasoning and what is motivating me to engage in it, in cases like this I'm simply no longer engaged in genuine emotionally

recalcitrant reasoning. This is because I'm not motivated to engage in it out of my emotional state, or, more precisely, because of my emotion's action tendencies. Rather, I'm motivated to engage in it by my higher-order judgment that doing so will allow me to enjoy the party, a judgment reached via self-reflection.

We might say of such cases that I'm no longer deliberating about how to avoid an attack with a view to avoiding or preparing for danger, but rather I'm deliberating from a higher-order perspective about how to avoid an attack with a view to alleviating *my fear* of such an attack. Of course, my practical reasoning may be aimed at both of these ends, however, by virtue of it being at least partially aimed at alleviating my fear, it is reasoning that takes place from a higher-order, self-reflective perspective. This distinguishes it from emotionally recalcitrant reasoning, which we engage in purely because our emotion is motivating us to work out how to act in accordance with it. In other words, in the case just considered, such reasoning would not, as Döring (2015) puts it, be accurately describable as a case of "allowing my emotion to influence my reasoning."[14]

What this suggests is that whilst we can obviously gerrymander (somewhat obscure) cases like this to try and identify practical reasons for our acceptances in cases of emotionally recalcitrant reasoning, we simply seem to be changing the focus in doing so. As I've argued, the acceptances within emotionally recalcitrant reasoning are irrational because we have no reason for them: this is precisely because we're motivated to engage in this reasoning by an emotion that is at odds with how we take the world to be. The lack of reasons is inherited from the recalcitrance of that emotion. In cases like the one just raised, where we derive some practical reason for the acceptances within our reasoning from some self-reflective perspective we might take, or elsewhere, we're no longer engaging in this reasoning purely out of our emotional state. In deriving such a reason for our acceptances, and accepting the propositions we do for that reason, it will now be something else motivating that reasoning; for example, our desire to enjoy the party. So it is no longer genuine emotionally recalcitrant reasoning. Such cases therefore do not threaten my account.

Another way we might put pressure on my account is by considering, as Majeed (2022) does, cases where my emotion is recalcitrant to a belief that is not epistemically justified. Perhaps my recalcitrant emotion tracks the relevant epistemic considerations better than my beliefs. In such cases, presumably I have epistemic reasons for the acceptances within my emotionally recalcitrant reasoning. For example, suppose that Fido is a large angry rottweiler with a track record of viciousness. I'm afraid of him given my awareness of his fear-inducing properties, yet I cannot help but believe that he is harmless. I may be an avid dog lover who naïvely thinks that no dog poses a threat. In such a case, it would be my *emotion* that accurately tracks the relevant epistemic considerations, and I would therefore be justified in accepting propositions such as "Fido is dangerous." I have good epistemic reasons to. Am I still irrational in accepting such a proposition as part of the reasoning motivated by my recalcitrant fear?

It certainly seems that I would be justified in accepting this, since I have epistemic and practical reasons for doing so: I'm aware that Fido is notoriously vicious. And, moreover, cases like this tap into the wider question of why recalcitrant emotions are often defaulted as interferers with our belief-forming mechanisms, rather than treated as epistemic sources themselves: as Brady (2014) argues, often our emotions can act as reliable epistemic guides. However, the problem with this objection is that it does not take into account the background assumption typical of debates on emotional recalcitrance that it is a *justified* belief that recalcitrant emotions conflict with. This assumption would likely be because we would expect our belief-forming mechanisms to generally be more accurate than our emotions at tracking truth

[14]Indeed, Solomon (1973) argues that as soon as we're consciously aware of some instrumental purpose of some emotion or emotional expression we may have brought about in ourselves, it no longer counts as a genuine expression of emotion. It is now a calculated behavior. Presumably this sentiment applies to the reasoning and cognitions our emotions motivate, too, which would support the claim being made here.

(whether or not this assumption is valid is up for debate, although this is a question for another day). When discussing the rationality of recalcitrant emotions, then, the aim of such inquiries is to work out what is irrational about that conflicting emotion itself—or the behaviors or reasoning they might motivate, in Döring's case and my own. There is clearly nothing irrational about my emotion in the example just given or the acceptances within the practical reasoning it will motivate. So, whilst relevant for shedding light on the important wider question of why emotions are not given their due as trackers of truth, cases like these are simply not my target. In such cases, the locus of irrationality lies within my beliefs and their responsiveness to epistemic considerations, rather than my emotion and the reasoning it is motivating.

Another possible objection would be to claim that emotionally recalcitrant reasoning is not genuine practical reasoning and therefore does not involve acceptances at all. Indeed, as Bratman (1992) claims, we do not find acceptances in hypothetical or suppositional reasoning; it might be tempting to say that these are the kinds of reasoning our emotions actually motivate. He illustrates this as follows: if you were to ask yourself, "Suppose I win a million dollars. How would I spend it?," you may engage in a form of deliberation about what you might spend your money on in such a scenario. This reasoning, Bratman argues, does not involve accepting that you will win a million dollars, since you are merely engaged in suppositional reasoning. You are not actually trying to work out how to act should certain circumstances obtain. One might argue that this is actually the kind of reasoning recalcitrant emotions motivate. If this is correct, we would therefore not be irrational in reasoning as such, since our reasoning would not be genuine practical reasoning that involves irrational acceptances as I've claimed.

There is, however, an important distinction between suppositional reasoning and the reasoning motivated by recalcitrant emotions: we seem to be genuinely committed to the course of action we're determining when engaged in emotionally recalcitrant reasoning. In our state of recalcitrant fear, for example, we're trying to determine strategies for threat avoidance or defense given that our fear is signaling that danger is imminent. We're not merely fantasizing about what we might do if we were in danger. This is reflected in the fact that we often adjust our present conduct accordingly when engaged in such reasoning in the grip of fear. We may tighten our seatbelt or sit on the opposite side of the room from Fido, for example.[15] We might therefore say that there is a distinct dissimilarity in *motivational potential* between suppositional reasoning and emotionally recalcitrant reasoning.

This is because, as we've seen, emotions have specific action tendencies and so are intimately connected with our behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007; Clore, 1994; Frijda, 1986, 1994; Scarantino, 2017; Tappolet, 2009). And the intermediary between emotions and behavior are the cognitions that facilitate our determination of appropriate action, i.e., practical reasoning. That is, emotions motivate us to act in emotion-relevant ways and thereby motivate us to work out how to act in emotion-relevant ways. They do not simply motivate us to suppose how we *would* act in certain circumstances. And this is true with recalcitrant emotions too. We therefore have good reasons to think that emotionally recalcitrant reasoning is not merely suppositional reasoning like fantasizing about winning the lottery, but is indeed genuine practical reasoning. I'm working out how *to* act in order to avoid Fido, not how I *would* act in order to avoid Fido. Only the former involves treating it as true—accepting—that Fido poses some danger to me. And this means that emotionally recalcitrant reasoning involves the kind of irrational acceptances I've identified.[16]

[15]On Döring's (2015) view, adjusting our action in such a way would qualify for practical irrationality, namely through acting akratically.

[16]Further, as stated, it may very well be the case that this reasoning does genuinely lead us to act in correspondence our emotion as well, thereby not only amounting to irrationality on my own account, but satisfying Döring's condition for practical irrationality, too.

5 | CONCLUSION

The claim that emotionally recalcitrant reasoning involves irrationality is true for both Brady and Döring. In engaging in it, Döring would say we have conflicting judgments, and Brady would say we're inclined toward irrational actions (although Brady does not make reasoning necessary for this inclination).[17] In this article, I've offered an extension to Döring's account by way of an explanation as to how this reasoning entails irrationality. I've argued that engaging in such reasoning is irrational because that engagement involves accepting propositions in the absence of justifying epistemic or practical reasons. Such reasons are absent precisely because our reasoning is motivated by an emotion that is at odds with how we take the world to be.

It is worth reiterating that the kind of reasoning I've highlighted is merely typical of the experience of recalcitrant emotions. I make no claims of necessity here, and it is certainly true that we can experience a recalcitrant emotion without engaging in this reasoning, meaning the irrationality I've identified would not emerge. All I've done is show how we're irrational when we do engage in it. Further, I've not claimed that this is the *only* way in which recalcitrant emotions involve irrationality. I agree with Döring that acting on our emotions would also be irrational. Indeed, to act on such an emotion will likely involve the kind of acceptances I've outlined, although these forms of irrationality are not to be conflated since such acceptances can be made without acting. In order for the irrationality I've identified to occur, we must merely engage in the practical reasoning our recalcitrant emotion motivates. And this will often be the case given how common such reasoning is in our emotional experiences.

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[17]My account may be a boon for Brady's; perhaps it could be treated as a way of pinning down the irrationality of being "inclined" toward emotion-relevant action, as he claims.

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