

## The Case of a Fear of Flying

*An enquiry into the rationality of recalcitrant emotions*

Thijs Heijmeskamp

### 1. Introduction

Your palms are sweaty, your mouth is dry; you feel dizzy as you breathe heavily. The muscles tense and your chest hurts. Many people undergo these ordeals when they merely enter a plane. For some people taking an airplane is as normal as taking the bus, for others airplanes are a somewhat uncomfortable mode of transportation and for some flying is one of the most frightening things in the world. It does not matter how many statistics on the safety of flying a person who is afraid of flying sees, the fear does not subside easily. Even though a person believes that flying is perfectly safe, that person can still be nailed to the ground with fear. The fear of flying is an example of a *recalcitrant emotion*. A recalcitrant emotion is an emotion that we experience despite a judgement that seems to conflict with it. In the case of a fear of flying it is the judgement 'flying is perfectly clear' that conflicts with the emotion of 'fearing for one's safety'. The fear of flying and other phobias are not the only cases of recalcitrant emotions. Recalcitrant emotions occur in ordinary experience and need not be emotions of fear.

In the case of the fear of flying there is a clear tension between the judgement and the bout of fear. *Prima facie*, there seems to be a rational conflict between the judgement and the emotion; that is the emotion seems to contradict the judgement. In the case of a fear of flying this rational conflict seems to be clear. However, not all cases of recalcitrant emotions are problematic. Such in the case of a rollercoaster ride or Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn who saves his friend Jim, there is no clear rational conflict. This raises the question how and if an emotion can rationally relate to an emotion. In which sense can a recalcitrant emotion involve rational conflict?

The aim of this paper is to present an account of the rationality of recalcitrant emotions. I will argue that a recalcitrant emotion is not irrational because of a conflict with a belief, but because of a practical conflict with a person's reasoned goals.

This paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, I argue that recalcitrant emotions have been for the most part judged unwarrantedly negative and that not all recalcitrant emotions can be judged as irrational. This is, in my view, most apparent in the *(neo)judgementalist* theories of emotions, which emphasises the evaluative aspect of emotions. The issue of recalcitrant emotions has been widely discussed by authors working within this tradition. In his paper *The Irrationality of Recalcitrant Emotions*, Michael Brady (2009) gave an extensive overview of why the judgementalist and neojudgementalist theories failed to adequately account for recalcitrant emotions and tried to formulate an alternative account within the (neo)judgementalist tradition. According to Brady, an emotion is an *inclination to assent to an evaluation*. I argue that Brady does not solve the problem of the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions. By examining the (neo)judgementalists and Brady an interesting problem comes to light. Namely, by focussing on phobias and other negative emotions, recalcitrant emotions are often unnecessarily portrayed in a negative light, while a recalcitrant emotion can be a very constructive experience.

In the second part, I provide an account of how recalcitrant emotions can be irrational. Although I do not identify my own position as (neo)judgementalist, I use Brady's theory of emotion as a springboard for an alternative account of recalcitrant emotions. I argue that Brady unnecessarily separates the emotions from the content of an evaluation. By applying the insights given by Brady in a framework that takes the

embodiment of emotions as forefront, I argue that the irrationality of an emotion is dependent on the action the emotion is oriented towards and the evaluative aspect of the emotion. I apply this account to the case of a fear of flying. I conclude that if an emotion hinders us to perform actions or goals that we deem worthy of pursuing, an emotion is irrational. The rationality of an emotion is largely derived from the action the emotion is oriented towards.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Judgementalism, Neojudgementalism and the Recalcitrant Emotion

One influential cognitivist theory of emotion is judgementalism, which states that emotions are a kind of evaluative judgement, that is assertive propositional attitudes. Although forms of judgementalism can be traced back to the stoics, its first contemporary formulation is usually attributed to Robert Solomon (1976). In this view, when a subject judges that he or she is in danger, then this warrants the feeling of fear. In other words, you cannot be afraid of X, if you do not believe X to be dangerous. Since an emotion contains propositional attitudes, an emotion can be stated in terms of propositions: I am afraid of the bear, because I judge the bear as dangerous. If emotions are (or embody) judgements, then this means that emotions have cognitive content and are subject to the same rational commitments as (other) beliefs.

### 2.1 Judgementalism and the problem of recalcitrant emotions.

Recalcitrant emotions pose a challenge for judgementalist theories, because recalcitrant emotions seem to suggest that judgements are neither necessary nor sufficient for the existence of an emotion. If emotions are judgements, then one should expect the fear to disappear once a person has judged flying to be safe. Just like you cannot genuinely hold two contradictory beliefs (believe both A and not A at the same time), you also cannot hold an emotion that contradicts a belief. A judgementalist is forced to ascribe two contradictory judgements to an agent and therefore the agent is irrational when holding a recalcitrant emotion. Judgementalists have a hard time explaining this conflict between judgements and emotions. In the case of a recalcitrant emotion a subject does not consciously assent to a judgement, so the judgementalist must hold that the judgement in question is held unconsciously

(Brady, 2009, p. 414). This is problematic because it implies that a subject is confused: he holds an incoherent evaluative profile. This would mean that the conflict between a judgement and an emotion is unintelligible. However, conflicts between emotions and judgements occur frequently and are quite intelligible. Although you know you are perfectly safe, the fear persists. This experience is common to most of us. Patricia Greenspan (1988) has argued that the judgementalists need a reason for why they violate the *principle of logical charity* (p. 18). The principle of logical charity states that we can assume that an agent behaves quite rationally in general. Although logical incoherency is possible, our ascription of beliefs to an agent ought to be governed by a principle of logical charity in such a way that “we need some special reason [...] for attributing to him an unacknowledged judgment in conflict with those he acknowledges” (Ibid., 1988, p. 18). Attributing an unconscious judgement to an agent is not the only solution in explaining the conflict between an emotion and an already consciously held judgement (this conflict might not necessarily even be a rational conflict, but could just be a psychological conflict); there are other possible (and more likely) explanations. The only reason judgementalists provide for ascribing an unconscious judgement to an agent in the case of a recalcitrant emotion, is that it follows from adherence to their theory. In order to explain recalcitrant emotions, the judgementalists need a better reason for assigning unconscious judgements to agents than that it follows from theory or risk undermining their own explanation of recalcitrant emotions.

The case of the fear of flying seems to be a nail in the coffin for judgementalist theories of emotion, since I can be well aware of the safety of flying, while still being afraid. This implies that the emotion in question is not or does not contain a judgement that is in contradiction with the belief that flying is safe. Therefore, judgements seem neither necessary nor sufficient for the existence of emotions.

### 2.2 Neojudgementalism

In response to the problem of recalcitrant emotions, judgementalist theories of emotions seem to have been largely abandoned in favour of neojudgementalist models of emotion. In reaction to the problem that (recalcitrant) emotions do not have propositional attitudes, neojudgementalists deny that emotions are judgements. A ‘simple’ neojudgementalist holds that emotions

do not involve evaluative judgements, but *evaluative perceptions or feelings or construals or thoughts* (Brady, 2009, p. 415). In this view, the subject of an emotional experience construes or thinks of an object in an evaluative way, which falls short of a fully-fledged judgement. Thus, there is no longer the question of contradictory beliefs. The fact that I see flying in a plane as dangerous, or construe flying as dangerous does not entail that I *believe* flying is dangerous. In order to believe that flying is dangerous, I need to *assent* to the appearance.

According to this neojudgementalist account of emotions, there is no rational conflict between a recalcitrant emotion and a judgement. An agent cannot be accused of irrationality when an agent is merely construing a situation as thus-and-so, while not believing the situation is thus-and-so. If emotions are more akin to perceptions, it is not clear how they can come into conflict with judgements. A person seeing a straight stick bending in water is not irrational. If emotions are like perceptions, then the mind of a phobic is not irrational, just like the mind of a person subjected to an optical illusion is not irrational. This goes against the intuition “(...) that there is something wrong, from the standpoint of rationality, when fear persists in the face of a subject’s judgement that she is in little to no danger” (Ibid., 2009, pp. 413–414). For a neojudgementalist there are two possible responses: either reject this intuition and maintain that emotions are not subject to rational requirements or try to meet this objection.

### 2.3 Emotions as inclinations

Brady aims to formulate a different neojudgementalist theory that can meet the objection that neojudgementalist theories fail to account for the intuition that recalcitrant emotions involve rationality. According to Brady, both the judgementalist and the other neojudgementalist answers fall short: “Whereas judgementalism imputes too much irrationality to someone experiencing recalcitrant emotion, neojudgementalism fails to impute enough” (2009, p. 416). Brady wants to hold on to the rational conflict between emotions and judgement, without having an overly strong conception of rational conflict that the judgementalists suffer from.

Brady intends to maintain a close link between judgements and emotions, but construing emotions as judgements imputes too much rationality

upon them. The neojudgementalist construe emotions as some sort of evaluation that falls short of a judgement. As a consequence, emotions cannot be construed as (ir)rational in this neojudgementalist view. What the neojudgementalist mean with emotion as a sort of evaluation is that when we experience an emotion the import of the situation impresses or trusts itself upon us (Brady, 2009, p. 420). The meaning of an emotion immediately becomes clear to us;<sup>2</sup> when we feel fear, we believe that we are threatened. So when we see a bear and genuinely experience fear, we believe that the bear is a threat to us. We do not have to infer from the feeling of fear and the perception of a bear, that the bear is fearsome. However, Brady adds to this that, to say that the import of a situation impresses upon a subject is roughly the same as saying that a subject is *inclined* to assent to a certain view of the situation. An emotion is an *inclination* to assent to an evaluation (Ibid., 2009, pp. 420–421). Emotions themselves do not contain rational commitments, but focus and hold one’s attention on a particular object or aspect of a situation in order to enhance our evaluative construal. An emotion focusses and holds our attention; therefore, an emotion requires many of the cognitive resources to incline a subject to endorse an evaluative construal. In the case of recalcitrant emotions this focus is a waste of energy, because an agent has already made a judgement in this situation and a focus of attention is no longer needed. That is why an emotion is irrational when it is recalcitrant (Ibid. 2009, pp. 426–429).

It is important to note that the inclination to assent to an evaluation is in itself arational. Thus, Brady successfully averts the criticism of judgementalist theories of having to account for two contradictory judgements. An inclination to assent is no more or less rational than to feel tired. It is not the emotion itself that is irrational because it contradicts judgement, but it is the waste of cognitive motivational energy that makes the recalcitrant emotion irrational. Brady formulates the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions in a second way: the recalcitrant emotion is irrational because it involves the violation of a certain epistemic norm. Namely, a recalcitrant emotion inclines a subject to accept and act on an evaluation the subject already judged as false. Thus, a recalcitrant emotion is not only epistemically irrational for what it inclines a subject to believe, but also for how it inclines a subject to believe despite being aware that there is no good reason to accept this construal (Ibid., 2009, p. 428). A third reason Brady gives for the irrationality of recal-

citant emotions is that people invent reasons to support their emotional claim (Ibid., 2009, pp. 428-429). However, this third reason explains little, because not all people invent reasons in the case of recalcitrant emotions and it does not explain the conflict between emotions and judgements.

#### 2.4 The negative attitude towards recalcitrant emotions

For Brady, a recalcitrant emotion is epistemically irrational. However, this does not solve the problem of the recalcitrant emotion, but merely shifts the problem. Now Brady must explain what exactly constitutes a waste of cognitive energy. But more importantly, he must explain why one should hold the norm that wasting one's cognitive energy is irrational. A recalcitrant emotion can be a fruitful instrument for new experiences. Take for instance rollercoaster rides, through which I can experience fear while having the belief that I am safe. It is not irrational for me to focus on my fear when riding a rollercoaster if I derive pleasure from it, as long as that fear is no basis for forming a belief. In fact, many of our cultural practises depend on similar discrepancy between emotions and judgements. For instance, when an actor plays the role of a suffering character, the audience can empathise but at the same time know that the actor is not really suffering. Hardly anybody is inclined to say that this is a case of a recalcitrant emotion. It remains unclear what warrants the epistemic norm. Thus, Brady's account of emotions as inclinations to assent to an evaluation falls short in accounting for the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions.

However, Brady's account of the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions shows a bias that is also present in judgementalist and many neojudgementalist accounts: conflicts between emotions and judgements must be avoided and when there is a conflict between an emotion and a judgement it is the emotion that has to lose out. There is the tendency in Brady and (neo)judgementalist theories of emotions to discuss examples of recalcitrant emotions where the emotions are in the wrong. The judgementalists speak of recalcitrant emotions as contradicting justified beliefs. Brady speaks of recalcitrant emotions as a waste of cognitive motivational energy. By focusing on negative emotions, judgements are unjustifiably favoured over emotions. The standard of favouring judgements over emotions leads to an overly negative appraisal of recalcitrant emotions.

A well-used example of favouring a recalcitrant emotion over its conflicting judgement is the case of Huckleberry Finn, which was first given as an example by Jonathan Bennett (1974). Huck helps his friend Jim to run away from his slave owners, but he has a bout of conscience while helping his friend. Huck decided to turn his friend Jim in, because he believed he had stolen property from others.<sup>3</sup> However, Huck's belief that he did something wrong conflicts with his sympathy and natural feelings for his friend. Instead of turning Jim in, he lies to the slave hunters in order to save his friend. Huck has many reasons for giving his friend up and none for stealing. Huck sees his compassion for Jim as a weak, ignorant and wicked felony. As Bennett (1974) puts it "he simply *fails* to do what he believes to be right" (emphasis in the original) (p. 4). In this case it is not the emotion that has it wrong. In this case adjusting our emotional disposition to our judgement would be wrong. Furthermore, it is difficult to judge Huck's reconsideration of his judgements to put them more in line with his emotions as irrational. In fact, the recalcitrance of his sympathy was even necessary, from the standpoint of rationality for Huck to reconsider his judgements (Döring, 2014, p. 129).

Examples like Huckleberry Finn show that there are no *prima facie* reasons to favour judgements over emotions and to judge each case of a recalcitrant emotion as irrational. The difference between a fear of flying and enjoying a rollercoaster ride seems to be of *practical* nature and *contextual*, not rational. Moreover, recalcitrant emotions become problematic when they are unwarranted. This implies that the (neo)judgementalists were wrong in putting the conflict between judgement and emotion in the forefront of understanding recalcitrant emotions. When it comes to cases like phobias such as a fear of flying, there is a clear conflict.<sup>4</sup> However, this conflict need not necessarily be a rational conflict. So how are we to characterise the conflict between the emotion and judgement in the case of unwarranted recalcitrant emotions?

### 3. A Sketch of a Theory of Emotion

So far, the analysis of (neo)judgementalist positions has left the emotion far from the realm of rationality. The problem of recalcitrant emotions seems not to be a case of an irrational problem, but more a problem of practical nature. So before I continue to address the rationality of recalcitrant emotions, I need to give an alternative account of emotions. In order to do this,

I address two specific mistakes in Brady's account that in my view stand in the way of adequately addressing the rationality of recalcitrant emotions. In section 3.1, I argue that Brady sees the role of emotions in evaluations as too limited. Furthermore, in section 3.2 I argue that Brady splits the emotions in mental and bodily aspects, thereby separating arousal, appraisal and action. By addressing these two problems, it becomes clear that an emotion does not contradict a belief, but an emotion can still be rationally assessed. The judgementalists emphasised the evaluative part of emotions, but made the mistake of construing emotional evaluations as a form of judgements. Although judgementalists had no problem explaining why an emotion could be rationally assessed, in the case of recalcitrant emotions a judgementalist was forced to impute too much irrationality to a subject. Brady's answer to the problems of judgementalism (and neojudgementalism) was to separate the emotion from the content of the evaluation. However, Brady was unsuccessful in showing how (recalcitrant) emotion can be rational or irrational, because the emotion had no influence on the content of its accompanying evaluation. In order to speak of the (ir)rationality of an emotion, we need a theory of emotion that relates the emotion to the content of an evaluative construal without the strong rational commitments of the judgementalists. Although the scope of this paper does not allow me to go beyond a mere sketch of a theory of emotion, it should be sufficient to further the investigation into the irrationality of recalcitrant emotions.

### 3.1 Why do we feel?

In Brady's view the role of emotions is to allow us to respond to important matters in the right way. They do this by alerting us to significant events or objects in our environment, thereby facilitating cognitive processing and enabling us to act appropriately with respect to these objects or events (Brady, 2009, p. 422). It is important to note that for Brady the evaluative construal is not the emotion nor is it created by the emotion. The emotion does not detect the salient objects or events, but the emotion captures our attention and enhances the representation of emotional objects (Ibid., 2009, p. 423). An emotion also prepares us for a specific behavioural response; for instance, the subject is being primed for fight-or-flight behaviour (Ibid., 2009, p. 425). In this way, Brady introduces a 'motion' into his theory of

emotion. Although Brady sees emotions as primarily passive, only reacting to stimuli and evaluative construals, they do involve a 'movement' in the form of an inclination to accept an evaluation or perform an action. However, the emotion does not have any influence on the content of the evaluative representation that is formed, besides the amount of attention that is given to the formation of the evaluative representation.

There is, however, good reason to question the limited role Brady gives to emotions in forming the content of an evaluation. Consider the following example given by Sartre (1984, p. 195): imagine yourself walking alongside a country road. Suddenly you are feeling hungry. You encounter a tree with a bunch of grapes; you extend your hand in order to reach for the grapes, however, the grapes are beyond your reach. Consequently, you shrug your shoulders and move on. In this example, our emotions not merely perceive salient properties of the world, but act upon the world itself (Ibid., 1984, p. 195). The grapes first appear as 'desirable' and 'ready to be picked'; however, the grapes are beyond reach so the urge for the grapes cannot be realised. This leads to an unbearable tension between the urge and the inability to reach for them. This tension is resolved by bestowing the new quality of 'too green' onto the grapes, thereby construing the grapes as unwanted. In the words of Sartre: "Only I cannot confer this quality on the grapes chemically. I cannot act upon the bunch in ordinary ways. So I seize upon this sourness of the too green grapes by acting disgusted. I magically confer upon the grapes the quality I desire" (1984, p. 195). Without actually modifying the structure of the object in question another quality is conferred upon it. In the case of the grapes one makes them less desirable. What occurs is a transformation of the world by our emotions, so that when all ways are barred we can still act. This transformation is not necessarily a conscious process. According to Sartre, when we experience an emotion "it is the body, which [...] changes its relations with the world in order that the world may change its qualities" (1984, p. 195). For Sartre, emotions are self-deceptive, a coping mechanism for a world we can no longer live in, strategies to avoid action and responsibility. However, Sartre ultimately took the wrong lesson.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not emotions are deceptive, it is emotions that show us possibilities for action. It is emotions that move us towards actions and redirect us towards alternative actions when we cannot act on our original urges.

Brady makes the same mistake as other neojudgementalists in seeing the emotions as passive in the sense of only responding to objects or events in the world and not as actively creating meaning. Again, the evaluative construal or judgement is favoured over the emotion in that the emotion is only there to aid the evaluation. Inclining us to actions is an activity in itself. Brady fails to see that introducing a vector in the emotions and thereby making the emotions more dynamic is at odds with seeing the emotion as fundamentally passive. He focusses too much on the fact that emotions consume cognitive attention, and too little on the unbreakable link between the emotion and the action. Seeing the grapes as green is not reacting to a new salient property or object, but is changing the relationship between the actor and the grapes by construing the grapes as undesirable.

### 3.2 Embodied appraisal

The second problem is that although Brady introduces an important notion of seeing emotions as inclinations, he also seems to split the emotion in mental and bodily aspects, each fulfilling different roles. Mentally, the emotions gather cognitive mechanisms for an evaluative appraisal. Bodily, they prepare an agent to act upon that appraisal (think of an increase in heart rate and breathing when one is afraid in order to facilitate running away). However, we do not seem to experience these two elements as separate and neatly distinct from each other (Colombetti, 2007, p. 83). A separation between arousal, appraisal and action is maintained by emotion theories such as judgementalism and Brady's neojudgementalism, which is not found in experience.<sup>6</sup> Without an intervention of cognitive evaluation the arousal remains meaningless for a subject. This means that on a personal level<sup>7</sup> there is no distinction to be found between bodily and mental aspects when it comes to emotions. According to Giovanna Colombetti the "emotional aroused body is rather that *through* which the subject evaluates her world" (emphasis in the original) (2007, p. 544).

Not only on a personal level does the distinction between cognition and emotion (as separate psychological faculties implemented in separate neural areas) not hold. A review of neuroscientific data by Pessoa (2008) shows that brain regions that are traditionally seen as involved with emotion are also involved with cognition. The amygdala, which is highly associated

with fear and is given a central role to fear responses and recognition, is also of crucial importance for cognitive functions such as attention, associated learning and decision making. This is part of the reason why Brady and neojudgementalism (or perceptual accounts) fall short in giving an adequate account of emotions. They rely on a dualistic view of the brain to which emotion and cognition are neurally distinct. However, cognition and emotion overlap and are distributed over the whole brain. All emotions are complex dynamical patterns of brain-body events and no longer separable from cognition (Colombetti, 2014, pp. 98-112).

What does this entail for emotions? Emotions can no longer be seen as inclinations to assent to evaluative construals, since an emotion is in itself already meaningful. In Sartre's example of the grapes, the grapes first appear as desirable and thus as something we can eat. However, when you are unable to reach those grapes, the grapes are construed as disgusting and as objects we can (or rather should) pass by. We move from the possibility of eating the grapes to the possibility of simply walking past the grape. Emotions do not just intervene in deliberative processes, but emotions shape the manner in which things appear to us and structure our reasoning as a consequence (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 187). Emotions do not incline us towards evaluations but towards possibilities of action. Contrary to Brady, I see emotions as intrinsically evaluative and motivational. The action a subject feels drawn towards is usually related to the object of the subject's emotion. This can take the form of an urge to slap somebody's face to a tendency to express a certain emotion. Thus, Brady's notion of emotion should be reformulated: an emotion is an inclination to assent to an action. Emotions move us in the world. They contain a clear 'motor component' that directly relates to the motivational aspect of emotions. Emotions help us to make sense of the world, which is a world in which we act. Therefore, there is no longer any difference between the arousal part and the appraisal part of the emotion.

### 4. The Intuition of Rationality

In the previous section, I argued that an emotion is part of the evaluation of a subject. Secondly, I argued that an emotion pushes us to a certain action. However, these two points do not immediately clarify whether an emotion is apt for rational evaluation. In this section I argue that emo-

tions cannot contradict beliefs, but emotions can still be judged irrational because of a potential practical conflict with our reasoned goals.

A recalcitrant emotion seems to be a mere psychological conflict between an experiential state and a judgement. However, this seems to be at odds with the widespread intuition that a recalcitrant emotion that conflicts with a judgement is irrational. In the words of Brady (2009): “For we have an intuitive sense that there is something wrong, from the standpoint of rationality, when fear persists in the face of a subject’s judgement that she is in little or no danger” (pp. 413-414). How can we reconcile this intuition with the notion of a recalcitrant emotion as a psychological conflict and not a contradiction? I argued that emotions should be seen as an awareness of the possibilities of action. It is important to note that emotions do not contain propositional attitudes;<sup>8</sup> hence emotions themselves cannot be in contradiction with a belief. This does not mean that we can do much against experiencing a recalcitrant emotion (warranted or unwarranted), there is definitely a conflict, but not in the sense that a subject is contradicting itself.

Sabine Döring (2014) argues that there is a non-inferential relation between emotions and other mental states, like judgements or beliefs (pp. 130-131). Inferential relations hold between the propositional contents of judgements. The modus ponens is an example of a deductive inference rule. Döring uses an example given by Peter Goldie to show why inference rules do not apply to emotions. If you feel that someone’s behaviour is irritating, you can feel amused by ‘how over the top’ his irritating behaviour is. However, your amusement cannot be deductively inferred from the premise that certain behaviours that are considered to be ‘way over the top’ are humorous and the premise that the behaviour in question is way over the top. The behaviour is immediately seen as funny. According to Döring (2014), this example shows that the evaluative content of emotions is in some way open to reasons, but those reasons are never compelling and that the contents of emotions are neither propositions, nor just particular objects (pp. 130-131). She gives the example that when we are afraid of a gorilla, this fear is generally not a fear of a sick or a dead gorilla. We fear gorillas only in situations where they present a danger to us. An emotion can persist both logically and psychologically in light of ‘better’ judgement and knowledge. The affective content of emotions is different in kind from the mental content of beliefs

and judgements. The content of beliefs and judgements is strongly susceptible to evidence, in the sense that a subject cannot at the same time consciously and explicitly believe *p* and not-*p* (Ibid., 2014, p. 132). According to Döring (2014), we intuitively sense that recalcitrant emotions are irrational, because they lead to a practical conflict by motivating the subject to act in ways that interfere with the *reasoned pursuit of goals* (p. 125). Conflict arises when an emotion persists in spite of the subject’s better judgement.

The conflict between an emotion and a judgement need not be resolved, as the example of the rollercoaster ride demonstrated, where the recalcitrant emotion does not lead to a practical conflict. However, in the case of Huckleberry Finn there is a conflict that needs to be resolved. Huck believed he acted wrongly in helping his friend Jim. Thus, he reasoned that he should give his friend Jim up to the slave hunters. That is (perceived by Huck and the society as) the moral thing to do. However, Huckleberry’s goal and accompanying actions of giving Jim up conflicted with his feelings of friendship. The compassion he felt for his friend Jim prohibited Huck from accomplishing his goal. In this case, Huck gave up his reasoned goal in favour of acting on his emotions. If an emotion leads to a problematic action in relation to our goals, we can adjust our emotions or our goals,<sup>9</sup> with their accompanying judgements and beliefs. This is something we do all the time; we can choose not to trust somebody because we have a ‘nagging feeling in the back of our heads’, despite there being no reason to distrust somebody. We can also choose to ignore this feeling and consider someone trustworthy. The feeling of distrust is incompatible with the belief that someone is trustworthy; we have to choose one over the other. We can be right or wrong, but it is difficult to consider someone irrational in both cases, even if the person in question is mistaken. When an emotion comes into conflict with a judgement, it becomes problematic if the emotion prohibits us from accomplishing our goals.

Döring (2014) draws the conclusion that this means that emotions cannot be irrational, only the actions that follow from the emotion (p. 135). However, I believe Döring is too quick in drawing this conclusion. According to her, emotions are like perceptions and therefore incapable of contradicting a judgement (Ibid., 2014, p. 135). She is right to emphasise the link between actions and emotions, but she does not consider the emotion as

part of the action in question. Remember that emotions show us possibilities for action and that they are relational experiences in the sense that an emotion indicates how an agent is inclined to respond to some object in the world. Neither is there a strict separation between cognition and actions, meaning that emotions cannot be like perceptions as envisioned by Döring. Contrary to Döring's account, emotions are part of the *evaluative profile* of our reasoned goals. As I argued in the previous section, emotions contribute to what we find meaningful, and therefore to what our personal goals are and what actions are appropriate to achieve those goals. In other words, our emotions cannot be easily separated from the actions. Emotional content displays a characteristic phenomenology while at the same time presenting the world as being a certain way (Slaby, 2007, p. 432). Thus, emotional content can be opposed to beliefs or judgements, without themselves being like judgements or beliefs. This also implies that the content and quality of an emotion are not separate or even separable. When the content of an emotion changes, there will be a change in how we feel about the situation and vice versa. When the content of an unwarranted emotion changes, the felt quality also changes; fear changes into relief. The *intentionality* and *phenomenality* of emotions are essentially united in emotional experience (Ibid., 2007, pp. 431-432). In the next section, I examine the link between irrational emotions and our reasoned goals. I argue that we still need to make a distinction between cases where the practical conflict of emotions and our goals can be solved and cases where this conflict is unsolvable. Only in the later case is a recalcitrant emotion irrational.

### 5. The Irrationality of Action

Being afraid in a rollercoaster is an important element of the enjoyment of a rollercoaster ride. The fear does not prohibit a person from attaining his goals, namely fun, but leads to excitement, which is a fun experience. That fear can lead to enjoyment is without question, since there are many examples of people purposefully seeking out fear.<sup>10</sup> In other words being afraid is part of the game. Here a difference to be found in comparison with a fear of flying. In both cases, there is a conflict between a judgement and an emotion (being afraid of a thing and judging the same thing as safe), but in the case of a rollercoaster ride being fearful perfectly aligns with what we set out to do, while in the case of flying being fearful clashes with safely travelling

from A to B. Being afraid in an airplane is deemed inappropriate in normal conditions. In the example of the fear of flying, a person is motivated to resolve the conflict between the emotion and the judgement, because the emotion inclines the subject to behave in a way that is contrary to the person's actions. In the example of the rollercoaster, a person is not motivated to resolve the conflict between the emotion and the judgement, because this conflict leads to enjoyment.

Whether an emotion is *warranted* or not is dependent on the goals a person has. However, this does not necessarily make an emotion irrational. Huckleberry's emotion interfered with his goals and judgements, so he adjusted one of them. There are also cases in which we can assert some control over our emotions. Emotions do not necessarily lead us to certain actions, at least not in a strict causal sense. Emotions show us a world of opportunities, i.e. practical situations that are significant for us. In the case of a recalcitrant emotion the recalcitrant emotion relates the subject with the world in a way that conflicts with the subject's reasoned goals. I speak of reasoned goals, because the goals must be construed as attainable and reasonable. In a society where nobody flies, a fear of flying is not a problem because flying is not considered as a possibility. Typically, we tend to act<sup>11</sup> on our emotions, so it is not difficult to see how an emotion leads us to behaviour we do not wish to have.

There appear to be two cases of an *unwarranted recalcitrant emotions*. In both cases an emotion interferes with the reasoned pursuit of goals. In the first case, the subject relates to the world in a manner that is incompatible with the subject's goals. This conflict is often solvable; we either adjust our emotional response or at the least withdraw our confidence of its content, or we can adjust our goals. This can be a constructive and fruitful experience. An example of this case would be Huckleberry Finn saving his friend Jim.

The second case, of which the fear of flying would be an example, is when a recalcitrant emotion not only becomes unwarranted but also problematic. In this case, the conflict between the reasoned pursuit of a goal and the interfering emotion is unsolvable.<sup>12</sup> Either a person is unable to change or discard his emotions, or a person is unable to change his goals. Emotional responses are notoriously difficult to change, especially when something is construed as dangerous even if we suspect that the emotion is

deceiving. Emotions can continue to move us even after we have discarded their content. Even changing one's goals can be impossible. Our goals are a fundamental part of our understanding of ourselves as rational agents. Our goals pertain the beliefs, judgements, desires and normative requirements a person commits himself to or society demands of him.

An emotion can be judged as inappropriate, while the emotion in question still moves a person towards a certain action. In light of a person's goals an action can be judged as rational or irrational. If you believe that in order to learn you have to go to school, then the goal of learning reasonably implies that you go to school. However, if you want to learn but you stay in bed and do nothing, your actions are irrational. The same holds when somebody is afraid of flying. If you want to visit friends who live far away, the safest, most comfortable and fastest way to travel is by airplane. However, during the flight, you act afraid and even terrified. Or in worse cases, you do not even make it on the plane. Reasonably you should behave in a comfortable way or at the very least unafraid when flying. However, we act in a different way than what is reasonable in light of our goals, hence our action in the plane can be called irrational. There is a mismatch between our rational goals and our emotional actions and evaluation, meaning that the irrationality of our emotions is derived from the irrationality of its accompanying action and evaluation. A recalcitrant emotion is not irrational because it exists, but because it disrupts the actions leading to the rational agent's goal *for no good reason*. The emotions as an evaluation and an inclination towards a certain action can undermine our evaluative profile of ourselves as rational agents. Therefore, an emotion can only be considered irrational in a weak sense. The recalcitrant emotions in question are irrational because they do not fit in the agent's specific construal of himself as a rational agent.

This of course raises the question of what it means to be rational when experiencing emotions. A full discussion goes beyond the aim of this paper and warrants a whole discussion in itself. What rational goals are or what rational behaviour is, is not a matter of individual reasoning, but reflects the normative expectations of the social group. What is rational is what is recognised as meaningful and therefore rational behaviour. Since the agent's goals and accompanying emotions have to meet the normative expectations of the group, the rationality of emotions gains an ethical dimension.

## 6. Conclusion

In the (neo)judgementalist tradition on recalcitrant emotions, there seems to be misdiagnoses of the problem. It is not the conflict between a judgement and an emotion that makes a recalcitrant emotion problematic, let alone irrational, because some conflicts between judgements and emotions are productive and often rational.

An emotion is irrational because the actions that follow from the emotion in question are irrational in relation to the agent's rational goal. The subject fails to construe the world in possibilities for action that correspond with the subject's goals and as a result the recalcitrant emotion moves (or inclines) the subject to act against his reasoned pursuit of goals. There is a mismatch between the emotional actions and the reasoned goals of the agent; this means that there is a mismatch between how a person behaves and how a person thinks he should behave given his desires and goals. To be more exact: a recalcitrant emotion is not necessarily irrational if it comes into conflict with a judgement nor is it necessarily problematic. When a recalcitrant emotion moves a subject towards an action that conflicts with the reasoned pursuit of his goals and the subject is unable to either adjust his emotional response or his goals, the emotion can be seen as leading to an irrational action. To fully understand a recalcitrant emotion, one must not focus on the belief the emotions seems to contradict but one must look at the agent as a whole, his rational goals and the social context the agent lives in.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank professor Heleen Pott for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. This paper improved significantly as a result of the suggestions of the editors of the Erasmus Student Journal of Philosophy.

*Thijs Heijmeskamp (1988) is currently writing his master thesis on an embodied, situated account of moral agency. Earlier he finished his bachelor's degree in Philosophy at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. His main research interests are in the area of philosophy of mind, metaethics, moral psychology and philosophy of cognition.*

## Notes

1. This paper is not meant to fully discuss all possible ways in which an emotion can be considered irrational, but only the specific cases of unwarranted recalcitrant emotions.
2. Of course, there are cases of conflicting emotions or cases in which we are not sure why we are feeling a particular emotion. However, the meaning of an emotion is always immediate.
3. moral turning in a runaway slave sounds to us, Huck was convinced that turning Jim in to the slave hunters was the moral thing to do. Thus, he viewed his own actions of helping Jim and not betraying him to the slave hunters as immoral.
4. Here, I mean there is at least a clear psychological conflict within a subject who has a phobia.
5. I do not wish to imply that emotions never deceive us. Sartre is right in the sense that emotions can deceive us and emotions do often deceive us. A fear of flying is a good example where it is possible to argue that an emotion deceives a person. However, emotions do not deceive us systematically, but are generally productive.
6. This argument is not necessarily a knockdown argument for a view of embodied emotions and appraisal and the aim of this paper limits room for a complete argumentation for a theory of emotion. However, my sketch here should be sufficient to support my larger thesis. For more on the integration between affect and appraisal see Colombetti (2007).
7. Between the personal and sub-personal level is derived from Daniel Dennett. In short, the personal level is where we have experiences. The sub-personal level is the underlying physical processes.
8. Also in Brady's account emotions lack propositional content as in many other neojudgementalist accounts. (See section 2).
9. I speak of goals in a broad sense. Goals are not only desired results or outcomes, but they also imply actions. Thus, goals pertain behaviour, attitudes, judgements, beliefs and desires.
10. What can be questioned is whether the fear that is sought out is the same as the fear experienced in unwarranted cases.
11. Action here is to be understood in a broad sense to include irrational and arational expressive actions.
12. At least not immediately solvable. For instance, a phobia can eventually be overcome through therapy, although this is not always the case. However, in the moment a person undergoes a phobic experience, there is little a person can do about it.

## References

- Bennett, Jonathan (1974) The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn. *Philosophy* 49, 123–34.
- Brady, Michael, (2009) The Irrationality of Recalcitrant Emotions. *Philosophical Studies*, 145, 413–430
- Colombetti, Giovanna (2007) Enactive appraisal. *Phenom Cogn Sci*, 6, 527–546
- Colombetti, Giovanna (2014) *The Feeling Body*. Cambridge, MIT Press
- Döring, Sabine S. (2014) Why Recalcitrant Emotions Are Not Irrational. In: *Emotion and Value*. Ed. Roeser, S. & Todd C., Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Greenspan, Patricia (1988) *Emotions and Reasons: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall
- Helm, B. (2001). *Emotional reason*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Pessoa, Luiz (2008) On the relationship between emotion and cognition. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 9, 148–158
- Ratcliffe, Matthew (2005) William James on Emotion and Intentionality. *Philosophical Studies*, 13, 179–202.
- Roberts, Robert C. (1988) What an emotion is: A Sketch. *The Philosophical Review*, Vol 97, No. 2, 183–209
- Solomon, Robert (1976) *The Passions*. New York: Doubleday.
- Sartre, Jean Paul (1984) *The Emotions: A Sketch of a Theory*. Transl. B Frechtman, New York, Philosophical Library
- Slaby, Jan (2007) Affective intentionality and the feeling body. *Phen. Cogn. Sci.* 7, 429–444



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License. For more information, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>