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Believing rationally given your actual beliefs: on Susanna Rinard's pragmatism

by

Marlon Rivas Tinoco

Under the Direction of Juan S. Piñeros Glasscock, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Susanna Rinard (2017, 2019, 2022) offers a refined pragmatist view of how to theorize normatively about beliefs. However, David Christensen (2020) disputes Rinard's claim on rationality by presenting some seeming counterexamples of her theory. In this paper, I challenge Christensen's objections to Rinard's theory. First, I introduce Rinard's theory of belief rationality. Second, I introduce Christensen's cases that allegedly debunk Rinard's thesis. Third, I refine Rinard's theory of rationality by arguing that the rationality of an agent's belief can be based on what is best for them given their existing beliefs, emotions, and perceptual experiences. Last, I will redescribe the cases Christensen presents to capture how people ordinarily deliberate in everyday life when undergoing tensions between their mental states. I will contend that the refined version of Rinard's theory that I propose can offer a clearer picture of why Christensen fails in his attempt to reject Rinard's original theory.

INDEX WORDS: Rinard, Beliefs, Emotions, Perceptual seemings, Pragmatic Rationality, Epistemic Rationality

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my friends in Peru, my new friends that I made at Georgia State, my parents and brother, and Dessie. All of you came up with ideas on how to improve my thesis and encouraged me to keep going with this work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. BRV: Belief Relative View
2. ET: Equal Treatment
3. IC: Internalist Commitment

1 INTRODUCTION

The question of whether the rationality of our beliefs can depend on practical considerations has two traditional responses. Evidentialists such as Feldman and Conee (1984), and Kelly (2002) argue that a belief is rational if and only if it aligns with the evidence, entailing that we should not believe for practical considerations. On the other hand, pragmatists such as James (1979) and Reisner (2009) argue that beliefs can also be rational if they serve the agent's benefits. Thus, there may be occasions when it is permissible to believe something even though we do not have evidential reasons for doing so.

Susanna Rinard (2017, 2019, 2022) offers a more refined pragmatist view. Where the standard pragmatist holds that the rationality of a belief *may* be determined by its usefulness in achieving the agent's practical goals, Rinard holds that the rationality of a belief is *only* determined by it. This assessment is based on another belief (or a set of beliefs) held by the agent about why the belief is worth holding. However, David Christensen (2020) disputes Rinard's claim on rationality, arguing that a belief's rationality cannot be solely based on practical considerations. He provides counterexamples of seemingly irrational beliefs that still maximize utility.

In this paper, I challenge Christensen's objections to Rinard's theory. First, I introduce Rinard's theory of belief rationality, emphasizing that it does not only have a pragmatist component, but also an internalist one. More specifically, I will show that Rinard's commitment to internalism can be distinguished by suggesting the presence of an evaluative outlook that enables the agent to assess the rationality of new beliefs. Second, I introduce Christensen's cases that allegedly debunk Rinard's thesis. Third, I refine Rinard's theory of rationality by arguing that the rationality of an agent's belief can be based on what is best for them given their existing beliefs, emotional episodes, and perceptual experiences. I will contend that *some* of the agent's perceptual

experiences and emotional episodes must be included in their evaluative outlook for assessing the rationality of a new belief. Last, I will argue that Christensen's cases ignore the complex nature of the agent's deliberation, so I will redescribe the cases he presents as cases that shed light on how people ordinarily deliberate in everyday life when undergoing tensions between their mental states. I will contend that the refined version of Rinard's theory that I propose can offer a clearer picture of why Christensen fails in his attempt to reject Rinard's original theory.

2 RINARD ON THE RATIONALITY OF BELIEFS

2.1 Rinard's robust pragmatism

One key distinction in pragmatism is between the standard view and Rinard's view. The standard pragmatist perspective, or moderate pragmatism, asserts that practical considerations can be reasons for belief (Rinard, 2015; Howard, 2019, p. 2228). In cases where there is insufficient evidence or the evidence conflicts with what one wants to believe, standard pragmatists contend that one's beliefs should be based on what is deemed beneficial for one to believe. For instance, Rinard (2017, p. 138) presents the case of an optimist patient who, despite grim medical predictions, believes they will survive. According to standard pragmatism, since the evidence is inconclusive, the patient can base their belief on what is beneficial to believe.

Rinard's pragmatist view, on the other hand, goes beyond this standard position. Rinard argues that practical considerations are not just reasons for belief but rather are the only reasons for belief (Rinard, 2015). This means that even when there is strong evidence against a belief, an agent can still rationally hold that belief if it is practically beneficial for them to do so. Unlike standard pragmatism, Rinard pushes for a different pragmatist account as she argues that we can dispense with epistemic rationality to guide us in what to believe. In her view, pragmatic considerations are the *only* genuine reasons for belief, since ordinary believers typically hold their beliefs true due to the benefits they find in believing them. She calls her view "robust pragmatism" (Rinard, 2015, p. 209). To argue for this, Rinard thinks that the answer to the question "What should I believe" must be the same as the answer to the question "What should I do" (2019, p. 1929). Simply put, actions, emotions, or desires can be equally treated like beliefs in terms of the way we assess their rationality. For her, since we typically assess the rationality of our actions or any other non-belief states in terms of how beneficial the option we take is for fulfilling our aims,

the same should apply to how we assess whether a belief is rational. She refers to this thesis as the “Equal treatment thesis” (from now on, “ET”):

Equal Treatment (ET): the rationality of a belief is determined in precisely the same way as the rationality of any other state (2017, p. 123).

ET is compatible with different theories of rationality. The most supported theory by Rinard is the Belief-relative account (from now on, “BRV”), which attributes an essential role to the agent’s perspective. BRV asserts that “it is rational for an agent to believe that p just in case believing p (as opposed to suspending belief about p or disbelieving p) would have the best-expected consequences, given the agent’s beliefs” (2022, p. 3). Going back to the example of the optimist patient, they rationally choose to believe in their survival and recovery, even though that is not what the evidence supports. The rationality of their belief is determined by the current beliefs they have, such as the belief that it is better to being optimistic in this matter of life and death.

According to Rinard, BRV is a good theory of rationality for anyone who thinks that the rationality of actions or beliefs should be determined by the agent’s own perspective of what is more valuable and effective to do or believe (2022, p. 3). Consequently, if the agent believes that q would be a more effective means to their ends, Rinard would claim that they would believe irrationally if they came to believe p and not q .

2.2 Rinard’s internalist commitment

In light of the reasons above, Rinard shows that the agent’s framework of current beliefs plays a crucial role in choosing the new beliefs they should hold. It looks as if the rationality of a

belief is solely determined by what is *internal* to the agent's mind. Although Rinard doesn't explicitly endorse it, I believe she is committed to:¹

Internalist commitment (IC): The rational basis of an agent's belief that *p* is determined by what is reflectively accessible by the agent that supports *p*, and what is reflectively accessible by the agent is their own mental states.

Although pragmatist accounts do not require endorsing IC, I claim that Rinard's pragmatism does support it. More specifically, Rinard's BRV supports the accessibilism thesis, according to which two possible individuals who can reflectively access their internal properties are exactly alike in regard to what is justified for them to believe (Pritchard, 2011, p. 236)². This justification chain can be understood as an outlook of beliefs that support the truth of propositions worth believing. For instance, believing that it will be sunny today can be based on the current belief I have about the weather, such as the belief that there are no grey clouds today. Rinard's accessibilism bears on a slightly different form of chains of reasons. Her concept of the agent's own perspective refers to the evaluative outlook of current beliefs that the agent employs when deliberating what deems beneficial to hold (2022, p. 8). This outlook, which guides rational belief formation, consists of the agent's actual beliefs regarding which beliefs maximize value and contribute to the attainment of practical goals. In other words, the agent's choice to believe proposition *p* is influenced by the belief (or set of beliefs) that holding that belief is beneficial in terms of their aims. According to Rinard, therefore, I should believe that it will be sunny today not

¹ However, Rinard explicitly says that ET is consistent with theories that assert that the rationality of a belief bears on the agent's perspective. This idea entails that the rationality of what to believe is determined by the reasons that enter into the agent's deliberative process. See Rinard, S. (2017), especially the conclusions.

² I will set aside the commitment of Rinard's account to a second classical internalist thesis, namely, the mentalist one. According to mentalism, any two possible individuals who are exactly alike mentally are also alike concerning their justifications (Pritchard, 2011, p. 235). For a traditional internalist, the agent's beliefs, experiences, memories, and other cognitive states are the ones that make a proposition likely to be true. In Rinard's view, the beliefs that value believing a course of action over another are the mental states that play a justificatory role in the assessment of rationality.

because of evidential support, but because I hold the belief that such a belief is advantageous for me in pursuing my goals, such as aiming to hold more true beliefs than false ones. Or suppose that I do not have any evidence that it will be sunny tomorrow. But my friend offers me \$10 million if I come to believe that proposition. I do not have any other reasons to disbelieve that it will be sunny tomorrow. Imagine that I also believe that *believing that something is true if I get some money is better than not believing it*. Although I lack evidence to support the belief that it will be sunny tomorrow, according to Rinard's view, I would be justified in believing that it will be sunny. Having summarized Rinard's theory, I will introduce the challenge Christensen raises against it.

3 CHRISTENSEN'S CHALLENGE AND RINARD'S UNSATISFACTORY REPLY

Christensen rejects Rinard's claim that epistemic rationality can be dispensable, as he argues that BRV, supported by ET, does not do the work that a theory of rationality should do. According to Christensen, a belief is intuitively rational if it is an appropriate reaction to the world's facts (Christensen, 2020, p. 8). So, a theory of rationality must be able to sort out which beliefs accomplish this goal and which do not. Christensen contends that there are some cases in which an agent's belief is intuitively irrational, but Rinard's BRV deems it rational (2020, p. 3).

3.1 Christensen's cases

He provides some examples to support his claim. I will consider two adapted examples from his paper³:

Charlie, the soap eater: Charlie is an optimist who believes that believing that the future bet he does about the next soap he eats will lead to an episode of gustatory pleasure and to his physical flourishing. He has eaten lots of soaps, but they all have made him sick and tasted terrible. However, he persists in believing that the next soap will be different. Lucy offers him a soap to eat, and Charlie eats it. However, it does not taste good, and he gets sick.

James, the slaveholder: In the 19th century, James advocated for the slavery system in the United States. He did not think of himself as bad, despite supporting policies dangerous to African Americans' freedom. He also wrote pro-slavery pamphlets. Although people were not convinced of his pro-slavery arguments, he persisted in believing that former slaves are better off being slaves than not being so. However, no one listened again.

³ For the sake of clarity, I will add some details to the original cases but preserving the simplicity that characterizes them.

For Christensen, in both cases, Rinard's view suggests that the states of Charlie and James are rational because they believe what is more valuable for them to believe and act accordingly. However, Christensen argues that both Charlie and James are intuitively irrational despite Rinard's view. Charlie's irrationality stems from his continual expectation of a different outcome despite repeatedly experiencing the same unpleasant result, which is tasting a soap that is neither tasty nor nutritious. Although Charlie's action of eating the soap offered by Lucy is rational given his beliefs, it cannot be rational for him to believe something that will harm his health. In James' case, he holds an irrational belief because he believed that African Americans would live better as enslaved people despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Christensen argues that Rinard's view yields incorrect verdicts in these cases and therefore can be rejected.

Christensen argues that a theory of belief rationality should be grounded in the evidence and consider sensitivity to the facts of the world. If a theory dismisses the fact that James' belief is heavily influenced by his repugnant motivations and still regards his case as rational, it is a deficient theory of rationality.

James' *actions* may be rational since his actions are explained by the beliefs and desires he holds. However, for his *beliefs* to be deemed rational, they must take into account the contrary evidence sketched above. Since BRV would still consider James's advocacy for the slavery system rational, Christensen thinks that we should reject it.

Christensen's critique pertains to the deliberative process by which an agent may persist in holding onto a belief that is intuitively harmful to their well-being (as in Charlie's case) or a belief that disregards the importance of empathy towards others (as in James' case). Roughly, he casts doubt on the idea that a belief is rational by looking at the way the agent internally coheres

that belief with their set of current beliefs about what benefits them to hold. Thus, Christensen's critique can also be interpreted as an attack on BRV's internalism.

3.2 Rinard's unsatisfactory response

Rinard replies by biting the bullet, agreeing with Christensen that her BRV theory would say that both Charlie and James hold rational beliefs. She distinguishes the assessment of a belief's rationality from the belief's harmful effects or its connection to abhorrent moral facts. In the case of Charlie, he is rational in what he believes, even if it leads to harmful consequences (2022, p. 10). Similarly, in the case of James, he is rational in his beliefs, even if they conflict with moral values (specifically, being pro-slavery) (2022, p. 9). Rinard acknowledges that, if we were acquainted with James, we should have attempted to change his beliefs that contradict normative facts regarding what is valuable (i.e., values against slavery). However, Rinard argues that aiming for behavior change in James is not the same as claiming that his beliefs were irrational. She asserts that we should not confuse the epistemic justification of a belief with the moral justification of holding a belief. For her, only the former kind of justification pertains to the sense of *rational* belief that she advocates in BRV. Thus, for Rinard, both characters are rational in holding their faulty beliefs.

I find Rinard's reply unsatisfactory. Her reply allows for the possibility of considering Christensen's intuition regarding the cases as an alternative conception of rationality. Recall Christensen's intuition that rational beliefs must be supported by evidence. However, by allowing this possibility, Rinard fails to achieve her own goal in proposing a theory of rationality, which is to have a unified notion of rationality ("speak in a single voice") (2017, p. 128). The existence of two standards for evaluating the rationality of beliefs weakens Rinard's response. In Charlie's case, her willingness to recognize the messy and tragic consequences of his actions suggests that she

considers it *rational* for Charlie to stop eating soaps. Although she claims that the formation of Charlie's belief should not be conflated with what he ought to believe, implying that the formation of Charlie's belief leads to negative consequences can be seen as an alternative conception of rationality, differing from her BRV-based understanding. In the case of James, the fact that Rinard allows the possibility of criticizing his morally wrongful beliefs and actions suggests that she detaches a practical justification of James' beliefs and actions from the epistemic justification of those states. Indeed, this epistemic justification is the one described in BRV. However, the former kind of justification, namely, that James is not morally justified in believing what he believes, contradicts her desire for a single conception of rationality. She allows that, not only James' beliefs are rational given their aims, but also that James' beliefs are not *rational* (in a different sense) given the moral facts that he dismisses (and Rinard herself acknowledges). Therefore, Rinard aims to avoid two competing notions of rational belief, but her response to Christensen's challenge seems to reject the existence of a unified sense of rational beliefs.

That said, I think that Rinard can offer a more convincing response to Christensen by emphasizing the importance of her internalist commitment. To achieve this, Rinard could examine the motivational structures of the characters in Christensen's scenarios and identify how other mental states, such as perceptual experiences and emotional episodes, can play a role in justifying or withholding beliefs. By doing so, Rinard could develop a modified version of BRV that would more effectively address these cases and avoid Christensen's objection to irrationality.

4 EXPANDING BRV'S EVALUATIVE OUTLOOK AND THE CASES OF PERCEPTUAL AND EMOTIONAL STATES

4.1 Introducing perceptual seemings and emotional episodes

In this section, I will offer an expansive evaluative outlook to support Rinard's BRV and then object to Christensen's criticism. By "expansive", I mean adding new states as justifiers of what the agent should believe. I will show how perceptual states and emotional episodes come into play to rationalize the agent's further beliefs. I will start with the perceptual states.

An excellent approach to the epistemic role of perception comes from Michael Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism account. According to Huemer, an agent's state of seeming p justifies their belief that p unless there are potential defeaters in the environment. For him, perceptual states provide the basis for how things seem to the agent to be true, and from this, the agent is justified in forming certain beliefs as being true (Huemer, 2007, p. 30). I will set aside his view that Phenomenal Conservatism is fundamental and should be endorsed by every epistemological theory of justification. I will only focus on the justificatory role played by the perceptual states to motivate modifying Rinard's BRV.

What are the seemings or appearances at play according to the phenomenal conservatism? Huemer states that they are not dispositions to believe or inclinations to believe but are perceptual states that bear a non-inferential and immediate justification for our beliefs. The state of seeming that p is true is distinct from merely imagining p or believing p . This is because perceptual states have presentational force. In other words, perceptual experiences present how the world might be in a directed and immediate way to agents (Bengson, 2015, p. 708). This means that what we perceive provides us with information about the apparent reality without the need for another chain of justification. In other words, it does not matter if what is perceived by agents captures

information of how things really are, because whether a perceptual experience accurately represents the world or not derives from what it seems to the agent how the world is.

Perceptual seemings, due to their immediacy and support for our beliefs about the external world, initially appear to be a reliable source of justification for these beliefs. For example, believing that my kettle is getting louder as the water inside heats up might require considering other reasons to establish its truth, whereas perceiving the whistling sound of my kettle as it heats up provides an immediate confirmation of what I perceive. I draw on Huemer's account, which suggests that an agent who experiences the force of perception as if p , despite being aware that not- p might be more rational to believe, is at least somewhat rational to believe p (Huemer, 2007, p. 34). The forcefulness aspect of perceptual seemings, or the subjective experience associated with them, seemingly requires little conscious effort from the agent. However, unlike Huemer, I argue that the agent is not compelled to believe p directly just because it appears to them as if p is true. There is additional cognitive work involved as the agent consciously interprets these seemings as reasons to believe what appears to be true. Unlike Huemer's perspective, the transition is not immediate: from the perceptual experience or sensation, the agent is aware of being in a state that seems true to them, and then they choose whether to believe what appears true or not. Therefore, the justification for a perceptual belief in p arises only when the agent consciously aligns what they ought to believe with what they strongly feel to be true based on their perceptual experience.

Why should perceptual experiences be included in the evaluative outlook? If we include them, Rinard's BRV will explain to a better extent how certain beliefs are worth believing for the agent. There is no restriction placed on Rinard's account concerning the mental states that guide the agent in what they should believe. Perceptual states, in general, provide us with a specific

assertive force (Smithies, 2019, p. 93); that is, they permit us to think the contents presented as true. Beliefs also do that. But as I noted earlier, the crucial difference is that perceptual experiences can also provide us with presentational force. They seem true to us, and given our introspective capacity to understand them, we can justify our perceptual beliefs. The perceptual experiences attempt to reveal aspects of how the world is (Siegel and Sillins, 2015, p. 790), which differs from a mere belief that does not have to bear on the phenomenology of our perceptual experience. Thus, by including perception in the outlook, we can give better verdicts to more cases of rationality.

Indeed, perceptual experiences *sometimes* rationalize beliefs that go afoul of the current evidence. This feature is compatible with the belief system of goals (the evaluative outlook described above) that Rinard links up to BRV. Suppose that Ramiro has recently taken hallucinogens and sees an apple in front of him. Although he should believe that there is no real apple in front of him, he strongly feels the sensory properties of the seeming apple at the moment, like its redness or apple shape. Therefore, despite probably being the case that he hallucinates the apple, this perceptual experience provides him *pro tanto* justification for believing something, albeit they are not wholly reliable sources for believing it on many occasions.

Another reason for including perceptual states is that the resulting account yields better verdicts in cases of apparent rationality. The refined version of the outlook I propose will help us determine which beliefs are more rational than others when an agent is conflicted about what to believe. Think of the following scenario. Lila is afraid of arguing with her dad, which causes her to believe that her dad is correct in everything he says. One day she hears someone screaming in the house next door and immediately tells her dad, but he doubts her and accuses her of lying. Even if she may be rational to believe that her dad is right, given what she currently believes about her dad, she is also rational to believe that someone is screaming. Granted that she strongly feels

her perceptual experience is an accurate description of how things are, she must act by following this belief and, perhaps, go to see what has happened to her neighbor. Thus, sensory appearances allow us to have a *pro tanto* rationalization of perceptual beliefs.

Emotions can also be included in the evaluative outlook. An uncontroversial claim about emotions is that they can be caused by external facts and justified by the agent's current cognitive states. A more controversial claim, which I will assume is true, is that emotions can rationalize beliefs. For instance, some accounts, like the perceptual theory, suggest that emotions are perceptions of value. As I interpret this account, emotions can *rationalize* evaluative beliefs, given that they are sometimes better guides to what makes sense to believe from an agent's perspective.

In which way are emotions perceptions of values? Earlier, I remarked that some perceptions could play a justificatory role in determining the rationality of certain beliefs. These perceptual states are about low-level content, that is, perceptual content that includes color, shape, or location (Milona, 2018, pp. 203-204). But ordinary perceptions can also have high-level content, specifically high-level value content. The value properties, like being wrongful, good, etc., comprise a high-level value content. Emotions can have this kind of content, considering that they are perceptual experiences of situations valued in a certain way. Indeed, emotions are not required to arise in the face of an external stimulus to which the agent can attribute value properties. Emotional episodes can arise from the imaginary reflection of hypothetical scenarios. However, what it is like to experience a value perception is often more revelatory of something's evaluative significance than getting at that evaluative judgment via imaginative reflection (Milona, 2018, p. 210). If I see someone hitting their child in the street, I will get angry and believe that this person is doing something wrong. This belief feels stronger than others since it is open to rational assessment. Another way of describing this is that my experience of anger and indignation is a

reason for believing that I should call this person out of being abusive to their child. Certainly, the experience of anger would be different if it were about an imaginary case.

Including emotions in the evaluative outlook is advantageous because emotions can explain how we are pushed to believe in specific ways. According to Laura Silva, some emotions are *outlaw emotions*, namely, emotions that conflict with the dominant perceptions and values that the agent has internalized as beliefs (Silva, 2021, p. 665). There are circumstances under which an agent has an emotion that confers (defeasible) justification for believing something, even if it goes against the epistemic outlook that the agent has already internalized. Consider the following case of outlaw emotions adapted for conciseness from Silva:

Raquel, the victim of sexual harassment: At a party with her female friends, Raquel feels a man squeeze part of her body. According to her oppressive beliefs (she lives in an overly misogynistic society), she should believe that what happened to her is flattering. However, this belief is in tension with her emotions of anger and frustration, which make her believe that she should confront this person because of his actions.

According to Rinard's proposal, this case would be interpreted as follows. Raquel believes rationally that she should feel flattered, proud, or simply good about what happened to her, given that her current beliefs are formed in conditions of gender oppression. The original version of BRV neglects the epistemic role that Raquel's anger and frustration play in assessing her beliefs. Certainly, Raquel has trouble connecting the experiences that were felt as unfair for her to a set of beliefs and concepts that allowed her to understand better what she was coming through. But her outlaw belief, i.e., that she should confront the guy, makes sense to her to hold, even if it is not based on what is beneficial to hold, given her current beliefs. Raquel undergoes anger and

frustration, which clash with the potential belief she should have about confronting the guy who harassed her.

My focus has been on the perceptual theory of emotions and how this theory could endorse that emotions rationalize beliefs. Another version of this account is Jesse Prinz's theory of emotions. According to Prinz, emotions are concerned with external stimuli affecting the individual experiencing the emotion (Prinz, 2004, p. 60). In his theory, emotions are configured to detect certain relationships between the individual and their environment. By perceiving their bodily changes, the individual recognizes what is significant to them. Fear, for instance, alerts the individual to what is threatening by detecting heart palpitations or other physiological changes that are typical of fear (Prinz, 2004, p. 68). If *S*'s fear of a specific person enables *S* to detect their unease around this individual, he may conclude that it is best to avoid them. Hence, emotions represent evaluative properties that signify how one should act in the world by monitoring changes in the body (Prinz, 2004, p. 69). As a result, Prinz's theory implies that emotions that represent evaluative properties and register bodily changes can constitute motivating reasons for individuals to adopt certain beliefs. Put differently, emotions make certain beliefs more salient than others, and therefore, justify those beliefs.

Going back to my analysis of the refinements of Rinard's BRV, I propose that one believes *p* rationally if and only if believing *p* is more effective than other doxastic attitudes at fulfilling the agent's goals, given their actual beliefs, *emotional episodes*, and *perceptual states*. Thus, the outlook presented in a previous section can now be modified as follows:

The outlook for believing *p* rationally is composed of the agent's actual beliefs about which propositions have a high expected value and the beliefs about what they think are the practical goals that they would like to fulfill. *Additionally, it is*

composed of some of the agent's perceptual and emotional experiences that rationalize what is best to believe for the agent in certain circumstances.

Expanding the outlook gives us a more accurate picture of the agent's cognitive structure. Recall that assessing the rationality of someone's belief involves considering what they could care about, even if their different considerations seem entirely arbitrary. It could be that they care about familial relations, others' suffering, etc. (Street, 2009, p. 289). And sometimes, what they care deeply about comes with their conviction of how things seem perceptually or with a solid emotional force about what they care about. Simply put, expanding the outlook resembles the deep motivational structure of what ordinary believers could care more about; on some occasions, what they care more about and hold as more valuable deals with their current perceptual states and emotional episodes. To illustrate, consider the case of *S*'s fear of someone else. *S*'s justification for their belief is influenced by detecting physiological changes and perceiving the situation as hazardous, indicating that *S* cares about being alert to potentially dangerous situations. Thus, driven by their emotions, *S* outlines what matters most during the process of deliberating what to believe.

Let me address a relevant observation before turning to analyze how my theory will face Christensen's challenge. As I will discuss in the final section, Christensen's cases had to be revised to identify the specific emotional kinds or perceptual states that the characters experience. My strategy of expanding the evaluative outlook and considering these other mental state types shed light on the IC of Rinard's theory. Her internalist view is defended by my version of BRV since the expanded outlook contains the beliefs about values, as well as emotional episodes or perceptual states that are *accessible* to the agent. However, it is important to note that my response is not a *direct* defense of Rinard's radical pragmatism. Christensen's attack can be successful in

undermining Rinard's pragmatist commitment and still, be a weak proposal to undermine Rinard's IC, which is related to her defense of BRV.

My expanded outlook, which proposes that we ought to be in a particular state based on current beliefs, certain emotions, or perceptual states, accommodates the pragmatist spirit as Rinard's view, at least in the aspect of not requiring to posit an epistemic kind of rationality that is exclusive to belief states. Indeed, to endorse my view, I do not need to subscribe to a more robust pragmatism. On certain occasions, perceptual seemings or emotional episodes can be considered evidential reasons for rational belief. Nevertheless, my account entails that we should draw attention to what is strongly felt emotionally or perceptibly as relevant in our decision-making to determine whether it is rational to be in a certain state. So, for an action to be rational, the agent does not only assess its rationality based on the current beliefs they hold; the agent must consider which relevant emotions or perceptual seemings they are currently feeling in their decision-making. The same applies to any other state. Therefore, my view is compatible with the truth of ET, which is simpler than an evidentialist account, as it does not make an exception for assessing the rationality of beliefs. As a result, my view can be considered an indirect defense of the pragmatist position that, as Rinard points out, is simpler than the evidentialist position due to being compatible with ET.

4.2 Refined BRV as a better reply to Christensen's challenge

In this final section, I will show why Christensen's challenge is insufficient to reject the expansive version of BRV. In the previous section, I showed why Rinard's BRV is incomplete without a more comprehensive approach to the agent's evaluative outlook. My aim is now to test this theory by considering legitimate cases that could refute it. I contend that Christensen's cases must be reframed in order to be deemed realistic enough to reflect how people ordinarily deliberate

about what to believe in everyday life, namely, undergoing some tensions between the mental states they hold. In his attempt to undermine Rinard's BRV, Christensen simplifies how characters Charlie and James could be motivated to choose certain beliefs, and this simplification explains why its conclusions are seemingly compelling. Nonetheless, he overlooks the presence of emotional episodes and seeming states in describing his cases' characters. Emotions and perceptions are manifest through their effects in making the agent uncertain about what to believe. Before I offer the argument in support of this idea, I outline the relevant features of a realistic case.

This paper argues that a realistic belief-choice scenario accurately depicts how agents typically go about determining what is rational to believe. In this process, emotional and perceptual experiences always play a role in shaping our deliberative practices when selecting our beliefs. For a deliberate process to occur, not only do current beliefs have epistemic significance, but other intentional states also aim to justify what to believe. Although metaphysically possible, Christensen's cases are rarer to parse as they do not consider options that are motivated by emotional or perceptual experiences. Therefore, a realistic scenario should encompass the simultaneous operation of different mental states, such as emotions and perceptual experiences, creating tensions when evaluating which beliefs to adopt. Rather than constructing abstract puzzles for a theory, the cases of Charlie and James should demonstrate how conflicts between emotions and beliefs frequently arise in real-life situations, compelling us to address them promptly. A theory of rationality must account for these tensions that emerge during the belief formation decision-making process. I do not argue that such conflicts manifest in every instance of belief deliberation, but the hypothetical cases presented in this objection fail to capture what my theory of rationality does: providing an answer to the question of what is worth believing by aligning with

our typical belief determination process. Consequently, such cases would be exceptional within the framework of my theory.

Why should we focus on the typicality of cases to argue for or against a theory of rationality? It is because real-life cases serve as generalizable problems for a theory of rationality regarding beliefs. By focusing on these cases, we avoid the pre-reflective intuition that Christensen seeks to emphasize, which states that any belief worth holding must be solely based on evidence. Conversely, a case that tests the plausibility of a theory of belief rationality must demonstrate how rational beliefs are also influenced by non-evidential reasons. In essence, a case should at least resemble the deliberative process that ordinary thinkers engage in, incorporating not only beliefs and desires but also emotions, perceptual judgments, and other subjective experiences that significantly contribute to belief determination. In the following cases that I will propose, agents understand and respond to emotional episodes or perceptual experiences as a means to rationalize their beliefs. These cases aim to elicit different evaluative reactions than those intended by Christensen, thereby enabling a more effective evaluation of the theory of rationality.

It is important to note that I do not oppose the use of morally charged cases, such as James', as counterexamples to a theory of rationality. However, for our intuitions about these cases to be considered reliable, their presentation is crucial. If the cases fail to consider the emotional reactions or feelings of the agent when making morally charged decisions about what to believe, they overlook the role that these mental states play in our moral justifications. Similarly, if the cases neglect to acknowledge that the agents in the stories hold certain perceptual seemings when making morally charged decisions, it raises questions about the reliability of the intuitions these cases elicit.

When the agent is aware of these states, namely, certain emotions or perceptual states, they cannot merely lean toward a belief with a high expected value according to their current beliefs. On some occasions, as we saw, emotions or perceptions justify beliefs that differ from the beliefs that align clearly well with the agent's current beliefs. To preserve simplicity in his objection to Rinard's BRV, Christensen can stick to the cases as he describes them. But I think that to propose a more explanatory theory of rationality, one would need more realistic cases, i.e., cases that reflect an agent's psychological tensions about what to believe. I describe them as follows:

Conflicted Charlie, the soap eater: Charlie is an optimist who believes that believing that the future bet he does about the next soap he eats will lead to an episode of gustatory pleasure and to his physical flourishing. But he also has a seeming state based on the smell of the next soap he receives from Lucy. This soap seems to have a strange and ugly smell as the previous soaps he has eaten (but that were not tasty either). However, he persists in believing that the next soap he eats will be tasty and nutritious. So, Charlie eats it. Unfortunately for him, it does not taste good, and he gets sick.

Conflicted James, the slaveholder: In the 19th century, James, a defender of slavery who couldn't convince people of his arguments, believed that what he argued for reinstating slavery was compelling, supported by the motivating thinking that what he thought was right and he was not a bad person. But he also felt sympathy for the anti-slavery movement that support African Americans' freedom. Although people were not convinced of his pro-slavery arguments, he persisted in believing that former slaves are better off being slaves than not being so. However, no one listened again.

The preceding cases are a realistic version of those given by Christensen. These modified cases reflect an agent's psychological tensions about what to believe, which are not present in Christensen's cases. Recall that Rinard's BRV suggests that the beliefs that make sense to the agent cohere well with their actual beliefs. Therefore, following Rinard's BRV does not look promising if the belief determined by the non-belief states seems as rational as the belief determined by the agents' current beliefs. Rinard could argue that agents tend to abandon any belief that is in tension with their current set of beliefs (Rinard, 2022b, pp. 449 – 450). Then, according to BRV, Charlie believes rationally that the next soap will be tasty and nutritious, regardless of having the perceptual experience of the soap smelling bad. Likewise, James believes rationally that he would persuade anyone that his racist views are true, regardless of feeling sympathy for the antislavery movement.

However, I contend that these last conflicted characters believe irrationally, but for different – and better – reasons than Christensen. In order to give concluding remarks on why my response to Christensen is more effective than Rinard's original response, let's analyze each of these modified cases.

Charlie is deciding whether to believe that eating a bar of soap is both tasty and nutritious. In this decision-making process, certain emotional episodes can influence his outcome. Based on the earlier discussion, these emotions could be significant in shaping Charlie's beliefs. For example, he might feel a sense of disgust towards the soap when he tries to taste it or when he smells it. This sensation activates some patterns of avoidance in him and an overwhelming feeling of disgust that makes him aware of the mistake he is making in eating the soap. As I said earlier, there is little involvement of the agent forming these thoughts, but there is the possibility of them

choosing whether these beliefs are worth believing. Therefore, emotions and sensory perceptions can play a crucial role in Charlie's reasoning process and shape his final beliefs.

It may be questioned whether Charlie's disgust reaction when he licks the soap can be taken as a reason for him to believe that he shouldn't eat the next soap Lucy offers. Even if it does happen, there won't be much space for Charlie to consciously deliberate about what to believe, and he will simply stop eating or keep eating. However, in other contexts, Charlie's emotional episodes may serve as (defeasible) reasons why he should not eat the soap. For example, if he has tasted many soaps before, his body would react differently when exposed to another soap, and he may have an unconscious expectation that it could be harmful to his health. Although these bodily reactions triggered during disgust elicitation may not be sufficient to change Charlie's act of eating the soap, they are enough for him to judge the situation as disgusting. In other words, he has reasons to believe that the soap he will eat is disgusting, and thus, it is irrational to believe that the next soap will be tasty and nutritious. According to my version of Rinard's the BRV, Charlie's case is one of irrationality, which is consistent with Christensen's and the majority's intuition.

As we already know, Christensen would only appeal to the world's responsiveness feature of belief states. Regardless of the new additions, Christensen would think that in this case, Charlie's failure to disbelieve that the next soap will be tasty and nutritious is still due to the malfunctioning process that produces this wrong belief. I will assume that Christensen could characterize Conflicted Charlie's perceptual experience as more sensitive to the fact that this character should not believe in the proposition at issue. However, since Christensen does not attribute any epistemic role to emotional or perceptual experiences that the agent undergoes, his potential verdict remains the same as the one he gives to the original Charlie case.

Let me turn to Conflicted James' case. This shows a conflict between two potential beliefs to select for different reasons. On the one hand, the belief that what he writes is right and that people will be convinced is supported by his current beliefs. On the other hand, the opposite belief is supported by his sympathy toward activists against slavery. Christensen's verdict would be the same as the one given to the original James case: in both the original and the modified version of the case, James believes irrationally that the people would be convinced of what he wrote about the need to reinstate the slavery system.

Nevertheless, I claim that James can perceive his world differently than perceiving it through the lens of his internalized beliefs. The emotion of sympathy leads him to reconsider and recast the claim that he should advocate for the slavery system. This is a contingent fact: not every person who feels sympathy changes their mind about the issue. Indeed, if James is sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, and starts to feel sympathy for the suffering of people who have not fulfilled certain normal conditions of living yet (e.g., people of color in James' geographical location and time), then his emotion will make him sensitive to believe that what he currently supports is wrong.

However, in the modified case, James lacks specific access to the reasons to justify his outlaw emotions, just like in the case of Raquel (Silva, 2021, p. 677). Still, he has a reason to believe that what he supports is wrong. The reason is that the coherence relation between his belief in what he advocates as right and his other current beliefs about what is beneficial to hold is weak. What has drawn Conflicted James' attention is the experience of the goodness in abolitionists' actions. Like Conflicted Charlie's case analysis, it is clear that only one belief derives from a strongly felt state. Conflicted James' belief about his central aim has a force in reflecting his belief system of what to value, but he can be more aware of and have more access to the properties that constitute his emotional episode of sympathy. By doing this, he should disbelieve that he will

compel anyone to support a reinstatement of the slavery system; instead, he should believe that he does not pursue that goal.

In sum, while Rinard and Christensen would give similar verdicts about whether the characters hold rational beliefs, I argue that my response to Christensen is more effective than Rinard's original response. The modified cases demonstrate how emotional episodes or seeming states can play a significant role in rational belief formation, and this needs to be taken into account for a more explanatory theory of rationality.

One might object that even if we reframe the cases of Charlie and James in a more realistic manner, they still pose a challenge for BRV, including my refined version. Given that my theory is also considering only the subjective perspective of the agent, Christensen could still challenge it and show that it is a thin theory. Let's consider an alternative version of Charlie's case, where Charlie smells the next soap with pleasure and chooses to believe that this soap will be tasty and nutritious. Likewise, envision a different version of James' case, where James despises being around antiabolitionist individuals who were formerly enslaved. Alternatively, imagine an even worse scenario, another version of James' case where he is incapable of experiencing any emotions. It appears that once again, we find ourselves aligning with Christensen's stance, acknowledging that both BRV and my refined version of BRV would deem James rational for optimistically believing in his proslavery ideas.

In reply, it may be enough for Christensen to suggest that what rationalizes, for instance, Charlie's belief that the next soap will be tasty and nutritious is another belief about values. But even the mere acknowledgment by a subject that what he has in mind is a belief is an interpretation (Crane and Farkas, 2022, p. 51). Even if Charlie is correct in recognizing that his rationalization for the wrongful belief relies solely on capturing beliefs (and not other types of mental states like

emotions or perceptions), he, like many others, can progressively replace imperfect interpretations with better, albeit still imperfect, and more stable interpretations of their minds. When a discrepancy arises between an agent's current beliefs and the available information they are aware of, it is advisable to consider the involvement of more than one type of mental state. While the web of beliefs can be useful for illustrating an agent's rational decisions, it is not always sufficient. To provide a more realistic interpretation of Charlie's thought process, we must recognize that he has access to other dispositions that could be relevant and influential in rationalizing a different belief regarding the taste of the next soap. Therefore, my version of BRV remains plausible, and we must broaden our perspective when determining which states constitute an outlook for accepting new propositions.

Surely, it is crucial to acknowledge that there are cases that legitimately test the plausibility of a theory of belief rationality. Although the scenario involving a completely unemotional agent reveals certain flaws in my view, I do not believe they hold more weight than the cases in which internal tensions between beliefs and emotions or perceptions are reflected by the agent. In the latter form of cases, such as Charlie perceiving the next soap as good or James' hatred toward the antiabolitionist movement, the construction of these scenarios has its merits in challenging and disproving specific claims or theories. Given what I mentioned earlier about what constitutes a real-life scenario, they are legitimate. My intention here is to outline that, despite its limitations, embracing a theory of belief rationality that offers a more effective approach to understanding how ordinary thinkers rationalize their beliefs holds greater promise.

Another objection that could be raised is that emotional episodes (the outlaw emotions) and certain perceptual states can take on the role of inducing agents to believe against what is best to believe, according to their outlook composed of their actual beliefs. These cases are analogous

to the cases in which someone acts against their best judgment, or cases of *akrasia*. Let me set up the analogy. In cases of *akrasia*, someone has deliberately gathered some reasons to consider that the best thing to do is *X*. However, they end up doing *Y*, even when they are aware of the deliberative process that takes them to think that *X* is better than doing *Y*.

However, just as there are cases of *akrasia* where it is wiser to act differently from one's own best judgment, there may also be cases where it is rational to believe against one's best judgment. In the former case, I agree with Normy Arpaly⁴ about the idea that akratic action is not necessarily irrational. Sometimes, it is wiser to act in a different way than predicted by one's own best judgment. Arpaly offers the example of Emily, a Ph.D. student who leaves the program despite having reasons to believe that she should stay. Arpaly claims that Emily acts rationally in this case, given that she has more reasons to act for leaving the program and can act for those reasons (Arpaly, 2000, pp. 504-505). Similarly, if James stops believing that what he is advocating for is right and stops supporting the pro-slavery system on the basis of his feelings of sympathy, he has reasons to believe differently; e.g., he ought to believe that he should support the rights movement. Indeed, if James attempts to believe it, this justificatory chain will be defeasible. Still, it is more rational to believe that what he advocates for is wrong, due to his felt episode of sympathy that influences his attention toward the good acts made by the abolitionists of the slavery system ideas.

One could argue that, unlike Emily's situation, neither Charlie nor James had any reason besides their subjective feelings to justify their subsequent beliefs. In Charlie's case, he experiences a sense of disgust due to the smell and unfamiliar appearance of the new soap that Lucy has offered him. The feeling of disgust is typically triggered by anything that could affect one's well-being,

⁴ I will only address Arpaly's conditions under which it is plausible to think that an *akratic* action is rational. In her paper, she does not commit to the idea that *akratic* beliefs, instead of actions, can also be rational. I will remain neutral to the idea that her theory could imply the possibility of getting to a similar conclusion with the *akratic* beliefs.

such as the risk of oral contamination. Specifically, the knowledge that the soap may be harmful to the body could be a trigger for the disgust response (Rozin et al, 2000, p. 639). From an internalist perspective, I believe that Charlie regards this episode of disgust as sufficient to justify his belief that he should not consume the next soap. Thus, given that Charlie could interpret his emotional episode as a mental state that accurately justifies their belief in refusing the next soap offered by Lucy, he should not believe otherwise.

In James' case, feeling sympathy⁵ toward other people has been considered the source of morality in people. This emotion allows us to connect with other people's well-being and care for them. To illustrate this point, let me clarify the concept of *sympathy* by considering Stephen Darwall's work. He cites the experimental studies carried out by Daniel Batson and his colleagues, who conducted experiments in which participants were presented with opportunities to help others in need. The results showed that the participants were highly inclined to help others when they were triggered by a certain degree of distress. Batson explained this altruistic behavior as being due to the feeling of empathy, which I will refer to as "sympathy" as Stephen Darwall does. The emotion of sympathy characterizes an object as being the person whom the emoter wants to help and feels concerned about (Darwall, 1998, p. 294). According to Darwall, sympathy pertains not only to the value of the person's good, but also goes beyond that. It becomes a neutral disvalue of another's woe, which justifies the need for preventing it (1998, p. 275). Therefore, a person who feels sympathy finds themselves with a categorical reason for aiming to improve the other's well-being. In light of this, they will come to believe that the person in need deserves better care. Since James experiences this emotion, he has a defeasible justification for believing against his best

⁵ Given the purposes of my paper, I am not going to carefully distinguish sympathy from another emotional type that is very similar to it, that is, empathy.

judgment. As a consequence, we can regard his belief that what he does is wrong to be potentially rational.

5 CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that it is possible to refine Rinard's theory of subjective rationality, referred to as BRV, to give a more satisfying response to Christensen's challenge about the flaws of her theory. More specifically, I showed how Rinard's BRV allows for the possibility of being interpreted as presupposing an internalist commitment, as well as presupposing the presence of an evaluative outlook that standardizes the way that agents rationalize their new beliefs. By showing this, I aimed to expand her evaluative outlook her BRV presupposes. I examined how certain perceptual and emotional states can be candidates for rationalizing new beliefs in the agent and replied to some possible objections to making these additions. Finally, I argued that Christensen's cases are so simplistic that they do not fit well with the complex framework that agents employ when evaluating what is rational to believe. By amending Christensen's cases slightly, I showed the theoretical advantages of my version of BRV for responding to his challenge.

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