

Making Sense of Akrasia

There are two extreme poles in the literature on akrasia. Internalists hold that it's impossible to act intentionally against your better judgment, because there's a necessary internal relation between judgment and intentional action. To the contrary, externalists maintain that we can act intentionally against our better judgment, because the will operates independently of judgment. Critics of internalism argue that it fails a realism test—most people seem to think that we can and do act intentionally against our better judgment. And critics of externalism argue that it flirts with incoherence by severing the intimate link between judgment and action. Drawing on resources from phenomenology, the cognitive sciences, analytic action theory, and recent “hybrid models” of skilled action, I argue that one route beyond this theoretical impasse is to understand akrasia as a form of skillful pre-reflective intentional action. This strategy, I argue, preserves the internalist insight that there is indeed an intimate relation between judgment and intentional action; and it also confirms the externalist claim that this relation is defeasible, but it does so without falling into incoherence.

1. Introduction

The puzzle of akrasia sets two powerful intuitions in paradoxical opposition. On one side, there's the skeptical intuition that akrasia is impossible: it makes no sense that anyone would intentionally act against her better judgment. If an agent's free to A, and she judges it best to A, why would she not-A?¹ On the other side, there's the voluntarist intuition that akrasia is not just possible but ubiquitous: most of us have experienced – and felt guilty and/or been blamed for – what feels like freely and intentionally acting against our better judgment. Call this the paradox of akrasia: akrasia is impossible, and it happens all the time.

Rival theories mirror these conflicting intuitions. Judgment internalism – a theory that traces back to Socrates in Plato's *Protagoras* – supports the skeptical intuition by maintaining that there's a necessary internal relation between judgment and intentional action. You can't intentionally act against your better judgment, because to act intentionally is precisely to act *on* your judgment. On this view, then, akratic acts are not intentional but rather due to a temporary loss of self-control typically attributed to excessive desire. Desire derails the agent's practical judgment, forcing her to go against her own sense of what's best. The biggest hurdle this theory faces is that no one buys it.² It seems most people think that we *can* intentionally act against our all-things-considered judgments, and so chalking up every instance of such behavior to a lack of self-control sounds more like a plea for excuses than an explanation.³ J.L. Austin captures this attitude nicely in his description of akratic dinner party decadence: ‘...do I lose control of myself? Do I raven, do I snatch the morsels from the dish and wolf them down, impervious to

¹ Some insist that this isn't an intuition at all but rather something we only think ‘under the influence of theory’ (Wiggins, D. (1987). *Needs, Values, Truth*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 239). As I see it, it's the other way around. Arguments that akrasia is impossible take their lead from an intuition that crops up in everyday life. For example, when a loved one with a cancer diagnosis lights up a cigarette, we react with shock and disbelief, “But you *promised* the doctor you'd quit!” What underlies our consternation in such cases is the intuition that it makes no sense that anyone would intentionally act against her better judgment when the stakes are so high.

² For evidence that this is the common view of akrasia, see Mele, A. (1987). *Irrationality*. New York: Oxford University Press, and Mele, A. (2010). ‘Weakness of Will and Akrasia.’ *Philosophical studies*, 150 (3), 391-404.

³ For empirical evidence for this claim, see Mele (2009), *op. cit.*

the consternation of my colleagues? Not a bit of it.⁴ We may accept that *some* people violate their better judgment due to a lack of self-control – e.g., people who suffer from lesions in their vmPFC⁵ – but few will accept that a lack of self-control explains *all* such acts. For this reason, critics of judgment internalism hold that the view captures too much intentional action under the heading of agential breakdown, thereby exonerating too much bad behavior. As John Doris puts it, ‘millions of betrayed spouses can’t be wrong’.⁶

On the other side of the argument, the voluntarist intuition finds support in judgment externalism. This theory – which traces its lineage to early Christian thought – understands the will as a mental faculty that is external to and functionally independent of judgment. This supports the voluntarist intuition, because, if the will acts independently of judgment, it’s no mystery that we sometimes intentionally act against our better judgment. The will, so to speak, can do its own thing, and so an agent can intentionally go against her evaluative judgment. But this replaces one mystery with others. If my will can do its own thing, independent of my judgment, why do my intentional actions so often flow seamlessly from my evaluative judgments? And why the consternation when they don’t? Moreover, in what sense is an akratic act a product of *my* will, if it violates the deliverances of *my* evaluative capacities? Why call it *mine* at all if it’s an independent non-cognitive power that can – like some alien force within – thwart *my* all-things-considered judgment? To capture these questions in a single worry: judgment externalism seems to render mysterious the intimate relationship between evaluative judgment and action.

To make progress here, we need to negotiate a compromise between these extremes. Each view gets something right. Internalists are right to recognize the intimate relationship between judgment and intentional action. Not only is it a matter of fact that we tend to act in accordance with our better judgment; it is a normative expectation that agents exhibit such a tendency—an agent who never acted on his better judgment would not present as a normal agent. However, the externalists are right to treat the link between judgment and intentional action as defeasible. For it seems clear that we *can* and *do* act freely and intentionally against our better judgment. But it’s a mistake to purchase that defeasibility at the cost of undermining the internalist insight about the intimate relation between judgment and action. Our task, then, is to develop a theory of akrasia that walks the line between these views, preserving what each gets right while trying to overcome their shortcomings.

I attempt to do so in what follows. In §2 I offer a more detailed diagnosis of the paradox of akrasia and sketch my proposed prescription. My basic diagnosis is that the paradox results when we approach the phenomenon of akrasia from the standpoint of the Deliberative Action Model; and my proposed prescription is that we tackle it from the standpoint of the Fluid Action Model. From this standpoint, I contend, we can make sense of akrasia as a form of skillful pre-reflective intentional action. In §3, I articulate a major objection to this proposal, and I spend §s 4-5 answering that objection, while simultaneously elaborating my phenomenological account of intentional pre-reflective action. By §6, then, I’m prepared to offer a more detailed account of my proposal along with some examples to bring it to life. In §7, I answer another important objection to my view; and in §8, I assess my view against some relevant comparators, focusing in particular on how my account a) negotiates what Davidson called “the paradox of irrationality” and b) contributes to the contemporary discussion of “rational akrasia.” I conclude by identifying a problem that this paper leaves unanswered but that I deal with another forthcoming paper.⁷ This work is unique in that it brings the resources of phenomenology, the cognitive sciences, analytic action theory, and recent “hybrid models” of skilled action to bear

⁴ Austin, J. L., 1956/7, “A Plea for Excuses,” in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd ed., J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ For instance, it’s difficult to fault the akratic missteps of those patients described in Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes’ Error*. New York: Grosset/Putnam.

⁶ Doris, J. M. (2015). *Talking to our selves: Reflection, ignorance, and agency*. OUP Oxford, p. 161.

⁷ Forthcoming.

on a problem that for many years has almost exclusively been the province of analytic philosophy. My hope is that it gets us somewhat closer to finally making sense of akrasia.

2. Diagnosis and Prescription

To begin with our diagnostic question, why do the above strands of internalism and externalism fall into their respective extremes? The answer, I contend, has to do with the philosophical tradition's perennial commitment to the Deliberative Action Model (henceforth DAM).⁸ According to DAM, the paradigm of human action is action that flows from explicit deliberation. Thus, DAM's core doctrine is that 'full-blown' – or 'full-fledged' or 'full-blooded' – intentional actions are in each case determined by an agent's deliberative judgment. As Michael Bratman expresses it, 'full-blown action involves the conclusion of a piece of evaluative practical reasoning.'⁹ This doctrine follows from a chain of intrinsic normative links that DAM forges between deliberation, judgment, intention, and action. That is, according to DAM, for every full-blown intentional action ϕ , an agent deliberates about what to do; through deliberation she reaches the judgment that she ought to ϕ ; in light of that judgment, she forms a prior intention to ϕ ; then, unless she deliberates again and changes her mind, when the time to act arrives, she ϕ 's. For proponents of DAM, only this type of fully deliberated action reflects my practical agency in the fullest sense; and any break in this chain will undermine the intentional status of my action. Of course, defenders of DAM acknowledge that we sometimes engage in spontaneous non-deliberative intentional action—to deny that would constitute an obvious intellectualist distortion of the phenomenology of action. But they insist that to be intentional, these spontaneous actions too must flow from a prior act of deliberative reflection. For instance, on Korsgaard's influential version of DAM, spontaneous intentional actions "need not involve any step-by-step process of reasoning, for when a principle is deeply internalized we may simply recognize the case as one falling under the principle..."¹⁰ Similarly, Watson claims that deliberation isn't necessary when an intention is "completely scripted in advance by reasons."¹¹ In other words, even spontaneous intentional actions are intentional only in virtue of antecedent deliberative processes. So what's the connection between DAM and judgment internalism's stance on akrasia?

On the standard account of akrasia, the akratic agent deliberates about what to do, reaches an all-things-considered judgment that she ought to ϕ , forms a prior intention to ϕ in light of that judgment, and then she *intentionally* acts against that prior intention. Alternatively, it's also possible that she never reaches the intention-formation stage, so that she makes an all-things-considered judgment that she ought to ϕ and then, without forming a prior intention to ϕ , she intentionally acts against her better judgment. On this standard picture, then, the defect of akrasia lies in the agent breaking the ultimate or penultimate link in the chain DAM forges from deliberation to action; moreover, the standard picture maintains that the agent makes this break *intentionally*.

By DAM's logic, however, it's impossible to break that chain intentionally. If, as DAM maintains, a full-fledged intentional action is an action preceded and guided by deliberative judgment; and to act akratically is to act against one's better judgment; then akratic action

⁸ My discussion of DAM here is inspired by Wrathall's (2014a, 2014b) recent discussion of two rival models of action in the philosophical tradition. See his introduction to Dreyfus, H. L. & Wrathall, M.A. (2014). *Skillful coping: Essays on the phenomenology of everyday perception and action*. OUP Oxford; and Wrathall, M. (2014) "Autonomy, Authenticity, and the Self" in *Authenticity and the Self: Themes From Division Two of Being and Time* (edited by D. McManus). Routledge, pp. 193-214.

⁹ Bratman, M. (1979). 'Practical Reasoning and Weakness of the Will'. *Noûs*. Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 170.

¹⁰ Korsgaard, C.M. (2009). *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*. Oxford University Press, p. 107.

¹¹ Watson, G. (2004). *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays*. Oxford University Press, p. 136.

cannot be a full-fledged intentional action. For one cannot simultaneously be *guided by one's* better judgment and act *against one's* better judgment.¹² Moreover, DAM also rules out the possibility that akratic action is spontaneous non-deliberative intentional action. For, according to DAM, such action can only be intentional in virtue of an antecedent act of deliberative reflection that, for example, allows one to immediately recognize that the current case falls under some deeply held principle. But the fact that deliberation precedes akratic failure implies that one does not immediately recognize the current case as falling under some deeply internalized rule of conduct—for if it did, deliberation would be unnecessary. Judgment internalism about akrasia is thus an implication of DAM: freely and intentionally acting against my better judgment seems impossible, because such action breaks the chain of intrinsic links that gives an action its status as a *full-fledged intentional action*. For this reason, internalists like Watson argue – against conventional folk-psychological wisdom – that akratic behaviour is best understood not as intentionally acting against your all-things-considered judgment but rather as a lack of self-control with respect to particular desires.¹³ The agent is simply too weak to keep the deliberative chain intact.¹⁴ Moreover, if this is right, then it seems wrong to hold agents responsible for akratic acts. For if they are too weak to control themselves, it would seem that the appropriate moral attitudes in response to their akratic misdeeds are, as Watson puts it, “shame and (if one goes in for this sort of thing) contempt, not guilt and indignation.”¹⁵

As we saw above, externalists try to unravel this exculpatory logic by driving a wedge between judgment and the will. This idea – that the will functions independently of judgment – creates some logical space for blame and other reactive attitudes in response to an agent's akratic failings: ‘He knew better, and *he did it anyway!*’ But this move runs into its own problems, in particular, it attributes akratic actions to the agent's will without explaining how the will actually reflects her agency. In other words, like internalism, it places almost everything we associate with genuine agency on the side of deliberative reflection, and, in doing so, leaves us incapable of explaining in what sense akratic actions are properly agential. If we blame an akratic agent when his will makes a maverick move against his better judgment, why don't we do the same thing with someone who suffers from compulsions? What makes the former properly agential and the latter *mere* compulsions? The problem with externalism, then, is that it's really just the other side of the DAM coin. For it suggests that there's no genuine agency outside the deliberative sphere—there's just brute psychological incentives and “inchoate volitional spasms”¹⁶ that bear no specifiable relation to our purposive practical agency.

¹² Watson makes this point forcefully in his seminal work on the will. Watson, G. (1977). ‘Skepticism about Weakness of Will.’ *The Philosophical Review*, 86(3), 316-339; Watson, G. (2004). ‘The Work of the Will’ in *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays*. Oxford University Press, pp. 123-158. In circumstances that call for deliberation, he argues, deliberative judgment plays an executive role in an agent's mental economy, viz., it guides intention-formation within a legislative framework of reasons (2004: 136). In other words, for Watson, deliberative judgment does the work that we attribute to the will: ‘When intention fails to be guided by judgement, it fails to operate in its executive capacity—it fails to operate as a will’ (ibid.). Watson therefore argues that intentionally going against my better judgment is, strictly speaking, impossible, because my evaluative judgment is precisely what guides the formation of my intentions.

¹³ This lack of self-control can be i) a consequence of an upbringing and/or mental constitution that makes me incapable of resisting certain temptations, ii) the result of some excessive desire temporarily derailing my capacity for self-control, or iii) some combination of i) and ii).

¹⁴ For the sake of time, we can ignore the fact that not all akratic actions appear to be a matter of giving in to desire. For example, I could, in a distant possible world, judge all things considered that I ought to take the day off and not exercise tonight – because I've exercised too much lately – and then akratically break with that judgment and exercise anyway. Prima facie, that doesn't look like giving in to desire.

¹⁵ Watson, G. (1977). ‘Skepticism about Weakness of Will.’ *The Philosophical Review*, 86(3), p. 333.

¹⁶ The phrase inchoate volitional spasms is from Frankfurt, HG (1988), where he makes a similar point that a “choice” not guided by our preferences and priorities can't really be understood as a

To capture our diagnosis in a sentence, then, DAM's core doctrine – that only actions guided by deliberative judgment are full-fledged intentional actions – implies the truth of judgment internalism's take on akrasia; and externalism's attempt to break with the logic of internalism ultimately reinforces DAM's fundamental assumption that the deliberative sphere is the sole site of agency. That's the diagnosis. What might we do about it?

I propose a two-part prescription. First, revise DAM's core doctrine: deliberative reflection is not *the* source but rather a source of full-fledged intentional action. Second, identify an alternate source of intentional action. In taking this second step, however, we need to tread gingerly near the pitfalls of externalism, selecting an alternate source of intentional action that a) stands in the right relation to our practical agency and b) does not mystify the link between judgment and action.

As I see it, the best candidate for this alternate source of intentional action is skillful pre-reflective intentional action (henceforth SPIA). I will dedicate a good deal of what follows to explaining precisely what SPIA is, but here at the outset I should unpack the terms skillful and pre-reflective in a preliminary way, as these terms are multiply ambiguous. Actions are skillful if 1) we can do them spontaneously without prior reflection, 2) they are under our control and yet 3) sufficiently practiced to be partially automatic, and 4) they allow for fine-tuned adjustments on the fly in response to changes in the situation. Like Dreyfus and Brownstein¹⁷, I don't identify skill with expertise but rather maintain that skillful action exists on a continuum from the novice's mediocrity to the expert's mastery, such that the majority of everyday action is skillful in the sense described by 1)-4). Now the term pre-reflective in SPIA hails from the existential-phenomenological tradition and signifies a form of awareness that is not an explicit act of reflection (or second-order self-monitoring) but rather an immediate, first-order, non-observational self-acquaintance.¹⁸ This pre-reflective self-awareness is a constitutive feature of phenomenal consciousness that makes possible reflection on my mental life – whereby I take my own mental life as an object of my awareness – because it is only in virtue of my original pre-reflective self-acquaintance that I can recognize my mental life as my own when I reflect on it explicitly. The existential-phenomenological tradition has long argued that if we bracket our rationalist assumptions and reflect on everyday action as we actually experience it, we can see that most action is done pre-reflectively – i.e., without explicit self-monitoring or reflection – and yet it is still intentional. My two year-old walks up to me, arms outstretched, and I bend down to pick her up; my wife asks me to grab the keys on the way out of the house and I do so without breaking my stride; my friend suggests that we pack up our laptops and grab some lunch, and my body is moving from my chair before I can reply. I don't reflect before acting in these cases; neither do I act on completely pre-scripted reasons or principles internalized through a prior reflective process; rather, I spontaneously and intentionally respond appropriately to the situation. Pre-reflective intentional actions like these permeate our lives, and what I will here call the Fluid Action Model (or FAM) breaks with DAM and takes such actions as the paradigm of intentional action.¹⁹

Although FAM has principally been developed by the existential-phenomenological tradition in the last 100 years, other traditions have made important contributions too, especially in recent years. For instance, in "Practical Competence and Fluid Action", Peter Railton defends FAM and

choice. "Rationality and the unthinkable," pp. 177-190 in *The importance of what we care about* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁷ Brownstein, M. 2014: Rationalizing flow: agency in skilled unreflective action. *Philosophical Studies*, 168, 545–68; Dreyfus, H. L. (2002). Intelligence without representation—Merleau-Ponty's critique of mental representation. The relevance of phenomenology to scientific explanation. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1, 367–383.

¹⁸ The notion of pre-reflective awareness or pre-reflective self-consciousness has played a major role in the phenomenological tradition. For illuminating discussions of this idea, see Zahavi (2005, 2014).

¹⁹ Again, Wrathall's (2014a and 2014b) work has shaped my approach here.

argues that “all action – including in particular paradigmatic premeditated intentional action – has and must have unpremeditated action at its source and core.”²⁰ In other words, Railton argues that there is no autonomous agency unless SPIA is genuinely intentional. We can reconstruct his argument as follows:

- 1) According to DAM, “bona fide intentional agency” combines a sense i) that one can choose among different action possibilities and ii) that one’s choice will ultimately determine what one does.²¹
- 2) This view of agency implies certain gaps in everyday intentional action, e.g., a) the gap between making a decision and taking action, and b) the gap between initiating an action and completing it.
- 3) For your actions to be attributable to you, then, you must fill in these gaps with bona fide intentional actions.
- 4) However, from 1) and 2), it follows that if these gap-filling actions are to count as full-blown intentional actions, then each one must have the same gaps to fill.²²
- 5) Thus, Railton concludes, a regress “...arises for any model of action that seeks to understand the distinctive operation of autonomous or rational agency in terms of some special sort of action on the part of the agent, whether the act is ‘choosing one’s reasons,’ or ‘endorsing certain reasons,’ or ‘identifying a certain reason,’ or ‘throwing one’s weight behind one reason rather than another.’ Since it would appear that these acts would themselves have to be done autonomously, the would-be agent has become Zeno’s deliberator.”²³

From this conclusion, Railton reasons that although deliberate choice is “one paradigm in the theory of rational or autonomous action”, it cannot be the only one, because such choice cannot function without “non-deliberative processes” that underwrite it.²⁴ These processes, Railton argues, are not reflective, but “they are intelligent and responsive to reasons qua reasons. They make us the agents we are, and give our agency its capacity for rational, autonomous self-expression.”²⁵ Thus, what DAM calls full-blown intentional actions can only be autonomous if SPIA is too.

So the recommendation that we take SPIA as our alternate source of intentional action is not a just-so story designed to accommodate my pet theory of akrasia. There is a longstanding existential-phenomenological tradition that takes SPIA as the paradigm for intentional action, and there are arguments like Railton’s regress that suggest that without SPIA there can be no autonomous agency at all. To this existing body of work, I want to add the claim that SPIA, properly understood, can help us make sense of akrasia.

The basic idea is simple. If it’s possible for agents to spontaneously engage in SPIA that isn’t preceded and guided by deliberation, then it should also be possible for an agent to form a judgment about what it’s best to do and then – without further deliberation – to spontaneously engage in SPIA that is inconsistent with that judgment. In other words, if we can spontaneously engage in SPIA *without* explicit deliberative judgment, then there’s no obvious reason why we can’t spontaneously engage in SPIA *against* our explicit deliberative judgment. Thus, SPIA gives us a plausible way to think about how we can *intentionally* break the deliberative chain

²⁰ Railton, P. (2009). “Practical Competence and Fluent Agency”. In D. Sobel & S. Wall (Eds.), *Reasons for action* (pp. 81–115). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Railton, P. (2012). Two cheers for virtue, or, might virtue be habit forming? In M. Timmons (Ed.), *Oxford studies in normative ethics volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 102.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100. In this passage, Railton is specifically discussing John Searle’s action theory, but for the sake of brevity I’ve left out direct reference to Searle’s work. Interested readers can see Searle, J. *Rationality in Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001): 15.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

discussed above: the akratic agent can deliberate about what to do, explicitly judge that she ought to ϕ , and then – without revising that judgment – pre-reflectively and intentionally not- ϕ . Akrasia is possible because we have an alternate source of intentional action in SPIA.

3. Moving the Bump?

The apparent simplicity of this proposal might make one wonder: Why hasn't someone already done this? After all, akrasia is one of philosophy's oldest problems, and there's a rich existential-phenomenological literature on SPIA going back more than a century, so if there were promise in this proposal, someone likely would have tried it by now. This thought, though reasonable, overlooks two important facts. First, DAM has dominated the philosophical literature on akrasia. Secondly, it's only very recently that phenomenologists and cognitive scientists have developed theories that make SPIA look like a properly agential, bona fide source of intentional action. Indeed, if I had to rely on traditional accounts of SPIA, my proposal would suffer from the same problems that afflict externalism. Allow me to illustrate this claim with a quick look at two of the most influential accounts of SPIA in the last few decades.

First, consider Hubert Dreyfus' seminal work on skillful action. According to Dreyfus, there are fundamentally "two distinct kinds of intentional behaviour: deliberative, planned action, and spontaneous, transparent coping."²⁶ At first, this sounds promising for our purposes, for he identifies transparent coping as an alternate source of intentional action. However, Dreyfus consistently characterizes such coping as utterly *mindless*:

In fully absorbed coping, there is no immersed ego, *not even an implicit one*. The coper does not need to be aware of himself *even in some minimal way*...If the expert coper is to remain in flow and perform at his best, he must respond directly to solicitations without attending to his activity or to the objects doing the soliciting. There is no place in the phenomenology of fully absorbed coping for mindfulness.²⁷

In skilled coping, Dreyfus tells us, the agent "is totally merged with the world [and] there is no place for *content*, neither experiential nor propositional..."²⁸ Thus, as Dan Zahavi notes, it seems that "absorbed coping for Dreyfus involves [no] experience" at all, as if "the relevant processing takes place nonconsciously."²⁹ How, then, does the expert fluidly respond to the situation in the right way at the right time? Stuart Dreyfus tells us in a summary of the view of expert action that he and his brother Hubert developed in *Mind Over Machine*:

...with enough experience in a variety of situations...the brain of the expert gradually decomposes this class of situations into subclasses, each of which requires a specific response. This allows the immediate intuitive situational response that is characteristic of expertise.³⁰

In other words, the expert doesn't need to think, no mindfulness or attention is required, because she's simply responding to a situation she's already dealt with and filed under a particular subclass. Her response is an automatic and mindless repetition of something she's

²⁶ Dreyfus, 'Refocusing the Question: can there be skillful coping without propositional representations or brain representations?', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, no. 1 (2002), 413-425.

²⁷ Dreyfus (2007) Response to McDowell, *Inquiry*, 50:4, 371-377, DOI: 10.1080/00201740701489401, p. 324, *my emphasis*.

²⁸ Dreyfus, HL (2013). "The Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental" in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate* (edited by Joseph Schear). Routledge, p. 29.

²⁹ Zahavi, D. (2013) "Mindedness, mindlessness and first-person authority" in *Mind, reason, and being-in-the-world: The McDowell-Dreyfus debate* (edited by Joseph Schear). Routledge, p. 322.

³⁰ Dreyfus, S. E. (2004). The five-stage model of adult skill acquisition. *Bulletin of science, technology & society*, 24(3), p. 180.

already done.

If I relied on Dreyfus's account skilled action, then, as I said above, my proposal for making sense of akrasia would suffer from a shortcoming reminiscent of the one that plagues externalism. The problem with externalism is that a will that acts independently of judgment doesn't seem to bear any relation to one's agency, and so the actions of that will don't seem properly intentional. Similarly, if Dreyfus is right and skilled action is just an utterly mindless and automatic repetition of a past performance, it would be hard to see a skilled action taken against my better judgment as properly intentional. How can such an action be attributable to me if I lack even a minimal awareness of doing it and it's nothing more than the automatic repetition of a prior action? Where is the agency in such a mindless action? Thus, Dreyfus's version of SPIA would be a hard sell as a candidate for the alternate source of intentional action we need to make sense of akrasia.

Shifting our attention to a second major player in the history of skilled action theory, Dual Process Theory (DPT) – at least in its traditional form – shows equally little promise for our purposes. Traditional versions of DPT share a core idea, i.e., within the brain there are two cognitive systems with independent goal structures. Authors typically refer to these systems as system 1 and system 2. On the standard view, system 1 – the system that executes spontaneous skilled action – is said to be unconscious, myopic, automatic, fast, and high capacity. And system 2 – the system responsible for deliberative reflection – is said to be conscious, farsighted, controlled, slow, and limited in capacity. Moreover, system 1 is made up of innate cognitive modules and habitual tendencies that produce mandatory and rigid responses to environmental stimuli, while system 2 is a domain-general intelligence marked by 'flexible goals and flexible cognitive control'.³¹

Again, this sounds promising for our purposes at first, because DPT identifies two sources of putatively intentional action. But that bubble of promise bursts when you reflect on the description of system 1 processes: if intuitive system-1 skillful action amounts to a kind of modular or overly rehearsed subpersonal automatic processing – devoid of the kind of flexible normative responsiveness that we associate with full-blown practical agency – then it's unclear how it could serve as the kind of alternate source of intentional action we need to make sense of akrasia. In other words, when described as automatic, mandatory, modular, habitual, rigid, myopic, unconscious, and so on, intuitive system-1 responses don't sound all that agential. For our purposes, then, DPT shows no more promise than Dreyfus's approach.³²

If we relied on these views, then, taking SPIA as an alternate source of intentional action would not solve the problem faced by externalism; it would merely "move the bump in the carpet",

³¹ Evans & Stanovich, 2013, p. 229. Despite DPT's intuitive appeal, the notion that the brain has two separable cognitive systems has come under fire in recent years, even by major proponents of the view. For instance, Stanovich and Evans (2013) argue that almost all the characteristics typically associated with the alleged two systems are not essential features of two psychological kinds but rather incidental correlates that occur with high frequency under controlled conditions. Moreover, the view's neuroanatomical division of labour appears to be an elegant fiction. In fact, the neural regions linked to the two systems constantly interact, so much so that all attempts to map two psychological systems on distinct neuroanatomical regions have failed (Kelley, Wagner, & Heatherton, 2015).

³² To be clear, I'm crafting a narrative here that explains why no one has pursued my proposal for making sense of akrasia. I am not saying that no version of DPT can (or will) ever generate a theory of skilled action that is up to the task. I am simply trying to show why some very influential theories of skilled action, historically speaking, would not have been suitable. Of course, some authors have used DPT to address the issue of akrasia. For an excellent example, see Levy (2011). Levy's account is complex and interesting, but it's not germane here, because he does not attempt to make the automatic system 1 action seem properly agential.

pretending to solve the problem by relocating it.³³ Fortunately, in recent years, some phenomenologists and cognitive scientists have developed accounts of SPIA that show more promise for our purposes. Of particular importance for me are 1) a relatively new interpretation of Heidegger that, pace readers like Dreyfus, argues that skilled action, for Heidegger, has an ineliminable, first-personal dimension³⁴, and 2) recent “hybrid” or “mesh” theories of skilled action from the cognitive sciences, i.e., theories that insist on the “interpenetration [or *mesh*] of thought and action”³⁵ in our everyday skillful comportment.³⁶ This second point is very important to get across before I give my account of SPIA. Against the views of Dreyfus and DPT, I reject the dichotomy between mindful reflection and mindless skill. Like Christensen et al., I endorse a “mesh” view, which proposes that “controlled and automatic processes are closely integrated in skilled action.”³⁷ In what follows, I draw on these recent developments to show how SPIA can help us make sense of akrasia.

4. The Phenomenology of SPIA

I begin by sketching a broadly Heideggerian phenomenology of SPIA. To be clear, I’m not interested in faithfully representing Heidegger’s actual view here, nor am I commenting on his work. I leave that to more accomplished Heidegger exegetes. My aim is to use some Heideggerian tools towards my own ends. On the interpretation of *Being and Time* I favour, the key to Heidegger’s phenomenology of SPIA is his pragmatic account of human understanding.³⁸ According to this account, we make sense of the world in terms of the skills we possess for

³³ A very astute and helpful anonymous reviewer raised this objection to an earlier draft of this article, i.e., that my view was merely moving the bump in the carpet. I wrote this section to unpack that objection, and I wrote §5 to answer it.

³⁴ Here I am influenced by Steven Crowell’s development John Haugeland’s notion of *existential commitment*: ‘Existential commitment ... is no sort of obligation but something more like a dedicated or even a devoted way of living: a determination to maintain and carry on. It is...a resilient and resolute first-personal *stance*’ (Haugeland, “Truth and Rule-Following” in *HT*, p. 341). Crowell follows Haugeland’s insistence that the normativity of action – the fact that what we do is always governed by (tacit or explicit) standards of success or failure – presupposes a kind of existential commitment to the norms that are constitutive of the kind of agent I’m trying to be. As Crowell puts it, for Heidegger, ‘what is being done (work) can be unambiguously identified only if it involves a being who is *trying* to do it’ (Crowell, S.G. (2013). *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*. Cambridge University Press, p. 217).

³⁵ Sutton, J., Mcllwin, D., Christensen, W., & Geeves, A. (2011). Applying intelligence to the reflexes: Embodied skills and habits between Dreyfus and Descartes. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42(1), p.80.

³⁶ A close relative of this new approach is the attention-control view defended by Bermúdez: “If you are acting skillfully, then you are reflecting, because performing a skilled action requires that throughout performance your attention is structured by a higher-order, performance-related intention” (2017, p. 900). This is similar to the mesh view, because it sees high-order thought at work in skilled action; but it’s different in that it works in the framework of DPT and characterizes this higher-order thought as reflective and representational. See Juan Pablo Bermúdez (2017) Do we reflect while performing skillful actions? Automaticity, control, and the perils of distraction, *Philosophical Psychology*, 30:7, 896-924, DOI 10.1080/09515089.2017.1325457

³⁷ Christensen, W., Sutton, J., & Mcllwin, D. J. (2016). Cognition in skilled action: Meshed control and the varieties of skill experience. *Mind & Language*, 31(1), 43.

³⁸ My pragmatic interpretation of Heidegger here works in a vein mined by Dreyfus, H. L. (1991). *Being-in-the-world: A commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*. MIT Press; Crowell, S.G. (2013). *Normativity and phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*. Cambridge University Press; Engel, A. K., Friston, K. J., & Kragic, D. (2016). The Pragmatic Turn: Toward Action-Oriented Views in Cognitive Science; Haugeland, J. (2013). *Dasein disclosed*. Harvard University Press; Martin, W. (2006). *Theories of Judgment: Psychology, Logic, Phenomenology*. Cambridge University Press; and Rouse, J. (2015). *Articulating the world: Conceptual understanding and the scientific image*. University of Chicago Press.

dealing with it, and we acquire those skills by being socialized into the practices of our community. The term practice here is broadly construed as a set of norms that govern and are constitutive of a set of activities in which I can participate when I am properly socialized and therefore possess the relevant skills. That is, in each practice, a set of norms – which can be made explicit but are typically only exhibited in behaviour – determines what counts as successful participation in that practice. To be clear, such participation isn't about perfect conformity with an uniformly codified set of regulations; it's a matter of adhering to the relevant norms as I understand them, and there is scope for experimenting with those norms in my efforts to align my performances with the normative expectations of other agents engaged in the practice.³⁹ According to Heidegger, when an agent is socialized into such a practice, she acquires what he calls a *Seinkönnen*—the “ability-to-be” a competent participant in that practice. I translate *Seinkönnen* here as *existential ability* (henceforth EA).⁴⁰ For Heidegger, our EAs allow us to participate in the practices of the shared world—they allow us to adhere competently to and experiment with the norms of those practices, and to make sense of ourselves in terms those practices. EAs are *abilities* in the sense that they determine what we are capable of doing, and they are *existential* in the sense that what we can do in part defines who we are in the world.⁴¹ Finally, for Heidegger, our EAs are what make us capable of SPIA: each EA is a skill (or a set of skills) that allows us to spontaneously and intelligently respond to the world in (at least roughly) the right way.⁴²

It helps to explain the concept of an EA with an example. Consider my role as a philosophy instructor. This EA i) informs the way certain action contexts show up for me and ii) fixes what my actions mean to me in those contexts. To illustrate the first point, when I enter a seminar room, the skills I've acquired in my training as a philosophy instructor give that action context its pedagogically salient affordances⁴³—I find chairs, tables, and whiteboards arranged in relation to each other in a way that facilitates my work as a teacher, and I ignore aspects of the room irrelevant to that work. Moreover, my competence in the practice of teaching philosophy allows me to appreciate the room's arrangement as good (or bad) for that end. Turning to the second point, the EA also fixes what my actions mean to me in that context. In the seminar room, my gestures, speech, and board work have their precise meaning in light of the fact that I'm trying to teach philosophy. For instance, when I talk about epistemic closure, my students and I experience that speech act as an attempt to teach. And the act is fixed with that meaning because in that context everyone present understands what I say and do in light of my EA as a philosophy instructor. So, on Heidegger's view, I am capable of taking appropriate skilful pre-reflective intentional actions when I teach philosophy, because I've acquired the EA – or set of skills – that makes that context fluidly intelligible to me.

³⁹ This is an important point about the norms of social practices raised in Rouse, J. (2007). "Social practices and normativity." *Philosophy of the social sciences* 37, no. 1, pp. 46-56.

⁴⁰ Macquarrie and Robinson translate *Seinkönnen* as both 'possibility' and 'potentiality-for-Being'. There are good reasons for doing so. But I think the term existential ability better captures the connection Heidegger draws between our abilities-to-be and our self-understanding.

⁴¹ Scholars who interpret Heidegger's position in this vein typically say that socialization allows an agent to occupy a 'social role.' I find this term inadequate, however, because although some abilities-to-be are social roles (e.g., teacher, husband, writer), not all of them are. For instance, my daughter has recently acquired skills and abilities that allow her to play piano, but it seems artificial to say she's taken up a new social role. So I prefer the broader notion of an existential ability.

⁴² If EAs are just skills, why use both terms? This is a reasonable question, but I think the term 'existential ability' conveys something important—these skills define who we are, our being-in-the-world. The term skill doesn't convey that by itself, and I think it's important to convey that Heideggerian insight.

⁴³ I borrow the term 'affordances' from Gibson, J.J. (1986). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Some philosophers explain Heidegger's concept of an EA by comparing it to Korsgaard's notion of a 'practical identity.'⁴⁴ This works well in one respect: for Korsgaard, your practical identity is a 'self-conception' or 'a description under which you value yourself and find your life worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking'⁴⁵; and, for Heidegger, your EAs play a similar role structuring your values and actions. To stick with the same example, my obligations to my students matter to me in terms of my EA as a philosophy instructor—if I weren't committed to that EA, those students would not stake a claim on me in the same way, and I would treat them differently. So the Korsgaard comparison works in that sense.

But there are at least two respects in which the comparison fails, and these failures are worth mentioning because they cast important features of our EAs in relief. First, practical identities are highly complex social roles – such as teacher, parent, and lawyer – that are associated with specific contexts, duties, and commitments. Heidegger tells us, however, that our experience is *always* intelligible and matters to us in terms of some EA. This implies that EAs include not just highly articulated practical identities but also humbler abilities that aren't associated with any specifiable social role. In fact, on Heidegger's view, *all* human abilities are existential—they all contribute to our being-in-the-world. Thus, even simple abilities – like drinking, sitting in a chair, or getting a better look at something – count as EAs on his view.⁴⁶ So our EAs lie on a continuum from simple bodily skills to the complex social roles taken up in highly structured institutional contexts. Each EA contributes to the way an agent understands herself in the world; and taken as a whole they constitute the pragmatic self-understanding in terms of which our first-person experience, for the most part, is intelligible and matters to us.

The second respect in which the Korsgaard comparison fails is that, for Heidegger, your pragmatic self-understanding is not a 'self-conception' or a 'description' or any other product of reflection. Understanding, on Heidegger's view, means "being able to manage something", "being a match for it", "being competent to do something".⁴⁷ Thus, for him, self-understanding denotes our pre-reflective sense of what we can manage, what we're a match for, and what we're competent to do. In other words, since understanding denotes skillful action, self-understanding refers to the sense you have of yourself as someone capable of such action as *you're doing it*. Self-understanding is not a self-conception or some form of 'immanent self-perception'⁴⁸ but rather an embodied competence in action. Thus, Heidegger rightly notes that we spend most of our lives 'absorbed in the world'⁴⁹ engaged in pre-reflective action.⁵⁰ Once an

⁴⁴ She introduces this idea in Korsgaard, C.M. (1996). *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge University Press, p. 101. For works that relate this notion to Heidegger's position, see Burch, M. (2010). Death and deliberation: Overcoming the decisionism critique of Heidegger's practical philosophy. *Inquiry*, 53(3), 211-234; Crowell, S. (2007). Sorge or Selbstbewusstsein? Heidegger and Korsgaard on the sources of normativity. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 15(3), 315-333; Okrent, M. (1999). Heidegger and Korsgaard on human reflection. *Philosophical Topics*, 27(2), 47-76.

⁴⁵ Korsgaard, C. M. (2009). *Self-constitution: Agency, identity, and integrity*. OUP Oxford, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Some will object to the thought that low-level bodily activities contribute to our pragmatic self-understanding; however, such abilities make facets of the world intelligible to us, at times affect what matters to us, and in part define who we are in the world. Anyone who doubts that such basic bodily abilities contribute to our sense of self might consider discussing the point with a person with a disability who lives without some of these abilities. On this view, everything about human existence, even our existence in time, can be seen as an ability. For look at our temporal abilities and inabilities, see Owen, G. S., Freyenhagen, F., Hotopf, M., & Martin, W. (2015). Temporal inabilities and decision-making capacity in depression. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 14(1), pp. 163-182.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time*. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, trans. Harper & Row: San Francisco, p. 184. Henceforth referenced as *BT*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Heidegger, M. *BT*, p. 149.

agent masters the skills required to participate in the social practices of her community, she can, for the most part, glide through the world without explicit reflection. So I can walk from here to there, pick up my daughters from school, and make dinner without once deliberating about what to do. Again, EAs make SPIA possible.

Finally, before we focus in on the intentional dimension of SPIA, one more aspect of our EAs – one Heidegger tends to ignore – merits emphasis: all our skills are *embodied skills*. This means that learning the ropes in a practice always involves educating my body; in particular, it requires that I gradually master certain practice-relevant sensorimotor contingencies (SMCs). SMCs are the law-like relations between my bodily movements and the sensory input I receive in response to those movements. Acquiring any EA requires that I get a grip on the relevant set of SMCs, because this bodily competence is partly constitutive of my ability to participate in a practice. This is true not only for predominately physical practices like sports but also for largely intellectual ones like teaching. For just as I will not be able to skillfully pass a soccer ball if I lack the agility and strength required to place my weight on one foot while striking the ball with the other, so I will not be able to skillfully communicate with my students if my posture, gestures, expressions, mouth, and so on don't work together towards that end. So part of acquiring an EA in a particular practice is developing the physical know-how that tells me what sensory input to expect in response to my specific bodily movements in the relevant context. This bodily knowledge builds up over time, becoming increasingly rich and more entrenched the more I engage in the practice. Thus, the exercise of a given EA depends on the mastery of certain SMCs that associate with a particular network of physiological responses, homeostatic regularities, and neurological connections. To use the teaching example one last time, not only does my body do important work in the exercise of my teaching skills, but over the years I have also built up a network of basic physiological associations with the work. For me, a certain level of anxiety, caffeination, rest, and excitement are all associated with teaching to the extent that variations in these physiological states can throw off my performance. Thus, a certain bodily know-how and a network of physiological associations in part constitute my normative expectations as I exercise that EA.

5. Putting the 'I' in SPIA

Above I argued that the views of skilled action offered by Dreyfus and traditional DPT don't make SPIA seem sufficiently agential for my purposes. I attempt to show that my view is different in §5.1-5.3 by identifying three aspects of SPIA that, on my account, make it robustly intentional.

5.1 Guidance Part of what makes SPIA robustly intentional on my account is the fact that it's guided by the norms that govern my EA. The rationale for this claim is as follows. First, I can't intentionally take some pre-reflective action ϕ unless I possess the EA (or skillset) that makes ϕ -ing possible.⁵¹ I could claim to intend to ϕ even though I lack the requisite skills for ϕ -ing, but my words would be empty. For instance, I might say that I intend to repair an F-16 jet engine tonight, but as things stand, I lack the know-how to make good on that intention. Such an intention would at best be a pseudo-intention, words that ring hollow when the time arrives to execute that "intention" in action. Moreover, in order to intentionally ϕ at t_1 , I not only have to possess the relevant EA, but that EA has to guide my action—I have to understand what I'm up to at t_1 in terms of that EA.⁵² To adapt an example from Danto (1981),⁵³ assume, *arguendo*, that I

⁵⁰ For an in-depth discussion of this difference between Heidegger and Korsgaard's views and why it matters, see Crowell, S. (2007). *Sorge or Selbstbewusstsein?* Heidegger and Korsgaard on the sources of normativity. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 15(3), 315-333.

⁵¹ Of course, if ϕ -ing depends on skills I've picked up in other practices, I might be able to pull off ϕ -ing, but that will only be because I happen to possess the skills that enable me to participate in that practice.

⁵² Crowell often cashes out this notion of trying in terms of the distinction between acting in light of norms and acting merely in accord with them: "*trying* to be something requires that I be able to act not merely in accord with the measures of these roles, but in light of them" (Crowell,

have the skills to produce a perfect forgery of Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, no. 57. Now, if I trip over a tin of paint in a studio at t_1 , and the spill results in a canvass that is indistinguishable from Motherwell's masterpiece, that act is not intentional, because even though I have the skills necessary to make such a copy, I wasn't exercising them at t_1 . To extend the point, if we recall that exercising an EA entails adhering to the norms that govern it as I understand them, it follows that a) my pre-reflective action is intentional at t_1 if and only if is guided by my understanding of the norms that govern the EA I'm exercising at t_1 , and, conversely, b) anything I do at t_1 that isn't guided by my understanding of those norms must be i) a mistake (i.e., something I did intentionally but only because I failed to see it as norm-discordant), or ii) unintentional behaviour due to non-agential forces. So, for example, if I tackle an opponent during a rugby match, even if I do so spontaneously without reflection, that action is intentional because it's guided by the norms of the EA I'm currently exercising. If the same collision occurs because another player pushes me from behind, however, that action isn't intentional, because, though consistent with what I'm up to as a rugby player, it's not guided by my understanding of the norms that govern that EA. In summary then, my pre-reflective action is intentional at t_1 if and only if it is guided by the EA – and thus guided by the norms that govern the EA – that I'm exercising at t_1 . SPIA is properly agential and intentional in part because it meets this guidance requirement—it's guided by an aspect of *my* agency.

5.2 Non-Observational Practical Knowledge Taking a cue from Elizabeth Anscombe, I also want to claim that pre-reflective intentional action is characterized by a certain non-observational practical knowledge of what I'm up to. As McDowell interprets Anscombe's claim, such practical knowledge is essentially the first-person equivalent to an observer's description of my action. In other words, when watching Lucy do such-and-such, I would have observational knowledge that Lucy is doing such-and-such; but when *I* act intentionally, I have non-observational knowledge that "I am doing such-and-such."⁵⁴ My Heideggerian approach is similar to this but it adds a normative dimension to McDowell's characterisation of intention-in-action. In Heidegger's language, Dasein always takes up a pre-reflective intentional action "in terms of a potentiality-for-Being [or EA] for the sake of which it itself is..."⁵⁵ In other words, when I engage in pre-reflective intentional action I always do so for the sake of the EA I'm currently exercising. So, for example, when my daughters come downstairs in the morning and I make them breakfast, I do so for the sake of being a good dad (as I understand the relevant norms). Thus, on this view, the non-observational practical knowledge that accompanies a pre-reflective intentional action should be expressed as follows: "I am doing such-and-such for-the-sake-of *this* EA." This content isn't explicitly self-conscious; rather, it's a non-observational sense of what I'm up to, which could be expressed explicitly if I were asked to give an account of myself.⁵⁶ Moreover, this practical knowledge of my intention isn't as fine-grained as the skilled action is fine-tuned to the situation. So the evidence that expert action isn't a completely intellectual affair – e.g., that experts who reflect too much tend to "choke", that many experts can't recall the details of their actions, and that experts who do try to recall those details tend to confabulate – is not obviously in tension with my view.⁵⁷ I am not taking the intellectualist

2014, p. 84). I want to avoid this language because the distinction between acting in accord and acting in light of norms is a contested one that is difficult to draw. For an illuminating discussion of this issue, see Orkent, M. (2016). "Responsiveness to Norms" in *Normativity and Naturalism in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Vol. 77) edited by Mark Risjord. Routledge.

⁵³ Danto, A. C. (1981). *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art*. Harvard University Press.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 417. To illustrate: if I were passing the salt, an observer might remark, 'He's passing the salt'; and my corresponding intention in action would be the first-person equivalent, namely, 'I'm passing the salt.'

⁵⁵ [BT, pp. 119/86].

⁵⁶ This tracks with recent work on the reasons-responsive character of skilful action by Peter Railton (2009), Julia Annas (2011), David Velleman (2008), and Irene McMullin (forthcoming).

⁵⁷ Juan Pablo Bermúdez (2017) Do we reflect while performing skillful actions? Automaticity, control, and the perils of distraction, *Philosophical Psychology*, 30:7, 896-924, DOI 10.1080/09515089.2017.1325457, pp. 897-898.

position that all skilled action is governed by propositional knowledge, such that knowing-how is reducible to knowing that. I am only claiming that SPIA is accompanied by a broad non-observational sense of what I'm up to and to what end.⁵⁸

But if this practical knowledge isn't explicit, in what sense am I aware of it? Heidegger answers: "The self is there for the Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception"⁵⁹ in this non-observational way due to a "a mirroring back of the self from things."⁶⁰ In other words, in SPIA I have this non-observational practical knowledge of what I'm up to in virtue of my awareness of the action context and the entities and others therein. To return to the example of greeting my daughters in the morning, my non-observational knowledge that I am greeting them warmly for the sake of being a good dad (as I understand it) is not something I self-consciously monitor but rather something reflected back to me in their own warm responses to my attention. So a certain kind of observation is necessary for me to have this kind of practical self-knowledge – I have to attend to the relevant features of the context, others, entities, and so on – but no further observation is necessary for me to be aware of my own pre-reflective intention. I don't observe or self-consciously monitor my own intention but rather I know it non-observationally, because it's mirrored back to me in contexts, things, and others. It is my activity and interactions in the world that tell me what I'm up to, not some act of self-conscious monitoring. This non-observational practical knowledge of my intention also contributes to making SPIA properly agential.

5.3 Normative Sensitivity Finally, another essential trait that makes skilful pre-reflective action intentional on my view is its normative sensitivity: SPIA is sensitively attuned to the normatively relevant features of the situation. One way to clarify this idea is through an analogy to compatibilist theories of free will that account for free action in terms of sensitivity to reasons.⁶¹ The hallmark of these theories is that they eschew the traditional libertarian requirement that an act is done freely only when an agent could have done otherwise. As an alternative to such *leeway* freedom, these compatibilists invoke *source* freedom, claiming that an action is free and therefore attributable to an agent only if the actual source of that action is the agent's own reasons-responsiveness. Moreover, such attribution is appropriate only when the agent's reasons-responsive capacities are suitably sensitive to the right range of reasons. In other words, the action is attributable to the agent if – holding constant her capacity to respond to reasons – in a suitably wide range of situations in which she has sufficient reason to act otherwise, she would recognize and respond to those reasons by acting otherwise. If an agent's reasons-responsiveness is sensitive in this way, then her action is attributable to her because, as Michael McKenna puts it, "the etiology of the act which she actually performed involved springs that were sensitive to reasons."⁶² This is where I want to draw an analogy. On these compatibilist views, an agent's action is free if its source lies in her suitably sensitive reasons-responsiveness; and her reasons-responsiveness is suitably sensitive if she would have acted differently in a sufficiently broad range of scenarios wherein she had sufficient reason to do so. Analogously, on my view, my pre-reflective action is intentional – and so attributable to me – if its source lies in my suitably sensitive skillful responsiveness to the situation; and my skillful responsiveness is suitably sensitive if I would have acted differently in a suitably wide range of scenarios in which there were sufficient normative considerations that counted in favor of my doing so. Conversely, if my response to the situation is rigidly automated and would not differ in a suitably wide range of circumstances wherein there were sufficient normative considerations that counted in favour

⁵⁸ My thinking on this topic has been influenced significantly by Luthra, Y. (2017). Self-Trust and Knowledge of Action. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 114(9), 471-491.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, M. (1982). *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* BPP. Alfred Hofstadter, trans. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 159.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174).

⁶¹ For some of the most influential versions of such a view, see Fischer, J. M., & Ravizza, M. (1998). *Responsibility and control: A theory of moral responsibility*. Cambridge University Press; and McKenna, M. (2012). *Conversation and responsibility*. Oxford University Press.

⁶² McKenna, M. (2013). 'Reasons-responsiveness, agents, and mechanisms', in *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, vol. 1, edited by David Shoemaker, p. 154.

of acting otherwise, then my pre-reflective behaviour is not intentional. To vary McKenna's formulation, then, my pre-reflective action is intentional and attributable to me only if the etiology of the act I actually perform involves a skilful responsiveness that is sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation.⁶³

But what determines which features of a situation are normatively relevant? The short answer is that our EAs do. Every action context presents more phenomena than we can possibly take in; there's no way to be sensitive to every detail. Fortunately, we don't have to be, because our EAs train our attention – to varying degrees across and within individuals – to the features of the situation most relevant to the practice we're currently engaged in. In exercising an EA, then, I am always holding myself accountable to the norms of the relevant practice (as I understand them), responding to changes in the situation as better or worse in light of those norms, and making suitable compensatory adjustments to keep my performance on track. For example, say I'm driving my kids to school, and there's a cyclist sharing my lane. In this situation, I'm exercising (at least) two EAs: as 1) a driver trying to observe the rules of the road and 2) a dad trying to get his kids to school safely (and on time). Given the EAs I'm exercising, there are countless features of the surrounding environment that simply don't show up for me: the shape of a cloud, the frog on the side of the road, the brand of the cyclist's trousers, etc. Instead, my EAs as driver and dad work together to train my attention to the normatively relevant features of the situation, i.e., those relevant to driving well and keeping my daughters safe (and punctual). These EAs thus focus my attention to the road conditions, the cyclist's pace, his location in the lane, the absence of traffic in the oncoming lane, etc. Taking this all in, I spontaneously respond with aversion to the cyclist's pace, move over into the empty oncoming lane, leaving plenty of room for the cyclist when I pass, and speeding up as I do in order to avoid staying too long in the oncoming lane. I do all this without explicit reflection. Is it suitably sensitive to the situation or merely mindless and automatic? The answer is that it is suitably sensitive if I would have responded differently in a suitably wide range of circumstances wherein there were sufficient normative considerations that counted in favour of acting otherwise, e.g., had there been a Range Rover not far off in the oncoming lane, had I felt too sleepy to execute the maneuver, had the sun been in my eyes, and so on. And, again, the idea that I would have responded differently implies that my skills were suitably sensitive in doing what I *actually* did. Of course, sensitivity comes in degrees and specifying a cutoff where skills become insufficiently sensitive is a tricky business. In light of this, I recommend that we think of sensitivity on a sliding scale from actions that are clearly sensitive to those that obviously aren't.⁶⁴ And along that sliding scale, other things being equal, the greater the sensitivity, the more attributable the action, and vice versa.⁶⁵

Is there any room for the automatic or mandatory implementation of action on this view? As we saw, on the account of SPIA offered by DPT, skilled action appears automatic, so to speak, all the way down. Does my alternative view invert this and take it to be entirely sensitive? No. Like Christensen et al., I endorse a "hybrid" or "mesh" view in which our normatively sensitive capacities operate in conjunction with automatic processes "in an intimately meshed arrangement."⁶⁶ According to Christensen et al., this mesh approach pairs with a hierarchical division of control responsibilities. They illustrate this hierarchy with a look at the skill of driving, which is convenient for us given the example we just considered:

Higher strategic control involves overall control of the primary skill in

⁶³ A full account of this analogy would require that I specify how sensitive one's skills need to be, and I would need to go beyond considerations about intentional action into questions of moral responsibility. I leave those matters for another time.

⁶⁴ Sherri Roush (forthcoming) makes this point about sliding scale when discussing a different kind of sensitivity in a very different context.

⁶⁵ This doesn't mean that my pre-reflective intentional actions always get things right. If the driver in front of me turns her lights on and I mistake the new illumination for brake lights, my slowing down in response is still intentional, because it's suitably sensitive to the situation.

⁶⁶ Christensen et al. (2016), p. 62.

relation to its goals. In the case of driving this includes navigation to the destination. *Situation control* involves the control of action in relation to the immediate situation. In the case of driving this involves proximal control of the car in relation to features of the situation, including maneuvers like accelerating to traffic speed, maintaining lane position, maintaining a safe distance to other cars, changing lanes, and so on. *Implementation control* involves performing actions that achieve situation control, which in the case of driving includes steering, accelerating, braking, changing gears, and so on.⁶⁷

According to Christensen et al., automation is strongest – though not complete – for implementation control, while situation control and higher strategic control don't automate well, because, in my terms, these aspects of control need to be sensitive to the normatively relevant features of the situation. That is, implementation control can automate because it "involves relatively stable relations (e.g. brake to slow down)", but when it comes to situation control and higher strategic control "the relation of action to context is usually complex and variable" and so it can't be easily automated.⁶⁸ In other words, situation control and higher strategic control need to be normatively sensitive to the situation in order "to manage the variable features of action, tracking the overall task and the structure of the situation, and adjusting action appropriately."⁶⁹ So when I pass that cyclist on the way to my daughters' school, my normatively sensitive capacities keep the action consistent with my strategic goals and attend to the relevant details of the particular situation, while my steering, accelerating, and gear changing are mostly implemented automatically. In my terms, strategic and situation control are rather normatively sensitive, while implementation control is barely so. Again, such sensitivity comes in degrees, and Christensen et al. argue that it tends to vary with the difficulty and novelty of the task. However, on this mesh approach, skilled action always involves a combination of normative sensitivity and automatic implementation.

To sum up §5.1-5.3, on my account, SPIA is robustly agential and intentional because it's i) guided by my EA, ii) accompanied by non-observational practical knowledge of my intention, and iii) sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation.⁷⁰ These three characteristics put the 'I' in SPIA.

5.4 Strangers to Ourselves⁷¹

One might object that my approach is far too sanguine about the possibility of identifying which pre-reflective actions are intentional. After all, a large and by now familiar body of psychological evidence suggests that we often lack insight into our own intentions,⁷² and so the fact that what we do *appears* to flow from our suitably sensitive skillful responsiveness to the situation does not guarantee that said responsiveness *is in fact* the source of our action. In other words, we could interpret a good deal of our actions as intentional in terms of the account just offered, when those actions are in fact attributable to non-conscious mechanisms that completely bypass our intentional agency.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 50.

⁷⁰ I am not interested in entering debates about whether non-human animals can act in light of norms. However, I will say that, according to this account, if non-human animals do act in light of norms, then they do so i) with a sense that failure is possible and ii) in a way that is sensitively attuned to the normatively relevant features of the situation.

⁷¹ This section heading is a reference to Wilson, T. D. (2004). *Strangers to ourselves*. Harvard University Press, which summarizes some of the empirical psychological research referenced in this section.

⁷² For recent philosophical work that draws on this literature to puncture our faith in the notion that we're reliably in touch with the actual springs of our action, see Doris (2002, 2015) and Carruthers (2009, 2011).

I have two responses to this type of objection. First, the account above isn't meant to offer a practical criterion for determining which pre-reflective actions are *in fact* intentional; it's an account of what SPIA is, not a guide for spotting it in the wild. Secondly, regarding the practical matter of determining the intentional status of particular pre-reflective actions, I would invoke Tyler Burge's "acceptance principle," which holds that "a person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so."⁷³ To apply the principle here: my sense that my pre-reflective action is attributable to my suitably sensitive skillful responsiveness to a situation should be accepted as (defeasible) evidence for the intentional status of that action, unless there are stronger reasons to not do so.⁷⁴

5.5 What role for deliberation?

One last point I need to clarify before offering my more detailed account of akrasia as SPIA is the role of deliberation on this approach. This issue is too complex to do full justice to it here, so I will only try to capture the essentials. In keeping with my Heideggerian approach, I don't conceive of deliberative judgment as an independent mental faculty or a raw computational power that evaluates my life, so to speak, 'sideways-on';⁷⁵ rather, like Crowell⁷⁶ and Gallagher⁷⁷, I understand deliberation as an existential ability or skill. Deliberation is a social practice; the norms that govern it vary across populations (culturally and historically); the ability to participate competently in that practice requires certain skills governed by those norms; and deliberative skill levels vary across individuals and within individuals over time and across contexts. Finally, like most social practices, deliberation meets a human need: when I confront a problem of sufficient difficulty, I use my deliberative skills to try to resolve that problem.

This might remind the reader of Dreyfus's view, but it's importantly different. According to Dreyfus, we spend most of our time engaged in mindless immersed coping, and we only explicitly deliberate in the face of a problem that demands flexible reasoning. Against this picture, again, I endorse a mesh theory: our normative capacities are always up and active, whether we're engaged in skilled action or deliberation. All situations require thought; some just require more than others. So my view recognizes that there are some situations where spontaneous, normatively appropriate action is not possible, because the problem one faces is too novel or difficult; and in these cases we engage in deliberative problem solving, while our other normatively sensitive EAs continue to search for a suitable response. But my view does not construe deliberative problem solving as radically discontinuous with skilled action. On a mesh view, the intensity of thought required for action increases along a continuum from easy conditions wherein we engage relatively effortless skilled action, to novel and/or difficult conditions that require more effortful thought, to very difficult situations that require intensive and sometimes protracted deliberative problem solving.⁷⁸ The difference along this continuum is not a difference in kind but a difference of degree and intensity. Deliberative skill, on this Heideggerian view, is still a skill; it's not a radically different way of being in the world; it's an intensification of the thought that accompanies everyday action. So I don't embrace the dichotomy between mindless action and explicit reflection defended by Dreyfus and DPT;

⁷³ Burge, Tyler (1993). "Content Preservation," *Philosophical Review* 102: 457–88.

⁷⁴ Here I take a cue from Barbara Montero (2016) who invokes Burge's principle for similar reasons in *Thought in Action: Expertise and the Conscious Mind*. Oxford University Press.

⁷⁵ I use McDowell's (1994: p. 153) expression 'sideways-on' in a kind of analogy here: just as we can't stand outside the conceptual order to evaluate its normativity from the outside, deliberators can't stand outside their lives but rather deliberate from within it.

⁷⁶ For an illuminating discussion of deliberation situated in Heidegger's ontology of care, see chapter 9 of Crowell, S. (2013). *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 191-213.

⁷⁷ Gallagher, S. (2017). *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind*. Oxford University Press, p. 203.

⁷⁸ Christensen et al. (2016) describe this continuity with great clarity on pp. 52-53.

rather, I see normatively sensitive thought as an almost ubiquitous feature of human activity that takes the form of deliberation under certain circumstances.

What does deliberation look like when we think of it as a skill? To a large extent, to deliberate is to enact in thought what we ordinarily do pre-reflectively in action. In SPIA, we skilfully respond to the situation in light of the norms that govern the EA we're currently exercising. But when we encounter a situation where a spontaneous response isn't forthcoming, we use our deliberative skills to identify a suitable response. Typically, such deliberation isn't a highly abstract process that appeals to explicit principles; rather, for the most part, it's an imaginative process that involves hypothetically "trying out" different action possibilities until we find one that seems fitting. In other words, in SPIA we spontaneously seize on an action possibility; and in deliberation we try out different action possibilities in order to find one that seems fitting given the current circumstances. And such actions seem fitting to the extent that they appear consistent with the norms that govern the EA one wants to exercise. Deliberation thus involves thinking about the normative landscape of affordances that we typically respond to spontaneously. And such thought varies along a continuum from the fairly concrete imaginative "enaction"⁷⁹ of different action possibilities to the evaluation of such possibilities in light of abstract principles and/or cost-benefit analysis. Regardless of the level of abstraction, however, the ultimate goal of deliberation is to find a fitting action to be taken up by my pre-reflective agency.

Typically, deliberative skill does this by referring to the norms that govern the EA I was exercising at the moment the problem arises. For example, when I'm spending time with my daughters in a pre-reflective mode, I do so in light of what I take to be the norms of parenting. And when my daughters throw me off balance, compelling me to deliberate about how best to respond, I also deliberate in light of my EA as a parent and my understanding of its governing norms. In the typical case, then, my intentional action and deliberation are structured and guided by the same EA before and after the breakdown. And deliberative skill settles on an action meant to get me back in action.⁸⁰ Ultimately, then, deliberative skill provides a kind of support in the face of situations where my skillful pre-reflective agency fails to manage a problem spontaneously. So, whereas judgment internalism assigns the faculty of evaluative judgment an *executive* role in the agent's mental economy, my view sees deliberative skill playing a *support* role. Deliberative skill does not provide executive orders but rather recommendations about how to proceed.

6. Akrasia as SPIA

Now that I have explained what makes SPIA properly intentional, I can flesh out the preliminary sketch of akrasia as SPIA that I gave in §2. I'll begin with a formal description and then add detail with a few examples.

Akrasia results from a three-part process: 1) a problem disrupts your pre-reflective intentional action and forces you to deliberate about how to go on; 2) your deliberative skill recommends a plan of action that seems likely to resolve the disruption; but then 3) you spontaneously exercise some other EA and engage in SPIA that goes against that recommendation. Such akratic breaks with our better judgment can take a variety of forms. For example,

Akrasia₁) Sometimes we deliberate and reach a judgment about what to do, but at the same time our skillful responsiveness detects different normatively relevant features of

⁷⁹ Again, see Gallagher (2017) for a helpful discussion of the enactive nature of the imagination.

⁸⁰ This is just the typical case. Such disruptions can also motivate me to engage in second-order deliberation about the legitimacy of the norms that regulate some EA, and they can also lead me to engage in third-order deliberation wherein I consider reconfiguring my life as a whole. For more on this kind of 'deep deliberation', see Burch, M. (2010). Death and deliberation: Overcoming the decisionism critique of Heidegger's practical philosophy. *Inquiry*, 53(3), 211-234.

the situation, and then, in light of this detection, we engage in SPIA against our better judgment.

Akrasia₂) In a diachronic version of **Akrasia₁**, we also sometimes we deliberate at t_1 and reach a judgment about what to do at t_2 , and then when t_2 arrives, our skillful responsiveness detects some normatively relevant feature(s) of the situation that a) weren't in view at t_1 , b) took on a different valence in the interval between t_1 and t_2 , or c) some combination of a) and b); and at t_2 we respond sensitively to these newly emergent normative differences by engaging in SPIA against our better judgment from t_1 .

Akrasia₃) Another common source of akratic behavior is ambivalence: sometimes we're deeply ambivalent in a way that our deliberative skill fails to appreciate, such that deliberation recommends one action possibility while on a pre-reflective level we prefer another; and so we engage in SPIA against our better judgment.

This list is not exhaustive, but any other form of akrasia as SPIA that we could add to it would share the same basic ingredients: my deliberative skill points in one direction on the basis of normatively relevant considerations, and some other EA responds to the situation differently, because it is sensitive to different normative considerations (or to the same considerations, but in a different way).

Now some examples. First, take Gina, a lawyer working on a brief for a major client. Running flat out to meet her commitments, Gina fears she won't finish on time. Then, in the midst of a stressful day, her partner Ella calls in need of emotional support, asking Gina for an hour of her time. Gina deliberates about what to do and judges that she ought to turn Ella down and finish the brief. Then – without revising that judgment – she goes to see Ella anyway. From the perspective of DAM's judgment internalist, Gina irrationally violates the deliverances of her evaluative judgment—not intentionally, but rather due to a lack of self-control. On my view, however, it's possible that Gina acts intentionally against her better judgment.

How should we interpret her action on my view? To begin, we should note that Gina's action fits the three-step pattern of akrasia described in the above sketch: 1) Ella's call disrupts Gina's pre-reflective action and forces her to deliberate. 2) Receiving the call at work, when she's intensely focused on an important brief, Gina's deliberation is shaped largely by normative considerations associated with her EA as an attorney, and so she judges that she ought to keep working. However, 3) her skillful responsiveness to the situation is sensitive to and moved by the claims associated with her EA as Ella's partner, and so she engages in SPIA and, against her better judgment, heads out to see Ella. On this interpretation, then, Gina's action is an instance of **Akrasia₁**: she deliberates and reaches a judgment about what to do, but at the same time her skillful responsiveness detects other normatively relevant features of the situation; and then, in light of this detection, she engages in SPIA against her better judgment.

The second thing to note is that, on this interpretation, Gina's action has all the hallmarks of robustly intentional pre-reflective action identified in §5.1-5.3: it's guided by her EA as Ella's partner, accompanied by a practical non-observational knowledge of what she's up to, and sensitive to normatively relevant considerations associated with being a good partner (as she understands it). Interpreted this way, then, her action is properly intentional. Her judgment that she ought to do her work might hang around at the back of her mind – “My boss is going to kill me!” – but it lacks the normative force to prevent her from going to see Ella.

Explaining *exactly* why Gina acts this way would require fine-grained insights into her personal psychology, but two broad points about her motivations seem fairly uncontroversial. First, it seems fair to say that, at the moment she acts, Gina prioritizes her partner's emotional wellbeing over her own current work commitments. Second, although there's certainly an affective dimension at play in Gina's decision, it would be artificial to describe what she does in terms of succumbing to an excessive desire. Indeed, it would be psychologically flat-footed to see her

conflict as a simple contest between reason and desire. At least at the moment she acts, Gina is motivated by the fact that she *cares* more about her partner's wellbeing than finishing her brief on time, and such caring isn't a brute desire pushing her around—it's an affective and evaluative orientation associated with an EA that matters to her. So it's not some raw desire demanding satisfaction that moves Gina to action but rather a concern for Ella and for a significant part of Gina's own self-understanding. That is, Ella's wellbeing is at stake in the decision, and so is Gina's EA as Ella's partner.

For my second example, I borrow and adapt Marilyn Friedman's description of an alienated, 1950s housewife.⁸¹ Call her Betty.⁸² Betty believes that "a woman's place is in the home" and yet she finds herself wanting more from life, such as intellectual stimulation, a career, and a social life. One day her friend invites her to attend a lecture at the local university. She wants to go, but after reflecting on her "proper place" in the world, she judges that she has good and sufficient reason to stay home. Then, without revising her judgment, *she goes anyway*. From the perspective of DAM, it seems, the best interpretation of Betty's behaviour is that she succumbs to an urge she lacks the strength to resist. And Friedman's description of Betty's psychology recommends this interpretation. As she describes it, the depressed homemaker is torn by a contest between her principles "at the highest level" and her motivations "at lower levels"⁸³. So, on Friedman's account, it would seem that Betty's principles simply lose out to low-level desires (or urges) she's too weak to control.

My view interprets the case differently. As with Gina, it seems artificial to describe Betty's conflict as a contest of reason vs. desire, or high- vs. low-level elements of her psychology. It seems more apt, rather, to say that she's torn between conflicting elements of her self-understanding. On the one hand, she understands herself as a homemaker, and that EA matters to her a good deal. She not only takes pride in it and holds deep beliefs about its importance, but it's also tied up with other important EAs – e.g., being a mother, adhering to a particular religious practice, and so on – such that putting her homemaker identity at risk puts these other aspects of her self at risk too. On the other hand, growing up, Betty received an education, and through that process she developed skills that made her a participant in the life of the mind. In other words, her education left her with another EA that still matters to her, even though it has been effectively stifled in her adult life. So Betty's conflict isn't a clash between reflectively endorsed higher principles and low-level motivations; it's a contest between incompatible possibilities associated with different EAs that both matter to her. That is, her conflict is between her commitments as a homemaker and her interests as an educated person.

Instead of DAM's story about Betty's principles losing out to an urge, then, we can describe her akratic behaviour as SPIA taken against her better judgment. Her action fits the three-part process of akasia: 1) a friend's invitation disrupts her everyday pre-reflective action as a housewife and motivates her to deliberate; 2) she deliberates in light of her role as a homemaker and judges – all things considered – that she ought to stay home; but then, 3) without revising her judgment, she acts spontaneously in light of her EA as an educated person with an interest in the life of the mind. And her pre-reflective action is intentional because 1) in attending the lecture her action is guided by her understanding of the norms that govern her EA as an educated person, 2) she has non-observational practical knowledge of her own intention, and 3) her action is sensitive to the features of the situation that are normatively relevant in light of her EA as an educated person. Thus, Betty's case looks like an instance of Akasia₃: she's deeply ambivalent in a way that her deliberative skill fails to appreciate, such that her deliberation recommends she stay home like a "good homemaker", while on a pre-reflective level she prefers to go; and so she engages in SPIA against her better judgment. Explaining why Betty is blind to her own ambivalence would take us too far afield into issues of oppression and false

⁸¹ Friedman, M. A. (1986). Autonomy and the split-level self. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 24(1), 19-35.

⁸² In honour of Betty Friedan.

⁸³ Friedman, M. A. (1986). Autonomy and the split-level self. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 24(1), p. 30.

consciousness to explore here, so we will just recall that deliberation is a social practice and thus societal pressures can go a long way in shaping what shows up as a relevant reason in the deliberative process. At any rate, when Betty goes out, her explicit judgment and feelings of guilt and social transgression might tug at her conscience, but not forcefully enough to keep her home that night.

Finally, let's turn to a classic example in the discourse on akrasia: the akratic smoker. Tonight Black has plans to meet up with his old pal Jones. Back in grad school, the two primarily passed time talking philosophy over beer and cigarettes. Black has since quit smoking, but he knows that Jones hasn't, and he feels a wave of temptation to take the night off from abstaining so he can relive the good old days. This temptation prompts deliberation. Black thinks about how long it took him to quit smoking, how hard it was, how proud he is of his ten-year stint as a non-smoker, and how much his partner hated his smoking back in grad school. He doesn't want to break that streak and he also worries that one night off could snowball into a full-blown habit. Thus, Black, upon reflection, judges all things considered that he shouldn't smoke that night and resolves to abstain. Once he's out at the pub and two pints in, however, Black starts to experience a motivational shift. Memories of his grad school days and the buzzy satisfactions of smoking come cascading back, and, without further deliberation, Black acts against his better judgment and lights up.

This kind of classic case is where DAM's judgment internalism really seems to shine. After all, the conflict does look like a battle between the Black's deliberative judgment and a desire to smoke that eventually defeats him. Black deliberates before his night out, forms an all-things-considered judgment that he ought not smoke, and then the desire to smoke chips away at him until it derails his rational self-control. It sure does look that way. The only problem is that this account doesn't actually explain the phenomenon of interest. What we want to understand is a case in which Black *intentionally* acts against his better judgment. But, as we already saw, from DAM's point of view, strict akrasia – acting freely and intentionally against one's own better judgment – is impossible. So, according to DAM, Black's failure can't be strictly akratic. If we find that unsatisfying – if we think that Black could act intentionally against his better judgment in this classic case – then we'll have to look beyond DAM for an explanation.

Let's consider this example from the standpoint of my existential-phenomenological approach. First of all, on my view, smoking is an EA. It's a practice; there are norms that govern it; you can fail to do it properly (e.g., smoking yourself sick); being a smoker defines part of who you are in the world; and, like all EAs, becoming a smoker requires mastering certain SMCs that associate with a network of physiological responses, homeostatic regularities, and neurological connections. Moreover, this bodily network associated with the EA, unfortunately, doesn't simply go away because Black doesn't smoke for ten years. The associative network is etched in his body-brain system, and environmental triggers can activate that network, motivating approach behavior and a renewed interest in exercising his dormant EA.⁸⁴ Secondly, by quitting, Black has acquired another EA, namely, the ability to abstain from smoking. This is a practical skill, which, among other things, involves avoiding triggers, shifting his attention away from temptations, fighting temptations when it's not possible to shift his attention, resolving not to give in to temptation, not celebrating abstinence victories with indulgence, seeking support from his partner when he feels weak, substituting smoking for other pleasurable skillful behaviours, and so on.

This puts Black's predicament in a different light. When he imagines his evening out with Jones, he's tempted to smoke, which prompts deliberation. And when he deliberates, he imagines using his skill for abstinence to ward off temptation that evening, and he reflects on how that skill is nested in mutually reinforcing relations with other significant EAs, e.g., he abstains from smoking to care for his health, to maintain his happy marriage, to set a good example for his

⁸⁴ For a helpful discussion of how sensorimotor theory explains the approach bias addicts display towards their drug of choice, see Fridland, E., & Wiers, C. E. (2017). Addiction and embodiment. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1-28.

kids, and so on. Smoking just does not fit with who he is in the world, while abstaining does. So he judges, all things considered, that he ought not smoke and resolves not to. But that night when he's out with Jones, he faces one associative trigger after another—the pub context, the taste of beer, the easing of inhibition, the rush of intoxication, easy conversation with an old friend, and the rich history of memories of being out with Jones, talking philosophy over beer and cigarettes. Black's official deliberative recommendation about what to do – i.e., “*Don't smoke!*” – remains, but in the face of these associative triggers his skillful responsiveness becomes sensitive to other features of the situation that count in favour of smoking, and eventually he engages in SPIA against his better judgment. And this isn't a matter of some externalized desire derailing his capacity for rational self-control. He acts intentionally: 1) his action is guided by his EA as a smoker, 2) he acts with a practical non-observational knowledge of his intention to smoke, and 3) his skillful responsiveness is suitably sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation, e.g., that he enjoys smoking, that he wants to relax, and that smoking would allow him to quit working on abstinence and to engage fully with his friend.

Regarding point 3), one might object that Black's skillful responsiveness isn't suitably sensitive to the situation, given that he acts against the many normatively relevant considerations identified by his deliberative skill. But the fact that he thought the normative considerations stacked up one way at t_1 doesn't bind him to seeing things that way at t_2 . Black's akratic smoking is an instance of *Akrasia₂*: he deliberates at t_1 and reaches a judgment about what to do at t_2 , and then when t_2 arrives, his skillful responsiveness detects some normatively relevant features about smoking that weren't in view at t_1 and others that took on a different valence in the interval between t_1 and t_2 ; and so at t_2 he responds sensitively to these emergent features of the situation by engaging in SPIA against his better judgment from t_1 .⁸⁵ Thus, Black's pre-reflective action is suitably sensitive at t_2 , i.e., the etiology of the act he actually performs involves a skillful responsiveness that is sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation.

7. More externalist woes?

One aspect of this account that readers might object to is the idea that EAs can function independently of deliberative skill. This is once again a version of an objection raised against externalism; in that context, it sometimes takes the form of a *reductio*:

- 1) Externalism holds that akrasia is possible because judgment and the will are functionally independent, and this independence allows the agent's will to act against his better judgment.
- 2) Moreover, since such acts are intentional, the agent is responsible for them.
- 3) Critics then extend 1): if the will is independent and so can act against the agent's judgment *in some cases*, then it's in principle possible that it could do so *systematically*.
- 4) Moreover, given 2), if the agent's will were to depart systematically from his judgment, the agent would be responsible for those actions too.
- 5) It would be absurd to view an agent who acted *systematically* against his better judgment as a normal agent who was responsible for his behavior.
- 6) Therefore, externalism entails an absurd possibility.

My concern here is not the force of this *reductio* vis-à-vis externalism but rather whether it applies equally to my view. If the skillful responsiveness of a normal agent can depart from the recommendations of his deliberative skill *sometimes*, isn't it possible that this could happen *systematically* in a normal agent? If so, doesn't my view entail an absurd possibility?

I don't think so. The reason this criticism has teeth when brought against externalism is that the functionally independent will identified by that view has no substantive connection to our actual agency. It's just a sheer power to act. If such a will can part ways with judgment sometimes, then, indeed, it's unclear why it couldn't do so systematically. Moreover, it's hard to

⁸⁵ Sometimes it is the dubious character of our so-called better judgment itself that our skillful responsiveness detects and spontaneously acts against.

see why externalism would hold that it's normal for the will to do its own thing in some cases, but pathological for it to do so systematically. For the sake of time, I'll bypass the externalist's answer to this objection and focus on my own.

On my view, the normative expectation is that agents act in accord with their deliberative judgment *most of the time*, but not *always*. They should act in accord with their judgment *most of the time* because a) the *raison d'être* of deliberative skill is to find a fitting action in response to a practical problem, and b) deliberative skill and our other EAs are sensitive to normative considerations in the same self-world constellation. Thus, if my EAs are all functioning properly and are sensitive to the same constellation of normatively relevant features of a situation, then the deliverances of my deliberative skill should, for the most part, track with the responses of my other EAs and vice versa. However, the self-world constellation that my EAs are sensitive to is extremely complex. Thus, it's hard for any EA – including deliberative skill – to bring all the relevant features of the self and world into view. So we should also expect that sometimes our deliberative skill and other EAs will i) detect different normatively relevant features of the situation, ii) weigh the same features differently, or some combination of i) and ii). And this means that we should expect agents to *sometimes* part ways with their better judgment. Thus, as I've argued throughout, in a normal agent we should expect the link between deliberative judgment and action to be tight but defeasible. Moreover, if an agent *systematically* fails to act in accord with his judgment, we ought to suspect that something has gone terribly awry. Either the agent's deliberative skill is insufficiently sensitive to relevant reasons, like certain individuals with traumatic brain injury who systematically fail to make use of information about past behavior when making decisions about the future;⁸⁶ or the agent suffers from some kind of deep-seated ambivalence, like persons with extreme anorexia nervosa who tell their doctors that they want to live but categorically refuse to eat;⁸⁷ or some EA has lost its normative sensitivity and become compulsive, as appears to happen in some cases of addiction.⁸⁸ Whatever the specifics of the case, on my view, no one who systematically acted against her better judgment could ever present as a normally functioning agent.

8. Rational Akrasia and the Paradox of Irrationality

In the wider literature on akrasia, my account most resembles the views of Davidson⁸⁹ and Mele⁹⁰, because they also i) argue that an agent can intentionally act against her better judgment and ii) try to avoid embracing a full-blown externalism that severs the ties between judgment and action. In other words, they also posit a tight but defeasible link between judgment and action. However, our views differ in that they preserve the traditional idea that akrasia is intrinsically irrational, while I argue that akratic action is sensitive to normatively relevant features of a situation. This section explores that difference.

I begin with a brief characterization of Davidson and Mele's respective views. Davidson establishes the possibility of akrasia by drawing a distinction between all-things-considered judgments and all-out judgments. The crux of this distinction is that an all-things-considered judgment, which he identifies with the agent's better judgment, is conditional, whereas an all-out judgment is unconditional. Thus, he argues, the problem with the incontinent (or akratic)

⁸⁶ This example was inspired by Gareth Owen, Fabian Freyenhagen and Wayne Martin, "Assessing Decision-Making Capacity after Brain Injury: A Phenomenological Approach," forthcoming in *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology* 25:1 (March, 2018).

⁸⁷ For a helpful discussion of such ambivalence, see Martin, W. (2017). "Human rights and human experience in eating disorders," *The Journal of Psycho-Social Studies* 10:2 (2017); 111-21; <http://www.psychosocial-studies-association.org/volume-10-issue-2-october-2017>.

⁸⁸ Everitt, B. J., & Robbins, T. W. (2005). Neural systems of reinforcement for drug addiction: from actions to habits to compulsion. *Nature neuroscience*, 8(11), 1481-1489.

⁸⁹ Davidson, D. (1970). "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?," in *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, pp. 21-42.

⁹⁰ Mele, A. (1987). *Irrationality*, New York: Oxford University Press; Mele, A. (2012) *Backsliding: Understanding Weakness of Will*, New York:

agent is that while she judges all things considered that she has reason to A, she cannot commit herself to an all-out judgment in favour of A-ing. That is, she can't transition from a conditional judgment – e.g., 'All things considered, I have most reason to A' – to an all-out unconditional commitment to A. Instead, she decides to B, even though she judges she has more reason to A. As Davidson sees it, then, akratic acts are intentional but irrational. And they're irrational because they violate the principle that we ought to "perform the action judged best on the basis of all available relevant reasons".⁹¹ Moreover, he claims, since the agent acts against her *own* better judgment, she is irrational by her own lights, and she therefore sees her action as 'essentially surd'.⁹² As Sarah Paul puts it, for Davidson, "if one sincerely judges that A is all-things-considered the thing to do, there is something *inexplicable* about then proceeding intentionally to do something other than A."⁹³

Like Davidson, Mele also attenuates but does not sever the link between judgment and action. On his view, an agent engages in akratic action when his evaluative assessment of an object fails to align with the motivational strength of his desire for that object. I'll illustrate Mele's view here with an example from John Heil, wherein the relevant "object" of my evaluative assessment and desire is an action:

I have a strong desire to insult Wayne, a student whom I have detected yawning surreptitiously during a lecture on self-control. I judge that, all things considered, it would be best not to insult Wayne, nevertheless I succumb to my urge and do it.⁹⁴

Mele's theory would explain this example as follows. Relying on my judgment, I assess the possibility of insulting Wayne and find it an ill-advised, shameful abuse of my position. So I decide not to do it. But then the motivational strength of my desire to insult Wayne suddenly spikes. And since this happens without my "assessment of the goodness of...[not insulting Wayne] also spiking dramatically", I experience a "motivation-evaluation misalignment": I judge it best *not* to insult Wayne "while being more strongly motivated" to really blast him.⁹⁵ So I insult him, against my better judgment, and, according to Mele, this is a "free, sane, intentional action".⁹⁶

The views of Davidson and Mele are extremely influential because they get so many things right; however, as I see it, they share a shortcoming that my view tries to improve on. That common shortcoming is this: on both their views it's unclear why we should see an akratic action as intentional. To begin with Davidson's view, if I see acting on my all-out judgment as essentially surd, because it goes against my own practical reasoning, why do I *intentionally* act on it? An appeal to my judgment's all-out character here would only beg the question. What makes an all-out judgment an all-out judgment if it's not a normative consideration that I'm somehow sensitive to? Isn't the element of my psychology that makes my all-out judgment causally efficacious here just a desire, pushing me around? And if that's the case, what's the actual difference between Davidson's view and judgment internalism? My worry about Mele's view is similar. I agree that it's fair to characterize akratic actions as involving a kind of evaluation-motivation misalignment. But I don't think Mele adequately explains why such a misalignment results in free, intentional, and uncompelled action. For on Mele's account, it

⁹¹ Davidson, D. (1970). "How Is Weakness of the Will Possible?," in *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 41.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁹³ Sarah K. Paul (2014) Diachronic Incontinence is a Problem in Moral Philosophy, *Inquiry*, 57:3, 337-355, DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2014.894273, p. 339 (my emphasis).

⁹⁴ Heil, J. (1989). Minds divided. *Mind*, 98(392), p. 578. Cited in Zheng, Y. (2001). Akrasia, picroeconomics, and a rational reconstruction of judgment formation in dynamic choice. *Philosophical studies*, 104(3), p. 231.

⁹⁵ Mele, A. R. (2012). *Backsliding: Understanding weakness of will*. Oxford University Press, p. 76.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

seems possible to see the akratic actor as a victim who is not guided – but rather assailed – by the motivational force of his desire. Consider the example wherein I insulted Wayne: if a sudden surge in the motivational force of my desire *causes* me to insult Wayne, does it make sense to see my action as free and intentional? Put otherwise, does it not make equal sense to argue, with an internalist like Watson, that a spike in motivational force that causes me to act against my better judgment sounds a lot like a powerful desire derailing my judgment? The point seems finely balanced. In both cases, then, it can be difficult to distinguish these views from judgment internalism.

Davidson and Mele might respond that the alleged problem I've identified here is not a bug but a feature of their views. The akratic agent acts against what she simultaneously takes the balance of reasons to be, and so any explanation of why she does so must see her intentional action as irrational and to that extent inexplicable. In other words, if we make akrasia too explicable, we lose our grip on its irrationality. Davidson calls this the "paradox of irrationality":

The underlying paradox of irrationality, from which no theory can entirely escape, is this: if we explain it too well, we turn it into a concealed form of rationality; while if we assign incoherence too glibly, we merely compromise our ability to diagnose irrationality by withdrawing the background of rationality needed to justify any diagnosis at all.⁹⁷

On this line of reasoning, then, what I'm complaining about is just how well Davidson and Mele capture akrasia's irrationality. They don't explain akrasia too well. They don't, like me, want to make sense of akrasia, because akrasia is irrational and therefore ultimately inexplicable. They also don't assign incoherence too glibly, because they don't want to withdraw the background of rationality in human action like externalism arguably does. In this case, the relevant feature of that background is the ordinary, intimate relation between judgment and action. Seen in this light, my criticism is just a failure to appreciate the way Davidson and Mele do justice to the paradox of irrationality.

Some authors challenge this view by identifying cases where akratic action in fact seems rational. The best-known cases are Bennett's Huck Finn, which was later taken up by McIntyre, and Arpaly's Emily.⁹⁸ For brevity's sake, we'll focus on the Emily case. Emily, a depressed PhD candidate, finds herself increasingly miserable in her chemistry graduate program and wants to quit, but every time she deliberates on the matter, she decides to press on. In this example, as Arpaly sets it up, the *objective* balance of reasons clearly falls on the side of quitting—Emily's desire to quit is demonstrably more rational than her decision to stay. Thus, when she quits her program one day on an impulse, Emily, according to Arpaly, acts *rationally* against her better judgment: "propelled exclusively by her feelings, she quits the program, calling herself lazy and irrational but also experiencing a (to her) inexplicable sense of relief."⁹⁹ Years later, however, she comes to see her choice as the rational thing to do at the time. The standard response to this case is to insist that Emily's akrasia, even if it improves her life, is still irrational. For even if the objective balance of reasons points towards quitting, Emily's action violates what she, by her own lights, takes the balance of reasons to be. This is a strong objection, but you can also see why Arpaly might push back, arguing that even if it's irrational for Emily to act against her own

⁹⁷ Davidson, D. (1982): "Paradoxes of irrationality", in R. Wollheim and J. Hopkins (eds.), *Philosophical Essays on Freud*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 303. This is cited and accompanied by an illuminating discussion in Zheng, Y. (2001). Akrasia, picroeconomics, and a rational reconstruction of judgment formation in dynamic choice. *Philosophical studies*, 104(3), p. 231.

⁹⁸ Bennett, J. (1974). "The conscience of Huckleberry Finn", *Philosophy*, 49, pp. 123-34; McIntyre, A. (1990). "Is akratic action always irrational?", in Rorty and O. Flanagan (eds) *Identity, Character, and Morality*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 379-400; Arpaly, N. (2000). On acting rationally against one's best judgment. *Ethics*, 110(3), 488-513.

⁹⁹ Arpaly, N. (2000). On acting rationally against one's best judgment. *Ethics*, 110, p. 504.

better judgment, it's *even more irrational* for her to go on making herself miserable in a PhD program to which she isn't well-suited. Thus, on balance, her akratic action is rational, and, ultimately, she comes to see this fact by her own lights.

My view takes a similar direction of travel. Like Arpaly, I also maintain that a given case of akrasia can be more rational than sticking to your judgment. Think of our depressed homemaker Betty: in her case, akratically going out certainly seems more rational than enkratically remaining a prisoner in her own home. But there are at least two important differences between my view and Arpaly's. First, we have different theories of action. Arpaly is interested in unpacking how Emily's akratic action is "propelled exclusively by her feelings", whereas my view would explain what she does in terms of her suitably sensitive skillful responsiveness to the particular situation. What that skill would be in Emily's case isn't straightforward, and I'd probably need more information to say definitively. However, care of the self is a social practice, whereby we look after our physical, moral, and emotional wellbeing, and it seems to me that Emily's skill at caring for herself was suitably sensitive to the situation when she left her PhD program. The second important difference between my view and Arpaly's is that, while she allows for an occasional akratic action that is more rational than a particular better judgment, I maintain that in every case of SPIA taken against one's better judgment, the action is rational in some sense. That is, even when a better judgment is objectively better – i.e., when sticking to my judgment would be superior in every sense – there is still a sense, on my view, in which the akratic action displays a kind of rationality, namely, it is a free response that is sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation that matter to me. On my view, then, akrasia is always ecologically or existentially rational—it's always a matter of taking an action that matters to me given who I am.

So I disagree with Davidson and Mele vis-à-vis the paradox of irrationality, and I disagree for two principal reasons. First, our deliberative skill is fallible. Its agility and depth varies across individuals and within individuals across occasions; and it all too often involves misinformation, myopia, motivated reasoning, bias, and bandwidth limitations. Indeed, clear-sighted, undistorted deliberation that brings all the relevant normative features of a situation into view is rare, and, as empirical psychology has shown time and again, it's not great at predicting what will make us happy.¹⁰⁰ Hence, it's not uncommon for people to mistrust their own judgment, not unheard of for some to lose faith in it entirely, and not unusual for people to treat deliberation as a collaborative affair, involving significant others and relevant peers to bolster what we know to be a fallible skill. So the fact that our better judgment is fallible is the first reason it's *not* inexplicable that we sometimes act against our better judgment.¹⁰¹

The second reason is that our other EAs, like our deliberative skill, are rooted in our agency and sensitive to normative considerations. That's why all the examples of akratic action that we've considered in this paper ultimately seem explicable. They might not be objectively more rational than the relevant alternative, but they all *make sense*: Gina is responsive to the needs of Ella, Betty is sensitive to the claims of an intellectual life, Black responds to the situational features that count in favour of cutting lose, I resent Wayne's rude behavior, and Emily is attuned to some of the ways her current life makes her miserable. Akratic actions make sense for the same reasons they are properly intentional: they are guided by one's EA; they are accompanied by non-observational practical knowledge of what one's up to and to what end; and they are sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation. So although you might act against what you take the balance of reasons to be, your akratic action does not seem essentially surd. You might feel torn by the pull of your better judgment, but on a pre-reflective level, you know what you're up to and why.

8. Conclusion and Future Work

¹⁰⁰ For a helpful review of this research in a philosophical context, see Tiberius, V. (2008). *The Reflective Life: Living Wisely with Our Limits*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

¹⁰¹ My thinking here is influenced by Borgoni, C., & Luthra, Y. (2017). Epistemic akrasia and the fallibility of critical reasoning. *Philosophical Studies*, 174(4), 877-886.

In this article, I have tried to make sense of akrasia by drawing on resources from phenomenology, the cognitive sciences, analytic action theory, and recent “hybrid models” of skilled action. I have argued that we can solve the apparent paradox of akrasia – i.e., the notion that it is both impossible and ubiquitous – by understanding akrasia as SPIA that is guided by our EAs, accompanied by non-observational practical knowledge of our intention, and sensitive to normatively relevant features of the situation. In developing this account, I have defended it against objections that it shares the shortcomings of externalism; and I have attempted to show how this account can contribute to the conversation about the “paradox of irrationality” and “rational akrasia.”

I want to end by bookmarking some unfinished business. As it stands, the view I’ve defended here is vulnerable to another important objection. In the foregoing, I’ve addressed a form of action against one’s better judgment that is superficially irrational but existentially rational: the characters in my examples act against their better judgment but in accord with some aspect of who they are. However, sometimes people take actions against their better judgment that are deeply irrational, i.e., radically inconsistent with their deepest sense of who they are. These are actions where an agent doesn’t seem to have any agential commitment to an EA relevant to the action she takes, or actions when she has made every effort to extirpate some EA from her life and yet continues to act on it anyway. These are profoundly irrational actions that seem to involve a breakdown of agency, because it stretches our credulity to think that an agent could *intentionally* take an action so radically at odds with any plausible account of what she thinks is best and who she is (or wants to be). There are resources within my view to account for this species of action too. To do so, I will have to distinguish between akrasia and weakness of will: where *akrasia* denotes intentionally acting against your *all-things-considered* better judgment, and *weakness of will* refers to acting against your *decisive* better judgment due to agential breakdown. Since I didn’t have the space to go into it here, I have dealt with it in another forthcoming paper.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Forthcoming.