

## Self-Regulation for Hyperopics like Me

7,244 words (including footnotes and references)

### 1. My Hyperopia

In elementary school I made budgets to determine how to use my allowance. In junior high I wrote lists of my daily tasks that included “wake up” and “eat breakfast.” By college I had schedules for when I would finish which homework assignments mapped out for the whole semester. I treated deadlines like contracts punishable on pain of death. These days I try to be a little more spontaneous, but often this desire amounts to a self-defeating effort to “pencil in” some time for spontaneity three Thursdays from now at 1:30 PM.

I can also relate to “Alfred” in the following vignette, written by Jason D’Cruz (2013, 37-38):

Alfred: What shall we have for supper tonight, dear?

Belinda: I have an idea: let’s forget about cooking supper and just eat ice-cream!

Alfred: But we have plenty of groceries in the fridge that we should use before they spoil.

Belinda: They won’t spoil in one day. We can cook with them tomorrow.

Alfred: I guess you’re right. But surely eating ice-cream for supper isn’t good for our cholesterol levels?

Belinda: But Alfred, we so rarely do such a thing. Skipping supper just once isn’t going to kill us.

Alfred: I guess you’re right. But what if the kids come home and there’s no ice-cream left? They might be cross.

Belinda: Alfred, they’ll understand when we tell them that their parents have decided to go on a little binge. They’ll probably find it quite funny.

Alfred: I guess you’re right again, Belinda, all things considered. Our diet won’t be seriously compromised, the groceries won’t be wasted, and the children won’t be cross. Yes, you’re quite right. Ice-cream for dinner it is!

Belinda: Oh, Alfred, forget about it. We'll just put in a roast and boil up some cabbage.

As D'Cruz puts it, Belinda has better "instincts" for when to act on a whim, while Alfred, who seems stultified and overly cautious, acts like "a Prufrock." Presumably Alfred does in fact like ice cream, but has somehow thwarted himself (and Belinda) in satisfying this desire. Of course, the decision facing Alfred and Belinda is not a policy choice. They are not deciding whether to become habitual ice cream eaters for dinner. The vignette implies instead that Alfred and Belinda's choice is spontaneous and more or less one-off. And in this particular case, Alfred's exercise in deliberative practical reasoning somehow undermines Belinda's suggestion. By deliberately considering whether to spontaneously eat ice cream for dinner, Alfred ruins the idea of spontaneously eating ice cream for dinner.

The aim of this paper is to illuminate a way of decision-making that Alfred and I appear to share. We are engaged in what I will call *hyperopic* decision-making. "Hyperopia" as I will use the term is most easily grasped by contrasting it with "myopia." In the context of self-regulation, myopia refers to short-sighted information processing. Behaviors resulting from myopic decision-making virtually exhaust the current objects of study in the emotion and self-regulation literature, ranging from impulsivity to procrastination to cheating.<sup>1</sup> Alfred and I, by contrast, are not short-sighted. The vignettes above depict us as attending to, deliberating about, and acting on the basis of our distal plans and reflective values. We are anything but impulsive. Spontaneity is a struggle for us, even if we would like to eat ice cream for dinner now and again.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I will first offer a provisional definition of hyperopia. It is a form of deliberative information processing involving attending to and weighting distal goals and reflective values excessively (§2). I distinguish hyperopia from nearby phenomena such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and discuss a theoretical framework of self-regulation into which hyperopia fits. I then argue that one reason why hyperopia is important to understand is that it threatens well-being in distinctive ways (§3). Hyperopic decision-making typically involves high degrees of self-control, and self-control can have significant costs, including a proneness to feelings and expressions of anger (§3.1) and trouble enjoying leisure (§3.2). In the final section of the paper, I propose that hyperopia illuminates a troubling feature of practical agency (§4). D'Cruz argues that Alfred has a "deliberation volatile reason" (DVR) for eating ice cream for dinner. Just in virtue of deliberately considering whether to spontaneously eat ice cream for dinner, Alfred undermines the value of being spontaneous, and thus no longer has reason to spontaneously eat ice cream for dinner. DVR cases, I argue, illustrate that genuine spontaneity unavoidably requires *taking a risk*.

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<sup>1</sup> "Hyperopia" is not quite a neologism. There is a small research literature on hyperopic decision-making in consumer contexts, discussed below. For use of the term "myopia" in the self-regulation literature, see for instance Steele and Josephs (1990) on "alcohol myopia."

<sup>2</sup> I use "spontaneity" in the folk sense—referring to things done or said without planning or deliberation—and not in the Kantian sense.

The risk involves making oneself vulnerable to acting in ways contrary to one's judgments about one's overall reasons for action. This suggests, I conclude, that hyperopia represents a form of irrational risk-aversion.

## 2. Defining Hyperopia

I have defined hyperopia provisionally as a form of deliberative information processing involving attending to and weighting distal goals and reflective values excessively. I adopt Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder's definition of deliberation as "bringing to mind ideas or images meant to have some rational relation to the topic being considered, in the service of reaching a conclusion about what to think or do" (2012, 212). In hyperopia, the ideas or images one brings to mind have to do with one's distal goals or reflective values. By distal goals, I mean states of affairs that an agent desires that are removed from the agent in time and space, such as "being a continent shopper" rather than "satisfying my desire for a Twinkie." By reflective values, I mean evaluations that an agent takes to be supported by "overall" reasons.

Hyperopia may sound reminiscent of OCD, but it is not equivalent to it. Patients with OCD try to neutralize persistently intrusive and unwanted thoughts or feelings with other thoughts or compulsive actions (American Psychological Association, 2000). For example, a person might try to neutralize her fear that she left the door unlocked by checking the lock dozens of times. According to at least one recent investigation, OCD patients are more likely than controls to experience their actions as "unfree," and this is not because they lack the willpower to control themselves, but rather because they feel compelled to exert conscious control over their thoughts and actions (de Haan et al., forthcoming). Rather than exhibit a basic trust in one's memory of having locked the door, for example, the OCD patient feels compelled to think about—evaluate, deliberate over, etc.—whether the door is really locked. Hyperopia is thus similar to OCD inasmuch as both involve a kind of online and perhaps inappropriate conscious control over one's behavior. Both OCD and hyperopia also seem to inhibit spontaneity. Sanneke De Haan and colleagues report that patients suffering from severe OCD who have been treated successfully with Deep Brain Stimulation report increases in their ability to act spontaneously. One patient they interview (forthcoming, 12) says, for example, "my actions now go faster than my thoughts: I do things without thinking. That is pretty scary!" Unlike OCD, however, hyperopia does not necessarily involve experiencing one's thoughts as intrusive or dominating. In my own case, the phenomenology of hyperopic thought presents itself like a pivot point in my character. It is not alien to me, but I do not endorse it. It is perhaps like the way in which a person who "has issues" with their severe religious upbringing may pivot between zealotry and atheism. Moreover, while both OCD and hyperopia involve conscious and self-controlled decision-making, OCD is not associated with conscious self-control in the service of any particular (distal or proximal) ends or values.

Hyperopia has gone virtually unnoticed in the empirical literature. For example, the four chapters dedicated to "Common Problems with Self-Regulation" in Kathleen Vohs and Roy

Baumeister's *Handbook of Self-Regulation* (2011) focus on substance addictions, impulsive eating, impulsive shopping, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Virtually all of the canonical experiments in the field—beginning with Walter Mischel's (1974) work on “delay discounting” — focus on myopic impulses, feelings, or actions, taking these to represent paradigmatic threats to successful self-regulation.

Since Mischel's original experiments, theoretical models of self-regulation have moved beyond delay-discounting alone. These models might seem better suited to describe hyperopia, but many aren't. Baumeister and Todd Hetherington's (1996) highly cited review, for example, distinguishes between “underregulation” and “misregulation.” Underregulation refers to the processes paradigmatically at work in Mischel's work. Children who fail to stifle their proximal impulse for a marshmallow are underregulated in the ordinary sense that they lack self-control. Misregulation, by contrast, is misguided or counterproductive regulation. Baumeister and Hetherington identify three forms of misregulation, none of which corresponds to hyperopia: (1) misunderstood contingencies; (2) quixotic attempts to control the uncontrollable; and (3) giving too much priority to the regulation of affect. (1) and (3) are clearly not related to hyperopia. Baumeister and Hetherington say that “misunderstanding contingencies” involves having false beliefs about oneself or the world. For example, one might be irrationally hopeful that an unrequited love will change his or her mind because one has overestimated one's attractiveness. And “giving too much priority to the regulation of affect” involves myopic, rather than hyperopic, affect regulation. For example, a person who procrastinates may successfully control his momentary anxiety by avoiding work, but thus misregulate their long-term anxiety by failing to do their work.

What Baumeister and Hetherington call “quixotic attempts to control the uncontrollable” may sound closer to hyperopia, but it does not capture the phenomenon I have described. Baumeister and Hetherington's example of this kind of misregulation is thought suppression, which tends to backfire (e.g., Wegner, 1994). One way in which thought suppression is different from hyperopic decision-making is that the latter does not necessarily involve controlling what *can't* be controlled. It may be possible (in principle) for an agent to make all of her decisions hyperopically. Whether an agent *should* do this is another question. Moreover, hyperopia is a form of *deliberative* information-processing. Attempting to control the uncontrollable can be deliberative or impulsive. An agent may deliberately embrace “strategic colorblindness,” for example (i.e., thought suppression in the case of race), or an agent may find strategic colorblindness hard to resist, despite reflectively thinking that it is a bad policy.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say, however, that theoretical models of self-regulation cannot countenance hyperopia. Any such model must first distinguish self-control from self-regulation. Crudely, self-control is a means, while self-regulation is an end. Catherine Rawn and Vohs (2011) propose a “self-control for personal harm” model that vividly illustrates the instrumental nature of self-control. Their aim is to argue that people often exert high levels of self-control in precisely those situations that are typically thought of as self-control failures. They focus on smoking, heavy drinking, binge

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<sup>3</sup> On strategic colorblindness, see Apfelbaum et al., 2008.

eating, self-sabotaging intellectual performance, drug use, extreme violence, and “consensual unwanted sex.” Rawn and Vohs argue that people often do these things because their goal is social inclusion. Teenagers start smoking to “fit in,” for example, and in order to do so, must overcome initial impulses to avoid what they know to be risky behavior (in addition to overcoming their initial dislike of cigarette smoke). Rawn and Vohs write:

The desire to be socially accepted can lead people to strategically enact self-harming behaviors aimed at meeting this goal, using self-control as the process for doing so. We further propose that a meaningful proportion of ill-advised behaviors that are normatively coded as self-regulation failures are in fact self-regulation attempts with the goal of interpersonal inclusion (2011, 267).

In short: “self-control that results in self-harm is still self-control” (2011, 271). Rawn and Vohs compile an impressive array of data attesting to the ways in which people exert self-control in order to overcome aversions to doing risky things.<sup>4</sup>

While Rawn and Vohs’ model helpfully characterizes the instrumental nature of self-control, its focus on the goal of interpersonal inclusion is orthogonal to understanding hyperopia. Jack Block and colleagues’ model of “ego-control” (EC) and “ego resiliency” (ER) retains this instrumental interpretation of self-control but provides a broader framework for understanding what sort of a normative end self-regulation might be.<sup>5</sup> On Block’s model, EC refers to an agent’s degree of impulse inhibition/expression and ER refers to “the dynamic capacity to contextually modify one’s level of ego-control in response to situational affordances” (Letzring et al., 2004). In other words:

Highly ego-resilient individuals are characteristically able to modify their level of control, either up or down, as may be appropriate or necessary according to the situational context. Individuals with a low level of ego-resiliency are more restricted to the same level of impulse containment or expression regardless of situational demands (Letzring et al., 2004).

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<sup>4</sup> For example (2011, 273): “people smoke only to the extent to which they believe it will lead to social rewards but do not smoke when those rewards are unattractive or absent, again suggesting that taste is not the reason for smoking but rather the goal is being accepted by others. It works, too: Strategic smoking does in fact secure friendships with other smokers.” For another view on the distinction between self-control and self-regulation, see Fujita (2011).

<sup>5</sup> See Block (1950, 2002); Block and Block (1980); Funder and Block (1989) and Letzring et al. (2004).

ER is a normative ideal on Block's model and self-control is the means for attaining this ideal.<sup>6</sup> But low ER takes two forms: "undercontrol" and "overcontrol." Undercontrolled individuals are those commonly described in the self-regulation literature. They tend to experience fluctuating emotions, are easily distracted, and express and act upon their impulses even when doing so may be personally harmful or socially inappropriate. Overcontrolled individuals are the opposite. They are *not* resilient, but rather are . . .

. . . inhibited in action and affect-expressiveness to the point of at times being excessively constrained. They have difficulty making decisions, may unnecessarily delay gratification or deny themselves pleasure, are tightly organized, are insulated from environmental distractions, and are able to continue even repetitive tasks for long periods of time (Letzring et al, 2004).

This model of self-regulation differs from common impulse-inhibition models (e.g., Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999; Mischel et al., 1988; Tangney et al., 2004) by not treating self-control as adaptive or advantageous in all situations. Self-regulation (or high ER) sometimes requires impulsivity, according to Block's model. Situations demanding impulsivity can be dramatic or mundane. Heroic action, for example, is often necessarily impulsive. At the same time, when a friend is visibly upset, a comforting gesture like a gentle touch on the elbow is most meaningful if it is immediate, spontaneous, and unhindered.<sup>7</sup>

I submit that hyperopia is a particular form of overcontrol that inhibits ER by preventing agents from being impulsive in the right ways. Hyperopia is just that form of overcontrol tracing back to an excessive deliberative attending to and weighting of distal goals and reflective values. (One could be overcontrolled for other reasons, such as a deep and pervasive distrust of other people.) In the next section, I suggest how hyperopia may harm well-being.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Hyperopia and Well-Being

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<sup>6</sup> Block's model does not include an account of what sort of broader normative framework—i.e., what sort of ethical or moral framework—ER fits into.

<sup>7</sup> This is reminiscent of Michael Stocker's (1976) point that a friend in the hospital would prefer that you visit her out of an immediate reaction that it is *her* in the hospital, and not because you have consulted your moral duties and found that one of them demands that you visit her. Bernard Williams' (1981) case of one's drowning spouse who would prefer to be saved simply because he or she is one's spouse, and not because he or she is one's spouse and in situations of this kind it is morally permissible to save one's spouse, is also relevant.

<sup>8</sup> While no "hyperopia scale" exists, Cacioppo and Petty's (1982) "Need for Cognition" scale, a measure of an individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy deliberative thinking, is likely to be correlated with hyperopic decision-making.

As I've implied, hyperopia has upsides and downsides. While I tend to be reliable, organized, and efficient, I often submit papers to journals and conferences before they are really ready in order to keep to my schedule. (Manifestly, not this one.) I feel anxious knowing there are unanswered emails in my inbox, and while this anxiety helps me to end most days having achieved the vaunted "inbox zero," it also prevents me from spending time with my kids. It's not that I'm work-obsessed per se. Rather it's that the email is on my agenda, and that agenda flashes like a neon sign in my mind. Other times my far-sightedness causes problematic inaction. More than once I have returned home from the supermarket empty-handed, having felt unsure how I would use any particular item in the coming days, the possibility of buying the wrong thing too strongly demanding my attention.

This is, of course, a jumble of highly anecdotal effects. Is there evidence that what I have defined as hyperopia undermines well-being in these or other ways? One likelihood is that the kind of overcontrol involved in hyperopia leads to feelings and expressions of anger (§3.1). Another is that hyperopia engenders a "productivity orientation" which prevents agents from enjoying leisure time (§3.2). I describe these effects only as "likely" because I am aware of no direct empirical research examining the link between hyperopia and well-being. My aim, of course, is to bolster the case for such research in the future.

### 3.1 Overcontrol and Anger

Let's add a bit to D'Cruz's vignette. What might Alfred say next to Belinda?

Belinda: Oh, Alfred, forget about it. We'll just put in a roast and boil up some cabbage.

Alfred: But Belinda, I thought you wanted to get ice cream? I just don't understand you at all!

(Alfred stomps off and sulks.)

Anger is often thought to be a product of a loss of self-control. Alfred, we might think, has "given in" to the temptation to snap at Belinda. But the relationship between self-control and anger is more complicated than this. Baumeister and colleagues' research on "ego depletion" suggests that feelings and expressions of anger might be a byproduct of self-control. In short, ego depletion is characterized by poorer than usual self-control on a task subsequent to another task that demanded self-control.<sup>9</sup> Once depleted (by, for example, being asked to suppress their thoughts while doing

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<sup>9</sup> For review, see Baumeister et al. (1998).

arithmetic) individuals are more prone, for instance, to break their diets (Vohs and Heatherington, 2000) and to drink excessively, even when anticipating a driving test (Muraven et al., 2002). Baumeister and colleagues have argued that ego depletion explains the link between self-control and anger.<sup>10</sup> The idea is that effortful self-control leads to the exhaustion of self-regulatory resources, which leaves agents less able to engage in subsequent acts of self-control, thus leading (sometimes) to aggressive and angry behaviors. This theory is meant to explain why, for example, people on diets are more likely to be irritable and aggressive (Polivy, 1996). If correct, this suggests that Alfred's hyperopia might leave him prone to feelings and expressions of anger because his deliberative far-sightedness requires effortful self-control.

It is also possible that effortful self-control is tied to anger more broadly. David Gal and Wendy Liu (2011) show that exerting self-control has “angry effects” in situations that don't plausibly involve subsequent acts of self-control. They show that engaging in effortful self-control increases agents' preference for anger-themed movies, interest in angry-looking faces, irritation with others' attempts to persuade them to act in a particular way, and endorsements of anger-framed policy messages. These results aren't plausibly interpreted as effects of ego-depletion. Preferring an anger-themed movie, for example, is no more a self-regulatory failure than preferring a comedy. Gal and Liu suggest that anger and aggression are not just one particular effect among others of ego depletion. Rather, self-control seems to serve as a cue for seeing, noticing, and feeling anger. If this is right, then hyperopia—understood as overcontrol—is likely to predict feelings and expressions of anger across a broad array of situations, including those that don't demand self-control.

I leave it as more or less intuitive that frequent feelings and expressions of anger can undermine well-being. The evidence for this is robust, ranging from Ernest Johnson's (1990) review of the link between the “deadly emotions”—anger, hostility, and aggression—and poor physical and mental health outcomes, to Louise Phillips and colleagues' (2006) survey of anger management across the lifespan, which finds that improvements in quality of life and mental health as individuals age are explained by variance in anger regulation. Of course, none of these data suggest that anger always undermines well-being or that there aren't times when feeling or expressing anger is healthy and/or appropriate. Specifying the conditions under which expressing or feeling angry promotes well-being is an important project for another day.

### 3.2 Productivity Orientations

Later on that night . . .

Alfred:           Belinda, I was thinking about what we should do when we retire. What would you like to do?

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Denson, 2009; Denson et al., 2010; Finkel et al., 2009; and Stucke and Baumeister, 2006.

- Belinda: I'm not sure. Perhaps visit friends, or get a timeshare in Florida. It would be nice to be near to home so that we can babysit the grandchildren.
- Alfred: Hmm . . . but what about something more exciting? Wouldn't you like to sleep in an ice hotel, or try eating chocolate-covered grasshoppers, or visit all 50 states in the USA?

It may appear that Alfred's exotic suggestions are out of step with his hyperopic personality. Ordinarily we think of the pursuit of unusual experiences in terms of thrill-seeking and impulsivity. Much of the self-regulation literature follows suit, treating "sensation seeking" as a product of myopia.<sup>11</sup> However, it may be that Alfred here exhibits what Anan Keinan and Ran Kivetz (2011) call a "productivity orientation" in his choices about leisure activity. People with such an orientation are more concerned than other people with being productive, making progress, and accomplishing more in less time. Keinan and Kivetz show that people with a productivity orientation tend to view free time as a way to "collect experiences" and build their "experiential CV." Visiting ice hotels, eating exotic foods, and travelling comprehensively essentially allows Alfred to check items off his list of planned indulgences. Alfred thus will kill two birds with one stone: "enjoy" himself while making "good" use of his time.

Keinan and Kivetz (2011) tie productivity orientations to a failure to "take a break from self-evaluation." I take this failure to be similar in the relevant respects to hyperopia. "Self-evaluation" in this context can be understood as a form of deliberative consideration of one's goals and values. Indeed, it is from Keinan and Kivetz that I borrow the term hyperopia. They use it more narrowly to describe a form of consumer decision-making. They write:

We propose that consumers who measure their self-worth in terms of productivity and accomplishment tend to be in 'production mode' even when consuming. Such consumers do not take a break from self-evaluation even when doing so is appropriate (e.g., when engaging in nonvocational activities), and they see all situations (including leisure and consumption activities) as opportunities to be productive and accomplished (2011, 936).

One problem with this tendency, of course, is that "collectable experiences" can be unpleasant. Keinan and Kivetz show that hyperopic consumers often choose to have experiences which the consumers themselves predict will be comparatively unpleasant compared to other options, such as staying in an ice hotel rather than in a hotel in Florida. Keinan and Kivetz's "Productivity Orientation" measure—which correlates with a variety of productivity-oriented behaviors—predicts consumers' preferences for collectable experiences over pleasant experiences (e.g., eating chocolate

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<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Barratt and Patton (1983) and Zuckerman (1994).

described as “unique and exotic” rather than “tasty and delicious”). Other measures produce similar results: people who set their watches faster than accurate time (in order to avoid being late) are more likely to prefer collectable experiences to pleasant ones (Keinan and Kivetz, 2011, 945).

Of course, collectable experiences may be preferable to pleasant ones in some, or even many, cases. But to the extent to which experiencing pleasure is a component of well-being, it appears hyperopia is undesirable for this reason too.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Hyperopia and Practical Agency

So far I have offered a rough characterization of hyperopia and suggested two ways in which hyperopia may undermine well-being. Of course, there is also positive value in the kind of spontaneity that hyperopia frustrates. D’Cruz suggests that this value has to do with experiencing feelings of freedom. He writes:

Eschewing deliberation and acting with abandon brings its own peculiar joy in that it engenders in one a feeling of freedom. It is possible to feel ‘hemmed in’ by one’s own rational calculation, and sometimes acting on a whim provides the antidote. While Nagel is right that ‘throwing caution to the wind’ is not a policy that should be generalized to all action, neither is ‘measuring life with coffee-spoons’ (2013, 37).

The particular joy associated with spontaneity represents a reason for (sometimes) thinking and acting in spontaneous ways. The problem is that reasons to be spontaneous are “deliberation-volatile.” Once considered in deliberation, they are no longer reasons for action. This was illustrated above in the first Alfred and Belinda vignette. As D’Cruz argues, once Alfred deliberately considers the reasons for and against spontaneously eating ice cream for dinner, he no longer has reasons to spontaneously eat ice cream for dinner. Whatever reasons Alfred had for spontaneously eating ice cream for dinner stemmed from whatever value or charm Alfred would have enjoyed by spontaneously eating ice cream for dinner. But by deliberating about these reasons, the value or charm that made them reasons for action is gone, precisely because Alfred is no longer being spontaneous.

What’s crucial to note is that in DVR cases, as D’Cruz puts it, “there is no reason that the agent should have considered which she did not in fact consider; moreover, she makes no error in assigning reasons their correct weight” (2013, 35). DVR cases are not cases of careless or faulty deliberation, in other words. This becomes clear through comparison to similar cases found in the moral psychology literature. Consider Nomy Arpaly’s (2004, 8) example of Peter the quasi-

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<sup>12</sup> On the role of pleasure in well-being, see Ryan and Deci (2001).

Nietzschean. Peter claims that “morality is for wimps” yet treats others unselfishly and kindly nevertheless. Arpaly points out that in thinking about Peter’s moral status we might reasonably conclude that he is a good person who happens to have silly views (rather than an atrocious person who is too weak-willed to follow through on his beliefs). Why is it reasonable to think this? Arpaly’s answer is that there are times when people act in accord with their overall reasons despite acting against the reasons they recognize in deliberation. Thus Peter is not simply lucky to act unselfishly. Rather, he values unselfish action, but is unaware of doing so. According to Arpaly, ordinary agents can act rationally or irrationally by acting on the basis of unacknowledged reasons (2004, 61). This is an important insight, but it isn’t a DVR case. Peter *could* have considered his reasons for treating others unselfishly, but didn’t. That he didn’t is an accidental feature of his psychology, and arguably he would have been better off had he reconsidered his silly views. There is nothing *constitutively* spontaneous about Peter’s unselfishness. In Alfred’s case, however, it is a constitutive element of what makes ice cream for dinner a good idea that Alfred *not* deliberate about whether it is a good idea. What DVR cases illustrate is the fact that there are times when there is no deliberative route, no matter how perfect one’s deliberation, to doing what one has reason to do.

If this is right, then from the perspective of a deliberative agent, acting on the basis of reasons to be spontaneous is fundamentally and unavoidably risky. Reasons to be spontaneous exist, but one cannot, on pain of reasons-volatility, recognize these reasons from a deliberative perspective. The unavoidable risk, then, is that in acting spontaneously one is always vulnerable to the possibility that what one does spontaneously will conflict with one’s overall practical judgments.

A skeptic might raise two objections to the notion that spontaneity is unavoidably risky. The first objection is that agents can perhaps avoid this risk by deliberately embracing plans to be spontaneous. In a cool moment of reflection I can make a policy choice that my future decisions favor spontaneity from time to time, in other words. This kind of planning, the skeptic might think, can rationalize future spontaneous decisions.

I do not think this response allays the riskiness associated with being spontaneous. If one makes very specific plans about when and where to be spontaneous, then one is no longer acting spontaneously when the time comes. And if one makes unspecific plans about when and where to be spontaneous, committing to the abstract notion that “being spontaneous once in a while” is a good idea, then the actual decision about whether to act spontaneously in *this* particular moment will not have been rationalized by a past decision. In short, planning either overspecifies or underspecifies when and where to be spontaneous. Moreover, as D’Cruz notes (2013, 34), DVRs only occur in deliberation about one’s own actions. From a third person perspective, without any threat of deliberation-volatility, I can recognize that Alfred has reason to eat ice cream for dinner. It is only Alfred who has a DVR, from his own perspective.<sup>13</sup> This point applies to one’s own future self just as it applies to other selves. I can recognize the reasons my future self has to sometimes

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<sup>13</sup> I avoid speaking of DVRs being “internal reasons,” given the many different ways in which this term is deployed across the philosophical literature.

make spontaneous decisions, but this recognition does not help my present self overcome the dilemma presented to me by DVRs.

A second objection is that spontaneity only appears risky if deliberating about whether to be spontaneous is the only way agents can decide to be spontaneous in accord with reasons. Perhaps there are nondeliberative routes to deciding to be spontaneous. Indeed, this is certainly the case. People make decisions nondeliberatively all the time. For example, above I noted D’Cruz’s suggestion that Belinda has better “instincts” for when to act spontaneously than Alfred. The question is whether one’s instincts—or some other nondeliberative route to deciding to be spontaneous—represent a reliable guide to rational action. And I mean “rational” here in a narrow sense, as simply acting in accord with one’s judgment about one’s overall practical reasons. Can nondeliberative decisions be *normative* for agents in this sense?

Arpaly (2004), as well as Arpaly and Schroeder (2012), provide persuasive arguments that agents can act for reasons nondeliberatively. They examine banal examples like passing the salt when someone asks you to “pass the salt” or seeing that a reaching device can be used to grasp a banana. Agents act for reasons in cases like these, and not because their actions are rationalized by some other previous, present, or future act of deliberation.<sup>14</sup> While this may be right, Arpaly and Schroeder’s argument only shows that nondeliberative reasons-responsive action is possible.<sup>15</sup> Arpaly (2004) and Arpaly and Schroeder (2012) do not aim to show how agents can actually go about making sound spontaneous nondeliberative decisions. Arpaly (2004) explicitly disclaims that she will not provide a “roadmap” to rational nondeliberative action. So while Arpaly and Schroeder’s work crucially opens space for rationalized nondeliberative action, it does not allay the risk an agent faces any particular time she must decide whether to deliberate or to act spontaneously.<sup>16</sup>

Valerie Tiberius (2008) *has* offered a “roadmap” of sorts for knowing how to act spontaneously in accord with one’s judgment about one’s overall reasons for action. She seeks to show when reflection—understood as critical thought about the nature and justification of a conception of the good life—should, and should not, guide our actions. Tiberius, like Arpaly, argues that a good life is one not dominated by reflection. Amongst other things, the good life requires that one be able to be “absorbed” in a “practical perspective.” Absorption refers to the kind of focus that demands all of one’s attention. During rock climbing, or dancing, or playing the guitar, one can become absorbed in the sense of “being in the moment” or “in the flow.” One is in

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<sup>14</sup> See also Railton (2009).

<sup>15</sup> I do not mean “only” in a diminutive sense. Showing how nondeliberative reasons-responsive action is possible is a significant and deeply impressive task.

<sup>16</sup> Arpaly and Schroeder also claim that knowing how and when to deliberate is itself a nondeliberative skill. I agree. But their aim is not to show how an agent can learn or implement this skill. As such, while I agree that knowing how and when to deliberate is a nondeliberative skill, I still do not know when I am implementing this skill properly, and thus am still at risk of acting poorly. Elsewhere, I have argued, with [reference removed], that “automatic” inclinations can be normative for agents [reference removed]. But our account similarly focuses only on showing normative automatic action to be possible. We also decline to provide any sort of roadmap for knowing which automatic inclinations are sound and which aren’t.

a “practical perspective” when one set of values directs one’s actions and feelings, and critical scrutiny of these values is suspended.<sup>17</sup>

Tiberius rightly recognizes that we cannot, on pain of regress, know how and when to shift perspectives—from the practical to the reflective perspective—by simply adopting the reflective perspective. Instead, she proposes that practical wisdom, among other things, involves “attentional flexibility,” which is the “capacity to grasp reasons or values, quasi-intuitively, without engaging in any reflection on how they are justified” (2008, 79). She elaborates:

The wise person is open to the intuitions, feelings, and perceptions that draw her attention to the relevant reasons without fully engaging her rational capacities. Being open to reasons from within a practical perspective means being able to appreciate what is at stake in considerations that are not at the center of attention from that perspective. Since considerations may appear to us as reasons without bringing along the justificatory background that makes them reasons, our acknowledgment of these reasons need not invoke a reflective conception of the good life or require that we take up a reflective point of view. This appreciation of reasons is not an explicit rational acknowledgment, but something more like an intuition or impression (2008, 81).

The worry here is that instructing agents to “be open” in order to “quasi-intuitively” “appreciate” what’s at stake in situations is tantamount to instructing them to simply trust their spontaneous inclinations. Is there something about having attentional flexibility that *warrants* this trust? Perhaps there is. Over time, an agent may come to see that her quasi-intuitive decisions work out better than her deliberative decisions. Similarly, from the second or third person perspective, we may see that agents who have developed the skills associated with attentional flexibility are better off than hyperopic or myopic agents. But these are deliberative considerations. They are borne of reflection upon what others ought to do or what one ought to do in the future. By definition these sorts of considerations cannot rationalize a particular spontaneous decision, on pain of reasons-volatility. One is not making a spontaneous decision if one’s decision is underwritten by previous deliberation.<sup>18</sup>

If these considerations are right, then acting spontaneously may indeed be unavoidably risky. Decisions made nondeliberatively may be rationalized second- or third-personally, but this is no help to the agent who wants to enjoy the particular values of spontaneity without violating her own reasoned judgments and must decide nondeliberatively in the moment what to do.

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<sup>17</sup> Tiberius’ account of being absorbed in a practical perspective is similar in many respects to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) empirical account of “flow,” which Csikszentmihalyi notably calls “optimal experience.” For discussion of flow and practical rationality, see [reference removed].

<sup>18</sup> This isn’t to say that one can’t or shouldn’t try to develop attentional flexibility in order to be more spontaneous. Rather, the point is that attentional flexibility only *warrants* spontaneity from a deliberative perspective.

And maybe this risk is small potatoes to you. Maybe you will say, “So what if I run afoul of my reasoned judgments now and again? Reasoned judgments can be faulty too, and anyway, it’s a small price to pay for the joy of being in the moment.” But then I contend that you are not hyperopic. You are rationally risk-tolerant, whereas hyperopic agents are irrationally risk-averse. Rather than leave themselves vulnerable to the possibility of doing something that they ultimately disfavor, hyperopic agents try—futilely—to ensure through deliberation that their spontaneous actions concord with their overall reflective judgments. This is a form of irrationality because, as D’Cruz puts it, “an agent manifests a peculiar kind of practical irrationality in so far as she endeavours to find a deliberative path to what she has reason to do when discovering such a path destroys the value of the destination” (2013, 39). And while the response to this problem is surely to say that an agent ought to develop attentional flexibility and the like, and to sometimes trust in her own nondeliberative decisions, it is precisely that this is a form of *trust* that frustrates the (putatively) risk-averse hyperopic agent.

## **5. Conclusion**

Hyperopia is relatively unrecognized, but worth recognizing. While there are undoubtedly benefits that accrue to agents who deliberately consider their distal goals and reflective values when making decisions, there are costs too. Among these costs are a likely proneness to feel and express anger and troubles with enjoying leisure. In addition, hyperopia is likely to prevent agents from enjoying the value of spontaneity. This is because, I speculate, hyperopics like me are averse to the vulnerabilities associated with acting for reasons that are unrecognizable through deliberation.

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