EMPOWERING RATIONALITY: 
RETHINKING THE LIMITS 
OF RATIONAL CHOICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper defends a version of the view that, sometimes, rational choice between two options can be grounded on a good reason whose justifying force does not depend on how the two options compare. The route via which this view is arrived at does not presuppose the existence of incomparable options, and so allows for common ground with skeptics about incomparability. Still, it requires that challenging cases be acknowledged and addressed, rather than abstracted from or assumed away. Ultimately, the reasoning provided suggests that rationality can handle quite a lot of messiness, which is important, since rationality wouldn’t be all that helpful if, whenever messiness threatened, we had to rush to its rescue rather than look to it for guidance.

INTRODUCTION

Suppose that I must choose one of two options, A or B. If the options are comparable, it seems plausible to suppose that I can make a justified choice, even if the justification for my selecting one of the options is, say, just that A and B are equally good and are thus both eligible for rational choice. But what if A and B are incomparable? According to a prominent view in value theory, “the possibility of justified choice between [or from among] two alternatives depends on their being comparable,” with which alternative(s) it is rational to choose being determined by how the two alternatives compare in terms of overall value given the value(s) at issue in the choice situation at hand (Chang 2002, p. 665; 1998; 2016).1 If this view, henceforth the comparability thesis,2 is right, then the possibility of incomparable options figures as a threat to rational choice. It might, however, still be that there is nothing to worry about because purported cases of incomparability are not in fact cases of incomparability. In this paper, I focus on this attempt at rescuing rationality and argue that it is problematic—not because there is anything wrong with the challenge raised against the supposedly clearest cases of incomparability, but because the most compelling version of the challenge actually paves the way for a defense of the view that rational choice from a pair of options is sometimes based on a consideration whose justifying force is not given by a fact about how the two options compare (in terms of overall value given the value(s) at issue in the choice situation at hand).3 My route to this view does not presuppose the existence of incomparable options, and so allows for common ground with skeptics about incomparability. Still, it requires that challenging
cases be acknowledged and addressed, rather than abstracted from or assumed away. Ultimately, my reasoning suggests that rationality can handle quite a lot of messiness, which is important, since rationality wouldn’t be all that helpful if, whenever messiness threatened, we had to rush to its rescue rather than look to it for guidance.

**RATIONAL CHOICE**

It is worth emphasizing that, in saying that a choice is *rational*, I mean that it accords with a correct all-things-considered judgment regarding the agent’s reasons for action. According to the relevant sense of *reasons for action*, whether or not an agent has a reason to X depends (tangential qualifications aside) on what features X actually has, rather than on what features the agent takes X to have. To pick up on a well-known example, K may think she has a reason to drink the stuff in front of her because she has a reason to drink some gin and believes the stuff in front of her is gin, but, in the sense of *reason* I am concerned with, K has no reason to drink the stuff in front of her (other things being equal) if K’s belief is mistaken and the stuff in front of her is petrol. Significantly, this leaves open the possibility that some (or perhaps even all) of an agent’s reasons for action depend on the agent’s basic desires, values, or taste, and so are, in some sense or to some extent, subjective. To return to the gin and petrol case, K may have a reason to drink gin because she finds it appealing.

Notably, the comparability thesis does not necessarily require that all considerations that figure as reasons for action must themselves be comparative, but rather that “the justifying force of any consideration—comparative or not—is . . . given by a comparative fact about the alternatives” (Chang 1998, p. 1573). For example, it may be that, other things equal, the non-comparative consideration that I find gin appealing figures as a reason for my choice of gin given the alternative of rum so long as I find gin at least as appealing as rum (where this comparative fact about the alternatives gives the non-comparative consideration that I find gin appealing its justifying force).

**THE PURPORTED THREAT**

According to the distinctive use of “comparable” that figures in debate regarding the comparability thesis and the possibility of incomparability, two options are not necessarily comparable just because they can be compared along some particular dimension or for some particular purpose. For example, two submissions for a creative writing contest are not necessarily comparable in the relevant sense just because one is better relative to *one* of the factors that matters given the context of choice, such as, say, originality. Similarly, the two submissions are not necessarily comparable in the relevant sense just because one is better in terms of a factor that is altogether irrelevant given the choice situation, such as, say, suitability for use as a door stop. To qualify as comparable in the relevant sense, it must be that the options can be compared in terms of their overall value given the value(s) at issue in the choice situation at hand. And the comparative evaluation must capture a positive claim to the effect that a certain evaluative relation obtains (e.g., X is worse than Y), rather than a negative claim to the effect that a certain evaluative relation fails to obtain (e.g., it is not the case that X is worse than Y; or, equivalently, X is not worse than Y).

The comparability thesis does not pose a threat to rational choice if there is no reason to believe that there are instances of incomparable options. But, given the small-improvement argument, the case for incomparability might seem quite compelling. According to this influential argument, it is easy to envision cases in which

(i) A is not better than B,
(ii) B is not better than A,
and

(iii) A+ (a slightly improved version of A) is better than A but not better than B.

Given the plausible assumption that, if two options are exactly equally good, then any option that is better than one of the options must also be better than the other option, (iii) implies that

(iv) A and B are not exactly equally good.

And, from (i), (ii), and (iv), we get that

(v) A and B are neither one better than the other, nor exactly equally good.7

Consider the following scenario, which is a variation on a prominent case in the literature on incomparability.8 I have the option of choosing A, a career as a lawyer, or B, a career as a clarinetist. Based on the details of the career paths and of my skills, talents, interests, etc., I plausibly hold that neither career is better than the other. Then a third option, A+, is introduced: a career as a lawyer that pays ever so slightly more than the original option. This third option is better than the original option involving a career as a lawyer, but it is not, it seems plausible to claim, better than the option involving a career as a clarinetist. We thus seem to have a case of the sort that fits the small-improvement argument, and, it might be concluded, a case in which A and B are incomparable.

But things are quite complicated. Given how much information must be processed in an attempt to compare two promising but very different careers (even for a particular agent), it might be worried that ignorance is somehow masquerading as incomparability, or at least unnecessarily confounding matters.9 Given this worry, it is helpful to turn to Ruth Chang’s tea and coffee case, in which “it is plausible to suppose that [the agent] know[s] everything that is relevant to comparing [the options]” (2002, p. 669). She tastes A, a cup of tea, and B, a cup of coffee, and judges that neither tastes better than the other. Moreover, in the case at hand, she has “first-person authority” over which drink tastes better to her, and there is nothing else that is at stake (p. 669). Now a second, slightly more fragrant cup of tea, A+, is introduced and she judges that it tastes better than the original tea but not better than the original coffee. This seems like a particularly simple and compelling case in which (relative to what matters in the case at hand) A is not better than B, and B is not better than A, and yet A and B cannot qualify as exactly equally good because A+ is better than A but not better than B. Is this case a threat to comparability and to rational choice? Interestingly, and as I will explain in the next section, according to Chang, it is not a threat to comparability or rational choice, even though it is a genuine instance in which A is not better than B, and B is not better than A, and yet A and B are not exactly equally good.

THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

According to Chang, A and B are not shown to be incomparable by a demonstration that A is not better than B, and B is not better than A, and yet A and B are not exactly equally good. As such, she does not advance her tea and coffee case as a case of incomparability. Relatedly, she does not see the case as a threat to rational choice, despite her commitment to the comparability thesis.

For Chang, what the case establishes is the possibility of parity. In cases of parity, options that are not comparable as one better than the other or as exactly equally good are nonetheless comparable as on a par or in the same league. Returning to Chang’s tea and coffee case, perhaps A and B both qualify as very good—better than the hot drinks the agent gets at her mom’s house, which are merely fair, but worse than the hot drinks she buys from the specialty shop down the street when she feels like splurging, which are great. But, if A and B are comparable as on a par, then the possibility of justified choice from this pair of options accords with the comparability
thesis. Intuitively, insofar as A and B are on a par, it is, other things equal, rational to choose either.

Chang sees parity as neat enough for rationality to handle, and things are tidied up even further by Chang’s notion of “comprehensive values.” According to Chang, determining whether an option is “all things considered” choiceworthy in a particular situation involves recognizing what values are relevant to the choice and how the values normatively relate to one another. More precisely, “‘all things considered’ is, in effect, a placeholder for a more comprehensive value that includes the things considered as parts” (2004, p. 2). Suppose, Chang elaborates, that one is evaluating philosophers for a job:

one might judge that philosopher #1 is more original and insightful than philosopher #2, that philosopher #2 is clearer and more historically sensitive than philosopher #1, but that, all things considered, philosopher #1 is better. Here, ‘all things considered’ is a placeholder for a value—philosophical talent—that has the things considered—(philosophical) originality, insightfulness, clarity, historical sensitivity—as parts, and it is in virtue of this more comprehensive value that originality counts for so much as against historical sensitivity, and so on. (p. 3)

Relatedly, an understanding of the comprehensive value at stake allows one to recognize certain values, such as, for example, the philosophers’ physical attractiveness, as altogether irrelevant. Chang goes on to suggest that, like a jigsaw puzzle that forms a picture, identifying the comprehensive value that matters in a certain case allows one to see how the component values in a certain situation should be considered; and this suggests that “even when the things at stake are very different, a correct all-things-considered judgment can nevertheless be made” (p. 5). The options will emerge as one better than the other, or as exactly equally good, or as on a par, and which alternative(s) it is rational to choose will be determined accordingly.

**The Problem with the Proposed Solution**

Let us assume, at least for the sake of argument, that Chang’s introduction of parity and of comprehensive values fends off the possibility of incomparable options. There remains a serious problem with the preceding attempt at rescuing rationality. Let me explain.

Note first that, like Chang, I will allow that cases involving complex options in which there is a great deal of information that must be considered raise unnecessary complications in the debate regarding the possibility of incomparability, since there is the worry that ignorance might easily masquerade as incomparability. Chang’s tea and coffee case is designed to avoid this issue. Recall that what is crucial about the case is that “it is plausible to suppose that [the agent] know[s] everything that is relevant to comparing [the options]” because she has “first-person authority” over which option she prefers and nothing else is at stake. I will grant the force of Chang’s reasoning concerning the case, and accept her conclusion that the case is one of parity rather than of incomparability. But, insofar as the case can be taken at face value, a related case can be used to support the possibility of *authoritative cyclic preferences*, which in turn suggests that rational choice from a pair of alternatives is sometimes based on a consideration whose justifying force is not given by a fact about how the two alternatives compare (in terms of overall value given the value(s) at issue in the choice situation at hand).

To see this, consider the following case. I am faced with ten premade cups of coffee. The leftmost cup is weak but has a good amount of cream. As one moves toward the right, the coffees become stronger but less creamy. The rightmost coffee is strong but has almost no cream at all. I favor strong coffee over weak coffee and creamy coffee over nearly black coffee. When comparing
two coffees, my subjective reaction depends on the strength and creaminess of each coffee and on whether the difference along each dimension is subtle or substantial. Relatedly, after sampling the coffees, I find myself with the following preferences. For each adjacent pair of coffees, I prefer the one to the right over the one to the left because the one to the right is substantially stronger with a hardly noticeable reduction in cream. But I also prefer the leftmost coffee over the rightmost coffee, since I prefer weak coffee with a good amount of cream to strong coffee with almost no cream. Indeed, while I find the leftmost coffee appealing, even if not as appealing as I would find a stronger coffee with the same amount of cream, I do not find the rightmost coffee appealing. Now suppose that all that matters in the case at hand is the appeal (to me) of the coffees; nothing else is at stake. Suppose further that I have first-person authority regarding the appeal (to me) of the coffees, at least in relation to simple pair-wise comparisons like those considered above, and so my preferences qualify as authoritative in the same way the agent’s preferences and preference gaps in Chang’s coffee and tea case qualify as authoritative. (Significantly, and as will become apparent, this is not to say that rationality invariably endorses my trading when that gives me the option of switching to a preferred coffee, since invariably following my preferences in such a case can be highly problematic.)

Suppose finally that, having acquired all the information I need via sampling, I will (as I am told in advance) be offered the coffees as follows: I will be provided with the leftmost coffee. I will then be given nine opportunities to trade, where each opportunity is such that I can trade whatever coffee I currently have with the coffee to the right of it. (So, for example, if I decline to trade the leftmost coffee for the coffee to the right of it, I will have a second opportunity to make the trade. If, however, I accept the first trade offer, the second trade offer will be between the second coffee and the third coffee. And so on.) I cannot return to coffees earlier in the line up, since they will be discarded if they are traded in.

My preferences in the situation just described do not form a linear ranking of the options. Indeed, they are cyclic. In particular, if the coffees from leftmost to rightmost are labeled c1, c2, c3, . . . , c10, my postulated preferences over the options can be represented as in Figure 1. They are thus not as well-behaved as one might like; in particular, they cannot be represented as the result of maximizing relative to fixed weights assigned to each dimension of interest (i.e., strength and creaminess). My subjective reactions simply do not fit with any such attribution. But the agent’s preferences in Chang’s tea and coffee case (which also do not form a linear ranking of the options, though they deviate in a different way) are similarly messy. In both cases, if all that matters is what the agent finds appealing, ignoring or dismissing the agent’s sensibility does not seem to be a viable option.

Notably, there are cases in which preferences seem cyclic when they are not because one of the values that, by hypothesis, matters to the agent has not been taken into account in individuating the options. Consider, for example, the following case (adapted from Anand 1993): Agent A generally favors large pieces of fruit over small pieces of fruit, but would never want to appear greedy. Suppose that taking a large piece of fruit over a smaller piece of fruit of the same type would...
appear greedy, but taking a large piece of fruit over a smaller piece of fruit of a different type would not appear greedy. As such, A favors selecting a large apple over a medium-sized orange. Similarly, she favors selecting a medium-sized orange over a small apple. But she favors selecting a small apple over a large apple. If one individuates the alternatives just in terms of the size and type of fruit obtained, then A’s preferences seem cyclic. If, however, one individuates the alternatives in terms of the size and type of fruit obtained and the implications of selecting that fruit with respect to appearing greedy—both of which are, by hypothesis, of concern—then A’s preferences clearly do not qualify as cyclic. In particular, the following preferences do not form a preference cycle: A favors selecting a large apple and not appearing greedy over selecting a medium-sized orange and not appearing greedy; A favors selecting a medium-sized orange and not appearing greedy over selecting a small apple and not appearing greedy; A favors selecting a small apple and not appearing greedy over selecting a large apple and appearing greedy.

Given the preceding complication, it is important to emphasize that, in the ten premade coffees case, there is no value other than the appeal of the coffees to the agent that is supposed to matter; relatedly, there is no postulated further concern that seems to generate—but actually dissolves—the proposed preference cycle.

Now, there is no need, in the ten premade coffees case, to argue for the comparability of the options that the agent must choose from at each trading opportunity. By hypothesis, adjacent options are comparable relative to the value at stake in the case at hand, namely their appeal (to me). This is so even if I think of the adjacent options not in terms of the coffees I face, but as opting or not opting to end up one coffee further to the right, however many other trades I make. The problem is that if, at each choice point, my choice regarding whether to trade is determined by how the options compare relative to the value at stake (namely their appeal to me), I end up with an option that is unacceptable relative to this value, even though acceptable options were in the mix. (Notably, there need not be a sharp line between acceptable options and unacceptable options. Indeed, in the case at issue, it is more plausible to suppose that the agent’s standard of acceptability—even if it is ultimately authoritative given the value at stake in the choice situation—is vague, and so there is a fuzzily bounded gray area wherein the acceptability of the options is indeterminate.)

The ten premade coffees case suggests that the comparability of two options is not the silver bullet that invariably determines rational choice between them. If rational choice is possible in the ten premade coffees case, it seems to be because, sometimes, rational choice from a pair of options can be grounded on a good reason whose justifying force is not given by a fact about how the options compare relative to the value(s) at stake in the choice situation at hand. For example, it may be rational to stick with the first coffee because one finds it appealing, even though one finds the second option more appealing (and appeal is the only value at stake in the choice situation).

At this point, it might be suggested that, as soon as one recognizes the challenge the agent in the ten premade coffees case faces, it is clear that the claim that “all that matters is the appeal of the coffees to the agent” is misleading. What ultimately matters, given the big picture (i.e., the situation broadly construed), is, it might be plausibly maintained, something like the following: ending up with a coffee that is appealing enough; or, similarly, ending up with a coffee that is acceptable (relative to the value at stake); or, perhaps, avoiding the rightmost coffee, as well as any other coffees that are determinately dispreferred to the one first provided.
Moreover, with respect to each of these candidates regarding what matters, it is not true that the second coffee is better than the first. Relatedly, it might be suggested that, generally speaking, in situations in which there is no optimal outcome relative to the value(s) at stake in the case at hand because the case involves authoritative cyclic preferences, rationality demands that one take a step back and (re)cast what matters in a way that is responsive to this challenge.

Let me fill in and respond to this line of thought by focusing on one of the candidates regarding what matters given the big picture, namely ending up with a coffee that is appealing enough. As will soon become apparent, the other candidates can be addressed in essentially the same way. Consider the following suggestion: If what matters in the ten premade coffees case is just ending up with a coffee that is appealing enough, then, even though the second coffee is more appealing than the first, the two coffees compare as equally appealing enough, making the choice of the first coffee comparatively justified (even though the consideration that the first coffee is appealing enough does not itself capture a comparative fact about the alternatives). Here is my response: If what matters really is just ending up with a coffee that is appealing enough, and the first coffee qualifies as appealing enough, then the justifying force of the consideration that the first coffee is appealing enough is fully captured by the fact cited in the consideration itself. Given that what matters is ending up with a coffee that is appealing enough, no further fact needs to be brought in to substantiate the consideration’s justifying force. A further fact would need to be brought in if, as in the gin versus rum case mentioned early in the paper, the relative appeal of the two options mattered, and the consideration cited as a reason mentioned only that the chosen option appealed to me; but, according to the line of thought under consideration, these conditions do not obtain. So, even given the current proposal regarding what matters given the big picture, we are led to the conclusion that, in the case at hand, rational choice is based on a consideration whose justifying force is not given by a fact about how the two options compare (in terms of their overall value, relative to what matters in the case at hand, given the context of the choice).  

Returning to the other candidates regarding what matters, we can respond in essentially the same way. If, for example, what matters is just avoiding the rightmost coffee, as well as any other coffees that are determinately dispreferred to the one first provided, and if selecting the first coffee achieves this, then the justifying force of the consideration that selecting the first coffee allows one to avoid the rightmost coffee, as well as any other coffees that are determinately dispreferred to the one first provided, is fully captured by the fact cited in the consideration itself. Similarly, if what matters is just ending up with a coffee that is acceptable, and the first coffee meets this qualification, then the justifying force of the consideration that the first coffee is acceptable is fully captured by the fact cited in the consideration itself.

Note that candidates regarding what matters that appeal to prior plans and/or resoluteness are amenable to the same sort of response. If, for example, what matters is just that one ends up, via an exercise of resoluteness, with a coffee that is acceptable, and if selecting the first coffee meets this qualification, then the justifying force of the consideration that selecting the first coffee allows one to end up, via an exercise of resoluteness, with a coffee that is acceptable is fully captured by the fact cited in the consideration itself.

Even if my reasoning so far is accepted, it might be suggested that what matters in important choices never hangs on someone’s sensibility, and so the sort of messiness I have been considering may be quite limited. But this is a highly controversial claim, and it
is certainly worth considering how rational choice is impacted if what matters in at least some important choices (such as, perhaps, career choices or choices of companions) does hang on someone’s sensibility. Notice, relatedly, that if what matters in at least some important choices hangs on someone’s sensibility, then what counts as benefiting or respecting someone may depend on that person’s sensibility, and so morality can also be infected by the sort of messiness I have been considering. In any case, my aim is not to insist that this sort of messiness is pervasive, but only that we should not assume that rationality cannot handle it; as needed, and whether or not the source of the messiness is someone’s sensibility, rational choice of an option from a pair of options can be based on a consideration whose justifying force is not given by a fact about how the two options compare (in terms of their overall value, relative to what matters in the case at hand, given the context of the choice). Of course, it can still be true that, in cases that are neat enough, rational choice from a pair of options will be based on a consideration whose justifying force is given by a fact about how the two options compare.

**Conclusion**

Given that choosing an option (from a pair of options) for a good reason, but a reason whose justifying force is not given by a comparative fact about the options, is sometimes key in certain cases involving authoritative cyclic preferences, why not think that, in the relevant scenarios, this is exactly what rationality prescribes? On this view, rationality does not need rescuing when messiness threatens; to the contrary, it can come to our rescue. In particular, it can steer us away from outcomes that are unacceptable, at least when acceptable outcomes are available. Moreover, by hypothesis, acting rationally would still involve acting on a good reason, as well as with a proper understanding both of what matters in the case at hand and of the available options. Relatedly—and as is suggested by the possibility of cases in which what matters depends on what the agent finds appealing, where this is, in at least some cases, something over which the agent has first-person authority—no false beliefs or short-sightedness need be implicated.

Rationality is, I submit, more robust and flexible than is often supposed: rational choice from a pair of options can be based on a consideration whose justifying force is not given by a comparative fact about the options; and, as should by now be clear, this is so even if options are invariably comparable to one another (which is, of course, a big if).

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**NOTES**

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1. This view is often associated with the axiom of completeness in rational choice theory, at least insofar as the axiom is interpreted as a requirement of rationality. According to the axiom of completeness, an agent’s preferences must not include any preference gaps, i.e. they must be such that, for any two options X and Y, either X is preferred to Y, Y is preferred to X, or X and Y are equally preferred. As will become apparent, one can be a proponent of the view that the possibility of justified choice between two alternatives depends on their being comparable, and yet not embrace the axiom of completeness.
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(interpreted as a requirement of rationality) because one allows for the possibility of parity and allows for rational preference gaps in cases of parity.

2. The comparability thesis is closely related to *comparativism*, according to which the “alternative [that] one is justified in choosing” in a particular situation is determined by “a comparative fact about the alternatives” (Chang 1998, p. 1572). This general definition of comparativism is refined in Chang 1998, with the connection to “the value at stake in the choice situation” made explicit. Similarly refined characterizations are provided in Chang 2016. Chang’s defense of (refined) comparativism is meant to vindicate the “conventional wisdom” that “the comparability of alternatives is necessary for the possibility of justified choice” (1998, p. 1569).

3. David Chan (2010) defends a version of this view, though his reasoning is very different than mine and does not grant the forcefulness of what I can (and do) accept as a potent challenge against the supposedly clearest cases of incomparability. (The challenge involves recognizing the connection between the small-improvement argument and the possibility of parity; more on this below.)

4. In an interesting twist in the debate regarding comparativism (see note 2 above), Nien-hê Hsieh argues that “contrary to what proponents of comparativism claim,” the most compelling depiction of rational choice that they appeal to “does not require the chosen alternative to be comparable to other alternatives, but requires the chosen alternative to be only no worse than other alternatives” (where “no worse than” signals the absence of a certain possible comparative relation and not necessarily the presence of the comparative relation “better than or equal to”) (2007, p. 78). The latter requirement (that the chosen alternative be only no worse than other alternatives) is automatically satisfied in cases in which the only alternatives are two options that are incomparable (relative to what matters in the choice situation). This is because incomparable options are not rankable in relation to one another, and so neither of two incomparable options can qualify as worse than the other; they are too different for any such relation—which would put them on a single scale or spectrum—to obtain. As will become apparent, my reasoning regarding the amount of messiness rationality can handle will steer me away from even Hsieh’s seemingly modest requirement, raising concerns about the comparability thesis that push in a different direction.

5. Note that my use of “all-things-considered” here is loose, and allows for Ruth Chang’s view (which I will return to below) that all-things-considered judgments are actually each relative to a single value and/or a small set of interconnected values. See Chang (2004).


7. For a clear and concise discussion of the small-improvement argument, see Chang (1997). Earlier variations on the argument can be found in, for example, Raz (1986, chapter 13), and de Sousa (1974). See, relatedly, Savage (1972, p. 17), wherein Savage considers a “test for indifference” according to which “if [a] person really does regard f and g as equivalent, that is, if he is indifferent between them, then, if f or g were modified by attaching an arbitrarily small bonus to its consequences in every state, the person’s decision would presumably be for whichever act was thus modified.”


10. The case has roughly the same structure as Warren Quinn’s “puzzle of the self-torturer” (Quinn 1993). I do not, however, insist that any of the differences I will appeal to are imperceptible, rather than at least somewhat, even if only barely, noticeable; moreover, and as will become apparent, my case, like Chang’s, is designed to plausibly limit epistemic complications by making what matters in the case at hand a question of what the agent currently finds appealing, something over which the agent can plausibly have first-person authority. The case also shares some features with the sort of trading case considered in Rabinowicz 2000, section 5.
11. The problems I have in mind are of the self-torturer and refined money-pump sort described, respectively, in Quinn (1993) and Rabinowicz (2000, section 5). Given the problems, rationality may require that an agent not follow her preferences, even if they qualify as authoritative in the sense of interest here. More on this below.

12. As suggested above and as will become clearer below, this is not to say that rationality requires the agent to follow her preferences, since, in some cases, invariably following one’s preferences, even when they are authoritative, can be highly problematic.

13. For some relevant discussion on this issue, see, for instance, Anand (1993), Aldred (2007), and Broome (1993).


15. Note that I am not here taking a stand on the rational acceptability or unacceptability of satisficing. Even if my reasoning is taken to suggest that, in the case at hand, the rational agent will accept a coffee that is appealing enough, whether or not this qualifies as an instance of satisficing is a complicated matter that is beyond the scope of this paper. It might seem like accepting a coffee that is appealing enough (even though a more appealing coffee is readily available) is a clear case of satisficing. Notice, however, that if satisficing involves accepting an option while knowing that it is or may be inferior to another available option relative to what matters in the case at hand, and if what matters in the case at hand is just ending up with a coffee that is appealing enough (as I have granted may be the case), then accepting a coffee that is appealing enough will fail to count as an instance of satisficing. For, so long as a coffee is appealing enough, it will not qualify as inferior to any other option with respect to being appealing enough.

REFERENCES


