Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Philosophical Explorations

An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action

ISSN: 1386-9795 (Print) 1741-5918 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rpex20

Value-deflationist self-control

Polaris Koi

To cite this article: Polaris Koi (27 Feb 2026): Value-deflationist self-control, Philosophical Explorations, DOI: 10.1080/13869795.2026.2636844

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2026.2636844

PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATIONS
https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2026.2636844

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Value-deflationist self-control

Polaris Koi

Department of Philosophy, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

On the standard conception of self-control, self-control entails the resolution of a motivational conflict in favour of the option ranked better, loftier, or otherwise more valuable, and behaving accordingly. Sometimes, however, we appear to use self-control under ambivalence, or against our better judgment. In this paper, I seek to eliminate the apparent paradox induced by these cases by defending and developing a value-deflationist conception of self-control. For the value-deflationist conception of self-control endorsed in this paper, self-control is that which is enacted to align one's behaviour with intention in the face of a competing motivation. I develop the view further by showing that errant and ambivalent cases of self-control are not mere anomalies or theoretical curiosities but instead are important for understanding disruptions of agency due to motivational-executive double binds, where agents struggle both to rank options and to steer their behaviour. Adopting a value-deflationist account allows us to describe how ambivalence undermines self-control. Value-deflationism about self-control has faced a range of criticisms, such as the criticism that errant cases would turn out to be standard cases under a different description. The paper responds to these criticisms, showing that attempts to reconcile these cases with the standard conception fall short.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 13 March 2025
Accepted 27 January 2026

KEYWORDS
Self-control; ambivalence; option ranking; value judgment; willpower; delayed gratification

Self-control is a curious capacity: according to a widespread conception, it can only be used for aims that we endorse. I term this view *standard self-control*. On this view, self-control entails ranking action options based on evaluative judgment and deploying self-control to stick to the preferred course of action.

We sometimes appear to use self-control to act on an intention contrary to our best judgment, however; this phenomenon is often held to be paradoxical (Mele 1995). At other times, we seem to use self-control without having judged what is best to do. Defenders of standard self-control have sought (and failed, as I shall argue) to bring errant cases into the fold of that account.

Richard Holton offers a view contrary to the standard account. On Holton's account, we sometimes fail to persist in sticking by our intention in the face of contrary motivation,

CONTACT Polaris Koi polaris.koi@utu.fi Department of Philosophy, University of Turku, Turku 20014, Finland

and we deploy a distinct faculty to do so. Since such a faculty can be deployed for a variety of purposes, it need not be deployed in line with evaluative judgment (Holton 2009). This helps us distinguish *akrasia* and *enkrateia*[1] from self-control and the lack thereof.

Even after we distinguish discussion of akrasia from discussion of self-control and its breakdowns, the question remains whether self-control should be thought of as a truly general-purpose capacity, or whether it should be conceived of as a capacity reserved for acting in line with evaluative judgment. Even as Holton's view has informed philosophical work on *akrasia* (see, e.g. Heinzelmann 2023; Holton and May 2012; Mele 2010), work on self-control *as a capacity* has engaged with this idea only to a limited extent (although see Arpaly and Schroeder 2013; Kennett 2013). Instead, most who work on self-control have continued to focus on standard self-control. In this paper, building on Holton's account, I expand and develop value-deflationism about self-control, and offer a novel defense of it.

I argue that by conceiving of self-control without recourse to option ranking, we gain a concept of self-control that is apt for capturing the capacity for deliberately steering our behaviour that is consistent across different motivational landscapes. This is important, because, as I will argue, deploying self-control against our better judgment or under ambivalence is not rare or unusual. Instead, understanding errant and ambivalent usage of self-control is central for understanding self-control failures, including because it allows us to articulate how ambivalence can undermine self-control. I also offer a sustained response to criticisms against value-deflationism, including but not limited to the criticism that errant cases would turn out to be standard cases under a different description.

I. From standard self-control to value-deflationist self-control

Self-control is standardly associated with evaluative judgment. Donald Davidson (1980) and Alfred Mele (1987, 1995, 2012) characterise self-control as acting according to an all-things-considered better judgment; Annemarie Kalis (2018) describes it as the rule of rational agency over appetites; Jeanette Kennett (2013) understands it as the regulation of our lives in accordance with our values; and for George Ainslie's (2001, 2021) approach, self-control is used to pursue larger, later goals rather than smaller, sooner goals. This latter approach is adopted by Neil Levy (2017) among others. On all these accounts, self-control entails the resolution of a motivational conflict in favour of the better, loftier, or otherwise more valuable aim and behaving accordingly.

While some of these accounts are explicitly normative, all of them hinge on evaluative judgment: for example, the evaluation of a later goal as more valuable than the sooner one. That is, while these accounts differ in the sort of evaluation they associate with self-control, such as in whether that evaluation is moral or prudential, objective or subjective, they all connect self-control to a ranking of motives based on evaluative judgment. Standard approaches to self-control can be characterized by the following umbrella formulation:

> *The standard conception of self-control.* Self-control is that which is enacted to align one's behaviour with a more valuable motive in the face of a less valuable motive.

To reiterate, this hierarchy of aims can be based on either prudential or moral value, or on a combination of both. More valuable motives are characterised by concepts such as

better judgments, reasons, core values, and larger, later rewards. Less valuable motives are characterised by concepts such as appetites, temptations, desires, impulses, and smaller, sooner rewards. Despite the heterogeneity of these accounts, an implicit assumption across the board is that prior to enacting self-control, agents evaluate which action option is more valuable; the use of self-control is possible only in accordance with such judgment.[2]

We sometimes appear to use self-control to act on an intention that does not match our better judgment. Mele (1987) terms this phenomenon errant self-control. At first brush, errant self-control can appear paradoxical. The paradox in fact arises only from the commitment, shared among proponents of standard self-control, to self-control involving the ranking of options in accordance with evaluative judgment.

Proponents of the standard conception have three options for dealing with this apparent paradox. The first option is to argue that the standard conception does not need to reckon with errant cases since they are anomalies. The second option is to bring errant self-control into the standard conception, a solution Mele (1987, 1995, 2012) opts for. He grants that some instances of self-control run counter to the agent's better judgment but suggests that these exceptions to the rule are best dealt with by introducing flexibility into the standard conception rather than by revising that conception. The final option is to hold that errant cases are not in fact cases of self-control.

These strategies will be discussed in more detail in sections IV–V. This paper claims that each of these strategies is inadequate. This is due, in large part, to a broader issue for the concept of self-control that errant cases indicate: namely, that due to the standard conception's commitment to option ranking, the distinction between processes of self-control on one hand and evaluative judgment on the other has come to be obscured.

The story of self-control, for the standard conception, is as follows: agents enact self-control only after weighing their options and deciding to pursue the course of action that better matches their values and preferences. If an agent then errs from the path she judged better, it is because her self-control has failed.

There are, however, two ways for agents to end up acting contrary to their evaluative judgment-based option ranking (subsequently referred to as option ranking, for brevity). The first is as discussed: to intend to do what is best to do, but to fail to do it due to a failure of self-control. The second is to form an intention to act against the option ranking: knowing full well what would be best to do, the agent makes up her mind to do something else. If need be, she deploys some capacity for guiding her behaviour in the face of contrary motivation – self-control – to succeed in this errant pursuit.

It is not only errant cases we need to worry about: sometimes our actions neither conform with nor contradict an option ranking. This is because agents do not always have an option ranking that their intentions can either match or fail to match. Agents sometimes make choices *without* having ranked their options. They may do this when deciding prior to having ranked their options, or when the options seem equal or incommensurable in value. Also in those cases, agents may encounter a contrary motivation, and may need to deploy some capacity for guiding their behaviour in the face of contrary motivation to act effectively.

On the standard conception, the capacity deployed in the absence of, or counter to, option ranking is outside the scope of the concept of self-control. However, it is unclear why the concept of self-control should be restricted only to cases where the

agent's intention matches the option that her evaluative judgment endorses. Self-control could instead be understood as a general-purpose capacity, not unlike other cognitive and physical capacities which, too, can be used for better or for worse.

Richard Holton (2009) holds a kindred view. He takes that decision and action execution are distinct processes. Carrying out an intention sometimes requires navigating contrary motivation and sticking to one's intention. Akratic action, for Holton, amounts to abandoning one's resolution too easily. This is a contentious claim, because sometimes akratic action seems to result from the lack of forming an intention that would match one's better judgment in the first place (for debate, see Mele 2012, 25).[3]

In this paper, I will not have much to say about akratic or enkratic action; that topic has been covered with great nuance by others. Instead, I will focus on the second branch of Holton's theory. Namely, Holton holds, when facing motivational conflict, we deploy some skill or faculty to stick to our intention. Crucially, on his account, this faculty can aid the agent in sticking by any commitment, not just commitments that correspond to the agent's evaluative judgment (Holton 2009).

Holton calls the skill or faculty in question 'willpower'. Mele (2012) worries that the concept is ambiguous. And, beyond being ambiguous, the concept of 'willpower' may even be misleading or harmful for agents' practical deliberation (Koi 2024). In light of these concerns, I call the skill or faculty in question self-control instead. Yet by my lights Holton and I are both interested in the same skill or faculty, and so it makes sense to think of our accounts as largely in agreement. In what follows, I will use the term self-control to refer to any view of such a skill or faculty, regardless of whether the author terms it self-control (such as Al Mele (1987, 1995, 2012), Jeanette Kennett (2013), Neil Levy (2017), Juan Pablo Bermúdez (2021), Polaris Koi (2023, 2024), and Chandra Sripada (2021) do) or willpower (such as Holton (2009) and George Ainslie (2001, 2021) do).

As a further advantage, this avoids criticisms towards the concept of will and willpower such as are raised by the likes of Gilbert Ryle (1949) and John Hyman (2015), who worry that the notion of willpower is altogether superfluous.

The notion that self-control is a skill or faculty is now mainstream, yet it remains equally mainstream for philosophical inquiry into self-control to tie it to the pursuit of the better over the worse (see, e.g. Ainslie 2021; Kalis 2018; Levy 2017). Drawing on and developing Holton's view, I defend *value-deflationist self-control,* a revision of our notion of self-control that allows for self-control in the service of *any* intention, including but not limited to intentions endorsed by our evaluative judgment. In addition to errant cases, I explore self-control under ambivalence. These rich phenomena demonstrate the extensive scope of cases left unaccounted for when self-control is restricted to the service of intentions for actions judged better than competing courses of behaviour.

I formulate value-deflationist self-control as follows:

> Value-deflationist self-control. Self-control is that which is enacted to align one's behaviour with intention in the face of a competing motivation.

The concept of intention, here, is used in the Bratmanian sense: it is a practical commitment to a plan of action (Bratman 1987).

Beyond Holton, there are other scholars whom I read as supporting value-deflationism. These include Arpaly and Schroeder (2013), whose account of self-control builds on Arpaly's (2000) view that rationality does not preclude acting against one's best judgment, and Heinzelmann (2023), who describes lapses of self-control as preference reversals driven by cognitive biases. I do not claim that they each would be in full support of value-deflationist self-control exactly as it is articulated in the present paper. However, they, as well as I, are drawn to this revised conception of self-control because it allows us to consider self-control as a capacity for steering behaviour that can be deployed in the context of any motivational conflict, and to separate it from the processes of evaluative judgment and decision-making. Judgment, decision-making, and the guidance of behaviour interact. We can dissipate much confusion about self-control by treating decisions and self-control as conceptually distinct and by understanding self-control as pertaining to the guidance of behaviour in motivational conflicts.

As I will argue, there are advantages to adopting the value-deflationist conception over the standard conception. First, the value-deflationist conception eliminates the paradox induced by errant cases of self-control. Second, it eliminates the need to speculate about which action option was in fact preferred by an agent in assessing whether self-control has taken place (see section IV). Third, it gives us language for capturing the guidance of behaviour in the face of ambivalence or counter to our option ranking (see sections II – III). Fourth, it allows us to consider self-control as a general-purpose capacity, much like other cognitive and bodily capacities. Fifth, it clarifies where the place of our normative commitments about self-control is: outside it, in its instrumental value for aims we care about, as well as in our normative attitudes *towards* self-control, rather than in self-control's supposed inherent normative properties (see section V).

In the following sections, I will first discuss errant and ambivalent cases of self-control, establishing that these are no rare anomaly, but rather, there is a rich range of agential experience where behaviour is guided under a motivational conflict but not in conformity with option ranking. I then explore whether these cases can be redescribed as standard cases. I conclude by discussing objections to the value-deflationist account as well as strategies for reconciling errant and ambivalent cases with the standard conception and showing that they do not give us sufficient grounds to reject value-deflationist self-control.

Finally, a caveat about what this paper does *not* do is in order. This paper does not make a positive contribution to the debate concerning the specific psychological *mechanisms* of self-control. Both the standard conception and the value-deflationist conception are compatible with a variety of accounts concerning how self-control is *realized*, such as a description of self-control as realized by dual systems dynamics (Levy 2011), top-down regulation of response pulses (Sripada 2021), executive functioning coupled with socioenvironmental constraints (Koi 2023) or flexible management of mixed-format intentions (Bermúdez 2021). While mechanistic accounts often presume standard self-control as a starting point, they could be revised to accommodate value-deflationism. The compatibility stems from the fact that various claims about *mechanisms* are not, in themselves, claims about the place (or lack thereof) of evaluative judgment in the concept of self-control. Rather than defending any specific conception about which mechanisms may subserve self-control, this paper focuses on explicating and revising the place of evaluative judgment in the concept of self-control.

II. Errant and ambivalent cases

According to the standard conception, self-control is used to refrain from behaviours characterized as offensive or harmful, and to undertake valuable but difficult or strenuous behaviours, such as exercising, mowing the lawn, or writing a manuscript. The agent ranks her options based on evaluative judgment (e.g. prioritizing writing or going to the gym) in all these cases. When a contrary motivation (e.g. to watch TV) arises in the agent, she identifies it as less valuable than her intended course of action and enacts self-control to stay on course.

Some instances of self-control do not seem to accord with the agent's evaluative judgment, however. Mele (1987, 1995, 2010) offers the following example:

> *Bruce*. Bruce is a youth whose peers pressure him to join them in breaking into a house. Bruce's better judgment advises against joining the break-in. Bruce falls in line nonetheless, perhaps out of a desire for peer acceptance. He is scared during the break-in and must deploy self-control in order not to chicken out.

For Mele, Bruce illustrates the concept of errant self-control, in which self-control is used to enact something contrary to the agent's better judgment. Other errant cases discussed in the literature include, e.g. Jeanette Kennett's (2013) discussion of how an alcoholic may need to deploy self-control in order to keep drinking, even if this is against the agent's better judgment. And, Arpaly and Schroeder (2013) discuss self-control in light of Huckleberry Finn's complex motivational structures concerning whether he should turn in the runaway slave Jim. It may appear, however, that errant self-control would be quite rare, or something that only occurs under unusual circumstances. I claim here that errant self-control is not unusual. Here are two further examples that illustrate the phenomenon's breadth:

> *Johnny*. Johnny is a white-collar professional with an irritable, misogynistic boss. Whenever the boss has a bad day, he takes it out on female employees. Johnny despises his boss's behaviour. He is concerned for his female colleagues, and feels moved to jump to his colleagues' defence and reprimand his boss when he witnesses these outbursts. Instead, he effortfully holds himself back and watches on stony-faced. He firmly believes his reasons for this are nothing but excuses. He feels deep disgust at himself for acting like this.

> *Jenny*. Jenny is a disheartened professional athlete. She has decided that it is best to quit sport due to the pains and ailments resulting from various injuries sustained during her athletic career. She has the means to retire and has grown to resent her continued engagement in professional sport. She nevertheless continues training. This training includes both rigorous practice routines that themselves demand self-control and a highly managed diet and sleep schedule. Everything Jenny has done for her career has required self-control. Now that training is painful, she requires self-control even more.

Johnny, Jenny, and others in similar situations seem to engage in errant self-control on a regular basis. If this is an accurate assessment, then errant self-control is not a rare occurrence.

Self-control can furthermore be used in the service of an intention that is neither errant nor preferred. This is because, at the time of choice, it is not always clear to agents which option is the best one; in other words, agents sometimes must decide without having exhaustively ranked their options. These decisions are then made in the absence of a

clear evaluative judgment-based recommendation. Self-control can be deployed after such decisions as well. Consider the following cases:

> *Andy.* Andy is deliberating whether to do the laundry or the dishes. He has time for only one of these chores before he leaves the house. Andy judges these options to be equally valuable and decides to do the dishes. As he goes to the kitchen, however, it occurs to him to do the laundry instead. He coaxes himself to forget the laundry and stick with his originally chosen task.

> *Joanna.* Joanna is upset because her husband has invited his racist cousin over for the holidays. Joanna has an impulse to yell at her husband. She is ambivalent. Joanna believes yelling would hurt his feelings, holds that it is bad to hurt her husband's feelings, and is therefore motivated to refrain from yelling. She also believes he deserves to be yelled at and is therefore motivated to yell. She feels unable to rank these two options. When she exerts self-control to refrain from yelling, she remains unsure if this was the right decision.

I term these sorts of cases *ambivalent self-control*. Neither Andy nor Joanna has a clear judgment concerning which option is more valuable – at any rate, one that they would be cognizant of. As Andy's example illustrates, such ambivalence can arise regarding decisions where the different options are judged to be (roughly) equal. However, as Joanna's example illustrates, ambivalence can also arise when the options are *not* judged to be equal. These cases may arise when the options are incommensurable, as well as when a judgment has not been arrived at, such as when the agent must choose before she has had sufficient time to assess which option is more valuable. In these situations, the agent decides without having exhaustively ranked her options.

Note here that I am not claiming decision would be 'random' in these cases; instead, agents can have a range of preference orderings without those preferences being exhaustive enough to inform their decision. Consider Sartre's (1975) example of a young man deliberating amongst enlisting for war or caring for his mother. This case involves deep ambivalence, but it is not 'random': the student prefers doing either of these over, say, joining enemy forces. In this way, evaluative judgment guides decision and action even in the case of ambivalent cases – its recommendation is simply not exhaustive in these cases. Put in decision theory's terminology, the agent's preferences are incomplete.

Incomplete preferences do not present challenges for practical rationality when the preference ordering is incomplete amongst dispreferred options, but we find ourselves truly torn when that ordering is incomplete amongst the strong contenders for decision and action. Proponents of the standard conception of self-control are committed to that self-control is in the service only of the option ranked better than its competition. They must therefore make accommodations to contain errant and ambivalent self-control within its scope, or else rule them to be outside the scope of the concept.

Errant and ambivalent cases count as self-control for the value-deflationist conception. They count as self-control simply because they involve the guidance of one's behaviour to align it with one's intentions in the face of a competing motivation. Such guidance and alignment may occur regardless of what sorts of evaluative judgments the agent has concerning her options, and regardless of whether she has exhaustively ranked these options.

The above discussion is one that Holton would likely agree with. Following Bratman (1987), he defends the notion that intention has utility in cases of ambivalence: 'We can form resolutions in cases where we treat the options as incommensurable. When

we do so, and revise our resolutions, we can show weakness of will' (Holton 2009, 79). Here, Holton is mostly interested in cases of incommensurability-based ambivalence, such as Joanna. In a footnote, Holton acknowledges there is no obstacle to self-control (or failures thereof) in cases of indifference, such as Andy, but remains puzzled by them:

> Can we generate parallel examples of weakness of will in cases of indifference? I see no reason in principle why not, but in practice it is hard to see why one would form *resolutions* in such cases, and hard to see why one would then be tempted to switch to other options. (Holton 2009, 79, footnote 16).

Since Holton takes self-control to be in the service of intention rather than evaluative judgment, he acknowledges that self-control can be deployed in ambivalent cases. Yet his discussion on these matters is brief and seems to me to undersell the importance of this issue. The use of self-control in cases of ambivalence has not received much attention in the philosophical literature on self-control[4], a gap I wish to address.

In the remainder of this section, I will expand on ambivalent self-control. In brief, I will make the case that it is precisely in cases in which the agent enacts self-control to stick to an intention that an agent does *not* judge best that self-control is sorely needed, and that it is more difficult to deploy self-control in such cases; and that rather than being rare, anomalous, or the subject matter of thought experiments only, the co-occurrence of ambivalence and self-control is not unusual and will be more frequently experienced by some people than others.

As stated above, an agent may lack a clear option ranking in two kinds of situations. The first kind occurs when options seem equal or close to equal in value to the agent. Take the case of Andy, who exerts self-control to do the dishes rather than the laundry. These options seem equal to Andy.[5] Andy makes a decision, although his decision is not based on an option ranking. Indeed, his decision cannot be based on such a ranking (in any manner where that decision would result from conscious deliberation): even if he does in fact have an option ranking, he is not aware of it.

One might wonder why we should pay any mind to cases like Andy's: if it does not matter to Andy which chore he completes, surely it should not matter to us. However, whenever we form intentions and attempt to carry them out, this does not just have implications for the objects of these actions – in this case, for the dishes and the laundry. This also has implications for the agent in question. These implications have to do with the agent's self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy beliefs are beliefs concerning one's capacity to act such that one can meaningfully pursue one's goals or adaptively handle changing situations (Bandura 2001). As the late social psychologist Albert Bandura puts it, 'Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties'. (Bandura 2001, 10.)

It matters to Andy that he feels he can competently set his mind on something as simple as doing the dishes and act accordingly. If he cannot, this will influence his sense of agency, his sense of whether he can succeed in such attempts in the future, and his sense of self-worth. If Andy, based on failures to stick by his intentions, believes himself to be unlikely to succeed in future instances of self-control, this becomes an obstacle for deploying self-control in the future – including in the service of his better judgment.

Holton finds it puzzling that Andy would feel the pull of competing motivation or be tempted to switch tasks. However, as the bounded rationality literature highlights, heuristics and biases shape motivation, choice, and behaviour independently of our value ascriptions (see, e.g. Grüne-Yanoff 2007; Heinzelmann 2023). Say, I pick up my phone to text my mother and see a notification that I have received an e-mail newsletter from a university administrator. I find myself clicking on the notification and reading the e-mail without a second thought, even though I do not take the admin newsletter to be more valuable than texting my mother. Or, say I resolve to return a book to the library. Upon getting to the library, I am distracted by a demonstration marching past it; when I get home, the book is still in my bag. Attention has steered my choice independently of evaluation. Similar mechanisms can produce response conflict also in cases of indifference, and resisting their influence on choice and behaviour can require self-control over an extended temporal period (Murray and Vargas 2020).

The other sort of situation where an agent may lack a clear option ranking is in the absence of a clear, exhaustive evaluative judgment concerning the comparative values of the available courses of action. This may be due to a deep conflict, such as a conflict stemming from incommensurable motives. The moral conflict experienced by Joanna, for example, leaves Joanna uncertain about how to respond to her husband's lack of judgment. But this can also occur when despite the options being commensurable, no ranking has been arrived at, such as due to time constraints.

It is not always clear which of these is the case. For example, Joanna's case is easily interpreted as a case of incommensurability, but we can also tell a different story where Joanna can stop time and deliberate as long as she pleases between experiencing the impulse to yell and either yelling or not yelling, and given this extra time, will know exactly which option ranks higher. Importantly, it is not always clear which of these is the case for agents themselves, and agents too can tell many different stories: for example, Joanna may wonder about whether giving some more thought to her dilemma would have helped her understand which option was better, or whether the options indeed were incommensurable.

Regardless of which of these is the case for Joanna, she makes up her mind while in the midst of moral ambivalence.[6] Her effortfully refraining from yelling then cannot be self-control according to the standard approach. According to the value-deflationist account, by contrast, our lack of knowledge about whether the options are in fact rankable does not bear on whether Joanna is engaging in self-control. She is engaging in self-control simply in virtue of engaging in the guidance of her behaviour to match her intention in the face of a competing motivation. The behaviours she enacts to coax herself to stay on course count as self-control not because she pursues a larger, later goal, or because she does what she judges best. They count as self-control due to their broader behavioural function: the alignment of behaviour to her intention in the face of a competing motivation.

III. Executive-motivational double binds: why ambivalent self-control matters

Acknowledging that self-control can occur in ambivalence is important for our understanding of self-control because in ambivalent action, our capacity to act effectively is at risk.

Self-control is difficult enough in paradigmatic cases, where an agent who intends to do what is most valuable nevertheless also desires that which she values less. In those cases, the agent has self-control strategies available to her that hinge on that evaluative ranking: for example, she can rehearse her reasons for valuing what she judges over the competing option. Furthermore, in addition to such strategies, simply judging an option better lends that option some motivational force.

The struggle is far more challenging after a choice involving ambivalence (or after an errant choice) because the agent's motivation to stick to her plan is not bolstered by her judging it better, nor are option ranking-based strategies like reasons rehearsal available. Other things being equal, in situations where the agent is ambivalent about which course of action is best, self-control therefore is more difficult to enact than it would be in a case of standard self-control.

Finally, there are also clinical grounds for paying attention to cases of ambivalence like Andy's. Namely, difficulties in executive function, associated with self-control, often co-occur with differences in the motivational systems of the brain, resulting in greater difficulty in ranking the value of competing courses of action (Koi 2021).

Motivational differences, associated with dysfunction in the dopamine reward pathway, generate difficulties in ranking competing motives. Difficulties in executive functioning encompass difficulties in planning, working memory, and behavioural control, among other issues. Those with executive functioning deficits exhibit greater difficulty staying on task and experience the pull of competing courses of action more often.

A range of causes produce both executive functioning and motivational differences. As a result, these difficulties are widespread. Causes include the most common forms of psychiatric illness and neurological difference, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Major Depressive Disorder (Koi 2021; McTeague, Goodkind, and Etkin 2016). Indecisiveness is included in the symptomology of Major Depressive Disorder, and is also associated with a range of other diagnoses such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (Lauderdale, Lahman, and Desai 2024). In addition, executive and motivational dysfunction are associated with e.g. insomnia, stress, somatic illness and somatic pain. In brief, these systems of the brain are very sensitive to disruption (Goldstein and Naglieri 2014). Scholars in action theory and moral responsibility sometimes restrict their accounts to 'sane', 'normal' or 'core' agents to bracket or avoid needing to tackle the heterogeneity of human cognition and motivation (Gorman 2024); often the motivation is to make sense of 'standard' cases first, and only then extend their accounts to 'nonstandard' ones. But given that executive functioning and motivational systems are so sensitive to disruption, it is unclear whether agents who are 'normal' in the sense of *conforming to a standard* are 'normal' in the sense of *prevalent*.

From the simple observation that differences of the executive and motivational systems of the brain often co-occur, and that such difference is quite widespread, we can surmise that there are many people who experience executive-motivational double binds. Such double binds involve both a higher frequency of self-control failure, including in standard cases of self-control, due to impairments in executive function, and a higher frequency of situations where one is not well placed to rank options due to impairments in motivational function.

Our everyday agency requires that we set intentions and steer our behaviour accordingly. For people in executive-motivational double binds, they may need to more often do so also when no option seems better than others (indeed, vacillation and rumination are frequent experiences for many). The standard conception of self-control requires us to say that agents in motivational binds categorically cannot deploy self-control. This seems overly strong, however. While I am here claiming that motivational difficulties make self-control more difficult, and executive-motivational double binds particularly so, facing these challenges can and do engage in self-control, despite great difficulty. We need language for capturing the efforts and strategies being used by people who steer their behaviour to align it with intention in the face of a competing motive in such complex situations, and the value-deflationist account of self-control gives us just that by allowing that self-control successes and failures can occur in the absence of option ranking. Furthermore, it allows us to capture that these efforts and strategies do not functionally differ from the self-control efforts and strategies deployed in cases that we label ordinary.

IV. Storytelling: redescribing our cases

A reader may have wondered whether it is true that the above cases do not fall into the standard conception, and whether, if the cases were described differently, the agents in these situations would turn out to have ranked their options. Action descriptions are a central element of philosophy of action of a broadly Anscombean-Davidsonian stripe. As Elizabeth Anscombe notes, 'the very same proceedings are intentional under one description and unintentional under another' (Anscombe 1957/2000, p. 30). An action can be described in multiple ways: for example, the same sequence of movement can be described as turning on the light, flicking the switch, etc. Donald Davidson (1980) argues that, as an action can yield to multiple descriptions, some intentional and some non-intentional, we can count as intentional those actions for which at least one of the acceptable descriptions frames that action in intentional terms.

Alfred Mele applies a similar strategy to self-control. Mele relaxes the standard conception by suggesting that cases that yield both to standard and errant description are permissible on his account of self-control (Mele 1987, 1995, 2012, 2017). He points out that there may be more than one motivational conflict at stake, and these may be resolved in mismatching ways. While the better angels of Bruce's nature may favour the impulse to flee because they rank not participating in a crime higher than participating in it, Bruce may also prefer to exhibit fortitude and carry out his original decision rather than to succumb to the impulse to flee. The same action can be described in multiple ways, with respect to the different sources of motivation for the agent; these descriptions yield different option rankings. This redescription solution works by relaxing the requirement of the service of option ranking to the extent that a case can lend itself to both descriptions that align with option ranking and ones that do not.

There are principled attractions to the redescription solution. It harmonizes with an Anscombean-Davidsonian approach to action theory, and with a broader appreciation of the role of narrative in structuring our inner lives and outer behaviour. Redescribing an agent's motivational structure can also work as a hypothesis, both in seeking insight into oneself and into the motivations of another person. Most importantly, the

redescription approach reflects the richness of agents' inner lives. There is, however, reason to approach these attractions with some caution.

Proponents of the redescription solution will doubtless have already envisioned ways to redescribe the ambivalent and errant cases of self-control presented in this paper. It could be that Andy is in fact enacting self-control to do a chore, any chore, rather than stay on the couch. Or, his background project is to avoid overthinking matters, and he is in fact deploying self-control to stop deliberating. Perhaps Joanna has a background project of 'turning the other cheek' when wronged; her effortfully remaining silent aligns with this project. Maybe Jenny's background project is to lead a life of rigorous accomplishment, and she knows no other way to do this than athleticism. These descriptions fit the standard conception just so. But there is a problem with the redescription solution, namely, armed with sufficient imagination, we can offer such redescriptions on any example put forth in good faith by our interlocutors.

The same, of course, goes for received standard cases. Perhaps the dieting agent who exerts self-control to refrain from a slice of cake is in fact acting against her better judgment, as she in fact values the delightful flavour of cake above her desire to diet, which is a merely a superficial temptation stemming from social pressures to conform to oppressive beauty ideals – a case structurally rather similar to Bruce's burglary under peer pressure.

Is it, then, that *all* cases of self-control turn out to yield to both errant and standard descriptions? While this would align well with appreciating actions under varied descriptions, it would seem to lose something of value, as there are aspects to errant cases that standard cases lack – and vice versa. Indeed, the value-deflationist account of self-control sometimes meets resistance in part precisely because there are differences between errant and standard cases, differences that some worry the value-deflationist theory would obscure. Here, one may say that not all redescriptions are acceptable; we may set goalposts for what sorts of redescriptions we are to accept, and reject ones that fail to meet these. However, there is no principled reason why redescriptions of seemingly errant cases as standard ones would fare better in terms of our epistemic desiderata than the inverse redescriptions of seemingly standard cases as errant ones.

Mele is correct, I think, to seek out a way to allow for self-control in the presence of multiple background projects: this is a psychologically more realistic approach than requiring agents to have one overarching aim only. However, if we take the value the agent ascribes to these background projects to ground whether the agent has exerted self-control, we run into difficult questions, such as: under what circumstances are we to accept that an agent has a certain proposed background project; how to ascertain which background project is highest in value; and how to account for epistemic constraints, including self-deception, in this assessment. While these are important questions for philosophy of action and for philosophical psychology, it would be rather nice to instead operate on a concept of self-control that does not require us to resolve these just to assess whether self-control has been deployed at a given instance.

In probing the nature of self-control, we should appreciate the richness of agents' inner lives and motivational structures, and operate on a conception of self-control that allows for multiplicity of aims, motivational ambivalence, and the difficulty we sometimes encounter in interpreting the aims and values of ourselves and others. The value-deflationist conception of self-control offers just that, covering cases that readily yield to a variety of interpretations without difficulty.

V. What can be said for the standard conception?

The standard conception of self-control has many formidable defendants, contemporary and historical. I have claimed that it is too narrow. In what follows, I discuss objections to the value-deflationist account.

> Accounts relying on subjective evaluative judgment alone avoid the problem of undue normativity, and therefore the value-deflationist revision is unnecessary.

This criticism takes the issue with the standard approach to be the particular *sorts* of value judgments self-control is often associated with: work over fun, diet over cake, chastity over pleasure (see, e.g. Horstkötter 2015). Would the pressure towards value judgments inherent in self-control not be resolved simply by jettisoning this undue normativity in favour of self-control in the service of any subjective option ranking, however eclectic?

I agree a Humean articulation of the standard conception highlighting the subjective and sometimes idiosyncratic character of evaluative judgment, where crimes, cakes and indecent proposals sometimes indeed rank highest, nicely captures many standard cases of self-control. However, it remains insufficient because such an account still encounters the complications discussed above concerning errant and ambivalent cases. As I hope my examples have illustrated, self-control is used in the service of intentions that occupy diverse positions in agents' motivational landscapes.

> Although errant and ambivalent cases are cases of self-control, the standard conception need not reckon with outliers, and therefore the value-deflationist revision is unnecessary.

This strategy accepts that errant and ambivalent cases are indeed cases of self-control but holds that these are rare anomalies. Given that many human kinds are fuzzy rather than crisply defined, one may hold that a conception of self-control need not account for outlier cases. If errant and ambivalent cases are outliers, they are not a factor in how self-control ought to be conceived of.

The examples presented above illustrate that errant and ambivalent cases occur in domestic and professional contexts and can concern both trivial and morally significant choices. I have also highlighted that, for clinical reasons, they are likely to be far more common than some acknowledge. In light of this, treating them as an anomaly that our account of self-control need not factor in is unsatisfactory.

> Although errant and ambivalent cases are cases of self-control, the standard conception sufficiently accounts for them, and therefore the value-deflationist revision is unnecessary.

For this objection, the gist is to grant that errant and ambivalent cases are self-control, but to maintain that in fact, if properly analysed, they turn out to be standard cases of self-control.

One way to do this is to maintain that agents always rank their options, or at least that they rank their options in all instances of self-control. One might hold so, for example, because one subscribes to the axiom of revealed preferences. According to this axiom, an agent's choice reveals what she prefers. When Andy opts to do the dishes, for instance, we can infer that he in fact prefers to do the dishes.[7]

Let us grant for the sake of argument that agents always choose according to which option they judge best. If we let this delimit our definition of self-control, then we are

introducing a redundancy. If all our behaviour accords with option ranking, then option ranking is not a defining feature of self-control. It is instead a general feature of human behaviour and should be omitted from our definition of self-control as redundant.

Alternatively, take the notion that merely all *self-controlled* behaviour is in accordance with our preferences, rather than all our behaviour as such. That is, the use of self-control reveals what the agent in fact prefers. However, given that self-control is applied upon facing a motivational conflict, it would be surprising if preferences were be revealed in the *presence* of motivational conflict, but not in behaviour that occurs in its *absence*, where the agent's choice is so wholehearted that self-control is not required. Such a surprising position would require further justification.

The second strategy for bringing errant and ambivalent cases into the fold of standard self-control is to redescribe them as standard cases, as described above in section IV. However, as discussed in section IV, the fact that these cases yield to more than one description raises further issues that the value-deflationist account avoids.

> Errant and ambivalent cases are not cases of self-control. Instead, they are cases of a faculty or mechanism underlying self-control.

The underlying mechanisms for self-control are discussed in the literature with great nuance and depth, and this objection requires a correspondingly detailed response. The gist here is to posit that there is a further capacity C that subserves both standard self-control and errant and ambivalent cases of C, which then do not fall under the self-control concept. Such a capacity would be closer to a natural kind concept than a concept defined by its function.

There are two responses available to value-deflationists here. One is to accept the charge, focusing our inquiry into the discrete capacity subserving self-control. The other is to deny that a subservient discrete capacity is what we are interested in explicating. Both lines of response would require taking a principled stance on the prospects of discrete capacities in (philosophical) psychology. The question then is: should we believe that there is a discrete capacity underlying self-control?

Holton offers a detailed analysis of what the faculty at stake might be. He describes it as a discrete faculty of the mind that is independent of beliefs, desires and reasons. However, Holton is open to treating the capacity at stake not as a discrete mental kind, but as something defined by its function. That is, while Holton's account is inspired by the literature on the ego depletion hypothesis (see, e.g. Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice 2007) that has since failed to replicate (see, e.g. Inzlicht and Friese 2019), Holton allows that the discrete, dedicated faculty of so-called willpower might turn out to be something other than ego depletion. He emphasises that the more detailed account is to be taken as an elaboration rather than a definition and is open to the possibility that the faculty at stake might turn out to be, e.g. a skill rather than a faculty.

This is aligned with describing self-control as a *function*. Treating self-control as a function entails the notion that self-control is not defined by a given faculty of the mind, mechanism, or process, but instead multiple different faculties, mechanisms, or processes can fulfil the role of self-control.

There is currently no empirical indication that there would be any one discrete capacity, mechanism, or resource underlying self-control. Instead, self-control appears to be realized by a heterogeneous set of processes and mechanisms (Duckworth,

Milkman, and Laibson 2018; Koi 2021, 2023; Levy 2017). Just how heterogeneous that set is, is under some debate: conceptions like Sripada's (2021) account of self-control as an extended stream of cognitive control also characterize self-control functionally, implicating a narrower set of processes and mechanisms than situationist accounts like Levy's (2017) and Koi's (2021, 2023, 2024) do. On the other hand, some, such as Marcela Herdova (2017), argue that the concept of self-control is too diffuse to admit of any mechanistic explanation; for Herdova, the notion of an underlying natural mental kind is deeply implausible as a result.

As it currently stands, we appear not to have empirical rationale for postulating an underlying, unitary faculty or resource, and hence this paper revises the functional construct of self-control rather than discussing any specific underlying faculty.

In other words, the articulation of value-deflationist self-control presented in this paper refines Holton's account in part by omitting the notion of a dedicated faculty while endorsing the insight that the capacity that allows us to stick by our intentions is distinct from evaluative judgment.

> On the value-deflationist conception, it is unclear why we would want to deploy self-control, to develop it, or to value it.

On the standard account, we are inclined to use, develop, and value self-control because it helps us pursue whatever it is that we value more. The objection then is, why would we use, develop, or value self-control on the value-deflationist account? What is there to be gained from sticking to our intentions, regardless of their content or our evaluative judgments concerning them?

This objection, however, rests on a misunderstanding. The value-deflationist conception does not claim that we could never accomplish valuable aims with the aid of self-control, nor does it claim that we would not value self-control precisely because it helps us accomplish aims that we value. We can value something instrumentally even if that same thing can be an instrument for something we place less value on. For example, reason makes us equipped to both resolve *and* create international crises. It is fitting, then, that we do not define reason as something for pursuing only the loftiest of aims. But it is just as fitting that we value reason instrumentally because it can be applied to the pursuit of valuable ends.

Likewise for self-control. We have a range of normative responses to self-control, some of which stems from to its instrumental value for aims we value. However, there is no normative content inherent in self-control per se. Rather, our normative responses to self-control and our normative commitments about it are placed *outside* self-control itself, in our attitudes towards it, in cultural conceptions of self-control which admit to value-ladenness, and in the value that we place on the aims we pursue with it.

VI. Conclusion

When agents recognize they must take some measures to stay on course in the face of competing motivation, they are in a position to deploy self-control. This paper urges us to revise the concept of self-control to denote this capacity to align behaviour with one's intention regardless of whether this intention that matches the agent's option ranking.

Value-deflationist self-control has many advantages over the standard conception. It is simpler than the standard conception, having a smaller set of presuppositions. In virtue of this, it minimizes, but does not eliminate, our need to scrutinize agents' mental lives to ascertain whether something falls within the scope of this concept. Value-deflationist self-control furthermore avoids the so-called paradox of errant self-control, a paradox emerging from the long shadows of *akrasia* and *enkrateia*. It gives us language for accounting for the rich experience of steering behaviour across a variety of evaluative landscapes and helps point to the functional similarities across these experiences. This matters, because errant and ambivalent self-control are not rare outliers but instead are far more widespread than previously appreciated. Agents in motivational-executive double binds face particular challenges, which a value-deflationist conception of self-control is well placed to capture and analyse.

Alfred Mele's strategy has been to resolve errant cases by appealing to action redescriptions, including via postulating further background projects for agents. I have argued that this strategy fails because redescription works both ways: standard cases of self-control can also be redescribed as errant by postulating further background projects.

Rather than claiming our evaluative attitudes towards self-control to be misplaced, the value-deflationist account clarifies that they stem from our cultural appreciation *for* self-control and the value – positive and negative – of what we accomplish *with* it.

The ways in which we sometimes make up our minds in accordance with our better judgment, and sometimes not, remain a rich subject of inquiry. However, rather than concerning self-control *per se*, this inquiry concerns our decisions, plans, intentions, and the like.

Notes

1. *Akrasia* is often translated as *weakness of will;* and enkrateia, as willpower. However, **kratos* refers to rulership, not power in the sense of physical force or energy. The term *enkratos* refers to rulership or control over other people (Dorion 2007). Since the Greek terms make no reference to will, weakness, or power (other than in the sense of power-over), translating these Greek constructs in terms of self-rule or continence is more precise. Here, I opt for referring to these by the Greek terms, which I hope helps draw the distinction between the problem of akratic action and the problem how self-control ought to be understood.
2. Proponents of the standard conception have offered both maximizing and satisficing formulations of self-control, i.e., self-control is used in accordance with either 'best' or 'better' judgment. In this paper, my use of 'better' is intended to be inclusive of both maximizing and satisficing variants.
3. Mele (2012) takes Holton to task for Holton's claim that his account would match lay conceptions of 'weakness of will'. Running a study on college students, Mele found that students are more likely to endorse thinking of 'weakness of will' as akrasia than thinking of it as acting contrary to one's plan, though both views found support. Overall, Mele argues the study shows the concept of 'weakness of will' to be disjunctive. For the purposes of the present paper, it is then helpful to avoid 'weakness of will' when possible given its dual connotations. Note, however, that even if Holton's account were to fail as an account of folk concept(s), it can be vindicated as a conceptual revision. Rather than attempting to describe a folk conception, the present article endeavors to revise the concept of self-control.
4. Although see Shepherd (2017) for a discussion of deploying control for halfhearted aims.

5. I am not claiming that one of Andy's options would not be, in fact, better than the other. I claim only that they seem to Andy to be equal. Say, unbeknownst to Andy, there is a stain on his favourite shirt, and he can only successfully remove the stain if he does so today. In this case it would in fact be more valuable for him to do the laundry. This information, which Andy is oblivious to, should be of no consequence when assessing whether Andy has successfully enacted self-control.
6. While Joanna's difficult choice pertains to a moral value conflict, such choices may also occur in the context of prudential value conflicts: ambivalence occurs in multiple domains.
7. For a classic criticism of revealed preference theory, see Sen (1973). There are methodological constraints to the application of revealed preference theory to self-control that have to do with the way our conceptions of self-control often invoke preferences as mental states, whereas revealed preferences subscribe to a more strictly behavioural conception of preference (see Thoma 2021). These intricacies, however, lie outside the scope of this paper.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank anonymous referees, audiences at the University of Milan and at the University of Konstanz, Elisa Aaltola, Valtteri Arstila, Hannah Altehenger, Juan Pablo Bermúdez, Lilian O'Brien, Dane Gogoshin, Milan Ney, Hille Paakkunainen, Juha Räikkä, Susanne Uusitalo, and Jukka Varelius for helpful comments and discussions on earlier drafts of this paper; and the Kone Foundation for research funding.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Polaris Koi is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Turku. His research interests span agency, ADHD, self-control, decision-making, and metacognition. His first book, *Against Willpower: Self-Control, Agency, and Society,* is under contract with Oxford University Press. For more information, see www.polariskoi.com.

References

Ainslie, George. 2001. *Breakdown of Will*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Ainslie, George. 2021. "Willpower with and without Effort." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 44:e30: 1–57. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X20000357
Anscombe, G. E. M. 2000. *Intention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Arpaly, Nomy. 2000. "On Acting Rationally against One's Best Judgment." *Ethics* 110 (3): 488–513. https://doi.org/10.1086/233321
Arpaly, Nomy, and Timothy Schroeder. 2013. *In Praise of Desire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bandura, Albert. 2001. "Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective." *Annual Review of Psychology* 52:1–26. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.1
Baumeister, Roy, Kathleen D. Vohs, and Dianne M. Tice. 2007. "The Strength Model of Self-control." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16 (6): 351–355. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00534.x
Bermúdez, Juan Pablo. 2021. "The Skill of Self-control." *Synthese* 199: 6251–6273. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-021-03068-w
Bratman, Michael. 1987. *Intention, Plans and Practical Reason.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Davidson, Donald. 1980. *Essays on Actions and Events.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dorion, Louis-André. 2007. "Plato and Enkrateia." In *Akrasia Greek Philosophy*, edited by Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée, 119–138. Leiden: Brill.
Duckworth, Angela L., Katherine L. Milkman, and David Laibson. 2018. "Beyond Willpower: Strategies for Reducing Failures of Self-control." *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 19 (3): 102–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100618821893
Goldstein, Sam, and Jack A. Naglieri, eds. 2014. *Handbook of Executive Functioning*. New York: Springer.
Gorman, August. 2024. "Against Neuronormativity in Moral Responsibility." *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1/2). https://doi.org/10.5206/fpq/2024.1/2.18721
Grüne-Yanoff, Till. 2007. "Bounded Rationality." *Philosophy Compass* 2 (3): 534–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2007.00074.x
Heinzelmann, Nora. 2023. *Weakness of Will and Delay Discounting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Herdova, Marcela. 2017. "Self-control and Mechanisms of Behavior: Why Self-control Is Not a Natural Mental Kind." *Philosophical Psychology* 30 (6): 731–762. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2017.1336528
Holton, Richard. 2009. *Willing, Wanting, Waiting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Holton, Richard, and Joshua May. 2012. "What in the World Is Weakness of Will?" *Philosophical Studies* 157 (3): 341–360. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-010-9651-8
Horstkötter, Dorothee. 2015. "Self-control and Normativity: Theories in Social Psychology Revisited." *Theory & Psychology* 25 (1): 25–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354314561487
Hyman, John. 2015. *Action, Knowledge, and Will*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Inzlicht, Michael, and Malte Friese. 2019. "The Past, Present, and Future of ego Depletion." *Social Psychology* 50:370–378. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000398
Kalis, Annemarie. 2018. "Self-Control as a Normative Capacity." *Ratio* 31 (1): 65–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/rati.12180
Kennett, Jeanette. 2013. "Just Say No? Addiction and the Elements of Self-control." In *Addiction and Self-control: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience*, edited by Neil Levy, 144–164. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Koi, Polaris. 2021. "Born Which Way? ADHD, Situational Self-control, and Responsibility." *Neuroethics* 14:205–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12152-020-09439-3
Koi, Polaris. 2023. "Accessing Self-control." *Erkenntnis* 88:3239–3258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-021-00500-y
Koi, Polaris. 2024. "Willpower as a Metaphor." In *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*. Vol. 8, edited by Santiago Amaya, David Shoemaker, and Manuel Vargas, 34–57. Oxford: OUP.
Lauderdale, Sean A., Kelli Lahman, and Hela Desai. 2024. "Clarifying Some Confusion: Indecisiveness and Procrastination Are Distinct Constructs." *Current Psychology* 43:32707–32722. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-06790-z
Levy, Neil. 2011. "Resisting 'Weakness of the Will'." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82 (1): 134–155. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2010.00424.x
Levy, Neil. 2017. "Of Marshmallows and Moderation." In *Moral Psychology Volume 5: Virtue and Character*, edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Christian B. Miller, 197–214. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
McTeague, Lisa, Madeleine Goodkind, and Amit Etkin. 2016. "Transdiagnostic Impairment of Cognitive Control in Mental Illness." *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 83:37–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2016.08.001
Mele, Alfred R. 1987. *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia, Self-deception, and Self-control*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Mele, Alfred R. 1995. *Autonomous Agents: From Self-control to Autonomy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Mele, Alfred R. 2010. "Weakness of Will and Akrasia." *Philosophical Studies* 150 (3): 391–404. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-009-9418-2
Mele, Alfred R. 2012. *Backsliding: Understanding Weakness of Will*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Mele, Alfred R. 2017. *Aspects of Agency: Decisions, Abilities, Explanations, and Free Will*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Murray, Sam, and Manuel Vargas. 2020. "Vigilance and Control." *Philosophical Studies* 177:825–843. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1208-2

Ryle, Gilbert. 1949. *The Concept of Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1975. "Existentialism is a Humanism." In *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Kaufman, 287–311. New York: Meridian-New American.

Sen, Amartya K. 1973. "Behaviour and the Concept of Preference." *Economica* 40 (159): 241–259. https://doi.org/10.2307/2552796

Shepherd, Joshua. 2017. "Halfhearted Action and Control." *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 4:09. https://doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0004.009

Sripada, Chandra. 2021. "The Atoms of Self-Control." *Noûs* 55 (4): 800–824. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12332

Thoma, Johanna. 2021. "In Defence of Revealed Preference Theory." *Economics and Philosophy* 37 (2): 163–187. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267120000073