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# Practical Rationality and the Belief in the Efficacy of Intention

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## Résumé

One is practically irrational when one holds beliefs and intentions standing in incoherent relations. However, to be truly practically irrational, does one also need to believe that one's incoherent intentions can make a difference in one's future actions? In other words, does practical irrationality constitutively implicate a belief in intention's self-efficacy? Intriguingly, an overwhelming majority of contemporary philosophers have given an affirmative answer to this question when it comes to instrumental irrationality. Consider the following attitude-pattern:

*First-order means-end incoherence*: Intend to E, believe that one's M-ing is indispensable for one's E-ing, but not intend to M.

Broome has influentially argued that this pattern can sometimes be rational despite its lack of the instrumental intention to M. For one might believe that M-ing is an action that one will perform anyway even without the instrumental intention to M (2002: 91–2; 2013: 162–3).

Given the rationalizability of *first-order means-end incoherence*, Broome has contended that true instrumental irrationality implicates a self-efficacy belief about the difference-making power of one's instrumental intention, i.e. the belief that one will M only if one forms the instrumental intention to M. And most contemporary philosophers have followed suit (see e.g. Brunero 2020: 59; Fullhart and Martinez forthcoming: 31; Kiesewetter 2018: 192; Lord 2017: 21; Setiya 2007: 668; Way 2012: 489).

But I cast doubt on this line of inference by focusing on another central form of practical irrationality:

*First-order intention inconsistency*: Intend to E, intend to F, but believe that one's E-ing and F-ing are incompatible.

As McCann (1999) has contended, Bratman's video game case (1987: ch.8) suggests that this pattern can sometimes be rational despite its inclusion of the inconsistent intentions to E and F. For one might expect that one's success in carrying out E-ing and F-ing is uncertain, and that by intending both actions one can maximize the chance of succeeding in carrying out *at least one* action. Importantly, by the same line of inference made by Broome, we can also infer from the rationalizability of *first-order intention inconsistency* that true practical inconsistency should further implicate a self-efficacy belief about the difference-making

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power of one's inconsistent intention, that is, the belief that if one intends to E then one will E, and that if one intends to F then one will F.

But I argue that this inference is unwarranted and eventually leads to a contentious state-focused conception of practical rationality, which contentiously takes practical rationality to consist in one's responsiveness to the expected effects of the states of one's intending or not intending something (rather than one's responsiveness to the compatibility and indispensability relation among actions). And I motivate an alternative view about the relation between practical rationality and the belief about intention's efficacy.

**Mots-Clés:** intention, practical rationality, instrumental rationality, intention consistency