

The Limits of Partial Doxasticism<sup>(\*)</sup>

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Abstract

Doxasticism is the thesis that intention is or involves belief in the forthcoming action (Velleman, Harman). Supporters claim that it is only by accepting that thesis that we can explain a wide array of important phenomena, including the special knowledge we have of intentional action, the roles intention plays in facilitating coordination, and the norms of rationality for intention. Others argue that the thesis is subject to counterexample (Davidson, Bratman). Yet some others contend that the thesis can be reformulated in a way that avoids such counterexamples and preserves its explanatory significance (Pears, Setiya). Their suggestion is that we view intention as involving *partial*—rather than *full*—belief. I argue that while the move from full to partial doxasticism helps to accommodate such counterexamples, it does so in a way that undermines the ability of the resulting view to explain the coordinating roles of and rationality norms for intention.

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1. Introduction

There is hardly any attitude that occupies a more central place in our practical thought and action than intention. Among the things this attitude does for us, we may highlight the roles it plays in motivating and guiding action as well as in informing and structuring practical reasoning. Philosophers have offered a variety of views about the nature of intention and a useful way to organize the theoretical landscape is to classify them by reference to the question of the relation between intention and belief. Here we find two dominant views. According to one view, intending to act is a special kind of belief that one will so act, or at least necessarily involves such a belief (Grice 1971, Harman 1976, Velleman 1989, Setiya 2007a, Marušić and Schwenkler 2018). According to the other, intending to act is instead a distinctive conative attitude that need neither be identified with nor involve the cited belief (Davidson 1978, 1985, Bratman 1987, Mele 1992). Call such views, respectively, *doxasticism* and *conativism* about intention.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The former view is also known as “cognitivism” about intention (Paul 2009a; Marušić and Schwenkler 2018). Like Langton (2004), I believe that “doxasticism” is a more accurate label for it.

My interest in this paper lies in what appears to be a variant of the former view. Two types of argument have in general been offered in support of doxasticism. One of them is an argument to the best explanation. It is claimed that it is only by accepting the thesis that intention involves belief that we can explain a wide array of important intention-related issues, such as the special knowledge that we have of intentional action, the roles intention plays in facilitating coordination, and the status and grounds of the norms of rationality for intention –including the norms of means-end coherence and of intention-belief consistency. The other is a more direct argument for that view: it is claimed that the cited thesis uncovers a deep truth about the nature of intention, independently of the issues it purports to explain. A familiar objection disputes the second type of argument for that view. There are cases, it is contended, in which one is committed to the realization of the action in the form characteristic of intention but lacks the belief that one’s intention will be successfully executed. The thesis that intention involves belief is thus subject to counterexample (Davidson 1978, Bratman 1987). Many doxasticists have set aside the objection as misguided, arguing that the cited cases fail to challenge the intention-belief thesis in one way or another (Velleman 1989, Marušić 2012). Yet, other philosophers who sympathize with the general spirit of doxasticism have disagreed. These philosophers acknowledge the relative force of such counterexamples but argue that the intention-belief thesis can be reformulated in a way that avoids them and preserves its spirit and explanatory significance. Their suggestion is that we view intention as involving *partial* –rather than *full*—belief in the success of the forthcoming action (Pears 1985, Setiya 2008, 2009)—where to have a partial belief that *p* is to have some credence, or degree of belief, in *p*. Call this, *partial doxasticism* about intention.

My discussion centers on this latter view. (To mark the contrast, I will sometimes refer to the former view as “full doxasticism”.) The thesis that intention involves credence in success is initially plausible and likely to be well-received by those who locate a doxastic element in intention but find it hyperbolic to classify it as full belief. The thesis also sits well with an influential trend in epistemology, recently revitalized, according to which belief is sometimes, or even always, best conceived of as something that comes in degrees, rather than as an all-or-nothing affair.<sup>2</sup> My general aim in this paper is to examine the explanatory significance of this thesis. Even if the thesis is true, there is still a question as to whether it can account for central intention-related issues, including those mentioned above: knowledge of intentional action, the roles that intention plays in facilitating coordination, and the norms of rationality for intention. Some have carefully discussed how partial doxasticism tackles the first issue.<sup>3</sup> But the questions of how that view addresses the second and third issues have unfortunately received practically no attention at all. A main specific aim of the paper is to analyze how partial doxasticism may approach the second issue, the

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<sup>2</sup> For a useful overview of current views of the relation between belief and credence, see Jackson (2020).

<sup>3</sup> Pears (1985) and Setiya (2008, 2009). For critical assessment of the latter view, see Paul (2009b).

roles intention plays in facilitating coordination. I concentrate on an aspect of this phenomenon where the family of doxasticist views seem to find themselves most at home: how the process of further planning that makes possible such coordination is cognitively framed. We plan many activities for the future on the assumption that our prior intentions for the nearer future will be executed. Doxasticism seems to offer a simple explanation of how this works. The assumptions that frame such further planning and coordination are just the beliefs that partly constitute our prior intentions. Unfortunately, things are more complex for partial doxasticism. The view is characterized by the thesis that intention involves partial –rather than full—belief and there is a question as to whether and how the latter attitude can do that cognitive work. I argue that there are reasons for skepticism. Another specific aim is to discuss, albeit more briefly, how partial doxasticism may address the third issue above, the status and grounds of the norms of intention rationality.<sup>4</sup> I suggest that the view encounters significant limitations here as well. My overall thesis is that while the move from full to partial doxasticism helps to accommodate the apparent counterexamples to the former view, it does so in a way that undermines the ability of the resulting view to explain the coordinating roles of and rationality norms for intention. The explanatory power of doxasticism is partly lost in the transition. This points to a deep divide between partial and full doxasticism, a divide that has not been sufficiently appreciated in the literature.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses how the intention-belief thesis bears on the question of the coordinating roles of intention. In section 3, I outline part of the motivation for partial doxasticism and point to difficulties the intention-credence thesis confronts in answering that question. The end of section 3 together with section 4 cast doubt on the common presumption that partial doxasticism is a genuine variant of doxasticism. Finally, in section 5, I call attention to several complexities that face partial doxasticism in accounting for the norms of intention rationality and conclude with some final thoughts.

## 2. Doxasticism, Conativism, and Coordination: On the Way to Partial Doxasticism

One of the central roles intention plays in one’s practical thought and action is that of facilitating the coordination of action, both across time and interpersonally. Consider a characteristic way in which it does this. Suppose that I intend to visit NYC next weekend and assume that I will be in NYC then. On the basis of this assumption, I may now go ahead and plan –i.e., form the intention—to go for a walk in Central Park on Saturday morning and to meet an old friend for dinner in the evening. Likewise, upon hearing about my plans, my friend may decide to join me for dinner on Saturday evening and to postpone his Sunday morning run to Sunday afternoon. Now suppose, in addition, that my friend and I do in fact have the cited intentions,

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<sup>4</sup> One such an approach is suggested, but not explored, by Setiya (2007b). See section 5 and note 29 below.

proceed to execute them when the time comes, and are successful in doing so. It seems accurate to say that in such a scenario my intention to visit NYC next weekend helped to structure my own planning, and also my friend's planning, in ways that facilitated the coordination of our actions, individually across time and interpersonally with those of the other. Speaking more generally, we may say that one's intention to act in the nearer future can facilitate the coordination of action by allowing one (and others) to form further intentions for the more distant future on the assumption that one's intention for the nearer future will be executed first. Briefly put, one can achieve coordination by planning on the presumed prior success of a previously-formed intention. Call this "prior-success" planning and coordination.

How precisely we should understand prior-success planning and coordination is a subject of much dispute between supporters of doxasticism and supporters of conativism. The doxasticist (Grice 1971, Harman 1976, Velleman 2007) agrees with the conativist (Bratman 1987) on a fundamental point. They think that the "assumption" that plays a role in cognitively framing prior-success planning is nothing but an attitude of belief.<sup>5</sup> Their thought, then, is that prior-success planning and coordination works by way of belief in success. In this vein, Velleman asserts that "[k]nowledge of [or belief in] one's forthcoming actions is what provides the basis for coordination" (2007, 208); and, similarly, Bratman declares that the process of cognitive framing is "a main role belief plays in ordinary planning" (1987, 38). However, despite agreeing that belief in success is responsible for the cognitive framing of prior-success planning, the doxasticist and the conativist disagree on a further point: the origin of such a belief. The doxasticist maintains that the cited belief is (partly) constitutive of the intention itself, while the conativist denies this.

It is against the backdrop of this dispute that the doxasticist has raised a pressing objection to conativist accounts of prior-success planning and coordination, to the effect that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of this feature of intention if we refuse to accept the thesis that intention involves belief (Audi 1991, 371; Velleman 2007, 206). The involvement of belief in intention ensures that the attitude deemed responsible for cognitively framing prior-success planning and thus for facilitating coordination—namely, belief in success—is present in the context in which such planning and coordination takes place; however, if no such involvement existed, it is unclear how the cited belief could be guaranteed to be present in every such context. Call the challenge to explain this, the "Belief Challenge" to non-doxasticist accounts of prior-success planning, and the associated problem of securing the presence of the attitude deemed responsible for framing such planning in that context, the "problem of presence."

It is a contentious question whether the conativist can give an adequate answer to this challenge. Elsewhere I have argued that they can in fact do so (2020). The idea is to appeal to an alternative account

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<sup>5</sup> Some conativists disagree, though. See, Mele (1992, 137-38), Brunero (2014, 27-30), and Alonso (2020); Cf. Bratman (1992). It is for simplicity's sake that in this paper I take Bratman (1987) as representing the conativist position.

of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning. On this account, the cognitive work is done by an attitude which, although external to the intention itself, is nonetheless available in that context. This is the non-belief-involving attitude of relying on success. But I will not dwell on that account here. Instead, I want to focus on an obvious response that the conativist might give to the doxasticist *before* addressing that challenge. The conativist might well accept that their view is as such unable to explain why belief in success is guaranteed to be present in all cases of prior-success planning.<sup>6</sup> But they might also contend that doxasticism is not in a much better position than conativism is on this score. Certainly, doxasticism appears to be uniquely equipped to provide the desired explanation. But that appearance, they might insist, is illusory: it vanishes as soon as it is realized that the purported explanation rests on a distorted, and thus false, view of the relation between intention and belief. According to the conativist, the intention-belief thesis is subject to clear counterexamples. It will facilitate our discussion below to mention two of them. One case is adapted from remarks by Donald Davidson on the connection between intentional action and knowledge of action (1978). Davidson invites us to think of an agent who presses hard on a piece of paper with the intention of producing ten carbon copies and who does not believe at the time of action that he is succeeding. Davidson tells us that if the agent nonetheless succeeds in producing such copies, he will have done so intentionally. Now, much in the same way in which the carbon-copier acts with the intention of producing such copies without believing at the time of action that he is succeeding, he may as well intend now to produce ten carbon copies later while lacking at the moment the belief that he will succeed then (1978, 92; Cf. Pears 1985). But, then, just as Davidson's original carbon-copier case undercuts the idea of a necessary connection between acting intentionally and knowledge of action, it might be concluded, so does the modified case undermine the thesis that intention involves belief. Another, more clear-cut, case against this last thesis is offered by Michael Bratman (1987). Imagine an agent who is considering the possibility of rescuing someone while being aware of the difficulty of accomplishing the task. Such an agent, Bratman says, may very well intend to rescue that person –i.e., she may be fully committed to that task. But although she may intend to carry out that task, Bratman notes, she may also be agnostic about success. She may neither believe that she will succeed nor believe that she will fail (1987, 38). From a conativist perspective, such cases cast doubt on the tenability of doxasticism not only as a view of the relation of intention to belief. They cast doubt on its tenability also as an element in an explanation of central issues in the philosophy of action and practical reasoning –including the phenomena under scrutiny in this paper. For the conativist, such cases thus undermine both direct and indirect arguments for doxasticism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Though this need not constitute a problem for their view, as insinuated above.

<sup>7</sup> As anticipated in section 1, the doxasticist challenges that conclusion, arguing that the counterexamples fail. But this is not, as we will see in the text below, the strategy pursued by the partial doxasticist.

The preceding remarks about the resources that doxasticism and conativism each typically brings to bear to explain the cognitive framing of prior-success planning seem to leave us at a standoff. As we saw, an appeal to doxasticism ensures the presence of belief in success in every such instance of planning, which seems essential given the commonly held idea that the latter works by way of the former. However, we also saw that a problem with this strategy is that it builds on a controversial thesis about the connection between intention and belief. On the other hand, we noted that conativism rejects that thesis but also suggested that it is precisely for that reason that this view seems unable to explain the target phenomenon.

At this point, it might be suggested that the nature of the cited standoff reveals that the desired account can be provided by neither doxasticism nor conativism, but will have to come from an alternative view of the connection between intention and belief. What is more, it might be argued that the problem is in fact more general and that the aforementioned represents just one among many standoffs between such views. There are questions about other important intention-related issues –such as the questions of the norms of rationality for intention and of the connection between intentional action and agential knowledge—whose answers seem to require the positing of a necessary connection between intention and some relevant truth-directed attitude about one’s forthcoming action, and yet it seems implausible to maintain that such an attitude is flat-out belief. Fortunately, it might be contended, there is an alternative view of the doxastic aspect of intention that provides us with a way out of such standoffs, including the present one. That view is partial doxasticism.

### 3. Partial Doxasticism and Coordination

We can initially characterize partial doxasticism as a view that shares the spirit of doxasticism but is not subject to the abovementioned sort of counterexamples. The partial doxasticist thinks that the intention-belief thesis is fundamentally right in calling attention to the existence of a doxastic element at the core of intention. But on the other hand they also acknowledge the relative force of such counterexamples.<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to reconcile such apparently conflicting reactions, the partial doxasticist proposes, first, in the spirit of doxasticism, that we understand intention as partly constituted by a doxastic attitude concerning one’s future action and, second, in response to the cited counterexamples, that we cast the latter attitude in a different light, namely, in terms of partial –rather than full—belief. David Pears (1985) and Kieran Setiya (2008, 2009) hold versions of this view. Pears maintains that one’s intention to perform an action necessarily involves the “minimal belief that [one’s] intention confers some probability on [one’s] performance” (1985, 82). Setiya holds a similar view. He states that intentions are “motivating states that

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<sup>8</sup> Each of the two versions of partial doxasticism discussed below are explicitly offered as a response to Davidson’s carbon copier example, mentioned above.

involve at least partial belief” (2009, 130).<sup>9</sup> In intending to perform an action, Setiya declares, one is, at a minimum, more confident that one will do it than one would otherwise be (2008, 391, 395-96).<sup>10</sup> Thus, Pears and Setiya agree that it is partly constitutive of one’s intention to  $\phi$  that one has some credence that one will  $\phi$ .<sup>11</sup>

Setiya does not elaborate much further on his view, but Pears offers some additional remarks that are relevant for our purposes. Pears points out that the credence involved in intention “may vary from minimal upwards” (1985, 81). This raises a question as to how “minimal” one’s credence can be, on this view, in order for one to count as intending –that is, it raises the question of the credence threshold for intention.<sup>12</sup> Pears declares that since one “can intend to do something that [one] assesses as extremely difficult” –for example, he says, one may intend to climb Mount Everest—the threshold must be “pitch[ed] ... very low” (1985, 80). In fact, Pears insinuates that it must be “pitched” at zero: although we are “allow[ed] ... to regard the varying probability of intention-based beliefs as a kind of sliding peg,” Pears notes, “[t]he concept of intending does not allow the peg to move down to zero” (1985, 85).<sup>13</sup> On this version of partial doxasticism, then, intention involves non-zero credence in success.<sup>14</sup>

Supporters might claim that this version of the view is implausibly weak and recommend that the credence threshold for intention be set at a higher value. One suggestion is to endorse a strong version of partial doxasticism, according to which intending to act involves having credence greater than 0.5 that one will so act. However, a problem with this second version of the view is that it does not avoid the aforementioned counterexamples. The latter are supposed to establish that intention is compatible with, at a minimum, agnosticism about success. Yet suspension of belief is normally taken to be compatible with credence lower than 0.5. A traditional credence-theoretic approach reduces (rational) suspension of belief

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<sup>9</sup> Setiya explicitly acknowledges the parallel with Pears’s view (2009, 130, n. 10).

<sup>10</sup> Pears thinks instead that the partial belief involved in intention is “non-comparative” (1985, 79). For discussion, see Peacocke (1985, 70-71), Paul (2009, 553), and Setiya (2009, 130-31).

<sup>11</sup> Setiya appears at times to favor a disjunctive thesis of the doxastic element involved in intention, according to which in intending to  $\phi$  one fully believes that one will  $\phi$ , or is at least more confident that one would otherwise be that one will  $\phi$  (2008, 391-92, 395-96). Yet Setiya also maintains that it is a “fact that belief comes by degree” (2008, 391), which suggests that in his view full belief ultimately reduces to partial belief and thus that it is appropriate to cash out his view of the doxastic element in intention in terms of the latter doxastic attitude. There are interesting questions as to how Setiya’s partial doxasticism sits with his thesis, defended in earlier work, that intention is “self-referential desire-like belief” (2007, 49). We might wonder, for example, whether intention can be identified in Setiya’s view with “self-referential desire-like [*partial*] belief” and whether such an identification would not come with significant explanatory costs, beyond those I go on to chronicle in the text. Unfortunately, I lack the space to discuss such questions here. For doubts about the latter sort of identification, see Harman (1976, 453).

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for urging me to address this question.

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Pears writes: “If [one] believed that [some] events ... would reduce the effectiveness of [one’s prospective] intention to zero, [one] simply could not form it. Otherwise, [one] could form it” (1985, 80).

<sup>14</sup> Davidson also suggests that Pears’s view is most plausibly interpreted this way (1985, 212-213). More on this in section 4.

to middling credence, where this is often characterized as any credence between 0.33 and 0.66.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, this approach to rational agnosticism challenges the strong version of partial doxasticism mentioned above. But it also motivates an alternative, more moderate version of that view. On this third version, intention involves credence greater than 0.33 in success. It is difficult to say what the most plausible version of partial doxasticism is. Fortunately, we do not need to resolve this here. The main arguments in this paper (esp. those in this section and in section 5) apply equally to all versions of it. Accordingly, I next characterize partial doxasticism in terms broad enough to cover all of them. Thus, we can say that Pears and Setiya both endorse:

*Partial Doxasticism:* it is partly constitutive of one's intention to  $\phi$  that one has credence above a relevant threshold that one will  $\phi$ —where this threshold is below the threshold for belief.

On the face of it, partial doxasticism appears to retain insights from both doxasticism and conativism while avoiding some of their alleged shortcomings. First, like conativism, but unlike doxasticism, partial doxasticism makes room for intention in contexts in which one is agnostic about success and in so doing appears to avoid the counterexamples offered against doxasticism. Surely, in intending to carry out the rescue operation I may not flat-out believe that I will succeed; but I may nonetheless have some credence that I will do so—perhaps I judge that my chances of success are two in five. Second, like doxasticism, but unlike conativism, partial doxasticism locates an essential doxastic component in intention, although understood this time in terms of partial—rather than of full—belief, which promises to help explain a wide array of phenomena, including those mentioned in section 1.

With this basic description of partial doxasticism in hand, we can now proceed to examine how the view addresses our target phenomenon, the cognitive framing of prior-success planning and coordination. A first thing to note is that supporters of partial doxasticism have unfortunately said very little about this. Setiya overlooks the issue, and Pears comments on it only in passing. Pears endorses the idea that intention-based planning works by way of an assumption of success: “intentions,” Pears avers, “put the agent and sometimes others in a position to act and plan on, and make inferences from the assumption that he will perform a particular action.” Pears says that it is natural to “suppose that in the agent’s mind the assumption is a belief.” But he also claims that this supposition “needs to be qualified” —presumably, in favor of a conceptualization of the cited “assumption” in terms of partial belief (1980, 235-36).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, although he does not elaborate on the details, Pears expresses optimism about the possibility of a partial doxasticist account of the target phenomenon. A second thing to note is that the remarks in the previous paragraph

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<sup>15</sup> For critical discussion, see Friedman (2013).

<sup>16</sup> This leads Pears to represent the theory that identifies intention with belief as unduly motivated by the need to account for the coordinating role of intention: “The theory,” he avers, “is an exaggerated tribute to the importance of this aspect of intending” (1980, 235-36).



appear to grant Pears's optimism. Indeed, they appear to support the conviction that such an account is in principle superior to competing accounts. It seems that, unlike doxasticism and conativism, partial doxasticism can explain why a relevant doxastic state is present in every instance of prior-success planning—where this includes cases in which one is agnostic about the success of one's prior intention;<sup>17</sup> and this appears to indicate that the view in question can in turn explain how every such instance of prior-success planning is cognitively framed.

Appearances notwithstanding, it is unclear whether, and if so how, partial doxasticism can provide such an account. A crucial question here is whether the doxastic element postulated by this view as being partly constitutive of intention—namely, credence in success—can cognitively frame prior-success planning. An initial observation is that it appears not to do this in the way characteristic of full belief. When one believes that one will  $\phi$ , one is necessarily disposed to plan to act on the premise that one will  $\phi$ . But when one has merely some credence that one will  $\phi$ , one need not be similarly disposed to plan on the premise that one will  $\phi$ . Return to my intention to visit NYC next weekend. Suppose that I have 0.4 credence that I will be in NYC next weekend. If I am rational, I will also have 0.6 credence that I will not be there then. Other things being equal, in such a case I will be more willing to plan my activities for the weekend on the premise that I will *not* be in NYC than on the premise that I will be there. For example, I will be more willing to plan to fix the garage door on the premise that I will be at home (and thus not in NYC) than to plan to have dinner with my friend in NYC on the premise that I will be there. However, we know that many times other things are not equal. I may have a relatively low credence in the success of my prior intention to visit NYC next weekend but assign a much higher value to the outcome facilitated by planning on its success (visiting an old friend in NYC) than to the outcome facilitated by planning on its failure (fixing the garage door at home). How one's credence in the execution of a prior intention shapes one's further planning will typically depend on other factors, such as how one evaluates relevant outcomes.

The foregoing remarks support the conclusion that partial doxasticism cannot as such—that is, in virtue of what it postulates as being constitutive of intention alone—explain how intention-based planning is cognitively framed. Nevertheless, such remarks also suggest that the view might be able to provide such an explanation if properly supplemented. The suggestion, in particular, is to supplement it with elements from which to construct a decision-theoretic account of the role that credence can play in framing such planning.

We may seek to construct such an account in two main steps. A first step is to call attention to a simple decision-theoretic account of justified planning. This says that one is justified in planning on the premise that  $p$  if the expected value of one's so planning is sufficiently high, where this is a function of

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<sup>17</sup> Though, see Davidson (1985, 211-15) and section 4 below.

one's relevant credences and evaluations, including one's credence that  $p$  and evaluation of the outcome facilitated by planning on  $p$ . Thus, on this account, I may be justified in planning to meet my friend in NYC on Saturday on the premise that I will be there that day, even if my credence that I will be there as a result of my intention (to visit NYC) is low, so long as the value I assign to meeting my friend there is sufficiently high. A second step is to move from such a *normative* account of planning on  $p$  to a *psychological* account of it. Standard decision theory tells us what combinations of relevant credences and evaluations justify one in planning on the premise that  $p$ . But our main task here is to identify the psychological roles that the cited credences and evaluations play and, in particular, the role that one's credence that  $p$  plays, if any, in cognitively framing one's planning on  $p$ . To move in the direction of the sought account, we may solicit contribution from two further premises. One of them expresses a form of internalism: it states that when one has the cited set of credences and evaluations that justifies one in planning on  $p$ , one is disposed to plan on  $p$ . The other expresses a substantive view about the idea of planning on what one takes as fixed in one's reasoning: it says that to plan on  $p$  is to plan on a relevant full—rather than partial—cognitive attitude that  $p$  (Cf. Velleman 2000, 255-77, Wright 2004, 178–83). Putting the pieces together, we arrive at the following account: when one is justified in planning to act on the premise that  $p$ , one has a relevant set of credences and evaluations that induces the formation of a full cognitive attitude that  $p$ , and it is on the basis of this latter attitude—rather than one's partial belief that  $p$ —that one plans to so act.

I think this account offers valuable insights. Among other things, it tells us that it is a full cognitive attitude that is responsible for the framing of prior-success planning and that such an attitude can be justified on the basis of both practical and epistemic considerations. However, I also think that the account faces several problems. These are of two sorts, internal and external. The former are problems for the account itself, independently of its connection to partial doxasticism and the issue of planning on, specifically, a prior intention. A problem of this former sort is that the account is incomplete in two respects. First, although the account specifies what it is to plan on the premise that  $p$  for cases in which such planning is justified, it is silent about what such planning amounts to in cases in which it is not justified. Second, and more importantly, the account fails to identify the full cognitive attitude that plays the cited framing role in cases of justified planning.<sup>18</sup> Given what was said above, it is implausible to suggest that such an attitude can in general be full belief.

The latter are problems for the suggestion that the partial doxasticist adopt such an account as their own account of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning.<sup>19</sup> A first problem here is that, on this account, the process of cognitive framing is effected by an attitude other than the one that partial

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<sup>18</sup> Nor does it identify, for that matter, what that attitude is in cases in which the cited planning is not justified.

<sup>19</sup> These are problems for all versions of partial doxasticism, independently of where the credence threshold for intention is set. Thanks to two anonymous reviewers for prompting me to clarify this.

doxasticism regards as partly constitutive of intention. It is effected by a full cognitive attitude, rather than by partial belief. This naturally raises a question about the explanatory significance of the intention-credence thesis, a question to which I return below. A second problem regards the abovementioned observation that such a full cognitive attitude is seen to be supported by both practical and epistemic considerations. It follows from this observation that, on the proposed account, the attitude responsible for framing intention-based planning will not have the normative profile often attributed to belief, that is, the profile of a cognitive attitude that can be supported solely by epistemic considerations. Therefore, if partial doxasticism were to be supplemented in the suggested way, it would not yield a purely doxasticist account of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning. This is a consequence, I think, that partial doxasticists like Setiya might not be happy to accept.

A third problem has to do with whether the account can give a satisfactory answer to the problem of presence, introduced in section 2. The question here is whether the attitudes that figure as premises and conclusion of the resulting decision-theoretic account—namely, relevant credences, evaluative judgments, and flat-out cognitive attitude—are guaranteed to be present in every case of prior-success planning. Partial doxasticism secures the presence of one of the attitudes that figure as premises, namely, credence in success. But it does not secure the presence of the remaining attitudes. Consider, for example, one’s judgment about the value of planning to act on the premise that one’s prior intention will be successfully executed. What does guarantee that one would have such an attitude in the context of intention-based planning?<sup>20</sup> A possible answer invokes the idea that in intending to act in a certain way one makes a judgment as to the value or desirability of one’s so acting, that is, it invokes the idea that one intends to act “under the guise of the good.” A difficulty with this answer, however, is that the idea it invokes is controversial and need not be endorsed by supporters of partial doxasticism—in fact, it is strongly criticized by them (Pears 1980, Setiya 2007). From a broader perspective, the worry is that the account on offer is too psychologically demanding. The cognitive attitude responsible for framing intention-based planning is, on the account, a consequence of a relatively large set of credences and evaluations. But it is implausible to hold that each of the attitudes in that set will be present in every instance of intention-based planning. Finally, some partial doxasticists might themselves highlight that on the present account the attitude that does the cognitive work is formed as a result of an inference and worry that this inference might never be drawn. For, they might argue, it is always possible for the premises to be present and for one to fail to see the connections between them.<sup>21</sup> In sum, the preceding considerations raise doubts about the possibility of securing the presence, in every case

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, other attitudes figure in the account as well, such as the set of credences and evaluations concerning alternative options—i.e., the alternatives to planning on the success of one’s prior intention—and there is a question as to what secures their presence in that context, too.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Setiya (2008, 394-95).

of intention-based planning, of all the attitudes that figure, as premises or as a conclusion, in the cited decision-theoretic account.

The latter represents one natural way in which a partial doxasticist account of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning might be developed. There might be others. Nevertheless, what is most important here is that, as anticipated earlier, a partial doxasticist account will not and cannot come from what is constitutive of intention alone. If such an account is possible at all, it will have to come partly from elements which are external to the intention itself, as its internal doxastic element is as such unable to do the requisite cognitive work. Here we find an important contrast with doxasticism. While the doxastic element doxasticism postulates as partly constitutive of intending –namely, belief in success—is able to cognitively frame prior-success planning, the one postulated by partial doxasticism –namely, credence in success—is plainly not. This, it is fair to conclude, evinces a clear explanatory weakness of the latter view.

The partial doxasticist might respond, however, that this conclusion misses the mark. They might contend that the just mentioned contrast concerns an issue of explanatory *sufficiency*, whereas any plausible account of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning they may provide will sensibly rest on a claim about the explanatory *necessity* of the intention-credence thesis. Their claim, they might insist, is that such a thesis is a necessary part of the best explanation of that phenomenon. Furthermore, the partial doxasticist might argue that this explanatory strategy is analogous to a strategy they have themselves employed to elucidate the doxastic dimension of *other* intention-related phenomena. An illustration is provided by Setiya's explanation of agential knowledge (2008, 2009), which appeals not only to the doxastic element constitutive of intention but also to elements external to the intention itself, such as knowledge how to perform the intended action.

To my mind, the foregoing would not be a persuasive response to the charge of explanatory weakness. First, the point remains that the intention-credence thesis is insufficient to explain the cognitive framing of intention-based planning and that this marks a limitation of the view –however significant we may consider it to be. Second, the abovementioned claim that the intention-credence thesis is a necessary part of such an explanation is controversial, if not false. A preliminary observation here is that the analogy offered in its support carries little to no weight at all. Once again, the comparison with doxasticism helps to see why. It is plain that the doxasticist agrees with the partial doxasticist that the explanation of agential knowledge cannot come from what is constitutive of intention alone. Clearly, knowledge (of intentional action) requires more than mere belief or credence (in the forthcoming action). However, in the eyes of the doxasticist a fundamental disanalogy still exists: what is constitutive of intention, while insufficient to explain knowledge of intentional action, is nonetheless sufficient to explain the cognitive framing of prior-success planning. Two implications follow. One is that the question of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning is a more direct and independent test of the explanatory power of a thesis about the

doxastic component of intention than the question of knowledge of intentional action is. Another is that the offered analogy does nothing to undermine the natural conviction that the issue of the explanatory power of the intention-credence thesis regarding the former question is an issue about both its explanatory necessity and its explanatory sufficiency.

With that preliminary observation out of the way, we can now examine the claim of explanatory necessity directly. This claim is in tension with two plausible ideas mentioned above, namely, first, the idea that they are flat-out cognitive attitudes –and, presumably, only such attitudes—that play the role of cognitive fixed points on the basis of which one may deliberate, plan, and act; and, second, the associated, and more specific, idea that it is a relevant flat-out, rather than partial, cognitive attitude that is responsible –indeed, *solely* responsible—for the framing of prior-success planning. Admittedly, these ideas do not conclusively establish that the necessity claim is false. But they at least support the presumption that it is, and thus shift the burden of proof. They exert pressure on the partial doxasticist who subscribes to that claim to explicate how credence in success is supposed to make an essential contribution to the cognitive framing of prior-success planning. Certainly, here it will not do to say that such credence is a necessary part of a set of conditions that give rise to an attitude responsible for playing that role. It will not do to say this, even if correct. For to say this is only to say that the former attitude is a causal antecedent of the latter, framing attitude, not to explain how the former attitude necessarily contributes to the performance of that role. Lastly, even if it were shown that credence in success does necessarily contribute to that role, there would still be a question as to the significance of that contribution.

I think that, taken together, the previous remarks support skepticism about the role that credence in success can play in cognitively framing prior-success planning and coordination.<sup>22</sup> This invites two comments. The first concerns a comparison between partial and full doxasticism. We have seen that the explanatory ambitions and credentials of the intention-credence thesis regarding the framing of prior-success planning are weak by comparison to those commonly attributed to the intention-belief thesis. Since a view is defined partly by the range of phenomena it can explain, the just mentioned asymmetry in apparent explanatory power supports the conclusion that partial and full doxasticism are, in fact, quite different views, and thus challenges the prevailing presumption that the former view is only a minor variation of the latter (Pears 1985, Setiya 2008). I say more about this in section 4. The second comment looks ahead. We

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<sup>22</sup> The partial doxasticist might seek to evade criticism by suggesting that intentions involving partial –rather than full—belief play only an attenuated role in facilitating coordination. (See, Holton [2008, 52] for a related suggestion on behalf of conativism.) They might claim, for example, that in such cases intention facilitates conditional –rather than ordinary prior-success—planning. The phenomenon of conditional planning is complex and deserves separate treatment. Suffice it to say here, however, that the cited suggestion and claim undermine an argument to the explanatory superiority of partial doxasticism over conativism, as the former view appears to be in no better position to account for conditional planning than the latter is (Cf. Bratman 1987, 38-40, Ludwig 2015, Alonso 2020). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to consider a response along such lines.

noted earlier that the move from full to partial doxasticism can be conceived of an effort to sidestep the counterexamples to the former view while preserving its putative explanatory power. However, we just saw that such a move in fact weakens the ability of the resulting view to explain prior-success planning. Although I lack the space to defend this here, I submit that a more promising way to meet those explanatory demands, concerning such counterexamples and form of coordination, is instead to endorse conativism and supplement it with a non-doxastic, reliance-based account of prior-success planning of the sort gestured at in section 2.

#### 4. Is Partial Doxasticism a Variant of Doxasticism After All?

Partial and full doxasticism differ not only in their apparent explanatory power. They do so also in their contents and implications. Consider Pears's partial doxasticism. Suppose, in consonance with this view, that one intends to  $\phi$  and has 0.3 credence that one will  $\phi$ . Provided that one adjusts one's credences in light of the axioms of probability, in that context one will also have a 0.7 credence that one will not  $\phi$ . A credence of 0.7 can meet the descriptive and normative threshold for full belief. Therefore, it follows from Pears's partial doxasticism that one may intend to  $\phi$  and (rationally) believe that one will *not*  $\phi$ . Evidently, this consequence is fundamentally at odds with doxasticism. A sharp contrast can also be observed when we compare doxasticism with strong or moderate versions of partial doxasticism. According to the latter views, one may intend to  $\phi$  and have middling credence (of, say, 0.55) that one will  $\phi$ . Clearly, middling credence in success does not warrant belief in failure. But it does not add up to belief in success, either. The claim that intention involves middling credence in success is still miles apart from doxasticism, as this latter view was formulated in section 1; and it is even further apart from an alternative, yet traditional, formulation of that view, championed by Paul Grice, according to which in intending to act in some way one is "sure" (or "free from doubt") that one will so act (1971, 266).<sup>23</sup>

It is partly awareness of the contrast between mere credence –i.e., credence that falls short of belief—on the one hand, and belief or Gricean "assurance," on the other, and also of the fact that different consequences follow from connecting intention to such diverse doxastic states, that leads Davidson in later work (1985) to conceive of his own conativist view of intention as being in fundamental agreement with the partial doxasticism of Pears, but in sharp disagreement with doxasticist views –including views that identify intention with belief and those that conceive of it as partly constituted by belief or assurance (1985, 212-13; cf. 1978, 99-100). Davidson maintains, with Pears, that whenever one intends to act in some way

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hampshire and Hart (1958). A similar point is made by Davidson, who sees Gricean "assurance" as amounting to credence near 1 (1985, 213). (More on Davidson's approach to these matters below.) The cited two formulations of doxasticism can be integrated into a single thesis, namely, that intention involves belief or Gricean "assurance." Grice's notion of assurance should be distinguished from the notion of assurance commonly associated with promising (Cf. Scanlon 1998).

one has non-zero credence that one will so act. But he also holds, against Pears, that such credence is not partly constitutive of the intention, but rather a condition of possibility for it. Intention is, in Davidson's view, an entirely conative phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> Still, why does Davidson conceive of his agreement with Pears as central and of their disagreement as only secondary? Davidson thinks that we can distinguish between views about the connection between intention and doxastic attitudes by observing how they answer two main questions. One is the question of whether there is a "logical connection between the concepts of intention and belief" (212), where this is understood by Davidson as the question of whether "the existence of the intention entails the existence of ... belief" (213), and where by "belief" Davidson means, more broadly, a doxastic attitude. The other is the question of (what we may call) the epistemic robustness of such a doxastic attitude, that is, whether it is full belief or assurance, rather than, say, low credence. For Davidson, the question of whether the doxastic attitude in question is partly constitutive of the intention is at best peripheral for such purposes. Davidson's basic thought, then, is that a core difference between views that establish a necessary connection between intention and some doxastic attitude lies in how they conceive of such a doxastic attitude, rather than in whether they regard such an attitude as partly constitutive of the intention or not. That is why Davidson regards his own view as being in fundamental agreement with Pears's view but in serious disagreement with doxasticism.

I believe that Davidson is right in stressing the importance, for identifying and distinguishing between views that posit a necessary connection between intention and a relevant doxastic attitude, of the question of the epistemic robustness of the latter attitude. But I also believe that Davidson is wrong in disregarding the importance of the question of constitution regarding that issue. How such views answer this latter question determines what kind of creature they take intention to be and, in particular, whether they take it to be an entirely conative attitude. In a way, we may think of Pears and Setiya as making a somewhat opposite mistake. The authors lucidly appreciate the relevance of the question of whether intention is partly constituted by a doxastic attitude. But in rushing to portray their partial doxasticist views as minor variations on doxasticism, they lose sight of important differences between mere credence and belief, and also of their implications for a theory of intention.

## 5. Partial Doxasticism and Norms of Rationality

It is often held that intentions are subject to certain norms of structural rationality such as, roughly, the requirement to avoid intending an end one believes one will not attain (intention-belief consistency) and the requirement to intend the believed necessary means to one's intended end (means-end coherence). Supporters of doxasticism (Harman 1976, Velleman 2007, Setiya 2007b) have proposed that we understand

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<sup>24</sup> Davidson famously likens intention to an evaluative judgment as to the desirability of acting in a certain way (1978), but ultimately identifies the latter with a disposition to act (1985, 211).

such norms of intention rationality in terms of corresponding norms of rationality for belief (deductive consistency and deductive closure). Since intention is partly constituted by belief, it is argued, we can associate any set of intentions and beliefs engaging the cited norms of intention rationality with a counterpart set of beliefs, and then evaluate the beliefs in the latter set in terms of the corresponding norms of belief rationality. Moreover, since the latter norms appear to be grounded on epistemic (or “theoretical”) considerations, it follows on this proposal that the cited norms of intention are in fact norms of theoretical—rather than norms of distinctively practical—rationality. The result is thus an account of the binding force and grounds of the norms of rationality for intention as deriving from those of the norms of rationality for belief. Let us call this, “Doxasticism about Practical Rationality” (DPR).<sup>25</sup>

There is much controversy about the explanatory adequacy of such an account.<sup>26</sup> But that is not our concern here. What matters is what the comparison with this account can tell us about the explanatory power of partial doxasticism regarding such norms and about how a partial doxasticist account of such norms might differ from DPR.<sup>27</sup> Consider the norm of intention-belief consistency. Suppose that one intends to  $\phi$  and independently believes that one will not  $\phi$ . DPR tells us that one is irrational in holding such a combination of attitudes. The irrationality lies in that in intending to  $\phi$  one believes that one will  $\phi$  and in that—as deductive consistency indicates—it is irrational for one to both believe that one will  $\phi$  and believe that one will not  $\phi$ . Unfortunately, the partial doxasticist cannot similarly appeal to DPR to explain why holding the cited combination of attitudes is criticizably irrational, for the latter account assumes the truth of the intention-belief thesis and this is something that they explicitly reject. Similar issues arise regarding the norm of means-end coherence. So, how might the partial doxasticist account for such norms?

The answer depends partly on how the partial doxasticist sees the normative relation between belief and credence. Those who think that rational belief reduces to credence above a fixed threshold will be naturally inclined to deny that intention-belief consistency and means-end coherence have as such any binding force. They will likely contend, as hinted at in section 4, that combinations of attitudes that violate such norms need not be irrational after all.<sup>28</sup> Some of them might seek to substitute such belief-involving norms with credence-involving norms of intention rationality and thus, in a way that parallels DPR, to account for the latter norms in terms of norms of probabilistic coherence for credences.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, it

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<sup>25</sup> The account is also commonly known in the literature as “cognitivism about practical rationality” (Bratman 2009, Brunero 2014; Cf. Setiya 2007b).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> To my knowledge, supporters of the latter view have not offered an account of such norms, though see note 29 below.

<sup>28</sup> For discussion of related issues, see Núñez (2020).

<sup>29</sup> Setiya argues in earlier work that the normativity of means-end coherence (what he calls the “instrumental principle”) “flows from the epistemic requirements on the beliefs that figure in our intentions,” namely, from the normativity of the norm of deductive closure (2007b, 650-51). However, this argumentative strategy seems no longer available to the author, who soon thereafter comes to endorse a form of partial doxasticism about intention (2008,



is important to note that the adoption of this latter strategy by the partial doxasticist would raise a new concern about the doxasticist status of their view. The concern is that the essence and grounds of the resulting partial doxasticist account of the norms of intention rationality might differ dramatically from those of the doxasticist account (DPR), for it is a highly contested issue whether credence norms can be vindicated solely on the basis of epistemic considerations.<sup>30</sup> Alternatively, the partial doxasticist might endorse a nonreductive view of the relation between rational belief and credence. However, it is unclear what account of the norms of intention rationality such a partial doxasticist would provide. They might or might not regard such norms as binding. In either case, their accounts would raise a concern analogous to the one mentioned above. Since many nonreductive views embrace the idea that rational belief is determined partly by practical considerations such as context or stakes,<sup>31</sup> the concern is that the accounts of the norms of intention rationality that such partial doxasticists might provide would likely rest not only on epistemic grounds but also on practical grounds, thus standing in sharp contrast with DPR.

Certainly, the matters touched upon by the preceding remarks are intricate and merit more detailed treatment. What should be clear, however, is that, at least in relation to the question of the status and grounds of norms of intention rationality, as well as to the question of the cognitive framing of prior-success planning and coordination, the partial doxasticist cannot simply get a hold of all the key conceptual resources that the doxasticist has at their disposal. Further or alternative explanations are required. The move from full to partial doxasticism, we have seen, is not costless.

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2009). (See also note 17 and accompanying text above.) Interestingly, in that earlier work Setiya entertains the possibility that the normativity of the “instrumental principle” be understood instead in terms of the normativity of “a principle of probabilistic coherence for degrees of belief” and suggests that “[t]he result would be a theory of greater generality” than one that appealed solely to the norm of deductive closure for belief (2007b, 666). In support of this suggestion, Setiya mentions David Christensen’s strategy (2004), regarding the norms of theoretical reasoning, of “replacing” the norm of deductive closure for belief with a corresponding norm of probabilistic coherence for credences (2007b, 666, n. 43). I think, however, that Setiya’s suggestion oversimplifies matters, as it neglects some important implications of the possibility it entertains. One of the main points Christensen stresses in the cited work is that deductive closure and probabilistic coherence are, in principle, different norms that demand different things from different doxastic attitudes (See, e.g., [2004, 32]). Accordingly, it is plausible that an interpretation of means-end coherence in terms of the former theoretical norm will contrast sharply from an interpretation of it in terms of the latter theoretical norm and, consequently, that the former interpretation will sometimes yield verdicts as to how our intentions should be formed and revised that are in frank opposition to those yielded by the latter.

<sup>30</sup> For overview of the recent discussion, see Vineberg (2016) and Pettigrew (2019).

<sup>31</sup> An influential version of this view establishes that rational belief is credence above a contextually determined threshold (Fantl and McGrath 2010). For further references, see Jackson (2020).

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