On Not Getting Out of Bed

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ABSTRACT: This morning I intended to get out of bed when my alarm went off. Hearing my alarm, I formed the intention to get up now. Yet, for a time, I remained in bed, irrationally lazy. It seems I irrationally failed to execute my intention. Such cases of execution failure (as I call it) pose a challenge for Mentalists about rationality, who believe that facts about rationality supervene on facts about the mind. For, this morning, my mind was in order; it was my (in)action that apparently made me irrational. What, then, should Mentalists say about the phenomenon of execution failure? The phenomenon of execution failure, and the puzzle it raises for Mentalists, have rarely been discussed. This paper addresses the puzzle in two parts. First, it argues (against John Broome) that execution failure is a real phenomenon. It is possible for agents to irrationally fail to act on their present-directed intentions. It follows that Mentalists in the philosophy of action must solve the puzzle of explaining what is irrational about cases of execution failure. Second, this paper begins the search for such a solution. It considers six possible resolutions to the puzzle, arguing that none is obviously the most attractive. These resolutions include a requirement of overall conative consistency, an appeal to the norm of intention consistency, a form of Volitionalism, an appeal to factive mental states, and a proposal due to Garrett Cullity, and a novel requirement of proper functioning.

Introduction

Waking up late, you decide to get up immediately, thereby forming an intention to get out of bed now. But you are lazy, and you lie in bed for a little while before getting up. You do not change your mind and decide to sleep in. Rather, maintaining your intention to get up now, you fail to get up. You do not do what you intend to do.

How should we understand your irrational dawdling in bed? You had the ability to get up: you were not paralyzed or tied down. Your intention was not irrationally unstable: at every instant in the lazy interval you intended to get up now. Due to your intention, you were not akratic: you intended to do what you believed you ought to do, namely get up now. Nor were you

instrumentally irrational: you believed getting up was a basic action, so there was no believed

necessary means you failed to intend. And your intentions were not irrationally inconsistent: you

did not intend to stay in bed, but rather merely desired to do so. Your failure appears to have

been one of execution, not intention. You were irrational because you failed to do what you

intended to do.

For some philosophers, the story can stop there. Aristotelians, for example, believe

practical reasoning concludes in action, so they see failure to act as a failure of reason. But many

philosophers disagree. Mentalists about rationality believe that facts about rationality supervene

on facts about the mind.[1] Whether you get out of bed is a fact about (the rest of) your body, not

your mind. So Mentalists must deny that your failure to get out of bed *per se* impugns your

rationality.

This form of irrationality, which I call execution failure, thus raises a puzzle for

Mentalists. The puzzle is to locate the source of your irrationality. The puzzle is challenging

because you appear to satisfy a wide range of familiar requirements of rationality: you are not

unstable, akratic, instrumentally irrational, or inconsistent. Where, then, do you go wrong?

Execution failure, and the puzzle it raises for Mentalists, have garnered little sustained

attention from philosophers of action.[2] The goal of this paper is to provide a detailed study of

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[1] The name Mentalism comes from (Conee and Feldman 2001). It has been endorsed in the context of action theory by (Wedgwood 2017, chap. 7; Broome 2013, 89). I discuss Mentalism further in section 7 below.

[2] Not getting out of bed was famously discussed by William James, in (James 1950, 524–25). More recent discussions have treated it as a form of weakness of will, and have assumed that it is irrational without seeking an explanation of its irrationality. See (Frankfurt 1971, 8; Davidson 1980a, 23–24; Rorty 1980, 343ff; Dodd 2009; Holton 2009, chap. 4; Ruben 2016; Mele 1987, chap. 3). Miranda del Corral and Garrett Cullity have both stated requirements of rationality intended to capture the distinctive irrationality of execution failure, in (Del Corral 2013; Del Corral 2015; Cullity 2008; Cullity 2016). I discuss del Corral's proposals briefly in sections 1 and 4, and I discuss Cullity's proposal at length in section 6. Neither foregrounds the puzzle that execution failure raises for Mentalism. Edward Hinchman has attempted to give a unified treatment of the irrationality involved in akrasia and in execution failure, in (Hinchman 2009). Hinchman appeals to ideas about the nature of rationality, normative judgment, and intention that are substantially different from those I presuppose here, so a comparison of his approach to the options I consider is beyond the scope of this paper. Ralph Wedgwood hints at, but does not discuss in depth, the puzzle execution failure raises for Mentalists in (Wedgwood 2017, chap. 7). Finally, a number of

execution failure, focusing on the question of how Mentalists might resolve the puzzle. Section 1 characterizes execution failure and distinguishes it from other forms of irrationality. Section 2 defends the idea that execution failure is genuinely possible against a pair of arguments for its impossibility, one due to John Broome. Sections 3-8 consider six ways Mentalists might explain execution failure's irrationality. I argue that none of them straightforwardly provides an appealing solution, and I explain what outstanding work each proposal would need to undertake in order to be made workable. The conclusion of the paper is that the puzzle of execution failure remains outstanding, and resolving it in a Mentalistically-friendly way will require substantial action-theoretic work.

1. What Is Execution Failure?

1.1 Characterizing Execution Failure

Begin by considering more closely the case with which I began:

Not Getting Out of Bed   You form the intention to get out of bed right now. Maintaining that intention over a span of time, you stay in bed. Eventually, you execute the intention and get out of bed.

In each moment, t, in the interval between forming the intention and executing it, you satisfy the following (for the relevant value of ϕ):

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philosophers have claimed that execution failure is impossible. I discuss John Broome's powerful argument for that view in section 2; that argument is given in (Broome 2013, 151–52; Broome 2008; Broome 2015). This view has also been held by John Bishop (Bishop 1989, 117–20) and Brian O'Shaughnessy (O'Shaughnessy 2008, vol. 2, chaps. 18–19).

(i)   You intend to φ now.[3]

(ii)   You believe that you intend to φ now.

(iii)   You don't φ.

Conditions (i) and (ii) distinguish your irrationality from two more familiar phenomena. Procrastinators (of one important type) fail to satisfy (i), only intending to φ at some moment (or other) during an interval.[4] The absent minded fail to satisfy (ii), losing track of their intentions before the time comes to act.[5]

Paralysis patients uncertain of their diagnoses satisfy (i)-(iii).[6] Those patients intend to move their affected limbs but fail to do so, thus confirming their paralysis. But you are unlike a paralysis patient in two ways. First:

(iv)   You are able to φ.[7]

You are neither paralyzed nor tied down, nor in any other way prevented from φ-ing.

Second, unlike a paralysis patient, you are rationally criticizable for failing to φ:

(v)   You are pro tanto irrational (seemingly in virtue of satisfying (i)-(iv)).[8]

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[3] That is, you have a present-directed intention. If we regiment intention contents so they are of the form "to φ in C," we can define a present-directed intention as an intention in which C makes reference to the temporal indexical "now." For a compatible but different theory of present-directed intentions, compare (Mele 1992b, chap. 4,10). I do not assume all actions involve present-directed intention. Nor do I assume action can be analyzed in terms of intention; my argument is compatible with the idea that action is prime, in Williamson's sense. See, e.g., (Rödl 2007, 44–45; O'Brien 2017; Williamson 2017; O'Brien 2010, chap. 8).

[4] Neither Broome nor Cullity clearly distinguishes execution failure from this kind of procrastination; see (Broome 2013, 151; Cullity 2008, 70–71).

[5] As in (Bratman 1987, 37–39).

[6] Compare (James 1950, 503) and (McCann 1975).

[7] I consider the question of the relevant sense of "ability" in section 2.1.

You face rational pressure either to execute your intention, thereby getting out of bed, or to give it up, thereby embracing your laziness.[9]

I call cases that satisfy (i)-(iv) cases of execution failure, and cases that satisfy (i)-(v) cases of irrational execution failure.[10] I call the agents in such cases execution failers.

I do not have an argument for the claim that execution failure is (at least sometimes) irrational. That seems to me to be obvious.[11] The psychological incoherence involved in execution failure is of a piece with the incoherence involved in other familiar forms of irrationality. The psychological pressure execution failers face (to get up or revise their intentions) resembles the pressures agents face to satisfy other requirements of rationality. And the kind of criticism execution failers appear to warrant in virtue of their incoherence intuitively resembles other criticisms of rationality.

Below I will assume that you are irrational in at least some cases of execution failure.[12] The question I will ask concerns how to diagnose your irrationality: which requirement of rationality do you violate?

1.2 Execution Failure Raises a Puzzle for Mentalists

If, intuitively, satisfying conditions (i)-(iv) is irrational, then perhaps rationality requires simply that we not jointly satisfy those conditions:

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[8] By "pro tanto irrational" I mean that you are less than ideally rational.

[9] Though if you stay in bed you may thereby become irrational in some other way.

[10] My usage of "execution failure" differs from that of Gideon Yaffe, who uses it to refer to misfires (as when I miss an easy putt I could have sunk) and intention instability. See (Yaffe 2010, 94–95).

[11] Here I am in agreement with such diverse authors as (Davidson 1980a, 23–24; Rorty 1980, 343ff; Dodd 2009; Holton 2009, chap. 4; Del Corral 2013; Wedgwood 2017, chap. 7; Hinchman 2009; Ruben 2016; Mele 1992b, chap. 3).

[12] Below I will consider some additional conditions one might have to meet in order to count as irrational.

Neo-Aristotelianism   The following is pro tanto irrational: jointly satisfying conditions

(i)-(iv).[13]

I call this principle Neo-Aristotelianism because of its appeal for those who accept the broadly Aristotelian idea that practical reasoning concludes in action.[14] On that view, failing to execute an intention is irrational because it involves a defect of reasoning.[15]

Many philosophers, however, cannot accept Neo-Aristotelianism. Mentalists believe that whether an agent is rational is a matter of what her mind is like. Earl Conee and Richard Feldman formulate this idea as follows:

Mentalism   Facts about whether an agent is rational at t strongly supervene on

facts about her mind.[16]

Mentalistically-acceptable requirements of rationality thus make reference only to facts about an agent's mind. But for many interesting values of ϕ, whether you ϕ is not a fact about your mind, and neither is whether you are able to ϕ at t. So Mentalists cannot accept Neo-Aristotelianism.[17]

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[13] Neo-Aristotelianism resembles Miranda del Corral's principle, "Resolve," in (Del Corral 2013, 582). In later work, del Corral retracts that principle on the grounds that it violates Mentalism. She revises Resolve in (Del Corral 2015), and I discuss that principle in section 5.

[14] These Aristotelians include (Thompson 2008; Boyle and Lavin 2010; Tenenbaum 2007). For criticisms of this idea, see, e.g., (Paul 2013). Neo-Aristotelianism may also be attractive to epistemological externalists who see a strong analogy between action and knowledge; compare (Williamson 2000; Williamson, 2017).

[15] Though telling this story may not be straightforward. Plausibly, not all failures to draw a conclusion warranted by the norms of reasoning involve irrationality. See (Broome 2013, chap. 13).

[16] See, e.g., (Conee and Feldman 2001). Compare also (Broome 2013, 89).

[17] I revisit the conflict between Mentalism and Neo-Aristotelianism in section 7 below.

1.3 There Is No Easy Answer for Mentalists

Diagnosing the irrationality of execution failure would be easy if execution failers inevitably violated some familiar, Mentalistically-acceptable requirement of rationality. But reflection on four widely-accepted requirements of rationality suggests they do not.

Requirements of intention stability enjoin that we not abandon our intentions over-readily. Giving up an intention because of temptation (rather than a change in one's reasons) is irrational.[18] But execution failers do not have irrationally unstable intentions. You stably maintain your intention to get out of bed over a period of time, until you finally get up.

John Broome's enkrasia requirement enjoins alignment between our normative judgments and intentions, so that (for example) we not fail to intend to do what we believe we ought to do.[19] But execution failers need not be akratic in this sense. You believe that you ought to get out of bed now, so your intentions and normative judgments are aligned.

Instrumental rationality enjoins that we not fail to intend to take the believed necessary means to our intended ends.[20] Intending an end but failing to intend what you believe to be the necessary means is irrational. Some execution failers may violate this requirement. But execution failers who intend what they believe to be basic actions satisfy this requirement.[21] You believe that getting out of bed is a basic action, for which there are no necessary means. So you fall outside instrumentally rationality's ambit.[22]

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[18] Compare (Holton 2009, chap. 4; Bratman 1987, chaps. 3–4; Broome 2013, chap. 10).

[19] Compare (Broome 2013, sec. 9.5)

[20] Compare (Korsgaard 2008b; Setiya 2007a; Bratman 2009a; Broome 2013, sec. 9.4; Cullity 2008).

[21] As in, e.g., (Danto 1965). For skepticism about basic actions, see, e.g., (Lavin 2013). My point requires not that there are any basic actions, but that some agents believe that there are basic actions—or, more specifically, that there are some action types that one can only perform as basic actions.

[22] I revisit this assumption in section 5.

The requirement of intention consistency enjoins that we not intend ends we believe to be incompatible.[23] But execution failers need not have inconsistent intentions.[24] You fail to get out of bed simply because of a desire to stay in bed, not an intention to do so. And conflicts between intentions and desires are not typically irrational.[25]

I have stated these requirements in a way that suggests controversial wide-scope, synchronic formulations. But moving to narrow-scope or diachronic formulations, when such formulations are available, does not help. Narrow-scope or diachronic requirements of rationality will either mention only facts about your mind, and thus fail to explain the irrationality of execution failure, or will require that you do what you intend to do, thus conflicting with Mentalism.[26]

There is thus no easy solution to the puzzle of execution failure. Perhaps the lesson of the puzzle is that Mentalism is untenable. But before swallowing that consequence, it is worth considering what Mentalists can say in their own defense.

2. Is Execution Failure Impossible?

An initial response to the puzzle might be to insist that no one ever jointly satisfies (i)-(iv). If you really intended to get out of bed, and were able to get out of bed, you would get out of bed. Your problem is self-deception or inability, not execution failure. Execution failure is impossible.

In general, I think psychological impossibility claims should not be accepted without argument. Moreover, there is phenomenological evidence against this claim: it seems to me that I

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[23] See (Bratman 2009c; Broome 2013, sec. 9.2).
[24] I revisit this assumption in section 4.
[25] I revisit this assumption in section 3.
[26] For arguments for narrow-scope requirements, see, e.g., (M. Schroeder 2004). On diachronic, "process-oriented" norms, see, e.g., (Podgorski 2013).

have jointly satisfied (i)-(iv) many times in the past. And a wide range of other philosophers agree with me that execution failure is, intuitively, possible.[27]

It would thus behoove Mentalists sympathetic to this strategy to have an argument showing that execution failure is impossible. Here, I consider two such arguments. According to the first argument, anyone who satisfies (i)-(iii) lacks the ability to get out of bed in the particular case.[28] According to the second argument, due to John Broome, anyone who satisfies (ii)-(iv) lacks an intention to get out of bed. I argue that both arguments face important problems. The first relies on an implausible principle about abilities. The second argument faces a pair of objections, and replying to them requires an implausible package of views. Because neither of these two arguments is obviously plausible, I suggest Mentalists have strong reasons to search for an explanation of why execution failure is irrational.

2.1 The Argument from Abilities

Could it be that cases of execution failure are not cases of irrationality, but rather cases of inability? If you fail to get out of bed, despite an intention to do so, then you were not able to do what you intended to do.

This approach is not supported by mainstream theories of abilities. Consider the necessary condition imposed by the simple conditional analysis of abilities:[29]

SCA Abilities   At t, A is able to ϕ only if: if (at t) A were to try to ϕ, A would ϕ.

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[27] See (Davidson 1980a, 23–24; Rorty 1980, 343ff; Dodd 2009; Holton 2009, chap. 4; Del Corral 2013; Wedgwood 2017, chap. 7; Hinchman 2009; Ruben 2016; Mele 1992b, chap. 3).
[28] Thanks to an anonymous referee for urging me to consider this argument.
[29] The full SCA is a biconditional. Compare (Ginet 1980), who states a version of SCA Abilities in terms of volitions, and another version in terms of basic bodily actions. I return to volitions in section 5.2.

You can satisfy SCA Abilities while also satisfying (i)-(iv). Perhaps if you were to try, you would get up.

It appears a theory of abilities that would support this argument must entail a principle as strong as the following:

SCA Abilities*   At t, A is able to ϕ only if: if (at t) A were to intend to ϕ, A would ϕ.

By satisfying (i) you satisfy the antecedent of the embedded conditional, so SCA Abilities* entails (i)-(iv) are inconsistent.

However, SCA Abilities* is subject to counterexample. Crucially, temporal gaps between present-directed intention and action are compatible with ability. It is possible for me, at t, to intend to do something, but to give up that intention without executing it, if new information arises. Yet, in such a case, it may be true that, at t, I was able to perform the action (and that I was in no way irrational). A driver might decide (and thus form a present-directed intention) to pull away from a stop sign now, but suddenly notice a dog in the road, and revise her intention before beginning to act. Such an agent was, intuitively, able to pull away from the stop sign, even though she failed to satisfy the revised version of SCA Abilities*.

I thus think any version of the simple conditional analysis of abilities that entails SCA Abilities* is implausible. And, indeed, neither the SCA nor other popular analyses of abilities entail SCA Abilities*[30] It thus seems that the prospects for showing that execution failure is impossible by reflecting on the nature of abilities are dim.

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[30] Modal accounts treat ability ascriptions as possibility modals, so that they are true if the agent performs the action at some accessible world (not at all). See (Kratzer 1977). Generic accounts analyze ability ascriptions in terms of the idea that the agent generally succeeds in her attempts, where this generalization admits counterexample. See (Maier Forthcoming).

2.2 Broome's Argument

John Broome argues that the nature of intention rules out the possibility of execution failure:

[A]n intention to get on the bus is a particular sort of disposition to do so. If you are disposed to do something, you do it unless something prevents you. So if you do not get on the bus, and nothing prevents you, you do not intend to.[31]

Here Broome asserts two premises, one about intentions and one about dispositions:

Intention Premise   If A intends to ϕ in C, then A is disposed to ϕ in response to the following stimulus: A believes C obtains, and A is able to ϕ.[32]

Dispositions Premise   If, at *t,* A is disposed to ϕ in response to stimulus S, then if A were to undergo stimulus S at *t*, A would ϕ.

Broome's Conclusion   If, at *t,* A intends to ϕ in C, then if at *t* A were to believe that C obtains and be able to ϕ, A would ϕ.

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[31] (Broome 2013, 151-2). I believe Broome initially presented this argument in response to a proposal of Garrett Cullity's, in (Broome 2008); see also (Broome 2015, 203–4). I discuss Cullity's proposal in section 6 below. Other denials of the possibility of execution failure can be found in (O'Shaughnessy 2008, vol. 2, chaps. 18–19; Bishop 1989, 117–20).

[32] Here I use the notion of ability to interpret Broome's talk of "nothing preventing you."

Broome's Conclusion entails that no one can simultaneously satisfy (i)-(iv). Failing to φ proves you did not really intend to φ.[33]

This argument faces several hurdles. I argue below that rendering the premises consistent requires accepting an implausible package of commitments. Moreover, since Dispositions Premise is one direction of the familiar subjunctive conditional analysis of dispositions (SCA Dispositions), it faces some standard objections to that theory.[34]

2.3 Are Broome's Premises Consistent?

The first problem with Broome's Argument is that there is a deep tension between its two premises. The standard theoretical motivation for Intentions Premise is inconsistent with Dispositions Premise, and one prominent defender of SCA Dispositions explicitly rejects principles like the Intentions Thesis. I thus think few philosophers will be willing to accept both premises.

Principles such as Intentions Thesis comes are standardly motivated by reflection on distinction between conative or motivational mental states (such as desires and intentions) and cognitive or representational mental states (such as beliefs).[35] One way to draw this distinction is to appeal to dispositions:

Dispositional Theory of Motivation   A mental state type, T, counts as conative or motivational just in case, if A bears an attitude of type T toward φ-ing in C, A is disposed to φ in

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[33] This may go without saying, but here I assume that anyone who intends to φ now believes that "it is now" obtains.
[34] The full SCA Dispositions is a biconditional version of Dispositions Premise. On that principle, see, e.g., (Lewis 1997).
[35] Note that some philosophers deny that intentions are cognitive states; see, e.g., (Velleman 1989).

response to the following stimulus: A believes C obtains and A is able to ϕ.[36]

Intentions Thesis follows naturally from the Dispositional Theory of Motivation (DTM), and I conjecture most partisans of Intentions Thesis are sympathetic to it for that reason.

However, DTM is inconsistent with SCA Dispositions.[37] This argument begins with the observation that sometimes our conative attitudes come conflict:

Conflicting Desires   The following is possible: at *t,* A desires to ϕ in C, A desires to ψ in C, A believes C obtains, A is able to ϕ and able to ψ, and ϕ-ing and ψ-ing are incompatible.[38]

I might desire to order seltzer now and to order coffee now, though I can order only one.

Conflicting Desires, DTM, and SCA Dispositions are jointly inconsistent. DTM entails that I now instantiate two incompatible dispositions, and the stimulus conditions of each obtains. But SCA Dispositions entails that cannot happen.[39] So, DTM and SCA Dispositions entail conflicts of desire are impossible. That is implausible, so either DTM or SCA Dispositions must be rejected.

Strikingly, neither of the mainstream responses to this argument is attractive to the proponent of Broome's Argument. Randolph Clarke denies SCA Dispositions, thus saving the

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[36] This idea is associated with Michael Smith, as in (Smith 1994, chap. 4). DTA is one component of the so-called Humean Theory of Motivation. It is also one component of the influential idea that all propositional attitudes can be characterized dispositionally; compare, e.g., (Schwitzgebel 2002).

[37] This argument is due to (Clarke 2010). Compare also (Loar 1981, 7).

[38] By "ϕ-ing and ψ-ing are incompatible" I mean "it is not the case that (A will ϕ and A will ψ)."

[39] By SCA and DTM, if S obtained, A would ϕ, and if S obtained, A would ψ. By Conflicting Desires, S obtains. So, A will ϕ and A will ψ. But, by Conflicting Desires, it is not the case that A will ϕ and A will ψ.

idea that conative states ground dispositions to act, but requiring him to reject Dispositions Premise.[40] Sungho Choi, a defender of SCA Dispositions, denies DTM.[41] He argues that what an agent is disposed to do in a particular case is a function of her entire psychology, not any particular desire. This response is compatible with Broome's Argument, but leaves Intentions Thesis unmotivated and dubious.

A defender of Broome's Argument might thus deny DTM but find an alternative motivation for Intentions Thesis. On this view, intentions are unique among the conative states in grounding dispositions. One might argue that this is what distinguishes intentions from other kinds of conative states, and why they (but not desires) are "conduct-controlling," to use Bratman's influential terminology.[42]

This response is not appealing, however. It involves a substantial departure from how standard theories of intention conceive of the conduct-controlling character of intentions.[43] And, more importantly, this idea implausibly entails not only that execution failure is impossible, but also that some familiar cases of inconsistent intentions are impossible. Those are cases just like Conflicting Desires, but in which the agent intends each of the two incompatible actions. On the standard view, such cases are possible, though the agents in them are irrational. But, by reasoning parallel to that above, SCA Dispositions and Intentions Thesis entail that these cases are impossible.

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[40] See also (Schwitzgebel 2002; Wedgwood 2007).
[41] See (Choi 2013), drawing on (Rupert 2008).
[42] (Bratman 1987, 16).
[43] Bratman's theory, for example, emphasizes that intentions inhibit reopening deliberation. Note that Mele's influential theory of present-directed intentions explicitly makes room for execution failure; see (Mele 1992b, 72–74).

I thus conclude that there is a tension between Dispositions Premise and Intentions Thesis. There is logical space for a theory according to which both are true, but few philosophers of action will find such a theory congenial.

2.4 Is the Dispositions Premise Plausible?

Broome's Argument faces a second problem. The Dispositions Premise faces a standard objection to SCA Dispositions. In this section, I rehearse that objection and argue that neither of two prominent defenses of SCA Dispositions are attractive to proponents of Broome's Argument.

The standard objection to Dispositions Premise stems from cases of "finking" and "masking," in which it is intuitive to say that object has a disposition, even though the relevant subjunctive conditional is false.[44] In finking cases, an object has a disposition, but the world is arranged so that if the stimulus conditions for the disposition were to obtain, the object would lose the disposition. For example, a fragile glass may be disposed to break if dropped, even though its guardian angel would immediately render it non-fragile were it in fact dropped.[45] In masking cases, an object fails to manifest a disposition while in the stimulus condition for the disposition, yet (intuitively) retains the disposition.[46] Again, a fragile glass might fail to break when dropped onto a soft pillow, without losing its disposition to break when dropped. The pillow masks, but does not eliminate, the disposition. In both cases, the glass is disposed to break when dropped, but it is not true that, if it were dropped, it would break.

Importantly, it is natural to interpret cases of execution failure as cases of masked dispositions. Lying in bed, you intend to get out of bed now, and so are disposed to get out of

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[44] See e.g., (Johnston 1992; Bird 1998; Manley and Wasserman 2008; Clarke 2008; Martin 1994).
[45] Compare (Johnston 1992, 232)
[46] Maskers are also called "antidotes." For a rigorous definition of masking, see (Choi 2011, 1168).

bed now. But that disposition is masked by your strong desire to stay in bed. You have the disposition even though the relevant subjunctive conditional is false.

Philosophers who believe that cases of finking and masking show that the Simple Conditional Analysis of dispositions is false can stop here. On their view, execution failure is a member of a familiar class of counterexamples to Dispositions Premise.

Philosophers sympathetic to SCA Dispositions may wonder if familiar replies to this argument can be used to defend Dispositions Premise. I consider two such replies and argue that neither one provides an attractive, straightforward option.

2.4.1 SCA* and No Intrinsic Maskers

The first defense simply qualifies SCA Dispositions so that it rules out cases of masking and finking:[47]

SCA Dispositions*   At t, A is disposed to ϕ in response to stimulus S iff if A were to undergo stimulus S at t, and A's disposition to ϕ was not masked or finked at t, A would ϕ at t.

We can then define Dispositions Premise* as the left-to-right direction of SCA Dispositions*. Dispositions Premise* by itself does not help Broome's Argument, as cases of execution failure appear to involve masked dispositions. Appealing to it in this context therefore requires arguing that execution failure does not involve masked dispositions.

One natural way to make that argument is to appeal to a claim defended by some proponents of SCA Dispositions*, namely that only extrinsic properties can be maskers:[48]

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[47] This is the strategy of (Choi 2011). Compare (Johnston 1992, 234).

No Intrinsic Maskers   If A's disposition to φ in response to stimulus S is masked by its property F, then F is not an intrinsic property of A.

That it landed on a soft pillow is an extrinsic property of the fragile glass. But your desire to stay in bed is an intrinsic property of you. No Intrinsic Maskers thus entails that a desire cannot mask a disposition to act.

We have now arrived at a package of commitments that allows for defending Broome's Argument from this line of objection: Dispositions Premise*, No Intrinsic Maskers, and Intentions Thesis. A philosopher willing to accept all of these theses would be able to defend Broome's Argument from this objection. But I think very few philosophers will be willing to accept this package of commitments. Choi, who defends SCA Dispositions* and No Intrinsic Maskers, rejects principles such as Intentions Thesis. He thinks it is obvious to that we can have conflicting conative attitudes, and he sees that SCA Dispositions* and No Intrinsic Maskers rule that out. By contrast, those who accept Intentions Thesis, such as Clarke, reject No Intrinsic Maskers, and have provided (what I take to be) strong objections to No Intrinsic Maskers.[49] So while there is room for defending Broome's Argument via this strategy, it is, at best, highly controversial.

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[48] For that view, see (Choi 2005; Handfield 2008).
[49] For those arguments, see, e.g., (Clarke 2008; Fara 2008; Ashwell 2010; Clarke 2010).

2.4.2 The Strategy of Getting Specific

The second familiar way to defend SCA Dispositions is the "strategy of getting specific," associated with David Lewis.[50] On this view, apparent cases of masking are really cases in which a highly complex stimulus condition does not obtain. It is not literally true that a fragile glass is disposed to break when dropped. Rather, to use Manley and Wasserman's example, it is disposed "to break when dropped on the Earth from one metre up onto a solid surface with a Shor durometer measurement of 90A, through a substance with a density of 1.2kg/m^2."[51]

Whether this strategy can be used to defend the role of SCA Dispositions in Broome's Argument is delicate. This strategy is characteristically concessive: its proponents respond to purported cases of masking by modifying their accounts of the stimulus conditions of the relevant dispositions, not by denying that the cases can arise. The spirit of this strategy would thus suggest denying Intentions Thesis rather than denying the possibility of execution failure. One might then hold that intentions do ground dispositions, but the stimulus conditions of those dispositions will be much more complex than those mentioned in Intentions Thesis. For example, they will include the absence of other conflicting motivational states.[52] Using the strategy of getting specific to defend Broome's Argument would thus require an independent positive argument for Intentions Thesis, which would explain why case of execution failure should not be treated concessively. It is hard to see what such an argument would look like, given my argument for the tension between the two premises from above.

These reflections show that Broome's Argument is hard to defend. There are deep tensions between Intentions Premise and Dispositions Premise. And, while Dispositions Premise

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[50] So-called by (Manley and Wasserman 2008, 63ff). See (Lewis 1997). Here I ignore Lewis's separate response to finking.
[51] (Manley and Wasserman 2008, 63).
[52] This idea is in the spirit of Mele's theory of proximal intentions, in (Mele 1992b, 72–74), and Loar's account of the relationship between desire and action, at (Loar 1981, 90).

can be defended from the standard objections to it, the packages of views one must take on in order to do so are unappealing.

I take it that, at the very least, these arguments motivate search for a Mentalistically-acceptable account of the irrationality involved in cases of execution failure. I turn to that search now.

3. The Requirement of Conative Consistency

In Not Getting Out of Bed, you experience conative conflict: your intention to get out of bed battles a desire to stay in bed. Could this conflict explain your irrationality? In this section, I develop a Mentalistically-acceptable version of this idea and argue that there are strong reasons to resist it.

This approach must begin by explaining exactly which conflicts between desires and intentions are irrational. For such conflicts are often not irrational. When we desire incompatible options, we have the power to choose one option, thereby forming an intention to pursue it. Yet rationality does not require us to extinguish the desire for the unchosen option.

A natural way to distinguish cases of execution failure is by appeal to the idea of a dominant desire.[53] In cases of execution failure, but not ordinary intention/desire conflict, your desire wins out, motivating your (in)action.We might therefore introduce the following requirement, which execution failers violate:

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[53] Compare (Bratman 1987, 18; Frankfurt 1971, 8).

Conative Consistency   The following is pro tanto irrational: intending to φ, having a dominant desire to ψ, and believing that φ-ing and ψ-ing are incompatible.[54]

This approach faces two obstacles. The first is that, so stated, it is inconsistent with Mentalism. If a desire counts as dominant in a case just in case it in fact determines your behavior in that case, then whether a particular desire is dominant is a fact about (the rest of) your body, not about your mind.

This obstacle can be overcome if we adopt a controversial theory of motivation. On this view, an intrinsic property of every conative state is a degree of strength, where those degrees can be represented on an interval scale and support the (ceteris paribus) generalization that everyone always does what they are most strongly motivated to do.[55] Then, at t, a desire (or set of desires) to φ is dominant just in case that desire is stronger than any other conative attitude you have at t to do anything you believe to be incompatible with φ-ing. This conception of a dominant desire renders Conative Consistency consistent with Mentalism. I am broadly sympathetic to this idea, so I will not consider objections to it in depth. But Conative Consistency will not be an option for Mentalists who reject this idea.[56]

The second obstacle concerns whether desires are subject to requirements of rationality. Many action theorists believe that while intentions and beliefs are subject to requirements of rationality, desires and imaginings are not. Moreover, two leading accounts of why beliefs and

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[54] This idea is in the spirit of (Smith 1994; Arpaly 2003).
[55] Here the "ceteris paribus" clause must allow only for external impediments and paralysis, not execution failure.
[56] For criticisms of this "quasi-hydraulic" theory of desire, see (Wallace 1999; Foot 2001, chap. 1; McDowell 1981).

intentions are subject to requirements of rationality cannot be generalized to explain the irrationality of Conative Consistency. Indeed, they suggest that principle is most likely false.[57]

One of those accounts is due to cognitivists about practical rationality. Cognitivists hold that intention involves belief, and argue that the requirements of rationality on intentions derive from requirements of rationality on beliefs. Those requirements of rationality are then explained however requirements of rationality on belief are explained.[58] Plausibly, desiring does not involve believing. So this approach to explaining the requirements of rationality cannot obviously support requirements of rationality on desiring. Cognitivists about practical rationality thus have no natural explanation of why Conative Consistency would be true, and it is hard to see how they could accept it.

The other account has been defended by non-cognitivists about intention, and it has a similar consequence.[59] Bratman argues that requirements of rationality on intention derive from a *sui generis* aim of intention: "the coordinated control of action that is effective in the pursuit of what is intended."[60] Inconsistent intentions are irrational because they are guaranteed to be frustrated in their aim of intrapersonal coordination. Since conflicts of desire are ubiquitous and not irrational, it is implausible that desires aim at being part of a coordinated system. So this approach to explaining the requirements of rationality on intention also cannot be extended to explain requirements of rationality applying to desires.

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[57] For statements of these ideas, see, e.g., (Bratman 1987, chaps. 2–3; Bratman 2009b; Wallace 2001; Setiya 2007a). Compare also (Broome 2013, sec. 15.1)

[58] See, e.g., (Velleman 1989; Velleman 2000; Setiya 2007a; Chislenko 2016; Nishi Shah 2003; N. Shah and Velleman 2005).

[59] For examples of non-cognitivism, see, e.g., (Bratman 1987; Mele 1992b; Broome 2013; Paul 2009).

[60] (Bratman 2009c, 54)

Philosophers who can accept both Conative Consistency and the controversial theory of motivation thus have an obvious resolution to the puzzle of execution failure.[61] Philosophers who are skeptical of either commitment must look elsewhere.

4. The Requirement of Intention Consistency

4.1 The Requirement of Intention Consistency

Philosophers who reject Conative Consistency typically do believe that conflicts between intentions are irrational:[62]

Intention Consistency The following is pro tanto irrational: intending to ϕ, intending to ψ, and believing that ϕ-ing and ψ-ing are incompatible.[63]

Some execution failers violate Intention Consistency, failing to get out of bed because they intend to stay in bed. If every case of irrational execution failure involves inconsistent intentions, then the requirement of Intention Consistency could be used to resolve the puzzle. This would require that a psychological generalization obtain:

Conflicting Intentions Whenever you satisfy (i)-(v), you also intend to ψ and believe that ϕ-ing and ψ-ing are incompatible.

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[61] For views along these lines, see (Arpaly 2003; Arpaly and Schroeder 2012; Smith 1994).
[62] Though see (Kolodny 2008; Raz 2005).
[63] Some theorists here distinguish the requirement that one not intend contradictory ends from the requirement that our intentions be rationally agglomerable (see (Bratman 2009c; Bratman 1987); compare also (Broome 2013, 156)). Intention Consistency entails the controversial requirement that one not intend to ϕ and believe that one will not ϕ (see, e.g., (Bratman 1987, chap. 3; Cullity 2008)).

But Conflicting Intentions is not obviously true. As I assumed in section 3, it seems possible that what motivates me to say in bed may be a mere desire. That motivation may not be the result of a decision (as most intentions are), and may seem to play none of the functional roles characteristic of intention.

Solving the puzzle via Intention Consistency thus requires providing an argument for Conflicting Intentions. In this section I consider a pair of such arguments, and explain what outstanding theoretical work would need to be done in order to defend them.

4.2 The Argument from the Simple View

Both arguments have two premises. The first premise is shared between them. It states that execution failers are irrational only if they staying in bed intentionally:

Intentional Laziness   Cases satisfying (i)-(iv) satisfy (v) only if your failure to ϕ

                                    is intentional.

An agent who intends to get out of bed but fails to do so, and whose failure to get out of bed is not intentional, is not thereby irrational. Perhaps she is medically pathological.

The second premise of the first argument concerns the relationship between intention and intentional action:

The Simple View   If you ϕ intentionally at *t* then at *t* you intend to ϕ.[64]

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[64] See, e.g., (McCann 1991; Bratman 1987, chap. 8).

On this view, any intentional action involves an intention to perform that action under the description under which it is intentional. The Simple View and Intentional Laziness jointly entail Conflicting Intentions.[65]

This argument faces a pair of problems.

The first concerns Intentional Laziness. Plausibly, if your staying in bed is unintentional, you are not irrational. But it is controversial whether the intentional/unintentional distinction is exhaustive.[66] Some of our doings may be neither fully intentional nor unintentional (and one need not intend them). Philosophers with this view will reject Intentional Laziness: if your failure to get out of bed falls in the middle ground between intentional actions and unintentional doings, you are still are irrational. This argument thus appears to require the controversial assumption that the intentional/unintentional distinction is exhaustive.

The second problem concerns The Simple View. The Simple View is widely thought to be subject to counterexample. Some counterexamples involve the foreseen but unintended side effects of one's actions. In some cases, it seems as though one performs those side effects intentionally, even though (by hypothesis) one does not intend them.[67] This suggests The Simple View is false.

Other counterexamples involve agents who desire believed incompatible ends, and disjunctively intend to achieve one or the other. Intuitively, when such an agent successfully achieves one of those ends, she does so intentionally. To use Bratman's example, one might intend (while playing a videogame) only to hit either target A or target B, and yet hit target A

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[65] Given the assumption that you believe staying in bed is incompatible with getting out of bed.
[66] See (Mele 2014; Mele 1992a, 201–2; Mele and Moser 1994, 45; Mele and Sverdlik 1996, 274; Bratman 1987, 174).
[67] Compare (Harman 1976, 433; Bratman 1987, 126), as well as the literature beginning with (Knobe 2003).

intentionally.[68] These counterexamples are especially troubling in the present context because a standard response by proponents of The Simple View is to give up Intention Consistency and accept a much weaker principle.[69] These counterexamples thus reveal a deep tension between Intention Consistency and The Simple View.

Because of these problems, I think the argument from The Simple View is implausible.

4.3 The Argument from the Complicated View

The second argument replaces The Simple View with an alternative principle, due to Bratman:

The Complicated View   If at t you ϕ intentionally, then at t there is some ψ such that you intend to ψ, and ϕ-ing is within the motivational potential of your intention to ψ.[70]

Whenever you ϕ intentionally, you have an intention, but not necessarily an intention to ϕ. You may have merely foreseen that you would ϕ, or you may have intended to either ϕ or ψ.

Whether The Complicated View allows us to derive Conflicting Intentions depends on how the idea of motivational potential is understood. This is undertheorized in the literature.[71] However, there is pressure for proponents of The Complicated View to understand it in a way that does not entail Conflicting Intentions. For a central motivation for The Complicated View is

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[68] See (Bratman 1987, 113–16), who imagines a case in which you believe hitting both targets is impossible.
[69] On that view, in order to hit target A intentionally, one must intend to hit target A (and intend to hit target B). See (McCann 1991; Adams 1986; Sverdlik 1996).
[70] See (Bratman 1987, 119–20).
[71] Bratman refers to the notion as a "theoretical placeholder" at (Bratman 1987, 120), and while philosophers have exploited the idea (e.g., (Zhu 2010)) I am unaware of any attempts to work it out in a detailed way.

the idea that an agent might intentionally ϕ in virtue of her intention to ϕ or ψ, and that idea can be used to construct a counterexample to Conflicting Intentions. Suppose you intend to get out of bed, and (desiring an indulgence) disjunctively intend to either take a long shower or linger in bed. Because of the video games case, The Complicated View will allow that lingering in bed is within the motivational potential of that intention. So it could be that, when you stay in bed, you do so intentionally in virtue of that disjunctive intention. And yet you may not believe that your intention to get out of bed and your disjunctive intention are incompatible, since they are not. In such a case you satisfy Intentional Laziness and The Complicated View, but not Conflicting Intentions. So Conflicting Intentions does not follow from those principles.

The argument from The Complicated View thus depends on two promissory notes. The first is a defense of the exhaustiveness of the intentional/unintentional distinction. The second is an account of an intention's motivational potential that rules out counterexamples such as the one just described.

I thus conclude that while this approach has some plausibility, it is worth considering whether other another approach might be more straightforward.

5. Means-Ends Coherence and Volitionalism

A third way to resolve the puzzle would be to appeal to a requirement of coherence rather than consistency. Considering two coherence requirements, I argue that this strategy requires adopting a highly controversial kind of Volitionalism.

5.1 Means-Ends Coherence

The most familiar coherence requirement is that of Means-Ends Coherence, or instrumental rationality:

Means-Ends Coherence   The following is pro tanto irrational: intending to ϕ, believing that ψ-ing is necessary means to ϕ-ing, and not intending to ψ.[72]

If you believe that a necessary means to getting out of bed now is sitting up now, and you don't get out of bed because you don't intend to sit up now, then you violate Means-Ends Coherence.

But not all execution failers violate this principle. Those who believe the action they intend to perform can only be performed as a basic action do not violate it, for they believe that their action requires taking no means.[73]

It could be that there are always non-basic ways of performing an action that is typically performed basically. For example, if you believe that you will not sit up basically, via your intention to sit up, you might believe that there is something else you could do as a means to sitting up. (Perhaps you will sit up if you mentally rehearse your lengthy to do list.) But this insight cannot be combined with Means-Ends Coherence to resolve the puzzle, however. For you might satisfy that requirement by intending to rehearse the items on the to do list, without in fact doing so.[74]

Are there any other requirements of coherence that execution failers might fail to satisfy? Volitionalists can argue that there are.

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[72] For details I elide here, see e.g., (Bratman 2009b; Broome 2013, sec. 9.4). Compare also (Korsgaard 2008b; Setiya 2007a; Broome 2008).

[73] Compare (Danto 1965). Whether there are basic actions is controversial (see Lavin 2013), but that some philosophers believe in them is not.

[74] I thank an anonymous referee for raising this point.

5.2 Volitionalism

Volitionalism is the idea that the only basic actions consist in the mental action of willing that your body act, and that this mental action of willing is a necessary means to any bodily action:[75]

Volitionalism   There is a mental action of willing, and a necessary means to every bodily action (of φ-ing) is willing that you φ.

Volitionalism leads naturally to a plausible account of execution failure. According to Volitionalists, willing is a paradigm case of trying.[76] And, phenomenologically, in cases such as Not Getting Out of Bed, it seems as though you are irrational because you are not even trying to get out of bed.[77] If in fact you tried to get out of bed, and failed, you would not be irrational. (That is part of what distinguishes execution failure from unwitting paralysis.)

We can capture this idea with a psychological generalization:

Lack of Willing   Cases satisfying (i)-(iv) also satisfy (v) only if at *t* you don't will that you φ.

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[75] This idea goes back to Locke; the classic contemporary argument is due to McCann, who refers to what I am calling willing as "volition." See, e.g., (McCann 1975; McCann 1972; McCann 1974). Compare also (Ginet 1990, chap. 2; Searle 2001, chap. 3). Two recent defenses of Volitionalism are (Zhu 2004; Stuchlik 2013).

[76] On the relation between willing and trying, see (O'Shaughnessy 1973; McCann 1975; Hornsby 1995). I return to the issue of trying in sections 6 and 8 below.

[77] Del Corral appeals to an idea like Lack of Willing when she revises her "Resolve" principle. She introduces a requirement that we try to do what we intend to do. However, she analyzes trying in terms of present-directed intentions, so the view amounts to a requirement that we form present-directed intentions to act on our future intentions. And that requirement does not explain the irrationality of execution failure. See (Del Corral 2015, 147).

Volitionalism and Lack of Willing do not combine directly with Means-Ends Coherence to explain the irrationality of execution failure. Means-Ends Coherence requires only that one intend to take the believed necessary means to one's intended ends. It is thus satisfied by someone who intends to will that she ϕ, but who does not actually will that she ϕ. Moreover, only those who accept Volitionalism believe that willing that they ϕ is a necessary means to ϕ-ing. So opponents of Volitionalism can commit execution failure without violating Means-Ends Coherence by failing to satisfy its belief condition.

This strategy therefore requires the introduction of a novel coherence requirement:

Intention-Volition Coherence   The following is pro tanto irrational: intending to ϕ in C, believing that C obtains, and not willing that you ϕ.

Volitionalism and Lack of Willing entail that in every case of irrational execution failure, you violate Intention-Volition Coherence.

This approach faces a pair of obstacles The first is simply the controversial nature of Volitionalism. Volitionalism has been subject to a wide range of objections, and philosophers skeptical of it will find this approach uncongenial.[78] I will not rehearse those objections here; perhaps execution failure produces a novel argument for Volitionalism.

The second obstacle is that one natural development of Volitionalism cannot be exploited to solve the puzzle of execution failure. Volitionalism requires an account of the relationship between the mental action of willing that I ϕ and the bodily action of my ϕ-ing. It is natural to suggest that the relationship between willing and acting is dispositional:

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[78] A classic source of objections to Volitionalism is (Ryle 1949, chap. 3); for an overview of more contemporary objections, see (Zhu 2004). A Volitionalist reply to the important phenomenological objection is (Stuchlik 2013).

Dispositional Volition-Action Link   The relationship between the mental action of willing that I

ϕ in C and my ϕ-ing is that, if I will that I ϕ in C, I believe

C obtains, and I am able to ϕ, then I am disposed to ϕ.

A version of Volitionalism that appeals to Dispositional Volition-Action Link is unable to resolve the puzzle of execution failure. As I argued in section 1, a plausible theory of dispositions must either make room for masked dispositions, or allow that agents' behavioral dispositions are determined by their overall psychologies, not by any individual mental state (or mental action). If the Dispositional Volition-Action Link is the full story about the relationship between volition and action, then it seems possible for an agent to will that she get out of bed, while very strongly desiring not to get out of bed, and because of that desire fail to get out of bed. Such an agent is surely irrational, though she satisfies Intention-Volition Coherence.[79]

Appealing to Volitionalism in order to explain the irrationality of execution failure thus requires developing a non-dispositional account of the relationship between volition and action. Doing so does not appear to be straightforward.[80] If such an account can be given, however, the Volitionalist strategy would have much to recommend it.

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[79] A Volitionalist might here appeal to a principle such as SCA Abilities to argue anyone who satisfies (i), (ii), (iv) and Intention-Volition Coherence fails to satisfy (iii). While this package of views has some appeal, I take it that the problem of explaining why it is volition, in this sense, that should be included in the conditionals used to analyze ability is closely analogous to the problem of accounting for the Dispositional Volition-Action Link.

[80] Here compare (O'Shaughnessy 2008, vol. 2, chaps. 18–19), though O'Shaughnessy's argues execution failure is impossible.

6. Garrett Cullity's Requirement

In a discussion of Means-Ends Coherence, Garrett Cullity has proposed a requirement of rationality that might resolve the puzzle. I argue that Cullity's proposal fares poorly by comparison with the Volitionalist strategy. Making Cullity's proposal plausible requires adopting a central idea of Volitionalism, and so faces Volitionalism's problems, but Cullity's proposal also faces an additional objection.

An adaptation of Cullity's requirement is as follows:[81]

Cullity's Requirement — The following is pro tanto irrational: intending to ϕ in C, believing that C obtains, and not believing that you are ϕ-ing or trying to ϕ.

This requirement explains the irrationality of execution failure when combined with a psychological generalization:

Lack of Belief — Cases satisfying (i)-(iv) also satisfy (v) only if at t you don't believe that you are ϕ-ing or trying to ϕ.

I now raise two problems for Cullity's proposal.

The first problem concerns an obvious class of counterexamples. If you falsely believe that you are ϕ-ing or trying to ϕ, you will satisfy Cullity's Requirement and Lack of Belief. But, intuitively, you may still be irrational. A false belief does not excuse you from practical irrationality.

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[81] (Cullity 2008, 74). Compare also (Cullity 2016). Cullity is not concerned with execution failure, per se. His concern is agents who intend the believed necessary means to their ends, but fail to take those means, thereby satisfying Means-Ends Coherence, despite seeming to be irrational

Cullity has a response to this objection.[82] If your false belief is irrational, he claims that fully explains your irrationality. You satisfy Cullity's Requirement but violate some requirement of epistemic rationality. If your false belief is rational, however, then you are not irrational after all. Why should rationality ask of you that you try to φ when you rationally believe you already are φ-ing?

I find this response dissatisfying. I think an agent who satisfies Cullity's Requirement in virtue of an irrational belief is rationally defective in two ways. Her beliefs are defective: she is not responding to evidence correctly. But, in addition, her intentions have malfunctioned. They are not controlling her conduct. The theory of rationality should recognize both of these defects: she is both epistemically and practically irrational. Similarly, when someone fails to φ but rationally believes that she is φ-ing, Cullity's proposal fails to recognize that her intentions are malfunctioning. I think this is a serious intuitive cost to Cullity's theory. It fails to count some intention malfunctions as practically irrational. If Cullity's proposal were the best option, this cost might be worth paying, but it would be better if the cost could be avoided.

The second problem for Cullity's proposal arises when we consider cases of unwitting paralysis. Such patients fail to move their affected limbs, but are not irrational. The final clause of Cullity's Requirement exempts paralysis patients, since such patients typically believe that they are trying to move their affected limbs. But what it is to believe that you are trying to do something?[83] I argue that the most plausible way for Cullity to answer that question is to adopt a Volitionalist conception of trying, so his proposal faces the same objections as Volitionalism.

There are three well-known accounts of trying one might appeal to here: (a) trying to φ is having a present-directed intention to φ; (b) trying to φ consists in taking (what one sees as) steps

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[82] (Cullity 2008, 74,80)

[83] Here I assume that one can satisfy Cullity's Requirement by believing that one doing something that counts as trying to φ, even if one has that belief under a different guise.

toward φ-ing (i.e., engaging in a bodily action); and (c) trying to φ consists in willing that you φ, in the Volitionalist sense. [84] Options (a) and (b) have unacceptable consequences in this context. Option (a) entails that execution failers always satisfy Cullity's Requirement, in virtue of satisfying condition (ii), rendering Cullity's Requirement unusable as a diagnosis of the irrationality of execution failure. Option (b) entails that paralysis patients cannot rationally believe they are trying but failing to move their affected limbs, implausibly rendering them irrational.

Cullity must therefore accept (c), or a disjunction including (c). The resulting view is that execution failers are irrational because either they do not believe that they are willing that they act, or they irrationally falsely believe that they are willing that they act. His approach thus requires a commitment to the Volitionalist idea that there is a mental action of willing that one acts.[85] And so, just like the Volitionalist, Cullity is on the hook for providing a non-dispositional account of the relationship between willing and acting. Otherwise he will allow that an agent might intend to φ, will that she φ, and believe that she is willing that she φ, but fail to φ because of her desire not to φ.

Cullity's proposal thus seems to me to be strictly less plausible than the Volitionalist approach. A defense of his proposal would require undertaking the same theoretical work as a defense of the Volitionalist strategy, but it also faces what I think is a serious intuitive cost. Whereas the Volitionalist can explain the distinctively practical irrationality of someone who falsely believes she is doing what she intends to do, Cullity cannot. Such agents violate Intention-Volition Coherence, but not Cullity's Requirement. If execution failure teaches us that

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[84] It is unclear which analysis of trying Cullity has in mind. He cites (S. Schroeder 2001), who does not provide an analysis of trying. Note that I put aside he the analysis of trying due to (Adams and Mele 1992), which I discuss s in section 8. For (a) see (Del Corral 2015, 149). For (b), see (Yaffe 2010, chap. 3), and, in a way, (Ginet 2004).
[85] Though he need not accept that willing is a necessary means to every bodily action.

we must adopt Volitionalism, I think we would do better to pair it with Intention-Volition Coherence rather than Cullity's Requirement.

7. Factive Intentions and Mentalism Revisited

Unpersuaded by these appeals consistency and coherence, one might begin to question the original argument for the inconsistency of Mentalism and Neo-Aristotelianism. I develop a version of this idea in the spirit of Williamson, and argue that its prospects are dim.[86]

Williamson and others argue that knowledge is a factive mental state type, which implies that a mental state counts as knowledge only if its content is true.[87] Philosophers of action impressed with this idea, and with Williamson's analogy between knowledge and action, might hold the following:

Factive Intentions   There is a mental state type of factive intention, such that one factively intends to ϕ just in case one ϕs intentionally.[88]

Ordinary intention stands to factive intention as belief stands to knowledge.

While the fact that you have a factive intention to ϕ guarantees that you ϕ, crucially, it is a fact about your mind. Factive Intentions thus opens the door to a seemingly Mentalistically-acceptable version of Neo-Aristotelianism:

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[86] I thank an anonymous referee for suggesting this approach.
[87] (Williamson 2000, chap. 1)
[88] Views in this spirit can be found in (Rödl 2007, chap. 2; O'Brien 2017, O'Brien 2010, chap. 8; Williamson 2017).

Neo-Aristotelianism*   The following is pro tanto irrational: having an ordinary intention

to φ now, believing that you intend to φ now, being able to φ now,

and not having a factive intention to φ.

Given Factive Intentions, all execution failers violate Neo-Aristotelianism. When you don't get

out of bed, you are irrational because your ordinary intention did not give rise to (or become) a

factive intention.[89]

Even granting the controversial idea that certain mental state types are factive, this

strategy faces four additional challenges.

Two challenges are familiar. First, Factive Intentions entails the widely rejected Simple

View (discussed in section 4.2). Second, Neo-Aristotelianism* implausibly entails that agents

who intend to φ now, but change their minds before acting, are irrational (see section 2.1).

Defending this approach would thus require defending the Simple View, and somehow

modifying Neo-Aristotelianism* to avoid that counterexample.

Suppose those challenges can be met. Is this strategy genuinely compatible with

Mentalism, as advertised? There are two reasons to doubt that it is.

First, consider abilities. For Neo-Aristotelianism* to be compatible with Mentalism, it

must be that whether you are able to φ (in the relevant sense) is a fact about your mind. This is

highly implausible. Facts about your abilities often depend on facts about your environment,

including facts about objects in your environment which you have not causally interacted with.

(A hidden demon, prepared to intervene, may render you unable to get out of bed.) Even friends

of factive mental states (and content externalism) will likely blanch at the idea that such facts

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[89] Not all proponents of Factive Intentions would accept Neo-Aristotelianism*; see (Rödl 2007, 44-45).

about abilities are facts about your mind. However, without that commitment, this strategy clearly is incompatible with Mentalism.

Second, arguably the best version of Mentalism entails facts about factive mental states are not relevant to facts about rationality.[90] While the formulation of Mentalism given in section 1.2 is consistent with Neo-Aristotelianism,* both Conee and Wedgwood argue that formulation should be revised.[91] They claim the standard arguments for Mentalism support a revised version of the principle that rules out Neo-Aristotelianism*. If Conee and Wedgwood are correct, then this strategy for resolving the puzzle requires giving up (the correct version of) Mentalism.

To illustrate, consider a simplified version of Wedgwood's approach.[92] As proponents of factive mental state types concede, there is an explanatorily important mental property shared by all instances of belief and knowledge, and one shared by all instances of ordinary intention and factive intention.[93] Wedgwood points out that we can order mental facts by relative degrees of internalness, as follows: one mental fact is more internal than a second just in case the former depends on strictly fewer facts about the world "outside the thinker's head" than the latter does.[94] Facts about the mental property shared by factive intentions and ordinary intentions are thus more internal than facts about factive intentions. Finally, Wedgwood argues that the best arguments for Mentalism support this revised principle:[95]

Mentalism*   Facts about whether an agent is rational at t strongly supervene on

                                facts about her mind that are internal to the highest degree.

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[90] E.g., (Conee 2004, 88-89, Conee 2007; Wedgwood 2017, Chap. 7). Compare also (Williamson 2000, Chap. 1).
[91] See (Conee 2004, 88-89; Wedgwood 2017, Chap. 7).
[92] (Wedgwood 2017, chap. 7). I set aside Wedgwood's method for dealing with content externalism, and his distinction between two kinds of facts about rationality. Neither is important here. See (Wedgwood 2017, 178-181).
[93] As at (Williamson 2000, 47-49). This mental property is individuated by the shared causal roles of factive and non-factive mental states.
[94] (Wedgwood 2017, 178).
[95] (Wedgwood 2017, 187-194)

Neo-Aristotelianism* is straightforwardly inconsistent with Mentalism*.

Because of these four challenges, I am pessimistic about this strategy. It is most plausibly understood as one that involves giving up Mentalism. And even if execution failure ultimately teaches us Mentalism is untenable, the outstanding problems for this strategy make adopting the original Neo-Aristotelianism principle seem a better bet.

8. The Requirement of Proper Functioning

A final strategy for resolving the puzzle of execution failure returns to the idea that intentions are conduct-controlling, in the sense that it is part of their functional role to combine with beliefs to generate action. This strategy will appeal to a blanket requirement on intentions according to which an agent is irrational whenever her intentions fail to perform their characteristic functional roles. After describing how this strategy might be pursued, I argue that the its plausibility depends on how Mentalism is best understood.

This strategy's starting point is functionalism about intentions. Many philosophers of action hold that what it is for a mental state to count as an intention is for it to play certain characteristic functional roles in an agent's psychology.[96] For example, according to Bratman, an intention to ϕ in C leads one to deliberate about how to ϕ, to ignore options one believes to be inconsistent with ϕ-ing in C, to persist in one's intention to ϕ in the face of temptation, and, when one believes that C obtains, to ϕ without further deliberation.[97] Crucially, however, a mental state can fail to play one of these roles in a particular case, and still be an intention. An agent who intends to ϕ might, e.g., over-readily give up that intention in the face of temptation.

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[96] See, e.g., (Bratman 1987; Mele 1992b).
[97] Compare (Bratman 1987, chap. 3)

Failures of intentions to play their functional roles are possible, but they are also typically irrational. Indeed, familiar lists of requirements of rationality on intentions closely resemble accounts of its functional role.[98] This suggests a general approach to understanding intention rationality:

Requirement of Proper Functioning — The following is pro tanto irrational: having an intention that fails to properly perform its functional role.

Perhaps any failure of proper functioning on the part of one's intentions constitutes a failure of rationality. Since one of the functional roles of intention is controlling conduct, the intentions of execution failers are not properly functioning.[99]

A benefit of this approach is that it allows us to vindicate an idea in the spirit of the plausible principle Lack of Willing, by appeal to an account of trying due to Frederick Adams and Al Mele.[100] Adams and Mele argue that trying to ϕ consists in having an intention to ϕ, and for that intention to begin playing its conduct-controlling functional role. Crucially, they hold that what it is for your intention to play that role is for appropriate signals to be sent from your brain down an efferent pathway leading toward relevant the body part. This explains why it is possible for paralysis patients to try (and fail) to move their affected limbs, and why you do not count as trying to get out of bed when you suffer from execution failure.

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[98] This is an idea familiar from the history of functionalism. Compare, e.g., (Loar 1981, chap. 4). It is consistent with but independent of the idea that intentionality is a normative phenomenon, and the idea that mental facts are normative facts (as in (Wedgwood 2007; Davidson 1980b)). It requires only that for each functional role of a mental state, there is a corresponding requirement of rationality. Compare (T. Schroeder 2003; Loar 1981, 20–24).

[99] Compare (Bratman 2009c; Bratman 2009a; Bratman 2009b). See also (Foot 2001, chap. 4; Núñez, n.d.; Korsgaard 2008a; Lawrence 1998).

[100] See (Adams and Mele 1992, 325–27).

For functionalists, this approach has a great deal of appeal.[101] But it also faces two important challenges. One questions the informativeness of the Requirement of Proper Functioning. That principle may be a true universal generalization, but can it be appealed to in order to explain the irrationality of specific phenomena, such as execution failure? An ongoing Mentalist research program is to state specific requirements of rationality, such as Intention Consistency and Means-Ends Coherence, even when it is clear that violations of such requirements involve intentions failing to play their characteristic functional roles. Appealing only to the Requirement of Proper Functioning may thus seem like an abdication of explanatory responsibility on the part Mentalists.

The second challenge concerns whether the Requirement of Proper Functioning is consistent with Mentalism after all. Mentalists believe that facts about rationality supervene on (maximally internal) facts about the mind. According to the line of thought associated with Adams and Mele, however, for an intention to play its functional role of controlling conduct, it must produce certain effects in the brain, and the nervous system more broadly. That a particular intention produces such effects is not obviously a (maximally internal) mental fact.

It may be, however, that this approach is on the right track. Evaluating this principle would require further theorizing about the most plausible version of Mentalism. Philosophers whose arguments for Mentalism are motivated primarily by concerns about paralysis and worldly failures may find the Requirement of Proper Functioning congenial.[102] By contrast, philosophers motivated by the concerns characteristic of epistemological internalists such as Conee and Feldman may find it unacceptable.[103]

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[101] Though Cullity would dissent; see (Cullity 2008).
[102] See (Cullity 2008).
[103] A full discussion of whether Wedgwood's argument for Mentalism* would motivate rejecting the Requirement of Proper Functioning is beyond the scope of this paper.

9. Conclusion

Execution failure is possible, and it is often irrational. Diagnosing that irrationality poses a genuine puzzle for Mentalists. Mentalists have a menu of options to choose from: they can defend a requirement of Conative Consistency; argue that all cases of execution failure involve violations of Intention Consistency; adopt Volitionalism and Intention-Volition Coherence; adopt Cullity's Requirement; adopt Factive Intentions and Neo-Aristotelianism*; or adopt the Requirement of Proper Functioning. My view is that the most plausible options are the appeals to Intention Consistency, Volitionalism, and the Requirement of Proper Functioning. But making any of these strategies plausible requires undertaking substantial further work. For now, the puzzle of execution failure lacks a compelling resolution.

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