

## Intentions, Akrasia, and Mere Permissibility

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The akratic agent believes that he should A but does not intend to A. It seems clear that something is wrong with the akratic agent – his attitudes do not fit together in the way that they should. In this respect, akrasia is similar to several other problematic combinations of attitudes. For instance, something is wrong with the agent whose has inconsistent intentions, or who fails to intend what he takes to be the necessary means to an intended end. Again, the attitudes of these agents do not fit together in the way that they should.<sup>1</sup>

To explain what is wrong with these combinations of attitudes, we might suppose that having certain attitudes requires you to have, or lack, certain others. For instance, we might suppose that believing that you should A makes it the case that you should intend to A, or that intending an end makes it the case that you should intend what you take to be the necessary means to that end. But on reflection, this idea does not seem very plausible. Someone who believes that they should jump over the moon does not thereby make it the case that this is what they should intend to do. Someone who intends to assassinate the president does not thereby make it the case that they should intend to hire an assassin. It is not so easy to “bootstrap” such requirements into existence.<sup>2</sup>

Many philosophers have taken observations of this sort to motivate the idea that there are “wide-scope” requirements against the problematic combinations – against akrasia, means-end incoherence, and intention inconsistency:

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<sup>1</sup> I use ‘attitudes’ in a broad sense in which absences of beliefs and intentions count as attitudes.

<sup>2</sup> See Bratman (1987) and Broome (1999) for especially influential versions of this point.

(Enkrasia Wide)	You should not [believe that you should A and not intend to A].
(Intention Consistency Wide)	You should not [intend to A, believe that you cannot both A and B, and not intend to B].
(Means-End Wide)	You should not [intend to E, believe that M-ing is necessary for E-ing, and not intend to M]. <sup>3</sup>

Since these requirements simply prohibit the problematic combinations, they do not entail that having certain attitudes requires us to have others. For instance, Enkrasia Wide does not entail that if you believe that you should A, then you should intend to A. After all, if you believe that you should A, there are two ways you can come to comply with Enkrasia Wide – by forming the intention to A or by dropping the belief that you should A. Enkrasia Wide only entails that you should do one or other of these things.

However, other philosophers have argued that we can explain what is wrong with the problematic combinations without accepting wide-scope requirements, and without allowing for objectionable bootstrapping. According to the view I shall call *disjunctivism*, each of the problematic combinations guarantees that you go wrong in some more specific way – e.g. that you believe something you should not or fail to intend something which you should. In the cases of interest here, the disjunctivist claims that:

(Enkrasia Disjunctive)	If you are akratic, then <i>either</i> you should not believe that you should A <i>or</i> you should intend to A.
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<sup>3</sup> Broome (1999) makes this case in an especially clear and powerful way. See Way (2010) for further references.

- (Means-End Disjunctive) If you are means-end incoherent, then *either* you should not intend to E *or* you should not believe that M-ing is necessary for E-ing *or* you should intend to M.
- (Intention Consistency Disjunctive) If you have inconsistent intentions, then *either* you should not intend to A *or* you should not believe that you cannot both A and B *or* you should not intend to B.

The disjunctivist holds that each of these claims follows from plausible independent claims about reasons for belief and intention. He then suggests that it is these claims which explain what is wrong with the problematic combinations. For the disjunctivist, the problem with the akratic (means-end incoherent, intention inconsistent) agent is not the way in which he combines his attitudes. It is instead an ordinary failure to conform to the balance of reasons bearing on belief or intention – the kind of failure you might make even if you did not exhibit the problematic combination. So there is no need to posit wide-scope requirements to explain what is wrong with akrasia, means-end incoherence, and intention inconsistency. Ordinary reasons for belief and intention already ensure that something is wrong with these combinations.<sup>4</sup>

The disjunctivist faces two tasks. First, it needs to be shown that the problematic combinations do ensure that you go wrong in some more specific way – that each of the above disjunctions of requirements hold. Second, it needs to be made plausible that it is this which explains what is wrong with akrasia, means-end incoherence and intention

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<sup>4</sup> Raz (2005) makes this case with respect to means-end incoherence. Kolodny (2007), (2008a), (2008b), (2009) extends the approach to intention inconsistency, akrasia, and other ‘coherence requirements’. Lord (2013), Schroeder (2009), and Skorupski (2010: 102) develop broadly similar approaches. Wedgwood (2003) presents a disjunctive account of akrasia.

inconsistency. In this paper I consider the first of these tasks, leaving the second for another time.<sup>5</sup> In section one, I argue that the disjunctivist is plausibly right about akrasia – there is a strong case that akrasia ensures that you believe something you should not or fail to intend something you should. However, I then argue in sections two and three that the disjunctivist is wrong about means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency. It is perfectly possible to exhibit these combinations of attitudes without going wrong in any more specific way. If this is right, then there is a strong motivation for accepting wide-scope requirements against means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency which does not apply to akrasia. This result puts pressure on the common assumption that we should give parallel explanations of what is wrong with these combinations. In the final section, I argue that this point offers support to a view of the requirements of means-end coherence and intention consistency I have defended elsewhere.

Two preliminary points are in order. First, it might be thought that, rather than offering a way to dispense with wide-scope requirements, disjunctivism in fact offers a way to vindicate such requirements. After all, given standard deontic logic, the disjunctions of requirements above entail the corresponding wide-scope requirements. However, and leaving aside the point that standard deontic logic is rightly controversial, this seems a mistake. Those who put forward wide-scope requirements do not merely claim that such requirements are true. They claim that these requirements explain what is wrong with the problematic combinations. But this could not be said of wide-scope requirements which are merely trivial consequences of the above disjunctions of requirements. So even if disjunctivism entails wide-scope requirements, it does not entail what we can call the wide-scope *view* (cf. Kolodny (2007, n.18); Way (forthcoming)).

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<sup>5</sup> See Way (forthcoming).

Second, I assume that what you should do and believe is determined by your reasons – that you should A if you have most reason to A and that it is permissible for you to A if you have sufficient reason to A. However, philosophers sometimes distinguish between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ reasons, and corresponding senses of ‘should’. Similarly, it is common in the literature we are concerned with to distinguish between the attitudes you *should* have and those that *rationality requires* you to have. (Sometimes, but not always, this distinction maps onto the former distinction).<sup>6</sup> However, while I am sympathetic to some versions of these distinctions, I will not rely on them in the bulk of the paper.<sup>7</sup> For present purposes, it does not much matter whether wide-scope requirements would be better understood as claims about what rationality requires. Similarly, it will simplify matters to assume that the disjunctivist only recognises one relevant sense of ‘should’ and ‘reason’. With mild circularity, we can identify the relevant sense of ‘should’ as that which answers the deliberative questions of what to do and believe.<sup>8</sup>

## 1. Disjunctivism about Akrasia

The akratic agent believes that he should A but does not intend to A. To show that something is wrong with akrasia, the disjunctivist must show that the akratic agent either holds the belief that he should A on insufficient grounds or fails to intend something which he should. So on

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g. Broome (2005); Kolodny (2005); Parfit (2011); Wedgwood (2003); Schroeder (2004), (2009); Way (2010), (2012).

<sup>7</sup> One version of the distinction will surface in the final section. I also note points at which such distinctions may be relevant in notes 8 and 11.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Kolodny (2007, 232-3). Schroeder (2009) argues that akrasia and means-end incoherence involve a failure to do what you *subjectively* should do. Although I will not be able to discuss this view here, it should be clear to readers familiar with Schroeder’s paper that the arguments against disjunctivism about means-end coherence below apply equally to Schroeder’s view.

the assumption that you should intend to A if you should A<sup>9</sup>, what the disjunctivist needs to establish is a kind of *weak infallibilism* about what we should do:

If you permissibly believe that you should A, then you should A.

You *permissibly* believe that you should A if you believe that you should A on the basis of considerations which together give you sufficient reason for this belief. In this section I shall argue that weak infallibilism is plausibly true.

The case for weak infallibilism varies depending on whether we accept *objectivism* or *perspectivism* about what we should do and believe. *Objectivism* is the view that what you should do and believe turns on the facts of your situation. *Perspectivism* is the view that what you should do and believe turns on your epistemic position (your ‘perspective’). I shall not here adjudicate between these views. Instead, I shall argue that weak infallibilism can be defended on either view.

The route from objectivism to weak infallibilism is straightforward. All objectivists I know of endorse the following:

(Truth Norm) It is permissible to believe that *p* only if *p*.<sup>10</sup>

Weak infallibilism is a trivial consequence of the Truth Norm.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I do not think this final assumption is true. It fails in cases in which intending to A is not necessary for A-ing. However, the assumption is harmless here, since there need be nothing wrong with cases of akrasia in which you permissibly believe that intending to A is not necessary for A-ing. Cf. Broome (2005: 323).

<sup>10</sup> For endorsements of the Truth Norm see, e.g. Littlejohn (2010); Shah (2003); Wedgwood (2002); Whiting (2010) and (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> It may seem implausible that what is wrong with some cases of akrasia is simply that the akratic agent has a false belief. While this concern falls outside this paper’s focus on whether the disjunctivist can show that *something* is wrong with the problematic combinations, it is worth noting that there is more the objectivist can say here. One possibility is to distinguish between what you *objectively* and *subjectively* should do, or what you should do and what rationality requires you to do. On many ways of drawing these distinctions, we will be able to argue from the Truth Norm that the akratic agent does something he *subjectively* should not do, or is irrational

The same holds on some versions of perspectivism. Perspectivists hold that it is permissible to believe only what you are in a good enough epistemic position to believe. However, on an increasingly popular version of perspectivism, you are in a good enough epistemic position to believe  $p$  just in case you know, or are in a position to know,  $p$ .<sup>12</sup> Since knowledge is factive, this view also trivially entails weak infallibilism.

Things are more complicated on other versions of perspectivism. Weak infallibilism will not be a trivial consequence of views on which you can be in a good enough epistemic position to believe  $p$  even when  $p$  false – that is, views which allow for permissible false belief.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, I want to suggest that there is still considerable pressure on perspectivists of this sort to endorse weak infallibilism.<sup>14</sup>

My argument for this claim will turn in part on what I shall call the *uniformity thesis*. This holds that we should accept a uniform account of the perspective-relativity of norms of belief and action: we should be perspectivists about norms of belief and action or neither. This thesis is sometimes denied<sup>15</sup> and I cannot fully defend it here. However, I do want to offer a couple of points in its support.

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(Wedgwood (2003) argues in this way). Another possibility is to argue that what is distinctive of the problematic combinations is not just that you go wrong in some way but that you are in a position to know that this is so (Kolodny (2007); see Way (forthcoming) for discussion). Either of these approaches will allow the disjunctivist to claim that there is something distinctively wrong with akrasia which does not apply to all cases of false belief.

<sup>12</sup> See Williamson (2005) for a prominent example. And see Whiting (forthcoming) for discussion and further references.

<sup>13</sup> Perspectivists differ about what constitutes your epistemic position and about what it takes to be in a good enough epistemic position to believe something. One way to develop a perspectivist view which allows for permissible false beliefs is simply to allow false beliefs to be included amongst the determinants of your epistemic position – thus consider the view that your epistemic position is constituted by your non-factive mental states. But even if we think that your epistemic position is constituted just by what you *know*, we may still allow for permissible false beliefs if we hold that in order to be in a good enough epistemic position to believe that  $p$ ,  $p$  just needs to be sufficiently probable in light of your epistemic position.

<sup>14</sup> I am not aware of many perspectivists of this sort who explicitly endorsing weak infallibilism. Kiesewetter (2011, 4) seems to do so, as does Kolodny (2009) and Wedgwood (2003) (although Wedgwood is only a perspectivist about the ‘subjective should’). Gibbons (2009, 171-3) and Smithies (2012, 283) defends claims close to weak infallibilism. (Gibbons’ argument turns on a wide-scope requirement against akrasia, and so is of little use to the disjunctivist).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g. Feldman (1988b) and Skorupski (2010).

The first point is that we should not be surprised if the uniformity thesis is true. At a general enough level, we should expect similarities between norms of belief and action. (As Gibbons (2010, 1) puts a related point, ‘similarities between practical and theoretical reasons have a built-in explanation: they’re both reasons’). Since the question of whether norms of belief and action turn on your epistemic position occurs at a highly general level, we should not be surprised if this question is answered in the same way in both cases.

The second point is that arguments for and against perspectivism in one domain invariably have analogues in the other. I shall give two examples. First, a standard argument against perspectivism about action turns on the observation that advisors typically take into account what *they* take to be the facts, not just what their advisees take to be the facts, when considering how their advisees should act.<sup>16</sup> To the extent that this observation counts against perspectivism about action, it also counts against perspectivism about belief: advisors also typically take into account what they take to be the facts when considering what their advisees should believe (cf. Thomson (2008, 225)). Second, a standard argument for perspectivism about action turns on cases in which the only sensible option is to do what, by your own lights, would not be the thing to do if you knew all the facts. For example, suppose that you have to choose between three envelopes. You know that A contains £70. You also know that one of B and C contains £100 and the other contains nothing but you do not know which is which. Here it seems highly plausible to say that you should take A even though you know that taking A would definitely not be the thing to do if you know all the facts.<sup>17</sup> This observation also has an epistemic parallel.<sup>18</sup> Suppose you are keen to know whether *p* but have no evidence either way. In such a case, it seems highly plausible that you should

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010, 119-20) and Thomson (2008: 187-91). See Kiesewetter (2011) for a perspectivist reply to this argument.

<sup>17</sup> This version of the argument is due to Ross (2012). For alternative versions see, e.g. Jackson (1991) and Kiesewetter (2011).

<sup>18</sup> I believe I have seen this point made elsewhere. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find it again.

suspend judgment even though if you knew all the facts – including whether  $p$  – suspending judgment would not be the thing to do.<sup>19</sup>

I take these points to show that the uniformity thesis has at least has the status of default presumption – it is something which we should accept in the absence of strong reasons to deny it. Since I cannot consider here whether there are such strong reasons, I will henceforth take the thesis for granted.

Given the uniformity thesis, there is pressure on perspectivists who allow for permissible false beliefs to accept weak infallibilism. For given the uniformity thesis, whether or not you should A is determined by the same set of considerations as determines whether it is permissible for you to believe that you should A – both are determined by those considerations which fall within your perspective. This point distinguishes questions about what you should do from most other questions. Ordinarily, the considerations which determine whether it is permissible to believe that  $p$  need not determine whether  $p$ . Since the question of whether you should A is an exception to this general rule it would not be surprising if, in this special case, truth and permissible belief did coincide.

This point does not guarantee weak infallibilism. Even though the considerations bearing on the questions of whether you should A and on whether it is permissible to believe you should A must both fall within your perspective, different considerations could still be relevant to each question. Perspectivism does not as such rule out the possibility of reasons to believe that you should A which are not reasons to A, or reasons not to A which are not reasons not to believe that you should A.<sup>20</sup> Reasons of this sort could make it permissible to believe that you should A when it is not the case that you should A. So it is certainly possible to accept perspectivism while denying weak infallibilism.

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<sup>19</sup> Indeed, if the objectivist holds that it is always permissible to believe the truth (Shah (2003), Wedgwood (2002), (2003), Whiting (2010)), then suspending judgment is never the thing to do. For this sort of objection to objectivism about belief, see Feldman (1988a, 245).

<sup>20</sup> Putative examples of this sort are discussed in the literature on Kearns and Star's (2009) view of 'reasons as evidence'.

Nonetheless, while this possibility remains open, I would be surprised if many perspectivists wanted to endorse it. If weak infallibilism is false, then there are cases in which it is not the case that you should A but in which it is permissible – there is sufficient reason – to believe that you should A. On the plausible assumption that if there is sufficient reason to believe that you should A, then you are not in a position to know that it is not the case that you should A, this means that there are cases in which we are hidden from normative truths by our permissible normative beliefs. I suggest that this runs counter to the spirit of perspectivism.

The central motivation for perspectivism is the vague but intuitive thought that the normative must be able to *guide* us. That is why perspectivists reject objectivism – they hold that considerations which fall outside our epistemic position cannot perform this function. If the normative is to guide us, they insist, there must be a special relationship between our epistemic position and facts about what we should do. However, if the considerations which determine whether we should A are to guide us then we do not only need access to those considerations. We also need access to their normative significance. This is not to say that we cannot make all sorts of mistakes about what we should do. Nor, perhaps, is it to rule out the possibility of unknowable facts about what we should do.<sup>21</sup> But it does seem to rule out the possibility of certain sorts of mistakes about what we should do. In particular, it seems that you should not be prevented from knowing whether you should A by the very strength of your epistemic position with respect to that question. When things are going well, as when your epistemic position gives you strong enough reason to permit the belief that you should A, your normative beliefs should not lead you astray.

While not conclusive, these considerations seem to me to put pressure on those perspectivists who allow for permissible false beliefs to nonetheless endorse weak

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<sup>21</sup> One reason perspectivists might want to allow for this turns on application of Williamson's (2000) 'anti-luminosity' argument to facts about what we should do.

infallibilism.<sup>22</sup> And as we have seen objectivists and perspectivists who reject the possibility of permissible false beliefs have a far more straightforward route to weak infallibilism. So if what I have argued here is right, both objectivists and perspectivists should accept that akrasia always involves some local failing – a belief you should not have or a failure to intend something which you should. Disjunctivism about akrasia thus looks like a viable view.

## **2. Disjunctivism about Means-End Coherence and Intention Consistency: The Problem of Mere Permissibility**

The means-end incoherent agent fails to intend what he takes to be a necessary means to an end he intends. The inconsistent agent intends to do things which he believes he cannot do together. Can the disjunctivist show that such agents must either have an attitude they should not have or lack an attitude they should have?

In considering this question I shall, until section 3.2, assume objectivism, for simplicity. I shall also restrict myself to cases of means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency in which the beliefs involved are held permissibly (and so, given the first assumption, true). And I shall continue to assume that you should intend to A if you should A, and now also that you should not intend to A if you should not A. Given these assumptions,

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<sup>22</sup> We might be tempted to think that the perspectivist can offer a more conclusive case for weak infallibilism as follows:

- (1) What you should do is determined by considerations which both fall within your perspective and bear on what you should do.
- (2) A consideration *p* falls within your perspective if you permissibly believe that *p*.
- (3) So, when you permissibly believe that you should A, the consideration that you should A falls within your perspective.
- (4) The consideration that you should A bears conclusively on what you should do.
- (5) So, when you permissibly believe that you should A, you should A.

But while tempting, this argument feels like a cheat. If you should A that must be in virtue of *other* considerations which give you conclusive reason to A. To guarantee weak infallibilism, it needs to be shown that when you permissibly believe that you should A, there must be such other considerations.

the disjunctivist can show that there is something wrong with means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency by establishing that the following claims hold:

- (1) If you permissibly intend to E and M-ing is necessary for E-ing, then you should M.
- (2) If you permissibly intend to A and you cannot both A and B, then you should not B.<sup>23</sup>

The standard way to argue for (1) is to appeal to the familiar idea that reasons for action transmit from ends to means. More precisely, suppose we assume:

(Transmission) If you have reason to E and M-ing is necessary for E-ing, then you have reason to M which is at least as weighty as your reason to E.

It plausibly follows from Transmission that if you have most reason to intend an end, then you have most reason to take the necessary means to that end (cf. Raz (2005); Schroeder (2009); Skorupski (2010)). It also plausibly follows that if you have most reason to intend an end, then you should not do anything which is incompatible with achieving that end.

Transmission thus supports (1) and (2) in a fair range of cases. However, as has often been noted, this does not establish that (1) and (2) hold in all cases. The problem is that there are many cases in which you permissibly intend to A but do not have most reason to A. In cases of *mere permissibility*, you have sufficient but not conclusive reason for multiple incompatible options. To take a standard example, Buridan's ass, stuck between two equally

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<sup>23</sup> It might seem implausible that what is wrong with some cases of means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency is merely that, e.g. the agent has a false belief. Again though, my focus in this paper is on whether the disjunctivist can show that *something* is wrong with the problematic combinations. It is a further question whether disjunctivists give a plausible explanation of what is wrong with these combinations. Cf. n.11.

attractive bales of hay, has sufficient reason to take the right bale of hay, but also sufficient reason to take the left bale of hay. In cases of this sort, it does not follow from Transmission that if you permissibly intend an end, you should take the means. Nor does it follow that you should refrain from doing anything incompatible with achieving that end. At most, it follows that you have sufficient reason to do these things.<sup>24</sup>

As I say, this problem has often been noted; in the next sections, I shall consider whether it can be solved. For now I want to emphasise two points. First, the problem here is not just one for the Transmission-based explanation of (1) and (2). The more general problem is that cases of this sort just look like counter-examples to the basic disjunctivist idea that means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency always involve a more local failing. Suppose that Buridan's ass has inconsistent intentions – he intends to take the left bale and also intends to take the right bale. Something is wrong with this combination. But taken individually, both attitudes look perfectly fine – it is okay to intend to take the right bale of hay and it is okay to intend to take the left bale of hay. The problem only arises when you put these attitudes together.

Second, cases of mere permissibility are ubiquitous.<sup>25</sup> To start with, cases in which, like Buridan's ass, we have *equally weighty* reasons in favour of multiple options are not unusual. As Michael Bratman (1987: 11) reminds us, we face cases of this sort every time we pick from a shelf of cereal packets in the store. Importantly though, cases of equally weighty reasons are far from the only cases of mere permissibility. There are also cases of *incommensurability*, in which the reasons in favour of two or more of our options do not outweigh each other but are not equally weighty. There may be incommensurable reasons in

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<sup>24</sup> For this point or the more general problem described below, see, e.g. Kolodny (2007), (2008); Ross (2012); Schroeder (2009), Wedgwood (2011), Way (2012). Bratman (1987) deserves credit for emphasizing the 'importance of Buridan' to the topic of practical reason.

<sup>25</sup> As Joseph Raz (1999, 100) famously put it, 'most of the time people have a variety of options such that it would accord with reason for them to choose any one of them and it would not be against reason to avoid any of them'. Raz calls this the 'basic belief'.

this sense for many people to go to law school or graduate school in philosophy, to visit Salisbury Cathedral or Stonehenge, to listen to the Beach Boys or the Beatles, or for Sartre's famous student to stay home with his mother or to fight for the resistance.<sup>26</sup> There are also cases of mere permissibility in which one of our options is *supererogatory* – morally admirable but not required. For example, it might be supererogatory in this sense to sacrifice next summer's holiday in order to make a large donation to charity.

In all of these cases, there is clearly something wrong with means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency. For instance, something would be wrong if you intended to go on holiday as normal but did not intend to book a ticket, or if Sartre's student intended both to stay home with his mother and also to fight for the resistance. But taken individually, the attitudes involved in these combinations are perfectly acceptable. So there seem to be a wide range of cases in which (1) and (2) are false.

### **3. Two Disjunctivist Replies to the Problem of Mere Permissibility**

However, we should not be too quick to reject (1) and (2). The cases above demonstrate, I think, that *prior* to intending a merely permissible end, you might lack most reason to take the necessary means, or to refrain from pursuing incompatible alternatives. But that is not enough to show that cases of means-end incoherence and intention consistency need involve no local failing. After all, means-end incoherent and intention inconsistent agents do not merely face a choice between merely permissible options. In addition, the means-end incoherent agent has chosen to pursue one of those options – and the inconsistent agent has

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<sup>26</sup> It is controversial whether such cases are well characterised as cases of incommensurability, as opposed to, e.g. incomparability, parity, or rough equality. (See, e.g. the introduction to Chang (1997), and the essays therein). For my purposes, this dispute does not matter; my use of the term 'incommensurability' is entirely stipulative. The crucial point is that in cases of this sort the central premise of the so-called "small improvements" argument applies (Chang (1997, 23-27)): a small increase in the weight of the reasons in favour of one of the options would not make that the option you should pursue.

chosen to pursue both! What the disjunctivist must argue is that it is this which makes the difference. The disjunctivist must claim that cases of mere permissibility are only possible prior to intending an end – that once you intend a merely permissible end, the balance of reasons shifts so that now you should take the necessary means, and refrain from incompatible alternatives.<sup>27</sup>

I know of two ways to argue for this conclusion. In what follows I shall consider them in turn and argue that neither succeed in getting around the problem. Even if we grant that intending an end can affect your reasons in the ways suggested, there will still be cases of mere permissibility in which (1) and (2) are false. For brevity, and because it is the more promising case for the disjunctivist<sup>28</sup>, I shall focus on the means-end case.

### **3.1 First Strategy: Intentions Provide Reasons for the End**

It is sometimes claimed that intending an end gives you an extra reason to pursue that end. If that is so, then even if two of your options are permissible prior to your choosing between them, forming the intention to pursue one of them might change this. Once you form an

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<sup>27</sup> Kolodny (2008a, 453) also notes that the disjunctivist must argue that it is the intention for the end which makes the difference. However, Kolodny's suggestion in that paper and in his (2007, 252) is not that intending a merely permissible end ensures that you have most reason to take the means. Rather, Kolodny argues that being means-end incoherent makes it the case that you should drop the end. Kolodny's argument for this surprising conclusion has two premises: (i) that if intending to E makes it no more likely that you will E then you should not intend to E and (ii) that intending to E without also intending (what you have sufficient reason to believe are) the necessary means makes it no more likely that you will E. Although I cannot discuss this argument here, I will make two comments. First, although the argument is framed as a response to permissive cases, it actually applies more generally. The argument makes no appeal to there being merely sufficient reason to E. So if it succeeds, the argument shows that, so long as they have sufficient reason for their means-end beliefs, the means-end incoherent should give up their ends. Second, this suggests that the argument shows too much. For surely *sometimes* the solution to means-end incoherence is to decide to take the means. To my mind then, this argument faces an objection not dissimilar to the objection which has traditionally motivated wide-scoping. Just as it is implausible to think that merely intending to E is enough to make it the case that you should intend to M, it is implausible that merely being means-end incoherent is enough to make it the case that you should drop the intention to E. Kolodny's suggestion thus seems to allow a sort of "reverse bootstrapping". Unfortunately, I cannot further explore this matter here.

<sup>28</sup> The strategies discussed below could be used to argue that if you intend to A and cannot both A and B, then you should not *form* the intention to B. But they could not be used to argue that the agent who does intend to A and also intends to B should *drop* the intention to B. The intentions to A and to B are symmetrical – any difference which the former makes to your reasons will be matched by the latter. So intention inconsistency is an even harder case for the disjunctivist.

intention, you now have an extra reason to pursue that end, and so more reason to pursue that end than the alternative. Given Transmission, your reasons to take the necessary means to the intended end will now be stronger than your reasons to take the necessary means to the alternative. Thus you should take the necessary means to the intended end, and will be going wrong if you do not intend to do so.<sup>29</sup>

One question this suggestion raises is *why* intentions provide reasons. One possible answer that is sometimes noted is that there might be some value in resoluteness, which we might understand (no doubt oversimplifying) to be a matter of doing what you intend to do. Another possible answer is that we should think of an intention for an end as *lowering the cost* of pursuing that end.<sup>30</sup> Intending an end, the suggestion goes, is the first step to achieving that end. So once you intend a merely permissible end, you have taken a step towards achieving that end which you have not taken towards achieving the alternative. There is thus less reason against, and so stronger reason for, pursuing the end that you intend. On this view, intending to take the right bale of hay gives you an extra reason to take that bale of hay in just the way that taking one step towards the right bale would.

One feature these ideas share is that the reasons which intentions provide are quite weak. In a way this is a virtue, since it would not be plausible to suggest that intending an end gives you a very strong reason to pursue that end. (This is just the “bootstrapping” objection with which we began). Unfortunately, this feature also prevents the idea from doing the work that the disjunctivist needs. If intending an end provides you with a weak reason to pursue that end, then this reason is presumably capable of breaking ties. So if prior to making up your mind the left and right bale are equally attractive, the intention-provided reason to take the left bale ensures that you now have most reason to take the left. But as I have emphasised, cases of this sort are far from the only cases of mere permissibility. In the other cases, the

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<sup>29</sup> This account of cases of mere permissibility is offered by Schroeder (2009).

<sup>30</sup> For defence of this idea, see Kolodny (2011, section 4).

suggestion does far less well. If two options are incommensurable, then a slight increase in the reasons in favour of one of them does not ensure that the reasons now conclusively favour that one. (This is one of the marks which distinguishes a case of incommensurability from a case of equality (cf. n.26)). Thus even if intending to go to law school, rather than graduate school, does give you a slight extra reason to go to law school, this does not ensure that you now have most reason to go to law school – just as a slight increase in your expected salary after law school would not.

The point is even clearer in the case of supererogation. Even if intending to take a holiday gives you a slight extra reason to go on holiday, rather than donating the money to charity, this reason need not be enough to shift the balance of reasons decisively in favour of going on holiday. After all, even if the holiday had been slightly cheaper, or slightly more attractive in the first place, it would still have been okay to give the money to charity instead.

I take these examples to show that on plausible versions of the idea that intending an end gives you an extra reason to pursue that end, there will remain cases of mere permissibility which the disjunctivist cannot accommodate.

### **3.2. Second Strategy: Intentions Strengthen Reasons for the Means**

John Brunero (2007) and Niko Kolodny (2011) defend a different explanation of how intending a merely permissible end might give you most reason to take the necessary means to that end. On Brunero and Kolodny's view, intending an end does not give you an extra reason to pursue that end. Rather, intending an end increases the strength of your reasons to take the means to that end. It is not clear whether Brunero and Kolodny take this account to show that intending a merely permissible end will *always* make it the case that you have most

reason to take the necessary means to that end, as the disjunctivist requires. Nonetheless, it is worth considering whether it does so.<sup>31</sup>

The Brunero/Kolodny account combines three ideas. First, intending an end makes a difference to what the future is likely to hold. Once I intend to go to Boston in the spring, I am more likely to do so. Importantly, I am also more likely to take the partial means to this end – for instance, to buy a ticket, book time off work, travel to the airport, board the plane, and so forth. Second, the likelihood that taking some partial means to an end will help you to achieve that end depends on how likely it is that you will take the other means which together will achieve that end. Thus how likely it is that buying a ticket will help me get to Boston depends on how likely it is that I will also book the time off work, travel to the airport, and so on. Third, the strength of your reasons to take some partial means to an end depends (among other things) on how likely taking that means is to help you achieve that end. (Thus Brunero and Kolodny assume a kind of perspectivism about what we have most reason to do).

These three ideas support the claim that we often have stronger reasons to take the means to permissible intended ends than to permissible unintended ends. Given the first and second ideas, it is more likely that taking a partial means to an intended end will help you to achieve that end than that taking a partial means to an unintended end will help you to achieve that end. And so given the third idea, we have stronger reasons to take such means. To illustrate, suppose that you intend, with sufficient reason, to go to graduate school in philosophy, although you also have sufficient reason to go to law school. Now that you have this intention, studying for the GRE is more likely to be an effective means to going to graduate school than studying for the LSAT is to be an effective means to going to law

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<sup>31</sup> Neither Brunero nor Kolodny present their account as a defence of disjunctivism about means-end coherence or intention consistency. Brunero accepts the wide-scope view. Kolodny does claim that the ideas he draws on ‘explain many of the phenomena taken to be evidence for a rational requirement of consistency in intention’ (2011, n.38). However, the account of intention consistency he defends in his (2008b) appeals to reasons against combinations of intentions of the sort described in section 4 below. He does not explicitly address means-end coherence in the work I am drawing on here. As I note in n.27 the account of means-end coherence he offers elsewhere is very different.

school. For since you do not intend to go to law school, you are unlikely to do any of the other things you need to do to get into law school, and so studying for the LSAT would be a waste of time. And since you do intend to go to graduate school, it is quite likely that you will do the other things you need to do to get into graduate school, and so studying for the GRE will not be a waste of time. You therefore have better reason to study for the GRE than to study for the LSAT.

I think that the phenomenon Brunero and Kolodny point to is genuine and important, and that their account of it is promising.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, I doubt that the account supports the claim that we always have most reason to take the necessary means to merely permissible intended ends. The problem is that (as both Brunero and Kolodny note) whether or not you intend an end makes no difference to the likelihood that taking a *sufficient* means to that end will be effective – sufficient means are, after all, sufficient. So the three ideas above do not support the claim that you should take the necessary means to an intended end when an alternative is to take a sufficient means to an unintended end.

Consider again the choice between taking a holiday and making a large donation to charity. Suppose that a necessary means to taking the holiday is booking a ticket and that a sufficient means to making the donation is pressing a button which will instantly and irrevocably send the money from your bank account to the charity. The disjunctivist needs to show that if you intend to take the holiday, then you have most reason to book the ticket, and in particular, more reason to book the ticket than to press the button. Clearly though, we

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<sup>32</sup> Although it is worth noting a worry that Kolodny mentions and attributes to Jay Wallace (2011, 58). We might suppose that what explains why intending an end makes you more likely to take means to that end is that, as a rational agent, you will be disposed to do what you take yourself to have most reason to do. But if that is so, the Brunero/Kolodny account presupposes that there is more reason to take means to intended permissible ends than to unintended permissible ends. It cannot explain why this is so.

Kolodny has a reply to this. He accepts that intending an end makes it the case that you have slightly more reason to pursue that end, on the grounds that intended ends are slightly “cheaper” than unintended ends. This is enough, he suggests, to dispose a rational agent to take the means to intended ends, rather than unintended ends.

However, if what I said in the previous section is right, this reply should not convince. Even if intending an end does increase the strength of the reasons to pursue that end it will often not do so enough to give you most reason to pursue that end.

cannot defend this claim by arguing that booking the ticket is a more effective means to going on holiday than pressing the button is to making the donation. The latter is as effective as a means can be.

Nonetheless, means-end incoherence would be clearly problematic in this case. Something would be wrong if you intended to take the holiday but did not intend to book the ticket. The Brunero/Kolodny account of how intending an end affects your reasons to take the means to that end does not help the disjunctivist to explain why this is so.<sup>33</sup>

#### **4. An Upshot**

I have argued that there is a plausible case that akrasia guarantees a local failing but that means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency do not. If this is right, then there is an important motivation for accepting wide-scope requirements against means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency which does not apply to the requirement against akrasia. In turn, this counts against the common assumption that we should expect a uniform treatment of akrasia, means-end incoherence, and intention inconsistency. In this final section, I want to suggest one reason why this is a significant result.

Consider what I have elsewhere called the *intermediate-scope* view of means-end coherence and intention consistency. Like the wide-scope view, this view accepts that means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency need not involve any specific attitude you should not have. But this view rejects the wide-scope's claim that what is wrong with means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency is explained by wide-scope requirements against

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<sup>33</sup> The problem here is clearest in the case of sufficient means but may not be limited to them. There may be cases in which you have to choose between a merely permissible risky end and a merely permissible sure-thing. In such cases, the means to the sure-thing may be more likely to succeed than the means to the risky end. So the explanation of why you should take the means to the risky end, if that is what you intend, cannot be that these means are more likely to be effective than the means to the sure thing.

these combinations. Instead, the view holds that there are requirements against the combinations of *intentions* involved in these combinations. The view might accept:

(Means-End Intermediate)    If M-ing is necessary for E-ing, then you should not [intend to E and not intend to M].

(Intention Intermediate)    If you cannot both A and B, then you should not [intend to A and intend to B].

These requirements imply that there is something wrong with cases of means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency which involve true beliefs. They do not by themselves imply that there is something wrong with cases of means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency which involve false beliefs. But the intermediate-scope view can be extended to cover such cases. One way to do this is to incorporate an element of the disjunctivist strategy. For example, if we accept objectivism, we could argue that means-end incoherence always involves *either* a belief you should not have *or* a failure to combine your intentions as you should. Another way to extend the view is to distinguish between reasons and rationality and argue that what you are rationally required to do is what, relative to your (perhaps rational) beliefs, you have most reason to do. Given this claim, the intermediate-scope requirements plausibly support the claims that if you (rationally) believe that M-ing is necessary for E-ing, then you are rationally required not to [intend to E and not intend to M], and that if you (rationally) believe that you cannot both A and B, then you are rationally required not to intend both to A and to B. When developed in either of these ways, the

intermediate-scope view implies that there is something wrong with all cases of means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency.<sup>34</sup>

The difference between the wide- and intermediate-scope views may seem slight. But as I have argued elsewhere, it turns out to be significant. We can illustrate this point by noting two important challenges that the wide-scope view faces. The first challenge is that it is not clear what grounds wide-scope requirements. For example, it is not clear what makes it the case that you should be means-end coherent. Part of the difficulty here is that standard wide-scope requirements have *unlimited application* – they apply to all agents, in all circumstances. This means that we are severely limited in the resources which we can appeal to, to explain why they hold. In particular, we cannot appeal to idiosyncratic features of particular agents, or particular circumstances, to explain why they apply to those agents in those circumstances (cf. Schroeder (2004, 349 and n.20); Way (2012, 492-3)). The second challenge is that it is not clear why we should comply with wide-scope requirements, or what reason we have to do so (Kolodny (2005); Broome (2005)). (These challenges are connected, of course, because one way to ground such requirements – I suspect the most promising way – is to appeal to reasons to comply with them). One reason that this challenge is hard is that wide-scope requirements have a peculiar form, so that familiar models of reasons for intention and belief cannot be applied to them. Ordinarily, reasons bearing on intention are reasons bearing on the action intended, and reasons bearing on belief are evidence bearing on the proposition believed. But neither of these familiar kinds of reasons bear on the combinations of belief and intention ruled out by the wide-scope requirements against means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency. It is thus hard to see what a reason to comply with these requirements might look like.

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<sup>34</sup> The second of these views is defended in Way (2010), (2012). A perspectivist version of the first is defended, with respect to intention consistency, in Kolodny (2008b). Wedgwood (2003) and (2011) defends a view of means-end coherence which draws on both strategies.

The intermediate-scope view promises to fare better with both of these challenges.<sup>35</sup> First, intermediate-scope requirements do not have unlimited application. They do not apply to everyone, in all circumstances. They apply only to agents in certain circumstances – agents for whom a means is necessary for an end or who face incompatible options. We should thus expect it to be easier to explain intermediate-scope requirements than to explain wide-scope requirements. Second, the intermediate-scope requirements make available simple and natural answers to the question of what reason there is to comply with them. When M-ing is necessary for E-ing, the reason not to [intend to E and not intend to M] is simply that M-ing is necessary for E-ing. And when you cannot both A and B, the reason not to [intend to A and intend to B] is that you cannot do both. These answers parallel the natural answer to the question, ‘what reason is there not to intend to A?’, when you cannot A – namely, that you cannot A. Third, reasons against combinations of intentions are familiar in other contexts. For example, I might have reason against both intending to take drug 1 and intending to take drug 2 because, although I have sufficient reason to take either, I have conclusive reason not to take both. So on this view, the reasons involved in means-end coherence and intention consistency do not look to be of a radically different kind to the reasons bearing on intentions in other contexts.

Despite this promise, a significant worry about the intermediate-scope view is that it appears not to extend to the requirement against akrasia. What is wrong with akrasia must be either (i) a problem with the belief that you should A, (ii) a problem with the lack of an intention to A, or (iii) a problem with the akratic combination. Since akrasia only involves two attitudes, there is simply no room for an intermediate-scope requirement against akrasia.

This may seem like a problem for the intermediate-scope view. We might have thought that if wide-scoping is the right way to go about akrasia, it will be the right way to go

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<sup>35</sup> See Way (2010), (2012) for a fuller defence of these claims.

about means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency, and that if disjunctivism is defensible about akrasia, it will be defensible about the other two combinations. Either way, the intermediate-scope view must be a mistake. However, if what I have argued in this paper is correct, we should not be so quick to assume a uniform account of the three problematic combinations. There is a strong motivation for accepting requirements against combinations of intentions in the case of means-end incoherence and intention inconsistency which simply does not apply in the case of akrasia. Ordinary reasons for and against individual intentions and beliefs do not explain what is wrong with means-end incoherence or intention inconsistency. But it may well be that such reasons do explain what is wrong with akrasia. So the intermediate-scope view may yet be the way to go.<sup>36</sup>

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