

Konstantin Weber: „Accepting Inconsistency“

The basic idea that it is in some way irrational to accept contradictions seems to be shared by all theories of rationality worth taking seriously. In this essay, I examine how exactly this basic idea should be spelled out. I argue that, to do this, two different senses of “accept” have to be distinguished. On the one hand, we can give it an active, practical sense. Accepting a contradiction would then be something that we actively do, like, e.g., bringing ourselves to have contradictory beliefs, and the object of rational evaluation would be a certain action or intention. Understood like this, accepting a contradiction does not seem to be precluded by rationality: Causing ourselves to have contradictory beliefs can even be rationally required. On the other hand, we can give “accept” a more passive, theoretical sense. “Accepting a contradiction” would then just amount to having contradictory beliefs, and the object of rational evaluation would be those beliefs themselves. I argue that, even in this sense, accepting a contradiction does not necessarily render a person irrational. I first present a counterexample to this claim and consider two unsuccessful responses to this counterexample. My conclusion is that a person is irrational in virtue of having contradictory beliefs only if their contradictoriness is in a certain sense accessible to this person.