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24.120 Moral Psychology
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X Strength of Will: More Normative Issues

TWO VERSIONS OF THE LINKING PRINCIPLE AND A PRINCIPLE LINKING THEM

Weak Link: *I shouldn't form an intention that I now believe I should, at the time of action, rationally reconsider and revise*

Strong Link: *I shouldn't form an intention that I now believe that if I were, at the time of action, to reconsider, I should rationally revise*

Rational Reconsideration Principle: *If I now believe that if I were to reconsider at the time of action I would reasonably revise, then I should reconsider at that time.*

A COUNTEREXAMPLE TO STRONG LINK

You are defending your ship. Your instruments tell you that you are being attacked from somewhere in a 30° arc to the North East. If you waited and calculated you could find out the exact position of the attacker. But you are anticipating further attacks that will need your attention. Rather than waiting, finding the exact position of the attacker, and responding with a single missile, you form the intention of launching, when the optimum time comes, a barrage of missiles to cover the whole arc. In effect you trade missiles for time to attend elsewhere.

THE RATIONALITY OF STRONG RESOLUTION

There is a difference between (i) reconsidering a resolution, deciding that it would be rational to revise and then not revising; and (ii) not reconsidering even if, were you to reconsider, you would think it rational to revise. The former is irrational; the latter is not. Does this make rationality too fragile? Not if reconsideration is an involved business. Perhaps you only come to a judgment about what is best subsequent to the formation of an intention

EXPLAINING WHAT IS RIGHT ABOUT THE NO-REGRET CONSITION

Regret as *indicating* substantial mistake concerning one's choice (not *constituting* formal mistake).

BACK TO KAVKA AND THE OTHER PARADOXES

Maybe we are in fact not so constituted that we could form the intention; but that doesn't show that it would be irrational. Consider how we would bring up in children in a world in which there were many toxin cases.

Now think about how we morally bring up children. We teach them not to reopen the question of what to do once they have promised. And more generally we teach them not to reopen the question of what to do once they have knowingly induced someone to rely on them. Perhaps this is a central moral skill.

What about Newcomb cases? These things are somewhat different, in that there is no prior commitment. But suppose we got people to commit to a Newcomb policy; and suppose they committed to one-boxing. Would they then be irrational if they failed to reconsider that policy when the time came to act?