

THE NORMATIVE POWER OF RESOLUTIONS
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This article argues that resolutions are reason-giving: when an agent resolves to ϕ , she incurs an additional normative reason to ϕ . I argue that the reasons we incur from making resolutions are importantly similar to the reasons we incur from making promises. My account explains why it can be rational for an agent to act on a past resolution even if temptation causes preference and even judgment shifts at the time of action, and offers a response to a common objection to the normativity of resolutions known as the bootstrapping problem, on which if resolutions were reason-giving they would problematically allow us to bootstrap any action into rationality simply by resolving to perform it.

1 INTRODUCTION

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1956) introduces us to a gambler who, fearful of financial ruin and disappointing his family, resolves to quit gambling. But the next day, when he approaches the game table, he "suddenly sees all his resolutions melt away" (69). He discovers that his resolution to stop gambling is inefficacious; it has no binding effect on him. He thinks:

[Y]esterday I even had a synthetic appreciation of the situation (threatening ruin, disappointment of my relatives) as *forbidding* me to play. It seemed to me that I had established a *real* barrier between gambling and myself, and now I suddenly perceive that my former understanding of the situation is no more than a memory of an idea, a memory of a feeling (70, emphasis in original).

Realizing that he is not bound by his resolution, the gambler takes a seat at the table and asks to be dealt in.

In what way has the gambler acted irrationally? One might think that this is a classic case of *akrasia*—that the gambler has simply acted against his best judgment. But that wouldn't be quite right. When the gambler approaches the game table, he unambiguously changes his mind about what he has all-things-considered reason to do. In the grips of temptation, he decides that he *ought* to gamble. He has therefore not acted against his best judgment. Rather, his change of mind, while genuine, is *unjustified*, and it is in unjustifiably changing his mind that he has acted irrationally. But in what sense is his change of mind unjustified?

Some philosophers try to explain why agents like the gambler act irrationally by appealing to the benefits of planning agency they forgo when they fail to respect their resolutions. Michael Bratman (e.g., 1987; 2007) has argued extensively that without the ability to follow through on our intentions—mental states that are characteristically stable and that directly control our actions—we would be unable to pursue projects that are spread out in time. As cognitively limited agents who do not always have the time, information, or clarity of mind to deliberate at the time of action, we need to learn to respect the authority of our better-positioned past selves' verdicts about what to do (Ferrero 2010). When the gambler gives into temptation, he forgoes the benefits of the intertemporal division of deliberative labor that is so important to the pursuit of our goals.

I agree that without the capacity for resolve, we forgo benefits of planning agency that make it possible for us to achieve our goals. However, this doesn't provide a satisfying explanation for the intuition that Sartre's gambler acts irrationally *right then*, when his resolve melts away. There are certainly advantages to being the kinds of creatures who follow through on resolutions. But that doesn't explain why we are wrong to disregard our resolutions *in any particular instance*. A single slip-up can't make or break our pursuit of our goals. As long as the gambler gets back on track, there is no reason to think that he has forgone the benefits of planning agency.

This article explains why it can be irrational to fail to follow through on one's resolutions in any particular instance. I argue that resolutions are reason-giving: when one resolves to ϕ , one incurs an additional normative reason to ϕ . In other words, the fact that one resolved to ϕ ought to count as a consideration in favor of ϕ ing at the time of action. When he resolves not to gamble, Sartre's gambler creates a reason for himself not to gamble, and he acts irrationally when he "sees all his resolutions melt away" because at that moment he fails to recognize and respond to the altered normative circumstances brought about by his resolution. If I am right, then resolution-making is a normative power.¹ With it, we can change our normative circumstances through sheer acts of will.

The way we cite resolutions when we explain or justify our actions provides some immediate evidence that resolutions are reason-giving. Suppose I ask my

¹ Other practices that have been understood as normative powers include promising (e.g., Shiffrin 2008), consent (e.g., Hurd 1996), forgiveness (Bennett 2018), and commitment-making (Chang 2013).

friend why she is doing yoga at six in the morning. "Because last night I told myself I would" seems like a perfectly reasonable answer. Of course, I might ask her why she made the resolution in the first place; she might elaborate on how she wants to get in shape, develop a habit of exercising first thing in the morning, etc. But when she wakes up tired and grumpy at six in the morning, those reasons are opaque to her. Like the gambler, her "former understanding of the situation is no more than a *memory* of an idea, a *memory* of a feeling." However, she *does* remember her resolution, and her resolution is not only a consideration in favor of doing yoga in the morning, but the reason *on which she acts* when, bleary-eyed, she unfurls her mat.

The paper proceeds as follows. In §2, I show that our power to form resolutions is crucial for executing our plans in the face of temptation. In §3, I argue that resolutions give us reasons in a similar way that promises give us reasons. I show that my account of the normativity of resolutions explains why an agent who revises a resolution may be irrational even if temptation causes a shift in her preferences and even her best judgment about what to do. In §4, I show that my account can easily answer the bootstrapping problem, an objection that has made philosophers hesitant to explore the possibility that resolutions (and other mental states) could be reason-giving.

2 THE THREAT OF TEMPTATION

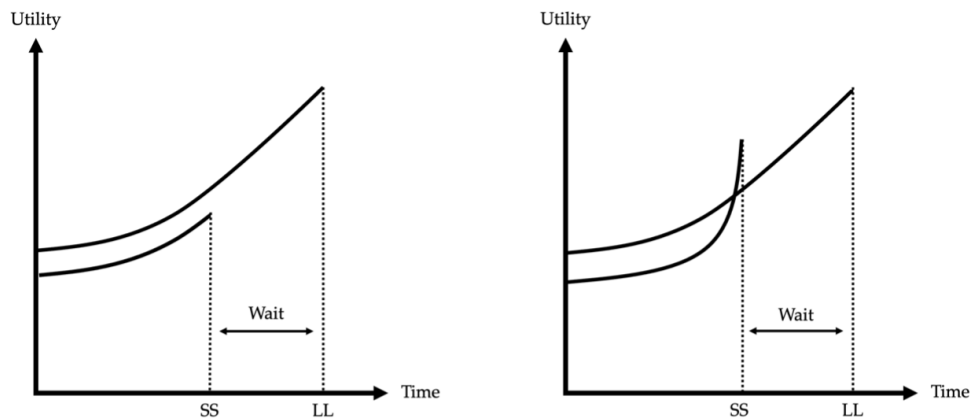
Resolutions are a special kind of intention designed to stand firm in the face of future contrary inclinations or beliefs (Holton 2009, 10; Tenenbaum 2018, 445). Sartre's gambler does not merely intend but *resolves* to quit gambling because he anticipates that he will be tempted to return to the game table. When you make a New Year's resolution (to call your parents more, start working out), you form an intention to do something where some barrier (lack of free time, laziness) threatens your success. Think, too, of showing resolve in the face of an obstacle. When you resolve to jump off a diving board, you decide to stop deliberating and *just do it*. We make resolutions when we need to commit to a course of action *and* refrain from further deliberation that might cause us to change our minds.

Like resolutions, intentions more broadly resist reconsideration and revision; they are characterized by what Bratman (1987) calls *stability*. Unlike resolutions, however, intentions are not always formed specifically with the aim of

resisting temptation. It's silly to call an intention to make pizza rather than pasta for dinner a resolution because there is no temptation that threatens to throw you off course; you simply need to choose between pizza and pasta and for the intention to be stable so you have something to eat for dinner.

Temptation is widely regarded to cause our desires—and sometimes our judgments about what we have all-things-considered reason to do—to shift (Holton 2009, 98-103). Suppose you set some time aside this evening to watch TV. Because you would like to get some work done afterwards, you resolve to limit yourself to one episode. But the episode's cliffhanger tempts you to watch another, and when the next episode automatically starts playing, you decide that in light of your heightened desire to continue watching TV and weakened desire to work, you now have most reason to continue watching TV. There is an intuition that you have acted irrationally, but as discussed in §1, your judgment shift makes it difficult to explain why.

The same preference and judgment shifts occur in temporal discounting. People often judge a good to be more valuable as they approach the time of its consumption. Some forms of discounting are rationally permissible; strictly speaking, there is nothing wrong with preferring to eat a chocolate bar *now* than in four hours. Other forms of discounting are irrational. Consider the figures below, which contrast *exponential* and *hyperbolic* discounting:



Suppose you are deciding whether to receive a reward of \$30 in one week or \$50 in one month; \$30 is a "smaller but sooner" good (SS) and \$50 a "larger but later" good (LL). If you are an exponential discounter, your preferences for SS and

LL are represented by the figure on the left. Although your desires for the two rewards grow as you approach the time you will receive them, they grow at the same rate. Because your comparative ranking of LL and SS remains fixed over time, you will be patient and hold out for LL despite your increasing desire for SS. However, if you are a hyperbolic discounter, your preferences are represented by the figure on the right. Your desire for SS *spikes* immediately before the time of consumption, surpassing your desire for LL. Therefore, you will succumb to impatience and choose SS when it is offered to you. Experiments conducted by Ainslie and Haslam (1992) suggest that most people are hyperbolic discounters. When faced with the possibility of receiving a reward immediately, we tend to take it even if there is a promise of a larger reward later. Hyperbolic discounting appears to be irrational. But if you judge that you have most reason to accept SS over LL *at the time of choice*, it is difficult to say why that is the case.

One explanation for why it is irrational to give into temptation and impatience despite the preference and judgment shifts they cause draws on Bratman's (2007) distinction between *policies* and *singular valuing*s. A policy is a general intention concerning a certain type of action (272). For instance, you might have a policy of limiting yourself to one episode of TV on evenings you need to write. According to Bratman, a person's policies ought to be prioritized over her singular valuing in her practical reasoning because of their "agential authority" (265-268). A person's policies constitute a point of view that is *hers* in an important sense: they establish where she stands and have a privileged status as authentically hers. Although many resolutions are policies (e.g., "I will limit myself to one episode of TV every evening I need to write"), they often concern one-off actions (e.g., "I will limit myself to one episode of TV tonight because my manuscript is due tomorrow"). Both types of resolutions have agential authority in Bratman's sense. A resolution concerning a one-off action still represents your authentic point of view, which temptation threatens to obscure.

To be clear, my point is not that we should never reconsider our resolutions. If you have a policy of limiting yourself to one episode of TV a night except after days that have been uniquely stressful, there is nothing irrational about watching more than one episode on days that truly have been uniquely stressful. In general, we should act on our resolutions in the face of temptation, but we need not completely deny ourselves flexibility in the pursuit of our goals. Chrisoula Andreou (2014) has pointed out that even when we abandon our resolutions, they

serve as useful "anchor points" that help us stay in the vicinity of our goals, especially when the stopping point specified by the resolution is somewhat arbitrary. For instance, if you break your resolution to watch only one episode of TV, you might watch an hour more than you planned to but stop well before watching the whole season. Indeed, in some cases, unexpected changes in one's circumstances can make remaining resolute irrational. Perhaps, as a rule of thumb, we should refrain from reconsidering our resolutions when the reconsideration is prompted by precisely the circumstances that the resolution was made to avoid. This would explain why you shouldn't keep watching TV because the episode ended on a cliffhanger—your anticipation that the show would hook you in was among the considerations that led you to resolve to limit your TV consumption in the first place!—but why it's okay to keep watching if, say, you learn that you were mistaken about the proximity of your impending deadline. But for now, I will set questions about the precise circumstances under which one may rationally reconsider one's resolutions aside.

3 RESOLUTIONS AND PROMISES

Resolutions are important: they help us stick to our plans in the face of temptation. But the question remains: why is it irrational for an agent to abandon a resolution even if temptation causes a change in her preferences and sometimes her beliefs about best judgment about what to do?

I propose that resolutions are reason-giving: when an agent resolves to ϕ , she incurs an additional normative reason to ϕ . The reason she incurs when she resolves to ϕ can tip the deliberative scales in favor of ϕ ing despite the preference shifts she experiences when faced with temptation. If, in the face of temptation, she changes her mind and decides that she ought to ψ instead, she fails to recognize and respond to her reasons to ϕ in the way rationality requires: she is *mistaken* about what she has most reason to do. In what follows, I argue that the reasons we incur from making resolutions are importantly similar to the reasons we incur from making promises.

There is nothing controversial in the idea that a person who promises to ϕ incurs a normative reason to ϕ .² My argument that resolutions are reason-giving

² Moreover, we think it is wrong to break a promise in any particular instance, not just when doing so threatens to undermine the institution of promising and the benefits it affords. If the

rests on their striking similarities to promises.³ Consider how we use statements like "I resolve to watch less TV" and "I promise myself I will watch less TV" more or less interchangeably. There are striking similarities between resolutions and promises that explain this. Consider their functional similarities. Promises play an important role in our social lives; they allow us to form expectations about others' future conduct and, relatedly, provide us with assurance that others will act a certain way. If I promise to pick you up from the airport, you can reasonably expect that I will be there when your flight lands and plan the rest of your day accordingly. Analogously, an agent forms a resolution when she wants assurance that she will follow through on a course of action, and her resolution generates an expectation about her future conduct. Suppose, knowing you need to write later tonight, you are deciding whether to watch some TV. In resolving to restrict yourself to one episode, you assure yourself that you will watch only one episode and that your decision to watch any TV at all is sensible. Moreover, having made the resolution, you can reasonably make plans based on the expectation that you will write tonight (by, for instance, scheduling less time for writing tomorrow). If you had not resolved to limit your TV consumption, it might be foolish or overly optimistic to expect yourself to get any writing done. It might, of course, be foolish or overly optimistic for you to expect yourself to get any writing done *even if* you resolve to limit yourself to one episode of TV. If you have a bad track record of following through on your resolutions, you might not have reason to trust yourself to follow through on this one. But the same is true of promises. If I promise I will pick you up from the airport, but I have a bad track record of keeping my promises, it might be foolish and overly optimistic of you to form any expectation that I will actually pick you up.

Because they create expectations and assurances about how others will act, promises facilitate interpersonal coordination and allow us to reap the benefits

normativity of promises and resolutions are grounded in the same considerations, there is all the more reason to think that violating one's resolutions is irrational in any particular instance and not just because in doing so repeatedly one forgoes the benefits of planning agency, as other philosophers have argued.

³ On many views of promising, an agent who makes a promise incurs not only a reason to ϕ but a moral obligation to ϕ . While reasons possess weight in our practical reasoning, moral obligations are thought additionally to silence other considerations that would otherwise count in favor of the act in question. For discussion of the preemptory character of moral obligation, see Schofield (2021, 29-31). Since an obligation to ϕ is a reason to ϕ , I will focus on the weaker claim that promises create reasons and leave as an open question whether they have an additional preemptory force.

of social cooperation. Analogously, the expectations and assurances generated by resolutions facilitate intrapersonal coordination and allow us to enjoy the benefits of planning agency. One way to illustrate this similarity between promises and resolutions is to consider them as solutions to prisoner's dilemmas. In a prisoner's dilemma, two players have the option of either defecting against or cooperating with their opponent. Each player does better by defecting no matter what their opponent does; defecting is a dominant strategy. But if both players cooperate, they each do better than they would have if they both defected. The challenge of the prisoner's dilemma is figuring out how to get players to cooperate and achieve the Pareto optimal outcome even though defecting is a dominant strategy. A potential solution to this challenge is for the players to *promise* to cooperate, to assure each other that they intend to band together to secure the best overall outcome. There is, of course, a question of how such a promise could be credible, especially in a one-off game. If the players do not know each other and will not play against each other again in the future, they appear to have little reason to follow through on any promise to cooperate. However, most real-life prisoner's dilemmas are *iterated* versions of the game. Because we can expect to encounter our opponents again, we have incentive to follow through on our promises to cooperate so our opponents will continue to trust us in the future. Indeed, Axelrod (1980) has shown that winning strategies in prisoner's dilemma tournaments are "trustworthy": they earn the trust of their opponents and do not betray that trust by defecting for their own advantage.

In addition to prisoner's dilemmas between two parties, we can recognize *intrapersonal* prisoner's dilemmas, where the two players are versions of oneself at different points in time and with different motivational states. Ainslie (2013) has suggested that recovering from addiction can be understood as an intertemporal version of an iterated prisoner's dilemma. The present-addict faces a choice between relapsing or abstaining. If he relapses now, he fulfills his present desire for a high, but imposes a cost on his future self, who must start the recovery process from scratch tomorrow. If he abstains now, but will relapse tomorrow, then he might as well choose to relapse now, so his present self incurs a cost. Relapsing is therefore the dominant strategy for both his present and future selves. However, if his present and future selves both abstain, they attain a Pareto optimal outcome: recovery. Moreover, because the addict must engage repeatedly in this intertemporal bargaining, every current defection diminishes his credibility

and jeopardizes cooperation in the future. Every time he relapses, his reasons to abstain next time weaken. Just as promises provide a potential solution to the interpersonal version of the prisoner's dilemma, resolutions provide a potential solution to the intrapersonal version. When we respect our resolutions, we build up credibility that we will respect our resolutions in the future, giving our future selves reason to engage in intertemporal bargaining with our present selves. And just as there are benefits to interpersonal cooperation, there are benefits to intrapersonal cooperation. Respecting resolutions allows us to attain outcomes that are better for ourselves overall, even if they are not best for us at the moment of action due to the preference shifts caused by temptation.

In addition to playing similar coordinating roles, there is good reason to think that the very same considerations that ground the normativity of promises also ground the normativity of resolutions. Consider Scanlon's (1990) and Owens' (2006) respective accounts of promises.⁴ I previously explained that promises generate expectations and assurances about how others will act. For some philosophers, the value of the expectations and assurances created by promises is not only a helpful feature of promises, but also the source of their normativity. For instance, Scanlon (1990) argues that when an agent makes a promise, she intentionally generates an expectation and provides assurance that she will perform the promised act. Failing to fulfill the promise would amount to negligently generating those expectations and assurances and is therefore morally wrong; this is why promising to ϕ gives an agent a reason to ϕ . I have shown that resolutions generate the same expectations and assurances in our intrapersonal lives that promises do in our interpersonal lives. When an agent resolves to ϕ , she expects and is assured that she will ϕ . If she *failed* to ϕ , she would have generated those expectations and assurances negligently, in a way that undermines her planning agency. Therefore, the same considerations that ground the normativity of promises on Scanlon's view would also ground the normativity of resolutions.

On another view of promising proposed by Owens (2006), promises derive their normativity from our authority interest: our desire to have authority over what others do in certain situations. To understand authority interest, it is helpful to think about the difference between communicating an intention to ϕ and

⁴ Here, my aim is not to endorse a particular account of the grounds for the normativity of promises and resolutions nor to survey all the accounts philosophers have proposed. Rather, I simply examine two popular theories of promising and show that if they successfully ground the normativity of promises, they also ground the normativity of resolutions.

promising to ϕ . Suppose I tell you that I intend to pick you up from the airport, but I explicitly add that "I'm not promising." According to Owens, I refrain from making a promise because I do not want to be bound to that course of action. If something else comes up, I want to be free to alter my plans without wronging you. If I had promised to pick you up from the airport, I would have ceded my authority to you, granting you the power to require me to give you a ride.

If resolutions allow us to overcome the threat of temptation, then it is very plausible that they serve our authority interest over our *selves*. Here I diverge slightly from Owens' analysis. In his discussion of authority interest, Owens asks us to consider an akratic agent who judges that she ought to give up smoking but knows she is unlikely to exercise self-control (70). Owens argues that she might nevertheless have an interest in retaining her *right* to exercise self-control. She might, for instance, reasonably refuse to cede her decision-making authority to someone else, even if she would be better off doing so. I agree with Owens that an akratic agent may reasonably wish to retain her right to decide what to do even if she knows that she is unlikely to act in accordance with her best judgment. But I think that when an agent gives into temptation, she fails to exercise authority over her actions *even if* she retains her right to exercise self-control. Our authority interest is closely tied to our ability to resist temptation, and therefore to our ability to form and respect resolutions.

I have argued that resolutions play the same role in our intrapersonal lives that promises play in our interpersonal lives, and that the normativity of resolutions can plausibly be grounded in the very same considerations that ground the normativity of promises. This suggests that there is a parallel between the normativity of resolutions and of promises: one incurs a reason to ϕ by resolving to ϕ in the same way that one incurs a reason to ψ by promising to ψ .

If resolutions are reason-giving, we can easily explain why it is irrational to act against one's resolutions even if temptation causes a shift in one's preferences at the time of action. Reasons come in varying strengths; some of them are weightier than others. Because resolutions (like Bratman's policies) have agential authority over singular valuing, we have a basis for thinking that they generate *stronger* reasons than one's temptation-induced preferences. Note that the strength of a reason is distinct from its phenomenological acuteness; it may be the case that one reason ought to be prioritized in an agent's practical reasoning even though another reason "preoccupies [him] and dominates his consciousness" (Raz 1975,

25). Thus, although the cliffhanger at the end of the episode may make your desire to continue watching TV *feel* stronger than any reason you have to stop, the felt strength of the desire is irrelevant to its strength as a reason. If rationality is a matter of recognizing and responding to reasons, and if resolutions give rise to stronger reasons than any reasons one incurs in the grips of temptation, then failing to respect resolutions is a way of failing to recognize and respond to reasons—of being irrational.

If resolutions are reason-giving, we can also explain why respecting resolutions (and not just the reasons that led you to form them) is a matter of rationality in the first place. There are always reasons underlying resolutions. For example, you might resolve to limit yourself to one episode of TV because your manuscript is important to you and you need to complete it tonight despite the fact that you would like to watch TV instead; these considerations make your resolution sensible. However, if you succumb to temptation and watch more than one episode of TV, leaving your manuscript incomplete, you are irrational not only for failing to recognize and respond to the reasons for which you formed the resolution in the first place, but also for failing to follow through on your resolution. We often speak of failing to show resolve (and not merely failing to act upon the reasons that made resolve necessary in the first place) as a rational failure. If resolutions give rise to *additional* reasons for action, we can explain why failing to respect one's resolutions is irrational: it demonstrates a failure to recognize and respond to the reasons one incurs from making a resolution, irrespective of the reasons that led one to make the resolution in the first place.

I have explained why failing to respect resolutions is irrational even when one experiences temptation-induced preference shifts. However, there is a lingering question concerning the rationality of acting on one's resolutions despite temptation-induced *judgment* shifts. If temptation causes a change in one's all-things-considered judgment about what to do, wouldn't showing resolve be a form of akrasia—a way of acting *against* one's (newly formed) best judgment?⁵

I think that cases where temptation causes a shift in an agent's best judgment about what to do put pressure on the prevailing assumption that akrasia is always irrational. To be sure, acting against one's best judgment is rationally suboptimal. But when one's best judgment is *incorrect*—when one is mistaken about what one has all-things-considered reason to do—acting akratically may be

⁵ Holton (2008, 148-152) calls this the problem of akratic resolution.

more rational than acting in accordance with one's best judgment. Arpaly (2000, 499) makes this point clearly and forcefully: "The literature pertaining to weakness of will routinely assumes that if a person believes that she should not eat a cake, but proceeds to eat it, she is acting more irrationally than if she sticks to her resolution; it does not, as a rule, add 'unless, of course, the decision to eat is the result of anorexia.'" In cases like this, acting akratically reveals sensitivity to one's normative circumstances, even though that sensitivity is not explicit in one's deliberation at the time of action.

4 THE BOOTSTRAPPING PROBLEM

Broadly speaking, there are two ways of understanding the normativity of resolutions. On one approach, our capacity to make resolutions is a power we have to create normative reasons by our willing. Call these *reasons* views. On a second approach, we are rationally required to follow through on our resolutions as a matter of means-end coherence. On this approach, although we may have reason to become the kinds of people who are disposed to follow through on resolutions, resolutions themselves do not give us reasons. Call these *requirements* views.

There are important differences between thinking that we have reasons to follow through on our resolutions and that we are rationally required to. Reasons have weight in practical reasoning, but are slack. Although they always "stay on the scene," they can be overruled by other, weightier reasons. If resolutions are reason-giving, when you resolve to limit yourself to one episode of TV, you incur a reason to limit yourself to one episode of TV. But new information might come to light that outweighs this reason. If a friend calls you and asks you to binge-watch a TV show with her to take her mind off a recent breakup, you incur a reason to watch more than one episode of TV that outweighs your reason not to; being a good friend is more important than working your manuscript. By contrast, requirements have no weight, and are strict; you either satisfy them or you don't, and they cannot be outweighed by other requirements. If we are required to follow through on our resolutions as a matter of means-end coherence, then if you resolve to limit yourself to one episode of TV so you can get writing done in the evening, you must adopt the means to achieve that resolution and refrain from watching a second episode. But if your recently single friend calls you and asks you to binge-watch TV, you can abandon your resolution and adopt a new end

of watching more than one episode, for which you are now rationally required to adopt the means.

The account of resolutions I have offered is a reasons view. However, philosophers tend to be skeptical of reasons views because of concerns about *bootstrapping*. If mental attitudes gave us reasons, the worry goes, we could bootstrap any action into rationality simply by acquiring the relevant mental attitude. Broome (2001) summarizes the bootstrapping problem in the following passage:

If you have no reason to do something, it is implausible that you can give yourself a reason just by forming the intention of doing it. How could you create a reason for yourself out of nothing? Suppose, say, that you have no reason either for or against doing some act, and you happen to decide to do it. So now, if intentions [or other mental attitudes] are reasons, you have a reason to do it. Since you have no contrary reason not to do it, the balance of reasons is in favour of your doing it. But [...] [i]t is implausible that just deciding to do something can make it the case that you ought to do it, when previously that was not the case (87).

Philosophers who have theorized about resolutions have gone to great lengths to avoid the bootstrapping problem. In her account of our normative power to create reasons by our willing, Chang (2020) argues that an agent can only exercise her normative powers in choice situations where the reasons for preferring one option over others have run out: when she either has no reason to prefer one option over others or the reasons in favor of each option are incommensurable. According to Chang, if it were possible for her to give herself a reason to ϕ by resolving to ϕ in a choice situation where she antecedently had most reason to ψ , her resolution could unacceptably bootstrap ϕ into rationality. In his account of resolutions, Holton (2009, 139) responds to the bootstrapping problem by claiming that it is rational for an agent to follow through on her resolutions only if she "thinks less" and refrains from reconsidering her resolutions when doing so would cause her best judgment to shift. On Holton's view, if an agent reconsidered her resolution to ϕ and decided that the balance of reasons favored ψ ing instead, relying on any reason generated by her resolution to ϕ would amount to unacceptably bootstrapping ϕ ing into rationality. In what follows, however, my aim is to show that thinking about the reasons we incur when we make resolutions as akin to promissory reasons provides us with the resources we need to address bootstrapping concerns.

There are three kinds of cases where resolutions appear to bootstrap prob-

lematically. The first is cases where the circumstances under which a resolution was made change. For instance, if Buridan's donkey finds himself between two bales of hay and, having no reason to prefer one over the other, resolves to head toward the one on his right, but a gust of wind then blows it away, it would be strange to say he still has reason to head toward that bale of hay. The second involves resolutions to perform immoral actions. For instance, if morality requires you not to steal, it seems implausible that you could make it rational to steal simply by resolving to do so. The third kind of case involves resolutions to act *against* what the balance of reasons antecedently favors doing. For instance, if you have more reason to work on your manuscript than to watch TV, it seems implausible that you could make watching TV rational simply by resolving to do it

Views on which respecting resolutions is a rational requirement and not a matter of recognizing and responding to reasons easily sidestep the bootstrapping challenge. To see why this is the case, we can draw a distinction between narrow and wide scope versions of means-end coherence (Broome 2007):

NARROW SCOPE: If you adopt the ends, rationality requires that you adopt the necessary means.

WIDE SCOPE: Rationality requires that if you adopt the ends, you adopt the necessary means.

Because means-end coherence is taken to have wide scope, you can choose to fulfill the requirement either by adopting the necessary means *or by giving up the end*. No bootstrapping occurs; if you abandon an end and adopt a new one, you are no longer rationally required to take the means to your previous end.

If I am right that the reasons resolutions give us are akin to promissory reasons, then views like mine on which respecting resolutions is not merely a matter of obeying rational requirements but of recognizing and responding to reasons also have an answer to the bootstrapping problem. After all, on all accounts, promises are reason-giving. Yet, the bootstrapping problem is never waged against promises.

Consider, first, cases where the circumstances under which a resolution was made change. Does Buridan's donkey's resolution to pursue the bale of hay on the right give him reason to continue pursuing it if it blows away? We can explain why it does not by thinking about how changing circumstances can nullify promises and the reasons they generate. Suppose I promise to pick you up from

the airport when your plane lands, but you later inform me that your flight was cancelled and you don't know when it will be rescheduled. I now no longer have a reason to pick you up from the airport; the altered circumstances have nullified my promise. Similarly, changes to circumstances can nullify our resolutions and the reasons they give us. The donkey resolves to walk toward the bale of hay to his right, but if it's blown away, he now has most reason to walk toward the bale of hay to his left. Our tendency to build conditions into our resolutions or refrain from making them until we are sure that the circumstances are settled lends credence to this analysis. It would be silly to resolve to limit yourself to one episode of TV tonight if you are fairly certain that supporting your recently single friend will require you to watch more unless you build that condition into the resolution.

Now consider cases involving resolutions to perform immoral actions. To address these cases, we can ask whether immoral promises are reason-giving. Philosophers disagree about this question. Raz (1997, 224) argues that promises generate obligations (and therefore reasons) even when they concern immoral actions. On his view, a person who makes an immoral promise will always act wrongly: either she will fail to fulfill her promise or she will perform the immoral act that she promised. Smith (1997) disagrees. On her view, it would be troubling if the power to promise allowed us to dictate the moral status of actions, to give ourselves any reason at all to perform actions that are immoral. I think both responses are plausible; I will not take a stance on the debate here. The important point is that if resolutions give us reasons that are akin to promissory reasons, we can appeal to one of these arguments to address bootstrapping concerns. We can follow Raz and argue that immoral resolutions give us reasons but not in a rationally problematic way, or we can follow Smith and argue that they do not give us reasons at all. Either way, no problematic bootstrapping occurs.

Finally, consider cases involving resolutions to act against what the balance of reasons antecedently favors. My focus in this paper has been on resolutions that generate relatively strong reasons for action in virtue of their agential authority. But not all resolutions have agential authority. An agent might abuse her capacity to generate reasons at will, resolving to do all sorts of things that she ought not to, all things considered, in an attempt to bootstrap those actions into rationality. In cases like this, her resolutions will lack agential authority and generate *weak* reasons that will not have enough weight to tip the deliberative scales. Suppose you

resolve to watch TV rather than work on your manuscript, not because you need a necessary and well-deserved break, but simply because you want to watch TV, in full recognition that the balance of reasons favors working on your manuscript. I don't think there's anything strange in saying that you have incurred a reason to watch TV. But the creation of that reason does not make watching TV rational. Acting on the basis of the reason you incurred from your resolution would be a way of failing to recognize and respond to your reasons for working on your manuscript—a way of being irrational.

I suspect that we can appeal to a comparison between resolutions and promises to respond to other scenarios where the reasons resolutions give us appear to lead to unacceptable bootstrapping. If promises are not susceptible to bootstrapping concerns, resolutions should not be, either.⁶

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