A Puzzle of Prudence: Reason to Prioritize Current Goals

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Abstract: Some goals have special significance to agents. An agent could find her life worth living because she is pursuing certain goals, and the agent could think that her previous life has no value because she did not pursue what she is pursuing. If an agent's current goals have special importance to the agent herself, then in terms of prudence the agent's decision to obtain the goals could be permissible even in the case where achieving her previous goals brings out larger advantages. A widely endorsed thesis of prudence (i.e. the temporal neutrality thesis) does not successfully explain this phenomenon of goal achievement. Furthermore, the present-aim thesis and the harmony thesis also fail in explaining why an agent has prudential reason to prioritize her current goals. This paper introduces a new thesis of prudence, according to which an agent's caring is significant in deciding whether the agent's actions are permissible. In particular, after introducing this thesis named the care thesis, I argue that the care thesis can explain why an agent has reason to prioritize her current goals if the agent finds her life worth living due to her current goals. It is permissible that an agent obtains her current goals rather than previous goals because achieving her current goals benefits the agent's cared one (i.e. the self who pursues her current goals).

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1. Introduction

If an agent finds her life worth living because she is pursuing religious goals, and the agent thinks that her previous life is disvaluable because she did not pursue religious aims, then in terms of prudence it seems permissible that the agent achieves her current goals even in the case where obtaining her previous goals brings out larger benefits for the agent herself. This case shows that in the perspective of prudence an agent's current goals can have special significance if the agent thinks that her current goals make her life worth living. However, given that prudence demands an agent increase the agent's own welfare, it is difficult to explain why it is prudentially permissible that an agent completes her current goals at the cost of extra advantages. In this paper, I will suggest an account for this phenomenon. Especially, I will argue that in the case above it is permissible that the agent completes her religious goals because the agent cares for her current self more than she cares for her previous self, and achieving her religious goals brings out benefits for her current self.

The structure of this paper is as follows: in section 2, I explain some features of goal achievement's prudential value. In section 3, I show that even if an agent's previous goals benefit the agent more than the agent's current goals, it could be permissible that the agent obtains the current goals rather than the previous goals. Furthermore, I argue that a widely endorsed thesis of prudence (i.e. the temporal neutrality thesis) is limited in explaining this phenomenon of goal achievement. In section 4, I show that alternatives to the temporal neutrality thesis fail in explaining why an agent has reason to prioritize her current goals. After examining these accounts, in section 5, I introduce the care thesis. Especially, I argue that the care thesis successfully explains the phenomena of goal achievement. In section 6, I show that an objection fails in defeating the care thesis.

2. Preliminaries

According to concurrentism, an agent's goal achievement increases the agent's welfare just in case the agent obtains her goals while wanting to obtain.[1] If an agent no longer wants to achieve her aims, then the agent's welfare does not increase unless as a result of goal achievement the agent obtains other prudential goods. At a glance, this understanding of goal achievement seems plausible. Given that an agent is no longer interested in her aims, it seems feasible to say that the agent's welfare does not increase as a result of obtaining the aims. However, concurrentism is not a right understanding of goal achievement. Let us discuss the following case where an agent pursues a goal:

> *The Climbing Case* Agent A has wanted to conquer Mt. Everest. She has overcome hardships to arrive on the top of the mountain, and she can conquer the mountain if she goes one step further. However, right before she conquers the mountain, agent A loses her desire to conquer the mountain. In particular, agent A has no desire to climb up the mountain because she is exhausted from the climbing.

In this scenario, though agent A no longer wants to conquer Mt. Everest, agent A's level of welfare seems to increase if agent A arrives on the top of Mt. Everest. Given that agent A has made significant efforts, and agent A has wanted to arrive on the top of Mt. Everest, it is difficult to believe that agent A's mountain conquest does not increase agent A's welfare just because at the moment of conquest she does not want to arrive on the top of the mountain. This phenomenon shows concurrentism's problem. Unlike this phenomenon of goal achievement, concurrentism has the implication that agent A's mountain conquest does not bring out advantages for agent A because at the moment of

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[1] Chris Heathwood endorses concurrentism. In particular, based on this thesis, Heathwood dismisses objections to the desire-fulfillment theory of welfare. See Heathwood (2005).

mountain conquest agent A no longer wants to arrive on the top of Mt. Everest.[2]

A feasible understanding of goal achievement is that an agent's goal achievement can increase the agent's level of welfare even in the case where the agent no longer wants to obtain the goal. This is why, in the climbing case, the mountain conquest increases agent A's level of welfare even though agent A no longer wants to conquer the mountain. This idea of goal achievement generates the question of which part of an agent's life receives benefits if the agent achieves her previous aims. In particular, two answers are possible in regard to this question of goal achievement. The first answer is that if an agent obtains her previous goals, then the part of life where the agent wants to obtain the goals receives advantages. According to this answer, in the climbing case, the mountain conquest benefits the part of life where agent A wants to arrive on the top of Mt. Everest. The second answer is that if an agent achieves her previous goals, then the part of life where the agent achieves the previous goals receives advantages. This answer implies that, in the climbing case, the conquest benefits the part of life where agent A arrives on the top of Mt. Everest.

In the literature of welfare's nature, the resonance constraint is widely endorsed.[3] Peter Railton, an advocate of the resonance constraint, explains his understanding of welfare's nature as follows:

> Is it true that all normative judgments must find an internal resonance in those to whom they are applied? While I do not find this thesis convincing as a claim about all species of normative assessment, it does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with

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2) Ben Bradley and Dale Dorsey suggest similar concerns regarding concurrentism. See Bradley (2009), p. 23; and Dorsey (2013), p. 157.

3) For instance, Connie Rosati, Richard Arneson, and Peter Railton endorse the resonance constraint. See Rosati (1996), Arneson (1999), and Railton (2003).

what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware.[4]

I also think that the resonance constraint is a right view of welfare. For instance, if an agent has never wanted to conquer Mt. Everest, and the agent has climbed up the mountain just because she has been forced to do so, then it is difficult to believe that the mountain conquest increases the agent's welfare. Assuming that the resonance constraint is a feasible view of welfare, a better answer for the question of achievement's beneficiary is that a goal achievement benefits the part of life where the agent wants to achieve the goal. In this answer, a prudentially valuable item (i.e. a goal achievement) is always attractive to the item's beneficiary because the beneficiary wants to obtain the item. In contrast, if it is assumed that a goal achievement's beneficiary is the part of life where the agent obtains the goal, then it could be the case that the valuable item is not attractive to its beneficiary.

Due to the reasons above, I will proceed discussion under the following two assumptions: first, an agent's goal achievement can benefit the agent herself even in the case where the agent no longer wants to obtain the goal. Second, a goal achievement benefits the part of life where the agent wants to achieve the goal.[5] A remaining issue regarding a goal achievement's prudential value is what makes an agent's goal achievement prudentially valuable even when the agent no longer wants to obtain the goal. According to the desire-fulfillment

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4) Railton (2003), p. 47.

5) One might claim that this understanding of goal achievement's beneficiary is problematic because it implies that an agent can bring out advantages for her past self if the agent obtains her previous goal. In particular, one might contend that no agent can change her welfare in the past because it is impossible to bring out new events in the past. This objection relies on the assumption that an agent's welfare in the past is determined just by events in the past. However, there is no conceptual reason to endorse this assumption. It is a substantial matter whether an agent's events in the present can decide the agent's level of welfare in the past. For an argument to show that an agent can bring out advantages for her past self, see Bruckner (2013).

theory, if an agent obtains her previous goal, then the agent's welfare increases because the goal achievement fulfills the agent's previous desire (i.e. the desire to obtain the goal).[6] Furthermore, perfectionism implies that an agent's goal achievement is valuable because the agent has practiced her rationality while she pursues the goal.[7] The discussion below is valid under any of the desire-fulfillment theory and perfectionism. However, for simplicity, I will assume that a goal achievement is prudentially valuable because if an agent achieves her previous goal, then the agent's desire to obtain the goal is fulfilled.

3. A Puzzle

The following is the case where an agent finds her life worth living because she is pursuing certain goals:

> *The Atheist Case* Agent A had pursued atheistic goals throughout her life. In particular, agent A had wanted that she would not have religious rituals on her deathbed. However, at the last phase of life, agent A converted to Catholicism. Agent A found her life worth living because she was pursuing religious goals, and agent A thought that agent A herself had lived a disvaluable life because she had pursued non-religious goals. Agent A is on her deathbed. All agent A wants is to have religious rituals.

In the perspective of atheism, it could be inappropriate that agent A has religious rituals on her deathbed. However, given that prudence is a domain of action-evaluation concerned with the agent herself,[8] it seems prudentially permissible that agent A has religious rituals on her deathbed. In other words,

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6) Heathwood (2005) provides an introduction to the desire-fulfillment theory of welfare.
7) For an account of perfectionism, see Kraut (2007).
8) For more accounts of prudence, see Brink (2011).

considering that agent A finds her life worth living due to her religious goals, and agent A has an antipathetic attitude toward her atheistic life style, theories of prudence must be able to accommodate the idea that agent A's decision to have religious rituals is prudentially permissible.

The atheist case is a puzzle for theories of prudence. In particular, a widely endorsed thesis of prudence (i.e. the temporal neutrality thesis) has a problem in explaining the atheist case.[9] An agent has prudential reason to achieve a goal if the goal achievement benefits the agent herself. This reason's content is that obtaining the goal brings out advantages for the agent herself, and various factors can determine the reason's strength. For instance, if a goal achievement brings out significant benefits for the agent herself, then the reason to obtain the goal is stronger than if the goal achievement causes minor benefits. The temporal neutrality thesis's main idea is that an agent's prudential reason to obtain a goal does not have different strengths depending on which part of the agent's life receives advantages. According to this thesis, if a goal achievement benefits the agent's far-future as much as another goal achievement benefits the agent's near-future, then the prudential reasons to obtain those aims have the same importance in deciding the rationality of decisions.

In the atheist case, agent A has two options on her deathbed. If agent A chooses the first option, then she obtains her previous goal (i.e. non-participation in religious rituals), and this goal achievement benefits the part of life where agent A wants not to have religious rituals on her deathbed. If agent A selects the second option, then agent A achieves her current aim (i.e. participation in religious rituals), and this goal achievement brings out advantages for the part of life where agent A wants to have religious rituals. Given that agent A desires not to participate in rituals longer than she desires to participate in rituals, the first option benefits agent A's atheistic period of life more than the second

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9) For instance, Henry Sidgwick and David Brink support the temporal neutrality thesis. See Sidgwick (1930), p. 124; and Brink (2011).

option brings out advantages for agent A's religious period of life.[10) Furthermore, according to the temporal neutrality thesis, the timing during which an agent obtains benefits is unimportant in deciding whether the agent's decision is justifiable. Therefore, in the atheist case, the temporal neutrality thesis contends that agent A should not have religious rituals on deathbed. However, considering that agent A finds her life worth living because she pursues religious goals, this contention is too demanding. An alternative to the temporal neutrality thesis is needed in order to show that in terms of prudence it is justifiable for agent A to have rituals.

4. Some Solutions

In this section, I will introduce two alternatives to the temporal neutrality thesis: the present-aim thesis and the harmony thesis. In particular, I am going to show that these two theses do not successfully explain why in the atheist case it is permissible for agent A to have rituals on her deathbed.

1) The Present-aim Thesis

While investigating the concept of practical rationality, Derek Parfit suggests the present-aim theory. In the form of rhetorical question, Parfit explains the present-aim theory's main idea as follows:

> In reply to the moralist, he [the self-interest theorist] may ask, 'Why should *I* give weight to aims which are not *mine*? But a Present-aim

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10) Various factors can determine a goal achievement's prudential value. For instance, Bradford (2016) assumes that depending on how much effort an agent has made, the agent's goal achievement benefits the agent. For simplicity, I will assume that if an agent wants to obtain her aim for a long time, then the agent's achievement increases the agent's level of welfare more than if the agent wants to obtain her aim for a short time.

Theorist can ask, 'Why should I give weight *now* to aims which are not mine *now*?[11]

The main idea is that an agent has reason to obtain her goal just in case the goal is her current goal. Based on this idea, one could suggest an alternative to the temporal neutrality thesis (hereafter referred as the *Present-aim Thesis*), according to which an agent has prudential reason to obtain her goal only when the goal is her current goal. The temporal neutrality thesis fails in explaining the atheist case because, according to this thesis, agent A's reason to obtain her previous goal (i.e. non-participation in religious rituals) overwhelms agent A's reason to achieve her current goal (i.e. participation in religious rituals). The present-aim thesis does not have the temporal neutrality thesis's problem because, within the framework of the present-aim thesis, it is impossible that the reason to obtain a previous goal overwhelms the reason to achieve a current goal. In the atheist case, agent A's current goal is to have religious rituals on her deathbed. Therefore, whereas agent A has reason to participate in religious rituals, agent A has no reason to die without any religious rituals.

Though the present-aim thesis can show that it is rational to have religious rituals, this thesis is not a plausible understanding of goal achievement. In particular, the present-aim thesis is problematic because it fails in explaining the climbing case. In the climbing case, agent A has prudential reason to obtain her previous goal (i.e. conquering Mt. Everest) because she has wanted to conquer Mt. Everest, and she has made significant efforts in order to obtain the goal. This is why it is prudentially irrational that agent A stops climbing Mt. Everest. However, the present-aim thesis cannot accommodate this fact of the climbing case. Within the framework of the present-aim thesis, an agent has no reason to obtain a goal unless the goal is her present goal. Since agent A no longer aims to conquer Mt. Everest, agent A has no reason to arrive on the top

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11) Parfit (1984), p. 95.

of the mountain. Therefore, the present-aim thesis predicts that it is permissible for agent A to stop climbing the mountain although agent A needs just one more step to conquer Mt. Everest. In order to show that agent A should arrive on the top of Mt. Everest, a thesis of prudence must be able to accommodate the idea that an agent can have reason to achieve a goal, even if the agent no longer wants to obtain the goal.

2) The Harmony Thesis

Krister Bykvist suggests the following idea in order to make right verdicts in the cases of desire-conflict:

> [A] person's personal preference at T1 for something to happen at T2 counts if and only if the person's priorities at T1 for T2 are sustained at or through T2 (⋯⋯) A person's priorities at T1 for T2 is sustained at or through T2 if and only if, for every time T within T2, either (a) she has no priorities at T for T2, or (b) her priorities at T1 for T2 coincide with her priorities at t for T2.[12]

Based on this idea of desire-fulfillment, one could provide a thesis of prudence (hereafter referred as the *Harmony Thesis*), according to which an agent has prudential reason to obtain her previous goal just in case the previous goal does not conflict with the agent's current goal. As this account shows, the harmony thesis has two features in regard to prudential reason for goal achievement. The first feature is that, within the framework of the harmony thesis, an agent can have prudential reason to obtain her previous desire. The second feature is that an agent should always obtain her current goal if she is in the situation where she cannot achieve both her previous goal and current goal.

Due to its second feature, the harmony thesis can explain the atheist case. In

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12) Bykvist (2003), p. 124 and p. 127.

the atheist case, agent A had wanted that on her deathbed she would not participate in religious rituals. If agent A on her deathbed had no desire regarding religious rituals, then the fact that achieving the previous goal (i.e. non-participation in religious rituals) benefits agent A's past self would have been a reason for agent A not to have religious rituals. However, agent A on her deathbed wants to have religious rituals, and this goal conflicts with her previous goal. Therefore, the reason to have religious rituals is the sole reason which agent A has on her deathbed. This is why in terms of prudence it is rational that agent A participates in religious rituals. Furthermore, due to its first feature (i.e. within the framework of the harmony thesis an agent can have reason to obtain her previous goal), the harmony thesis can also explain the climbing case. In the climbing case, agent A has no goal which conflicts with her previous goal (i.e. the goal to conquer Mt. Everest). Agent A has just lost every desire because she is exhausted from the climbing. Therefore, agent A has prudential reason to obtain her previous goal, and this reason demands agent A arrive on the top of Mt. Everest.

The harmony thesis can explain the atheist case because, according to this thesis, an agent should achieve her current goal if she cannot obtain both her previous and current goals. However, this feature causes a problem to the harmony thesis because there are cases where an agent's prudential reason to obtain her previous goal overwhelms the agent's prudential reason to achieve her current goal. Imagine that, in the climbing case, agent A loses her desire to climb up Mt. Everest. Especially, not only does she just lose her interest in the conquest but she also has a strong desire not to climb up the mountain. In this scenario, though agent A has a strong desire not to climb up Mt. Everest, it is rational that agent A conquers Mt. Everest because she has wanted to climb up the mountain for a long time, and she has made significant efforts to conquer it. Unlike this phenomenon, the harmony thesis predicts that agent A should abandon her goal to conquer Mt. Everest. Since agent A's previous goal (i.e. the goal to conquer Mt. Everest) conflicts with agent A's current goal (i.e. the goal

to go down from the mountain), agent A has no reason to obtain her previous goal. Therefore, following the reason to obtain her current goal, agent A should turn back from the top of Mt. Everest rather than go one step further in order to conquer the mountain.

5. The Care Thesis

In this section, I will suggest a solution for the puzzle of prudence (i.e. the atheist case). In particular, after introducing the care thesis of prudence, I will argue that this thesis can explain the atheist case.

1) The Prudential Significance of Care

Elsewhere I suggested the care thesis of prudence.[13] The care thesis's main idea is that an agent's caring is significant in determining whether the agent's action is prudentially permissible.[14] In the domain of morality, the fact that an agent cares for other agents is important if the agent is related in certain ways with the other agents. First, if agent A has a friendship with agent B, then the fact that agent A cares for agent B can justify agent A's decision for agent B. Imagine that agent A is friends with agent B. Agent B and strangers need agent A's help, and agent A can help either agent B or the strangers. In this case, even if agent A can bring out larger benefits for the strangers, in terms of morality it could be justifiable that agent A makes a decision for agent B. In particular, one reason to justify this decision is that agent A cares for her friend (i.e. agent B) more than for she cares for the strangers. Second, if agent A makes influences on agent B's mental states (e.g. beliefs, desires, and intentions) or *vice versa*, then the fact that agent A cares for agent B is also important in evaluating agent

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13) Choi (manuscript).

14) For an account of caring's nature, see Seidman (2009).

A's action for agent B.[15] For instance, if agent A prioritizes her student's benefits over a stranger's advantages, then it is permissible that agent A benefits her student even in the case where she can bring out larger advantages for the stranger. A reason to justify agent A's decision for her student is that agent A is psychologically related to her student, and agent A cares for the psychologically related agent (i.e. agent A's student) more than for the stranger.

Not only does caring have significance in the domain of morality but caring is also important in the domain of guest-serving etiquette. If agent A is friends with agent B, or agent A is psychologically related to agent B, then it is justifiable that agent A treats agent B better than she treats other guests. For instance, assuming that agent A cares for agent B more than for other guests, in terms of guest-serving etiquette it seems permissible that agent A serves desserts for agent B if agent A has to choose whether she will serve desserts for either agent B or the other guests. Given that caring is significant in the domains of morality and etiquette, it is reasonable to say that in normative domains caring is a factor to evaluate the rationality of actions. An agent has friendships with her temporal selves because an agent and her temporal selves care for one another for one another sake, and they also know this fact of mutual caring.[16] Furthermore, an agent is psychologically related to her temporal selves in that an agent's mental states determine, for instance, which mental states the agent's future self would have. Therefore, if an agent cares for herself at a certain time, then this fact of caring is prudentially significant in evaluating actions and attitudes.

Let me explain the care thesis with an example. Imagine that agent A has two options. If agent A chooses the first option, then she can obtain goal X. If agent

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15) While investigating the concept of practical rationality, Parfit argues that psychological relations are significant in evaluating whether an agent's actions and attitudes are rational. See Parfit (1984), pp. 199-345.

16) Aristotle suggests a similar understanding of friendship's nature. See Aristotle (2005), 1155b-1156a.

A selects the second option, then she can achieve goal Y. Especially, obtaining goal Y benefits the part of life where agent A wants to obtain goal Y more than achieving goal X benefits the period of life where agent A desires to achieve goal X. In this scenario, other things being equal, agent A's prudential reason for goal Y is stronger than agent A's prudential reason for goal X because goal Y benefits agent A more than goal X. However, if agent A cares for the period of life where she wants to achieve goal X more than she cares for the part of life where she desires to obtain goal Y, then this fact of caring makes agent A's prudential reason for goal X stronger. If this enhanced reason for goal X is stronger than the prudential reason for goal Y, then in terms of prudence it is permissible that agent A obtains goal X rather than Y even though goal Y brings out a larger amount of benefits for agent A.

2) The Atheist Case Revisited

The temporal neutrality thesis fails in explaining the atheist case because, according to the temporal neutrality thesis, agent A's reason for her previous goal (i.e. non-participation in religious rituals) overwhelms agent A's reason for her current goal (i.e. participation in religious rituals). The care thesis does not encounter the temporal neutrality thesis's problem. In the atheist case, achieving the previous goal benefits the atheistic period of life more than achieving the current goal brings out advantage for the religious period of life. If all that matters is how much welfare a goal achievement increases, then just as the temporal neutrality thesis implies, agent A should achieve her previous goal. However, according to the care thesis, the fact that an agent cares for herself is important in deciding the rationality of the agent's action. In particular, given that agent A finds her current life worth living, but she thinks her previous life is disvaluable, it is feasible to say that agent A cares for her current self more than for her previous self. This fact of caring enhances agent A's reason for her current goal. This is why, according to the care thesis, it is permissible that

agent A obtains her current goal though achieving her previous goal brings out larger benefits.

The care thesis can also avoid the present-aim thesis's problem. The present-aim thesis fails in explaining the climbing case because, according to the present-aim thesis, agent A does not have reason to arrive on the top of Mt. Everest. In particular, agent A does not have this reason because she is indifferent to conquering Mt. Everest. Unlike the present-aim thesis, the care thesis can show that agent A should go one step further in order to obtain her previous goal. Within the framework of the care thesis, an agent has prudential reason to obtain her previous goal in the case where achieving the previous goal increases the agent's level of welfare. By stipulation, agent A (especially, the part of life where agent A wants to arrive on the top of Mt. Everest) receives advantages if agent A obtains her previous goal (i.e. conquering Mt. Everest). Therefore, even though agent A is indifferent to conquering Mt. Everest, agent A has reason to obtain the goal of mountain conquest. In particular, since agent A's reason to obtain the previous goal is stronger than agent A's reason not to obtain the goal, agent A should go one step further to conquer Mt. Everest.

The care thesis does not encounter the harmony thesis's problem. The harmony thesis assumes that if an agent's previous goal conflicts with the agent's current goal, then the agent does not have reason to obtain her previous goal. Due to this feature, the harmony thesis cannot show that, in the climbing case, agent A should complete her previous goal even if agent A desires not to conquer Mt. Everest. Unlike the harmony thesis, the care thesis can explain why agent A should arrive on the top of Mt. Everest. According to the care thesis, if achieving a previous goal benefits the agent herself, then the agent has reason to obtain the previous goal even in the case where the previous goal conflicts with her current goal. This is why within the framework of the care thesis agent A can have prudential reason to complete her previous goal though this goal is not compatible with her current goal (i.e. going down from the mountain). In particular, achieving the previous goal benefits agent A more than

achieving the current goal, and there is no ground to assume that agent A cares for her previous self more than for her current self. Therefore, in terms of prudence, agent A should go one step further to conquer Mt. Everest.

6. An Objection

Critics might contend that, according to the care thesis, if an agent cares for her present self much more than she cares for her past self, then the agent's reason to obtain her current goal overwhelms the agent's reason to achieve her previous goal. In particular, regardless of how much advantage the previous goal brings out for the agent's past self, the agent's reason for the current goal is stronger than the agent's reason for the previous goal. This is why, in the atheist case, it is permissible that agent A has religious rituals though she had wanted not to participate in rituals throughout life. Critics might contend that if an agent's decision brings out the outcome where the agent lives a miserable life, then the decision is impermissible unless the outcome is necessary to enjoy larger benefits. Due to the assumption above (i.e. if an agent cares for her present self much more than for her past self, then it is permissible that the agent obtains her current goal), the care thesis allows an agent to achieve a goal, even if the achievement makes her miserable. Therefore, critics might say, the care thesis is not a plausible understanding of goal achievement.

At a glance, the care thesis seems to justify an agent's decision even in the case where the decision makes the agent's life miserable. Imagine that agent B finds her life worth living because she is pursuing her current goals. However, agent B believes that she might abandon her current goals when she gets old, and due to this belief agent B cares for her present self much more than she cares for her future self. In regard to this case, critics might contend that the care thesis would allow agent B to achieve her current goals, even if her future self should live in miserable circumstances. In particular, the care thesis would

justify this problematic decision because within the framework of the care thesis caring is significant in evaluating actions. The fact that agent B shows the above pattern of caring enhances the reason to obtain the current goals, and this enhanced reason allows agent B to achieve the goals, even if her welfare in the future drastically decreases.

The argument above defeats the care thesis only when it is assumed that, besides welfare increase and caring's strength, nothing decides the prudential rationality of actions. However, the care thesis's advocates do not have to accept this assumption. Imagine that an agent cares for her friends much more than she cares for strangers. In this case, if the agent can save a stranger from a miserable situation, then unless she can bring out enormous advantages for her friend, in terms of morality the agent should perform beneficial acts for the stranger. The care thesis's advocates could claim that this case shows the significance of miseries. To put this another way, in normative domains, the fact that an agent can save others from miserable situations is a strong reason to perform beneficial acts for the others. Based on this claim, the care thesis's advocates could dismiss the above argument against the care thesis. Agent B has a prudential reason to achieve her current goals because she cares for her present self much more than she cares for her future self. However, all things considered agent A should not obtain her current goals because her reason to obtain her current goals (i.e. the goal achievements benefit her present self) is overwhelmed by her reason not to obtain the goals (i.e. agent A should not put her future self in a miserable situation). Therefore, the above argument fails in showing that the care thesis is a problematic view of goal achievement.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated why in terms of prudence it could be permissible that an agent obtains her current goals, even if her previous goals bring out larger benefits for the agent herself. In particular, I have argued that in explaining this phenomenon of goal achievement the care thesis does not have the problems of other theses. Therefore, given that the care thesis successfully explains the phenomena of goal achievement, it is reasonable to contend that in regard to goal achievement caring has a significant role in deciding whether an agent's action is permissible.

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국문초록

타산성에 관한 퍼즐: 현재의 목표를 우선해야 할 이유

최 동 용

【주제분류】윤리학, 분석철학

【주요어】타산성, 현 목표의 우선성, 시제 중립성 논제, 현재-목표 논제, 조화 논제, 돌봄 논제

【요약문】몇몇 목표는 행위 주체에게 특별한 중요성을 갖는다. 예를 들어, 행위 주체는 특정 목표를 추구하고 있다는 사실에 근거하여 현재의 삶을 가치 있다 판단하고, 이 목표를 추구하지 않았던 과거의 삶을 무가치하다 여길 수도 있다. 만약 현재 목표가 이와 같은 중요성을 갖는다면, 설령 이전 목표의 달성이 더 큰 이득을 발생시킨다 하더라도, 지금의 목표를 달성하는 선택은 타산성의 관점에서 허용될 수 있는 듯하다. 타산성에 관한 지배적 입장인 시제 중립성 논제는 목표 달성에 관한 이 현상을 성공적으로 설명하지 못한다. 더불어 시제 중립성 논제의 대안인 현재-목표 논제와 조화 논제도 타산성에 관한 이 현상을 설명하는데 실패한다. 본 논문은 타산성에 관한 새로운 관점인 돌봄 논제에 근거하여 현재 목표의 타산적 중요성을 설명한다. 돌봄 논제에 따르면 행위 주체가 특정 시점의 자신을 다른 시점의 자신보다 아낀다는 사실은 행위의 타산적 합리성을 판단하는데 중요한 역할을 한다. 특히 타산성에 관한 이 논제는 현재 목표를 과거 목표보다 우선시할 수 있는 이유로 해당 목표의 달성이 행위 주체가 각별히 아끼는 현재의 자신에게 이득을 준다는 사실을 꼽는다.