

Faces of irrationality in Euripides: on Medea's irrationality

Faces da irracionalidade em Eurípides: sobre a irracionalidade de Medeia

Abstract

In Nascimento (2015) I criticized the thesis defended in Irwin (1983) according to which two of the most famous characters in Euripides' plays, Phaedra and Medea, could be said to exemplify akratic behavior and, in the case of Phaedra, even to explain it. In that article, I've pointed out several weakness in these thesis in order to justify my disagreement. I also suggested that, although there was no reason why we should stop looking for examples and explanations of akratic behavior in Euripides' plays, that should not be the only kind of irrational behavior we ought to be interested in finding there. In this paper, I argue that Medea actually instantiates a form of irrational behavior that is different from akratic behavior. The argument that follows is divided in four parts. After a brief introduction (section I), I clarify what sort of irrationality I believe to be instantiated by Medea's behavior using Michael Bratman's theory of plan stability (section II). Then, I analyze Euripides' text in order to show why I think we should say that Medea does display that kind of irrationality (section III). The paper concludes with a brief summary of the argument (section IV).

Keywords: Euripides, Medea, Irrationality, Bratman, Intention.

Resumo

Em Nascimento (2015), critiquei a tese defendida em Irwin (1983) segundo a qual dois dos mais famosos personagens das peças de Eurípides, Phaedra e Medea, poderiam ser citados como exemplos de comportamento acrático e, no caso de

* Professor no Departamento de Filosofia da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
E-mail: danielsimaonascimento@gmail.com.

Phaedra, até mesmo para explique. Nesse artigo, aponteí várias fraquezas nessas teses para justificar minha discordância. Também sugeri que, embora não houvesse motivo para deixar de procurar exemplos e explicações do comportamento acrático nas peças de Eurípedes, esse não deveria ser o único tipo de comportamento irracional que deveríamos estar interessados em encontrar ali. Neste artigo, argumento que Medea na verdade instancia uma forma de comportamento irracional diferente do comportamento acrático. O argumento que segue é dividido em quatro partes. Depois de uma breve introdução (seção I), clarifico que tipo de irracionalidade eu acredito ser instanciada pelo comportamento de Medea usando a teoria do plano de estabilidade de Michael Bratman (seção II). Então, eu analiso o texto de Eurípedes para mostrar por que eu acho que devemos dizer que Medéia mostra esse tipo de irracionalidade (seção III). O artigo conclui com um breve resumo do argumento (seção IV).

Palavras-chave: Eurípedes, Medea, Irracionalidade, Bratman, Intenção.

I. Introduction

Euripides has been one of the most studied classical authors, and ever since antiquity the style and content of his plays have been the subject of much controversy¹. In recent years, we've seen the appearance of a wealth of publications about Euripides' works which have only increased the diversity of interpretations that are available to those who are still interested in his works today². In such a scenario, it would be imprudent – not to say reckless – to even suggest that there is such a thing as a dominant approach, let alone a dominant interpretation, of Euripides' works. As has been noted in (McClure 2017, 3-4), in the last fifty years alone one can see the appearance of at least three hermeneutical approaches to the works of Euripides.

1 Good introductions to the reception of Euripides' works can be found in (Michellini 1987, 3–51) and, more recently, in (Mastronarde 2010, 1–28). For a comprehensive account of the reception of all Euripides' extant plays over the centuries see (Lauriola and Demetriou 2015).

2 These publications include not only the fifth volume of *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Kannicht 2004), which contains an updated and expanded version of the complete fragments of the poet, but also several commentaries on the plays and fragments whose aim is to introduce the poet's work to a new generation of students – see f. ex. (Mastronarde 2002), (Mossman 2003), (Mastronarde 2004), (Diggle 2004), (Parker 2007), (Allan 2010), (Mastronarde 2010), (Mossman 2011), (Liapis 2012), (Stuttard 2014) and (McClure 2017).

Informed by structuralist and semiotic theories, several recent studies have tried to find, examine and explore symbolic meanings and systems within the plays³. Other new approaches have focused their attention in questions of politics, gender, and sexuality, and the construction of personal and social identity⁴. Last but not least, deconstructionist readings have tried to show how Euripides' plays not only raise a lot more questions than they answer, but also exhibit an openness of form, structure, and meaning that compels the spectator – and therefore the reader – to determine their own perspectives on the play's characters and actions⁵.

But before any of these new hermeneutical approaches gained the force and presence they have today, there was an older and equally venerable tradition that saw Euripides as a poet whose main object was the struggle between reason and emotion, the rational and the irrational, and even between the emotions themselves, inside the human soul. Among the many works that have contributed to establish this tradition, some of the most important were Eric Dodd's article "Euripides the Irrationalist" (1929)⁶; Werner Jaeger's *Höhe und Krisis des attischen Geistes* (1944) – the second volume of his *Paideia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*⁷; Bruno Snell's *Entdeckung des Geistes: Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen* (1946)⁸; Helen North's *Sophrosyne, self-knowledge and self-restraint in Greek*

3 F. ex. (Segal 1986).

4 F. ex. (Blondell et al. 1999), (Mendelsohn 2007), (Chong-Gossard 2008), (Powell 2012) and (Wohl 2015).

5 F. ex. (Meltzer 2006).

6 "For Euripides the evil in human nature is thus indestructible and rooted in heredity (which with him, as with Ibsen, takes the place of the Aeschylean Ancestral Curse); the intellect is powerless to control it, though early education may have some effect in favourable cases. Euripides' characters do not merely enunciate these principles; they also illustrate them in action. The Medea, the Hippolytus, the Hecuba, the Heracles: what gives to all these plays their profoundly tragic character is the victory of irrational impulse over reason in a noble but unstable human being. (...) Hence the scientific care which, as an ancient critic remarks, he devoted to the study of erotas te kai manías--the dark irrational side of man's nature" (Dodds 1929, 99).

7 "Euripides is the first psychologist. He is the discoverer of the soul in a new sense of the word, the revealer of the restless and moving world of the emotions and passions of men. He never tires of showing how they are expressed and how they conflict with the intellectual forces of the soul. He is the creator of the pathology of the mind". (Jaeger 1944, 413).

8 "The people of Aeschylus are not altogether dependent on the gods, but are to a degree responsible for their own actions. Euripides goes further and locates his arena of conflicts in the human heart alone. Men like Aristophanes may lament that a beautiful world has thus collapsed, but for most of the Greeks this profanation of myth was not a sacrilegious act; faith in the Christian

literature (1966)⁹; Terence Irwin's article "Euripides and Socrates" (1983); and Jacqueline de Romilly's *Patience mon cœur, l'essor de la psychologie dans la littérature grecque classique* (1984)¹⁰.

The present work can and should be understood within this last hermeneutical tradition. In a very important sense, it is a continuation of a previous work – namely (Nascimento 2015) – in which I criticized the thesis defended in (Irwin 1983) according to which two of the most famous characters in Euripides' plays, Phaedra and Medea, could be said to exemplify akratic behavior and, in the case of Phaedra, even to explain it. In (Nascimento 2015), I've pointed out several weaknesses in these theses in order to justify my disagreement and suggested that, although there was no reason why we should stop looking for examples and explanations of akratic behavior in Euripides' plays, that should not be the only kind of irrational behavior we ought to be interested in finding there.

As I've remarked on that opportunity, it is surprising to find that, despite the fact that the authors in the last hermeneutical tradition mentioned above are still widely known, there is no in-depth study of the different forms of

sense was unknown to them, especially in matters of the Homeric religion which by and large controlled the great works of literature. The Greek myth was not destroyed by the opposition of nonbelievers, or the fanaticism of heretics; it underwent a logical transformation in accordance with its own laws. The divine gave way to what was considered more natural—or should we say, in the spirit of this religion, to what was considered more divine? Men gradually succeeded in depriving the gods of their power over the natural world and claiming it for themselves, for they had discovered that the human mind was itself divine. There were gods who had long ceased to work with miracles, which demand faith because they shock human reason. Though Aristophanes pictures Euripides as indulging in wickedness with his natural, his all too natural interpretation of the characters of myth, Euripides for his part aspires to serve a moral interest with his exposés. The objective of the *Hippolytus* is by no means merely an analysis of the passion of love as such, but a scrutiny of the moral conflict of Phaedra which is no different from that of Medea. The call of morality is voiced against blind impulse, and once more the ethical reactions, scruples and inhibitions and a bad conscience, come into play" (Snell 1946, 122).

9 "To Euripides, who saw in the triumph of the irrational over the rational the primary source of tragedy for the individual and society, *sophrosyne* is one of several names for the rational element. It is that quality, intellectual in origin, but predominantly moral in its application and effect, which controls and moderates the passions, whether lust, anger, ambition, cruelty, or even something so trivial as gluttony or drunkenness. Euripides has been called the first psychologist, and very likely it was his keen interest in probing the motives to action and exposing the death struggle between passion and reason in the human soul that led him to set so high a value on *sophrosyne*, which is called in the *Medea* the fairest gifts of the gods (636) and in *Fragment 959* the most venerable of all virtues, since it dwells for ever with the good" (North 1966, 69).

10 "(...) Euripides not only has discovered the contradictions of the heart and the incoherence of passion, which his predecessors ignored: he has at once elevated them to such a degree that neither the commentators nor the imitators, not even the modern ones, have managed to follow him" (Romilly, 1984, 101).

irrationality that are actually depicted in Euripides' plays. Although one could not possibly pretend to fill this gap in one article, I do intend to provide here a modest contribution to such a study by arguing that Medea actually instantiates a form of irrational behavior that is different from akratic behavior.

The argument that follows is divided in three parts. In section II, I clarify what sort of irrationality I believe to be instantiated by Medea's behavior using Michael Bratman's theory of plan stability. In section III, I analyze Euripides' text in order to show why I think we should say that Medea does display that sort of irrationality. In section IV, I conclude with a brief summary of the argument.

II. Michael Bratman on plan stability, temptation and irrationality

According to Bratman, one of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings is that they are, or are at least are capable of being, "planning creatures" – creatures that settle in advance on more or less complex plans concerning the future, which will then guide their later conduct (Bratman 1983, 271). We may do this either to avoid the need for deliberation at the time of action or in order to coordinate various activities that we have to perform. Either way, says Bratman, the ability to have such plans is a kind of "universal means", useful in our pursuit of a wide variety of different ends (Id., 275). In order to be able to serve us for this function, our plans have to satisfy three main conditions: they must function as conduct-controlling pro-attitudes, and they must possess both means-end coherence and stability.

But what exactly is a "conduct-controlling pro-attitude"? In his writings, Bratman argues that plans tend to motivate us to act as planned, which means that they are "pro-attitudes" in at least a very general sense in which desires, inclinations, goals, and valuations are pro-attitudes. But he also argues that we need to distinguish between two kinds of pro-attitudes: conduct-influencing pro-attitudes, such as desires, and conduct-controlling pro-attitudes, such as plans. In (Bratman 1983), the author formulates this difference as follows:

Suppose I desire a milk-shake for lunch, recognize that the occasion is here, and am guilty of no irrationality. Still, I might not drink a milkshake; for my desire for a milkshake still needs to be weighed against conflicting desires—say, my desire to lose weight. (...) Now, the motivational role of plans seems different; plans seem not to be merely conduct-influencers. Suppose that this morning I settled on a plan that included my having a

milkshake at lunch. Lunch-time arrives, my plan remains, and nothing unexpected happens. In such a case I do not need yet again to tote up the pros and cons concerning milkshake drinking. Rather, in the normal course of events I will simply proceed to execute this part of my plan and order a milkshake. My plan will not merely influence my conduct, it will control it: it is a conduct-controlling pro-attitude. (Bratman 1983, 273).

Bratman's point in the above mentioned passage seems to be clear enough. Conduct-influencing pro-attitudes are those attitudes which provide us with motivations for acting in a certain way but do not settle in advance how it is that we should act in a given context, while conduct-controlling pro-attitudes are attitudes that not only motivate us to act in a certain way, but also do away with the need for further deliberation in some situations precisely because they settle in which way we are to act in these situations.

In what concerns constraints of means end-coherence, Bratman argues that our plans typically involve both a hierarchical and a linear structure, which means that general plans will typically embed more specific plans, or sub-plans, that these sub-plans should display the level of detail we believe to be required for us to fulfill our general plans¹¹ and, finally, that they should also be consistent both with the plan within which they are embedded and with our other plans (Id., 276-278).

Last but not least, stability is the factor that allows our plans to survive in time. According to Bratman (Id., 271), when we settle on a plan we create a new psychological state – the “state of having a plan” – and this state possesses a certain stability. In the normal course of events, says Bratman, this state will not vary in response to ordinary, non-rational bodily processes, unlike my desires to eat and drink, and, although any plan may be reconsidered, having plan involves a strong disposition not to reconsider it except in the face of a significant problem (Id., 274).

11 It is important to notice that Bratman recognizes that our plans have a sort of incompleteness about themselves, and that the demand for means-end coherence is both connected with and limited by this characteristic of plans (Bratman 1983, 275-276). Our plans do not specify what to do in every conceivable circumstance, they don't normally specify what to do down to the most detailed, physical level and, when initially formulated, they may only provide a relatively general specification of some later conduct, a specification the agent knows will need to be filled in prior to the time of action. The demand for means-end coherence is not a demand to complete my plans with respect to every conceivable circumstance and detail. It is only a demand to fill in my plans with enough specifications so that I can successfully execute them.

As the author is well aware, once he uses an associated disposition not to reconsider a plan as a means to define stability he is setting a challenge for himself, namely, to determine what are the conditions in which it is reasonable for us to reconsider, and even discard, our plans. Indeed, it does seem obvious that even though we do not want, as limited rational agents, to be constantly reflecting on whether to reconsider our plans, we want to be able to say that when the time and circumstance for putting our plans in action arrive we will abandon our plans in favor of some alternative course of action if that is the rational thing to do. The problem, of course, is to determine just when it is rational to abandon our plans in favor of some alternative course of action.

Although Bratman mentions and treats the question of the reasonable stability of plans in several of his more recent writings, the nucleus of his theory of reasonable plan stability can already be found in (Bratman 1992, 1996 and 1998). In these writings, he develops his theory through discussions and analyzes of several problematic cases which raise different questions for a theory of reasonable planning. For the sake of clarity, brevity and objectivity, I'll only deal with two of these questions, namely, what are the changes of belief that warrant reconsideration, and eventual abandonment, of our plans, and when can we say that it is reasonable to abandon our plans when we are faced with what Bratman calls "temptation".

In (Bratman 1992, 4-5), the author proposes that we consider the following case in order to determine just what are the changes in beliefs that would warrant reconsideration and eventual abandonment of our plans. Suppose (1) at t_1 an agent forms the intention to A at t_2 on the basis of his relevant desire-belief reasons for and against A at t_2 and for and against its relevant and admissible alternatives; (2) at t_1 this same agent sees the desire-belief reasons he has in favor of his A-ing as superior to those he has in favor of the relevant alternatives to A-ing at t_2 as superior to those he has in favor of the relevant alternatives to A-ing; but (3) when t_2 arrives there is no change in his desires, but there are differences between what he expected at t_1 to be the case at t_2 and what he now, at t_2 , believes to be the circumstances.

As the author remarks, it seems clear that some kinds of divergence between his earlier and later beliefs about his circumstances at t_2 will straightway oblige him to reconsider and even abandon his plan – for example, he cannot rationally intend to A at t_2 and also believe that the circumstances at t_2 make it impossible for him to A. On the other hand, some kinds of divergence between earlier and later beliefs will normally have no tendency at all to trigger even reconsideration, let alone the abandonment of a plan – for example, if he discovers yet another reason for A-ing, or yet another reason against one of A's alternatives.

In contrast to both cases, some changes in belief may not oblige him to abandon his plan but might require him to reconsider it. For example, if an agent has decided to go to the theater instead of going to a piano concert but eventually discovers that the tickets for the theater are more expensive than he had earlier anticipated, or that there is also a string quartet concert that he could attend instead. In the first case his cognitive change somewhat weakens his desire-belief reasons for going to the theater, in the second case his cognitive change introduces a new and attractive alternative not previously considered. Such cognitive changes do *potentially* threaten his earlier plan even though they may not be enough for him to even reconsider it, let alone to straightaway abandon it. In (Bratman 1992, 7-8), the author calls such changes *prima facie triggers of reconsideration*.

Although we do not need to outline in detail the way Bratman conceives such *prima facie triggers of reconsideration*, there are two aspects of his theory that are worth emphasizing. The first is that, according to him, *even when such changes occur it might not be worth to the agent to reconsider his initial plans*. This is because, as (Bratman 1992, 6-7) notices, reconsidering a plan is an activity that has costs: it uses up time and other limited resources, and while engaged in reconsideration an agent might be unable to do other valuable things. This is why Bratman proposes that when thinking about whether or not to even reconsider a plan we need to first ask ourselves if a change of plans would bring enough benefits to outweigh the costs of the reconsideration itself. If the answer is “yes” and the agent has no special reason to distrust his own judgment, then reconsideration of our plans, given his change in beliefs, is recommended (Bratman 1992, 9-10). The second is that *even if such a change warrants reconsideration*, says Bratman, *it might still not be worth it for the agent to change his plan* if the costs of abandoning it are greater than the benefits yielded by the alternative course of action that he is now considering.

In (Bratman 1998, 60) the author builds on this theory when he argues that planning agents have a background of beliefs, values, desires, cares and concerns which support considered evaluative rankings of various kinds of alternatives in light of relevant beliefs; that these rankings are expected to shape his choices of which plans to adopt; and that in order for the reconsideration and eventual abandonment of a plan to be rational it must be grounded in a change in one or more elements that constitute the background which grounds the plan, even though not every change in one of these background elements justifies the reconsideration and eventual abandonment of a plan.

So much for Bratman's theory about the reasonability of reconsidering our plans in the face of changing beliefs. It is time to move to the second question I proposed to treat here, namely, when, according to Bratman, it is reasonable to abandon our plans in the face of temptation. In order to answer this question, we must first understand what exactly is Bratman calling temptation.

In (Bratman 1996), the problem of temptation is introduced with the following example:

Suppose I am a pianist who plays nightly at a club. Each night before my performance, I eat dinner with a friend, one who fancies good wines. Each night my friend offers me a fine wine with dinner, and as I also love good wine each night I am tempted to drink it. But I know that when I drink alcohol, my piano playing afterward suffers. And when I reflect in a calm moment, it is clear to me that superior piano playing in my evening performance is more important to me than the pleasures of wine with dinner. Indeed, each morning I reflect on the coming challenges of the day and have a clear preference for my turning down the wine. Yet early each evening when I am at dinner with my friend, I find myself inclined in the direction of the wine. If I were to go ahead and drink the wine, mine would be a case of giving into temptation. (Bratman 1996, 294-295).

The first thing we must notice about this example is that Bratman does not think that succumbing to temptation is the same thing as losing control of one's action¹². That being said, it still remains unclear just how he conceives what is going on in the above mentioned example. In order for us to understand that, we should bear in mind the way he uses the concept of *temporal discounting* to explain his example:

12 "Austin once warned us not to "collapse succumbing to temptation into losing control of ourselves" (1961, 146). Ainslie would agree. On his view, when I give into temptation, I do not lose control of my action. I control my action in accordance with my preference at the time of action; but this preference is itself at odds with central preferences of mine at different times. I proceed to sketch this story". (Bratman 1996, 295). In this, and many other aspects, Bratman's theory is heavily indebted to the works of George Ainslie. Although Ainslie's only work cited in (Bratman 1996) is (Ainslie 1992), interested readers would do well to consult (Ainslie 1975, 1987, 1989 and 1991), as well as (Ainslie and Herrnstein 1981), for a better grasp of the scientific bases that underlie (Ainslie 1992), and (Ainslie 2003, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, and 2017), as well as (Ainslie and Monterosso 2003), to see how the author has developed his theory in the last 25 years.

Begin with the idea that we frequently discount goods simply because they are in the future. Think of the utility of a certain good to me at a certain time as a measure of my preference for that good as compared with competitors. In temporal discounting, the utility to me today of a good that I would certainly get tomorrow is less than the utility it would have for me tomorrow, and this difference in utility is due solely to the temporal difference. Bill, for example, prefers cake now to ice cream now, yet he prefers ice cream now to cake tomorrow. If this shift in preference is not due to uncertainty about getting the cake tomorrow if he so chose, but is rather due solely to the different times at which Bill would get the desserts, then Bill's case is one of temporal discounting. For such cases we can speak of the discount rate - the rate at which the utility of the future good is diminished solely by the perception that the good lies in the future. Perhaps such temporal discounting is irrational. Still, many (...) suppose it is pervasive. If so, we can expect certain cases of giving into temptation. If, for example, my discount rate is steep enough, the utility to me at dinner of my playing well that evening will be substantially reduced from its utility to me later that evening. The utility to me at dinner of drinking wine may then be above the utility to me at dinnertime of playing well later. If my action at dinner is determined by such preferences, I will drink the wine. (Bratman 1996, 295).

As Bratman notices shortly after, if we apply this theory to the case of the pianist in a straightforward manner we will not yet be able to explain why earlier in the day he had a clear preference not for the wine, but for the superior performance, since the performance was further distanced in time than the wine. Nevertheless, Bratman argues that we can account for the preference reversals displayed by the pianist if we allow that certain discount functions are not linear or exponential but, rather, sufficiently bowed so that the utility curves cross prior to the earlier event (Bratman 1996, 296).

As the author explains, if we suppose that the pianist's discount rate concerning wine is the same as that concerning piano playing, and suppose that his evaluations of both goods are subject to highly bowed discount functions, then we can expect the following: from temporally far away, he will prefer superior piano playing to wine at dinner, but at some time before dinner the utility curves will cross, and there will be a reversal of preference. This reversal, however, is temporary. At some time after dinner, he will again prefer superior piano playing to the wine and, if he has already drunk the wine, he will then regret it.

As it must be clear by now, the problem posed by cases of temptation as conceived by Bratman is the problem of how a rational agent should deal with the kind of situation that is created by such highly bowed discount functions. As (Bratman 1998, 70) remarks, the standard answer to this question is that he should take into account both the present and the future consequences of his actions, give equal weight to both types of consequences when they're equally certain, and then choose the course of action that offers the best overall consequences. Bratman himself endorses this opinion when he proposes that we should stick to our plans in occasions of temptation when (a) if we stick with our plans we will be glad we did and (b) if we do not stick with our plans we will end up wishing we had stuck with it, i.e. we will end up regretting not having stuck with our plans. Whenever (a) and (b) are true, says Bratman, following through with one's plans satisfies the *no-regret condition* and, therefore, it is what the agent should do in order to act rationally.

Although this solution might still appear elegant and powerful to some, the fact is that it is open to one important objection. In his early articles Bratman, relied heavily on the rationality of non-reconsideration of previously made plans. According to the theory delineated there, in order to act rationally when under temptation an agent had to anticipate the future regret he would experience if he abandoned his plans in order to avoid even reconsidering them. But why must an agent who is under temptation have such fear of reconsideration?

As remarked in (Bratman 2014, 299), although we could say that sometimes the cost of reconsideration will make it better not to reconsider, we must also recognize that sometimes reconsideration in face of temptation implies no such costs. Therefore, we must concede that at least in some cases we have no good reason not to reconsider our previously made plans in face of temptation, even though we may, in the end, stick with our previously made plans. This raises a problem for the theory in Bratman's earlier articles because it is not clear how exactly can that theory make it rational for an agent to stick with his plan when he does reconsider it in the face of temptation.

Indeed, according to Bratman himself temptation is not just a motivational push in a given direction: it implies a change in judgement as to what is better in light of the considerations that matter to a given agent in a given occasion (Bratman 2014, 297-298). This means that a case of temptation is a case where the agent actually believes, at the moment he is being tempted, that it is best to give in to temptation. Therefore, if the agent does reconsider his plans when under temptation he'll do so under the impression that his best course of action is to give in to temptation and, if that is so, it is hard to see how can it be rational for such an agent to choose not to give in to temptation.

It seems that, to answer this question in the affirmative, a supporter of Bratman's early theory would have to claim that when under temptation the agent should take into account only his future preferences, and not his present preferences. Although this is a possible answer, Bratman himself came to be dissatisfied with it because it violated what he called *the principle of the rational priority of present evaluation* (Bratman 2014, 297). According to this principle, if at any given time the agent does indeed have a relevant judgment concerning which alternative would be strictly best, then, if that agent is functioning rationally, she will opt for that alternative. Once we've accepted such a principle, it follows that the theory delineated by Bratman in his earlier articles gives us an overly weak view about the rational significance of our plans and, therefore, his early theory must be changed – as the author himself noted in (Bratman 2014, 299).

According to the new theory we find in (Bratman 2014), what happens when an agent rationally resists temptation is that the temptation leads an agent to shift his previous judgement in favor of a given option, and maybe even to reconsider his previous plan, but then the anticipation of future regret shifts that judgement back in favor of his previously selected option (Id., 308). In other words, when an agent resists temptation through anticipating future regret what he does is not to refrain from reconsideration, but to engage in further reconsideration taking into account both the value judgment that is embedded in his policy about the desire he is considering whether or not to satisfy and his eventual future regret. Anticipated future regret, says Bratman, can change which action will seem best for the agent and, therefore, make an impact on his deliberation (Id., 304).

Having clarified how Bratman's later theory of temptation deals with the objection formulated above, I'll finish this section with a brief summary of this theory before moving on to Euripides' text.

If what is said above is correct, we say that according to Bratman temptation is a phenomenon that occurs when the following conditions are met. At t_1 the individual faces a choice between doing A or doing B at t_2 ; the individual's evaluation of A and B is subject to bowed temporal discount functions so that (a) at t_1 he prefers to do A than to do B and, therefore, he chooses and plans to do A at t_2 . But, precisely because the individual's evaluation of A and B is subject to bowed temporal discount functions, (b) the individual will come to *temporally*, but not definitively, prefer B to A before t_2 , and so he will be tempted to do B instead of doing A either before or at t_2 ; so that (c) if he actually does B instead of A he will come to regret it later, once his preferences are back the way they were at t_1 .

According to Bratman, an agent can deal with temptation rationally in either of two ways. If the case is such that what is to be gained by abandoning his plans cannot possibly outweigh the cost of reconsidering his previous plan, then an agent will act rationally if he does not reconsider his plans. But in cases where reconsideration implies in no such costs an agent may reconsider his plan and still act rationally if he anticipates his future regret, takes it into consideration when reconsidering his plans, and decides to follow through with his plan.

I believe I've said enough about Bratman's theory for our present purposes. It is now time to turn to Euripides' *Medea* and show why I believe this theory can help us see the kind of irrationality that is displayed by Medea in Euripides' play.

III. The irrationality of Euripides' Medea

In order to properly understand the setting of Euripides' play, it will be useful to remember the broad outlines of the history of Jason and Medea according to the Greek mythical tradition¹³.

Jason was the son of Aeson, king of Iolcos. In some versions of his myth he had Alcimede, daughter of Phylacus, as his mother, but in other versions his mother is Polymede, daughter of Autolycus. The different versions also disagree as to how exactly Aeson ceased to be the king of Iolchos. Some say he was deposed by his half-brother Pelias, the son of Tyro and Poseidon, but others say that Aeson had entrusted power to Pelias until Jason came of age. Either way, all versions agree that Jason was brought up at mount Pelion by the Centaur Chiron, who taught him medicine, and that when he reached manhood Jason left mount Pelion and returned to Iolcos dressed in a tiger-skin, carrying a lance in each hand and having no shoe on his left foot.

Jason arrived in Iolcos just as his uncle Pelias was offering a sacrifice precisely because he became alarmed when an oracle had told him to 'mistrust a man who had only one shoe'. After staying five days in the city, Jason called on Pelias and claimed the power which was his by right, i.e. the throne of Iolcos. In response, Pelias not only denied him the throne but also ordered Jason to bring him the golden fleece.

At that time the golden fleece was in the possession of Aeetes, king of Colchis, and was known to be guarded there by a dragon. Pelias, of course, was certain that Jason would never succeed. Indeed, Jason himself was so certain he could not do

13 The information contained in the next paragraphs were taken from (Grimal 1990, 229-230, 259-260).

it alone that he sought the help of several other companions, which came to be known as ‘the Argonauts’. But even they would not have been enough for such a daunting task. For one of them, Argos, actually needed and had the help of Athena to build the very boat they would need for their voyage to Colchis, which was named “the Argo”, and in Colchis Jason would eventually meet yet another ally who would prove to be necessary for the completion of his mission, namely, Medea.

Medea was the daughter of Aeetes, the granddaughter of Helios – the Sun, which the Greeks took to be a God – and the niece of Circe – a famous sorceress who was also a daughter of Helios. According to some versions of the Myth Medea’s mother was Idyia, but according to others it was Hecate, who was also a goddess. All the versions of the myth of the Argonauts agree on the importance of the part played by Medea in their mission: without her, Jason would not have won the Golden Fleece. She gave him the ointment to protect him from the bulls of Hephaestus, and used her spells to send the dragon that guarded the golden fleece to sleep. Jason promised to marry her in return for her help. As soon as the fleece was gained Medea took flight with him and the Argonauts, never to return to Colchis.

After leaving Colchis, Jason and Medea went back to Iolchus in search of revenge against Pelias – who was still the king. Once more, Medea’s skills as a sorcerer proved invaluable in the attainment of their goal. After arriving in Iolchus, Medea persuaded the king’s daughters that she could rejuvenate any living being by cutting it up and boiling its pieces in a magic liquid. She even successfully demonstrated her skill using an old ram. Convinced by this, the daughters of Pelias cut him up and threw the pieces into a cauldron provided by Medea hoping that she would bring him back to life. Medea, however, never did so. After this ruse, Acastus – who was Pelias’ son and, consequently, heir to the throne – banished Jason and Medea from his kingdom.

After they were forced to leave Iolchus the couple made their way to Corinth, which was the native city of Aeetes. They lived there in peace for some time, until Creon – the king of Corinth – offered the hand of his daughter to Jason. Euripides’ play begins after Medea has learned that Jason has accepted the king’s offer. During the whole play she refers several times to his acceptance as a betrayal and a breaking of his oath of marriage to her, which is in line with the mythical tradition we know. Indeed, in this tradition all the subsequent crimes of Medea were explained by Jason’s infidelity to his oath¹⁴.

14 As we know, in archaic Greek law an oath between two parties sufficient to establish wedlock, but that ceased to be so in the classical epoch, and Euripides’ plays presents us with an

The play opens with a monologue spoken by the nurse of Medea's children in which she laments the fact that Jason and the Argonauts sailed to Colchis in search for the Golden Fleece (1-48). Had that not happened, says the nurse, none of the current misfortunes being suffered by Medea would have happened, and she would not be so deep in grief. The nurse says she is afraid that Medea will hatch some sinister plan of revenge, and at the end she announces the arrival of the children of Medea and Jason, who are oblivious to their mother's plight.

The children enter the scene accompanied by their tutor, with whom the nurse exchanges a few brief words. He says he heard that Creon has decided to exile Medea and her Children from Corinth (49-95). The Nurse is taken aback by the news, and even manifests her surprise to the children by asking them if they have heard what kind of man their father is towards them (82-84). In the end, she reassures them that all will be well and orders them to go into their house (89). Immediately after, however, she also tells the Tutor to keep them as far away from their mother as possible because she has seen Medea look at them savagely, as if intending to do something to them (89-95).

It is only then that Medea appears (96). In the next segment, she shows all her grief over Jason's actions, calls her children "accursed children of a hateful mother", prays that they perish with their father and that his whole house collapses (111-114, 160-167), expresses her intention to seek revenge and, finally, asks the Chorus to keep this intention a secret (259-266). The Chorus Leader assures her they will do so (267-268), and then announces the arrival of Creon (269-270).

In the scene that follows (271-356), Creon tells Medea that he has heard of her threats against the royal house, and that he has indeed decided to exile her immediately. At first, Medea tries to convince Creon he is wrong about her desires of revenge against the royal house, saying that the only one who has done wrong against her is Jason. But Creon is unconvinced by such words, and in the end he only agrees to give her one day to make her preparations to leave after Medea adopts the posture of suppliant and insistently supplicates him to do so. Before he leaves, Creon tells Medea in no uncertain words that she will be put to death if she is still inside the borders of Corinth after the next the sun rises.

After Creon's exit, the Chorus Leader laments the misfortunes of Medea and wonders where can Medea go to find reprieve from her troubles after she leaves Corinth (357-363). But although in her answer to this lament Medea shows herself to be aware of the difficulty of her position, she also

interesting fusion between archaic and classical legal perspectives on marriage. On this matter, see (Gombini 2018).

feels confident enough to say that she has secured what she needed to begin executing her plan for revenge. Since this is the first time in the play that she actually spells out her intentions, it is worth to quote it in full.

The situation is bad in every way: who will deny it? But things are not at all as you describe them, do not imagine it: there are still struggles for the newly-wedded pair, and for the maker of the match difficulties that are not trifling. Do you think I would ever have fawned on this man unless I stood to gain, unless I were plotting? I would not even have spoken to him or touched him with my hands. But he has reached such a pitch of folly that, while it lay in his power to check my plans by banishing me, he has permitted me to stay for this day, a day on which I shall make corpses of three of my enemies, the father, his daughter, and my husband. Now since I possess many ways of killing them, I do not know which I should try first, my friends: shall I set the bridal chamber on fire or thrust a sharp sword through their vitals, creeping into the house where the marriage bed is laid out? One thing, however, stands in my path: if I am caught entering the house and plotting its destruction, I will be killed and bring joy to my foes. Best to proceed by the direct route, in which I am the most skilled, and kill them with poison. So be it! Now let us suppose they have been killed. What city will receive me? What friend will give me a safe country and a secure house and rescue me? There is no one. And so I shall wait a short time yet, and if some citadel of rescue appears, I shall go about this murder by stealth. But if hard circumstance forces me into the open, I shall take the sword and, even though I am sure to die for it, kill them with my own hand, going to the very utmost of daring¹⁵. (Medea, 364-394)¹⁶.

15 *κακῶς πέπρακται πανταχῆ: τίς ἀντερεῖ; (365) ἀλλ' οὔτι ταῦτη ταῦτα, μὴ δοκεῖτέ πο, <μέλλει τελευτᾶν εἴ τι τῆ τέχνη σθένω.> ἐτ' εἰς' ἀγῶνες τοῖς νεωστί νυμφίοις καὶ τοῖσι κηδεύουσιν οὐ μικροὶ πόνοι. δοκεῖς γάρ ἄν με τόνδε θωπεύσαι ποτε εἰ μὴ τι κερδαίνουσιν ἢ τεχνωμένη; (370) οὐδ' ἄν προσεῖπον οὐδ' ἄν ἠψάμην χεροῖν. ὁ δ' ἐς τοσοῦτον μωρίας ἀφίκετο, ὥστ', ἐξὸν αὐτῷ τᾶμ' ἐλεῖν βουλευόμενα γῆς ἐκβαλόντι, τήνδ' ἐφήκεν ἡμέραν μείναι μ', ἐν ἧ τρεῖς τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν νεκροὺς (375) θήσω, πατέρα τε καὶ κόρην πόσιν τ' ἐμόν. πολλὰς δ' ἔχουσα θανασίμους αὐτοῖς ὁδοὺς, οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποια πρῶτον ἐγχειρῶ, φίλαι: πότερον ὑφάψω δῶμα νυμφικὸν πυρὶ, (ἢ θηκτὸν ὄσω φάσγανον δι' ἥπατος), (380) σιγῇ δόμους ἐσβάσ', ἴν' ἔστρωται λέχος; ἀλλ' ἐν τί μοι πρόσαντες: εἰ ληφθήσομαι δόμους ὑπερβαίνουσα καὶ τεχνωμένη, θανούσα θήσω τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἐχθροῖς γέλων. κράτιστα τὴν εὐθείαν, ἢ πεφύκαμεν (385) σοφοὶ μάλιστα, φαρμάκους αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν. εἰδέν: καὶ διὴ τεθνήσκει: τίς με δέξεται πόλις; τίς γῆν ἄσυλον καὶ δόμους ἐχεγγύους ξένος παρασχών ῥύσεται τοῦμὸν δέμας; οὐκ ἔστι. μείνας' οὐν ἔτι μικρὸν χρόνον, (390) ἦν μὲν τις ἡμῖν πύργος ἀσφαλῆς φανῆ, δόλω μέτεμι τόνδε καὶ σιγῇ φόνον: ἦν δ' ἐξελαύνῃ ξυμφορὰ μ' ἀμήχανος, αὐτῆ ξίφος λαβούσα, κεί μέλλω θανεῖν, κτενῶ σφε, τόλμης δ' εἶμι πρὸς τὸ καρτερὸν.*

16 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Euripides' text follow the one provided by David Kovacs in (Euripides 1994).

As we can see, Medea's plan shows just the kind of hierarchical structure highlighted by Bratman. At this point, Medea has already established the goal of her plan – namely, to kill Creon, his daughter and Jason – but she has not yet settled all its details. Medea's doubts have nothing to do with the goal she set for herself. What she has not yet determined is what is the best route to achieve her goal. She is in doubt as to whether it is better to attempt the murder by stealth, using poison, or if it is better to go 'to the very utmost of daring' and sneak into their house in order to kill Creon, his daughter and Jason with a sword. The disadvantage of the second plan is that it is very risky, and this is why Medea decides not to try it unless she is forced to do so. We could say, then, that she has settled on a general plan, but has not yet chosen what are the subplans that will make up that general plan.

As fate – or perhaps Zeus – would have it, Medea actually does find someone with whom she can barter an assurance of safe haven way before her time expires¹⁷. After Medea has unveiled her general plans, we are treated to a short passage in which the Chorus speaks (410-445) and then Jason arrives on the scene to meet Medea. What follows is a lengthy discussion between Jason and Medea on the merits of Jason's actions in which the two characters cannot reach any agreement (446-625)¹⁸. Once Jason exits the scene, the Chorus sings of the troubles endured by the couple (629-662) and then Aegeus – who at that time is supposed to be King of Athens – suddenly, and unexpectedly, enters de scene to meet Medea (663).

In the next passage (663-758), Aegeus tells Medea he is coming back from a consultation with the oracle of Delphos which he made because he is still childless at his age, a condition that has him very much worried. At first Medea merely expresses her wishes that he finds the solution to his troubles, but when he sees her distress and asks her what is wrong she not only tells him all about what Jason and Creon have done, but also promises to help him with his childlessness by making use of her knowledge about these matters if he gives her safe haven in Athens. By the end of their conversation, she has even managed to extract from him an oath that he will not only receive her at

17 On the influence of Zeus over the events of Euripides' *Medea*, see (Kovacs 1993).

18 Jason tries to convince Medea that her marriage to the princess is not only in his best interests but also on the best interests of Medea and their children. Medea, of course, is convinced. Indeed, although his social situation was certainly going to be improved by the marriage, once we take into account the laws of the Greek concerning former wives and their children the argument present by Jason according does seem to be misleading, to say the least. On this matter see (Leão 2018, 183-184).

Athens, but also that he will neither banish her from there nor give her up to anybody for as long as he lives (719-730, 749-751). Aegeus sole condition is that Medea must leave Corinth and come to Athens by herself, without any help from him.

After making his vow, Aegeus leaves the scene. Right after his exit, we hear the Chorus Leader praise him for his generosity and express his wishes that Hermes, patron of travelers, sees that he returns safely to his house and is able to accomplish all that his heart desires (759-763). Having secured such an oath from Aegeus before any hard circumstances have forced her to resort to the sword, Medea can now go about determining the particulars of her plan for revenge. In the lines that immediately follow the praise of Aegeus by the Chorus Leader, she presents her plan to us as follows:

O Zeus and Zeus's justice, O light of the sun, now, my friends, I shall be victorious over my enemies: I have set my foot on the path. Now I may confidently expect that my enemies will pay the penalty. For this man, at the very point where I was most in trouble, has appeared as a harbor for my plans: to him will I tie my stern cable when I go to the city of Pallas Athena. Now I shall reveal to you my entire design. Hear, then, words that will give you no pleasure. I shall send one of my servants and ask Jason to come to see me. When he arrives, I shall speak soothing words to him, saying that I hold the same opinion as he, that the royal marriage he has made by abandoning me is well made, that these are beneficial and good decisions. I shall ask that the children be allowed to stay, not with the thought that I might leave my children behind on hostile soil for my enemies to insult, but so that I may kill the princess by guile. I shall send them bearing gifts, bearing them to the bride so as not to be exiled, a finely-woven gown and a diadem of beaten gold. If she takes this finery and puts it on, she will die a painful death, and likewise anyone who touches her: with such poisons will I smear these gifts¹⁹. (Medea, 764-789).

19 (764) ὦ Ζεῦ Δίκη τε Ζηνὸς Ἥλιου τε φῶς, (765) νῦν καλλίνικοι τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν, φίλοι, γενησόμεσθα κείς ὁδὸν βεβήκαμεν, νῦν ἐλπίς ἐχθροῦς τοὺς ἐμοὺς τείσειν δίκην. οὗτος γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἢ μάλιστα ἐκάμνομεν λιμὴν πέφανται τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων: (770) ἐκ τοῦδ' ἀναγόμεσθα πρυμνήτην κάλων, μολόντες ἄστῃ καὶ πόλισμα Παλλάδος. ἦδη δὲ πάντα τὰμὰ σοὶ βουλευμάτα λέξω: δέχου δὲ μὴ πρὸς ἡδονὴν λόγους. πέμψασ' ἐμῶν τιν' οἰκετῶν Ἰάσονα (775) ἐς ὄψιν ἐλθεῖν τὴν ἐμὴν αἰτήσομαι. μολόντι δ' αὐτῷ μαλθακοὺς λέξω λόγους, ὡς καὶ δοκεῖ μοι ταῦτα καὶ καλῶς γαμεῖ γάμους τυράννων οὗς προδοὺς ἡμᾶς ἔχει, καὶ ζῦμφορ' εἶναι καὶ καλῶς ἐγνωσμένα. (780) παῖδας δὲ μείναι τοὺς ἐμοὺς αἰτήσομαι, οὐχ ὡς λιποῦσ' ἂν πολεμίας ἐπὶ χθονὸς ἐχθροῖσι παῖδας τοὺς ἐμοὺς καθυβρίσαι, ἀλλ' ὡς δόλοισι παῖδα βασιλέως κτάνω. πέμψω γὰρ αὐτοὺς δῶρ' ἔχοντας ἐν χερσίν, (785) (νύμφη φέροντας, τήνδε μὴ φυγεῖν χθόνα), λεπτόν τε πέπλον καὶ πλόκον

As we can see, all the stages of her plan for revenge have now been clearly settled by Medea. First, she'll ask Jason to come to see her and make peace with him by pretending to have changed her own mind about his decision. Then, she'll ask him if the children can stay. As it becomes clear in their conversation, although Jason would very much like if the children could stay both he and Medea know that this decision is up to Creon, and that he'll probably be heavily influenced by her daughter when making it. This is why Medea will tell Jason that it is a good idea to send them bearing such splendid gifts to the princess in order to soothe her. Once Jason agrees, all that is left for her to do is to give the items to the children and command them to go deliver it to the princess. If all goes as planned, she will put them on, die a painful death and take with her whoever touches her.

So far one could say that Medea has stuck with the general lines of her plan. The only change, it seems, is the fact that when she first presented it to us she made it clear that she wanted to murder Creon, his daughter and Jason, but now she is telling us that the plan is only guaranteed to murder the princess. Be that as it may, it seems safe to suppose that Medea is hoping that Creon and Jason will try to save her once they see the pain she is enduring, touching her in the process and, consequently, dying of the poison too.

But Medea's plan does not end here. Indeed, she knows there is one more deed she needs to perform before she can leave Corinth and, as she very well knows, it is this final act which will be the hardest for her to accomplish. This is how Medea herself speaks about this final deed after she has told us how she intends to kill the princess.

*This subject, however, I now leave behind. Ah me, I groan at what a deed I must do next! I shall kill my children: there is no one who can rescue them. When I have utterly confounded the whole house of Jason, I shall leave the land, in flight from the murder of my own dear sons, having committed a most unholy deed*²⁰. (Medea 790-796).

χρυσήλατον: κάνπερ λαβούσα κόσμον ἀμφιθῆ χροῖ, κακῶς ὀλεῖται πᾶς θ' ὅς ἂν θίγη κόρης: τοιοῖσδε χρῖσω φαρμάκοις δωρήματα.

20 (790) ἐνταῦθα μέντοι τόνδ' ἀπαλλάσσω λόγον. ὤμωξα δ' οἷον ἔργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον τοῦντεῦθεν ἡμῖν: τέκνα γάρ κατακτενῶ τᾶμ': οὐτις ἔστιν ὅστις ἐξαιρήσεται: δόμον τε πάντα συγγέας' Ἰάσονος (795) ἔξεμι γαίης, φιλτάτων παίδων φόνον φεύγουσα καὶ τᾶσ' ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον.

Although this act was not mentioned by Medea when she first outlined her plans to us, it is worth mentioning that before she first outlined her plans she did express her desire that they perish with their father and that his whole house collapses in ruin (111-114). Therefore, we can say that Medea's wish for the death of her children with Jason was made known to us even before she first outlined her plans. Nevertheless, at that moment she said neither that she intended to make their death a necessary part of her plan nor that she intended to kill them herself. Couldn't she have found some other way? Why must the children die too?

When faced with the Chorus Leader's doubt about whether she will be able to bring herself to kill her own children (816), Medea answers only that it is the way to hurt Jason the most (817). And when the Chorus Leader answers that by committing such an act she will become the most wretched of women (818) she says only that, although that might be so, until the moment comes for her to carry out her action all talk is superfluous, and then she immediately asks the nurse to go fetch Jason for her (819 et seq.).

The reason presented by Medea on these lines connects rather well with the motivation she presents to us both when she first outlines the general plan for revenge and after she has already met Aegeus and has settled on a specific course of action, namely, to win glory and avoid the mockery of her enemies. On these occasions, Medea explains what motivates her to draw such plans with the following words,

(395) By the goddess I worship most of all, my chosen helper Hecate, who dwells in the inner chamber of my house, none of them shall pain my heart and smile at it! Bitter and grievous will I make their union and bitter Creon's marriage alliance and his banishment of me from the land! Come, Medea, spare nothing of the arts you are mistress of as you plot and contrive! Into the fray! Now it is a contest of courage. Do you see what is being done to you? You must not suffer mockery from this Sisyphean marriage of Jason, you who are sprung from a noble father and have Helios for your grandsire. You understand how to proceed. And furthermore we are women, unable to perform noble, but most skilful architects of every evil²¹. (Medea, 395-409).

21 (395) οὐ γὰρ μὰ τὴν δέσποιναν ἦν ἐγὼ σέβω μάλιστα πάντων καὶ ξυνεργὸν εἰλόμην, Ἐκάτην, μυχοῖς ναίουσαν ἐστίας ἐμῆς, χαίρων τις αὐτῶν τοῦμόν ἀλγυνεῖ κέαρ. πικροὺς δ' ἐγὼ σφιν καὶ λυγροὺς θήσω γάμοις, (400) πικρὸν δὲ κῆδος καὶ φυγὰς ἐμὰς χθονός. ἀλλ' εἴα φείδου μηδὲν ὄν ἐπίστασαι, Μῆδεα, βουλευούσα καὶ τεχνωμένη: ἔρπ' ἐς τὸ δεινόν: νῦν ἀγὼν εὐψυχίας. ὄρας ἂ πάσχεις; οὐ γέλωτα δεῖ σ' ὀφλεῖν (405) τοῖς Σισυφείοις τοῖσδ' Ἰάσονος γάμοις, γεγῶσσαν ἐσθλοῦ

(797) *The laughter of one's enemies is unendurable, my friends. Let that be as it will. What do I gain by living? I have no fatherland, no house and no means to turn aside misfortune. My mistake was when I left my father's house, persuaded by the words of a Greek. This man—a god being my helper—will pay the price of his deeds to me. He shall never from this day see his children by me alive, nor will he have children by his new bride since that wretch must die a wretched death by my poisons. Let no one think me weak, contemptible, untroublesome. No, quite the opposite, hurtful to foes, to friends. Such persons live a life of greatest glory*²². (Medea, 797-810).

In these two paragraphs, Medea portrays her motivation to take revenge as a way to avoid being the subject of mockery to her enemies – i.e. of being laughed at by them. She believes that she can achieve this goal if she turns Jason's marriage and her banishment, which are supposed to be victories for them and, therefore, something sweet, into something bitter, and that she can operate this transformation if she shows herself not to be weak and contemptible, but hurtful. In other words, by inflicting pain on them for what they have done to her. If we take this into account, we can then explain the murder of her children with Jason as a way to inflict the maximum amount of pain she can inflict on Jason – which is the main responsible for her current predicament.

Nevertheless, one could argue that the desire to avoid mockery and to hurt her enemies is not enough to justify the murder of the children²³. Indeed, even if the Princess and Jason clearly count as Medea's enemies, it is not clear that the children also should count as her enemies. Couldn't Medea have spared them? Wasn't the murder of the princess enough punishment for Jason? Wasn't that pain enough to make sure she would not be the subject of mockery by her enemies? Why did Medea feel that it was needed to sacrifice the children in order to fulfill her plan?

πατρός Ἡλίου τ' ἄπο. ἐπίστασαι δέ: πρὸς δὲ καὶ πεφύκαμεν γυναῖκες, ἐς μὲν ἔσθλ' ἀμυχανώταται, κακῶν δὲ πάντων τέκτονες σοφώταται.

22 (797) οὐ γὰρ γελάσθαι τλητὸν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν, φίλοι. ἴτω: τί μοι ζῆν κέρδος; οὔτε μοι πατρὶς οὔτ' οἶκος ἔστιν οὔτ' ἀποστροφή κακῶν. (800) ἡμάρτανον τόθ' ἠνίκ' ἐξελίμπανον δόμους πατρώους, ἀνδρὸς Ἑλληνος λόγους πεισθεῖς, ὃς ἡμῖν σὺν θεῷ τεῖσει δίκην. οὔτ' ἐξ ἐμοῦ γὰρ παιδᾶς ὄνεται ποτε ζῶντας τὸ λοιπὸν οὔτε τῆς νεοζύγου (805) νύμφης τεκνώσει παῖδ', ἐπεὶ κακὴν κακῶς θανεῖν σφ' ἀνάγκη τοῖς ἐμοῖσι φαρμάκοις, μηδεὶς με φαύλην κάσθενῆ νομιζέτω μηδ' ἡσυχάειν, ἀλλὰ θατέρου τρόπου, βαρεῖαν ἐχθροῖς καὶ φίλοισιν εὐμενῆ; (810) τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων εὐκλεέστατος βίος.

23 I have argued this myself in (Nascimento 2015, 271-272).

In order to answer this question we must remember that, according to Medea and the whole Greek mythical tradition, when Jason accepted to marry the princess he was breaking the oath of marriage he has made to Medea, that his oath is guarded by the gods (20-23, 161, 439, 492, 1392), that divine justice demands that he should be punished accordingly (26, 160, 165, 578, 580, 582, 592, 1352-53) and that, as has been remarked by (Kovacs 1993, 59-60), the most common form of punishment invoked by the Greeks against such an offence was the total destruction of the perjurer's family²⁴. Since the children surely count as Jason's family, we can conclude that by killing them Medea was bringing about an integral part of the punishment that should be inflicted upon Jason according to the divine laws of the Greek gods. In fact, it seems even plausible to say that it was to this penalty that she was alluding in the beginning of the play when she expressed her desire that they perish with their father and that his whole house collapses in ruin (111-114). If we do so, we can then explain Medea's desire for the death of her children as a desire for Jason to suffer the just penalty for his actions.

Having explained how Medea came to settle on her particular plans for revenge, it is now time to show why I believe that we can use Bratman's theory about the reasonable stability of our plans to argue that there is a kind of irrationality in Medea's behavior when she executes her plan. If what is said below is correct, the problem Medea faces when trying to put her plan into action is the problem of temptation, and we can say that she displays a sort of irrationality because she irrationally abandons her plans in the last step – i.e. when the time comes for her to kill the children. Although we shall also see that this abandonment does not last long, for Medea immediately reconsiders the abandonment of her previous plan and decides to fulfill it, this does not change the fact that she does abandon it.

As I've said before, according to Bratman the stability of an agent's plan can be threatened by temptation even when the agent knows beforehand that he may be tempted to abandon his plan and that he should not give in to temptation. But this does not seem to be the case of Medea. Indeed, through the whole of Euripides' play Medea herself never explicitly says that she is anticipating anything like what Bratman describes as temptation

24 For the earlier mentions of this punishment in Homer, Hesiod and others see (Gagné 2010, 2013). See also Andocides 1.98 and Herodotus 6. 86 for latter mentions of it.

– i.e. a change of judgment as to what is best to do²⁵. Only the Chorus clearly expresses such doubts about Medea's strength to fulfill her plans (856-865)²⁶.

Nevertheless, Medea does show that she is aware of how painful will be the task she has set for herself not only when she unveils to us the final steps of her plans – at which point she says, as we've quoted, that she “groans” (οἰμῶζω) at the deed (791) – but also in several other moments of the play. Can any of these passages be used to argue that Medea was tempted not to kill her children? In order to answer this question we have to take a close look at each of them.

The first of these passages comes right in the next scene (894-905), where she pretends to reconcile herself with Jason. In this scene, there is a passage where she calls the children to come greet their father and, as they're doing so, Medea suddenly starts crying in the middle of her lines. According to the explanation that is offered by her in these lines, she does so because she is full of foreboding, thinking of something the future keeps hid (900-902). The most natural way of interpreting this passage is to say that it is the thought of killing the children in the future that is bringing tears to Medea at this moment and, as far as I can tell, this has been the standard interpretation of this passage.

The second passage comes a few lines after, after she and Jason are already “reconciled” (908-931). Right after Jason commends Medea for her change of heart, saying that she is now acting like a prudent woman, he says to the children that he has secured abundant prosperity for them, and that all they have to do in order to hold the very first place in the land of Corinth – along with their future brothers who the Princess will presumably give birth to – is grow to manhood. When Jason prays that they do so, Medea immediately starts weeping again. When Jason asks her the reason for her tears, she says that she was thinking about the children (925) and that, when he prayed they might live, she felt pity for them wondering whether this would be (925-931).

25 This is not a problem for the interpretation defended here. All that Bratman says is that an agent may foresee that he'll feel temptation and still feel tempted when the time comes. Nowhere does he say that for temptation to exist the agent must have foreseen it.

26 “(856) How will you summon up the strength of purpose or the courage of hand and heart to dare this dreadful deed? (860) When you have turned your eyes upon your children, how will you behold their fate with tearless eye? When your children fall as suppliants at your feet, you will not be able to drench your hand in their blood (865) with hardened heart”. (Medea, 856-865). (856) πόθεν θράσος ἢ φρενὸς ἢ χειρὶ τέκνων σέθεν καρδίᾳ τε λήγη δεινὰν προσάγουσα τόλ- (860) μαν; πῶς δ' ὄμματα προσβαλοῦσα τέκνοις ἄδακρυν μοῖραν σχήσεις φόνου; οὐ δυνάση, παίδων ἰκετᾶν πιτνόντων, τέγξει χεῖρα φοινίαν (865) τλάμονι θυμῷ).

The third passage comes after the Tutor of the children has returned with them from the house of Princess (1002-1020). Once he tells Medea that the presents offered by the children were accepted by the Princess and that she has agreed not to exile them, she once again starts weeping. The Tutor, who is oblivious to Medea's plans, is very much surprised by her reaction, and when he asks her why she is crying she says merely that she has every reason to feel the way she does. "The gods, and I, thinking wickedly (*κακῶς φρονοῦσ'*)", says Medea, "have contrived it so" (1014)²⁷.

Now, it is worth noticing that although in the above mentioned passage I decided to translate *κακῶς* as wickedly, choosing to highlight its moral meaning, the term could also be translated as 'poorly' so as to give the idea that what Medea is saying is that she was not thinking well when she decided to murder her children²⁸. But even if we do change the translation in this way it is hard to see how one could argue that Medea was feeling tempted not to kill her children in this passage.

Indeed, even if we accept that at this point Medea had changed her mind about the wisdom of her decision, we must recognize that neither this passage nor the passages mentioned before where Medea weeps at the thought of killing her children suggest that Medea is considering not going through with the murder. Indeed, at the third passage she even speaks as if at that point it was too late for her to do anything else but kill her own children. Therefore, none of these passages can be counted on as evidence that Medea was tempted not to kill her own children at that point.

The fourth passage comes right after the third (1021-1039). In this passage Medea addresses her own children and once again laments the destiny that awaits both herself and them. More specifically, she says that her *αὐθάδεια* (willfulness or stubbornness) has made her *δυστάλαινα* (most miserable) (1028) because she will have to go to another land before she can see them married and happy (1024-1027), and they will neither tend to her when she becomes old nor dress her for burial with their own hands when she passes (1032-1039). This, says Medea, means that all her troubles to give them birth and to bring them up were in vain (1029-1031).

27 *ταῦτα γὰρ θεοὶ κἀγὼ κακῶς φρονοῦσ' ἐμηχανησάμην.*

28 I believe this is the sense of the translation we find in (Euripides 1994, 377), even though Kovacs prefers to translate *κακῶς φρονοῦσ'* for 'in my madness'. After all, since the Greek word for madness (*μανία*) does not appear anywhere in this passage, it seems the only plausible way to explain Kovacs choice is by saying that he is using the word 'madness' here in a figurative way.

As it is the case with the third passage, although one could claim that when Medea says that her *αὐθάδεια* has made her *δυστάλαινα* she is criticizing her own decision, we also find no suggestion in this passage that Medea is considering not going through with it. Once again, she speaks as if at that point it was too late for her to do anything else but kill her own children and, therefore, this passage also cannot be counted on as evidence that Medea was tempted not to kill her own children at that point.

Having dealt with these four passages, we can now move on to the fifth and final passage I wish to analyze here. The passage I'm referring to has been cited as one of the most famous and commented passages in all Greek tragedies. It comes right after the fourth passage I have quoted, and goes all the way from line 1040 to 1080. As we shall see, in this 40-line passage Medea gives a long speech in which she changes her mind numerous times before finally going along with her plan. For the sake of exposition, it will be convenient to divide this passage in several pieces – each of which corresponds to one such a change of mind.

Bearing in mind this division, we can start with the following lines

*Oh! What is the meaning of your glance at me, children? Why do you smile at me this last smile of yours? Alas, what am I to do? My courage is gone, women, ever since I saw the bright faces of the children. I cannot do it. Farewell, my former designs! I shall take my children out of the land. Why should I wound their father with their pain and win for myself pain twice as great? I shall not: farewell, my designs!*²⁹ (Medea, 1040-1048).

As we can see, in this passage Medea explicitly abandon her plan to kill the children. The way she does it must be emphasized. At first, she tells us that her courage – or, more literally, her heart (*καρδία*) – was gone when she saw the face of her children and announces the abandonment of her plan. It is only then that a rational justification for such an abandonment is offered: Medea reasons that she should not kill their children because that would generate twice more pain in her than in Jason.

Even though this might seem like a powerful argument, Medea will immediately ascribe her acceptance of it to mere weakness and change her mind once again. The next lines of her speech can be read as follows,

29 (1040) φεῦ φεῦ: τί προσδέρκεσθέ μ' ὄμμασιν, τέκνα; τί προσγέλαιτε τὸν πανύστατον γέλων; αἰαί: τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται, γυναῖκες, ὄμμα φαιδρὸν ὡς εἶδον τέκνων. οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην: χαιρέτω βουλευμάτα (1045) τὰ πρόσθεν: ἄζω παῖδας ἐκ γαίας ἐμούς. τί δεῖ με πατέρα τῶνδε τοῖς τούτων κακοῖς λυποῦσαν αὐτήν δις τόσα κτᾶσθαι κακά; οὐ δῆτ' ἔγωγε: χαιρέτω βουλευμάτα.

But what is coming over me? Do I wish to suffer mockery, letting my enemies go unpunished? Must I put up with that? No, it is mere weakness in me even to admit such tender words into my heart. Children, go into the house. Whoever is not permitted to attend my sacrifice must take care himself not to be there. I shall not weaken my hand.³⁰ (Medea, 1049-1055).

Once again, Medea reaffirms her desire not to suffer mockery, and this time she explicitly says that she would suffer it if she lets her enemies go unpunished – suggesting, therefore, that the murder of the children are indeed a way to punish them, and that this punishment is a condition for her not to be subject to mockery. Although there is no explicit reference to regret here, it does seem that the most intuitive way to understand Medea's reasoning is to say that she is considering if it is worth it to spare the children now and endure her enemies' mockery later, and that she concludes that it is not worth it – i.e. that if she spares the children now and suffers mockery later she will end up regretting it. If we do so, we can then say that it is the thought of posterior regret that makes Medea retake her previously abandoned plan.

Although by line 1055 Medea has already adopted the stance with which her monologue will end, the text of Euripides' play that has gotten to us contains two more episodes of reconsideration that go from line 1056 to line 1064 before the conclusion, which goes from line 1065 to line 1080. As we know, these 25 last lines of Medea's monologue have been the topic of considerable controversy among scholars³¹. Some – like (Bergk 1884, 512 n. 14), (Müller 1951), (Reeve 1972) and (Zwierlein 1978) – have proposed that should be entirely excised. Others – like (Kovacs 1986, 348-349) – have proposed that only lines 1056-1064 should be excised. A third group, among which we can place (Seidensticker 1990) and (La Combe 2006), have argued that all lines must be kept.

Since we can't possibly hope to settle this dispute here, I believe the most prudent way to proceed is to discuss this last lines as if they belonged to the

30 *καίτοι τί πάσχω; βούλομαι γέλωτ' ὀφλεῖν (1050) ἔχθρους μεθεῖσα τοὺς ἔμοις ἄζημίους; τολμητέον τὰδ'; ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐμῆς κάκης τὸ καὶ προσέσθαι μαλθακοὺς λόγους φρενί. χωρεῖτε, παῖδες, ἐς δόμους. ὄτω δὲ μὴ θέμις παρῆναι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι θύμασιν, (1055) αὐτῷ μελήσει: χεῖρα δ' οὐ διαφθερῶ.*

31 The bibliography on this subject is too vast to be quoted here. For the main references to the contemporary debate see (Seidensticker 1990, 99 n. 1).

monologue. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that, if what is said below is correct, the thesis I'm arguing for is neutral on this controversy. Indeed, if we accept the argument that follows, we should conclude both that, even if we do decide to excise them, lines 1040-1055 already give us enough to argue that Medea has irrationally succumbed to temptation before she retakes and executes her plan, and that the passage that goes from 1056-1080 gives us no evidence that Medea abandons her plan once more. Since we don't need them to argue that Medea is guilty of the kind of irrationality we are trying to ascribe to her and they do not offer us the possibility of ascribing them another irrational episode, our argument is indeed indifferent to whether or not we accept these lines as part of the play.

That being said, we can move on to lines 1056-1058. They can be read as follows,

*Oh! Do not, my angry heart, do not do these things. Let them go, hard-hearted wretch, spare the children! If they live with me in that other place, they will gladden you.*³² (Medea, 1056-1058).

As has been argued by many – f. ex. (Kovacs 1986, 347) – the expression ‘that other place’ here must be a reference to Athens, where Medea herself plans to escape, instead of to the afterlife – as it is most naturally taken when it appears elsewhere on the monologue. According to this interpretation, then, what she is proposing here is to escape with the children with her to Athens because if she does so she will be gladdened to live there with them. This, of course, is clearly a consideration against the murder of the children. But it is unclear whether or not Medea once again abandons her plans in light of this consideration. Indeed, nowhere in these two lines we see the kind of clear rebut of her plans we found between lines 1044 and 1048. Therefore, they offer us no safe ground from which to argue that Medea abandoned her plans at this precise moment.

Having made this point, we can move on to the next passage. It can be read as follows,

By Hell's avenging furies, I shall never leave my children for my enemies to outrage! They must die in any case. And since they must, the one who gave

32 (1056) ἄ ἄ. μὴ δῆτα, θυμέ, μὴ σύ γ' ἐργάση τάδε: ἕασον αὐτούς, ὃ τάλαν, φείσαι τέκνων: ἐκεῖ μεθ' ἡμῶν ζῶντες εὐφρανουσί σε.

*them birth shall kill them. These things are settled in any case and cannot be undone.*³³ (*Medea*, 1059-1064).

As we can see, in this passage Medea rejects the consideration she had entertained in 1056-1058 and reaffirms the need to kill her children. Given what we have said so far about Medea's motivation, the most intuitive way of reconstructing her reasoning here is to say Medea has reminded herself that the children must die in order for Jason to get the punishment that is assigned to those who break their oaths. Now, in order for that to happen Medea cannot escape with the children nor let anyone else save them: she must either kill them herself and spare them any outrage, or leave them to be killed and outraged by her enemies for the murder of the princess. Faced with these two options, she chooses to kill them herself instead of leaving them to be killed and outraged by her enemies.

Having finally settled decisively on a course of action, Medea concludes her monologue in the following manner,

*Already the crown is on her head and the royal bride is perishing in the robe, I know it well. But – since I now go down the road of greatest misery and send these down one unhappier yet – I want to say farewell to the children. Give me your right hands to kiss, my children, give them to me! O hands and lips so dear to me, O noble face and bearing of my children! I wish you happiness – but in that other place. What is here your father has taken away. Oh, how sweet is the touch, how tender the skin, how fragrant the breath of these children! Go in, go in. I can no longer look at you but am overwhelmed with my pain. And I know well what pain I am about to undergo, but my θυμός is the master of my plans, (1080) θυμός that brings mortal men their gravest hurt.*³⁴ (*Medea*, 1065-1080).

33 μὰ τοὺς παρ' Ἄϊδη νερέρους ἀλάστορας, (1060) οὔτοι ποτ' ἔσται τοῦθ' ὅπως ἐχθροῖς ἐγὼ παῖδας παρήσω τοὺς ἐμοὺς καθυβρίσαι. πάντως σφ' ἀνάγκη καταναεῖν: ἐπεὶ δὲ χρή, ἡμεῖς κτενοῦμεν οἵπερ ἐξεφύσαμεν. πάντως πέπρακται ταῦτα κοῦκ ἐκφεύζεται).

34 (1065) καὶ δὴ πᾶσι κρατὶ στέφανος, ἐν πέπλοισι δὲ νόμφη τύραννος ὄλλυται, σάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ. ἀλλ', εἴμι γάρ δὴ τλημονεστάτην ὁδὸν καὶ τοῦσδε πέμψω τλημονεστέρην ἔτι, παῖδας προσεπιεῖν βούλομαι: δότ', ὦ τέκνα, (1070) δότ' ἀσπάσασθαι μητρὶ δεξιάν χεῖρα. ὦ φιλότατη χεῖρ, φίλτατον δέ μοι στόμα καὶ σχῆμα καὶ πρόσωπον εὐγενές τέκνων, εὐδαίμονοιτον, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖ: τὰ δ' ἐνθάδε πατὴρ ἀφείλετ'. ὦ γλυκεῖα προσβολή, (1075) ὦ μαλθακὸς χρῶς πνεῦμά θ' ἥδιστον τέκνων. χωρεῖτε χωρεῖτ': οὐκέτ' εἰμι προσβλέπειν οἷα τε ἤπρὸς ὑμᾶς ἄλλα νικῶμαι κακοῖς. καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα τολμήσω κακά, θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων, (1080) ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἰτίος κακῶν βροτοῖς. Here I have changed the translation we find in (Euripides 1994, 383). Kovacs has chosen to translate θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων as "my wrath overbears

Once again, even though Medea proclaims the children to have a sweet touch and a fragrant breath, nowhere do we find any suggestion that she is even considering, let alone being tempted, to abandon her plan once more. Having gone through all the parts of Medea's monologue, we can then conclude that the only passage that could allow us to say that Medea has succumbed to temptation, even though in the end she went through with her plan, is the one that extends from 1040-1055. Therefore, it is based on that passage that the thesis proposed here must be defended.

That being said, if we examine this passage by itself it seems that all it allows us to say for certain is that Medea indeed came to abandon her plans to kill the children. But what I'm trying to argue is not only that she abandoned her plans, but also that she abandoned because she was under temptation as understood in Bratman's theory. Therefore, even though we have ascertained that Medea has indeed abandoned her plans, we still need to ask if it is indeed reasonable to ascribe Medea's abandonment of her plans to temptation as understood in Bratman's theory.

As we've seen in section II, according to Bratman temptation is a phenomenon that occurs due to an individual being under bowed discount functions when measuring the value of two alternative courses of action. This phenomenon can lead to the reconsideration of one's plans, and the rational way for an agent to deal with it is for him to take into account whether or not he'll end up regretting having abandoned his plan. According to Bratman, an agent will have dealt rationally with temptation either if he does not reconsider his plans in face of temptation, when and if the temptation is not enough to warrant reconsideration, or if he does reconsider it but sticks to his plan because he understands that if he doesn't he'll end up regretting it.

Can we say that Medea's evaluation of the two goals between which she must choose – killing her children in order to avoid the mockery of her enemies and spare the children's lives in order to avoid the pain of murdering them – is subject to bowed discount functions? Although any answer to this question must rely on some speculation, I do believe we have good reason to say she is. Indeed, even though in several moments of the play Medea shows herself to be aware of the pain that the murder is going to cause her, she starts to speak as if she had made a mistake when she decided to kill the children

my calculations", a translation that is very similar to the one we find in (Irwin 1983, 191). Since I've already defended the translation proposed by me in (Nascimento 2015, 269-272), there is no need to repeat my arguments here.

only as the time for the murder is approaching, and it is only when she is about to perform the act that she suddenly starts thinking that it is better not to go through with it and abandons her plan.

Besides, after the murder is done she never shows an ounce of regret or suffering over having done it. Once Medea is through with her speech, the chorus leader laments the labors and pains that mortals who have children must endure (1081-1115) and then Medea herself spots the arrival of a messenger who is bringing news from the castle (1116-1120). Once the messenger relates how the princess and her father have died from the poison contained in the gifts sent by Medea (1120-1230), the chorus both states that calamity was brought upon Jason with justice and laments the fate of the princess (1235) and Medea announces again her resolve to kill the children (1236-1259). Although that announcement is followed with remarks by the chorus about the consequences of spilling kindred blood (1251-1270), the next thing we read is a cry for help from one of the children (1271). The murder of both of them happens quickly (1271-1279), and all that is left for the chorus to do is to lament that Medea pushed herself to such an extreme (1280-1291).

In the last scene (1294-1419), Jason arrives with the double intent of bringing Medea to justice and saving the children from the vengeance of the other members of the royal house, but as soon as he announces his intents the chorus leader tells him that Medea has killed their children. All he'll manage to do is confront Medea about her actions before she leaves the scene in the carriage that was given to her by Helios – her grandfather. In this last confrontation Jason shows himself to be astonished with the fact that Medea was capable of killing the children (1323-1329), remarks that no Greek woman would dare to do that (1339-1340) and highlights that she, Medea, is a sharer in his misfortune (1361). Her answer is short and very much to the point of our discussion: “Of course”, says Medea, “but the pain is worthwhile if you cannot mock me” (1362).

In the closing lines of the play she denies repeated requests made by Jason to bury the children and announces that she'll bury them herself in Athens, at the sanctuary of Hera Akraia. Jason calls repeatedly for the divine powers – the Furies, Justice (1389) and even Zeus (1405-1407) – to punish Medea for her deeds, but she will successfully exit the scene on her grandfather's carriage and the bodies of her two children.

Given all this, I believe we can say that if we look at the behavior of Medea during the play we have good reason to ascertain that that Medea's evaluation

of the two goals between which she must choose in the last step of her plan is indeed subject to bowed discount functions along the play. Nowhere does she put so much value on her children's lives as she does when the moment comes to kill them, and once she has summoned to mind the regret she'll feel if she lets them live she never changes her mind again even though, if we accept the authenticity of some of the disputed lines, we are forced to say that she did entertain one more consideration for a contrary course of action.

Once we accept that Medea's evaluation of the two goals between which she must choose is subject to bowed discount functions, we can say that Medea indeed behaved irrationally according to Bratman's theory of plan stability when she abandoned her plans. For Medea abandoned her plan without anticipating and taking into account her future regret while reconsidering it (1040-1055). Therefore, it does seem we have enough to say, according to Bratman's theory, that Medea's abandonment of her plan was indeed irrational.

IV. Conclusion

As I've stated in the introduction, the purpose of this article was to argue that Medea instantiated a kind of irrational behavior that was different from the kind of irrationality that was attributed to her in (Irwin 1983). In order to do so, I proposed to clarify what sort of irrationality I believe to be instantiated by Medea's behavior using Michael Bratman's theory of plan stability (second II), and then to analyze Euripides' text in order to show why I think we should say that Medea does display that sort of irrationality (section III).

In section II, I've given a broad outline of Michael Bratman's theory of plan stability in order to present his theory about how a rational individual should deal with what he calls temptation. As I've shown in that section, according to Bratman temptation is a phenomenon that occurs when the following conditions are met. At t_1 the individual faces a choice between doing A or doing B at t_2 ; the individual's evaluation of A and B is subject to bowed temporal discount functions so that (a) at t_1 he prefers to do A than to do B and, therefore, he chooses and plans to do A at t_2 . But, precisely because the individual's evaluation of A and B is subject to bowed temporal discount functions, (b) the individual will come to *temporally*, but not definitively, prefer B to A before t_2 , and so he will be tempted to do B instead of doing A either before or at t_2 ; so that (c) if he actually does B instead of A he will come to regret it later, once his preferences are back the way they were at t_1 .

According to Bratman, an agent can deal with temptation rationally in either of two ways. If the case is such that what is to be gained by abandoning his plans cannot possibly outweigh the cost of reconsidering his previous plan, then an agent will act rationally if he does not reconsider his plans. But in cases where reconsideration implies in no such costs an agent may reconsider his plan and still act rationally if he anticipates his future regret, takes it into consideration when reconsidering his plans, and decides to follow through with his plan.

In section III, I've argued that Medea was tempted not to kill her children when the moment came because she discounted the good she was aiming at in her plan, namely, to avoid the mockery of her enemies. As I hope to have shown, we can say that Medea's evaluation of the two goals between which she must choose – killing her children in order to avoid the mockery of her enemies and spare the children's lives in order to avoid the pain of murdering them – is subject to bowed discount functions. For it is only right before the time to kill her children arrives that she prefers not to kill them. Indeed, Medea is calling for their death since the beginning of the play, she announces her intention to kill them right after she meets Aegeus, and never does she express any regret for having killed them after she has done it.

Besides, I also argued that if we accept Bratman's theory of plan stability we can say that Medea behaved irrationally when she abandoned her plans in face of temptation. Indeed, at that moment Medea gives no thought to the regret she'll feel for letting the kids live and becoming a subject of mockery for her enemies. It is only after she has abandoned her plan that such thoughts enter her mind and, as soon as they do, she retakes her plan and follows through with it.

Although it could be said that this interpretation ascribes to Medea an irrational act of very little importance, since in the end she did follow through with her plan, we must bear in mind that when looking for depictions of irrational behavior in the works of Euripides we should not necessarily look for irrational acts of great consequence. What should interest us is not the magnitude of the act, but the mere fact that Euripides took the time to depict such acts as thoroughly and accurately as he did. Given that philosophers did not begin to study such cases of irrationality before the 20th century, this is certainly remarkable in itself.

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