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“A Jailhouse Decision”

Caught red-handed and immediately arrested, my friend and I genuinely sense a future behind the iron bars of prison cells. The district attorney enters this scene and stands before me with an enticing offer – I can provide additional information, betraying my partner in crime, in return for considerably less jail time. My other choice is to stay silent, remaining loyal to my friend but risking more time behind bars. Complications arise as I realize that the amount of jail time I serve will also depend on whether or not my friend betrays me. Given that my friend and I are rational, I choose to provide the district attorney with the additional information.

Betrayal, in this case, is the most rational decision. The following table illustrates the most probable consequences of providing and of not providing the district attorney with additional information:

		FRIEND	
		Betrays	Does Not Betray
I	Betray	Both: 4 years	Myself: 6 months Friend: 10 years
	Do Not Betray	Myself: 10 years Friend: 6 months	Both: 2 years

By betraying my friend, I will receive, at most, four years of jail time, and I even have a chance of getting as little as six months. However, by not giving up the information, I may end up in prison for ten years. Clearly, the least risky and most rational decision requires betraying my partner in crime because I can gain the most and lose the least from it. If my friend chooses to remain silent, I only receive six months of jail time. If my friend chooses to betray me as well, I

still benefit from my decision because I receive, at most, four years of jail time as opposed to the ten years I would have received if I had withheld the information.

Knowledge of my friend's rationality also influences my decision. Because I know my friend is also rational, I know my friend realizes that betraying me offers the most to gain and the least to lose. Therefore, my friend will likely provide the district attorney with the additional information in hopes of either reducing the punishment to six months – if I do not give in to the district attorney – or getting four years instead ten years of jail time – if I do give in to the district attorney as well. Because my friend will likely betray me, I must betray my friend; otherwise, I may be imprisoned for ten years.

However, some people do not agree that the most rational decision is to provide additional information to the district attorney. These individuals argue that if both my friend and I are rational, we will not betray each other, allowing each of us to endure only two years of prison. This decision does not minimize the jail time for just one person but, rather, for both people involved and therefore is not only the most rational but also the most moral decision. However, the flaw in this decision is that my friend and I must work together to minimize our punishment. My friend is a rational person but not necessarily a moral one; helping minimize my punishment may not be one of my friend's goals. Furthermore, even if my friend is a moral person, my friend's rational thinking will not allow the withholding of information from the district attorney; if I betray my friend, my friend may be imprisoned for ten years, a risk that a rational person is unlikely to take.

Although not the best moral decision, betrayal is the most rational decision. By betraying my friend, I avoid ten years of jail time, and I have a chance at just six months. However, because my friend is also a rational individual, my friend will likely betray me as well, and we

will probably each receive four years of jail time. If both of us remain silent, we will only face two years of imprisonment each, but the risk involved make this decision irrational; if I remain silent but my friend does not, I will be imprisoned for ten years. The key point is that I can gain the most and lose the least by providing the district attorney with additional information. Choosing to betray my friend is certainly not the virtuous tactic, but it is the rational one.