An Essay Concerning the Nature of Personal Commitment

A Dissertation

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By

Clemens Schlink

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Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Stefan Gosepath, Freie Universität Berlin

Second Supervisor:

Prof. Dr. Ruth Chang, University of Oxford

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I hereby declare that this dissertation was written and prepared by me independently. Furthermore, no sources and aids other than those indicated have been used. Intellectual property of other authors has been marked accordingly. I also declare that I have not submitted the dissertation in this or any other form to any other institution as a dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Abigail plans to visit her friend next month. Bart promises his mother to do the dishes. Cedric and Danielle marry each other. Eric finds himself unable to swear on the Bible because of his atheist beliefs. Florence sets herself the goal of running a marathon next year. George and Hannah spend their lunch breaks together. Iwan shows solidarity towards his fellow workers when he does not break the ongoing strike. These are all plausible examples of commitment.

This motley crew of commitments (Gilbert 2006, 126) is representend in economic theory as a challenge towards traditional ways of thinking about human behavior (e.g. Sen 1977), in action theory as a way of explaining the inertia of plans or joint action (e.g. Bratman 1987, Gilbert 2006), in moral theory as part of the idea of promises (e.g. Migotti 2003, Raz 1977, Robins 1984), in ethics as a condition for diachronic agency (e.g. Bratman 2007a, Frankfurt 1988), in the practical reason debate as a way of takting control over one's life (e.g. Chang 2013a), in social psychology as a way of analyzing the dynamics of relationships (e.g. Kelly and Thibaut 1978, Johnson 1973, Rusbult 1980, Stanley and Markman 1992), in political science as a tool to help explaining important concepts such as solidarity (e.g. Ahmed 2004, Marin 2017, Sangiovanni 2015, Ypi 2016), and (perhaps unsurprisingly) also finds its way into modern pop culture and self-help literature (e.g. Drogba 2015, Reeder 2014).

This clearly demonstrates that commitment is a widely used term nowadays. Companies are committed to reducing their environmental

impact. Sports teams are committed to "turn things around." The World Economic Forum is committed to improving the state of the world. The football club of Athletic Bilbao is committed to only sign players of Basque nationality. Partners commit to each other.

Not only are there a variety of possible meanings when it comes to commitment, it is also a highly contested concept at present. For example, the fact that today's societies are largely pluralistic and open in ways unimaginable only a century ago has led some communitarian philosophers to believe that the modern person is unable to make any truly deep commitments (MacIntyre 1981; Taylor 1992). We become indistinguishable individuals with no distinct personality. And, indeed, even our ability to make less profound commitments is undermined by an ever constant attack on our will (Schwartz and Sharpe 2011; Sennett 1998).

This is even more surprising when considering that commitment is an important factor in our social lives. Indeed, social interaction seems impossible without commitment (Cf., e.g., Clark 2006 and Gilbert 2006). Commitments to others take the form of agreements or promises. But we can also commit ourselves privately – e.g., to run a marathon.

Perhaps all of us know what it is like to privately or internally bind ourselves to an end or goal, whether it is the achievement of finishing a triathlon or something more substantive like becoming a vegetarian. The once optional goal gains a certain hold on us. It now normatively constrains our conduct and future choices. But this kind of binding can be also be achieved by different means.

You can, for example, casually plan to to write a mystery novel. So

long as you have that intention you are required to take the necessary means to your end. Or, you can promise yourself to improve your golf handicap. In the case where you fail to meet your goal, you would be morally blameworthy. Rather differently, it could also be the case that you experience something as so important to you that you cannot imagine your life without it.

There is, however, also the possibility to put your will behind something. You can make it the case that you have reason to help out at the local soup kitchen biweekly. You can exercise your normative power to make yourself about something, that is to say, you can commit yourself. By personal commitment, then, I understand the act of privately binding oneself to an end or goal as to normatively constrain one's future.

It is up to you if you commit to running the Boston marathon next year or if you commit to competing at The Great British Bake Off or to something else entirely. Meaningful lives depend on the possibility to make yourself into the kind of person that has reason to run rather than to bake. Personal commitments provide you with the opportunity to make yourself about something.

Commitments in these personal terms seems to be a vital part of our practical lives. Additionally, they provide us with unique reasons to live the lives that we lead. When you personally commit yourself to something you take responsibility for your life and hold yourself accountable. That is, you adopt the stance to pursue your goal and give it significance in your life. Someone who fails to shape her identity in this way somehow fails to give substance to her life.

And yet, very surprisingly, this idea of personal commitment is under-reasearched and does not get a lot of attention. This dissertation offers a theory of what it means to be personally committed to something. By personal commitment I have in mind the kind of commitments mentioned above.

A quick note on methodology is in order. Throughout this dissertation I engage in conceptual analysis. That is, I begin by describing what we plausibly understand when we talk about something like personal commitment. This phenomenological engagement allows me to extract the most plausible and important desiderata any plausible theory of personal commitment has to meet. These desiderata, then, serve as a benchmark for my engagement with a variety of concepts that make use of the idea of commitment in some way. In the end, I will offer a refined phenomenology of personal commitment; in this way, I will engage in something that can perhaps best be captured as "analytic phenomenology."

1.1. A Paradigmatic Example of Personal Commitment

Your life doesn't just happen to you: you have a say in how you live your life. You have the opportunity to make yourself into the kind of person that has reason to read philosophy or pursue a career in music. You can put yourself behind one pursuit or the other (or something else entirely). What you can commit to depends critically on it being important to you in some way.

Let's say that you have committed to running a marathon. What this

means is that you put yourself behind it and that you ought to do so in light of this commitment. Your commitment demands engagement and begins to color your life. In this case, you might develop exercise routines, change your diet, and so on.

What is demanded by your personal commitment is very rarely (if ever) the only thing that is possible for you to do. It does not exclude the ability to act against your commitment. It is possible for you to stay in bed or to spend an evening on the couch after a particularly stressful day – Weakness of will is still possible. However, you would fail to take yourself seriously in those instances. You would likely feel ashamed (depending on the case).

Additionally, the deontic pull of a commitment doesn't depend on motivation. That is, you still ought to run a marathon even if you don't particularly feel like it right now. It is stable in that sense. This is also able to make sense of the feeling that you govern yourself and that you are being governed at the same time.

The fulfillment of a commitment isn't owed to anyone. You might perhaps feel embarrassed if you don't achieve it but no one can demand performance from you. You can give up your commitment to run a marathon when it no longer occupies that special role in your identity that it once did. You don't sign away control when you commit yourself. Your former obligation no longer applies to you. You no longer ought to run a marathon. You can exit a commitment at will.

Your commitment does not rest on mental states (belief, desire, and so on) and it also does not rely on already existing reasons for guidance. It is

rather something that is entirely up to you. Thus, I appropriately call it a "personal commitment."

1.2. Outlook

The idea of personal commitment is one that has not received much attention in philosophical discourse. Somewhat related phenomena such as intention, promise or volitional necessity all utilize some idea of commitment in trying to make sense of the respective account's staying power. However, what they are unable to express is the distinct activity that we can find at the very heart of the idea of personal commitment. A personal commitment has to be entered into, and exited out of, at will and demands proper engagement in the meantime.

The following chapter offers phenomenological insight into what it means to be personally committed. To be personally committed means that one binds oneself internally through an act of will. It also introduces some important desiderata any theory of personal commitment needs to incorporate. A commitment is something that you decide to make. It is in this sense that you "put yourself behind something." Your commitment begins to color your life in that it demands engagement. That is, you start spending your time in ways that aim at the manifestation of your commitment. It is reasonably stable in that it survives changes in motivation. You assign significance to a previsouly optional end. It allows you to shape your distinct identity. Further, by personally committing yourself you set yourself aims that your have reason to pursue. Thus, to act in accordance with your personal commitment is something that you ought

to do by virtue of your own will. Finally, it is possible to exit personal commitments at will.

The third chapter takes a closer look at different varieties of intention and whether any of them are able to accommodate the aforementioned features of personal commitment. Intentions are thought to come with some sort of commitment to action. Typically, they also require activity (with the notable exclusion of reductive accounts of intention). The commitment in intention boils down to a requirement to act on one's intention. Additionally, an intention can easily be abandoned. Intentions ultimately fall short because they do not stand in the correct relation to volition and cannot account for the reason-creating force of commitments.

In the fourth chapter I consider whether it makes sense to think of personal commitments in terms of promises. When you make a promise to someone you hand over to her the right to demand performance. Stability is ensured by giving away control. You cannot willingly exit a promise. Further, it is contested whether promises create reasons or if they trigger reasons by relying on a pre-existing normative principle. Promises cannot account for all the properties of personal commitment.

The fifth chapter examines the prospects of understanding personal commitments in terms of incapacities of the will. You run into an incapacity of your will when you discover that you cannot bring yourself to do something, e.g., go against your pacifist ideals. The stability of it hinges upon psychological continuity. That is, from the moment that you no longer care about the object of your incapacity, you are free to go your way. You, the agent, don't have a say in it. Incapacities of the will are marked by

a particularly strong motivation. That is, you neither enter nor exit an incapacity of the will by choice.

In the penultimate chapter I am taking a closer look at two accounts that sail under the flag of will-based commitments and will investigate whether they can fit the bill. Here it becomes particularly clear that all the above-mentioned phenomena are somewhat related to the will. However, they cannot account for the will as being a creator of reasons. In this chapter the importance of the will for personal commitments will be made clear.

The final chapter summarizes what has been identified as essential to the notion of personal commitment, why it is not best understood as being a subcategory of an already existing phenomenon and proposes a theory of personal commitment. A personal commitment, on my account, is the willing of some consideration to be a reason for you and to properly engage with it. From that point on it begins to color your life. Personal commitments offer a sensible stability in terms of being unaffected by changing motivations. Further, you exit it at will when it no longer provides the meaning for your identity that it once did. Personal commitments are important because they allow us to take control over our lives and to make us into the particular agents that we are.

Chapter 2: A Provisional Sketch

After exploring the various different uses of the term commitment, it is now time to consider what I mean by personal commitment. This chapter paints a picture of the contours of personal commitment and introduces some properties of a plausible theory of personal commitment. I distinguish between three possible understandings of commitment and propose that personal commitment is best understood as a subcategory of "will-based commitments." By "will-based commitment" I have in mind that some agent binds herself to something by her own volition as to change her normative situation. This can be achieved in relation to other individuals but also internally just by yourself. I shall continue to explore the distinct characteristics of personal commitment that serve as a benchmark for our later assessment of what can possibly be a personal commitment.

In order to achieve this, I begin by describing what personal commitments are. This is followed by an investigation of the question of whether personal commitment is a distinct phenomenon or simply a subcategory of an already existing one. Finally, I analyze some important properties that no theory of personal commitment can do without.

2.1. A first sketch

Let me begin by considering what personal commitments are. Perhaps all of us know what it is like to internally (or privately) bind ourselves to an end or goal. Let it be the achievement of finishing a

triathlon or something more substantive like becoming a vegetarian. You assign a previously optional end importance, you take a stand, and it subsequently colors your life. It now normatively constrains your conduct and future choices. You exercise a normative power by committing yourself. By personal commitment, then, I understand the act of internally binding yourself to an end or goal by your own will so as to normatively constrain your future.

The term "commitment" is widely used and it should come as no surprise that differences in what is meant to be described occur. For example, I am committed to finishing my dissertation. High-school athletes commit to a certain university to pursue their athletic endeavors. The World Economic Forum (WEF) is committed to improving the state of the world. Vegetarians are committed to a meatless diet. The football club of Athletic Bilbao is committed to only signing players with Basque nationality and Enlightenment philosophers are committed to taking morality as practically binding. Naturally, what we mean by "commitment" varies. Normally, we think that a commitment involves taking on responsibility and holding oneself responsible as well. That is, someone that is committed adopts the stance to pursue her goal and gives it some significance and weight in her life.

But even this narrowed-down understanding of commitment allows for multiple meanings. For further clarity, I want to distinguish between three possible understandings of commitment. First, we sometimes employ a *cognitive sense of commitment* (e.g. Liberman and Schroeder 2016, Michael et. al. 2016, Ross 2012, Shpall 2014). Here, what we mean when we say that someone is committed is that certain conclusions are rationally implied by

the person's dispositions. For example, if you tell me that you were born in the month of July, you are thereby committed to the claim that you were not born in any other month but July. Similarly, someone who believes that everything that is written in the Bible is true, is committed to believing that creationism is true.

Second, we sometimes make use of a *motivational sense of commitment* (e.g. David Hume, Bernard Williams and others) to describe those goals that we are particularly inclined to achieve. For example, we may talk of a runner as being committed to the goal of running a marathon in the sense that he puts lots of time and effort into training sessions, organizing training camps, planning ahead for the competition, juggling long training hours and time for his family, and so on. If, however, the runner's desire fades and, as a result, he consistently neglects training and slowly withdraws from his plan to run a marathon, we would not talk of him as being committed to running a marathon anymore. The runner's commitment, then, depends on the persistence of his desire and belief, i.e., on his motivation. Or, if it turns out that the "committed runner" really was doing all this so he could impress and win over a woman, we might say that he never really was committed to running a marathon but, perhaps, to something else entirely (e.g. winning over that woman).

Finally, we sometimes employ, what I call, a *will-based sense of commitment* (e.g. Ruth Chang, Margaret Gilbert and others). Here, you have committed yourself to a project, in the sense that you have bound yourself, i.e., put yourself under some normative constraint to pursue what you have committed. It is important to distinguish between two kinds of will-based

commitment (Cf. Michael and Pacherie 2015).[1]

First, you can make *other-commitments*, i.e., willingly bind yourself to someone else. You can, for example, bind yourself to look after my cats by promising this to me. I can now hold you to this and blame you if you should not live up to your promise. When you make a promise to me, you willingly change the normative landscape by transferring to me some authority over you. You weren't obligated to do what you are now obligated to do via your promise to look after my cats. Hence, we have established that it is within our power to willingly alter the normative landscape, e.g., by making a promise.

Second, you can make *self-commitments*, i.e., willingly bind yourself to yourself. You can, for example, personally commit to running a marathon. And you do this without the involvement of anyone else. I suggest that we would intuitively say that you now ought to run a marathon (even in the absence of owing it to anyone). You do not owe the realization of your commitment to anyone but yourself. Here, you have the opportunity to commit yourself independently of your motivation. Your will serves as the source of the created reason. This is the result of making use of your normative power to bind yourself (to yourself). Again, you have made it the case that you now ought to do something (i.e. run a marathon) that you weren't obligated to do before by personally committing to it. Hence, we have established that it is within our power to willingly change what it is that we ought to do by committing ourselves (to ourselves).

[1] Both kinds of will-based commitment can either be made privately, i.e., only the authors of the commitment know of it, or publicly, i.e., the commitment gains an audience, e.g., by telling your loved ones about it. This is commonly referred to as "raising the stakes." It is important to note, however, that the audience of your commitment is not entitled to demand the realization of the commitment and, hence, no obligation towards them exists (Cf. Michael and Pacherie 2015). I will later make the point that your loved ones would do best to remind you of your commitment in case of neglect.

Will-based commitments change what we have reason to do (Cf. Chang 2013a)[2], and, hence, our reaction towards someone who fails to comply with a commitment will be different in the will-based scenario than the motivational case. The avid runner's withdrawal from his ambitions of running a marathon due to his withering motivation plausibly supports the suspicion that he wasn't really a committed runner. Our reaction would be different, however, had he volitionally committed himself to it because he had failed himself. We would most likely sympathize with him and remind him of the importance of the commitment for him. The runner himself might likely feel embarrassed if he fails to act on his commitment. It is true, this failure might be justified; he might have all-things-considered reason to do something else instead.

This dissertation focuses on a specific subset of will-based commitments: personal commitments. As I said earlier, a personal commitment is the act of internally (or privately) binding oneself to an end or goal as to normatively constrain one's future. Since many commitments are to others, (such as promises, contracts, joint-intentions), they can be appropriately described as "social," to indicate that they involve interaction between at least two parties. It typically takes all the involved parties to successfully rescind such a commitment (Cf. Gilbert 2006). Personal commitments, however, are inherently internal, i.e., they do not rely on the involvement of others either in making or rescinding them.

[2] Just how this change is being accomplished is up to debate. It is plausible, however, that this is being achieved by different means. This will come up again at some later point in this dissertation.

2.2. The Phenomenology of Personal Commitment

We now have a first idea of what personal commitments are and what the distinguishing marks from other kinds of commitment are. In this part, I want to take a first brief look whether personal commitments are a distinct phenomenon or are simply best understood as a subcategory of an already existing phenomenon. In order to achieve this, I take a closer look at the phenomenology of personal commitments, constrast it to nearby phenomena such as intentions and promises, and suggest that the plausibility of the introduced examples support the distinctiveness thesis of personal commitments.

Take for example, someone who is making a personal commitment to perform a single act. Suppose that Anna looks for a new challenge and finishing a marathon would be suitable. Although she isn't up for the task right now, she feels confident that with the right approach she can tackle her newly identified challenge. Anna also has good reasons to compete in a marathon – she enjoys the mixture of solitary and collective training units; it offers a change from her otherwise stale work day routine and allows her to clear her head, regular exercise promises health benefits, and so on. But while these considerations make it reasonable for Anna to run a marathon, they don't, by themselves, make it the case that she must indeed compete in one.

Let us assume that Anna decides to compete in a marathon. She can approach her decision in a few different ways. She can, for example, simply form an intention to finish a marathon. As long as she has this intention, she is required to act on it. Would Anna act otherwise she'd be guilty of

practical irrationality. If, however, it proves to be too much of a hassle, or if she rather wants to do something else, she can simply change her plans. As we will see later on, intentions are easily revised.

Alternatively, she can make a public commitment in the form of a promise to her doctor as a way to stay more healthy in general and to strengthen her weak heart in particular. This would result in Anna being pro tanto morally obligated to finish a marathon. Unless, of course, there is some more stringent moral duty or her doctor releases her from her obligation (e.g., if the doctor finds out that Anna is actually hurting herself with her demanding training regime instead of improving her health).

Yet another option is available, however, to Anna. This option promises to be more normatively robust than intentions or plans and, at the same time, does not involve the moral weight of promises. Anna can make a personal commitment which means that she internally binds herself to compete in a marathon. By making this personal commitment, Anna is bound to follow through on it. Now, suppose that she has personally committed herself but never acted on it. We are likely to react in two possible ways. We would possibly infer that she never really made a robust commitment or, if she did, that she needs to be reminded of the commitment's role in her life. Getting out of a commitment seems to require, at least, some sort of an explanation. Simply not acting on it is not sufficient.

Now, let us take a look at a more permanent course of action such as being a vegan. Beatrice considers a vegan diet worthwhile, though does not consider it to be a moral duty. There are quite a few reasons in favor of

veganism: it promises general health benefits, reduces the impact on the environment, makes economic sense (both personal and social), and shows compassion for animals.

Beatrice could go about this matter in several different ways. She might simply settle on a plan to becoming a vegan and figure out in the process how she's coping with it and whether she wants to stick with it. Maybe it proves to be too difficult for her and, perhaps, she opts for a "flexitarian" diet instead. Her plan is only binding as long as she's having that plan and having a plan or not is equally good. Her plan does not possess any additional weight.

Or, she might promise her spouse to adopt a vegan diet as to make things go more smoothly at home and to show that she is really trying. This would put her under some moral obligation to follow through with her idea of becoming a vegan (excluding the possible release from the promise).

But Beatrice also has another option: she might make a personal commitment to becoming a vegan. Like Anna's commitment, this commitment too seems to give rise to new reasons for action; additional reasons on top of the already existing reasons. Beatrice's commitment seems to change what she ought to do. If Beatrice has indeed robustly committed herself to becoming a vegan, she ought to abstain from eating meat.

Furthermore, such a personal commitment excludes certain considerations for as long as you remain committed that otherwise would count as a reason to eat meat as relevant (e.g., the nutrients or the taste of a steak). To a committed vegan those considerations are not being

outweighed but, more significantly, are "off the table," "unthinkable" or "crowded out." Whereas abandoning such a personal commitment seems to demand an explanation, breaking it seems to warrant to be reminded of the commitment by one's loved ones.

Finally, we might decide to make a personal commitment to a more general goal. In such a case the resulting demands it makes are not previously specified. Let's consider Caryl, whose previous romantic relationships were never really anything more than casual, but now she is keen on committing to her new boyfriend. She always had the feeling that something essential was missing in her previous (uncommitted) relationships.

It's not obvious from the outset what Caryl is getting herself into and what demands her newly adopted personal commitment is going to make on her. It is, for example, comprehensible that Caryl is now required to look after her sick boyfriend instead of pursuing her initial plan to go out. It seems plausible to say that Caryl is now obligated in ways she wasn't before and others possibly aren't and that a failure to comply gives rise to feelings of self-betrayal. If this would be one of Caryl's earlier relationships there probably would be no such demands (excluding other moral obligations).[3]

We react differently in the case of uncommitted proceedings and personally committed proceedings. By personally committing ourselves we take on a previously optional end that will from now on constrain our future choices. We thereby assign it some significance in our lives. If a

[3] For a particularly helpful analysis of why commitment may not be helpful (or even counter productive) for love or relationships see Ghaeus 2016. Ghaeus argues that the sacrifices that come with commitment endanger the spontaneity of love. An argument for the contrary can be found in Marin 2013.

personal commitment has indeed been made we are likely to be in a position to remind the person who has breached her personal commitment of it. Our reactive attitudes support the assumption that our personal commitments truly change what we ought to do.[4]

The normativity in personal commitments is stronger than that involved in instrumental rationality but, at the same time, does not generate moral obligations. It seems to be more subtle (yet equally demanding). The "ought" of the commitment can be fleshed out in terms of the commitment's recipient and not its audience. That is, a personal commitment creates an obligation towards myself and no one else can hold me to it (Cf. Michael and Pacherie 2015).

Think of Anna, our ambitious runner, whose personal commitment demands that she follows through on it. We can imagine that should she genuinely stop caring about her athletic ambitions that she would be released from her personal commitment to finish a marathon.[5] We cannot blame her. Should Anna have made a promise to someone things would be different. Now she cannot get out of it by herself but instead needs to be released by the promisee. She is morally obligated to act on her promise.

The intuition that there is something between a promise and an intention makes a good case that for the existence of personal commitments: commitments which cannot be reduced to some other already existing phenomenon. Given the plausibility of our intuitions in the

[4] It is unclear, however, how much we really are involved in the matter. It is a *personal* commitment after all; a commitment that the person made to herself. Therefore, I am not claiming that we can legitimately hold the person to act on her personal commitment but that we may criticize her in a way to remind her on what she wants herself to do. Some sort of intimacy between the persons seems to be required for this kind of criticism, which, then, seems to most likely be appropriately performed by family, partners, and friends.

[5] Anna can, of course, tell her friends about her ambitions and, as a result, raise the stakes. This does not change, however, that the ought is private. She cannot be blamed in the case where she exits her commitment.

cases of Anne, Beatrice and Carol and thus making the idea of personal commitment as a distinct phenomenon attractive, such an account is in need of a more detailed discrimination as opposed to other related phenomena and of the properties of the phenomenon itself.

How precisely personal commitments differ from other related phenomena such as intentions or promises and what the exact subtleties are, is what I am going to explore in great detail in the following chapters. It is there that we will also find additional encouragement for our initial intuition of the existence of personal commitments.

2.3. Properties of Personal Commitment

Now that we have an ample description of personal commitment at hand, it is time to analyze its properties. For this, I am going to introduce some properties that are necessary in order to speak of personal commitment. They will accordingly help me to put some flesh on the bones of our phenomenological observations.[6]

It might, however, be helpful to begin with saying what a personal commitment is not. Even though a personal commitment might require you to act in repetitive ways it should not be confused with the somewhat close-by concept of a habit. A habit is something that you do regularly and repeatedly (sometimes without knowing it). Going for a run every Sunday evening or having a coffee the first thing in the morning are possible

[6] This list of properties gives us a first feeling about personal commitment and is by no means exhaustive. In the course of this dissertation, I construct and defend my account of personal commitment against other accounts but I will also take something away from those acconts. The properties of personal commitment will subsequently go through some refinement during the course of this dissertation.

instances of habit.

It seems quite plausible that the existence of a habit can make you feel as if you were personally committed. It can produce a "sense of commitment." After all, regularly going out for a run in order to strengthen your health sounds very similar to being committed. Actively seeking a habit, however, aims at the manipulation of one's character by causally interfering with potential options.[7] It does not normatively dismiss other options but simply takes them away completely. In the most mundane habits you simply do something because you are used to it.

A habit tries to replace agency with automatic behavior in ways that not only try to eliminate potential sources of error but also aim at the manifestation of something as automatic behavior. Even though habits and personal commitments both aim at achieving a goal they do so in drastically different ways. Habits demand obedience in terms of routine whereas personal commitments make you engage with something that is important to you. Ultimately, habits seem to be a strategy whereas commitments allow you to allocate priority to something. Habits are, at best, a (potentially dangerous) by-product of commitment.

There is a constraint on what we can personally commit to in the sense that you need to regard what you commit to as important for yourself. It is phenomenologically plausible that we don't commit to something that we aren't interested in. Without taking an interest in the object of a commitment in some way, Anna would not commit to running a marathon,

[7] Aristotle, of course, famously argues that one becomes good by regularly doing good. Excellence of character, then, can only be achieved by habit (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b 20ff). A personal commitment, however, is not the attempt to strive for excellence of character and is not especially after "the good."

Beatrice would not become a vegan and Caryl would continue her long string of uncommitted relationships. In other words, they all think of their respective commitments as important. However, we are not automatically committed to something simply because we take it to be important. We need to be active with respect to what we find important, it builds the basis of what we can plausibly commit to. As such, taking something to be of importance for oneself is a precondition for personal commitment.

A personal commitment is willing a consideration to be a reason for you (Cf. Chang 2013a). Therefore, it requires agential activity. You assign significance to a vegan lifestyle for your life by commiting to it, you make yourself about it in a way that does not hold true for others. It is about something, i.e., it has an object that it aspires to achieve. But now let's take a closer look at the properties of personal commitments.

2.3.1 Volitional Activity

What we can plausibly commit to is restricted by what we deem worthy of our attention.[8] However, we aren't committed to just everything we take an interest in. What you commit to is up to you and no one else can do it for you. A personal commitment requires volitional activity. The very verb "to commit" already suggests that activity is conceptually necessary. It is something that you do. Ideally, this would involve some sort of reflection but deliberation is by no means necessary for making a decision. A decision is possible without deliberation. A personal commitment is not a judgment or evaluation of what is best and as such also is not a life-plan in the sense

[8] The assumption that we can commit to just anything vastly overestimates our agential power. I follow this line of thought in more detail later in this dissertation.

of John Rawls or Alan Gibbard. We can will things separately (cf. Holton 2009). And even if you deliberate about what to commit to, you don't necessarily reflect extensively or competently about yourself. Your personal commitment can be ill-chosen (it might be unsuitable for you).

While ill-chosen commitments are perfectly possible they are likely to be disregarded and frequently abandoned. As such they are going to undermine the agent's self-respect and confidence in her ability to make the right choices. In order to avoid this, we typically engage in deliberation. We take an interest in our lives and take ourselves seriously when engaging in reflection about what matters to us and deliberation about what or whom to commit to. When you commit to something, you are "taking a stand" or "putting yourself behind it" (Cf., e.g., Bratman 1996, 2007a; Chang 2013a, 2013b, 2017). But is a decision always necessary?

Some philosophers suggest that it is possible to be committed even without having made a prior decision. They argue that we can "discover" (Chang 2013a) or "fall into" (Gilbert 2006) a commitment. Consider the following scenario. Jim and Jill are in a romantic relationship. It is not really anything serious but after a while they moved in together for practical reasons. After living together for a few years, Jim realizes that his long-term plans revolve around Jill and he discovers that he has been committed to her all along and that she is indeed "the one".

What is wrong with this picture is that Jim has not discovered that he was committed to Jill all along but, instead, that he realized that he now wants to commit to Jill. He still has a job to do. What he needs to do is make up his mind. Similarly, someone who goes for a run twice a week for

the last twenty years doesn't simply discover that she is committed to running a marahon. Or, you may have been continuously drawn in one direction. You might, then, consistently act in ways as to suggest that you might be committed. This does not mean that you are committed to it though. Far from it!

Sure, you may have acted in ways that are beneficial for what you are committed to now. What the description of Jim as a committed partner lacks is the decision to commit to Jill. A decision, however, is phenomenologically prior to a commitment.[9] The given examples are maybe best described as feeling as if one were personally committed. Additionally, psychological research suggests that there is a considerable lack of staying power in cases of sliding into a commitment (Stanley et. al. 2006).

When making the decision to commit yourself to running a marathon you "put yourself behind it." That is, you assign significance to it and make it the case that you ought to do it. Again, a personal commitment requires a decision to commit yourself.

2.3.2 Stability

A decision alone does not suffice. After all, we make many decisions. Some of them even result in commitment-like circumstances. For example, the choice to study philosophy, to take on a career in finance or whom to

[9] The allure of this line of thought (that commitments can be discovered) is that it is able to include cases of what Harry Frankfurt calls "volitional necessities." What this does unfold is that there are different kinds of commitment that are sometimes difficult to tell apart. As we shall see later, however, volitional necessities aren't prime candidates for personal commitments.

befriend will likely all have a major impact on your life.

Another feature of personal commitments is that they are relatively stable (Cf., e.g., Bratman 2007a). What happens when we personally commit ourselves is that we assign importance to some end and put aside potential future worries and other worthwhile aims. We close the door on any potential further deliberation and resist reconsideration for the sake of our commitment.[10]

Some social scientists argue that satisfaction makes for stability and that you remain committed for exactly as long as your satisfaction-level is positive, i.e., the benefits of staying committed outweigh the costs of abandoning it (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult 1980). When you become dissatisfied, so the argument goes, you will try to uncommit yourself. It seems likely that long-term dissatisfaction may result in reconsideration, but not in the immediate abandonment of your commitment.

Why is this the case? Well, we become invested in our personal commitment. We have a tendency to stick to what we are already invested in because giving it up comes with costs. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the "sunk cost fallacy." If you have ever had a hard time giving up on an immensely boring book that you forced yourself halfway through because you think that your investment of time and energy would be for nothing if you did, you know all about this phenomenon.

But this is a potential recipe for disaster and might even lead to an escalation of commitment. An escalation of commitment occurs when you

[10] Social psychologists have convincingly argued that too many choices undermine the ability to commit yourself and that continuous deliberation undermines a commitment in inappropriate ways, e.g., satisfaction with choice (Iyengar 2010; Iyengar et. al. 2000; Schwartz 2004; Schwartz et. al. 2002; Wilson 1993).

keep on investing even though the course of action is failing (Brockner 1992; Staw 1976, 1981). In other words, you remain committed and act accordingly without getting closer to your aim. Let's call this the "commitment bias." A commitment aims at its own manifestation by exploiting the human need for consistency (Cf., e.g., Cialdini 2007).[11]

Or, to use some more colorful language, commitments color our lives. Let me give you an example. Bob is a marine biologist who committed himself to writing the next great American novel. He eagerly pursues his project and makes good progress. One day he gets invited to take part in a research trip to Antarctica to study the mating behavior of penguins as part of his research affiliation with the university he teaches at.

Bob's commitment to write the next great American novel comes under heavy pressure during this time-consuming trip. He neither has much time nor energy to work on his manuscript. However, just before going to bed he finds himself thinking about the latest draft of one of his chapters and writes down thoughts and notes for chapters to come. He is recommitting himself.

By engaging with his commitment in ways that aim at the realization of it he is constantly "recommitting" himself. Recommitment requires that he pays attention to the demands of his commitment and acts accordingly. If Bob doesn't engage with his commitment properly the next great American novel begins to slip out of his fingers. A robust personal commitment requires proper engagement with it.

[11] This is also a concern of Albert Hirschman who suggests two ways of dealing with dissatisfaction and the abandonment of a commitment: voice and exit. He laments a tendency towards "exit" in today's modern world (Cf. Hirschman 1970). Ultimately, then, it is a question of how we deal with our dissatisfactions.

A personal commitment, then, is (relatively) stable. But the work of social psychologists suggest that this might not always be for the best reasons. You can stay committed either because you simply are committed right now or because you properly engage with your commitment in ways that aim the realization of it. If it is the former, how do you get out of a commitment?

In the case where you realize that a commitment has grown sour you are not necessarily stuck with it forever. Commitment is not, as some authors in a religious context suggest (e.g. Bartley 1962 and Trigg 1973), an arbitrary barricade against reason and argument. It does not equal "unbelehrbarkeit." Similarly, personal commitment does not represent a strategy to get you what you want by changing other people's expectations and their behavior accordingly (Cf. Nesse 2001 and Schelling 1960).

While personal commitments can be expected to possess a certain stability they do not equal the irrevocability of what if often called "precommitment." There is considerable room for reconsideration. However, caution is in order because opening up reconsideration (potentially) undermines the commitment as a whole. This might be an instance of self-sabotage. Therefore, you should be sure that this is really what is at issue.

When exactly and how can you uncommit yourself? Is it enough to have simply changed your mind as Ruth Chang or Margaret Gilbert suggest? If yes, commitments would likely not be as demanding as I described them to be. This rather seems to showcase that the character in question never really has been committed at all or never took the right sort of interest in it

(for it is with such ease that she opts out). And yet it seems possible to withdraw your support for your commitment.

There are several different ways one can exit a commitment. It seems reasonable to assume that personal commitments can both be *lost* and *left behind*. A commitment can be left behind in three different ways. First, by actively working against the commitment in an attempt to get rid of it. This is a case of self-sabotage. The commitment never really had the grip that it is supposed to have. Second, by not properly engaging with the demands of a commitment. The commitment mights lose its special role for the agent's identity and she might come to a place where she seriously reconsiders her commitment as a result of taking insufficient care of it. Third, a commitment can be outgrown. Think of a person that outgrows a childish or immature romantic relationship; she might come to realize that the relationship is poisonous and decides to uncommit. A personal commitment can be exited, then, in the same way it has been entered: through an act of will.[12]

We also need to uncommit ourselves. While a commitment can be taken away from us, they usually don't disappear by themselves. So even in the face of exiting a commitment, we are forced to engage with it. The formerly excluded reasons are no longer being excluded once a commitment has been exited. The obligation ceases to exist.[13] Looking a little ahead, I later want to argue that you can willingly exit a commitment when it no longer occupies the role in your identity that it once did. It is in

[12] A commitment can also be lost in the sense that it can be taken away from you. For example, a partner can leave you or your commitment is no longer realizable in some other way through no fault of your own.
[13] Chang suggests that the abandonment of a commitment leaves behind, what might be called, "normative residue," which still demands a certain interaction with the previous commitment (Cf. Chang 2013a). This is most likely also true for cases in which a commitment is lost.

this sense that a commitment can "expire."

2.3.3 Identity-Conferring

We are unique in the way that things matter to us (Cf. Frankfurt 1971). What we can plausibly commit to is limited by what we take to be of importance. Since we are finite agents, our capacity to commit ourselves will always be limited. We do not and cannot commit to everything we take to be of interest. Rather, we need to make up our minds and decide what to commit to. Not everything we take to be of interest is practically important to us.

We are forced to reflect about what matters to us and decide what commit to. By personally committing ourselves we assign importance to some ends. We make ourselves about those ends and, in some sense, identify with the objects of our personal commitments. They tell us something very important about an agent. Namely, what she is about (Cf. Bratman 2007a; Chang 2017; Frankfurt 1988) or "where she stands." A commitment is also something that should not be entertained lightheartedly because of its binding character. Personal commitments not only tell us something about an agent they are partly constitutive of that agent's identity.

The persistence or stability of personal commitment enables agents to continuously pursue their goals over time. Commitments have a guiding function. As such, they allow us to experience cross-temporal agency and, at the same time, unify us. It is possible to be an episodic agent (a drifter) but that would tell us nothing interesting about the agent. We would come to know nothing about the agent's will nor her projects. Personal

commitments project normative demands into the future (see, e.g., Chang 2013a, Gilbert 2006) and, hence, it is necessary for us to share the normative perspective with our "previous selves." Episodic agents cannot make sense of this.

Personal commitments, then, are not so much part of what one might call one's self-conception or narrative (even though that is most likely also true). Rather, they are part of a deeper notion of one's identity. That personal commitments occupy such a role becomes particularly clear when we think of their roles in our lives. We cannot simply stand back from our commitments because they have a certain depth or thickness, they lend our lives meaning and provide reasons for living it. As part of this they gain priority in deliberation and are of the greatest importance to the agent. Personal commitments give us the opportunity to engage in meaningful activity and live a meaningful life. They provide us with a future worth having.

When can we say that someone is personally committed and when can we say they are not? Does personal commitment not allow for weakness? Yes, it does. But it is not helpful to try to put an arbitrary limit on the number of allowable lapses one can have before we can say they are not committed. Rather, it is when the impulse to take an action that would satisfy the personal commitment routinely prevails over competing desires, and it prevails because of her autonomous choice that the person still counts as being committed. That is also why the person who can simply uncommit herself was, most likely, never really committed at all.

I said earlier that personal commitment is mostly about figuring out

what one's life is about. Personal commitments provide us with the opportunity to determine which end we want to place significance on in our lives. This changes the weight they have *for us*. We make ourselves about what we have committed to. Personal commitments are about taking control over one's life and choosing how one wants to live one's live. Thus, making a commitment is an act of self-constitution. As such our commitments have standing authority over us.

2.3.4 Creates Reasons for Action

As we have seen earlier, Anna has prudential reasons to run a marathon. It is good for her health, it allows her to distance herself from her stressful work, and so on. But how is it possible that she ought to run a marathon simply by committing to it?

It isn't set in stone what she is supposed to do. She can just as well do some yoga exercises for health benefits or play computer games to let off steam after a particularly stressful day. It isn't obvious what she should do and, indeed, it isn't settled whatsoever. After all, there are many reasons to do many things. The agent finds herself with many options, none of which is best for her to pursue. This is what Chang describes in terms of a hard choice (Cf. Chang 2017). She can do yoga on some days and go jogging on others, and this is a perfectly fine strategy. In other words, she can drift.

There is, however, also the option to commit (Cf. e.g. Chang 2013a). Anna intervenes in the normative landscape when she commits herself to running a marathon. And she does so quite differently than if she only

intended to do so. Intentions are subject to what John Broome calls "normative requirements" (Broome 1999). He suggests that you are normatively required to take the necessary means to your ends.

If you happen to have the intention to make a dentist appointment (and additionally believe that this could be done by picking up the phone), you are normatively required to pick up the phone if you indeed want to make the appointment. This emphasizes that you can either uphold the intention and accept the normative requirements or that you can simply leave it alone. Whatever you do, it is equally good.

No such thing can be said about a commitment. That is, Anna can *make it the case* that she has most reason to run a marathon by committing herself (Cf. Chang 2020, 292).[14] She is in the position to create a reason for herself because the situation is normatively underdetermined, i.e., it cannot be properly determined what she has most reason to do. Anna intervenes in the normative landscape when she commits herself to running a marathon.

That is, Anna now ought to run a marathon because she committed herself to it.[15] In addition to creating reasons, personal commitments also make you engage with it as to further its realization. As a result, it makes plausible the aforementioned demands the commitment makes on her. She now should train hard, abstain from staying out late, adjust her diet, and so on.

Someone who is not personally committed to running a marathon

[14] For a discussion of how exactly commitments can create reasons see the groundbreaking work done by Chang in her 2009, 2013a, 2013b, and 2017.

[15] It is plausible that an act of commitment does not always create reasons. Indeed, not all situations are marked by an inability of already existing reasons to determine what one ought to do (Cf. Chang 2013a). There is an argument, then, that the exercise of normative powers underlies certain requirements (Watson 2009; Chang 2020).

does not have any of those reasons (Cf. Chang 2013a, 102). Keith, of course, might share the same prudential reasons. After all, some sort of exercise will also be good for his health but that does not make it the case that he ought to run a marathon. Absent the personal commitment to do so, it is but just one possibility amongst many that are available for him to consider.

Personal commitments, then, not only create reasons but also make you engage with the object of your commitment creatively in ways that aim at the realization of it, i.e., they color your life.[16] Bob, the occupied marine biologist, does engage with his commitment to writing by finding time to scribble down notes and think about the structure of his book. They do so even on days when you are not particularly motivated to do so.

Just what exactly is demanded of us in personal commitments is open-ended, i.e., the precise content is often unknown (in contrast to a promise) and, perhaps, sometimes quite surprising. Remember Caryl and her plans to go out for the evening. Her plans get overthrown when she learns that her new boyfriend is sick. Because the demands our personal commitments make on us, we need to be flexible to change existing plans for the evening, and needs must spontaneously be met.

2.3.5 Crowds out other aims

As we have seen, you can create reasons for action by committing yourself. A formerly optional end becomes something that you now ought to pursue. It becomes meaningful in a way that it was not before and that

[16] Joseph Raz describes commitment as "a way of being or getting engaged" (Raz 1986, 355).

other ends aren't. Anna could have committed to something else than running a marathon but the fact that she did commit to it makes it the case that she will violate her personal commitment if she fails to pursue it (unless there is an excuse). She has this reason in virtue of her personal commitment (Cf. Chang 2013a, 2013b, 2017, and 2020).

Personal commitments make demands that constrain deliberations. They do this by pushing other worthwhile options "out of the picture." That is, they have the upper hand in cases like Caryl, the would-be vegan, who personally commits to a vegan lifestyle; her commitment does not just mean that considerations in favor of eating meat are outweighed but, rather, are excluded from consideration altogether (Cf., e.g., Bratman 1987, 1996, 2007a; Frankfurt 1988, 1999). The commitment prevails not because of its strength but as a matter of principle.

It is plausible, however, that not all considerations are being excluded. We want to allow for certain considerations such as new information or unanticipated events to count as relevant reasons and as potential reasons for change. We don't shut ourselves off from the world completely when we commit ourselves.

Indeed, this may not be too much of an obstacle because you can, after all, unwill a commitment. However, while you are committed those reasons are being excluded. It is also not that easy to exit a commitment as some might suggest. A commitment must first have lost its special role for your identity before you can exit your commitment.

Earlier in this chapter we noted that personal commitments tend to be rather stable. This is partly due to their structure of crowding out other

worthwhile aims. As such they resist reconsideration. Personal commitments ceteris paribus rule out resuming deliberation about whether you are to pursue their object. They gain this kind of "agential authority" (Cf. Bratman 2007a) in virtue of their role in constituting our identity.

Personal commitments gain priority in deliberation and help us to overcome lack of motivation or counteract contrary motivation. We ought to stay on course despite current contrary motivation and are required to do things in light of our personal commitments that we possibly do not desire (at the time).

Because commitments color our lives it also makes sense to argue that they demand steps be taken to preserve the commitment, e.g., avoid certain situations that might endanger it. A personal commitment to run a marathon this summer might demand that one does not to drink any alcohol during the course of preparation and, therefore, avoid being in situations that increase the likelihood of doing so. By doing so personal commitments project normative demands into the future.

Personal commitments have authority over us that they gain from their role in our personal identity. They constrain us in the sense that they crowd out other worthwhile options. Reopening deliberation is deferred under a personal commitment. Should your circumstances (drastically) change, reconsidering your commitment is perfectly reasonable (Cf. Bratman 1987). Even though personal commitments are unconditional they are not to be unreasonably held.

This way of framing personal commitment opens up the potential for self-betrayal. If you are personally committed to finishing a marathon this

summer but you are repeatedly acting against fulfilling this aim by cancelling one training session after another for no good reason you are guilty of self-betrayal. The failure to conform to a personal commitment amounts to self-betrayal even though it might be one that we barely notice.[17]

2.4. Conclusion

One of the things that agents do is to personally commit to things. However, this is a rather underdescribed area of philosophy. In order to change this, I differentiate between different kinds of commitment in the first part of the chapter and highlighted internal will-based commitments.

During the phenomenological observation in the middle section, it became apparent that personal commitments should be understood as a distinct phenomenon and not as a subcategory of an already existing concept like intention or promise.

In the latter part of the chapter, I proposed and analyzed some important properties that a plausible theory of personal commitment should account for. I argued that a commitment is the result of a decision to assign importance to some end. This is an act of self-constitution. However, a decision alone does not suffice. The agent needs to recommit herself and engage with her commitment in suitable ways. As a result, the commitment colors the agent's life.

Even though you might have prudential reasons to run a marathon it

[17] This makes it painstaikingly hard to distinguish between self-betrayal and genuine change (self-transformation). It is plausible, however, that consistent neglect of a commitment not only leads to the withering away of the commitment itself but also results in undermining the agent's self-trust and self-respect.

is not the case that you ought to do it. Personally committing yourself provides you with the opportunity to make it the case that you ought to run a marathon. Personal commitments create normative reasons.

In summary, personal commitments can be said to have at least the following properties:

1. Personal commitments are commitments to something. They are about something, a goal or an aim which is their object that they try to achieve. It is not possible to have a commitment to nothing whatsoever.

2. You need to commit yourself. No one else can do this for you. By making the decision to commit herself the agent is putting herself behind it; it is an act of will.

3. Personal commitments shut down deliberation, i.e., they settle your course of action. In the absence of drastic changes they have authority over you and resist reconsideration.

4. Personal commitments have a reasonable level of stability. You become invested in the object of your commitment.

5. You cannot be said to be committed unless, at least to some degree, you guide your conduct in accordance with your personal commitment.

6. Personal commitments make you to engage with the object of your commitment aiming at the manifestation of it. They change what's practically important.

7. Personal commitments are partly constitutive of your identity. Committing yourself is an act of self-constitution.

8. Personal commitments guide your deliberation and conduct, i.e., they coordinate your behavior in a way that makes the achievement of your commitment (more) likely.

9. Personal commitments "crowd out" other worthwhile aims (absent defeaters).

10. The frustration of a personal commitment results in self-betrayal.

Personal commitments involve at least these properties. Moreover, the introduced properties clearly show that our commitments have a deontic pull on us (Cf. also Lieberman 1998) yet they differ from moral obligations. By personally committing ourselves we set ourselves aims that we have reason to pursue (properties 1, 5 and 6), settle what we are supposed to do (properties 2 and 7), they cannot be easily altered (property 3, 4 and 9), and they put pressure on us to remain committed (properties 5, 8 and 10). These properties show why we sometimes have good reason to do something we do not desire to do. The fleeting motivation of a desire cannot compete with the normative strength of a personal commitment. Further, belief and desire are beyond decision. Thus, to act accordingly to my personal commitment is something that I need (ought) to do out of the nature of my very own will.[18]

In the next four chapters I am going to take a closer look at potential candidates for personal commitment and begin by taking a closer at

[18] In the context of marital love, Kierkegaard writes of duty as an old intimate, a friend who authoritavely reminds the spouses that it is their own will that they have to respect (Kierkegaard 2013, 146).

decisions, intentions, and plans. I want to argue that those candidates lack the necessary depth to be considered as personal commitments and are, as a result, unsatisfactory. Rather, being personally committed is to place significance onto something and, as aresult, to give it practical priority which will subsequently color one's life. Personal commitments allow us to engage properly with what is important. The bounds of our agency are revealed in our personal commitments.

Chapter 3: Personal Commitment as Intention?

The previous chapter set out to explore the most important properties of personal commitments. It highlighted that personal commitments result from agents taking a stand, i.e., they place significance on certain projects and not others. Further, commitments shut down deliberation, have a reasonable level of stability, and are partly constitutive of an agent's identity. They crowd out other worthwhile projects and put pressure on the agent to stay committed. The frustration of a personal commitment results in some form of self-betrayal. All in all, we ought to act according to our commitments.

The idea of commitment is particularly prominent in action theory: more precisely, in the concept of intention. It seems to be widely accepted that intentions come with some sort of commitment; a commitment to realize the intention's content. You risk being inconsistent if you don't act on your intention. In other words, you are bound to act on your intention.

This view was brought to the forefront by Michael Bratman. He argues that an intention to act "is a complex form of commitment to action" (Bratman 1987, 110). Similarly, Garrett Cullity states that an "intention to do something is a commitment to doing it" (Cullity 2008, 58) and Jay Wallace writes that "to intend an end is to be committed to realizing it or bringing it about" (Wallace 2001, 20).

Adding more context to this, Bruce Aune argues that an intention results from a decision which commits us to act in accordance with that

intention "as long as the mandate is in effect" (Aune 1977, 119). Sarah Paul suggests that a decision "is an act of settling on what to aim at and thereby committing oneself to exerting one's agency toward that goal" and that "[d]eciding to ϕ is a way of forming an intention to ϕ" (Paul 2012, 336-7).

And, finally, Harry Franfurt argues that a deliberate decision creates an intention, it establishes "a constraint by which other preferences and decisions are to be guided" (Frankfurt 1988, 175). We have good reason to believe that a decision ends in an intention; or at least comes very close to it.[19]

All of this suggests a certain phenomenological closeness. But are personal commitments best understood as intentions? Intentions vary dramatically in their scope both, motivationally and temporally. I don't think that personal commitments can be understood in terms of intention because they prove to be more robust than an intention and they also differ in why we employ them. I want to achieve this by taking a close look at four different conceptions of intention beginning with the so-called Davidsonian model.

3.1. Davidsonian Intentions

Perhaps the standard model of intention is the Davidsonian account. Donald Davidson's theory rests on the Humean assumption that you need a present desire which provides the motivational background for you to act.

[19] See, for example, Ruth Chang who argues that we can treat decisions and intentions as somewhat the same phenomena for our purposes (Chang 2013a, 86).

To act intentionally means that you have the relevant desire and the appropriate belief which, taken together, lead (or cause) you to act.[20]

Appropriate here means that the belief has to stand in the right relation to the desire, i.e., it has to be about the object of the desire. For example, Susan's desire to finish her next 10km race in under 40 minutes paired with her belief that she can do this by utilizing a certain training regime provides her with a reason to exploit this new traning regime. Susan employs the new training regime because of her desire and the correlating belief.

When Susan acts for a reason, i.e., intentionally, her action has been caused by the relevant belief-desire pair. The reason rationalizes her action. Susan's "intention", then, is made up out of two distinct parts, desire and belief. Davidson is a reductionist about intention, i.e., it isn't a distinctive attitude. Rather, an intention is reducible to complexes of belief and desire. Intentional action, according to Davidson, is based on an all-out evaluative judgment that exploiting the new training regime is best and the causal result of acting on this reason, i.e., acting on an appropriate belief-desire pair. Susan's action to adopt a new training schedule can be fully explained (in a rationalizing way) by her belief-desire pair.

We are now in the position to analyse Davidsonian intentions in terms of the normative constraints of its two components of belief and desire. Belief differs from imagining or assuming in the sense that it is based on evidence. It is a psychological state which aims at the truth. I cannot believe something that I know not to be true. If, for example, I believe that

[20] This dominant view of what it means to act intentionally is put forward by Donald Davidson (1980). Hence the appropriate name.

it is raining and, then, look outside the window and see that it is, in fact, not raining cannot continue to (rationally) believe that it is raining. Quite contrary, after looking outside the window I now believe that it is indeed gorgeous outside and am perhaps baffled by my previously held belief. A belief, then, represents reality (or at least what the agent perceives as such).

Similarly, belief is subject to logical consistency. I cannot belief that Shanghai is the most populated city in the world and, at the same time, believe that Beijing, and not Shanghai, is the most populated city in the world. I cannot have incompatible beliefs. Davidsonian intentions are subject to just the same normative constraints as belief because belief is one integral part of it. Given these constraints, intentions must also be based on evidence and logical consistentency.

For example, I cannot (rationally) intend to rescue the Titanic from sinking whilst knowing that the Titanic already sunk. The constraint of logical consistency implies that I cannot intend both, to go to Oxford this winter and not to go to Oxford this winter. Additionally, it implies that I cannot intend to go to Oxford this winter and also intend to spend the winter in Florence. Similarly, we usually also only intend to spend the winter in Oxford if we believe that it is likely going to happen. We do not say "I intend to spend the winter in Oxford, however, it is quite unlikely that I will actually do so." We do not intend what we do not believe to be probable.[21]

Desires, on the other hand, do not come with these constraints. They do not put us under any pressure to pursue the desired object. Desires often

[21] This seems to be uncontested. Intending, it seems, does not entail that you believe you will succeed in doing it. You might lack confidence that you will succeed in spending the winter in Oxford. You do, however, think that there is some chance that you will succeed. This is what Holton calls a *partial* belief (Holton 2009, 33). Believing that there is a *chance* of success seems to me to be a minimal condition of intending. Marušić extends this analysis of epistemic uncertainty to resolutions and promises (Marušić 2015).

change and it is possible to desire mutually inconsistent things. We also do not choose our desires in the relevant sense that we are responsible for them; they aren't responsive to reasoning. It would be a mistake to ask for the reasons for wanting something. Our desires are not subject to the same constraints as our beliefs; to be precise, they are not subject to any constraints. What does this mean for the picture of intentions?

Under the Davidsonian picture of intentions, a person counts as acting intentionally when her desire and belief cause her to act. On this account, an intention is not an independent, distinctive attitude. There can be no intention without acting. An intention, then, is also always present-directed and crucially depends on the presence of a desire (and some corresponding belief). To have an intention is, per definition, to act. We can say that a desire for something is strong enough if it can move us to act. But what if I fail to act on my intention?

To have an intention means, if anything, to act intentionally, i.e., the right connection between my desire and belief moves me to act. This also means that failing to act on an intention is conceptually not possible. If I failed to act on my so-called intention to spend the winter in Oxford I fell victim to either one of three things: first, it is possible that I never really had the intention to spend the winter in Oxford; second, my intention may have been outweighed by some stronger intention, e.g., to spend the winter in the sunnier region of Tuscany; or third, I may have engaged in self-defeating behaviour.

Conceptually, however, it all comes back to the first option because if I did not spend the winter in Oxford I cannot possibly count as having

intended to do so. Davidsonian intentions, then, come with a relatively thin normativity because they depend on the motivational strength of one of their components, i.e., desire. And this component is under no voluntary control whatsoever. Quite the opposite, desires are a fleeting thing and, on Davidson's picture, agents always act on whichever of their desires are strongest.

What can we make of this? Are personal commitments really just some sort of intention? In what follows I want to argue that Davidson's reductionist model of intentions cannot account for the characteristics of personal commitments. Personal commitments stand out due to their robustness and their persistence over time. The very limited normativity of the intentions just discussed is outmatched by the normativity of personal commitments. There are obvious similarities between Davidsonian intentions and personal commitments.

Personal commitments like intentions are subject to logical consistency. You cannot (at the pain of irrationality) commit yourself to never flying again while, at the same time, intend to fly to the Bahamas next summer. This conflict needs to be resolved by either not committing yourself to never flying again or by revising your intention. And, like intentions, personal commitments are somewhat based on evidence. Someone who would commit to lifting the long-lost treasure of Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island, which we know to be nothing more than an invention of an imaginative novelist, would be criticizable (and epistemically mistaken). Lifting the treasure is impossible because it does not exist.

There are, however, also blatant differences. As already mentioned, Davidsonian intentions count as intentions only if they cause us to act. Under this picture we cannot have intentions that are somewhere in a drawer in the back of our head, stored to act on on a better day. We either act on our intention or we do not have one to begin with. This also means, simply for conceptual reasons, that we cannot fail to act on our intentions. Failing to act on a so-called intention simply means that you did not have that intention.[22]

If, for example, you intend to live on a vegetarian diet from now on but at the next barbecue you attend you put it on the back burner and choose to have a steak, you are not criticizable. You simply never had the intention of being a vegetarian or you, as everyone can now see, no longer have it and, hence, cannot fail. Though remember that this example is distorted because it is, under the current description of intentions, not possible. Our intentions are the very incarnation of our actions. The normative force of intentions only persists so long as the motivational factor, i.e., the desire, is present and continues to exist.

We have come a long way from our earlier description of personal commitment. The current account of intentional action would let us off the hook all too easily. The previously introduced properties of personal commitments are much more robust. It is precisely one of the functions of a personal commitment to create a bond which secures the continuation of it. The normativity of personal commitment is diachronically extended. Hence, a committed vegetarian cannot simply give up his vegetarian diet

[22] This is also the reason why Davidson's account cannot make sense of the notion of weakness of will. However, this is an important phenomenon which has its appropriate place in a theory of personal commitments.

just as much as a committed triathlete cannot simply pull out of the training for her next competition.

We have to engage with our commitments in a certain way which promises its furtherance and does not allow us to simply abandon it. The frustration of a personal commitment results in some sort of self-betrayal. Our personal commitment puts pressure on us to stay committed. It becomes obvious that these considerations are too strong and outweigh the claims of Davidsonian intentions.

But what if we understand intentions as particularly strong and persistent in which a given desire simply endures? Imagine a triathlete whose desire to compete at a competition simply does not waver. The ambitious triathlete simply never ceases to be motivated. This description comes closer to our original picture of personal commitments.

There are other difficulties with this account. While this model promises a somewhat stable source of motivation it proves to be difficult to tell whether the triathlete made a personal commitment or can simply count himself lucky to be motivationally stable. We will only ever get to know whether he committed himself or not in the case where his motivation should fade. This means that whether someone made a commitment or not on this acccount can only be assessed retrospectively. Our initial description of personal commitment is quite different. It is true that you can also fail to act on your personal commitment or even break it. So what is the difference between a stable motivational force and a personal commitment? On our account someone counts as having made a personal commitment when she normatively constrains her future.

Personal commitments, in opposition to intentions, are supposed to absorb potential motivational losses in the way that they oblige us to act on our personal commitment. The motivationally-drained triathlete nonetheless finishes her training session just as much as the meat craving vegetarian stays committed to his vegetarian diet. Personal commitments cannot be assessed in terms of later success but rather on the willingness to normatively constrain your future.

Personal commitments, then, are not best understood in terms of Davidson's model of intention for at least two reasons. First, it does not have the right connection to volition. We are passive towards our desires and beliefs whereas we actively will our personal commitments into existence. Second, it does not come with the same level of robustness as personal commitment. Intentions can be easily abandoned just by losing the relevant motivation. Personal commitments, on the other hand, cannot be abandoned that easily. As mentioned before, they exert a deontic pull on us.

Even though this particular model of intention falls short, it makes sense to take a closer look at other accounts because they promise to be much closer to our illustration of personal commitment and to make up for some of the shortcomings of Davidsonian intentions.

3.2. Precommitment

The standard assumption of rational-choice theory is that a fully rational agent has stable preferences over time. Perfect rationality involves a capacity to relate to the future. Someone who now prefers to commute to

work by bike tomorrow should still prefer it, ceteris paribus, tomorrow. However, human beings aren't fully rational. They are only imperfectly rational; circumstances change and we have shifting preferences over time. Now, the main goal of rational choice theory is to find an answer to the question of how we can cope with changing preferences or instances of weakness of will (so-called dynamic decision problems).

A prime example for such cases is someone who believes in human-made climate change and adopts the preference to stop flying. Lisa believes this to be her small contribution to save the planet. Planning her next holiday with her partner, however, Lisa quickly realizes that she wants to go somewhere exotic and is also persuaded by the airline's cheap ticket prices so that she ends up booking a flight to the Bermudas. Back home after a relaxing and beautiful holiday she regrets her decision to go on a holiday via air-plane and embraces her original preference to not fly again.

Is the unsettled agent simply acting accordingly to what she wants most in any given situation, i.e., acting on her respective strongest desire, or is there something more to this case? We can probably make the justified call that the agent's revision of her original preference to not fly was against her own interest, i.e., irrational. Is there a way for the newly environmentally-aware person to avoid such leaps of judgment? Is it possible for her to stick with her original judgment despite temptation?

The question then remains as to whether we can influence action beyond the present. When can you reasonably reconsider your initial preference and when is it better to stick with it? Those are questions of dynamic choice. The person who prefers not to fly now but ends up

preferring to fly then and acts on it can be labeled myopic. A myopic person does whatever is presently best for her (at the possible expense of the person's prior self and much to the irritation of other people). The person who prefers not to fly now and makes sure that she does not end up flying can be named sophisticated. A sophisticated person makes a plan or an intention and makes sure to stick to the intention (at the possible expense of the person's later self).[23] A sophisticated person seems closer to fulfill what we would expect of a personally committed person.

The sophisticated person engages in counter-preferential choice. But how can this be rational? After all, we try to explain why it was irrational not to stick with the initial preference to not fly. A sophisticated person is aware of or recognizes possible future complications and takes action to not let those complications influence her initial preference-based decision. A sophisticated person anticipates threats to her initial intention. She forms only those intentions that she "expects to have adequate reasons for executing" (Gauthier 1996, 223).

That is, her intentions must be supported now and then. Sophisticated Lisa, then, does not form the intention to not fly if she expects to fail and succumb to cheap ticket prices. A sophisticated chooser must show enough foresight in order to make plans or intentions for the future. In fact, Lisa must show almost too much foresight so that it might become difficult for her to form any intention, like the one to not fly, for the future at all. At least if she expects to not make good on her intention.

[23] A person who neither disappoints his prior nor later self can be named *resolute*. A resolute person makes a plan and sticks to it without precautious measures because he considers himself to be committed despite his changed preferences. More on this in the next section.

Are we then simply a prisoner of our own expected failure and merely capable of acting according to our strongest desire? We are certainly not. We can quite literally cut off options, make them unavailable to us. Richard Holton argues that temptation corrupts one's judgment and leads to a shift in judgment (Holton 2009, 110). It causes persons to re-evaluate. If we are aware of what triggers temptation within us we can, however, take steps against it and ensure that we act in line with our intial preference.

It is within our power to limit our options or impose constraints on ourselves. Perhaps the prime example for this is Ulysses. After the victory over Troy, Ulysses embarks on the journey by ship back home to Ithaca. On his way home he has to pass the Sirens and he expects to be lured in by their singing. That's when he decides to let himself be tied to the mast and put wax in the sailors ears to be able to pass the Sirens unharmed. Ulysses resorted to the method of self-imposed constraints, wax in the ears of the sailors and himself tied to the mast, in order to be able to make good on his initial preference to return home to Ithaca.[24]

Jon Elster calls this method *precommitment*. Ulysses' predicament is the basic rationale for precommitment: being weak and knowing it. He emphasizes the limitations of the human ability to resist temptation and highlights the need to employ a strategy of precommitment. Precommitment is a technique to bind yourself to a course of action in anticipation of temptations by denying yourself a short-term gain that comes with a long-term cost in order to achieve your initial goal, i.e., a long-term advantage. The agent takes measures to guarantee staying on course at

[24] This is the prime example in Jon Elster's studies of rationality (Elster 1979 and 2000) and David Gauthier's explorations of the matter (1996). Bruno Verbeek provides an interesting modification to Ulysses' story (Verbeek 2007).

a later point in time by making certain options unavailable to her. We simply eliminate the possibility to do otherwise by creating constraints. We do so by throwing away the keys; we remove access to the remote control if we are easily tempted to watch tv instead of doing our work.[25] Similarly, we might resort to deleting someone's phone number, perhaps an ex-partner's, from our cell phone so we cannot call or text them.[26] We deny ourselves access to the ability to deceive ourselves. Precommitment, then, is primarily a tool that helps us to not succumb to temptation (or fear) via the route of causal interference or manipulation of our future choices when times are rough.

We do well to understand precommitment as a tool or strategy to overcome a struggle for self-control. Psychologist Roy Baumeister and New York Times columnist John Tierney argue that we exercise willpower when we stay on course despite being confronted with temptations. They suggest that willpower is a muscle that can be exhausted by all too frequent exertion; making decisions is exhausting.

They suggest that the struggle for self-control can be tamed by precommitment so that we don't need to rely on willpower too much (Baumeister and Tierney 2012, 150-4). Baumeister and Tierny also rely on the idea of side bets to ensure that people abide by their set goals. They call upon colonial explorer Henry Morton Stanley, Ulysses and modern self-

[25] Some are even willing to pay extra for having less options and not being in the situation to need to control themselves. Indeed, Robert Strotz already used the notion of precommitment as a strategy available to agents as to reach their goals and argued that we are often willing to pay a price for the stability of our plans (Strotz 1956, 173). The following remark of Thomas Schelling makes good on that claim. Schelling writes that "I have often wished that for a small addition to my bill the hotel would disable the television in my room during my occupancy" (Schelling 1980, 114). Perhaps Schelling should have visited South Tyrol more often (https://www.zirmerhof.com/de). Of course, many people watch films, series and so on on their computers nowadays. You can probably download a program that initiates a countdown of your choosing which blocks the access to Netflix or similar streaming services for any given amount of time.

[26] Of course, this doesn't help if you remember the number by heart but modern people don't remember phone numbers, they put them in their phones.

improvement tools such as publicly visible side bets as examples for their version of precommitment (ibid.: 150-4, 228, 255-6; Iyengar 2010, 252).[27]

Elster suggests that we can either precommit ourselves by causally interfering in our future choices and, thus, avoid temptation or by changing the reward system, e.g., by telling someone about it, so that giving in to temtptation becomes more costly and, therefore, less attractive than avoiding temptation. So-called side bets benefit from the the involvement of others as a result of the simple act of communicating your goals because there now is an external pressure not to lose sight of your goal: we can outsource self-control (Baumeister and Tierney 2012, 258).[28]

Such a side bet could, for example, take the form of acquiring a training partner in order to exercise regularly. Remember the triathlete from earlier? Let us imagine a different version of her. Instead of being highly motivated all the time, let's say she has trouble finding the motivation to get in those training sessions on the bike all on her own. Several hours alone on the bike do not only cost her a lot of time but is also often quite boring. Because she knows that she will often succumb to her laziness but still wants to compete on a high level next year, she secures herself a training partner. Now with the stakes being high and the possibility of disappointing someone else, she somewhat forces herself to exercise regularly on the bike.

[27] A modern-day Ulysses doesn't use wax and ropes but incentives and the internet. You can put a contract out on yourself.

[28] Elster actually tends to favor this second approach. Causal interference might just be a "sacrifice too heavy" (Elster 1979, 104) and not that common (Elster 2000, 66). Schelling sides with Elster in cases of a quest for self-command (Cf. Schelling 1980). However, this approach might become less and less attractive the more we make use of it because your friends might become annoyed with you for your lowkey efforts and repeated failures to make good on your intentions (Cf. Elster 2000, 79).

She has made it highly unrewarding to do otherwise by changing the reward system.[29]

Precommitment is a very useful technique for us in everyday life. It enables us to reach what we want now in the future by cutting of the option to give in to temptation. Simple decisions, as we have seen, aren't always enough to ensure that we stick to our decisions in the future. Lisa, who couldn't stick to not flying could have used some sort of precommitment very well. She, of course, could have just said that she'll ignore the airline's incentives and the Bermudas' enticing weather conditions but that would have been "mere bluff" (Gauthier 1996, 224). She knows quite well that she's not strong enough to resist. Just like Ulysses knows that he and his sailors aren't strong enough to resist the sirens alluring song. They cannot do without a helping strategy. Precommitment helps us to stay strong and not watch tv or call our former partners. We can't just rely on our former decisions.

Elster's main insight is that we can protect ourselves from irrationality by binding ourselves. He understands precommitment as a technique of avoiding negative consequences and adds that it is pointless to bind yourself if you could simply unbind yourself in the future (Elster 1979, 96). Schelling agrees with Elster and argues that "if commitments could be undone by declaration they would be worthless in the first place" (Schelling 1966, 65). Are you, then, bound forever or is legitimate change possible?

Elster suggests that we should bind ourselves only to those preferences that feature repeatedly in our preference structure. But again,

[29] This, if I understand things correctly, can be understood as part of a Humean theory of willpower. Humean strength of mind relies on something external and not on individual effort to steel your mind (Cf. Kopajtic 2015).

this doesn't have the right connection to volition. We are not responsible for our preferences in the way we are for our willings (personal commitments). His description sounds to me rather as to what it actually is declared as, a stable preference; but not a personal commitment. But what if you experience a genuine change in preferences? If I understand Elster correctly, a genuine change in preference occurs when an agent's preference structure no longer repeats itself. She is uncommitted by virtue of the preference being no longer available. This, again, doesn't have the right connection to volition. Every plausible theory of commitment must include a story about when commitments are justified to be left behind. I will come back to this later in this dissertation.

Can we understand personal commitments as the technique of precommitment just described? Both constrain and bind us. However, the way they do differs. Precommitments strengthen our intentions by causally interfering and changing (or manipulating) our reasons for action indirectly either by eliminating options or by changing the reward system. Remember that we bind ourselves by throwing away the key or deleting the phone number. Personal commitments, however, don't rest on such a causal interference. They rather bind because we will it so, i.e., they change our reasons for action directly.

Remember the personally committed marathon runner. She committed herself by deciding to do so and then by engaging with the object of her personal commitment. She ought to exercise regularly and stick to a certain food regime because this will further her personal commitment and not because those are the only options available to her. Precommitment facilitates normative change by causal interference whereas

personal commitment brings about normative change by exercising a normative power.

In the case of precommitment you "deposit your will" (Elster 1979, 43) in the sense that you eliminate other options causally or make it highly unrewarding to act differently by negotiating public side bets. You deprive yourself of your agency. Quite contrary, in the case of personal commitment you exercise your will. The personally committed triathlete ought to pursue the object of her commitment simply because she commited herself. By personally committing ourselves we don't "burn our bridges." Instead, we make it mandatory to act in line with our personal commitment by intervening in the normative landscape through the exercise of our will. We can still act otherwise but we ought not.

3.3. Resolutions

The myopic (or naïve) agent never disappoints herself but is also very likely to not achieve her earlier-held preference. She is simply relying on her respective strongest desire and is unable to make good on possible intentions for the future. Hence, she disappoints her former self. The sophisticated agent engages in counter-preferential choice in order to make good on her present future-directed intention. She might resort to the method of precommitment and, therefore, disappoints or at least disregards, her future self. Both, the myopic and the sophisticated chooser "fail to fulfill their preferences in contexts in which those preferences change" (Gauthier 1996, 237).

Is it possible for an agent to disappoint neither her former self nor her future self? Gauthier argues that it would be better still if the agent sticks to a plan without causally meddling with her future options. But how can you protect your current judgment? You can make a resolution. The resolute agent makes a plan or forms an intention and sticks with it without taking precautionary measures. But how can this agent achieve the remarkable ability to stay consistent over time?

The previous two models took agents to be time-slice agents (independent selves at different points in time) whereas the idea of the resolute agent relies on the assumption that our agency is diachronically extended (one self across time). Edward McClennen puts it this way: "Whereas the ex ante sophisticated self is oriented to the idea that the ex post self is an independent self, the ex post resolute self is oriented to the idea of the ex ante self as a controlling self and, hence, to the idea of his ex post self not being completely independent" (McClennen 1990, 160 emphasis added).

He suggests that the resolute chooser strikes a bargain between her present and future self (ibid., 217).[30] That is, the resolute agent now chooses to do something in accordance with her resolution. She would do something else had she not made that resolution. The initial decision represents something of significance to both her former and her future self. We can also add to this picture by saying that the future self must not violate the expectations of her prior self. The future self is restricted by the former self's decision because of the self's "temporal thickness." Resolutions serve to block temptations.

[30] For a somewhat different picture of the bargaining agent see Ainslie (2001).

When is it okay to not be resolute? When is it okay to rationally abandon a plan? Agents are allowed to quit their plans in the light of new information or due to unintentional error, e.g., when things turn out differently than expected.[31] The agent achieves dynamic consistency if she correctly anticipated the structure of choices and, as a result, sticks to her plan – despite possible preference changes (ibid.: 116; Gauthier 1996, 229).[32] McClennen proposes that problems of dynamic consistency can be solved by resolute choice.

Resolute choice promises, in contrast to sophisticated choice which crudely eliminates potential future choices, to constrain an agent in the future by her own judgment of what she judges to be the best plan available to her. The agent chooses resolutely by sticking to her initial plan even though she would, in absence of the plan, not make that choice now.[33] This, then, is different from precommitment where the agent ties her hands by making certain options literally unavailable. The resolute agent doesn't re-evaluate, her mind is made up. She experiences a constraint of commitment exercised by her controlling ex ante self. It is rational for the agent to stick to her resolution despite contrary inclinations. Rational agency, then, is portrayed as making choices that are beneficial to both an agent's present and her future self.[34]

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[31] Holton argues that weakness of will consists in overreadily revising one's resolutions and provides a list of when it is reasonable to do so (Holton 2009. 75). A weak-willed agent cannot maintain her resolution. A similar theme can be found in Hill (1986). Holton goes on to suggest that "strength of will turns to stubbornness when [agents] stick by their resolutions even when it is reasonable to reconsider and revise them" (ibid., 80).

[32] McClennen suggests that the resolute chooser *revises* her opposing preferences (McClennen 1990, 214) whereas Gauthier believes that the resolute chooser *overrides* her opposing preferences (Gauthier 1996, 240). He also proposes some revisions to McClennen's conception of when resoluteness is, indeed, rational.

[33] McClennen acknowledges that resoluteness requires "something akin to what is called 'strength of will' or 'willpower'" (McClennen 1990, 14). Roberts calls willpower a "skill of self-management" (Roberts 1984, 238). Baumeister and Tierney argue that we can use precommitment to strengthen our self-control by turning it into a habit which strengthens our self-discipline (Baumeister and Tierney 2010, 154, 157). Charles Duhigg holds that "the best way to strengthen willpower [...] is to make it into a habit" (Duhigg 2012, 131). Self-disciplined people replace

McClennen concludes that the resolute approach is not only pragmatically superior because it doesn't give other agents incentives to exploit us (ibid., 195-7) but it is also superior in general because it saves us valuable resources, i.e., time and energy (ibid., 208-9). This is also how we can establish that past preferences and plans have a certain degree of power over us. Those who can successfully resolve will likely do better than those who constantly reevaluate or choose time and again. But doesn't the sophisticated chooser do the same?

Yes, but the resolute chooser saves resources that the sophisticated chooser has to spend (because she disregards her future self by executing the strategy of guaranteed outcome instead of negotiating a bargain). Being irresolute is costly. A resolute Ulysses, e.g., is modified in the way that he, "on contemplating the costs of hemp, wax, and agency arrangements, resolves to sail by the island and pay the singing sisters no mind and then proceeds to do just that" (ibid., 285).[35] He considers himself committed despite his changed preferences. Indeed, a resolution "signals some 'investment' by the agent and, if failing, violates that agent's personal constitution" (Schelling 1980, 113).

The resolute agent, then, doesn't cave in to temptation. The resolute triathlete employs willpower and doesn't consider the attractiveness of a lazy afternoon as an option. She doesn't reconsider, she acts resolute. A

willpower, i.e., consciously controlled behaviour, with habits, i.e., automatic behaviour. This Aristotelian approach tries to make a virtue out of our awareness that we all too often lack willpower. This constitutes a manipulation of one's own character (or character transformation) which itself is also based on the Elster-ian theme of precommitment. Holton seems to agree by stating that "the point at which an action becomes automatic is really the point at which willpower is no longer needed" (Holton 2009, 122). A habit, however, is dangerous is in its own right (E.g. Ainslie 2001 and Millgram 2004).

[34] Gauthier points out that the future self has reason to stay resolute as long as the plan continues to be beneficial to her. I don't think that McClennen would disagree (McClennen 1990, 212). According to Gauthier, however, a resolute planner has reason to remain resolute only if she comes to the conclusion that a sophisticated version of her would not have done as well as her current resolute self (Gauthier 1996, 237).

[35] McClennen, however, doubts that a resolute approach is possible for Ulysses (McClennen 1990, 285).

resolution holds firm against temptation; it protects our initial judgment. The triathelete has a special reason not to reconsider her resolution because it was made to defeat exactly those contrary desires.[36] Once a reconsideration is underway, however, things change and it is only one consideration amongst many. The resolution has lost its special status. The commitment to it has been withdrawn. But what exactly is a resolution?

Vanya Kovach and John Fitzpatrick (1999) argue that a resolution is a tool for change which aims at overcoming some aspect of yourself. Holton argues that a resolution is a species of intention; a special kind of intention which aims at being contrary inclination defeating (Holton 2009, 77). It is their role to defeat other options. A resolution involves a primary intention and a second-order intention about that primary intention.[37] So the triathlete, e.g., forms an intention to exercise conscientiously and along with it an intention "not to let that intention be deflected" (ibid., 11).[38]

The commitment of a resolution, if I understand Holton correctly, lies in refusing to reconsider one's resolution. He rightly argues that "to reconsider would defeat the point of having [resolutions]" (ibid., 146). Agents manage to resist temptation by "developing habits of nonreconsideration" (ibid., 140).[39] Remember, temptation is responsible for judgment shifts. We succeed in being resolute not by taking all alternatives,

[36] A resolution, Holton argues, "provides a reason for *not reconsidering* [...]. The resolution serves to entrench [the initial reasons that led to forming it]; it does not provide an extra one" (Holton 2009, 140).
[37] There is controversy about the structure of resolutions. While Holton endorses a hierarchical picture, Marušić takes a resolution to be simply "an intention or decision to resist temptation" (Marušić 2015, 32).
[38] Holton resorts to side bets, i.e., precommitments, to make resolutions stick. He suggests that a wary agent can make his resolution public and, therefore, benefit from the incentive that is the potential scorn that he will suffer (Holton 2009, 82). Remember, Becker argued that a decision which is "not supported by such side bets will lack staying power" (Becker 1960, 38). Resorting to public side bets would be the response of the sophisticated chooser.
[39] Holton's willingsness to take precommitments onboard doesn't sound like a "habit of nonreconsideration" to me. Kovach and Fitzpatrick argue that precommitments should be disregarded because they don't improve or secure motivation. Agents are better off adopting strategies that help them visualize negative effects or break down a delicious dessert into its unhealthy, disgusting ingredients instead (Kovach and Fitzpatrick 1999, 170).

and therefore the temptation, into consideration but by effectively resisting, or blocking reconsideration. Therefore, when an agent successfully developed habits of nonreconsideration she also shouldn't be in the situation to be able to go through a shift in judgment about the object of her resolution. In such cases it is rational to be resolute.[40] It is rational to be resolute even though it would be rational to not be if one had not made the resolution in the first place.

A resolution subordinates posterior choices to prior choices. Someone who resolved to exercise on a daily basis subordinates her current lack of motivation and her craving for a relaxed evening on the sofa with a glass of wine to her original decision of daily exercise, i.e., she disregards her laziness and opts to go running instead. She resists adverse inclinations, i.e., she employs willpower. A resolute athlete, for example, benefits from being resolute (or from not reconsidering) in three ways. First, she does not violate the expectations of her prior self. That is, her practical identity remains intact. Second, she harvests the benefits of her work. Third, she saves resources as opposed to other possible ways to achieve her goals. Resolute choice argues that agents have the capacity for genuine commitment which helps them to realize their plans; especially in contexts in which those preferences change.

Resolution sounds a lot like personal commitment. Unlike the myopic model it places importance on resisting current contrary inclinations and, in opposition to the sophisticated model it shows how this can be achieved without any causal interference. Sometimes we need to consider our lives

[40] There are, of course, cases in which we actually experience a shift in judgment. In such cases, however, the agent typically already reconsiders her resolution. Here, the agent could be rationally resolute on pragmatic grounds.

more wholly in order to determine what we ought to do. A resolution does just that. Its rational stability is assessed over a period of time rather than just at one particular point of time. Both, resolutions and personal commitments highlight that we are, in essence, diachronically extended agents instead of time-slice agents.

Personal commitments, however, cannot be understood in terms of resolution. It is true that both concepts work under the assumption that the agent is somewhat invested in her personal commitment or resolution and that not living up to it violates the agent's personal constitution. The crucial difference, however, lies in the application of this investment. The very idea of a resolution is that it is rational to resist temptation and remain resolute as long as, and only as long as, doing so is beneficial to the agent.

A resolute athlete whose exercise regime is actually damaging her health instead of providing the expected gains is one such example. Remember Anna, the ambitious marathon runner from before. It is rational for her to reconsider (and presumably to abandon that particular resolution). We make resolutions in order to overcome temptation. The idea within personal commitment differs in so much as it is better understood as allocating significance to certain ends within an agent's life and not as serving the purpose of overcoming temptation. The description of resolution solely in terms of instrumental benefit doesn't fit the picture of personal commitment. A personal commitment isn't required to instrumentally benefit the committor – it may even come at some personal cost.

Further, resolutions must be well thought out. A resolution is the result of an agent's judgment about what is the best plan available to her current self and her future self. Her future self is consequently bound (in a reasonable manner) to her present decision. However, your typical New Year's resolution probably won't do. Psychological evidence suggest that the typical agent makes too many resolutions and, as a result, cannot keep up with them. Are those resolutions the result of a careful judgment or are they just made impromptu out of some sort of false shame that one sees no room for potential improvement for oneself?[41]

Whatever it is, personal commitments aren't a judgment about what is best. We have seen that the resolute agent successfully develops habits of nonreconsideration. This represents the commitment in resolution. Resolutions bind because we refuse to reconsider them. They show us the way how to make the right, i.e., benefitial, choices in light of those resolutions. Personal commitments, however, gain their deontic pull not by developing a successful method to resist reconsideration but by making certain ends central to our lives. A personal commitment results from a decision and is followed by constant engagement with it. It colors our lives.

And, finally, the structure of a resolution doesn't fit with that of a personal commitment. It doesn't matter if we understand a resolution to be simply an intention to resist temptation (via Marušić) or as as an intention to not let one's initial intention go awry (via Holton). If resolutions are just a species of intentions then, they too, fall under the same norms as

[41] Can we really know our future preferences or anticipate them in a reasonable manner as McClennen and Gauthier suggest? A resolution takes place under epistemic uncertainty and represents an attempt to anticipate one's future preferences. It might be a shot in the dark and even the scholars working on it aren't sure if this is an entirely realistic picture of agency.

intentions. That is, their purpose does not defeat the fragility of resolutions as intentions. All this would do is help us illuminate the extreme fragility of intentions and resolutions alike. The reason why will become clear in the following part on Bratman's conception of intention.

3.4. Plans

Perhaps the most influential recent account of intention is brought forward by Michael Bratman. Bratman convincingly argues that intentions are irreducible mental states, i.e., intentions cannot be reduced to beliefs and desires; they are an independent, distinctive attitude. We have seen that we are capable of influencing action beyond the present. We are capable of temporally extended courses of action. Bratman offers a detailed account of the properties of intentions and the relevance of plans for our lives. As part of his planning theory, he develops a notion of commitment neatly tied to intentions. He proposes that plans (intentions writ large) bring with them a commitment to action. They allow for temporally extended agency and provide us with a practical standpoint. Agents, so Bratman says, are future-directed, planning agents. In this part of the chapter, I want to critically assess Bratman's planning theory of intention.

Consider the desire-belief theory of action that was primarily brought forward by Donald Davidson. Davidson's causal desire-belief theory holds that to have an intention is to make an all-out evaluative judgment: a judgment that some action is better than another. It is because Davidson understands intentions to be the result of practical reasoning that he cannot account for their organizing role in our lives. This organizing feature,

however, structures the very process of practical reasoning by constraining available options. Davidson's theory cannot account for the organzing role of intentions because it neglects the very basis of it, i.e., that intentions do not need to be all-out evaluative judgments (Bratman 1985).

Bratman's planning theory of intention largely rests on three main claims.[42] First, he understands future-directed intention to be the paradigm case of intention. Quite the opposite, the desire-belief theorist takes the paradigm case of intention to be directed at immediate action; intentions guide action because of the involvement of presently occurrent desires.[43] It seems strange, however, to say "I intend to go to Oxford" as I am already on my way to Oxford. Wouldn't we rather say "I am going to Oxford"? It appears natural to say "I intend to go to Oxford", or, to make things even more clear, as Bernard Williams puts it: "I will go to Oxford"[44], before I actually started going there, and once I actually started to go there, I no longer intend to do so, but I am simply going there. This suggests the forward-looking nature of intentions. Intentions, then, do not serve the role of describing what I am doing, but rather lay out what it is that I am going to do.

Second, plans are typically only partially filled in. My plan to visit a friend in a somewhat nearby town does not require me to settle on all the details for the planned trip yet. I rather decide to visit my friend, and deliberate later about how to get there (by bike, car or train) and when to leave. The plan, so far, is incomplete but, as time goes by, I start filling in

[42] Cf. Bratman 1987, Ch. 1 and 3. In Bratman's terminology the terms "intention", "plan", and "policy" roughly all express the same future-oriented attitude. We can use them interchangeably.
[43] See, e.g., Anscombe (1963) and Davidson (1980).
[44] Williams takes this to be the primitive expression of an intention (Williams 1973, 138).

my plan as needed with specifications about which train to take and when to head back home. All that is required of me now is a partial plan – the rest can be adequately filled in later when required.

Third, singular intentions are usually part of larger, more complex plans of action. Plans are hierarchically structured, i.e., they consist of higher-order parts and lower-order parts. The plan to spend a year as a visiting researcher at Stanford University requires sub-plans about being adequately prepared, visiting the American embassy to obtain a visa, searching for an apartment, and so on. This offers the possibility that particular sub-plans should be abandoned or thought as reasonable despite current preferences.

For example, my intention to start writing a new paper turns out to not promote my plan of going to Stanford, which suggests that I am better off abandoning this particular intention. Searching for an apartment in the Palo Alto area is required even though I might not feel like doing it right now. This is also how I fill in, i.e., realize my larger plan of going to Stanford for the year. Plans do not provide reasons for action.[45] Rather, they are to be considered "framework reasons" in practical reasoning. Plans provide an "option filter" by which they shape later conduct. If I have a plan to visit a friend in a nearby town, I consider the different means of achieving this end, e.g., different types of transportation.

My plan doesn't allow me to consider going fishing that day as a realistic option. In fact, different ends are out of reach for me; I have the plan to visit my friend and not to attend a football game. The question

[45] Bratman refers to this as the "bootstrapping problem" (Bratman 1987, 24ff). Cf. also Broome (2001). Bratman argues that we treat an adopted plan *as if* it were a reason (Cf. Bratman 1996 and 2000a), i.e., we pretend.

which kind of transportation I will actually use to get to my friend's town is still being answered by weighing the appropriate desire-belief reasons. My larger plan, however, controls my lower-order intentions. It follows that deliberation is "plan-constrained."

Plans "pose problems and constrain solutions to those problems" (Bratman 1987, 42). My plan to visit my friend poses the problem of how to get there while at the same time constrains solutions to it by putting the idea of attending the football game that day out of my mind and proposing different possible means for achieving this end. If I want to be successful in implementing my plans, I need to do things that I currently do not have an opinion about. Plans require us to abandon intentions that aren't consistent with them and also allow us to extend present deliberation for future purposes.

Plans are subject to consistency and coherence constraints. The consistency constraint requires that my plans are to be consistent relative to my beliefs. Plans must be internally consistent to allow for successful coordination in the world that I find myself in. The coherence constraint states that I need to fill in my partial plans in ways that serve well the furtherance (actualization) of them, i.e., they need to be means-end coherent. My partial plans need to be filled in with adequate sub-plans that allow for the realization of my initial plan.[46]

So far, so good. Bratman's argument that intentions are paradigmatically future-directed seems to be well supported. But how do future-directed intentions normatively bind us? How is it possible that an

[46] Elster argues for a similar two-level approach to future action (Cf. Elster 1977, 77).

intention I am making now is still binding me in the future? Consider my plan to spend the year at Stanford: my intention to visit the American embassy tomorrow to obtain a visa still continues to normatively bind me tomorrow morning because of its role in my larger plan to go to Stanford. The intention, then, is binding in the future as long as my plan is still in place.

An intention is conduct-controlling, (relatively) stable, and influences practical reasoning in the sense that further intentions need to be consistent with each other. They involve a special commitment to later action. It can be argued that an agent will at least try to follow through with her intention. Oftentimes we stick to our intentions for pragmatic reasons. Once we have settled on a course of action we rely on it for effective coordination across time (intrapersonal coordination) just as much as others might do for joint activities (interpersonal coordination). Constantly rethinking our decision would likely result in their frustration and a waste of our time. Intentions put deliberation to an end. If it weren't for the stability of intentions, we'd constantly reconsider our decisions and, therefore, could not effectively participate as agents in this world. Intentions enable us to orient ourselves in a world of limited resources as well as to act effectively.

The resilience of an intention's commitment, however, likely depends on the agent's personality. Where a rigid person is unlikely to reconsider an intention, a slack person might be prone to do so. The possibility of such a change in plans comes in degrees. For some only a small divergence is already enough to prompt reconsideration whereas others require a dramatic alteration.

My present intention to visit a friend in a nearby town controls my later action; the commitment, however, does not involve irrevocability of the intention. Serious reconsideration nullifies an intention's commitment because it brackets this very intention in the process of practical reasoning (Bratman 1987, 94); it losens its hold. My intention to visit a friend "will involve commitment to the later action only in the sense that I will so act later if (but only if) it is rational so to act" (ibid., 107).

Plans are useful. They have a "deep pragmatic role": they enable us to function properly intrapersonally and interpersonally. But Bratman ascribes to the idea that plans also have the practical role of preventing us from becoming time-slice agents. Instead, we are, as we have already seen, temporally extended agents. Plans give us the opportunity to place ourselves on the agential map. They speak for us in the sense that they show "where we stand."[47]

In a series of exceptional essays[48] Bratman highlights that prior plans – or "self-governing policies"[49] – have the authority to speak for us because they enable us to live the temporally extended lives we do live.[50] Self-governing policies are, in a sense, constitutive of who we are and gain "agential authority" by instrumentally benefitting us and structuring our

[47] See Bratman 1996 and 2007a. Bratman's own account is, of course, much indebted to the reoccurring theme of the idea of commitment in Frankfurt 1988 and 1999. Hierarchical theories of this sort aim at capturing some such commitment which aims at settling where an agent stands. Bratman disagrees with Frankfurt and argues that there "seem to be significant commitments [...] that are sufficient to ground full-blown agency but that are not volitional necessities of the relevant sort" (Bratman 2001, 315). He is seeking "a model of reasonable stability in self-governance that does not require [...] such an incapacity of the will" (Bratman 2007a, 11).

[48] Most of those essays can be found in Bratman 2007a with the exception of Bratman 1996.

[49] Bratman clarifies that "such policies are intentions that are appropriately general so they involve distinctive commitments and bring with them distinctive norms of consistency, coherence, and stability over time" (Bratman 2003a, 225-6).

[50] Bratman's view rests on what he calls "Lockean ties". Lockean ties consist in overlapping psychological states such as backward-looking memory as well as forward-looking continuities and unify an agent cross-temporally.

lives over time.[51] Their hierarchical structure also implies that they control the way in which lower-order parts like desires and intentions can make a reasonable claim to be taken into consideration by the agent. A policy, then, gains agential authority and speaks for me in a way that lower-order intentions and desires do not or cannot.

Am I stuck with a policy forever once I have decided on one? Surely not. Intentions are defeasible and new information can give way to reconsideration. Remember, a plan loses its special status when seriously questioned. The unreflective implementation of plans might prevent us from noticing such change. Some people settle on a policy because they are painfully aware of their "unreliability in reasoning" (Bratman 1989, 453) or because they need to get on with their lives. Doing so makes their behavior reliable. Plans can be outweighed, however, and reasons (can) change. Sticking to a plan despite being well aware of new circumstances that demand change is an example of "extreme willpower" or "rule worship".[52] Bratman argues, however, that it is rational to stick to a policy despite current contrary preferences when the agent knows that she will come to regret her decision to give in to temptation. Contrary desires are distracting and create a vast amount of, what Gary Watson calls, noise. It is the aim of

[51] In order to possess such far-reaching authority a higher-order self-governing policy needs to be free from serious challenges and the agent needs to be satisfied with it. For an attempt to justify such an account of "agential authority" see Bratman 2007a, Chs. 2–7. For a critique of Frankfurtian satisfaction see Bratman 1996. Bratman's account gives rise to the appropriately dubbed "authority problem." It challenges the idea that certain attitudes have the authority to represent an agent's practical standpoint (Cullity and Gerrans 2004; Hinshelwood 2013). Cullity and Gerrans argue that a self-governing policy is insufficient for giving authority to an action (2004, 321). They seem to be arguing that we need to appeal to yet another higher level in order to account for the proper kind of authority that we are looking for.

[52] This is well exemplified in Bratman's discussion of rule-worship (Bratman 1992), Elster's discussion of binding yourself, and Holton's discussion on resolutions. Willpower can turn sour, It can turn into (facilitate) compulsion (compulsive behavior), plans can become prisons (Ainslie 2001, 145).

plans to cancel out such noise. The agent's anticipated future regret delegitimizes considering the temptation as an equal contender.[53]

Policies gain such an authority by being unchallenged from other policies. If free of conflict the self-governing policy will lead the agent, if you will, through time. The agent needs to be, to speak in Frankfurtian terms, satisfied with her policy that structures her life over time and shows us where she stands.[54] And she is satisfied when her policy is unchallenged. Hence, it is rational for her to stick to her initially formed policy.

Bratman argues for the plausibility that human life "frequently involves decisions [...] that go beyond [intersubjective value-judgments]" (Bratman 2003b, 159). It is especially in Buridan cases, i.e., situations in which one's options are on a par, that the agent is taking a stand.[55] The agent needs to decide in order to continue and structure her life.[56]

No-one denies that plans can rationally be abandoned, but as long as they aren't being seriously reconsidered (that is, as long as the agent doesn't distrust[57] the process of intention or policy formation) it is rational for her to stick to her plans despite current contrary preferences; this is because they serve the purpose of coordination and allow us to exist over time.[58] By drawing on the work of Christine Korsgaard, Bratman articulates the thought that practical identity crystallizes through an agent's commitments.

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[53] See Bratman 2000b, 255 and 2007a. Bratman sees himself as defending a view in the space between sophisticated and resolute choice (Bratman 1998 and 2007, 289).
[54] On the difference between Bratman's and Frankfurt's understanding of satisfaction see Bratman 1996, 195 and Bratman 2000a, 49.
[55] See Bratman (2003a: 228-30 and 2003b), Chang (1997) and (2004).
[56] Holton uses the example of someone not being able to decide which color to paint her front door. The agent needs to decide, however, because other actions depend on it. She decides to paint her front door blue and sticks to it because her friends rely on recognizing a blue front door as hers and would be misled otherwise (Holton 2009, 1, 3-4). Subsequently she intends to paint her front door blue.
[57] Bratman 2007b, 276 and Hinchman 2003.
[58] For a detailed account of when plans are reasonably expected to be reconsidered see Bratman 1983 and 1989.

That is, they shape our practical identity over time to, by and large, our own satisfaction and as such possess agential authority. Intentions made at some point in the past continue to have authority over us because we are pragmatically better off without reconsidering and because they are part of larger plans or policies that are largely responsible for our personal identity.

Like personal commitments, intentions project normative demands into the future. They shut down deliberation, have a reasonable level of stability and are partly constitutive of our personal identity, i.e., they determine "where we stand." I argued earlier that acting against your personal commitment would result in some sort of self-betrayal and abandoning it in some loss of your personal identity. Bratman showed how such commitments gain the authority to speak for us and how we stay connected over time. Their stability allows for diachronic consistency. Additionally, personal commitments can be precise in what is required of an agent. The triathlete, for example, knows that she is required to train hard, pay attention to her diet and so on. However, the precise content of personal commitments is often unknown (in contrast to a promise) and only comes to light when needed. Remember Caryl needing to take care of her partner which required her to give up already made plans.

It is also true that both plans and personal commitments crowd out other worthwhile aims for measures of consistency, yet they do this in different ways. Plans are framework reasons and provide an option filter which means that they eliminate certain options. Anna's plan to finish a marathon calls for a rigorous training regime (amongst other things) but also, most importantly, for not making any other plans that might endanger

her plan. Plans change what I ought to do by imposing consistency constraints and making an authoritative claim on our identity.

Anna is normatively required to take the necessary means to her end but only as long as she is having that plan. But Anna doesn't have a reason to pay close attention to her diet. She is required to do so if her initial plan is still in place. She acts irrationally if she acts against her plan whilst it is still active. But she might just as well abandon it. After all, she can always change her mind.

Alternatively, her intention might have been fragile to begin with (Cf. Frankfurt 1988, 174). Broome's discussion suggests that having a plan and not having a plan is equally good. Anna either has the plan to finish a marathon or she doesn't. It doesn't matter which one it is. Plans don't have a particularly high exit cost. Her life isn't worse off if she has that plan or not and nothing much seems to depend on it.

This doesn't sound like a personal commitment. Personal commitments give us the opportunity to assign importance to certain projects within our lives. They crowd out other worthwhile aims "for good." Being personally committed to running a marathon, it doesn't sound right to say that it is equally good for Anna to leave that commitment behind. Something stronger is in place here. With a personal commitment to run a marathon this autumn in place, Anna would betray herself if we see her partying all summer. Simply abandoning her commitment does not seem possible for her and "hanging it out to dry" would demand an explanation.

I have already argued that personal commitments can create reason for action. Anna's commitment provides her with reasons to run a marathon as well as reasons to train hard, to not stay out late and so on. Someone who isn't committed, doesn't have any those reasons. Of course, someone else might have reason to do those things out of prudential consideration. After all, it contributes to your health to go running every now and then. But absent the commitment, our casual runner does not have the same reasons as Anna, the personally committed marathon runner.

We intervene in the normative landscape by committing ourselves. Additionally, personal commitments push other worthwhile options "out of the picture." They direct us not to act on considerations that otherwise would be attractive options. Anna ought to work on a tight training schedule, to eat healthy, to abstain from drinking alcohol – something the casual runner lacks (and that a plan cannot make up for).

Suppose Martin wonders if he should adopt a vegetarian diet. Now, he could simply adopt the plan to not eat meat. He generally acknowledges the health benefits and also likes to think that he is contributing to saving the planet. But as things are he also quite likes the taste of steak. Plans are quite prone to reconsideration, i.e., they are not only not very robust but might also lack supporting reasons to follow through with them. Suppose further that Martin sometimes desires to eat a steak at a friend's barbecue. He could form a new intention to have one without violating any integral part of his identity.

Josephine, however, is deeply committed to vegetarianism. She takes it very seriously and would not forgive herself for eating meat. Further, she

could not even bring herself to do so. Her friends all know how important it is to her. Her commitment renders the option to eat meat not impossible – as indeed it is technically possible for her[59] – but irrelevant or even unthinkable. It isn't outweighed – eating meat is simply "off the table" for her because of the commitment's authority. Josephine's personal commitment shows her what she ought to do. Her personal commitment is clearly more robust than Martin's plan to do without meat.

But what is happening here? Martin recognizes the importance of the issue but does not lift it to the level of a personal commitment. He does not assign it special significance. Josephine, on the other hand, not only recognizes the importance of vegetarianism for herself but also endorses it as constitutive of her practical identity. She makes her life about it in some way (and, as a result, makes other options unavailable to herself). As we have already seen with Bratman, Buridan cases can help illustrate this process nicely. I think, however, that we mostly commit ourselves outside of such cases and the possibility of committing yourself is not limited to situations of parity. Indeed, Josephine does not consider a carnivorous diet to be worthwhile. Rather, the possibility of committing yourself is constrained by what matters to us.[60]

Personal commitments differ from plans in kind not in degree, not in weight but in importance because personal commitments are what our lives are about in a very real sense. They exert a strong passivity whereas plans only amount to the weak passivity of normative requirements. Bratman's

[59] I don't think that this implies that one no longer cares about vegetarianism as Anderson suggests in a painful critique of Frankfurt (Anderson 2003). It should rather be understood in terms of something like weakness of will. The phrase "can do no other" should be understood as staying true to onelself and what one finds truly important.
[60] This suggests that what we (can) commit to rests largely on who we happen to be.

planning theory of intention allows for a relitively low threshold for plan abandonment.

Cheshire Calhoun proposes that the strength of a commitment depends on "how much one is prepared to weather" (Calhoun 2009, 620). This doesn't seem to be a very high bar for personal commitment either. Sure, I can withdraw "my support" from a personal commitment like Calhoun and Chang suggest and, hence, "hang it out to dry" but I do not successfully exit a personal commitment by simply deciding to get rid of it. After all, what good is a commitment when I can simply decide to get rid of it?

Do commitments express a "ghostly mode of influence" (Bratman 1987: 110) after all? I don't think so. Personal commitments are expressive of what matters to us. Instead, I want to argue that personal commitments can reasonably be expected to be abandoned once they have lost their special role for us, i.e., once we have stopped sharing the normative perspective with our former self. We have lost sight of what truly mattered and so our personal commitments can go astray. But this I am going to explore in more detail in the later part of this dissertation.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have taken a look at different conceptions of intention with the aim of contrasting it with our initial proposal of personal commitment. Intentions reduced to a desire-belief pair, also kown as Davidsonian intentions, fell short because they rely on present desires and,

therefore, do not have the right connection to volition and are also easily grown out of if there is a stronger desire. They aren't very stable.

Precommitment promises more stability but only at the cost of causally interfering with our future choices. We "deposit our will" by causally eliminating future choices or by establishing side-bets that make it highly unrewarding to act differently. Even though precommitments prove to be more stable, they still cannot account for personal commitments because personal commitments change our reasons directly and not by means of causal interference.

Resolutions aim at protecting current judgments. It is rational to stick to your resolution even though, were you not to have made it, it would be rational to do something else. Their proponents argue for them on pragmatic grounds. Staying by them simply saves us valuable resources. Personal commitments, however, aren't a judgment about what is best but are a method of assigning certain projects significance in our lives. The structure of resolutions also doesn't suit personal commitments. Resolution as a species of intention cannot be expected to be any more stable than an intention itself.

The most ambitious project is that of Bratman's planning theory of intention. Intentions, so the argument goes, acquire agential authority because we are pragmatically better off without reconsidering and because they are part of larger plans which are at least partly responsible for our personal identity. Intentions, plans or policies are subject to normative requirements. They can, however, rather easily be revised. Personal commitments crowd out other options in virtue of their importance for us.

By personally committing ourselves we are making our lives about that commitment in some way. The possibility of an easy revision seems odd. The normative strength of an intention cannot compete with that of a personal commitment. Personal commitments cannot primarily be understood in terms of intentions.

In the following chapter I want to take a closer look at promises. Promises offer a stronger normativity and can be expected to be more robust. Is it possible to understand personal commitment in terms of a promise?

Chapter 4: Personal Commitment as Promises?

The previous chapter set out to explore whether personal commitments can be understood as being subordinated to intentions. It concluded that personal commitments cannot be understood in terms of intentions or plans because intentions and plans are too easily revised. Unlike the instrumental rationality of intentions, which requires you to stay en route only as long as you have that intention, promises are more robust and don't offer as easy an exit. It is not equally good to either fulfill a promise or to abandon it.

In this chapter I will turn to the possibility of understanding personal commitments as a particular kind of promise: a self-promise. Initially, there are a few similarities between promising someone to help move houses and the idea of personally committing yourself to running a marathon next year. After a thorough examination, however, it becomes clear that personal commitment cannot be understood in terms of promises to oneself.

We are autonomous beings and, for the most part, decide for ourselves what it is that we want to do. As such, the ability to make promises is an important part of our lives. It is part and parcel of our general standing as agents. We want to be in the position to use our freedom to make binding commitments as suggested by, for example, Joseph Raz and Gary Watson. We can willingly tie ourselves to someone else and give ourselves a reason to do something that we didn't have a reason to do before.

Promises, agreements, and other commissive speech acts arguably make the paradigm case of commitment (Michael et.al. 2016; Farley 2013). They are a "remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future" (Arendt 1998, 237). They feed back into your behavior and make it more likely for you to act in a certain way simply because you have said so.

For example, if I promise to help you move to a new house next weekend, I obligate myself to you to actually show up next weekend and help. Promises involve some sort of commitment. Without the promise to φ there is no commitment and no reason for me (let's stipulate and put prudential reasons aside for a moment) to do what I have promised you to do. A promise allows me to bind myself to you, i.e., to hand over to you the authority to demand performance (of what I have promised), e.g., to help you moving. Promises are a worthy candidate to look at in more detail because they resemble personal commitments in key areas. They allow us to volitionally tie ourselves to someone and, as a result, give rise to moral obligations to follow through.

Think of my personal commitment to running a marathon. Running a marathon and a change in my diet both seem to be excellent ways of improving my health. But it is the fact that I personally committed myself to running a marathon that is able to explain the fact that I now ought to run a marathon. It is in some sense up to me what I ought to do as I can shape the world I live in by exercising my normative power to bind myself willingly. Agents possess normative powers that they can use to shape the

world they live in; making promises is but one such occasion.[61] Both, promises and personal commitments, give us the opportunity to bind ourselves and subsequently constrain our future conduct.

A personal commitment is both like and unlike the full-blown moralized promise we make to each other. Take the example of running a marathon. My personal commitment to running a marathon gives rise to a reason to do so and colors my life in certain way. Other options are being pushed out of the picture. A promise, however, also comes with a significant moral weight. My promise to φ makes you come to rely on me, expect or trust me to φ. If I don't live up to what I have promised, you can legitimately blame me for not doing φ. A personal commitment doesn't carry the moral weight of a promise. It would be peculiar for you to feel let down or betrayed if I don't run the marathon or, in fact, if I simply don't bother engaging with my personal commitment at all. The violation of a personal commitment doesn't call for resentment.

If I personally commit myself to running a marathon, but this turns out to be a mistake, I may feel frustrated and disappointed, but it would be unusual to think that I have done something morally wrong. Traditionally, a promise is between two or more people. A successfully communicated promise results in me owing you performance, e.g., helping you move, and disappointing you is typically regarded as a moral failure. A personal

[61] Ruth Chang doubts that the making of a promise involves the genuine use of a normative power. Instead, she argues that we only employ an "ersatz normative power" which is responsible for simply triggering a normative principle but doesn't create normativity (Chang 2009, 267-8). Gary Watson (2009) argues that not all promises give rise to reasons to do what has been promised and, as a result, questions the unrestricted promissory power (if not that of all normative powers). Perhaps normative powers do not always give rise to reasons for action but only in specific circumstances. This (I take it) is also what Chang is suggesting. There is additional doubt about the universal applicability of the "standard case" of promising. Many cases turn out to be more complicated. See, for example, Williams (1985), Gilbert (2006) and Rosati (2011). As we shall see later on in this chapter, lots of these doubts are justified.

commitment doesn't require communication. It can be made internally without other people being aware of it. On top of that there is no transfer of rights taking place which seems to be the basis of legitimate blame. In the end it becomes blatantly clear that we cannot understand personal commitments in terms of promises.

4.1. The Commitment of Promises

Promises involve some sort of commitment. Take the above example of moving houses. My friendship to you might already be a reason to help you, but this reason could be outweighed. It could be defeated by an already existing plan to spend the weekend in a nearby town with my fiancée, perhaps a trip I had booked a long time ago. Or, perhaps I broke my arm last week and without the ability to carry heavy boxes; I would not be of much help at all. Things are somewhat different if I make a promise to you to help you. If I make a promise to you to help you move houses on the weekend, I acquire an obligation to do so.

It is not up to me anymore what I am going to do on the weekend. I am in your hands, so to speak, and you can now demand my help. After a tiring week at work I might want to spend the weekend on the couch rather than help you move, but my participation is no longer dependent on how I assess the situation at the time of action. My assessment is simply irrelevant. I am obligated to help you in virtue of my promise to do so. It is irrelevant because I gave myself a first-order reason, motive or moral obligation by making a promise to you which is being protected by an exclusionary reason not to act on any conflicting reason (Raz 1975; 1990).

That is, I now have a reason to help you move. I am obligated to do something formerly optional. Additionally, other plans are defeated by the newly created moral obligation. This is not to say that helping you is per se more valuable than spending a relaxing weekend on the couch. Michael Robins argues that the promissory obligation results from a commitment implied by your acceptance of my expressed intention to help you (Robins 1984). Watson argues in a similar fashion that "promising gives rise to obligations because it is the undertaking of a commitment to another" (Watson 2009, 156). Margaret Gilbert expresses this fact of commitment to another in her term of "joint commitment" (Gilbert 2006). I am obligated to help you simply because I promised to do so (absent defeaters).[62]

It is not up to me anymore whether I help you move or not. After all, I don't simply intend to help you. If I did, I could simply not intend it anymore and, thus, would be free to go about my way (as we have seen in the previous chapter on intentions). Instead, I promise to help you, that is, I commit myself to helping you. Joseph Raz, for example, writes that "promises are commitments" (Raz 1977, 214). Mark Migotti argues that "to make a promise is to make a robust commitment" (Migotti 2003, 61). Gary Watson states that promises are commitments of the will and, as such, constrain our future conduct (Watson 2004, 64). Stanley Cavell holds that a promise is a commitment to a course of action (Cavell 1979, 298). Finally, John Austin argues that promises "commit you to do something" (Austin 1962, 150).

[62] This is another encounter with the bootstrapping-problem. How can Adrienne give herself a reason to φ simply by promising to φ? The idea that we can will obligations into existence is highly contested. The locus classicus for doubt about this proposition is David Hume (T.3.2.5); see also Prichard (2002) and Robins who, echoing Hume, writes that a promise is "still the most mysterious" of all moral obligations (Robins 1976, 321).

When we make promises we likely exercise our normative power to shape the world that we live in. The normativity of a promise stems from the commitment made to another. A commitment in terms of transferring authority to another.

4.2. The Act of Promising

What exactly happens when we make a promise? All major theories of promising agree on three key steps when it comes to making a promise: the making of a promise, being committed, and the dissolving of the promise. A promise is made when the person making the promise (the promisor), attempts to obligate herself to another person (the promisee). This usually takes a performative utterance along the lines of "I promise you to φ". But the language of promises can also take a different form – a form which might crucially depend on the level of intimacy between the involved parties.[63]

Thus, it is commonly accepted that other expressions suffice for making a promise, for example, "I will do φ", "Trust me" or "I'll phone you tonight".[64] The speaker performs a commissive speech act by illocutionary means (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). What matters is that the promisor

[63] Indeed, a healthy relationship seems to do without many explicit promises. Daniel Markovits (2011) goes so far to argue that promises are opposed to intimacy and, indeed, harmful to personal relationships because they introduce a certain kind of distance to it. Seana Shiffrin agrees with Markovits that "too much precision and formality between friends tends to grate" (Shiffrin 2008, 154). That does not mean, however, that friends don't engage in the practice of promise-making. She quite differently suggests that the language used in making promises differs between strangers (formal) and friends (relaxed). Intimates rely on promises because they provide us with the opportunity to *morally* bind ourselves to another. Shiffrin argues, following Hume, that promises are an absolutely vital part of human relations. Raz argues that promises between intimates are the norm not the exception (Raz 1982, 931).

[64] See, for example, Raz (1977), Anscombe (1978), Robins (1984), and Scanlon (1998). Austin distinguishes between primary performative utterances ("I'll phone you tonight") and explicit performative utterances ("I promise to phone you tonight"). The expression of "I will" or "I shall" may be a primary performative utterance in Austin's sense, however, it may also simply be, according to Williams, the primitive expression of an intention (Cf. footnote 44). It may or may not be a promise.

communicates her intention to be bound under an obligation to, for example, return a borrowed book. She offers the promisee the right or the authority to control her future in a certain way, i.e., to insist on the performance of the promise. A promise requires what J.L. Austin and J.J. Thomson call "uptake" (Austin 1962; Thomson 1990).

The communication of a promise not only requires that the potential promisee understands and recognizes an agent's attempt to obligate herself but also that the promisee accepts the offered right in order for the promisor's attempt to be successful. To illustrate, I need to make clear to you my intention of obligating myself to help you move houses this upcoming weekend. Guessing what I am up to isn't part of the practice of promising. If, however, you don't take me up on my offer I am not obligated to actually come over and help you. To be sure, I am still doing something by offering, but I am not promising. That is, I (the promisor) have failed to secure uptake and can be said to have only attempted to make a promise. I have failed to successfully make a promise and the promissory transaction is incomplete.

Should I have been successful, however, I am morally obligated to do as I have promised: I (the promisor) owe it to you (the promisee). Promises are unlike firm intentions or plans in that they produce moral obligations. The promisor cannot just release herself. Failure to comply with a promise most likely generates legitimate blame and a demand for commpensation. The action is the promisee's so to speak. That is, the promisee has control over my will. The promise to help you move this upcoming weekend is unlike an intention to help you, which I can simply disregard should I have changed my mind. A promise requires performance unless the promisee has

decided to release the promisor from her obligation. The promisor is normatively tied to actually do what she promised she would do.

Let us begin by comparing how we make promises and personal commitments. Promises are generally made by employing a speech act. Saying "I promise you to do φ" suffices as to obligate oneself to φ (for the sake of simplicity let us assume that the promisee recognizes and accepts one's willingness to obligate oneself to her). As we have seen, however, not much depends on the word "promise" as we can successfully make promises by using slight alterations of the above phrase such as "I'll phone you tonight" or "Trust me, I'll be there". What matters is that the potential promisee recognizes one's attempt to obligate oneself to her and subsequently accepts the offer. The promisor now is bound to the promisee. She handed over to the promisee a right to demand satisfaction of what has been promised. The promisor is bound as long as it takes her to make good on the promise (or until she is otherwise being released). Uptake has successfully been secured and the promissory transaction has succeeded. Promises, to be effective, require some sort of communication.

A personal commitment does not require communication. We don't make personal commitments by employing a formula and saying it aloud. For sure, we can say something along the lines of "I hereby commit myself to ..." but nothing much depends on this. Rather, we internally bind ourselves without the involvement of others and, therefore, it seems too much to assume that we have to make our personal commitments known to others. Additionally, personal commitments don't seem to involve the transfer of rights to someone else. Personal commitments are binding, to be sure, but not because someone else holds a right over us and can demand

performance. A transfer of rights doesn't seem to make much sense as it would still be the same agent who holds that right over herself (more on that later). Rather, we have made it the case that we ought to run a marathon by committing ourselves and making it central to our lives, i.e., they make up a large component of who we are.

Next, let us consider how promises and personal commitments can be outweighed or dissolved. Both, promises and personal commitments, can be outweighed in similar fashion. My promise to help you move apartments on the weekend will be outweighed if I break my arm or my mother suddenly gets sick and I need to take her to the doctor. This, however, does not release me from my incurred obligation. It will only postpone it and I am still obligated to help you move. The obligation persists. The fact that I am willingly violating an obligation (perhaps I cannot do any other) opens the door for legitimate criticism.[65] It seems that I owe you at least an explanation as to why I wasn't able to come around to your place to help you. I will need to make it up to you. Of course, if it turns out that I just fell awkwardly and no serious harm occurred I still ought to swing by your house in order to help you. Although momentarily muted, the promise (and with it the obligation) is still active.

There are situations in which you are justified in ignoring promissory obligations. However, the obligation is only momentarily outweighed and cannot be ignored for good. It is not up to the promisor to decide whether the promise continues to be binding or not. There is, however, a chance that the promisee may recognize the extraordinary circumstances, not hold

[65] Some promises are so ridiculous that we are unlikely to blame someone for non-fulfillment even though we are technically justified in doing so. For example, the promise to count the number of water drops that manage to escape your leaky tap.

a grudge against the promisor and not demand satisfaction. Quite apart from a promisee's good will there is a case to be made that the promisee herself might actually be obligated "to waive his or her right to performance" (Williams 1985, 222) when the promisor finds herself in situations of distress.

Similarly, a personal commitment to adopting a healthier lifestyle will be outweighed if you come to learn that your newly adopted intensive running training regiment overtaxes your muscles and, as a result, hinders your chances of a successful implementation. For the time being, your commitment is put "on hold." Like a promise, while momentarily out of order or on hold, a personal commitment does not lose its force. As long as you remain committed, your personal commitment continues to exert a certain pull on you and prominently features in your life.

Your commitment to a healthier lifestyle makes you engage with the matter in a creative way. You have a certain leeway here. You can adopt an alternative diet. So even when a commitment's demand temporarily is on hold it still requires you to engage with it once the excusing circumstances are over. That is, once your body has recovered fully you ought to find different ways of adopting a healthier lifestyle. You can, for example, turn to swimming instead of running. You engage creatively with your commitment. When you come to learn that my I did not really brake my arm and am, in fact, still able to help you I am still obligated to help you. I

am not released from my promise just as you are not released from your personal commitment by interrupting circumstances.[66]

A promise can also be dissolved. Typically, this is only the case when the promisee agrees to waive her right to performance and, as a result, releases the promisor from the promissory obligation.[67] The normative force formerly binding the promisor has vanished. You cannot release yourself from the promise to help your friend move houses. Only your friend (the promisee) can release you by waiving her right over your action. Take the case of my broken arm in which I have a genuine excuse. But if you simply cannot be bothered or want to go to the rock show instead you have no such excuse. In such a case you need to be released by the promisee. The promisee can hold you to your promise or can simply release you (perhaps she doesn't want your griping ruining her day). If that is the case, the initial promissory obligation is no more. You can go your way.

At the same time, a personal commitment can also genuinely be dissolved. A commitment to a healthier lifestyle, for example, does not mean that you are committed for the rest of your life. The way personal commitments can be dissolved differs significantly from how promises can be revoked though. We have seen that the promisee can simply release the promisor from her promissory obligation. She doesn't need a particularly good reason for it. Unlike with promises no one else can release you from your personal commitment; it also seems to be the case that you cannot release yourself from it willy-nilly or "for no reason." I cannot simply

[66] It can, however, be the case that the fulfillment of a promise or a personal commitment will become impossible, e.g., due to a serious injury. Even then, it sounds wrong to say that you are released.
[67] Rosati argues that most of our assumptions about promises are not as straightforward as we take them to be. She argues, for example that, at times, the promisor can indeed release herself from a promise (Rosati 2011, 138) and that the promisee cannot always release the promisor at will (ibid., 134). All these ambiguities make a strong case, according to Rosati, for the possibility (and importance) of self-promises.

release myself from a personal commitment just because I do not want to be committed anymore.

Something more seems to be required in order to exit a personal commitment. If you were able to simply abandon your personal commitment to a healthier lifestyle at the thought of an extravagant night-out, you hardly could have been counted as having been committed at all. The fact that you can leave the commitment with such ease suggests that there was no commitment to begin with. You were only fooling yourself. A personal commitment that has simply been neglected falls back on the agent. It continues to exert its deontic pull, demands engagement and invites self-criticism if neglected. There is, then, an important difference between breaking a commitment and releasing yourself from it.

A simple decision doesn't suffice to release yourself from a personal commitment. But how or when can you release yourself from a personal commitment? Consider, for example, my friend's critical comments about my ability to run a marathon. He observes that I am making no progress and reminds me of my track record of failed attempts at endurance sports. The rather unfriendly but accurate remarks of my friend can lead to an erosion of my personal commitment to run a marathon. I begin to reconsider the situation.

If, however, I am committed to a healthier lifestyle the comments of my friend show me quite plainly that running a marathon isn't going to cut it. Constantly neglecting training and losing sight of important milestones is not a good way of improving my health. Getting healthy has to be achieved differently. My personal commitment colors my life and lets me engage with

the object of my commitment. A healthier lifestyle can also be achieved by cutting back on alcohol or a change in diet, for example. In this case I am not considering exiting my commitment. Quite contrary, I am showing further engagement with it.

Or, think of my personal commitment to philosophical inquiry that comes under fire by the thoughtful and well-meant advice of my supervisor. She tells me all about the precarious job situation within the academic field, which threatens my initial idea of a career in philosophy. I come to realize that academic philosophy doesn't underlie the same curiosity (or, rules) as pure philosophical inquiry. Philosophy might have lost its essence (in my opinion). But philosophical inquiry can also be achieved outside of academia. According to Kierkegaard real philosophical inquiry doesn't take place at the university anyway but out on the streets in the "real world."

But what about my personal commitment to finishing this dissertation? I might come to think of my dissertation as a hopeless endeavor because no-one will ever read it much less converse about it. The evidence for this are the countless number of articles on the internet that rarely get the audience that so many of them deserve. Additionally, I am financially burdened and miss the social aspect of my previous days as a student. I come to evaluate the situation differently than before (and perhaps differently than I previously anticipated).

Come to think of it, a simple decision doesn't suffice to exit a personal commitment. This would be the case with intentions. I have tried to illustrate that a personal commitment requires creativity in our engagement with it. It continues to put pressure on us. I can approach my

commitment to a healthier lifestyle or philosophical inquiry differently if my first attempt fails to succeed. However, you can come to lose your personal commitment as we have seen with the examples of running a marathon or writing a dissertation.

Rather, in order to exit a personal commitment at will you need to have (carefully) considered the matter. To be sure, having considered the matter does not save you from making bad decisions. It may turn out to be a mistake to leave a personal commitment behind. Nonetheless, you need to assess the situation differently and have come to the conclusion that you no longer want to be committed.

Consider my commitment to running a marathon. After a while I discover that I do not really enjoy intensive running for 42.195 km; this fact, along with my friend's critical reminder of my life-long failures in endurance sports, and the returning conflict with my other commitments all add up to eroding my commitment to running a marathon. The bad news just seems to keep on piling up. Perhaps the commitment has lost its special role for my identity along the way. I release myself from a personal commitment willingly, yes, but only after I don't see it as a part of me anymore. I need to make it intelligible to myself (and, perhaps, my friends) as to how my situation has changed and why I am no longer committed.

Nonetheless, we would expect a fight (in the sense of being engaged) from a committed person. As we have already seen, simply giving up a commitment at the first encounter of an obstacle isn't good enough. What is more, the constant neglect of a personal commitment can lead to it being lost for the agent. She is unable to find her way back in again. Additionally,

she is to be reminded for not attending her commitment properly. And rightly so.

It is difficult to distinguish between a genuine change of heart and sheer laziness. A personal commitment has been breached in the absence of any considerations to exit the commitment. The constant neglect of a personal commitment is not enough for releasing yourself from your commitment. At some point, your intimates would critically remind you of your commitment. As opposed to promises where the promisee can release the promisor on a whim you can only release yourself from a personal commitment for "good reasons." My moral obligation to help you move apartments doesn't vanish because I no longer care about helping you. The fact that the goal of running a marathon no longer occupies the central role in my life that it did before is the first step required to be able to legitimately exit a personal commitment.

Not only is it not in your hands if and when you are released from a promise it also does not require any good reason on the promisee's side. Personal commitments, on the other hand, require both, self-release and an adequate explanation for leaving the commitment behind. Perhaps the most convincing explanation of why someone abandons a personal commitment is because it no longer occupies a central role in one's identity (in the necessary sense).

4.3. Self-Promises

We now know all about promises. A successful promissory transaction requires the intentional and volitional communication of an intention to obligate oneself to another and needs to be understood by all parties involved. Promises generate voluntary moral obligations. I can obligate myself to clean the apartment on the weekend simply by promising you to do so. But can I also obligate myself to clean the apartment by promising myself to do so?

The claim that this is possible seems rather mysterious. Thomas Hobbes, for example, argues that you cannot bind yourself because it is also within your power to release yourself (Hobbes 1991, 184) and Robin Downie finds the idea of self-promises "dubious" (Downie 1985, 266). Further, Hannah Arendt argues that self-promises are unintelligible because "no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself" (Arendt 1998, 237). The argument holds that self-promises fail to create moral obligations because you can release yourself from the promise at will (something that is not possible in two-party promises). A self-promise requires me to act as both the promisor and the promisee. But was I ever really bound if I can simply release myself at will?

Self-promises seem conceptually impossible. The claim is that self-promises cannot successfully create obligations. While some find it intuitively implausible, others are puzzled by the absurdity of the claim. The general worry is that we can escape the somehow created obligation of a self-promise at sheer will. If that were generally possible, how can I be said to have ever been bound to clean the apartment on the weekend?

There have been a few recent attempts to argue for the validity of self-promises.[68] Those philosophers hold that not just any promise gives rise to an obligation. For example, it seems plausible that the promise to do something immoral, e.g., to kill someone, does not give rise to an obligation to do so. It is also doubtful that the promisee can really release the promisor whenever she will to do so. For example, the promisee may not be able to do so if the promisor's autonomy is at stake. Think of an addict who relies on her friend to keep her secret supply hidden at all times or a student who needs her friend refrain from distracting her (with an otherwise perfectly fine but tempting suggestions to spend time together) so that she can focus on the paper that she needs to hand in the day after tomorrow.

It seems to me that the student cannot simply say "Alright then, I hereby release you from your promise. Let's play some video games and after that we'll go out party". The friend, i.e., the promisor, will likely hold her(self) to the premise of the promise. But even if we accept the standard version of "release at will", we come no further in showing that the same cannot be said for self-promises. If other-promises hold only as long as one is actually bound by the promise the same should be said for self-promises. Self-promises, then, bind as long as I do not release myself. At least by analogy, self-promises seem to be possible after all.

The trouble for any account of self-promising lies with a plausible story of when we break a self-promise and when we release ourselves from it. It can generally be said that one has successfully released oneself from a self-promise if one has carefully considered the matter and decided for (what one takes to be) good reasons to abandon the self-promise. A self-

[68] See Dannenberg (2015), Fruh (2014), Habib (2009), Hill (1991), and Rosati (2011).

promise has been breached, however, if one fails to do as promised in the absence of having released oneself.

Self-promises look a lot like other-promises. We make them by saying something like "I promise myself to φ". If not aloud, then silently in our heads to ourselves. You need to intend to do φ and you need to understand that your words imply that you will have done something wrong and that you are subject to legitimate (self-) criticism if you should fail to do φ. That does not mean that self-promises do not allow for self-release. A self-promise can lose its force when the agent carefully considers her situation in the light of new information and has concluded that it is best for her to abandon the promise.

A self-promise has been broken in the absence of any such considerations. Self-promises generate moral obligations. Consider my self-promise to exercise daily. The self-promise is still very much intact even if I have failed to exercise yesterday. Noncompliance does not equal release. Noncompliance gives rise to feelings of guilt and others might think less of me as a result of my infidelity (Cf. Hill 1991, 142). Someone who breaks her self-promise does something wrong. She is breaking her word. If, however, she has previously released herself from her self-promise we cannot blame her for not acting on her previous self-promise. All we can do in such a case is to criticize her for exiting the promise for what we think are inadequate reasons.

The literature on self-promises agrees on the plausibility of self-promises. It does not follow from the possibility to release yourself at will from a promissory obligation that self-promises are non-binding. It simply

means that the obligation generated by a self-promise binds you only as long as you have it and not beyond that (just as a traditional promise). You can release yourself if you have good reasons for it in terms of either having changed your mind after "having considered the matter" (Rosati 2011, 135) or at the discovery of previously unavailable information (Hill 1991).[69]

First of all, self-promises differ from promises in that they don't need to be communicated. It might make sense to say something like "I hereby promise myself" out loud or silently as to signal others just how serious you are. You raise the stakes by doing that (Rosati 2011, 144) which makes it sound a little bit like a precommitment (the difference being that a promise generates direct normative change). Indeed, Hill is fond of the idea that we make self-promises in the light of anticipated temptation and that we make them explicit because of their special role.

A broken self-promise seems to be less objectionable than a broken other-promise. Whereas in other-promises we legitimately blame someone who doesn't perform, we are less likely to blame someone for the breach of a self-promise (Hill 1991; Habib 2009). Allen Habib is not suggesting that self-promises (or personal commitments for that matter) are less weighty because of their private nature. Rather, he is pointing out that we sometimes think that way and are quicker to forgive someone in the case of a breached self-promise. That does not mean that they are not normatively binding.

[69] Rosati argues that you can just as much release yourself from an other-promise because the promisee "lacks the authority unreasonably to refuse release from a promise" (Rosati 2011, 135). This, perhaps, is in line with Williams' pervious remark.

Connie Rosati reminds us that we are better off reminding the person of her own worth through encouragement rather than criticizing her for her own failure (Rosati 2011). Nonetheless, a self-promise is morally binding. The obligation is real but we don't seem to be too hard a judge in such cases.[70] This is most likely due to the private and self-rewarding nature of self-promises. It only shows that we have mixed feelings about this sort of self-release.

Our mixed feelings, however, don't change the fact that you are morally obligated to act on your self-promise. You are likely to have feelings of guilt in the case of a broken self-promise. Most of the work falls back onto you. Even though you might be able to raise the stakes by promising yourself to exercise more regularly it is ultimately up to you if you perform. No one else can demand performance but yourself. Our mixed feelings might hint at the possibility that we don't take the act of binding ourselves privately seriously enough.

Self-promises and personal commitments seem to share a similar story. But we'd do well not to understand personal commitments as self-promises either. They share the way they are brought to life. We don't require communication to make a self-promise or a personal commitment. Both are brought about internally. They also seem to come close to each

[70] Thomas Hill argues that not all self-promises generate moral obligations. For example, "I promise myself a treat tonight" or "I promise myself to be filthy rich at the age of forty" don't give rise to moral obligations. In the case of non-achievement, feelings of guilt would be misplaced. Hill holds that self-promises generate moral obligations when the agent puts her self-respect on the line. He writes that "there are certain cases in which it is hard to deny the moral significance of such promises. Moreover, I suspect that the temptation to view promises to oneself as morally binding stems from concentration on these special cases, just as the facile dismissal of promises to oneself results from the focus on a different range of examples ..." (Hill 1991, 153). I want to suggest that Hill's counterexamples are best understood not as genuine self-promises but rather as an expression of our everyday employment of the concept. Linguistic usage does not always represent the proper use of a concept. We don't use the concept of a self-promise properly in our everyday communication. You can only promise things that are within your voluntary control. Everything else is wishful thinking or hoping. For the sake of the argument I will follow Habib (2009) and Rosati (2011) who take self-promises to generate moral obligations.

other when it comes to their coordinating function. Both, self-promises and personal commitments can be given up at will. While it takes thoughtful consideration to exit a self-promise it seems that something more is required in the case of personal commitments: commitments need to have lost their place in an agent's identity. I am not sure as to whether this leaves the idea of self-promises unnecessarily fuzzy. After all, it seems that you can exit a self-promise just because you don't want to follow up on it (more on that later in the part on self-respect). A personal commitment is meant to overcome such fuzziness.

However, whereas the breach of a self-promise produces feelings of guilt the breach of a personal commitment rather generates shame. Bernard Williams (1993) argues that guilt is connected to moral failure whereas shame serves to protect oneself. Hill wonders if this is the reason why "people who break their promises to themselves tend to feel a need to punish themselves" (Hill 1991, 150). It can be followed that self-promises are inherently moral. No such thing can be said about personal commitment. Consider your commitment to a healthier lifestyle. We would hardly say that you are morally obligated to go running or change your dietary plan. Personal commitments, then, should also not be understood as promises to the self.

In the following three sections I will take a closer look at three possible ways to understand the normativity of self-promises and explain why the normativity of personal commitments cannot be understood the same way.

4.4. Raised Expectations

Full of doubt about the plausibility of the claim that promises obligate morally, David Hume proposed that people are inclined to keep their promises because they fear to be excluded from social transactions (not because it is intrinsically wrong to break them). This line of Humean skepticism suggests that promise-making is a necessary convention for a well functioning society. However, such a social convention of promise keeping is unable to explain why breaking a promise is wrong.

According to thinkers such as Adam Smith and Thomas Scanlon, we are morally obligated to keep our promise because others have reasonable expectations towards us as a result of making a promise. In other words, they rely on us. Whereas Hume insisted that promises are being kept as a result of a social practice, the expectation account (EA) argues that we are morally obligated because we would disappoint someone relying on us, i.e., her expectations in us.[71] We ought to keep our promises because we owe it to others to take them and their expectations seriously. Frustrating someone's expectations amounts to an injury of the agent's right to rely on us.[72]

"Typically", Scanlon writes, "a promise is asked for or offered when there is doubt as to whether the promiser will have sufficient motive to do the thing promised" (Scanlon 1998, 322). That is, promises serve the role of reassuring your counterpart and they also manage to coordinate our

[71] Some philosophers argue that (freely mutually recognized) expectations generally, i.e., quite apart from promises, are responsible for our obligations in relationships, e.g., Cibik (2018).
[72] What if you promise me to help me move apartments but I don't expect you to deliver? Maybe my experience with you tells me that you aren't to be trusted. Instead of relying on you I take precautions myself. Aren't you obligated to help me despite me not expecting performance? I'd say that you probably are.

behavior. Suppose I had promised to assist you with an important essay of yours: not only am I responsible for your expectation that I will help you with the important essay, but you have also gained the right to rely, that is, the right to demand the realization of your very expectation.

On this account, a promise doesn't require commissive speech acts of the sorts of "I promise to φ" to reasonably make someone rely on you. It is sufficient for the generation of a moral obligation that someone reasonably expects you to do φ. Thus, this account goes beyond mere promises. While Adam Smith pointed out that a promise differs from a "mere declaration of intention" (Smith 1978, 472) it should be obvious that it also includes those firm expressions of intentions, plans, and so on that lead others to expect that you will φ.

For example, you tell me that you'll pick me up on your way into work tomorrow. Happy about the opportunity to avoid taking the bus tomorrow, I form the expectation that you will actually pick me up on time tomorrow. I coordinate my behavior around the fact that you are going to pick me up. For example, I can get up half an hour later than I normally do because I don't have to take my bike for the ride into work or I can get something else done before work. You invited me to rely on you. And I know that you are going to pick me up because a promise creates a moral obligation, i.e., you ought to pick me up. However, you probably should have told me that your nice gesture depended on whether your partner needed the car himself. Promises (broadly construed) generate moral obligations because they are responsible for reasonable expectations that others might form.

This is why we need to be upfront with others about our intentions so they don't form false or unwarranted expectations. That is, you should have mentioned that your plan for picking me up depended on the car being at your disposal. Once you find out that your partner needs the car in the morning you either need to pick me up anyway or warn me that you cannot do so. It is true that you might have a good excuse for disappointing me, but the promise is still standing and you have to somehow make it up to me. You cannot simply ignore my expectation. Otherwise, you'd injure my right to rely (Scanlon 1998, 305).[73] You need to be released by me in order for your promise to be dissolved.

But what if I expect you to pick me up simply because you mentioned that you pass my house on your way into work? You never mentioned that you would do so and you certainly made no such promises. I simply drew my own conclusion. It is helpful to distinguish between "mere reliance" and "trust" (Hawley 2014).[74] I might rely on you to pick me up, but you certainly didn't betray me in any way if you don't since you never made such a commitment. You'd betray my trust if you had made such a commitment and still didn't pick me up. One typical way for such a commitment to come about is by making promises. This discussion has shown that it might be sensible to suggest that no moral obligation has been created and that the expectations weren't reasonably held.

To summarize, the raised expectation account holds that we engage in the practice of promise making because we seek reassurance and want to coordinate our behavior. Promises coordinate our behavior by reassuring

[73] Margaret Gilbert (2004) is skeptical that there are any moral rights in the sense Scanlon is arguing for. He cannot, according to her, account for the promisee's rights.
[74] A famous example are Kant's meticulously timed walks (Baier 1986, 235; Simmons 1996).

others, i.e., because we have a moral duty not to betray someone else's trust. By promising you to φ, I am making you rely on me by producing trust in you towards me. In other words, I assure you that I am motivated to do φ. That is, once you have made a promise to φ, you handed over control over your action to the promisee. This control takes the form of a right.

A certain similarity is clearly there. That is, both promises and personal commitments have a coordinating role in our lives. When I promise you to look after your cats and plants in your apartment while you are away on holidays you can enjoy Cambodia reassured that your everyday obligations are taken care of. Similarly, a personal commitment to finish a marathon next year requires me to coordinate my behavior around my commitment to finish the marathon. By doing so, I give myself reason to pursue my commitment and it also outweighs potential clashing desires to do something else with my time. This allows me to consistently go after my commitment. Both promises and personal commitments possess the quality to coordinate our behavior accordingly.

However, promises achieve coordination differently than personal commitments. Promises offer coordination by providing the promisor reassurance about my firm intention to look after her apartment. I am putting myself out there. I am making a clear statement about what I am intending to do, i.e., to look after her apartment while she is gone. As a result, she now expects me to look after her apartment, i.e., she relies on me. And she is justified in doing so because not meeting her expectation would be a moral wrong. It is no more up to me if I want to look after her apartment or not. I am now required to do so and it is within her power to demand my compliance (or, of course, to release me from my promise if,

for example, she has to cancel her trip). In summary, she not only knows what I am intending to do but also has authority over me to demand satisfaction.

Can we make sense of promises as raised expectations in the intrapersonal case? That is, can you reassure yourself that you are going to finish a marathon next year? Do you really bargain with yourself (as McClennen suggests)? I want to suggest that such a metaphysical dualism is unhelpful here. It seems that this is a tricky thing to do for two reasons. First, I am aware of what I am intending. This means that I'll have a hard time expecting myself to run a marathon next year if I am not intending to do so. I cannot reassure myself to run a marathon by promising myself to run a marathon. I can make a false promise to others but not to myself. And even if the promise is genuine it cannot survive a change of intention (more on that later). Simply put, I don't need the possible assurance that a promise provides me: an intention seems to do the job just fine. Second, in an intrapersonal account of promises it is hard to make sense of the idea to hand over authority from one part of an agent's self to her other part (more on that later, too).

We don't make personal commitments to reassure ourselves that we will do something. Can you even reassure yourself that you are going to do φ? It seems rather difficult to assure yourself that you are actually going to do φ by promising yourself to do φ. Raised expectations accounts argue that promises get their normative force from the expectations we create in others. This does not work for personal commitments.

4.5. Transfer of Rights

We have seen at length that the making of a promise results in the transfer of a right. If I promise you to help you move houses, I hand over to you the right to demand performance. The normativity of promises is essentially characterized by a transfer of rights. Joseph Raz writes that "promises are commitments undertaken through being communicated to an addressee who acquires a right to demand the performance of the promise and the right to release the promisor from his obligation" (Raz 1977, 214). My promise to help you not only gives you the right to demand performance, but it is also up to you to release me. I am in your hands.

This kind of account captures very well what is going on in an interpersonal promise. We can decide to whom we obligate ourselves. If I promise you that I will clean the apartment tonight, I hand over to you a certain authority over me (Owens 2012). This authority takes the form of a claim or right to demand performance. You alone can release me from the obligation to clean the apartment tonight. Making promises allows me to exercise my agency and shape the world that I live in (normatively).

Is this possibility of explaining the normativity of promises through a transaction of rights more plausible? More importantly: is it plausible to think of self-promises (or personal commitments) in terms of a right being transferred? It seems to me that it does not. Consider your commitment to finishing a marathon next year: do you really hand over a right to yourself to demand performance from yourself? This sounds rather quite strange, to say the least.

It is hard to make sense of the idea that you can demand compensation from yourself because you are one and the same person. In relation to this, Hill writes that "payment would, so to speak, go from one pocket to the other" (Hill 1991, 150). It seems that nothing depends on it normatively. What does the normative change amount to if the right leaves one hand only to make it to the other hand if both the hands belong to one and the same person? You certainly let yourself down but it seems strange to say that you are violating your own right to demand performance.

We could try to make sense of this but the transfer of rights on the intrapersonal level would force us into metaphysical oddities. This approach would direct us towards treating self-promises as a special case of promising others, thinking of our earlier and later selves as especially intimate "others." The idea of a divided self itself isn't new.

We aren't time-slice agents, however. We already have rejected such an account in the previous chapter for the more promising account of temporally extended selves, no matter how intimate our intimate others might turn out to be. We have the ability to govern ourselves over time. The person who personally commits to running a marathon and the person who fails to get up in the morning to get those early morning practices in is one and the same person.

Even if you were to make intelligible the securance of uptake, the transfer of a right from my right hand to my left hand doesn't make any normative difference. It is still me who would hold such a right. What we can take away from this discussion is that we have the power to release ourselves from our personal commitments. What is required, however, is a

clearer distinction between the breach and the exit of a personal commitment.

4.6. Self-Respect

In this part of the chapter I want to look closely at the most promising grounding of self-promises, i.e., self-respect. Remember that the general worry about the plausibility of self-promises has been the possibility of self-release. This account argues that general disbelief of the possibility of releasing yourself at will from a self-promise is unwarranted. Rosati writes that "although an agent, as promisee, can release herself, as promisor, at will, so long as she does not release herself, she is indeed bound" (Rosati 2011, 135).

Hill (1991) and Rosati (2011) argue that self-promises are inherently linked to self-governance and self-respect. Self-respect here means to recognize and honor the duties to oneself because, as Kant argued, "the man who has violated the duties to himself has no inner worth" (Kant 1997, 123). The violation of your duties to yourself amounts to a violation of your autonomy. You owe it to yourself to keep the promise you have given to yourself.

Again, consider the commitment to a healthier lifestyle. You might fail to treat yourself with respect if you opt for an evening on the couch instead of putting on your running shoes. You would, in a way, treat your laziness as more important than your commitment. We have already seen that your commitment may be outweighed by a muscular injury. Self-

respect, however, might help us to explain why you are required to find other ways to live up to your commitment, e.g., by changing your diet.

It generally seems to be the case that self-promises do, in fact, bind us. There is a qualification though. This qualification comes in terms of "so long as she does not release herself". Can you simply release yourself after having made a promise? A worry is that you can release yourself if you don't feel like it. The reluctant runner who goes on to spend the evening on the couch serves as an example once again. Her repeated failure to run in the evening erodes her self-confidence and self-respect. This, however, would be a sign of utter disrespect for her commitment and also undermines her ability to govern herself.

Rosati invites us to consider "the abused wife who promises herself that she will no longer tolerate the abuse but who remains with her husband. As a matter of morality, her moral failing plausibly consists in an insufficient appreciation of and responsiveness to her own value" (Rosati 2011, 145). The woman in the story does not have the power to stand up for herself.

So, we have learned that you cannot simply release yourself. You need a story as to why you are justified to exit a self-promise. Rosati argues that you can effectively release yourself from a self-promise if, and only if, there is a genuine change of mind which results from "having considered the matter" (ibid., 135).

She argues that self-promises are important because they allow us to enhance our autonomy, i.e., they serve as a tool to help us act in the way we want to act. As shown earlier, self-promises invite moral criticism when

neglected (fully or occasionally). Self-promises occupy a coordinating function that they also obtain because of the external pressure to stay on course.

If, however, you have made a convincing case for releasing yourself from a self-promise, then any potential criticism would be unjustified. You need to have considered the matter and come up with good reasons for self-release. Hill argues that these good reasons would need to rely on new information in the absence of immediate temptation.

Ultimately, we make self-promises out of a concern for our autonomy and we keep them because we (hopefully) have respect for ourselves and the ability for self-governance. The same holds for personal commitments. When we make personal commitments we typically bind ourselves by exercising our capacity for self-governance. Though self-promises and personal commitments are quite similar, personal commitments do not invite moral criticism when breached or prematurely given up on.

Consider your personal commitment to a healthier lifestyle. You now really ought to exercise regularly and adjust your dietary plan. However, you won't be blameworthy if you don't engage with your commitment in an appropriate way. You aren't a morally bad person. Following Rosati, we might say that the continued failure to engage with your commitment is corrosive of your self-confidence and self-respect. But the prospect of a damaged self-respect is not what keeps you on track; it does not explain the commitment's normativity.

While personal commitments aren't moral in nature, they might very well generate moral upshots in due course. Think of my personal

commitment to run a marathon. Further, you are my training partner and as such I make a promise to you to go running together every other day at 6am. I have now invited you to rely on me. I am now morally required to meet up with you. This is what Hill and Rosati mean when they say that you can "raise the stakes" by telling others. The underlying moral force, however, does not come from the personal commitment itself but from the fact that I invited you to rely on me.

As we have learned, we don't transfer any authority or right to anyone else when we personally commit ourselves. Thus, no one can legitimately demand performance. You lack the moral standing to do so as well as to blame me if I give up my commitment to run a marathon. However, you do have the standing as a friend to remind me of the importance of this commitment for me.

4.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I took a closer look at promises and self-promises and came to the conclusion that personal commitments can be grasped in terms of neither of them. Promises can take the form of a firm expression of an intention (Scanlon) or are just a species of intention (Rosati). We might be tempted to assume that this implies that promises also only have the inertia of intentions. This, however, is not the case.

Promises are, like plans, conversation-stoppers. Anna's plan to run a marathon next year changes what she is normatively required to do. It is possible for her to change her mind and adopt a different plan. Unlike

plans, however, promises are morally binding. I don't have those options. I am not free to change my mind. I am in your hands. I might not want to help you move apartments, however, I am morally required to do so. But you can release me from my obligation. If you choose to do so the normativity is no more. A personal commitment, on the other hand, might leave a normative aftermath (Cf. Chang 2013a, 95).

On Hill's description we can only make genuine self-promises when our self-respect is on the line and, according to Rosati and Habib, self-promises create moral obligations at all times. Personal commitments do not fall under any of the two accounts: they do not create moral obligations. Further, a self-promise cannot be simply abandoned. We need to think carefully before we potentially give up a self-promise. Both promises (or self-promises) and personal commitments share the fact that they are stronger than the instrumental rationality of intentions. However, they are distinct in that only the breach of one of them represents a moral wrong. The neglect of a personal commitment does not invite moral criticism.

The upcoming chapter investigates whether personal commitments can be understood in terms of incapacities of the will. Incapacities of the will seem to be a promising contender because they offer a robustness based on what is near and dear to the agent.

Chapter 5: Personal Commitment as Incapacities of the Will?

In the previous chapter we looked into the idea if personal commitments can be understood as being subordinated to promises. This chapter wants to assess the possibility of understanding personal commitments as being part of what makes you the particular agent that you are instead of being just the same as someone else.

This account often assesses temporally extended agency in terms of integrity. Integrity holds, amongst other things, that you shouldn't change your mind just to please others and that you should stand your ground in the face of serious disagreement or challenge, and that you should stay strong when in doubt or being tempted to give in. Integrity is a question of character (which is made up out of "core commitments"). People of integrity have an uncorrupted character. They are true to themselves. Sometimes it seems to be a matter to stick to projects or commitments because they are your own. But what does it mean that a project is your own?

Bernard Williams argues that an agent discovers the projects that are most deeply her own by experiencing that there are certain things that she must do or cannot do. A pacifist, for example, might find that she is incapable of shooting someone else. She cannot bring herself to do it and doesn't even seriously consider it. Her character is in large parts defined over her pacifist ideal. Williams likes to call those projects that are essential to the agent's life and her identity "ground projects" or "commitments."

The frustration of a ground project would result in a considerable loss of her life's meaning.

Similarly, Harry Frankfurt proposes that agents typically constitute themselves by what they care about. They frequently encounter situations in which they cannot bring themselves to act differently. The resulting commitments are, according to Frankfurt, a result of their will. They cannot will differently. Again, the loss of those commitments which are deeply ours causes the fragmentation of our agency. We can also refer to them as "identity-conferring commitments" (Taylor 1985; McFall 1987; Blustein 1991). Without those commitments a meaningful life seems impossible.

The employed language already shows that both models depend on the idea that the agent discovers what her life is about. The later decision to act on her commitment is just the manifestation of her agency in terms of incapacities of the will. Incapacities of the will do not rest on social affirmation. Quite the opposite, identity-conferring commitments express what is most important to the agent. A life according to those commitments is one of integrity or unification. The preservation of an agent's identity depends on, according to Garbiele Taylor, "whether or not she possesses integrity" (Talyor 1985, 109). A commitment's frustration results either in the death of the agent or in the fragmentation of her.

A commitment, then, is something that we possess in virtue of the incapacities of our will. Both, Williams and Frankfurt argue that our will has limits. We frequently encounter the limits of our will in situations in which we cannot bring ourselves to act differently, i.e., we cannot will to act differently. Those limits define who we are. If we believe that the above

descriptions are accurate there is some sort of commitment involved in the incapacities of our will.

But can we understand personal commitment to be a part of the concept of "practical necessity" or "volitional necessity"? I am answering this question in the negative. After taking a close look at the theories of the two most prominent proponents of incapacities of the will I come to the conclusion that personal commitments don't fit the description of such incapacities of the will because we don't discover them. We rather will them into existence. Further, they prove to be more robust because they don't rely on our psychology. They survive a potential motivational loss or change and continue to be normatively binding even when we don't particularly care. Finally, by committing ourselves we give our lives direction which also means that they can be abandoned at will.

5.1. Bernard Williams: Ground projects, practical necessity and identity

In his Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy Bernard Williams argues that moral theories or morality itself cannot help us determining what it is that is important in our lives. Whilst morality is trying to offer us an impartial perspective it is blatantly failing at recognizing that we as agents cannot deliberate in acstract of our characters. Moral theories are failing to account for the distinctiveness of the lives we live. Williams attacks the very idea of an impartial morality by asking how it would leave an agent "with enough identity to live a life that respects its own interest" (Williams 1985, 69). An agent's own interests are crucial, however, because the practical

question of how one should live is radically first-personal. Morality, Williams argues, does not leave enough space for such an identity. We need to take into account the particular lives that people lead. Williams does so by arguing that people display integrity by honoring their respective commitments and that this core self sets the limits for your engagement with morality. His arguments against impartial moral theories became subsequently known as the "integrity objection".[75]

He introduces us to George who has difficulties finding a job after successfully completing his doctoral dissertation. George suffers from ill-health and he and his wife have small children to look after. A well minded friend lets him know that there is a job available at a research lab specializing in chemical and biological warfare. George, a lifelong pacifist, is appaled at the very idea of taking the job. It is very clear, however, that the position will be filled anyhow and research be done, no matter what his decision will be. He experiences great pressure from both, his friend and his wife to take the job.

[75] Williams is concerned with "personal integrity." For a distinction between "moral integrity" and "personal integrity" see Lynne McFall (1987). McFall argues that we need to be committed to something important, whatever that may be, in order to be able to possess integrity. This allows for stubborn generals and plotting revolutanaries. Williams too argues that integrity is only attainable for those who do something important, i.e., meaningful. But, crucially for Williams, the content of what's important generates itself from whatever the agent finds meaning or purpose in. Integrity, then, doesn't require that we lead a particularly morally good life. Quite the opposite, it allows for evil projects and the idea that evil people can possess integrity. This leads Schauber to dismiss integrity as something worth pursuing (Schauber 1996). John Rawls notes that integrity "allows for most any content" (Rawls 1999, 456). Various authors argue that such a conception of integrity is deeply flawed. Elizabeth Ashford (2000), for example, argues for an "objective integrity" and Jody Graham (2001) argues that we need to be committed to "objective moral goodness". Carolyn McLeod (2005) argues that people with integrity stand for what they think is right and try to establish moral norms by negotiating with their moral community about what should motivate others; as such integrity is a social concept (Calhoun 1995). Calhoun argues that we can only really successfully commit ourselves to things that are socially acceptable because only then it is possible for us to possess integrity. Stubbornness of pigheadedness does not go along with it. These authors agree that the concept of integrity does not have plave for morally questionable characters. Whether a person possesses integrity or not is simply a matter of moral luck on those account (Cf., e.g., McLeod 2004). It is because of those concerns, I take it, that Williams develops his notion of the "well socialized agent" (Williams 1995, 17). The projects of a well socialized agent are compatible with or expressive of ethical considerations.

Another case is the one of Jim, a scientist on an expedition through South America. Jim finds himself in a situation in which twenty indigenous people are about to be shot in some central square. The leader of the state troops offers Jim the questionable honor to shoot one of indigenous people himself and, if he should do it, the other nineteen will be let free. Should he decline the opportunity things will continue as planned and all twenty indigenous people be killed. Jim experiences pressure from the indigenous people to shoot one of their own so the rest could live. Both situations have in commen that the protagonist is pressured to act against his own beliefs. Both, Jim's and George's pacifist ambitions are an integral part of their respective identity.

What should they do? Shouldn't George take the job and Jim shoot one of the captives? According to Williams what we should do cannot be arrived at by logical deduction but, crucially, depends on what is most important to us. But how do we know what is most important to us? Williams' ingenious suggestion is that we discover what's most important to us by learning that there are certain things that we must do and others that we are incapable of doing. Such incapacities reveal the nature of a person's character. Of course, the mere psychological capacity to jump of a cliff or to enter an elevator doesn't count as being part of your particular identity or character. Rather, you encounter your ground projects in trying to quit music forever, abandon your marriage, and so on. You find that you can't do those things.

This, of course, does not mean that you are literally unable to do those things. Your ground projects seem to be revealed in what you are prepared to seriously consider as an option under normal circumstances.

For example, someone might force you at gunpoint to choose whether to abandon your ground project to vegetarianism or not. You experience serious coercion. Once serious coercion is happening, the "normal circumstances" clause is no longer active, so the fact that you are considering eating meat as an option doesn't mean you don't still have a ground project that prevents you from eating meat in normal circumstances. It wasn't you in an important way; your agency has been overridden. Ground projects are stable aspects of our identity and as such can be understood to possess a reasonable stability.[76] We discover our incapacities (of character) in a deliberative process constrained by our ground projects.[77] Someone who displays integrity "acts from those dispositions which are most deeply his" (Williams 1981b, 49), i.e., acts from dispositions expressive of his character.

A person's character is made up out of various projects, some of which are conditional to our existence. We need to be alive, i.e., have the opportunity to take up a certain job, learn a new language or make that long dreamed of holiday to an exotic destination (amongst other various things such as having enough money to be able to afford those things). We only want those things on the assumption that we are alive.

Other projects do not depend on our existence. Rather, they are categorical and our existence is based on them in the sense that they "propel us into the future", provide meaning for our lives which leaves us

[76] Williams himself anticipates this; see also Harris (1974) and Taylor (1995). Ground projects cannot be removed at will and an incapacity of character "expresses itself in the refusal to undertake any [attempt to remove that incapacity]" (Williams 1993, 68). So they *as* defined aren't "easily disposable". Thanks to Nicholas Smyth for helping me to clarify this point.

[77] Craig Taylor suggests that deliberation is not necessary and argues that it is possible to come across a moral incapacity "on the go" (Taylor 1995, 278). Is deliberation itself perhaps already "one thought too many"?

wanting to continue those lives.[78] They are essential for us. Williams calls those projects with which we are deeply intertwined and identified ground projects or commitments. Being identified with your commitments means that you don't want to change them, i.e., that you are satisfied with them. They typically point out the direction you yourself want to be taking.

Without such commitments there would be no future worth having. It is only possible for you to possess integrity if you have something that provides your life with meaning, i.e., if you have commitments. Ergo, a life worth having is a life lived with integrity. It seems reasonable to me to assume that we are diachronic agents because we have commitments that guide us in that sense. They guide us in making it the case that there are certain things that we must do; we are subject to practical necessity which derives from the commitments that are essential to us.

For example, someone might have a commitment to finishing the triathlon in Kona, Hawaii which makes her life meaningful (to her) and, at the same time, help her to live her life. Additionally, she comes to the conclusion that she must exercise daily, carefully watch her diet, not stay out late, and so on instead of spending more time with her family, indulging in the newest culinary pleasures of her friends, and so on. She makes a discovery about herself when she comes to that conclusion. Namely that she is the kind of person that takes her triathlon very seriously. Practical necessities leave her with the feeling that she must do those things whilst, at the same time, make no such demand on others. She recognizes that while she needs to train, watch her diet, and so on others might not need to do

[78] Williams makes the distinction between the "conditional" and the "categorical" in *The Makropulos case* (Williams 1973b, 85-6).

that and, indeed, may have good reason to do the things that she cannot do. Practical necessities do not possess the all-encompassing force of moral obligations. Jim's and George's projects belong into this category.

Both, Jim and George, discover that they can neither take the job, nor shoot the rebel. In other words, they are incapable of doing it. They don't choose their respective commitment but arrive at it passively. They find their lives bound up with it. According to Williams, then, integrity is the result from acting in accordance with your commitments (which you genuinely care about). As a result, integrity requires success in the pursuit of one's commitments. Or short, integrity requires being true to your commitments.

Our commitments are of the "highest deliberative priority" and of the greatest importance to us. We conclude that there is something that we "must" do which "goes all they way down" (Williams 1985, 188). The musician, for example, dismisses the idea of going away for the day and, therefore, not being able to practice the new songs before an important gig the next day. Similarly, the committed husband does not entertain the idea of divorcing his wife in unhappy circumstances. Rather, he is trying to figure out different means to salvage the situation. Both don't consider sacrificing their commitment.

It is entirely plausible that a conflicting option does not even occur to us. For example, we'd like to think that the thought to betray one's partner does not enter a good person's head. His inability is prereflective and his character of "natural purity". Commitments typically restrict our deliberation. Take a committed vegetarian. She is very well capable of

thinking about the possibility of consuming meat after someone mentioned the various alleged advantages of a carnivorous diet to her. Her incapability rests with the inability to entertain the conflicting option as a serious contender to act on. She is outright dismissing it. Her inability is gained through deliberation and her character of "acquired purity". It is, indeed, unthinkable to her.

Vegetarianism matters most to her and as as such has been "singled out" in her thinking (Gay 1989, 553) which gives us an answer as to why she is committed to it. She displays an incapacity of character. It is true that it isn't impossible for her to eat meat fullstop. She might, for example, mistake the chicken in her pasta for wild mushrooms. Rather, it is impossible for her to intentionally doing it. Our commitments limit what we can and cannot do.[79] The fact that those limits are neither simply external to you, nor just a volitional matter lends your commitments their special authority.

Williams now argues that Jim "is identified with his actions as flowing from projects and attitudes which in some cases he takes seriously at the deepest level, as what his life is about ... It is absurd to demand of such a man ... that he should just step aside from his own project ... It is to alienate him in a real sense from his actions and the source of his action in his own convictions ... It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity" (Williams 1973a, 116).[80] By giving into the pressure put on them, Jim and George would compromise their integrity. They would be alienated from

[79] Note that these limits are fundamentally different from those imposed on us by plans as discuseed earlier. While plans impose limits on us as long as we have such plans, ground projects limit our capacity to act in the sense that we rely on them for a meaningful life. Plans do not have that significance.

[80] It is not clear to me why Williams speaks of projects here and not of commitments when he previously made clear that commitments are projects of a special kind.

their commitments and consequently suffer a loss of their identity. To avoid this they need to suffer the consequences of their commitments, they need to remain loyal to themselves because otherwise they wouldn't be at all.

Hence, commitments acquire their normativity by being of the utmost importance to the agent. It makes your life worth living for you and a life without it might well be not worth living (for you). The divorced husband might find that this is his darkest hour. The frustration of his commitment leaves him only with a bleak and dismal future. He lost his reason to go forward, to avoid death. It is in this sense that it feels to thim that it doesn't matter whether he died or not. Were you to frustrate your commitment you might feel as if you "might as well have died" (Williams 1981a: 13). Jim and George, then, stick to their commitments because they are their own; their identity is (at least partly) built on their commitment.

Let us pause and consider the possibility that this is simply a fancy way of describing selfish persons. They act out of a narcissistic concern for themselves. Is this really just a matter of self-indulgence as already anticipated by Williams? Surely not; George not taking the job and Jim not shooting the rebel is simply expressive of their characters. It is not that they are overly concerned with themselves or that they are selfish, they simply cannot do it. Further, many commitments are, essentially, other-regarding, e.g., a parent's love for her newborn child, a child's care for his elderly grandparents, a citizen's love for her country, and so on. Williams

understands this accusation of "squeamishness" as a trick to lure us into a mode of utilitarian thinking.[81]

Commitments, according to Williams, might very well be worth dying for (Williams 1981a, 13) although we'd do good to understand this only as the condition of some commitments, e.g., the commitment to overthrow a tyrant regime, to develop a vaccine against a poisonous desease, and so on. It is at least doubtful that this also applies for a commitment to vegetarianism (since it is not necessary for the commitment itself). The frustration of a commitment obviously doesn't result in death because persons usually have a nexus of ground projects (ibid.). We can usually count on our other commitments to keep us going.[82] However, the withering of a commitment erodes the person's identity nonetheless because they not only structure our lives but also provide them with meaning and significance.

In summary, Williams argues that incapacities of character represent a discovery about yourself and what's important to you. It is in this way that your commitments reveal themselves. Acting in accordance with your commitment is "the most substantial way in which an action can be [your] own" (Williams 1981c, 130). Your commitments give you a unique reason for living your life. Indeed, for living a life at all. They empower us to be diachronic agents. We cannot simply stand back from them because they have "a certain depth or thickness" (Williams 1995a, 169). They are expressive of what you deeply care about, they give your life meaning and

[81] Williams is quite clear that he doesn't take integrity to be a virtue (Williams 1981b: 49). He does, however, presuppose that integrity is of considerable value. This way we avoid the dissection of a person into several selves (which he calls a "convenient fiction"). For a critical reading of Williams see Harris (1974), and, for a friendly one, Moseley (2014).

[82] Williams makes it explicit that the "loss of all or most of [our commitments] would remove meaning" (Williams 1981a, 13).

provide reasons for living the life you do and their frustration alienates you from yourself.

Only a meaningful life, i.e., a life containing such commitments, makes it the case that you possess integrity. Further, your commitments set the limits for your engagement with morality (Markovits 2009, 126; Wolf 2012) and this is particularly well expressed in Williams' paradigm case of having "one thought too many."[83] Integrity, then, requires you to maintain your commitment to φ not only in the presence of some clashing desire to φ but also in the presence of potential moral demands not to do so.

Can we understand personal commitments in Williams' terms of ground projects? To be sure, ground projects have a lot in common with personal commitments. Both take seriously the significance the commitment has for the person as being hers and don't build on the idea of the potential objective importance of the project. They provide your life with meaning. Ground projects and personal commitments alike have a special sort of significance for your life, they exclude other options. Ground projects stand strong in the face of a clashing desire. Someone with the ground project of being a pacifist has strong reason not to take a job at a research lab specializing in biological and chemical warfare. Without that ground project, George should have probably taken the job. They change what you have reason to do.

[83] Williams invites us to think of a situation in which you have the ability to save either your wife or two strangers from drowning but not all three of them. Of course, you save your wife but by trying to morally justify your decision you are having one thought too many (Williams 1981a, 18); you are drawn into a vicious circle (Sartre 1946). You rescue her because she is your wife. Frankfurt is correct in noticing that the bare legal relationship does not suffice but that you in virtue of you loving your wife already have a reason to save her (Frankfurt 2004, 37). I am confident in believing, however, that Williams had in mind exactly such a framework as presented here by Frankfurt. After all, in order for you to have a distinctive reason to save your wife you need to deeply care about her, i.e., be committed to her.

Similarly, your personal commitment to competing at a triathlon makes it the case that you ought to compete at one. Further, it demands engagement in the form of conscientious exercise, meticulously adhering to a dietary plan and not staying out late. All things equal, there are compelling reasons to spend more time with your family or to enjoy an excessive dinner at your favorite restaurant until late with good friends once in a while. But what matters most to George is his pacifist ideal and you ought to compete at Hawaii.

At the same time, both contribute to our practical identity. You make your life about your commitments in a certain sense. This is not to say that there aren't other things that contribute to your practical identity but that your commitments are an important part of it, too. They give you the opportunity to make sense of yourself and your life, provide you with a practical standpoint and allow for temporally extended agency. You assign certain ends a specific importance for your life by engaging in ground projects and personal commitments. Their exceptional meaningfulness for your life explains how ground projects and personal commitments generate the unique and weighty reasons for which, in fact, they are responsible for.

However, there are also grave differences between commitments as ground projects and commitments understood as personal commitments. They differ in their stories of how we get them, how they steer our lives, and how we lose them. Let's begin with how we adopt our commitments. On Williams' account, agents find themselves with ground projects, i.e., they discover them via certain incapacities.[84] We cannot choose what we

[84] Chang also uses the language of discovery. Her account of commitment is quite different than Williams' as we shall see later on in chatper 7.

care about and ground projects are expressive of our deepest cares. This becomes especially clear when holders of ground projects go to immeasurable lengths so that their commitments be preserved. Examples might include a communist whose political ideals were to get buried by a revolution, a woman who recently became a mother, and so on.

We don't choose what we find our lives (psychologically) bound up with. Their lives would not be worth living and they don't see a future without it or, as Williams puts it, they "might as well have died." Personal commitments, on the other hand, must be established actively.[85] As I argued earlier, personal commitments are the result of an agent taking a stance towards herself. She commits herself by exploiting a normative power. The agent binds herself and doesn't let herself be bound. We are passive towards our ground projects (although we then actively act on behalf of them) whereas we actively commit ourselves.

They also differ in how they guide our lives. We have seen that ground projects give rise to specific demands. The language of those demands, however, is too strong for personal commitments. Williams' description of ground projects seems to suggest that they are best understood as the allegiance to some (personal) ideal. Can a commitment to triathlon really count as a ground project? Is there room for such a trivial thing as triathlon in the concept of ground projects? Williams himself argues that there is a broad range of what one can be committed to.[86]

[85] Cf. also van Hooft 1988. For him commitment is solely based on the notion of fondong something important. That is, not finding it important anymore necessarily results in the loss of the commitment. I argue, however, that this is only a precondition for being able to exit a commitment. Personal commitment extends beyond the pure motivational force of finding something important.

[86] He writes that one "can be committed to such things as a person, a cause, an institution, a career, one's own genius, or the pursuit of danger" (Williams 1973a, 112).

Perhaps the commitment to a religion, parenthood or the allegiance to a football club would fall into this category. Just think of all the enthusiastic football fans who are devastated because of their team's relegation. Indeed, many fans claim that they did not choose to support their club but that they were chosen instead. They inherited their allegiance from their fathers or grandfathers who already supported the club. Ground projects give us reason to care about our own lives and as such shape our identity.

Daniel Markovits reads Williams in a way that brings him close to Bratman. He argues for an understanding of ground projects as intentions (Markovits 2009, 129-32). As I have previously argued though intentions aren't that strong and they cannot simply replace the identity-defining role of ground projects (and personal commitments). Further, Markovits doubts the psychological plausibility of ground projects by arguing that "a person's ambitions are not generally arranged in such a way as to produce a neatly, or even only roughly, distinguishable ground project" (ibid., 127). Be that as it may. This argument shows, however, what sets personal commitments apart from Williamsonian commitments. They can be clearly singled out and, further, are not solely dependent on the agent's psychology. We let ourselves be guided by our ground projects whereas we actively guide our lives ourselves with our personal commitments. This brings me to my last point.

Finally, they differ in the way we can possibly exit our commitments. While it is true that ground projects are strongly motivating us (after all, they are the reason we go forward), once you stopped caring about what you are committed to, you are no longer bound by it either. What is more,

the threats to our commitments are purely external. We have seen earlier that only the use of force might make us reconsider our commitment. The agent's agency has been overridden in such a case. She still cares about it and continues to be bound by it. This constitutes an attack on her integrity.[87] A ground project is expected to be stable as long as you care about it. Ground projects obtain their normative force out of the meaning they provide for your life. This meaning ceases to exist once you have stopped caring about it and so does the project's hold on us. All this shows us, is that it doesn't matter whether you really died or just stopped caring enough. The result, ultimately, is the same: a life robbed of its meaning.

A personal commitment changes what we ought to do but it doesn't offer that all or nothing motivational force of ground projects. It is quite common, I suppose, for the committed triathlete to feel the urge to want to go out with her friends and to let her training slide. A personal commitment is not defined by its psychological persistence and to experience a pull in the other direction seems to be nothing out of the ordinary. A personal commitment, then, is subject to both internal as well as external threats. Of course, force may be used to bring you to act against your commitment (external), however, the triathlete's experience of her at least sometimes occurring struggle to follow her meticulous training regime (internal) is very much plausible just as well. Just think of her as being weak-willed or a victim of self-deception. This does not mean, however, that the triathlete is no longer committed.

[87] The frustration of a ground project also results in a loss of integrity. This brings Nancy Schauber to argue that integrity isn't simply analyzable in terms of ground projects because we cannot prolong their meaningfulness for us at will (Cf. Schauber 1996).

Quite contrary, personal commitments are supposed to bind you even in the face of experiencing contrary inclinations. The triathlete does not throw her commitment overboard. When she is going out with her friends instead of getting a good night's sleep, she is violating her commitment, not undoing it. Of course, persons have various options available to them. What is demanded by a personal commitment is very rarely, if at all, the only thing that they can do. It is not literally impossible for them to act against their commitment, however, if we want to take the idea of personal commitment seriously it is in some sense necessary or the only option available to us if we don't want to betray ourselves, i.e., if we take ourselves seriously.

In summary, ground projects and personal commitments resemble each other in the sense that the agent who's holding them is not prepared (at all times) to set them aside. The two concepts are marked by a great divide though. Imagine our triathlete waking up one day and simply not caring about entering the race in Kona, Hawaii next October anymore. According to commitment as ground project, she is no longer bound by it. She is no longer required to exercise hard, watch her diet, neglect her family and friends, and so on. It was particularly important to her because she deeply cared about it (which gave rise to unique reasons). If, however, she personally committed herself to finishing the most important race in the calendar, she doesn't get away with simply having stopped caring about it. Whilst it is true that we care about our personal commitments, it is also true that they bind us even when we don't particularly care. We neither enter, nor exit our ground projects at will whereas it seems that with personal commitments we do both, enter and exit at will.

There certainly is room for ground projects and some aspects of our lives might best be described in terms of it, however, a personal commitment does not fit the phenomenological picture of ground projects.

5.2. Harry Frankfurt: Wholeheartedness, volitional necessity, and the Integrated Self

The account of commitment as ground project is too demanding and, as a result, cannot comprise an accurate description of personal commitment. Whilst our personal commitments are indeed important, the idea of immediately losing them once you stopped caring about them seems too strong. Rather, as I have argued, they endure. We should, however, consider a class of commitments which are not necessarily essential to our identity, but about which one nonetheless cares. This sort of approach is concerned with the integration of the self.

On this model it is possible to act volitionally against what you care about but only at the cost of fragmentation. We achieve autonomy or integration by resolving conflicts between desires for which we need to endorse (or identify with) certain elements in our psychic lives to make them authoritative for us by means of self-reflection. This enables us to live a coherent and unified life as well as constitute ourselves.[88]

One such very familiar model is the one proposed by Harry Frankfurt. Frankfurt analyzes caring in terms of first-order and second-order desires. Think, for example, of someone who wants to learn how to play the piano and, at the same time, wants to learn a new language. The

[88] Those conflicts that are of interest are resolved by rejection (Frankfurt 1971; 1988, 67; 1988; 170).

person has two competing first-order desires. Now, she could just let it play itself out and see whichever desire wins, i.e., moves her to act. On some days, for example, she dives into music theory and tries to play her favorite songs on the piano and on others she picks up her newly acquired book on how to learn French the fast way. She is neither really successful at learning how to play the piano nor at acquiring basic language skills in French because the time she spends on them cuts into the time required for learning one of them properly.

She could, however, also develop an attitude towards it. We are valuers after all. By doing this she forms a desire about a desire, i.e., a second-order desire. She adopts a second-order desire either "when she wants simply to have a certain desire or when she wants a certain desire to be her will" (Frankfurt 1971, 10). Wanting a desire to be your will is what Frankfurt calls a second-order volition. A second-order volition tells us about a person's motivational make-up. It tells us which desire someone wants to be effective, e.g., the desire to learn how to play the piano.

Through the formation of a second-order volition she identifies "with one rather than with the other of her conflicting first-order desires. She makes one of them truly her own and, in so doing, withdraws herself from the other" (ibid., 13). The identification with a desire, then, requires the formation of a second-order volition which is expressive of the desire she wants to have motivational power, i.e., she makes it her own. The newly acquired desire is expressive of her will, i.e., internal, while the rejected desire is external to her.

By making a desire her own she engages in self-constitution. Roughly, she has a commitment in virtue of identifying with one of her desires.[89] A person's will is free and she acts autonomously when her actions align with her second-order volitions. Her second-order volitions are the essence of her personhood. Instead of acting on whichever desire might be the strongest, she undertakes the effort to guide her behavior in accordance with what she really cares about.

Forming your will is an attempt to bring structure into the "forest of desires" and, at the same time, to constitute yourself. It is in announcing one desire to be your own, i.e., to identify with it, that you exercise your will. You are "taking sides" (Schechtman 2004, 411). Those higher-order attitudes are reflective attitudes. You, the agent, are active with respect to your will. You identify with some and distance yourself from others.[90]

There are two possible problems with this approach. First, the possibility of clashing second-order volitions. You want something to be your will and, at the same time, not to be your will. Your will isn't unified and this indecisiveness or ambivalence might hinder yout to act at all. You are yourself divided. The ambivalent agent displays a lack of

[89] Frankfurt talks of commitments on at least three different occasions. He talks of "decisive commitments" in the context of identification with a desire (Frankfurt 1971, 16; 1988b, 168-70) and of "volitional commitments" as a result of successfully executing some action after prior deliberation in the context of actions that aren't open to the agent *because* of her commitments (Frankfurt 1988c, 181).

[90] Gary Watson (1975 and 1987), Charles Taylor (1985) and Susan Wolf (2002) all argue that this kind of self-evaluation can only be achieved under the guidance of objective values. The individual cannot have the last say in it (something that Frankfurt was very much against and was later dubbed the "Platonic challenge" by Bratman). Paul Benson (2005), Marilyn Friedman (1986), Marya Schechtman (2004), and Robert Young (1980) all argue that an agent might not know and can be misled about what she truly wants. Further, endorsing some desire uncritically does not make you free (Wolf 1987 and Benson 2005). Similarly, Gabriele Taylor argues that an agent's identifications "may not survive that particular occasion" (Taylor 1985, 114), which allows the agent to be "shallowly sincere." Proper evaluations need to be time-consistent and Frankfurt cannot account for that.

wholeheartedness.[91] She suffers from internal disunity. Put differently, she (or rather her will) is unified only when her commitment is wholehearted (Frankfurt 1988b; 1992).[92]

Second, that of an infinite regress.[93] How can we prevent such an infinite regress from happening? Frankfurt himself realized early on that the "mere fact that one desire occupies a higher level than another in the hierarchy seems plainly insufficient to endow it with greater authority or with any constitutive legitimacy" (Frankfurt 1988b, 166). For him the answer lies within his concept of identification.

He argues that "when a person identifies herself decisively with one of her first-order desires, this commitment 'resounds' throughout the potentially endless array of higher orders" (Frankfurt 1971, 16) and later adds that "the fact that a commitment resounds endlessly is simply the fact that the commitment is decisive" (Frankfurt 1988b: 168).[94] It is simply the decisiveness of having made this commitment without reservations with which the person expresses her recognition of what she finds important and, as a result, does not consider overriding it.

Or, as Frankfurt would say, "no further question remains to be asked" (Frankfurt 1971, 16). She is unwilling to investigate any further. She makes it the case that other potentially conflicting desires are external to her

[91] Frankfurt speaks of ambivalence as potentially destroying the person (Frankfurt 1971, 16). Jan Bransen (2000), Laura Ekstrom (2010), Justin Coates (2017), and Thomas Schramme (2014) doubt that ambivalence is a threat to one's agency per se. It might, in fact, leave open much needed "pockets of freedom."
[92] Kierkegaard writes that "purity of the heart it to will one thing."
[93] Frankfurt himself is aware of those problems. The first problem might hinder an agent to act at all and the second can give rise to an infinite regress. Frankfurt offers two solutions. First, he turns to common sense and a saving fatigue and, second, to decisiveness (Frankfurt 1971, 16). Keith Lehrer argues for a "power preference" (Lehrer 1997) and Wright Neely for the authority of higher-order desires (Neely 1974). Eleonore Stump denies the plausibility of an infinite regress because a higher-order desire will necessarily collapse into a desire of the second-order, i.e., it would only be a reaffirmation of the already present lower-order desire (Stump 1988, 1996).
[94] The idea that a commitment proper is one which resounds endlessly can also be found in an early critique of Frankfurt by Elster (Cf. Elster 1979, 111 ft. 135).

and aren't candidates for satisfaction at all (Frankfurt 1988a).[95] Conflicting desires are crowded out in virtue of the desire she identifies with. It is likely for her to experience alienation when she acts on a formerly rejected desire. To speak with Bratman, the desire she identifies with has agential authority and, as a result, cuts through the ribbon of a potentially longer series. In other words, it has motivational power.

But what is important to us? It certainly cannot be up to us in the sense that we decide in a vacuum what's important to us. It is here that Frankfurt turns to the idea of caring. Something is important to us because we care about it and its capability of affecting us in ways that we care about. We are volitionally limited creatures. He writes that

> "a person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He identifies himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced. Thus he concerns himself with what concerns it, giving particular attention to such things and directing his behavior accordingly. Insofar as the person's life is in whole or in part devoted to anything, rather than being merely a sequence of events whose themes and structures he makes no effort to fashion, it is devoted to this" (Frankfurt 1982, 260).

A person who identifies herself with one of her desires cares about it and, therefore, also "necessarily considers herself as having a future"

[95] A powerful critique can be found in Schechtman 2004, 416-7.

(ibid.).[96] The notion of identification and caring build on the idea that the agent continues to exist. As we have already seen, caring is paradigmatically future-directed. Like Bratman and Williams, Frankfurt highlights aspects of our temporally extended agency. The agent continues to exist over time because she shows continued interest in herself and lets herself be guided by what she cares about. Without persistence in her desires, she would become a mere wanton, i.e., she wouldn't be at all (also see Williams). The person's will manifests itself in what she cares about.

Decisions are often an incapable, at least unreliable, companion when it comes to what we care about. After all, we can be mistaken. More helpful is what Frankfurt calls "volitional necessity." Volitional necessity is the idea that you must or cannot do something in virtue of something that you care about. It is an expression of the limits of your will.[97] Options that a person would otherwise be able to pursue are unavailable to her; volitional necessity limits the choices you can make (Frankfurt 1999b). It seems plausible to me that a die-hard vegetarian finds it impossible to bring herself to eat meat.

[96] Frankfurt argues that we have reason to live because we love life for its own sake and not, as Williams puts forward, because we have ground projects which propels us into the future and provides us with reason to live our lifes. For someone who loves living that would be one thought too many (Frankfurt 1999d, 172).

[97] Sometimes a person discovers that performing a certain action is unthinkable to her. She runs up against the limits of her will. The person endorses her aversion, she doesn't want to change it. Frankfurt speaks of "necessities of the will" which protect the person from "succumbing to the influence of radical disturbances of her judgment" (Frankfurt 1988c, 190). This resembles the Williamsonian theme from earlier.

Or, think of Luther who was unable to revoke his writings.[98] They cannot bring themselves to will differently. It is unthinkable for them. It is because you are identified with the object of what you must do that you don't experience it as external. The whole process is passive without you being passive. Volitional necessities are self-imposed because they are a product of your will, at the same time, they are involuntary because they aren't a product of your voluntary control. This, Frankfurt is keen on stressing, does not imply passiveness on your part.

Rather, your are active with regards to your own will. You are unwilling to change it; you are satisfied. This represents an important shift in Frankfurt's thinking. A shift from the idea of self-creation (Frankfurt 1988b, 170) to an overhauled idea of self-acceptance (Frankfurt 1992, 100-1 and 2002). In other words, identification as acceptance. I want to call this "Frankfurt's Kierkegaardian turn."[99]

In other words, you care about caring for it. You cannot help caring about certain things and you need this restriction of your will in order to make meaningful choices, i.e., direct your life. It is important to you. If you care about something you'll take precautionary measures in order to make sure that the object of your care continues to occupy this place in your heart. Volitional necessities keep us from hurting what we love; they

[98] It is possible that the object of your volitional necessity is amoral or even evil. Frankfurt argues that the meaning of your life derives from what you care about and admits that "the very circumstances that make the life meaningful may be deeply objectionable. It might be better to live an empty life than to generate or to endure so much suffering and disorder" (Frankfurt 1999a, 85). However, caring is a fundamentally constitutive feature of our lives and Frankfurt argues that it is more important *that* we care about something than what we care *about*. Our lives would be miserably deprived if we didn't care (or love). Should we care (or love) because we are capable of caring (or loving)? Frankfurt would affirm this. He, however, recognizes that "the reason [for loving] may not be good enough; it may be outweighed by other considerations. However, the possibility of loving something is in every instance a reason that tends, at least minimally, to justifiy doing so ... [It is] though of course not a decisive one" (Frankfurt 1999d, 179). We mustn't rush blindly into what we love.

[99] For some authors who put Frankfurt's work in a Kierkegaardian context see Mooney 1989 and Rudd 2012. For the idea of self-acceptance in Kierkegaard see Kierkegaard 1992 and Mooney 1996. For Frankfurt's shift between the two notions of identification see also Watson 2002.

prevent us from violating ourselves and leave us intact. Another feauture of this kind of necessity is that you cannot get rid of it at will. They rather lose their grip on us and (eventually) cease to exist when we stop caring.

Frankfurt is particularly interested in love, perhaps the most authoritative account of caring (Frankfurt 1982, 266-8; 1999; 2004). To love something is experiencing it as mattering to me. Love is also subject to volitional necessity in the sense that loving entails that we must and that we mustn't do certain things. Williams writes that discovery, trust, and risk are central to the state of being in love (Williams 1972, 79). Frankfurt argues that the claims made upon us by what we love are categorical, they leave no room for negotiation: "we simply must not betray what we love" (Frankfurt 1999c, 130).

We are "in the grip" of the object of our love. Lovers aren't narcissistic though. They rather show a selfless or disinterested concern for the beloved, i.e., they are in it for the sake of the beloved and not some personal gain. They aren't motivated by self-interest because they identify the interests of their beloved as their own. Their well-being is tied up with the well-being of whom they love. Additionally, love cannot simply be replaced with or substituted by something strikingly similar. Love is particular and it "cannot possibly be all the same to the lover whether he is devoted to what he actually does love or to something else instead" (Frankfurt 1999d, 169). Love is constrained by volitional necessity which role it is to ensure that we take the claims of love seriously. In fact, that we take ourselves seriously.

To summarize, Frankfurt argues that we are volitionally limited creatures. We often find ourselves volitionally constrained by what we care about. The feeling that you must do a certain thing is what Frankfurt calls volitional necessity. You simply cannot do otherwise; it is unthinkable for you. This volitional constraint is thought to be liberating and authoritative rather than external because it is expressive of who you are (what you identify with).

Frankfurt's theory is fleshed out in terms of hierarchical desires. A first-order desire climbs the hierarchical ladder when you identify with it. But what does it mean to identify with a desire? To identify with what you care about means that you are satisfied with it; you don't want to bring about change even if something "better" were readily available. Caring is reflexive, you care about caring for it. We engage in self-constitution when we identify ourselves with certain cares and not others. We put ourselves behind it.

Frankfurt writes that "what it is in particular that we care about has a considerable bearing upon the character and quality of our lives" (Frankfurt 2004, 17). For him, caring is a necessary feature of our agency. It helps us to constitute ourselves. An agent's commitments wouldn't be her own unless she identified with them. Volitional necessity keeps us from acting against what we want and care about. It accounts for our temporally extended agency. If we were to volitionally rebel against our authoritative cares we'd be volitionally acting against our own will which would result in fragmentation of the self. By doing so we wouldn't take ourselves seriously.

Can personal commitments be understood in terms of what we care about? Frankfurt's notion of caring and personal commitment offer striking similarities. Both argue, for example, that willingly acting against the object of your care or personal commitment results in self-betrayal. It is possible for an agent to willingly fight against what she cares about. Frankfurt would argue, however, that this would be an instance of self-betrayal because you volitionally act against your own will and thereby shatter your unity. You hinder yourself from existing across time. On this picture, you can't make sense of yourself. It is also possible for an agent to willingy act against what she is personally committed to. This amounts to self-betrayal in the sense that not only you endanger the success of your commitment but also fail to take yourself seriously.

Frankfurt's model doesn't build on the idea of the potential objective importance of the object of our care. Rather, it provides meaning for your life detached from potential objectivity. Indeed, what you care about makes for what can be said is essentially you. While acting otherwise is technically possible for the agent it is unthinkable for her. This model helps us to explain how certain actions are properly attributable to an agent whilst others can be disregarded as external.

Frankfurtian commitments stand strong in the face of clashing desires because the agent threw his whole weight behind what she cares about. She wholeheartedly identifies with what she cares about. Potentially clashing desires aren't candidates for satisfaction. What we care about changes what we have reason to do. Further, Frankfurt argues that we should take action to ensure the continuity of our cares. It can be said that what we care about guides us and shapes our identity.

Similarly, your personal commitments contribute to your understanding of yourself. Your personal commitment to veganism, for example, makes it the case that you ought not to consume animal products. It makes you engage with what you are committed to in ways that aim at the manifestation of your commitment. For example, you search the internet for new vegan recipes, you look if the restaurants you regularly frequent offer vegan options on their menu, you seek for likeminded people, and so on. Veganism plays an important role in your life now. In other words, it colors your life. A personal commitment (much like Frankfurtian objects of care) allows you to position yourself on the agential map. Clashing interests aren't candidates for satisfaction. It changes what we have reason to do. The two ideas, then, are quite similar when it comes to how they guide our lives.

There are, however, also major discrepancies between the two proposals. Frankfurtian commitments differ in their stories of how we adopt them and how we get rid of them. Let's begin with how we adopt our commitments. Frankfurt argues that agents find themselves psychologically bound up with what they care about. They experience that there are certain things that they must do.

That is, they experience themselves as being volitionally constrained. But agents aren't simply passive when it comes to their volitions. They are active, according to Frankfurt, in the sense that they are satisfied; they don't want to bring about change. They can be said to identify with what they care and engage in self-constitution.

Frankfurt only offer us a "mild activity" at best. The limits of our will are set by what we cannot help caring about. They provide our lives with the particular meaning it has. Frankfurtian commitments direct our lives in terms of agents being psychologically incapable of changing what they care about. Frankfurt argues that we need this restricition for meaningful choice. The activity builds on the fact that you don't want to change what you care about. We let ourselves be guided by what we care about. After all, being satisfied with something is also something that we don't bring about. It is not an act of will.

This, however, is too weak for our idea of personal commitment. It seems wrong to say, as Frankfurt is committed to saying, that when you don't act on what you care about you actually display that you don't care that much or, perhaps, never even really cared at all. Not all our carings have practical priority though (Cf. Blustein 1991, Bratman 2006, and Calhoun 2009). They might even blind us for what really is important (Cf. Benbaji 2001). You don't find yourself with your personal commitments. Rather, commitments must be established actively. That is, you identify certain things as important to you and as potentially occupying an important role in your identity. You put yourself on the agential map and determine what you have reason to do by committing yourself.

The two accounts also come apart in how they describe the terms by which we can possibly exit our commitments. Frankfurt acknowledges that the triathlete might feel a sudden urge to give up her dream of competing at Hawaii and go out on a spree with her friends instead. However, this isn't a question of strength but of authority. She experiences the urge as external to herself. It is exactly what it is, an urge. Personal commitments share that

part of the story. Caring also enables us to envision a future. As such carings aren't simply abandoned, they are lost. Their normative force derives from the meaning they give our lives. A Frankfurtian commitment loses its meaning, i.e., its grip on us, and ceases to exist when we stop caring about it. It is stable only as long as your care about it. This is why Frankfurt envisions the caring agent to take steps towards securing her care.

In opposition to Frankfurt, however, I argue that we can give up our commitments at will (a precondition is that the commitment has lost its special role for our identity). We don't automatically lose our commitments once we have stopped caring about it. Remember, many people stay committed in a relationship, a company, a long-term project, and so on even though they stopped caring about it a long time ago. We now only have the chance to exit them properly. And for this we have to exercise our agency, i.e., exit the commitment by our own will.

In summary, Frankfurtian commitments and personal commitments share much of the guidance they provide for our lives. Aditionally, on both accounts the agent is not prepared to set the commitment aside and takes active measures in order to prolong the commitment. The two models are clearly distinguishable though when it comes to how we enter and exit commitments. On Frankfurt's model activity is being described as being satisfied with what you happen to care about. This, however, is too weak for our understanding of personal commitment. In order to personally commit yourself you need to decide what you confer special significance to in your life; after all, not all of them can take that role.

Similarly, they differ in how we abandon our commitments. Again, imagine our triathlete woke up one morning and simply stopped caring about entering the race in Kona. According to Frankfurt, she is no longer bound by it. She is no longer required to exercise hard, watch her diet, neglect her family and friends, and so on. Her project had authority over her because she deeply cared about and was being satisfied with it. A personal commitment doesn't let us off the hook by simply having stopped caring about it. Our personal commitments bind us even when we don't particularly care. We enter and exit personal commitments at will.

It is certainly true that we care about our personal commitments, however, there is more to the story. They aren't made up of desires. There certainly is room for Frankfurtian carings and some aspects of our lives might best be described in terms of it, for example, parental love (Cf. Frankfurt 2004). A personal commitment, however, cannot be described in terms of it.

5.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined two different models of incapacities of the will and compared them with the idea of personal commitment. Both, Frankfurt and Williams argue that the will has limits in terms of necessities. The two notions of "practical necessity" and "volitional necessity" differ in scope and depth.[100] While Williams argues that practical necessity is expressive of our character and rather broadly construed to

[100] Schauber refers to those commitments as "passive commitments" because we have them "in virtue of our concerns" (Schauber 1996, 121). Schauber is mistaken, however, when she claims that "active commitments" which are the product of deliberation are essentially social, e.g., promises. Personal commitments are neither passive nor social. Rather, they are active and internal. Schauber cannot account for that.

include an individual notion of morality, Frankfurt takes volitional necessity to be more narrowly tied to a specific way of caring about someone or something: love.

A ground project and a personal commitment are similar in the way they provide meaning to the agent's life, crowd out other options, and change what we have reason to do. They differ crucially though in the way you adopt them, they guide your life, and abandon them. You discover your ground projects whereas you will your commitment into being. Aditionally, the language of ground projects is too strong. While it is true that you might lose an important part of your life when you give up a personal commitment it is not the case that you "might as well have died." Finally, unlike an intention, a ground project is very stable. It is an expression of who you are. Indeed, it proves to be a bit too stable: You lose a ground project only by having stopped caring about them. And once you have stopped caring you lose it immediately. A personal commitment, however, is supposed to absorb the loss of caring. It is not tied to your psychology. You cannot act against your ground project, but you can certainly act against your personal commitment.

A Frankfurtian commitment is similar to a personal commitment in the way it provides meaning to your life, crowds out other options as unthinkable, and changes what you have reason to do. Further, volitionally acting against you commitment shows that you don't take yourself seriously. A personal commitment colors your life in ways that promise to promote the object of your commitment. The two models of commitment come apart, however, in the way you enter and exit them. A commitment comes into existence on Frankfurt's account when you are satisfied with what you

care about. In a way that is a discovery, too. You enter a personal commitment, on the other hand, by willing it into existence. Frankfurt wants you to secure the existence of your care because you'd lose your commitment should you stop caring. Personal commitments, however, can be given up willingly. We don't lose them once we stopped caring. No, we remain committed. But it is now that we can give them up. And this is being done by an act of will.

Williams and Frankfurt provide us with the conceptual space to make sense of the common feeling that we sometimes must do something in terms of psychological incapacities that are expressive of central aspects of who we are. However, it seems reasonable to assume that what you care about, i.e., your "ground project" or "final end," is subject to (reasonable) change. And, indeed, both Williams and Frankfurt acknowledge this. However, on Williams' model you "might as well have died" and on Frankfurt's account you lose part of who you are. My account of personal commitment leaves open the possibility of reasonable change whilst respecting the demands our commitments make on us.

Personal commitments aren't dependent on the agent's psychology. They aren't mental states and cannot be captured in desires or carings. We let ourselves be guided on Frankfurt's model whereas personal commitments are a way of actively guiding your life yourself. As we will see later, personal commitments are not irrevocable. The exit constraints are more substantial than a mere shift in your psychology though. I am going to argue in the next chapter that a precondition for being able to exit a commitment is that it has lost its special role for your identity. The mere reliance of the agent's psychology would leave us with passivity again but it

is the agent who can willingly exit a commitment. There certainly is room for and some aspects of our lives might best be described in terms of a ground project or authoritative carings, however, a personal commitment cannot be described in terms of it.

Chapter 6: Will-based Commitments

The previous chapter set out to explore whether the phenomenon of personal commitment could best be understood in terms of incapacities of the will. Despite a fair few similarities between the two concepts it became clear that reliance on the agent's psychology suggested, however, that this isn't a good fit. The agent needs to be active when making a commitment as well as when exiting one. Incapacities of the will cannot make sense of that.

There are many situations in which we cannot determine what we should do by relying on already existing reasons. They are insufficient for settling the question of what we should do. In such cases it is up to us to determine what we will do and we can do so by making it the case that we have reason to pursue one option over the other. Some authors suggest that we can do this by committing ourselves. We can call this the "existentialist response."

This chapter takes a closer look at two relatively recent accounts of commitment. Both can somewhat broadly be defined as falling under the category of "commitments of the will." Gary Chartier invites us to think about commitment in terms already discussed. His account focuses strictly on a possible metaphysical role of commitments, i.e., to allow for temporally extended agency. He is unable to explain, as we already should know by now, how commitments can create reasons.

Ruth Chang introduces the idea that we can create reasons by committing ourselves. She provides a sophisticated account which is able to

not only explain how it is possible that we can create reasons but also when we can do so. Her account gives us genuine insight into the idea of commitments as the result of willing and is to be clearly favored for my purposes but not without some minor corrections when it comes to how we enter and exit personal commitments.

Can commitments of the will solely be understood as a response to an eminent problem in rational choice theory? I want to argue that the restriction to such cases does not do justice to what personal commitment plausibly is. When you personally commit yourself you put your agency behind some option and, under the right circumstances, create a reason for yourself. In short, personally committing yourself is willing something to be a reason for you and properly engaging with it.

6.1. Commitments of the Will

A commitment is a willing of some kind. Strictly speaking, all of the previously introduced contenders are commitments of the will under some description. Intentions require the will to establish a course of action for effective coordination. Promises make use of the will to enable the agent to obligate herself to another. Incapacities of the will express the idea that the will is something neatly tied to the agent's identity. However, for one reason or another, they all fell short of being able to account for one or more of the important features of personal commitment.

As already argued a personal commitment to running a marathon doesn't make it the case that you are morally required to run a marathon.

You may or may not run a marathon (morally speaking). Similarly, your commitment is not in need of supporting reasons and it can be made without prior deliberation. You don't need to weigh reasons for or against running a marathon. You can simply commit.

Margaret Gilbert argues that typically a decision kickstarts a commitment. Take the example of running a marathon. Your decision to run a marathon commits you to doing so. You now have sufficient reason to conform to your decision to run a marathon. Your commitment to running a marathon does in some sense bind you. It delegitimizes the claims contrary inclicanations make on you. It is exclusionary in Raz's sense (Cf. Raz 1975).

Imagine, for example, that you run into a couple of old friends. You are immediately tempted to go out with them for a couple of beers and let today's training slide. As long as you are, in fact, committed your nostalgic encounter isn't a legitimate contender. That is, unless you change your mind and repudiate your decision to run a marathon. Maybe you would rather go to the museum and, as a result, rescind your previous decision to run a marathon. Thus, you are no longer bound by your previous decision to run a marathon. Taking it back is a legitimate option and not a very difficult one at that.

All of this comes as no news to us. But all you need to do in order to part with your commitment is to "change your mind." If you do rescind your commitment it loses all of its normative force. But until you do so, you are under the directive of your commitment. An assessment that is shared by Calhoun (2009), Chang (2013a) and others. Gilbert goes on to argue that

"commitments ... have considerable practical import while they stand" (Gilbert 2006, 132). Indeed, you now ought to run a marathon. But what does that "considerable practical import" amount to if you can simply abandon a commitment by changing your mind when facing an inclination in opposition to it? After all, the stability of this kind of commitment is "relatively weak" (ibid., 133).[101]

The proposal that a personal commitment can simply be given up at will just like an intention cannot make sense of the idea that changing one's mind itself might be constrained by other considerations. After all, something of importance to us is at stake. What has been on offer so far carelessly neglects why we make commitments and, as a result, also pays no attention to as to why changing one's mind isn't perhaps as easy as sometimes is being suggested. This will become especially clear during the investigation of two such accounts of "commitments of the will."

6.2. Gary Chartier: The Logic of Commitment

Gary Chartier understands a commitment to be "a resolution, a plan, a decision, a choice that is treated by the person making it as not to be altered simply at will" (Chartier 2018, 1). He, like Gilbert, shows a willingness to include intentions into the realm of commitments. Several different phenomena, then, are called upon as to explain one single notion of commitment. Those phenomena, however, are unable to do what is being asked of them because their respective notion of commitment is a

[101] A more powerful kind of commitment can be found in her notion of *joint commitment* present in, for example, promises. They are more powerful because simply changing your mind is not going to do it. You need to be released from your obligation. They do, however, also only bind as long as your are obligated. Joint commitments are also commitments of the will. My focus throughout this dissertation is on *personal* commitments, however.

different one. On top of that, the idea of personal commitment does not fit into this picture. Personal commitments cannot be made sense of under the flag of (however broad) intentions.

Chartier's study is concerned with three overarching themes. First, self-creation. According to Chartier a commitment "seems to be an exercise in self-creation" (Chartier 2018, 56). This already marks an important difference with, for example, Frankfurt's account. This process of self-creation makes the object of the commitment "ours" (ibid., 99).

Commitments allow us to make sense of ourselves and to give our lives direction. They are tantamount to a decision about "who we will be ... To disregard these commitments is, then, or can be, to attack our own identities, our own selves" (ibid., 21). That is, we make (and keep) commitments out of a concern for our identity.

As such it is characteristic of a commitment to shut down deliberation and "to narrow one's range of appropriate choices" (ibid., 47). In other words, it has authority over the agent due to its identity-shaping character. This constraint resembles an obligation to myself and not to anyone else. This sets them apart from promises whose trait it is to involve other people. The commitments of concern here are intrapersonal. He argues that commitments influence our future preferences and choices and allow us to actively shape our identity and, as a result, provide us with reasons for action "that it would be inappropriate for us to ignore" (ibid., 4).

Another concern is the great need for coordination. The vast plurality of human goods prompts us to make and keep commitments. We need to

make commitments because they enable us to tie ourselves down and make plans around them. Think of the earlier introduced Buridan cases. We need to make a decision in order to get on with our lives. We save valuable resources by doing so. For example, we don't need to revisit the same question over and over again. Making a commitment, then, is one way of how one can settle these encounters. For Chartier, commitments enable us to save resources as well as to fight contrary inclinations.

It is highly unlikely, however, that a concern for coordination really serves as a decision procedure when it comes to "the choice of a profession, a partner, a hobby, a region of residence, a religious community" (ibid. 43) and that "it will ... be perfectly reasonable for you to decide using some random procedure" (ibid. 47). This might apply to situations in which you are unsure which color you should paint your front door with but certainly not in others. To me it makes more sense that we do not commit ourselves because it saves us time and energy but because it provides us with the opportunity to assign significance to something; to put ourselves behind it.

Thus, finally, he writes that commitment is "a valuable response to inner fluctuations, conflicts, or disconnections" (ibid., 75) which makes him sound to endorse Bratman's claim that some agents settle on a plan because they are painfully aware of their unreliability in reasoning (Cf. Bratman 1989). He continues writing that

"we make commitments expecting that we will be tempted to ignore or radically modify the plans they are intended to solidify and secure. If we supposed that we could fulfill our plans effortlessly, not encountering any inner resistance or else overmastering any such resistance without difficulty,

we wouldn't bother committing. Commitments serve to keep us on track when we want to change our course ..." (ibid., 91)

which brings him closer to what Holton calls resolutions. And, indeed, it seems that this protective layer serves the purpose of a precommitment or that of a resolution. We expect to be tempted and act accordingly.

Chartier argues that a commitment, once it is made, will transform into a habit which will not only shape your future behavior but also make it the case that compliance comes easier. A commitment on this description will turn into an independent instrument of perfect fidelity.

But can we revise our commitments at all? According to Chartier we ought to reconsider a commitment when morally required. Those cases aside, however, it seems that we cannot exit a commitment without violating our self-integration. He only allows for the abandonment of a commitment when its realization has become physically impossible for you, when it has becomes pointless or, finally, if you were epistemically mistaken (Cf. ibid., 95-7). Absent any of those enablers your abandonment of a commitment amounts to failure (ibid., 27).

But what if the agent simply stops treating her initial choice as protecting her commitment? According to Chartier, it seems to be the case that agents cannot willingly stop treating their choice as protected from willing differently due to a concern for their identity. Thus, exiting a

commitment seems unnecessarily hard. It remains unclear why someone cannot simply stop treating her initial decision as decisive.[102]

What can we make of Chartier's account of commitment? His analysis offers a few similarities with what I have introduced under the banner of personal commitment. For example, a commitment is something active. It is based on a decision and resembles an internal pledge. Both take seriously the idea that commitments provide your life with meaning and that they are yours in an important sense. They shut down deliberation and normatively constrain future options. A commitment gives you a new reason to do what you are committed to. As such it exercises a deontic pull on us. It is not something that you owe to others. Your commitment to running a marathon, for example, settles the matter whether you should really do so or pursue your ambitions of becoming a whiskey sommelier instead. You made it the case that you ought to run the marathon.

However, his willingness to include a whole class of normative commitments of the will prohibits him from being able to come up with a precise notion of commitment. Sometimes he is talking about plans when he writes that "many of the plans we commit to fulfilling aren't that important, and we may well treat them as such" (ibid., 97) which opens up the question how exactly we should differentiate between those plans that matter and those that don't.

At other times he is talking about something closer to Williams' ground projects when writing that "some commitments are sufficiently self-

[102] This is especially the case because Chartier argues against the possibility of inconsistent commitments. Why isn't it possible that the previous commitment lost its special role for your identity or that you embrace the inconsistency of your commitments? It is unclear why the already existing commitment is authoritative. It seems that Chartier is committed to the claim that it is authoritative because it was there first. If so, this is a highly unsatisfying answer.

involving, implicate our identities to such a degree, that abandoning them will mean letting go of ourselves and giving up what gives meaning to our lives ... we will abandon them only on pain of something close to self-destruction" (ibid., 93).[103]

I have already argued in chapters four and six respectively that personal commitments aren't best understood as plans or ground projects. Plans cannot serve his envisioned purpose because they do not create reasons. His language of "treating a decision not to be altered at will" is revealing and lays open as to exactly why plans are easily revisable: you can simply stop treating it as such. It is good to have a plan but it is just as good to have a different one or none. This is simply not the case with personal commitment.

On his account a commitment becomes a habit which serves the purpose to abide by one's initial commitment.[104] It is a failure to act against your commitment because "... to act contrary to a habit is to make it harder to exhibit the original habit in the future, particularly since one has, by one's choice, begun to form the habit of declining to be loyal" (ibid., 27). It is a failure because you undermined the economic benefits of a commitment. This does not only sound very harsh but is also misleading. It is misleading because it is something different to act against a commitment once or all the time. It is overly harsh because acting against a commitment may lead to reasonably realizing that you aren't in it anymore. And this isn't necessarily a failure but the necessary realization to cut the chord.

[103] I take it (as did Williams) that the loss of a commitment can be compensated by the agent's various other commitments.
[104] Previously I have argued that it is dangerous to understand personal commitment as habit because of the underlying difficulties and threats to our agency that come with habits.

I am sympathetic to his claim that we cannot will to exit a commitment because they are part of who we are. But a commitment can lose that role. Imagine that your commitment to running a marathon is something that loses its appeal over time (maybe because you did not engage with it properly). The commitment no longer occupies a special role in your identity anymore. You can exit the commitment at will.

According to Chartier, this represents "a clear instance of failure." It sounds overly harsh to label this as a clear instance of failure. It might be true that this constitutes an attack on your life's story but stubbornly clinging on to something just because you committed to it isn't a particularly strong sign of character either. A life's story must allow for reasonable change. This is what his account is unable to provide. Leaving a commitment behind can be a sign of personal growth instead of failure (just think of the abused housewife).

This inability is by design though because we mainly make commitments, according to Chartier, because of our limited resources. This might be true when it comes to Buridan cases. It is also plausible, however, that we make commitments out of a deep concern for ourselves. That is, we see ourselves rather as a vegetarian than a carnivore. This sounds closer to what I have in mind when I talk about personal commitments. It is particularly interesting that he doesn't consider drifting to be a reasonable response to such cases because he acknowledges that someone might not be very interested in her identity (Cf. ibid., 18). You couldn't ask for a better description of Kierkegaard's "A."

He also emphasizes that we make commitments to counter anticipated temptation. We wouldn't need them if we were able to achieve our goals effortlessly. This makes him sound a lot like he is talking about Elster's precommitments or Holton's resolutions. And I think that he, indeed, is. But this isn't why we make personal commitments either. Commitments aren't the support troops for our withering motivation. Instead, we make personal commitments because we make our lives about something, i.e., we assign certain things significance in our lives.

Chartier characterizes commitment as "a past event" (ibid., 10). This is problematic because it suggests that a one-time decision does the trick where, in fact, constant renewal is required. A personal commitment requires much more effort than a simple decision. You need to constantly recommit yourself in order for you to be committed. A commitment, if you will, requires constant attention or engagement. Commitment as a past event is unable to explain its present hold and already implicates that the commitment itself isn't there anymore.

Here, the importance of the idea of constant engagement, i.e., recommitment, gains traction because a lack of it serves as a clear warning sign for the agent and might lead her to take steps towards securing her commitment. The agent takes on the responsibility and investigates the reason for her lack of engagement. It is in this sense that she takes herself and her commitment seriously. It may turn out that the reason for this disengagement lies with the agent not having paid enough attention to the commitment (which is why she might need to be authoritatively reminded). However, she made sure to confront the matter and not to pigheadedly stay

committed. A simple decision or a habit is unable to explain this engagement.

Further, we need to be careful to understand the commitment itself as a reason for keeping the commitment. That seems not to be the case. It would result in pigheadedness beyond compare. Rather, a personal commitment crowds out other options and gives rise to new reasons that make it the case that you ought to, for example, run a marathon. Special reasons that apply only to you. Others might have prudential reasons to do the same but they lack the commitment's special reason to do so. The fact that you have a commitment, then, doesn't imply that you should remain committed. It is rather the meaning a commitment has for your life which is decisive for keeping the commitment. Recommitment is so important because it continues to demonstrate the commitment's importance for your life.

Finally, Chartier doesn't offer a plausible account of when you can reasonably exit a commitment (except for external circumstances). He holds that leaving a commitment behind amounts to failure. I have argued that a more nuanced picture is being called for and also provided the first steps for such an understanding. A commitment can be left behind when it no longer occupies that special role in the agent's identity it once did. Just how this might come about is a different matter entirely and doing so can cause your intimates to be concerned.

In summary, despite a few overlapping themes the two accounts are clearly marked by major discrepancies which primarily is due to Chartier's general treatment of the matter. He is opposed to the idea that a

commitment can be altered at will. Thus, an agent can only be said to have lost a commitment. This does not square with our agential experience. He goes on to acknowledge that some commitments (plans) you do actually can get rid of at will if and when they turn out to be unimportant whereas others (ground projects) you cannot abandon at will. Chartier's account is unable to address and explain the common feeling that you can also exit a commitment at will. A commitment is not a past event, it is not "done and dusted." Rather, it demands constant egangement and colors your life. And, sometimes, it might even be best to exit a commitment.

6.3. Ruth Chang: Hard Choices and Commitment

The most sophisticated account of commitment to my knowledge that does understand commitment as a distinct phenomenon is offered by Ruth Chang. She presents a clear argument for commitment as the agent's possibility to determine what she has most reason to do. As such, the act of commitment is an act of self-creation and an exercise of one's agency.

There are situations in which we are unsure about what we should do. It is not obvious to us what we have most reason to do. Oftentimes there is no option that we have most reason to pursue. Just remember the earlier introduced Buridan cases. Chang has done a lot to improve our understanding of such situations. She is proposing that your reasons can be on a par, i.e., that the options are neither better or worse, nor equally good, but still comparable (Cf. Chang 1997, 2002 and 2017).

When someone finds herself in a situation like this, she is facing a hard choice. A hard choice can be one between two different career paths, e.g., that between becoming a philosopher or a civil servant. We can think of more mundane cases as well. You can be stuck between two delicious deserts. Neither of the deserts is better than the other, nor are they equally good. What are you supposed to do? Chang's answer is that you have the opportunity to commit yourself to either one of the options in order to overcome the impasse.

In situations of normative underdeterminacy, then, you can commit yourself. Chang doesn't understand commitment necessarily as just a tiebraker though; it can also change the distance between reasons and, therefore, might possess explanatory potential.[105] She tries to resolve a dilemma in rational choice theory which is concerned with the possibility of rational choice in situations in which no best option exists. The already existing reasons are unable to tell you what to do.

She holds that deliberation takes place in two stages. So-called given reason are located on the first stage; given reasons include both, internal and external reasons. Should they fail to fully determine what you should do you have the opportunity to create voluntarist reasons. This takes place on the second stage. She calls this "hybrid voluntarism."

It is widely accepted that our job as rational agents is to recognize and respond appropriately to our available reasons in order to answer the

[105] A commitment might, for example, help us to explain why the abused housewife doesn't leave her battering husband even though she should. Cf. also Rosati (2011) who understands this to be a case of lacking self-respect. This might also be an example of how the arrangement of reasons over time can change. The housewife might have indeed once had all-things-considered reason to be with her husband but this changed when he started abusing her. Thus, it is possible that a commitment only possesses limited power. It can be derailed by circumstance. What you ought to do, then, might change through no fault of your own.

question what we have most reason to do. Chang thinks of this deliberation as taking place in two stages. On the first stage of deliberation we try to figure out what to do by appealing to the reasons that are "out there." That is, by appealing to the so-called given reasons.

Given reasons are "considerations that are reasons in virtue of something that is not a matter of our own making. They are given to us and not created by us and, thus, are a matter of recognition or discovery of something independent of our own volition or agency" (Chang 2013b, 177). They operate as a metaphysical constraint, i.e., they prevent us from being able to create voluntarist reasons willy-nilly, and as a normative constraint, i.e., they enjoy prevalence over voluntarist reasons. Call this the "principle of hierarchy."[106]

In case your given reasons fail to fully determine what you have most all-things-considered reason to do, i.e., when they have run out, you enter the second stage of deliberation.[107] Now, you have the opportunity to create voluntarist or will-based reasons by committing yourself in order to determine what you have most all-things-considered reason to do (Cf. Chang 2009, 2013a, 2013b, and 2017). She calls this model of deliberation hybrid voluntarism. According to Chang, we enter this second stage quite regularly. Such situations are characterized by reason's inability to lay out

[106] The principle of hierarchy holds that voluntarist reasons cannot change the valence of reasons, i.e., you cannot – by creating a voluntarist reason for the worse option – make it the case that the worse option somehow becomes the better one of the two available options. What you can do, however, is to shorten the distance between the available options. For an informative illustration of this point see Chang 2013a, 106f.

[107] Your given reasons run out in either of two situations: first, you don't have most reason to do one thing – your reasons are "on a par" – and, second, you do have more reason to do one thing over another, but it is unclear by how much – your reasons are "indeterminately valenced" (Cf. Chang 2013a, 104).

what you rationally ought to do. Your choice is rationally underdetermined. Thus, you are facing a "hard choice."[108]

In hard choices, then, you have the opportunity to determine what you have most reason to do by committing yourself. She isn't concerned with what one might call moral commitment which would require uptake. Commitments are rather an internal affair. Chang introduces a list of four features that commitments need to satisfy (Chang 2013a, 79-81):

- A commitment is something that you can in principle decide to make.
- A commitment can both be synchronic and diachronic.
- A commitment is "up to you" and not a matter of what we have (most) reason to do.
- A commitment gives rise to and explains your (newly acquired) special reasons.

Where does this list of features leaves us? Chang rules out beliefs, desires, endorsement, and intentions as possible contenders for commitment. These states cannot muster the necessary amount of activity (beliefs and desires), have the wrong recipient (endorsement), or do not give rise to new reasons (intentions).

She decribes a commitment to be the volitional activity of "willing something to be a reason." This volitional activity is best understood as "putting yoursehlf behind something" (ibid., 93, ibid. 2013b, 169, 180 and 183, and ibid. 2017, 16) or as "standing for it" (ibid.).[109] By putting yourself

[108] For Korsgaard a hard choice is portrayed as "being pulled in both directions" (Korsgaard 2009, 126).
[109] Similar language can be found in Bratman, Calhound and others.

behind something you create a reason for yourself. Possible areas of commitment include "the needs or interests of your children or spouse, nuclear disarmament, or learning to play the piano" (Chang 2017, 17). You can commit yourself to pretty much anything.

In the course of her outline of what commitments are, Chang describes how you can come to have "new special reason" to empty someone's bedpan.[110] By "special reasons" she has in mind those reasons that we have in virtue of our commitment. That is, you have a reason to empty Harry's bedpan because you made a commitment to him. The normative source of your special reasons isn't an underlying normative principle (as is the case with promises according to Chang) but your will.

This commitment includes a "downstream effect" which is thought of as prohibiting an all too easy disposal of the commitment itself. She introduces us to Harry, whom you have a committed, loving relationship with. After a few years you run tired of the relationship and stop willing his interests to be a reason for you.[111] You successfully "uncommitted" yourself. Things can be even more dramatic: you can uncommit yourself "even in the next moment" (ibid. 2017, 18). You can make and unmake commitments "as a matter of will" (ibid. 2013a, 95).

Committing yourself, Chang argues, "is something rational agents simply do, and the activity of willing this rather than that to be a reason is by its very nature not something that is guided by given reasons" (ibid., 110). Voluntarist reasons are autonomous and, as a result, we can commit

[110] It is important to note that, as I have discussed earlier, that everyone might have prudential reason to do so. You, however, have a special reason to do so in light of your commitment.
[111] This illustrates nicely an earlier point of mine. People often stay committed despite running tired of the relationship or desiring something else. A further step is required for leaving the commitment: stop willing something to be a reason for you.

ourselves to anything we want. This includes the possibility to commit yourself to something you don't desire. In a footnote Chang writes that we can, e.g., commit ourselves to a project of serial murder (Cf. ibid. 77 footnote 7).

While we can commit ourselves to serial murder, we cannot make it the case that we have all-things-considered reason to act accordingly. We cannot change the valence of reasons; it is an unsuccessful attempt to turn the worse option into the better. We don't need to commit ourselves when facing a hard choice, we can also drift; Chang writes that "drifting is a rational response just as committing is [...] What you do will be an act of self-constitution" (ibid. 2017, 19). We don't need to commit ourselves in hard choices but it might just be something that changes the experience of what it is to be a (self-governing) agent.[112]

Now that we are equipped with the basics of Chang's theory, it is now time to take stock and critically assess her proposal. She puts forward the idea that hard choices present us with an opportunity to create our "rational identity" by committing to one of the options. One of the upshots of her proposal is that what we commit to is not determined by already existing reasons and that she allows for an exit of commitment without falling back on the idea of failure.

Chang's account offers a good explanation of the autonomy of voluntarist reasons. It leaves open the possibility that we can commit ourselves to something that we don't actually want because we don't commit ourselves on the basis of given reasons. We are free to commit. But

[112] Compare, for example, Frankfurt (1988).

that also implies that we can just as well uncommit ourselves as a matter of will. This includes the possibility to exit a commitment simply because one has changed one's mind.

But can you really commit yourself to just anything. I don't think so. A hard choice between things unimportant to you doesn't warrant the reponse of commitment. A choice might not be hard for you even though already existing reasons are unable to tell you what to do.[113] And why should you commit yourself? Any other way of reaching a decision will suffice. Or, you could simply drift. You are not in the kind of situation that warrants commitment. Things would be different if all hard choices are by definition hard because they are between things that somehow matter to you. But this is not the case. It is, however, possible that you come to realize what is important to you in the light of a hard choice and, as a result, commit yourself. It only makes sense for you to commit yourself to something that matters to you. Thus, what you can plausibly commit to is constrained by the way things are of interest to you.

Earlier in this chapter we have seen that kissing a commitment goodbye doesn't result in failure. Exiting a commitment is perfectly fine and doesn't call for resentment. And, indeed, this is what Chang is going for.[114] But if all of this is true how can it be the case that you can simply exit a commitment at will? It is true that you might remain committed because it is too costly for you, e.g., because of new given reasons. But how do you exit a commitment? Think of the following: You are alone in a room and make a commitment to running a marathon. You do not phone or tell

[113] There might, however, also be commitments that you should make, e.g. the commitment to your child (Cf. Chang 2013a, 96).
[114] Elsewhere, Chang speaks of commitment as a "shallow phenomenon" (Chang 2012).

anyone about it or invite pressure to stay committed by other means. Why can't you just exit the commitment whenever you want, say, the very next minute?[115]

It seems reasonable to suggest that all that is required for you to exit the commitment is that you simply stop willing it to be a reason for yourself. Chang and others hold that all you need to do is change your mind in order to exit a commitment. That is, to stop willing it to be a reason for you. And she is right. But does Chang leave too much space? Is it really possible to give up a commitment just a minute after making it? In cases in which the object of your commitment didn't matter to you – you gave up on it only a minute later – you weren't committed but probably something else entirely.

Take Carol, for example, who wills herself the respectful treatment of animals to be a reason for her to be a vegetarian. From time to time she attends a good friend's barbecue and finds herself craving a steak. Chang, I suppose, would claim that as long as Carol wills it to be a reason she also remains committed. But what if Carol simply gave up on vegetarianism? She now seems to be free to eat that steak. This, I propose, is something that is not possible for her to entertain in light of who she is. I think that we would have a hard time believing that she was ever really committed. Rather, she can exit the commitment if and when vegetarianism no longer occupies the central role in her life that it now does. Let me explain.

This might suggest, however, that commitments cannot be expected to be very stable. We would expect that a commitment at least sometimes

[115] This example was suggested to me by Chang in personal conversation.

"involves gritting one's teeth, rolling up one's sleeves, taking a deep breath, and doing what one has no desire to do" (Chang 2013a, 85). In other words, it requires proper engagement with the object of your commitment. This is a very good point indeed. I think it is supposed to remind us that you cannot give up a commitment willy-nilly. Rather, you do those things because your commitment matters to you. That is, commitments are stable in the sense that they endure changes in motivation and the like.

If you are leaving a commitment just because it is not going too well, you probably weren't really committed. Commitment does not square with being a fair-weather friend. To be committed to something only when things are going well is tantamount to not being committed at all. To be committed means to endure contrary inclinations, mood swings, and so on.

It is true that a commitment only binds as long as we have it, however, the fence that we need to jump in order to exit it might just be a bit higher than expected. It is plausible that you can exit a commitment once it lost its special hold on you.[116] That is, when it is no longer important to you. Personal commitments are an important feature of the good life. Commitments, then, are reasonably stable because and can be left behind at will only after it no longer occupies an important role for your identity.

6.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I investigated whether personal commitments can best be captured in terms of an already existing account of "commitment of the

[116] Chang might be agreeing when she writes that you can uncommit yourself in the next moment "if you find that you can no longer put yourself behind his needs and interests" (Chang 2017, 18).

will." The idea is that to willingly commit yourself provides you with the opportunity to make yourself about something. You can make it the case that you have most reason to pursue what you have committed to. In order to achieve this I took a look at two such accounts. The major disagreement turned out to be the sensible treatment of when and how you can exit a commitment and what the implications of it are.

First, Chartier's account proved to be insufficient because it proved to be an all or nothing affair. He holds that we mostly make commitments out of a concern for being able to coordinate ourselves in a world of limited resources. What we have here is an explanation why exiting a commitment amounts to failure. You not only failed to coordinate your behavior but also failed to make sense of yourself. Exiting a commitment on Chartier's account seems unnecessarily hard. It falls short of being able to explain how it is possible that a formerly committed musician now is a committed environmentalist with no sign of any failure when it comes to either coordination or identity. Exiting a commitment does not automatically imply failure and being committed does not guarantee success. Rather, we make and exit commitments as a way of expressing what is of significance in our lives.

Second, Chang argues that you have the opportunity to commit yourself when facing a hard choice (i.e. when your given reasons have run out). She wants to be able to offer a solution to to a problem in rational choice theory (how to choose rationally when there is no best option available) and offers a compelling argument for how you enter and exit a commitment. The point of making a commitment, for Chang, is to be able to behave rationally. This also explains why you can exit a commitment

simply after having changed your mind. In contrast to this, I am pressing the point that you make a commitment because it allows you to assign importance to certain things in your life, which also lends plausibility to the claim that we cannot exit a commitment out of nothing. Rather, a commitment can reasonably be left behind when it no longer occupies a central role in your identity.

In summary, both accounts acknowledge the idea of commitment as an act of self-creation and an exercise of one's agency, however, they fall short of being able to adequately explain an adequate way of how we can exit a commitment. They make it unnecessarily hard or too easy. I fall between the two offered accounts when I say that a commitment is something that can be given up at will but only when certain cirumcstances apply.

Chapter 7: Conclusion – A Theory of Personal Commitment

Throughout this dissertation I described personal commitments as an opportunity to make yourself about something, to confer significance onto some previously optional goal that you not ought to pursue. Take my commitment to writing this dissertation. It is something that I do, not something that happens to me. I make it the case that I ought to finish this dissertation by personally committing to it and, at the same time, I can willingly exit the commitment. But how is this possible?

7.1. The Story so Far

In the beginning of this dissertation I introduced some properties that any theory of personal commitment should be able to accommodate. It is plausible that nearby phenomena share some of the properties of a personal commitment. After all, they are somewhat in the same neighborhood. It is helpful to briefly revisit those properties in order to highlight the distinctiveness of personal commitments and to show just where exactly nearby phenomena "go wrong." In the end it should become clear that they are different responses to different situations in life.

7.1.1 Volitional Activity

Let us begin by considering that personal commitments require agential (i.e. volitional) activity in terms of a decision. Someone who decides to commit herself assigns significance to the object of her commitment. This, of course, does not prevent her from possibly making bad decisions. Both, intentions and promises also require the agent to be active. Typically, an intention rests on a decision. However, on reductionist accounts of intention it is enough to have an appropriate belief-desire pair. On this account intentions are not a distinctive attitude which we can decide to entertain. It is only possible to act intentionally. Any reductionist account of intention is based on motivation and, thus falls short. It is impossible for them to make sense of something like weakness of will whereas it is entirely possible to act weak willed on a picture of personal commitment. They are designed to endure changes in motivation.

There are more sophisticated models of intention that argue that an intention is a distinctive attitude which rests on a decision. Similarly, promises are also something that we decide to make. Incapacities of the will, in contrast, rely on the idea that the agent discovers what she is committed to by not being able to act otherwise. They do not stand in the right relation to volition.[117] We do not discover or fall into a personal commitment.

A decision alone, however, does not make a commitment. When an agent commits herself she assigns significance to some end. That is, she

[117] It is true that volitional necessities are the kind of thing that agents can in principle also decide to make but it is the distinguishing mark of this phenomenon that the agent cannot bring herself to act differently. Hence, it does not stand in the right relation to volition.

closes the door on further candidates. A commitment comes with a reasonable level of stability. This stability is the result of the agent becoming invested in her commitment. That is, the commitment colors the agent's life. Think of Bob the marine biologist who finds just enough time to write down notes for his novel. That is, he recommits himself. A commitment demands that you pay attention to its demands and that you engage with it in creative ways.

You can also exit a personal commitment by willing not to be committed anymore. I have convincingly argued that an intention can be left behind simply by getting rid of it. It is just as good to have one intention or a different one. It is in your control. What matters is that you have one in order to get on with your life. Intentions offer only a thin stability and are somewhat prone to reconsideration. The commitment in the most promising account of intention boils down to a mere requirement to follow through on one's intention.

A promise proved to be more robust. It needs to be upheld until one is being released. The commitment in promises, however, is an instance of depositing your will. You facilitate normative change by handing over the authority to demand performance to someone else. Thus, you don't have control over whether you are bound or not. You cannot escape its obligation at will.

The same applies for incapacities of the will. It is not up to you whether you exit one or not. On top of that, you also don't enter them willingly. You happen to discover them. Only personal commitments offer you the opportunity to enter them at will as well as to exit them as will while

at the same making it the case that you ought to pursue the object of your commitment.

7.1.2 Stability

Intentions, promises and volitional necessities can also be expected to have a certain stability even though they achieve it by different means. Volitional necessities are only stable as long as you cannot bring yourself to act differently. That is, they rest on psychological continuity and their loss is marked by psychological discontinuity (e.g. lack of care). This also means that an agent is automatically no longer committed once she has stopped caring about it. It is outside of the scope of the agent's power to determine whether or not she is committed.

Promises on the other hand achieve stability by signing away control over the situation. They offer a strict stability until either the promise is fulfilled or the promisor has been released by the promisee. Additionally, we can arguably make seemingly unimportant (e.g. to buy you an ice cream tomorrow) or silly (e.g. count the raindrops from your leaky tap) promises. It is not within the promisor's power anymore to decide whether she should uphold her promise or not. She handed over control to the promisee.

Intentions achieve stability either by causal interference, manipulation or by their organizing role in an agent's life. There are two varieties of precommitment. First, you can make certain options literally unavailable by causally interfering (e.g. throwing away the keys). Second, you can manipulate the reward system by engaging in public side-bets (e.g. telling

people). Their purpose is to protect one's preference against the temptation to act differently. Both have in common that you "outsource self-control" or "deposit your will." This provides them with a strong sense of stability. Too strong. They do not allow for the agent to (reasonable) change her mind because she signed away control. Again, this is a stability via the means of renouncing control. An agent doesn't give away control when she commits herself. She stays in charge.

Plans (or intentions writ large) offer the most sensible stability when it comes to intentions. They can be expected to be relatively stable due to their organizing role in our lives. One promiment feature of plans is that we often rely on them for effective coordination across time. That is, we often make plans for pragmatic reasons. On this picture, it is just as good to have a plan to run a marathon or to participate in the annual eating contest (or to have no particular plan). The same does not hold for commitment. It matters (to you) whether you achieve your goal of running a marathon or not and to which object you are committed to.

7.1.3 Identity-Conferring

Early on I argued that personal commitments are partly constitutive of an agent's identity. You have the chance to assign significance to some ends and not others. By doing that you engage in an act of self-constitution. That is, the commitment gains authority in that it demands adequate engagement. It subsequently begins to color your life. Theoretically, you do without personal commitments, but this would deny you an important part of what it means to be an agent.

Things are different when it comes to plans. We oftentimes make plans in order to get on with our lives and we are pragmatically better off not to reconsider because they allow us to continue our lives. Their main purpose is coordination. That is, plans allow us to exist over time (what Bratman calls cross-temporal identity). This does not (necessarily) mean that their content is important to us and that we stick with them. Again, it is just as good to have a different plan.

Promises cannot be said to be constitutive of an agent's identity. Yes, they can tell us something about the kind of promises she makes, the situations in which she makes them and whether she generally keeps the promises the made. But that is rather telling us something about the agent's character, not her identity. Additionally, you don't need to make any promises. But making promises is probably something that agent simply do, too.

Incapacities of the will are different yet again in that we discover them by not being able to act differently. For example, a loving mother may find herself unable to give away her child even though she resovled to do it. Such necessities of the will protect the agent from disturbances of her judgment and make up the agent's "core identity." It is plausible that incapacities of the will can trump will-based commitments.[118] If the care vanished, however, the agent also automatically loses some part of her. More dramatically, she might as well just have died. It is neither up to you if you have a commitment nor if and when you can give it up. Personal commitments are less reliant on the agent's psychology and not as strong in language.

[118] It is in such cases that the agent is bound to lose either way (Cf. Watson 2002).

7.1.4 Creates Reasons for Action

Throughout this dissertation I claimed that another important part of personal commitments is that they can create reasons. It is at the time to further investigate this claim. For this, it is helpful to revisit the reason-making force of commitments, set them apart from the other phenomena and, lastly, to show that agents cannot create reasons whenever they want. Personal commitments, then, have a limited reason-creating potential. Their power is restricted.

Consider Anna's commitment to running a marathon. Her commitment changes what she has reason to do. She ought to run a marathon if she commits to it. Other considerations such as the prospect of a lazy afternoon or a boozy weekend are now irrelevant. They are being pushed out of the picture. When Anna commits herself she is altering her normative perspective. Her commitment demands that she pursues the furtherance of her goal.

Additionally, we hold ourselves responsible when we commit ourselves. Anna's commitment demands that she trains appropriately. In the last couple of weeks, however, she repeatedly lets it slide and goes out with her friends drinking instead. She engages in self-betrayal. She failed to live up to her commitments and is most likely to feel ashamed.

The neglect of a personal commitment makes one open to rational criticism (Chang 2020, 293). First and foremost this seems to be self-criticism. It seems to me that criticism from outside would often be inappropriate (even if valid) to be carried out by others as they lack the standing to do so. After all, Anna didn't promise anyone to run a marathon.

She made a commitment to herself. Yet there is something to the idea that intimates can question her behavior. To put it more appropriately, then, the ought of a commitment serves as a "authoritive reminder" carried out by intimates or oneself as to recall the importance of the commitment for her. The function of this reminder is to prohibit a long-term neglect of the commitment.

Thus, a personal commitment makes you engage with the object of your commitment in ways that aim at the manifestation of the commitment. In other words, it colors your life. Remember Bob, the marine biologist who is committed to writing the next great american novel. During his research trip to Antarctica his commitment comes under heavy pressure due to the high workload on board. He is not able to work as much on his book as he would like because he simply lacks the time and energy to do so. Just before going to bed, however, he finds himself thinking about the novel and jods down his latest thoughts (and tries to make sense of his friend's annotations). He is manifesting his commitment. Or, he is recommitting himself.

But what about the other phenomena that make use of the idea of commitment? Incapacities of the will do not create normative reasons. It is true that they provide you with the unique reasons for living your life in that you feel that you must do something. It is debatable whether they provide an agent with reason to do something all-things-considered. They do demand, however, that you take steps towards the prolongation of your commitment and guard it against psychological intruders. Willingly acting against a commitment (if possible at all) amounts to some form of self-betrayal on this picture. That is, it also demands proper engagement.

Incapacities of the will, then, rather change the weight of the agent's reasons based on her contingent psychology.

Things are different when it comes to promises. You incur a moral obligation to help me move houses if you promise me to do so irrespective of what exactly grounds the normativity of a promise.[119] Whether a promise really creates a reason or if it only triggers "a pre-existing reason by fulfilling the conditions under which that reason comes to be manifest via a normative principle" (Chang 2013a, 101 and Chang 2020) is up to debate. What can be said, however, is that all candidates on offer for the grounding of a promise's normativity cannot make sense of the internal nature of commitments. The fact that I ought to run a marathon when I commit to it can neither be explained in terms of expectations I have towards myself, by the idea that I trust myself nor by the metaphysical obscure idea that I hand over authority from one part of myself to another. Additionally, personal commitments do not put you under a moral obligation. While the breach of a promise calls for blame, criticism is inappropriate when it comes to commitments. You do not owe it to anyone.

The case is different yet again when it comes to intentions. Intentions do not create reasons.[120] Precommitments facilitate normative change by causal interference (i.e. making options unavailable) whereas plans are subject to normative requirements. That is, the agent is normatively required to take the necessary means to her ends. She acts irrational if she goes to the cinema whilst having an intention to go to the rock show,

[119] Some argue that the normativity is best explained by the expectations of the promisee (Scanlon 1998), others flesh it out in terms of trust (Friedrich and Southwood 2011), and yet again others argue that a transfer of authority is the most plausible candidate (Owens 2006).
[120] Cf. Bratman (1987). This long-held assumption is questioned by, e.g., Holton (2009).

however, she can just as well give up her intention to go to the concert. Having an intention or not is equally good. In order to be able to achieve coordination, however, it is sometimes suggested that the agent treats her intention as if it were a reason (Bratman 1996 and 2000a). Obviously, this is not being the same as it being a reason. That is, intentions do not prove to be as powerful and durable as personal commitments.

As such the normativity of a personal commitment is stronger than the instrumental rationality of intentions but, at the same time, does not generate moral obligations. Take Anna's commitment of running a marathon. She ought to participate in one but is in no way morally obligated to do so. That is, the way promises and personal commitments obligate us differs significantly. If she fails to live up to her commitment she engages in self-betrayal but she is not a morally bad person.

On this description one might worry that if it is possible to create reasons by committing yourself to something that you can make it the case that you have reason to do something unpleasant or morally bad. Take, for example, someone's commitment to serial murder. He now arguably has some reason to go through with it. It is plausible, however, that the agent does not have all-things-considered reason to act on his commitment. The commitment cannot tip the scale in favor of murder. That is, the valence of reasons cannot be changed.[121]

What does that mean and when can we be expected to have been successful in creating a reason by committing ourselves? We sometimes lack

[121] We have already seen that there are constraints on what we can successfully promise. Watson suggests that not all promises are successful in creating reasons. Instead, promises (and other normative powers) give rise to reasons for action only when specific circumstances apply, e.g., taking into account the moral standing of others (Watson 2009). Otherwise there would be an interference with someone else's agency in an important sense. The question whether making a promise is a normative power or not is itself contested.

the necessary standing to properly exercise our normative powers. A normative power, according to Watson, is a power "to create or rescind practical requirements at will" (Watson 2009, 155). And, according to Chang, a normative power is the capacity "to create normative reasons by our willing or say-so" (Chang 2020, 275).

What can the specific circumstances be in which we can successfully exercise a normative power? To anticipate, you make it the case that you have all-things-considered reason by committing yourself when your given reasons have run out. This is quite regularly the case.

It is widely accepted that it is our job as rational agents to recognize and respond appropriately to reasons in order to answer what it is that we shall do (i.e. have most reason to do). At least some reasons are not up to us. That is, they are given to us. Chang defines given reasons as "considerations that are reasons in virtue of something that is not a matter of our own making. They are given to us and not created by us and thus are a matter of recognition or discovery of something independent of our own volition or agency" (Chang 2013b, 177).

On this picture, given reasons operate as a metaphysical constraint, i.e., they prevent us from being able to create reasons willy-nilly, and as a normative constraint, i.e., they enjoy prevalence over will-based reasons.[122] Call this the "principle of hierarchy." This is what it means that the valence of reasons cannot be changed.

There are plenty of situations, however, in which it cannot properly be determined what one has most reason to do. In such an instance your

[122] In her earlier work Chang speaks of "voluntarist reasons" (Chang 2009) but switched to "will-based reasons" (Chang 2017; 2020).

inquiry into what you have most reason to do cannot be adequately answered by going over the same reasons again and again. Your given reasons have run out. Think of Anna who can decide between running or yoga as a means to come down from her stressful work.

Her choice, if you will, is rationally underdetermined. It is up to her to decide whether she wants do something active or simply relaxes on the couch. She is facing a hard choice.[123] It is now that she has the opportunity to exercise her normative power to create a reason for herself. That is, it is also our job as rational agents to create reasons.

Given reasons, Chang claims, allow us "a space of rational freedom" (Chang 2009, 265) which can be made use of when our given reasons have run out. We still need to make a choice and one way we can tackle this is by committing ourselves. Chang's "hybrid voluntarism" avoids the pitfalls of pure voluntarism whilst making sense of the idea that we can shape our (rational) identity by employing the normative power to commit ourselves.

It is important to note, however, that you do not have to make a choice. You do not need to commit yourself. You could also drift. Anna could simply go for a run today, do some yoga tomorrow, and play computer games the day after tomorrow. Whether or not Anna commits herself can generally be "explained by the role such choices play in [her] rational identity" (Chang 2009, 259). A choice between two desserts hardly ever occupies that role. A choice between, say, careers is more likely to

[123] I take it that a "hard choice" does not necessarily come as a choice between two options ("marathon" or "yoga," "banking" or "philosophy") but that it can also take the form of simply going for "marathon." That is, it is not necessary for the agent to come to a dead end when attempting to answer what she should do but that she could also simply commit to running a marathon (in situations in which she does not face such a choice). A hard choice, then, simply means that it cannot be properly determined what she has most reason to do in absence of committing herself. I have reason to believe that Chang would be sympathetic to this reading.

place that role. This is not to say that it cannot also be the other way around.

Any of this does not touch the structure of commitments though. You can still commit to atrocities like serial murder. But now we are in a better position to explain why such a commitment is unsuccessful in making it the case that you have all-things-considered reason whereas you can successfully make it the case that you have all-things-considered reason to run a marathon by committing to it.

We can conclude that for a personal commitment to make it the case that you have all-things-considered reason to purse the object of your commitment might just rest on the right circumstances (suitable conditions). That is, the normative power of personal commitment can only be successfully exercised when your given reasons have run out.

That is not to say that this is a rare event. Again, you do quite regularly have the opportunity to make it the case that you have all-things-considered reason to do something by committing yourself. If and when you commit to running a marathon you most likely now ought to run a marathon. Personal commitments aren't as powerless as it might appear at first glance. They are a regular and vital part of what it means to be an agent. They help us to determine what we have most reason to do.

We commit ourselves by exercising our will. You will a reason into existence. I already argued that you can only commit yourself to something that matters to you (precondition). That is, such a choice only ever is a factor in forming your (rational) identity when you take it to be important. Otherwise you would not be identifying it as occupying that role. This, I

take it, is also supported by Chang's remarks about the possibility of voluntarist reasons being constrained by considerations of who we are.

Personal commitments, just like all the contenders, provide you with the opportunity to place yourself on the agential map. However, commitments do this very differently and it should be obvious by now that all those phenomena are different responses to different situations in life. A personal commitment is an act of self-constitution that requires continuous engagement.

7.1.5 Conclusion

As it turns out, the phenomena of intention, promise or incapacity of the will all cannot accommodate the notion of personal commitment for one reason or another and that this best supports the idea that personal commitment is a distinct phenomenon. A personal commitment is willing a consideration to be a reason for you and to properly engage with it.

In the case of intentions it was the rather limited potential to explain the guiding force of commitments. They turned out to be easily revisable. The concept of promises showed great potential in that it was able to cast light on the binding force that a personal commitment typically comes with. However, the way in which we make and exit promises and personal commitments differs significantly. Personal commitments open up a middle ground between intentions (or plans) and promises, as they are normatively stronger than plans but, at the same time, don't carry the moral weight of promises. Incapacities of the will wring activity from the agent only in the sense that she needs to accept her discovered commitments. Personal

commitments, however, are the result of an exercise of will and not mere acceptance.

7.2. A Picture of Human Agency

We are not mere bystanders to our lives. Our lives typically don't just happen to us. Many philosophers accept and emphasize that the agent herself has an important role to play in determining her identity. Those philosophers who stress the importance of concepts like autonomy highlight the need for committing oneself (in one way or another) as essential to our agency. Indeed, they tend to talk of putting yourself behind something, standing for something, and so on. Are you the kind of person that pursues a well-paid career in banking or an intellectually stimulating career in philosophy? Which sport do you pick up? Any at all? Are you enjoying the perks of a bachelor's life or are you a family person? The agent is largely involved in determining her own identity.

Our personal commitments are not given to us. We need to actively commit ourselves and have the opportunity to make ourselves about something; to provide our lives with substance. When we answer such self-defining choices we are shaping our identity.[124] That is, we are exercising our autonomy. Ideally, this is how we determine what we have (all-things-considered) reason to do. Someone who fails to shape her identity is, at least to some extent, failing to govern herself.

[124] It is important to distinguish between "practical identity" and "rational identity." Roughly, your practical identity is a description under which you understand yourself whereas your rational identity is an expression of your ideal rational self. Ideally, those two overlap. That is, what you have most reason to do ideally coincides with who you take yourself to be. This, however, isn't always the case. You might, for example, see yourself as an intellectual when you actually have most reason to be an activist. In hard choices, I understand, you have the opportunity to shape both your practical and rational identity.

Take Ben, for example, who has the chance to make himself into the kind of person that has reason to run a marathon. He doesn't have to commit himself. He can simply remain the kind of person that goes for the occasional run whenever he feels like it. That is, he has the opportunity to drift just as much as he has the opportunity to commit himself.

It is possible to think of someone who always drifts. This "universal drifter" cannot make much sense of herself. She lacks a conception of what makes her life hers, that is, what is of significance to her. The drifter is failing to exercise her autonomy insofar as she is failing to make herself about anything. That is, she is failing to shape her identity.

However, we do not make ourselves in the ambitious and radical sense that, for example, existentialists like Sartre had in mind. Sartre believed that you are radically free in the sense that you can willingly redefine yourself whenever you wanted to. Today, Ben sees himself as the kind of person that has reason to run a marathon and tomorrow as a more laid-back person that rather pursues intellectual endeavors. Ben seems to have a sheer unlimited power to reinvent himself. A power that is unaffected by his past, previous decisions, and so on. Sartre envisions that we can create ourselves from nothing.[125] On this picture, it is difficult to make out a self worth speaking of and, on top of that, one that sets Ben apart from the drifter.[126]

Another possibility to understand the ways of our agency is offered by philosophers like Harry Frankfurt who proposes that any given agent's

[125] It was Kierkegaard who already argued that any agent's attempt to create herself entirely results, in the end, in the destruction of the agent as well (Cf. Kierkegaard 1992).
[126] You can, of course, argue that the drifter isn't interested in her identity at all whereas Ben is but that he is simply changing his mind. Be that as it may, it doesn't change the fact that Ben is guilty of some sort of drifting.

identity can be defined by what she cares about. It is the agent's contingent psychology that determines her identity. Hence, the limits of the will are set by what she cannot help caring about. Frankfurt argues that we need to recognize and identify with what we care about. He speaks of "identification as acceptance."

Take Fiona, for example, who happens to care about her local football club. According to Frankfurt, Fiona needs to recognize and accept that this club occupies such an important role in her life. Her will, then, is limited by what she happens to care about. It seems, however, that Frankfurt's view carelessly neglects the agent as part of determining her own identity. The agent's activity rests on accepting what she happens to care about and also on protecting this care. On this picture of agency Fiona's identity degenerates into mere discovery.

Additionally, I think that this picture doesn't allow her to stay committed when she comes to stop caring. But you can be committed even when you have stopped caring. After all, this is what many couples do. One partner stopped caring about the relationship but remains committed to his partner and, thus, tries to revive their relationship. The relationship isn't automatically over should you stop caring about it. What is at stake though is your willingness (your commitment) to work on it.

As I have already argued, it is plausible that some parts of our identities rest on being responsive to what is important to us. However, taking this as the sole description of our agency falls short of taking into account the many possibilities in which it is up to us to determine our identity ourselves. What is important to us makes for meaningful choices.

That is, it limits the contenders of what we can (meaningfully) commit to. Not everything that matters to us has practical priority though.

A more nuanced picture of human agency in opposition to contingent psychology and radical freedom is called for. Thus, what you can commit to depends on whether the object of your potential commitment matters to you. That is, such a choice only ever is a factor in forming your identity when it is important to you. It is a precondition for commitment. If, for example, John isn't interested in sports at all it wouldn't make much sense for him to commit to the local football team over the basketball team. Quite plausibly, he commits to neither of them.

If, however, he is a huge sports fan it might make sense for him to commit to the basketball team. John identified the choice as important to his identity. That is, he now can plausibly commit himself. We can make something matter to us in the way that we put ourselves behind it. By doing that we alter our normative perspective. John now ought to support the basketball team.

Personal commitments demand proper engagement. They color our lives in that they demand continuous recommitment. By doing that we answer the call of our existing commitments. To understand personal commitments in this way puts us into a better position to understand the specific ways in which we can exit a commitment. I argued that we cannot simply abandon a commitment will-nilly.

Rather, we can only abandon a commitment at will when it no longer occupies the role of potentially playing an important factor in determining our identity. This puts me into a more comfortable position to be able to

explain why we sometime stay committed despite not caring anymore and, at the same time, when we can give up a commitment.

A modest conception of personal commitment enriches not only our very understanding of what is within our agential power but also achieves a clearer picture of what it means to be committed, i.e., to make yourself about something in a strong and robust way. They offer us an understanding of human agency that can make sense of our feelings of being governed and, at the same time, of governing ourselves.

Personal commitments allow us a reasonable space in which we have the opportunity to make us into the agents that we are. They make it plausible that I can will to have most reason to pursue a career in philosophy while you can will to have most reason become a somewhat successful musician. They enable us to exercise our autonomy. But how do they do that?

We personally commit ourselves by willing a consideration to be a reason. That is, we "put ourselves behind" something. For example, running a marathon, adopting a healthier lifestyle or working on one's self-control. A commitment makes demands on us in the way that we now ought to do what we are committed to as well as that it makes us engage with it. It colors our lives in ways that make plausible the various ways in which we engage with our personal commitments and also what lets us hold onto them when in doubt.

The discussion so far could leave you with the impression that personal commitments are this great thing that makes you achieve anything you want. You just need to commit and you'll see that soon you're there.

This sounds like something straight from a self-help book. But why, then, did Raymond Poulidor ("The Eternal Second") never win the Tour de France?

Well, things aren't like that.[127] Just saying something or willing something doesn't make you achieve it. And this comes at no surprise. Commitment isn't some sort of elixir; it requires hard work and might not always lead you to the promised land. It isn't primarily about reaching your goals but making your life about something. It requires constant engagement with the (object of your) commitment. Repeated failure to act on your commitment or frequent disregard for its concerns results in losing sight of it which, in turn, makes it easier to continue such behavior. Ultimately, this might lead to the abandonment of the commitment. In other words, you lose (part of) your life's focus. You failed to take yourself seriously which is why the commitment withered. A commitment requires continuous attention and provides you with reason to pursue its object.

Personal commitments provide us with reason to do what we are committed to and, under the right circumstances, with all-things-considered reason. Of course, persons have various options available to them even when committed. What is demanded by their personal commitments is very rarely, if ever, the only thing that they could do.

It is not, in this sense, like the precommitments I have discussed in chapter four. It is not literally impossible for you to act against your commitment. However, if we want to take the idea of personal commitment seriously it is in some sense the only (or, rational) option available to you.

[127] Although Didier Drogbas's autobiography, simply entitled "Commitment", might suggest otherwise. An autobiography, however, has always to be taken with the necessary grain of salt.

You ought to attend to your commitment. If you fail to do that, you not only betray yourself but are also open to criticism.

The idea of personal commitment is able to make sense of the common phenomenon that you can create reasons for yourself by willingly putting yourself behind something. That is, you now ought to do something. The ought of a personal commitment captures the priority as opposed to the mere instrumental rationality of intentions. Yet it proves to be more flexible than a precommitment and a promise. It stands out in that you do not sign away control. Thus, it is also in your control to uncommit yourself. On top of that, the exit of a personal commitment does not warrant (moral) criticism. It is not something that you made to anyone else and no one (other than yourself) can hold you to it or demand performance. A personal commitment is an internal affair.

That is, we are in a comfortable position to explain how it can be that your personal commitment to running marathon makes it the case that you ought run a marathon. You put yourself behind it. Additionally, it can be expected that the deontic pull survives changes in motivation. Motivational changes are able to explain why you don't want to get out of bed this cold morning to go for your usual run, however, they cannot change the fact that you ought to. Your personal commitment is stable. It also colors your live in that it demands proper engagement. The sole decision to run a marathon might make it the case that you ought to do so, however, it cannot account for someone being committed. Proper engagement means to fill the commitment with live and also counter the enemies of commitment (e.g. boredom). This, then, leads to a somewhat expected manifestation of the

commitment. You need to continuously recommit yourself in order to live your commitment.

Other accounts aren't able to fully capture the whole picture of what it means and implies to be personally committed to someone or something. Making personal commitments is a common feature of our agency and one that enables us to make us into the distinct agents that we are. Thus, the making and unmaking of personal commitments provides you with the opportunity to shape your very identity.

7.3. A Theory of Personal Commitment

It is an important fact of our lives that we commit ourselves to things. Personal commitments are a crucial part of our lives and our agential experience lends plausibility to the claim that commitment is something that we simply do. Personal commitments provide us with the opportunity to make ourselves about something. That is, we can shape our identity by committing to something. For example, you can make it the case that you are the kind of person that has most reason to run a marathon by committing to it whereas I have most reason to learn how to play the piano.

You can, however, also get by with simply drifting all the time. You don't need to take control over your life. You would fail, however, to make sense of yourself in an important way and also miss out on a crucial bit of what it means to be an agent if you fail to commit yourself in situations where some choice has an important role for your identity. Personal commitments occupy an important role in our lives because they allow us to

steer our lives in one direction rather than another and make it the case that we ought to do so. Thus, personal commitments are a vital part of live well lived.

It is plausible that personal commitments involve intentions on a lower level. For example, my commitmet to finish this dissertation depends upon me being able to make intentions that further my ability to do so. That is, I need to plan when I get the reading done, do some last revision and, finally, set a date for submission and adjust my behavior accordingly. Similarly, personal commitments are likely to give rise to moral commitments in the interim (e.g. expectations). But this does not change anything about the fact that personal commitments are a private matter. Rather, what this shows us is that personal commitments are primarily about putting yourself behind something via the exercise of your agency and only secondarily employ the metaphysical role of enabling us to lead temporally extended lives. Personal commitments are about taking control over one's life and choosing how one wants to live one's life.

We commit ourselves for the quality of our lives. That is also part of the explanation why we can give them up at will. This seems counterintuitive: let me explain. Under suitable conditions you can exit a commitment at will. That is, when the commitment no longer occupies that special role for your identity. This can happen in different ways. Your commitment does not disappear but now you can exit it at will.

We came to understand that we cannot simply leave our personal commitments behind; we cannot simply "cancel our subscription."[128]

[128] I owe this expression to Lynne McFall (1987).

Calhoun argues that your commitment depends on "how much you are prepared to weather" (Calhoun 2009, 620) and Schauber agrees by writing that "we learn how serious our projects are, or how committed we are to our projects by seeing how far we are prepared to go with them" (Schauber 1996, 124).

This does not mean, however, that you can simply will, at any time, not to be committed anymore. I have already argued in the last chapter that this casts doubt upon whether the agent has really ever been committed at all.[129] Indeed, such a radical abandonment would plausibly undermine genuine agency itself. We have already seen that it is plausible to think of taking an interest (i.e. care) as a precondition for personal commitment. It is also plausible that the loss of interest makes for a good reason for abandoning a commitment.[130]

Thus, a precondition for exiting a commitment is that you have stopped caring about it. What I mean by that is not that you are no longer motivated to pursue its object but, rather, that the commitment has lost its special role for your identity. A position it once occupied. You haven't automatically lost your commitment when this happens, however, you now have the opportunity to legitimately exit it. You still need to exit it at will.

A personal commitment can lose this role, for example, if the agent is getting bored of it (Cf. Millgram 2004), due to depression or

[129] Some authors argue that action is the test of commitment (Blustein 1991, van Hooft 1996). Jeffrey Blustein, for example, argues that "one must, to some extent, act according to one's commitment if one is to be committed ... at all" (Blustein 1991, 95).
[130] For a particularly helpful discussion of the differences between losing *sight* and losing *interest* in your reasons see Calhoun (2008).

demoralization[131] (Cf. Calhoun 2008) or constant neglect (i.e. not properly engaging with it) unto the point that you no longer "feel it anymore." In all of the above cases the commitment begins to lose its grip on you and, eventually, stops coloring your life. I no longer share my previous perspective that the object of my care is of importance to me. This underlines the sensibility of personal commitments in terms of demanding proper engagement.

We can take away from this discussion that it is appropriate to exit a commitment when it has lost that special role in determining your identity that it once occupied. You still need to exit your commitment at will because you might just be the kind of person who thinks that it is necessary to finish what you you have started. That is, you stay committed and work towards achieving it, however, you could also give it up. Once a personal commitment has successfully been abandoned it is no longer the case that you ought to run a marathon. Your former obligation simply no longer applies to you.

We don't necessarily lack integrity when we lose or exit a commitment. If you deliberately sabotage one of your commitment, I'd say, you can be said to lack integrity (as in betraying yourself). If, however, you lose a commitment or fulfillment of it became impossible (e.g. your partner could have left you), you can hardly count as lacking integrity. The role of a commitment can change. If it no longer occupies that important role in your life you can exit it at will.

[131] For example, the repeated snarky comments of my friend about my inability to run a marathon, my previous failings at any kind of endurance sports, and so on can all add up as to erode my commitment in the way that they demoralize me.

Sometimes the quality of our lives even demands that we exit a commitment. Think of someone who becomes seemingly unhappy in her relationship. She is unsure what to do and hopes that things will soon turn around and this is inly a phase that supposedly all couples have to deal with during the course of their relationships. Things, however, don't seem to get better. Further, after a while things seems to rub of on her partner. Both spend most of their time together in misery and the commitment is experienced as a drag. It seems reasonable, then, that integrity suggests that you should give up your commitment.[132] Sadly this line of thought is something that cannot be pursued further on this occasion. However, this seems to be promising for further research.

A commitment is only binding as long as it is in place (as are indeed all the other phenomena). When you willingly cut the chord on your commitment to run a marathon you make it the case that you no longer ought to run a marathon. The previous commitment, however, might very well be responsible for the fact that some further engagement is necessary. For example, your training partner still expects you to show up for your early morning runs. Or, outstanding bills for the planned training camp in Girona still need to get paid (you might be lucky and be able to cancel it only for a small processing fee). You still need to do things in virtue of a once-held commitment. The corresponding ought is a quite different one though. Thus, we area able to explain why we sometimes need to engage

[132] Personal commitments are not a stubborn clinging on to something that once was important to you. Strong character is not what Nietzsche made it out to be (Cf. Nietzsche 1886 and 1887). Ralph Waldo Emerson knew it better when he wrote that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Nietzsche took it that "[w]henever you reach a decision, close your ears to even the best objections: this is the sign of a strong character. Which means: an occasional will to stupidity" (Nietzsche 1886, §107). Quite the opposite, a strong character reveals itself when someone correctly reads the circumstances and makes the correct decision about whether to prolong or to exit a commitment. A strong character is way harder to achieve and requires much more than simply staying committed no matter what.

with a previous commitment even when it has long been abandoned. A commitment might leave behind "normative residue."

The fact that we can willingly exit a commitment does not invite a laissez-faire treatment of an existing commitment though. As long as you are committed you ought to act on it. That is, it is absolutely vital that you attend the demands of your commitment properly. That is, engage with your commitment in appropriate ways. Acting against our personal commitments results in self-betrayal and personal disintegration. The fact that our personal commitments are private (or internal) makes them prime candidates for "intimate criticism." It is true that we often tell the ones close to us about our commitments. That is, we are raising the stakes and potentially make it more difficult to uncommit ourselves. This does not change, however, that we do not owe living up to the commitment to anyone. No one can demand performance. Even though the ones close to us have the standing to criticize us for our failings, they'd go good if they authoritatively remind us of our commitment instead of accusing us of treason. This reminder might just lead to a renewed appreciation of the commitment. The constant neglect of your personal commitment might leave you feeling embarrassed.

Only personal commitment can account for the earlier introduced properties. All the other phenomena are reductive in that they take commitment to be only a part of something different, somewhat larger phenomenon. They express the feeling of being bound and not the power to make it the case that you ought to do something. My definition is phenomenologically accurate and proves to be superior because it is non-reductive.

Personal commitments endure changes in motivation. The fact that I am tempted to do something different or that I no longer want to run a marathon doesn't change the fact that I still have all-things-considered reason to run a marathon. In that sense they protect us from being overly lazy and, at the same time, are somewhat stable. Personal commitments color our lives in the way that we assess our ways in light of our commitments. Personal commitments demand proper engagement.

Personal commitments are an important part of what it means to be an agent. They figure prominently in our lives. The idea of personal commitment presented in this dissertation is able to make important headway on what it means to put yourself behind something. To put yourself behind something means to commit yourself to something and, as a result, making it the case that you ought to do what you are committed to. We ought to do something in virtue of a commitment and yet we can enter and exit the commitment willingly. The here offered account of personal commitment demonstrates not only that we need personal commitments in our lives but also how such commitments work and gain authority over us through our own willing. To adhere to the ought of a personal commitment is something that you do out of the nature of your very own will.

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