

THE NORMATIVITY OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT

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PREVIEW

# THE NORMATIVITY OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Many of us share the experience of having privately bound ourselves to an end or goal. Through an act of the will, we take on a previously optional end in a way that now normatively constrains our future choices. I call this sort of act a “personal commitment.”

I argue that three attempts to assimilate personal commitments to more familiar normative phenomena each fail to recapture a distinctive characteristic of that initial picture. First, personal commitments are more robustly normative than bare intention. There are substantive constraints on when we get to revoke them, constraints that go beyond considerations of efficient agency. Second, though integrity and personal commitments can both change our reasons for action, integrity-based reasons are generally holistic in their demands. Commitment-based reasons, by contrast, seem to apply each time one’s personal commitment is at issue. Finally, we might be tempted to understand personal commitments as inwardly-directed promises, since both promising and commitment seem to generate non-holistic reasons through the exercise of a normative power. But even if personal commitments are genuinely normative, they do not seem to be strongly moral in character, like promises. A personal commitment to run a marathon may really obligate one to undertake the appropriate training, but it stretches a common sense of the moral to say that it would be unethical to fail to do so. For those

of us who found the initial idea of a personal commitment compelling, accepting any one of these analyses would require a significant revision in our pre-theoretical experience of personal commitment.

I conclude by arguing that we have good reason to resist that sort of revision. Recognizing a *sui generis* normative power of personal commitment adds to a more nuanced picture of normativity as such, and the means by which agents can bind themselves. It also adds to our understanding of the ways in which agents can be self-defining.

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

## The Normativity of Personal Commitment

We often talk of being “committed” to various ends. I am committed to teach in the spring. That woman is committed to her husband. Libertarians are committed to small government. But just what we mean by ‘commitment’ can vary.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, we use the word ‘commitment’ in ways that signify the giving *over* of responsibility, such as when a person is consigned to the care of some institution for the mentally ill. More commonly, however, to say that one is committed involves *taking on* responsibility, as well as *holding oneself* responsible. Here, a person may commit herself to some end, adopting a settled stance toward some value or goal, a stance that involves furthering that value or pursuing that goal, and giving it some significance and weight in her life.

‘Commitment,’ in the sense of taking on responsibility, can itself be ambiguous. Let’s start by distinguishing among three ways in which I might mean that I am committed to some end. Sometimes when we say that someone is “committed”, we are using what we might call an implicative sense of commitment, which marks out those stances that are implied by my other commitments, by my general behavior, and so on. Thus, if I tell you that I was born in August, I’m thereby committed to the claims that I wasn’t born in July, or September, or February, and so on. And if I say that I believe in

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, I think a lot of confusion over the question of “commitment” stems from a growing interest in the general topic coupled with a tendency to use this term in a relatively loose way. Mark Migotti, for example, has discussed the connections between theoretical and practical senses of ‘commitment’ (2003), and even within the practical realm, the term ‘commitment’ can vary from Michael Bratman’s theory of intention (1999, 1987) to more binding practical stances like legal contracts or promises. On the other hand, any analysis of a concept of “commitment” is further complicated by the fact that different discussions of similar concepts have been proceeding using different names, e.g., Susan Wolf on meaning (*forthcoming*), Harry Frankfurt on love, caring, and importance (2006, 2004, 1999), Bernard Williams on ground projects (1973), and so on.



evolution through natural selection, then I am at least committed to denying that creationism is true.

Alternatively, we sometimes employ a motivational sense of commitment, used to describe those goals that we happen to be strongly disposed to pursue. For example, I may say of my friend David that he is committed to his students, in the sense that he puts a lot of time into preparing for class, holds extensive office hours, writes thoughtful comments on their papers, and so on. In this case, if I say that David is committed, I mean that in fact he is strongly disposed to put time and energy into his students (whether or not he has deliberately or reflectively chosen this commitment). If, let's imagine, David burns out this semester and ends up putting a great deal less effort into his teaching, our response would be that he is *no longer* committed to his students. Or if it turns out that all of David's efforts were really just a cynical ploy to win the admiration of his colleagues, I might say that David *never really committed* to his students.

In contrast to the implicative and motivational senses, 'commitment' is sometimes used to mean that an agent has committed herself to some project in a *normative* sense. To say that I have committed myself in this sense is to say that I have, in some way, *bound* myself, put myself under a normative constraint, to pursue the project in question. Now, sometimes agents simply "end up" normatively committed as an indirect result of the ways in which they causally change the world, as when I obligate myself to apologize to you by accidentally treading on your foot.<sup>2</sup> Other times, however, a normative commitment is the result of deliberately exercising a normative power. As one example,

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<sup>2</sup> This sort of phenomenon gets discussed extensively in the literature on pre-commitment (e.g. Elster), but also in discussions of moral responsibility and reactive attitudes (including Strawson and Wallace).

I can deliberately and directly commit myself by making a promise to you. When I deploy a given normative power, I exercise a capacity to change the normative landscape directly, through my voluntary acts. As Hohfeld puts it, the exercise of a normative power is some voluntary act that causes normative changes, through normative means.<sup>3</sup> And while the term ‘normative power’ is a technical one, the concept itself is familiar: for example, I now have the normative powers to make promises and to change my legal name, though each of these powers will require the cooperation of another party, (a promisee, in the first case, and the local government, in the second).<sup>4</sup>

Because my normative commitments change the reasons that I ought to consider in deciding how to act, our response to failure in the normative case should be different than our response to failure in the motivational case. In the motivational case, David being a worse teacher this semester is evidence against the claim that he is committed to being a better one. If, by contrast, David makes a normative commitment to be a better teacher this semester but fails to follow through, this is precisely how we will put it: he *fails*. The failure might be justified – perhaps this commitment is outweighed by some stronger reasons – but the central point is that he has gone wrong *by the lights of this commitment*.

In this dissertation, I focus on the normative sense of commitment, and in particular, on a subset of normative commitments that I call ‘personal commitment’. Often, our normative commitments are to others: we have already mentioned promises,

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<sup>3</sup> This general description comes from Carl Wellman’s classic discussion of Hohfeld.

<sup>4</sup> Obviously, this is not to say that we always have the power to change our normative situation, nor that all agents have the same normative powers. At the moment, for example, I lack the normative power to perform marriages, since I don’t happen to be a member of the clergy, nor a justice of the peace.

and could add legal contracts and plans for coordinated action. We can call these commitments ‘social,’ to mark that they essentially involve an interaction between two or more parties. Other times, however, we seem to make *personal* commitments, putting ourselves under some sort of constraint without having to make a commitment *to* another person. That is to say, we sometimes seem able to bind ourselves to ends, and thereby to change our reasons for action, without necessarily engaging in a social transaction.<sup>5</sup> In these cases, we might say that I have made a commitment *to myself*.<sup>6</sup>

Take, for example, New Year’s resolutions. Of course, not all New Year’s resolutions are personal commitments: our “resolutions” are sometimes mere intentions, plans, goals, or even fantasies. I may resolve to take up running, just like I do every year, with the full expectation that I will fail this year as I always have in the past. Sometimes, however, New Year’s resolutions seem to be more robustly normative: we feel *bound* by our resolutions. I may say to myself, “this year, I *really* resolve to start jogging.” On these occasions, we seem to be letting ourselves down, or perhaps even failing to respect ourselves, if we don’t take our resolutions seriously. When making this sort of personal commitment, I may happen to inform others of my goals, and this communication may help to causally reinforce my commitment, but the resolution remains, in some sense, “my business.” Nobody else (reasonable reliance on my performance, and independently standing duties aside) has been wronged if I fail in my resolution. If these personal

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<sup>5</sup> As discussed, e.g., by Ruth Chang, Allen Habib, and Connie Rosati.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, to say that I have made a commitment to myself is not to say anything about its content. While we sometimes make personal commitments that are largely self-regarding, like a serious commitment to take up some hobby, we also seem able to make relatively other-regarding personal commitments, like a private commitment to volunteer at the local soup kitchen.

commitments are normative, then we have to explain this normativity without appeal to a social transaction.

To start to get a firmer grasp on personal commitments, let's look at a few concrete examples. What sorts of acts seem to fall into this category of personal commitment, and which features characterize them? First, imagine someone making a personal commitment to perform some discrete act. Suppose that Annie learns that her local community theater desperately needs \$5,000 for some urgent building repair. Though Annie doesn't currently have \$5,000 lying around, she feels confident that she could raise that money somehow. Annie also has good reason to plan to raise this money – she enjoys going to the group's productions, having the theater helps to build a sense of community in her town, and so on. But while these considerations make it reasonable for Annie to decide to raise the needed money, they don't, by themselves, make it the case that Annie *must* devote herself to raising that money.

Assuming that Annie does decide to raise the \$5,000, she might take on that decision in a few different ways. She might simply form a private *intention* to raise money for the community theater. So long as she has this intention, she ought to act on it, on pain of practical irrationality. But if it turns out that raising the money is just too much work, or if Annie realizes she'd prefer to do something else, she can simply change her plans. Intentions, by themselves, are easily revised or revoked.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, Annie might make a public commitment to the theater troupe. She might, for example, promise

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<sup>7</sup> This is a claim we will take up in the next chapter.

them that she will raise the \$5,000. In this sort of case, familiarly, Annie will be *pro tanto* morally obligated to do as she promised to do: she must raise \$5,000 unless doing so would interfere with some more stringent moral duty, or she is released from her obligation by the theater troupe (e.g., if they tell her not to bother, since they've found a different source of money).

There seems, however, be a third course open to Annie, one which is more normatively robust than planning, but without the moral weight of a promise. Annie might make a *personal commitment*. She might privately decide to bind herself, perhaps even obligate herself, to raise \$5,000 for her community theater group. If Annie makes this personal commitment, then it seems like she is in some sense bound to follow through on it. Imagine that several months later Annie tells you, her friend, that she had made this personal commitment and simply never acted on it. Your reaction is likely to be either that Annie never actually made a robust commitment, or else that she is blameworthy in some way. If Annie decided that she wanted out of this commitment, it seems that she should have done something to excuse herself.

Next, let's consider someone making a commitment to a more sustained course of action, like being a vegetarian. After some consideration, Jason comes to the conclusion that, while being a vegetarian isn't strictly a moral duty, it's still a worthwhile end: raising animals is relatively resource-intensive in terms of energy, land, and water; and besides potential health benefits, a meat-free diet will leave Jason more money to devote to other pursuits. Like Annie, Jason could take this end on in a few different ways. He

might merely settle on a plan to be a vegetarian: he's not committing to a vegetarian lifestyle in any robust sense, but just "trying it on for size," so to speak. More ambitiously, if a bit oddly, he might make a promise – to his vegetarian spouse, for example – to eat vegetarian.

But Jason might also make a personal commitment to becoming a vegetarian. As with Annie's commitment, this act of commitment seems to give rise to reasons for action, reasons which go beyond the antecedent considerations in favor of making a personal commitment. That is to say, Jason's personal commitment seems to change what it is he ought to do. Whereas eating a vegetarian meal on a particular occasion may have already been an attractive option, if Jason has really robustly committed himself, then we may see him as *required* to forego meat, or at least not justified in eating it. It also seems reasonable to say that certain considerations – like the flavor of the meat dishes, or the relative prices of omnivorous and vegetarian meals – shouldn't even occur to Jason as relevant to his meal choice. Rather than being outweighed, these considerations should be "off the table" to a committed vegetarian. And if Jason ends up deciding to dissolve his commitment then we would expect him to be able to provide good reasons for the change of heart, and perhaps, to feel some regret.

As a final case, an agent might make a personal commitment to a more general goal, one whose component demands can't be antecedently specified in the way that the demands of Annie or Jason's personal commitments could. Take, for example, Shannon, whose hasty temper causes some problems in her personal and professional relationships,

and which causes her unnecessary physical and emotional stress. Though there are no doubt universalizable reasons to strive for more patience, reasons which apply to all but the most naturally patient individuals, Shannon may decide to give this goal a more central place in her life. Thus, Shannon might make a personal commitment to curb her temper and to cultivate greater patience.<sup>8</sup> If she has truly committed, then it seems like Shannon must actively work on ways to remain patient (e.g. therapy, meditation, self-help books, etc.), and become more aware of the aspects of situations that tend to trigger her impatience (is it crowds? tiredness on her part?). If Shannon nonetheless lashes out at a friend one day, it seems reasonable to take Shannon as failing in a different way than someone else who acted with similar impatience, but who hadn't made this personal commitment.

Our reactive attitudes in each of the preceding examples – our feelings that each person ought to do as he or she committed to do, and that rejecting this commitment takes some amount of justification – suggest that our personal commitments may genuinely change how it is we ought to act. When we say that someone has *really*, or to put it slightly less colloquially, *robustly* committed, we seem to be saying that her commitment puts her under some important sort of normative encumbrance. This is not to claim that personal commitments generate a moral obligation. We can say that our personal

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<sup>8</sup> Let me note here that I recognize all three of these examples – and indeed, the various other examples I'll use for the next few chapters – are examples in which an agent has committed to some antecedently worthwhile end. As I'll continue to urge, I take it to be very significant that the act of personal commitment changes these ends from something valuable to something that the agent is *required* to pursue. Nonetheless, one might worry that I've "stacked the deck" in my favor by choosing these examples to make my view of personal commitment plausible. In response, let me first say that I take these sorts of examples to be paradigmatic of our experience of personal commitment, and therefore not really an instance of "cherry-picking". More substantively, however, I will address the question of less laudable commitments in the final chapter.

commitments change our reasons for action, while recognizing that their force is somehow different, and generally weaker than that of a promise with the same content.<sup>9</sup> For example, while a mere preference shift may not be enough to excuse me from a personal commitment, a quite serious and stable change in priorities may. If, while continuing to recognize the importance of becoming more patient, Shannon nevertheless decides in good faith that it is more important at this point in her life to focus on her career, then we may take her to be released from her personal commitment. By contrast, if she had made a promise to her significant other to work on becoming more patient, the fact that she comes to care more about career advancement will not be enough to get Shannon out of her promise. Again, though, recognizing that personal commitments are generally more easily abandoned than promises needn't imply that our personal commitments can be jettisoned for no good reason, or without some sort of residue.<sup>10</sup> The phenomenology gives us at least some *prima facie* reason to think that personal commitments do have some binding force.

### **Personal Commitments: A Proposal**

Given the examples of Annie, Jason, and Shannon, we can now make a few tentative remarks about the characteristic nature of personal commitments. One distinguishing mark of personal commitments is that they seem to give rise to new reasons for action. By saying that personal commitments give rise to new reasons, I

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of different flavors of normativity that fall between the instrumental and the moral, see Susan Wolf, Harry Frankfurt, Bernard Williams.

<sup>10</sup> We'll return to what sorts of justification are needed to drop a personal commitment, and under what conditions normative residue will remain, throughout this dissertation.



mean to distinguish them from two other ways in which agents can change the normative landscape. In the first place, personal commitments give rise to a more robust normativity than what John Broome has called ‘normative requirements’<sup>11</sup>. We might describe normative requirements as consistency constraints: given the fact that an agent has taken some stance, she must now either abandon that stance or else accept its normative consequences. Broome takes this to be the sort of normativity involved in intending: if I intend to *phi*, I must either take the steps necessary to *phi*, or else I must abandon the original intention. These two options are symmetrical. By contrast, our examples suggest that acting on one’s personal commitment and rejecting that commitment are not, generally speaking, equally good options. Rather, making a personal commitment gives one reason to follow through on one’s commitment. We’ll be exploring this idea more fully in chapter 5.

In saying that personal commitments seem to generate *new* reasons, I mean to say that they do not just specify standing reasons. In contrast to things I happen to say, or ways in which I happen to present myself – which may specify the standing demands of integrity, or consistency – the normativity of personal commitments isn’t just a matter of filling in the details of some more general extant norm. Personal commitments create new reasons for action through the *act of commitment*, not by piggybacking on some other normative demand. (We will come back to this contrast in Chapter 3, in terms of the distinction between specifying a virtue like integrity, and creating a new reason through the exercise of a normative power.) While personal commitments will turn out

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<sup>11</sup> John Broome. Normative Requirements. *Ratio*, 1999, 12: 398–419.

to be intimately related to the virtue of integrity, I will argue that integrity alone does not exhaust their normativity: personal commitments also give rise to novel reasons for action.

Furthermore, commitment-based reasons seem to be structurally complex in a particular way. As I have been describing them, personal commitments clearly give rise to positive first-order reasons for action. Positive first-order reasons are familiar: they are considerations that count in favor of doing (or not doing) something. That personal commitments seem to change our first-order reasons for action is perhaps the most clear when an agent commits to one end out of a group of equally eligible but incommensurable ends. Before making a personal commitment to raise money for her community theater, for example, raising \$5,000 to the group would be an end worth pursuing for Annie, but not something she seems to be *required* to do in any sense. She also could have chosen to spend her free time volunteering for a different organization, or pursuing some hobby. Once she has committed, however, she is violating her commitment if she never gets around to raising the necessary funds. Other times, it may be the case that an agent already ought (all things considered) to pursue the end to which she commits. In the case of the fairly common resolution to exercise more regularly, for instance, it is no doubt true that most people have prudential reason to exercise more often anyway. By making a commitment, however, one adds to, or solidifies the reasons that one has for exercising, making the need to exercise a demand that constrains other deliberation.

In concert with these first-order reasons, personal commitments also seem to give rise to second-order reasons like the sort that Joseph Raz calls “exclusionary reasons”.<sup>12</sup> Exclusionary reasons are second-order reasons directing us not to act on considerations that would otherwise count as relevant first-order reasons.<sup>13</sup> So, when Jason commits to being a vegetarian, the fact that he would really enjoy eating a hotdog is simply irrelevant to what he should decide to eat tonight. Acting on this preference is not just *outweighed* by Jason’s commitment; rather, it is *excluded*. Though Jason might think to himself, in the presence of very strong temptation, “my commitment to being a vegetarian is simply much more important than how delicious that hotdog would taste!”, this seems like a second-best way of approaching the situation. Presumably, most of us will think that the truly committed vegetarian will simply not take the potential taste of the meat to be a relevant consideration, and that, if he does, he is being weak willed relative to that commitment.

A second characteristic of personal commitments is that they seem to be accompanied by some substantive constraints on how and when they can be fully revoked. The demands of a personal commitment could, of course, be defeated on particular occasions by more weighty or stringent considerations. Even if Annie successfully makes a personal commitment to raise money for the community theater, she

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<sup>12</sup> Raz calls this particular combination of reasons a “protected reason” (*The Authority of Law*, 18). While I won’t get into the details of Raz’s own account in this dissertation (see, though, Emran Mian for criticism), I want to borrow his general structural suggestion: personal commitments, in generating demands, give rise to complex reasons that both direct us to act on the commitment, and forbid us from acting on a range of competing ends.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Raz. *Practical Reason and Norms*. Princeton, N.J : Princeton University Press, 1990, p.39.

may need to put off the actual fundraising if she needs to go care for a sick family member. The question here, however, is when someone who has made a personal commitment can rightly count as *no longer* being committed.

As we have already seen, there are senses of ‘commitment’ on which being committed just is following through on one’s commitment, and hence, to drop a commitment is simply to stop acting on it. Another sense of ‘commitment’ is that of an intention, and as we will see in the next chapter, intentions can typically be revised or abandoned with relatively few constraints. Dissolving a personal commitment, by contrast, seems like it may require meeting more weighty exit constraints, not just failing to act on the commitment, or changing one’s mind on a whim.

If Shannon merely intends to work on becoming more patient, simply waking up one day without a desire to be more patient would be enough to justify giving up that intention. Shannon capriciously dropping a mere intention to become more patient might be flaky, or ill-considered, (or perhaps a very good idea), but simply changing her mind doesn’t violate the norms of intending as such. (I’ll return to flesh this claim out in the next chapter.) But while an intention is just a practical attitude that allows us to settle on one course of action, personal commitment is a way of conferring a new sort of significance on certain ends and goals. Once Shannon makes a personal commitment to developing patience, more seems to be needed to excuse herself fully: for example, perhaps the time and energy needed to develop patience are needed more urgently for some other important end, (e.g., caring for her family, or meeting her professional

obligations). If one fails to meet the higher standard for revoking a personal commitment, one will be cheating on the commitment, rather than freeing oneself from it.

In addition to demanding relatively significant justification, we might also regard as apt a sort of regret from the committed agent if he is to exit his personal commitment honorably.<sup>14</sup> For example, it seems reasonable to expect that Jason be disappointed if he is forced to renounce vegetarianism, either because he made a personal commitment that turned out to be unreasonable, or because circumstances compel him to revoke his commitment to an end that he had found so valuable. He will seem blameworthy, at least to some extent, if he fails to experience this sort of regret. We will return to the question of what sorts of exit constraints can be attached to personal commitment in more detail in Chapter 5.

Finally, and related to the last point about regret, personal commitments seem to be accompanied by certain characteristic affective shifts. In the paradigm case, the content of a personal commitment should feel more important than it did before committing: a committed agent ought to feel a sense of satisfaction when she follows through on her personal commitment, some sort of guilt when she fails, and regret if she ends up having to abandon her commitment. So if Shannon makes a personal commitment to cultivating greater patience, we feel that she should recognize, but also *feel* the normative weight of this commitment. We may expect her to feel apprehensive

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, feeling regret is compatible with simultaneously experiencing other emotions – one may regret the need to give up a time-consuming and unrewarding commitment to a local charity, all the while feeling profound relief to be free from a draining obligation to a poorly organized group.

in situations that could provoke her temper, proud when she maintains her patience, and disappointed or even guilty if she gives in to frustration. Ideally, personal commitments seem typically to involve a sort of attunement, an interest in the details of one's world that may be relevant to one's commitments. Thus, for example, Shannon should begin to notice which aspects of situations trigger her temper, and to look out for those triggers ahead of time. If she really cares about her personal commitment, these details ought to become salient for her, in a way that they likely weren't before.

Now, it may sound odd to claim that whether we can successfully make personal commitments depends on contingent psychological changes. To compare, whether I'm bound by my promise to meet you for lunch is precisely not a matter of my contingent psychology: once I've made this promise, I have to meet you whether or not I care about doing so. Indeed, I am not claiming that this sort of affective shift is a necessary condition of personal commitment, (nor could it be a sufficient condition!). Having the appropriate affect, however, may be one mark of success. This sort of caring can be a sign that one truly has committed, and also that one recognizes the import of having made a personal commitment. It would certainly seem to be unusual that an agent would make a personal commitment without also *feeling* its importance. Though Shannon simply might not come to care about her personal commitment, this would strike us as odd. More strongly, we may be inclined to say that Shannon's commitment is defective in some way.

Again, though, the normative force of personal commitment doesn't seem to be dependent on that affective shift. Thus, just as happening to care (in a psychological

sense) about some end is not sufficient to constitute a personal commitment, so finding that one no longer cares can't be equivalent to fully exiting a personal commitment. A committor's affective attunement may fall off as time goes by; where she once cared deeply, she may simply find herself apathetic about whether she acts on her personal commitment. But while this would certainly be a sign that the agent should reevaluate her commitment, it does not, by itself, seem to mean that she is no longer committed.

### **The Puzzle**

Reflecting on the examples above seemed to suggest that personal commitments really are normatively binding. But does this intuition survive critical reflection? Though personal commitments may *seem* to be part of our lives, are they genuinely normative in the way I have described, or is this normativity merely apparent?

There are at least a couple of in-principle reasons to be wary of the claim that personal commitments are binding: one, that this claim runs afoul of Wittgenstein's private language argument, and two, that it is guilty of bootstrapping. Starting with the private language argument there are, familiarly, various ways of understanding just what Wittgenstein was arguing. One way of interpreting Wittgenstein is as arguing that without independent standards of correctness, we can't count as engaging in a normative practice (like language) at all. And just as languages are inherently social, one might argue, so private systems of normativity more generally don't make sense. That is to say, if normativity essentially only makes sense in a social context, in which individuals can

hold each other accountable to public norms, one might be skeptical of the possibility of personal commitment, as a normative move that I've claimed can be made in full privacy.

Nonetheless, I think this worry is misplaced. Even if it is the case that normativity essentially involves agents being able to justify reasons to, and demand reasons from, one another, this needn't impugn the possibility of personal commitment. Rather, one could simply see personal commitments as one agent's moves within a socially-defined system. Just as we can talk to ourselves, while denying the possibility of private languages, so we can commit ourselves, without implying there can be privately-generated normativity. Though personal commitments are always (at least in principle) privately enacted, we can always (at least in principle) be judged and held responsible for those commitments by one another.

Alternatively, one might worry that personal commitments as described above are guilty of bootstrapping. To object that something is an instance of bootstrapping, in the problematic sense, is to allege that it illicitly tries to create reasons "out of nothing". Put colloquially, the objection is that we can't give ourselves new reasons for action simply because we *decide* to "commit" ourselves to having those new reasons for action. As T.M. Scanlon points out about taking on a new course of action, "To see something as one's end is to see it as something one has reason to promote. But it does not follow that to see something as one's end is to see it as something one has reason to promote *because* it is one's end."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In his *Moral Dimensions*, p.93, though Scanlon makes a similar point in "Reasons: A Puzzling Duality?".