Chapter 7
Beyond Self-Goal Choice

Rationality and Commitment

Discussions of the cooperation problem, as encountered in experimental economics in Chapter 5, and the comments on the theory of coordination and necessary revisions of our model of practical reasoning in Chapter 6, have shown how important it is to include an understanding of social identity and the sharing of intentional attitudes in social science. This sets us in sharp opposition to the dominant view of economic rationality. At the same time, there are many sources in earlier social theory as well as in the current debate on the economic model of human behavior on which such a revision can draw. In this chapter, one of these sources – perhaps the most important one in terms of personal reputation – shall be examined. In the current debate on economic rationality, Amartya Sen's work plays a uniquely important role. Sen is widely regarded as one of the most astute and thorough critics of rational choice theory; papers such as his *Rational Fools* (1977) have been of tremendous influence on the further development of the debate. In this paper, as well as in his later contributions to the topic, Sen largely relies on one conceptual tool to demonstrate the limitations of rational choice. The concept in question is *commitment*. Commitment, Sen argues, is a central feature of most domains of human behavior. And it cannot be accounted for, Sen claims, within rational choice theory. This chapter examines Sen's claim. Special attention is paid to the way Sen ties commitment to social identity. Moreover, it is argued that the most radical of Sen's claim, which even sympathetic interpreters tend to reject, makes sound sense if we consider the structure of joint action. The issue at stake here is Sen's claim that an adequate account of committed action requires us to go beyond what Sen calls the self-goal choice assumption. This is true in the most straightforward sense, I argue, if we consider the structure of *collective* goals.

I shall proceed as follows. In a first step, I shall present two ways of meeting the challenge set by commitment in the received theory of practical rationality. The first way is the defensive strategy, which sees commitment as an element of the enlarged subjective motivational set of the agent. The second way is to pit commitment against instrumental reasoning. This is the critical strategy, which is chosen by authors such as Robert B. Brandom, and John Searle. I will then turn to Amartya Sen's account of committed action. Sen's thoughts on commitment follow the critical line. Uniquely radical among the claims he makes concerning the relation between rational choice and commitment is that committed action violates the *self-goal choice*

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assumption implicit in rational choice theory, i.e. the assumption that people should be seen as basically pursuing only *their own goals*. As many of Sen's interpreters have pointed out, this claim seems problematic because it appears that self-goal choice is part and parcel of the folk psychological concept of action. So how could any kind of agency ever violate self-goal choice?

In defending Sen's claim, I shall resort to the theory of collective intentionality. I shall argue that Sen's claim does make sense with regard to *shared* goals. In interpreting Sen's claim, special attention will be paid to the role of social identity in committed action. Committed agents, it is argued, are basically *team players*. This chapter ends with the claim that by construing Sen's concept of committed action in this way, the most obvious problem of other critical accounts of committed agency can be avoided.

§23 Commitment: Two Opposing Views

In the philosophical debate about the limits and scope of rational choice theory, the analysis of the structure of commitment plays a uniquely important role (Weirich 2004: 387ff.). However, Sen is not alone in pitting committed action against the standard model of rational behavior. Before turning to Sen's analysis below in §24, I shall start with an observation concerning some of the other relevant accounts.

It seems that the concept of commitment plays a key role in two opposing views on what is wrong about the classical model. On the first view, commitment epitomizes everything that transcends those egoistic preferences, inclinations, and desires on which Homines oeconomici are usually taken to act. What is needed in order to accommodate committed action is, first of all, a wider concept of the subjective motivational base of actions, and perhaps to allow for a less static conception, which gives more room for deliberation, and for planning (e.g., Verbeek 2007). On this first view, talk about "desires" as being the motivational base of action has to be taken in the sense of Davidson's (1963) "pro-attitudes", or in something like the formal sense in which Bernard Williams uses this term. As Williams puts it, the "subjective motivational set" is not limited to egoistic impulses or desires, but "can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects [. . .] embodying *commitments* of the agent" (Williams 1979: 20; my emphasis). Thus commitment appears as just another form of motivation which, together with appropriate beliefs, rationalizes an agent's behavior. All that is needed to accommodate commitment is a relaxation of the conceptual restrictions on human motivation.

According to the second account, however, "commitment" stands for the necessity of much more radical changes in our understanding of practical reason. On this view, it is not enough to widen our concept of motivation. If commitments are reasons for action, this is not because these commitments somehow express what the agent wants. Commitments are not based in the agent's desires. Quite to the

opposite: if an agent wants what she does when she acts on a commitment, she wants it because she believes she has a reason to do so, and not the other way around. Thus on this second view on committed action, reasons and not motivations are metaphysically basic (cf. McNaughton and Rawling 2004: 117). In this sense, commitment plays a key role in those theories of practical reason which are radically skeptical of the understanding of rationality in action that is usually called "Humean" (even though it might not have as much in common with David Hume's actual views as its proponents like to think). Robert B. Brandom describes his anti-Humean turn in the following words:

> The concepts of desire and preference are [. . .] demoted from their position of privilege [. . .] Endorsement and commitment are at the center of rational agency [. . .] and inclination enters only insofar as rational agents must bring inclination in the train of rational propriety, not the other way around. (Brandom 2000: 30)[1]

Most prominently, John Searle has sketched a non-Humean account of rationality in action, in which an analysis of the structure of commitment plays a key role (Searle 2001a). On his view, commitments do not fit into an account of rationality in action, which bases the reasons for action in the subjective motivations of the agent. Rather, commitments create, as Searle puts it, desire-independent reasons for action. In Searle's example, one does not have to have any (egoistic or altruistic) desire to have reason to pay for the beer one has ordered. The fact that one has ordered the beer is quite reason enough. Searle's analysis of the structure of commitments runs about as follows: commitments are created with the use of language; by means of some "semantical categorical imperative," as Searle calls it, ordering a beer in a bar results in the creation of a reason to pay for the beer, a reason which is independent of whatever the agent in question does or does not have in her or his subjective motivational set (Searle 2001a: 167ff.).

As opposed to the first, Humean or internalist, account of commitment, the second one is the Kantian or externalist one. I do not want to go further into the details of either of these accounts here, but limit myself to the most obvious problems of both views. The problem with the Humean view of commitment seems to be that it blurs the distinction between two different cases of reasons for action. From the agent's point of view, at least, it seems important to distinguish the case in which we believe we have reason to do x because we want to do x from the case in which we want to do x because we believe we have a reason to do x. Sometimes, there are even cases of conflict. One sometimes feels bound by commitments against one's "subjective motivations," however wide these motivations are (one might even feel bound by commitments against one's altruistic motivations). It seems that the Humean view cannot do full justice to these cases.

The existing Kantian or externalist accounts of commitment, in turn, have their own problems. If one takes reasons for action, but not motivation, to be metaphysically basic, especially if one accepts the creation of reasons for action through the

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[1] For another non-Humean account of practical rationality based on an analysis of the structure of commitment see Benn and Gaus (1986).

semantic categorical imperative, the old question imposes itself, of how those reasons, all in themselves, should move us to act, without the aid of some desires such as the one to be a rational agent.[2] It is a well-known feature of everyday life that we fail to do what we have reason to do even in cases in which we are aware of those reasons. So what is missing in these cases in which reasons fail to motivate us? In his book on rationality in action, Searle tries to answer this question with what he calls "secondary desires," which are desires, but desires that are created by the recognition of some prior desire-independent reason (Searle 2001a: 168ff.). In other words, those secondary desires play the decisive role of ensuring that one really wants to do what one ought to do.

As such, secondary desires are simply too good to be true. In Searle's story, these secondary desires play the dubious role of the *deus ex machina*, who suddenly puts in an appearance on the scene to save Searle's externalist account. And indeed it seems hard to see why we should worry about the semantic categorical imperative were it not for some prior desire such as the one to be consistent in our views, or the desire to be a trustworthy person and not to erode the base of mutual trust, or some other desire of this type.

Both accounts of committed action have their relative strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps the problem with finding out what side to take has to do with the way the line between the two camps is drawn. Looking at this constellation from afar, I think it is plausible to assume that there might be something wrong with this whole controversy. Maybe the whole question concerning the relation between motivation and commitment is wrongly put. Even though I do not know what Sen's own position on the controversy between internalist and externalist accounts of commitment is,[3] I think that some elements in his analysis of committed action point the way to leaving that constellation behind. In the following, I shall turn to Sen's analysis (§24), before coming back to the controversy between internalist and externalist accounts of commitment at the end of the chapter (§25).

§24 Amartya Sen's Critique of Self-Goal Choice

It seems that in his papers on the topic, Sen's analysis of the structure of committed action revolves around two main ideas, one of which is widely accepted, while the other, as far as I can see, has not met with much approval so far. The first, less controversial point concerns the "wedge between choice and welfare" driven by committed action, which Sen postulates in his paper on "Rational Fools." Committed action requires us to go beyond narrow standard models of preference. "Preferences as rankings have to be replaced by a richer structure involving meta-rankings and

[2] Or, to put it in Amy Peikoff's words: "Rational action entails rational desire" (Peikoff 2003).

[3] In a footnote on the relation between his own "external reference" approach and Williams' internalism, Sen claims to be in line with Williams, because, unlike Williams' internalism, "external reference" externalism is about choice, not about persons (Sen 1995: 30).

related concepts" (Sen 1977: 344). In his paper on "Goals, commitment, and identity," Sen further analyzes this by saying that committed action violates both the assumption that a person's welfare depends only on her or his own consumption (goal-self-regardingness), and the assumption that a person's only goal is to maximize his or her welfare (self-welfare goal), including satisfaction of sympathy. Both assumptions are implicit in the standard economic model of rational action (Sen 1985: 213). Whereas these two points can be seen as a refinement of the earlier statement made in "Rational Fools," Sen now goes one step further by saying that there is yet another standard assumption that is violated by committed action. It is self-goal choice. According to the more radical of Sen's two statements of the self-goal choice assumption (Sen 2002: 34), it basically says the following: "a person's choices must be based entirely on the pursuit of her own goals." (In a slightly softer version, self-goal choice is taken to mean that "each act of choice is guided immediately by the pursuit of one's own goals" [Sen 1985: 214, 1987: 80; my emphasis].) Since, in Sen's view, committed action violates this assumption, the wedge driven by commitment is not between the agent's choice and her or his welfare, as it was in "Rational Fools." Rather, it is between the agent's choice and her or his goals. The claim is that committed agents do not pursue their (own) goals. As Sen knows well, this claim sounds rather extreme. Indeed it seems that in spite of its appeal to some everyday phrases, it is not even understandable. In everyday parlance, we might say of strongly altruistic or heteronomous people that they do not pursue their own goals, but the goals of other people instead. Yet in the proper sense, self-goal choice is not violated even in the most extreme cases. For the whole clue of such strongly altruistic or perhaps heteronomous behavior seems to be that the agent makes the other's goals his own. As Sen, who is well aware of this problem, puts it: "it might appear that if I were to pursue anything other than what I see as my own 'goals', then I am suffering from an illusion; these other things are my goals, contrary to what I might believe" (Sen 2002: 212).

Perhaps the problem in Sen's claim becomes clearer if we take a closer look at the role of goals in agency. I take it that, in a basic sense, goals are something like the conditions of satisfaction of intentions. "Conditions of satisfaction" is meant in Searle's sense (Searle 1983), and it has nothing to do with any kind of psychological enjoyment. The claim that goals are the conditions of satisfaction of intentions simply means the following: goals are whatever has to be the case for somebody to have done what she or he intended to do. In order to attain my goal of closing the door, I simply have of closing the door.

As compared to other, more elaborate accounts of goals and their roles in agency, this approach might seem overly simplistic. More than that, it might appear that this reading draws intentions and goals too close together. Especially, it seems that to identify goals with conditions of satisfaction of intentions wrongfully excludes such cases as when somebody may be said to have a goal without actually intending to do something about it. I might have the goal to close the door, and yet not the intention to close the door, because my more important goal is to eat the ice

cream.[4] Against this objection, one might argue that the intention to do something about it is what distinguishes an actual goal from a mere wish, or desired state of affairs. However, we need not settle this issue here, because in the present context, the role of goals interests us only insofar as goals pertain to intentionality and action (or, in the parlance of the economic model of behavior: to choice). Thus we need not claim that there are no goals without intentions, or no intentions without goals, for that matter (even though I conjecture that the use of the term "goal" in these cases is widely equivocal). All that is claimed is that the role of goals in action is that of conditions of satisfaction of the corresponding intentions. I assume that something similar must be included in any account of the role of goals in agency. And this claim seems especially fit to shed light on the trouble with Sen's critique of self-goal choice.

The example mentioned above may serve to illustrate the point. In order to attain my goal to close the door, I simply have to close the door. This, however, I have to do myself, because the mere fact that the door is shut is not enough to satisfy my intention. If you pre-empt me and close the door for me, or if the draft does the job before I could get around to doing it, this might fully satisfy some other intentional state of mine such as my long-standing desire that the door be closed. However, it does not satisfy my intention to close the door (which might have been prompted by that desire). This well-established fact directly pertains to what is at stake in Sen's claim that self-goal choice is violated in committed action. In a manner of speaking, one can transcend one's own aims in all sorts of ways, for example by intending to do something on behalf of others, or for the benefit of others. Also, one can intend to influence other people so as to prompt them to act according to one's own wishes. However, one cannot directly intend the other's actions, because one can intend only what one takes oneself to be able to do (cf. Baier 1970). I can intend to make it the case that you close the door, but I cannot intend your closing the door (Stoutland 1997). In continental philosophy, this basic feature is sometimes called the "mineness" or "ownness" of intentionality.[5] Just as one cannot die the death of others, even though in some cases, one can die *for* them, one cannot pursue the other's goals without making these goals one's own. This is an essential fact about our intentionality. Thus it seems that what Sen believes to be violated by committed action is nothing less than a basic trait of what makes an agent an agent – at least if we take intentionality as constitutive of agency, and if we take goals to be the conditions of satisfaction of intentions.[6] Or, to put it negatively: no agency without self-goal choice. In this sense, the claim that the structure of committed action (or any action, for that matter) violates self-goal choice seems to be a *contradictio in adjecto*.

[4] The example is by courtesy of Peter Vallentyne, to whom I am grateful for pointing out the problem.

[5] "Mineness" translates such terms as Martin Heidegger's "Jemeinigkeit" (Heidegger [1927] 1996).

[6] The last clause is of special importance. Clearly, there is no problem involved in pursuing other people's goals where goals are simply desired states of affairs, rather than conditions of satisfaction of intentions. Concerning the decision for an intentionality related concept of goals, see the above remarks.

Should we therefore simply forget about Sen's second claim, taking it as a condonable excess of his righteous fury at the annoyingly persistent small-minded idea of agency in economic theory? Should we just return to the first feature of Sen's analysis of the structure of committed action, the wedge between choice and welfare, which is less controversial, and still an important contribution to the theory of rationality in action? Or is there any way to make sense of the idea of a violation of self-goal choice by a committed agent?

I suggest that we start by taking a closer look at Sen's claim. In "Rational Fools," Sen already emphasized the role of group membership for committed action. In "Goals, Commitment, and Identity," as well as in other papers, Sen further elaborates this idea. On a first line of thought, Sen introduces "as if" goals to explain the violation of self-goal choice by committed action.[7] However, Sen is well aware that "as if" goals offer no more than a formal equivalent, which does not capture the real structure of the phenomenon.[8] Just the fact that committed action can sometimes be accommodated in "as if" objective functions (Sen 2002: 41), in itself, does not shed light on the structure of committed action. The question is: what do people actually do when their behavior violates self-goal choice?

In addressing this question, Sen introduces the concept of interpersonal or social *identity*. As Sen puts it, "the pursuit of private goals may well be compromised by the consideration of the goals of others in the group with whom the person has some sense of identity" (Sen 2002: 215). It is, as he says, this "sense of identity" which "partly disconnects a person's choice of actions from the pursuit of self-goal" (ibid. 216). One might wonder what this "sense of identity" – which drives a wedge between choice and self-goal – might be. In some passages, Sen seems to suggest a reading according to which the agent identifies himself so thoroughly with another person that the goals he pursues are no longer his own goals. The assumption that one can pursue other people's goals without making them one's own, however, flies in the face of our understanding of agency as analyzed above; taken in this sense, identification amounts to some paradoxical self-elimination. If the object of identification is taken to be some other person, any attempt to go beyond self-goal choice by means of identification amounts to nothing but the futile attempt to stop being oneself by taking on somebody else's identity (cf. Charlie Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich* for a vivid illustration). In this self-eliminative sense, identification with others is simply self-defeating. The harder one tries to get rid of one's own identity by identifying with somebody else, the more it becomes apparent that it is all about *oneself* trying to be another, and not another.

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[7] "Consider a pair of individuals whose real goals are those as in the Prisoner's Dilemma, but whose actual behavior violates goal-priority (and self-goal choice). The 'revealed preference' relation of their respective choice functions may place the cooperative outcome on top, that is, they may behave 'as if' they would favor that particular outcome most of all" (Sen 2002: 217).

[8] In "Maximization and the Act of Choice," Sen states with regard to the phenomenon of Japanese employees working themselves literally to death: "The as if preference works well enough formally, but the sociology of the phenomenon calls for something more than the establishment of formal equivalences" (Sen 2002: 191).

In this sense, identification is self-defeating, because the very act of identification presupposes the very difference in identity that the agent in question tries to eliminate. On this line, there is no way to go beyond self-goal choice, because no matter how far one goes in making somebody else's goals ones own, it is still invariably *one's own* goals that one pursues.

However, this self-eliminative sense is not the only reading of the role of identification that Sen suggests. The predominant line is quite a different one: here, identification is not with others, taken as single agents. It is not a matter of any I-Thou relation, but between agents and groups – a matter of the I-We relation, as it were. In this sense, identification is not *self-eliminating* (which would be self-defeating). Rather, it is *self-contextualizing*. This kind of identification is not about trying to be somebody else with whom one identifies, but simply about not just being oneself, but one of us. This second concept of identification is the one put forth in Sen's talk on "Reason before Identity", where Sen develops an understanding of belonging that avoids the pitfalls of the communitarian critique of liberalism (Sen 1999; cf. also Sen 2004).

On this second line, the claim that committed action violates self-goal choice takes on a very different meaning. If identification with a group lies at the heart of the structure of commitment, an agent does not have to perform the paradoxical task of choosing someone else's goal without making it his own in order to qualify as truly committed. In a sense, committed action is neither about one's own goals, nor about anybody else's goals. The point seems to be that in committed action, the goals in question are not individual goals, but *shared* goals. If the scandal of the self-goal choice assumption is that it implies too narrow a conception of goals, this is not because it excludes some form of altruism, but because it wrongfully limits goals to individual goals, thereby banning shared goals from the picture. What is needed in order to correct the shortcomings of the self-goal choice assumption is not an account of other-goal choice, but an account of the pursuit of shared goals, or of collective agency.[9] As Sen puts it: "'We' demand things; 'our' actions reflect 'our' concerns; 'we' protest at injustice done to 'us'" (Sen 2002: 215).

§25 Commitment: A Third Account

This "self-contextualizing" notion of identification, however, has its own problems. How does the claim that collective agency violates own-goal choice square with the earlier thesis that self-goal choice is a defining feature of any kind of agency? If the

[9] For an analysis of the link between Sen's concept of identification and the demand for a robust concept of collective agency, see Anderson (2001). In her reflections on collective agency, Carol Rovane clearly distinguishes projection into another individuals' points of view from orientation on common ends: "these activities do not require that persons project themselves all the way into another person's own rational point of view so as to take up that person's perspective. These activities require rather that persons project themselves into a rational space that is generated by the ends which they hold in common [...] When persons project themselves into this common rational space, they can reason and act together from the perspective of their common ends" (Rovane 1998: 138).

earlier considerations on the status of goals in intentional behavior are correct, it seems that departing from self-goal choice amounts to endorsing one of the following two equally repellent alternatives. Either it requires denying that the individuals taking part in collective actions are proper agents, or it requires making a category mistake of the most basic Rylean type. The first of these alternatives seems implausible because whatever one takes collective action to be, it is clear that the individuals involved in shared activity are agents, not just, say, organs in some collective body. There is no reason to doubt that it is legitimate to demand that an account of collective agency be consistent with the notion that individuals do act when they act together. If one accepts this assumption, however, it appears that the only reason left to believe that collective agency violates self-goal choice is a category mistake. For the only alternative then seems to be to understand collective action as something different from the actions of the participating individuals. This, however, is in direct conflict with the predominant view, according to which it is not only the case that individuals act when they act together, but that the actions of the participating individuals is what collective agency is. There is no collective agent, no macro-subject, that acts in addition to the participating individuals, when individuals act jointly. To adapt the Rylean example to the given case, it seems that whoever contests this makes a mistake similar to the spectator watching some soccer game for 90 min, before saying "I have had enough now of those twenty-two people running about on the field in some coordinated way. I just wonder when, finally, the teams will start playing!" Because individuals, running about on the field in some coordinated way is what team play *is*.

Therefore, it appears that collective agency does not violate self-goal choice: all that is chosen in collective action is individual goals, namely the goal to contribute to the attainment of some shared aim. As it was put in an earlier contribution to the theory of shared goals: if a team has goal x, than each individual member has goal x (cf. Levesque and Cohen 1991) – or, more precisely, some contributive goal y – which conforms to self-goal choice.

Thus it seems that any attempt to depart from self-goal choice faces a dilemma. It amounts to ending up either in some massively collectivist conception, which flies in the face of even our most basic understanding of intentional autonomy (cf. Pettit 1996: 117ff.), or in a conception that is based on a simple category mistake. Since both alternatives appear equally unacceptable, it seems that we should not depart from self-goal choice.

I think, however, that the argument concerning the second alternative is not sound. In the following, I shall argue that even though the participants act when they act jointly, there is no category mistake in assuming that joint action violates self-goal choice. The thesis I would like to put forth is not that agents violate self-goal choice when they act together (this claim would lead directly into some of the nonsense we have encountered before). Rather, my claim is that the self-goals which individuals choose when they act together cannot be adequately represented within an account which takes all goals to be self-goals, because these self-goals presuppose shared goals.

The argument is the one put forth by those advocating a non-reductivist reading of collective agency. Participative intentions and goals are, to use a term coined by Wilfrid Sellars, “we-derivative” (Sellars 1980: 99). If we play a duet together, my aim is not just to play my part while you play yours (such cases may occur, but they do not constitute genuine cases of shared agency). Instead, it is as a part of our shared activity that you and I do what we do individually when we play together (cf. Searle 1990). In order to account for our contributive self-goal choices, an observer needs to understand that what she or he observes is something the agents are doing together (for more arguments for the non-reductivist view cf. Chapter 2 above).

Some current accounts of shared agency and collective intentionality are accused of circularity, because their analysis of what individuals do when they act together presupposes what should be explained. From a non-reductivist perspective such as the one I just have taken, this is not surprising, but simply reflects the ontological structure of participative intentions or participative goals. In the sense of the “we-derivativeness” of participatory intentions and goals, togetherness is irreducible; or, to use Sen’s term of the “privateness” of goals: shared goals are not simply combinations of private goals. There is a difference between goals that individuals just somehow happen to have in common, on the one hand, and goals which individuals have individually only because they have this goal in common, on the other.[10] An account of agency that is unable to see beyond the limits of self-goal choice cannot account for the latter kind of goals, i.e., the case of genuinely shared agency. Paradoxically, the self-goal choice assumption renders action theory blind for one special, but important kind of self-goal choice, namely, contributive self-goal choice.

There is yet another argument for a non-reductivist account of collective agency that I would like to mention, even though this brings me into some tension with Raimo Tuomela’s account of collective agency. As Annette Baier (1997a: 26, 1997b: 37) has pointed out, there are some rare cases in which individuals fail to form an appropriate we-derivative individual intention, even though, in a sense, they still can be said to share an intention (for a differing view cf. Tuomela 1991: 271ff., 1995: 135ff.). Take the case of some spontaneous and transitory collective action, such as the one of a couple of passers-by joining their forces in order to push a car. As a participant in that activity, I might suddenly feel estranged from my role and lack the aim to provide my contribution, even though I might still think of our goal to push the car as our goal, and not merely as their, the other people’s, goal. In such cases, it seems to make perfect sense to speak of collective goals or collective intentions in a sense that does not refer to corresponding individual contributive goals or intentions. An account that is based on self-goal choice seems to be blind for such cases.

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[10] Jay Rosenberg calls the former type of ends “common” and the latter “communal.” “A communal end... will be one which is collective without being conjunctive. It will be an end which is mine and hers and his by virtue of the fact that it is ours and that each of us represents himself/herself as one of us. It will, in other words, be a genuinely plural end, attributable to all of us collectively and therefore univocally to each of us severally and to all of us conjunctively” (Rosenberg 1980: 160).

Admittedly, these are rare and perhaps even pathological cases. But in light of such deviant cases, normality reveals some of its basic traits. If I think of some goal as our goal, I can be expected to have a corresponding individual contributive goal, or some other kind of pro-attitude. In the absence of overriding reasons, I should choose to do my part. The relation between shared goals and individual contributive goals (i.e., between shared goals and self-goal choice) is a normative one. This, however, points against a constitutive relation between individual contributions and shared goals of the kind at work in reductivist accounts of collective agency. Normativity entails contingency. That I should choose my contributive goal in our collective project presupposes the possibility that I decide not to contribute to the attainment of our shared goal. The possibility (perhaps more than the fact) of dissidence, as well as of other kinds of failures to do one's part, is an essential part of shared agency. It is what makes the relation between shared goals and individual choices normative. And again, an account that is limited to self-goal choice seems to be blind to the fact that some self-goal choices normatively depend on shared goals. In short, the self-goal choice assumption is incompatible with a nonreductivist account of collective agency.[11]

As was pointed out early on in the collective intentionality debate, shared intentions or projects provide us with a standpoint from which we critically measure and evaluate our individual plans and aims (Rosenberg 1980: 159). As normative sources, shared intentions, aims, goals, and projects provide us with reasons for individual action. This brings me back to the initial point concerning the controversy between internalist and externalist accounts of commitment. For these special reasons, which are based in shared intentions and projects (in short: shared desires), have an interesting status. They are neither internal nor external reasons. In some sense, they are independent of us as single individuals, or, more precisely, they transcend our "subjective motivational set" – that is why they can serve us as a critical standpoint for our self-evaluation. In this sense, reasons that accrue from shared desires are not internal. On the other hand, these reasons are not external either. They are not disconnected from the sphere of "desires" (in Williams's formal sense of the word). If and insofar as the reasons for committed action are ultimately based in shared desires, the distinction between internal and external reasons does not apply. Because shared desires are neither internal to one's motivational set, nor external. Instead, they transcend one's subjective motivational set. An account of the structure of commitment that has neither "subjective motivations" nor "metaphysically basic" reasons, but shared desires playing the leading part in committed action, seems to avoid the two problems I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It avoids both the "Humean" inability to conceive of the agent's power to transcend their individual desires, and the old "Kantian" problem of first throwing motivation out with some great gesture of depreciation and then having to beg it in again through the back door.

[11] Thus I assume that the self-goal choice assumption is ultimately equivalent to what Margaret Gilbert (1989: 418–425) criticizes under the label "singularism".

In the rich literature on Williams' internalism about practical reason, it seems that Martin Hollis' view is closest to the one developed here. In spite of his externalist bias, Hollis comes close to an account of shared desires, when he discusses the relation between "interest" and community (Hollis 1987). If we move from interest to shared desire, the problem with Williams' internalism is not that it bases reasons in motivation. Instead, it is the way in which Williams conceives of human motivation. Not all our motives are part of our "subjective motivational set." Some are intersubjective. I believe that this insight is part of what makes Sen's invitation to look beyond the limits of self-goal choice so important.[12]

[12] I am grateful to the participants of the Workshop on Rationality and Commitment, held at the University of St Gallen on May 13–15, 2004 (especially to Raimo Tuomela, and Philip Pettit), to Peter Vallentyne, and to the two referees for Oxford University Press for their criticism and comments on this paper.