1 The Anatomy of Commitment

It is not our goal to try to give a generally valid and universal definition covering every shade of meaning of the term *commitment* in natural language. For one thing, the word *commitment* and the corresponding verb *commit* are used in many different senses, and there is no reason to suspect that there is a common core meaning in all of them. The heterogeneous nature of some of these varieties of usage may be indicated by the following list of sentences:

1. a. The people committed all power to one man.
   b. The court committed the criminal to prison.
   c. The philosopher committed her thoughts to paper.
   d. She committed her writings to the flames.
   e. He committed a fallacy.
   f. This resolution commits the party to support the housing project.
   g. He avoided committing himself on controversial issues.
   h. She is committed to the same ideals as we are.
   i. Our ancestors were committed to certain odd scientific beliefs.

Of these *a* through *e* show what senses of "committing" do not concern us. Example *f* is a case of commitment to action (supporting the housing project), a subject we shall deal with in section 1.1. Examples *g*, *h*, and *i* are cases of propositional commitment. As we hope to show in

section 1.2, propositional commitment is a special case of commitment to action. One dictionary gives the following sense for the verb *commit* such as it is used in *f* through *i*:

> 2. to oblige or bind to take some moral or intellectual position or course of action[1]

As a corresponding sense for the noun *commitment*, we may quote:

> 3. the state of being obligated or bound (as by intellectual conviction or emotional ties)[2]

These are lexical definitions we can start with, since they give roughly the senses we want. In this chapter we shall have more to say, both on the nature of commitment bonds and on the question of the objects of commitment, that is, the things or entities one is committed to. We shall not, as a result, need to abandon the definitions cited above, but we hope to give them a more precise meaning.

From now on we can put aside all the other senses listed by the dictionaries. Thus, for instance, we shall not expound on the sense of commitment displayed by example *e*, though of course we feel free to use the expression *committing a fallacy*, when discussing dialogue theory. But before leaving these other senses altogether, we should mention one of them that deserves to be looked into, since it is related to commitment in our sense and since it is a key concept of existentialist philosophy:

> 4. a decisive moral choice that involves a person in a definite course of action.[3]

We shall discuss commitment to a course of action presently, and we would be glad to add these words to definition (3) (they are already there in definition (2)!). On the other hand, making a decisive moral choice seems to be just one way of *incurring* a commitment (in our sense), hence it shall be listed among other such ways in section 2.1, but we shall not go into the underlying views on morality and freedom. Note that the words *involves . . . in* in (4) come close to *commits . . . to* in our sense. But what (4) especially brings out that is notable is the idea of commitment as a distinctively personal engagement which, in its deepest form, comes from the individual's heart or inner conscience. My commitments are deeply and fundamentally *mine*, in an important sense, as opposed to anyone else's. The root notion is that one's commitments are personal—that is, indexed to a distinct person, or individual—and they may even be, in some cases, private and only partially accessible to others.

Commitment is not to be confused with intention (to follow a course of action) or with involvement (in a course of action). One may

make a promise without having an intention to keep the promise. Nevertheless, one is committed to following up on the promise. Involvement is a matter of degree, but having a commitment is a yes or no affair.[4] One is either committed to a course of action or one is not. The concept of obligation comes closer to that of commitment, but seems to be narrower. In such cases as commitment to philosophy or volleyball it would seem odd to speak of obligations. One's legal and moral obligations constitute commitments, but there are many other types of commitment.

1.1 Action Commitment

Our primary interest is with propositional commitment, but since commitment to a course of action, or "action commitment," seems in some ways more fundamental, we shall discuss that first. We shall call statements to the effect that someone is committed to a course of action (*simple*) *action-commitment statements*. In order to have a standard formulation for these, we could use the schema

    5. X is committed to A-ing

However, we shall prefer a less formal parlance:

    6. X is bound to A,

where 6 is to be understood as equivalent to 5 and not to be taken to express a physical necessity (as in: the tower is bound to topple over) or an assurance (as in: the audience is bound to laugh).[5] Examples:

    7. a. John is bound to take out the garbage.
        b. Mary is bound to have her car fixed.
        c. The court is bound to hear out the witness.
        d. Mary's father is bound to let Mary go to school.
        e. The government is bound to refrain from interfering with the real estate market.

As may be clear from the examples, the substituents for the variable "X" in 6 are singular terms for *persons* or *collectives*. Here by the word *collectives* we understand well-structured institutions or organizations that can act, take responsibilities, and so on.[6] Examples are governments, corporations, states, clubs, unions. But, generally, a mob, an audience, a school class, a gang, or a family would not qualify as a collective. We shall call a person or collective that is committed to a course of action the *subject* (*of that commitment*). The substituent for the variable "A" in 6 is to indicate what we shall call the "*object (of commitment)*," that is, the course of action to

which the subject is committed. By a happy accident of English grammar the variable "A" in 6 is replaceable by an imperative asking for exactly that course of action to which the subject is committed. Thus we may profit from the logic of imperatives in our analysis of action commitment. In fact, we shall apply Hamblin's *action-state semantics*.[7]

For each simple action-commitment statement 6, there is an *associated imperative* addressed to the subject of the commitment:

    8. a. *A* (addressed to *X*)!
        b. *X, A*!

(Notation 8b is available only when "X" is replaced by a proper name).

For example, these are the imperatives associated with the commitment statements in 7:

    9. a. John, take out the garbage!
        b. Mary, have your car fixed!
        c. Hear out the witness (addressed to the court)!
        d. Let Mary go to school (addressed to Mary's father)!
        e. Refrain from interfering with the real estate market (addressed to the government)!

Notice that sometimes one has to change an anaphoric pronoun, as when going from 7b to 9b. A statement like

    10. Everyone is bound to fight the enemy,

is not a *simple* action-commitment statement (since "everyone" is not a singular term). We may dub it a *complex* one. Its associated imperative is:

    11. Everyone, fight the enemy!

which is not the simplest type of imperative either. According to Hamblin's *addressee-action-reduction principle* an imperative has a clear meaning if and only if "the various addressees are each, under every conceivable circumstance, in effective receipt of injunctions in respect of their individual actions."[8] It is our contention that living up to a commitment is the same as satisfying the associated imperative. So, if 11 enjoins everyone, separately, to fight the enemy, this is what everyone, separately, should do in order to live up to the various commitments described in the complex action-commitment statement 10.

Puzzling commitment statements have equally puzzling associated imperatives. For instance

    12. a. 1. Someone is bound to open the door.[9]
            2. Someone, open the door!
        b. 1. Mary is bound to have the car fixed, if John takes out the garbage.[10]
            2. Mary, have the car fixed, if John takes out the garbage!

  c. 1. Any citizen who sees a burglary is bound to report it to the police.
    2. Report it to the police (addressed to any citizen who sees a burglary)![11]

This is not the place to discuss such puzzles, but it may be clear from these examples that advances in the analysis of imperatives will soon yield more insight into the meaning of puzzling commitment statements.[12]

  We shall now have a closer look at the nature of the objects of commitment. To know what a subject is committed to is to know what the subject should do (or not do) to live up to this commitment, that is, to satisfy the associated imperative. According to Hamblin, with each imperative i there is associated a set of possible worlds W_i "within any one of which it would count as having been carried out." It is "the set of worlds in which i is satisfied *extensionally*," that is, where John takes out the garbage, Mary has her car fixed, and so on,[13] but, as Hamblin argues, extensional satisfaction is not enough for *full* or *wholehearted satisfaction*, and perhaps it is not even required:

> No imperative counts as wholeheartedly satisfied if it is possible to say of it *He wouldn't have done it if it hadn't been for so-and-so, or It only came about by accident, or It would have come about anyway, what he did was irrelevant to it (or impeded it)*. Conversely, even when extensional satisfaction is lacking, we sometimes want to say *Yes, but it wasn't his fault*, or *He did everything he could*. Full or wholehearted satisfaction perhaps includes extensional, but what it adds is sometimes seen as the more important component.[14]

Wholehearted satisfaction of an imperative i (given at the time t) is defined by Hamblin in terms of an addressee's *partial strategies*. Basically, to act, as from time t, conforming to an imperative i (and hence, we may say, conforming to a commitment statement that has i as its associated imperative) consists in the adoption of (and the following of) a so-called *partial i-strategy* at each time t' ($t' > t$).[15]

  A *partial i-strategy* starting at t assigns, for each $t' > t$, to each *possible history of the world up to t'*, $j_{t'}$, a set of *deeds* (i.e., elementary or atomic actions). Think of this set as that from which the addressee of i should select one deed at time t', in order to follow the strategy, provided he thinks the history of the world up till then to be $j_{t'}$. The assigned set of deeds, D, should conform to the following two conditions: (1) if at t' (given $j_{t'}$) there are still deeds conforming to strategies for the addressee that will lead to the extensional satisfaction of i, D is to contain deeds conforming to one such strategy only; (2) if there are no such deeds, but

there are deeds available for the addressee that do not obstruct the extensional satisfaction of i, D is to contain deeds of the latter type only.

In this connection, one might ask how many alternative histories of the world there are and how many choices an addressee has to make. But this question is not the metaphysical problem it seems to be. Rather, it is a matter of the required depth of analysis in the particular context of a given case. In a particular case, the number of alternative histories and the number of choices to be made by an addressee may be quite small. Time may be discrete, and the moments of time may be days or even periods of a year.

When can we legitimately say that someone adopted a particular strategy? As soon as you can answer all relevant questions of the type: if this or that had happened (some relevant change in circumstances), from what set of deeds would he have picked one; that is, what could he have done and what not (supposing that he had not changed his plans in the meantime)?

To wholeheartedly satisfy an imperative i is not just to adopt and follow one particular *partial i-strategy* at time t. For the addressee could change its strategies several times and yet be said to wholeheartedly satisfy i. Thus, in order to *wholeheartedly satisfy* an imperative i (up to time t'') the addressee should at each time t' such that $t'' \geqslant t' \geqslant t$: (1) adopt a strategy that is *as far as he or she knows*, a *partial i-strategy* $q_{t'}$, that starts at t'; (2) make an estimate of the history of the world (including deeds by other agents) up to time t' (let this history, according to the addressee, be $j_{t'}$); (3) do one of the deeds from the set that $q_{t'}$ assigns to $j_{t'}$.[16]

This is already a fairly precise and technical account of the central mechanism of action-commitment implementation, even though it may be a much simplified model and leaves a number of complications aside. We want to stress, however, that *living up to a commitment* (i.e., wholeheartedly satisfying the associated imperative) does not characteristically consist in simply doing the right thing, but in a number of strategic decisions and estimations of circumstances, and in performing deeds according to these decisions and estimates. Let us illustrate these points by the following case:

CASE 1.1   John is bound to take out the garbage. For him to live up to this commitment is the same as to wholeheartedly satisfy the imperative: John, take out the garbage! The address-action-reduction principle says that, in order for this imperative (and hence for the corresponding commitment statement) to have a clear meaning, it must be clear—from the context, say—

what John is supposed to do (what garbage he is to put where and when, and so on). Let us suppose that John made a promise to Mary to put out the garbage before 7:00 A.M., when it will be collected. The alarm clock goes off at 6:00 A.M. What actions by John are compatible with his living up to his commitment?

Certainly, he shouldn't jump out of his bed and catch the 6:10 express for Vladivostok, leaving the garbage where it is. (Unless John really thinks this to be a way to go about his task and adopts it as a strategy. We shall not suppose this to be the case.) But what John could do is get a little more sleep and reset the alarm for 6:30. Then, as the alarm wakes him up again, he may change his strategy once more and opt for 6:45. Presumably, this is still in keeping with his promise. (Whereas resetting the alarm clock for 7:30 is not: this would not be part of following any *partial i-strategy*.) What if tension builds up, and Mary is going to take out the garbage at 6:55, if John is still in bed at that time? Would it be all right for John just to stay in bed? If John were simply bound to make sure that the garbage is out at 7:00 A.M., perhaps this could be a permissible strategy. But, since we have supposed that John should *take* out the garbage, it is not. Neither is the strategy of resetting the alarm for 6:56, at least not as long as we suppose that John knows well enough what Mary will do at 6:55.

Suppose John has reset the alarm for 6:30. What if his son Bill, quite unexpectedly, takes out the garbage at 6:15? In that case we may say that John has lived up to his commitment (has kept his word), even though the associated imperative was not extensionally satisfied. (In the terminology we shall introduce later, he has *maintained* but not *fulfilled* his commitment.) John may, at 6:30, go to sleep for the rest of the morning (all partial strategies are eligible), provided, of course, that he is informed about Bill's action (and believes his ears). John was prevented from taking out the garbage, but he has not reneged on his commitment.

Neither is John delinquent if he (unknowingly) takes out a garbage bag stuffed with sweaters that Bill put in the place where the garbage used to be. But if John accidentally takes out the garbage, being under the impression that these are some sweaters he abhors, then he has not thereby met the

commitment that he undertook. In the first case John has lived up to his commitment, in the second not (supposing that is all he does). The last case can in the present vocabulary be described as one in which the imperative is *extensionally* satisfied , but it is not *fully* or *wholeheartedly* satisfied.

Now, take the case where Mary gets sick at 6:30 and John takes her to the hospital. There is no time to bother about the lesser problem of the garbage. We cannot say, then, that John has lived up to his commitment: he did not adopt any *partial i-strategy* after 6:30. So we must say that John was delinquent at least as far as the garbage is concerned. Even so, who would say that John *wrongly* reneged on this commitment? Indeed, there were other, and more important, commitments that took over. So in undertaking to meet the total of his commitments, in this case John acted correctly.

Finally, what if at 6:30 John has simply forgotten about the garbage? As this would probably prevent him from adopting an *i*-strategy, we would not say that he is living up to his commitment (even if later he decides to be nice, and for once take out the garbage, so that the imperative gets extensional satisfaction). Forgetfulness, may, however, in some cases be excusable, depending upon circumstances.

We discussed the subject and the object of a commitment, but it remains to (briefly) inquire into ways subjects are bound, or into the nature of *commitment bonds*, as we shall say. Just as, with imperatives, one may distinguish commands, requests, advice, and so on,[17] there are commitments with varying forces or strengths:

13. a. *X* is not in a position to omit *A*.
    b. *X* is supposed to do *A*.
    c. *X* is told to do *A*.
    d. *X* is under the (moral) obligation to do *A*.
    e. *X* is forced to do *A*.

It seems that an explanation of the nature of these various bonds would have to go into a whole background of, say, command structure, moral codes, legal codes, social codes, and affiliations. A trenchant and useful, though perhaps perfunctory, way to gain some understanding of these matters is to ask, in each case, for the *sanction*. What exactly would happen if the subject of the commitment does not live up to it? Would he or she be ridiculed? Blamed? Censured? Banished? Executed? Go to

the back of the line? Lose four hundred dollars? Or would the subject incur other specific commitments? Or fail to meet certain standards? The better we can answer these sanction questions, by setting a specific penalty in a particular case, the better we seem to understand the nature of a given commitment bond.

Though the sanctions may, in a particular case, be partially or simply ordered according to strength, and we may thus speak of stronger and weaker types of commitments, this does not imply that commitment is a scalar notion. As noted above, having a commitment is a yes or no affair. One does not gradually shift from one type of commitment to the other becoming more and more committed. What is meant, when people use the expression "*getting more deeply committed*" is either a shift to another stronger type of commitment, or a deeper involvement. Involvement, as opposed to commitment, is a matter of degree. We can speak of stronger and weaker commitments. We can't speak of having a commitment only partially, or to a certain degree.[18]

Let us now go back to 3, the lexical definition of commitment given by Webster's. It defines commitment as a state of the subject, for instance the state John is in when he is committed to take out the garbage. We can continue to use the word *commitment* in this way, provided we do not for *state* silently substitute *mental state*. We must rather think of a state here as a definite set of circumstances (legal, moral, social, etc.). A person's various commitments (the specific states he or she is in) together determine the (total) commitment (the state the person is in). This latter state determines what the person is committed to doing, and sets the various sanctions if he or she fails or falls short. We may call this state a person's *agenda*. A somewhat simplified model of an agenda of a subject X may be constructed in the following way. For each sanction S, there is a *sanction set* $C(S, X)$, the members of $C(S, X)$ are sets of partial strategies for X. Think of each of these latter sets as a set of *partial i-strategies,* where i is an imperative associated with some simple action-commitment statement: X is bound to A, with sanction S. The sets $C(S_1, X)$, $C(S_2, X)$, and so on, together give us a language-independent (concept and) model of an *agenda*. If Q is an element of $C(S, X)$, we may call Q *an object of S-commitment of X*, or simply an *S-commitment of X*. If Q gives the objective content of an imperative: $X, A!$, we may also say that "doing A" is an S-commitment of X (though one would hardly say that doing A is a part of a state of X).

The model can be enriched by giving more structure to the various sets (hierarchical orderings, etc.), but we shall not go into that here.

1.2 Propositional Commitment

It is time to explain what we mean by the term *propositional commitment* and to connect this notion with what has been said on action commitment on the one hand, and with rules of dialogue on the other. Let us look at some cases:

CASE 1.2   On the evening preceding the setting of case 1.1, John asks Mary: "Where will you put the garbage for me to take out tomorrow morning?" Mary answers: "Behind the door, as usual." Mary has now promised to put the garbage behind the door, so she's now committed to that course of action. There are several propositions associated with this commitment, for example, "Mary will put the garbage behind the door" (describing what, ideally, should happen), or "The garbage will be behind the door" (describing the desired result). But we shall not, for this reason, call Mary's commitment to putting the garbage behind the door a "propositional commitment." Mary's commitments, however, are not restricted to putting the garbage behind the door. She has also incurred some commitments that are more intimately connected with propositions. For instance, Mary is now bound not to deny (at least not without due explanation) that she will put the garbage behind the door, or that it will be behind the door, or that there is any garbage. These we shall call Mary's *propositional commitments*. Notice that, in ordinary circumstances, these propositions are not challengeable; that is, it would be odd to ask Mary for reasons or evidence for them.

CASE 1.3   John is about to take the garbage out. He asks Mary: "Where did you put the garbage?" Mary answers: "Behind the door, as usual." In this case Mary has not committed herself to do anything about the garbage, but she has incurred a propositional commitment with respect to the proposition that she has put the garbage behind the door. She cannot (without more ado) deny this proposition, and perhaps it wouldn't be entirely out of place to ask for evidence ("Are you sure?").

CASE 1.4   John is about to take the garbage out. He asks Bill where Mary put the garbage. Bill answers: "On the roof." Bill has incurred a propositional commitment to the proposition that

Mary has put the garbage on the roof. It seems quite acceptable to challenge this proposition. A dialogue may start.

CASE 1.5   Mary is the city's environmental specialist. She announces that the city's output of waste will, over the next ten years, increase by 5 percent per annum, if no measures are taken to prevent this. She mentions some undesirable effects of this. She then goes on to suggest some measures the city government should take. Mary has expressed opinions on matters of fact, on what is desirable, and on what should be done. On all three accounts she has incurred propositional commitments. Living up to these commitments, would, in this case, mean that Mary should try to argue for her tenets, to defend them, when challenged. This holds not only for propositions on matters of fact, but also for value judgments, normative statements, and injunctions. Clearly Mary is committed to certain courses of action in some possible dialogues.

It should be clear, from these examples, that whoever makes a declarative statement thereby commits himself to some course of action, depending upon the context. In this respect asserting (but also denying, conceding, doubting) is rather like making a promise: it puts something on the speaker's agenda. (And, usually, it puts something on the listener's agenda as well.) Suppose X asserts that P. Depending upon context X may then become committed to a number of things, for example, holding that P, defending that P (if challenged), not denying that P, giving evidence that P, arguing that P, proving or establishing that P and so on. And, in various contexts, these commitments may be differently spelled out. Ultimately, X becomes committed to some (sets of) partial strategies. But the reason that we speak of *propositional* commitment here is that all X's commitments (as defined by the strategies he is committed to) center on the proposition P, or perhaps even on X's particular formulation of P. Moreover, the various courses of action are *dialogical*, that is, of such types as one would expect to occur in dialogue. We shall say in this case that X *is committed to* P, meaning that X is committed to a set of partial strategies centering on P.

To sum up then: *propositional commitment* is (1) a kind of action commitment whose (2) partial strategies assign dialogical actions that (3) center on one proposition (or a formulation thereof).

As we saw, commitments may be of various strengths, and for that reason, we split a subject's agenda into a number of different compartments, or sanction sets, one for each sanction: $C(S_1, X)$, $C(S_2, X)$, and so on. It is no different with propositional commitment, but in order not

to complicate matters we shall only consider two sanctions: 1. failure to comply with the basic constraints that hold for the particular type of discourse in which the commitment is incurred, and 2. failure to perform well in this type of discourse.

In our view of commitment then, the way one is bound to follow the rules for a type of dialogue differs from the way one is bound to optimize behavior within the compass of the rules. If one goes against the rules of a type of dialogue, one is open to a particularly strong form of censure or criticism. Such a failure to realize the speech event of the assigned type is a serious kind of deviation that is highly inappropriate, unless the move is acceptable for external reasons, agreed to and approved by the other party. However, if one follows a weak strategy, but one that conforms to the rules, this type of internal failure is generally not quite so serious. However, one does run the risk to lose the exchange; for example, in a persuasion dialogue, one may fail to persuade the other party.

If, as we shall from now on assume, the type of discourse is one of rule-governed dialogue (a dialogue game), the first sanction may be formulated as quitting the dialogue by breaking the rules (in some dialogue games that would mean a loss or even a dishonourable loss), whereas the second sanction would amount to choosing a legal but bad strategy (this may lead to an honourable loss, if the other party chooses a good strategy). We shall call the sanction sets corresponding to these sanctions $C_1(X)$ and $C_2(X)$.

The inclusion of the second type of sanction reflects our point of view that in dialogue one should not just conform to the rules (e.g., defend one's assertion, if required) but perform to the best of one's abilities (e.g., give one's strongest arguments, etc.).

Thus, we get corresponding to X's assertion that P, at time t, in the context of a dialogue game two objects of commitment for X: a set $Q_1(P, X)$ and a set $Q_2(P, X)$ of partial strategies for X ($Q_1(P, X)$ is an element of $C_1(X)$ and $Q_2(P, X)$ is an element of $C_2(X)$). The rules of the dialogue game in question prescribe that X, from t on, stay within the confines of the partial strategies $Q_1(P, X)$, whereas, for X, it would be a matter of optimizing his strategy to stay within $Q_2(P, X)$. (If there is just one optimal strategy for X, $Q_2(P, X)$ will contain just that strategy.) Notice that, generally, X's adversary in dialogue, Y, will incur commitments, too, on account of X's assertion at time t: $Q_1(P, Y)$, $Q_2(P, Y)$. Each of the sets $C_1(X)$ and $C_2(X)$ contains a number of sets of partial strategies for X, one set for each commitment. And each "object of commitment" $Q_1(P, X)$ or $Q_2(P, X)$, starting to be operative at t contains a number of partial strategies for X. Evidently, these partial strate-

gies and hence X's agenda are very complicated objects. We shall, therefore, as we introduce models of dialogue, not describe them directly but go about it in another way: we shall formulate rules of dialogue and a codification of the history of dialogues in such detail that these rules, together with a given codified history, completely determine the content of each set $Q_1(P, X)$ or $Q_2(P, X)$ that is, the action reductions of each person's propositional commitments. Thus the rules determine not only a participant's legal actions on account of a propositional $(Q_1(P, X))$, but also what constitutes good strategy $(Q_2(P, X))$, even though it may be hard to determine the latter in a given case. And they determine not only such actions as flow from a participant's assertions, but also such as are required by his or her opponent's assertions and by challenges, utterances of doubt, questions, and so on.

As to the codification of the history of the game, what we need primarily to lay down is what propositions a participant is committed to. We shall for that purpose introduce commitment stores (or sets) of several types.[19] For instance one commitment set may list a participant's assertions, another his concessions, and so on. Moreover, some commitment sets will contain formulated propositions, that is, sentences instead of the propositions themselves. Finally, nothing prevents us from including within certain commitment sets propositions that are not connected with any speech act within the dialogue. As we shall see in the next section, there are other ways of incurring commitments than by speech acts.

We shall end this section by making a short remark on the notion of a fallacy. Both actions diverging from those assigned by $C_1(X)$ and those diverging from those assigned by $C_2(X)$ could, perhaps, be called fallacies. We shall, however, prefer to use the word *fallacy* only in the strongest sense, that is, that of diverging from $C_1(X)$. A fallacy then is an infraction of some dialogue rule. For the other sense ("bad strategy") the words *blunder* and *flaw* seem appropriate, whenever strong terms are needed. A consequence of this stipulation is that what constitutes a fallacy in one game of dialogue does not need to constitute a fallacy in another (it could be just a blunder, or even be entirely all right).[20]

1.3 Problems to Be Solved

Commitments were analyzed into subject, object, and commitment bond. There remain many problems with respect to each.

With respect to the subjects of commitment: when does a set of people qualify as a collective; that is, when is it possible for a set of

people to incur commitment? For instance, a group of people in a room does not normally constitute a collective, but if someone walks by and ask them to leave the room tidy, and if some of them say yes, it appears that they are committed as a collective. A further investigation would bring us into social philosophy (cf. the reference to Spit in note 6).

Normally, it is convenient to think of the individual person as the main subject of commitment. However, some odd cases challenge this preconception. In split-brain or multiple personality cases, the same person (or at least the same body) may be committed differently, so that it may be best to speak of several distinct subjects of commitment. Defining the subject of commitment in such a case could be a substantive problem for the philosophy of mind and for philosophical psychology.

In a mundane type of case, it may initially seem best to see a person who is deliberating an hour to act in a problematic situation as a single subject engaging in monological (i.e., nondialogue) reasoning. But if she is weighing the pros and cons of two opposed viewpoints, and perhaps is playing devil's advocate by hypothetically adopting the one viewpoint as a means of criticizing the weak points of the other, it may be better to see this as a case of two subjects of commitment engaging in a dialogue with each other. This is a problem of how to identify subjects of commitment in relation to the kind of dialogue theory developed in chapter 4. In dialogue theory, we may try to analyze monological reasoning as a type of interpersonal dialectical reasoning, that is, as an internal dialogue in which the reasoner functions in two distinct dialectical roles and, consequently, takes on commitment, not absolutely, but relative to these roles (self-criticism). Thus we would enter into problems regarding the best way of identifying subjects of commitment in a given case.

With respect to objects of commitment: in our analysis these are very complicated objects (sets of partial strategies). Could they be reduced to something more manageable? For instance, do all possible histories of the world have to be taken into account if I want to describe your commitment to volleyball, or could we do with a subset of these and a selected part of each history? How about the notion of a deed (atomic action)? Can it be given a viable meaning that does not depend on metaphysical preconceptions? Also, the notion of knowledge (about the history of the world as well as about the effect of following a certain strategy) needs further analysis, and so does the notion of "making an estimate." Further problems that could be investigated are the relations between the objects of commitment and the notions of intention, goal, obligation, duty, ideal, and so on.

An especially important problem is whether the notion of commitment in dialogue can be used to help define the notion of intention.

Intentions are often difficult to determine, but commitment to one notion or proposition is surely a good way to think of an intention. According to Segerberg: "The best way to think of intentions is perhaps as commitments on which the agent acts; he acts so as to bring about, make true, realize that to which his commitments commit him—to implement the intentions . . ." [21] The reader might like to look at Segerberg's account, where intention is defined as a subspecies of commitment.

With respect to the nature of the commitment bond one may wonder whether other approaches than that by a characterization of sanctions could be fruitful. Can one give a classification or hierarchy of sanctions and thus give more structure to the concept of an agenda? Can the idea of an agenda be worked out to yield a theory of personhood?

Many puzzles are provided by complex commitment statements. Hamblin (in a chapter on grammar-logic) discusses a number of complex and/or puzzling imperatives, which yield as many puzzling commitment statements, such as conjunctive, disjunctive, and conditional imperatives of various kinds.[22]

The concept of 'living up to a commitment' (wholeheartedly satisfying the associated imperative) is in need of some empirical links. What evidence can we use to establish that someone would have acted in that or that way had such and such been the case? What analysis of counterfactuals is appropriate in this context?

The problem of wavering (mentioned in note 16) is this: if someone, X, is committed to a set of (partial) strategies Q, and is living up to that commitment, this does not exclude X's changing strategy all the time in a way that systematically and perversely obstructs the possibility of reaching external satisfaction of the associated imperative. For instance, if the imperative is not to allow a draft in the sickroom, and if both the door and the window happen to be open, X could waver between the strategy of closing the door and that of closing the window, both of which would be in Q. After having taken one step toward the door X could change strategy and take two steps toward the window, then again change strategy and take two steps toward the door, and so on. How can we exclude this as a case of living up to one's commitment without excluding bona fide changes of strategy as well?

The present analysis does not take into account the possibility that a person's knowledge or belief with respect to the history of the world and with respect to the effects of certain deeds may change as time passes. How could our analysis be modified so as to take these factors into account?

The problems mentioned thus far pertain to commitment in general. As to commitment *in dialogue*, we note, at this stage, the following two special problems:

1.   Is every commitment in dialogue propositional? Or are there some
        nonpropositional commitments that are nevertheless dialogical?

2.   We introduced, for dialogue theory, just two types of sanction,
        and two "negative" qualifications with respect to moves within
        dialogue: fallacy and blunder. How about distinguishing more
        than just these two sanction sets, and, consequently, more than
        two "negative" qualifications? This would, obviously, influence
        the weighty question of how to define a viable concept of 'fallacy.'

1.4 Summary

The term *commitment* has many lexical uses, but our central interest in
this book will be with those commitments that can be expressed by
(simple) action-commitment statements: X is bound to A. Basically,
commitment has three aspects: a subject (X), an object (A), and the
special nature of the commitment bond (the way X is bound to A).
The subject is a person, or any well-structured institution or organiza-
tion that can act or take responsibility. The object is the course of
action to which the subject is committed. In the general form "X is
bound to A," "X" stands for the subject of commitment and "A"
stands for the object. An example is "John is bound to take out the
garbage." Associated with this (simple) action-commitment statement
is the imperative, "John, take out the garbage!" Our way of approach-
ing commitment is an application of Hamblin's action-state semantics
for imperatives (systematically developed for our purposes in the appen-
dix). In his account, wholehearted satisfaction of an imperative is de-
fined in terms of a subject's partial strategies, each of which assigns a
set of deeds to each possible history of the world at a given point in
time. Living up to a commitment (wholeheartedly satisfying the associ-
ated imperative) must be distinguished from merely doing the right
thing. Rather, whether a subject is living up to a commitment must be
judged in light of that subject's estimations of circumstances, strategic
decisions, and deeds, not only in the actual world, but also in
counterfactual situations.

Propositional commitment is a kind of action commitment whose
partial strategies assign dialogical actions that center on one proposition.
For example, if Mary asserts the proposition "There is too much garbage
in Hamilton," then she will become committed to a set of partial strate-
gies centering on this proposition. But what she will be exactly commit-
ted to depends on context. For instance, if the proposition is challenged

by John, with whom Mary is engaged in a critical discussion about garbage disposal, Mary becomes committed to defending it.

Commitment bonds are the different ways subjects are bound to the objects of commitment. A useful way to understand the nature of a commitment bond in a given case is to identify its sanctions, the penalty the subject would incur if he did not live up to his commitment in that case. The agenda of a subject represents the totality of his commitments, along with the various sanctions if he fails to live up to these commitments.

Our primary concern is with commitment in dialogue, and so with propositional commitment. Here we consider only two types of sanctions, failure to comply with the rules of dialogue, which might amount to a kind of loss of the exchange, and failure to perform well in the dialogue. Correspondingly, we distinguish between fallacies and blunders. This orientation will be important later, in chapters 3 and 4, where our primary concern will be with how propositional commitments are gained or lost in a context where two parties are reasoning with each other by exchanging arguments.