Rational and moral action : a critical survey of rational choice theory

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1. Introduction

Sen’s concern with ethics can be characterized as a continuous confrontation with utilitarianism that he regards as an impoverished ethical theory. He criticizes it for being preference-based and for taking only utilities into account when evaluating states of affairs and neglecting, for example, the presence or absence of rights.

Sen was among the first authors to introduce the concept of commitment into rational choice theory. Though the concept of commitment is often taken to refer to an intention to act morally, this is not necessarily so. But it is a very useful concept for describing some characteristics of rational choice theory, in particular its relation with ethics.302

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302 As I said before, Sen has repeatedly stressed that committed action should not be seen as identical with moral action. People may be
Sen introduced the concept of commitment in a famous article in 1977 called “Rational Fools”. In this article he distinguished ‘commitment’ from ‘sympathy’. Sympathy refers to the case in which the concern for others directly affects your own well-being. “If the knowledge of torture makes you sick, it is a case of sympathy; if it does not make you feel personally worse off, but you think it is wrong and you are ready to do something to stop it, it is a case of commitment.” (Sen, 1977a, 95)

It this chapter I shall first explain why the concept of commitment cannot be accommodated by rational choice theory. Thereafter, I will discuss in more detail the characteristics of commitment and show that it creates a wedge between choice and personal well-being and between choice and self-goal. In the sections that follow I discuss how these wedges can be repaired.

2. Inclusive and exclusive accounts of well-being

Let us assume that everything we do contributes to our well-being. The argument runs as follows: whenever we act intentionally, we act for a reason or for reasons. We do what we do because we prefer to do it and think that it serves our well-being. As long as agents deliberate and act rationally and succeed in conforming impartially to their best reasons, they are serving their well-being, and are doing what they are morally required to do at the same time. Moral considerations do conflict with non-moral considerations, but they do not conflict with the concern for the agent’s well-being. This argument, then, leads to a view in which there is no room for rational actions that do not contribute to the agent’s well-being. It uses, to borrow an expression from Sobel (1998), an inclusive account of well-being.303

committed to moral principles, but they may be equally committed to, say, sectarian principles.

303 The inclusive account of well-being uses an all-things-considered notion of preference ranking.
Sobel pointed to the dilemma that a preference-account of a person’s good faces. "For, either the account takes everything that matters to the person to constitute a preference and to contribute to his/her well-being into consideration, or it does not. If the account does this, it has exhausted what matters to a person’s well-being. (...) If, on the other hand, one has concern for something beyond the extent to which that concern furthers the agent’s well-being, then not all concerns and not all preferences contribute to the agent’s well-being. At the same time it is acknowledged that well-being does not capture the whole of what matters to the agent." (Sobel, 1998, 252/3) This is what Sobel calls an exclusive account of well-being. This account must define which concerns or which preferences do not contribute to the agent’s well-being.

What comes first into your mind? To exclude thoughtless inclinations, or preferences that are manifestations of weakness of will, or preferences for risky habits? Maybe these are the kind of preferences you would think of. But in rational choice theory the idea is to exclude preferences to be benevolent and preferences to act morally; in short, those preferences that usually are considered to be other-regarding. (Brandt, 1979) But we know that some other-regarding preferences do contribute to an agent’s well-being. A clear example is the well-being of one’s children. Their well-being has a direct influence on the well-being of the parents. We could say that the utility functions of the parents extend to those of their children. Thus, it is plausible to conclude that in the case of ‘named benevolence’ (Hahn, 1991), the utility functions of agents extend to those of known others (as children, family members, friends, and perhaps neighbors). Instead of benevolent preferences ‘tout court’, the consideration above would lead us to exclude only the preferences for the objects and concerns of “anonymous benevolence”. We should make matters of anonymous benevolence the subject of collective provisions. This idea is very alike the proposal of Overvold. From the point of view of Overvold, self-interested preferences are preferences for states of affairs in which the agent is an essential constituent.
Preferences excluded by definition are altruistic preferences for the well-being of (anonymous) others, malevolent preferences, that (anonymous) others be harmed, and principled preferences, that e.g. justice be done. All of the states of affairs that are the object of these preferences can be obtained whether or not the agent exists and for that reason are not logically relevant to the determination of his self-interest (Overvold, 1984). The subset of preferences that does not contribute to anyone’s well-being in the exclusive account are the kind of preferences that Brandt mentioned, i.e. preferences for the common good and other-regarding (or principled) preferences. The exclusive account of well-being, then, is intelligible when we assume that rational action is equivalent to self-interested action. The consequence is that the notion of rationality is contaminated with the notion of self-interest. Someone who is committed to a cause that does not contribute to his own well-being is not acting rationally no matter how generous the action is.

This exclusive account of well-being needs to be amended. Being self-interested does not exclude that the agent is fully aware of mutual interests. After all, he has to negotiate and trade with other people. Moreover, a rational agent is not amoral and therefore we should watch the utilitarian roots of rational choice theory. The utilitarian model of rational action accommodates compliance with some social and moral norms because these norms are instrumental useful, i.e., they enable or facilitate the realization of non-moral ends. What are the conventional standards of good behavior in a rational choice framework? This is the quality to care for oneself and for those persons for whom the agent is responsible and/or with whom he has special relationships. It is also the quality that acknowledges that keeping promises or telling the truth and engaging in common enterprises or fulfilling one’s obligations is not contrary to one’s self-interest. This is the quality of keeping an eye on one’s long-term interests. An agent may be calculating but also grants a fair share to those with whom he trades. In short, the agent is rational, but not greedy, and he never loses sight of his own interests but he is
also keen to keep a good reputation. These are all important qualities and they distinguish him from agents who are selfish and/or are under the spell of their present aims. To add moral sentiments to Overvold’s model is to incorporate prudential concerns and the commitment to prudential norms. This is still an exclusive account, for the well-being of anonymous others is not taken into account.

3. Other-goal choice and identity

What kind of behavior does the concept of commitment involve? It seems to represent the opposite of self-interested account of well-being, namely choices that are not motivated by the pursuit of one’s personal well-being only.

In his contribution to a symposium on commitment Sen reflected on the way in which the self is central to one’s preferences and choices in rational choice theory. He distinguished: (Sen, 2005, 6)

a) self-centered welfare: a person’s welfare depends only on her own consumption.

b) self-welfare goal: a person’s only goal is to maximize her own welfare, which rules out incorporating within one’s objectives some other consideration, such as the welfare of others or the pursuit of social justice, except to the extent that it influences the person’s own welfare.

c) self-goal choice: a person’s choice must be based on the pursuit of his own goals, which rules out being restrained by the recognition of other people’s goals.

We see that the concept of self-interest is broadened, while going from a) to c). The picture of rational choice theory as contained in b) and c) confirms the concept of sympathy. Within this version there is room for ‘fellow-feelings’, the concern for others can sometimes directly affect your own well-being. Through extended utility functions the well-being of ‘named others’ is connected to your own well-being. Sympathy violates self-centered welfare but not necessarily the other two requirements, while commitment need not involve a violation of self-centered welfare but can violate
self-welfare goal or self-goal choice. Sympathy, therefore, can be incorporated in rational choice theory. This leaves us with the concept of commitment and with two wedges: the wedge between welfare and choice and the wedge between self-goal and choice.

In an earlier article Sen made the concept of identity central. This was the result of Sen’s concern with the prisoners’ dilemma (PD), which symbolizes the wedge between choice and (collective) well-being. The prisoners’ dilemma game made Sen aware that the ability of groups and societies to deal with conflicts of interest and/or goals among their members depends largely on the way individuals think and act. Central is how persons define their identity, what image they have about themselves. We all have many identities, and 'being just me' is not the only way we define ourselves. Community, nation, race, gender, class, and so on, all provide identities that can be crucial to the way we view ourselves and thus to the way we view our welfare, goals and obligations.304

In the standard game theoretic format the following behavioral assumptions tend to be incorporated (Sen, 1985d, 242/3):
1. Goal-completeness: every player’s goal takes the form of maximizing according to a complete order of the resulting states.
2. Goal-self-regardingness: each player’s goal takes the form of maximizing his or her welfare.
3. Goal-priority: each player pursues his or her goal subject to feasibility considerations.
4. Mutual knowledge: each player is well informed about the other players’ goals, values and knowledge.305

304 It will not come as a surprise that Sen thinks that “The conception of the individual as a very “private” person -unconcerned about the rest of the world- has been, and in my judgment rightly, both empirically unrealistic and theoretically misleading.” (Sen, 1985d, 346)
305 Goal-self-regardingness and goal-priority are the same assumptions as self-welfare goal and self-goal choice. There does not seem to be much of a difference between Sen’s conceptions of the self and of identity and that is rightly so for a person has as many selves as he has identities.
I shall ignore the assumptions of mutual (or common) knowledge and goal-completeness that are not essential to elucidate the concept of commitment.

Can goal-self-regardingness be sensibly weakened to solve the problem? Sen argues that, at first sight, this must be the case. Indeed, the PD is often taken as a classic illustration of how ‘selfishness’ on the part of each will harm all. But, suppose, Sen tells us, that the players are completely non-selfish, though they have different moral views about what is good for the world, and they act entirely in pursuit of that moral goodness as they see it. Then each person would end up in a state that he or she regards as morally inferior to the state that is possible. It is, of course, possible that the kind of ordering needed for the PD may occur less frequently, but the ordering combination, when it does occur, will lead to the same dilemma. Thus, this is, according to Sen, not an adequate solution to the dilemma. This sounds like an artificial argument to me. The idea that moral persons get involved in a prisoners’ dilemma violates the very idea of moral persons, to wit: detachment, tolerance, other-regard. It is not credible to assume that moral persons would be engaged in a game with a dominant strategy. Therefore, I believe that people with a moral disposition would never get engaged in a PD game. But since Sen does not share this view, he turned to the possibility of adapting goal-priority.

Goal priority is a different type of requirement. One can argue that recognizing the existence of other people’s goals is part of living in a community and the observable conflict in the individualistic pursuit of the respective goals must call for some response in behavior. “Of course, such a response might take the form of revising one’s goals (to bring them in

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306 This example confuses moral characters with zealots. It is also in stark contrast with other writings of Sen. In “Behaviour and the Concept of a Preference”, for instance, he criticizes rational choice theory because it “underestimates the fact that man is a social animal and his choices are not rigidly bound to his own preferences only.” (Sen, 1973a, 252/3) But it could be an argument when people are engaged in different ideologies.
line with those of others), (...)” (Sen, 1985d: 345). But Sen believes that, in rational choice theory, anything short of the unwavering pursuit of one’s own goals is seen as simply ‘irrational’ and perhaps even as ‘not understandable’. Adopting ‘as if’ goals could provide a way out of the dilemma. “Indeed, ‘as if’ goals may play an important part in removing the perceived conflict between the communal and the individualistic principles.” (Sen, 1985d: 346) If people are ready to act on the basis of some ‘as if’ orderings, they can do better than when acting individually in direct pursuit of their own individual goals. 307

Commitment can involve violations of self-goal choice, since the departure may possibly arise from self-imposed restrictions on the pursuit of one’s own goals (in favor of, say, collective goals). “(...), the pursuit of private goals may well be comprised by the consideration of the goals of others in the group with whom the person has some sense of identity.” (Sen, 1985d: 348). “The rejection of self-goal choice reflects a type of commitment that is not able to be captured by broadening the goals to be pursued. It calls for behavioral norms that depart from the pursuit of goals in certain systematic ways. Such norms can be analyzed in terms of a sense of “identity” generated in a community (..), and it has close links with the case for rule-based conduct, (..)” (Sen, 1985d: 352).

We see that in this article Sen is looking for a different solution to solve the conflict between individual and collective interests. In the PD game agents are confronted with dominating strategies and therefore they will defect. Within this game the conflict of interests cannot be solved. The alternative is that players adopt different identities and play a different game in which goal modification is a real

307 In “Rational Fools”, Sen already suggested that a person “is more sophisticated than the theory allows and that he has asked himself what type of preference he would like the other player to have, and on somewhat Kantian grounds has considered the case for himself having those preferences, or behaving as if he had them. This line of reasoning requires him to consider the modifications of the game that would be brought about by acting through commitment (..)” (Sen, 1977a, 107)
option. We can distinguish two forms of other-goal choice: the first is that one adopts other people’s goals, i.e., other people’s goals shape one’s own goals (this is what Pettit has termed ‘goal-modifying commitment’); the second is the recognition of other people’s goals beyond the extent to which other people’s goals get incorporated within one’s own goals (what Pettit termed ‘goal-displacing commitment’).

The case of goal-modifying commitment means that an agent, recognizing that the goals of others are negatively affected by what he is about to do, alters his goals as a result. His modified goals will reflect broader values that bear on how others are to be treated or how common goals are to be promoted. The suggestion is that agents feel that they are part of a collective in which problems are solved by joining forces. (Anderson, 2001, 29) This implies a commitment to a joint strategy, in which goals are shared. We should make a case for the existence of ‘shared intentions’ (Bratman, 1993); ‘team preferences’ (Sugden, 2000) or ‘we-intentions’ (Davis, 2002). The agent’s capacity for ‘reasoning and self-scrutiny’ can help him to transform his goals in this way.

We are still left with the case of ‘goal-displacing commitment’. The notion of goal-displacing commitment is highly implausible, since it suggests that we no longer act on our own goals. It is here that Sen proposes to make use of ‘as if’ goals, or to assume that people adopt certain behavioral rules. Like Pettit, I do not see that this really means giving up the idea of self-goal choice. “[T]he goals endorsed in common with others are still goals we each endorse, and so are in that intuitive sense our individually endorsed goals.” (Pettit, 2005, 20) My interpretation is that we do not here discuss the distinction between self-goal and other-goal, but a distinction between acting on internal or external reasons. 308 The goals of

308 An example of goal-modifying commitment is the case in which the agent’s goals conflict with communal goals and thereby with the goals of agents who are committed to these communal goals. A goal-modifying commitment assumes that people can act on a ‘collective intention’. In the case of ‘goal-displacing’ commitment, the agent has to follow rules of
other agents provide the agent with reasons to adopt this goal and to make it one of his own. The integration of commitment in some modified variant of rational choice would, from this point of view, require that it can be argued that an agent can act on external reasons, i.e., on reasons that were not his own from the outset. The implication is that the Humean theory of motivation is replaced by a non-Humean theory.

If, for the moment, it is accepted that external reasons could motivate an agent, then (some of) the cases in which Sen talks about goal-displacing commitment would be transformed in goal-modifying commitment, and we could conclude that goal-displacing commitment hardly has a place in an adequately modified version of rational choice theory. There remains a case of other-goal choice that is not compatible with any version of rational choice theory and I discuss it in the next section.

4. Other-goal choice and integrity

Williams criticizes utilitarianism especially because of its consequentialism. He mentions two problems with the concept of commitment in connection with utilitarianism. The first is that a commitment may not contribute to a person’s happiness, the second, and the one I will focus on, is other-goal choice.

The problem as mentioned by Williams has to do with goal-displacement and integrity. The decisions of an agent as a utilitarian agent are a function of all the satisfactions that he can affect from where he is, and this means that the projects of others determine his decision. This may be so either positively or negatively. In the utilitarian view, the undesirable projects of other people as much undermine one’s decisions in the negative way as the desirable ones do in a positive way. But what if the projects of other people conflict with some project of the agent?

Williams mentions the case of a man, Jim, who finds himself in the central square of a small South American village. Tied
against the wall is a row of twenty local Indians and in front of them stand several armed soldiers. The captain in charge offers Jim a guest’s privilege of killing one of the Indians himself. If he accepts this privilege the other Indians will be let off. But if he refuses, all the Indians will be shot. What should Jim do?

What is of interest in this case is that the consequentialism of utilitarianism also involves the notion of negative responsibility; that if I am ever responsible for anything, then I must be just as responsible for things I allow or fail to prevent as I am for the things that I myself, in a more restricted sense, bring about. The doctrine of negative responsibility thus represents the notion of impartiality, and abstracts from the identity of the agent (Williams, 1973: 93ff). The simple consequential point of view takes up a neutral, impersonal standpoint with regard to collective well-being. From the point of view of consequentialism, Jim should kill one of those Indians: it is better that one gets killed than twenty. And the one that he kills would be killed anyway. Opposed to this is the point of view that we should take account of the agent’s position. From a personal point of view, the choice is forced upon him. He does not bear the same responsibility for the wrongdoings of others as he does for his own. This argument depends on an agent-relative value of responsibility. A third position is that one should never kill a person. Moral imperatives are side-constraints. Following these last two imperatives, Jim should refuse the offer. The utilitarian solution is that Jim ought to accept the captain’s offer and participate in the captain’s project. Williams concludes from this that utilitarianism cannot make sense of personal integrity.

This case raises two questions. First, the question whether an agent should act on another person’s goal. Second, the question whether there can be a conflict between what an agent should do to preserve his integrity and what he should do to enhance collective well-being. This case is very illuminating for discussing other-goal choice. It appears that there are two circumstances in which an agent can be forced
to act on another person’s goal, namely when he is forced by violence to do it and when the situation apparently leaves him no choice. In the case as described by Williams it is the situation that is relevant. From a utilitarian point of view, Jim should accept his responsibility and kill one of the Indians. When, notwithstanding this appeal, he refuses to do so because his moral conviction and his sense of self-integrity forbid him to kill a human being, then, from a utilitarian point of view, his sense of integrity conflicts with his obligation to maximize collective well-being.

But is the utilitarian point of view the correct way of interpreting this case? Shouldn’t we argue that the choice left to Jim is, from a moral point of view, a pit-fall: either he kills a person, or he is held responsible for the killing of many persons. Doesn’t this resemble “Sophie’s Choice”? Whatever Jim did, he would regret it. Only free persons can be held morally responsible for their actions. Since rational choice theory is concerned with the actions of ‘free’ agents, this variant of other-goal choice does not apply to her.

5. Consequential evaluation and responsible choice

In a theoretical context in which rational behavior is closely connected to self-regarding action the possibility of actions that benefit anonymous others (for instance actions that aim at social justice) and which do not contribute to one’s own well-being must be considered to be irrational. To avoid such a conclusion constructions have been developed in which well-being and agency are disconnected. (see Sen, 1985b).

The well-being aspect is important in assessing a person’s advantage; it refers to a person’s command over things. The agency aspect is important in assessing what a person can do in line with her conception of the right thing to do. It refers to her ability to form goals, to engage in commitments and to value her actions. The distinction between both aspects is required because it is possible that there is a difference between an action being right and the state resulting from that action being the best feasible state from the point of view
of one’s well-being, for instance because the agent rejected a lucrative job, for he feared that the company might behave in a socially irresponsible way. Therefore, there is no need that the two correspond as consequentialism assumes. Opposing the consequentialism of utilitarianism, Sen introduced consequential evaluation that he regards as the discipline of responsible choice. Consequential evaluation should be performed as a two level evaluation. First, to evaluate choice through an assessment of its consequences. Thereafter, to combine this analysis with an evaluation that focuses on the process leading to the consequences. In order to carry out this two level evaluation actions performed should be seen as part of the state of affairs resulting from an action. A state of affairs certainly does consist of what has happened and when an action x has been performed by person H, then it certainly has happened that H has done x. Sen thinks that it would be odd to remove this occurrence from the description of the resulting state of affairs. Taking the action into account can make one conscious of the rightness or wrongness of an action. Take, for example, the case of A who pushes B into the river, just for the fun of it, and B, who cannot swim as he happens to be afraid of water, hardly escapes drowning. It can be said that everything follows from the consequences of A’s act. But A failed as a responsible agent when he did not consider whether B was a good swimmer, and this too has to be included in evaluating the state of affairs. (Sen, 1985b, 219)

The distinction between well-being and agency is also relevant because well-being does not need to cover everything that matters to the agent. A person may have objectives other than personal well-being. If, for example, a person fights, under a dictatorial regime, for democratic processes, he may be put in jail. He did a great job (it was a big agency-achievement), but it was accompanied by a loss in personal well-being. “[I]t may be said that we move from

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309 This distinction is lost in a model of exclusively self-interested motivation. For in that case the person’s agency cannot be geared to considerations not already covered by his well-being. (Sen, 1987a, 41)
agency achievement to personal well-being by narrowing the focus of attention through ignoring ‘commitment’, ...” (Sen, 1987b, 28; see also Sen, 1985b) This suggests a kind of trade-off between the agency aspect and the well-being aspect. Making use of the distinction between well-being and agency we could close the wedge between (moral) choice and well-being by attributing to the agent two ultimate ends: material comfort and social respect. Between these ends there can be a trade-off. When agents deliberately try to act appropriately, not just because they want to gain acceptance for their action from their fellow-agents, but because their quest for self-integrity requires this, then the knowledge that they acted properly will make them feel good. Moreover, it is quite possible that the acknowledgement by other people that they behaved with propriety will arouse signs of approval and appreciation. This will also affect the agents' well-being in a positive way. 310 I do not suggest that a gain in symbolic utility precisely offsets a loss in substantive utility, but that the agent would not feel well when he violated his sense of integrity or encountered signs of social disapproval.

Consequential evaluation not only requires that the action should be included in the evaluation of states of affairs. The theoretical framework also permits taking other aspects of the state of affairs into account than merely (dis-)utilities, for instance the presence or absence of moral (human) rights, whenever this is relevant for the description of the state of affairs 311 Rights aim at freedom of the rights holder to do certain things, and it demands some correlate obligations on

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310 I have deliberately chosen the term social respect instead of social status, because I wish to exclude any association with economic success through which the two ends would coincide after all. A proposal to include social respect as an end of equal importance as the acquisition of material comfort has also been made by Brennan and Pettit. They argue that social respect and self-esteem is something one gets by the grace of what others think, or what one thinks oneself. (Brennan and Pettit, 1993)

311 We should not equate human rights with legal rights. In normative discussions rights are entitlements or powers or immunities that it would be good for people to have. (see Sen, 2000, 496)
the part of others to help in the realization of this freedom. Neglect or disregard of those obligations can be seen as a bad thing, and can be taken into account in evaluating state of affairs. A consequence of taking rights into consideration is that an agent will have to balance rights and this presupposes that rights have certain moral ‘weights’ and that he should see whether one right is or is not outweighed by another. 312

6. Conclusion

Sen has formulated three propositions related to his concept of commitment: (i) that commitment is a relevant concept to describe human relationships; (ii) that rational choice theory cannot accommodate this concept; and (iii) that an alternative theory of rational action should be developed that is able to incorporate the concept of commitment. (Sen, 2005)

Sen proposes to develop a more general theory of rational choice, in which utility maximization is a special case. 313 The problem with rational choice theory is not the maximizing framework itself, rational people will of course choose among the available options the option they regard as the best, but the limiting features of utility maximization in combination with the construction of the selfish agent.

Sen has suggested that we should adopt a goal-rights system in which the values of states of affairs take the value of protecting rights and the disvalue of having them violated into account. Also the action itself should be included among

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312 Scanlon believes that in many conflict situations it may not be decent to balance rights against one another. The question rather is whether one of these rights may be infringed in the situation at hand (for instance, the right to privacy). He agrees that any acceptable process through which principles of action are justified must be consequence-sensitive. But we should consider not the overall value of resulting states of affairs, but the reasons that individuals have for accepting or rejecting these principles. (Scanlon, 2001) I believe that Sen agrees with this comment. Anyway it fits my construction of Sen’s theory of responsible choice.

313 Sen rejects the requirement of optimalization and replaces it with the weaker requirement of maximization. The maximization approach does not require completeness of orderings. (see also Walsh, 2008)
the consequences that constitute the resulting state of affairs. This should be combined with replacing economic man by rational man, an agent with a different identity. A characteristic of such a general theory is that agents are able to engage in reasoning and self-scrutiny. Sen considers reflective rationality in the form of self-scrutiny and assessment as an important aspect of a concept of the self that opens the door to morality and moral considerations. When we reflect on our lives, eventually, inevitably, it occurs to us to ask ourselves whether our most fundamental desires are justified and directed at worthy ends. This is the step in which one raises the ‘desire-transcending question’, that makes us agents. (Regan, 2002, 223) One way in which an activity or pursuit might be good for the agent engaged in it is by making the agent’s life worthwhile and meaningful. "By acting in accordance with moral requirements, we enter into a distinctive kind of relationship with other people, one that is based on mutual recognition or acknowledgement, and that involves essentially a form of interpersonal justification". (Wallace, 2002, 409)

Commitment, as a moral concern, reveals the ability to be involved in the pursuit of collective well-being or in the well-being of anonymous others; to have other-regard. In the general maximization framework that Sen envisages notions such as ‘identity’, ‘collective agency’ and ‘reasons for action’ can be accommodated. (Sen, 2001) Once it is accepted that rational choice theory is not a body of accepted and unshakeable views, the concept of commitment is no longer foreign to rational choice theory.314 I pursue this issue in the following and concluding chapter of Part III.

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314 In 1977 Sen wrote that the characteristic of commitment is the fact that it involves a counter-preferential choice. (Sen, 1977, 96) But it is only counter-preferential within a theoretical context in which the agent is by nature self-interested.