

Commitments, Reasons, and the Will

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Harry wants to see a show on Broadway but is \$50 shy of the price of a ticket. Do you have a normative reason to give him \$50? Whether you do depends, among other things, on whether you have a personal relationship with him. You don't, in general, have a reason to pay for the theatre-goings of every Tom, Dick, and Harry. But if Harry is your child, your friend, your father, or your lover, you may well have this reason. Being in a personal relationship gives you reasons you might not otherwise have.

Some of our personal relationships are *committed*—they involve people to whom we are committed—and some of them aren't—they involve people to whom we aren't. If Harry is the barista with whom you chat every morning while he makes your latte on your way to work, you are probably in an uncommitted relationship with him. Were he to leave the job, you'd be sorry but not all that fussed. Your personal relationship with him gives you reasons that you might not otherwise have: to give him generous tips, to put him on your holiday card list, to ask after his pet iguana whose exploits he has regaled you with over the foaming machine. But it doesn't give you a reason to buy his theatre ticket or, say, to give him one of your kidneys, reasons you might have were you committed to him as your lover, father, or child. While being in a personal relationship gives us agent-relative reasons we might not otherwise have, being in a *committed* personal relationship gives us still further, special, agent-relative reasons.

Philosophers interested in understanding the reasons of personal relationships tend not to distinguish committed relationships from uncommitted ones, treating all personal relationships (and sometimes throwing in personal projects for good measure) as giving rise to reasons in the same way. But since many of the reasons we have in committed relationships—whatever those turn out to be—are reasons to have distinctive attitudes and to engage in distinctive activities that would be supererogatory at best and bizarre at worst if directed at those to whom we are not committed, we might wonder whether the way in which committed relationships give rise

to reasons is different from the way in which uncommitted ones do. That, at any rate, is my hypothesis here.

More particularly, I am going to assume, not too controversially, I hope, that in so far as there is a difference in how reasons are generated in the two kinds of relationship, the *commitment* in committed relationships plays a key role in explaining how committed relationships generate the special reasons of those relationships. Making a commitment to Harry explains why you have a special reason to give him your kidney, a special reason you don't have in relation to someone to whom you have not committed. Explaining the nature of these commitments and how they give rise to special reasons are the two main aims of this chapter.

But there is a third aim. If commitments are to be understood in the way I'll suggest, then it turns out that the way in which they account for the special reasons of committed relationships has striking metanormative implications. As I'll suggest, commitments are exercises of our *normative powers*, the power to confer reason-giving force on something through an act of will.¹ When you make a commitment to Harry, you *will* that his interests—e.g., his need for a kidney—be a reason for you to give him yours. And under the right conditions—to be explained in due course—this willing *makes* his interests reason-providing for you. You have created reasons for yourself by willing something to be a reason. More precisely, your willing Harry's interests to be reasons for you is *that in virtue of which* they are reasons for you. Your willing is the *source* of your reason's normativity.²

If this is right, then our commitments to people in personal relationships provide a way of vindicating the broadly Kantian idea that our wills can be a source of normativity—they can be that in virtue of which something is a reason. The third aim of this chapter then is to outline a view of the sources of normativity that grows out of the suggested view of commitments.

The proposed view, what I call 'hybrid voluntarism', is however importantly different from the usual Kantian approaches to the source of normativity. Those views are ambitious, trying to locate the source of *all* of practical normativity in what the will *must* will if it is to be rational. The view proposed here, by contrast, is modest; it holds that only some, but not all, of practical normativity has its source in the will. Moreover, what makes something a reason is not what a rational will *must* will but what it

¹ I develop this view further in my 2009, 2013a, and draft.

² The source question has been brought most prominently into contemporary focus by Christine Korsgaard in her 1996. I try to distinguish the source question from others in the region in my 2013b and to distinguish different ways one might answer the source question in my 2013a. I take the source question to be one about the ground of something's being a reason; thus it is a metanormative question whose answer has possible implications for naturalism and non-naturalism.

is genuinely free to will—this willing is not constitutive of being a rational will but is a willing that is, in a way to be explained, ‘up to us’.³ As we will see, this post-Kantian modesty allows us to make good on the basic Kantian idea while avoiding what are widely considered to be its fatal flaws. Although a full defence can’t be given here, hybrid voluntarism is offered as an attractive and plausible expression of the idea that our wills can be a source of normativity.

1. COMMITMENTS: INTERNAL VS. MORAL

The commitments of interest are those typically made to people in relationships of love and friendship, and most paradigmatically in relationships of romantic love. They are also the commitments made in the pursuit of personal projects, such as writing a book, helping to save the whales, or raising one’s children right. Indeed, they are arguably the most important commitments of a good life. In this chapter, I’ll be focusing on commitments in relationships rather than projects, but what I say about the one is meant to hold for the other.

These commitments need to be distinguished from another important kind of commitment with which they can be easily confused—the *moral* commitments involved in making a promise to or agreement with someone, perhaps oneself.⁴ Moral commitments require ‘uptake’ on the part of the person to whom one is committed. I can’t promise to love and to cherish you unless you are in some way aware of my undertaking, and in the usual case, form expectations and rely on that undertaking. The moral obligation that arises from promises and other agreements crucially depends upon this uptake.⁵

³ The kind of autonomy won by the post-Kantian view favoured here is not the somewhat counterintuitive and disappointing ‘forced to be free’ kind usually associated with Kant. A full discussion of freedom and normativity would take us too far afield, but I make some suggestive remarks about how I see things in my 2009.

⁴ Which kind of commitment should be of most interest to us? Nancy Schaubert and Cheshire Calhoun have argued that what I am here calling ‘moral’ commitments aren’t what they are cracked up to be; they are necessary neither for the integrity of the self (Schaubert 1995) nor for the well-lived life (Calhoun 2009). I’m inclined to agree; I suspect that the ‘internal’ commitments at issue here are more central to both integrity and to the most profound conditions for a good life, but I can’t argue the point here.

⁵ Even self-promises seem to require uptake by the self, and the obligations that follow by the self to the self depend on this uptake. Connie Rosati (2011) points out that if you promise yourself to quit smoking, there is a distinction between breaking this promise and changing your mind about whether to hold yourself to it. The badness of breaking the promise depends on letting yourself—the you that experienced the uptake—down.

The kind of commitment I am talking about here is, by contrast, very much an *internal* affair. It is an intensely personal thing that you, yourself, do or undertake. Think of the internal commitment you have made to your personal projects—to getting the book written, to learning to play the piano, to having a balanced life. Your commitment essentially involves just you; it doesn't require uptake by anyone else to be a genuine commitment. Just as you can internally commit to a personal project without there being uptake by anyone else, so too can you internally commit to a person—resolving that he is 'the one' for instance—without his realizing it.⁶ In this way, you can (somewhat creepily) commit to Brad Pitt while all alone in your living room. In the normal case, of course, your commitment will be to someone with whom you already have a personal relationship. The key point to make here is that unlike moral commitments, internal commitments don't require as a condition for their existence the uptake of other people. Since they don't require uptake, they are not moral in the sense of essentially being relied upon by others.⁷

Internal commitments are easy to overlook because in almost all intuitively committed relationships there are also commitments of the moral kind. Committed relationships typically involve a moral promise or vow—for example, to love and to cherish until death do us part. And when both parties make a mutual promise, the relationship is thought to be satisfyingly mutually committed. Internal commitments may also have downstream effects. Having made an internal commitment to Harry, for instance, you might then behave in ways that lead him reasonably to form expectations and to rely on you in various ways. Your internal commitment can lead you to act in ways that then generate moral commitments. By failing to meet Harry's expectations, you fail to meet your moral commitments. These facts have led philosophers, mistakenly I think, to model the commitments of personal relationships or projects entirely on moral commitments like promising.⁸ We do more than simply make promises to our partners in committed love relationships, and the focus on moral commitments—mutual or otherwise—misses this.

⁶ Talbot Brewer (2003) appears to make a similar distinction between promises and 'internalist commitments' which come from the agent's 'own values'. As we will see, however, his view of commitments is different from the sort of 'internal' commitment of interest here since, for Brewer, commitments are not a matter of the will but seem to be expressions of dispositions over which we have no direct volitional control.

⁷ Nor, by the way, are they moral in a substantive sense; you can commit to a project of serial murder or to the devil.

⁸ And there are interesting philosophical puzzles associated with the possibility of mutual commitments that provide further distraction. See, e.g., Korsgaard (2009), Gilbert (1996), Bratman (2007).

Hollywood gets the point. Jack is a wild, fun-loving, carefree bachelor who spends his free time drinking and road-tripping with his male buddies. He has serial one-night stands but can't seem to sustain a romantic relationship. Then he meets Jill, who seems different from every other woman he's met. They go ice skating in the Rockefeller Center and engage in mildly witty repartee. But Jill has his number; she's not going to 'commit' to him until she sees that he 'commits' to her. What is it that Jill wants from Jack? Does she want Jack to make a promise to her—to love and to cherish her in just the way he might promise to take her to lunch or to pick up her dry cleaning? Both Jill and the audience know exactly what Jack needs to do: he needs to commit to her in the sense of interest—to do something all by himself, to resolve internally that she is 'the one'. This internal commitment usually comes to Jack in a flash, and just in the nick of time before Jill is to board a plane to work with indigenous populations in the remote regions of the Amazon. The promise to love and to cherish comes later, at the closing wedding scene, when the credits roll and everyone is supposed to leave the theatre feeling romantically uplifted.

Note that Jack's promise to love and to cherish Jill—however sincerely given—wouldn't have the meaning it does without Jack's having made an internal commitment to her. Indeed, such a promise without an internal commitment would ring hollow. Compare Jack's promise to meet Jill for lunch. He need not have made any internal commitment to her; he's simply and sincerely agreed to meet her for lunch. In just the same way, he can with utmost sincerity promise to love and to cherish her—he's simply sincerely agreed to do so, and he'll be in for moral censure if he fails to follow through. In the usual case, and in the Hollywood trope, however, a promise to love and to cherish has greater normative significance than that of incurring an obligation through a promise. This is because it is backed by an internal commitment—something the promisor has done all by himself that gives his subsequent promise special significance or meaning. This is not to say that Jack wouldn't be under the same obligation as he would be without having made the internal commitment—a promise is a promise—but only that the wedding scene as the credits roll would no longer have the normative weight or significance it is meant to have.⁹ Internal commitments—ones that you make all by yourself—are integral parts of what we intuitively regard as committed relationships.

⁹ One way to think about the special normative significance of promises backed by an internal commitment is along the dimension of 'meaning' rather than permissibility. The reasons you have because you have made the promise may be the same, but a promise backed by an internal commitment has 'meaning'—for example, for your relations with other people. Scanlon (2008) has such a view about the normative significance of intentions.

While there is certainly more to say about internal commitments, I hope I have said enough to distinguish these commitments from the usual moral commitments, like promising, that spring to mind when there is talk of ‘commitment’. In the rest of the chapter I’ll use ‘commitment’ to signify the internal commitments of interest.

2. THE NATURE OF COMMITMENTS

So how are we to understand commitments? Answering this question turns out to be more difficult than it might at first seem.¹⁰ We might start with four quite minimal but intuitive features that any plausible understanding of them arguably needs to accommodate.

First, a commitment is something you *can* decide to make. After several years in an on-again-off-again relationship with Harry, you might decide to commit to him. This decision might be a conscious and deliberate choice to shut down further deliberations about whether he is ‘the one’ and resolve that he is. Or it could be an unconscious and non-deliberate decision; after living together for a few years, more and more of your long-term plans involve Harry, and his interests have greater importance than they had before. Indeed, were he to need a kidney, you would offer up one of yours. You have resolved that he is the one, but not consciously or deliberately. Finally, a commitment need not be a matter of decision at all. There is a difference between drifting into a career as a lawyer if, say, you come from a long line of lawyers, and being committed to such a career, even if you haven’t decided or resolved—even unconsciously—that that career is the one for you. You can be invested or involved in an activity without ever having decided to be invested or involved. The point here is that although commitments need not be a matter of decision, they must be the kind of thing that you *can* in principle decide to make.

Second, a commitment can be both a discrete event—you can make a commitment at some point in time and thereby bring it into existence at that time—as well as an ongoing state—if you are committed to someone in a personal relationship, the commitment persists over time. It might be thought, for instance, that a commitment is essentially an emotion. The onset of the emotion would be the event that is the making of the commitment, and the continued persistence of the emotion would be the

¹⁰ To my knowledge there are only two book-length treatments of ‘commitments’, and neither of these focuses on the nature of what are sometimes called ‘substantive’ commitments, which include both moral commitments and the ‘internal’ commitments I have in mind here. Instead, the majority of work on ‘commitments’ concerns the formal commitments of intending to do something. See, e.g., Robins (1984) and Lieberman (1998).

persistence of the commitment. This is not to say that the emotion must be at the forefront of one's consciousness at all times in order to persist over time. (See a psychotherapist if you doubt this.) As the first feature makes clear, commitments need not be conscious or deliberate but can be something of which one becomes aware of having made even while it persists. Typically, being in a committed relationship involves both the event of making a commitment and its continued persistence. So an account of commitments needs to understand them as the kind of thing that can come into existence at a time and persist over time.

Third, your commitment can in some sense be *up to you*—it can be, roughly speaking, 'personal', or 'individual', or 'your own'. For present purposes, we can interpret this idea of being 'up to you' in the sense of not being rationally required.¹¹ The idea here is not that a commitment can be a conscious, deliberate decision or choice—we have already made that point above—but rather that commitments need not be compelled by reasons. In your on-again-off-again relationship with Harry, it may be perfectly rational for you to commit and perfectly rational for you not to. You may have reasons to go either way, but you may not have decisive reason to go one way rather than the other. Similarly, if you have a range of personal projects, you may not be rationally required to commit to one over the others or indeed to any at all. Whether you commit or not, you need not be less than fully rational; not all commitments or failures to commit are defects in rationality. Again, this is not to say that commitments must always be up to us but rather that an account of them had better allow that at least some of them are.

Finally, and most importantly, commitments explain why we have the special reasons we might not otherwise have without having made the commitment. Before committing to Harry, you may have no special reason to subsidize his theatre-goings, give him your kidney, or empty his bedpan, but after committing to him, you may have such reasons. (This is of course compatible with your having a general agent-neutral reason to give up one of your kidneys to anyone who needs it and with your having an agent-relative reason to give up your kidney to someone with whom you stand in some uncommitted personal relationship.) Commitments give rise to special reasons we might not otherwise have. Without the commitment, we don't have the special reasons, and so, by hypothesis, the commitment explains why we have those reasons. We can leave open for now the *way* in

¹¹ There is a deeper sense in which your commitment is up to you; it *is*—or more precisely, is a key component of—the rational you. For further reflections on the relation between the 'willingness to be reasons' that I believe are at the core of commitments and your 'rational identity', that is, your ideal rational self, see my 2009.

which a commitment might provide such an explanation. But the correct account of commitments needs to show how they can explain why we have the special reasons we have when we make commitments to people in personal relationships.

So what is a commitment? The aim is not to give a full-blown account of everything a commitment typically involves but only what lies at its core. Some seemingly plausible candidates suggest themselves: a commitment is essentially a normative belief in the special value of one's beloved or in one's relationship; a desire that one's beloved's life go well for his own sake; a set of dispositions to do things for one's beloved in various circumstances; various emotions like love for one's beloved; endorsement of one's desires, dispositions, or emotions towards one's beloved; intentions to do things for one's beloved under certain circumstances; plans to engage in activities with or to do things for one's beloved; policies or dispositions to treat one's beloved as having special value or as being more important than other people; or a complex amalgam of these beliefs, desires, dispositions, endorsements, intentions, plans, or policies. As we will see, none of these suggestions works.

2.1. Normative beliefs

We might start with the suggestion that a commitment is essentially a belief or set of beliefs that the person with whom one is in a committed relationship has special—either more or distinctive—value. Being committed to Harry would, on this view, be a matter of believing that Harry is the cat's whiskers. One question here is, what is the basis for this belief? Beliefs are based on evidence, and evidence is typically publicly available. So if there is evidence that Harry is the cat's whiskers for all to see, then presumably everyone should believe he is the cat's whiskers. But not everyone is committed to Harry.

Better is the idea that a commitment to Harry is the belief that the relationship one has with Harry possesses special value. I can share the evidence for your belief and come to believe that the relationship you share with Harry has special value without thereby being committed to Harry or to your relationship with him since it's your relationship, not mine. You believe that your relationship with Harry has special value, but you don't believe that your relationship with your bank manager or barista does. Perhaps that is the crucial difference between having a committed relationship in the one case and an uncommitted one in the other.

But the same problem arises. Consider you and your doppelgänger, identical in every relevant respect. You are both contemplating whether to make a commitment to Harry/doppelgänger-Harry. As already noted, a feature of

commitment is that it may be rationally permissible to commit or not to commit. So it might be perfectly rational for you to make a commitment and for your doppelgänger not to. How could this be if commitment were a matter of believing that the relationship has special value? If the evidence for this proposition is uncertain, arguably the rational thing for both you and your doppelgänger to do is to suspend belief. So while it seems rational to commit and rational not to, it does not seem rational for one of you to believe that the relationship has special value while the other, faced with exactly the same evidence, does not.

It might be argued instead that in such cases it is rational to believe but also rational not to believe; and so it would be rational for you to believe that your relationship with Harry has special value and for your doppelgänger to fail to have that belief of the very same, qualitatively identical relationship she has with doppelgänger-Harry.¹² If this were possible, the commitment—the belief that the relationship has special value—would be ‘up to you’ in the requisite way. But it is hard to see what could be the content of your belief that your relationship with Harry has ‘special value’ if at the same time it would be rational for you not to have that belief when contemplating whether it does. The worry here is that there is no way to cash out ‘special value’ that does not presuppose what the belief is supposed to be an account of, namely a commitment. Your relationship having special value is plausibly a function of your having made a commitment. If you’ve committed but your doppelgänger has not, it is rational for you to believe that your relationship has special value and rational for your doppelgänger to lack that belief. Your belief is a rational upshot of your having made a commitment but not in what the commitment consists.

Another problem is that the belief approach fails to give commitment the right relation to volition. A commitment is something you can decide to make. But you can’t decide to believe that something has special value. After your twelfth date with Harry, you might decide to commit to him and thereby be so committed. But you can’t decide to believe that something is valuable and thereby believe that it is. An evil demon might offer you a million dollars if you believe that $2 + 2 = 5$; try as you might, by deciding to believe this you cannot make yourself believe it. The best you can do is to cause yourself to be in a state of believing it, perhaps by taking a pill, but beliefs themselves are not a matter of decision.

Finally, understanding commitment as a normative belief makes it a mystery as to how commitments can explain the special reasons of committed

¹² William James thought that it is rationally permissible to ‘will to believe’ that p and rationally permissible not to when the evidence is uncertain. Bishop (2007) provides a modern development of this view in the case of religious belief.

relationships. Suppose your commitment to Harry is a matter of your believing that your relationship has special value. How can this belief explain why you have a special reason to give him your kidney? Suppose your belief is false. How can a false belief explain why you have a reason to give up your kidney? Suppose your belief is true; perhaps your commitment is the *recognition* that your relationship has special value. Can your recognition of this fact explain why you have a reason to give him your kidney? If you didn't recognize it, would you then have no reason? Why think that the recognition plays any role in explaining the reasons you have over and above the fact that your relationship has special value? It is not the recognition that would explain your special reasons but its content—the fact that your relationship has special value. But if the special value of your relationship explains why you have a reason to give Harry your kidney, it's the fact of special value—not the commitment—that explains your reason. In short, either the 'special value' of the relationship is a function of having made the commitment, and any account of commitment in terms of this special value would be circular, or the 'special value' of the relationship exists independently of the commitment, in which case we are left without an explanation of how the commitment explains why we have the special reasons of committed relationships.¹³

2.2. Desires and desire-like states

Perhaps a commitment is a set of structured desires or dispositions concerning the object of commitment that is had for the sake of that object, or a set of distinctive emotions towards the object. Your commitment to Harry might essentially consist in a set of desires that his life go well, that he have your kidney if he needs one, that you empty his bedpan when the nurses are neglectful, and so on—hierarchically structured, with some desires having precedence over others, and perhaps each had for Harry's sake. Or it might be a matter of caring about him or loving him for his own sake, where this caring and loving in turn consists in a set of dispositions to do things, such as to give him your kidney and to empty his bedpan when the need arises.¹⁴

¹³ David Velleman has argued that one can rationally adopt the belief that *p* on the grounds that *p* will be true if one believes it (2000: 21–26, 49–52). It seems odd, however, to think that my reason to give Harry my kidney is explained by my believing that I have a reason to give Harry my kidney (or that my relationship with Harry has special value) on the grounds that I will have such a reason by merely believing that I have the reason (that *y* relationship has special value). While Vellemaniacal belief may explain some phenomena, such as intentions, it does not help us to understand the nature of commitments.

¹⁴ Susan Wolf (2010) has suggested that romantic and familial love are essentially a matter of deep and personal caring. See also Frankfurt (1999, 2004, 1988). I believe that

Or, relatedly, your commitment may be an amalgam of warm and fuzzy feelings, emotions, and moods towards Harry.

Although this approach may at first pass seem to be a promising way to think about commitments, it conflates what is essential to commitments with what is a typical consequence or element of having made one. Like beliefs, desires and their ilk have the wrong relation to volition. You can *decide* to commit to Harry and thereby be committed to him, but you cannot decide to want his life to go well, or decide to be disposed to empty his bedpan, or decide to feel affection towards him and thereby want or be disposed to do or feel these things. Try as hard as you might, you cannot come to want something simply by deciding to want it. Again, you can decide to cause yourself to be in a state of wanting it, but you can't want something merely by deciding to want it. Like beliefs, desires don't stand in the right relation to volition.¹⁵ Or, more concessively, a plausible account of commitments should not be held hostage to such a controversial and *prima facie* implausible claim that they do.¹⁶

2.3. Endorsement or identification

If a commitment is an endorsement of a mental state such as a desire, and endorsement is volitional, we succeed in accounting for the first feature of commitments that has caused us trouble so far: endorsements are things that you can decide to make. Endorsing or identifying with a desire, for instance, is often thought to be *willing* that the desire be efficacious in action.¹⁷ If, for instance, you decide to endorse a desire that Harry receive

some kinds of love essentially involve the kind of commitment of interest here; if I'm right about this and about how commitments should be understood, then these 'caring' views leave out a crucial volitional element in their account of love and the reasons one has because one loves.

¹⁵ This worry also shows why views that try to combine desires and beliefs into a mixed state of conation and cognition (for example, Murdoch (1975), McDowell (1979), and Helm (2001)) cannot help us in understanding internal commitments. Neither beliefs nor desires are states one can plausibly decide to have, and presumably an amalgam of them is also beyond decision.

¹⁶ Another worry about the desire account is that it is unclear how desiring something can explain why you have a reason. This opens large issues about what kinds of considerations can explain why you have a reason which I catalogue and criticize in my 2013b. For a compelling set of arguments as to why desires and desire-like states cannot explain why we have reasons, see Parfit (2011).

¹⁷ Other non-volitional views of endorsement, in terms of normative beliefs (*à la* Watson), higher-order desires, or 'satisfaction' *à la* Frankfurt, are non-starters in the present context so I do not consider them. More precisely, views that understand volition in terms of desires or dispositions to be satisfied with one's psychic states, i.e., 'satisfaction', are subject to the critique of the previous section, and those who understand volition in terms of normative beliefs are subject to the critique of the first section.

your kidney, you decide to will that your desire that he get your kidney lead you to give it to him. Moreover, it can be rational to endorse a desire and rational not to. In this way, your endorsement is ‘up to you’.¹⁸ Finally, you can endorse something at a point in time and your endorsement can persist over time. So the endorsement approach satisfies the first three desiderata for an account of the nature of commitments.

But there are other difficulties.¹⁹ One is that it gives commitments the wrong object. When you will that your desire move you to action, the object of your willing is your desire. But when you commit to Harry or to your relationship with him, your commitment does not seem to be directed inward, towards your own mental states. Commitments are directed outward, towards something outside of oneself.²⁰ So even if a commitment so understood could meet our final desideratum—even if it could explain why we have the special reasons of committed relationships—it would do so in the wrong way, by explaining our special reasons as a consequence of inward-looking activity. You would have a reason to give Harry your kidney because you willed that *your* desires concerning Harry be satisfied. This is the mock commitment of a narcissist. A narcissist might be ‘committed’ to Harry in the sense that she endorses that *her* cares and concerns contribute to her action, and as luck would have it, those cares and concerns have Harry as their subject matter.

Finally, a commitment is capable of flying in the face of one’s desires and thus need not be an endorsement of them. Sometimes a commitment in a personal relationship involves gritting one’s teeth, rolling up one’s sleeves, taking a deep breath, and doing what one has no desire to do. The unhappy wife who has no desire to be with her husband may nevertheless be committed to him. The middle-aged man who has no desire to exercise may nevertheless be committed to his morning calisthenics. The swinging bachelor who has no desire to care for the child of a dead relative might commit to raising it as his own. Nor does it help to suggest that commitments are endorsements of counterfactual desires, desires you would have had if you were less resentful, lazy, or selfish, since commitments seem in some sense to reflect not just who you want to be but who you already are. None of

¹⁸ You also make them your own in the sense of being owned by you rather than simply occurring in your life. See Frankfurt (1988). Of course there are some desires that you cannot decide to endorse—these include Frankfurt’s ‘volitional necessities’ (1999). Some commitments may be volitionally necessary, but not all of them need be.

¹⁹ The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for endorsement of beliefs that lead to action.

²⁰ This also seems true of commitments you might make to a personal project, even one of self-improvement. You might commit to the project of sticking with your desire to be a better person. The object of commitment may seem to be outward looking—to being a better person—but it is yourself. All this is compatible with the idea that a commitment is ‘internal’ in the sense of not requiring uptake by others.

this is to deny that desires often follow commitments—once you commit to Harry, you will naturally find yourself with a host of new desires—but it is a mistake to think that the commitment is essentially an endorsement of such desires.

2.4. Decisions, intentions, plans, and policies

Perhaps a commitment is a decision, intention, or plan to do something.²¹ Michael Bratman defines an intention as ‘a complex form of commitment to action’.²² So maybe your commitment to Harry is just a decision or intention to help him make it to the theatre, to give him your kidney when he needs one, and to empty his bedpan when the nurses are scarce. On this view, when you decide to commit to Harry, you decide to decide to do these various things.

Again, this suggestion captures the right relation between the will and commitments; just as you can decide to commit, you can decide to decide, intend, or plan to do something. Moreover, a decision or intention can be a discrete event in time, and an intention or plan can persist through time. And in so far as a decision, intention, or plan can be rationally permissible without being rationally required, it will be ‘up to us’. Finally, unlike the previous approach, understanding commitments as essentially a decision, intention, or plan to do something gives them an object apart from our own attitudes. So far, so good.

But there are some serious problems. One is that commitments aren’t essentially decisions, intentions, or plans to perform an action. Just think about it. When you make a commitment to Harry, you need not thereby be deciding, intending or planning to do anything in particular. A commitment is, intuitively, a kind of internal pledge or binding of yourself to someone, not a list of decisions, intentions, or plans to do things. Nor can a commitment plausibly be understood as a set of conditional such-states. When you commit to Harry, you are not intending to give him your kidney if he needs one, intending to empty his bedpan when the nurses aren’t around, intending to give him \$50 if he’s short in the ticket queue, and so on. As Marcel Lieberman writes, ‘[in a] . . . commitment . . . [in a personal relationship] . . . it is not at all clear what, if anything, is intended in being

²¹ Although some philosophers treat decisions differently from intentions, for our purposes we can treat them together. (Compare O’Shaughnessy (1980: 295–298) and Raz (1978: 130–136) who understand decisions as an intention that resolves uncertainty or answers the question of whether one should continue to deliberate, but this difference does not make a difference to our argument.) For our purposes, both intentions and decisions are possible objects of decision.

²² Bratman (1987: 110).

so committed. As we move towards the more substantive cases of commitment, commitment no longer seems to track intention since the content of what is intended cannot be read off directly from the commitment.²³ A commitment is something you *do*, but it's not essentially the same kind of thing you do right before you, say, tie your shoelaces or go on vacation—the intentions that precede ordinary actions.

Perhaps a commitment is essentially what Bratman and Velleman call a 'policy'—an intention or plan to act in certain *general* ways, perhaps amor- phously specified. You might have a policy to 'stand up for the truth'²⁴ or to refrain from discussing grades with your students²⁵ or to turn down a second drink when you have to drive home.²⁶ Instead of understanding commitments, implausibly, as 'specific' intentions to do specific things in a circumscribed set of circumstances—e.g., to give Harry your kidney should he need it—they might more plausibly be understood as 'general' intentions to do something general across a broader range of circumstances—e.g., to help Harry when you can or to 'do good by him'.

Of course the term 'policy' can be used to signify a range of phenomena, including our internal commitments. But policies, strictly understood as general intentions to do things, however amor- phously specified, suffer from a further problem shared by their specific counterparts; they run afoul of the fourth desideratum. How can a specific intention to do something in a specific circumstance explain why one has a reason to do that thing in those circumstances? And how can a general intention to do something across a more broadly specified range of circumstances explain why one has a reason to do what one intends to do in a specific circumstance?

Consider specific intentions first. How can a specific decision, intention, or plan to do something specific in a specific circumstance explain why one has a reason to do that thing? As Bratman taught us long ago, an intention to do something can't give rise to a reason to do it.²⁷ Suppose you intend to cut off your thumb at noon. The reasons you have to do or not do this aren't explained by your having intended to do so. It is easy to think, mis- takenly, that intending to do something gives you a reason to do it because intentions figure in a related form of normativity, what Scanlon calls 'struc- tural rationality', the rationality governing relations primarily among one's mental states and only derivatively between one's mental states and action.²⁸

²³ Lieberman (1998: 65).

²⁴ Velleman (1989: 307–308).

²⁵ Lieberman (1998: 82).

²⁶ Bratman (1987: 57).

²⁷ Bratman (1987).

²⁸ See Scanlon (2004: 239). (Note that the metaphysical issue of how the normativ- ity of structural rationality relates to the normativity of reasons is something on which

If you want to kill someone in the most gruesome way possible and believe that the way to do it is to use a chainsaw, then given that you have that belief and that desire, it can be structurally rational for you to (intend to) use a chainsaw. But you may have no *reason* (to intend) to kill someone with a chainsaw.²⁹ In the same way, given that you intend to cut off your thumb, the fact that you have so intended can make it structurally rational for you to do so. It's structurally rational for you to follow through on your intentions, other things equal, but you may have no *reason* to do what you have intended to do.

Your intention to do something can, however, explain what reasons you have in an indirect way. Bratman points out that intentions can have downstream effects; one's intention to *x* can cause one to take steps that then make it the case that one has reasons one didn't have before.³⁰ But your reason to give Harry your kidney is not a downstream effect of having made a commitment to him in the way that your reason to go to the store is a downstream effect of having intended to go to the store *and* having put on your shoes, got into your car, and driven half-way there.

An intention to do something may also operate as a normative condition under which you have a reason to do something according to some normative fact or principle—it might, for instance, 'fill in the blank' of the antecedent of a conditional normative principle in the way that punching someone in the nose does in the principle, 'If you punch someone in the nose, other things equal, you have a reason to make amends'. In this way,

I needn't take a stand, since even those wishing to reduce the latter to the former must allow that a mere decision to *x* does not explain why one has a reason to *x*.) Other philosophers have argued that decisions can play normative roles beyond explaining why we have certain reasons. Patricia Greenspan (2005, 2007) suggests that the norms of structural rationality allow one's decisions to determine the weights of one's reasons for the purposes of rational deliberation. See also Nozick (1981). Chrisoula Andreou (2009) suggests that intentions can rationally transition an agent from one deliberative framework to another—by intending to *x*, you can alter what it is structurally rational for you to regard as your choice situation. What I find most interesting about both Greenspan and Andreou's views is that they suggest interesting ways in which the will can be 'active' while nevertheless obeying the requirements of structural rationality.

²⁹ Recall that our interest throughout is in *normative* reasons.

³⁰ He calls these 'snowball effects' (Bratman 1987: 82). Bratman also suggests in later work that an intention to do something can be a reason not to reconsider whether to do it, but one has that reason in virtue of the reasons one has to make one's intentions conform to norms of rationality that call for the stability of intentions. In the end this is another case in which intentions can 'explain' reasons only via norms of rationality (Bratman 2007, 2012). Similarly, Scanlon has suggested that decisions to adopt an end can 'generate' pragmatic reasons not to reconsider the decision in the absence of new information and can be second-order reasons to treat one's decision as a reason to regard certain other considerations as reasons (for example, the fact that something is a means to one's adopted end), but the decision is not itself the source of these reasons (Scanlon 2004: 239).

intending to cut off your thumb could, other things equal, be a condition under which you have a reason to, say, seek immediate therapy. It is hard to believe, however, that there is a normative principle that says, 'here's how you can have a reason to give someone your kidney—by intending to give it to him'. None of the usual forms of consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, perfectionism or pluralist theories defend principles according to which you can have a normative reason to do something simply by intending to do it.³¹ This sort of bootstrapping isn't normatively acceptable.

Moving to general intentions doesn't help matters. It is hard to see how a general intention to, say, 'do good by Harry' can explain why you have a special reason to give him your kidney when he needs one, either as a general matter or in the very specific circumstance in which he actually does. If you intend to 'do good by Harry', you may come to have as downstream effects a belief that Harry has special value or a desire to give him your kidney when he needs one. But even if these downstream effects figure as antecedent conditions of a normative principle whereby you then have a special reason, these effects are contingent. You can intend to do good by Harry without having any particular accompanying mental attitude. And, again, it is highly implausible to think that there is a normative principle according to which if you intend to do good by Harry, you have a special normative reason to give him your kidney. What plausible normative theory could make intentions so powerful? Of course, having certain intentions can affect the normative landscape of your reasons in many different ways. But it is hard to believe that having an intention to do good by Harry could, as a substantive normative matter, be sufficient for your having a special reason to give him your kidney, let alone in the specific circumstances in which he needs one. Once again, your intention to do good by him can affect your structural rationality—it is, other things equal, structurally rational for you to follow through on your policies—but this is not to say that your having a general intention to do something is sufficient for your having a reason to do some specific thing in specific circumstances. We might say instead that your intention to give Harry your kidney or to 'do good by him' may be a consequence of being a structurally rational agent who has committed

³¹ Strictly, there are two kinds of case here. First, as we've already suggested, there isn't a plausible normative principle that says, 'here's how you can have a reason to give Harry your kidney—by intending to give it to him'. But there is another possibility. Could there be a normative principle that says, 'here's how you can have a reason to give Harry your kidney—by intending to do some *other* specific thing'? This second sort of principle also seems dubious because merely intending to do some specific action isn't itself plausibly a condition for having a reason to perform some different specific action. It might be a condition under which you have a reason to have some other attitude, however, in which case what we have is not a normative principle concerning reasons but a principle of structural rationality.

to him, but your intention is not in what your commitment essentially consists.

A final suggestion along these lines. Bratman thinks that there is a special kind of policy, what he calls a 'self-governing policy', and this idea may appear promising. A self-governing policy is an intention to 'treat a desire as providing a justifying reason in motivationally efficacious practical reasoning'.³² It is an intention to perform a very special kind of action—the action of treating certain considerations as reasons in one's deliberations. So perhaps a commitment is a self-governing policy to treat certain considerations as reasons in your deliberations.³³ Of course, Bratman's aim in introducing self-governing policies is not to account for commitments and the special reasons to which they give rise but to explain what attitudes might plausibly constitute the standpoint of the agent in deliberation. However, since his self-governing policies get closest to what I believe is correct about commitments, it might be instructive to see why they fail for our purposes.

A general intention to treat certain considerations as reasons is a plan to treat those considerations *as if* they were reasons. The truth of whether they *are* reasons is no part of having these attitudes. But this raises a dilemma. Suppose the considerations you treat as reasons aren't reasons. Then your attitude of treating them as reasons is intrinsically irrational and cannot explain why you have those reasons. We should want the clear-eyed, ideal rational agent to be able to make commitments. But how could a perfectly rational agent give a consideration weight in her deliberations that she knows it does not have? Suppose instead that the considerations you treat as reasons are reasons. How then can the intention to treat them as reasons explain why they are reasons? How can treating Harry's interests *as if* they gave you a reason to give him your kidney explain how you have a reason to give him your kidney, a reason you presumably have independently of your intention? And if you don't have the reason independently of the intention, how can intending to treat something as a reason thereby make it true that it is a reason?

The core difficulty is that these intentions essentially involve a kind of *pretence*; you treat a consideration as a reason independently of whether it

³² Bratman (2007: 39 and 1996).

³³ Samuel Scheffler proposes that what it is to 'value' a relationship is, among other things, to be disposed to 'treat that person's needs, interests, and desires as providing one with reasons for action' (2004: 248). This disposition is not something one can decide to have, however, and so is neither a self-governing policy in Bratman's sense nor the nature of the commitments of interest. My suspicion is that Scheffler's notion of 'valuing' a relationship is at least sometimes what follows from having made a commitment. It is, in this way, perhaps more akin to the 'caring' views of how we have special reasons, which also attempt to give a unified view of how we have reasons for personal relationships, whether committed or not. See note 35 for further discussion of Scheffler's view.

really is one; you give it a role in your deliberation that, were it a reason, the consideration would have. But commitments don't plausibly involve such pretence. When you make a commitment to Harry, you don't *pretend* that his interests give you special reasons—indeed, there's no use in pretending *as if* you have these special reasons since, by hypothesis, you have them. In short, it is unclear how pretending that you have a reason can explain why you have it.³⁴

If we try to discover the nature of commitments among the mental states with which we are most familiar—beliefs, desires, dispositions, endorsements, decisions, intentions, plans, or policies—we will fail. As we have seen, each of these states either runs afoul of one of our desiderata or suffers from other difficulties. Nor would combining them into an amalgam or cluster of attitudes help; the failure of one mental state to satisfy a desideratum is grounds for rejecting it as essential to the nature of commitments, and it does not help to pile on additional problematic states.³⁵

³⁴ For the same reasons, it is implausible to think that there is a normative principle according to which a sufficient condition for your having a reason to give Harry your kidney is to pretend that Harry's interests have more normative weight than they might have.

³⁵ Scheffler has argued that personal relationships (and projects) give rise to agent-relative reasons because of their value and that this value is in part constituted by participants in the relationship 'valuing' them. What it is to value a relationship is to have a 'complex syndrome of interrelated dispositions and attitudes, including certain characteristic types of belief, dispositions to treat certain kinds of considerations as reasons for action, and susceptibility to a wide range of emotions' (Scheffler 2010: 4 and see 2004: 248). Valuing a relationship is an amalgam of mental states and psychic susceptibilities. Scheffler's aim is not to give an account of commitments in the sense of interest but to give a general account of agent-relative reasons one might have in personal relationships since he does not distinguish committed relationships from uncommitted ones. Valuing a person, as he sees it, would not be able to play the role of being committed to her in the sense of interest because the dispositions and beliefs that constitute valuing don't stand in the right relation to volition. You can't decide to believe or to have a disposition to treat something as a reason as you can decide to commit to someone. And if, by hypothesis, a commitment explains why one has special reasons of committed relationships, valuing cannot be in what a commitment consists. I take Scheffler's account as probably the right way to understand why we have the agent-relative reasons we may have in uncommitted relationships and some of the reasons we have in committed ones. But I believe his account does not cover the special reasons we have in committed relationships that arise out of our commitments. Our views can be understood as complementary parts of a larger picture of reasons of personal relationships. See also Scheffler (2004 and 2001: chs. 6 and 7), and for related arguments, see Kolodny (2003) and Jeske (2008).

Although I am sympathetic to Scheffler's view, I wonder whether 'valuing' should, in any case, be understood so passively. Take, for instance, the disposition to treat a person's needs as reasons. Note that Scanlon (1998: ch. 1) defines desires 'in the directed attention sense' in more or less these terms—having a tendency to see features of the object of one's desire as providing reasons. Since we often desire things in the directed attention sense that we don't, in an intuitive sense, 'value', it might be argued that what is missing from the account of 'valuing' is some volitional activity, such as 'willing something to be

The strategy of trying to understand the nature of commitments by appeal to mental states is doomed to failure because a commitment is not essentially a mental state or set of such states. When you make a commitment, typically you will end up having various mental states, but these upshots of making a commitment should not be confused with the nature of commitment itself. A commitment is rather an *activity*; it is something you *do*. It is, in particular, a *volitional activity*, an activity of the will. Commitments are by their nature *willings* of some kind. Or so I will now suggest.³⁶

3. WILLING A CONSIDERATION TO BE A REASON

Our riddle is this: What could be sometimes a matter of decision and sometimes not, come into existence as a discrete event and yet persist over time, and be something for which we sometimes have reasons but at other times be ‘up to us’—all while explaining why we have the special reasons we have in committed relationships? What could your commitment to Harry be such that it has these features?

It might help to look at some phenomenology. You and Harry are in an uncommitted relationship. Harry is afflicted with gall bladder disease and lands in the hospital. He is heavily sedated and pretty much unaware of what’s going on around him. You see that his bedpan needs emptying but the nurses are nowhere to be seen. Its fullness does not strike you as providing you with any special reason to empty it yourself. That’s the nurses’ job, and given the exorbitant hospital fees, it’s the least they could do. They’ll take care of it eventually.

If you commit to Harry, things might be different. Again, suppose Harry is high on morphine, and the nurses are nowhere in sight. But now the fullness of the bedpan might seem to give you a special reason—perhaps even an urgent reason—to empty it for him. (I say ‘might’ because commitments come in many different flavours and not all are of the emptying-bedpans-when-nurses-aren’t-around variety.) The fullness of the bedpan goes from

a reason’. Perhaps what lies at the heart of valuing—or at least one important kind of valuing—is the activity of willing something to be a reason (which may, in turn, be an expression of one’s agency). This volitional activity may typically have the downstream effects that Scheffler discusses—causing one to have certain beliefs, dispositions, and susceptibility to emotions.

³⁶ Intentions are in some sense ‘willings’, but in so far as they are cashed out as *intentions that*, they are not the sort of willings I have in mind. Moreover, the willings I have in mind don’t play the typical role of intentions—as allowing us to make plans and to solve coordination problems, for example. I leave my notion of ‘willings’ undefined, however, in an attempt to capture a different, but common, intuitive notion. As I argue in my 2009, they involve at a minimum putting one’s agency behind what one wills.

striking you as not providing you with any special reason, to striking you as providing you with a special reason to empty it.³⁷ The same might go for Harry's theatre-going quandary and need for a kidney. How can your making a commitment explain this change? We have already argued that it cannot be explained by appeal to commitments as beliefs, desires, dispositions, endorsements, decisions, intentions, plans, or policies.

Here's an alternative suggestion. Your commitment to Harry essentially involves your *willing* that his interests be reasons for you to do things. Commitments are essentially volitional activities. When you will that some consideration is a reason, you 'stipulate' or 'command'—by a sheer act of will—that it be a reason. *Willing something to be a reason* is willing—perhaps unconsciously and non-deliberately: Let this be a reason! It is not believing, wanting, hoping, deciding, or intending that something be a reason. Nor is it pretending that or simply treating something *as if* it is a reason. Willing something to be a reason is the activity of placing your will—your very agency—behind its being a reason.

When you make a commitment to Harry, you will his interests to be reasons for you to do things. Your commitment might be general; you might will his interests in general to provide you with reasons to do things in general. Or it might be specific; you might will the indignity of his lying there with a full bedpan to be a reason for you to empty it, his profligacy to be a reason for you to subsidize his theatre-goings, or his need for a kidney to be a reason to give up yours. The sort of commitment you make is determined by what you will to be a reason for what.

Although willing something to be a reason is a *sui generis* act of will, it is in many ways familiar and intuitive. It is, more or less, the practical analogue of stipulating the meaning of a word. When you will something to be a reason, you 'stipulate' that it is a reason in much the way you stipulate the meaning of a word.

Suppose, as you search through the philosophy literature for articles to assign in your philosophy classes, you find yourself wishing that there was a word that means 'clearly written, interesting, and insightful'. It would be handy to have a word to indicate which philosophy papers are good in just these ways. So you stipulate that 'glig' means 'clearly written, interesting, and insightful'. You might say to yourself, 'I hereby will "glig" to mean "clearly written, interesting, and insightful"! And, lo! It does. Or you might stipulate meaning less deliberately; you might find yourself muttering to

³⁷ Striking you as reason-providing needn't be a belief that it is a reason. There is no charge of over-intellectualism that applies here since something can strike you as reason-providing with your having only the minimal concept of 'being part of a case for' or 'counting in favour of'. See Raz (2011: 32), for a nice defence of this point.

yourself ‘I wish this paper were more *glig*’ without having made any conscious or unconscious decision to use ‘*glig*’ in that way. You can, after all, *just do* things without having decided to do them. (Slang sometimes arises in this way; someone uses a word in an unorthodox way without having decided to do so—it just comes out—and new meaning is born.) Just as stipulating the meaning of a word is a volitional activity that confers meaning on a word, willing something to be a reason is a volitional activity that confers normativity on a consideration.³⁸ Just as you can put your will behind ‘*glig*’ meaning ‘clearly written, interesting, and insightful’, you can put your will behind Harry’s need for a kidney being a reason for you to give him yours.

Back to bedpans. Before you commit to Harry, the fullness of his bedpan strikes you as not your problem. After you commit to him, it strikes you as providing you with a special reason to empty his bedpan. Commitments understood as willings-to-be-reasons give us a nice explanation of how this could be. When you will Harry’s need for a kidney to be a reason to give him yours, you stipulate that his need for a kidney gives you a reason to hand over yours. This stipulation, like the stipulation of the meaning of a word, entails that you will see his need as reason-providing—in much the same way that, after stipulating the meaning of a word, you will see that word as having that stipulated meaning. And, by the way, if Harry reciprocates in his commitment, he will see your full bedpan as a reason for him to empty yours. That is how committed couples stay married.

There is an immediate worry, however, that needs to be addressed.³⁹ If a commitment is essentially a matter of willing something to be a reason, then the exit costs of commitments seem implausibly low. Just as you can stipulate, as a matter of will, the meaning of a word, so too can you ‘unstipulate’ it as a matter of will. And just as you can will Harry’s need for a kidney to be a reason, as a matter of will, so too can you ‘unwill’ it as a matter of will. If commitment is a matter of will, then so too is ‘uncommitment’.

³⁸ Just as stipulating the meaning of a word already presupposes meaning, so too willing something to be a reason presupposes normativity. You don’t literally create normativity through willing, rather, you confer it on some fact through willing that fact to be a reason.

³⁹ Another can be handled in this note. It might be wondered which facts can be willed to be reasons. Can I will the fact that I’m wearing red shoes as a reason to give Harry my kidney? Like everyone else with a view on the matter, I implicitly impose a logical constraint so that only those considerations that, as a logical matter, count in favour of an action or attitude are eligible as either given or voluntarist reasons. In most normal circumstances, the fact that I am wearing red shoes cannot as a logical matter count in favour of giving up an organ. As we will see below, there are further constraints on willing-considerations-to-be-reasons besides these logical ones.

Is a steady will—not changing your mind—all there is to the depth of your commitment to a loved one?

Suppose you and Harry have been in a loving, committed relationship for many years. But you start to grow apart and no longer have common interests or are able to share deeply felt emotions. You begin to feel dissatisfied with the relationship and entertain thoughts of what life would be like without Harry. What might you do? You might steel your will against the motivations for abandoning your commitment and continue to will his interests to be reasons. Your commitment can remain intact in the face of incentives for withdrawing your will: you can continue to will that Harry's interests are reasons despite strong incentives to do otherwise. You might, instead, abandon your commitment—you might no longer will Harry's interests to be normative for yourself. We sometimes call this 'falling out of love'. This coming in and out of existence as a matter of will is in the nature of these commitments. You can make them and you can unmake them as a matter of will.

It does not follow, however, that a commitment's exit costs are implausibly low. For one thing, any reasons you might have had to make a commitment in the first place may persist. For another thing, your commitment to Harry will, as we've seen, typically have downstream effects: for example, Harry's expectation, and subsequent reliance, on the fact that you have the kind of relationship in which you will subsidize his theatre-goings, empty his bedpan, and offer your kidney if he needs one. These downstream effects can give you reasons you wouldn't have otherwise had—reasons to make amends or even to meet some of Harry's expectations—despite the fact that you have withdrawn your commitment. So the exit costs of uncommitting—including the costs of discharging downstream reasons—can be very high. Lawyers call it alimony.

Notice that if your commitment is to Harry Houdini (dead) or Harry Potter (fictional) or Prince Harry (out of your league)—that is, if it's a commitment from afar so that this Harry cannot form any expectations or rely on your commitment, the full exit costs will be low.⁴⁰ All you have to do to 'undo' your commitment is no longer to will Harry's interests to be normative for you. Again, this is as it should be; as the life of any teenager attests, a commitment to a distant public performer, fictional character, or royal personage can wax and wane as a matter of will. The issue of exit costs, then, far from being a problem for the account, adds further grist.

The real test of the willing account of commitments is whether it can meet our four desiderata. Can it?

⁴⁰ Other exit costs may include the 'internal' costs of abandoning a commitment given other commitments you have made. But these are not details that need concern us here.

A commitment is something you can decide to make. No problem there: you can decide to will Harry's interests to be a reason for you to undertake certain actions. We also said that a commitment might be something you decide to make unconsciously or non-deliberately. Here too, you can come to realize, perhaps through therapy, that you have unconsciously decided to will Harry's interests to be normative for you—you had hidden the decision from yourself. Finally, we said that although some commitments can be a matter of decision, they need not be. Willing something to be a reason is something you can do without deciding to do it. Just as you can discover that you are angry at a friend without ever having decided—even unconsciously—to be angry with her, you can discover that you've willed Harry's interests as reason-giving for yourself without ever having decided—even unconsciously—to do so. The analogy shouldn't be misunderstood, however; the commitment and anger are yours—they don't just happen to you but are owned by you: in the commitment case there's something you do that makes it yours. Willings, like commitments, need not be a matter of decision, but they can be.

Willing something to be a reason can also be both a discrete event and something that continues over time. Your commitment to Harry might come to exist when you, for the first time, will his interests to be reasons for you to do things. You might continue to will this over time, in much the same way your will might be continually engaged in being a philosopher or raising your children right. Volitional activities needn't be at the forefront of consciousness to be activities in which one is continuously engaged. Or your commitment might arise in a more specific way. You might one day will Harry's need for a kidney to be a reason to give him yours. A test of whether that commitment persists is how his need strikes you; if it no longer strikes you as providing you with special reasons, then you will have lost that very specific commitment.

Moreover, willing something to be a reason can be 'up to you': it might be rationally permissible but not required for you to will Harry's need for a kidney to be a reason to give him yours. Whether you stipulate his need to be in this way reason-providing is up to you. You have the freedom—so far as your reasons go—to will his need as a reason to give up your own or not. So willings-to-be-a-reason are up to us in the right way. At the same time, it could be that you have most reason to commit to Harry—to will his interests as reason-providing for yourself. It might be thought, for instance, that a biological parent makes a mistake of rationality if he fails to commit to his biological child in this way. So willing something to be a reason can be up to you, but it can also be something you have most reason to do.

The fourth desideratum is a bit trickier. Can the volitional activity of willing something to be a reason explain why we have the special reasons of

committed relationships? How can your willing Harry's need for a kidney to be a reason for you to give him yours explain why you in fact have the reason? How can stipulating that something is a reason succeed in making it a reason?

4. EXPLAINING THE SPECIAL REASONS OF COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS

Willing something to be a reason presupposes that through the willing, you can succeed in creating a reason. Just as stipulating the meaning of 'glig' presupposes that you can confer meaning through the act of stipulation, so too willing something to be a reason presupposes that you can confer normativity through the act of willing. Although willing something to be a reason assumes the possibility of creating a reason by the willing, 'willing' is not a success verb. You can will Harry's need for a kidney to be a reason to give him one of yours, but fail to create a reason. How could willing something to be a reason succeed in creating a reason?

We begin with a natural suggestion. The way that a commitment explains the special reasons of committed relationships is by triggering application of an existing normative principle according to which when you make a commitment, it follows that you have certain reasons. Put schematically, we might say that a commitment 'fills in the blank' of the antecedent of a conditional normative principle:⁴¹

If you _____, then you have a reason to *x*.

There are many things you do that can plausibly fill in the blank of such normative principles. If you punch someone in the nose, then you have a reason to make amends; if you have a child, then you have a reason to save for its college education; if you promise to wash his car tomorrow, then you have a reason to wash his car. And so on. These normative principles are generated by normative theories. What fills in the blank is what triggers the application of the principle and brings to bear the reasons you have according to the principle.

Now suppose we fill in the blank with a commitment.

If you ____ [*make a commitment to Harry*]_____, then you have a reason to *x*.

⁴¹ A similar suggestion was mooted earlier as a way in which intentions might indirectly explain reasons. And there we drew a similar conclusion: it is implausible to suppose that there are any normative principles according to which a condition for having a reason to *x* is intending to *x*.

If you make a commitment to Harry, then according to a normative principle, you have a reason to support his theatre-goings, give him your kidney, and empty his bedpan. Your commitment explains why you have these special reasons by being a condition that triggers application of a pre-existing normative principle according to which you have these reasons upon making the commitment. Your commitment to Harry would then explain your special reasons in the same way that the fact that you punched someone in the nose explains your reason to make amends—by satisfying the normatively sufficient conditions for having a reason to do so by the dictates of a substantive normative principle.

Notice that on this suggestion, the special reasons of committed relationships are, as it were, already there, given by a substantive normative theory about what reasons we have. They are just waiting for their antecedent conditions—the making of a commitment—to be fulfilled in order to kick in. If we ask a different question, in virtue of what do you have those special reasons?, the answer will be ‘In virtue of the substantive normative principles according to which when you commit, it normatively follows that you have those reasons.’ The normative *source* of those reasons—what makes the considerations that are reasons reasons—is the normative principle, not your commitment. You don’t *create* the special reasons of committed relationships by willing; rather your willing triggers reasons already there as provided by normative principles. This is the standard way philosophers have understood the role of willing and commitments in explaining our reasons.

The problem with the standard view in the present case, however, is that we don’t have an understanding of commitments that could plausibly play the required role. We have already seen that a commitment is not essentially a belief, desire or disposition, endorsement, decision, intention, plan or policy. We mooted instead the idea that a commitment is essentially a willing—willing something to be a reason. But if this is right, if commitments are essentially willings-to-be-reasons, then they could not plausibly explain the special reasons of committed relationships by being normative conditions of substantive normative principles according to which we had such reasons. This is because there couldn’t plausibly be such principles.

Consider the normative principle:

If ___[*you will Harry’s interests to be a reason to give him your kidney*]___,
then you have a reason to give him your kidney.

This principle says that a condition that is normatively sufficient for your having a reason to give Harry your kidney, a reason that, by hypothesis, is already there, waiting to be triggered and not a matter of creation by your willing it, is your engaging in a volitional activity that falsely presupposes

that you can create it. That is, the principle holds that in order to have a reason that is, by hypothesis, a reason in virtue of something other than your willing, you have to engage in an activity that falsely presupposes that your willing is that in virtue of which it is a reason. Could it be a normative fact that a way in which you can come to have a reason you cannot create is by engaging in an activity that falsely presupposes that you can create it? Could normative principles be internally conflicted in this way?

There's a rough analogue in the case of meaning. Very roughly, the meaning of a word might be said to arise in two ways, one 'publicly', that is, not in virtue of the stipulation of any one person (though perhaps such a stipulation is required as in the case of expert terminology), and the other 'privately', that is, simply in virtue of an individual's stipulation.⁴² 'Water' has public meaning. Is it plausible to suppose that if an individual were to stipulate that 'water' mean 'a colourless, transparent, odourless, tasteless liquid that forms the seas, lakes, rivers, and rain and is the basis of the fluids of living organisms: chemical formula H_2O ', she would thereby succeed in creating that public meaning for the term? How could it be sufficient for public meaning that an individual stipulate that meaning, a meaning which by hypothesis holds not in virtue of the stipulation of any one person? How, in other words, can it be a condition of non-stipulated, public meaning that it be stipulated in order to be meaning that holds in virtue of something other than being stipulated? Could there be such internally conflicted semantic facts?

The problem with the standard view is as follows: how can it be a normative fact that by engaging in a volitional activity that presupposes that your willing can be that in virtue of which something is a reason, it follows that you have a reason which cannot hold in virtue of your willing? How can it be a condition for triggering a reason you cannot create by willing that you engage in an activity that presupposes you can create it by willing? Indeed, on the suggested view, no clear-eyed, ideally rational agent could make commitments. For no ideally rational agent could go in for the irrational activity of creating reasons when, by hypothesis, reasons are not the sorts of things that can be created. If commitments are willings-considerations-to-be-a-reason, then they don't plausibly explain the special reasons of committed relationships by being the antecedent conditions of normative principles.⁴³

⁴² There are cases in-between, e.g., of a secret club of individuals jointly stipulating the meaning of a word, which need not concern us here.

⁴³ There is a twist on this suggestion made to me in one form or another by David Chalmers, Sven Ove Hansson, and Luke Russell. Although commitments themselves do not plausibly figure as antecedents of conditional normative principles, perhaps they trigger beliefs, desires, or other mental states that are antecedent conditions of a normative

What is needed is an account of how commitments, understood as willings-to-be-reasons, can explain the special reasons of committed relationships without appeal to implausible normative principles or to an understanding of commitments that prevents them from being had by ideally rational agents.

5. COMMITMENTS AS EXERCISES OF NORMATIVE POWERS

We are looking for a way in which willing Harry's need for a kidney can explain why you have a special reason to give him yours. The above strategy treats commitments as normatively sufficient conditions—like punching someone in the nose—of a normative principle according to which when that condition is satisfied, it normatively follows that one has a reason to do something—like make amends. These normative principles are the substantive normative principles of a normative theory about what we have reasons to do. But, as we've seen, there are no plausible principles of this kind—there are no plausible normative principles according to which a condition for having a reason you cannot create is to do something that presupposes that you can create it.

Were this strategy to work, the way commitments—willings-to-be-reasons—would explain why you have the special reasons of committed

principle. There are two difficulties with this suggestion, however. First, the normative principles it implicates are even more tortured than the internally conflicted principles noted above. Could there be, as an upshot to normative theorizing, a normative principle according to which if you engage in the activity of creating a reason to *x*, which it is impossible for you to succeed in doing, and if that activity happens to trigger some mental state or attitude, then you have a reason to *x*? It is hard to believe that there could be such normative principles. And a clear-eyed, ideally rational agent would once again be precluded from making commitments. She would be expected by such a normative principle to go in for the activity of stipulating reasons, while knowing that reasons are not the kinds of things that can be stipulated, in the hopes that she might contingently trigger some mental states or attitudes that fulfilled the antecedent conditions of the principle. No ideally rational agent could be guided by such a principle. Second, the connection between a commitment and some other mental state, such as a belief, desire, intention, endorsement, disposition, or policy, is contingent. As we have already noted, you can commit to someone without thereby intending to do anything. And while most commitments lead to a host of mental states, they need not. The unhappy, disaffected wife who is committed to a husband whom she despises and lacks any desire to help him or to contribute to his well-being, does not endorse a desire she does not have that his life go well, lacks the belief that he (or their relationship) has special value, and has no disposition or policy to give his interests any special weight in her deliberations. Indeed, she might have a disposition or policy to do the opposite—positively to disregard his interests in her deliberations about what to do—but she might, nevertheless, be committed to him—she might will his interests to be reason-providing for her.

relationships is by being the normative conditions for your having such reasons. Is there some other way in which willings-to-be-reasons could explain why you in fact sometimes have those reasons you will yourself to have?

Understanding commitments as an exercise of our *normative powers* delivers such an explanation. You have normative powers in so far as your act of will can be *that in virtue of which* something is a reason for you, that is, the *source* of a reason's normativity or, equivalently, what *makes* some consideration have the normativity of a reason.⁴⁴ Your commitment to Harry is not a condition under which, according to a normative principle, you have a reason to give your kidney to him but rather *that in virtue of which* his interests are a reason for you to do so. Willing Harry's need for a kidney to be a reason to give him yours can be the normative *source* of your reason to give him your kidney; it is what *makes* his interests reason-providing for you. Your commitment to Harry—your willing his interests as reasons for you to do certain things—explains why you have reasons to give him your kidney and empty his bedpan by being *that in virtue of which* his interests are reasons. Thus we have both an account of the nature of commitments and an account of how they explain why we have the special reasons of committed relationships.

If this explanation is right, then the special reasons of committed relationships have a distinctive normative source—the will. Our investigation of commitments has led us to deep metanormative waters; what the account of commitments suggests is that there may be two ways in which a reason can arise—sometimes not by an act of will and sometimes by an act of will. Loosely speaking, we can say that reasons can be distinguished by what makes them reasons in the first place, that is, by their normative source. Many of our reasons—like the reason not to cause unnecessary suffering—seem to have their normative source in something other than the will, while the special reasons of committed relationships have their normative source in the will. We might call reasons of the first kind 'given', because they are given to us and not made by us, and reasons of the second kind 'voluntarist', since they are the products of our acts of will—we create them. The reasons you have as a result of normative principles are 'given'; your reason to make amends if you punch someone in the nose is given to you by a normative

⁴⁴ It is worth pointing out that the term 'normative powers' typically is used to refer to the power to fulfil the triggering condition of a normative principle. So I have the 'normative power' to 'create' a reason to make amends by punching you in the nose; I have the 'normative power' to 'create' a reason to meet you for lunch by promising to do so. These are 'normative powers' in an anaemic sense; these 'powers' do not involve the power to endow a consideration with the normativity of a reason but only the 'power' to trigger a pre-existing reason by fulfilling the conditions under which that reason comes to be manifest via a normative principle. I trace this anaemic use of the term to Martin Leibowitz (1943), Neil MacCormick and Joseph Raz (1972)—see also Raz (1975: section 3.2). See my 2013a and draft for further discussion.

principle, not created by your act of will. But your special reason to give beloved Harry your kidney has its normative source in your will; it is not given to you but is rather created by you. You make his need a reason by willing it to be one.

Because of their normative source, voluntarist reasons will differ from given ones in another important way: they will be ‘private’ reasons, reasons just for you. They will not be universalizable in the sense of being reasons for everyone (though of course a supervenience thesis can hold for voluntarist reasons as well as for given ones—an agent in exactly the same circumstances will have exactly the same reasons so long as willing can be reduced to natural properties). Just as your stipulation of a word confers meaning on the word only for you, your willing Harry’s need to be a reason can only make that thing a reason for you and not for anyone else.⁴⁵ A quick argument shows why this must be. If you could ‘stipulate’ for me that Harry’s need of a kidney is not a reason for me to give him mine, and I can ‘stipulate’ for me that Harry’s need of a kidney is a reason for me to give him mine, then if those stipulations make reasons, I would end up with a contradiction in my reasons. But there can be no contradiction in reasons, whether voluntarist or given.⁴⁶

So we have two conclusions. A commitment essentially involves willing something to be a reason, and commitments explain why we have the special reasons of committed relationships by being that in virtue of which we have those reasons. When you commit to Harry, you will his interests to be reasons for you to, for example, give him your kidney and empty his bedpan. By willing his interests to be reasons to do these things, you thereby—modulo a condition to be discussed below—create voluntarist reasons to do them. Our commitments to people in personal relationships are thus an exercise of our normative powers.

With this explanation in place, we can distinguish two ways in which the conditional claim ‘If you make a commitment to Harry, you have a reason to give him your kidney’ can be true. One way it is true is as a

⁴⁵ This is not to say that voluntarist reasons are not ‘objective’, that is, reasons whose existence as a reason is independent of one’s mental states. Here I perhaps disagree with Thomas Hill (2002: 266–267), who argues (against Korsgaard) that Kantian commitments to personal projects need not generate objective value, though it is unclear to me whether he has the same sort of commitments in mind that are of interest here. Your reason to give your kidney to Harry (or to study philosophy) is just as objective as your reason not to cause unnecessary suffering.

⁴⁶ I assume, I think not controversially, that the will is not contradictory. Your very agency, unlike your desires, which are had by you and are not you, cannot be contradictory without entailing more than one locus of agency. This is compatible with being ambivalent, of course. Some agents are deeply ambivalent, but they are a single agent nonetheless.

metanormative description, as opposed to a first-order normative principle, of the normative *source* of your reason to give Harry your kidney. Your reason is a reason *in virtue of* your commitment to him. On this reading, the conditional describes a metaphysical determination relation between your act of will—your commitment—and your voluntarist reason to give him your kidney; your act of will is that in virtue of which you have a reason to give him your kidney.⁴⁷

But the claim can be true in another way. It can be true not only as a metanormative claim about that in virtue of which you have a voluntarist reason to give your kidney to Harry but also as a (enthymematic) *first-order normative* claim about *given* reasons you may, contingently, have to give Harry your kidney. I argued above that the claim is not true as a first-order normative principle; a substantive normative principle that claimed that in order to have a reason you cannot possibly create, you have to engage in an activity that presupposes you can create it, suffers from an internal tension and is not a principle that an ideally rational agent could follow. However, it is not implausible to think that it is a normative truth that if you will yourself a voluntarist reason to give Harry your kidney, and *if you then, contingently*, perform further acts in light of this willing, there may be downstream effects such that you now have a *given* reason to give Harry your kidney. For example, your commitment to Harry might naturally, but contingently, lead you to perform further acts which in turn lead him reasonably to form expectations about your willingness to give up your kidney should he need it. So it can be true that if you commit to Harry and, as a contingent matter, perform these further acts, you will have a *given* reason to give him your kidney. Commitments, like intentions, can have downstream effects, and these effects can change what *given* reasons you have. So, in the usual case, if you commit to Harry, you will have not only a voluntarist reason to give him your kidney but also a given one—e.g., you will betray his reasonable expectations if you don't.

6. A HYBRID VIEW OF THE SOURCES OF NORMATIVITY

Our picture of commitments leads to a broader metanormative view according to which there are two sources of normativity—some reasons are reasons in virtue of an act of will, while other reasons are not. In the closing pages

⁴⁷ This reading should be understood to be consistent with a further quietist meta-metanormative view about the relation between the metanormative and normative—namely, that the former collapses into the latter.

of this chapter, I want to turn to the broader metanormative view which the account of commitments I've offered underwrites.

What follows is the slightest sketch of a view of the sources of normativity—the view is developed in more detail elsewhere—but a sketch will suffice to show how the broader metanormative view gives us a plausible and attractive framework not only for understanding commitments and the special reasons of committed relationships, but also for vindicating what is arguably Kant's deepest insight: that the will can be a source of normativity.

On what I call the 'hybrid voluntarist' view, the will is the source of only some, but not all, of our reasons. Some reasons, like the reason not to cause unnecessary suffering, are given to us independently of what we will.⁴⁸ And thus we have two kinds of reasons already encountered, 'given' and 'voluntarist'. The hybrid view also imposes a hierarchy on these reasons, giving metaphysical priority to given reasons over voluntarist ones. Only when your given reasons 'run out', that is, when they fail fully to determine what you have most reason to do, can you create a voluntarist reason in favour of one alternative over the other. The existence of your voluntarist reasons depends on your given reasons running out.

Reasons run out when (1) one fails to have more, less, or equal reason to do one thing rather than another—what we might call a state of 'equipose', or (2) one has more reason to do one thing instead of another, but it is indeterminate how much more—what we might call being 'indeterminately valenced'.⁴⁹ The reasons for alternatives are in equipose when they are incomparable⁵⁰ or 'on a par'—that is, comparable, but neither is better than the other and nor are they equally good.⁵¹ And they are indeterminately

⁴⁸ See Parfit (2011) for a tour de force in favour of an 'externalist' conception of given reasons.

⁴⁹ For simplicity, I use the weighing metaphor for the normative relations among reasons, but of course the relations among reasons can be much more complex—certain reasons can silence, cancel, exclude, bracket, trump, etc., others. By being 'indeterminately valenced', then, I just mean to capture the idea that one's all-things-considered reasons favour one alternative over the other, however that favouring comes about. It may seem odd to label such reasons as 'running out' since they determine what one has most reason to do, but they 'run out' in the sense that the fully determinate social scientific view of reasons (and their associated values)—for example, as being cardinally representable by a ratio or interval scale—does not hold. Since that view should not be assumed to be false, I make room for its being true by including among the cases in which reasons 'run out', cases of being indeterminately valenced.

⁵⁰ Or, as Raz would say, when the reasons render options 'eligible' (1999: 65). See my 1997 for a battery of arguments against the existence of incomparability.

⁵¹ There are good reasons for thinking that only parity, and not incomparability, holds when we successfully exercise our normative powers in cases of equipose. Moreover, there are good reasons for excluding the case of equality from our two conditions. I explore such issues in my 2012.

valenced when there is most reason to choose one alternative but it is indeterminate how much more one alternative is supported by the reasons. With respect to given reasons, the latter condition is plausibly very common. And as I have argued elsewhere, so is the former.⁵²

Given reasons have not only a metaphysical priority over voluntarist reasons but also a normative priority. When your given reasons have a valence—that is, when they favour one alternative over another—they determine what you have all-things-considered reasons to do. Voluntarist reasons can never switch the valence of your all-things-considered given reasons. They can, however, make it the case that you have most all-things-considered reason to do one thing rather than another when your given reasons are in equipoise. There are justifications for both constraints which we will encounter in due course.

So you can will Harry's need for a kidney to be a reason for you to give him yours, but you will succeed in creating a voluntarist reason to do so only if your given reasons are in equipoise or indeterminately valenced. Suppose you and Harry have been dating for a bit but are in an uncommitted relationship. Harry announces over drinks that he needs your kidney. You don't, let's suppose, have more, less, or equal given reason to give your kidney to him rather than keep your organs intact. Your given reasons concerning the matter are in equipoise. According to the hybrid view, by committing to Harry—by willing his need to be a reason—you can create a voluntarist reason for you to give him your kidney. This voluntarist reason may then make it the case that, all things considered, you have most reason to give him your kidney.

Now suppose you're a renowned oncologist on the brink of developing a vaccine against cancer, and the anaesthesia from a kidney donation surgery would compromise the creativity you would need to make a breakthrough. Harry, again, propositions you for your organ over cocktails. Let's suppose that you have most all-things-considered given reasons to keep your organs intact, but it's indeterminate how much stronger those reasons are as against the competitor reasons. Your given reasons are indeterminately valenced. You might, nonetheless, will Harry's need for a kidney to be normative for you. According to the hybrid view, you will have succeeded in creating a voluntarist reason to give him your kidney. But this voluntarist reason cannot change the valence of your all-things-considered given reasons; you have most given reasons not to give Harry your kidney and thus most all-things-considered reasons—given and voluntarist—not to do so. No voluntarist reason can change the valence of your agent-relative and agent-neutral *given* reasons.

⁵² See my 2002.

It might be thought that the metaphysical and normative priority of given reasons over voluntarist ones renders the latter largely irrelevant, normatively speaking, perhaps restricting their importance to marginal, tie-breaking, cases. But this is not so.

Return to the case in which you are the world-famous oncologist. Voluntarist reasons explain the difference between differences in strengths of reasons for giving up your kidney and for keeping them intact in different circumstances. By hypothesis, in that case you have most all-things-considered reason to keep your kidneys intact. But your commitment to Harry explains why the degree to which you have stronger reason to keep your kidneys is less than it would have been had you not committed to Harry. In this way, voluntarist reasons help to explain the normative differences among one's reasons in cases in which there is a commitment and cases in which there isn't. They can also help to explain instances of irrationality, such as *akrasia*. Generalizing from the case of commitment: You now have most all-things-considered reason not to eat the chocolate cake. But you've willed its deliciousness to be normative for you and created a voluntarist reason to eat it. This voluntarist reason might then help explain why you acted against your better judgement. You put your will behind its deliciousness and so it becomes, as a psychological matter, more difficult to put your will behind your judgement about what you have most reason to do. There are other cases of irrationally voluntarist reasons that may play a key role in understanding. You might wonder why Jane could so easily leave her battering husband while Jill couldn't leave hers. The psychological explanation might have a normative component: because Jill made a commitment to her battering husband and Jane didn't, Jill has *less* all-things-considered reason to leave him than she would have had had she not committed to him. That the difference in the strength of reasons is less than it is in Jane's case might account for her irrational action of staying with him, whether or not it is a case of weakness of will.

Moreover, as we've already pointed out, a commitment will typically have downstream effects that give rise to further *given* reasons. These further *given* reasons may then have further downstream effects. Although it is up to you whether to commit to Harry, once you do, it could be *morally wrong* for you not to give him your kidney. Your commitment may lead you to act in ways that lead Harry reasonably to expect that you would give up your kidney to save his life. Your failure to meet these expectations might violate your moral duty to him. What would have been a supererogatory act in the absence of a commitment may become a morally obligatory one given it.

Finally, and most significantly, if, as I believe, many choice situations are ones in which our given reasons are in equipoise—in particular, on a par—then far from being marginal tie-breaking reasons, voluntarist reasons

are present in most of rational life. Voluntarist reasons support a radical revision of our conception of rational agency: being rational is not simply a matter of recognizing and responding to given reasons but of exercising our normative powers, and through their exercise, determining what we have most reason to do.

In sum, the hybrid view gives us an attractive framework for understanding commitments and the reasons to which they give rise. Much of this attractiveness is due to the features of the hybrid view—the duality of sources of normativity and the metaphysical and normative hierarchy among them. But are these features plausible—or are they simply ad hoc? What other work do they do?⁵³

I want to end by showing how these features allow the hybrid view to vindicate the Kantian thought that the will can be a source of normativity while achieving a plausibility closed off to most contemporary developments of the Kantian view. The leading developments of the Kantian view attempt to show how *pure* voluntarism is true—the will is the source of normativity of *all* practical reasons. This ambitiousness leads to what are widely considered to be two fatal objections to the view. The hybrid view, however, purports to show how the will is the source of the normativity of only some, but not all, reasons. This modesty, and the hierarchical structure the view imposes on reasons, are what allow the hybrid view to sidestep these objections. What we are left with is a view about the sources of normativity that gives us an attractive and plausible way to understand not only what commitments are and how they give rise to reasons but how the will can be a source of normativity.⁵⁴

⁵³ The features of hybrid voluntarism have a deeper unity that I don't have space to discuss, but here is a quick outline of what I have in mind. First, there is a single underlying relation that explains why reasons 'running out' should involve both the case of equipoise and the case of indeterminately valenced reasons. Second, there is a plausible view of the role of our willing in a world of given facts—both non-normative and normative—according to which both the metaphysical and normative priority of given reasons over voluntarist ones make sense. That picture is one according to which the will has the freedom to create reasons beyond a 'fence' of given facts. How much space there is beyond the fence is a matter of substantive debate, but if the will is to have such a role, it is plausible that its role be as the hybrid view suggests.

⁵⁴ Some defences of Kant are not in my sense 'Kantian' because they understand Kant as locating the source of normativity not, strictly speaking, in the will but in something of intrinsic value, such as persons, or humanity. Christine Korsgaard is probably the main proponent of the ambitious Kantian view I have in mind here and she has arguably developed this view as elegantly, forcefully, and plausibly as it can be (see her 1996, 2008, and especially 2009). As my remarks below suggest, I worry that either her view falls prey to these objections or it has to be understood as a defence of a too-anaemic notion of normativity—one of the constitutive norms of regulation rather than the normativity of reasons. So, for instance, our concept of reason allows us to ask: what reason do we have to act in accordance with our constitutive natures as agents and to act on the Categorical

The two purportedly fatal objections are these. First, if what makes a consideration a reason is some act of willing, what prevents us from willing reasons willy-nilly? This was Samuel Clarke's attack against Hobbes's voluntarism and more recently Jerry Cohen's attack against the Kantian voluntarism of Christine Korsgaard. As Cohen put the point, voluntarists cannot block a Mafioso's willing all-things-considered reasons to shoot the kneecaps off his rival.⁵⁵ Call this the Right Reasons Problem. Kant's answer was that *rational* agents could not will reasons willy-nilly; rational agents are bound by purely formal laws that govern the autonomous, rational will, and these laws guarantee that a rational agent can will reasons only in accord with the moral law. But Kant's argument notoriously fails, and ingenious attempts to rescue Kant on this score have, I think it is fair to say, fallen short of the mark.

The second fatal difficulty grows out of attempts to remedy the first. Voluntarists try to constrain willing by appealing to what the rational agent *must* will in order to be a rational agent in the first place. The strongest sense of 'must' they are in the ballpark of defending, however, is only the 'must' of structural rationality, sometimes further cashed out as the norms of regulation that are constitutive of the agent being the kind of thing that she is.⁵⁶ So willing is a source of normativity that is constrained by various structural requirements, such as the hypothetical and, it is argued, categorical imperatives.

But it makes sense to ask, why should the rational agent be bound by such structural requirements? This question asks what *reason* an agent has to bind her will in this way, and this question has bite even if it is true—which is itself highly controversial—that to be the kind of things she is, she must more or less conform to these structural requirements. It is, after all, constitutive of being a torturer that one be regulated by norms governing torture, but it nevertheless makes sense to ask, what reason does she have to conform to the torture norms? This appeal to a *reason*, in turn, requires further normative materials beyond those that the pure voluntarist is plausibly

Imperative? And so the regress problem remains. This question is not open on the hybrid account because, as we will see below, it makes no sense to ask of the activity of stipulation what reason one has to stipulate one way rather than another. If you ask that reason you are no longer talking about stipulation; and so our concept of reason doesn't cover activities that are by their nature not governed by reasons. But my purpose is not to examine Korsgaard's view carefully here.

⁵⁵ Cohen's (1996) objection is not that the voluntarist cannot block the Mafioso from willing *a* reason to harm his enemy, which the hybrid view allows. The challenge is to block the conclusion that he has all-things-considered reasons to harm his enemy; a challenge met by hybrid voluntarism but not I think successfully by pure voluntarist views.

⁵⁶ See especially Korsgaard (2009).

able to provide. Either she must admit that her reason to follow structural requirements has its source in something other than structural requirements and so the will is not the only source of normativity, or she is faced with an endless regress of structural requirements that provide reasons to conform to other structural requirements. In short, the will cannot be the source of normativity because it leaves open the question: what reason do we have to will in conformity with the requirements of structural rationality? Call this the Regress Problem.⁵⁷

A hybrid voluntarist view avoids the Right Reasons Problem. Purely formal constraints on willing, like those suggested by Kant and his followers, are insufficient to prevent the willing of reasons willy-nilly. If, however, the hybrid form of voluntarism is correct, then the will is the source of only our voluntarist reasons. And since voluntarist reasons cannot change the valence of our all-things-considered given reasons, the Mafioso is unable to create the reasons that make it permissible for him to shoot the kneecaps off his enemy. This is because he has all-things-considered given reasons not to do so, and his voluntarist reasons cannot change the valence established by these reasons. Of course, according to hybrid voluntarism, the Mafioso may have *more* reason to shoot the kneecaps off his enemy if he has created a voluntarist reason than if he had not created such a reason. But this is as it should be.

The hybrid view also sidesteps the Regress Problem. Suppose you are faced with a choice between A and B, and your given reasons for choosing either have run out. According to the hybrid view, you have the normative power to create a new voluntarist reason through some act of will, which may then give you most all-things-considered reasons to choose A over B. Now if we ask, ‘What reason do you have to exercise your normative power, that is, to will a voluntarist reason as opposed to, say, employ the decision procedure “eeny, meeny, miny mo . . . or toss a coin between them?”’ we can appeal to given reasons. You might have a given reason to will a voluntarist reason because it’s a good thing to exert one’s agency in making it true that one has most reason to do things. Or you could have a given reason to exercise your will in order to achieve control over what you have most reason to do instead of leaving your reasons to the vagaries of a coin toss. There are many other possible given reasons that justify the activity of creating voluntarist reasons.⁵⁸ Because the hybrid view does not attempt to make the will the source of all practical normativity, it can allow that

⁵⁷ This objection is formulated in general terms by Railton (2004) and specifically against Korsgaard’s voluntarism by Scanlon (2003), Fitzpatrick (2005), and in a related form by Enoch (2006). It goes back, in the context of beliefs, to Gilbert Ryle (1949).

⁵⁸ I broach some in my 2009.

given reasons are deployed in answer to the question, ‘Why go in for the activity of creating voluntarist reasons?’ These additional resources—given reasons—block the regress problem faced by standard forms of voluntarism. So while the question, ‘What reason does one have to create a voluntarist reason?’ is open, hybrid voluntarism has the resources to answer it.

It is important here to underscore the difference between being *assessed* by reasons and being *guided* or *governed* by them. What we have just noted is that we can *assess* the activity of creating voluntarist reasons by given reasons, but it does not follow that the activity of creating voluntarist reasons is itself *guided* or *governed* by given reasons. Willing something to be a reason is something rational agents *simply do*, and the activity of willing this rather than that to be a reason is by its very nature not something that is *guided* by given reasons. Just as it makes no sense to ask: what reason do you have to stipulate this rather than that meaning of the word ‘glig’? it makes no sense to ask: what reason do you have to will this rather than that to be a reason to give Harry your kidney? Stipulation is by its very nature an activity that is not *guided* by reasons. If the activity of willing reasons is only open to assessment by reasons but not open to being guided by reasons, then which reasons you will, then, is quite literally up to you. In this way, hybrid voluntarism blocks a second possible regress posed by the question: why will this rather than that? The answer is that the question is misguided.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ This chapter grew out of a much longer paper entitled ‘Do We Have Normative Powers?’ on which I received many helpful comments. The meat of that paper now appears in this one and so I’d like to record my debt here to those individuals who helped me as I was grappling with aspects of that longer paper. Thanks are due to Ralf Bader, Dorit Bar-on, Rudiger Bittner, Ben Bradley, Michael Bratman, Andrew Buckareff, Patricia Curd, David Enoch, Mark Greenberg, Elizabeth Harman, Sally Haslanger, Barbara Herman, Thomas Hill, A. J. Julius, Felix Koch, Kate Manne, Doug McLean, David Plunkett, Huw Price, Peter Railton, Joseph Raz, Geoff Sayre-McCord, Tim Scanlon, Tamar Schapiro, Samuel Scheffler, Andrew Sepielli, Seana Shiffrin, Michael Smith, David Sobel, Michael Stocker, Sigrun Svavarsdottir, David Velleman, Alec Walen, Ralph Wedgwood, Susan Wolf, and last but not least, Tyler Doggett, who sent me a really wonderful set of written comments. I am also grateful to GlaxoSmith—Kline and the National Endowment for Humanities for fellowship support at the National Humanities Center at the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina for the academic year 2009–10 during which the seeds of this chapter germinated. Finally, I should like to thank those who helped me with the chapter in more or less its current form: Kit Fine, Derek Parfit, and Sam Scheffler gave me very useful advice and comments, and I received helpful audience feedback at the Madison Metaethics Workshop, the NYU colloquium, the annual meeting of the Association of Scottish Philosophy, where it was delivered as the keynote address, and last but not least, the Pacific APA where I received probing comments from Julia Markovitz. I am also indebted to two anonymous referees of this journal for their helpful remarks.

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