



HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Social Commitments : Expectations, obligations and entitlements
Author(s)	Del Corral, Miranda
Description	SOCREAL 2010: 2nd International Workshop on Philosophy and Ethics of Social Reality. Sapporo, Japan, 2010-03-27/28. Session 4: Argumentations and Speech Acts
Citation	SOCREAL 2010: Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop on Philosophy and Ethics of Social Reality, 383-411
Issue Date	2010
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/43243
Type	conference paper
File Information	Miranda.sli.pdf



Social Commitments

Expectations, obligations and entitlements

SOCREAL2010 – Sapporo, 27th-28th March

Miranda del Corral
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
mdelcorral@bec.uned.es

Outline

- Background: Individual, Social and Collective Commitments
- Theoretical framework for social commitments
 - Three features: expectations, creation process, operations on commitments
 - Towards a definition of social commitment
- The specificity of commitment: social norms and speech acts
- Conclusions

Outline

- Background: Individual, Social and Collective Commitments
- Theoretical framework for social commitments
 - Three features: expectations, creation process, operations on commitments
 - Towards a definition of social commitment
- The specificity of commitment: social norms and speech acts
- Conclusions

Background Issues

- The concept of commitment is widely used, but it has not been deeply analyzed.
- Commitment as a binding device (“glue”):
 - Between the agent and her goals (intention = stick to a plan).
Implicit normativity in instrumental reasoning.
 - Between two (or more) agents in order to attain a shared goal.
Social normativity.

Background Issues

- Commitment is used to explain
 - Intentional actions (Bratman, MAS)
 - Strategic actions (Schelling, Elster)
 - Counter-preferential actions (Sen, Searle)
 - Collective agency (Tuomela, Gilbert, Bratman)
- When explaining collective agency, [joint] commitment is used to explain how I-Intentions become We-Intentions.
- But this link is problematic: as it is not explained, it may make the argument circular.

Background Issues

- Kinds of commitments (Castelfranchi, 1995):
 - Individual (an individual agent's intentions)
 - **Social**
 - Collective (a collective agent's intentions)
- Social commitments (S-COMM) take this form:
 - $(S-COMM_{xya}) \rightarrow (OUGHT_x(DOES_{xa}))$
 - “If x is S-Committed to y, he has a duty, an obligation, he ought to do what he is committed to” (Castelfranchi, 1995)
- Narrow/Wide formulations:
 - Wide: $O(A \rightarrow B)$ (e.g. von Wright)
 - Narrow: $A \rightarrow OB$ (e.g. Castelfranchi)

Outline

- Background: Individual, Social and Collective Commitments
- Theoretical framework for social commitments
 - Three features: expectations, creation process, operations on commitments
 - Towards a definition of social commitment
- The specificity of commitment: social norms and speech acts
- Conclusions

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

- An explicit social commitment is a social interaction in which an agent acquires the obligation of performing an action, in virtue of another agent's agreement (attribution of obligation).
- Examples of explicit social commitments: promises, contracts, coordinated actions, orders given, etc.

- Features of social commitments not considered here:
 - Implicit social commitments
 - The role of the witness
 - Institutional commitments (contracts)
- Three features: expectations, creation process, and operations on commitments.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

(I) Expectations

- Empirical expectations
 - The agent's beliefs about what facts will be the case (intentions, actions and states of affairs), and her motivational attitudes towards them.
 - Precondition for the commitment: what is possible, what is attainable, the agent's capabilities.
 - A minimum trust is necessary for commitment (Müller, 2008)
 - Similar arguments can be found in the case of intentions
 - A S-Comm can generate empirical expectations, specially regarding the agent's intentions.
 - Play an important role in the persuasive power of social commitments. They can be strategically created.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

(II) Expectations

- Normative expectations:
 - Two senses of “normative expectations”:
 - Traditional sense (Sudgen, 1998): *what we think others should do* (→ normative beliefs)
 - Bicchieri's sense (Bicchieri, 2006): *what we think that others believe we should do* → we use this sense
 - They are generated with the act of committing
 - If they are pre-existent, committing may lose its point: is it reasonable to commit oneself to perform an action which is already mandatory?
 - Normative expectations and beliefs are the ground for considering the non fulfillment of a commitment as an *incorrect* action, this is, a *wrong* action.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

Creation and Attribution

- Commitment creation and attribution
 - Explicit social commitments necessarily begin with the act of committing oneself, although they may not have a clear end, temporally speaking.
 - Committing oneself is not an individual action: it requires the other person's agreement. S-Comms cannot be unilaterally created.
 - S-Comm generates rights and entitlements, with the agreement of both agents: the creator and the attributer, or the debtor and the creditor (Singh, 1999).
 - Without agreement, the agent can feel internally committed, but there is not *social obligation*.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment Operations on Commitments

- S-Comms can change their state.
- Possible operations on S-Comms (Singh, 1999):
 - Creation and discharge (fulfillment)
 - Commitments may be cancelled (non-fulfilled) or released (no success or failure)
 - And also delegated (change of debtor) or assigned (change of creditor)
- The main idea is that social commitments describe a complex set of actions and choices, and not only the mere action of promising.
- The state of a S-Comm can be negotiated, in the same sense that its creation is negotiated.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

Preliminary definition

- A social commitment is a kind of social interaction involving, at least, two agents: a debtor (x) and a creditor (y), and an action to perform (z).
- The S-Comm is mutually known by x and y.
- The act of S-Committing is a social obligation for z acknowledged by x and y.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

4 conditions

If x is socially committed to y to perform the action z, then:

- (C1) y has empirical expectations concerning x's performance of z: z is a possible state and x is able to perform it.
- (C2) y has a normative belief concerning x's performance of z, in virtue of the S-Comm: because he is committed to, x should do z.
- (C3) x has normative expectations concerning her performance of z (and acknowledges the S-Comm as a reason for action): because he is committed to, x believes that y thinks that x should do z.
- (C4) x and y have performed a social action in which the S-Comm has been explicitly created, and its conditions are mutually known by the agents.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

4 Conditions

- “Self-defeating” commitments
 - Attributing a commitment while believing either that the goal will not be attained or that the debtor is not honest (C1) may be strategically useful, although they cannot be considered social commitments in the sense above.
- Dishonest commitments
 - Conditions 2 and 3 are not necessarily applied to x, otherwise dishonest commitments would not be commitments at all. Of course, (C2) and (C3) are applied to x in the case of honest commitments.

Towards a Definition of Social Commitment

4 conditions

- Commitments as obligations
 - Conditions 2 and 3 relate to the normative aspect of commitments. A social commitment is a social obligation:
 - It is a socially acknowledged reason for action. Even if there are no other motivations or reasons for performing z, committing oneself to perform z is a self-sufficient reason for performing z.
 - It is not necessary that the commitment itself is x's reason for action: we must distinguish between a reason for the agent and the agent's reason (Miller, 2006)

Outline

- Background: Individual, Social and Collective Commitments
- Theoretical framework for social commitments
 - Three features: expectations, creation process, operations on commitments
 - Towards a definition of social commitment
- The specificity of commitment: social norms and speech acts
- Conclusions

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Social Norms

- The act of committing, as a social action, is regulated by social norms (SN).
 - Let's consider the following norm: “commitments ought to be kept”
 - Is this norm *necessary* to explain S-Comm? **Yes**; otherwise, S-Comms would not be social obligations and therefore they would not create any specific rights or entitlements.
 - Is this norm *sufficient* to explain S-Comm? **No**; the content of the commitment is also norm-dependent:
 - Pointless commitment: $S\text{-Comm}(xyz) = SN\ O(z)$ or $SN\ O(C \rightarrow z)$
 - Contradictory commitment: $S\text{-Comm}(xyz) = SN\ O(\neg z)$ or $SN\ O(C \rightarrow \neg z)$
 - Von Wright (1951): If $\neg(PB)$ & $(OA \rightarrow B)$, then $\neg(PA)$

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Social Norms

- Social norms are impersonal commands, while social obligations refer to specific agents and circumstances
- A social norm may have a wide interpretation:
 - $O(A \rightarrow B)$
 - The relation between A and B is obligatory
- A social obligation (a S-Comm) has only a narrow interpretation:
 - $A \rightarrow RB; A \rightarrow OB$
 - A is a self sufficient reason for doing B; A makes B obligatory

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Speech acts: persuasion and manipulation

- Persuasion: the paralelism between a S-Comm and an argument:
 - They both try to show a link between premises and conclusion:
 - Conclusion C follows from premises P1 and P2 in virtue of the reasonability* of inferring C from P1 and P2.
 - Action z follows from my commitment to perform it in virtue of considering this act of committing a social obligation
 - They both can be accepted or rejected (but not for the same reasons)
 - You should take your umbrella because it's raining → Ok
 - You should eat your vegetables, because otherwise you won't have dessert → O

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Speech acts: persuasion and manipulation

- However:
 - This parallelism refers to:
 - The persuasive power of commitments (when they are used as arguments)
 - The similar structure of conditional S-Comms and normative arguments (A should be the case because of B), but not empirical ones (A is the case because of B)
 - These two aspects are easily mixed up, which can lead us to believe that S-Comms can be set unilaterally.

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Speech acts: the Gricean Maxim

- Gricean maxim of quality: “be truthful: do not say what you believe to be false or lacks of supporting evidence”
 - If we consider MQ a SN, then it can be argued that all speech acts are S-Comms (except, maybe, those pointless or explicitly forbidden)
 - But: it is necessary that the speech act becomes a social obligation, a socially acknowledged reason for performing the action uttered in the speech act.
 - This makes the difference between S-Comm and declarations of intentions:
 - Ex: if John says to Ann: “I will go to the zoo tomorrow”, neither John or Ann recognize this speech act as a reason for John to go to the zoo.

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Speech acts: Threats and Promises

- Conditional and unconditional S-Comm:
 - Conditional: x will perform z if/unless conditions C are satisfied
 - Unconditional: x will perform z whatever conditions exist
- Promises and threats as different speech acts
 - Are threats S-Comms?
 - If we assume that S-Comm implies a shared goal (or desire), then no, they aren't.
 - If we assume that a threat does not involve normative beliefs (y does not believe x should keep his threat), then no, they aren't.

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Speech acts: Threats and Promises

- Problems with this account:
 - The difference between a threat and a promise is defined by the *desirability* of the action, mainly for agent *y*.
 - Hard to define (t-inconsistency): the drunk's friend.
 - The difference between conditional threats and conditional promises is not clear.
 - A conditional threat is a kind of promise (of not performing the action if certain conditions are satisfied)
- A threat will be a S-Comm if making this threat is acknowledged as a social obligation.
 - This differences between promises and threats as S-Comms and as mere declaration of intentions.

The Specificity of Social Commitments

Speech acts: conclusions

- S-Comms exceed the scope of the speech act analysis.
- Unlike speech acts, S-Comms cannot be unilaterally set or created.
- Setting a S-Comm requires communication between the agents, but cannot be identified with the speech act of committing itself.

Outline

- Background: Individual, Social and Collective Commitments
- Theoretical framework for social commitments
 - Three features: expectations, creation process, operations on commitments
 - Towards a definition of social commitment
- The specificity of commitment: social norms and speech acts
- Conclusions

Conclusions

- It is important to analyze S-Comms as non reducible to individual commitments, in order to explain collective commitments and agency.
- S-Comms are a social interaction which starts with, but is not limited to, the act of committing.

Thank you!