ABSTRACT. There is a great deal of plausibility to the standard view that if one is rational and it is clear at the time of action that a certain move, say \( M_1 \), would serve one’s concerns better than any other available move, then one will, as a rational agent, opt for move \( M_1 \). Still, this view concerning rationality has been challenged at least in part because it seems to conflict with our considered judgments about what it is rational to do in cases of temptation that share the structure of Warren Quinn’s self-torturer case. I argue that there is a way to accommodate our considered judgments about the relevant cases of temptation without giving up the standard view or dismissing, as in some way rationally defective, the concerns of the agents in the relevant cases. My reasoning relies on the idea that, at least in some cases, whether an action serves one’s concerns well depends on what action(s) or course(s) of action it is part of. In the final section of the paper, I explain how this idea sheds light on an important source of frustration in collective decision-making.

KEY WORDS. collective decision-making, planning, practical deliberation, rationality, temptation, the puzzle of the self-torturer

Given the sort of creatures we are, plans are very useful to us. They allow us both to make decisions in advance, so as to avoid having to make a hasty decision at the time of action when time may be short, and to coordinate our activities over time.\(^1\) Still, there are situations in which rationality requires abandoning a plan. Consider, for example, situations in which, though one has adopted an intrapersonal plan, it is clear at the time of action (and, in particular, clear to oneself at the time of action) that making a certain move precluded by one’s plan would serve one’s concerns better than making any other available move, including the move required by one’s plan. Presumably
in at least some such situations, abandoning one’s plan is the rational thing to do. Indeed, it is tempting to take it for granted that a rational agent would abandon her plan *every* time she found herself in such a situation. For, there is a great deal of plausibility to the view that if one is rational and it is clear at the time of action that a certain move, say \( M_1 \), would serve one’s concerns better than any other available move, then one will, as a rational agent, opt for move \( M_1 \). This view, which I will refer to as ‘the standard view,’ has, however, been challenged at least in part because it seems to conflict with our considered judgments about what it is rational to do in certain cases of temptation, such as Warren Quinn’s famous self-torturer case. While a complete defense of the standard view is beyond the scope of this paper, I will argue that there is a way to accommodate our considered judgments about the relevant cases of temptation without giving up the standard view or dismissing, as in some way rationally defective, the concerns of the agents involved. I will thus show that, contrary to appearances, cases of temptation like that of the self-torturer are not genuine counterexamples to the standard view. This undertaking will involve, among other things, arguing that, at least in some cases, whether an action serves one’s concerns well depends on what action(s) or course(s) of action it is part of. In the final section of the paper, I will explain how this idea sheds light on an important source of frustration in collective decision-making and, in particular, on a type of disagreement that can persist even when consequences are agreed upon and values are shared.

I

Before considering Quinn’s self-torturer case, let us get a firmer grip on the standard view by considering the following less puzzling case:

Suppose that Olga is concerned with making a bit of extra money today. Suppose further that she adopts the plan to sell a lawn mower she no longer needs. Finally, suppose that when the time for action arrives, it is clear that her concerns would be