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To cite this version:

Philippe Fontaine. Commitment, Cold War, and the battles of the self: Thomas Schelling on behavior control. Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 2024, 60 (2), 10.1002/jhbs.22302 . hal-04590190

HAL Id: hal-04590190
https://hal.parisnanterre.fr/hal-04590190

Submitted on 28 May 2024

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DOI: 10.1002/jhbs.22302

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Commitment, Cold War, and the battles of the self: Thomas Schelling on behavior control

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Funding information
MSH Paris-Saclay and IRN CNRS "Transforming Homo Economicus"

Abstract

Economist Nobelist Thomas C. Schelling (1921–2016) is known for his contribution to the analysis of international conflict and many see him as the Cold Warrior par excellence. At a time of great uncertainties and dangers, Schelling combined a deep understanding of strategic analysis, a detailed knowledge of US commitments around the world and an inimitable talent for dissecting everyday behavior, which made him a think tank all on his own. When he turned to the analysis of bargaining in the mid-1950s, one question dominated policy discussions: "How to demonstrate the US commitment to the 'free world'"? Schelling answered unequivocally: By restricting one's choices so as to shift others' expectations and thereby influence their behavior in the desired direction. By the mid-1970s, after he had broken with the US administration and joined the Committee on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior, Schelling transposed the tactics deployed in international conflict to the analysis of individuals trying to achieve self-control. In the process, he reproduced the logic of military conflict at the level of the self. The view of a conflicted self itself comprised of two selves made restricted choice the daily routine of individuals who wish to avoid the negative consequences of their present behavior in the future while it promised those who enjoy unbounded freedom of choice an unsettling future.

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KEYWORDS
behavior control, commitment, self-control, strategic behavior, Thomas Schelling

> "Such is the position you must take up, Monsieur de Malassise," he concluded.
> "And how far may I recede from that position, Sire [Charles IX of France]?" I enquired.
> The King brought his fist down on the table.
> "Not one step!"
> I rose at once.
> "Sire, find a soldier. I am a diplomat."
>
> —Francis Walder (1958/1959)[1]

> Like it or not, the language of threat and ultimatum is today—this month, this year—the language of diplomacy. It is, for many, an unfamiliar discourse. For them these lectures, whose subject is the logic and the rhetoric of threats, may provide some guide to current headlines.
>
> —Daniel Ellsberg (1959/1968)

1 | INTRODUCTION

As he accepted his party's presidential nomination at the 1960 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, Senator Kennedy (1960a) hammered his message home: "We must prove all over again, to a watching world, as we sit on a most conspicuous stage, whether this nation, conceived as it is with its freedom of choice, its breadth of opportunity, its range of alternatives, can compete with the single-minded advance of the communist system." In the volatile environment of the Cold War, demonstrating ideological dedication—one important meaning of *commitment* in political discourse—was supposed to forge a sense of common purpose while convincing the nation of the determination of liberal leaders in the fight against communism.

Within months, the imbrication of the US administration and the social science community, especially economists, was taken to an all-new level. When compared with the views of contemporary students of conflict, Kennedy's rhetoric proves ironic: to them, demonstrating commitment entailed the acceptance of limited alternatives, reduced opportunity, and restricted choice—the very features that supposedly characterized the enemy's society. Commitment, as pointed out by Kennedy, might help the cause of the "free world," but as social scientist-turned strategists saw it, it implied reduced leeway on decision making.[2]

In the history of postwar social science, the commitment idea has received scant attention, and when it has, its relation with national security concerns has been invariably emphasized. Obviously, it cannot be placed on the same footing as the cognate and more encompassing ideas of rationality and choice, over which leading US social scientists struggled. Yet the idea occupied a significant place in Cold War strategic thought, where it enriched social scientific understandings of rationality and choice, showing that seemingly irrational behavior can help decision makers achieve their goals and that freedom of choice does not mean unbounded choice.[3]

Among the most influential analysts of commitment was Nobel Prize winner and economist Thomas Schelling (see Figure 1), the author of *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960/1980a), which Myerson (2009, p. 1109) described "as one of the most important and influential books in the history of social science" (see also Zeckhauser, 1989, p. 154). His reputation in social science being what it is, Schelling has variously been described as a theorist of nuclear deterrence and arms control (Amadae, 2016, p. 11), the intellectual legitimator of game theory (Mirowski, 2002,

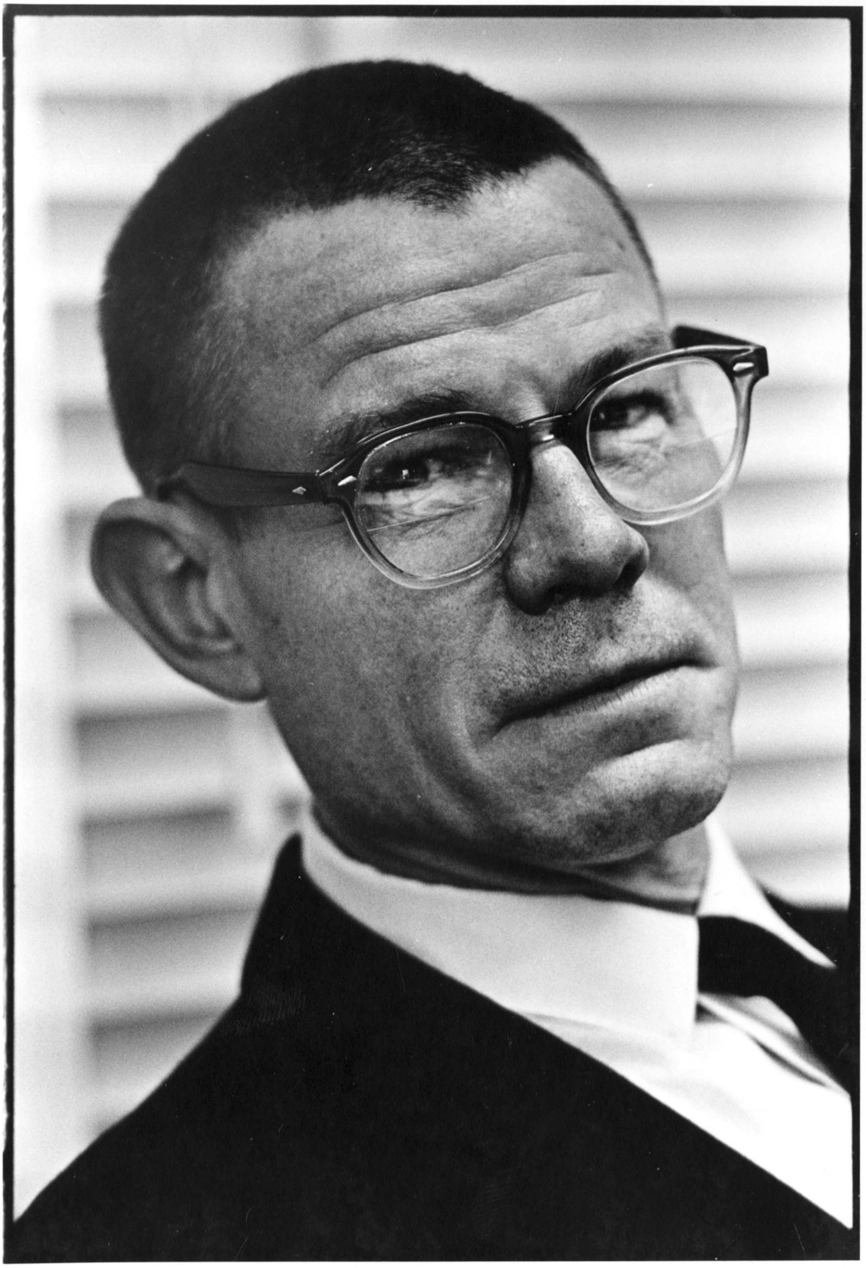

FIGURE 1 Schelling portrait, by Mark L. Rosenberg, 1968. From a military family, Schelling had kept the buzz cut, head deportment, seriousness, and unfathomable composure. Thomas C. Schelling Collection, Box 6, Folder 14, Hauser RAND Archives, Santa Monica, CA.

p. 330), a significant contributor to the general theory of strategy (Ayson, 2004, p. 31), or simply a Cold Warrior (Dodge, 2006, chap. 8; Sent, 2007). He liked to think of himself as an “errant economist” (Schelling, 1984a).

Given that Schelling had some influence on US strategic policy in the 1960s, it is tempting to suggest that his application of the commitment idea—taken as a tactic for shaping another's expectations so as to change that other's behavior—was directly informed by and confined to national security concerns.[4] Starting a few years after the beginning of the Cold War and ending around the fall of the Berlin Wall, our story shows that until the second half of the 1960s, Schelling's conceptualization was indeed shaped by Cold War political anxieties, even though it originated in a literature that was not. His association with the RAND Corporation from 1957 marks a turning point, with Schelling making commitment one of the core concepts of his analysis of strategic behavior in international relations. For a country to change the behavior of another in the desired direction, it had to orient the other's expectations. The best way to do that was for that country to demonstrate its unwavering commitment to a course of action. On that view, commitment is central to strategies to control others.

With the end of the golden age of strategy in the late 1960s and the beginning of the détente period in the early 1970s, the intellectual and political environments were distinctly less supportive of applying the commitment idea to military conflict analysis. After years of social unrest, there was greater awareness of social problems and less concern about the prospect of nuclear annihilation. Social change was increasingly seen as a source of personal dislocation; as such, it called for behavioral adjustment. Participation in the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior from 1976 to 1982 offered Schelling the opportunity to explore various forms of behavioral adjustment and prompted him to explore another variation of the commitment concept. Self-control—taken as the strategic struggle for inner control between two selves in each person, which had occasionally piqued his interest in the 1950s and 1960s—increasingly informed his view of commitment.

The shift from commitment as control of others to commitment as self-control reflects Schelling's change of focus in strategic thought, culminating with modeling the inner struggle of a person's two selves on the image of Cold War international relations. As he transposed the tactics used to control the behavior of others to self-control, Schelling reproduced the logic of military conflict at the level of individuals. The view of conflicted individuals made restricted choice the daily routine of those who wish to avoid the negative consequences of present behavior in the future, while it promised those who enjoy unbounded freedom of choice an unsettling future.[5] On that view, the idea of commitment, remains a creature of the Cold War. As such, it provides a potent conceptualization of the inherent tensions shaping postwar attempts to imagine the political future of US society and how it was experienced by individuals.

This article emphasizes the centrality of commitment in the strategic worldview of Schelling and considers previously unexplored aspects of his strategic thought outside the military world. It illustrates the benefits of a cross-disciplinary perspective for the historical understanding of commitment. Finally, it puts forward the variety of ways the Cold War shaped the commitment idea while recognizing the latter's influence on how the former was approached.[6]

2 | FROM BARGAINING TO COMMITMENT AS CONTROL OF OTHERS

Retrospectively, the way Schelling (1956) defined commitment in “An Essay on Bargaining” suggests its possible relevance to strategic analysis in an age of thermonuclear weapons, but military issues had yet to become his main concerns. Negotiations associated with foreign assistance programs motivated his effort, more than the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.[7]

Schelling joined the Marshall Plan in 1948, the year it became clear to many observers that the bipolarization of international relations was inevitable and mostly confrontational. After a year in Denmark and a year and a half in Paris, he spent 3 years in Washington, reviewing foreign aid proposals for the White House. While in government, Schelling spent most of his time dealing with negotiations. His interest in bargaining had begun when he was in graduate school at Harvard University (1946–1948), and by the time he accepted a teaching position at Yale University in 1953, Schelling had already decided to work on bargaining (Ayson, 2004, p. 16; Swedberg, 1990, pp. 187–188).

Back then, the theory of bargaining had a long history in economics, its most significant result being that under bilateral monopoly (a single large employer facing a labor union or a real estate agent dealing with a potential buyer, for instance), the outcome of the bargaining process is typically indeterminate. In other words, even though a pair of negotiators have a common interest to cooperate, they may find it difficult to reach an agreement because they have conflicting interests over the range of achievable outcomes (Pen, 1952). The most recent elaboration of bargaining theory was mathematical, assumed perfect knowledge of the other party's position, and did not consider negotiation preliminary to agreement. Mathematician John F. Nash Jr.'s (1950) idealization of the bargaining problem assumed two highly rational individuals. Centered on the mathematical properties attached to the general solution to the bargaining problem, Nash's approach deemphasized the ability of real agents to predict the outcome of the bargaining process in practical situations.[8]

Schelling started to compose his 1956 essay on bargaining shortly after he arrived at Yale, but the essay followed a review of a book on American foreign assistance and an article on the sharing of costs for programs undertaken jointly by several countries, both published in 1955 (Schelling, 1955a, 1955b). In the book review, Schelling mentioned the United States intentions to influence the behavior of recipient countries and accordingly put forward that negotiators can enjoy greater effectiveness when they lack flexibility because their intentions are less ambivalent (1955a, pp. 613, 615). In the article, as he discussed various schemes for the division of costs between countries negotiating their shares in the funding of international programs, Schelling (1955b, pp. 24–25) noted that in many negotiations something is needed to “fill the vacuum of indeterminacy.” Here it is useful to distinguish between the perspective of the economist, who concludes that the outcome of such negotiations is indeterminate, and the perspective of the negotiator, who relies on a variety of tactics that help allied countries with diverging interests—not enemies—achieve an agreement.

In “An Essay on Bargaining,” Schelling used prose and concrete examples; he emphasized the role of tactics in the emergence of a solution to the bargaining problem. The class of tactics considered was for a party to bind itself to a line of action, to set aside options to make other choices, so as to convince the other party that the line of action under consideration would be inevitably followed. Schelling's description of the US government's negotiations over foreign assistance with other governments illustrates that point:

> If the executive branch is free to negotiate the best arrangement it can, it may be unable to make any position stick and may end by conceding controversial points because its partners know, or believe obstinately, that the United States would rather concede than terminate the negotiations. But if the executive branch negotiates under legislative authority, with its position constrained by law, and it is evident that Congress will not be reconvened to change the law within the necessary time period, then the executive branch has a firm position that is visible to its negotiating partners. (1956, pp. 286–287)

As tactics of bargaining, commitment, together with threat and promise, acted as a way to fix expectations, so that they did not prevent eventual agreement between the United States and its allies. Finding ways that confirm mutual expectations was crucial for maintaining good faith between contracting parties. On that view, commitment appears as an important force to ensure the continuance of the relationship between the United States and its allies. At a time when thinking and planning the future of American society was intimately connected with the defense of the “free world,” it is ironic that controlling the behavior of its allies through restricting its own options appeared as the best way for the United States to save the world from the communist threat.

Central to Schelling's argument was the question: “How does one make someone else believe something?” That question marked a move away from a vision of bargaining as sheer confrontation towards an understanding of the role of various tactics one party uses to influence another's expectation about its behavior. Moreover, it shifted emphasis away from whether what one wants someone else to believe is true or false toward the power of commitment to make things true. Taking the example of someone wanting to convince someone else “that he would not pay more than $16,000 for a house that is really worth $20,000 to him"—not exactly a military situation—Schelling speculates: "But suppose the buyer could make an irrevocable and enforceable bet with some third party, duly recorded and certified, according to which he would pay for the house no more than $16,000, or forfeit $5000. The seller has lost; the buyer need simply present the truth" (Schelling, 1956, p. 283). Obviously, not all situations allow for such ease of commitment. Making things appear true can be an extremely complicated endeavor. More important, when replaced in the context of the Cold War, the virtues of the make-believe strategy are uncertain. Its success is premised on the idea that in bargaining, disagreement between the parties stems from distinct preferences regarding achievable outcomes, whereas it can also concern the opportunity of negotiation. Among allied countries, the make-believe strategy seems sensible because it can be expected that negotiation is regarded as a normal form of interaction. With an enemy, it is more intricate since negotiation is not necessarily the privileged mode of interaction.

A few months after "An Essay on Bargaining" was published, the crushing of the Hungarian revolution and the election of Dwight D. Eisenhower to a second term as US president marked a turning point in the Cold War and illustrated the importance of commitment, threat, and promise in international relations. Now that Soviet intentions in Eastern Europe had been clearly reaffirmed, it was vital for the US president to prove his country's commitment to the defense of the free world. Months before the events in Budapest, Eisenhower had denounced insidious communist "tactics" against the free nations. The invasion of Budapest followed the confirmation of a "policy of nonintervention in internal affairs of others states" by the Soviet government only a few days earlier, and Eisenhower (1956) was offered a vivid reminder of the perilous business of maintaining good faith between the United States and the Soviet Union. At a time when commitments to individualism and collectivism were often presented as incompatible in the political arena, it is worth noting that the idea of commitment, as described in American strategic thought, based the defense of the free world on the power to demonstrate one's intentions through restricted choice.[9]

Since the early 1950s, national security theorists at RAND had considered a variety of tactics that could help achieve favorable outcomes in international relations, but Schelling was not yet a member of that community.[10] It would be anachronistic to read "An Essay on Bargaining" and its practical considerations on commitment as echoing military concerns, although it was not long before they resonated with discussions about interdependent decision making at RAND. After spending the summer of 1957 at RAND, Schelling increasingly engaged with the formulations of national strategy in game-theoretic language. His acquaintance with RAND's work on strategy convinced him that there were parallels between bargaining in legal and contractual contexts on one hand and bargaining in military contexts on the other. Those parallels justified the extension of the idea of commitment to military conflict (see Ayson, 2004, p. 19; Schelling, 1957).

Schelling's analysis of commitment gained greater currency with the publication of the widely read *Strategy of Conflict*. Featuring a number of his published and unpublished essays, most of which had been written at RAND, the book appeared in 1960. That was a prolific year for US strategic thinking, with the publication of two other significant books: *On Thermonuclear War* by Herman Kahn and the much less sensational yet notable *Fights, Games, and Debates* by Anatol Rapoport. Schelling's book did not cry wolf like Kahn's; likewise, its emphasis on the importance of mutual understanding was much more utilitarian than mathematical biologist Rapoport's. Yet its solid theoretical framework, colorful applications, broad scope, and marked distancing from game theory ensured its long-lasting success in the strategic community.

The Strategy of Conflict opened with "The Retarded Science of International Strategy," a paper Schelling had presented at a political science conference on international relations in April 1959, a few months before Richard Nixon and Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev made the differences between East and West more concrete at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. Even though *The Strategy of Conflict* represented the culmination of Schelling's efforts to analyze conflict behavior as a bargaining process, "The Retarded Science of International Strategy" emphasized the lack of a well-developed theory in international affairs analysis. Given Schelling's emphasis on the "tactics" of bargaining in the mid-1950s, pointing out the lack of a systematic theory of international strategy in the late 1950s comes as no surprise: it signals tensions between reliance on the premise of rational behavior and the observation that "many of the attributes of rationality… are strategic disabilities in certain conflict situations" (Schelling, 1960/1980a, p. 18). To Schelling, it was crucial to consider the differences between what the theorist expects from "hypothetical participants" in a conflict and what real participants actually do. The premise of rational behavior was central to the production of theory because actual behavior shows departures from the behavioral consistency implied by the rationality assumption and such departures provided a better understanding of negotiation.

Here deterrence theory provides an interesting example. In the early 1950s, following the thermonuclear revolution, RAND analyst Bernard Brodie made the notion of deterrence central to strategic thought. Schelling's theory endorsed the shift away from applying force toward exploiting potential force, a transition that accompanied the growing perception that unrestrained warfare was hardly imaginable with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Schelling, 1960/1980a, pp. 4–5; see also Brodie, 1958).[11] The significance of deterrence in the analysis of conflict behavior brought to the fore the complexities of commitment and provided ample justification for the need "to control or influence the behavior of others in conflict." Accordingly, it was crucial "to know how the variables that are subject to our control can affect their behavior" (p. 4).[12]

In these years, international relations offered repeated illustrations of the problems attached to commitment, with politicians regularly pointing to the need to (and indirectly revealing the difficulty of) making their country's intentions clear. During the US presidential campaign, while the Berlin crisis was simmering, Kennedy (1960b) insisted: "it's important that we maintain our determination here; that we indicate that we're building our strength; that we are determined to protect our position; that we're determined to protect our commitment." The question was: "How to do it?" Schelling was not definitive on the subject. Obviously, he could only rejoice when Kennedy's "flexible response" defense strategy came to the fore as an alternative to Eisenhower's policy of massive retaliation in the early 1960s. For someone who believed that mutually assured destruction could deter reckless nuclear initiatives on both sides, that doctrine was a move in the right direction. Likewise, in situations where communicating one's intentions and reading another's are a perilous enterprise and making a decision presents itself as an all-or-nothing answer, it seemed reasonable to introduce flexibility, indeed, to contemplate a variety of scenarios. Schelling had already witnessed the benefits of scenarios when he organized a political game in Cambridge involving a Soviet invasion of Iran, and he did so again when he ran simulation war games for the Pentagon in the summer and fall of 1961, placing high government officials in the difficult situation of dealing with threats and counterthreats over Berlin (Kaplan, 1983, pp. 301–302; see also Dodge, 2006, chap. 12).[13] When it came to deciding what to do practically in response to enemy moves, Schelling, now a seasoned member of the almost entirely male strategic community (see Figure 2), knew one thing for sure: even if flexibility was acceptable, abundance of options could undermine one's position—strategies of commitment were the key.[14]

By the mid-1960s, following half a decade of growing tensions in South Vietnam, Schelling had had ample opportunity to assess the relevance of the commitment idea to US foreign policy. Following a stay at the Institute for Strategic Studies in London in 1965, he finalized the draft of a new book in which the extension of bargaining theory to war situations captured the concerns of the day. *Arms and Influence* (1966), with its long chapter on the art of commitment and its abundant historical illustrations, situated the notion at the center of strategic thinking, with deterrence as its companion concept. As the 1960s drew to a close, it was almost impossible to discuss the role of US political commitments abroad without considering how Schelling and a few others at RAND had conceptualized the idea. As he discussed commitment in international relations, political scientist Weinstein (1969) distinguished between situational and nonsituational commitments. The former corresponded to a country's present view of its interests and were therefore attached to the balance of international forces at a given moment, whereas the latter stemmed from the conviction that commitments are interdependent and serve "as a symbolic demonstration of a country's dedication to principles, security interests, or other considerations removed from the situation with which the commitment is concerned" (p. 41). Unsurprisingly, Weinstein linked nonsituational commitments to Schelling's (and Kahn's) "rationality of irrational commitments" idea and saw them as central to US

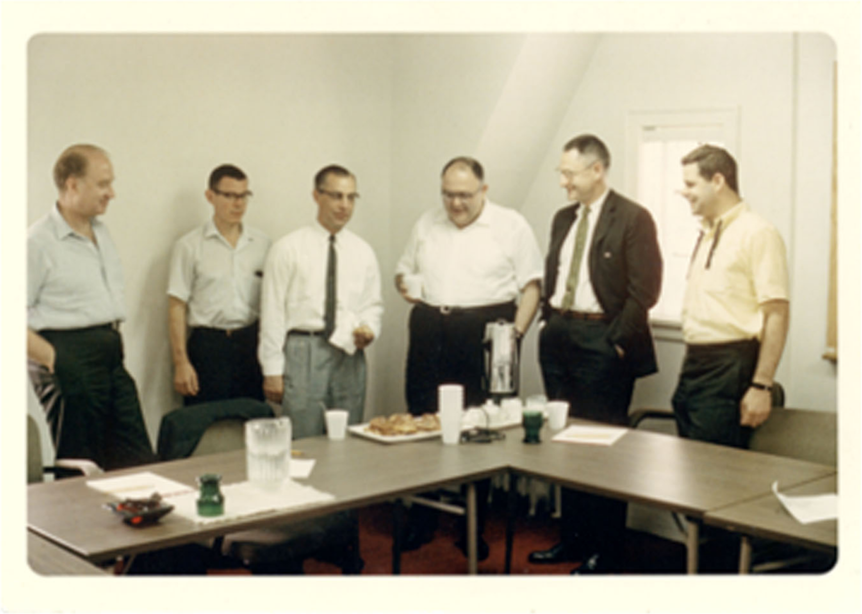

FIGURE 2 Schelling and RAND analysts, ca 1960. Almost pushed into the background by nuclear mandarin Albert Wohlstetter (far left) and Herman Kahn's imposing presence (third from right), a withdrawn Schelling (second from left) ponders the right move to make at the grown-ups' table. Thomas C. Schelling Collection, Box 6, Folder 23, Hauser RAND Archives, Santa Monica, CA.

foreign policy. Yet he ominously concluded: "Surely, however, there is a limit to how far a nation can go in fulfilling irrational commitments before irrationality can no longer be regarded as rational" (p. 55).

By the time Weinstein's article appeared in March 1969, the golden age of (nuclear) strategy was gone, and there was a sense that the body of thought associated with it "was somehow out of touch with reality" (Trachtenberg, 1989, p. 331). From the mid-1960s (if not earlier), social problems, not just military problems, had been on the mind of policy makers. The kind of practical questions that dominated public debates about the family, education, poverty, discrimination, segregation, crime, and mental illness made the hypothetical situations considered by nuclear strategists look even more out of place (see Fontaine & Pooley, 2021). The developments in Southeast Asia did not help either, soon making the war as much a social as a military problem. If Schelling was immersed in solving Cold War problems so as to simply not consider the moral implications of his views of commitment, by the early 1970s, he made clear that while dealing with strategic problems, there is more to appraising decisions than considering their role in achieving agreed-on ends.[15]

3 | CHANGING COMMITMENT

In November 1968, after a long and arduous campaign in a rather tumultuous political climate marked by growing opposition to the war in Vietnam, former Vice President Richard Nixon was elected the 37th president of the United States. Following a half-decade of social unrest and violence, increasing consideration was given to the assessment of US commitments abroad. In March 1969, hearings on national security policy at the House of Representatives explicitly raised the question: "Today our Nation has formal security commitments with 42 nations and quasi-commitments to perhaps another dozen countries. In view of scientific and political developments which have taken place in the years since they were made, are these commitments still relevant to America's security interests? If not, how and where do we begin the difficult task of revising them or disengaging from them?" (*Strategy and Science*, 1969, p. vi). In his statement before the subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments, which Schelling made within days of Nixon announcing changes to President Lyndon B. Johnson's Sentinel antiballistic missile program, the strategist merely hoped that the new administration would not make discussion about such a weapon system an ideological test case. When he replied to a question from the chair of the subcommittee, Clement J. Zablocki (WI-D) Schelling described Nixon's announcement of March 14, 1969 rather favorably, as a "decent statement" (p. 127).[16]

A year later, another presidential announcement caused a less charitable reaction, not to say consternation. On April 30, 1970, only 10 days after announcing new troop withdrawals from South Vietnam in accordance with his Vietnamization strategy, President Nixon revealed the invasion of Cambodia. Within days, Harvard staff, students, and faculty members organized to have their voices heard in Washington. Schelling led a group of 13 Harvard faculty who confronted their former colleague Henry Kissinger in the White House basement on May 8, 1970. The group counted prominent faculty members who all had high-level experience in the Executive Branch, with the exception of Michael Walzer, whose presence Schelling justified by the need "to keep us [ex-government types] honest" (Kinsley, 1970). Leading the charge against Kissinger, Schelling insisted: "we'e a group of people who have completely lost confidence in the ability of the White House to conduct our foreign policy, and we have come to tell you so. We are no longer at your disposal as personal advisers" (quoted in Shawcross, 1979/1987, p. 156). To Schelling, the fact that US commitments abroad were all equally binding was justified by their interdependence, and that interdependence by the moral principle that aggression was impermissible. The invasion of Cambodia turned that logic upside down, making the interdependence of commitments nothing more than an excuse for US imperialism.

Most participants described the meeting as painful and emotional. During the encounter, accusations of tearing the country apart domestically, reproaches for appallingly bad foreign policy, denunciations for lack of consultation with the secretary of Defense and secretary of State, and expressions of doubts concerning the execution of the promise of withdrawal marked the exchanges and exposed a high level of recrimination about foreign policy in Vietnam. The group expected answers, but after an hour and a half with Kissinger, Schelling was left perplexed by the meeting: "Did it make any difference? I don't know" (Kinsley, 1970). What followed could hardly reconcile the Harvard group with Nixon's foreign policy.

Even before the break with Kissinger and the Nixon administration, Schelling had moved away from national security concerns. A quick look at his scientific output reveals that while warfare attracted much of his attention in the 1950s and early 1960s, his interests began to diversify around the mid-1960s. That change was abetted by RAND's newly developed interest in social issues following the arrival of its new president in January 1967. Building on his experience in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and well acquainted with the Great Society programs, Henry Rowen made every effort to ensure that RAND diversify into social welfare research (Jardini, 1996, pp. 355–367). With social problems consuming much of his thought and international conflict being less of a preoccupation, Schelling's new intellectual orientations dovetailed with Rowen's ambitions for RAND (see Light, 2003, p. 70).

Schelling had been given a first opportunity to explore social problems when Jessie Bernard, one of the few sociologists interested in game theory at the time, invited him to Montreal for the 1964 annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP). By his own admission, Schelling (1965, p. 367) was not sure what the SSSP president meant when she asked him "to talk about strategic aspects of social problems." At the time, strategic thought was often equated with US nuclear strategy and, as argued by political scientist Schneider (1959) a few years before, war was hardly a social problem. While he presented his paper in late August 1964, the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin earlier that month were still on the minds of many, including Schelling's. Soon, they served to illustrate various military tactics in *Arms and Influence*.[17] So his bemusement at Bernard's invitation was hardly artificial. Yet in the interval, Schelling had time to figure out what to say about strategic aspects of social problems.

Schelling's published version of his talk to SSSP began with two pages chock-full of illustrations from everyday life: setting up a special mail drop for drug addicts to be able to ask for medical advice discreetly, granting protection to informants in Vietnam so they could avoid reprisals, coercing Florida hotel owners to integrate to avoid being accused of doing it voluntarily and suffering reprisal, forbidding small gatherings in towns susceptible to riots, confining siblings to their rooms so that they do not fight each other, and so on (Schelling, 1965, pp. 367–368). Addiction, crime, segregation, racism, and family disruption—these were unquestionably social problems. Unlike most sociologists, Schelling did not simply approach them as the outcome of interpersonal relationships at the aggregate level. To him, understanding the nature of social problems implied taking into account the fact that "each person, together with the courses of action he can be expected to take, is part of the other person's environment, and a part that is relevant to his choice" (p. 369).

By the end of the 1960s, the lengthy "Models of Segregation" RAND memorandum confirmed the diversification of Schelling's (1969) interests.[18] In April 1968, during the nationwide riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Bill in a still highly segregated Washington, DC. The bill included the Fair Housing Act, which contributed to the outlawing of *de jure* segregation by introducing a number of prohibitions against housing discrimination. A year later, Schelling took a distantiated (not to say highly abstract) approach, starting with the observation that there was "little explicit theory relating what goes on in the aggregate to what determines the behavior of the individuals who comprise the aggregate" and resolving to attempt "some theory" himself. He saw his contribution as differing from those of social psychologists and sociologists, who preferred to emphasize the motives and origins of individual behavior or the collective phenomena resulting from social interactions. The memorandum revealed the phenomenon of "neighborhood tipping," which occurs when a new recognizable minority enters a neighborhood in sufficient numbers to make earlier residents to begin leave (Schelling, 1969, p. iii; see also Schelling, 1971a). That was a perfect illustration of what he called the "strategic" aspects of social problems, but it is better understood as their conceptualization in terms of interdependent decisions. Neither dispositional or systemic in nature, that approach complicated the segregation question and its solutions. To the extent that collective results did not necessarily reflect individual preferences, there could be residential segregation even when most people did not intend it. Schelling's increased attention to domestic problems was not limited to segregation. Pollution and congestion, to mention just two examples, captured his interest as well. Overall, his perspective on social problems emphasized the possible discrepancy between what people are individually motivated to do and what they want to accomplish at the aggregate level.

Schelling's (1978a) effort to connect macrobehavior to the motives of individual behavior is manifest in *Micromotives and Macrobehavior*—a volume that mostly includes essays published in the first half of the 1970s (Schelling, 1971b, 1971c, 1971d, 1973). That book seems to illustrate what Erickson et al. (2013, p. 49) described as the effort by "Cold War rationalists… to bridge individual and collective rationality." The idea that interdependent choices can produce unanticipated outcomes at the aggregate level perfectly fits in that overall effort. More important is that the book represents a change in perspectives, which is not necessarily obvious but highly significant, from analyzing how a decision maker (an individual or a collective) can influence another's behavior to analyzing how the behavior and choice of many can influence one's individual decisions. It marks a break with Schelling's analysis of commitment as control of others, where the difference between individual and collective rationality is assumed away by the conflation of persons and collective entities under the umbrella of the decision maker (see Heyck, 2012, p. 104). Similarly, the book differs from Schelling's analysis of commitment as self-control, where the gap between individual and collective rationality is not even considered because the emphasis is on the possible discrepancy between what people are individually motivated to do and what they want to accomplish at the individual level.

4 | COMMITMENT AS SELF-CONTROL

By the time the war in Vietnam came to an end, Schelling, through a combination of necessity and chance, was eventually led to reintroduce the concept of commitment in the no less conflicting lands of the self. Even though he occasionally described self-control as a special case of control of others, Schelling discussed the two notions separately. Thus, in December 1977, at the annual meeting of the American Economic Association (AEA), he presented “Strategically Self-Serving Behavior,” a paper centered on the kind of behavior that influences others by affecting their expectations, and another—“Willpower and Overeating”—considering self-control.[19]

Schelling was not first in using the commitment idea to describe self-control. In economics as early as the mid-1950s, Robert H. Strotz used it (*precommitment* was his term) in the context of an individual choosing an optimal plan of consumption for a future period of time. He wondered what happens if the individual in question is able to reconsider his plans at later dates. Strotz (1955–1956, p. 165) concluded that as long as this inconsistency was recognized, the rational person could “precommit” his or her future behavior, that is, eliminate future options that do not conform to present intentions, or alternatively change the chosen plan so that it takes into account the possibility of disobeying it.[20]

That use of commitment included a form of inconsistency avoidance, which gives rise to a formulation in terms of “strategies,” even if one's tactic is used against oneself and not someone else. Although Schelling pursued the idea of committing one's self as a way to control one's behavior in the second half of the 1970s, he was aware of its sporadic presence in the game-theoretical literature as of the late 1950s. In his RAND work, he remarked that self-control appeared in *Games and Decisions* (Luce & Raiffa, 1957/1985), a synthesis of game theory's postwar developments, where “Luce and Raiffa have pointed out … that the same tactic [as that used in a two-move game] can be used by a person against his own self when he wants, for example, to go on a diet but does not trust himself.” Likewise, he illustrated the issue of how people try to govern their own behavior by the case “when one deliberately embarks on a vacation deep in the wilds without cigarettes” (Schelling, 1958a, p. 43; 1958b, p. 223). A few years later, when he addressed the SSSP, he remarked: “In fact, one can rationally devise techniques to safeguard against irrationality…. As a matter of fact, ‘self-control’ is one of the most interesting dimensions of rationality, and safeguards against loss of control are often amenable to strategic analysis” (Schelling, 1965, p. 375).[21]

By the mid-1970s, Schelling was too much of a general social scientist to ignore that a number of important works outside economics had considered forms of commitment in relation to self-control. The kind of behavior referred to by Schelling when he considered self-control had been on the agenda of psychologists for a few decades, with *Behavior Change through Self-Control*, a notable essay collection edited by Goldfried and Merbaum (1973), offering the latest and most comprehensive treatment of the subject.[22] An increasing number of social scientists were focusing their attention on self-control, as shown by the publication of experimental psychologist Ainslie's (1975) survey article on impulsiveness (or failure to delay gratification) and impulse control in the mid-1970s. Ainslie reviewed a considerable and varied literature—mostly experimental psychology—from the previous two decades, some of which dealt with self-control. His article included the most significant references of the social scientific literature on commitment. Thus, while dealing with techniques for controlling impulses, Ainslie mentioned Strotz. When he turned to “precommitting” devices that can account for self-control in human behavior, he noted that the arguments used in support of their redefinition, when one considers a person's bargaining with him- or herself, were of the same nature as those put forward by Schelling when he approached interpersonal bargaining in *The Strategy of Conflict*.

Ainslie was one of a few experimental psychologists working on pigeon behavior who had connected commitment, choice, and self-control.[23] Animal experiments on self-control may have had an impact outside psychology, but in terms of academic attention, by the mid-1970s, Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel's experiments in delayed gratification had achieved more recognition. Although there is no evidence that Schelling was aware of these experiments, economics training had familiarized him with models of intertemporal choice, within which the idea of delayed gratification found an immediate translation. Finally, Schelling was aware of the work of economists who used insights from psychology to provide a better understanding of consumer decisions that involve intertemporal trade-offs.[24]

When Schelling was asked to sit on the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior in the summer of 1976, he was already aware that many scientists outside economists had reflected on self-control, but he also knew that he could use the idea of commitment as self-control to approach disorders associated with tobacco, alcohol, eating, marijuana, and more.[25] That multidisciplinary committee was chaired by psychologist and behavior geneticist Gardner Lindzey. Among others, it included psychiatrist Jerome H. Jaffe, Nixon's first "drug czar"; behavioral pharmacologist Peter Dews, who had worked at a leading center of behavioral pharmacology, the Harvard Psychobiological Laboratory, with B. F. Skinner; University of Chicago psychiatrist and pharmacologist Daniel X. Freedman; University of Pennsylvania psychiatrist and specialist of eating disorders Albert J. Stunkard; and a few social scientists, including sociologist Howard S. Becker and anthropologist James P. Spradley. Participation in this committee acquainted Schelling with a variety of problematic behaviors, which satisfied his unusual curiosity, suited his eclectic thinking, and even echoed his repeated efforts to quit smoking. Likewise, the various conferences organized by the committee familiarized him with a literature he would not necessarily have encountered otherwise. Finally, debates about self-control in the committee led him to refine his views on the subject.

As he confessed to his surprise at having been chosen as *the* economist for the committee, Schelling made no mystery of his several-years-long attempt to convince other members that people can use strategies of commitment to govern their own behavior (Schelling, 1984a, p. viii). With the exception of sociologist Becker (1960), who had used Schelling's work in his own, committee members were not familiar with the economist's use of the idea to describe the way people control the behavior of others (Fontaine, 2024). Likewise, it is doubtful they were interested in the possibility of subsuming self-control under the rubric of rational choice. The rational choice approach had yet to pick up in political science and sociology, and its influence in social psychology, public health, and epidemiology was negligible. There is every reason to believe that most committee members acquainted themselves with Schelling's views on commitment as self-control through discussions in the committee and at its conferences. Because of their familiarity with the psychological literature on behavior control, its use of the notion of commitment, and its treatment of self-control as a form of control over others, they might have experienced a feeling of déjà vu about Schelling's technology of behavior.

As we have seen, even before Schelling joined the committee, his intellectual interests had moved away from national security concerns, but his activities in the committee brought issues related to the conflict in Vietnam, notably drug abuse, back into the picture. A few years previously, less than a week after the release of the Pentagon Papers, President Nixon had launched a new "all-out offensive" on drug abuse, "public enemy number one" in America.[26] During his speech in June 1971, having in mind the report of Congressmen Robert Murphy and Robert Steele on heroin addiction in the military in Vietnam, the president mentioned the war, "which has brought to our attention the fact that a number of young Americans have become addicts as they serve abroad" (Nixon, 1971). Inevitably, with troop withdrawals on the increase, the question of the return of Vietnam drug users gained political salience. Within days, clinical psychiatrist and soon-to-be appointed director of the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention Jerome H. Jaffe asked sociologist and psychiatric epidemiologist Lee N. Robins if she could do a study on what happened to servicemen who used heroin in Vietnam, the results of which she presented to the Pentagon in April 1973 (Robins, 1973; see also Jaffe, 2010).[27]

From then on, even though the study's findings were contrary to the suspicion of an "addicted army," the prevailing conviction in policy circles was that a more systematic and integrated approach to drug abuse was needed. That conviction led to the establishment of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), "the federal agency that funds large-scale social surveys and research ranging from behavioral to epidemiological to historical to neurophysiological to ethnographic" (Campbell, 2021, p. 291), in 1974. NIDA sponsored the first conference of the newly created Committee on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior (CSAHB), which Schelling was invited to join in August 1976 and where he sat until 1982.

The mid-1970s marked a transition away from what Nancy Campbell (2007) has described as the "addiction research enterprise"—centered on classical clinical pharmacology methods and symbolized by the Addiction Research Center in Lexington, Kentucky—toward a more diverse definition of drug abuse. Following the proliferation and diversification of drug abuse research in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the monopoly of the addiction research enterprise was contested. In this respect, it is worth noting that the CSAHB was formed as the National Research Council (NRC) discontinued its decades-long sponsorship of the Committee on Problems of

Drug Dependence (May & Jacobson, 1989, pp. 197–198). While the latter was mostly composed of scientists (especially chemists and pharmacologists) and pharmaceutical executives, CSAHB moved away from prebehavioral pharmacology work to recognize a variety of approaches, including behavioral scientists and some of their critics. In a sense, the formation of the CSAHB represented an effort to take stock of the growing diversification of addiction research and contemplated the definition of drug abuse as a social problem while taking heed of the less moralistic and punitive public mood about drug use in American society. As Musto and Korsmeyer (2000, p. xx) put it jokingly while describing the presidential campaign of 1976: “What attention was devoted to drugs took the form of a competition between the candidates as to who would be more understanding of his children's experimentation with marijuana.”

Originally, CSAHB was supposed to “provide a capability to synthesize current research regarding substance abuse and habitual behavior, develop agendas for future research, and identify the implications of such knowledge for public policy”; however, after considering the magnitude of its task, the committee determined that “preventive and treatment strategies (as well as analysis of substance use policies) were excluded as matters of emphasis in the first phase of the Committee's work.”[28] The first official conference, devoted to commonalities in substance abuse and habitual behavior, was organized in March 1977. Its goal was to uncover the similarities between habitual use of heroin, alcohol, and other drugs and more common forms of habitual activity such as smoking, overeating, overworking, and gambling.[29] Thanks to the precirculation and discussion of “papers on micro- and macro environmental topics in habitual substance use,” Schelling began to form a better idea of existing approaches (National Research Council, 1977, p. xi). Although the methods to reduce substance abuse were not central to the conference, they were in the mind of participants, if only because substance abuse had been part of public debate for decades and taken on a new dimension with the Vietnam War. Robins's conclusions in the mid-1970s had helped move attention away from the chronicity of addiction and its association with psychiatric disorder toward the impact of specific social contexts.

In keeping with the political recognition of the need for a multidisciplinary approach, the committee made the major theme of its research agenda “the concept of control in the process of habitual substance use” (National Research Council, 1977, p. 7). As the conference report makes clear, natural and social scientists on the committee considered a variety of controls:

> Genetic, biochemical, neurological, physiological, pharmacological, and motivational factors are those [internal controls] of major concern. External controls refer to conditions and events “outside the skin” that influence internal homeostatic properties: the manner in which variables in social and physical environments interact with an individual's behavior and personality development. (National Research Council, 1977, p. 8)

In these approaches, control is considered from the perspective of those who are subjected to its influence, whereas Schelling also considered control from the perspective of its initiator and accordingly allowed more room for human agency.[30] As he transposed his analysis of commitment from control of others to self-control, Schelling continued to endorse the same approach, even if he now considered the influence a two-self person can exert on their own behavior by strategically mobilizing one self against the other. By the end of the year, Schelling had digested part of the conference's conclusions on the commonalities among forms of habitual activity. His first take on the subject was the paper on willpower and overeating presented at the annual meeting of the AEA in December 1977.[31]

In May 1978, after almost 2 years of participation in the committee, an extended version of Schelling's paper was published as “Egonomics, or the Art of Self-Management.” There he reviewed a number of everyday life situations to illustrate the “continual contest for control” between two selves. He pointed out that a variety of existing social arrangements can help people resist the temptation to renege on their commitments (“Christmas savings” scheme, for instance), but also emphasized the role of individuals in mobilizing the environment: “Many of us have little tricks," wrote Schelling (1978c, p. 290), "we play on ourselves to make us do the things we ought to do or to keep us from the things we ought to foreswear."

As of February 1976, the proposal for the formation of the committee mentioned the issue of self-control and placed it under the jurisdiction of psychiatry, but in the committee, the place given to self-control proper was still limited 2 years later, as can be seen from discussions at the second conference on "Issues in Controlled Substance Use" organized in June 1978.[32] As Maloff and Levison (1980a, p. 1) explained in the introduction to the volume edited after the conference, the word *control* was often used in discussions of substance use and abuse, but with changing meanings. One common thread was the equation of controls with regulatory mechanisms. The perspective that dominated the committee was still that of the determinants of individual behavior.

Four working groups were organized, in which the issue of control permeated the various levels of analysis.[33] Two groups deserve special attention. One, on informal social controls, was composed of sociologists, social psychologists, and an anthropologist; it included Becker, who co-authored the group's position paper, in which controls stemming from membership in social groups were analyzed (Maloff et al., 1980). The other, on problems of control and intervention in the rehabilitation of the overuser, included Schelling; it produced a paper centered on societal control (Fonaroff et al., 1980).

Schelling's reaction to the two papers centered on self-control. He thought an essential question was missing from the former: "How do informal controls relate to people who use substances but wish they could quit? Informal controls are not necessarily effective in helping self-control problems" (Solomon, 1980, p. 46). To him, more focus was needed on the role of human agency in self-control. That is not to say that he neglected social determinants. Even his own article, "Smoking as Induced Behavior," endorsed a social-environmental approach—inspired by his earlier work on neighborhood tipping and suggesting a contagion phenomenon (Schelling, 1980b). Were it not for the use of economic modeling language and marginal and cost–benefit analysis, the paper's approach resembled that of "Informal Social Controls and their Influence on Substance Use" (Maloff et al., 1980). With its focus on how controlled use is learned in close-knit groups and inspired by cultural recipes, the latter paper pointed to the influence of sociocultural factors.

Although Schelling acknowledged the importance of social influence, he was more inclined to emphasize the role of human agency in commitment, as when he commented on "Redemption of the Overuser" by Fonaroff, Falk, Kaplan, and O'Brien. As an economist, he was uncomfortable with the paper's connotations of guilt and morality, but he appreciated its effort to deal with what needs to be done by the user to change his or her behavior. Schelling meant to reincorporate a number of extreme behaviors in a more general theory of human behavior in which more attention is paid to people's inability to guard against or break certain habits and the tactics they use to protect themselves. In focusing on mundane behavior, Schelling hoped to direct attention to self-control (as opposed to social controls) as a viable option to curtail unwanted habitual behavior. He mentioned in passing nail biting, scratching hives, bad posture, careless speech, and procrastination. His conclusion was meant for his fellow conferees:

> Among the different models or perspectives or attitudes I would make a division between those that treat the patient as essentially incapable of contributing much to the management of his own problem, and those that substantially depend on and try to help and reinforce the conscious efforts of the patients to manage their own behavior. (Schelling, 1980c, pp. 138–139)

Some committee members found the latter models appealing. Not the least was Becker, who was aware of Schelling's earlier work on commitment. Before the conference, as he was discussing with Spradley and Rodin their common interest in the way informal social controls affect the consumption of substances, Becker tried to answer the question as to why people "don't take as much of any substance as they like as they can without killing themselves or running into some mechanical obstacle." When he listed possible answers, he found that "the most potent control… consists of things being so arranged that the easiest, most convenient way of doing things is to use whatever it is in the same way as everyone else does." He added, "I can enlarge that argument ad nauseam, relying on material from Tom Schelling, and David Lewis' book on conventions."[34] Becker found Schelling's use of ordinary life situations especially germane to his observation-centered approach to knowledge acquisition. In these situations, however, he saw illustrations of the importance of social arrangements in relation to commitment and insisted on the former's coercive power.

In January 1979, at an American Association for the Advancement of Science symposium with committee members in Houston, Schelling (1980d, 1984b) presented "The Intimate Contest for Self-Command," an extended version of "Egonomics, or the Art of Self-Management."[35] The Houston article drew extensively on his earlier work. Even though the latter made no reference to commitment, it proposed an analysis of the "art of self-management" that echoed what was described as the "art of commitment" in *Arms and Influence*. In "The Intimate Contest for Self-Command," Schelling (1980d, p. 96, 1984b, p. 155) insisted that the parallel between research on control of others and research on self-control is perfectly legitimate. With an individual behaving as if he or she had two selves, it made sense to speak of "strategic egonomics." Individual internal conflict appeared as a special case of interpersonal conflict.[36]

Schelling's paper was not the only one to refer to self-control. The idea made its way within the committee with the help of psychologist Levison and psychiatrist Albert J. Stunkard, who had participated in a working group on data acquisition with Schelling and explored individual strategies for controlling substance use in a paper presented at the June 1978 conference (Levison & Stunkard, 1980). As an indication of the committee's shift toward the self-control language, the committee's proposed plan of action (from September 1, 1978 to August 31, 1979) already included the project of the January 1979 symposium, which was then titled "Self-Control Factors in the Use of Addictive Substances."[37]

With the exception of Gerald E. McClearn's paper on alcohol intake in laboratory mice, the other four papers presented at the symposium show that self-control had become the point of convergence for all social scientists on the committee. In the introduction to the volume, Levison offered a definition of self-control that he presented as close to common sense but was partly reminiscent of Schelling's view of commitment as applied to self-control: "self-control means the conscious rejection of certain opportunities to indulge in very tempting but possibly harmful or devalued activities" (Levison, 1984b, pp. 1–2). This is not to suggest that Schelling's viewpoint necessarily influenced other members, even if it may have prompted more interest in the "divided mind" view of self-control. The fact is, an increasing number of committee members felt the need to endorse the language of self-control (e.g., Rodin et al., 1984, p. 40).

Schelling's contribution—"The Intimate Contest for Self-Command"—at the January 1979 symposium was published in 1980. After 4 years of participation in the committee, Schelling had digested a substantial literature. His attention to social arrangements together with the strong empirical dimension of his analyses mitigated the effects of his focus on the decisions of individual actors, so his differences with other social scientists in the committee were never irreconcilable. In later publications, very much like sociologists and social psychologists, Schelling continued to emphasize that self-control occurs in a social environment and that people's efforts in that direction are either helped or hindered by social arrangements. Likewise, he conceded that "the ordinary human being is sometimes also not a *single* rational individual" (Schelling, 1984a, p. 93). Finally, his highly instructive illustrations served the ambition of social science as a whole by providing easily identifiable areas of application for its views on substance use and abuse, and by promoting their relevance for public policy. Yet the view that people behave as if two selves were alternately in control remained Schelling's trademark in the committee. It differentiated him from psychologists, who were more likely to associate that idea with psychotic disorder, and from sociologists, who believed that the notion of social interactions was more compelling. As a result, despite fruitful exchange in the committee and familiarization with noneconomic work, Schelling could still feel a sense of difference several years after his participation in the committee came to an end in 1982.

Despite its long pedigree in philosophy and social science, the idea that people sometimes behave as if they have two selves acquired a semblance of originality with Schelling. It implied that the present self uses strategic behavior to prevail over the future self. Hence the intimate (and identity-threatening) contest for self-command. Directed at an audience broader than the academic world, "The Intimate Contest for Self-Command" used a number of mundane examples, among them New Year's resolutions, to illustrate that what one learns from the tactics to manage another, one could also use to control oneself. Interestingly, despite ample exposure to the work of other social scientists, Schelling continued to describe individual internal conflict the same way he had analyzed conflict between countries. He emphasized a number of self-binding tactics that can alleviate that conflict, indeed solve it. Even though Schelling (1980d, p. 101, 1984b, p. 160) argued that "treating your sometime self as though it were somebody else is a ubiquitous and familiar technique of self-management," a question remained about the implications of such a suggestion regarding personal identity.[38]

It is no accident that economist Amartya Sen, who also used the notion of commitment but endorsed a more complex view of identity centered on the person's various communities of belonging, took a different route. Both agreed that in certain situations people do not do what seems economically rational. Whereas Schelling showed that commitment can eventually benefit its initiator, Sen, introducing moral considerations, contemplated the possibility of a person making a choice without benefitting from it. Likewise, as with strategic analysis, others are taken into account—but not as opponents (Sen, 1977, 1985).[39]

After the publication of *Choice and Consequence*, Schelling could realize once more the impact of his ideas on society at large.[40] The book, which included "The Intimate Contest for Self-Command" and other essays on behavior control, was widely reviewed in academic journals and leading newspapers across the United States, which pointed to the economist's original view of human behavior. The title of economist Mancur Olson's (1984) piece in the *New York Times Book Review* perfectly summarized the kind of question the essay collection could raise: "How Rational Are We?" Olson's conclusion said something of the way the book could be received: "Mr. Schelling's book is a superb place to get a sense of both the need for and the dangers of the assumption of rationality."[41]

5 | CONCLUSION

Some 30 years after John F. Kennedy put forward the need for the United States to constantly demonstrate its commitment in the confrontation with the Soviet Union, the world inherited from World War II took a new direction, with the fall of the Berlin Wall as a watershed event. After almost a half century of all sorts of conflicts, but without nuclear warfare, the Cold War came to a close, opening new spaces for interventions on the international scene. Within a decade, that momentous development became entangled with the reaffirmation of US military and political superiority over the Soviet Union. This unfought war had a winner, too. There is no need to discuss the triumphalist narrative or alternative interpretations of the Cold War (see Schrecker, 2004). Instead, it should be noted that in political discourse, the former often came with an a posteriori vindication of America's various commitments around the world. That such a lesson could be drawn from the end of the Cold War shows that it is easy to forget that the commitment idea refers to the political dynamics formed by interdependent decision making among states (see Parrott, 2022).

As pointed out by Schelling, commitment is a question of demonstration of intentions, not a show of force. As such, it involves at least two protagonists. Writing the history of US commitments in the Cold War without considering their effects on the Soviet Union's expectations about possible US reactions conceals the eminently strategic dimension of international relations. In view of the considerable effort expended in influencing the enemy's expectations during the Cold War, it would seem sensible to pay more attention to the post hoc effect of strategic thought on the enemy's behavior. Likewise, when studying commitment, Schelling moved unhesitatingly from one level of analysis—the person—to another—the nation. But he also knew that it is one thing for an individual to be or become committed, and it is quite another for a nondictatorial polity. Forgetting about that distinction in political discourse amounts to focusing on the efficiency of US commitments in the Cold War at the expense of their democratic legitimacy. Not unrelated to that issue is that of the social responsibility of social scientists. When

Schelling felt that the Nixon administration had breached the public trust with the invasion of Cambodia in 1970, he made it clear to Kissinger that it was no longer possible for social scientists to advise the government on strategic matters. Interestingly, from then on, Schelling gradually moved away from the use of the commitment idea in international conflict and increasingly used it in the study of intrapersonal conflict.

Schelling's transition from commitment as control of others to commitment as self-control reveals another dimension of strategic thinking in the Cold War. It betrays a shift from defining tactics that allow collectives to protect individuals against collectives toward defining tactics that allow individuals to protect themselves from their internal conflict. Although both conceptions entail a depersonalization of the self—the former because individuals are lost into collectives and the latter because it presupposes two selves in the same person—they feature different notions of the self: an endangered self on one hand and a militarized self on the other. Despite idiosyncrasies, Schelling's reflections about commitment as an effort to control others were reminiscent of the views of some of his contemporaries, who described the behavior of individuals as increasingly influenced by others' expectations and, more generally, emphasized the pressures of society on the self. With the description of the self as suffering from the flattening of mass society came the idea that the integrity of individuals was undermined by social forces, leaving little room for a proactive self (Ross, 2021, 2022). Yet when Schelling turned to self-control in the last quarter of the 20th century, he reimagined the agency of individuals in relation to social change. Individual agency was represented by the capacity of people to play one of their two selves against the other to achieve their goals. On that view, individuals are often described as torn between the demands of the present and those of the future. They must constantly struggle to keep their behavior in check. Inherited from a conflictual worldview and perpetuated in more recent versions of the neoliberal self, that conception of strategically committed individuals is so ingrained in US public policy that it has become difficult for political leaders to imagine planning for the future without restricting people's choice in the present.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Cercle d'épistémologie économique at the Université of Panthéon-Sorbonne (May 2023) and at the LED research seminar at the Université of Paris 8 (January 15, 2024). In the course of this research, I benefited from the assistance of Daniel Barbiero, archivist at the National Academy of Sciences, who helped with the papers of the Committee on Drug Abuse and Habitual Behavior; Eric Newman and Masha Zhdanova, who helped with Thomas Schelling's papers at RAND Corporation; Nancy Campbell, who answered various queries and offered instructive comments; the editor and anonymous referees of *JHBS*, who offered valuable suggestions; and Jamie Cohen-Cole, David Engerman, Jeff Pooley, and Robert Leonard, who commented on earlier drafts. My thanks go to them all. This study was funded by MSH Paris-Saclay.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The author has nothing to report.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Passage underlined in Schelling's copy of *The Negotiators*, Francis Walder, Translated by Denise Folliot, McDowell and Obolensky, Annotated by Thomas Schelling, 1959. Thomas C. Schelling Collection, Box 21, Hauser RAND Archives, Santa Monica, CA.

[2] On the view that individual freedom was central to Cold War presidential rhetoric but remained trapped in the language of obligation and responsibility (see Rodgers, 2011, chap. 1). On the problematic relationship between social scientific expertise and democracy during the Cold War (see Rohde, 2013, chap. 2). On the more general reconfiguration of the relationship between social science and politics (see Bessner & Guilhot, 2019).

[3] Significant examples of the literature on rationality and choice include Mirowski (2002), Amadae (2003), Heyck (2012), and Erickson et al. (2013). One of the rare discussions of how the commitment concept relates to various conceptions of rationality appears in Erickson (2015, pp. 190–198), who considers intellectual differences between Schelling and Anatol Rapoport. That is not to say that the debates about the nature of "rationality" and "choice" concerned only national security concerns (see Erickson, 2010).

[4] On Schelling's indirect influence in the Department of Defense during the war in Vietnam (see Kaplan, 1983, chap. 23). Desch (2019, pp. 157–162) finds Schelling's influence among policy-makers paradoxical given his commitments to economics and abstract models, but minimizes Schelling's unconventionality as an economist.

[5] Of course, there were other conceptions of the self during the Cold War (see Cohen-Cole, 2014).

[6] On how the Cold War shaped social science (see Engerman, 2010; Gilman, 2016; Heyck & Kaiser, 2010). On the usefulness of the idea of Cold War social science (see Solovey, 2012).

[7] On the significance of Schelling's work on bargaining, see see (Ayson 2004, p. 16) and Wilson (2021, p. 179). For a less generous appreciation of Schelling's analysis, which he sees as suffering "from ideological blindness, cultural insensitivity and amorality," see political scientist Lebow (2006, p. 450).

[8] Nash did not ignore the tactical dimension of bargaining, however (Leonard, 2010, pp. 327–328). On the different approaches to the bargaining problem in the mid-1950s, see Harsanyi (1956). Unlike Harsanyi, Nash had not read the work of analysts of the bargaining problem as noted by Leonard (1994, pp. 497, 502–503).

[9] Pacifist and mathematical biologist Anatol Rapoport (1960, p. 335) captured the stakes involved in the rhetoric of commitment: "I believe that commitments to collectivism and to individualism are complementary rather than antagonistic commitments. But they are pictured in the propaganda of both sides as incompatible outlooks."

[10] The effort to subject strategy to a scientific treatment inspired by economic concepts coincided with the beginning of the Cold War (Brodie, 1949). Interestingly, Brodie (1957, p. 317) contrasted tactical matters as pertaining to the means available for war to strategical matters as pertaining to the object of war. He saw the military as mostly preoccupied with the former and political scientists specializing in international affairs as concerned with the latter. On the growing significance of "scientific strategists" in research institutions on military affairs (see Brodie, 1964).

[11] Rapoport (1964, p. 111) points out the merits of that distinction in Schelling's analysis of international conflicts. On the impact of the thermonuclear revolution on strategic thought (see Trachtenberg, 1989).

[12] A similar effort to identify the variables ("decision elements") influencing strategic choices is found in Ellsberg (1961). On Schelling and deterrence (see Kuklick, 2006, pp. 136–142).

[13] On a scenario as a "hypothetical sequence of events" that could guide decision (see Kahn, 1962, pp. 143–155, 185–208).

[14] Cohn (1987) offers a feminist critique of the Western concepts of reason in the world of defense intellectuals. Given her attention to the language of that community, it comes as a surprise that she does not consider whether speaking the language of commitment "does not allow certain questions to be asked or certain values to be expressed" (p. 708).

[15] For the view that in *The Strategy of Conflict*, "The rational-actor construct assumed that the achievement or nonachievement of thoughtfully considered and agreed upon ends was necessary and sufficient to appraise decisions," see Kuklick (2006, p. 165). To use Sibley's (1953, p. 558) language, by the early 1970s, it seemed hardly satisfactory to Schelling "to derive the notion of reasonable behavior from the notion of mere rationality."

[16] Schelling wrote his statement the night before Nixon made his announcement. His reply to Zablocki is dated March 18, 1969.

[17] To Trachtenberg (1989, p. 332), the publication of *Arms and Influence* in 1966 marks the climax of US strategic thought. To Ayson (2004, p. 35), it also "marked something of an end of an era… in terms of Schelling's own work."

[18] On the influence of the RAND context on Schelling's models of segregation (see Chassonnery-Zaïgouche & Larrouy, 2017).

[19] Both papers were published a few months later, the former as "Altruism, Meanness, and Other Potentially Strategic Behaviors" (Schelling, 1978b); the latter under the programmatic title "Egonomics, or the Art of Self-Management" (Schelling, 1978c). On interest in overeating among behavioral engineers, including Skinnerians (see Rutherford, 2009, p. 105).

[20] For a useful discussion of Strotz's argument, see Pollak (1968).

[21] On the study of self-control by economists, see also Shefrin and Thaler (1978). See also the studies that dealt with self-control with a view to building a theory of imperfect rationality, as in Elster (1977).

[22] As suggested by Rutherford (2009, p. 104), "with the use of the concept of self-control, behavior analysts signified not only a change in language, but a change in approach. Willpower, insight, and actualization were out, behavioral self-control was in."

[23] In 1970, Rachlin (1970, p. 186) described Ainslie as one among the few who had conducted laboratory research on self-control. See also the works by Rachlin and Green (1972), Ainslie (1974), and Rachlin (1974).

[24] The most significant example of that literature is *The Joyless Economy: An Inquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (Scitovsky, 1976).

[25] Schelling was invited by the Office of the Assembly of Behavioral and Social Sciences of the National Research Council: Goslin to Schelling, August 12, 1976, NAS-NRC Archives: Central File: A&C: ABASS: Committee on Substance Abuse & Habitual Behavior (hereafter NAS-NRC: CSAHB). For an overview of Schelling's participation in the committee, see Dodge (2006, chap. 20).

[26] Nixon's emphatic phrase is in keeping with government's exaggeration of "the prevalence of addiction and the threat it posed to the nation," as described by Courtwright (2012, p. 486). It is now well established that the war on drugs began after World War II and not with Nixon's public statement (Frydl, 2013; Pembleton, 2017).

[27] Campbell (2014) situates Robin's study in the shift of postwar psychiatric epidemiology from community studies based on nonspecific surveys to studies based on specific diagnostic criteria operationalized through detailed structured interviews conducted by nonpsychiatrists.

[28] Proposal to NIDA for support of a Committee on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior, February 1976, p. 1: NAS-NRC: CSAHB.

[29] Fourth Quarterly Report, February 27, 1977–May 26, 1977, Enclosure 5, NAS-NRC: CSAHB.

[30] In the committee, behavioral pharmacologists shared Schelling's focus on individual subjects.

[31] The list of background papers used by the committee for its report included social psychological research, such as Nisbett (1972), Rodin (1978), and Stunkard (1975). Papers are listed in National Research Council (1977, pp. 27–28). Schelling's use of willpower language should temper any attempt to characterize his effort as behavioristic in nature, although it does not rule out his awareness that the environment can be used in the art of self-management. What Rutherford (2009, p. 155) says of "behavior modifiers" in the mid-1970s may shed light on Schelling's idiosyncratic position on self-control: they "overlooked the inconsistency between a philosophy that demanded the renunciation of human agency and a technology that required human agency in order that it be adopted in the first place." As an economist, Schelling did not have to face that inconsistency to recognize the power of individuals to change their behaviors.

[32] See Proposal to the National Institute, p. 3.

[33] On the four groups—"Informal social controls and their influence on substance use," "Approaches to data acquisition on factors related to excessive substance use in the general population," "Problems of control and intervention in the rehabilitation of overusers," and "Animal models as pharmacogenetic tools in substance use research"—see Maloff and Levison (1980b, p. v). Schelling was part of groups 2 and 3: "First Quarterly Report, September 1–November 30, 1977," p. 1, NAS-NRC: CSAHB. An additional paper was produced for the group on data acquisition, but presented separately (Schelling, 1980b).

[34] Becker to Spradley and Rodin, May 16, 1977, Com. on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior, Yearly Progress Report, May 26, 1976–August 31, 1977, pp. 1, 3, 4: NAS-NRC: CSAHB. The book referred to by Becker is *Convention: A Philosophical Study* by Lewis (1969).

[35] The paper presented at the 1979 conference was published in *Public Interest* (Schelling, 1980d) before it appeared in Levison (1984a), with the other papers presented at the conference.

[36] On the flourishing of work on the relationship between social change and the self from the mid-1970s, see Snow et al. (1992). One referee wonders if Schelling's shift from controlling others to the self, making the conflicted self appears as a special case of interpersonal conflict, might have resonances with peace studies. Although students of peace, including Herbert Kelman, Rapoport, and Kenneth Boulding, would concede that the individual can be an appropriate unit of analysis in the study and resolution of international conflict (e.g., Kelman, 1991, pp. 265–266), their perspective does not imply transposing the idea of international conflict into the self even if it recognizes that resistances to change in a conflict relationship can be rooted in personal tensions. Moreover, their notion of interpersonal relations gives pride of place to mutual empathetic understanding.

[37] Proposal to the NIDA for continued support of a Committee on Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior, August 1978, p. 12: NAS-NRC: CSAHB, 1429a.

[38] On the more general question of rationality and personal identity, see Parfit (1984).

[39] On Schelling's, Sen's, and Hirschman's common intention to complicate the *homo economicus* paradigm in the 1980s, see McPherson (1984).

[40] On some implications of the introduction of interdependent decision for rational choice theory, see Isaac (2019).

[41] Among the newspapers reviewing the book were the *Boston Globe*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New Republic*, the *St. Louis Post*, and the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*.

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How to cite this article: Fontaine, P. (2024). Commitment, Cold War, and the battles of the self: Thomas Schelling on behavior control. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, *60*, e22302. https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.22302