

Joint actions

My aim here is to make some progress towards understanding how we act together, as opposed to alongside each other, or in mere coordination. You and I may paint the house together, as a team, or we may separately and coordinately paint different parts of it. Both might be instances of a broad concept of collective action. But, in the former case, we realize our goal together, whereas, in the latter, each of us acts on his or her own. This paper is about collective actions of the former kind, which I label *joint actions*.

We do not have a precise concept that corresponds to what I have outlined, and that we could analyze. I propose instead to construct a concept that I believe to be of particular interest. My arguments should be construed as arguments about the merits of the concepts different views generate.

The relevant philosophical literature has recently focused on shared intentions. But I argue against taking them as a starting point to understand joint actions. I review various phenomena that it makes sense to think of in terms of a concept of joint action, while no intention is, or even can be, shared (§§1-2). (I particularly discuss the individualistic theory of Michael Bratman and the normative theory of Margaret Gilbert.) Examples include actions in hierarchical contexts (in which agents may ignore the goal they contribute to, and may even have false beliefs about it), collaboration through coercion (agents may act together because they all leveled credible threats against the others), or the actions of non-human animals (chimpanzee group hunts for instance). I argue that these are (often) better thought of as joint actions, while the participants do not (always) share an intention — intuitively, and also on either or both of the dominant theories.

To introduce a different view of joint actions (§3), I start with a minimal mental condition. Participants to a joint action should each believe that they all track the same goal — whatever the goal is, however they describe it, and however little each participant knows about its nature.

I then propose to add non-mental conditions to fully account for acting together. I rely on some observations of Margaret Gilbert to formulate a central condition in terms of demands. But, contrary to Gilbert, I understand it not as a symptom of some normative fact, but as a descriptive condition on joint agency. I put forward the following view:

Participants jointly *A* iff (1) they all contribute to the *A*-ing, (2) they believe they all track the same goal, and (3) conditions obtain for some or all of them to be able to, and to know they are able to, make effective demands on some or all of the others that they perform actions relevant to the *A*-ing — and each stands in the ancestral of this relation with all the others.

It is important to construe the relevant concept of demand so as to include all imperative speech acts, cues as well as orders. You may demand an action of mine simply through the other actions you perform, when you expect me to take them as cues.

I propose a three-part defense of the demand view.

First, I argue that it makes sense, on intuitive grounds, to draw the borders of the concept in the way the demand view does (§3). It makes sense to group together the cases that fit the view, and to exclude those that do not.

Second, I highlight the connection between the demand view and vicarious actions (§4) — all cases in which someone, the Principal, effectively demands some action from someone else, the Agent. On the demand view, vicarious agency is the building block of joint actions. I argue that it provides an illuminating explanation of the joint nature of these actions.

A demand is similar to an intention — something often noticed. It is a representation that tends to and aims at making its content true. In a vicarious action, a demand connects the Principal's intentions about the Agent to the Agent's own intentions and subsequent complying action. If we regard the demand as a quasi-intention, the resulting chain of intentions and quasi-intentions is relevantly similar to intra-individual chains of intentions. I argue that it allows the Principal to be the vicarious agent of an action she did not perform herself, and that it allows the Agent to engage in the Principal's action, even though he may not know what it amounts to.

Vicarious agency supports the role of effective demands in joint agency, if not the particular formulation of the demand view. Demands allow actions to have multiple agents. Those participants to a joint action who can issue demands relate to the whole collective effort as (at least) potential vicarious agents. They hold the individual contributions of various participants together. The relation helps explain why we think of the participants as acting together.

Third, I review a few fruitful applications of the demand view (§5). For example, it helps us make sense of joint and non-joint aspects of some

activities. Philosophers often draw a sharp contrast between competitors and collaborators. But chess players both act against each other and with each other. The demand view helpfully separates competitive and collaborative aspects of what they do. What they can demand from each other (compliance with the rules, help in maintaining the conditions required to play, etc.) is what they do together. Where demands cease to be effective is where competition starts. The demand view also allows for degrees in joint agency. We can act together in *more or less* joint ways. The demand view could explain variations: we may demand more or less from each other, and we could be more or less reluctant to make or to answer demands.

Taken together, I hope these remarks will show the interest of a study of joint actions, alongside collective actions and shared intentions.