

Can shared activity simply be willed?

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1. Introduction

How does shared activity get started? Sometimes it's like this: you start doing something on your own, and end up acting *with* someone, but there was never a moment when you *decide* to act with anyone, let alone *this* person. Somehow you just fell into it, and it might come as a sudden revelation that you're not acting on your own. Very often, however, it seems that individuals can just get together and *decide* to act jointly. That is, shared activity often is simply and knowingly willed into existence by the individuals who will participate in it. And this, I want to suggest, poses a problem.

Philosophical reflection suggests that shared activity involves a distinctive, interlocking structure of intentions. The worry is that it is not obvious how each participant can simply decide or will, and thereby frame, the intention that (philosophers contend) is his or her contribution to this structure of intentions. That's because the intention that I as a participant form settles not only my action, but those of my partners as well. The challenge will be to reconcile such an intention with a respect for the autonomy of fellow participants. And it is a challenge that a theory of shared agency must face, for it seems that this respect (or something like it) is also a requirement on activity or agency that is genuinely *shared*.

The tension between autonomy and shared activity has not gone unnoticed.¹ But this problem is somewhat more difficult to solve than has been appreciated. I will focus on a sophisticated response that would have one predict rather than determine what partners will do and thereby, it is hoped, render moot the concerns about autonomy. I will argue that this predictive strategy cannot work because it would undermine the practical reasoning leading to the very intention whose possibility the prediction was meant to secure. I'll also take the initial steps toward a defense of a different approach.

2. Participatory commitment and the intention thesis

Suppose that several individuals undertake some shared or joint activity, call it *J*. Many theorists who differ on a host of issues will nevertheless agree that a

¹ David Velleman has raised a form of it in "How to share an intention."

satisfactory description of the situation will involve each participant having an intention or intention-like attitude concerning J.² Call this the *Intention Thesis*.

What motivates the Intention Thesis? One argument starts with the idea that intention involves a sort of commitment, and that this is reflected in the rational norms or requirements associated with intending. These norms distinguish an intention to A from a mere desire to A.³ I will assume that this is correct. Now, the Intention Thesis says that a participant in some shared activity J has an intention with respect to J. It would follow that each participant in shared activity J is *committed* to it. This seems to be just what we should say about shared activity. The Intention Thesis would thus yield an account of an important feature of shared activity – that of *participatory commitment*.

But why think that each participant in shared activity is committed to it? There are a number of reasons, but I'll mention two. First, when people act together and coordinate what they do, they inevitably rely on each other to do his or her share of the activity. And this reliance would not make much sense unless each individual can recognize others as at least to some extent committed to the undertaking.⁴

Second, some theorists recognize a special obligation participants in shared activity have to one another.⁵ But it's hard to see what this obligation could require of one, other than to do what one reasonably can to see the activity through (or at least to run it by others if one should decide to opt out). Implicit in the mutual obligations between participants, then, is some sort of commitment to the shared activity.

So a number of considerations suggest that participatory commitments are essential for shared activity. And these commitments, in turn, suggest the Intention Thesis – that is, an understanding of shared activity that attributes to each participant an intention concerning the activity.⁶

The Intention Thesis might also be motivated more directly. Attributing intentions to each participant serves to distinguish shared activity from other social or collective phenomena. In shared activity, we think of the individual participants as exercising their agency so as to do one thing or another *together*; acting together is something

² Bratman, Tuomela, Searle, Gilbert.

³ Bratman, Harman reference.

⁴ Bratman reference.

⁵ Gilbert, Roth references.

⁶ It would be a further step to argue that the individual intention in question is just the sort of attitude of intending that we are familiar with from the study of individual agency. Someone who is interested in the project of giving a reductive account of shared activity in terms of individual agency would no doubt be motivated to take this additional step. (E.g. Bratman, at the end of "Shared Cooperative Activity".) My present concern, however, is to show that reductivist and anti-reductivist can agree on the need to attribute something like an intention to each individual.

aimed at, even if not always an end in itself. The contrast is with certain collective or social phenomena where it is theoretically or explanatorily useful to describe a collection of individuals as a single agent or entity, or if not that, to describe events associated with a collection of individuals in terms of action, activity, or intention. But in these cases this might be useful for reasons that have nothing to do with the goals of the constituent individuals. Perhaps no individual aims for their country to make use of cheap migrant labor, but a host of economic, social, and political factors, along with individual business decisions might be usefully described as one country seeking out cheap labor from a neighboring country. To take another example: the interactions of various individuals might result in some prevailing market price, but no one aims for the market to have such a price. Whereas, in the social phenomenon that concerns us here – shared agency – part of what individual participants are aiming at is doing something together. And it is natural to understand this aiming in terms of the participant's intention with respect to the activity.

This connects with something noted near the outset, that shared activity can be brought about through the participants simply deciding to act together. But if decision is a matter of forming an intention, then it would seem that each participant must have intentions with respect to the activity, just as the Intention Thesis asserts.

3. The problem: autonomy and shared activity

So there seems to be good reason for endorsing the Intention Thesis, and I will proceed under the assumption that it is true. To see the difficulty that we now face, we have to appreciate that one can only form intentions regarding matters that one takes oneself as being able to settle.⁷ Suppose I'm considering whether to go to the library or to the beach this afternoon. I settle the matter by intending to go to the latter. But suppose I know or believe that I cannot go to the beach, or that it is something beyond my control. Then I cannot settle on going to the beach; I cannot decide and intend to go.

Now, if shared activity involves my intention that we J, it would seem that our J-ing is something that is to be settled by me. But is it? Coercion and manipulation are not compatible with the shared activity that is generally at issue in the literature. But it's

⁷ There is some debate about how this condition is to be formulated. Do I need to believe that I can bring about what I intend? Or merely that I have a good chance of doing so? Or is it that I should only lack the belief that I cannot or will not? The condition is generally understood to be internalist. But there might be some limits on this. We would not count as genuine intentions attitudes the presuppose delusive beliefs about what can be accomplished. I cannot, for example, intend to fly by flapping my arms. Velleman seems to have some internalist condition in mind, but he's not always clear on it. See 203 in his *The Possibility of Practical Reason*. It is less clear that there is a problematic tension between the Intention Thesis and the autonomy if the settling condition on intentions is construed externalistically. See below.

not clear how, besides through some such control or undue authority, my intention could settle what you do or intend. What you do is a matter for you to decide; at least, that's how I should see it if I'm acting *with* you. And if that's the case, then the practical issue of what *we* do is not something I regard to be settled by my intention or decision. So, although it might be possible in other contexts to have the intention that we J, it appears not to be compatible with shared activity.⁸

In sum, the Intention Thesis attributes to each participant in shared activity an intention regarding the entire activity. This entails that a participant can settle what his or her partners will do. And that's hard to square with the idea that the participants are *sharing* activity – where it's not up to an individual to determine what everyone does. This is the problem of autonomy.

4. The predictive strategy

If my intention that we J doesn't settle the matter for you, how, then, could I be in a position to form it? I will focus on the suggestion that I can *predict* that you will have the requisite intention.⁹ Many conditions or circumstances are not under my control. But given that it's reasonable for me to believe with some confidence that they'll be in place, I can go ahead and settle some practical matters by forming intentions that presuppose these circumstances. Now, our J-ing requires certain intentions on your part. But if I can *predict* with some confidence that you will have the appropriate intentions, I can go ahead and form the intention that we J.

My prediction does not entail that you cannot form your intention through practical reasoning in the usual way, or that such reasoning isn't available to you. There is nothing inherently coercive about making predictions about what others will do, and then going on to form intentions or plans in light of those predictions. So it appears that we have an explanation for how it is that a participant of shared activity can form the intention that we J.

But might there be something worrying about regarding a fellow participant in this predictive mode? It may not be coercive, but it still doesn't seem to be quite the right attitude to have toward partners or prospective partners in shared activity. After all, you don't generally look at yourself in this way when making decisions about what to

⁸ I've formulated this problem in terms of autonomy, drawing on one way Velleman describes his concerns. But his main characterization of the problem is as the problem of explaining how discretion can be shared. I don't think that these are equivalent, but cannot argue that here.

⁹ This is *roughly* what Bratman proposes in "I intend that we J". See below. There are other responses to the autonomy problem such as one that appeals to conditional intentions, and another to the idea of intending *one's part* in the shared activity. I think that these views face serious difficulties, but I cannot discuss them here.

do.¹⁰ This would not be to respect your own agency. Fellow participants in shared activity would seem to command a similar respect, one which is lacking when one regards them from a predictive stance.

One can, in moments of reflection, step away from participation, and the attendant shared practical perspective, in order to take on a more individual, predictive stance with respect to fellow participants. Indeed, an analogous intellectual maneuver is possible with respect to one's own. The point, however, is that this is not, fundamentally, how the agent looks upon what she is doing; taken too far, it's symptomatic of an alienation that undermines genuine agency. The predictive stance would seem to occupy a similarly precarious position in the case of shared activity.

A *preliminary* puzzle for the predictive strategy, then, is this. On the one hand, shared activity involves individual participants with intentions of the form *I intend that we J*. To have such an intention, I need to be able to regard my intention as settling the matter. On the strategy outlined just above, this involves my making a prediction about your intentions. But on the other hand, the predictive attitude appears to be the wrong perspective to have on fellow participants. It is the point of view of some third party observing what we're up to. Whereas, in acting together, you and I are sharing a practical perspective. So I ought to regard what you do as something that is an open matter until you form the intention – much in the way in which from the practical perspective I regard what I do as something that is not settled until I form an intention. But this respect for you is at odds with my making the prediction necessary for me to intend that we J.

5. Intention and prediction

Recall how we got to the view that would have us regard fellow participants in the predictive mode. The original problem with shared agency concerned autonomy: how can I, in shared activity, take myself as settling what you will do? The predictive strategy is meant to solve this problem. I don't have to settle what you do; I can predict what you do instead. I've just suggested that in the context of shared activity, there may be some concerns with my taking a predictive attitude with respect to your intentions and actions. But surely these concerns pale next to those stemming from my *determining or settling* what you are to do. Not everyone has the intuition that shared activity requires each participant to have the respect that would preclude

¹⁰ Since I will be in the neighborhood, it would be a good idea to go shopping at the market and decide to do so. But why do I think I'll be in the neighborhood? Perhaps it's a prediction as to my whereabouts: I am being kidnapped, and predict from their past behavior that the kidnappers will release me in the vicinity of the market. It would be odd that I would take a similar attitude toward my own actions: I merely predict that I'll be shopping at the hardware store next door – given my need for nails and my past behavior. That would reveal an oddly alienated attitude towards one's own actions. Normally, I think I'll be in the neighborhood because I've decided and intend to go to the hardware store in that neighborhood.

adopting a predictive attitude regarding fellow participants; for some it hints of preciosity. If that respect is the price to pay to solve the autonomy problem, many would be happy to pony it up. I therefore do not want to rest too much on the claim about the attitude of respect, or lack thereof, implicit in the predictive strategy.¹¹ For all that's been said, shared activity might differ from individual agency in being more hospitable toward taking the predictive stance – at least with respect to one's partners.

Let's think a little more about this predictive strategy to try to see what, if anything, might be wrong with it. I will argue that insofar as I succeed in making a reasonable prediction about your intention, I will for all intents and purposes have predicted *my own* intention. And the suggestion will be that predicting one's own intention is a problem.

The proposal we're considering, then, is that for me to be able to intend that we J, I must be able to predict that you will also have an intention with a similar form. But that cannot be all. If I am to rely on your intention, or the prediction of your intention, as a basis for forming mine, then I have to think that your intention is *sound*. I can't think that your intention is a passing fancy, somehow misguided or confused, or based on false or unfounded presuppositions. It would, for example, be problematic for me to plan around your intention to go shopping when I know that your car is broken and that you have no other means of transportation. Similarly, without some confidence in the soundness of your intention regarding our J-ing, I would not be able to rely on it in shared activity; I would be unable to intend and commit to the activity.

To assess the soundness of your intention, then, I need to be confident in its presuppositions. One presupposition of your intention that we J is that I also so intend. Our J-ing requires my contribution after all, and in shared activity, that contribution won't be forthcoming unless I have the right intention. In assessing your intention as sound, I have to think that your prediction or presupposition of *my* intention was correct.¹² So in order to form my intention, I would be predicting it.

¹¹ A further consideration: simply asserting the incompatibility of taking the predictive mode with fellow participants in shared activity seems rather close to Margaret Gilbert's claim that there is a kind of obligation – what I call contralateral commitments – holding between participants in shared activity. I am sympathetic to Gilbert's thesis, and have adapted it to defend a conception of interpersonal intention in an account of shared activity (see below). But I am pursuing another line of thought toward that view of intention and shared activity.

¹² But maybe it doesn't matter whether your intention was soundly formed with respect to its presupposition that I intend. I can, after all, *make* your presupposition correct, by intending as you think I will. Thus, simply going ahead and intending will ensure that I will be able to rely on your intention, which is a condition for that very intending of mine. All this, without having to predict my own intention. In response, we should note that the situation, of course, is going to be the same for you. You will take yourself to be making my intention correct. But if I recognize that our situations are analogous, and take myself to be making your intention correct, then I should realize that you're doing the same to me.

What's so bad about predicting one's intentions? As was noted above, I can on occasion think about myself from a detached, third-personal perspective, and come to conclude that I will intend or do so-and-so because of my character and such-and-such circumstances. But the troublesome aspect of the present case is that the detached perspective enters right into – and, I contend, undermines – the practical reasoning that's supposed to lead me to act. The point is most perspicuous in the case of forming the intention *right now*, where every participant forming or having formed the intention by now is required for our J-ing: it's now or never. This requires that I have to believe, *now*, that you intend likewise. But in coming to believe, in these circumstances, that you soundly intend that we J, I will have *discovered* that I already have the intention. No reason, then, to *form* the intention through practical reasoning.

Not all cases are like this. Your intention (or the intention you will acquire) might be premised on the *prediction* that I will intend, not on my already having the intention. So the only theoretical conclusion that I would run in to in assessing the soundness of your intention is that I will intend sometime in the future. And it's not yet clear that this is problematic.¹³ At least, it doesn't seem as bad a result as the one where an attempt to reason toward intending results in the discovery that I already intend. If I only predict that I will intend, could I not then go ahead and form the intention at my leisure?

What would this amount to? One forms intentions for the future in order to settle some practical matter. But, given my prediction, it seems that there is nothing about the world for me to settle. Or, if it is not something in the world but my thought that is to be settled, I've already done so by predicting. So what would be the point of intending this conclusion? Intending (or deciding, for that matter) is not supposed to be an endorsement of one's fate or destiny. From one's point of view, the intention is to be taken as settling the matter. But in reasoning toward the intention, one realizes that the matter is already settled by the prediction that one will intend.

Goldman has argued that nothing precludes one from having inductive knowledge of one's future acts – and, presumably, intentions – knowledge that is not based on intending or deciding on those acts. He criticizes Hampshire, who insists that knowledge of one's own voluntary actions can only be practical, based on one's firm intention or decision to act.¹⁴ One of Goldman's counterexamples to Hampshire's thesis involves the agent forgetting the prediction and subsequently intending and

But how, then, could I think that *I* was settling the matter? If it is up to you to secure the presuppositions regarding my intention, it becomes difficult to see how I could take myself to be settling the matter.

¹³ Goldman reference. See Velleman *Practical Reflection*, Ch. 5 for discussion.

¹⁴ Goldman, *Theory*, 192-4. He cites Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual*, 54. See also Hampshire and Hart, 5 for something close to the claim that one cannot have predictive/evidence-based knowledge of voluntary action (assuming that a voluntary action is one based on a decision).

acting as predicted. In another case, the agent starts with the prediction of a course of action – in this case, suicide – but then gradually over the course of five years acquiesces to the idea, so that in the end he possesses the intention to kill himself.

Goldman's case perhaps is effective against Hampshire's thesis as it was formulated, especially if one shares with Goldman a compatibilist view of voluntary action.¹⁵ His counterexamples nevertheless betray *some* sort of incompatibility between the practical and theoretical perspectives. In neither instance is the practical matter settled through any act of will or decision undertaken in the context of a prediction regarding that very matter. In the first case, the prediction is screened off from having any impact on decision because it is simply forgotten or not attended to. In the second, there is no decision; one's will is structured passively, over an extended period of time. At no point in this example does one decide on suicide.

One factor underlying the incompatibility of prediction and decision/intention is that the former undermines the point or motivation for the latter. If the issue of what I will do is already settled for me, then what purpose is served for me to *decide* so to act?¹⁶ We can make the point by assuming that forming an intention is an instrumental act, a means we take toward an end.¹⁷ In this case, the act would be without point or purpose, since the matter is already settled. But even if we don't think of intention formation as an act, the point remains that it would be an attitude without a function or role to play in reasoning. For that role would already be played by the prediction.

Another consideration in support of incompatibility of prediction with intention involves a normative ideal articulated recently by Moran, namely, that one's theoretical beliefs concerning one's own intention to A should defer to practical deliberation about whether to A.¹⁸ It is, Moran contends, a rational requirement on intentions and being an intender that one's relation to one's intentions be radically non-evidential, one of "self-constituting" avowal. One must arrive at one's intention not by some sort of higher order perception of one's attitude or evidence concerning one's psychology, but through an outward looking deliberation about what it is that one [can and] should do in these circumstances (92, transparency 105).¹⁹ If this normative ideal is not met, that is, if a theoretical perspective takes precedence, then there is the

¹⁵ It is less clear to me that the formulations in H&H are susceptible to the counterexamples. I need to check the Hampshire reference...

¹⁶ What if I don't go beyond a *probability* that I intend, and never, as Hume puts it, *fix my judgment*? (See *Enquiry 10.4*) Then we give up the idea of commitment and judgment in the theoretical realm. But is that realistic? In order finally to make use of one's beliefs, either in further reasoning or in action, one's judgment needs to be fixed or settled. To the extent that we have such a notion of commitment in the theoretical reasoning, we have our problem. Even Hume seems to think that at some point one must commit; mere intensity of thought or attitude (i.e. perception, to use Hume's terminology) isn't enough.

¹⁷ Harman talks about intention formation as a means.

¹⁸ Moran, "Authority and Estrangement", 63.

¹⁹ Moran, 92, 105. Moran doesn't seem to raise the issue of ability in this context.

possibility of arriving at a conclusion regarding what one's intention is, irrespective of what one thinks is possible and worth doing. Prioritizing the theoretical in this way would entail that deliberation about what one can and should do would leave open what one intends and what one will do. But then it's not clear that this subordinated deliberation can count as genuine practical reasoning. One cannot take oneself to be deliberating or engaging in practical reasoning if the upshot is not to count as "making up one's mind", and settling the matter.

The suggestion is that if we were to take up the predictive strategy for forming the shared intention, we will inevitably run afoul of the normative ideal identified by Moran. Part of the practical reasoning necessary for intention involves an assessment of what it is in one's power or capacity to intend. Indeed, genuine deliberation and reflection on the reasons for acting will in some way encompass the issue of whether one can A, for one doesn't have the relevant sort of reason to A if one cannot A. I have suggested above that in the case of reasoning toward the intention that we J, I will inevitably be led to predicting my own intention. And so, even if I wanted to respect Moran's requirement to defer the theoretical to the practical, I would, in attempting to engage in the latter as the predictive strategy would have me, inevitably be led into a theoretical or evidential relationship to my own intention, thereby violating Moran's requirement.

In sum, although Goldman establishes the possibility of predicting one's own intentions, his compatibility result is restricted to cases where prediction lies outside the context of practical reasoning toward the intention. Hence it does not bear on the situation that is our concern – that of willing shared activity. If we adopt the predictive strategy in our account of shared activity, theoretical prediction cannot be in one way or another screened from practical intention formation. The theoretical perspective would enter right into – and thereby undermine – the practical reasoning undertaken to form the relevant intention for shared activity. And that seems to be reason enough to reject the predictive strategy.

I should note that the proposal I've been criticizing is not quite how Bratman implements the predictive strategy (in "I Intend That We J"). As he describes it, what allows me to form the intention that we J is not my outright prediction that you will likewise intend. Rather, I believe that you will form the intention, *if I form the intention*. The conditional form of my belief relieves me from having to predict my own intention. I only need to be assured that if I were to intend, you would have the intention, and that it would be sound. So, the issue of our J-ing is therefore still an open one, but one that I now can settle by going ahead and intending that we J.

That does seem to solve the problem on the side of the issuer of the intention, me in this example. I have formed the intention independently of you; but we are supposing that the situation is not the same for you. You are faced with the

(unconditional) intention that I've issued based on my prediction of what you would do if I were to intend. You set about to intend; but in doing so, you have to think that my intention is sound. And part of what would make my intention sound, is the soundness of the prediction I've made about your intention. So then in trying to form your intention in response to mine, you will predict your own intention, and the matter would be settled for you. The point, as before, is that it's not settled in the right way.

6. Acting directly on another's intention

It seems that shared activity can be willed into existence. But so far it's not clear how. The problem at the outset was to see how one individual could issue an intention that we J in a way that was not coercive, manipulative, etc. If I'm to respect you as a fellow participant, I have to see your contribution to our J-ing as stemming from a decision you make for yourself, as an autonomous agent. My intention that we J would be a consideration for you to weigh, but it shouldn't be dispositive for you. It doesn't settle what you will do. And if that's right, then our J-ing is not something that I can intend.

But maybe we can relax the individualistic assumption that only one's own intentions can rationally settle what one does. Perhaps my intention that we J can settle what you're to do, just as your own prior intentions can. Suppose, that is, that it is possible that one can legitimately act directly on another's intention. Then we would have a straightforward story about how it is that shared activity can be willed into existence. One of us simply issues one such intention that we J, and we both act directly on it.

What does it mean to act directly on an intention? In the individual case, when it comes time to act on the prior intention, the practical issue is supposed to be settled (defeasibly, of course). I decided earlier to go for a bike ride now, and in so deciding, committed myself to this course of action. This commitment is reflected in some general norms or requirements of practical reasoning with intentions. For example, when one intends to A, one should not intend or act in ways that are incompatible with A-ing, and one is subject to some sort of demand for intending means that promote one's A-ing. It is not compatible with my having so decided that I treat the matter of whether to ride as an open one. The matter is settled for me, and I should act directly on the prior intention.

Perhaps something like this might happen between people. I issue the intention that we J. This intention settles the matter of our J-ing. It wouldn't do so if the matter of our J-ing is, for you, an open question. Part of what enables me to issue the intention is that you take the intention to settle the matter of what you, and therefore we, will

do. You (and I) act directly on an intention I've issued for the both of us. Indeed, the suggestion is that if you were not to take up the intention in such a way that it settles what you will do, then you would be violating norms of commitment associated with these interpersonal intentions. You would be guilty of something akin to the irrationality of failing to act on one's own intentions.

But isn't your autonomy undermined if I were somehow to settle what you're doing? To see that this need not follow, consider the individual case. Acting directly on one's own intention does not entail that somehow I am being manipulated or coerced by my past self; there need be no hint that somehow, at the time of action, my status as an agent is compromised.²⁰

Indeed, it is unclear how one could be self-governing if one didn't have the ability to act directly on one's prior intentions. Part of what's involved in autonomous agency is acting in accord with a conception of what is good or right or worth pursuing. But to a significant extent, that will require some foresight: often it is difficult to articulate or discern what is worthwhile, and to figure out how to pursue or implement it. It's not something that can be accomplished on the spot – not always, at least. One important way to avoid overwhelming our deliberative and reasoning capacities when it comes time to act is to plan ahead of time. If at any moment I reach some decision about what to do, I should be able to take for granted that decision at least for some time. Acting directly on one's prior intentions affords the sort of stability required for one's more reflective judgments to have an impact on one's actions. The moral is that the notion of acting directly on an intention is not, in itself, at odds with autonomy.²¹ It seems, rather, to be a condition for it.

I do think that acting directly on another's intention is analogous in some respects to claims about individual practical reasoning over time. So questions arising for the one might also arise for the other. In the individual case, it would seem that one can act directly on a prior intention in such a way that the earlier decision settles what one does later. Do we actually reason in this way? And to what extent ought we? How are the norms or requirements of intention-based commitment related to reasons for action? What reasons does one have to act in accord with these principles? And what reasons are transmitted by such a mechanism?

Similar interesting and difficult questions about the interplay of reasons with norms of commitment can be raised concerning the interpersonal thesis. I do not pretend to have a response to them all here. My point is that we do not evade all such questions by eschewing the thesis of acting directly on another's intention. And to the extent

²⁰ Note that one *can* manipulate one's future self by restricting options. It's just that forming an intention for one to act on directly in the future is not by itself to manipulate oneself.

²¹ (This is, of course, something that could be manipulated or taken advantage of. But no one said that we should be immune to that.)

that we must address them in the context of individual practical reasoning, we might have the beginnings of a response for the interpersonal case. I'll attempt the preliminary steps of such a response in the last two sections.

7. Entitlement

Underlying this notion of acting directly on another's intention is the **authority** that one individual has to settle what another will do. I would add that there is, correspondingly, an **entitlement** on the part of the latter to the practical judgment underlying the intention issued by the former.²²

Let's start with the latter. What sense of entitlement do we have here? Well, when I act directly on my own prior intention – say, to go for a bike ride – my action is not merely that of conforming to a prior intention. I am setting out on a bike ride, for whatever reasons I had for so deciding, and in the face of competing reasons to pursue other activities or projects. I don't necessarily have those reasons at hand, for not all reasons for A-ing, let alone the rest of the considerations that figure in deliberation, need be available at every moment during the course of an action in order to guide it through. Constantly attending to the further considerations or reasons in favor of what I'm doing can be distracting, hindering or even undermining performance of the task at hand.

But though these further reasons in favor of A-ing are not attended to, I am in some sense acting on them. The intentionality and the rationality of the decision is richer than just that of acting on a prior intention. Imagine what it would be like *merely* to act on what is so to speak stated in the content of the prior intention, but with little or no regard to the reasons for which one so intended. One might meet the letter of what it is that one intends, but fail utterly to address the considerations that prompted it. Those reasons serve as a standard for guiding and assessing the action (e.g. whether it is completed, how well it was accomplished). Moreover, they are the standards that the *agent* does or would invoke. So what the agent is doing is not merely fulfilling her prior intention. The further reasons that went into the decision/intention also figure as reasons that the agent is acting on. Thus, the intentionality of what is being done encompasses many of those further considerations.²³

²² The authority I have in issuing my intention to you explains your obligation or “contralateral commitment” to me to do your part in shared activity. The entitlement explains my contralateral commitment to you; when I issue an intention for you, I cannot also intend and act in ways that would undermine your being able to carry out that intention.

²³ Anscombe reference. The structure she identifies regarding the individuation of action.

What follows from the fact that I don't have these further reasons in mind, but nevertheless can act *for* those further reasons? It must be that in acting I am related to those reasons in a way different from the standard understanding of the relation in intentional action, where one guides one's actions toward the end one consciously has in mind. I will speak of the alternative relation to the further reasons for which an agent is acting as that of *entitlement*: I am entitled to these further reasons in that my action is entitled to be described in those terms.²⁴ It's this entitlement, then, that allows me to act for these further reasons, and thus underwrites the richer intentionality and rationality we noted at the outset of the argument.

For example, how I undertake the bike ride will depend on what my reasons are for going. Which bike I choose, how hard I ride, and what path I take, will vary depending on whether, for example, I am riding in order to get some exercise, for fun, or as a commute. What it would take (or should take) for me to cease riding, or to alter my plans, will also depend upon my reasons. This sort of intentional action, an action A done for some reason R (and in the face of other reasons), is often decided or settled upon ahead of time, and sometimes could not be done unless planned ahead (perhaps not the case of a bike ride). So the fact that I can, as a matter of course, act on a prior decision or intention and thereby act for reasons at some remove from what I'm immediately executing suggests an entitlement to the earlier judgment and the reasons underlying it. To be able to act for reasons in this way would require that I be able to act directly on certain prior intentions.²⁵

Turning to the interpersonal, what might serve as a starting point for defending an entitlement to rely on the practical judgment and intention of another? I suggest that it is something like this: I have some sort of reason for what I'm doing that goes beyond what I actually have in mind. What I do does have a richer rationality, a richer intentionality, for in many cases the further reasons entailed by the richer description of the action serve for the purposes of guidance and assessment of my performance, and are standards that I myself do or would endorse. Some one or some others together have formed the requisite intention, or engaged in the deliberation that culminates in an intention to A. I may have never actually done so myself. But granting that I nevertheless am acting for those reasons, I must, then, be entitled to those reasons and the practical judgment that went into the intention.

Of course, I am not always so entitled. I may not understand the further reasons for the intention, or the significance of the larger course of events of which my doings are a part. If there is no possibility of communication with those who formed the

²⁴ Burge reference.

²⁵ The strategy here is to defend entitlement transcendentally, as a condition for a certain kind of acting for reasons. There might be other ways of justifying the entitlement. Perhaps the cohesiveness of a group, or group agency as well. But the justification for me to act on it would not be as clear. A more promising strategy might be in terms of the relationships one has with certain others.

intention that would somehow allow me to secure this sort of comprehension or understanding, then that would seem to preclude my entitlement to those reasons. If there were no way for me to comprehendingly simulate the reasoning of those who have decided so as to capture the further reasons for what I'm doing, then that too would challenge an entitlement to those reasons. But that is to be expected, for we would not want to say that one could be acting for these further reasons in those circumstances. (Or if the action is done for those reasons, the action in question – at least under that description – is not genuinely mine.)

So, one's entitlement to the reasons underlying the intention of another – an entitlement that would underwrite acting directly on that intention – is by no means straightforward. It would require some capacity for comprehension, recapitulation, and/or communication of the relevant reasons. Nothing guarantees that I will be able to do any of this. On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be any inherent obstacle to my doing so.

8. Authority

Turning from the entitlement to act on an intention of another, let's look into the nature of authority one individual has to issue such interpersonal intentions and settle what another does. In lieu of a full and proper discussion, I'd like to make two points, one about consent, and another concerning an allegedly problematic asymmetry.

A natural thought would be that your **consent** would secure for me the relevant authority to settle what you are to do. In the case of shared agency, each participant consents to conforming to the relevant intentions of his or her partners. One worry I have is that consent might *presuppose* forms of shared activity. For example, consent is normally secured through conversation, itself shared activity. So one challenge for this approach is to explain how consent might be given in a way that does not presuppose shared activity. There is the further concern that not all instances of shared cooperative activity appear to involve consent. Is there normally anything like consent or promising when people come together to play chess or softball?

Now part of the idea of introducing the notion of acting directly on the intention of another was the failure of alternative approaches to maintain the sense in which an intention involves a sort of commitment to a course of action. (This was a challenge particularly for the proposal involving interdependent conditional intentions.) But we can see now that a picture of the authority to issue an intention for another that appeals to the notion of consent will not capture this commitment. For if one were to issue any such intention, it wouldn't settle the matter for the other. The matter would

not be resolved until the other grants consent. And that means that one had not issued an intention.²⁶

Let me turn to the point about asymmetry. Part of the resistance to the thought that you would act directly on my intention is the idea that there would be a significant asymmetry between the sort of agency being exercised by each of us. I issue an intention for all the reasons there are for us to J, whereas you just act the way you do because I issued the intention. How could such an asymmetry be reconciled with the fact that the activity is supposed to be shared? The answer is that in acting directly on my intention you are entitled to the practical judgment and the warrant and reasons underlying it. So then your agency does not seem to be as compromised, and the intentionality of what you're doing not as limited, as the idea of acting directly on another's intention might initially suggest.²⁷

9. Conclusion

Theories of shared activity typically and with good reason attribute to each participant an intention concerning the shared activity. A central problem is that of reconciling such intentions with the autonomy of the participants; willing shared activity into being would seem to require that one individual can settle what everyone else will do. The problem is not solved by predicting, rather than settling, what fellow participants will do. That would lead to the prediction of one's own intentions, which is toxic for the practical reasoning meant to form those very intentions. What's needed, I contend, is the possibility of acting directly on another's intention. Someone has to issue the intention and we all act directly on it.

Much more needs to be said about the notions of authority and entitlement underlying this interpersonal form of intending. But I hope to have said enough to suggest that the idea of one person acting directly on the intention of another is not a non-starter, and might be put to use in an account of shared activity. If so, then we might hope to get a start on whatever it is that we're doing together.

²⁶ I would allow that consent might be involved in establishing or altering relationships or arrangements in ways that would allow for individuals to act directly on the intentions of one another.

²⁷ A further thought is that, at least in cases of shared agency and related phenomena, **reciprocity** might also address our concerns about the asymmetry between participants. Part of why it is that I have the authority to settle the matter for you is that you also have the authority to settle matter for me.