

Lecture 04: Joint Action

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1. Commitment in Shared Agency

Intentions are associated with commitments to yourself.

‘Having a desire to walk together is compatible with having a desire not to do so ... whereas, in intending, one has gone beyond the point of weighing considerations for and against, and has committed to a course of action.’ (Roth 2004, p. 361)

Shared intentions are associated with commitments to each other.

‘the parties to a joint commitment are in an important sense obligated to conform to the commitment. Notably, the obligation in question is directed: ... one is obligated to the other parties to conform to the commitment.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 367)

‘joint commitment is ... a commitment by two or more people of the same two or more people.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 6)

‘When people regard themselves as collectively intending to do something, they appear to understand that, by virtue of the collective intention, and that alone, each party has the standing to demand explanations of nonconformity and, indeed, to demand the conformity of the other parties. A joint commitment account of collec-

tive intention respects this fact. Though it would take too long to argue this here, accounts that do not appeal to joint commitment—such as those of Michael Bratman and John Searle—are hard-pressed to do so.’ (Gilbert 2013, pp. 88–9)

‘If they are walking together, both Andrea herself and Heinrich will have the understandings so far described: by virtue of their walking together Andrea has a right to Heinrich’s continued walking alongside her, together with the standing to issue related rebukes and demands.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 25)

‘Mightn’t one have a noncommittal attitude toward one’s walk with someone if, for example, one suspects that person might turn out to be irritable and unpleasant company?’ (Roth 2004, p. 361)

2. Gilbert on Joint Commitment

Is having a contralateral commitment just a matter of having an intention?

‘it is unclear how one’s own intention to pursue a goal amounts to a commitment to anyone besides oneself.’ (Roth 2004, p. 371)

Is having a contralateral commitment just a matter of having conditional commitments?

‘It’s not even clear from the start that Bob has any commitment ... because his commitment is, in effect, conditioned on itself (by way of the conditioning on Sue’s intention).’ (Roth 2004,

p. 378)

Are contralateral commitments irreducible to personal commitments?

‘a commitment

by two or more people

of the same two or more people.’

Contrast personal commitment (by me, of me)

Contrast contralateral commitment (by me, of me, to you)

joint commitment is ‘the collective analogue of a personal commitment’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 85)

‘what is needed, to put it abstractly, is expressions of readiness on everyone’s part to be jointly committed [...]. Common knowledge of these expressions completes the picture.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 253)

‘In order to *create* a new joint commitment each of the would-be parties must openly express to the others his readiness together with the others to commit them all in the pertinent way. Once these expressions are common knowledge between the parties, the joint commitment is in place—as they understand’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 311)

‘[i]t is not clear that there is any very helpful way of breaking down the notion of expressing one’s readiness to be jointly committed’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 48)

‘this is pretty much the whole story regarding the creation of a basic case of ... joint commit-

ment’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 48).

‘Once the idea of joint commitment has been clarified, one may find it obvious that the parties to any such commitment ... owe each other such actions in their capacity as parties to the joint commitment’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 400-1)

‘What each is committed to, through the joint commitment, is to do his part [...] These actions are owed solely by virtue of the existence of the joint commitment’ (Gilbert 2013, pp. 401-2)

‘just as—in the case of a personal commitment—you are in a position to berate yourself for failing to do what you committed yourself to do, all of those who are parties with you to a given *joint* commitment are in a position to berate you for failing to act according to that joint commitment’ (p. 401). (Gilbert 2013, p. 401)

‘We agree with Gilbert that joint action goes, intuitively, with the sort of joint commitment that she describes.’ (Pettit & Schweikard 2006, p. 32)

3. Joint Commitment: Some Applications

‘joint commitment underlies a host of central social phenomena in the human realm’ (p. 400); it is a ‘precondition of the correct ascription’ of acting together, collective belief, shared intention, and more’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 9)

‘Any joint commitment can be described in a statement of the following form:’ ‘A, B, and so

on (or those with property P) are jointly committed as far as is possible (by virtue of their several actions) to emulate a single doer of X’. (Gilbert 2013, p. 311)

‘What is a “single body” [...]? whereas a single human being constitutes a single body [...], a plurality of human individuals does not in and of itself constitute such a body. [...] however, such a plurality can emulate such a body—one with a plurality not only of limbs, eyes, and ears, but also of noses and mouths’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 116)

‘a “body” here is understood to be a non-collective body.’

‘when two or more people share an intention, none of them need to have a contributory intention.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 103)

In manifesting any collective phenomenon, we can truly say ‘We have created a third thing, and each of us is one of the parts’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 269)

References

- Gilbert, M. P. (2013). *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pettit, P. & Schweikard, D. (2006). Joint Actions and Group Agents. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 36(1), 18 –39.
- Roth, A. S. (2004). Shared agency and contralateral commitments. *The Philosophical Review*, 113(3), 359–410.

For two or more agents to collectively:	... is for each to be jointly committed to emulate a single body that:	see chapters
intend to ϕ	intends to ϕ	1,4,5,10
believe that p	believes that p	6,7
value item I	believes that I has a certain value	8
have a social convention concerning regularity R	accepts the fiat that R is to be conformed to	9
make an agreement that p	upholds a decision that p	9,13,18
feel guilt over action A	feels guilt over action A	10
attend to X	attends to X	14