Can joint commitments live longer than individual commitments?

Anna Strasser
OVERVIEW

1. COMMITMENTS
   - varieties
     - individual
     - explicit joint
     - implicit minimal

2. CLASHING INTUITIONS
   - necessity of normative relations
     - Bratman versus Gilbert

3. ARMCHAIR VS. COMMON SENSE
   - experimental approaches
     - Gomez-Lavin & Rachar
     - Butterfill & Michael
Commitment – the social glue

agents stand in a specific relation to their intentions
- helps to plan individual actions unfolding over longer timescales
- enables individuals to resist temptations & distractions
- makes individuals’ behavior predictable

explicit group's relation to its shared intention
- helpful for planning & coordinating joint actions unfolding over longer timescales
- facilitates cooperation by making people willing to perform actions that they would not otherwise perform

one agent stands implicitly in a relation to the shared intention
- expectations & motivation can be disassociated
Can joint commitments live longer than individual commitments?

To what extent individual and joint commitments can fall apart in joint actions?

**Non-Normativist**
- There are joint actions without a joint commitment.

**Normativist**
- All joint actions have necessarily a joint commitment.

**In-Between**
- At least a minimal sense of commitment is to be found.
WHAT HAPPENS IF ONE PARTICIPANT OF A JOINT ACTION IS CHANGING THEIR MIND?

**Bratman (2014)**
- ... necessarily destroys the shared intention and the joint commitment

There are minimal joint actions without joint commitment.

**Gilbert (2013)**
- ... there still is a joint commitment

All joint actions are necessarily based on joint commitments.

2019 Lebowitz Prize of the American Philosophical Association for Philosophical Achievement and Contribution

**Michael Bratman** and **Margaret Gilbert**, “What is it to Act Together?”
virtual meeting on 6 April 2021
Ned Olive’s statement to Pam at the end is accurate! bricks and mortar.

As I see it, once Ned has changed his mind they no longer have a shared intention to climb to the top.

We will hike to the top of the hill.
Is Olive justified to claim a joint commitment?

Ned didn’t inform Olive that he decided to go only halfway.

Pam assumes that Olive & Ned are acting together.

According to Olive’s knowledge the joint commitment holds.

Initial joint commitment is existent.
Can such intuitions be experimental tested?

Gomez-Lavin & Rachar (2019)

**SUPPORT NORMATIVE APPROACH**

Butterfill & Michael (under review)

**DID NOT SUPPORT NORMATIVE APPROACH**

**NON-NORMATIVIST**

**Michael Bratman**
- lacking common knowledge condition initiates a minimal joint action
- there are minimal cases of joint action without normative relations

**MARGARET GILBERT**
- common knowledge condition does not have to hold throughout the joint action
- actionrelative normative relations are inherent in joint action

**NORMATIVIST**

FORMAL APPROACHES TESTING INTUITIONS BY SYSTEMATICALLY SAMPLING NAIVE PARTICIPANTS’ INTUITIONS ABOUT EXPERIMENTALLY CONTROLLED SCENARIOS

- Margaret Gilbert
- Butterfill & Michael (under review)

Gomez-Lavin & Rachar (2019)

Support normative approach

Margaret Gilbert

DID NOT SUPPORT NORMATIVE APPROACH
indicating the normativist paradigm

3×1 between-subjects design:
control condition (C): no evidence of a joint action / low condition (L): low, joint action / high condition (H): high, joint action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>scenario</th>
<th>hypotheses</th>
<th>obligations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>helping (perspective of the helper)</td>
<td>JOINT ACTION (\rightarrow) NORMATIVITY</td>
<td>obligation of the helper to notify the person being helped that he is leaving the joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping (perspective of the helped)</td>
<td></td>
<td>having the standing to rebuke the helper for leaving the joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking together (perspective of the participant that changes her intention)</td>
<td></td>
<td>having the standing to rebuke the other for leaving the joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking together (perspective of the other participant)</td>
<td>NORMATIVITY (\rightarrow) JOINT ACTION</td>
<td>obligation of the participant to notify the other person that he is leaving the joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elevator</td>
<td>OBLIGATION (\rightarrow) MORALITY</td>
<td>evidence that a normative relations between two agents indicates that the two are acting together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATM</td>
<td></td>
<td>obligation creates a moral obligation between actors engaged in a morally questionable joint action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joint actions are inherently normative, and this normativity is distinct from morality.

(1) Gomez-Lavin & Rachar (2019)

3×1 between-subjects design:
control condition (C): no evidence of a joint action / low condition (L): low, joint action / high condition (H): high, joint action
**Behavior involving shared intentions, commitments, obligations**

3x1 between-subjects design:

1. **baseline condition (B):** joint action with no complications
2. **test condition (T):** joint action where one participant had secretly changed his individual intention
3. **parallel condition (P):** individual, NOT joint action

### Scenario Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Test Whether</th>
<th>Hypotheses (median)</th>
<th>Relation to Predict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  hiking</td>
<td>behavior is categorized as involving shared intentions, commitments, obligations</td>
<td>(T) = (B)</td>
<td>commitment → shared intention, obligation → shared intention, commitment → obligation, commitment → shared intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  hiking*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(T) ≠ (P)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  playing tennis</td>
<td></td>
<td>(T) = (B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Results Do Not Support the Hypotheses

- Median of shared intention & commitment questions:
  - (T) < (B)
  - (T) not significantly different from (P)
- Median of obligation question:
  - (T) not significantly different from (B) and (P)

**Experiment 1 & 2:**
- commitment → shared intention
- obligations did neither predict shared intention nor commitment

**Experiment 3:**
- commitment do not predict shared intention
- obligation → shared intention
- obligation did not predict commitment
Can we compare those results?

Gomez-Lavin & Rachar (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITIONS:</th>
<th>scenario</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high condition (H)</td>
<td>high, joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low condition (L)</td>
<td>low, joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control condition (C)</td>
<td>no evidence of a joint action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Butterfill & Michael (under review)

- baseline condition (B): joint action with no complications
- test condition (T): joint action but one participant had secretly changed his individual intention
- parallel condition (P): individual, not joint action

SCENARIOS:
- helping to push a broken car
- walking down Fifth Avenue
- two men speeding up to leave an elevator
- taking money from an ATM
- hiking up the hill
- playing a 5-set tennis match

**DESIGN**: $3 \times 1$ between-subjects design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>scenario</th>
<th>walking</th>
<th>hiking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>measure</td>
<td>Rebuke</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the person who stays have the right to call out the person who peels off?</td>
<td>To what extent do you think that Ned and Olive have a commitment to walk to the top of the hill?</td>
<td></td>
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Figure 1. Mean responses for all three test questions in Experiments 1-3. The error bars represent standard errors.
Relationships between conditions

1. Relationship between LOW & high in study 1 is NOT similar to the relationship between TEST & baseline.

2. Relationship between LOW & control in study 1 is NOT similar to the relationship between TEST & parallel.

Both studies agree on stating that the relationship between baseline & high involves a significant difference in the same direction (being higher) than parallel & control.
Interpretation of the pattern of results

participants in study 1

• took the scenarios describing the two kinds of joint actions (LOW & high) as somehow similar
• judged that the scenario describing LOW can be clearly distinguished from the scenario describing the non-joint action (control).

participants in study 2

• did not see a similarity between the two scenarios describing the two kinds of joint action (TEST & baseline)
• judged that there is a similarity between the scenario describing the non-joint action case (parallel) and the scenario describing the joint-action condition TEST

Of course, I do not know what participants actually thought

• 1st study made it easier to recognize LOW as a joint action
• participants of the 2nd study might have doubted whether scenarios of the TEST condition illustrate a joint action
Measures - questions

7-point scale anchored at 0

Notification measure (experiment 4)
- Should the person who peels off notify the other that they're leaving?

Points to a normative relation one could describe as a commitment of this person.

Rebuke measure
- Has the person who stays the right to call out the person who peels off?

Points to a normative relation one could describe as a commitment of one person expecting the other one to be committed.

Commitment Question
- To what extent do you think that Ned and Olive have a commitment to walk to the top of the hill?

Seems to ask whether there a bi-directional joint commitment.

Surprisingly, the 1st study seems to examine the presence of a minimal sense of commitment, while the 2nd study looks for fully developed joint commitments.
Finding indicators for a minimal sense of commitment, makes it more likely to take a scenario as describing a joint action.

Not finding indicators for full-fledged commitment you might think that the scenario doesn’t describe a joint action.

What now?

**Maybe, Gomez-Lavin & Rachar made it too easy, and Butterfill & Michael made it too hard.**

Finding indicators for a minimal sense of commitment, makes it more likely to take a scenario as describing a joint action.

Not finding indicators for full-fledged commitment you might think that the scenario doesn’t describe a joint action.

While waiting for further results assessing common-sense intuitions – I return to my armchair intuitions about Ned & Olive.

In favor of Gilbert, I claim that even minimal joint actions display a minimal sense of commitment. They are not free of commitments.

**A minimal sense of joint commitment can live longer than involved individual commitments**

by emphasizing Pam’s perspective

- there is a commitment in the sense
  - that she expects that Ned should feel committed and
  - that she herself feels committed
- assuming, that Ned has a bad conscience for not informing Olive

- there is a commitment in the sense
  - that Ned thinks that Olive expects from him to be committed.
Some sort of commitment is always to be found

joint action

minimal joint action

joint action @ t1

joint action @ t2

joint action @ t3

joint action @ t4

joint action @ t5

joint action @ t1: start of the joint action
- shared intention, joint commitment and obligations present

joint action @ t2 & t3: acting on purpose together
- varying strength of the joint commitment

joint action @ t4: before the end of the minimal joint action
- Ned thinks that Olive expects from him to be committed
- Pam feels committed

joint action @ t5: before the end of the joint action
- Pam expects that Ned should feel committed
- Pam feels committed
Thanks a lot for listening & I hope I will meet you in the Q&A session!

References


