Individual Actions and Shared Actions: An Interactional Framework

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the notion of individual action and claims that an interactional framework is needed in order to understand both individual and shared action. As far as individual actions are concerned, standard causal theories tend to offer a strong, stable account of action that can be sketched as follows: an agent's doing something is an agent's action if and only if it is caused by the *right* mental event (or state), in the *right* way. This approach identifies the (event of) action with the (event of) bodily movement, and it inevitably entails a reduction of the notion of action to a physical gesture rightly caused and explained. With regard to shared actions, contemporary philosophical literature[1] has focussed on what is shared by single participants of a certain shared action, and the debate is

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[1]   Scientific literature on shared actions is heterogeneous. There are psychological analyses oriented towards understanding which mechanisms make it possible to engage in different sorts of shared actions (Vesper et al. 2010). There are studies focussed on knowing when joint actions emerge, what they presuppose and what abilities are required to engage in them (Moll and Tomasello 2007; Huge and Leekam 2004). There are also formal accounts of how practical reasoning for joint action differs from individual practical reasoning (Gold and Sudgen 2007). For an overview of the different scientific trends and goals see Butterfill (2011, 23-24).

oriented towards understanding "what aspect of the inner life of the parties distinguishes two or more people who act together from others, behaving in similar ways, who are not acting together" (Gilbert 2010, 69).

In this paper, it will be argued that:

i.   accounts which claim that individual action corresponds to the bodily movement (rightly caused and explained) leave out many of the meaningful doings that are ordinarily considered as actions;

ii. we need a notion of individual action consistent with the agent's concrete exercise of her agency and with the ways through which agents understand and attribute agency to other agents. Such a notion of individual action is a non-reductive one;

iii. a non-reductive notion of individual action is compatible with a notion of shared action understood in terms of "joint commitment".

This paper is structured as follows: in the next section, I place the notion of individual action within the claims of standard causal theories (2). Then, following part of Jennifer Hornsby's challenge to standard causal theories, I show that these theories are not sufficiently able to account for individual actions: the reductive notion of action they propose does not help us to understand: *i*) the agent's concrete exercise of her agency, and *ii*) the ways through which we, as agents, conceive and attribute agency to other agents (2.1). In the third section, I argue for the need for an alternative, non-reductive notion of action conceived within an interactional framework (3). In the fourth section, I frame the issue of shared action (4) and sketch out the three main approaches to it (4.1), subsequently I highlight their key common limitation (4.2). I go on to introduce the joint commitment approach to shared action, and explain why it is the most useful account to adopt if we are to understand shared actions in relation to the previous analysis of individual action (4.3).

In the concluding remarks I recap the main steps of the previous sections (5). I will not provide an account of shared action in this paper, rather my claim is that the non-reductive notion of individual action I propose is consistent with a notion of shared action understood in terms of joint commitment. Indeed, the joint commitment approach, although not free from difficulties, guarantees the interactional framework needed in order to understand both individual and shared actions.

2. Standard Causal Theories of Action

Expressions such as "the standard story" or "the standard view" refer to the standard event-causal theory of action.[2] Theories of this kind are made up of two parts: the first one regards the nature of action, the second one concerns the reason explanation. To simplify matters, we can follow Schlosser's schematization:

> Causal theory of the nature of action: An agent-involving event is an action just in case it is caused by the right agent-involving mental states and events in the right way. Causal theory of reason explanation: Reason explanations of actions are explanations in terms of the agent's mental states and events that rationalize and causally explain her performance. In particular, a reason explanation of an action in terms of the agent's mental states and events is true only if those states and events causally explain the action. (Schlosser 2011, 14)

Understanding which are the *right* kind of mental events (or states) and what the *right* way of causing (the event that is) the action is, is what different versions of event-causal theory differ over. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to say that in all these versions the right mental event is some mental attitude (such as intention, desire, belief) that rationalizes and causally explains the performance of an action, and that the right way of causation is a kind of causation that avoids *deviant chains*. A deviant chain is one in which causation does not provide a reason explanation for the effects achieved by the agent: suppose a man whose intention is to kill his uncle is so agitated by this thought that he drives too fast and accidentally kills a pedestrian who happens to be his uncle. Even if the man's intention was to kill his uncle, the killing of his uncle was not achieved by the man's intention to kill him (see Chisholm 1966).[3] The right kind of causation, hence, seems to be one that succeeds in guaranteeing the agent's control over her action and over the effects of her action (Bratman 2001; Mele 1995, 2003): An agent exercises control in this way only if her action and its effects are properly caused by the mental

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[2]   On causal views of action, the notion of (a) "cause" can be used with two different purposes: *i*) it can be used to explain the relation between events and, in this case, actions are basically understood as bodily movements properly caused and explained. This is the notion of «cause» used by proponents of the so-called standard story or standard view; or ii) the notion of cause can be used in order to qualify the agent's role in respect to her action; in this case the agent directly *causes something*. The main difficulty lies in understanding what kind of thing the agent causes: An event? Her action *itself*? A state of affairs? This is the notion of cause used by proponents of the so called "agent causal approach" according to which only a cause that *directly* applies between the agent and her action can guarantee the kind of control required for free will (Clarke 2003; O'Connor 2003). In this paper, I exclusively consider the standard view where the notion of cause applies to events.

[3]   Two kinds of causal deviance can be distinguished: a primary deviance that occurs between the mental event and the initial bodily movement, and a secondary deviance that breaks the causal path from initial bodily movement to later consequences (Davidson 2001, 78-79).

states and events that rationalize them. This point is extremely relevant; indeed many sophisticated strategies have been developed to try to understand the matter of the *right kind of causation*. Starting from the classic Davidsonian desire-belief model – in which only the pairing of a belief and a desire (or pro-attitude) causes and rationally explains an action – much work has been done in order to find the right kind of mental event able to provide strong control over the action and its effects over time. The notion of *intention* has been developed such that it is understood as guiding and controlling the *whole* execution of physical gestures; physical gestures which the action is identified with (Brand 1984; Bratman 1987; Mele 1992).

Things such as climbing a mountain, writing a book, and cooking dinner are things people do by moving their bodies. If, for instance, Giorgio *intentionally* opened the door by moving his body thus and so, then – according to the standard causal approach – "Giorgio's opening the door" identifies a bodily movement by referring to an effect it had.[4] But how do standard causal theories explain the fact that effects of certain bodily movements are ordinarily attributed to a person? Why do we ordinarily say "Giorgio opened the door" if Giorgio's action *actually* is – according to the standard view – his physical gesture (Giorgio's moving his body thus and so)?

In his paper, "Agency", Donald Davidson refers to this feature of the language we use when we talk about actions with the expression "accordion effect" (Davidson 2001, 53).[5] This expression was originally used by Joel Feinberg. In Feinberg's analysis, the accordion effect is a feature of our language "whereby a man's action can be described as narrowly or broadly as we please" (Feinberg 1970, 134): When an agent A did the action X with the consequence Y, we can individuate the agent's action by means of the narrower description "A did X" (in this way we relegate Y to consequence), or we can incorporate Y into a broader description saying "A did Y".

In Davidson's view, the accordion effect is a mark of agency because it allows us to attribute the effects of an event to a person only if *such an* event is an action: "It is a way of enquiring whether an event is a case of agency to ask whether we can attribute its effect to a person" (Davidson 2001, 54).[6] The event that is

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[4]   This is the so called "identity thesis" of action individuation. Philosophers have argued for or against this thesis attributed both to Donald Davidson and G. E. M. Anscombe (1963). According to the identity thesis, with one identical bodily movement an agent can produce different effects, nevertheless *the* agent's action is only one, and the different descriptions in terms of effects of bodily movements refer to the *same* action.

[5]   For a more recent discussion of the accordion effect within the standard causal framework see Bratman (2006) and Aguilar (2007).

[6]   Davidson's understanding of the accordion effect differs from Feinberg's. Davidson uses the accordion effect within the standard causal framework, where actions are conceived as events (bodily movements). Davidson is looking for a criterion in order to distinguish a simple event (a happening) from an event that is an action.

the agent's action can be described in terms of any of its causal effects, such as: "Giorgio's pulling the handle", or "Giorgio's opening the door", or "Giorgio's scaring his sister". What needs to be noted is that in Davidson's view and thus in event-causal approaches, there is only *one* single action performed by Giorgio (the basic action of moving his hand), with different descriptions based on its effects or on the circumstances surrounding its execution. If Giorgio moves his hand in such a way as to produce the opening of the door and thus the opening of the door causes the scaring of his sister, the accordion effect applies; indeed, it is possible to say both that Giorgio opened the door and that he scared his sister. The accordion effect does not reveal in what respect the single action performed by Giorgio is intentional: It is possible he did not intend to move his hand so as to produce the door's opening, nor to scare his sister, but for the accordion effect to be applied an intention is always required (Davidson 2001, 54).

To summarize, according to the standard event-causal theories of action:

1. an agent's doing something is an agent's action if and only if it is caused by the *right* mental event (or state), in the *right* way;

2. the agent's action is identified with the agent's basic bodily movement (rightly caused and explained);

3. thanks to the accordion effect, it is possible to extend (or contract) the descriptions of single actions so as to include (or to exclude) effects and consequences of bodily movements. What we extend or contract by means of the accordion effect are descriptions of single actions: We cannot extend or contract the action, the action is always one and *always* a bodily movement.

2.1 Against a Reductive Notion of Action

We can imagine many cases in which we intentionally do something without performing any bodily movement: Mary decides not to take a piece of cake and refrains from moving her arm on the table; Stewie does not want to be disturbed by phone calls and allows the phone to carry on ringing; Phil is too angry with his friend and stops talking to him.

In all the above cases nobody moves their body, so according to the standard causal theories there is no event, no action. As Jennifer Hornsby (2004) points

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By contrast, in Feinberg's analysis, the importance of the accordion effect lies in the fact that "we can usually replace any ascription to a person of causal responsibility by an ascription of agency or authorship" (Feinberg 1970, 134). Feinberg develops and deepens Hart's classical view according to which the primary function of action sentence is to ascribe responsibility (Hart 1949). In Feinberg's view, hence, the main function of the accordion effect lies in the possibility of ascribing different kinds of responsibility to a person for what she did.

out, the standard story treats bodily movements as spatio-temporal particulars, and in any of its versions finds actions among such particulars (among events). This is the reason why the standard story fails to explain cases in which there is no event and therefore no action in its own sense. The fact there is no action in standard story sense does not show there is *actually* no action, but simply shows that the notion of action, in this view, is used in a technical and artificial sense. Moreover, Hornsby argues that the standard story general conception of agency derives from a model of reason explanation. As we have seen, to explain actions, standard story uses the following kind of causal statement: "Her wanting.... and her believing... caused and rationalized her bodily movement", in Davidsonian terms or, in contemporary terms: "her intention... caused and guided her bodily movements". To simplify matters, we can say that the standard story's causal statement is of the following style: "Her desire/her intentions.... caused [an event which was] her bodily movement". Proponents of standard story "not only take the occurrence of a particular to be causally explained when an action explanation is given, they also assume items in a realm of particulars are what do the explaining" (Hornsby 2004, 6).

Nevertheless, when we ask someone *why* she did something we do not always care whether or not there was a positive performance on her part. I can ask Mary why she did not take the cake, or Stewie why he let the phone carry on ringing. I can also ask Phil why he started to ignore his friend.

Suppose Stewie wants to provoke his sister, and to spoil her party: it does not matter whether, for example, Stewie avoids to clean the kitchen, even if it is his turn to do it (in this case there is no event that is Stewie's spoiling the party – he makes no bodily movement) or he plays the guitar loudly in his room (so that his spoiling the party is an event, namely, Stewie's playing loudly in his room). Either way, we say that Stewie spoiled the party because he wanted to provoke his sister and we can construct a statement such as "His wanting to provoke… caused [an event which was whatever bodily movement was] his Φ-ing" (Hornsby 2004, 7).

Hornsby remarks that: "a causal explanation of why someone did something could not always be the explanation of an event's occurrence", and that "an action explanation doesn't ever seem to be focussed on saying why an event occurred" (Hornsby 2004, 7).

Once these points are acknowledged – Hornsby concludes – the habit of thinking that action explanations must mention items which combine with one another in the production of an event starts to be undermined (Hornsby 2004, 9).[7]

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[7] Hornsby argues for a causal explanation of action (see also Hornsby 1997, 129-155), however we may use her main challenge to the standard view without endorsing the claim that action explanations are causal explanations.

3. A Non-Reductive Notion of Action

Event-causal approaches treat bodily movements as spatio-temporal particulars and they find actions among such particulars. These approaches provide a strong stable account of action understood as a *physical action*: Such an account is what is needed to provide an understanding of actions and agency as part of a natural causal order.

Nevertheless, event-causal accounts leave out *i*) all our doings that – even without a positive performance – can be considered our actions in an ordinary sense, and *ii*) some basic understanding of human beings as agents and of the way in which they relate to the effects and the consequences of their physical gestures. For these reasons, we need 1) a non-reductive notion of action able to account also for doings as Mary's or Phil's: Doings that, although without a positive performance, achieve significant effects, and 2) an alternative perspective from which to look at human actions, a perspective able to include the ordinary, practical and interpersonal capacities of human beings (such as capacities to achieve effects and consequences by means of our behaviour, capacities to distinguish meaningful doings from irrelevant ones, and more generally capacities to be agents, and to be agents with other agents).

In order to provide an alternative non-reductive notion of individual action, I will focus attention on: *i*) the relation between bodily movements and their effects (the opening of the door), or consequences (the scaring of my sister); and on *ii*) things we do not physically do, but which are ascribed to us with their consequences, as much as our bodily movements are.

As far as the relation between bodily movements and their effects or consequences is concerned, if we focus on our ordinary practices of attribution of agency, we note that we do not refer to what people do by mentioning bodily movements, rather we refer to what people do by individuating *salient* effects or consequences of their physical gestures: We do not generally say "you moved your mouth", we say "you said I'm stupid", or "you offended me!", or "you ruined my day!".[8] Indeed, the adjective "salient" has to be understood in terms of what is or might be relevant for the agent, and for the other agents who are in different ways affected by the effects or consequences of the agent's bodily

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[8]   For a pluralist view about actions we do with words (speech acts) see Sbisà (2013). The idea defended by Sbisà is that an utterance token can carry out more than one speech act, or, more precisely, that "there are cases in which one and the same utterance token is the vehicle of more than one illocutionary act" (Sbisà 2013, 233). Sbisà moves from a pragmatic theme in the philosophy of language – namely speech act – to the philosophy of action: She argues that Austin's distinction of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts already presupposes speech act pluralism (Sbisà 2013, 230-233), and shows that all views admitting of speech act pluralism require an ascription-centred conception of action, such as that outlined by Austin in his papers in the philosophy of action (Sbisà 2013, 242-243).

movements. Our doings – among which we pick out actions – are individuated in terms of significant effects or consequences of bodily movements, namely effects and consequences that are relevant to our living together. The fact that we define our actions in terms of the effects and consequences of physical gestures clearly emerges in our ordinary ascriptions of agency: We generally refer to our bodily movements in order to contract our agency as in the case in which I ask my brother: "Did you wake Mom up?" and he answers: "I pushed the door handle!". And, at the same time, we attribute more agency by including more effects (or consequences) in the description we give to the action ("You did not push the door handle, you woke Mom up!").

Sometimes we do not perform any bodily movements at all, but the consequences of our not physically doing anything are ascribed to us as much as the effects (or consequences) of bodily movements actually performed. Suppose my flatmate is waiting for an important phone call for a new job, but he must go out for an hour and he asks me to answer the phone. He goes out, and when the phone rings I let it carry on ringing. I do not carry out any bodily movements at all, I do not perform any action in standard causal sense. And yet, the consequences of my not performing any bodily movement will be straightforwardly ascribed to me. My furious flatmate will certainly not say: "You did not perform any bodily movement!", rather he will say: "You let the phone carry on ringing" or, very probably: "You made me lose my job!". Once again, the point seems to lie in the relevance of the consequences of agent's performances (including negative performances) for other agents: Among the possible doing-descriptions, the one that identifies the agent's action is subject to criteria of appropriateness that are not established by the agent herself.

Acknowledging the fact that some consequences of not (physically) doing anything are to be treated in the same way as consequences of positive performances, and recalling the possibility that we have to refer to what a person does under different doing-descriptions (possibility also acknowledged by standard causal theories), and given that we do not accept the identification of the action with bodily movements, then the crucial question seems to be the following: Among the different descriptions in terms of effects or consequences of positive and negative performances[9], what is the most appropriate description that individuates[10]

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[9]   With the expression "positive performances" I refer to all cases of performance where the agent moves her body. With "negative performances" I refer to all cases where the agent can be said to do something without moving her body. In this paper I do not distinguish among the different kinds of negative performance such as tryings, refrainings, and omissions.

[10]   As Olle Blomberg pointed out to me, there are two senses of the term "individuation" here: a *cognitive* sense and a *metaphysical* sense. In the former sense, individuation refers to that which picks out some entity in thought, as in the case of a witness who may be said to have individuated a killer at an identity parade. As far as the metaphysical sense is concerned, individuation means a "mind-

the agent's action? The appropriateness of the description of an action is conceived in terms of the salience of what the agent is held responsible for. To be clear, the notion of responsibility I am referring to is not a moral one. This notion applies to agents' doings independently of their being valued as good or bad (see Sbisà 2007, 467). This is consistent with the fact that in our ascriptions of responsibility we identify the agent's relevant doings by selecting the more salient effects or consequences, and that these effects or consequences can also be valued as good or bad.

It is not a matter of indifference which effects or consequences we include in the description we give to the agent's action and which effects we relegate among the consequences of action: «She moved her finger» is not an appropriate description for the action of a woman who shot her partner in business to obtain money from insurance. On the other hand, «He killed his grandmother» is not the most appropriate description for the action of a grandson who, to surprise his old grandmother, caused such a great emotion that she suffered of a deadly heart-attack. The attribution of responsibility to the agent is what allows us to assess a certain agent's behaviour as *the* agent's action; moreover, by individuating the appropriateness of the attribution of responsibility to the agent as the inter-subjective criterion with which to identify the action, we do not ignore the agent's intentions and beliefs and the circumstances of her performance, rather, we take all these aspects in.[11] This criterion is consistent with an interactional framework within which to conceive of human actions and agency. Such a framework allows us to understand the attributions of personal agency as attributions of degrees of responsibility: Whenever we have the possibility of attributing a certain degree of responsibility to an agent, then there is agency. The more we attribute responsibility to a person, the more we acknowledge her as an agent. This framework also accounts for the agent's capacity to monitor the effects and consequences of her physical gestures, and for her capacity to be an agent in the ordinary sense.

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independent determination relation between entities" (Lowe 2010, 5). It is in this sense that a set is individuated by its members, its members determine which set it is, and in so doing they fix its identity. When philosophers are concerned with the ontology of action, the sense of "individuation" traditionally involved is the metaphysical one. On the contrary, I suggest that the cognitive-attentional sense of the term individuation is the most relevant one to approach the philosophical issue of action individuation.

[11]   As it has been pointed out by Knobe and Doris, when we attribute moral responsibility to other agents we use quite different criteria in different kinds of cases: "[…] the ordinary practice of responsibility attribution is pervasively variantist. People's ordinary responsibility judgments do not appear to follow from a single system of criteria that can be applied in all cases. Instead, it seems that people use different sorts of criteria depending on the case at hand" (Knobe and Doris 2010, 346). The attributed responsibility which I refer to as an identifying criterion of action is not necessary moral, however Knobe and Doris's studies can be equally useful in understanding ordinary practices of attribution of a more basic kind of responsibility.

4. Framing Shared Actions

In this section, I frame the issue of shared action (4) and sketch out the three main approaches to it: Tuomela and Miller's approach, Searle's, and Bratman's (4.1), I subsequently highlight their key common limitation (4.2). I later introduce the joint commitment approach, and explain why it is the most useful approach to adopt if we are to understand shared actions in relation to the previous analysis of individual action (4.3).

Different authors use different terminologies, speaking of shared actions, collective action or joint actions, and similarly, different authors variously use the terminology of 'shared agency', 'collective agency' or 'joint agency'. I use the expression "shared actions" as the most basic term to indicate cases in which two or more agents do something together by sharing some aspect of their action. Nevertheless, by using this expression I do not want to imply that it is unambiguous. In fact, "shared action" may refer to a situation in which a group of people act *qua* institution, as in the case in which the board approves the allocation of funds, or it may refer to a situation in which two or more agents jointly act to achieve a common goal, as in the case of musicians playing as a trio.

To simplify matters, we can assume that shared actions occur when two or more agents are *doing something together*, where the qualifier "together" is used to mark the fact that a shared action is at issue, rather than the fact that single agents are physically adjacent to one another (see Gilbert 2010, 67). Cases of shared actions in this sense include going for a walk together, protesting against the Prime Minister together, cheering a team together, investigating a crime together, and robbing a bank together.

4.1 Three Main Approaches to Shared Action

As in the case of individual actions, theorists have focussed their attention on the mental states of the individual participants involved in a certain shared action, investigating what aspect of their inner life distinguishes two or more people who act together from others, behaving in similar ways, who are not acting together. Three main approaches which take this line can be distinguished: Tuomela and Miller's, Searle's and Bratman's.

Tuomela and Miller propose that intentions distinguishing agents acting together are intentions shared by single agents. They understand these intentions as "[…] a species of other-regarding intentions […] relating to […] situations in which some agents act together, usually or often with the purpose of achieving some joint goal" (Tuomela and Miller 1988, 367). These "we-intentions" can be

analysed as sets of individual intentions together with sets of mutual beliefs about other agents' intentions and beliefs (see Pacherie 2011)[12]. Their analysis has been criticized by Searle, who claims that it is unable to grasp the cooperative dimension of joint actions (Searle 1990). In challenging Tuomela and Miller's account, Searle claims that the existence of a shared goal as well as mutual beliefs among single agents does not ensure the intention to cooperate mutually. According to Searle, we can grasp the cooperative dimension of shared actions and therefore account for collective actions only if we accept that the intentions attributable to the agents involved in them are different in type from the intentions attributable to those same agents when they engage in individual actions (Searle 1990, 404-406). For this reason, Searle proposes that, in addition to the personal intentions of agents expressible by sentences of the form "I personally intend to do such and such", there are intentions of agents that are not expressible in this way. Rather, they are expressible in sentences of the form "We intend to do such and such" (Searle 1990, 404). According to this approach, the inner element at the core of a collective action is the corresponding set of we-intentions, one for each agent. It is important to note that, according to Searle, all intentional states are states of individuals, thus, even we-intentions can only be entertained by individuals. The individual intentions of the participating agents are related to the we-intention as means to ends and this relation is simply part-whole. To recall Searle's example of two cooks preparing a hollandaise sauce together, the content of Cook1's we-intention would be something like: "That we make the sauce by means of me stirring", and the content of Cook2's we-intention could be rendered as "That we make the sauce by means of me pouring" (Searle 1990, 412-413).

On Bratman's view, the inner aspect of a shared action is a set of personal intentions of the individual participants, and the content of such intentions may be characterized as follows:

> We intend to J if and only if
> 1. (a) I intend that we J, and (b) you intend that we J,
> 2. I intend that we J in accordance with and because of 1a, 1b, and meshing sub-plans of 1a and 1b; you intend that we J in accordance with and because of 1a, 1b, and meshing sub-plans of 1a and 1b,
> 3. 1 and 2 are common knowledge between us. (Bratman 1993, 106)

Bratman proposes a constructivist account of shared intentions that are construed in terms of personal intentions, the attitudes of the participants, and the interrelation of these. Indeed, shared intentions do three interrelated jobs: 1) They help

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12   See also Tuomela (2005). For the analysis of we-intention in connection with the I-mode/we-mode distinction see Tuomela (2006, 2007).

coordinate our intentional actions; 2) They help coordinate our planning; and 3) They structure relevant bargaining (Bratman 2009a, 2009b).

4.2 The Common Limitation

The common limitation that these three approaches share is the assumption that what is required for a shared action is a certain type of mental state shared in a certain way by single participants.

As far as Tuomela and Miller's account is concerned, the set of personal shared intentions has to be analyzed together with a set of mutual beliefs about the other agents' intentions and beliefs. Searle challenges their view by claiming that mutual beliefs among members are not sufficient to guarantee that their doing something together is a case of acting together, indeed, there can be mutual beliefs about members' respective intentions without any form of cooperation between them. According to Searle what ensures the cooperation required for a collective action is a set of we-intentions to cooperate mutually ('we-intend that').

Nevertheless, we can claim that the sense of a shared action is not *just* a matter of intentions ("we" or personal) or mutual beliefs in favour of the action in question. We need to know, indeed, whether there are conditions under which a given mutual belief (about other agents' beliefs), or a given intention ("we" or personal) are appropriate, and, if so, whether these conditions have to do with anyone other than the possessor of the mutual belief or the intention ("we" or personal) (see Gilbert 2010, 71). In preparing the sauce together, for instance, Cook1 and Cook2 are acting appropriately, each is acting, each is making an effort to be coordinated with the other. Suppose Cook1 suddenly stops stirring and starts to prepare goulash. Is Cook2 in a position to demand that Cook1 starts stirring again? If so, what precisely puts him in this position? Moreover, in respect to one's own we-intentions set (both in Tuomela and Miller's version and in Searle's), it is also not clear whether or not one agent is in a position to revoke her own we-intention without the concurrence of the other agents – as one is in a position to revoke a personal intention of one's own (Gilbert 2010, 71).

As far as Bratman's understanding of acting together is concerned, personal intentions properly shared coordinate single agents' intentional actions, guide planning, and structure their bargaining. An important limitation of his account lies in the fact that although it uses ordinary personal intentions, their assemblage is costly and requires agents that are more cognitively sophisticated than is necessary (Pacherie 2011, 180-181). Moreover, Bratman's interest lies in cases of small-scale shared intentional agency in the absence of asymmetric authority relations, where personal intentions are sufficient to provide a basic explanation

of the action. Nevertheless, it is not obvious that participants in a certain shared action are always involved in symmetric authority relations, as it is not obvious that the kind of coordination provided by the interrelations between agents' personal intentions accounts for *all* cases of acting together.

4.3 The Joint Commitment Approach

Margaret Gilbert's joint commitment account may be introduced by reference to the concept of a personal decision: By making a given decision, one imposes a kind of normative constraint upon oneself. If I have decided to go to Rome tomorrow, I am committed to going to Rome tomorrow, and if I do not go to Rome tomorrow I will not have acted appropriately. This is true also of personal intentions, although decisions and intentions differ in various ways. For instance, whereas an intention can simply disappear, a decision needs to be explicitly revoked, otherwise it stands (Gilbert 2010, 71). Gilbert proposes that people can be subjected to both personal commitments – by personally deciding and intending – and to joint commitments (Gilbert 2014, 38). One agent is not subjected to a joint commitment simply by having made a personal decision or formed a personal intention that corresponds in some way to the personal decision or intention of one or more other people. Rather, two or more people jointly commit with each other and they do so, "by mutually expressing to one another their readiness jointly to commit them all in a particular way, where these expressions are common knowledge" (Gilbert 2010, 72)[13].

A joint commitment cannot unilaterally be rescinded by any one party without some special background understanding: "The parties to any joint commitment owe each other conformity to the commitment in the pertinent sense of 'owe'" (Gilbert 2010, 68). That sense is closely linked with the standing to demand conformity. Indeed, "parties have a special standing to demand of one another appropriate actions", and they also have "the special standing to rebuke inappropriate actions" (Gilbert 2010, 68). The parties act together in the sense that they act as a plural subject. In Gilbert's view, indeed, there can be no joint commitments that are not the commitments of a plural subject and there can be no plural subjects without joint commitments.[14]

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13   These mutual expressions may involve a variety of processes. One of them is the process of making an agreement. Although a prior agreement is not a necessary condition of all collective actions, such collective actions do often proceed on the basis of an agreement (Gilbert 2014, 49). In "Acting together", Gilbert specifies that there are also cases where joint actions get started with some other preliminary interchange, and cases that involve no such preliminary interchange (Gilbert 2014, 27; see also Gilbert 1990).

14   The notion of a plural subject may sound ambiguous. It is not clear if we, independently from

Gilbert's account is the most useful account of those considered here if we are to understand shared actions in relation to the previous analysis of individual action. Gilbert's account of collective action, indeed, is grounded in an interactional framework as understood by our previous analysis of individual action. Such a framework is interactional to the extent that it acknowledges: [15]

1. that participants of a shared action are personally and jointly engaged in a sense that is not reducible to their owning and sharing a certain type of mental state;

2. that this sense in which agents are engaged lies in a contractual/legal mode: In order to participate in a shared action, indeed, the agents have to mutually express to one another their readiness jointly to commit themselves in a particular way;

3. that the participants have a special standing to demand of one another appropriate actions, and to rebuke inappropriate actions.

Gilbert's understanding of joint action accounts also for cases where agents are not in symmetric authority relations: The variety of processes through which agents express their joint commitments, indeed, concerns the specificity of their interpersonal relations. An elaboration of Gilbert's view would allow us to distinguish types of shared action exactly on the basis of the processes through which agents express their joint commitments.

5. Concluding Remarks

According to standard causal theories an agent's doing something is an agent's action if and only if it is caused by the *right* mental event in the *right* way. This approach identifies the (event of) action with the (event of) bodily movement, and it inevitably entails a reduction of the notion of action to a physical gesture rightly caused and explained. A reductive notion of individual action that identifies the action with bodily movement leaves out many of the doings that are ordinarily considered as actions. We need a notion of individual action consistent with the agent's concrete exercise of her agency and with the ways through which agents understand and attribute agency to other agents. Such a notion is

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Gilbert, can reject the notion of plural subject and accept that of joint commitment. I consider this to remain an open question.

[15]   I am not claiming that Gilbert's account is free from difficulties. However, among the various accounts of shared action mentioned here, it is the one which provides an interactional framework within which we can place shared action.

a non-reductive one, and can include not only salient effects and consequences of the agent's bodily movements, but also salient effects and consequences of negative performances that are attributable to the agent. Given the possibility of referring to the agent's doings under different descriptions in terms of effects and consequences of her performances, we need a criterion to single out the most appropriate description that individuates *the* agent's action. Among the different doing-descriptions, the most appropriate one is the description that picks out the salient effects or consequences of the agent's performance. If the appropriateness is conceived in terms of salience of attribution of responsibility to the agent for the selected effect or consequence, then the agent's action is not identified with the agent's bodily movement, but is description-relative and can also include effects and consequences of the agent's (positive or negative) performance. This non-reductive notion of individual action is compatible with a notion of shared action understood in terms of joint commitment: Both a non-reductive notion of individual action and a notion of shared action understood in terms of joint commitment demand an interactional framework.

As in the case of standard causal theories, in respect to individual action, the three main approaches sketched out in (4.1) understand shared action as a matter of which aspect of the inner life of the parties distinguishes two or more people who act together from others who are not acting together. The common limitation these three approaches share is the assumption that what is required for a shared action is a certain type of intention shared in a certain way by single participants. By contrast, the joint commitment approach, by acknowledging that participants of a shared action are personally and jointly engaged in a sense that is not reducible to their owning and sharing a certain type of intention, allows us to shift reflection on the topic of shared action from an enquiry about the kind of mental event shared by participating agents to an enquiry about the conditions of appropriateness of each other's contribution to the shared action, where appropriateness is conceived in terms of the participants' special standing to demand of each other certain actions rather than others. Although not free from difficulties, the joint commitment approach seems to be the one which guarantees the interactional framework within which to conceive the phenomenon of acting together. As we have seen in the third section, the interactional framework is also what allows us to conceive the notion of individual action in non-reductive terms.

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