

WE-INTENTIONS AS INTENTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS

Charles Lang

University of California, Davis

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Introduction:

With the title I mean two things. (1) The account of we-intentions given in this paper characterizes we-intentions as a sub-class of intentions of individuals; the paper seeks first to identify some features that all intentions of individuals have, and then point out how these features have certain properties in cases we-intention. And (2) that the account puts emphasis on the idea that intentions are things in the heads of individuals; specifically, the account is compatible with John Searle's¹ two conditions for adequacy of anything we say about collective intention:

1. It must be consistent with the fact that society is nothing over and above the individuals that comprise it. All consciousness and intentionality is in the minds of individuals. Specifically, individual brains.
2. It must be consistent with the fact that all intentionality could be had by a brain in a vat.

I owe the term 'we-intention' to Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller². I use the term because

¹ Searle, 1990.

² I owe more than just the term to Tuomela and Miller. Tuomela and Miller 1988, Tuomela 2005.

among the various terms used in the literature it is the most appropriate to my approach. The term 'collective intention' is used by all the approaches in the field and 'shared intention'³ is used to talk about something that cannot be had by a brain in a vat; it requires that at least two intentional agents exist. At the end of the paper I note, however, that the account of we-intention can also characterize a kind of shared intention, through the addition to the account of one condition.

Central to the account presented in this paper is the claim that in cases of we-intention, an agent believes that her intention to do something depends on someone else's intention to do the same thing; she believes that she and at least one other person intend to accomplish that X⁴, and that her intention to accomplish that X depends on that other person's (or those other persons') intending to accomplish that X. This condition is necessary but not sufficient for an intention to count as a we-intention; it will be argued that one other condition is needed for sufficiency. The account presented in this paper is the following:

(WI) A we-intends (a special kind of intending of an individual) to accomplish that X iff:

- (a) A intends to accomplish that X (A intends to do something);
- (b) A believes that the circumstances in the world which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will include, for every other member of a group G, the intention of that member to accomplish that X;
- (c) A believes that all other members of group G believe that A intends to accomplish that X.

Intentions of individuals:

Intentions in general have at least two features that can be identified with relatively little

³ This term is used by Michael Bratman (see for instance his 1999).

⁴ In connection with his claim that in cases of shared intention I intend that we J, Michael Bratman argues that intentions are different from attempts in that we can intend *that*, instead of only intending *to* (we cannot attempt *that*) (Bratman, 1999 p. 97). In the present paper, I talk about an agent's intention *to accomplish that X*, which can be taken to be equivalent to intending that X. I take it that *every* intention is an intention to accomplish that X. For example, if I intend to go running, I intend to accomplish that CSL goes running. If I intend to fix my door with a power drill, I intend to accomplish that CSL fixes the door with a power drill. I use this way of speaking instead of Bratman's for three reasons: (1) it is more common to talk about intending *to* do things than intending *that*; (2) it draws attention to my claim later in the paper that in cases of we-intention, I intend to accomplish the group's (or dyad's) action in the same way I intend to accomplish a project using tools; and (3) given that to accomplish something is to do something, it allows for a quite natural expression of what is at the heart of we-intending: a we-intending agent believes that her intention to do something depends on someone else's intention to do the same thing.

controversy. If an agent A intends to accomplish that X then A *believes it to be accomplishable that X at A's will*. This entails that A have beliefs about the way things are; A must believe that the circumstances in the world are such that A can accomplish that X by deciding to⁵. For example, if A intends to move a pencil across the desk⁶ she must believe that she *can* move the pencil: in the usual case she believes, among other things, that the pencil is not an illusion, and that she can grip it with her hand.⁷ If A didn't think she could move the pencil at her own will then A couldn't accurately be described as intending; she might want to or desire to, but not *intend* to move the pencil.

The second feature of intending I would like to draw attention to is that A must decide that X will be accomplished, or at least that A must plan to not deliberate (or deliberate any longer) about whether X is to be accomplished. If there is any A is undecided at all as to whether she will move the pencil, she can't be said to intend; in this case she may be deliberating or desiring, but not intending.

Given the two features identified above, the following rule, which applies to intentions of individuals in general (GI), can be stated:

(GI) The following conditions are necessary (perhaps also sufficient) features of an agent A's intending to accomplish that X:

1. A believes that the circumstances in the world allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at the will of A;
2. A decides to accomplish that X, or at least the issue of whether A will accomplish that X is settled for A: A plans to not deliberate (or deliberate any longer).

I will argue for (GI) by elimination, by considering several cases that may appear to present problems for it, and showing that these too follow (GI).

Consider a case in which A intends to do something that is as a matter of fact impossible.⁸ For

5 Or by continuing to intend to accomplish that X. I suppose we may intend to do things without deciding to do them, as when we wake up in the morning with an intention, or we may have certain intentions since birth.

6 As in the footnote above, I here maintain the equivalence of 'A intends to move a pencil' and 'A intends to accomplish that A moves a pencil'. Throughout the text I use these forms interchangeably.

7 She may intend to move the pencil in some other way; she may believe that she has the faculty of telekinesis, for example. In this case, however, she just believes that some other circumstance in the world allows her to be able to move the pencil at her will.

8 Kirk Ludwig raised this point in conversation.

example, suppose that a child (A) intends to travel faster than light when she grows up (we can assume for the sake of the example that this is as a matter of fact impossible). In this case, both parts of (GI) are fulfilled, however A's beliefs are simply wrong. She believes that circumstances are required for her traveling faster than light, and she believes that the circumstances in the world (or CITW) make it possible for her to do so at her will. It may be, for example, that she believes that space ships already travel faster than light, or she may have beliefs about laws of nature, or she may even have beliefs about being able to get research funding for developing a project to build such a spaceship. (GI) only requires that she *believe* that some circumstances make it possible for her to be able to travel faster than light at her will.

Consider another case where the circumstances which are believed by A to enable A to accomplish that X seem hard to pinpoint; suppose A is uncertain how she will accomplish that X. For example, I might plan to have coffee this afternoon, but have no idea where I will do so. In this case it is again clear that I believe that some circumstances in the world allow me to accomplish that X at my will. The circumstances, in the usual case, include that there is at least one cafe open in downtown Davis this afternoon, among other things.

Finally, consider the case of someone who intends to win the lottery today. That someone has such an intention, surely, is possible (as a matter of fact, some people have such intentions), but it seems that if A intends to win the lottery, A must have a superstitious or religious belief about the circumstances in the world, or a belief about the circumstances of the world that is not true. A person who buys a lottery ticket and who does not believe that it is, for example, his lucky day, or that God has chosen him to be the winner today, cannot intend to win the lottery (assuming he is not cheating).

We-intentions and special circumstances in the world:

Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller have argued that in cases of we-intending, an agent must believe that the "joint action opportunities for X will obtain, especially that at least a sufficient number of the full-fledged and adequately informed members of G, as required for the performance of

X, will (or at least probably will) do their parts of X." (1988, 2005) In this section, I will support a related but more modest claim that (i) in cases of we-intending, an agent must believe that the circumstances in the world which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will include the intention of another agent to do something. This claim is provisional; it will be shown to be a necessary condition of we-intention but require some fine-tuning.

To show the claim we can take examples of we-intending and notice that if we try to create similar cases (cases that resemble the we-intending cases in as many ways as possible) that do not fulfill (i), we end up with something that is not a we-intention.

Taking Margaret Gilbert's⁹ example of walking together¹⁰, we have a case where a we-intention is clearly present. I intend to go on a walk with Suzie, I intend to converse with her, and I intend to interact with her in certain ways (ways characteristic of going on a walk with someone). In this case I intend to do something that I believe I can do because Suzie has some intention(s). That is, in this case I believe that the circumstances in the world which allow for me to be able to accomplish that X (that CSL and Suzie go on a walk, they converse and interact in certain ways characteristic of going on a walk together) at my will include the intention of another agent (Suzie) to do something.

There may be some worry on the part of the reader about how I've been characterizing the X of my and Suzie's intentions. However, I wish to remain neutral about this question for the moment, and maintain only that in cases of we-intending, the agent intends to do *something or other*, but, more importantly, that there is an intention to do something or other that depends on a belief the agent has about a relation between the agent's intention and certain kinds of circumstances of the world (specifically, intentions of other agents).

If we consider a similar case to the one just given but in which the condition (i) is *not* met, it is apparent that we do not have a case of we-intending. I cannot intend to walk with Suzie, converse with her and interact with her in certain ways (ways characteristic of going on a walk with someone) in such a case. I may intend to walk *next to* Suzie, talk *at* her, and *behave* in certain ways, but I lack

⁹ Gilbert, 1990.

¹⁰ This example is used by Gilbert to show different points, however the example is equally well-suited to the present discussion.

something that seems essential to we-intention.

(i) seems to pick out an essential feature of we-intending. But (i) proves to characterize many intentions besides we-intentions. Consider the case in which Smith's friend Stewart offers to lend Smith his car for the weekend and Smith then forms an intention to drive to Los Angeles in that car. It seems Smith believes that one of the circumstances in the world which allow for her to be able to have her intention is that Stewart intends to lend her the car. She believes that since he intends to lend her the car, she can accomplish that she drives to Los Angeles in his car at her will. This case thus fulfills (i), but is clearly not a we-intention.

In order to see what else (at least) besides (i) is required in order to have a case of we-intention, we need only observe that in this last case Stewart intends to accomplish that *something else*. That is, while Smith intends to accomplish that Smith drives in Stewart's car to Los Angeles, Stewart only intends to lend Smith his car for the weekend (he may not even know Smith's destination).

It seems that (ii): In cases of we-intending, an agent A must believe that the circumstances in the world which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will include the intention of another agent to accomplish *that X*. (ii) rules out cases like the car-lending case, but allows cases like going on a walk together with Suzie. In that case, we recall that I intend to accomplish that Suzie and CSL go on a walk together and interact with one another in certain ways (ways characteristic of going on a walk together). In accordance with (ii), then, in this case I believe that the circumstances in the world which allow for me to be able to accomplish that Suzie and CSL go on a walk together (in the way characteristic of going on a walk together) at my will include the intention of Suzie to accomplish that Suzie and CSL go on a walk together (in the way characteristic of going on a walk together).

(ii), like (i), picks out a necessary condition for we-intention; whenever (ii) does not obtain, no we-intention is formed. Another example helps clarify how this condition seems to work in groups. Suppose that A, B, C, D, E and F are meeting for a game of soccer this afternoon. In this case A

intends to accomplish that agents A, B, C, D, E, and F play a game of soccer together, and it seems that A has a we-intention (that is, A intends to accomplish that they play soccer in the usual way). Then A believes that B, C, D, E, and F all intend to accomplish the same thing as she does,¹¹ and, further, she believes that the circumstances in the world which allow her to be able to accomplish that they all play soccer together at her will include the intention of another agent to accomplish that they all play a game of soccer together.

Indeed, in this case, she believes that the circumstances in the world she appeals to include the intentions of *every one* of B, C, D, E and F to do the same thing she intends to do. Together with the earlier examples, this suggests the following provisional account:

(WI-Provisional) A we-intends (a special kind of intending of an individual) to accomplish that

X iff:

- (a) A intends to accomplish that X (A intends to do something);
- (b) A believes that the circumstances in the world which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will include, for every other member of group G, the intention of that member to accomplish that X.

Returning to the soccer example, it is clear that A must believe that any person who fails to intend to accomplish that X is not a member of the group G, even if A believes an intention of that person allows for A to be able to accomplish that X. If B and C are only involved in that they plan to open the gate to the field¹², then they are not members of group G: their intentions to open the gate are circumstances in the world which A believes allow for the accomplishment of the soccer-playing

11 A may intend to *win* and some of B, C, D, E and F may intend to accomplish that A *loses*, which is of course not the same thing, but they still intend the same X being discussed: that they all play a game of soccer together.

12 If they intend to open the gate *in order for* the rest of the group to play soccer, then they intend to accomplish that that group (A, D, E and F) play soccer. But if A believes that the CITW *that allow for A to be able to accomplish that A, D, E and F play a game of soccer* include only that B and C intend *to open the gate*, then it is not relevant that they *also* intend to accomplish that A, D, E and F play a game of soccer (even if A believes that they so intend). The case considered in the main text is that B and C intend *only* to open the gate in order to drive B's truck through it (ignorant of the game that will ensue), while the others intend to go through the gate in order to play soccer, although either case displays the point.

X, but those intentions are not to accomplish that A, D, E and F play a game of soccer.

A worry related to ways of forming of we-intentions:

Suppose my friend Chris wants to play a game of racquetball. He calls me on the phone and informs me: “I was thinking of playing a game of racquetball. I don’t want to go alone, but if you’re up for it I will go.” He is informing me of something like (given the analysis above): ‘The circumstances in the world are such that, if you want to accomplish that we go play racquetball together, you can accomplish that at your will.’ Still on the phone, I consider his statement. I decide, in my mind (I don’t yet say anything on the phone), to go, and thereby initiate an intention: I think the circumstances in the world allow for me to accomplish that Charles and Chris walk down to the Wooden Center and play racquetball (in such and such a way) at my will (fulfilling (GI) (1)), and I plan to not deliberate any longer (fulfilling (GI) (2)). Then I reply to his proposal: I say “Sure”. Given the analysis, again, I am saying something like ‘The circumstances in the world are such that you can accomplish that X at your will, because I intend to accomplish that X.’ At this point, assuming I believe he heard me (the phone didn’t go dead etc.), and assuming that I believe him to have a good history of following through on his obligations¹³, I believe that his intention to accomplish that X has been engaged. Further, it seems that at this point I have a we-intention (and so does Chris).

A worry about the provisional account seems clear on the introduction of this example. It seems that in this case I begin to intend to accomplish that we go play racquetball *before* Chris has an intention to accomplish the same thing. Specifically, this is the case after he has invited me to play racquetball and I have decided to go, but before I have said “Sure”. It seems, then, that at this moment I do not believe that the CITW that allow for me to accomplish that we play racquetball include Chris's intention, as is specified in (WI-Provisional) (b). Rather I believe that the CITW that allow for me to be able accomplish that we play racquetball at my will include that another member’s

¹³ Though the question of how obligations relate to we-intentions will not be dealt with in this paper at all, it seems clear (i) that Chris has an obligation to me given what he has said on the phone, and (ii) that his obligation is part of the reason I believe that I can intend to accomplish that we go play racquetball at my will.

intention to accomplish that X is *engagable* at my will: all I have to do to get him to intend is say "Sure".

However, this points only to a curious feature of we-intention and not to a problem with the account. Condition (b) does not require that A believe that the CITW which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will are the only CITW that *could* allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will, and it doesn't require that they are the only CITW that *have, in the history of the intention in question*, allowed for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will. So, while I intend to accomplish that X before I say "Sure", I do not fulfill (b) until after I have done so.

To illustrate the point further, consider a case in which I intend to mow the lawn tomorrow, and the CITW that I believe allow me to be able to do so at my will include that my old lawnmower is in the shed. If a friend gives me a new lawnmower this afternoon as a surprise gift and I then give away my old mower, my intention to mow the lawn tomorrow continues the whole time uninterrupted; however, it depends on different CITW after I get the new mower and dispose of the old.

In this case, we might carve out something called a 'new-mower intention'. It would look like this:

(NI) A new-mower-intends (a special kind of intending of an individual) to accomplish that X
iff:

- (a) A intends to accomplish that X (A intends to do something);
- (b) A believes that the circumstances in the world which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will include that a brand new mower is in the shed.

It's clear that I can form the intention to mow the lawn based on CITW that do not fulfill (b), but that as circumstances change, (b) can be fulfilled (and I can form a new-mower-intention) without interruption in my intention to mow the lawn tomorrow.

Beliefs about the beliefs of other group G members:

Considerable thought has been devoted to developing elements in other accounts requiring that agents involved in collective intentions have some collective beliefs or shared beliefs.¹⁴ The present short discussion considers a similar addition to the provisional account just given.

Suppose Jones and Smith intend to surprise White on his birthday by taking him out for dinner, and White learns about the surprise ahead of time unbeknownst to Jones and Smith, through a mutual friend named Green. Then it seems that White has an intention to accomplish that Jones, Smith and White go out to dinner, and it seems also that White believes that the CITW that allow him to be able to accomplish that they go out to dinner include the intentions of Jones and Smith to accomplish the same thing. So it seems that (a) and (b) are fulfilled. But we hesitate to call this a case of we-intention.

To block this and similar cases, the following can be added:

(c) A believes that all other members of group G believe that A intends to accomplish that X.

It may seem that this too is not adequate to block counterexamples. Consider a case similar to that just considered, but in which White believes that Jones and Smith believe that White has found out about the planned outing; suppose Smith has been talking with Suzie about how he's looking forward to the party, and then, a few days later, hears from the mutual friend Green: "Jones and Smith heard from Suzie that you found out about the party."

In this case it may seem that White does not have a we-intention, even though (c) is met. However, there is an aspect of the story that is left to the imagination, which, if clarified, supports the view that (c) is adequate. Upon hearing Green's message, White may wonder whether Jones and Smith were disappointed to hear that White found out about the party, and whether they may have lost interest and stopped intending to go. This is because White has just been informed that one of the reasons Jones and Smith had for intending to go to the party -- their desire to surprise him -- is no longer active. And it seems that *this* is the reason we hesitate to say White has a we-intention: the

¹⁴ References to be added.

problem is not with (c), rather (b) is simply no longer true, since White doubts whether all group members' intentions are engaged (or even engagable at his will).

Suppose, however, immediately following Green's message, Green says "but they're still just as excited about going." In this case the doubt is cleared up, and (b) is restored. With this clarification it is difficult to think that no we-intention exists, which suggests that (c) deals adequately with collective beliefs.

We-intentions and their implicit reference to the subject:

first part:

It is not unusual to have an intention to do something that requires the cooperation of non-agent objects. I can intend to build a raft using power tools, for example, or I can intend to drive to Los Angeles in a car. In the former case, I believe that circumstances in the world that allow me to be able to accomplish that CSL builds a raft using power tools include that the tools are in working order; the drill bits are sharp, there are no electrical problems, and so on. In the latter case, I must believe that the car is in working order, in a similar way.

One of the virtues of the accounts (GI) and (WI) developed in the earlier sections of this paper is that they treat cases that depend on intentional agents (specifically, on intentions of those agents to accomplish the same thing as the agent A) no differently than it treats cases like those just given. Most cases of the former type are special in that they are we-intentions, but as far as (GI) is concerned, non-agents (tools) and agents alike are considered by A as circumstances that allow A to accomplish something.

There has been a worry about whether a person can have an intention *that someone else do something*¹⁵, since intentions have an implicit reference to the subject that is intending.¹⁶ However, it is surely not objectionable that a person intend to accomplish *that a tool performs a function in something I intend to accomplish*, as in the above cases. So it is strange to consider it to be

15 Here I deliberately use Michael Bratman's language of intending that, since the objection at hand has been raised with respect to his work.

16 For example Stoutland, 1997.

objectionable that a person intend to accomplish *that another person performs his function in what I intend to accomplish*. I cannot have the former intention without having beliefs about the tool being in good working order; I cannot have the latter intention without having beliefs about the person having certain intentions.

Consider robots that interact with humans in certain ways but which may fail to have intentions. Suppose I intend to accompany such a robot down the hall to the kitchen and that, thanks to some sophisticated electronic machinery in the robot, I believe the robot will accompany me. I intend to accomplish that CSL and the robot walk down the hall together, keep pace together etc. (and maybe even that we have a conversation about my appointments scheduled today). But on (WI), I do not have a we-intention if I do not believe that the robot has an intention to do the same thing. (It is clear, however, that a child in the same situation may in fact have a we-intention, and that the child may simply be deceived in thinking that the robot has an intention.)

second part:

The implicit reference an intention makes to the subject helps to block a potential worry about (WI). Because an intention is always *someone's* intention, it can't be an intention to accomplish that something that does *not* involve the agency of the subject take place. That is, I cannot intend to accomplish that a book lying on the table be replaced to the shelf without intending to accomplish that CSL does something. I may for example intend to accomplish that CSL put the book back on the shelf, or I may intend to accomplish that CSL gets Green to put the book on the shelf, or I may intend to accomplish that CSL gets a robot to put the book on the shelf, or I may intend to accomplish that CSL somehow get the book onto the shelf¹⁷; but I can't just intend to accomplish that the book be replaced to the shelf.

This blocks the following worry. Suppose I *could* intend only to accomplish that a book be replaced to the shelf. Then it would be possible that I believe that my intention depends on someone else's intention to do the same thing. Suppose for example that Green intends the same thing, and

¹⁷ In this last case, I may not intend to get the book onto the shelf in any particular way; I may have a number of options before me, and have not decided which to take.

knows where the book belongs, but that I do not, and that I intend to wait until he is just about to insert the book into the appropriate place, and snatch it away from him and then insert the book myself. Then (a) and (b) and even (c) (suppose Green is aware of my plan) would be fulfilled with respect to me. But it seems we don't want to call my intention a we-intention.

Since I can only intend to accomplish that CSL does something, however, the counterexample fails: Green does not intend to accomplish that CSL does something. Rather, Green intends to accomplish that Green does something, and I intend to accomplish that CSL does something. We fail to intend to do the same thing.

Returning to the robot example, intending to accomplish that someone does something, to be sure, is different in other important ways from intending to accomplish that a tool does certain things in response to some stimuli. An intention of a parent to accomplish that his child earn a college degree usually is accompanied by additional intentions or desires: the parent may intend to accomplish that the child have a feeling of accomplishment, or may simply desire that the child be happy. This point is also helpful in clarifying that the account presented in this paper does not imply any kind of cynicism, though we-intentions do involve persons using other persons in some respect just as they use tools.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the account of we-intentions developed in this paper is the following:

(WI) A we-intends (a special kind of intending of an individual) to accomplish that X iff:

- (a) A intends to accomplish that X (A intends to do something);
- (b) A believes that the circumstances in the world which allow for A to be able to accomplish that X at A's will include, for every other member of a group G, the intention of that member to accomplish that X;
- (c) A believes that all other members of group G believe that A intends to accomplish that X.

A shared intention (one that cannot be had by a brain in a vat; one that requires at least two intentional agents) appears to result if an additional condition is added: (d) A's beliefs are true. However, this may raise the specter of Gettier cases, and further work would also be required to remove the imbalance in favor of A's perspective.

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