

Article

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A Dual Aspect Theory of Shared Intention

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Abstract: In this article I propose an original view of the nature of shared intention. In contrast to psychological views (Bratman, Searle, Tuomela) and normative views (Gilbert), I argue that both functional roles played by attitudes of individual participants and interpersonal obligations are factors of central and independent significance for explaining what shared intention is. It is widely agreed that shared intention (I) normally motivates participants to act, and (II) normally creates obligations between them. I argue that the view I propose can explain why it is not a mere accident that both (I) and (II) are true of shared intention, while psychological and normative views cannot. The basic idea is that shared intention involves a structure of attitudes of individuals – including, most importantly, attitudes of reliance – which normally plays the relevant motivating roles and creates the relevant obligations.

Keywords: Shared intention; Psychological and normative aspects; Psychological roles; Interpersonal obligations; Reliance.

1 Introductory Remarks

We do many things together, and yet it is difficult to say exactly what joint action is. A few things seem clear, though. It seems clear that there is no joint action that is not also the action of some individuals in the group. If you and I are walking together down the street, to appeal to Margaret Gilbert's famous example (1996c), there will be no actions in our walking together that are not my actions in our walking together or your actions in our walking together. It also seems clear that in joint action the acts of individuals are normally coordinated. In walking together with you, I will, for example, keep pace with you and avoid bumping into you; and so will you. These two points suggest that joint action normally involves

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a group of individuals acting in a coordinated way. Yet joint action is not simply an aggregation of coordinated acts of individuals. People can be acting individually in a coordinated way – acting in parallel, as we might say – but still not be acting jointly in a proper sense. We can intuitively see the difference between joint action and parallel action by appealing to contrast cases. Consider one suggested by Michael Bratman (2006), built partly upon Gilbert’s example. Imagine that you and I are walking together down Fifth Avenue. Now contrast this with a case in which I am walking down Fifth Avenue alongside a stranger and in which the stranger and I are walking at the same pace, without bumping into each other. Both cases involve a sequence of individual, coordinated acts. Yet, it is intuitively clear that the case of you and I walking down Fifth Avenue constitutes an instance of joint action, while the case of my walking alongside a stranger does not. This indicates that the mark of joint action does not reside solely in its external or behavioral component. It resides, also, in its internal component, in the participants’ having a shared (or collective or joint) intention to so act.¹

It is commonly agreed that the joint action of adult human beings like us is to be understood partly by reference to the phenomenon of shared intention.² But there is disagreement about the nature of this latter phenomenon. Here we may distinguish between two opposing views. According to one view, shared intention is a structure of attitudes of individuals – including, mainly, intentions of individuals – that explains joint action much in the same way in which my intention to raise my arm explains my action of intentionally raising it. The basic idea is that such a structure of attitudes leads to joint action by playing central psychological roles. According to another view, shared intention is a phenomenon that creates a normative relation between individuals, much in the same way in which a promise creates a normative bond between promisor and promisee. Basically, when we share an intention to act together, we incur certain obligations to one another – say, to do our parts in the joint activity – and acquire corresponding entitlements (or rights). Call such views, respectively, the “psychological view” and the “normative view” of shared intention.³ Tuomela and Miller (1988), Searle (1990), Bratman (1999a, 2014), and Pacherie (2013), among others, offer versions of the psychological view. Versions of the normative view are advanced by

¹ For other formulations of this contrast, see Searle (1990) and Gilbert (1992, 2000c).

² For recent attempts to explain joint action, especially in the case of small children, by reference to weaker phenomena, see, for example, Butterfill (2012).

³ In calling the latter view the normative view, I am using the term “normative” in a very specific and narrow sense, namely, as referring to the norms associated with interpersonal obligations and entitlements, rather than, say, to the norms of rationality usually taken to govern attitudes of individuals such as intentions and beliefs. Further, I am assuming here that the cited obligations

Gilbert (1992, 1996a, 2013) and, perhaps, in less explicit form, by Darwall (2006, Ch. 8) and Korsgaard (2009, Ch. 9).

As usually understood, the dispute about the nature of shared intention is a dispute about the relative significance, for explaining what the phenomenon of shared intention really is, of psychological roles and of interpersonal obligations. For the psychological view, only psychological roles have explanatory significance; for the normative view, only interpersonal obligations do. For the former view shared intention is a psychological phenomenon; for the latter, it is a normative one. In this article I argue for an alternative view of the nature of shared intention. According to this view, each of psychological roles and of interpersonal obligations has, when properly understood, *central* and *independent* explanatory significance for shared intention. In earlier work (2009), I argued that shared intention involves a structure of attitudes of intention and of reliance of individuals, and that this structure is responsible, given the type of normative considerations it engages, for the creation of interpersonal obligations between such individuals. In this article I step back and reflect on what this structure further tells us about the nature of shared intention. I argue that this structure is also responsible, given the psychological features it possesses, for the practical thought and action of individuals in joint action. Further reflection on such a structure of attitudes thus tells us that shared intention presents, in contrast to what the two aforementioned views suggest, not just one but two main aspects: a psychological aspect and a normative one. In arguing that shared intention presents these two aspects, in this article I will be proposing what might be called a “dual aspect” theory of shared intention.

The dispute about the nature of shared intention is a particular instance of a more general dispute about what kinds of psychological elements, and what kinds of norms, should figure in the explanation of our actions and practices. This brings out a general set of questions about how to conceptualize the relation

are “relational” (or “bipolar” or “directed”) in structure (Thompson 2004; Gilbert 2004; Darwall 2012; Wallace 2013). Roughly, one’s obligation to perform a certain action is relational just in case it is an obligation one has specifically *to* another person and this person has a corresponding entitlement (or right) *against* one that one perform that action. This entails, among other things, that if one violates one’s obligation to that person, one will be *wronging* that person in particular, in a way in which one will not have wronged uninvolved third parties. There is much controversy about how best to understand the relational structure of interpersonal obligations and about whether and how different moral theories can account for them. Here I assume that such an account is available. Cf. Roth (2004) on the “special” and “executive” character of “contralateral commitments.”

between issues in the philosophy of action and issues in moral philosophy, as it applies to the particular case of shared intention. My aim in this article is partly to take some steps toward such a conceptualization.

Reflection on what it is for a group of agents to share an intention to act together indicates that this phenomenon is systematically associated with two regularities – as both proponents of the psychological view and proponents of the normative view have widely acknowledged. These regularities are that, (A) shared intention normally guides the individual participants' thought and action in ways that lead to the successful execution of the joint activity; and, that (B) shared intention normally comes accompanied by interpersonal obligations and entitlements between individual participants. It seems to be a desideratum for any theory of shared intention, then, that it explain why each of those regularities is systematically associated with shared intention – or, at least, that it make room for such an explanation.⁴

This is how this article is organized. In Section 2 I discuss how the psychological view and normative view attempt to account for the cited regularities and how they answer the question of the psychological nature and of the normative nature of shared intention. Since Bratman and Gilbert give opposing answers to that question – each of them claims that shared intention is a phenomenon of a particular nature, rather than of the other – my discussion focuses on their versions, respectively, of the psychological and normative views.⁵ Discussion of such views will not only portray an important part of the theoretical landscape. It will also allow us to see, as I argue in Section 3, that there is conceptual space for an alternative view of shared intention. In Section 4, I offer and defend one such a view, a dual aspect view of shared intention. I argue that an advantage of this view is that it helps us explain, in ways that competing views do not, why it is not merely an accidental or contingent feature of shared intention that both the cited regularities, (A) and (B), are true of it. In Section 5, I conclude with a few remarks about the conceptualization of shared intention and about how this phenomenon compares to other, related phenomena.

⁴ That versions of the psychological view and of the normative view, such as the ones I discuss in this article, take (A) and (B) to be systematically associated with shared intention suggests that such regularities may provide us with a somewhat independent – that is, pre-theoretical – fix on this phenomenon. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for prompting this clarification.

⁵ My discussion of Bratman's view concentrates, for the most part, on the essays reprinted in his (1999a), whereas my discussion of Gilbert's view focuses mostly on her earlier two collections of essays (1996a, 2000a). Bratman and Gilbert introduce some complexities in the specific details of their views in later work (Gilbert 2006, 2009, 2013; Bratman 2009, 2014), but since these are not central to the issues discussed in this article, I think we can safely put them aside.

2 Two Opposing Views of Shared Intention

2.1 Bratman's Psychological View

Bratman's leading idea is that the phenomenon of (future-directed) intention or "planning" is at the heart of human agency, insofar as it plays some central characteristic roles in one's practical thought and action (1987). A distinguishing role of intention, Bratman tells us, is to help organize and coordinate one's actions both over time and interpersonally. According to Bratman, intention plays this role in virtue of involving a two-fold commitment to action which other conative attitudes, such as desire, normally lack (p. 15–18, 108–109). First, one's intending to do something involves a disposition to "settle" or "control" – rather than merely to "potentially influence" – what one is going to do: if one intends to perform an action, and one's intention persists until the time of action and nothing interferes, one will proceed to execute it then. Second, intending to perform an action disposes one to see the cited action as a fixed point in one's deliberations and to reason in certain ways. In particular, it disposes one to avoid reconsidering one's intention in the absence of new and significant information, to form further intentions about how to execute one's intended end, and to eschew from deliberation options believed to be incompatible with one's intention. It is one of Bratman's fundamental ideas that such dispositions to reasoning are responsive to or guided by, associated norms of intention rationality such as intention stability, means-end coherence of intentions, and intention consistency.

But how should we understand shared intention, that is, the intention of a group of individuals? Bratman's thesis is that we should understand it as a complex structure involving intentions of each individual participant: "a shared intention," Bratman writes, "consists in a public, interlocking web of appropriate intentions of the individuals" (1999b, p. 9). Bratman's argument for thinking that shared intention consists in such a structure or "web" of intentions comprises two steps. First, Bratman claims that it is distinctive of shared intention that it plays some central roles in our thought and action, and, further, that we have reason to identify shared intention with whatever it is that plays those roles. Second, Bratman argues that the central roles of shared intention are played by the cited structure of intentions of individuals. Therefore, Bratman concludes, that structure of intentions is shared intention – or, at least "one important kind" of it.⁶ Three questions arise here. First, what are, in Bratman's view, the central

⁶ In concluding in later work (1999e, p. 142–144) that the cited structure of intentions is at least "one important kind" of shared intention, Bratman observes that this phenomenon might be

roles of shared intention? Second, what exactly does the cited structure of intentions of individuals involve? And, third, how is it that such a structure plays the cited roles?

Suppose that you and I share an intention to dance the tango at the local club on Saturday. According to Bratman, our shared intention to dance the tango will typically play three interrelated roles in our lives. First, it will help us coordinate our individual actions: one of us will lead the dance, for example, and the other will follow. Second, our shared intention will help us coordinate our associated planning. For instance, if I plan to get the tickets but not to drive to the local club, I will make sure that you plan to drive. Third, our shared intention will provide a background framework that can structure forms of bargaining between us, in case we have conflicting preferences about how we will dance the tango – say, about who will lead, what tango style we will dance to, and so on. Bratman's point is that our shared intention will typically play such trio of interrelated roles in ways that lead to our successfully dancing the tango. When an individual agent intends to perform an action, Bratman claims, she commits to future conduct in ways that help organize, coordinate, and unify her agency over time. Much in the same way, Bratman suggests, when we share an intention to act together we commit to future conduct in ways that help organize, coordinate, and unify our joint intentional agency (Bratman 1999c, p. 112).

For Bratman the complex structure of intentions constituent of shared intention involves, mainly, intentions on the part of each participant in favor of the joint activity. When you and I share an intention to dance the tango, I intend that we dance the tango and you intend that we dance the tango. In addition, such a structure involves various complex interconnections between the cited intentions of participants. The details are not central here, but Bratman speaks of “interlocking” and “reflexive” intentions (1999c, p. 118–119); of intentions in favor of “meshing subplans” (p. 120); and so on. Finally, Bratman maintains that the cited structure of intentions is common knowledge between the participants (p. 117). Bratman argues next that the cited complex structure of intentions accounts for

“multiply realizable” in the sense that there might be other complexes of attitudes of individuals that “realize” the roles characteristic of shared intention. For further elaboration, see Bratman (2014). In this way, Bratman pulls back from his original claim about the (type-type) identification of shared intention with the cited structure of intentions (1999c, p. 111–112). Consequently, whereas in his original article (1999c) Bratman conceives of the elements in the cited structure of intentions as necessary and sufficient for there to be a shared intention, in later work (1999e, 2014) he regards such elements as only jointly sufficient for shared intention (1999e, 2014). For the sake of simplicity, in this article I concentrate on Bratman's original statement of the view (1999c).

the aforementioned trio of roles characteristic of shared intention. Basically, Bratman says, we start by noting that shared intention involves intentions of individuals, intentions with the cited special contents and interconnected in the aforementioned ways. Then, we note that these intentions are, after all, ordinary intentions of individuals, and as such, are subject to norms of intention rationality such as means-end coherence and intention consistency. Finally, we note that such norms of intention rationality exert pressure on those intentions of individuals – intentions with such contents and so interconnected – in ways that lead to the coordination of action and of planning, and to appropriate bargaining, in pursuit of the joint activity (p. 122–125).

In Section 1, I called attention to two regularities associated with shared intention, namely, that (A) shared intention normally leads to joint action, and that (B) it is normally accompanied by interpersonal obligations. Clearly, the preceding remarks constitute Bratman's explanation of the former regularity, (A). But what does, in Bratman's view, explain the latter regularity, (B)?

Bratman points out that we normally arrive at shared intention as a result of agreements, mutual assurances or promises, forms of reciprocally induced reliance, and so on, and that the latter "processes" normally generate moral obligations between participants (1999c, p. 125–129; 1999d). That is why, in his view, (B) holds true of shared intention. Bratman makes some further points about the connection between shared intention and interpersonal obligations that are relevant to our discussion. To begin with, Bratman points out that we may arrive at shared intention without having thereby acquired obligations to one another. He thinks that there are two kinds of circumstances where this is so. First, there are cases in which moral considerations prevent such obligations from arising. Perhaps the joint activity we intend to perform is morally impermissible; or, perhaps we arrived at shared intention through certain forms of coercion, deceit, or manipulation (1999d, p. 132–133). Second, there are cases in which we arrive at shared intention through processes that are not "obligation-generating" (1999d, p. 138–140). Perhaps I unilaterally formed my relevant intention that we act, you unilaterally formed yours, and the social context made it obvious to us that we each had such attitudes (1999d, p. 139). In addition, and more importantly, Bratman points out that the defining feature of shared intention is that it leads to joint action by playing the aforementioned coordinating and bargaining roles, and that mutual obligations are neither necessary nor sufficient for this. Such obligations are not necessary, given the remarks in the paragraph above; and they are not sufficient, since we may reciprocally incur obligations to one another by way of any of the aforementioned processes but be insincere and have no intention to comply with them (1999c, p. 111). All these points give us reason to conclude, Bratman maintains, that although "shared intention does *typically* bring with it

associated obligations,” those obligations are “not *essential* to shared intention itself” (1999d, p. 132. The emphases are mine).

Bratman believes that a conception of the very nature of shared intention follows from the previous reflections. Since shared intention is a structure of intentions of individuals that typically plays some central roles in the individuals’ thought and action in pursuit of the joint activity, since interpersonal obligations are neither necessary nor sufficient to play such roles, and since shared intention does not necessarily create such obligations, Bratman concludes that shared intention is a psychological phenomenon, not a normative one. As he writes:

[S]hared intention... supports coordinated planning and action, and relevant bargaining, aimed at the joint activity and... it is typically but not necessarily accompanied by relevant... obligations. That seems... a reason to see the phenomenon captured by [the cited structure of intentions] as at the heart of the matter... [S]hared intention is primarily a psychological – rather than primarily a normative – phenomenon. The step to... obligations and entitlements is a step beyond this more basic phenomenon (Bratman 1999c, p. 128).

The just cited passage is definitely illustrative of Bratman’s conception of the nature of shared intention. However, a point needs clarification. In pointing out that “shared intention is *primarily* a psychological – rather than *primarily* a normative – phenomenon” (my emphases), Bratman is not saying that although shared intention is both a psychological phenomenon and a normative phenomenon, it is more of the former than of the latter. For Bratman shared intention is itself not a normative phenomenon at all.⁷

2.2 Gilbert’s Normative View

Gilbert offers a picture of the nature of shared intention that contrasts sharply with Bratman’s. To begin with, the authors’ starting points of reflection are different. Whereas Bratman is impressed by the similarities – or “deep continuity” (2014, p. 4) – he sees between individual agency and shared agency, Gilbert is struck by the parallels she finds within the whole range of social phenomena. Gilbert thinks that all social phenomena – ranging from “collective mental states,” such as shared intentions and collective beliefs, to interpersonal transactions, such as promises and agreements – involve (what she calls) a “joint commitment” between the individual participants. Joint commitment, Gilbert writes, “may be regarded as the core of human sociality” (2000a, p. 4). Gilbert

⁷ See also note 17 below.

characterizes joint commitment in terms of several features, but three of them are central to our discussion. First, a joint commitment is not an aggregate of “personal” commitments – where a “personal” commitment is, in this view, the commitment characteristic of a “personal” decision, intention, or goal (2000c, p. 21). It is, rather, a primitive phenomenon. Second, unlike personal commitments, the joint commitment of two (or more) individuals can be created and rescinded only by those individuals together. One may rescind one’s personal commitment by changing one’s mind. But one cannot rescind a joint commitment in a similar way. Any unilateral decision to be rid of the joint commitment does not amount to its rescission, but to a violation of it (2000c, p. 21–22). Third, and most crucially, the mere existence of a joint commitment necessarily creates relevant obligations and entitlements between participants. “[T]hese obligations and entitlements,” Gilbert says, “derive from the joint commitment alone,” they “*inhere* in the joint commitment in the sense that once the joint commitment exists, they exist also” (2000c, p. 26. The emphasis is hers).

For Gilbert shared intention is clearly a social phenomenon, and as such, it necessarily involves a joint commitment between individual participants. It involves a joint commitment to (intend to) act together (2000c, p. 22). Since shared intention involves an underlying joint commitment, Gilbert explains, it necessarily creates reciprocal obligations and entitlements between participants. Each participant incurs an obligation to the others to conform to the shared intention – specifically, to do his or her part in the joint activity – and acquires a corresponding entitlement against the others to their conforming actions and also to rebuke them for nonconformity (2000c, p. 16–17, 25–26). Suppose that we are dancing the tango and I suddenly decide to stop and walk away without saying a word to you. In such type of case, Gilbert tells us, you are entitled to rebuke me for having failed to conform to our shared intention; you are so entitled in virtue of our joint commitment to (intend to) dance the tango. It is important to note how Gilbert conceives of such obligations. For Gilbert the obligations created by shared intention are not moral, but *sui generis* in nature – she also sometimes labels them as “associational” or “political” (1992, p. 411). They are grounded in the (value of the) “jointness” of its underlying joint commitment; or, as she puts it, they are “a function of the fact that the joint commitment is indeed joint” (2000d, p. 103). Moreover, Gilbert thinks that such obligations are unconditional (2000d, p. 104–105). This means in her view that “the obligations of joint commitment are present just in case a joint commitment is itself present... neither the *circumstances* nor the *content* of a joint commitment, given that it exists, affects the presence of its obligations” (2000d, p. 104. The emphases are mine). Thus, if we arrived at a shared intention to dance the tango in coercive circumstances – suppose I told you, “Dance with me or I will reveal your secret!” – we would still

have incurred obligations to conform (2000d, p. 105). Similarly, if the content of our shared intention involved the performance of immoral actions – suppose we shared an intention to rob a bank together – we would still “have obligations of joint commitment to perform immoral actions” (2000d, p. 105).

The connection between shared intention, joint commitment, and obligation is central in Gilbert’s view. It is purported to explain not only why (B) shared intention is normally accompanied by interpersonal obligations,⁸ but also why (A) shared intention normally leads to joint action. Gilbert makes three central points about the explanation of joint action. The first two are negative. First, Gilbert points out that a group of individuals may share an intention to do something together, and yet lack corresponding “personal” intentions and similar attitudes of individuals (2000c, p. 17–18, 27). Second, she claims that “insofar as [shared intentions] do motivate, their motivational force does not derive from the motivational force of corresponding personal intentions” (2000c, p. 18). The third point is positive. Gilbert maintains that shared intention motivates by virtue of its ensuing obligations (2000c, p. 24, 27). Since obligations give, or constitute, (normative) reasons for action (1996b, p. 288; 2000d, p. 120, n.36), shared intention leads to joint action by giving each individual a reason to act accordingly (2000c, p. 24).

Now we are in a position to see how Gilbert arrives at her conception of the nature of shared intention. From the premises that shared intention necessarily creates interpersonal obligations, that these obligations are responsible for playing the motivational roles characteristic of shared intention independently of “personal” intentions and the like, and that such attitudes of individuals are not necessary for shared intention, Gilbert concludes that shared intention is, at its core, a normative phenomenon, as opposed to a psychological one.

3 Clearing out Space for an Alternative View of Shared Intention

Having expounded the main ideas behind the views by Bratman and by Gilbert, I argue in what follows that there is space for an alternative view of the nature of shared intention, a view that captures the main insights of both the cited views

⁸ Of course, Gilbert would insist here that, although true, the regularity stated in (B) misrepresents the facts. For, in her view it is a “pretheoretical” feature of shared intention that this phenomenon is necessarily – rather than just normally – connected to interpersonal obligations (2000c, p. 16–17).

while avoiding what we will see are some of their main pitfalls. This alternative view rests on a specific way of thinking about the question of the psychological nature and of the normative nature of shared intention. To this question, I turn next.

To answer the question of the psychological nature and of normative nature of shared intention we must answer a prior and more fundamental question. This is the question of the *standards* that shared intention must satisfy in order for it to be properly conceived of as, respectively, a psychological phenomenon and a normative phenomenon. As we can see from Section 2, Bratman and Gilbert clearly agree on what is necessary to establish that shared intention is a normative phenomenon, namely, it must be shown that this phenomenon is necessarily connected to interpersonal obligations.⁹ It is not entirely clear, however, whether the authors also agree on what is necessary to establish that shared intention is a psychological phenomenon. Gilbert thinks that to establish this we must show that intentions (and other attitudes) of individuals are necessarily connected to shared intention and that the former account for every case in which we say that the latter moves such individuals to act jointly. Bratman broadly agrees with Gilbert on this, but is more specific about what showing that would involve (1999c). He adheres to a form of functionalism about intention, according to which the concept of intention is the concept of a mental state that typically plays certain roles in our lives and is subject to associated norms of rationality.¹⁰ So, in Bratman's view, to show that shared intention necessarily involves intentions of individuals amounts basically to showing that it necessarily involves a web of attitudes that typically plays some coordinating and bargaining roles in pursuit of the joint activity.¹¹ Thus, it is plausible to say that, for Bratman, what makes shared intention a psychological phenomenon is not so much the brute fact that it necessarily involves the cited intentions of individuals, but the fact that such intentions typically play the cited roles in the individuals' thought and action.¹²

I think that Gilbert and Bratman are mistaken about what is really necessary to establish that shared intention is a normative phenomenon. To ask for a

⁹ But see note 17.

¹⁰ As mentioned earlier (note 6), in later work (1999e, 2014) Bratman no longer conceives of such intentions of individuals as strictly necessary for shared intention. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that Bratman's functionalist argument applies to any of the "multiple" structures of attitudes of individuals that may "realize" shared intention.

¹¹ For present purposes, we can safely ignore the rationality element in intention identification.

¹² We might read Bratman's and Gilbert's answers to the question of relevant standards as functioning as implicit premises in their arguments to, respectively, the sole psychological nature and sole normative nature of shared intention, discussed in Section 2 above.

necessary connection between shared intention and interpersonal obligations is simply too strong. To appreciate this, think of another interpersonal transaction commonly thought to be tightly connected to obligations: promising.¹³ It is central to promises that they generate promissory obligations. Yet, it is not the case – at least according to many – that whenever I promise you to do something, I incur an obligation to you to perform.¹⁴ Promises generate obligations only in the absence of special circumstances – circumstances are special, for example, when the promise was obtained under certain forms of coercion, deceit, or manipulation, or when the content of the promise is that the promisor perform a morally impermissible act. Something similar may be said about other interpersonal transactions such as making agreements, consenting, and so forth. Relevant moral considerations normally ground obligations when such interpersonal transactions have taken place, but they do not do so when special circumstances are present.¹⁵ At the same time, we should not infer from the fact that the connection that exists between one such transaction and its associated obligations is not necessary that the existence of this connection is of no significance to the nature of such a transaction.¹⁶ On the contrary, we understand interpersonal transactions such as promises, agreements, and so on, partly by reference to the obligations they normally generate. Indeed, we conceive of such transactions as paradigmatic normative phenomena.¹⁷

The parallel with promising not only allows us to see what is wrong with Gilbert and Bratman's answer to the question of the normative nature of shared intention, but also elicits a proper answer to it. As it was just mentioned, it is central to promising that it generates promissory obligations, although it does

13 I first called attention to several parallels between shared intention and promising in Alonso (2009). Here I explore some of these parallels in greater detail.

14 Gilbert disagrees with this. As mentioned in Section 2 above, in her view promising involves joint commitment and the latter creates obligations necessarily. For further elaboration, see Gilbert (2011).

15 The idea that there is only a defeasible connection between interpersonal transactions and obligation is shared by otherwise very different views of the nature of moral obligation, including consequentialist and deontological views. But the idea is best captured, in my opinion, by contemporary contractualist views such as the one advanced by Scanlon (1998, p. 197–202, 299, 2008, p. 21). See, also, Darwall (2006, 2011, p. 269–271), and Watson (2009, p. 167–174, 176–177).

16 Compare Hart (1955, p. 176).

17 In arguing for the sole psychological nature of shared intention, Bratman makes the further claim that even if shared intention was necessarily connected to interpersonal obligations, this would not tell us anything about “what shared intention is” but would only speak to the “normative consequences” of that phenomenon (1999c, p. 128–129. His emphasis). See, also, Bratman (1999d, p. 140–141). But here one might want to ask about Bratman's view: if not even the strongest possible connection with obligations would show that shared intention is a normative phenomenon, what could?

not generate them necessarily. But although promising does not generate such obligations necessarily, it is still tightly – that is, non-accidentally – connected to them. Specifically, it is often assumed that promising necessarily involves what we may call a “basis” for promissory obligations, that is, in rough outline a set of behavioral and psychological conditions that typically produces an effect, which in the absence of special circumstances helps create such obligations by engaging relevant moral principles or considerations.¹⁸ To illustrate, consider three alternative sets of conditions often regarded as a basis for promissory obligations, here singled out, for purposes of simplicity, in terms of their main elements: an act of communication or signaling performed with the intention of, respectively, communicating a truth about one’s future behavior (Warnock 1971), inducing reliance (MacCormick 1982), and providing assurance (Scanlon 1998, 2003).¹⁹ According to George Warnock, when I promise you to *X* in the future I act with the intention of communicating to you a truth about my future actions – namely, that I will *X*. Moreover, when you take this act of communication as originally intended, Warnock contends, the transaction engages the value of veracity, which normally enjoins me to make that act of communication true, that is, to *X* (1971, p. 106–116). Neil MacCormick offers a different view. When I promise you to *X* in the future I act basically with the intention of inducing you to rely on my *X*-ing. Further, when your reliance on my *X*-ing is so induced as a result of this transaction, considerations about the priority of “not harming people” in general, and of not harming you in particular, are engaged and normally ground an obligation on my part to perform as relied upon, that is, to *X* (1982, p. 201–202, 205). Alternatively, Thomas M. Scanlon maintains that in promising you to *X* in the future I act with the intention of assuring you that I will *X* (1998, p. 306–307). Scanlon maintains also that in “central” or “pure” cases of promising I do succeed in assuring you that I will *X* and you desire to have such an assurance (p. 311–314),²⁰ and that the value to you of your being so assured normally supports, in the general way specified by contractualism, an obligation on my part to *X* (p. 302–305).²¹

18 This characterization attempts to make more precise the idea of a basis for obligations introduced in Alonso (2009, p. 447, n. 10).

19 This certainly draws on a particular picture of how promissory obligations arise. For an alternative, see Owens (2012).

20 Note that the idea of a basis for promissory obligations does not perfectly apply to Scanlon’s account of such obligations, since on his account a condition for the latter is that you desire to be assured that I will *X* and such a condition is in principle independent of my having promised you that I will *X*.

21 It is worth mentioning that Scanlon agrees with MacCormick that forms of reliance can be a basis for obligations, but rejects the idea that promissory obligations in particular are reliance-based (1998, 2003). I return to Scanlon’s account of reliance-based obligations below.

The discussion in the preceding paragraph certainly simplifies complex issues about promising. But what is important for our purposes is to underscore what the notion of a basis for obligations allows us to see. This is that although there is not a necessary connection between promising and promissory obligations, there is nonetheless a necessary connection between promising and the factual conditions that trigger such obligations. Therefore, in parallel with the case of promising, I want to suggest that to establish the normative nature of shared intention we must show, not that it necessarily gives rise to relevant obligations, but only that it necessarily involves a basis for them.

Return now to the question of what is necessary to establish the psychological nature of shared intention. On this question, I agree with Bratman. We must show that this phenomenon necessarily involves a structure of attitudes that typically plays some functional roles – such as the coordination of the individuals' thought and action – that lead to joint action.²² A form of functionalism about the mind gives us a correct answer here. That being said, a point needs emphasizing at this juncture. According to this way of seeing things, shared intention plays the cited roles only typically, but not necessarily. This seems correct to me. For clearly there are cases in which we have a shared intention to act together but our shared intention does not play the cited roles. In some of those cases the breakdown is owed to our failure to be appropriately responsive to relevant norms of rationality: perhaps I have inconsistent intentions and am pushed in different directions; or, perhaps I fail to intend the believed necessary means to our joint activity. In some other cases, our emotions simply get in the way: perhaps I am just paralyzed by fear and am unable to think and act in pursuit of our joint activity. Once we recognize that point, we realize that what we want to say about the question of the psychological nature of shared intention is somewhat analogous to what we said about the question of its normative nature. To establish that shared intention is a psychological phenomenon we must show that it is necessarily connected, not to the performance of characteristic functional roles themselves but rather, to that in virtue of which it typically plays those roles – namely, a structure of attitudes that includes relevant dispositions to play such roles.

From this discussion it emerges, then, a particular way of thinking about the question of the psychological nature and of the normative nature of shared intention. To be revealing of the nature of shared intention, relevant psychological features – such as the performance of characteristic functional roles – and normative features – such as the creation of characteristic obligations – must each

²² Though, as we will see in the next section, I partly disagree with Bratman (1999c) about what attitudes the cited structure exactly involves.

be tightly connected to the metaphysics of this phenomenon. This need not take the form of a necessary connection between shared intention and such features themselves. But it must take the form of a necessary connection between shared intention and that which explains, or helps to give rise to, those features – here, respectively, dispositions to play the cited roles and a basis for obligations. This way of thinking about the question of the nature of shared intention opens up space for an alternative view of this phenomenon. According to this alternative view, shared intention is both a psychological and a normative phenomenon, and it is so in virtue of involving a basic structure of attitudes of individuals that both includes dispositions to play the cited functional roles and is a basis for interpersonal obligations. I argue for this view in the next section. But before I proceed, I want to discuss an issue that will be relevant to my argument.

Our answer to the question of the nature of shared intention goes hand in hand with our answer to the question of what features paradigmatic cases of shared intention must possess. Bratman seems to think that, since shared intention is a psychological – as opposed to a normative – phenomenon, the paradigmatic or “basic” case of shared intention is one in which this phenomenon plays the aforementioned coordinating and bargaining roles in pursuit of the joint activity (1999c, p. 128). I agree that it is a central feature of paradigmatic cases of shared intention that it plays the cited roles. But it is not clear to me why such cases must exhibit only this feature. In particular, it is not clear why the creation of interpersonal obligations is not, also, a central feature of such cases. Bratman acknowledges that it is part of the “normal etiology of shared intention” (1999d, p. 132) that this phenomenon brings with it associated obligations, but excludes the creation of such obligations from paradigmatic cases of shared intention on grounds that such obligations may fail to be so created.²³ Yet, it seems to me wrong, for reasons adduced earlier, to exclude the creation of obligations from paradigmatic cases of shared intention on such grounds. Furthermore, such line of argument seems to me to have puzzling implications. First, if the existence of a necessary connection between shared intention and obligation was, to borrow an apt phrase by Railton in a different context, the “price of admission” to paradigmatic cases of shared intention (2003, p. 297), then, by parity of reasoning, relevant functional (psychological) roles would have to be excluded from paradigmatic cases as well. For, as we saw above, there is not a necessary connection

²³ It is interesting to note, though, that the cases of shared intention that Bratman discusses and regards as paradigmatic in his own work – such as the example of two agents sharing an intention to paint a house together in the absence of special circumstances (1999c) – are ones in which shared intention seems to generate relevant obligations, as it will become apparent in Section 4 below.

between shared intention and the performance of those roles, either. Second, consider what Bratman's line of argument would commit us to if we applied it to the question of what features paradigmatic cases of other types of interpersonal transactions, such as promising, must possess. It would commit us, for example, to the view that promissory obligations should be excluded from paradigmatic cases of promising on grounds that there is not a necessary connection between promising and promissory obligations. This line of argument cannot be right. I suggest instead that paradigmatic cases of shared intention are those that display this phenomenon's dual psychological and normative nature, that is, those in which shared intention leads to joint action by playing its characteristic coordinating and bargaining roles, and creates its characteristic obligations.²⁴

4 Two Aspects of Shared Intention

In this section, I argue that shared intention involves a basic structure of attitudes of individuals and that this helps us give an answer to the two main questions discussed in this article, namely, the question of the psychological and of the normative nature of shared intention, and the question of why it is not merely a contingent feature of shared intention that it is systematically associated with the two regularities noted in Section 1 above.

4.1 A Basic Structure of Attitudes in Shared Intention

Let us begin by considering the cited basic structure of attitudes of individuals involved in shared intention. As I have argued elsewhere (2009), this structure includes in my view at least three basic elements. First, it includes intentions on the part of each individual. Here I follow Bratman (1999c) and conceive of such intentions as ordinary intentions of individuals in favor of the joint activity. When you and I share an intention to dance the tango, I intend that we dance the tango and you intend likewise. I think this conception most clearly captures the nature and extent of an individual's commitment in shared intention, as compared to alternative proposals.²⁵ Second, and this is central to my view, the cited structure includes attitudes of reliance on the part of each individual. Specifically, when we

²⁴ Gilbert seems to agree that paradigmatic cases of shared intention must possess the cited two features (2000c) – though, as it will be shown in Section 4 below, Gilbert and I disagree about how to understand the latter.

²⁵ Here I have in mind, mainly, the proposals by Searle (1990) and by Tuomela and Miller (1988).

share an intention to dance the tango, I rely on your intending that we dance the tango and on your doing your part in our joint activity when the time comes; and so do you. I elaborate on this below. Finally, a third basic element in the structure is that the cited attitudes of intention and of reliance of individuals are common knowledge – that is, they are “public” – ²⁶ between them.²⁷

Consider the second element of such a structure in more detail. It is a natural thought that when people do things together, they rely on each other in different ways. But why exactly are the cited forms of mutual reliance necessary for shared intention? Reliance gets into shared intention by way of its connection to the constituent intentions of individuals. It is a familiar cognitive constraint on intending in general that one may only intend what one takes one’s so intending as settling. One cannot intend to win the lottery if one does not take one’s so intending as settling the issue of one’s winning it, as being efficacious in causing that result. But how can *my* intention in favor of *our* activity satisfy the cited constraint? How can *I*, in intending that we act, take myself to be settling the issue of *our* acting?²⁸ Bratman addresses this question in connection to his own account and provides an ingenious response. He argues that I can (coherently) intend our joint activity, and thus take myself to be settling the issue of our acting, as long as I can reasonably *believe*, among other things, that you intend (or will intend) likewise, and thus that you will be settling that issue as well (1999e, p. 148–160, 2014, p. 76). Bratman’s response, to put it in simpler terms, is that in order for me to intend that we act, I must believe that you intend (or will intend) likewise. I think that the structure of Bratman’s response is broadly along the right lines. But I also think that conceiving of the cited cognitive constraint on such intentions in terms of the attitude of belief is overly strong.²⁹ Instead, we do better to conceive of it, I suggest, in terms of the attitude of reliance. But what is reliance? And how does it differ from belief?³⁰

26 I understand the publicity condition in terms of common knowledge for reasons of simplicity. But something weaker than common knowledge might do the relevant explanatory work.

27 Although I take these three elements to be necessary for shared intention, I do not claim that they are also jointly sufficient for it. Cf. Bratman’s (2014) focus on sufficient conditions.

28 Strictly speaking, this is only part of the challenge, as originally formulated by Velleman (1997, p. 32–33).

29 It should be noted that Bratman is not himself committed to this conception, as he clarifies in later work (2014, p. 76–77). His point is that even when the settle condition is conceived of in terms of belief, intentions in favor of the joint activity can satisfy it. For an alternative challenge to this conception, see Roth (2014, p. 639–40).

30 In what follows I appeal to a view of reliance I develop in much greater detail in Alonso (2014, 2016).

Reliance is, like belief, a cognitive attitude, rather than a conative one. Both attitudes have it as a function to *cognitively guide* (or *frame*) one's reasoning. Each of relying on *p* and of believing that *p* disposes one to deliberate, plan, and act on the basis of *p* when the conditions for such deliberation, planning, and action are satisfied. Suppose that I very much want to dance the tango with you at a party on Saturday. If under such circumstances I relied on your intending that we dance at the party, I would, for example, form my own intention that we dance, buy two tickets for the party, deliberate about how to get there, eschew alternative plans, and so on. The same would be true if in those circumstances I believed that you intend that we dance at the party. Such similarities notwithstanding, reliance differs from belief in many ways. A central difference here has to do with the norms of correctness for such attitudes. While belief is correct just in case it is true, reliance is correct just in case it cognitively guides one's reasoning in a way that is instrumental to one's relevant ends and values. This difference establishes a contrast with respect to the grounds on the basis of which such attitudes are justified. While belief can be justified solely by evidence for its truth, reliance can be justified on the basis of both evidential and pragmatic considerations; and while belief justification requires one to have sufficient evidence for its truth, reliance justification requires one to lack sufficient evidence for its falsity.³¹

Since reliance is subject to a less stringent evidential constraint than belief is, conceiving of the cognitive constraint on intending the joint activity in terms of reliance allows us to make room for, and also make sense of, many ordinary instances of such intentions that are ruled out by the belief conception. It seems clear that I may lack evidence justifying the belief that you intend that we dance at the party (perhaps you are an indecisive person and have not yet responded to my invitation), but nonetheless rely on your so intending and form my own intention that we dance on the basis of such reliance. What is more, my reliance and intention may well be rational or justified in that case. After all, I may have good pragmatic reasons for so relying and intending (perhaps I very much enjoy dancing the tango with you and believe that my so relying and intending are means to securing the success of that activity) and my reliance may meet the cited evidential constraint (perhaps I lack evidence justifying the belief that you will eventually turn down my invitation). These remarks support the claim that reliance satisfies the cognitive constraint on intending the joint activity. But

³¹ Strictly speaking, this is true only for the type of cases of reliance we are interested in here, that is, cases in which one's reliance will be instrumental to one's end only if it succeeds in tracking the truth. These cases should be distinguished from others in which the instrumentality of one's reliance is not a function of the truth of what one relies upon. For discussion, see Alonso (2016).

reliance is not only sufficient for satisfying such a constraint. It is necessary for it as well. This is because framing my intention that we dance by the belief that you intend likewise gives way to a corresponding attitude of reliance. In this context, my belief is not merely tracking the truth, but is primarily cognitively framing my intention that we dance the tango. But as soon as my belief starts playing this framing role, it gives rise to an attitude that can be appropriately assessed in terms of, and is typically guided by, its instrumentality in playing such a role; namely, it gives rise to my reliance on your intending likewise.³²

4.2 Shared Intention and Obligation

I have also argued in earlier work (2009) that once we look closely at the cited basic structure of attitudes of intention and of reliance of individuals, we see that shared intention necessarily involves a *basis* for interpersonal obligations. This is because the cited structure produces an effect of mutual reinforcement of the individuals' attitudes of reliance and this effect helps create relevant moral obligations between such individuals. Let us consider this in some more detail. Once you and I share an intention to dance the tango, we each have the attitudes of intention and of reliance mentioned above, and these attitudes of each are public between us. This produces an important effect. In persisting in my intention that we dance in such a context of publicity about our attitudes, I thereby signal to you what I intend and will do in the future, and as a result normally reinforce your reliance on my intention and eventual actions. And so do you. The next point to note is that *reinforcing* reliance in others in this way is a basis for obligations. It is so for the same reasons that the more familiar activity of *inducing* reliance in others is such a basis. Following work by Scanlon (1998, 2003), we may say that in general others have good reasons for wanting to be protected against the losses they may incur as a result of relying on assumptions that we have reinforced or induced in them, and that those reasons normally ground moral obligations on us to prevent such losses – where these losses may include wasted time and resources, incurred opportunity costs, and so on. Given all this, it is not difficult to see why in sharing an intention to dance the tango in normal circumstances, you and I incur obligations to one another. Since in sharing such an intention we reciprocally reinforce each other's reliance, and since in that context each of us

³² As we will see below, the fact that reliance gets into shared intention so as to cognitively frame (and thus make possible) the intentions of individuals does not entail that its cognitive role in shared intention reduces to this.

has good reason to believe that the other would suffer reliance losses were one not to perform one's part in the joint activity, we incur obligations to one another to prevent such losses. More specifically, we incur obligations to one another to either give the other a timely warning if one will not perform one's part in the joint activity, perform one's part, or (if one fails to take the previous two steps) compensate the other for reliance losses.³³

As anticipated, the fact that the aforementioned structure of attitudes is a basis for obligations helps us account for the normative aspect of shared intention. To begin with, this fact establishes, given the standard set in Section 3 above, that shared intention is a normative phenomenon. In addition, it offers a principled explanation of one of the regularities noted in Section 1 above, namely, that (B) shared intention normally brings with it obligations. For it is plausible to think that we normally share intentions in the absence of special circumstances, and we know that relevant obligations are created in such cases. Furthermore, the fact that the cited structure is a basis for obligations also accounts for the widespread presence in the context of shared intention of practices of holding responsible, which Gilbert has done much to emphasize.³⁴ When we share an intention to act together, we are entitled, and have a corresponding tendency, to hold each other to account: I am entitled and disposed, *inter alia*, to demand that you comply with the obligation you have incurred to me, and to blame you if you fail to comply without excuse – where my blaming you includes typical moral reactions such as my resenting you for having violated such an obligation to me, my complaining to you for this, and my demanding an explanation from you; and similarly for you. Undoubtedly, the topic of our responsibility practices in shared intention raises large issues – including, for example, the issue of whether such practices take exactly the cited form. Nevertheless, what is important to note for our purposes is that the explanation of such responsibility practices will appeal to the fact that shared intention is a basis for the obligations for which we hold each other to account. It is precisely in supporting such responsibility practices where the significance of shared intention's being a basis for obligations mainly resides.³⁵

³³ These remarks parallel Scanlon's argument in favor of a principle of loss prevention he offers concerning the activity of inducing reliance in others, which he calls "Principle L" (2003, p. 239–242). Scanlon does not explicitly consider the activity of reinforcing reliance, but as I have argued in earlier work (2009) an analogous version of Scanlon's argument applies to this latter activity as well. As I explain there, my focus on the latter owes to the fact that the participants' attitudes of reliance are necessarily reinforced, but not necessarily induced, in shared intention.

³⁴ But, in contrast to Gilbert, in my view such practices are of a moral – rather than of an "associational" – nature, since they involve distinctively moral reactions.

³⁵ Its significance does not exclusively reside in this, however. See Section 4.3 below.

In conceiving of shared intention as intimately connected to obligations and related normative phenomena, my view aligns with Gilbert's against Bratman's. We saw that for Bratman different bases for interpersonal obligations – or, as he calls them, different “obligation-generating processes” – are normally but yet contingently associated with shared intention. This indicates that in Bratman's view it is a contingent fact that regularity (B) holds true of shared intention. I think, on the contrary, that it is not a contingent fact, due to the presence of some basis for obligations external to shared intention, that this phenomenon normally generates obligations. Rather, in my view a particular (though defeasible) basis for obligations is internal to, or partly constitutive of, shared intention itself.³⁶ Furthermore, Bratman and I explore the question of the connection between shared intention and interpersonal obligation with an eye mainly to different issues. Bratman's main concern is whether such obligations are responsible for playing the motivational role we commonly attribute to shared intention. I am also concerned with this issue, and will say more about this below. However, my main concern in exploring the cited question is of a more normative sort. It has to do with whether there is a basis for obligations in shared intention and, if so, with the intrinsic normative significance of this – where this includes, especially, the support of responsibility practices in this context.

Alternatively, although I join Gilbert in thinking that shared intention is non-accidentally connected to interpersonal obligations, I part company with her on that I do not think that this non-accidental connection takes the form of a necessary connection between shared intention and such obligations themselves. In my view the obligations characteristic of shared intention are created only in the absence of special circumstances, rather than necessarily. They are moral obligations, rather than “associational” ones. In these last two respects, my view aligns with Bratman's against Gilbert's. But there is another contrast with Gilbert's view worth stressing here. In appealing to considerations such as the presence of attitudes of reliance of individuals in shared intention, the reciprocal reinforcement of such attitudes by those individuals, and the value to such individuals of their being protected against the losses they may incur as a result of such reliance, I have attempted to provide a simple and informative normative story of why shared intention is a basis for obligations. It is not at all obvious, however, that this is also the case with Gilbert's view. All Gilbert seems to be offering in terms of a normative story is the aforementioned claim that the obligations characteristic

³⁶ Of course, this is not to deny that shared intention may also engage external bases for interpersonal obligations, such as mutual assurances or promises. But in my view, and here I am in agreement with Bratman (1999d), such bases are not partly constitutive of shared intention. See, also, Alonso (2009).

of shared intention are generated by an underlying joint commitment and that they are “a function of the fact that the joint commitment is indeed joint” (2000d, p. 103). But this claim only pushes the problem one step back. For now we would want to know what it is about the “jointness” of a joint commitment that creates the relevant obligations, and about this question Gilbert seems to remain silent.

4.3 Shared Intention and the Explanation of Joint Action

I want to argue next that the cited basic structure of attitudes of intention and of reliance of individuals involves dispositions to play relevant functional roles that lead to joint action and that this fact helps us account for the psychological aspect of shared intention. First, this fact establishes, given the standard set in Section 3, that shared intention is a psychological phenomenon. Second, it helps us explain why the other regularity we noted in Section 1, namely, that (A) shared intention normally leads to joint action, is not an accidental feature of this phenomenon. In relation to this latter issue, I want to suggest, in line with Bratman’s approach, that appeal to the psychological roles played by the constituents of shared intention is an ineliminable part of the explanation of joint action. But I also want to suggest that this is not always sufficient. The moral obligations shared intention characteristically generates make a difference as to how this phenomenon leads to joint action. And I think that a theory of the basic aspects of shared intention should account for this, since the creation of such obligations is one of the two central features of paradigmatic cases of shared intention, as suggested in Section 3 above.³⁷ So, when it comes down to the question of how shared intention leads to joint action, I think it is important to distinguish between two types of cases: to wit, (i) cases in which shared intention does not generate its characteristic obligations, and (ii) cases in which it does.

Consider type (i) cases. Imagine that you and I share an intention to rob a bank together. Since robbing a bank is a morally impermissible action, our having formed such a shared intention does not create relevant obligations between us. But even though this is so, I want to suggest, our shared intention may still guide our thought and action in ways that lead to our successfully robbing the bank together. My suggestion is that in cases like this our attitudes of intention and of reliance will lead to joint action much in the way Bratman has insightfully

³⁷ In later work Bratman also highlights the importance of accounting for the motivational role that obligations can play in shared intention (2014, Ch. 3 and 5), but not for the reasons I mention here.

described, that is, basically, by being appropriately interconnected and responsive to their associated norms and, consequently, by inducing dispositions to play and then by typically playing characteristic coordinating and bargaining roles. Surely, more should be said as to what exactly such interconnections and norms are as well as to how they cooperate with the cited attitudes to play the aforementioned roles.³⁸ But I think nonetheless that the previous remarks provide us with an outline of how the motivational story will go. That being said, let me note a difference – though, perhaps only of emphasis – with Bratman’s view. In my view, shared intention involves attitudes of reliance of individuals and these attitudes, I want to stress, occupy a central place in the explanation of how shared intention plays the aforementioned coordinating and bargaining roles. Return to our shared intention to rob the bank together. It is partly because I rely on your intending to reduce the guards and to keep an eye on the hostages that I intend to open the safe and to put the money in the bags; and it is partly because I rely on your following through with your intentions that I effectively execute mine. And vice versa. Thus, it is partly because we rely on each other in those ways that our shared intention coordinates our planning and action in ways that lead to our successfully robbing the bank together.³⁹

What to say about type (ii) cases? These, recall, are paradigmatic cases of shared intention. Here we must go beyond an appeal to the functional roles played by the attitudes partly constitutive of shared intention. In type (ii) cases, individuals incur relevant moral obligations as a result of their shared intention and this gives each of them a special reason to act accordingly, a reason they would not have in type (i) cases.⁴⁰ Further, if such individuals accept a relevant moral principle or norm grounding the cited obligations and endorse the cited reason for action, this will typically have consequences for the way in which their shared intention coordinates their planning and action, and structures forms of bargaining between them, in pursuit of the joint activity.⁴¹ One of those

38 Here I should mention that although I subscribe in broad outline to Bratman’s motivational story (1999c) as applied to type (i) cases, I disagree with some of its details. However, since such differences of detail do not introduce a further substantive difference in our conceptions of the very nature of shared intention, I will not consider them here.

39 Compare Bratman’s discussion of the role of common knowledge in regard to what he calls “the connection condition,” that is, in regard to how shared intention leads or “connects” to joint action (2014, p. 78–83).

40 These moral reasons are special, I am assuming here, in that they are, like the obligations they are connected to, “relational” or “bipolar” in structure. See esp. Wallace (2013).

41 On the notions of accepting a norm and of endorsing a reason, see Gibbard (1990). According to Gibbard, a central feature of accepting a norm is that it brings about a “syndrome of tendencies” to be guided by the norm, including tendencies to conform to the norm and to avow it in

consequences is that the individuals' motivation will be reinforced as a result of their having incurred such obligations. Whatever their initial reasons for participating in the joint activity are, such individuals will now be moved in addition by the aforementioned moral reason. A related consequence is that individuals will stick more firmly to their shared intention than they would otherwise have, which will make their shared intention more stable as a result.⁴²

This account of the motivational role of shared intention contrasts sharply with the one offered by Gilbert. Although Gilbert and I agree that the obligations shared intention generates make a difference as to how it leads to joint action, we disagree about the difference they make. This connects to a deeper disagreement between our accounts, concerning the motivational role played by attitudes of individuals. As we saw in Section 2, Gilbert denies that an appeal to attitudes of individuals is necessary to explain how shared intention motivates. She claims that an appeal to the obligations individuals incur in shared intention is sufficient to explain how this phenomenon leads to joint action, independently of intentions of individuals, their attitudes of reliance, and so on (2000c, p. 17–18, 2009, p. 171–173). However, this claim raises many worries, one of which is that in order for such obligations to motivate individuals to act, they must somehow engage the individuals' psychologies, and it is not obvious how this is supposed to work in Gilbert's view. There are difficult questions here as to whether the cited obligations will induce dispositions to comply with them and whether such dispositions, if so induced, will be embedded in intentions of individuals or the like. Consequently, it is not apparent in Gilbert's view why it is not a contingent fact that (A) shared intention normally motivates.⁴³ Another worry with Gilbert's claim is that there are cases of shared intention in which it is intuitively clear that no obligations are created between individuals, and yet such individuals are disposed to think and act in ways conducive to joint action – these we called earlier, recall, type (i)

normative discussion (1990, p. 75). See also Railton (2006). The notion of accepting a norm, it is worth mentioning here, has wide application in the conceptualization of shared intention, as we may also appeal to it to explain, for example, how in having some of the attitudes involved in shared intention, such as intention and reliance, an individual participant tends to be guided by their respective norms. For discussion of norm-acceptance in the cases of intention and of reliance, see, respectively, Bratman (2014, p. 16–18, 32–33) and Alonso (2014).

⁴² Bratman also has independently noted how, in some cases, obligation-like phenomena can contribute to the stability of shared intention (2014, Ch. 3 and 5). Nevertheless, Bratman has claimed, in addition, that the stability of “basic” cases of shared intention excludes the contribution by such phenomena (2006, p. 7–9), which is clearly in tension with my remarks, in Section 3 above, about what constitute paradigmatic (or “basic”) cases of shared intention.

⁴³ Bratman independently raises a similar worry about Gilbert's view in (2014, p. 116–117).

cases. Gilbert might respond to this worry by insisting that reciprocal obligations are still created in such cases of shared intention but that these obligations are “associational,” rather than moral, in kind. Our intuition that no obligations arise in such cases, Gilbert might contend, owes to the fact that in thinking about such cases we have a concept of obligation of the wrong kind in mind. Be that as it may, this response would bring us back to the normative question as to how exactly the purported “associational” obligations arise in the first place, a question for which, I suggested earlier, Gilbert fails to provide a satisfactory answer.

4.4 Centrality, Independence, and Interconnection of Explanatory Factors

I have argued in this section that shared intention involves a basic structure of attitudes of intention and of reliance of individuals, which includes both dispositions to play relevant psychological roles and a basis for interpersonal obligations. Now we can see why the included two factors have, as anticipated in Section 1, *central* explanatory significance for shared intention. First, such factors establish that shared intention is, respectively, a psychological and a normative phenomenon; and, second, appeal to such factors is necessary to explain, respectively, why (A) shared intention normally motivates and why (B) it is normally accompanied by obligations. Furthermore, we can see why such factors can have, as also anticipated, *independent* explanatory significance for shared intention as well. We may see this by reflecting on some non-paradigmatic cases of shared intention, in particular, on cases in which shared intention is successful in leading to joint action but not in creating its characteristic obligations, and vice versa. Earlier we considered non-paradigmatic cases of the former type (type (i) cases), and saw that the explanation of how shared intention leads to joint action in such cases appeals to relevant dispositions to coordination and bargaining of the constituent attitudes of individuals, which are independent of the obligations that such attitudes typically contribute to generate. Now consider the latter type of non-paradigmatic cases of shared intention – call these type (iii) cases. Imagine once again that you and I share an intention to dance the tango in a context in which the usual defeaters of moral obligation are absent: none of us has coerced the other into participating in it, what we intend to do is morally permissible, and so on. It follows from the view defended here that in such a context you and I will have incurred obligations to one another to act accordingly. It also follows from that view that each of us intends that we dance the tango and relies on the other in important ways. But now imagine, in addition, that although I have the just cited attitudes, I am not moved to act accordingly. Perhaps my intention that we

dance the tango is overpowered by the force of an incompatible intention of mine, say, the intention that your friend and I dance the tango. Or perhaps I am just paralyzed by the realization that you will soon discover my poor dancing skills. In such a context, our shared intention may fail to lead us to dance the tango – since, among other things, it may fail to coordinate our actions – but I may still be obligated to you to act accordingly, and you may appropriately demand that I so act.⁴⁴ Finally, it is worth noting that although the cited two factors – dispositions to play psychological roles and a basis for obligations – can be explanatorily independent, they also interconnect in an important way. As shown above, they interconnect in the explanation of how shared intention motivates in paradigmatic cases (type (ii) cases).

As discussed in Section 2, Bratman and Gilbert treat relevant psychological roles and interpersonal obligations as competing explanatory factors, especially when it comes down to the question of how shared intention motivates. For the authors, appeal to one of those factors, but not to the other, is necessary and sufficient for explaining how shared intention leads to joint action. I take a different approach. I see psychological roles and interpersonal obligations not as competing explanatory factors but as aimed at explaining, in the first instance, different regularities or facts about shared intention, the former how this phenomenon motivates and coordinates joint action, the latter how it obligates participants to one another and supports responsibility practices between them, all the while recognizing that such factors may interconnect in the explanation of the former regularity as well.

At this point it might be argued, however, that since what constitute a basis for interpersonal obligations in shared intention, according to the view I have proposed, are psychological features of this phenomenon – namely, a set of attitudes of individuals that normally produces an effect of reinforcement of the individuals' attitudes of reliance – in this view the psychological aspect of shared intention is in the end more crucial to the phenomenon than its normative aspect. I think this conclusion would be unwarranted. Surely, it is correct to say that in this view the psychology of shared intention has ontological priority over its normativity. But it does not follow from this that in this view the former aspect also has explanatory priority over the latter – that is, that the former aspect is explanatorily more significant for understanding the nature of shared intention than the latter is. Once again, the parallel with promising is instructive here. Return to

⁴⁴ This type of cases should be distinguished from another in which you and I have incurred obligations to one another as a result of sharing an intention, still continue to be so obligated, but no longer share that intention – say, because one of us has abandoned his or her intention in favor of the joint activity. I return to this latter type of cases in Section 5 below.

Scanlon's account mentioned in Section 4. Normally, in promising you to act in a certain way, I assure you that I will so act – where this involves my having voluntarily and intentionally led you to believe that I would so act – and you desire this assurance. Once I have assured you in that way, the value to you of your being so assured is engaged and helps to ground an obligation on my part to so act. It is natural to infer from this that on Scanlon's account the psychological aspect of promising has ontological priority over its normative aspect. However, it does not follow from this that on Scanlon's account the former aspect has explanatory priority over the latter as well. Ontological priority need not entail explanatory priority for interpersonal transactions such as promising and shared intention. That being said, I want to stress that my main concern in this article has been to argue for the explanatory significance of both the psychological and the normative aspects of shared intention. Certainly, there is an interesting question as to whether any of those aspects is explanatorily more significant than – that is, has explanatory priority over – the other. But the view I have proposed here is silent on this latter question.

5 Concluding Remarks

In this article I have argued for a dual aspect view of shared intention, a view that is an alternative to both the psychological and the normative views. According to the dual aspect view, we saw, shared intention involves a public structure of attitudes of intention and of reliance of individuals, and in virtue of this it exhibits two central, independent, and often interconnected, aspects: psychological and normative.⁴⁵ I have argued also that the dual aspect view explains, in ways that prominent psychological and normative views cannot, why it is not a contingent feature of shared intention that *both* the regularities cited in Section 1, concerning its connection to (A) joint action and to (B) interpersonal obligations, are true of this phenomenon. The fact that shared intention involves the aforementioned structure of attitudes of individuals, I claimed, plays a crucial role in the explanation.

⁴⁵ Others have also suggested that shared intention involves at its core both psychological and normative elements. Here I have in mind the account by Roth (2004, 2014) and Tuomela's account of "we-mode" joint intentions (2005, 2007). Such accounts, however, differ in important ways from the one offered in this article. Although I lack the space to discuss such differences here, I would like to mention one of them. While I conceive of the normative element of shared intention as moral in nature, both Roth (2004) and Tuomela (2007) conceive of it as irreducibly social. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to clarify this.

Furthermore, in this article I have proposed a specific way of thinking about the question of the nature of shared intention, one that articulates how issues in the philosophy of action and issues in moral philosophy are brought to bear on that question. Basically, I have suggested that we can settle the question of the nature of shared intention by answering two interrelated questions: namely, (a) what structure of attitudes of individuals is essential to shared intention and how such a structure normally guides the individuals' thought and action in pursuit of joint action; and (b) how that structure normally contributes to generate relevant obligations. This way of thinking about the nature of shared intention has, to my mind, several advantages. Let me mention three of them. First, it correctly assumes that the question of the normative nature of shared intention, (b), is partly answered by reference to the question of its metaphysics (or psychology), (a). In the metaphysics of shared intention we find conditions that set restrictions on the possible *content* and *normative grounds* of the obligations that such a phenomenon generates. One way to appreciate this point is to connect it to Scanlon's discussion of assurance-based and reliance-based obligations mentioned above (1998, 2003). Scanlon contends that assurance and reliance constitute different bases for obligations. The value that is being protected when we give others a desired form of assurance differs dramatically from that which is protected when we induce or reinforce reliance in others, and those values ground obligations on us to do different things.⁴⁶ What is being protected in the former case is the value to others of their being assured that a relevant action will be performed, and such a value grounds an obligation on us to perform that action. In contrast, what is being protected in the latter case is the value to others of their being able to rely on certain assumptions about our future actions that we have led to form without suffering reliance losses, and this value grounds an obligation on us to either give them a timely warning, perform the relevant action, or compensate them. In light of Scanlon's discussion, then, we may say that it is partly because shared intention necessarily involves forms of mutually reinforced reliance, but not forms of mutual assurance,⁴⁷ that such a phenomenon is a basis for obligations to warn, perform, or compensate rather than a basis for stronger obligations to perform. Similarly, we may say it is partly because shared intention necessarily involves the cited metaphysical structure that the obligations it typically generates are grounded on the value of loss prevention, rather than on the value of assurance.

Second, thinking about the nature of shared intention in the way proposed above helps us not to confuse metaphysical features of this phenomenon with

⁴⁶ But see note 33.

⁴⁷ See note 36.

normative ones. It is not the case, Gilbert's claims notwithstanding, that one cannot unilaterally decide to withdraw from a shared intention, and thereby do away with the shared intention, without first obtaining "concurrence or permission" from the other participants (2000b, p. 17, 2009, p. 173). It is, as a matter of psychological fact, obviously possible for one to do so. It suffices that one abandons one's intention in favor of the joint activity and one can do this simply by changing one's mind. To be sure, if the shared intention in question created its characteristic obligations, one would lack the *authority* to unilaterally withdraw from it, for in unilaterally withdrawing from the shared intention one would be wronging the other participants, as one would be violating an obligation one has to them. But this is lack of normative discretion, not of factual one.⁴⁸

Finally, the proposed way of thinking about shared intention also helps us to avoid conceptualizing the significance of certain features of this phenomenon in the wrong kind of terms: the significance of its normative features in psychological terms, and vice versa. To illustrate, consider another version of Bratman's argument to the sole psychological nature of shared intention. Bratman suggests in recent work that we should not see the fact that shared intention supports responsibility (or "accountability") practices as "central" to "what shared intentions are" since, he claims, we "should... think about shared intention" in terms of a form of functionalism about the mind that attributes a defining role to this phenomenon, and although "human shared agency many times... brings with it... associated practices of holding accountable... it is natural to see this not as a defining role of shared intention – as what shared intention is *for*" (2014, p. 26–27. His emphasis). As discussed earlier, I agree with Bratman that it is fruitful to conceive of the complex psychological work that shared intention does in leading to joint action as a "defining role" of that phenomenon. Further, I also agree that it is "natural to see" the fact that shared intention supports responsibility practices "not as a defining *role*" of it (my emphasis). But in my view this is because we do not think of this fact, in the first instance at least, in such functionalist terms. In general, we do not see the connection between an interpersonal transaction and the responsibility practices it supports as speaking primarily to what such a transaction is for, psychologically speaking. We see it, rather, as speaking primarily to the transaction's intrinsic normative significance. Thus, as indicated earlier, we see the connection between shared intention and responsibility practices as speaking primarily to the normative significance of the former phenomenon.

⁴⁸ Compare with Bratman's similar, but independent, remarks that the problem with Gilbert's concurrence condition resides in "not sufficiently distinguishing shared intention and mutual obligation" (2014, p. 116–117).

At the same time, the fact that we do not see the support of responsibility practices as a defining functional role of shared intention should not prevent us from seeing it as a defining feature of this phenomenon. Indeed, the dual aspect theory suggests that we see it in this latter way.

According to the dual aspect view, shared intention presents basic similarities and differences with two sets of familiar phenomena. It is similar to individual intention in that both phenomena play a central role in guiding the agents' practical reasoning and in producing action. And it is similar to interpersonal transactions such as promising and making agreements in that they all constitute bases for interpersonal obligations. On the other hand, shared intention is, unlike individual intention, a basis for interpersonal obligations. And it plays, unlike the other cited interpersonal transactions, a guiding role in the agents' practical reasoning and action that can be independent from the obligations it normally generates. Shared intention is undoubtedly a rich and complex phenomenon.

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