

**Why there are no “We-Intentions”  
(and not even a puzzle about collective intentions)**

Abstract:

Some philosophers hold that the minimal criterion for there to be a collective action is that the actions of the individual agents are caused by so-called “we-intentions”. But, as I want to argue (from a Late-Wittgensteinian point of view), intentions cannot be thought of as mental entities of any kind that can be in some sense *possessed* by individuals and which *causes* an action. The point of the concept of intention is that we would not ascribe an intention to an agent when she does not perform the relevant action – although she has the opportunity to do so. An intention must therefore not be thought of as an entity, but as a way of behavior that can be understood in a context as being bound by a self-prescription by an agent. Accordingly, a collective intention is the behavior of the individual members of the group that can be understood in a context as being governed by *one* self-prescription. When two people intend to X together, then they have *one and the same* intention, not two very similar, but numerically distinct, mental states. It is the *context* of the performances of the actions that ensures that the partial actions are parts of the performance of one collectively intended action. (The context of an item of individual or collective behavior is the conceptual criterion for there to be a collective action.) To that context must belong that the shared intention was *expressed* either verbally (by agreement, promise or contract) or non-verbally (by the way the joint action or attempts to it were performed). As I will argue further, this also holds for more complex collective actions of larger groups of agents, so that there is no difference between basic and complex collective actions in principle.