A pencil sketch of a hand holding a pen, with the text "Conditional Intentions and Shared Agency" overlaid in white. The sketch is on a piece of light-colored paper. The hand is shown from the side, with the index finger pointing towards the right. The pen is held between the thumb and index finger. The drawing is done with light, sketchy lines. There are some faint handwritten notes in the top left corner and bottom left corner of the page.

# Conditional Intentions and Shared Agency

Matthew Rachar









*What is shared agency?*

# *Shared Agency*

(1) Purposeful coordination of action towards achievement of a shared goal

(2) Dispositions to support one another and deliberate about execution

(3) Bargaining against a background framework of resolving disagreement

Not individual intention towards individual  
action plus mutual beliefs/common  
knowledge

# *Collective Intention*

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Individual Intention**

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Over Time**



**Individual Intention**

*defined by*

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Norms of Rationality**

*explain*

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Over Time**

*defined by*

**Individual Intention**



# *Today's General Strategy*

**Norms of Rationality**

*explain*

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Over Time**

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Across People**

*translate*

**Individual Intention**

*defined by*

# *Today's General Strategy*

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*translate*

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**Collective Intention**

*defined by*

# *Today's Aims*

- (1) Motivate, develop, and defend the *conditional intention account* of collective intention.
- (2) Use that account to explain shared agency

# Part 1: Individual Intention

# *Roles of Individual Intention*

(1) Settle what to do

# *Roles of Individual Intention*

(1) Settle what to do

(2) Filter inconsistent plans

# *Roles of Individual Intention*

(1) Settle what to do

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(3) Pose means-ends problems

# *Roles of Individual Intention*

- (1) Settle what to do
- (2) Filter inconsistent plans
- (3) Pose means-end problems

How do intentions play these roles?

# *Dispositions*

(1) of tracking, adjustment, and responsiveness to an intention-neutral conception of the act-type to be performed

(2) to adhere to certain norms of rationality with respect to intention and see deviations from those norms as mistakes

# *Rationality Norms on Intention*

(1) Stability

# *Rationality Norms on Intention*

(1) Stability

(2) Consistency

# *Rationality Norms on Intention*

(1) Stability

(2) Consistency

(3) Means-end coherence

# *Rationality Norms on Intention*

(1) Stability

(2) Consistency

(3) Means-end coherence

# Part 2: Collective Intention

# *Roles of Collective Intention*

(1) Settle on our joint activity

# *Roles of Collective Intention*

(1) Settle on our joint activity

(2) Filter inconsistent (individual and joint) plans

# *Roles of Collective Intention*

(1) Settle on our joint activity

(2) Filter inconsistent (individual and joint) plans

(3) Structure joint deliberation about means-end problems

# *Roles of Collective Intention*

- (1) Settle on our joint activity
- (2) Filter inconsistent (individual and joint) plans
- (3) Structure joint deliberation about means-end problems

# Part 3: Conditional Intention Account

# *The Conditional Intention Account*

Two or more people collectively intend to  $\phi$  if each has an intention to  $\phi$  conditional on the others' intention to  $\phi$ .

Ex: "I intend to  $\phi$ , if you intend likewise".  
I'll call these "participatory intentions".

Conditional intentions that have five properties (*individual, reciprocal, internal, non-precautionary, and elective*) make the conditional intention view plausible.

Conditional intentions that have five properties (*individual, reciprocal, internal, non-precautionary, and elective*) make the conditional intention view plausible.

Why think conditional intentions with these features are a good place to start?

# *Motivation*

(1) Parsimonious

(2) Intuitive

(3) Solves *settle condition problem*

# *Parsimonious*

No collective minds/joint states

No new individual psychological states/abilities

Need conditional intentions to understand individual agency

# *Intuitive*

Collective intention involves a certain kind of mutuality or interdependence.



# *Settle Problem*

Intention thesis: for us to engage in shared agency, each of us must have an intention towards *our activity*.

# *First Modification: Intention Thesis*

But the conditional intention account  
doesn't actually satisfy this as stated!

The participatory intentions we have so far  
aren't about anything *we* do.

# *Content of Participatory Intentions*

Intention-to vs. Intention-that

“Joint activity” in the content: “I intend *that we  $\phi$* ”

# ***First Modification: Intention Thesis***

Change form of participatory intention to:

“I intend *that we*  $\phi$ , so long as you intend likewise”

# *Settle Problem*

Settle Condition: I can only intend something I take to be up to me to settle.

But then, how could it be up to me to settle your part of our activity?

# *Settle Solution*

Reciprocal conditional intentions solve this problem:

The satisfaction condition of each intention is outside the scope of that person's agency.

# *Recap*

(1) Parsimonious

(2) Intuitive

(3) Solves *settle condition problem*

As long as we have “I intend *that we*  $\phi$ , if you intend likewise”.

Roth's Challenge: But those  
aren't intentions!

Conditional intentions that have five properties (*individual, reciprocal, internal, non-precautionary, and elective*) make the conditional intention view plausible.

# *Kinds of Conditional Intention*

## Internal

Condition is in the content of the intention.

Ex. I intend to  
( $\phi$  if C)

# *Kinds of Conditional Intention*

## Internal

Condition is in the content of the intention.

Ex. I intend to ( $\phi$  if C)

## External

Condition is on the existence of the intention.

Ex. If C, I intend to  $\phi$ .

# *Kinds of Conditional Intention*

## Internal

Condition is in the content of the intention.

Ex. I intend to  $(\phi \text{ if } C)$

## External

Condition is on the existence of the intention.

Ex. If  $C$ , I intend to  $\phi$ .

# *Roth's Challenge: External*

The problem with reciprocal, *externally* conditional intentions is that they *don't settle anything*.

If I intend to  $\phi$ , then you intend to  $\phi$ .

If you intend to  $\phi$ , then I intend to  $\phi$ .

So, I intend to  $\phi$  if I intend to  $\phi$ .

# *Roth's Challenge: External*

I think this is right.

We should give up on individual, reciprocal, external conditional intentions.

# *Roth's Challenge: Internal*

What about internally conditional intentions (with the other properties)?

Ex: "I intend that we  $\phi$  if C"

# *Answer to Roth's Challenge*

This confuses a conditional intention with an intention to make a conditional true.

# *Answer to Roth's Challenge*

This challenge doesn't exclude *internally* conditional intentions.

# *Answer to Roth's Challenge*

But it should lead us to exclude some.

# *Kinds of Internal Conditional Intention*

Precautionary vs. Non-Precautionary

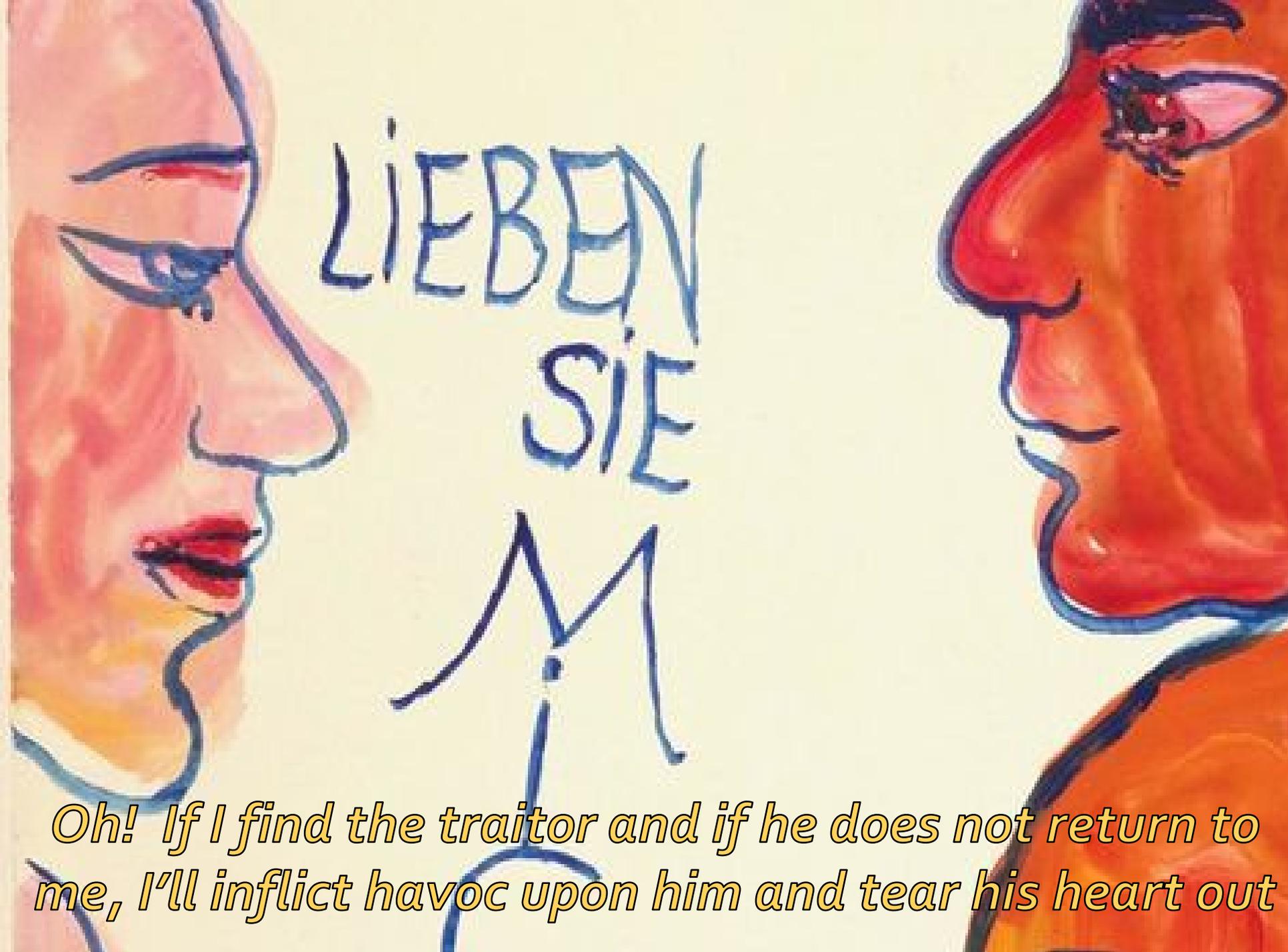
# *Kinds of Internal Conditional Intention*

Precautionary vs. Non-Precautionary

Conditional intentions that have five properties (*individual, reciprocal, internal, non-precautionary, and elective*) make the conditional intention view plausible.

# *Kinds of Internal Conditional Intention*

Enabling vs. Elective



LIEBEN  
SIE  
MICH

*Oh! If I find the traitor and if he does not return to me, I'll inflict havoc upon him and tear his heart out*

# *Enabling Conditions*

“If I find the traitor...” is a condition on the possibility of inflicting havoc.

# *Elective Conditions*

“...if he does not return to me” is a condition Elvira chooses.

# *Kinds of Internal Conditional Intention*

Enabling vs. Elective

*Reciprocal, individual* conditional intentions are genuinely interdependent and genuinely intentions if they're *internal, non-precautionary, and elective.*

# Part 4: Conditional Intentions and Shared Agency

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Individual Intention**

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Over Time**



**Individual Intention**

*defined by*

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Norms of Rationality**

*explain*

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# *Today's General Strategy*

**Norms of Rationality**

*explain*

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Over Time**

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Across People**

*translate*

**Individual Intention**

*defined by*

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Norms of Rationality**

*explain*

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Over Time**

**Roles in Organizing  
Agency Across People**

*translate*

**Individual Intention**

# *Today's General Strategy*

**Norms of Rationality**

*explain*

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**Roles in Organizing  
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*translate*

**Individual Intention**

**Collective Intention**

*defined by*

Does the psychological structure posited by the conditional intention account play all the roles of collective intention?

# *Roles of Collective Intention*

(1) Settling on our joint activity

# *Roles of Collective Intention*

(1) Settling on our action

(2) Filter inconsistent (individual and joint) plans

# Roles of Collective Intention

(1) Settling on our action

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# Roles of Collective Intention

(1) Settling on our joint activity

(2) Filter inconsistent (individual and joint) plans

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# *Shared Agency*

(1) Purposeful coordination of action towards achievement of a shared goal

(2) Dispositions to support one another and deliberate about execution

(3) Bargaining against a background framework of resolving disagreement



# *Regular traders*



# Price-fixers

But when people go to share a collective intention, say to fix prices, they are set to engage in behaviour that does meet the definition of shared agency.

They are committed to supporting the entire shared activity, so they have dispositions to monitor and adjust their own actions and to support their partners in the execution of their actions in turn.

That requires them to coordinate their actions in pursuit of a shared aim.

# Part 5: Conclusion

The conditional intention  
account of collective intention  
is plausible,

if the conditional intentions  
are (i) *individual*, (ii) *reciprocal*,  
(iii) *internal*, (iv) *non-*  
*precautionary*, and (v) *elective*.

*Thanks!*

