

DETACHED AGENCY: HOW TO GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS

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Suppose Φ is a feasible course of behavior. How might you Φ at will? Here is an obvious answer: you form the intention to Φ , and then enact that intention. *Ordinary intentional agency*, however, is not the only mechanism through which you might Φ at will. In this paper, I highlight a more circuitous mechanism, one that dispenses with the intention to Φ , hence that *enables to Φ at will without intending to Φ* . I call this mechanism *detached agency*. In highlighting this mechanism, I aim to advance our understanding of agency under non-ideal circumstances.

First, I motivate the need for an alternative to ordinary intentional agency by drawing attention to cases where Φ -ing is something we'd rather not do, but have no choice but to do. In such cases, it would be comforting news if you could get yourself to Φ without having to intend to Φ . If Φ is morally repugnant, for instance, managing to Φ without intending to Φ would keep your intentional psychology safe from involvement in wrongdoing—hence, would arguably reduce your responsibility for Φ -ing. There might even be cases where forming the intention to Φ is simply beyond you and where, therefore, ordinary intentional agency won't enable you to Φ . Imagine a gay man in a heteronormative society. He might have no choice but to marry a woman, and yet be psychologically incapable to form that intention. Here too, an alternative to ordinary intentional agency would be welcome, for ordinary intentional agency won't help that man comply with oppressive social norms (and avoid sanctions for non-compliance).

Second, I explain what detached agency involves as follows:

1/ You map out the steps $\varphi_1, \varphi_2, \dots, \varphi_n$ which, if completed, would very probably suffice for successful Φ -ing.

2/ You form the intention to enact the plan that comprises steps φ_1 through φ_n , while nonetheless not committing yourself to Φ -ing. So, although committed to a plan likely to result in Φ -ing, you would not care if that plan failed to result in Φ -ing due to changing circumstances.

3/ You enact your plan.

As this suggests, detached agency exploits the gap between intending to Φ and intending to enact a plan designed to Φ . Though you intend the enactment of your plan, you have no investment one way or another in its success: you merely go through the motions. And yet, if your plan is well designed and if the world cooperates, enacting that plan (something you can do at will) enables you to Φ .

Third, I defuse two worries. Detached agency, I argue, need involve neither self-deception, nor irrationality.

There would be self-deception if deliberating about how to Φ , or intending to φ_1 through φ_n implied, as a matter of psychological necessity, forming the intention to Φ . For then detached agency would be no alternative to ordinary intentional agency. However, I argue that you can deliberate about how to Φ while remaining uncommitted to Φ -ing, as when you imagine what a tentative course of action would involve. I also argue that intending to φ_1 through φ_n does not amount to intending to Φ . As intention is normally conceived (e.g., Bratman 1984; 1987), intending to Φ disposes you to check that your plan is on track to Φ , and to adjust your plan should it go off track. Similarly, then, intending to φ_1 through φ_n implies a tracking disposition to $\varphi_1, \dots, \varphi_n$. Now, due to changing circumstances, φ_1 -ing, \dots , and φ_n -ing might perhaps no longer suffice for Φ -ing. However, if you merely intend to φ_1 through φ_n , you won't be disposed to adjust your conduct to remain on track to Φ (Kutz 2000: 100-101). In short: the intention to Φ and the intention to enact a plan designed to Φ come with different tracking dispositions, a fact that makes detached agency possible.

There would be irrationality if detached agency, in addition to involving the intention to enact a plan designed to Φ , also involved the intention to *not* Φ . For this violates the requirement that intentions be means-end coherent (Bratman 1987; Broome 2013): enacting a plan designed to Φ which you know to be so designed is a terrible means towards satisfying your intention to *not* Φ . Detached agency, however, does not involve intending to *not* Φ , but merely *not* intending to Φ . There would also be irrationality if rationality required to intend to Φ when you already intend to enact a plan designed to Φ . But that is not the case. Imagine that you are following the steps of a mayonnaise recipe you created just to see what will happen, perhaps because you are a professional cook and you are interested in assessing how that recipe compares to others. In that scenario, you need not be committed to making mayonnaise: in fact, if your following of the steps of that recipe failed to yield mayonnaise, you would not adjust your conduct—but simply note that this recipe is no good. In this scenario, you intend to enact a plan that you have designed to Φ , while not intending to Φ , but clearly your conduct cannot be suspected of any practical irrationality. It is therefore false that rationality requires to intend to Φ when you intend to enact a plan that you have designed to Φ . Lastly, there would be irrationality if detached agency conflicted with the principle of *Intention Agglomeration* according to which (roughly) it is rationally required, when intending to Ψ and intending to X , to also intend to Ψ and X (Yaffe 2004; Velleman 2007; Bratman 2009; Goldstein 2016). True, a detached agent intends to enact each step of the plan $\phi_1 \dots$ through ϕ_n ; but this only creates a rational pressure to intend to enact the conjunction of $\phi_1 \dots$, and ϕ_n , and not to intend to Φ . For as I argued earlier, the intention to Φ is not identical to the intention to enact a plan designed to Φ . Detached agency, therefore, does not fly in the face of *Intention Agglomeration*.

Lastly, I show how the concept of detached agency might be put to philosophical work. Focusing on oppression theory, I suggest that detached agency might clarify the debate between those who think that oppressed agents can be fully agentic (Khader 2018; 2020), and those who claim, instead, that oppression jeopardizes the agency of the oppressed (Oshana 2006; Stoljar 2014). Oppression, I contend, is a context where detached agency is made desirable, for it enables you to do whatever is required to comply with oppressive norms while not intending to so comply. Oppression, in other words, is a context where the oppressed have reason to deliberate ordinary intentional agency away and, instead, to engage in detached agency.

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