

# Lecture 02: Joint Action

s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk

## 1. Walking Together in the Tarantino Sense

Objectives so far:

understand questions about shared agency

can use the method of contrast cases

understand distributive and collective interpretations of sentences

can distinguish acting together from joint action

familiar with the Simple View

can critically assess objections to the Simple View

‘each agent does not just intend that the group perform the [...] joint action. Rather, each agent intends as well that the group perform this joint action in accordance with subplans (of the intentions in favor of the joint action) that mesh’ (Bratman 1992, p. 332).

Our plans are *interconnected* just if facts about your plans feature in mine and conversely.

‘shared intentional agency consists, at bottom, in interconnected planning agency of the participants’ (Bratman 2011).

*Bratman’s claim.* For you and I to have a collective/shared intention that we J it is sufficient that:

- (1) ‘(a) I intend that we J and (b) you intend that we J;
- (2) ‘I intend that we J in accordance with and because of la, lb, and meshing subplans of la and lb; you intend that we J in accordance with and because of la, lb, and meshing subplans of la and lb;
- (3) ‘1 and 2 are common knowledge between us’ (Bratman 1993, View 4)

## 2. Shared Intention: A Rough Guide

‘I take a collective action to involve a collective [shared] intention.’ (Gilbert 2006, p. 5)

‘The sine qua non of collaborative action is a joint goal [shared intention] and a joint commitment’ (Tomasello 2008, p. 181)

‘the key property of joint action lies in its internal component [...] in the participants’ having a “collective” or “shared” intention.’ (Alonso 2009, pp. 444–5)

‘Shared intentionality is the foundation upon which joint action is built.’ (Carpenter 2009, p. 381)

‘What events in the life of a person reveal agency; what are his deeds and his doings in contrast to mere happenings in history; what is the mark that distinguishes his actions?’ (David-

son 1971, p. 43)

‘Echoing Wittgenstein’s question about the difference, in the individual case, between my arm’s rising and my raising it, we can ask: what is the difference between such a contrast case and corresponding shared intentional activity? In the case of individual intentional human action, we can see the difference from a contrast case as involving an explanatory role of relevant intentions of the individual agent. ... I propose an analogous view of the shared case: the difference in the case of shared agency involves an appropriate explanatory role of relevant shared intentions. Our painting together is a shared intentional activity, roughly, when we paint together because we share an intention so to act.’ (Bratman 2014, p. 10)

Strategies for explaining shared intention:

1. mess with the subject (e.g. Helm 2008; Schmid 2008, 2009; Pettit & Schweikard 2006)
2. mess with the attitude (e.g. Searle 1990; Gallotti & Frith 2013)
3. mess with the content (e.g. Bratman 1993, 2014)
4. mess with all three (e.g. Gilbert 2013)

Plural prediction does not in itself entail aggregation!

‘What is it for \*us\* to intend or to do something?’  
(Helm 2008, p. 18)

Collective predication of intention:

Can we intend that we  $\phi$  where this is not, or not only, a matter of our each intending that we  $\phi$ ?

Collective predication of intention entails shared intention?

Is our collectively intending that we  $\phi$  related to our having a shared intention?

‘society consists of nothing but individuals. Since society consists entirely of individuals, there cannot be a group mind or group consciousness. All consciousness is in individual minds, in individual brains.’

(Searle 1990, p. 96)

### 3. Bratman on Shared Intention

Concerning modest forms of sociality,

‘What concepts do we need to understand them adequately?’

In what do these forms of sociality consist?

How are they related to relevant forms of individual agency?’

Bratman (2015, p. 3)

(Bratman 2014, p. 3)

aim: ‘provide ... a sufficiently clear and articulated framework of ideas to help support ... the-

orizing about these basic forms of sociality both in philosophy and ... other domains and disciplines’

(Bratman 2014, p. 3)

the continuity thesis

‘once God created individual planning agents and ... they have relevant knowledge of each other’s minds, nothing fundamentally new—conceptually, metaphysically, or normalively—needs to be added for there to be modest sociality.’

Bratman (2015, p. 8)

(Bratman 2014, p. 8)

What is shared intention?

Functional characterisation:

shared intention serves to (a) coordinate activities, (b) coordinate planning and (c) structure bargaining

‘We seek ... a construction of interconnected intentions and other related attitudes ... that would ... play the roles characteristic of shared intention.’ (Bratman 2014, p. 32)

To illustrate: if we share an intention that we cook dinner, this shared intention will (iii) structure bargaining insofar as we may need to decide what to cook or how to cook it on the assumption that we are cooking it together; the shared intention will also require us to (ii) coordinate our planning by each bringing comple-

mentary ingredients and tools, and to (i) coordinate our activities by preparing the ingredients in the right order.

‘Our shared intention to paint together involves your intention that we paint and my intention that we paint.’

(Bratman 2014, p. 12)

‘the team intention ... is in part expressed by “We are executing a pass play.” But ... no individual member of the team has this as the entire content of his intention, for no one can execute a pass play by himself.’ (Searle 1990, pp. 92–3)

the own-action condition:

‘it is always true that the subject of an intention is the intended agent of the intended activity’

(Bratman 2014, p. 13) [Note that Bratman \*denies\* this claim.]

the settle condition:

‘intentions . . . are the attitudes that resolve deliberative questions, thereby settling issues’ (Velleman 1997, p. 32)

A solution?:

(c) if we both do as we intend, we will paint

(b) our intentions that we paint are interdependent\*

Our intentions have *persistence interdependence* just if (a) each of us ‘will continue so to intend if, but only if the other continues so to intend’ and

(b) ‘there is this interdependence because each will know whether or not the other continues so to intend, and each will adjust to this knowledge in a way that involves responsiveness to norms of individual plan-theoretic rationality.’ (Bratman 2014, p. 65)

‘The sub-plans of the participants *mesh* when it is possible that all of these sub-plans taken together be successfully executed.’ (Bratman 2014, p. 53)

‘there is common knowledge among the participants of the conditions cited in this construction’ (Bratman 2014, p. 58)

Why require common knowledge in the construction of shared intention? ‘in shared intention the fact of the shared intention will normally be out in the open: there will be public access to the fact of shared intention. Such public access to the shared intention will normally be involved in further thought that is characteristic of shared intention, as when we plan together how to carry out our shared intention. Since such shared planning about how to carry out our shared intention is part of the normal functioning of that shared intention, we need an element in our construction of shared intention whose functioning supports some such thinking of each about our shared intention.’ (Bratman 2014, p. 57)

‘public access to the shared intention will normally be involved in further thought that is char-

acteristic of shared intention, as when we plan together how to carry out our shared intention.’ (Bratman 2014, p. 57)

## References

- Alonso, F. M. (2009). Shared intention, reliance, and interpersonal obligations. *Ethics*, 119(3), 444–475.
- Bratman, M. E. (1992). Shared cooperative activity. *The Philosophical Review*, 101(2), 327–341.
- Bratman, M. E. (1993). Shared intention. *Ethics*, 104, 97–113.
- Bratman, M. E. (2011). Acting over time, acting together (draft).
- Bratman, M. E. (2014). *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carpenter, M. (2009). Just how joint is joint action in infancy? *Topics in Cognitive Science*, 1(2), 380–392.
- Davidson, D. (1971). Agency. In R. Binkley, R. Bronaugh, & A. Marras (Eds.), *Agent, Action, and Reason*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Reprinted in Davidson, D. (1980) *Essays on Actions and Events*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gallotti, M. & Frith, C. D. (2013). Social cognition in the we-mode. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 17(4), 160–165.
- Gilbert, M. P. (2006). Rationality in collective action. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 36(1), 3–17.
- Gilbert, M. P. (2013). *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Helm, B. W. (2008). Plural agents. *Nous*, 42(1), 17–49.

Pettit, P. & Schweikard, D. (2006). Joint Actions and Group Agents. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 36(1), 18–39.

Schmid, H. B. (2008). Plural action. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 38(1), 25–54.

Schmid, H. B. (2009). *Plural action: Essays in philosophy and social science*, volume 58. Dordrecht: Springer.

Searle, J. R. (1990). Collective intentions and actions. In P. Cohen, J. Morgan, & M. Pollack (Eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (pp. 90–105). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted in Searle, J. R. (2002) *Consciousness and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (pp. 90–105).

Tomasello, M. (2008). *Origins of human communication*. The MIT Press.

Velleman, D. (1997). How to share an intention. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57(1), 29–50.