

Lecture 03: Joint Action

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1. Shared Intention: A Placeholder

‘A first step is to say that what distinguishes you and me from you and the Stranger is that you and I share an intention to walk together—but you and the Stranger do not. In modest sociality, joint activity is explained by such a shared intention; whereas no such explanation is available for the combined activity of you and the Stranger. This does not, however, get us very far; for we do not yet know what a shared intention is, and how it connects up with joint action’ (Bratman 2009, p. 152; compare Bratman 2014, p. 10).

‘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)

2. Bratman on Shared Intention (Recap)

What is shared intention?

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

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)

3. A Counterexample to Bratman

‘Bratman’s account presupposes the element of sharedness it aims to explain.’ (Schmid 2009, p. 36)

‘It is only because we intend J that I can have intentions of the form “I intend that we J_x”’ (Schmid 2009, p. 36)

‘Bratman’s ... account of shared intentionality ... fails to give an account of the crucial element of collectiveness that is presupposed at its very

base’ (Schmid 2009, p. 37)

We have an *unshared intention* that we $\langle J_1, J_2 \rangle$ where $J_1 \neq J_2$ just if:

- (1’) (a) I intend that we J_1 and (b) you intend that we J_2
- (2’) I intend that we J_1 in accordance with and because of la, lb, and meshing subplans of la and lb; you intend that we J_2 ...
- (3’) 1 and 2 are common knowledge between us.

Our individual subplans concerning our $\langle J_1, J_2 \rangle$ -ing *mesh* just in case there is some way I could J_1 and you could J_2 that would not violate either of our subplans but would, rather, involve the successful execution of those subplans.

4. Commitment in Shared Agency

Intentions are associated with commitments to yourself.

‘Having a desire to walk together is compatible with having a desire not to do so ... whereas, in intending, one has gone beyond the point of weighing considerations for and against, and has committed to a course of action.’ (Roth 2004, p. 361)

Shared intentions are associated with commitments to each other.

‘the parties to a joint commitment are in an important sense obligated to conform to the com-

mitment. Notably, the obligation in question is directed : ... one is obligated to the other parties to conform to the commitment.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 367)

‘it is unclear how one’s own intention to pursue a goal amounts to a commitment to anyone besides oneself.’ (Roth 2004, p. 371)

‘joint commitment is ... a commitment by two or more people of the same two or more people.’ (Gilbert 2013, p. 6)

References

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