

Lecture 07: Joint Action

s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk

1. Unbearable Reflectiveness

‘participants in joint action are usually focused on whatever it is they are jointly doing rather than on each other. Where joint action goes smoothly, the participants are not thinking about the others anymore than they are thinking about themselves’ (Schmid 2013, p. 37)

‘cooperators normatively expect their partners to cooperate; they do not predict their cooperation’

Dominant View: ‘the representation of the participation of the others has a mind-to-world direction of fit.’

Alternative View: ‘the representation of the participation of the others has a world-to-mind direction of fit.’ (Schmid 2013, p. 38)

‘participants in a joint action represent their partners as doing their parts in the same way as individual intentions implicitly represent the agent as continuing to be willing and able to perform the action until the intention’s conditions of satisfaction are reached’ ‘individual agents of temporally extended actions “represent” their own future intentions and actions in the same way in which cooperators represent their partners’ intentions and actions.’ (Schmid 2013, p. 49)

2. Parallel Planning

A representation or plan is *agent-neutral* if its content does not specify any particular agent or agents; a planning process is agent-neutral if it involves only agent-neutral representations.

Practical vs theoretical reasoning: ‘The mark of practical reasoning is that the thing wanted is *at a distance* from the immediate action, and the immediate action is calculated as a way of getting or doing or securing the thing wanted’ (Anscombe 1957, p. 79). See also Millgram (2001, p. 1): ‘Practical reasoning is reasoning directed towards action: figuring out what to do, as contrasted with figuring out how the facts stand.’

Some agents each *individually make a plan for all the agents’ actions* just if: there is an outcome; each agent individually, without discussion, communication or prior arrangement, plans for that outcome; and each agent’s plan specifies roles for herself and all the other agents.

Our planning is *parallel* just if you and I are each planning actions that I will eventually perform and actions that you will eventually perform, where the resulting plans non-accidentally match.

What attitude results from parallel planning? Intentions that are open-ended with respect to who will act.

3. The Simple View Revised

The Simple View Revised: We intentionally exercise shared agency exactly when

1. there is an act-type, ϕ , such that we each intend that we, you and I, ϕ together;
2. we engage in parallel planning; and
3. for each of us, the intention that we, you and I, ϕ together leads to action via our contribution to the parallel planning (where the intention, the planning and the action are all appropriately related).

(Nonaccidental success requires, further, that our parallel planning results in matching plans.)

Two or more plans *match* just if they are similar enough that the differences don’t matter in the following sense. First, for a plan in an agent, let the *self part* be those representations concerning the agent’s own actions and let the *other part* be the other representations. Now consider what would happen if, for a particular agent, the other part of her plan were as nearly identical to the self part (or parts) of the other’s plan (or others’ plans) as psychologically possible. Would the agent’s self part be significantly different? If not, let us say that any differences between her plan and the other’s (or others’) are *not relevant for her*. Finally, if for some agents’ plans the differences between them are not relevant for any

of the agents, then let us say that the differences *don't matter*.

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 normatively—needs to be added for there to be modest sociality.' (Bratman 2014, p. 8)

'The notion of a [shared intention] ... implies the notion of cooperation' (Searle 1990, p. 95)

On accounts like Bratman's or Gilbert's, 'it makes some sense to say that the result is a kind of shared action: the individual people are, after all, acting intentionally throughout. However, in a deeper sense, the activity is not shared: the group itself is not engaged in action whose aim the group finds worthwhile, and so the actions at issue here are merely those of individuals. Thus, these accounts ... fail to make sense of a ... part of the landscape of social phenomena' (Helm 2008, pp. 20–1)

References

- Anscombe, G. E. M. (1957). *Intention*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bratman, M. E. (2014). *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Helm, B. W. (2008). Plural agents. *Nous*, 42(1), 17–49.
- Millgram, E. (2001). Practical reasoning: The current state of play. In *Varieties of Practical Reasoning* (pp. 1–26). Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Schmid, H. B. (2013). Trying to act together. In M. Schmitz, B. Kobow, & H. B. Schmid (Eds.), *The Background of Social Reality*, number 1 in *Studies in the Philosophy of Sociality* (pp. 37–55). Springer Netherlands.
- 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).