

Lecture 08: Joint Action

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Proposition: Examples and contrast cases are just not enough to ground a theory of joint action.

1. Searle vs Bratman on Cooperation

‘One can have a goal in the knowledge that others also have the same goal, and one can have beliefs and even mutual beliefs about the goal that is shared by the members of a group, without there being necessarily any cooperation among the members or any intention to cooperate’ (Searle 1990, p. 95)

Is this a sound objection?:

1. ‘The notion of a we-intention [shared intention] ... implies the notion of cooperation’ (Searle 1990, p. 95)
2. Meeting Bratman’s proposed sufficient conditions for shared intention does not imply that your actions will be cooperative.

Therefore:

3. Bratman’s conditions are not in fact sufficient.

‘This involves a bit of linguistic legislation’ (Bratman 2014, p. 38)

2. Problem

If examples and contrast cases are not enough to ground a theory of joint action, what could ground a theory of joint action?

Step 1: identify features ...

- collective goals
- coordination
- cooperation
- contralateral commitments
- experience

Step 2: ... which generate how questions.

3. Collective Goals

A *goal* is an outcome to which an action is directed.

An outcome is a *collective goal* of two or more actions involving multiple agents if it is an outcome to which those actions are directed where

this is not, or not only, a matter of each action being directed to the outcome.

Objection: Are there collective goals?

Reply: If there is a single outcome, G , such that

1. Our actions are coordinated; and
2. coordination of this type would normally increase the probability that G occurs.

then there is an outcome to which our actions are directed where this is not, or not only, a matter of each action being directed to that outcome, i.e. our actions have a collective goal.

Question for a theory of joint action: In virtue of what could two or more agents’ actions have a collective goal?

4. Two Standard Notions of Cooperation

Candidate question for a theory of joint action: What enables humans to cooperate?

a ‘cooperator is someone who pays a cost, c , for another individual to receive a benefit, b ’ (Nowak 2006, p. 1560)

‘[b]y cooperation we mean engaging with others in a mutually beneficial activity’ (Bowles & Gintis 2011, p. 2)

‘Cooperation appears in nature in two basic forms’ (Tomasello 2016)

5. Philosophers' Notions of Cooperation

Actions are cooperative when appropriately related to a shared intention (and no deception nor coercion) (Bratman 1992, 2014)

'A definition of cooperation ... typically [has this] structure: a set of individual intentions [with] certain origins and ... certain relations, ... is common knowledge' (Paternotte 2014, p. 47) (Paternotte 2014, p. 47)

6. Trade-off Cooperation

Demandingness and well-suitedness require trade-offs across multiple actions, not all of which need be yours.

Purposive actions are *trade-off cooperative* to the extent that, for each agent, her performing these actions rather than any other actions depends in part on how good an overall pattern of trade-offs between demandingness and well-suitedness can be achieved for all of the actions.

Question for a theory of joint action: What enables humans to perform actions which are trade-off cooperative?

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