

# Mindreading & Joint Action: Philosophical Tools

## Lecture 7: What Is Shared Agency?

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How do activities involving shared agency differ from activities involving parallel agency only?

A *joint* or *collective action* is an exercise of shared agency.

### 1. Shared agency requires shared intention?

‘I take a collective action to involve a collective intention.’<sup>8</sup>

‘The sine qua non of collaborative action is a joint goal [shared intention] and a joint commitment’<sup>14</sup>

‘the key property of joint action lies in its internal component ... in the participants’ having a “collective” or “shared” intention.’<sup>1</sup>

‘Shared intentionality is the foundation upon which joint action is built.’<sup>6</sup>

‘it is precisely the meshing and sharing of psychological states ... that holds the key to understanding how humans have achieved their sophisticated and numerous forms of joint activity’<sup>5</sup>

### 2. What is shared intention?

The functional role of shared intentions is to: (i) coordinate activities; (ii) coordinate planning; and (iii) provide a framework to structure bargaining.<sup>3</sup>

For you and I to have a 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.’<sup>3</sup>

‘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’<sup>2</sup>

‘shared intentional agency consists, at bottom, in interconnected planning agency of the participants’<sup>4</sup>

### 3. A challenge

‘the contribution of lower-level processes to social interaction has hardly been considered. This has led philosophers to postulate complex intentional structures that often seem to be beyond human cognitive ability in real-time social interactions.’<sup>10</sup>

### 4. A conjecture

The prior existence of capacities for shared agency partially explains how sophisticated forms of mindreading emerge in evolution or development (or both).

‘[F]unctions traditionally considered hallmarks of individual cognition originated through the need to interact with others ... perception, action, and cognition are grounded in social interaction.’<sup>9</sup>

‘the unique aspects of human cognition ... were

driven by, or even constituted by, social cooperation.’<sup>12</sup>

‘human cognitive abilities ... [are] built upon social interaction’

## 5. Shared Agency without Shared Intention

### 5.1. First attempt

A joint action is an action with two or more agents?<sup>11</sup>

*Objection* ‘our primitive actions, the ones we do not by doing something else, ... these are all the actions there are.’<sup>7</sup>

### 5.2. Second attempt

A joint action is an action event grounded by two or more agents’ actions.

Two or more events *overlap* just if any (perhaps improper) part of one of these events is a (perhaps improper) part of any of the other events.

**singular grounding** Event  $D$  grounds  $E$ , if:  $D$  and  $E$  occur;  $D$  is a (perhaps improper) part of  $E$ ; and  $D$  causes every event that is a proper part of  $E$  but does not overlap  $D$ .

To be the *agent of an event* is to be the agent of the action which grounds it.<sup>13</sup>

**plural grounding** Events  $D_1, \dots, D_n$  ground  $E$ , if:  $D_1, \dots, D_n$  and  $E$  occur;  $D_1, \dots, D_n$  are each (perhaps improper) parts of  $E$ ; and every event that is a proper part of  $E$  but does not overlap  $D_1, \dots, D_n$  is caused by some or all of  $D_1, \dots, D_n$ .

For an individual to be *among the agents of an event* is for there to be actions  $a_1, \dots, a_n$  which ground this event where the individual is an agent of some (one or more) of these actions.

### 5.3. Further attempts

A joint action is an event grounded by two or more agents' actions where these actions have a **distributive collective shared goal**.

A *goal* is an outcome to which actions are, or might be, directed. A *goal-state* is an intention or other state of an agent linking an action to a goal to which it is directed.

**Distributive goal.** The *distributive goal* of two or more actions is G: (a) each action is individually directed to G; and (b) it is possible that: all actions succeed relative to this outcome.

**Collective goal.** The *collective goal* of two or more actions is G: (a) G is a distributive goal of the outcomes; (b) the actions are coordinated; and (c) coordination of this type would normally facilitate occurrences of outcomes of G's type

**Shared goal.** The *shared goal* of two or more

agents' actions is G: (a) G is a collective goal of their actions; (b) each agent can identify each of the other agents in a way that doesn't depend on knowledge of the goal or actions directed to it; (c) each agent most wants and expects each of the other agents to perform actions directed to G; and (d) each agent most wants and expects G to occur as a common effect of all their goal-directed actions, or to be partly constituted by all of their goal-directed actions.

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