

ACTING AND THINKING TOGETHER

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Routledge Lecture June 2014

SHARED AGENCY



A Planning Theory of Acting Together

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I. SHARED AGENCY

Shared intentional activity (SIA)

- ⦿ We have the capacity for shared intentional (and shared cooperative) activity.
- ⦿ Examples: we paint the house together, dance together, have a conversation together, perform an experiment together, put on a play together, walk together (Gilbert).

Significance of these phenomena

- Such SIAs are important in our lives, both instrumentally and non-instrumentally.
- Of concern in relevant special domains (law, political theory, cognitive psychology, business ethics ...)
- A theory of human thought and human action needs to be, in part, a theory of thinking and acting together.

In contrast to SIA

1. Mere strategic interaction (e.g., just walking alongside each other).
2. Explicit promises (Hume's rowers row together "tho' they have never given promises to each other.")

Small scale SIA

Initial aim: articulate ideas useful in understanding small-scale SIA, in the absence of asymmetric authority. Duets and quartets rather than orchestras with conductors.

A fundamentally new capacity (and associated concept)?

- John Searle: new attitude of “we-intention” (vs. ordinary intentions involved in individual agency) in the minds of participating individuals.
- Margaret Gilbert: new inter-relation of “joint commitment” (involves special mutual obligations) between the participants.
- Such approaches are non-reductive and single-faceted.

My alternative approach

- ① Begin with a rich theory of individual planning agency.
- ② Aim for a multi-faceted model of our shared agency, one that is grounded in structures of individual planning agency.

A reductive, multi-faceted model

- Use the theoretical resources available within the theory of individual planning agency to “construct”/provide sufficient conditions for shared agency.
- Thereby support continuities between individual planning agency and shared agency: conceptual, metaphysical, normative.

Strategy of sufficiency

II. INDIVIDUAL PLANNING AGENCY

Individual planning agency

- ⦿ Cross-temporally organized human agency, plans and planning.
- ⦿ Especially given our resource limits, these tend to be partial plans that need to be filled in as time goes by.
- ⦿ Intentions are plan states (in contrast with ordinary expectations)

Roles

Characterize these plan structures in part by appeal to their characteristic *roles* or functions in the cross-temporal organization of our resource-limited agency:

- Settle on certain (future, partial) options
- Stable over time (resistance to reconsideration/revision)
- Pose problems of means (given partiality)
- Filter admissible options
- Guide action

Norms

These roles are explained in part by the *guidance* by (implicitly) *accepted norms* of plan rationality. Two especially salient norms:

- ⦿ Means-end coherence [problem posing role]
- ⦿ Consistency and agglomerativity [filtering role]

Plans and temporally extended individual agency

- ⦿ Planning and plan states, understood by appeal to these characteristic norm-guided roles, help explain the diachronic organization of individual intentional activity.

Planning capacities as a common core?

- Conjecture: Our capacity for SIA, like our capacity for individual temporally extended intentional agency, can be grounded in our individual planning capacities.
- Leaves open the possibility of individual planning agents who are not capable of SIA.(e.g., Tomasello on the great apes.)

III. SHARED INTENTION

SIA and Shared Intention

- ⦿ Explanatory role of shared intention (Cp. explanatory role of individual intention)
- ⦿ Normally, if our walking together is a SIA it is explained by our *shared intention* in favor of our so acting.

What is shared intention?

- ⦿ Individual intention: focus on roles in cross-temporal organization within an individual's life.
- ⦿ Shared intention: focus on roles in inter-personal organization.

Overarching roles of shared intention

1. inter-personal coordination of action and planning in pursuit of X ,
2. structure thinking together (bargaining; shared deliberation) concerning how to X .

Norms of social consistency and coherence

If shared intentions are successfully to play these roles, the relevant plans of the participants need to satisfy (though perhaps not be guided by the acceptance of) norms of

- (a) social consistency and
- (b) social means-end coherence.

Toward a plan-theoretic construction of shared intention

Aim: specify a structure of inter-connected plan states of individuals that would, when functioning in the norm-guided ways characteristic of individual planning agency, play these social roles of shared intention and satisfy these associated social norms.

Building Blocks

Focusing on our shared intention to paint the house together, what are the building blocks of this construction?

A. Intending that we

- ⦿ Each of us intends that we paint the house.
- ⦿ Not all intending is intending to: I can intend that we act in a certain way.
- ⦿ It is not just that I intend to paint given, as I expect, that you will paint; and vice versa. (intention vs. expectation)
- ⦿ In basic case, weak concept of our action -- avoid circularity.
- ⦿ Intending that we vs. “we intention” (Searle).

Rational dynamics of intending that we

- ⦿ If each intends that we paint then, given demands for individual plan coherence and consistency, each is set to track and support our joint painting (and not just his own painting), and to filter out options incompatible with that.
- ⦿ So – normally – each set to help the other.

B. Interlocking intentions

- ⦿ Contrast case (change examples): I intend that we go to SF by way of my throwing you into the trunk of my car. The “mafia sense” of: “We’re going to SF together.”
- ⦿ Further building block: Each of us intends that we paint the house by way of the intention of the other that we paint; our intentions *interlock*.

C. Intended mutual responsiveness and mesh in sub-plans

- ⦿ Each of us intends that we paint the house by way of *mutual responsiveness* between us in sub-plan and in action, mutual responsiveness that tracks and supports the intended joint activity.
- ⦿ In particular, each intends that our sub-plans for our painting *mesh* with each other/are co-possible.
- ⦿ There might not yet be mesh in sub-plans. Intention in favor of mesh may help frame relevant bargaining/shared deliberation in the pursuit of mesh.

D. Interdependence

- ⦿ Our intentions that we paint the house are interdependent in their persistence.
- ⦿ Roughly: each retains her intention that we paint just in case the other does.

Interdependence

Interdependence in persistence may be

- (a) desirability-based (e.g., Romeo and Juliet) and/or
- (b) feasibility-based (e.g., piano movers) and/or
- (c) obligation-based (e.g., exchange of assurances)

Each settles that we act

- ⦿ Given interdependence in persistence, each participant's intention can *settle* that we paint, in part by supporting the other's corresponding intention that we paint, where the combination of both intentions leads to our painting.
- ⦿ This blocks a potential objection to the appeal to intending that we act.

E. Out in the open

- ⦿ These conditions are out in the open among us.
- ⦿ This supports both the cited interdependence and our ability to reason together about how to follow through on our shared intention.

Building blocks: summary

A plan-theoretic construction of shared intention to J:

- ⦿ A. each intends that we J
- ⦿ B. interlocking intentions that we J
- ⦿ C. Each intends mutual responsiveness and mesh
- ⦿ D. Interdependence in persistence
- ⦿ E. Conditions are out in the open

IV. A PLANNING THEORY OF SHARED INTENTION AND SIA

The basic thesis

- ◎ This construction of inter-connected plan states, when functioning successfully in the ways specified by the planning theory of individual agency, is sufficient for robust forms of shared intention and SIA.

Defense of the basic thesis - 1

- ⦿ Given my intention that we paint by way of your intention, mutual responsiveness, and meshing sub-plans, I am under rational pressure (given accepted norms of individual plan coherence and consistency) to coordinate with you in the direction of our joint painting, to support your role – perhaps by way of helping actions – and to avoid ways of acting that are incompatible with all that.
- ⦿ Analogously for you.

Defense of the basic thesis - 2

- So the rational pressures on each of individual coherence and consistency engage these distinctive contents of the attitudes of each and thereby induce pressures for social coherence and consistency, and associated social coordination and effectiveness.
- Shared intention and SIA emerge from the rational dynamics of this plan-theoretic construction.

Obligations

- Etiology and rational dynamics of SIA will normally involve assurance, intentionally induced reliance, and the like; and these normally engage norms of moral obligation.
- Morality is in the neighborhood.

Shared action, different reasons: unity despite diversity

- ⦿ There can be SIA even though each participates for different reasons. Acting together does not require convergence in reasons for participating.
- ⦿ E.g. I participate in our house painting because I can't stand the color; you participate because you can't stand the mildew.
- ⦿ Significance for liberal politics

A path between

- ⦿ A path between a simple reduction to individual planning agency and an appeal to a fundamental new element.
- ⦿ Conceptual, metaphysical and normative *continuities* with individual planning agency, though shared intentionality goes beyond simple individual planning agency.

Ockham's Razor

Theoretical richness of this multi-faceted planning model challenges appeal to a fundamentally new element.

V. Planning capacities as a common core

Planning model of these forms of sociality helps support our conjecture that planning capacities can serve as a common structure behind both the cross-temporal and the social organization of our agency.