

What is Joint Action?

<s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk>

1. History

Ask a *psychologist* ‘joint action [is] any form of social interaction whereby two or more individuals coordinate their actions in space and time to bring about a change in the environment.’¹³

Ask a *philosopher* ‘I take a collective action to involve a collective intention.’⁷ ‘The sine qua non of collaborative action is a joint goal [shared intention] and a joint commitment.’¹⁴ ‘The key property of joint action lies in its internal component ... in the participants’ having a “collective” or “shared” intention.’¹ ‘Shared intentionality is the foundation upon which joint action is built.’⁵ ‘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.’⁴

2. The Challenge

Show that a notion of joint action is already contained in a notion of action.

3. The Constraint

Any notion of joint action is

- central to a tangle of philosophical and scientific questions commonly taken to be ques-

tions about joint action, and

- such that an implicit conception of it is available through reflection on many or all of the cases commonly taken to be paradigmatic.

4. Towards a Solution

4.1. First attempt

A joint action is an action with two or more agents¹⁰

Objection ‘our primitive actions, the ones we do not by doing something else, ... these are all the actions there are.’⁶

4.2. Second attempt

A joint action is an action event with two or more agents¹⁰

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.¹²

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.

4.3. Goal-directed joint action (third attempt)

A goal-directed joint action is an event grounded by two or more agents’ actions where these actions have a collective 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.

A *goal-directed joint action* is a joint action which, taken as a whole, is directed to a goal.

Distributive goal. The *distributive goal* of two or more agents’ activities is G : each agent’s activities are individually directed to G .

Collective goal. The *collective goal* of a joint action is G : (a) each agent’s activities are individually directed to G (i.e. G is a distributive goal); (b) the agents’ activities are coordinated; and (c) coordination of this type would normally facilitate occurrences of outcomes of G ’s type

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