

PROBLEM DISCUSSION: DOES COLLECTIVE ACTION REQUIRE WE-INTENTIONS?

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Values in Argumentative Discourse (PTDC/MHC-FIL/0521/2014)

Value Seminar
April 12, 2019



IFILNOVA
INSTITUTE
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MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO E CIÊNCIA

Collective Actions

Example 1: Carrying a Washing Machine

In order to successfully carry a washing machine, several agents must coordinate.



Example 2: Orchestra Performance



Even though every orchestra musician plays their part, the performance of the whole orchestra is what counts and yields the end result (at least outside of solo passages).

Main Problems

Two major problems:

- ▶ How to define CAs: What is a CA and what social ontology does its proper characterization involve?
- ▶ Collective action problems: Why or when do we act collectively when individual pay-offs are low?

Examples of Collective Action Problems (1)



Example 3: Coordinating Traffic Rules

If everybody drives on the right side of the street, this can prevent accidents. Alternatives: driving on the left side; the 'strongest' car has precedence. But how does the norm arise?

⇒ Instance of a simple coordination problem. Classical Game Theory can explain why several solutions exist (Nash equilibria). Evolutionary Game Theory can explain how a particular norm evolves.

Examples of Collective Action Problems (2)

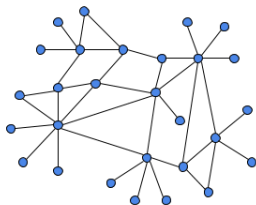


Example 4: WW1 Attacks

If everybody attacked an enemy trench at the same time, they could overrun it. At the same time, every individual soldier has a strong incentive to wait and let others do the attacking. Hence, sometimes nobody moved without further incentive (like e.g. a loaded gun pointed by an officer or equivalent threats).

~> Classical collective action problem: Despite potential large payoff for the group as a whole, each individual has a very low or even negative payoff for doing their part of the CA.

Examples of Collective Action Problems (3)



Example 5: Ad-hoc Mesh Networks

If everybody around the same time installed some existing, special software on their home router, this would create a city-wide network that could be used by everyone nearly everywhere. Except possibly at peak times, nobody except the telecom company would loose.

↪ Collective action problem with '**free riders**': Everybody has an incentive to be a free rider, to use the network without contributing to it, if only the majority installs the software.

Examples of Collective Action Problems (4)

Example 6: Voting Paradox

Voting gives a little bit of disvalue; you have to go there, make a cross, loose time, etc. At the same time, the chance of *your* vote making a difference is extremely low. So why vote?



↪ Collective action problem under expected value hypothesis:
benefits of CA * probability of making a difference
≪ value of not voting

Searle's Example



Example 7: Running for the Shelter

CAs cannot be identified from the outside:

- ▶ *I* am running to the shelter.
- ▶ We are running to the shelter.

↪ Searle (1990) considers we-intentions indispensable to explain CAs. In the picture probably everybody runs to the shelter on her own (1937, Spanish Civil War, Bilbao), but we can also imagine a **performance** that can only be explained as a CA with we-intentions.

Shared Intentionality

There is a lot of literature on shared intentionality.

- ▶ Searle (1990): we-intentions (irreducible, primitive)
- ▶ Bratman (1992): “interpersonal structure of related intentions” (Roth 2017)
- ▶ Tuomela & Miller (1988), Miller (2001): participatory intentions (in principle reducible)
- ▶ Gilbert (2008, 2009): joint commitment & mutual obligations (irreducible, primitive)
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Some Questions

1. What *are* we-intentions?
2. Are we-intentions needed for the explanation of CAs? If so, for any CA or only for some of them?
3. Are we-intentions irreducible?

What are we-intentions?

- ▶ According to Searle, we-intentions are constitutive of CAs and irreducible.
- ▶ But he doesn't explain what they are.
- ▶ My own 'intentions' are divided. I might sometimes have a feeling of doing something jointly with others:
 - ▶ *We are carrying the washing machine.*
- ▶ But sometimes I might not have this feeling at all:
 - ▶ *I am voting.* Not: *We are voting.*
- ▶ Ironically, many cases of CA Problems seem to fall into the second category. For some examples it seems hard to make it plausible that any kind of we-intention is involved.

An Approach?

Tentative Thesis

We-intentionality is not needed for the definition and explanation of collective actions, in the same sense as intentionality is not needed to explain **complex** actions of individuals.

From Basic Action to Complex Action

Basic Action

Example: lifting your arm

An intention is used to distinguish the action from an involuntary movement.

Complex Action

Example: washing your car

An intention is not needed for the explanation of the action, because it is very hard to wash your car accidentally and external force would be easy to spot.

Connection to Event Structure?

According to Hovav & Levin (2010: 21), there are two classes of non-stative verbs:

Manner Verbs

nibble, rub, scribble, sweep, flutter, laugh, run, swim, . . .

Result Verbs

clean, cover, empty, fill, freeze, kill, melt, open, arrive, die, enter, faint, . . .

Observation: Most CAs seem to be based on activities with a result as a goal and involving a complex plan.

The Role of Goals

- ▶ *Carrying a washing machine*: 1. no result, e.g. carrying it around for fun, 2. with a result as a goal, e.g. carrying the WM to the 2nd floor.
- ▶ *Voting*: if you aren't casting your ballot, you haven't voted; shared goal: elect representatives.
- ▶ *Attacking a trench*: attacking itself seems to be a manner verb, but in the WW1 example the shared goal is to capture the enemy trench.
- ▶ *Router installation*: the goal is not just to install the software, but to enable to enable the mesh network (shared goal)

Complex Goals & Plans

Reductionist Thesis of CA

We can describe CAs as actions whose plans and goals involve contributions of other people conforming to our expectations. The plans and goals are 'we-plans' and 'we-goals', the expectations involve the behavior of others.

There is no obvious equivalent to a basic action for CAs, because they are complex.

A Taxonomy?

Joint Action: we-intention (Searle), group rationality (List & Pettit) carrying a washing machine, race driving?

Joint Activity: other-directed goals & plans, complex goals involving other's contributions working in an assembly line, national defense response, voting, playing in orchestra

Institutional Activity: no we-intention, group rationality, or other-directed goals & plans required policeman giving a TV interview, government spokesman, company CEO, driving on the right side of the road [not according to Searle (2015)]

Most CA Problems seem to involve joint activities, not joint actions. Have these types of activities been mixed up?

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