

Mindreading and Joint Action: Philosophical Tools

CEU, Fall 2012-3, PhD Elective
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1. Short description

This course will introduce a variety of new and established philosophical ideas that might usefully inform experimental research on mindreading or on joint action (or both) but have so far been neglected or misunderstood by cognitive scientists. Starting from foundational questions like *What is a mental state?* and *Which events are actions?*, we shall search for tools that might help us with two tasks. First, we need theoretically coherent and empirically motivated ways of distinguishing kinds of mindreading, and kinds of joint action. Second, we need ways of decomposing mindreading in something like the way that actual reading can be decomposed into orthographic, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components.

Questions arising include:

Action Does identifying an action as such necessarily involve representing an intention?

Holism Could there be mindreaders who can identify intentions and knowledge states but not beliefs?

Modularity If mindreading is modular (or automatic), what can we infer about the representations and processes it involves?

Tracking What could someone represent that would enable her, perhaps within limits, to track another's mental states?

Evidential basis What evidence could in principle support the ascription of a particular belief to a given subject, and how does the evidence support the ascription?

Objectivity Could there be mindreaders who are able to identify beliefs despite not understanding what it is for a belief to be true or false?

Self-awareness Does being a mindreader entail being able, sometimes, to identify one's own mental states and actions?

Interaction How is mindreading involved in joint action?

Social Grounding In what ways (if any) could mindreading, or its development or evolution, depend on abilities to engage in joint action?

2. Provisional schedule

Most classes will take the form of a lecture with questions and discussion time. There are also four afternoon sessions in which we'll discuss key papers. See table 1 on the following page for a provisional schedule. The schedule may change depending on group discussion and research interests.

3. Method of evaluation

Students may be asked to prepare one or more short (5–10 minute) presentations to introduce a discussion sessions. Presentations will not be graded nor contribute to any overall mark.

Students may submit a short midterm paper of no more than 3000 words (fewer is better). Midterm papers will not contribute to any overall mark. Midterm papers will receive feedback some feedback (a paragraph or so) but will not receive grades.

Students should submit a short term paper. The topic of each paper should ideally be agreed in advance; alternatively term papers may answer a question chosen from the list of questions below. Term papers may not substantially overlap with midterm papers where any individual is an author of both.

4. Sample essay questions

In addition to those below, also consider questions from the titles of lectures in table 1 on the next page.

1. Are there limits on the behaviour that can be modelled using simple forms of decision theory (such as the version presented in Jeffrey 1983)? You may choose to answer with respect to one of Sugden (2000) or Bratman (2000).

1.	sept 12	<i>Introduction: Some Questions about Mindreading and Joint Action</i>
2.	sept 19	<i>What Are Mental States?</i> Reading: Jeffrey (1983, §§1.1–1.3, 3.1–3.4, 4.1), Fitch & Nelson (2009, §1)
	sept 26	[no class]
3.	oct 3	<i>Tracking, Measuring and Representing Beliefs</i> Reading: Matthews (1994), Kovács et al. (2010)
4.	oct 10	<i>What is Core Knowledge (or Modularity)?</i> Reading: Fodor (1983, 2000); Baillargeon et al. (2010); Wellman et al. (2001) Discussion: Sugden (2000)
	oct 14	[no class]
5.	oct 24	<i>Radical Interpretation</i> Reading: Davidson (1985, 1973, 1980b, 1990) Discussion: Matthews (1994)
6.	oct 31	<i>Actions, Intentions and Goals</i> Reading: Davidson (1971, 1980a); Bratman (1985, 2000) Discussion: Davidson (1973)
	nov 7	[no class]
7.	nov 14	<i>Goal Ascription: the Teleological Stance and Motor Awareness</i> Reading: Millikan (1989, 1993b,a); Gergely et al. (1995); Csibra (2003); Fogassi et al. (2005) Discussion: Bratman (1984)
8.	nov 21	<i>What Is Joint Action?</i> Reading: Bratman (1992, 1993); Ludwig (2007); Searle (1990)
	nov 28	[no class]
9.	dec 5	<i>Shared Intention and Motor Representation in Joint Action</i> Reading: Knoblich & Sebanz (2008); Kourtis et al. (2010)

Table 1: Provisional schedule

2. How, if at all, can we distinguish different kinds of mindreading? If you provide a distinction, discuss an application of it.
3. Which events are actions?
4. What is the relation between a goal and an action when the action is directed to the goal?
5. What could someone represent that would enable her to track others' desires?
6. What could count as evidence that a mindreader was ascribing intentions to other individuals? You might relate your answer one or more of the following: Fogassi & Ferrari (2007); Dasser et al. (1989); Astington (2001); Malle & Knobe (2001).
7. 'The concept of a joint action as such is just that of an event of which there are multiple agents' (Ludwig 2007, p. 366). First explain and then evaluate this claim.
8. Does joint action necessarily involve mindreading?

5. Deadlines for submitting papers

5.1. Midterm papers

Midterm papers should be submitted by 9 am on Monday 5th November. Mindterm papers should be emailed directly to me (Butterfill). Late midterm papers will not be read without prior agreement. Midterm papers will be returned with feedback by Wednesday November 14, 2012 (unless there are very many).

5.2. Term papers

The deadline for submitting term papers is 9 am on January 7, 2012. The grades will be returned by the instructor by January 21, 2013 together with some feedback (a paragraph or so).

6. Reading and Sources

(See the provisional schedule in table 1 on the preceding page.)

Astington, J. (2001). The paradox of intention: Assessing children's metarepresentational understanding. In B. F. Malle & L. J. Moses (Eds.), *Intentions and Intentionality: Foundations of Social Cognition* (pp. 85–103). MIT Press.

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- Bratman, M. E. (2000). Valuing and the will. *Noûs*, 34, 249–265. Reprinted in Bratman, M. (2007) *Structures of Agency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (pp. 47–67).
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- Fodor, J. (1983). *The Modularity of Mind: an Essay on Faculty Psychology*. Bradford book. Cambridge, Mass ; London: MIT Press.
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- Fogassi, L. & Ferrari, P. F. (2007). Mirror neurons and the evolution of embodied language. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(3), 136–141.
- Fogassi, L., Ferrari, P. F., Gesierich, B., Rozzi, S., Chersi, F., & Rizzolatti, G. (2005). Parietal lobe: From action organization to intention understanding. *Science*, 308(5722), 662–667.
- Gergely, G., Nadasky, Z., Csibra, G., & Biro, S. (1995). Taking the intentional stance at 12 months of age. *Cognition*, 56, 165–193.
- Jeffrey, R. C. (1983). *The Logic of Decision, second edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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