



Which joint actions ground social cognition?

Comment on Stephen Butterfill

By Thea Zander
Centre for Integrative Neuroscience
Tübingen, 6th June 2011



Mainpoints

- Premise: joint actions play an important role in explaining how humans come to understand minds
→ children's engaging in joint actions facilitates their cognitive and social development
- Bratman's account of a specific form of joint activity (based on shared intentions) is incompatible with this premise
- There are joint actions that do not require shared intentions
- This kind involves shared goals instead
→ joint actions are goal-directed actions that comprise two or more agent's activities



Shared goals

- Function: to coordinate plural activities around a result (\neq state)
 - Indicators of joint action:
 - all of the actions are directed to a common goal
 - each agent modifies his actions in accordance with other agents pursuing a common goal
 - expectations about a common effect
- mere presence or efficacy of a shared goal is not sufficient for joint actions
- shared goals characterise one form of joint actions



Less cognitive and conceptual demands ...

- are required!
- Really?
- Not having shared intentions: information seems to be more „implicit“ and „blurry“
 - how do we know who will coact?
 - how do we know how to interpret actions of coagents?
- Which cues do inform us about the commitment of our possible coagents?
 - we often know more than we can tell
- What's about the expectations?



Which specific kind of social cognition ...

- is fostered by the engaging in joint actions?
- What can autism tell us about the development of social-cognitive abilities with regard to joint actions?

Try to get knowledge about the social environment

- Social awareness
- Social learning, learning by imitation
- Theory of mind: attributing mental states to oneself and others
→ Cooperatively achieving one common goal



Relation of joint actions and rational agency?

- What can we learn about rationality from the standpoint of joint actions fostering social-cognitive development?
- As starting point for the discussion:

Goal-directed actions =
rational actions?

Engaging in joint
actions in order to
achieve a **common**
goal = rational?

Engaging in **joint**
actions = rational per
se?



Thank you!