

Intention and motor representation: how to resist temptation

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Abstract

Are there distinctive roles for intention and motor representation in explaining the purposiveness of action? Standard accounts of action assign a role to intention but are silent on motor representation. The temptation is to suppose that nothing need be said here because motor representation is either only an enabling condition for purposive action or else merely a variety of intention. This paper provides reasons for resisting temptation. Some motor representations, like intentions, coordinate actions in virtue of representing outcomes; but, unlike intentions, motor representations cannot feature as premises or conclusions in practical reasoning. This implies that motor representation has a distinctive role in explaining the purposiveness of action. It also gives rise to a problem: were the roles of intention and motor representation entirely independent, this would impair effective action. Resisting temptation therefore requires explaining how intentions interlock with motor representations. The solution, we argue, is to recognise that the contents of intention can be partially determined by the contents of motor representations. Understanding this content-determining relation enables better understanding how intentions are related to actions.