

444 Lecture 22

Bratman on Group Action

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Day Plan

Bratman's Theory

Three Conditions

1. Mutual Responsiveness
2. Commitment to joint activity; i.e., we both intend to do this very activity, under something like this description.
3. Commitment to mutual support; i.e., we both intend to help the other should they falter, and not claim all the glory.

The last condition is a strengthening of the idea that cooperative activity is not side-by-side activity.

Many Person Groups

- Like with Gilbert, you might worry about the generalisation of these to many person groups.
- In a large group, I can intend that this group activity happen without having any commitment to being part of it.
- That can't happen in a two person group; if I leave, the group ceases to exist.

Many Person Groups

- So there is this tricky question about what kind of commitment is needed on the part of each individual for a large group activity to persist.
- Thinking about two person cases is unlikely to help clarify that.

Extra-Personal Intentions

- One of the central moves Bratman makes is that each person individually intends that the group does something.
- You might think this is odd; I can only intend that I do things.

Extra-Personal Intentions

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Extra-Personal Intentions

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- I can even, I think, do it without being 100% sure of the sunshine.

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- Another example: I can intend to holiday in Paris, although I can't control all the aspects of my getting to Paris.
- Maybe (when thinking about my family) I can intend that we holiday in Paris.
- And that's all Bratman needs.
- So it's a bit weird, but seems maybe ok.

Big Question

What are the limits on intention? Two dimensions you might care about.

- Power dimension: how much is it in my power to make it happen.
- Epistemic dimension: is it compatible with knowing it won't happen/not knowing it will happen?

Mesh

- Bratman's idea that plans should mesh is, I think, a really nice way of splitting the difference between the views that our plans must match, and that there is no constraint on mutual plans.
- Matching plans is too strong; I don't need to have views about what you do.
- No constraints is too weak; it isn't a joint activity if I don't have some kinds of vetos.
- Mesh is a nice attempt to get something between these.

Problems for Mesh

- But as stated it feels too strong.
- Imagine that your job is to get the paint.
- I have views about where to get the paint from (as in Bratman's example), but also how to drive there.
- This feels like it shouldn't matter; it's your job to get the paint.

Structured Groups

- This is really evident in structured groups.
- If it quite literally your job to do X, and my job to do Y, we could be in a group even if I disapprove of how you do your job.
- Imagine applying mesh to a group the size of the United States Armed Forces.

Mesh and Counterfactuals

From the other direction, it's fascinating to think through cases that turn on how counterfactually resilient mesh must be.

- Some level of resiliency is needed. If we are working side by side on different projects, the fact that they happen to mesh doesn't make them joint projects.
- But total counterfactual resiliency isn't needed either. I can be in a group with you, but be disposed to leave if you insist on singing arias while we work.
- I suspect there will be some vague cases in the middle here.

Coercion

- Assuming that everyone plans to stay in the group, and to be cooperative, it feels we should give each other some flexibility in how they do their jobs.
- There is something vaguely coercive about even having views about how you should get to the store to buy the paint.
- Of course, it's fine to be helpful, and there isn't really anything wrong with having views about what is better and worse.
- I don't really know to balance these considerations.

Power and Coercion

It's famously hard to draw a line between a power imbalance and a coercive situation.

- Coercion doesn't literally mean that I give you no options at all. I can coerce you while you have agency.
- But not every unwanted pressure is coercive.

Groups and Coercion

Thinking about groups helps with a really hard puzzle case for coercion.

- A1 has illegitimate power over C1, and A2 has illegitimate power over C2.
- C2 enters into a deal with A1 that is mutually beneficial, but which they would not enter into but for A2's illegitimate power over them.
- C1 enters into a deal with A2 that is mutually beneficial, but which they would not enter into but for A1's illegitimate power over them.

Groups and Coercion

This seems kind of bad at some level, but it is possible that the 'deals' are still in some sense cooperative ventures.

- But if A1 and A2 are exercising their illegitimate power as part of a group, in some strong sense of group, then the deals are coercive.
- This matters if, e.g., C2 doesn't keep up their part of the deal - does A1 have a legitimate complaint?
- Perhaps it depends on how closely they are working with A2.

Coercion

Note that for Bratman there is a difference between a **shared intention** and a **shared cooperative activity**.

- Even coercive agreements might produce shared intentions. (If the coercion is to steer your agency, not to bypass it.)
- But they can't produce shared cooperation.

What Counts as Support

- The single possible kind of support feels really weak.
- What if there is a kind of thing I can't stand seeing anyone suffer through?
- Feels like we need a generic here not an existential.

Are Competitive Games SCAs, or Group Actions

- Last case, because this is both a problem for Bratman and an interesting puzzle that tells us something about the stakes of these questions.
- Is playing chess with a friend a shared cooperative activity?
- It doesn't satisfy mesh, or support. I want to upset your plans.
- But in some ways it is; a chess game involves a fair amount of coordination and cooperation.

Are Competitive Games SCAs, or Group Actions

- What turns on calling a game of chess a shared cooperative activity or not?
- I don't really have a good answer here.

An Objection to Gilbert

Bratman believes that intentions typically come with resilience conditions.

- But he doesn't think that shared cooperative activity comes with a Gilbert style obligation to continue.
- One key case for him is where the participants explicitly disavow any such obligation.
- Are such cases plausible? Are they problems for Gilbert?