BRATMAN ON SHARED COOPERATIVE ACTIVITY

444 Lecture 3

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BRATMAN'S THEORY

STRATEGY

- Like Gilbert, Bratman starts with a simple case, and builds up.

- But for Bratman, the building isn't an impressionistic picture; it's a set of conditions.

- Of course, these conditions don't quite work in puzzle cases, so we add complications.

- The history of philosophy suggests this path does not have a great record of success.

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.

TARGET

The focus of Bratman's paper is the notion of a Shared Cooperative Activity (SCA).

- It isn't clear how much this is a pre-theoretic notion, and how much it is something he is trying to introduce by theorising about it.

- One question is how closely this is related to the notion of a **shared intention**.

SHARED INTENTION

Shared intentions are fairly easy to understand.

- If **we** intend to move the piano, that's a shared intention.

- It's also a shared cooperative activity.

- And just thinking about that simple case, or the other cases he discusses like singing a duet or painting a house, might make you think these are the same notion.

SHARED INTENTION AND SCAS

But as we see at the end of the paper, it's a bit trickier than that.

- If **we** intend to play chess, that's a shared intention.

- Is it a Shared Cooperative Activity?

GAMES AND COOPERATION

Games are these really tricky things.

- If Alice and Bob are playing chess, they each want to win, and hence each want to thwart the other's play.

- But they also are cooperating in collectively playing chess.

- Alice doesn't want to simply set the pieces up so her pieces are checkmating Bob's.

- She wants to win a game of chess, and Bob is partially cooperating with that, by playing, and partially not cooperating, by playing well.

GAMES AND COOPERATION

Note though that Bob in a sense can't be maximally cooperative.

- If he made it easy for Alice to win, that wouldn't give Alice a *game of chess*. It would be more like a shared activity of setting up a checkmate board, which is boring.

- Maximally altruistic Bob, who wants to help Alice get what she wants, has a tricky task here.

- And that in turn complicates what it is for a game to be a cooperative activity.

WE-INTENTIONS

BACKGROUND

Bratman is most famous in philosophy for his work on **intention**, like intending to quit smoking, or intending to go to New York this summer.

- Prior to his 1980s work, a lot of philosophers thought that intentions were somehow reducible to beliefs and desires.

- E.g., intending to go to New York is some combination of wanting to go and believing I will go.

- Bratman persuaded a lot of people that that's wrong, and intentions are something above beliefs and desires.

INTENTIONS

If you're coming from PPE or Cog Sci, or anywhere that does formal modeling of rational action, this should give you some pause.

- Our standard formal model of agents gives them a probability function, a nice formalisation of beliefs, and a utility function, a nice formalisation of desires.

- If that model leaves out something as big as intentions, what does that tell us about the model.

- Maybe we'll come back to this when we do our own formal modeling in the game theory part of the course.

EXTRA-PERSONAL INTENTIONS

- One of the central moves Bratman makes in *this paper* 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

- But really there are lots of cases where I intend something not entirely in my control.

- I can intend to spend a sunny day at the beach, without intending the sunshine.

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

EXTRA-PERSONAL INTENTIONS

- 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

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 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

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 coercion cases are why Bratman says there is a difference between a **shared intention** and a **shared cooperative activity**.

- Even coercive agreements might produce shared intentions.

- That happens if the point of the coercion is to steer your agency, not to bypass it.

- But they can't produce shared cooperation.

BACK TO THE TARGET

This relates back what I was saying earlier about the point of the paper.

- Do we have some pre-theoretical understanding of what a Shared Cooperative Activity is?

- What turns on whether we count chess games as SCAs or not?

SUPPORT

WHAT COUNTS AS SUPPORT

Bratman runs himself into some hard problems here. (Of course, it is good that he shows that the problems exist!)

On the one hand, SCA requires support; it's not just that we are doing stuff alongside one another.

On the other hand, SCA does not require anything goes; we could be doing an SCA but I might not help if you stupidly get yourself stuck in water and I can't swim.

BRATMAN'S VIEW

All it takes is that in *some* counterfatual possibility, I would support you in a way that helped the SCA.

This seems much too weak.

Imagine that we are doing something that is intuitively not SCA, it's more like doing stuff alongside one another.

But if I'm suffering in a certain way you'd help, because you'd help *anyone* suffering in that way.

GENERICS AND EXISTENTIALS

Here are three strengths of claims we might make:

1. Universal - All Xs are Ys

2. Generic - Xs are Ys

3. Existential - Some Xs are Ys

GENERICS AND EXISTENTIALS

The last is clearly weaker than the others.

1. All cows eat chocolate.

2. Cows eat chocolate

3. Some cows eat chocolate

I'm sure 1 and 2 are false, but 3 is probably true - someone out there feeds their cows chocolate.

UNIVERSALS AND GENERICS

But the generic can be true without the universal.

1. All cows eat grass

2. Cows eat grass

3. Some cows eat grass

2 and 3 are true, but I don't think 1 is, since some cows are grain-fed, and some have allergies.

BACK TO SUPPORT

I think what Bratman needs here is the middle claim.

1. In an SCA, the parties support each other in all difficult situations.

2. In an SCA, the parties support each other in difficult situations.

3. In an SCA, the parties support each other in some difficult situations.

FOR NEXT TIME

FOR NEXT TIME

We'll go over Jennifer Lackey's work on joint (rational) belief.