

Joint Action

Joint action is a familiar feature of everyday life: people move tables together, walk together, play piano duets and cooperatively rear babies. For social (and eusocial) animals, effective joint action is necessary for survival. It also arguably explains the emergence, in evolution or development, of sophisticated cognitive capacities. Yet philosophers currently struggle to answer even the most basic questions about joint action. These include:

- What distinguishes genuine joint actions from merely individual actions performed in parallel?
- How, if at all, could models of individual action be revised or extended to accommodate joint agency?
- Which planning mechanisms enable us to coordinate our plans and actions, and what if anything do these mechanisms tell us about the nature of joint action?
- What kinds of commitment, if any, are required for joint action?
- Does the existence of joint action entail that there are mental states with plural subjects, or that there are special kinds of mental state (so-called ‘we-intentions’), or special kinds of reasoning (‘team reasoning’)?
- How can there be aggregate (or ‘group’) agents—that is, agents whose proper parts are agents?
- How, if at all, can we make sense of the idea that states like knowledge or intention can be shared by two or more subjects?
- When does joint action first appear in human development?
- What role might joint action play in facilitating development?
- Can recent discoveries about the motor or perceptual processes which enable us to coordinate our actions inform theories about what joint action is?

In this course, we will critically examine existing attempts to answer such questions and consider some new ideas. By the end, you should be familiar with key philosophical and selected scientific theories about joint action. You should also be well placed to independently investigate one or more questions about joint action such as those above.

Advance reading

It is sufficient to read any two items by two different authors. Ludwig is appropriate if you like logic and semantics (the course will present all ideas informally).

Bratman 2014. *Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together*. Oxford: Oxford University Press [Chapters 1–4]

Bratman 2009. “Modest Sociality and the Distinctiveness of Intention.” *Philosophical Studies* 144 (1): 149–65.

Gilbert, M. P. (1990). *Walking together: A paradigmatic social phenomenon*. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 15:1–14.

Gilbert, M. P. (2013). *Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. [Chapters 1–3]

Ludwig, K. (2007). *Collective intentional behavior from the standpoint of semantics*. *Nous*, 41(3):355–393.

Ludwig, K. (2016). *From Individual to Plural Agency: Collective Action*. Oxford University Press.

Encyclopaedia articles

This course takes an approach closer to Roth’s than to Schweikard and Schmid’s. Both provide interesting perspectives.

Roth, A. S. (2010). *Shared agency*. In Zalta, E. N., editor, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2001 Edition)

Schweikard, D. P. and Schmid, H. B. (2013). *Collective intentionality*. In Zalta, E. N., editor, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, summer 2013 edition.