HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Is Intention sufficient to explicate Collective Agency?
Author(s)	Swain, Biswanath
Description	SOCREAL 2010: 2nd International Workshop on Philosophy and Ethics of Social Reality. Sapporo, Japan, 2010-03-27/28. Session 3: Responsibility and Collective Agency
Citation	SOCREAL 2010: Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop on Philosophy and Ethics of Social Reality, 329-348
Issue Date	2010
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/43241
Type	conference paper
File Information	Biswanath.sli.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Is Intention *sufficient* to explicate Collective Agency?

Biswanath Swain

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India

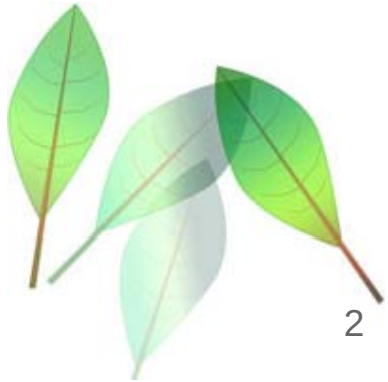
“…What is left over, if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raised my arm?”

-:**Ludwig Wittgenstein**

Philosophical Investigations

Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe

1953, 621, P – 161



The Pervasive Nature of Change

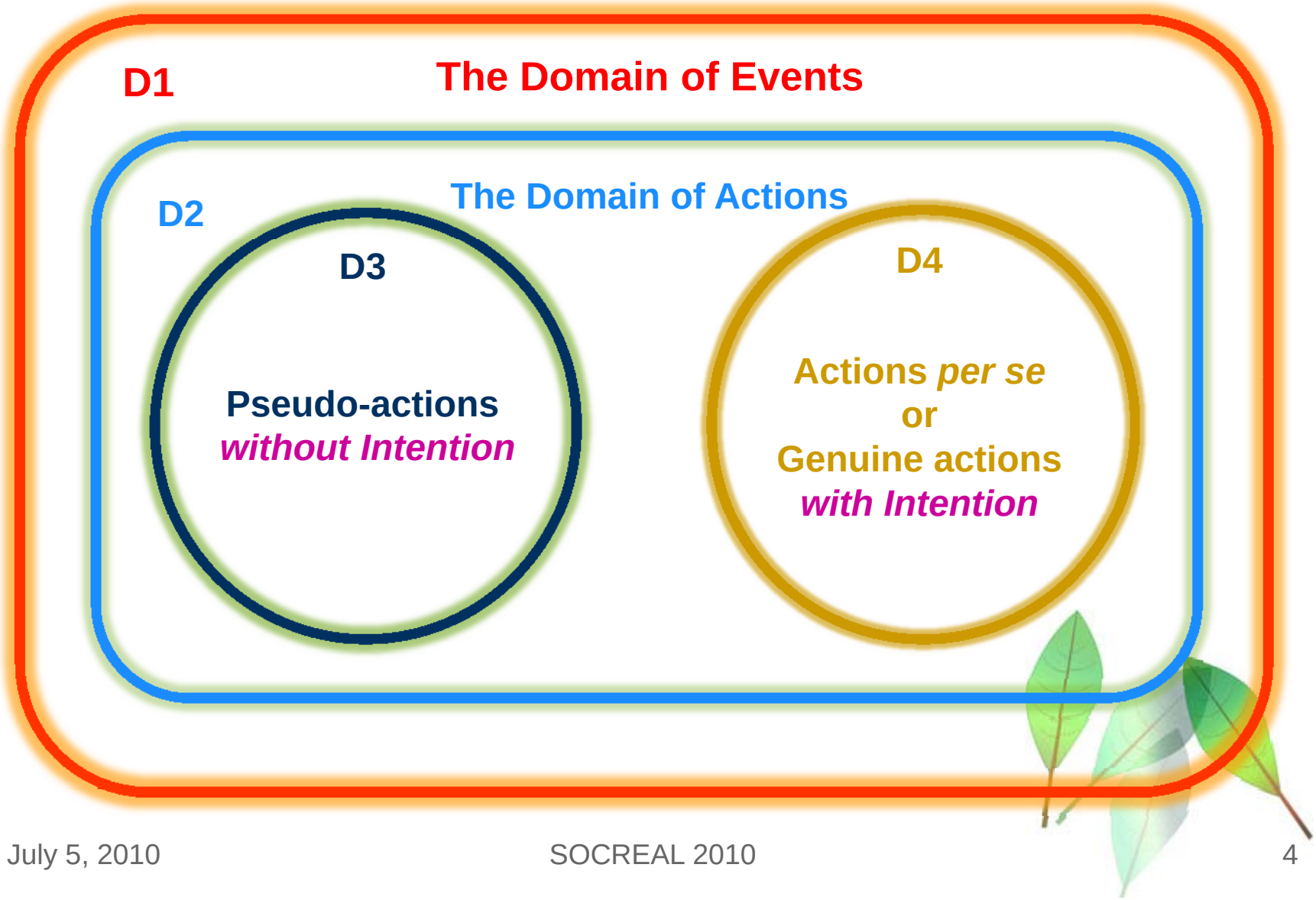
Except the change itself, which is not subject to change, every other things in this world is subject to change. At a particular time, it comes into being and at another particular time, it goes out of existence.

Two types of changes across this world

- Changes that are *brought about* by *Human Being*
  i.e., a uncoerced, unconditional, purposive behavior being guided by a free and a self-motivational force within a human being

- Changes that are *caused* by *Natural Forces*
  i.e., a purely conditional happening being guided by the *Laws of Nature*, and thus available for *causal explanation*.

$(\alpha \wedge \sim\alpha)$ The World of Changes $(\sim\alpha \wedge \alpha)$



Intention:
The Differentiating Mark

- That bisects the world of changes into two parts.
- That differentiates Actions from the Events.
- That keeps apart the mere bodily behaviors from the behaviors that makes an action possible.
- That draws a dividing line between the answerability and unanswerability.

Continued…

- That keeps aside the agent and all the agential forms from all the form of non-agents and pseudo-agents.

- That produces more often moral or non-moral actions than *amoral* actions.

- Eventually, that shapes up an individual into a just individual or into a righteous person.

- Sometimes, Intention gets instantiated by some mental states like desire, pro-attitude, beliefs, predispositions etc.

Collective Intention behind

Collective Agency

- **We** are **social beings** by the very existence.
- Where we witness the **gregarious instinct** outrightly.
- Performance of **Inter**-dependent actions, apart from doing his/her **In**-dependent actions.
- Involvement in **Inter**-dependent actions by performing **In**-dependent actions.
- By **sharing a public place** with others under a **common goal**.

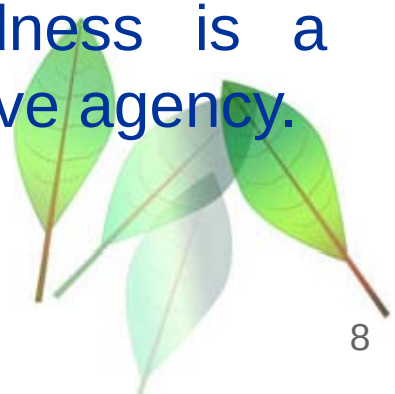
Continued…

- Keeping individuality and individual goal(s) aside, plunging into **commonality**.

- Becoming a part of that **shared intention** for the betterment of that group where he/she hails from.

- So the shift from **I-Intention** to **We-intention** sprouts the idea of **collective agency**, where all the I-Intentions are merged into a whole/ single.

- This collective intentional goal-directedness is a **necessary condition** for explicating collective agency.



Intention and Collective Action

- .Distinction between Intending-to and Intending-that.
- Individual autonomy vs. Collective autonomy.
- Distributive conception of collective intention.
- Instance of *seemingly* collective action where the collective intention is missing.
- Instance of a group action which is guided by an individual intention – cannot be a collective action as there is no collective intention.

Features of Collective Action

To evade the concept of collective intention from misuse, M. Bratman comes up with four features.

- Members of the collective each intend that they engage in the intended action.
- They each intend to do their part in this engagement.
- They each believe that the other members intend to do their part as well.
- Because of believing this, they each intend to do their part of the collective action.

Continued…

Stressing more on shared character of the members, he proposes *three basic features* of shared character which is indispensable for collective intention.

❶ Mutual responsiveness to each other's intention and action.

❷ Commitment to the joint activity.

❸ Commitment to mutual support in performing he joint activity.

Joint Commitment

Proposed by Margaret Gilbert (1989).

❖ Commitment is a **matter of will** to commit to oneself or to others.

❖ **Shift** from Individual commitment to Joint commitment.

❖ Plurality of individual wills intermingle to form **a single will**.

❖ Later, becomes a **single commitment** made by all of them, and are committed for the same intended goal.

❖ Members are **jointly committed** to one another.

❖ Each one is **supposedly obliged** to do his/her part of the action to make it the case that **they all act as a body**.

❖ It would necessarily invite **obligatory** or **normative considerations**.

❖ **Mutual reliance** and **expectation** would ensue from this commitment.

Continued…

Is normativity intrinsic or a matter of consequence?

- Account of Bratman, Gilbert, Davidson and Dennett.
- For Bratman, it is a matter of consequence, so it is contingent.
- For Gilbert, it cannot be contingent, rather it is intrinsic to collective action.
- For Davidson, normativity or rationality is constitutive of the idea of the intentional or mental.
- For Dennett, rationality in intentional behavior is interpreted in a epistemic or instrumental sense.

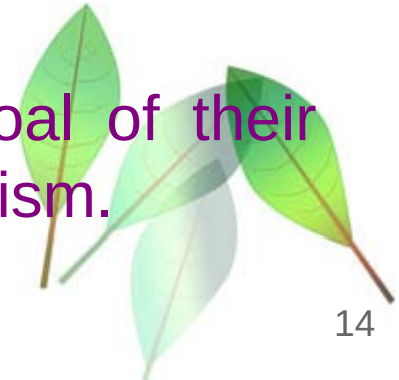
Internal Evaluative Mechanism

- A phenomenological shift of stance from *individual evaluative mechanism* to *collective evaluative mechanism*.

- This collective evaluative mechanism is not conditioned or constrained by the external forces, rather by the *ideals of rationality* within that group.

- *Joint evaluative perspective* is to be framed judiciously by each member of the group.

- Try to *evaluate* the significance of the goal of their collective intention in the light of this mechanism.



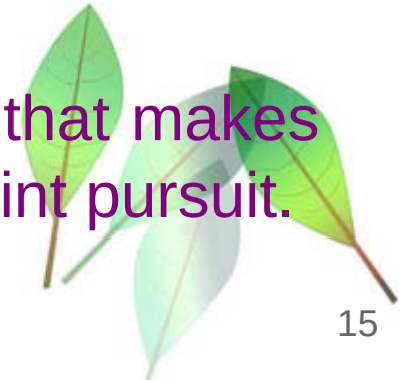
Continued…

- Take a course of *appropriate responsive behaviors* in regard to that envisaged end.

- *My* sense of concern and care for the desired end is for *our* sake, and is for my sake as well, because I feel myself *inalienably bound up* with the collective *we-identity*.

- Become *rationally beholden*, and also *answerable* for the result of *that* collective action jointly.

- Least fear for the unwanted outcome, and that makes all the members *fully devoted* towards that joint pursuit.

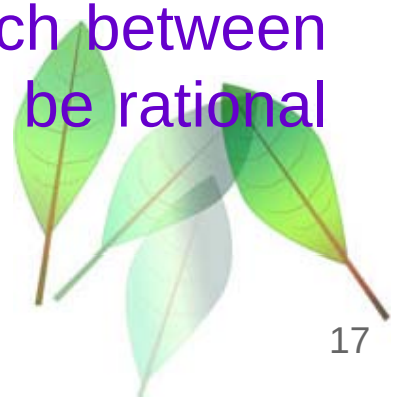


Agential Ability

- There should be a reasonable match between the content of the intention and agential ability to execute an action plan.
- Intention and possibility are supposed to go side by side.
- The collective intention must be in line with the possibility of executing the intention.
- There should not be a mismatch between the intention and the capacity.
- The collective agent i.e., we should realize the magnitude of the goal in relation to the standard agential limits.

Continued…

- We should be rationally self-confident enough to execute an action plan.
- That means rationally we should fathom our agential ability, before stepping into a course of action to realize the intended goal.
- If the match between the agential ability and the intention stands to suffer due to ailed foresight, the grave failure will be obvious.
- It is for sure that, intention cannot be irrational. It can only be rational.
- So, there may be the possibility of mismatch between desire and agential capacity. Only desire can be rational or irrational.



Key References

✓ **Bratman, M. E. (1999). *Faces of Intention*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.**

✓**Gilbert, M. (1989). *On Social Facts*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.**

✓ **-- (2005). "Rationality in Collective Action." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 3 – 17.**

✓ **Helm, B. W. (2008). "Plural Agents." *Nous*, 42, (1), pp. 94 – 114.**

✓**Tuomela, R. (1977). *Human Action and its Explanation: A Study on the Philosophical Foundations of Psychology*, Dordrecht, Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company.**

✓ **Wittegenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by Anscombe, G. E. M. Englewood Cliffs/N.J.: Prentice Hall.**

Acknowledgment

- Organizers of SOCREAL 2010 for selecting me, and providing the travel grant.

- Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, India for letting me be.

- Anonymous reviewers of my manuscript for their incisive comments and valuable suggestions.

- My thesis supervisors (Prof. C. A. Tomy, Prof. Bijoy H. Boruah and Prof. Munmun Jha) for their stimulating ideas and the words of encouragement, and Akhaya for his timely help and suggestion.

Thank you