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Together After All: Competition and Joint Action

by

Antonio Monaco

Under the Direction of Andrea Scarantino, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Competition and cooperation are often perceived as opposites, but there is a middle ground in which they come together: competitive games like chess or soccer. Leading accounts of joint action theory fail to explain games of this sort. I propose a definition of cooperative competitions as joint events in which agents possess a *joint competitive intention*. An agent has a joint competitive intention when a) she has the goal to win or snatch an advantage over her opponent, b) she agrees to act in an uncoerced way, and c) she has the intention to follow the norms governing the activity in question. Finally, I defend my definition from objections and show how my account can helpfully reframe our understanding of what a cooperation is to make room for agonistic aims.

INDEX WORDS: Joint Action, Joint Intention, Cooperation, Competition, Action Theory

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May 2023

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Tommaso, Luca, Sara, and my mother Adalgisa. Thank you for your support, understanding and kindness during these two years in which we have been so far away.

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I would like to thank Andrea Scaratino and Daniel Weiskopf for their invaluable guidance and encouragement in writing this thesis through their insightful comments and suggestions, and for challenging me with objections and revisions. I want to express my gratitude to them for teaching and showing me how to become a professional philosopher.

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INTRODUCTION

Competition and cooperation are perceived as two ends of a spectrum that goes from a cruel war between two countries (competition) to painting a house together with a friend (cooperation). However, between these two ends, there is a middle ground in which cooperation and competition come together. The clearest examples are competitive games: in a chess match, for example, although each player tries to prevail and win, the game is the result of a common effort and commitment to follow the rules and norms.

Although cooperation and competition are not incompatible, they appear to be incompatible in most accounts of joint actions. Joint action theorists have tried to characterize joint intentions in order to define cooperative behaviors. Currently, two leading paradigms compete for the explanation of joint intentions: reductive views and non-reductive views about joint intentions. According to the reductive views, joint intentions can be completely analyzed in terms of individual intentions and other mental states, such as shared goals and common knowledge. The non-reductive views claims that this analysis cannot be successful: joint intentions are a particular kind of intention essentially different from individual intentions. However, both these models systematically fail to account for cooperation involving competition.

This failure is surprising and concerning. It is surprising because competitions are an extremely common example of joint action and are pervasive in almost any field of collective activities, from politics to education, law, and science. The inability of joint action theories to explain competitions that include elements of cooperation can hardly be justified, given their importance for collective behaviors. This failure is also concerning because it raises the possibility that we cannot make sense of collective actions that include cooperation and competitive goals.

In this paper, I will try to answer two main questions. Do joint action theories fall short when explaining cooperative competitions because the presence of a competitive element makes the collective action inevitably not joint? If not, what would an account of joint actions capable of accommodating both cooperative and competitive elements look like?

In Section 1, I raise several objections to mainstream accounts of joint actions. I focus on the non-reductive view about joint intention offered by Searle (1990) and Tuomela (2005, 2006, 2013) and the reductive views offered by Bratman (1993, 2009) and Ludwig (2016, 2020). These models fail because they prioritize purely cooperative behaviors among a small group of adults over other forms of cooperation.

In Section 2, I offer a definition of *joint intentional competitions*, i.e. joint actions in which agents compete against each other, and in Section 3 I defend it from objections. My definition shows that a cooperative competition is not a contradiction in terms and that the distinctive elements that favor and allow cooperations are compatible with maintaining the goal of winning or gaining an advantage over an opponent. I conclude by discussing the philosophical payoff of expanding the notion of joint action to include elements of competition.

1. JOINT INTENTIONS AND COMPETITION

A great deal of what we do every day involves some other people that help, assist, or merely accompany us. Some of the things we do together involve a great deal of cooperation, as in the case of roommates trying paint a house together and students developing a computer program for a group assignment. Sometimes, the things we do together also involve competition, as in the case of players enjoying a chess match or participants of an art auction trying to buy a work at the best bid. In all these cases, which we can broadly refer to as *joint actions*, the minds of the agents are directed to common projects, plans, and goals that ultimately guide their individual actions in a coordinated and common enterprise.

A central question regarding joint actions is what makes these actions intentional but different from the mere sum of individual intentional behaviors. Consider the case of walking together (Gilbert 1990). I can say "we walk together" because (a) we agree to walk together to the station (action intentionally done together) or (b) because it happens that you and I walk to the station following the same path a few steps from each other, but I am doing it independently from what you are doing and you as well (action unintentionally done together). What does it make the difference between (a) and (b)?

Tuomela and Miller (1988) were among the first to argue that what is distinctive of joint actions is a particular intention. The central insight is that what makes the difference between walking together as cooperation and walking together independently of one another is not a feature of the externally observable behavior but rather an "internal" disposition of the "we" who does the action. Let us call this disposition a *joint intention*. By intention, I mean a practical attitudes toward executing a plan that guides the agent's action and facilitates coordination with other agents (Bratman 1987, 1999).

Tuomela and Miller's account was definitively abandoned after the objections moved by Searle (1990). Searle argued that Tuomela and Miller's conditions for a joint intention were insufficient since it was possible for a set of agents to meet them and still not possess a joint intention.

Since Tuomela and Miller's work, many theories have tried to explain what a joint intention is. However, I will argue that these models systematically fail to adequately account for joint *intentional competitions*, a class of joint intentional actions in which participants are competing with one another in some ways.

When people play a chess match or participants of an art auction try to buy an artwork at the best bid, they seem to be involved in joint actions in the same way as people walking to the station together: performing these actions depends on each agent doing their part and contribute in an appropriate way to the common enterprise. Not only are competitive actions extremely common examples of joint actions, but competitive elements are also pervasive in cases of alleged mere cooperation. For example, two students developing a computer program for a group assignment (a cooperative enterprise) may start developing antagonist behaviors in trying to show each other who is the best programmer. Or two friends painting a house together may at the same time compete in trying to impress with their dexterity and speed a person who is watching them painting from her porch. In other words, cases in which the parties of a cooperative enterprise are *not* trying to get some sort of advantage over one another may be quite rare.

Competitive attitudes come into play in all sorts of cooperative activities. In politics, parties forming one coalition try governing a country together, but each party wants to implement its own political agenda. In trials, the parties may try to reach an agreement thanks to the mediation of a judge, but their interests do not align. In a scientific community, scientists work together to

promote a scientific project, but they also are in competition with each other for funding, job positions, prestige, publications. Despite the pervasive presence of competition in joint actions, mainstream joint action theories struggle to account for even the most straightforward cases of joint competitions, like competitive games (e.g. chess) and negotiations (e.g. bargaining to buy a used car).

As mentioned before, the standard approach to joint actions is to understand them in terms of joint intentions. Two main views emerged on how to understand joint intentions: reductive views and non-reductive views. According to the reductive views, joint intentions can be completely analyzed in terms of individual intentions and other mental states, such as shared goals and common knowledge. The non-reductive view claims that this analysis cannot be successful: joint intentions are a particular kind of intention essentially different from individual intentions. I will argue that both joint action paradigms fall short of explaining competition.

Searle (1990) and Tuomela (2005, 2006, 2013) are two prominent proponents of a non-reductive view about joint intention. According to these authors, we possess a unique kind of mental state, we-intentions, different from any other type of intention. As Seale puts it, “collective intentional behavior is a primitive phenomenon that cannot be analyzed as just the summation of individual intentional behavior” (Searle 1990, p. 401, my emphasis). Searle argues that every attempt to find a definition of we-intentions requires an irreducible reference to the concept of cooperation. For example, imagine you and I have the same intention to achieve a goal, such as making some cookies; I believe you have the intention to make cookies, and you believe I have the intention to make cookies. It can also be that we are in the same room and close to each other while we are preparing the cookies, so we are fully aware of what the other is doing. However, although we have the same intention, and we know it, this does not speak in favor of the fact we

are cooperating in some way. Maybe it is just a coincidence we individually have the same intention to make cookies in the same place at the same time.

Searle does not offer a detailed clarification of what we-intentions are and what cooperation amounts to, so I will focus on Tuomela's view, which provides more details on the matter. According to Tuomela, a sentence like "we do A together" expresses a joint intention, an intention that can be ascribed to the group of people that identify as "we". Each member of a group possessing a joint intention must have an appropriate we-intention. We-intentions are then the intentions of each member of a group pertaining to her specific contribution to the joint activity of the group. According to Tuomela, we possess we-intentions of two different kinds: I-mode we-intentions and we-mode we-intentions. I-mode intentions and we-mode intentions can share the same representational content: I can both (a) I-mode intend to perform my part of our walking together to the station and (b) we-mode intend to perform my part of our walking together to the station. Only in the second case, I intend my contribution to the plan of waking to the station as cooperative. If you and I merely I-mode intend to walk to the station, no we-intention is generated.

What makes we-mode intentions so special? What is distinctive of we-mode joint intentions is that they require a particular group perspective (or "we-perspective") on the action. Since a we-mode intention entails a group perspective, Tuomela essentially agrees with Searle: in the definition of a we-intention, we need to introduce a reference to the cooperative component that cannot be analyzed in more simple elements. Since the concept of we-mode is a primitive notion, it is difficult to clarify what this group perspective entails. However, in trying to better explain his idea, Tuomela says that "performing X as a group is understood to *involve acting fully as a group member*, thus for a group reason ('forgroupness') and being collectively committed to the performance of X and also to the joint intention to perform X;" or also, "we-mode personal

intentions [is] essentially of the kind '*I, as a group member*, intend to participate" (Tuomela 2006, pp. 44-46, my emphasis). What does it mean to say "I, as a group member" or "acting fully as a group member"? Presumably, it means that agents of a collective action think of themselves as belonging to a group that tries to achieve something. Adopting a group perspective requires a particular kind of identification of the agents as members of a group. For example, let's say that you and I have to prepare some cookies together for a MasterChef chef episode. Each of us will prepare half of the cookies, so we can work autonomously, but we will be evaluated as a team: we both either fail or succeed. Even if each of us will do exactly the same things we would do if we were preparing the cookies alone, we know we are a team, i.e. we identify ourselves as part of a group, and we act *fully* as group members: I do not just rely on the quality of your cookies, but I do my best to contribute to the activity in which I take part as a group member.

Tuomela sets a strong requirement for the group perspective of the we-intention when he argues that agent of joint actions have to act fully as members of a group. If acquiring a group perspective requires some sort of group identification or group membership, Tuomela's we-mode joint intentions are difficult to reconcile with joint competitions. Consider the case of negotiations. In a negotiation, the parties try to reach an agreement by considering each party's proposal and making concessions. For example, I try to bargain down the price of a t-shirt with you to the lowest price you are willing to sell, and you try to sell the t-shirt at the highest price I am willing to pay. In a negotiation, we are trying to intentionally do something together (the transaction that sees me paying and you selling), but we are also in competition with each other: the lower the price I pay, the lower your profit is. What form of group identification can be displayed here? There is not a particular type of group membership that plays a role in this context. On the contrary, being competitive can involve not feeling part of the same group. For example, in a soccer match, each

player adopts a group perspective and identifies with her own team, but no player is required to identify as a member of a group that includes the opposing team: this would be even counterproductive to develop the right agonistic feelings required to win the match. Group belonging, identification or membership exclude several examples of joint competition, like a soccer match or a t-shirt negotiation, from the field of joint action.

One may object that Tuomela's theory of we-mode intentions is designed specifically for joint actions where members share a group identity. This, however, cannot be the case since Tuomela is committed to the thesis that *any* joint action cannot be analyzed into merely individual mental states. The impossibility of explaining joint actions with individual intentions is the core group for the justification for pustulating two distinct modes of joint intentions. The we-mode intentions are then the mental state that must be ascribed to each individual involved in every kind of cooperative activity, regardless of the level of group identification. This is why I take joint competitions to be a strong counterexample to Tuomela's explanation of what a we-mode is.

Non-reductive views on joint actions also face challenges of other kinds. One could insist we should be more ontologically parsimonious and not assume a different type of intention than the one we normally use to explain individual intentional actions. Instead of assuming two different kinds of modes of joint intentions (I-mode and we-mode), they suggest explaining the specificity of joint intentions through the representational content of the intention. This is the fundamental insight behind reductive views on joint intentions.

A leading proponent of the reductive view on joint intention is Bratman (1993, 2009). According to Bratman, two agents, Γ and Δ, share the intention to J together if and only if the agents (1) Γ individually intends to J, and Δ individually intends to J; (2) Γ intends to mesh her plan for J-ing with Δ's plan for J-ing, and Δ intends to mesh his plan for J-ing with Γ's plan for J-

ing; (3) Γ intends J-ing to be effective because of the relevant intention of Δ, and Δ intends J to be effective because of the relevant intention of Γ; (4) conditions (1), (2), and (3) are common knowledge between Γ and Δ.[1] For example, let say you and I decide to paint the house together. In order to paint the house together as a joint action: we both need to individually intent to paint the house together (condition 1), we must be willing to find a compromises on how we want to paint the house (condition 2), we must intend our painting the house as the result of the effort and intention of both of us to do so (condition 3), I know you know conditions (1) to (3), and you know I know conditions (1) to (3).

Unlike non-reductive views, which posit we-mode intentions, these conditions do not rely on anything other than individual intentions reinforced with an interlocking mechanism such that the content of one agent's intention includes a mention of the other agent's intentions and plans, plus the common knowledge of condition (4). This is why Bratman's model has been considered as one of the most promising explanations of joint actions and has been taken as the starting point of other scholar's account (Pacherie 2011, 2013).

Given the influence of Bratman's model for joint intentions, it is natural to ask if he can account for joint competitions. In case it does not, part of the confidence in how powerful this model is must be reconsidered. Let us have a look at condition (2), which is added by Bratman to prevent that agents have with incompatible intentions. For example, we intend to paint the house together, but I intend to paint the house completely blue, and you intend to paint it completely red.

[1] Bratman (2009, 2014) presents a stronger version of this account that does not change the essential features of his previous version. Bratman further adds (e) "dispositions to help if needed", (f) interdependence in the persistence of each person's relevant intention", (g) "joint action-tracking mutual responsiveness in the intentions and actions of each" (Bratman 2009, 158-159). Conditions (e)-(g) moves in a direction that would make Bratman's model even more unsuitable to account for joint competition. Consider condition (e); in a competitive game, let's say a 100 meters sprint race, I do not need to have any disposition to help another player in trouble. If the runner next to me falls, it is totally acceptable for me to keep running to win. Of course, it may depend on the context: the scenario I presented works better for an Olympic game than a friendly training between my friend and me. However, condition (e) is not necessary to account for joint competitions in general.

The problem is that, as Bratman himself noted, condition (2) has "a drawback: it does not provide for a shared intention to play a competitive game together" (Bratman 1993). Willingness to mesh sub-plans means compromising between plans. In a competitive game like a soccer match, on the other hand, this is not required: the two opposing teams do not have to find a comprise between their plans that works for both, at least since each plan includes the victory of one's own team.

Bratman rightly points out that it must be possible for agents involved in a joint enterprise to compromise on their individual plans. This is true not only for painting a house together but also for a soccer match. If the case where team A refuses to recognize that their opponent team B has scored a point, or team A refuses to recognize the authority of the referee when she punishes them for having committed a foul, then the game becomes impossible, and the joint cooperation comes to an end. Bratman should be concerned about the fact that his requirement for compromising in a joint action does not work in the case of joint competitions because this highlights a major deficiency in how he understands the activity of reaching an agreement. Bratman tries to explain how we compromise in joint intentions, but he fails to do so, and we should find another way to account for that without requiring to mesh individual sub-plans.

Ludwig (2016, 2020) is also a proponent of the reductive view, but he is more aware of the deficiency of most accounts of joint actions when it comes to explaining joint competitions. Unlike Tuomela and Bratman, Ludwig specifically discusses competitive games and aims to account for them (Ludwig 2020). As a result, his proposal is the most promising attempt to explain joint competition within a general theory of joint intention.

Ludwig thinks that the most central feature of joint intentional action J is a common plan shared by the agents of J. Each agent of J intends to follow a common plan, which means that each agent intends with her own action to contribute to the general plan for doing J. In this way, Ludwig

can rule out situations like the one described by Bratman in which we want to paint the house together but each of us selects a different color.

How does this apply to competitions? In the case of competitive games, the common plan is generated by the game's rules. The rules of chess, for example, would generate a common plan that each chess player shares. Ludwig implicitly admits that what the chess rule generates is not exactly a common plan. Chess rules set constraints on each player's plan allowing the two players to respond appropriately to the opponent. But there is not a common plan shared: what is shared is a set of infinite possible plans of action, among which both players will choose while they are gradually playing by responding to the opponent's moves. However, let us concede that game's rule generates a common plan in the sense of a shared set of compatible individual plans of action.

Ludwig also argues that the rules must be constitutive rules, not merely regulative ones.[2] An example of regulative rules is the Geneva Conventions, where the parties have commonly agreed to treat prisoners and civilians in a specified by the treaties.

Ludwig's account presents two important virtues. First, the common plan requirement allows distinguishing between (a) joint intentional competitions and (b) competitions that do not involve cooperation at all. Indeed, some forms of competition, like wars and fights, do not involve any form of cooperation: there is no common plan in a war or in a fight. On this, I agree with Ludwig: non-joint intentions can perfectly explain the intentionality of each action that leads to the war and its execution. In the action of declaring war or attacking or defending itself, the country must only

[2] I accept the way to distinguish between regulative and constitutive rules presented by Searle (1969, p. 33-34). Regulative rules "regulate a preexisting activity, an activity whose existence is logically independent from the rules." For example, rules of etiquette will tell you how to cut your food and hold the knife, things you can do even without the regulative rules. Constitutive rules instead "constitute (and also regulate) an activity, the existence of which is logically dependent on these rules." For example, chess rules will tell you how the very definition of checkmate, and you cannot checkmate if not according to the rules of chess.

intend to realize its plan regarding its own actions, where the opponent is involved but not as a co-agent for the execution of the plan.

Second, the constitutive rule requirement avoids that the presence of regulative rules, like the Geneva Conventions, may be sufficient to transform the war into a joint intentional action. As Ludwig noted, the cooperation involved by the Geneva Conventions regards an agreement that gives constraints on the competition, not the competition itself: "the cooperation takes place against the background of the acknowledged conflict, which is not a form of cooperation. We are not cooperating in making that the background" (Ludwig 2020, p. 22).

That being said, there are two major problems with Ludwig's solution. First, there are competitions that are joint intentional actions but do not possess constitutive rules like games do. Consider the case of negotiating a t-shirt in a street market. It is true that there are norms and expectations about how the negotiation works: for example, the buyer does not ask the seller to give her t-shirt for free; each party hides how much they are disposed to pay or accept as reasonable for the purchase. However, these rules are merely regulative (I can very well tell the highest price I am disposed to pay, and the seller then can decide if sell me or not), but they still are sufficient to generate plans of action. If this is the case, Ludwig's requirement of constitutive rules generating common plan is not necessary to characterize joint intentional competitions.

Second, Ludwig thinks that another important feature that crucially distinguishes wars from games is that countries do not agree to go to war. One attacks, and the other responds. It is possible that a country provokes the other or it seeks a mere pretext to attack, but what does not happen is that one refuses to attack if the opponent does not agree to go to war. I agree with Ludwig on that. However, his account does not explain why this feature is important in joint intentional actions. If

what it takes for an intentional action to be joint is a common plan, then the willingness to act should play no role in the distinction between wars and games.

In contrast, I think that a crucial reason why wars are not cooperative in nature is that countries cannot consent to go to war: for example, country A does not wait for country B's consent to attack it. The absence of consent plays a role also in cases where the agents are forced to act jointly. If you force me to play chess with you by threatening my family, there is a sense in which I do not have a joint intention of playing with you. The result of our playing together will be a joint action since it is an event in which both of us are direct agents. Yet, if I have been coerced to play with you, my intention to act is almost completely dependent on the intentions who is forcing me.

The fact that my intention to perform a coerced action depends on the intention of whoever is forcing me becomes clear in case the action is interrupted. Imagine you are a DC Comics supervillain, a sort of Joker who loves to play with his victims. You kidnap me and tell me I will be killed unless I win a chess match against you. Of course, I will have the intention of playing with you and the goal of winning the match. However, what happens if, in the middle of the game, you tell me that you don't want to play chess anymore but that to save my life, I need to give you one thousand dollars (you are not as evil as Jocker after all)? Immediately, my intention to play or my goal to win will disappear.

I intended to play only insofar as you wanted me to play. Similarly, I possessed the goal to win only insofar as you wanted me to have it. Once you have no intention to play chess with me anymore, I will also stop to have a similar intention and goal. This is because the only intention and goal that I genuinely possess is the goal to save my life by obeying your request: this is, however, an individual intention, not a joint one. In a non-coerced joint action, if we agree to play chess but you want to stop playing at half of the game, I will reasonably rebuke you because my

intention to play is not a mere consequence of yours.[3] Instead, in the coerced scenario, if you want to stop playing in the middle of the game, my intention to play will also disappear: after all, I never wanted to play in the first place; rather, my intention was entirely dependent upon yours.

The dependency of intentions that I just described seems incompatible with a genuine case of joint action and also of intentional joint competition. Yet, forced actions can possess constitutive rules and would count as joint actions in Ludwig's theory.

In conclusion, both reductive and non-reductive views on joint action are unable to account for joint intentional competitions successfully. Why is that so? Is it because joint competitions are not important examples of joint actions? This cannot be right: joint competitions are common and pervasive forms of joint action. Indeed, Bratman acknowledges the inability of his account to explain competitive games as a "drawback", and Ludwig explicitly tries to show how his model can explain competitive games but excluding wars.

Why then does joint action theory fails to explain joint competition? I suspect that this failure is due to the overall strategy to start defining joint intention focusing on what merely cooperative behaviors have in common. If we start by focusing exactly on how a joint intentional competition works, the result may be very different, and this is what I want to show in the next session. Joint competitions can be successfully defined if we abandon the idea that there is only one kind of joint intention in play in every form of joint action. I want to suggest a *pluralist* approach for the understanding of joint actions and joint intentions, i.e. there are distinct but related ways of

[3] Gilbert (2009, 2013) emphasizes that in a joint action, each agent owes the other agent an action. For example, if we agree to play chess, once I make the first move, you owe me to respond. She argues that the notion of obligation manifested in this "owing an action" is then the most essential feature of collective behaviors. I do not endorse Gilbert's model, but I also find significant the fact that in a joint action the agent may rebuke the other party if she fails to perform the actions, she owes to the coagent. I take this as a clue to the fact that in our joint action my intentions are not entirely dependent on yours: if you invite me to play chess and you stop playing in the middle of the game, I will rebuke you because my intention to play is still there, and it does not disappear only because yours does, even if you suggested to play in the first place.

realizing joint intentions and none of these ways subsumes or reduces to any of the others. Other scholars have adopted approaches that move in a similar direction. Paternotte (2020) endorses a form of pluralism for joint actions with the idea that cooperation can also be manifested in contexts where those factors that facilitate cooperation are absent. In a volume edited by Anika Fiebich (2020), it is proposed that more attention should be devoted to "more attenuated cases of cooperation" rather than the project of finding necessary and sufficient conditions for any joint action.

Understanding each form of joint action may lead to an enriched understanding of what cooperation implies and what the conditions are for cooperation in different situations with different degrees of competition, different agents involved (e.g. young children, non-human animals), and different circumstances (e.g. very large groups, teams whose members do not know each other's).

2. A NEW ACCOUNT: JOINT COMPETITIVE INTENTIONS

In the last section, I argued that reductive and non-reductive views about joint intentions fail to successfully account for competitions like games and negotiations because they model their proposal on purely cooperative behavior. In this section, I will present my positive account of joint intentional competitions.

As in the case of joint intentional actions, joint intentional competitions are not necessarily recognizable by looking at external behaviors. I will use as an example a variation on a famous case of Searle (1990). Compare these three situations: (a) it starts raining, you and I, independently from each other, decide to run under a shelter at the park (*sum of two individual actions*), (b) it starts raining, you and I commonly decide to run together under at a shelter in a park (*joint intentional action*), (c) it starts raining, you and I decide to compete over who arrives first under a

shelter in a park (*joint intentional competition*). If a third person looks at these three different scenes, she will see three forms of intentional behaviors without being able to tell which is the mere sum of two individual actions, the joint intentional action, and the joint intentional competition. Scholars have tried to find the difference between cases (a) and (b) by looking at the internal disposition of the agent, calling it joint, shared, collective, or we-intentions. I suggest using a similar strategy to distinguish cases (b) and (c): this section aims to define the internal disposition that characterizes joint intentional competition, and I will call it *joint competitive intention*.

I will use Ludwig's analysis of collective intentional actions as a starting point for defining joint competitive intentions (Ludwig 2016). According to Ludwig, a joint intentional action A, like agents Γ and Δ singing together the national anthem intentionally, requires:

(Condition I) A being a joint action, and

(Condition II) agents Γ and Δ have a joint intention to A.

According to Ludwig, for A being a joint action (Condition I) means that there is one event A of which Γ and Δ are both agents and no one else is. Instead, Γ and Δ have a joint intention to A (Condition II) if Γ and Δ have a common plan, and they intend to contribute to A by doing something in accordance with their common plan.

As discussed in the previous section, I do not think Ludwig's analysis of Condition II is suitable for joint intentional competitions which can also occur in the absence of constitutive rules capable to generate a common plan (like in the case of negotiations).

However, I agree with Ludwig on his analysis of Condition I and his overall strategy to conducting an analysis of collective intentional actions. This means that we can rewrite Ludwig's analysis by only changing Condition II:

Definition of Joint Intentional Competition. Let S be a finite set S of agents $\Gamma_1, \ldots, \Gamma_n$; A is a *joint intentional competition* iff

(Condition I) A is a joint action performed by the members of S;

(Condition II) the members of S have a *joint competitive intention* to A.

My purpose is now to spell out the necessary and sufficient conditions for Condition II. The question is then: what is a joint competitive intention? It is a set of mental states that make an agent's action (a) the result of an intention, (b) (intentionally) cooperative, and (c) (intentionally) competitive. To satisfy (a), an agent with a joint competitive intention must have a pro-attitude towards the execution of a plan. To satisfy (b) an agent with joint competitive intentions is such that her individual plans towards the execution of a joint action are compatible with the other agents' plans involved in the same joint action, and she is not engaged in a coerced behavior. Finally, to satisfy (c), the agent with a joint competitive intention must have a pro-attitude towards winning or prevailing over the other agents involved in the same joint action. These three conditions will find a detailed illustration in the next three subsections, where I will define these criteria of adequacy for the successful account of joint competitive intention, starting from the last one: the competitive component.

2.1. COMPETITION

In his analysis of joint intention, Tuomela argued that a sentence like "we do A together" expresses an intention that can be ascribed to the group of people that identify as a "we." However, I also argued that group identification and belonging are incompatible with competitive games: I do not identify with the opposite team in a soccer match. Instead, what ties together agents of a joint intentional competition is precisely the goal to win against each other. So, the first component of a joint competitive intention is the goal to win or prevail against other agents in a joint action:

Condition (1) for a Joint Competitive Intention: given a joint action A, members of a finite set S of agents $\Gamma_1, \ldots, \Gamma_n$ have the common goal to snatch an advantage over at least one of the other members of S at A.

Condition (1) works also on large-scale competitions such as tournaments. In a tournament, it is not necessary that each participant aims to win the first place; it is sufficient that each of them aims to do at least better than someone else ("snatching an advantage over at least one of the other members of S").

Contrary to what Tuomela argued, what agents of a joint actions have in common is not a special group membership or group perspective on their actions, but the common goal "I want to win." By a common goal G of group S, I only mean that each agent of S has the same goal G, and each agent's goal differs from the others in the sense that my goal to win refers to me winning, and your goal to win refers to you winning. In this sense, my notion of the common goal "I want to win" allows the indexical "I" to refer to different agents.

2.2 COOPERATION

The second element of a joint competitive intention is a cooperative component. Condition (1) does not rule out mere competitions, like wars and fights, as a form of joint competitive action, so one must introduce conditions to ensure the agents do not merely want to prevail over the other parties.

Ludwig denied that mere competitions like wars are joint actions because they do not possess constitutive rules able to generate common plans. I argued that Ludwig's strategy is unsuccessful: we can have mere competitions even in the presence of constitutive rules in case of negotiations or if one agent forces the other to participate in a rule governed joint action. For example, if you force me to play chess by threatening my family, this makes my intention dependent upon yours:

I possess the intention to play only insofar as you want me to play. As soon as your intention ceases, my intention also ceases. This dependent intention is not a full-fledged, autonomous joint competitive intention. Yet, our competition is governed by constitutive rules. Condition (2) allows to avoid mere competitions like forced actions and war-like cases:

> **Condition (2) for a Joint Competitive Intention**: each member of a finite set S of agents Γ_1, …, Γ_n consents to A.

By "consent," I only mean that the parties agree to A in an uncoerced way.[4]

As example, compare these two applications of Condition (2). I ask you if you could sell me this 7$ T-shirt for 5$, and you suggest making it 6$. In this case, your consent to negotiate is expressed by your engaging in action after my making the first move. This case shows that it is not necessary that the uncoerced agreement should be expressed verbally. Second case, I ask you to play chess, and you accept, but unbeknownst to me, you have been threatened to accept my future request to play chess. In this case, your consent is not uncoerced, and therefore your intention to play is not a joint competitive intention.

2.3 COMPATIBILITY OF PLANS

Assuming Condition (1) and (2) are met, in a chess match, two agents with joint competitive intentions must have the goal to win and must consent to play without being coerced. However, what happens if both the players want to play white? In this case, the joint action will not go very far. The individual plans of each agent must be compatible with each other.

[4] Coercion can be qualified according to McAleer's development of Nozick's account: "A coerces B into doing x just in case (I) A wants B to do x, (II) A credibly threatens B with undesirable consequences should B fail to do x, and (assuming the coercion is successful) (III) B does x at least partially because B wishes to avoid the undesirable consequences A threatens her with. […] (IV) A has no right to threaten B with undesired consequences for not doing x" (McAleer 2009).

As we saw, Bratman (2009) tried to solve this problem. For Bratman, the agents must intend to mesh their individual sub-plans to make them compatible. I argued that this solution could not work for competitive games or negotiations, where the agents must strategically hide their plans from the opponent in order to be successful. For example, in a soccer match, team Γ may have decided to perform a particular strategy that requires players A, B and C to execute a certain sequence of actions. If the opponent team Δ knows which plan Γ has in mind, Δ will focus its effort to stop players A, B and C, instead of other players. Team Γ's plan benefits from Δ being ignorant of its plan, and it wants to delay as much as possible the moment in which Δ realizes what strategy Γ is implementing.

My suggestion is that the compatibility of plans is generated by the individual intention of each agent to follow the norms (constitutive rules or merely common practice)[5] that regulate the action in question:

Condition (3) for a Joint Competitive Intention: each member of a finite set S of agents Γ_1, …, Γ_n intends to follow the norms that regulate A.

Let us consider Condition (3) helps to solve the problem of a chess match where both players want to play white. It is common practice that in a friendly match, when both players want to play the same color, the color is sorted randomly (by drawing lots, for example). In official tournaments, the colors are selected the first time randomly; then the tournament direction assigns them in a way that each player gets equal numbers of whites and blacks. In order to have a joint competitive intention, players of chess must intend to follow norms and common practices which solve

[5] I follow the characterization of norms proposed by Brennan et al. (2013): norms are not just valid rules, but requirements and principles that *must be accepted in and by a group*. Each norm has a normative element that describes what the agent must or must not do and an empirical element: norms are social facts of a particular community or group. The norms I am interested here are behavioral norms, i.e. norms that concern what the agent does, not her attitudes (what the agent feels, thinks, intends and so on) (Brennan et al. 2013, p. 246-247).

conflicts among participants. If the participants fail to comply with these norms, they display a lack of relevant joint competitive intention.

Condition (3) serves another important purpose. A joint action is successful only if all agents involved do their parts. Imagine we plan a three-day trip on a mountain together, and we decided that you would bring water and food for both. If you do not do your part, the trip cannot be successful. Similarly, if I move my pawn in a chess match, you need to do your part and respond with an appropriate move. The intention to follow the norms that regulate the action in question can ensure you do your part while I do mine. Indenting to follow the rules of chess means intending to do one's own part when one's turn comes.

2.4 DEFINITION OF JOINT INTENTIONAL COMPETITION

In Section 2, I proposed the following definition of joint competitive action:

> **Definition of Joint Intentional Competition**. Let S be a finite set S of agents $\Gamma_1, \ldots, \Gamma_n$; A is *joint intentional competition* iff:
>
> Condition (I) A is a joint action performed by the members of S;
>
> Condition (II) the members of S have a *joint competitive intention* to A.

I then tried to spell out the conditions for the joint competitive intention mentioned in Condition (II). We now have all the elements for a full definition of joint competitive intention:

> **Definition of Joint Competitive Intention**. Let S be a finite set S of agents $\Gamma_1, \ldots, \Gamma_n$; the members of S have a *joint competitive intention* to A iff:
>
> Condition (1): members of S have the common goal to snatch an advantage over at least one of the other members of S at A;
>
> Condition (2): each member of S consents to A;
>
> Condition (3): each member of S intends to follow the norms that regulate A.

My overall definition of joint competitive action requires an event of which all members of S are agents (Condition I), and that the agents possess a joint competitive intention (Condition II). For example, our chess match is an event of which you and I are the only agents: so it passes Condition (I). We both have the goal to win (Condition 1), and we intend to follow the norms that regulate chess (Condition 3). Besides, we both consent to play free of any form of coercion (Condition 3). Since we play respecting Conditions (1) to (3), we both have a joint competitive intention: so our chess match also passes Condition (II).

Joint competitions as I defined them require 1) mental states that tie together the agents in a common action, as Tuomela argued for joint action), 2) compatibility of the individual plans of the agents, as observed by Bratman), 3) to be differentiated form mere competitions like wars-like behaviors, as Ludwig pointed out. Unlike Tuomela's model, mine let us account for cooperation in the absence of a particular group perspective or identification. Unlike on Bratman's model, joint actions are possible even where agents are not willing to mesh their plans. Finally, unlike on Ludwig's model, it is possible to explain why coerced actions are not cooperative.

One can wonder if my accounts can be applied to purely cooperative joint actions. Answering this question goes beyond the purpose of my paper. I would suggest that common goal to win requirement (Condition (1)) can be adjusted to account for purely cooperative behaviors. In this case, it would be sufficient a common goal instead of the common goal to win. However, my intuition is that there are differently families of joints actions characterized by specific types of joint intentions that share structural similarities such as, for example, the need to allow compatibility of plans in a common enterprise. The degrees of similarities between these joint intentions can however vary across situations (e.g., large groups, online environments) and depending on the agents involved (e.g., children, non-human animals).

3. OBJECTIONS

I now want to consider possible objections to my account. A first objection argues that I did not provide an account of joint intentional actions, because a non-joint intentional action can meet the conditions I set for joint intentional competitions. This objection is a variation of Searle's objection against Tuomela and Miller (1988) (Searle 1990, 405). Consider the members Γ1, …, Γn of a group S such that they all graduated from the same business school X. Suppose that:

1. Each member of S intends to pursue her selfish interest and by doing so make more money than at least another member of S;
2. Each member of S consents to pursue her selfish interest of making money;
3. Each member of S intends to pursue her selfish interest according to the norms and rules learned at the business school X.

It seems that the members of S possess a joint competitive intention because they possess the goal to snatch an advantage over at least another member of the group (by 1.), are not being coerced to act (by 2.), intend to follow common norms and rules (by 3.). However, there is no joint intentional action occurring in this context: each agent is attending to only her own actions and plans.

I agree with the objector that there is no joint intentional action in the scenario described, and a fortiori, no joint intentional competition. The reason why there is no joint intentional action is that there is no joint action in the first place. In my account, A is a joint intentional competition iff A is joint action (Condition I), and agents of A possess a joint competitive intention to A (Condition II). In this scenario, Condition I is not satisfied: there is not an action of which Γ1, …, Γn are agents, and nobody else is. In the business school scenario, the action in question is making money, which is an event each agent is performing by herself. Since Condition (I) is not satisfied, Condition (II) is also not. Two agents have a joint competitive intention to A iff A is an event of which both are agents, and no one else is, and they have a common goal to win, consent to A and

intend to follow the norms and rules that govern A. For these reasons, the first objection then does not show that a joint intentional competition is not a joint intentional action.

A second objection argues that a joint competitive intention, as I defined it, is not an authentic joint intention. Pacherie (2013) argues that joint intentional actions, in a strong sense, require that the agent takes the jointness of her action not as a mere means to a goal but as a goal itself. For example, imagine I need to carry a wardrobe upstairs, and I ask you for help. I do not care about the jointness of our action; I see you as a tool to reach my aim to bring the wardrobe upstairs (inauthentic joint intention). In a genuine joint intention, I do not see the coagent as a mere means to achieve my goal. For example, we watch a movie together, and I do not see you as a mere means for watching the movie, but I see watching the movie together as an independent goal (authentic joint intention).

In my definition, a joint competitive intention is not an authentic joint intention. For example, suppose two agents want to play chess: they want to win, and they consent to play against each other, and they intend to follow the norms and rules of chess. In this scenario, it is possible that each player uses the other as a mere means to satisfy her desire to play and does not care about the cooperation among them as an independent goal of their actions.

In reply to Pacherie, I do not think my account needs to meet the strong requirement for joint intentions. I find it perfectly coherent to have joint intentional competitions where not everyone cares about cooperating as an independent goal. Pacherie's strong requirement for joint actions does not even apply to other forms of purely cooperative behaviors. For example. Ritchie (2020) argues that cooperation in large teams often does not require knowing who the other members of the team are or caring about their joint-ness: everyone wants to have the work done, and this is enough, insofar as the roles are designed properly.

A joint competition can meet the Pacherie's strong requirement in some cases. For example, a tennis match where the two opponents do not want merely to win, but they enjoy a fair game and the time spent together. However, I would still consider a joint competition a tennis match where the opponents do not even know each other names. Imagine I just like playing tennis and I need someone to do it with me: I do not care who they are, any player is as good as any other. In this situation, according to Pacherie's analysis, I see my opponent as a mere means to reach my goal to play tennis. In my account, I am not interested to capture what distinguishes between a "genuine" joint competition (in Pacherie's sense) and a less genuine joint competition, but the very minimal conditions of any joint competition and joint competitive intention. In conclusion, the second objection does not show that a joint competitive intention is not a joint intention.

A last objection concerns the second condition I imposed for joint competitive intentions, which requires that each agent must consent to act, i.e. express their agreement without being coerced. The reason why Condition (2) has been introduced is to distinguish between joint competitions and mere competitions like wars and fights. I argued that in a war, fight or any other coerced activity, there is distinctive dependence of intentions: if agent A is coerced by agent B, then A's intensions entirely depend on B's intention. The example I provided is the case in which I have been forced by you to play chess upon the threat that you will kill my family if I refuse. In this case, my intention to play arises as a mere consequence of your intention to play, and my intention will also end as soon as you want us to stop playing because you get bored.

An objection to my argument is that the dependence of intentions I described can occur in non-coerced joint actions too, and it does not represent a problem for having a genuine joint intention. Consider the following scenario, I visit my family for Christmas Eve, and my 12-year-old cousin asks me to play chess with him. I really do not want to, but he keeps asking me and

eventually I agree to play. In this context, my intention to play is dependent on my cousin's intention, but this dependence is innocuous and does not prevent our chess match from being a joint intentional action.

In reply to this objection, I want to firstly point out that I agree that the match between my cousin and me is a joint competition. This scenario does indeed satisfy Condition (2) of my account: we both consented to play. Second, I think that the cousin's case does not display an authentic dependence of intentions. For example, I agree to play chess with my little cousin, but during the match, he refuses to follow certain rules of the game. I get annoyed by his behavior, and I decide to stop playing. Here, my cousin's intention to play has not ceased to exist, but I could instead revoke my intention to play with him. It is then not the case that my intention is dependent upon his one for its entire existence, while in the coerced scenario, my intention lasts as long as whoever is coercing me keeps having that intention.

Consider also the case in which my cousin follows the rules, and we are almost finishing the match. Since my cousin realizes I am close to winning the game, he says he does not want to play anymore. I may very well protest, "I want to finish the game now! It is too easy quitting when you lose; now you keep playing!". In this case, my intention to play does not cease to exist when his one does. While in the coerced scenario, as soon as you tell me you want to stop playing chess and that my family is now safe, my intention to play will immediately cease.

Both the case in which I do not want to play anymore even when my cousin wants and the case in which I want to keep playing even if my cousin doesn't show that my intention is quite independent of my cousin's one. It does not possess that dependence that will compromise the jointness of our actions. This is why I consider coerced action significantly difference form other cases of mere pleasing other by agreeing to their intention to do something. In conclusion, the third

objection fails to how that my account imposes a too strong restriction on how independent the intentions of the agents should be.

CONCLUSION

One of the central questions of joint action theory is what makes joint actions intentional but different from the mere sum of individual intentional behaviors. The answer to this question has been sought in trying to understand what joint intentions are, i.e. try to understand the particular internal states that characterize agents involved in cooperation. Two leading paradigms, reductive and non-reductive views, claim to explain what a joint intention is for every joint intentional action. However, I argued that there is an important class of cooperative behaviors that are not explained by these accounts. Joint competitions escape any attempt to be characterized in terms of joint intentions as defined by these two strands of joint theory research because of their focus on merely cooperative actions as the starting point and paradigmatic case for their models. This failure can be explained by the fact that leading joint action theories use as starting point of their account examples of purely cooperative behaviors.

After realizing this failure, two strategies are possible. One is trying to fix the definitions of joint intention on the market by suggesting ad hoc modifications to explain joint competitions. I suggested a different strategy: defining the joint intention involved in competitive behavior and seeing what this intention has in common with purely cooperative joint intentions. This strategy can be adopted for other intentional behaviors that do not fall under the umbrella of the mainstream joint actions model. The insight behind this strategy is that "joint action" is a term that includes families of different joint actions that share differences but also important similarities. Joint action theorist should then not try to define a unique notion of joint intention but focuses on how joint intentions vary in different contexts and agents.

My account of joint intentional competitions is then a starting point for a similar strategy. I proposed a definition of joint intentional competitions that has at the center the notion of joint

competitive intention: a set of conditions that explain why an action is intentionally cooperative and competitive and, at the same time, excludes wars and coerced actions as joint intentional competitions.

Can my account work for the kind of actions Bratman and Tuomela are primarily interested in? My account does not aim to capture the nature of purely cooperative behaviours. Indeed, Condition (1) for joint competitive intentions requires the agents' goal to win, prevail or snatch an advantage over each other. This condition may be revoked to describe merely cooperative actions and replaced with a more general shared goal. However, I suspect that the difficulty in accounting for joint competitions has mostly due to the fact joint actions are a large family of behaviors that may not satisfy one overreaching definition. Joint action between young children may be irremediably different from the highly organized cooperation of a large team with specialized roles and various layers of management. I am confident that a pluralist approach can, however, do justice to the similarities and uniqueness of these different collective behaviors, which are distinct but related to each other in ways that do not fall under only one overreaching definition.

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