

Remembering Together: is there a social ontology of memory?

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Social ontology & memory: preview

1. Background concerns & plan
 2. Pettit on joint action & group agency
 3. Pettit on features of group agency
 4. Lessons from Pettit for memory
 5. Diachronic aspect of plural subjects
 6. Memory & intertemporal accounting
 7. Memory & self-regulation
 8. Shared memory: groups and members
 9. Shared memory on incomplete resources
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1. Distinct background concerns

Social ontology – Pettit

- Rovane: Gilbert, Tollefsen, Velleman ...

Distributed cognition/ extended mind

- Clark, Hutchins, Kirsh, Tribble

Collaborative/ transactive/ relational memory

- Moral psychology (eg Sue Campbell)
 - Social-developmental-cognitive psych (Wegner, Hirst, Nelson, Fivush)
 - And in the social sciences post-Halbwachs
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1. Putting them all together??

Collaborators:

Amanda Barnier and Rob Wilson

The wishful aim: distinct but mutually-informing empirical & conceptual investigations of the nature and functions of shared remembering

Core cases: small-group remembering

1. Overall aims, & how today fits

To get at

- ❑ costs & benefits of shared memory
- ❑ parameters of group influence & mechanisms/ processes of sharing
- ❑ fate of shared memories

Among the challenges:

naturalistic ontology of group memory?

relevant varieties of groups?

memory & temporally extended agency?

relation between empirical & conceptual?

1. Plan

Draw on Pettit-style picture of group agency in social ontology to test its applicability to the case of memory

Sketch Pettit-style picture of group agency

Find lessons about true plural subjects, and about some roles for memory within the social-ontological scheme

Sketch very rough analysis of shared memory

2. Joint action vs group agency

Pettit & Schweikard 2006

'Our performance X is a joint action':

We each intend that we perform X

We each intend to do our bit in performing X

We each believe that others intend to do their bit

This belief causes us to each intend to do our bit

We each believe in common that all this holds

Is there a single collective intending subject here (Gilbert)?

Or even a single 'we-intending' (Velleman)? No.

Joint action is necessary but not sufficient for group agency.

2. Some features of joint action

We do think and act as a plurality, and easily recognize joint action as option

'We are very good at recognizing what this or that joint performance requires of us; think of the versatility of footballers as they concoct a joint move'

Or 'I'll go for a walk if you will'.

'Then I will'. And off we go! (Velleman)

2. Some features of joint action

As a social species, 'it is as if we go around, advertising to others conditional intentions', assuming their presence in others, and routinely accepting the invitations, 'thereby triggering cooperation'.

Meetings of incomplete intentions, leading to joint action, can be banal and momentary.

And don't *require* explicit deliberation ongoing active self-monitoring for rational interest.

Far cry from ongoing committed group agency

3. Features of group agency

Apply in core cases to purposive groups, with shared purposes, aiming at coordinated, effective, credible judging and acting

These are integrated collectivities or 'social integrates' (Pettit 2003)

Like individual agents, despite cognitive and other performance limitations such groups are and should be responsive to a range of constraints on agency, on judgement, and on action

3. Features of group agency

Like individual agents, group agents
seek consistency in judgements
are responsive to reasons & (have to) care
about making sense over time
'keep track in intertemporal accounting'

Such agents will face discursive dilemmas, and
have mechanisms and procedures for dealing
with them, allowing possibility of 'stark
discontinuity' between group belief and beliefs
of many or all group members

3. Mutual awareness & plural subjects

Just as joint action is not sufficient for group agency, so the complex webs of mutual awareness which can (perhaps) ground isolated shared beliefs or attitudes is not sufficient for a truly plural subject

Mutual awareness is compatible with absence of care for those constraints on reasoning and action: such a collectivity can be 'as wayward in the postures it assumes as the most casual aggregate of individuals'

3. Features of group agency

Purposive groups can't *always* just revise past collective judgements to support a current collective view inconsistent with those past judgements, 'on pain of becoming a laughing-stock'

They are answerable to past judgements and actions; can be held responsible for failures in ideals, for being (eg) 'out of kilter with earlier commitments'

Needs explicit deliberation: not tug-of-war

3. Discipline of self-regulation

Range of available strategies as 'part of a discipline of self-regulation in which members can participate or be in some sense complicit' (List and Pettit 2005)

Among possible procedures for thus collectivising reason are relaxations of majority voting by distributing responsibility for distinct decisions to specialist subgroups (epistemic gains?)

4. Lessons from Pettit

1. Plural subjecthood has essential diachronic dimensions
 2. Some form of memory is required for appropriate intertemporal tracking
 3. We can specify a range of possible kinds of groups, with distinct aims, which fall short of full group agency but still exhibit forms of joint action
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5. Diachronic aspect of plural subjects

Creation of a novel centre of attitudes and actions isn't immediate

contra Gilbert: typical commitments & expectations associated with even transitory joint action (or eg mutual belief on a single issue) arise from the action (belief), not *vice versa*

5. Diachronic aspect of plural subjects

A true plural subject has a history: relations of accessibility, trust, reliability between members arise through the pooling of wills over time

So *how* does the group keep track of its history well enough to remain sensitive to constraints of reason in its ongoing decisions & actions?

6. Memory & intertemporal accounting

Pettit: a social integrate is an unusual kind of intentional subject, 'without its own faculties of perception or memory', though it can register and endorse facts perceived or remembered by its members

Not because memory needs some 'inherently mental material' (functionalism should apply here too)

6. Memory & intertemporal accounting

What kind of memory *does* it have?

An effective group generates a history of judgements that it is on record as making.

First suggestion: organizational memory distributed over archives, technologies, practices

Compatible with organization still being responsible for its memories (both their coherence and their tracking of truth)

6. Memory & intertemporal accounting

Second suggestion: groups have and need memory, alongside their beliefs, goals, attitudes, and linked actions

Some shared memories reducible to shared beliefs about the past

Compare *semantic* memory in the individual

What of shared episodic-like memories?

6. Memory & intertemporal accounting

Memory required in discursive dilemmas when group must treat (eg) earlier judgements as live, committing, mattering, either owned or (in light of dilemma) rationally disowned

And some 'premises' in discursive dilemmas are themselves memories

Rational inferences often on the basis of a mix of memories and beliefs

7. Memory & self-regulation

A third suggestion about the kind of memory groups have and need links memory to self-regulation

Compare individual self-regulation, on (eg) a Velleman-style picture

Memory is vital for us to maintain some consistency between my life stories and my life

7. Memory & self-regulation

Eg strong feedback loop from reflective self-representation in memory to action, living out ongoing integration between self-ascribed character, memories, plans, & life.

Narratives produce the actions they recount

A matter of degree: both reported and actual memories can be more like a PR report, floating free of causal processes behind firm's (self's) action

7. Velleman on life & stories

Life follows stories most obviously as we make up actions on the fly: 'I'm going for a walk', or 'I won't take the lolly'

Incomplete desires and narratives filled out in momentary self-talk

We make up our lives as we go, an epistemic openness which can spread across people in joint action

7. Velleman on life & stories

Self-fulfilling self-narratives of memory,
in this two-faced form

Narrative influences memory: I
remember what I did and what
happened to me in part according to
my self-conception (social psych)

And memory influences life: choices and
actions driven in part by content of
ongoing activities of remembering

7. Memory, life, & stories

Dual temporal cross-referencing in memory

Not just between present and past
(memory caused by the experience to which it refers)

Also distinctive forward-looking features
and functions of remembering

7. Memory & self-regulation

Bridges between individual and social functions of remembering

- a) development and maintenance of full autobiographical memory may depend on relational & social supports
 - b) identity and well-being of full group agents involves memory in support of training, relationships, group aims ...
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8. Shared memory: groups and members

Link back to empirical work

And to initial analysis

- Clear differences between memories
- a) accidentally held in common
 - b) shared memories without active collaboration in remembering
 - c) active group collaboration in re-evaluation of shared memories
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8. Looking for the strongest case: shared memory of joint action?

1. We acted jointly (then)
 2. Each of us remembers acting jointly
 3. Each of us remember this *because* of our past joint action
 4. It is common knowledge among us that we have mutually intentionally expressed willingness jointly to remember joint action
 5. Our remembering activities are responsive to ongoing constraints of group goals
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8. Shared memory

Such shared memory, whether of joint actions or not, brings characteristic commitments and expectations of plural subject phenomena

Forms of epistemic openness in memory coexist with causal constraints

8. Shared memory

Can there be the stark discontinuities between the group and the members characteristic of the genuine group agent when faced (eg) with the discursive dilemmas?

Many different things happen where there is (re)negotiation of either disputed or incomplete memories in a group with a history and some shared purposes

9. Shared memory on incomplete resources

Eg empirical studies of collaborative inhibition in sharing memories

Even a simple aggregate group without history remembers better than any individual but worse than the sum

Do real groups (families, friends, committees etc) have better aggregation procedures?

9. Shared memory on incomplete resources

Eg William Hirst on role of dominant narrator in family remembering

Eg Robyn Fivush on dictatorial, isolated, and coordinated styles of family remembering

Many ways of merging, selecting, negotiating memory content which depend on the distinct nature and mechanisms of groups
