

## Diskussion/Discussion

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### Corporate Action: A Reply to Coleman

*Abstract:* This short note argues that the basic points Coleman (1993) makes against my critical paper (1993) are incorrect. These points concern the possibility of a single agent holding a corporate goal, the doxastic conditions concerning group action, and 'jointness-effects'.

Two recent issues of this journal were devoted to critical papers on Professor James S. Coleman recent monumental work *Foundations of Social Theory*. My own contribution to this discussion was about Coleman's account of corporate action (Tuomela 1993). In his reply to my paper Coleman mainly comments on my own views. I find his main points to be incorrect and would like to set the record straight concerning these issues. The upshot is that our views are actually much closer than Coleman in his reply says they are. Perhaps it was in part an unfortunate fault of my concise presentation not only that my theoretical views rather than Coleman's became the focus of his comment on my paper but that some of my formulations misled him to attribute to me views that are not mine.

My critical paper could obviously only give a glimpse of my views, and at least one of Coleman's points may be based on my possibly misleading exposition. (However, my 1989a; 1989b papers and especially the 1994 book – referred to in my critical paper – should be consulted for the correct view.) To proceed to Coleman's (1993) critical points, I read him as making the following two main claims against my views:

- i) According to Tuomela's theory it is not possible that only a single agent holds a corporate goal in the case of intentional corporate action.  
(I take thesis i) to be entailed by what Coleman says on 64-5, although he is not fully explicit about the matter.)
- ii) According to Tuomela's theory "all members or agents of Tuomela's group must believe that agents' actions taken jointly will generate the group goal, and the operative agents must intentionally perform their actions holding that belief" (65).

Coleman also makes a point concerning 'jointness' elements, and I will comment on it later. I will below argue that the central theses i) and ii) are false and that his comment on jointness factors does not answer my criticism.

Coleman's theses are best discussed in view of the following summary of my basic analysis of fully intentional group action (presented on p. 19 of my paper):

(GAI) A group, G, performed an action X intentionally in the (right) social and normative circumstances C if and only if in C, there were operative agents  $A_1, \dots, A_m$  of G such that

- 1)  $A_1, \dots, A_m$ , when performing their social tasks in their respective positions  $P_1, \dots, P_m$  and due to their exercising the relevant authority system of G, intentionally jointly brought about X (viz. there was an action Y such that the operative agents intentionally jointly performed Y and this performance of Y generated, and was believed by the operative members to generate, the result-event of X).
- 2) because of 1), the (full-fledged and adequately informed) nonoperative members of G, as members of G, tacitly accept the operative agents' intentional bringing about of X – or at least ought so to accept it;
- 3) there was a mutual belief in G to the effect that there was at least a chance that 1) and to the effect that 2).

Why is Coleman's thesis i) false? The examples I give in the paper contain two cases in which there is only one operative member. However, clause 1) in the above summary analysis speaks about intentional joint action by the operative members, entailing joint intention. Here the conciseness of my exposition may have misled: I allow that  $m = 1$  and that in such a limiting case there be only one operative agent. In my mentioned works I am quite explicit in pointing out that the formulation in clause 1) is a simplifying convention. Let me still emphasize that in such a case the intention that a single operative member has still is a social intention, not a mere personal intention. This should suffice to show the falsity of Coleman's first claim.

As to Coleman's thesis ii), it simply is not entailed by my analysis, and I do not see why he thinks it is. While this suffices to show the falsity of ii), let me nevertheless make a further comment. It is worth noting that the following two somewhat related claims are rather trivially entailed by (GAI):

- a) There is a mutual belief in G to the effect that there was a chance that the operative members  $A_1, \dots, A_m$ , when performing their social tasks in their respective positions  $P_1, \dots, P_m$  and due to their exercising the relevant authority system of G, intentionally jointly brought about X (viz. there was an action Y such that the operative agents intentionally jointly performed Y and this performance of Y generated, and was believed by the operative members to generate, the result-event of X).
- b) There is a mutual belief in G to the effect that, because of 1) of (GAI), the (full-fledged and adequately informed) nonoperative members of G, as members of G, ought to accept the operative agents' intentional bringing about of X.

Depending on what mutual belief precisely is taken to mean, we do get from a) the view that at least most full-fledged and generally adequately informed members regard the operative members' performance of X in C to have been within the scope of things that operative members are supposed to do or allowed to do and that the performance of X did was not a surprise (but instead X had a chance of getting performed).

This is not really the place for me to argue for my views. Coleman may of course want to argue against a) and what I just said it entails, but that he certainly does not do in his comment. I guess that my strategy against somebody taking a) to be too strong would be to claim that such a person has something weaker than fully intentional group action in mind.

As to my b), I am implying that also the nonoperative members must regard themselves as being *prima facie* obligated to accept what the operative members do at least in a sense of not strongly rebelling against it. (My analysis does not claim that they necessarily have to obey that weak obligation.) If somebody now would argue against me that this is too strong, I would say that that person has in mind something which does not amount to group-binding group action. (I label such actions "group coaction" in my 1994 book.) I should also emphasize that the above formulation (*GAI*) is geared to cases of 'internal' (as opposed to, e.g., externally imposed) authorization in my account – a revision of the Hobbesian theory. (Coleman speaks of conjoint authority systems in more or less this same sense.)

In all, I think that my view with its (function- and task-dependent) operative-nonoperative distinction fits quite well the case of hierarchically organized collectives (the above formulation (*GAI*) of course is geared to cases of internally authorized operative members). At least what Coleman says in his comment does not give reason to think otherwise.

As to what I say about the missing jointness-features, it is a good feature of Coleman's system that it goes beyond mere aggregation – this is Coleman's basic point in answer to me. However, the interdependency he is discussing in his comment certainly is not sufficient for the jointness I am after, and actually is not even necessary. I would like a social theory to speak about 'we-attitudes' and other 'we-notions' as well as things like mutual obligations in a serious sense. This is the central kind of jointness that I have argued is needed in social theorizing.

## Bibliography

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