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Christopher McMahon, *Collective Rationality and Collective Reasoning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Pp. ix, 251.

Animals gather in herds because two hundred eyes are better than two. Most social animals pool their information and act in coordination using inherited social routines; we humans are deeply social and yet think in largely individual terms. We thus have to solve two problems: how to *act* cooperatively given a characterization of our situation and how to *reason* cooperatively or collectively, to get a better characterization of the situation. The enormous virtue of McMahon's book is that he sees clearly that cooperative action and shared thinking are intimately related. The first half of the book deals with action and the second with thinking. The general strategy is first to give a broad picture of cooperative activity, and then to discuss shared deliberation as a special kind of cooperative activity.

The first two chapters deal with standard issues of cooperation. With a twist: McMahon's agents are situated in social situations in which some courses of collective action, some "cooperative schemes," are plausible candidates and others are not. He points out that even with a straightforward coordination problem in which one outcome is favored by all, the costs of being among a minority choosing that outcome may be high enough that participants will require some independent confirmation of one another's intentions. Thus, assurance problems are distinct from problems of cooperation. McMahon does not give any uniform way of tackling the former; for the latter he proposes a Principle of Collective Rationality (PCR), as a rational foundation for our normal practices. The PCR in effect says that one should contribute to a cooperative scheme when the benefit to one of the combination of one's own contribution with those that one expects to be made by others exceeds that of not contributing. One consequence is that if all that individuals know about one another is that they all observe the PCR then cooperation will not be produced. In a way, this is welcome, for we are surrounded by innumerable possible cooperative activities that we all know to have real benefits if only we all took part in them, but that we sensibly ignore. In another way this seems to define its way out of the problem other philosophers struggle with. For we might expect a principle of rational cooperation to help tell us when in fact it is reasonable to expect others to cooperate given the structure of the situation. And if no one cooperates except when they are sure that many others will, the whole business never gets off the ground. On the other hand, McMahon's PCR allows one to contribute to the schemes that are actually promising candidates, rather than those that are abstractly the optimal or the most just.

The later chapters of the book are concerned with collective reasoning. (There are discussions of political structures, legitimate authority, and promising, in middle chapters that I shall not discuss.) These chapters are not held

together by a single principle as the early chapters are. Chapter 5 discusses shared reasoning toward factual conclusions when one has reason to think that the judgments of others are flawed. McMahon argues that the sharing aims at producing a pool of reasons, which each can then draw on or not depending on their assessment of its force. A person who is producing a barrage of hokum may also come up with one telling point that you would otherwise have ignored. Presumably there are delicate questions here of the balance between the benefits to be obtained from such a pool of reasons and the time and distraction involved in contributing to it. The conclusion is that this is sometimes an aim that can make sense of some measure of shared flawed reasoning.

Chapter 6 makes the transition to shared practical reasoning. The big contrast, according to McMahon, is that when we are reasoning to facts disagreement suggests that someone has made a mistake, while this is much less clear with practical or moral matters. (The contrast cannot be very sharp: people can disagree about the facts because they have different evidence, or because their inductive practices differ in some rationally permissible way.) The aim of the chapter is to say when we can trace moral disagreement to cognitive malfunction. McMahan relates this question to Habermas's and Scanlon's accounts of moral rationality but no definite answer is given. The themes of this chapter are continued, however, in the following, which describes a number of ways in which to the extent that people do not take their moral disagreements to be the result of "malfunction" they can modify their values and preferences so as to produce agreement.

In the final chapter of the book the themes come together. Collections of reasons are like collections of food or social infrastructure: everyone can benefit from contributions that will vary from one individual to another. Adversarial and other models of debate are discussed as modes of collective action. These are cooperative schemes to which an individual should contribute if she can expect to gain from doing so, as specified by the PCR. McMahon points out that free riding is less of a danger here since in order to use the pool of reasons one has to understand them, and this can be hard unless one has contributed to the discussion. Agents also have reason to remove the irritant of contrary opinions by refuting them, thus contributing to the pool. (These agents are irrational enough to underestimate their fallibility, but rational enough to change their opinions given a refutation—a delicate balance.) Collective reasoning can also provide reasons for beliefs that solve the compliance problem for some cooperative scheme, so that it would help if getting these reasons did not itself require solving some difficult problem of cooperation. As far as I can see, McMahan's solution here is that individuals have an interest in finding ways to adopt fair and profitable cooperative schemes, so that reasoning that aims at discriminating the better forms of cooperation is something to which everyone is willing to cooperate. The danger of being caught in an

unfair or inferior scheme outweighs any advantages of letting other people do the thinking for you.

I have ignored a lot that is of interest even in those chapters I have discussed. The themes that I have discussed add up to a coherent and interesting set of connections between our reasons for acting cooperatively and our reasons for reasoning collectively. I am convinced by what McMahan says, so far as it goes. My doubts center on whether he has radically understated his thesis. On McMahan's picture one often has reasons to act cooperatively that can be largely though not entirely based on non-collective reasoning, and one often has reasons to reason collectively that are largely independent of the cooperative schemes open to one. I suspect that many more of our reasons for acting cooperatively come from the advantages of shared deliberation. Many cooperative schemes have shared deliberation built into them, so that if one contributes, a pool of data and arguments become available to one, which will be advantageous in one's other activities. And I suspect that many of our reasons for contributing to processes of shared reasoning derive from the potential benefits of cooperative schemes of which they are part. Sometimes the shared reasoning tells one enough about the thoughts of others that one can solve the compliance problem, and sometimes it is an essential part of a cooperative scheme whose benefits outweigh the costs of expressing and defending one's thoughts. All these strands are very hard to separate because we are adapted to forms of life in which many different cooperative activities and many different strands of collective reasoning are happening simultaneously, so that we do not generally keep track of which ones are motivated by which others.

This is a stimulating, original, and sometimes frustrating book. Its ideas could contribute to a wide range of shared philosophical reasoning.

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