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Abstract: In this paper I present four different forms of social action: individual action, shared action, collective action and corporate action. The main thesis is that all four forms of action are social in important ways and irreducibly so. In addition I argue that this differentiation is drawn from a rather sociological point of view, but that this still has important consequences for the ontology of action. By giving a rich description of the different phenomena of social action it can be suggested that this is maybe independent of or at least prior to an ontological analysis of action. From a meta-theoretical point of view this is due to the fact that the sociological differentiation is of utmost important to us in order to describe and explain our social world. In the end of the paper I hind at three ways in which this meta-theoretical stance can be realigned with an ontology of action trough different ways of analyzing intentional action: by just skipping the mental vocabulary associated with intention and replacing it with a concept of practical rationality, by claiming that intentionality can be external to the mind as a form of representation or even by externalizing mental vocabulary altogether, as for instance in a certain interpretation of Davidson's radical interpretation.

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Four Forms of Social Action

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Four Forms of Social Action

abstract

In this paper I present four different forms of social action: individual action, shared action, collective action and corporate action. The main thesis is that all four forms of action are social in important ways and irreducibly so. In addition I argue that this differentiation is drawn from a rather sociological point of view, but that this still has important consequences for the ontology of action. By giving a rich description of the different phenomena of social action it can be suggested that this is maybe independent of or at least prior to an ontological analysis of action. From a meta-theoretical point of view this is due to the fact that the sociological differentiation is of utmost important to us in order to describe and explain our social world. In the end of the paper I hind at three ways in which this meta-theoretical stance can be realigned with an ontology of action trough different ways of analyzing intentional action: by just skipping the mental vocabulary associated with intention and replacing it with a concept of practical rationality, by claiming that intentionality can be external to the mind as a form of representation or even by externalizing mental vocabulary altogether, as for instance in a certain interpretation of Davidson's radical interpretation.

keywords

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1. Introduction

The analytical theory of action is confronted with countless difficulties and problems. What actually happens, when someone acts? What role do desires, beliefs, intentions, plans, practical rationality and so on have to play when it comes to action? Do we have to give some kind of causal explanation of action or will that only destroy the very form of a good action explanation? These are just a few examples of the vexing questions analytical philosophy of action is struggling with. In face of those many issues at least one thing seems to be obvious to most analytical philosophers of action and taken for granted by them, which is the alleged fact that only individual human (or animal) beings are capable of action. Even when it comes to shared or collective action it is widely assumed that this has to be constructed out of some basic form of individual action underlying those more complex forms of action. It is always the individual and her intention we have to look it, when we want to explain action.

I want to question this professed truism and show that we can distinguish at least four forms of social action whereas none is entirely reducible to one other of those forms which probably would be the purely individual form. Luckily there are some philosophers in conversation with strict individualists who are also unhappy with their stark reductionism and on whose groundbreaking work I can build (Baier 1997, Stoutland 1997, Velleman 1997, Schmid 2005, Pettit/Schweikard 2006, Kannetzky 2007, Schweikard 2008). Instead of approaching the issue in a direct and rather technical way, I want to make use of a classical but for my purpose somewhat altered and maybe a little misused example taken from literature to present my differentiation of four forms of social action. The example is that of painting a fence as presented by Mark Twain. I want to argue that first it is possible for Tom Sawyer to paint the fence alone, which still is a form of social action. Second it is possible for him to ask some friends to help him and thereby turn the fence painting into a shared action. Third it might become a custom for teenagers in the Mississippi region to spend their free time happily with an activity now called group fence painting, much to the delight of their parents and the whole community. This will turn fence painting into a form of collective action. Fourth it might be that Tom Sawyer or one of his equally imaginative descendants created a company for securing the rights for fence painting spots and selling them to increasingly desperate groups of teenagers in need of increasingly rare fences in need of being painted. This way not fence painting itself, but providing opportunities for fence painting is turned into a corporate activity.

I hope that this example will on the one hand prove to be complex enough to capture what makes the difference between the four forms of social action and explain why they are irreducible in important ways. On the other hand the example should also be innocent enough not to be seen as giving way to any ideological purposes. Whether only individuals or also groups can act is a subject that might be related to questions of the inherent moral value of individual human beings and collective entities like states or tribes. That line of thought would lead to rather large questions of political philosophy and indeed raise the topic of ideological entanglements (Popper 1957, Lukes 1973). However I do not think that we have to go this far, but in fact can separate the question of different forms of social action from the question of moral value, because the ability to act might (but just might) be a necessary condition for inherent moral value, but it certainly is not a sufficient condition for this moral value and most certainly not for human dignity.

In what follows I will first present the four different forms of action and try to show why they are different in important ways. At the same time I do not want to claim that those four forms

of social actions are all forms we can think of and differentiate, but maybe they are the most important ones. Following this I will shortly discuss an obvious objection against my rather generous handling of irreducible and maybe ontological categories. The objection states that this approach violates the principle of ontological humility and that it brings disorder to our ontological toolbox, which has to be neat and tidy. Although not being fond of this self-imposed ontological poverty anyway, I will rather argue that this is a misunderstanding of the irreducibility thesis. The four forms of social action are not reducible from a sociological point of view and it simply doesn't matter what that means on the ontological level. This is because we essentially care about action as a social fact and not an ontological entity.

2. Individual action

According to the first scenario it is Tom Sawyer and him alone who is painting the fence. Only he carries out all the many actions that are needed to go about this business. He dips the brush more or less carefully into the paint-pot, he smears the paint more or less sluggishly onto the pickets of the fence and so on. You could say that it is his desire to do these things and he does believe that what he is doing passes as painting the fence. Or you could say that it is his intention to paint the fence and he believes that he is acting out this intention. It of course is another question if he is painting the fence out of his own free will, but it is enough that he indeed is willing to paint the fence, if maybe only reluctantly (Frankfurt 1988). Since nobody else is doing what Tom Sawyer does or at least not in any way near by, it should be safe to conclude that his painting the fence is an individual action.

But although Tom is acting individually, his painting the fence still is a social action in many respects of which I want to emphasize four. First the intention to paint the fence is his own, but it did not come out of the blue. Others wanted him to paint the fence and in fact they did not leave him much of a choice. It actually was considered to be a punishment for some mischief of his. So others had an important role to play in the formation of his intention to paint the fence. They gave him reasons to form this intention, in this case not deliberative, but coercive reasons, which under certain circumstances can still be good reasons for action. Call this the *social dimension of intention formation*.

Of course the painting of the fence is still Tom's own action, because it consists not only of his body movements, but he is also the one intending those movements, for whatever reasons this might have come about. But even in this rather straightforward action there is a social element. This becomes clear when considering questions like the following: Where did he get the paint from and the brush? Who built this damn fence in the first place, anyway? It is only

possible for Tom Sawyer to paint the fence, because other people did other things, like providing him with paint and a brush or building a fence for instance. Therefore even his individual action is socially dependent on the action of others. Call this the *social preconditions of action*.

But Tom's action has not only social preconditions, it also has social consequences. They come in two forms. First it might be that some people pass by while he is painting the fence and think: "Finally our Tom is on the right way to become a good boy." Or: "What's wrong with this kid?" So his action leaves an impression on others, when they see or learn of what he is doing. Call this the *social impact of action*. Also after Tom Sawyer has finished his task and painted the whole fence (let us assume for the moment that he did so), some people will pass by the freshly painted fence and be delighted, amazed or annoyed by this sight which is the result of Tom's individual action. Call this the *social impact of the consequences of action*.

Although in many cases action and even individual action will be social in some or all of those respects, it is not clear that any of those social circumstances of action is in any way necessary. The last three certainly are not. Someone can act in a way that has no social preconditions, no social impact and its consequences may indeed be of no consequence. Just think of scratching your head while sitting alone in your office reading a book. But the first kind of those social circumstances of action is a more interesting case, because maybe every formation of an intention has a social dimension. In fact I do think that this is so for at least two reasons.

The first point I want to emphasize is that children learn to intend in a social process. The capacity of intending and therefore every intention is social in an ontogenetic sense. Of course very young children certainly have brute desires and probably also beliefs in a way. So you might want to say that they are able to act as soon as they are able to cry for food. But that is only a very instinctive way of behaving and has nothing to do with intentional action we are concerned about here. The difference between an unqualified desire-belief model of action and intentional action can be seen by looking at the role of reason in both cases. It is possible to act on a desire and a belief, but without a reason. To be sure, the desire (together with the belief) then is the reason for the action, but the agent does not act for a reason (Bittner 2001: 65-80). In the case of intentional action the agent always acts for a reason, which is connected to his or her intention. Now children have to learn to act for reasons and they learn this in a social process. (Mead 1967, Joas 1996: 148-166, Tomasello 2009)

The second point I want to emphasize is that intentions are ascribed in a social process. We do not only learn to intend in a social process by learning to use our reason. Also what our actual intentions and our reasons for action are is itself determined in a social way. Most of the time the intending person herself has authority over determining what her intentions are. This probably is because most of the time she has better knowledge of what she is doing then others. But that is not always the case. Imagine for instance that a dispute between a psychotherapist and her patient erupts about what the real intentions of the therapist are. This does not have to mean that the patient thinks that the therapist is lying about her intentions. She can very well be of the opinion that the therapist just simply lacks self-knowledge and therefore misunderstand herself and the patient might even be correct in her assumption. The reason behind this possibility is that intention ascription is a social process where different aspects of an action are linked together (Stoecker 2009).

It is a mistake to think that an intention is something that is seen through the inner eye only. Consciousness of emotions and thought certainly has a very important role to play, that is part of the reason why we often (but not always) grand first person authority when it comes to intentions (Grundmann/Spitzley/Stoecker 2009). But it can also be misleading. Think of a man who gives an ironic comment that comes out much too serious. He might really think that he intends to be ironic and not be aware of any negative emotions. But someone else might see the cruel or envious twist around his mouth when giving the comment and conclude correctly that the man did not intend to be ironic at all, but in fact is dead serious. Or to come back to Tom Sawyer: Imagine Huckleberry Finn passing by, asking Tom why he is painting the fence. Tom might answer that he really has no other choice and is doing it *only,* because as a means of punishment he was forced to do so. "Why are you enjoying yourself so much then", Huck might reply.

So Tom's fence-painting is a social action in a fundamental sense, because it is an intentional action and intending is an essentially social capacity. But his painting the fence is still an individual action, because he is painting it alone. But what happens when someone joins him, let's say his friend Huckleberry Finn, who just came by and saw how much fun it is, and now they are painting the fence together?

3. Shared action

Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are painting a fence together. They are engaged in what can be called a shared action. This might even involve some kind of division of labor. Huck for instance might paint the first layer and Tom the second. They are now working as a team

and constitute a small group consisting of two teenage painters. When someone stops by and asks Huck what he is doing, Huck might point at Tom and the fence and then say: "We are painting the fence", thereby putting emphasis on the "we". It is their collective enterprise now; they are in this together and not doing it separately. Tom is not alone anymore. But the passerby might be a stubborn individualist and insist that he asked what he, Huck, is doing. Then Huck might have to answer that he is painting the fence together with Tom. And to the following question, why he is doing this, he could answer with saying that he intended to help his best friend.

So on a level of action, Huck and Tom act as a team; they constitute a group, a "we" that acts together. On the level of intention, they also intend as a team and they also constitute a group, a "we" that intends together. "We intend to paint the whole fence", they might say with a challenging note in their voices. But, and that is important here, their we-intention is formed by a set of individual I-intentions. This is important, because the question whether a we-intention can be traced back to a set of I-intentions or not makes all the difference between shared action and collective action (Tuomela/Miller 1988, Tuomela 2005). In the case of shared action we-intentions are formed by a set of preceding I-intentions and can at least on an analytical level be reduced to those I-intentions. In the case of collective action we-intentions are not formed by preceding I-intentions and can therefore not be reduced to them. You might want to call this second kind of we-intentions basic intentions (Searle 1990, Meijers 2003). There is an ongoing, maybe the ongoing debate in the area of collective action whether all we-intention is reducible to a set of preceding I-intentions or not and therefore whether there is only shared action or also genuine collective action (French/Wettstein 2006, Schmid/Schulte-Ostermann/Psarros 2008, Schmid/Schweikard 2009).

The idea of irreducible we-intentions gained prominence through the work of John Searle (1990). Searle basically claimed that there are we-intentions in individual minds that are basic and can not be traced back to preceding I-intentions. He gives a couple of examples, like dancing or cooking together. Instead of defending that those we-intentions are irreducible in a direct fashion he simply claims that there is no way of analytically reducing them to I-intentions and then he goes on to challenge critics of his position to prove him wrong. Exactly this challenge was taken up by Michael Bratman (Bratman 1987, Bratman 1999, Bratman 2006). Bratman presents an analysis of how we-intentions can be formed out of preceding I-intentions. He uses the example of painting a house, which of course does not in any way imply that he read Twain only superficially. According to Bratman you and I individually have the intention to paint a house together which leads to the fact that we intent to paint the

house together. Our individual intentions are linked through a learning process where we form corresponding beliefs of our respective intentions. If we have arrived at the correct beliefs about our intentions to act together, then we are ready to do so. I think this analysis is basically correct. The case where Huck joins his friend Tom and helps him to paint the fence, may it be out of friendship or because it looks like fun or because of both, indeed is a case of shared action and not of genuine collective action. In this situation the we-intention of painting the fence together can be reduced to preceding I-intentions attributable to Huck and Tom respectively.

But from the fact that some cases like painting a fence or painting a house together are cases of shared action, where the involved we-intentions can analytically be reduced to preceding I-intentions, we can of course not conclude that all we-intentions are reducible in that way. In fact it is conceptually impossible for Bratman to show this by presenting a method of reducing we-intentions, because all we-intentions we can think of would have to be put to the test. Of course Searle's challenge therefore is a bit of a problem itself, because he can not seriously ask his critics to test all imaginable we-intentions and state that he remains unconvinced until this is done. But maybe we can do better and show that some we-intentions are not reducible in the way Bratman suggests. Indeed I think we can do that and even imagine practices of collective fence painting that are not reducible in the way Bratman suggests, as the next example will show. The example is also designed to show that in some cases it is very unlikely that the involved we-intentions can be reduced in any other way, but instead constitute genuine collective action.

4. Collective action

A couple of dozen years have passed, Tom Sawyer is long done with painting his fence and in fact a man in his best years, who has returned to his home town after living far away for most of his past life. As he walks through town he sees several groups of young teenagers painting fences together. He stops in front of one of those groups and asks a young girl, who actually looks a little bit like him, what she is doing. "Why, *we* are painting fences of course", she might answer. When he further inquires why *they* are doing this, she might look at him in a queer way and respond: "That is just what *we* kids do around her." And then after some consideration she probably would add: "To have some fun, you see." It is tempting to analyze this "we" in the statement of the girl as an irreducible we-intention and ultimately I think that this is the case. But we have to move carefully here, because it might be that no we-intention is involved at all or if it is that then it can be reduced to a preceding set of I-intentions.

The first objection against analyzing this situation as involving irreducible we-intentions basically denies that any we-intentions are involved. It is the girl who has an individual intention to paint fences in her free time and the same counts for all other children. I think that underestimates the importance of the "we" the girl herself stressed in her reply to the older Tom and moreover underestimates the importance of custom, culture and community in general when it comes to intention formation. The girl replied that fence painting is "what we do", thereby referring to all or most of the teenagers in this town, herself included. In my understanding she is aware of the fact that she has an individual I-intention to paint the fence. She needs to have that, because she is an individual subject and therefore an agent who can only act on the ground of individual I-intentions. But she also wanted to say something more about where her individual I-intention is coming from and what else is going on. It is formed after the model of a pre-existing collective we-intention to paint fences. This collective we-intention applies to teenagers in this town and this is why she is doing it.

So the girl basically wants to say: I intend to paint fences with my friends, because we teenagers around here indent to paint fences together. This understanding of her intention directly opposes the analysis Bratman offered for shared intention. It is not (or not only) that a couple of teenagers I-intend to paint fences and decide to do it together, thereby engaging in shared agency. Instead there is a taken for granted we-intention of teenagers to paint fences which guides the individual I-intentions of teenagers to do so. Now the important point is that this we-intention itself does not rest on preceding I-intentions of those teenagers. Before adopting this we-intention they never had individual intentions to paint fences, let alone to do it together with other kids in order to have fun. Instead they just came across this pre-existing we-intention. It was (socially) given to them, so to say. Or: they found it in themselves. They could have resisted of course and some kids might do so, forming a rebellious subculture by labeling paint fencing a poor leisure activity and instead engage in learning Latin or something. But they still would not deny that there is a we-intention to paint fences, something they just do not approve of and instead have to resist actively.

Now, someone skeptical of this pre-existing we-intention might ask where it came from. This is the second objection to my analysis of this case of fence painting as depending on irreducible we-intentions, because it might lead to another set of I-intentions and show that even these custom-like we-intentions are reducible. And it is true that eventually even those we-intentions might rest on I-intentions of the long gone past where paint fencing was nothing but a random activity shared by Tom and Huck. But from this it does not follow, that the we-intentions of now are reducible in all respects that are of any importance. The we-intentions

are irreducible for those teenagers who engage in fence painting today, just because that is what teenagers do. So if Tom comments, that it actually was him who invented fence painting as a leisure activity, the girl might just sneer at him and say that she couldn't care less and now really wants to go back to what she enjoys doing – fence painting with her friends. There is surprisingly little awareness of the fact that while all we-intentions might be reducible to I-intentions strictly analytically speaking, for real agents many we-intentions present themselves as irreducible, as given even (Baier 1997).

Maybe Margaret Gilberts work could also be interpreted in a way that leaves room for irreducible we-intentions (Gilbert 1989, Gilbert 1990, Gilbert 2000, Gilbert 2006a, Gilbert 2006b). Her main point is that individual agents form a plural subject when acting upon a we-intention and this formation of a plural subject brings certain normative features with it. Often we can not leave a plural subject just like this, but have at least to give a reason or excuse for doing so. Most of Gilbert's examples seem to consist of cases of shared action like dancing or walking together. But sometimes, especially in her political thought she also seems to allow for genuine collective action as I understand it. She has the rather strange example (but who am I to complain about strange examples) of a people living at a coast forming a community which has a policy to drive off or even kill all strangers coming from the sea, but welcomes all strangers coming from the inland into their community. Now if a stranger from the inland joins this community, he has to vow that he will uphold this policy of fighting all strangers coming from the sea and that he will take all actions necessary for this task. For him this is a pre-existing we-intention, he had no part in forming this we-intention, because his I-intentions played no role in this process. So for him this is not a shared, but a straightforward collective intention, which he can join or not (Gilbert 2006b).

Although this example captures the important point that for individual agents we-intentions can be irreducible, it still neglects another important observation concerning collective action. According to this example and to Gilberts view in general individuals always have a choice, whether they want to join a group with a we-intention or not. In that respect it seems to always depend on their individual I-intention whether they want to adopt an irreducible we-intention or not. But I do not think that this is the case. We find ourselves as having many we-intentions we never have chosen to have: things we as a family, a religious or political group, we as citizens or we as academics intend to do. This becomes also clear in the fence painting example. The kids do not choose to join the group with the we-intention of painting fences together, because this is just what kids do and that is what they are: kids. Of course they still

have a choice, but one that is very different, because what they can choose is to reject this pre-existing intentional demand and to become some kind of social critics or even revolutionaries.
I think it basically is some kind of a liberal fallacy that we-intentions and therefore collective action must always be reducible to I-intentions and shared action. It is the idea that the individual always is in perfect control of what he or she intends and does. But this is more of a normative claim and less a conceptual truth. Presenting it as a conceptual truth might in fact cloud the need for the normative claim, because one way for individual agents to control their actions is to be acutely aware of the collective dimension of their intention. Only then will they be able to criticize the customs, social norms and communal demands that are put forward in the garment of collective we-intentions. But of course this criticism also is not always necessary and being part of a collective seems to be just part of the human condition, maybe not a necessary, but still a highly probable and for many a highly desirable condition. Collective fence painting for one does no harm, as the adults of our little town will be quick to point out, and there is nothing wrong with upholding this custom, even when resting on a collective we-intention.
There is a third and final point that might be seen as an objection. This section is supposed to deal with collective action, but in fact it has established the existence of irreducible we-intentions (if anything). Now we-intentions do not necessarily lead to collective action. It is possible that we intend that I do something. For example a family might intend that the father does his part of the housework. Likewise it might be that kids intend to paint fences alone and they still can say: "That is just what we do". I think that this is just right and not a problem at all. It just asks for further clarification. On the level of intention we now have three forms of intentions: Individual I-intention, shared we-intentions and collective we-intentions. All of them are forms of social intentions, because even I-intentions are social in a fundamental sense. Now I-intentions might lead to individual action or they might start a process of forming a shared we-intention which will lead to shared action. Collective we-intentions on the other hand can lead to individual action or collective action, but never directly to shared action. This is because we can intend that I or you do something or we can intend that we do something together. It seems unlikely that we can intend irreducibly that I and you intent to intend something together. If "we intend" is a shared intention, then it even leads to a shared action in the case where we intend that I or you do something. This is because the process of intention formation already involves some kind of shared action. If the "we intend" is a collective intention, then it is not a collective action when we intend that I or you do

something. It is just an individual action based on a collective intention, because no collective action is involved.

This is complicated enough, but still not the whole story. So far we were concerned with individual agents only who are intending and acting alone or in groups. But what if there are also other agents, collective or better corporate agents you might call them, who are different from individual human (or animal) agents, but also capable of acting?

5. Corporate action

We are now in the 21st century and Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, the girl and her friends are long gone. During the 19th and 20th century fence painting has become a very popular teenage activity not only in the USA, but also in much of the rest of the affluent world, Europe and East Asia for instance. It has become so popular in fact that now there is a serious shortage of fences that are in need of being painted (to re-paint a freshly painted fence is no fun of course). A couple of years ago someone, maybe a descendant of Tom Sawyer, had the idea to launch a company selling fence painting spots. He bought the according rights from fence owners and sold it to teenagers desperate to paint fences. This company is very successful and although there are quite a few competitors now, it still holds the biggest market share worldwide and has more then 200.000 employees securing fence painting rights and selling them to groups of teenagers all over the globe.

The teenagers are still engaged in collective action, but what about the people working for the corporation, call it Tom Inc., and what about the corporation itself? Do the employees act individually or in groups? Are they engaged in shared or collective action? On the one hand it would be strange to say that they act individually, because they are working for this big corporation after all. But then it might be that many employees do most of what they do for the corporation, securing fence painting rights and selling them to teenagers, on their own. Is this still shared or collective action? Or is it coordinated individual action resting on a shared or collective intention? It seems that the latter is a more appropriate description of what is going on. It certainly is not the employees' individual intention to secure fence painting rights or to design a new advertisement for selling fence painting spots or to organize a customer service handling complaints by teenagers unhappy with their acquired fence painting spots. But it also does not seem to be just shared intentions all those activities are resting on. It is not the case that the present employees have agreed to form a we-intention of running this company and now each is doing his or her part according to this shared intention.

So maybe the situation can be described correctly with a collective intention. This would be quite convenient, because then we would not have to add a fourth form of intention and action. But I think this does not work, because when someone working for the corporation is asked, why he or she is doing, what he or she is doing, the answer will not be "this is just what we do". The answer will rather be something like: "This is what is good for Tom Inc." Or: "This is what my boss asked me to do." Or just: "It's a for profit corporation". I think all of those answers lead to the same conclusion. The employee follows the orders of another agent and this agent ultimately is none else, but the corporation itself (French 1979, French 1995). When the employee stresses what is good for or in the interest of the corporation, then he wants to stress that it is his job as an employee to act accordingly to this good or interest. Sometimes he or she has not to decide on his or her own what this is, but a superior will do so. But then this superior is giving his or her directives according to what is good for or in the interest of the corporation.

Now, acting in the interest or for the good of someone does not turn this someone into an intentional agent. We can act for the good of a species or in the interest of an unborn child for instance. If it is true that individual employees see their corporation as an intentional agent, thereby turning their individual or group action into some form of corporate action, something more has to be said about that. I think what has to be added is the fact that employees see their corporation not only as having interests, but also as having plans. They are planning agents and the employees intend and act according to those plans. Why or better how is this so? According to Bratman plans are something that provide an agent with a future and sometimes long term goal in a way that also is action guiding in a very direct way (Bratman 1987, Bratman 1999). If an agent has a plan then this has a normative force on his intention forming, because she always has to ask if certain things she intends to do will further her plans or rather interfere with them. This is what distinguishes plans and interests. I can have an interest to go to Damascus, but never do anything for it. But if have a plan to do so, that will have an effect on what I intend to do or I have to admit that I do not really have the plan to go to Damascus, but only some desire I like to indulge in, but never want to fulfill, maybe exactly for that reason.

Now this difference helps to see how the situation within Tom Inc. can be described. The employees ascribe plans to their corporation and not only interests. Those plans have a direct impact on their intentions as employees of Tom Inc., they have a normative force and are in so far action guiding. It is of course the individual employees acting out their own intentions, but in this they follow the plan of the corporation. They act as functionaries of the corporate

agent. This is how 200.000 employees manage to act together without creating a complete chaos. The very existence of corporations as cooperating structures therefore depends on this mechanism of modeling the corporation as a planning agent. Each individual agent also has her own plans of course; to get rich maybe, to make a career probably or to do a good job even. But this does not preclude that at the same time they also act as functionaries of the corporate agent. It is their individual task to strike a balance with their own plans and the plan of their corporation. Sometimes they manage quite well and sometimes less so.

Now there seems to be a more serious objection to understanding corporations like Tom Inc. as planning agents, thereby identifying a fourth form of social action which would be corporate action. According to this objection it is individual agents who ascribe interests to corporations and transform those interests into plans by acting them out in their own intentional action as functionaries of the corporation. I think that is exactly right, but not an objection. It is not an objection, because the two process are quite distinct and should not mixed together in a way that would allow to reduce it to some form of shared or collective intention and action. In ascribing a plan to a corporation all kinds of individual, shared and collective intention take place. In a traditional company there might be a certain way, a certain culture of doing things and understanding the interests of this corporation. In a very modern enterprise there might be a clear structure and hierarchy where the board of directors decides what the interests of the corporation are, maybe having the picture of a war engine in mind when thinking about these matters (Pettit 2007). In most real corporations both kind of processes will take place and individual agents will also try to leave their personal stamp on this process of interest formation.

But nonetheless this rather complex process is very different from the process where individual agents act out the plans of the corporation as its functionaries and they should not be confused, because they cannot be reduced to each other. So Tom Inc. for instance might be a for-profit corporation, but the same time there might be some of the old spirit of the founders of the company still at work in this multinational corporation. For this reason there might be an unwritten policy to sell fence-painting spots at reasonable prices to teenagers or there might be a tradition to give out fence-painting spots to kids who cannot afford them or there might be several open competitions for pulling the best tricks on well-respected citizens. Depending on whether such a spirit and such a policy exist or not, the individual actions of the employees of Tom Inc. will be very different, because they ascribe different plans to their corporate agent.

6. The ontological objection and the inherent sociality of action

By now some ontological doubts about the four different forms of social action might have come up or at least about the way I have described them. It might be a phenomenological rich description, the objection would probably concede, but it remains rather mysterious in ontological terms. The charge then is, that I might have told a pretty story, but philosophically speaking this amounts to nothing else but a declaration of analytical bankruptcy. I am accused of having sacrificed rigorous analytical thinking on the altar of narrative playfulness. Well, I do not think so. But nonetheless I want to take this charge seriously, not the least because it helps to clarify confusion between ontological and phenomenological or sociological aspects of the concept of action.

The ontological objection rests on the assumption that intentions are states of mind and therefore something in the head of individual persons. Since they are in the heads of those persons they cannot literally be combined and shared. Intentions therefore are entirely separated and strictly individual, the stuff of the hidden inner side of persons. Because of this an ontologically sincere account of social action can at best allow for a form of shared action where individual intentions are synchronized, but it cannot allow for collective or corporate action where intentions are literally shared or even ascribed to institutions without their own heads and minds (Searle 1990). It of course is true that things that are in the head cannot be combined, interlinked or mixed together in an ontological sense or at least not for now. We do not have anything like brain networks, which probably is a good thing. But that does not have to mean that intentions cannot be shared or even be collective and corporate.

There are three ways of how the ontological objection can be refuted, that I am aware of. They all basically claim that intentions are not something that is in the head of individual persons or at least that it does not have to be so and that the concept of intention is not correctly described when restricted to and equivocated with brain activities. The first position rests on a rejection of the classical causal action explanation. If we do not understand action explanation as a causal explanation whereas bodily movements are caused by mental events, there is no need to rest the form of action explanation on mental activities at all. Instead we could develop an account of practical rationality that is able to explain action and distinguish it from mere behavior that can be constructed from a purely external point of view (Stoutland 1997). The second way of refuting the ontological objection rests on the idea that intentions are basically self-fulfilling representations. They represent an action and at the same time represent this representation as causing the action. Here we have a way of holding on to the

causal action explanation and at the same time refute the idea that intentions are individual mental states only. To be transformed into action those representations need to be adopted by persons and enter their minds of course. Otherwise these action causing representations cannot develop their motivational force. But that does not mean that the mind is the place of origin or only place of existence for those representations. Narratives and other social facts can have intentional content and maybe be called pre-intentions or conditional intentions, because they take this form of representation (Velleman 1997, Searle 1983).

The third way of refuting the ontological objection rests on a certain interpretation of the Davidsonian theory of action in combination with his radical interpretation claim (Davidson 2001, Stoecker 2009). This interpretation holds on to the classical and psychological theory of action in a more direct way, whereas actions are caused by mental events consisting of desires and beliefs. But according to this interpretation mental events are not something that is in the head of individual persons. There we can only find physical activity, if we are lucky, that is. Mental events instead are ascribed to persons through interpretation. The whole vocabulary of the mental is a social vocabulary of social interaction. It of course cannot outright contradict our physical description and explanation of the world. It somehow is dependent on that physical world, but it is not equivalent with it and instead follows its own logic or rationale. Mental causation therefore is not equivalent with physical causation, but of its own kind. This interpretation of Davidson tries to take serious his unified theory claim and to combine his action theory with his anomalous monism and his theory of normal language and radical interpretation (Stoecker 2010). To me this seems to be a promising way of making sense of his work. However, I don't want to take a stance here and favor one of the three ways of refuting the ontological objection over the other and instead point out again what they have in common.

All three positions agree that intentions are not just something in the head, because the mental is unlike physical brain activities. It is not just a sloppy laypersons way of talking about what neuroscientists now know more about and have better physical vocabulary for. It is something else, part of a more holistic semantics. This can best be seen with an example. When Schiller in his "Ode to Joy" praises happiness, he not only describes physical states of the body. He describes an experience of human beings within their social and religious context, using the power of language and imagination to do so. That cannot be reduced to a description of bodily states without losing its force and without losing its distinctive meaning even. This kind of semantics can be developed in terms of practical rationality, (symbolic) representation or a social understanding and development of the vocabulary of the mental. In the end these three

different stances probably are not so far from each other anyway. The important point in this present context is that if intentions are not something in the head, there is no initial need to restrict intentions to individuals. Representations can be collective, because they can be embedded in social facts. And corporate action becomes comprehensible in so far as a form of practical rationality can be used to describe its place in the word. Or corporate action can be integrated into the social world of the mental by ascribing intentions to corporate agents.

If the thesis that the mental is more social then physiological is feasible, it becomes clear why the ontological objection is misplaced. It just simply underestimates the social dimension of the mental and therefore relies on an underdeveloped concept of action in general. In this context a reminder of what Ockham's razor, which might be the intellectual form behind the ontological objection, actually is about might be in place. It does not claim that we should try to reduce as much as possible to as little ontological entities as possible and thereby create a rather small(-minded) and boring world. It only claims that we should explain what we want to explain in an ontological parsimonious way. Now if we have a rich phenomenology of social action that distinguishes forms of individual, shared, collective and corporate action in order to explain quite different forms of how people interact and if this helps to make sense of the complexities of our social world, there seems to be nothing wrong with this generosity, even from an Ockhamian point of view. In this sense we should probably just accept that ontology follows phenomenology and not vice versa. And this is also the final sense in which there is an inherent sociality of action: Action after all is a social category designed to explain the social place of social beings in the social world using social vocabulary.

7. Bibliography

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