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Habitual Behavior: Bridging the Gap between I-Intentionality and We-Intentionality

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The central question of the debate on We- intentionality or Collective Intentionality is how to grasp the relationship between individuals and collectives. We'll briefly introduce the debate and the theoretical aspects of this complex issue. Moreover, we suggest to investigate habitual behavior that represents a fundamental part of the nature of human beings in both individual and social contexts.

1. What is Collective Intentionality?

Intentionality is the propriety of the human mind to be directed at objects, state of affairs, goals and values. Collective Intentionality (CI) can be interpreted likewise and corresponds to that propriety of the human mind to be "jointly" directed at objects, states of affairs, goals and values. There are some important modes in which CI appears in everyday life: shared intention, joint attention, shared beliefs, collective acceptance, collective emotion. These topics are at the center of several cross-disciplinary researches.

CI is the key-notion to understand the nature and the structure of social reality and the very modalities that occur in human construction of the social world. Even though we can trace back accounts of social interactions, practices, social consciousness in the philosophical tradition, CI in the contemporary debate focuses on the conceptual and psychological features of joint or shared actions and attitudes i.e. actions and attitudes of groups or collectives, their relations to individual actions and attitudes, and their implications for the nature

of social groups and their functioning. It addresses to the study of collective action, responsibility, reasoning, thought, intention, emotion, phenomenology, decision-making, knowledge, trust, rationality, cooperation, competition, and related issues, as well as their role in social practices, organizations, conventions, institutions, and ontology.

2. The Central Problem

If I want to go to the cinema to see "The Wolf of Wall Street" tomorrow and you want to go to the cinema to see "The Wolf of Wall Street" tomorrow, does it mean that we have a collective intention? No, to have a collective intention does not mean to summate individual intentions. CI is irreducible to individual intentionality, and by virtue of this irreducibility CI can be attributed to participants *as a group*. Obviously, the fact that shared intentions are possessed by a group does not block attribution of the intentionality in question to the individuals. So, for instance, to say that a group intends to go for a walk is *the same as* saying that the participating individuals intend to go for a walk. Some philosophers criticize the Irreducibility Thesis and propose the Individual Ownership Thesis, namely the basic claim that each individual has a mind of her own and has a sort of intentional autonomy that is incompatible with the view that individual minds are somehow fused when intentional states are shared.

Consequently, the central question in the field of CI is a plausible consideration of the ontology of individual agents and their psychological states and interactions. There are ontological (do group agents exist?), conceptual (how do we consider social concepts?) and psychological (how do we understand collective mental states?) dimensions that characterize the field of CI [1]. These questions are relevant to the traditional debate between methodological individualism and collectivism in the social sciences. We'll consider the role of habits in human individual and social ordinary life and we move from the fact that habitual behavior is fundamental to organize our activities in individual as well as in social contexts. Instead of considering classical and revised version of intentionality, we prefer to focus on habits that reduce the complexity of daily life, and also on their corresponding activity in social life where we take part to informal joint practices as well as to institutionalized ones. We cooperate to create and to participate in social practices because we need to organize our life together with other people to create common spaces that have different functions and significance depending on the corresponding practice (for example, we all pay the ticket to take a train and many of us participate in religious rituals or similar activities).

3. Dimensions of Habitual Behavior

We will propose a fruitful relationship between habits and rituals that could provide the link to harmonize I-intentionality and We-intentionality. We begin with presenting a plausible sense for the notion of habit, which goes beyond the mere repetitive behavior or routine. Starting from Latin, there are two meanings for the English word "habit". The first is *Habitus*, that entails a deliberate disposition to act; the second is *Consuetudo*, that implies the constant repetition of an event or behavior without deliberation. The traditional philosophical sense of habit (*Habitus*) is introduced by Aristotle to characterize the notion of "virtue". Virtue can be considered as a habit in the sense of a disposition to deal with good or bad emotions and tendencies. Aristotle conceived this notion of habit as a mechanism that is analogous to natural mechanisms, and somehow guarantees the uniform repetition of facts, acts, or behavior by eliminating or reducing effort and fatigue and so by making them pleasant. Aquinas moves from the Aristotelian view and maintains that habit is not a mere potency (i.e. a capacity) because it makes us able or unable to act in a good or wrong way. Habit as repetition without reasoning is also exemplarily described by Pascal and Hume. Bergson presented a relationship between habits and moral obligations: moral obligations can be interpreted as social habits to favor social life and social order. Metaphysical interpretations of the notion of habit are offered by Main de Biran, Hegel and Ravaisson. In this case, we can observe that habit has a strong connection with religious views. Dewey maintains that it is a human activity influenced by previous activity: we can say that it is acquired in the process of socialization and entails a certain order and a certain system of minor elements of action. Habits can be seen as dynamic dispositions that work in a subordinate form when they are not the dominant activity at a certain time.

We argue for a plausible account of the notion of habit that rests on some aristotelian thesis also by reference to research in psychology and neuroscience. A habit is not only a mere automatism or a repetitive behavior, but also a stable disposition for action (practical skill), that implies the relationship between automatism and flexibility. The same process is involved in our participation and constitution of social informal and formal spaces [2].

3.1 Habits beyond Routines

Habits have a very important function in individual life because they reduce the complexity of daily life; they make our daily life easier and pleasant. Naturally, we can control habits concerning the satisfaction of our basic natural needs. Depending from natural and social environment, we develop different habits which organize the way to satisfy our human needs. The difference between habits and automatism or simple routines is that the former give con-

trol over actions, while the latter don't [3]. According to this view, that crosses philosophy and neurobiology, the habit is a "stable disposition for self-development".

Graybiel proposes a fruitful relationship between habits and goals because goals are explicitly present during action evolution and selection and they increasingly blur the more an action is repeated. Along this line, we find interesting studies in the ambit of neural-dynamic logic [4].We have examples of habits as fixed action patterns namely complex repetitive behavior in non-human animals and repetitive behavior and thoughts in human pathological conditions. She concludes that a habit completely disengaged from a goal becomes either a stimulus-response pair for a non-human animal or a pathological trait for human beings. Her theoretical contribution resides in the classification of habits as "neutral", "good" or "bad" where good habits seem to be those choose to guide our behavior and bad habits those that powerfully take control on our behavior. This categorization seems to make possible to include goals as drivers of habits. Graybiel also maintains that habits play an important role in social life, as in this case they are "shaped" as mannerism and rituals.

Williams James' notion of habit is central to the study of neurobiological foundations of motor routines, the relation of consciousness with habits, the mechanism of instrumental learning in animals and the implication of these phenomena in human disorders. But, because of the associationist view grounding this research, it seems far from explaining the complexity of human habits. Consequently, Bernacer and Murillo [5] underscore three important results from a deep study of the Aristotelian analysis of habits in *Nicomachean Ethics*. An acquired habit is an acquired disposition to perform certain types of actions; this disposition, usually acquired by means of repetition of one or more actions, makes the exception of these actions prompter, more spontaneous and autonomous from continuous supervision, all of which generally leads to a better performance. If the habit increases cognitive control of actions, it can be termed a habit-as- learning; on the contrary, if it increases its rigidity, it is a habit- as-routine. Habits-as-routines are fundamental for the cognitive enrichment of actions entailed by a variable amount of practice (efforts are required to engage in activities and performances). Differently, habits-as-learning are not merely acquisition of a way of acting; they entail a cognitive capacity connected to the habit that can be flexibly used in different contexts. Habits-as-routines and habits-as-learning have a different relation to consciousness. Habits-as-routines represent a fully unconscious performance. Habits-as-learning reduce or eliminate consciousness of basic elements of the action in order to concentrate on higher goals, while preserving at all times the possibility of recovering them for conscious attention. It is worthy to underline the contribution of the Aristotelian distinction between good and bad habits, that intends good habits as those enhancing the agent's control to reach certain goals. Consequently, we can clarify the relation between habits and emotions. The

habits-as-learning entail control and for this reason they are fundamental to reach personal goals. This is the process that favors the agent's pleasure and happiness.

Some authors intend the idea of "habit learning" as the performance of an action, previously learned after many repetitions namely in an unconscious manner, and whose execution is inflexible and independent to the outcome [6]. This perspective requires an integration with other perspectives that recognize the importance of the sensitivity to the outcome and of different levels of flexibility and feedback. According to Lombo and Giménez Amaya, a neurobiological view of "habit learning" and recent experimental contributions (especially those of Graybiel) are consistent with the Aristotelian notion of "habit". Human habits are essentially based on two aspects: (a) the stable character of an acquired quality; and (b) the capacity for new actions that arises from that quality.

3.2 Rituals as Social Habits

Recent studies from cognitive neuroscience, biology and psychology show converging perspectives on the organization of goal-directed, intentional action in terms of (brain, computational) structures and mechanisms. They conclude that several cognitive capabilities across the individual and social domains, including action planning and execution, understanding others' intentions, cooperation and imitation are essentially goal-directed [7]. To form habits we need goal representations both in individual and social contexts. They have a crucial role in the planning and control of action; moreover, action understanding and imitation are performed at the goal rather than the movement level. It seems that the motor system is highly engaged in anticipatory, simulative and generative processes. Some authors introduce an interesting speculative perspective, and make the case that the same predictive mechanisms provide both a 'linkage with the future' required for taking goal-directed action, and a 'linkage with others' required to act socially. We can observe a significative reformulation of basic concepts in cognitive and behavioral sciences, and a common theoretical view—a motor-based (or action-based) view of cognition—is emerging across disciplines. Thy provide a description of the abilities of action execution, its planning, and understanding of others' intentions as essentially goal-directed and served by the same representations, which are action- oriented and deeply involve the motor apparatus.

Routines and goal-directed behavior characterize habits both in the case of individual and social behavior. We create our own habits while fulfilling our basic needs and desires. But, we are social beings and we need to organize our activities also to participate in different social practices. For example, rituals have the important function to create social spaces in which individuals can share emotions, experiences, values, norms and knowledge. The function

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to share experiences is fulfilled when there exist a social space created by cooperation for reaching certain goal. If we want to get a positive result about the extension of habits in the social dimension we need to move from a sort of goal-directed activity that we can perform together. We create social habits in the form of rituals by using the "status function", which is a peculiar kind of function from which we constitute the social world.. Rituals are characterized by two special features: [1] "collective intentionality" that expresses our social nature and [2] collective imposition and recognition of a status.

The "constitutive rule" is essential to the process of constitution of institutions in general [8]. The canonical form introduced by Searle is:

Status Function = X counts as Y in C

For instance, a certain expression counts as promise in a certain context C. So, it is fundamental to assign functions to objects and persons. We use ordinary language to represent state of affairs and norms, namely to understand what are the conditions of satisfaction of different speech acts (assertions, commands, promises etc.). Beyond the classical dimensions of syntax, compositionality and generativity, there is a fundamental dimension which generates public norms i.e. "deontology", which is characterized by the speech act of "declaration". For example, if we say "This is my house" or "This is my coach", we do not only represent a state of affairs, but we create a deontology which manifests itself in rights, obligations and duties as well as in the acceptation of the corresponding speech acts from the part of the interlocutors.

We pointed out the fundamental process of assigning functions to objects or to some non-physical entities, which is a form of symbolization aiming at creating institutional reality. This process is at the basis of the institutionalization of rituals and works in every community even though social practices in general are culturally characterized. Status Function apart, there are other two basic notions that occur in the explanation of a successful functioning and stability of social institutions. The first is "cooperation" as a "strong" form of Collective Intentionality and the second is "collective recognition" as a "weak form" of it. We think that these two forms of intentionality correspond to the notion of "flexibility", which imply the voluntary control over our actions and to the notion of "rigidity", which characterize the mere following rules in the sense of routine behavior.

A very famous example of a ritual (Searle often refers to) is "marriage". First, we need to be moved to act in a certain way. We-Intentionality works when we want to do something together (we have a collective intention) so that we can cooperate to achieve our common goal. As we already anticipated, Collective Intentionality presents a weak form (collective recognition) and a strong form (cooperation). Both are crucial for rituals, in our case marriage. Now we can see how a social transition from one status to another is performed through an institutionalized ritual:

- We have "collective recognition", which means that the couple simply accepts the institution of marriage prior to actually getting married.

- But, the actual marriage ceremony is an example of active cooperation, in which the couple enters in a new social situation acquiring new social statuses consequently.

- This fact obtains by the performance of the speech act of promise.

- The social context requires also the speech act of declaration from the part of the institutional figure who has the suitable deontic powers to celebrate the rite and to ascribe the new status to the couple.

4 Conclusion

We briefly introduced the famous "central problem" in the debate on Collective Intentionality, that concerns the relationship between the individual and another person or a group when they form a joint intention to do something. Some authors move from the individual mind while others analyze the structure of a collective intention as primitive. We propose to consider "habitual behavior" as a bridge for the gap between individual and social intentions, because it organizes human life by reducing its complexity and by making it easier and more pleasant both in individual and social contexts. We think that a research that crosses philosophy and neuroscience/ neurobiology could offer some important clarification of the functioning of habits and can extend to the social sphere of rituals and their function in individual and interpersonal contexts. Habits and rituals require routines and goal-directed activity even though the context is different. Rituals require also a kind of symbolization that can be represented in different forms: the attribution of a symbolic value to certain objects, animals and procedures. The object acquires a "status function" i.e. counts as something that can be recognized to mean something else.

For instance, the ceremony to award diplomas requires the students to dress the robe which means the passage to a higher level of education and a potential access to a prestigious university. In bullfight, people assign a symbolic value to the bull and to the peculiar uniform of the toreador. Also in the case of rituals we can have "good" and "bad" practices and the recognition of them implies the agents' control on habitual behavior (habits-as-learning) so that they can consciously choose to take part to ritual practices or to change their choices. For example, to kill a bull is not considered a good practice in every culture or for anyone (like eating lamb for Easter). Differently, to acquire a higher level of education can be generally considered a good practice. Language (written or spoken) is not always present in rituals,

even though as we have seen, symbolization is required to establish a social practice like a rite. Let's think to dance as a performance largely present in rituals. Similarly to the case of marriage, in the tea ceremony the ritual focuses on a codified set of sentences as well as on some specifically objects used to prepare tea, so that they acquire a certain value and on the meaning of the very ritual.

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