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## *Introduction*

It is acknowledged in philosophical and theoretical writings concerning the basic nature of the social world that social practices are central elements of “forms of life” and, consequently, of social life. Nevertheless, very little serious analytical work concerning social practices and, for that matter, social institutions exists in philosophy or elsewhere. The present work aims at remedying this situation. The novel approach taken in this book is called the “Collective Acceptance” account, and it is heavily based on “*shared we-attitudes*,” which represent a weak form of collective intentionality (or “social representations,” in social psychology terminology). As a slogan, “we-attitudes drive human life.”

There are several good reasons for embarking on a conceptual and philosophical study of social practices. The deepest sense is that they form the conceptual basis of thinking and other conceptual activities, viz., thinking and acting on the basis of concepts. They can be regarded as conceptually crucial in that they – or rather some fundamental kinds of them – can in themselves be meaningful, “rock-bottom” activities. Furthermore, it can be argued that the concept of correctness of such activities as rule following and in general rational conceptual activities crucially depend on the social practices of the community in question and that basic social practices are a kind of irreducible and noncircular conceptual *fundamentum* of conceptual activities. If this is right – a mild version of this view will indeed be adopted in this work – the notion of a social practice is central not only for social science and the philosophy of social science, but for systematic philosophy in general. Secondly, social life centrally contains recurrent social activities – social practices such as business practices, educational, religious, and political practices – as everyone knows from one’s own experience. Social practices thus are part of the domain of investigation of social studies and therefore are also a philosopher’s concern. Included here is also the study of multiagent systems in artificial intelligence, insofar as it attempts to capture – even

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approximately – the important aspects of the social world. Thirdly, as many sociologists have argued, social practices are de facto central for the creation, maintenance, and renewal of social systems and structures.

All the above-mentioned themes will be taken up in the present systematic philosophical work, which in a self-contained way constructs the central notions needed for its topic. The most central – and novel – claim of this book is that collective intentionality in the form of shared we-attitudes is constitutive of standard social practices and social institutions. Underlying this central theme, and closely related to it, is the thesis that collective intentionality is also central for the ontology of the social world in that a central part of the social realm is collectively constructed in terms of collective acceptance, understanding collective acceptance in terms of coming to hold and holding a we-attitude. This I call the *wide program of social constructivism* in this book and is, of course, to be understood strictly in terms of the theory created rather than in terms of any preconceived views on social construction. Philosophically, the most central chapters of the book are 4–6, which develop the main theory of collective sociality and defend the wide program of constructivism. The book also, and most importantly, defends the *narrow program of constructivism*, according to which collective intentionality in terms of shared we-attitudes in part constitute social practices in the core sense, which in turn are central for the conceptual construction and factual maintenance of social institutions.

The Collective Acceptance account of this book is based on three central features, the third of which has not been made use of in the literature. The first feature is that many social entities and their characteristics are performatively constructed by the group members. For example, they may collectively bring it about that certain pieces of paper qualify as money. Secondly, institution concepts have been regarded as self-referring (reflexive) – thus greenbacks are not money unless collectively accepted to be money. Although the features of performativity and reflexivity have been considered earlier, precise analyses of them seem not to exist. I will try to improve the situation in this book. My account adds another aspect of sociality, the “we-mode” aspect, which relates to the idea of thinking and acting as a group member. We may distinguish between attitudes and actions in the “I-mode” and those in the we-mode (thinking and acting as a group member with proper “collective” commitment). Thus a we-mode attitude involves thinking and acting from the group’s perspective, and such activities are meant for the use of members. The members are collectively committed to the content of

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the attitude, whereas the I-mode lacks the mentioned two features of we-modeness and concerns basically the agent's self-directed (but possibly altruistic) benefit (or "utility") and action. There can be social practices in either mode, but we-mode practices are anyhow central especially for institutional practices.

The kind of collective acceptance that is needed for the conceptual construction of such central notions as social institutions can then be explicated basically as holding, and acting on, either a collective intention (viz., we-intention) or a collective belief (viz., we-belief) in the we-mode. This entails that collective intentionality in the form of shared we-attitudes has a central place in the theoretical analysis of social life. We-attitudes of these kinds are the underlying building blocks of social practices, and they are also causally relevant to the initiation and maintenance of both social practices and social institutions. Social practices include a variety of cases, for example organic farming, wearing blue jeans, eating with the fork in one's right hand, or various teaching practices in schools. A social practice in its core sense is taken to consist of recurrent collective social actions performed for a shared social reason, expressed in the collective attitude (viz., shared we-attitude) underlying the social practice. A shared we-attitude represents the (or at least *a*) standard kind of collective intentionality. The idealized, "pure" notion is this: a person has a we-attitude *A* (say a goal, intention, or belief) if he has *A*, believes that the others in his collective (group) have *A* and believes in addition that there is a mutual belief in the collective that the members have *A*.

Basically, the notion of a social institution (in a general sense) is a reflexive notion concerning a core social practice or practices governed by a system of norms based on collective acceptance for the group's benefit and use. The collective acceptance in question confers a new conceptual and social status on the practices or on some items that they involve (cf. the case of money). It is argued in detail in this book that social institutions must involve we-mode activities and not only I-mode activities. Social institutions in the sense of organizations are treated in precise mathematical terms in the final chapter.

The "big picture" that emerges from the account given in this book is this: "jointness" notions involving collective intentionality, especially shared we-attitudes (of which joint intentions and mutual beliefs represent special cases), together with collective and joint action form an "interrelationistic" basis for the conceptual and ontological construction of the social world, or at least its artificial parts. The account makes

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use of some presumably irreducible social notions. Especially the notion of we-mode attitude (and action) is to some extent a holistic notion, although its primary area of application is the “jointness” level. In current social science jointness factors tend not to be taken seriously into account. Thus, accounts of institutions tend to ignore joint intentions, wants, beliefs, and actions. To account for jointness, nevertheless, no social macronotions (e.g., social structures) need to be postulated in an ontologically committing sense, even if in a sense holistic concepts (basically we-mode concepts) are needed. The account of human and social agency on which the account ultimately relies is a mental-causationist and realist one. The kind of constructivism involved in collective acceptance does not extend to the physical world in an ontological sense.

Over and above their intrinsic importance, the detailed analyses of the key notions of social life given here are relevant and important both for normative work, for example in ethics and political philosophy, and for theory-building and empirical research in the social sciences. The theoretical framework created in this book should be of interest also to researchers in the field of distributed artificial intelligence (DAI). Both researchers and graduate students in philosophy and in neighboring fields of study should accordingly find the book to be of interest, as it contains a new theory of social practices and institutions based on a well-developed account of collective intentionality.

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## CHAPTER I

*Collective intentionality and the construction of the social world*

## 1.1 WIDE AND NARROW SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

The central claim of this book is that collective intentionality in the form of “shared we-attitudes” is crucial for the proper understanding of social practices and social institutions as well as sociality in general. The systematic elaboration of this grand thesis will occupy most of what follows. Underlying this central theme, and closely related to it, is that collective intentionality is also central for the ontology of the social world in that a central part of the social realm is collectively constructed in terms of “collective acceptance.” I will start by a brief discussion of this grand thesis, which can also be called the *social constructivist program in the wide sense*.

It may sound like a platitude to say that the social world is made and maintained by people by means of their social practices. Today the various views that fall under the label “social constructivism” emphasize the constructed nature of the social world. The construction can be performed on purpose or it can take place in part in terms of the unintended consequences of intentional action.<sup>1</sup> As to modern literature related to social constructivism, I will not attempt to survey it here, nor will I take a stand on its various versions. I wish to emphasize that the physical world on my account, contrary to some other forms of constructivism, is not a social construct and that, furthermore, only some parts of the social world are intentionally collectively constructed. Thus, my wide program is compatible with (scientific) realism in general and especially with realism concerning the physical part of the world.

The theory that is created in this book has points of connection to some recent accounts, all of which emphasize two features of sociality in collective contexts (cf. Barnes, 1983; Bloor, 1997; Kusch, 1997; Searle, 1995). The first feature is that many social entities and their characteristics are performatively created by “us” (group members). For example, we

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may collectively bring it about that certain pieces of metal qualify as money. Secondly, some central collective and social concepts have been regarded as reflexive in roughly the sense indicated by saying that money is not money unless it is collectively accepted to be money. Although the features of performativity and reflexivity have been discussed earlier (especially outside philosophy), little effort has been made to give a precise analysis of them. I will try to improve the situation in this book (cf. especially chapters 5 and 6). The present account, furthermore, adds a third feature of sociality, namely the distinction between “I-mode” and “we-mode” attitudes and actions. There can be social practices in either mode. The we-mode aspect will entail the collective availability or “forgroupness” of collective social items and the participants’ (group members’) collective commitment to them.

The wide constructivist program advocated in this book investigates in what sense the social world is man-made, viz., an artifact. Thus, it is shown what kinds of conceptual and ontological building blocks the social world is made of and how these building blocks are to be fitted together in order to arrive at a conceptually and normatively right or acceptable result. Among the central notions are collective social actions, social practices, and social institutions, and they will accordingly be discussed in detail. Underlying them are such notions as collective intentions and mutual beliefs, as well as other notions expressing collective intentionality. These notions are needed for an analysis of the notion of social practice, and they are also argued to be causally relevant to the initiation and maintenance of social practices and, more importantly, of social institutions, too. Furthermore, these kinds of deeper, detailed analyses of the key notions of social life are also important both for normative work, for example in ethics and political philosophy, and for theory-building and empirical research in the social sciences. The authors mentioned above and some other authors, like Bourdieu (1977), Pettit (1993), and Brandom (1994), have worked on some of the topics dealt with in this book. However, contrary to the account in this book, none of these authors has developed (or used) a detailed theory of collective intentionality or of social practices in their work. In this book, collective intentionality will be characterized by shared we-attitudes.

Part of the wide constructivist program of this book is formed by the subprogram that constructs social practices and social institutions from collective acceptance, viz. from holding relevant we-attitudes. This program, which will be argued for in detail, will be called the *narrow program of social constructivism*.

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As this is a philosophical book, its research method consists of an analytic study of relevant concepts and their interconnections, and in the course of developing the theory I will consider some metaphysical questions as well as certain factual questions that are also studied by the social sciences. My starting point is the common-sense framework of agency, viz. the conceptual framework concerned with human agents as thinking, intending, feeling, and norm-obeying agents capable of intentional action (action performed on purpose and presumed to express free will). As we have learned to use this framework as children, we all carry an enormous amount of information related to agents, including especially agents acting in the social world. Such information, and examples related to it, form an important part of the “data basis” of the present study. This basis not only helps to generate philosophical and (general) factual hypotheses, but is also central for testing the hypotheses so generated. It should be noted that the preanalytic framework of agency is not a precisely formulated framework and it is often argued to be incoherent (think of the free will debate, for instance). Therefore, making this framework a coherent and detailed theory-like system involves much philosophical and theoretical work. Furthermore, the resulting account does not really compete with what social scientists are doing as it rather is meant in part to critically analyze the presuppositions of current scientific research and, especially in the present book, to provide a new conceptual system for theory-building.

After these remarks on the methodology used in the book, let me formulate the *wide program of social constructivism* in terms of the following broad theses to be defended in the book.

- (1) Social practices are central for full-blown conceptuality, viz., conceptual thinking and acting.
- (2) Social practices in their core sense are repeated collective social actions based on collective intentionality in the sense of shared we-attitudes.
- (3) Social institutions conceptually depend on collective acceptance, viz., on the group members’ holding a relevant we-attitude, and on the social practices satisfying and maintaining those we-attitudes.
- (4) Central aspects of sociality (and, as a consequence, of social reality), including social norms and social institutions, are created and maintained by collective acceptance and the social practices that the maintenance of collective acceptance requires. In particular, the maintenance of social structures and institutions involves causally induced effects (including unintended and unforeseen ones)

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generated by collective acceptance and feeding back to collective attitudes and acceptance.

What I above call the *narrow program of social constructivism* consists of theses (2) and (3). While the development and defense of the narrow program will occupy most of this book, the wide program will also be defended.

Here is a preliminary comment on the theses, which will be enriched later in the chapter. In thesis (1) centrality is in part conceptually constitutive and in part causal. The conceptual aspect that has been focused on in the literature is the claim that there are conceptual activities which criterially require suitable underlying social practices. The causal aspect which will be of most interest has to do with the kind of causal grounding that the *collective* “pattern-governed behaviors,” to be discussed in chapter 3 provide. Thesis (2) makes the point that the most central notion of social practice will rely on collective intentionality in the sense of shared we-attitudes. This thesis will be argued for in detail in chapter 4, on the basis of conceptual tools developed earlier in the book, in chapters 2 and 3. Thesis (3) is defended primarily in chapter 6, but the groundwork, viz., the “Collective Acceptance” account of collective sociality, needed for it is developed in chapter 5. Thesis (4) is a broad one, the various aspects of which will be discussed in chapters 4–7, which anyhow are the central ones for the theory developed in the book. Note concerning thesis (4) that even if collective acceptance is central for social institutions, this does not entail that they are intentionally constructed and maintained by people in the “conduct” sense based on collective intentions (cf. chapter 3): collective acceptance can be at least collectively *nonintentional* in the conduct sense, and, what is more, social institutions need not even be *collectively* initiated. However, collectively accepted items (e.g. social institutions) nevertheless express collective intentionality in the “aboutness” sense of intentionality.

As indicated, the focus of this book is on detailed analyses of its central notions. Given such analyses, it is much easier to discuss in which sense the four theses are true. Thus, while an important part of the general philosophical message of the book lies in these theses, many related minor topics will be discussed.

The main argument for the wide thesis of social constructivism proceeds as follows. First, chapter 2 presents the required underlying concepts related to collective intentionality, especially the required we-attitude concepts. The argument is started in chapter 3 by claiming that social practices are central for conceptuality and defends what will



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be called the “weak” communitarian view. Next, chapter 4 presents a new theory of social practices relying heavily on collective intentionality in the form of shared we-attitudes and also on the notion of collective pattern-governed behavior. Chapter 5 relies both on collective intentionality and social practices and develops the “Collective Acceptance” account of sociality, which gives the central argument for the wide constructivism in this book. Collective acceptance is argued to amount to holding shared we-attitudes of relevant kinds. Chapter 6 applies the Collective Acceptance model to social institutions (in the synchronic case) and chapter 7 shows how the account can be mathematically analyzed and applied to the diachronic (viz., dynamic) case, where such features as unintended and unforeseen consequences of social practices (including institutional ones) also find a place. The key issues in the narrow program will be the treatment of we-attitudes in chapter 2, the theory of social practices in chapter 4, and the basic account of social institutions in chapter 6.

## 1.2 THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 2 is a background chapter in that it develops an account of shared we-attitudes, with special reference to the notions of collective intention and mutual belief applicable to several agents collectively. In principle the account also covers attitudes attributable to groups (collectives). Thus a group’s belief that the earth is flat or a group’s goal to merge with another group are dependent on the group’s decision makers’ (“operative members’”) relevant shared we-attitudes (e.g., joint acceptances, joint intentions) that normatively bind the whole group.

Chapter 3 discusses conceptual activity and rule following. The centrality of the notion of “pattern-governed behavior” (in the sense of Wilfrid Sellars) for a viable account of rule following is emphasized. (Pattern-governed activities form a subclass of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “blind actions” and “bedrock practices.”) The most central contribution of this chapter is probably an account of the notion of *collective* pattern-governed behavior (the collective version is not available in Sellars’ work). Thesis (1) above expresses the philosophically deep sense in which social practices are central, for they are taken to form the conceptual core of our lives as social human agents. This chapter also discusses and defends the view that the notion of a social practice is central for giving an account of conceptual activity and, hence, for rule following (cf. thesis (1)). The account is given in terms of the broadly understood “negotiation” model

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of collective acceptance. This account bears resemblance to Sellars' games of "giving and asking" reasons and their further development by Robert Brandom (1994, 2000). It also resembles the "holistic" and "communitarian" accounts of rule following and concept use that have been defended in the context of the extensive literature on rule following related to Wittgenstein's late work. However, my account also accepts "solitary," nonsocial language and thinking, while emphasizing that full-blown conceptual activities (e.g., typically those requiring speech acts) are essentially social.

Chapter 4 investigates social practices in detail, starting from the idea that they are meaningful recurrent patterns of collective behavior. While their meaningfulness may in part depend on their being based on meaningful, intentionally performed, individual component actions, the main source of their meaningfulness nevertheless comes from the underlying productive collective attitudes serving to coordinate and "assemble" those component actions. In other words, a social practice consists of recurrent collective social actions performed for a shared social reason, expressed in the collective attitude underlying the social practice. Social practices include a variety of cases, for example teaching practices in schools, driving on the right-hand side of the road, standing in line, eating ham at Christmas dinner, cleaning the house together every Saturday.

Many kinds of social practices are discussed in chapter 4. The central ones, however, are connected and unified by the notion of a collective attitude, analytically explicated as a shared we-attitude. The content of the we-attitude is the shared social reason for the collective social action or practice in question. A shared we-attitude represents the (or at least *a*) standard kind of collective intentionality. The idealized, "pure" notion is this: a person has a we-attitude *A* (say a goal, intention, or belief) if he has *A*, believes that the others in his collective have *A* and believes in addition that there is a mutual belief in the collective that the members have *A*. We-attitudes drive much of human life, because people are social in the sense they involve and tend to take into account in their thinking and acting what others think and do.

A we-attitude can be in the we-mode or in the I-mode. The we-mode involves thinking and acting from the collective's perspective and thus it expresses a central notion of sociality or, rather, collective sociality. Such activities are meant for the use of the members of the collective and in general the members are assumed to be collectively committed to the content of the attitude, whereas the I-mode lacks the mentioned two features of we-modeness and concerns centrally the agent's own