

Social Facts Explained and Presupposed

Boris Hennig, Saarbrücken

1. Introduction

Attempts are often made to explain collective action in terms of the interaction of individuals. A common objection to such attempts is that they are circular: Since every interaction presupposes the existence of common practices and common practices involve collective action, no analysis of collective agency in terms of interaction can reduce collectivity away. In this essay I will argue that this does not constitute a real circularity. It is true that common practices are presupposed in every attempt to explain collective action. However, this does not mean that every analysis of collective action presupposes an understanding of *collective action*. Common practices do not involve or presuppose particular collective actions. They are more fundamental than individual or collective agency. The subject of a common practice is not a ‘us’ or ‘them’, but the impersonal ‘one’: ‘One does this and that’. What ‘one does’ is not yet a joint activity. It is not a particular action at all.

2. Killing Together

Consider a case of joint action. Two terrorists intend to assassinate a politician. One of them is driving the car; the other one is firing the gun. Let us suppose that this is a necessary cooperation, that is, that it would not be possible to shoot the politician in question except from a moving vehicle, and that it is not possible for one person both to drive the car and to use the weapon. Let’s say it happens on a busy highway. Suppose further that the terrorists do not drive the car in a way that would be blameworthy as such, were it not for the killing, and that the firing of the gun wouldn’t cause any harm without the driving. Think away any laws that may prohibit weapon use on highways, suppose it is allowed here as long as nobody is harmed. Then none of our two terrorists would be able to do anything harmful by

going through the same movements in isolation. There would be no crime without the two of them co-operating. What sort of crime did the driver of the car commit, then?

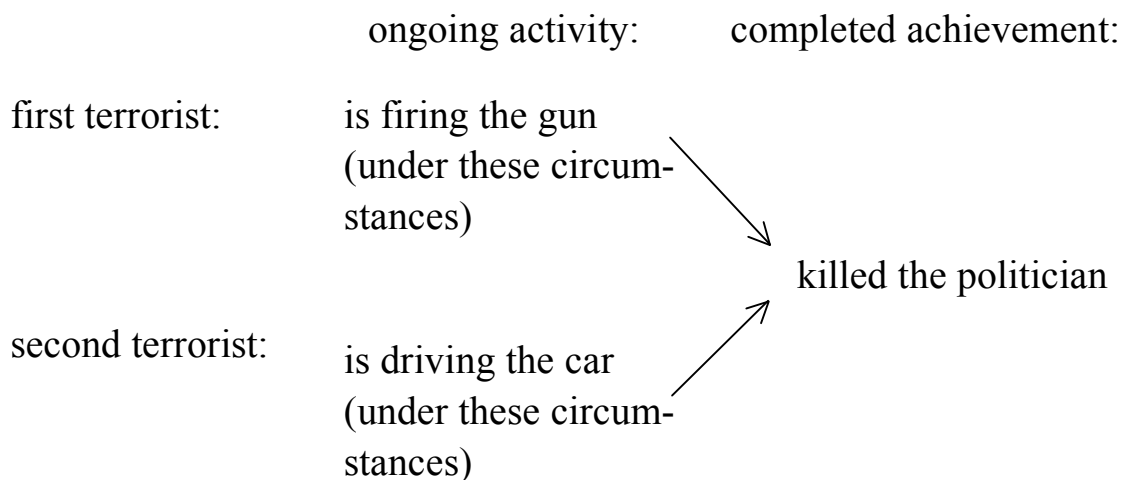
When someone gets shot from a public bus, the driver of which did not know in advance what would happen, then that bus driver cannot be accused of any crime. The driver of the terrorist's car, however, knows what will happen, and more importantly, he intends to contribute to its taking place by driving the car. His driving the car is an intentional contribution to a joint action. He does not merely render the killing possible; he is rather doing his part as a co-agent in the assassination. In this sense, he does not merely aim at his restricted goal of driving the car, which would not distinguish him much from the bus driver. But what else does he do besides driving a car, when he drives the car as part of the joint action? He need not *visibly* do anything additional, that is, he could drive the car in just the same way he would have driven it in any other case. Perhaps his accomplice is sitting behind him and he does not even notice him at least for some time, that is, while he is busy with driving. What makes the difference, then? It appears to be a matter of his *intention in action*. By driving the car, he *aims at* the end of the joint action. And he is accountable for what he aimed at. Moral responsibility, one might say, is not concerned with particular visible behaviour as much as it is about the intention underlying and guiding this behaviour.

3. Action and Result

In such cases of morally bad collective actions, a certain discrepancy becomes apparent between the intended collective action on the one hand, and the concrete action that each of the participants actually carries out on the other hand. In one sense, no one of the terrorists can intend to kill the politician. The reason is that one cannot intend what one is obviously unable to do. Since each of the terrorists – taken in isolation – is not able to do the entire killing, each of them can only intend to *contribute* to the joint crime. In another sense, however, each of them *does* intend to realize the joint action. This is why each of them commits a crime. In such cases, Ste-

ven Sverdlik¹ has suggested applying the distinction between intended activities and intended result states. In a similar fashion Raimo Tuomela² distinguishes between *action intention*, which concerns only the individual contributions of an individual, and *aim intention*, which concerns the result of a joint action. Thus I can be said to intend to achieve a common goal or aim, that is, the result of a joint action, by intending to do my part in achieving this goal. Put in this way, the goal is one and the same for all participants, but the means for reaching it are distributed.

One might as well say: While the joint *achievement* is shared, the particular *activities* that lead to it are distributed. In such a statement, ‘activities’ are understood to be doings that can be referred to in continuous tense: “he is *driving* the car”, „he is *pointing* the gun”. Achievements, on the other hand, are only realized when everything is over: “they *killed* the politician”. Until the politician is dead, they did not kill him, and as soon as he is dead, they are not killing him any more. They have done it.



Alexander Mourelatos has argued that the distinction between activities and achievements is not a distinction between different kinds of processes.³ It is rather a formal feature of many languages that verb phrases admit of

¹ Sverdlik (1987).

² Tuomela (2005).

³ Mourelatos (1978).

different grammatical aspects.⁴ Accordingly, it might be a formal feature of any true ontology of processes that any given process can be referred to as going on or as having been completed. That is, the distinction between “driving the terrorists’ car in these circumstances” and “killing the politician” does not indicate a difference between two separate processes, but between two different ways of referring to one and the same process.

Killing, of course, is a somewhat special case.⁵ It bears perfective aspect by definition; that is, it sounds odd to say that “I was killing X, but did not in the end kill X”. ‘To kill’ is certainly used as a success verb in this context. But there is no such thing as a corresponding ‘success process’.⁶ A success verb might be defined as a verb that can only be applied to completed processes. A completed process, however, is not any longer a process. The category of success verbs does not correspond to any ontological category. We do not *say* that the terrorists were jointly killing someone unless they actually succeeded. Otherwise, they were merely *trying* to kill him. However, this does not mean that killing and aiming for someone’s death are two different processes. In the case of success, the terrorists were both aiming for the death of *and* killing their victim. Then they are not doing two things at once, nor were they doing something else when it turns out later that the victim is not dead after all. It is only that we use a different *word* to refer to what they were doing, depending on the circumstances.

Other verbs are more flexible. I can be making tea without then having made tea.⁷ I cannot be walking without having walked, but I can be walking across the street without then having walked across the street. Making tea and walking can function to denote an activity or an achievement, depending on aspect and circumstances. I chose the example of killing be-

4 Comrie (1976: 3) “aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”.

5 This is partly so because humans cannot be killed twice. I guess that the verb ‘killing’ would lose many of its interesting features if we discovered a way of resurrecting dead people. Then it might be alright to say that ‘John was killing Mary’ or that ‘John used to kill Mary’, just as we say that John was kissing Mary or that he used to kiss her (Cf. Comrie 1976: 45).

6 This remark need not apply to success verbs like ‘to know’ or ‘to perceive’.

7 See Anscombe (1957: 40).

cause the distinction between the imperfective and the perfective aspect is already visible at the lexical level. It coincides with the lexical distinction between ‘killing’ and ‘aiming for someone’s death’.

4. Intervention and Change of Mind

The susceptibility to aspect is a general feature of processes.⁸ Indeed, one might define the very notion of a process by this feature: X is a process if and only if it is (conceptually) possible that there is a time when X *was occurring* without there being a time when it is true that X *has occurred*. It is possible, for instance, that I was making tea without there being a time when I have made this tea. “Me making this tea” is a process. Processes allow for a discrepancy between the perfective and the imperfective aspect. They are comprised, one might as well say, of some kind of movement towards an end and that end itself.⁹ By this definition, every process has an end.¹⁰ The movement is the part we refer to by using the progressive tense or the imperfective aspect. The end is an achievement, which may be referred to in the past tense and perfective aspect.

Before a process ends, its end is already ‘present’ by virtue of being the point towards which the movement is directed. In the case of intentional action, it is quite easy to see how the completion of a movement can already be present in the movement itself. When I am crossing the street, then it will remain true that I was crossing the street, although I may not have reached the other side at that time. Then I will have been crossing the street, but I will not have crossed the street. The reason that I nonetheless *was* crossing it is that I crossed some part of the street with the *intention* of crossing all of it. The goal of my action was present in my intention, al-

⁸ Cf. Thompson (forthcoming) and Rödl (2005).

⁹ “Movement” in the broad, Aristotelian sense (*kinesis*).

¹⁰ I am deliberately ambiguous here. “End” may be understood as the point where the process is over and as the *telos* that constitutes its successful completion. Mourelatos and Comrie use ‘process’ in a different sense. A ‘process’, in their terminology, does not include its end, whereas an ‘event’ is completed. Obviously, this is not an ontological distinction, though it relies on the features of what I call ‘processes’. See Gill (1993) and Mourelatos (1993).

though it may not have been realized. Likewise, when I intend to contribute to our collective action X, then X is present in my intention, although X may not happen to be realized.

Imagine that I am walking next to you, and whereas I think that ‘we’ are walking together, you do not. Rather, from your point of view, there is no ‘we’, and there never was a ‘we’. This should take me by surprise. For there was no joint action to take part in; I only seemed to be walking together with you, but I didn’t. But shouldn’t we say that I *was* indeed *walking* together with you, but *did not* walk with you in the end? For as in any case of failed action, the end of walking together was present ‘in my intention’. My intention in action was to participate in ‘our’ walk; I simply didn’t manage to execute this intention. The situation seems to be comparable to the one of unsuccessfully crossing the street. The joint action of walking together was present in my intention, but I failed to execute my intention. But the reason for my failure is not a dead end, a broken traffic light, or any other external, insurmountable obstacle. I fail for lack of a presupposition. It is as if I discovered, after some time ‘walking’, that I do not have feet to walk with. Then, of course, I was not walking at all. If I discover that there never was a ‘we’, I never contributed to ‘our joint action’.

This is a crucial point regarding collective action: When I am crossing the street intentionally, my intention does not cover anything that I could not in principle complete by myself. There are only two possible reasons for which I may not reach the other side: I changed my mind or something intervened. In the case of joint action, however, there are *three* possible reasons for a failure to realize the intended end:

1. External obstacle: Both terrorists set out to kill the politician, and they manage to make some progress toward this end. But then their car breaks down and they fail.
2. Change of mind: They set out to kill the politician, but when they see his daughter, they agree that it is wrong to kill the father of such a cute little child.

3. Mixed case: They set out to kill the politician, but on seeing the politician's daughter, the driver's conscience compels him immediately to stop the car, so that the shooter misses his shot.

Only the second case is really analogous to a change of mind in the case of individual action. In this case, the group of terrorists changes its *group mind*, as it were. The third case is a change of mind for one of the participants, but a mere interruption for the other. It is a middle case between the first two cases: 'the terrorists' were not interrupted and 'they' did not change 'their' mind. One of the terrorists interrupts another by changing his mind and thereby destroys, as it were, the joint agent. Even if both terrorists change their minds separately but simultaneously, this would still be two individual changes of mind happening at once. Each of them would initially be surprised by the other's behaviour. To agree upon changing the joint plan is something different.

On a closer view, strange things are happening here. For some time the driver intends that 'we do it', and so does the shooter. But then, rather suddenly, we are confronted by the following situation: The driver does not want to achieve the result of the joint action and he ceases to do his part. The shooter, however, still intends to take part in the joint action, which is however rendered impossible, for there is no ongoing joint action any more. He intends the impossible.

This shows that actions are not shared in the same way as cakes are: one cannot cut out some part of a joint action and just do it, regardless of what the other participants do. A few seconds ago, both terrorists were still aiming at the death of a politician, and now one of them finds himself pointing a gun somewhere without doing anything further by doing this. He is no longer engaged in a process of killing a politician. There is nothing to contribute to by firing a gun.

5. Common Practice

In his contribution to this volume, Frank Kannetzky argues that every account of collective action presupposes the existence of a common practice. On the basis of the concepts so far introduced, the reasons for this claim can be developed rather straightforwardly.

Actions are processes in the specified sense. That is, for every action X, it is conceptually possible that there is a time when X is or was being done (imperfective aspect), but no time when X was done (perfective aspect). I may be making tea without then having made tea. Therefore, X cannot always be taken to refer to an actual event. There need be no actual, completed making of tea. The simple solution in the case of intentional action was to say that while an agent is doing X, X is present in his intention. But even then, what is present in the intention cannot be an executed action, for the action can fail to be executed, and still be present in this way. Therefore, what is present in intending X cannot be a particular state of having done X, but must rather be a generic action type, or as Sebastian Rödl calls it, an *action form*.¹¹ I can intend to cross the street when there is such an action form as crossing the street. Crossing the street, in this case, is not a particular action. I can cross the street more than once, and you can show me how to cross the street. An action form can be executed more than once and by different agents. Let us then say that intending X, whether collectively or individually, presupposes the existence of an action form X. Then every intentional action is the actualization of an action form. The action form, not its particular instance, is present in the agent's intention.

Action forms are *generic*. They are the kind of thing that can be done by different agents in different circumstances. There are many ways of crossing a street or killing a politician. This leads to the next step in our argument for Kannezky's claim: Since action forms can be realized in indefinitely many different ways, there must be common criteria, on the basis of which their instances can be evaluated. Otherwise the respective form would not be generic: I can intend to do X only if I know how *one* does X. Thus it appears that I can only intend realizations of forms that are subject to *evaluation by anyone*. This evaluation concerns the relation between the

¹¹ Kannezky speaks of "generic action types". He adds "generic", since there are other meanings of "type", in which he is not interested. Rödl (2002: 328) uses "action form" for the same reasons. As Rödl indicates, the argument from the existence of an action to the existence of an action form can be given much more generally, but perhaps less convincingly: since processes are distinguished from other occurrents by being countable, they "fall under sorts" Mourelatos (1978: 430). These sorts are, in the case of actions, generic action types.

generic form that is present in my intention and the particular occurrence or event which this intention is supposed to govern. The intention to do X can only count as an intention to do *this* particular thing when I can judge – according to public criteria – that *this* is an instance or a realization of Xing. I have to subsume instances under generic forms. Of course, I need not ask someone else in each case when I want to know whether I succeeded in doing something. This is because I can evaluate myself according to given criteria. But the criteria, by which I then judge whether an action form is successfully instantiated, are themselves common. They would not exist in the complete absence of some sort of community.

This, at least, seems to be Kannezky's point. Every account of collective intentionality, he claims, necessarily presupposes a common practice of evaluating executions of generic action forms. Indeed, this seems to hold for any account of intentional action, collective or not. Now Kannezky seems to say that this shows the unavoidable *circularity* of any attempt to explain collective action in terms of individual action.

6. Circularity?

However, an attempt to explain collective actions by reference to individual intentions will only be circular if the common practice that is presupposed in intending is itself a collective action of the kind that was to be explained. It is not clear, for example, whether Tuomela's account is subject to Kannezky's criticism. Tuomela does not try to reduce collective action to something that can be understood in the complete absence of collectivity. He wants to reduce collective action to individual action, be that what it may.

Seumas Miller and John Searle have claimed that Tuomela's account is viciously circular (*op. cit.*, section VI). If I intend to do my part in our joint action X, their objection goes, then this intention presupposes the notion of a joint action X. Without understanding X in the first place, we do not know what it is to participate in or to contribute to X. Therefore, collective actions cannot be explained by the intentions of the participants to do their part in them. Tuomela does not deny this, but qualifies both his original claim and the objection: "I can go along with my critics to the extent that

doing one's part in a sense presupposes collective (or joint) action but only in an implicit and unanalyzed sense of aiming at the joint action". That is, the agent need not have an explicit concept of doing X jointly in order to participate in a joint action X. For a participant in a joint action, an implicit notion is sufficient. But that is beside the point. The question was not whether Tuomela's account presupposes an explicit notion of joint action on the side of the *agent* but whether it presupposes it on the side of the *reader* of his paper. Although the agent need not be able to describe his contribution to X as a contribution to a joint action X, *we* need to, in order to understand what it means to have an implicit notion of jointly doing X. To say that a person implicitly understands something *is* to make explicit what that person does not make explicit. Therefore, in order to understand Tuomela's analysis, we have to make explicit what it is to do X jointly. This should be considered a drawback. Tuomela has still done something useful: While presupposing that we already understand implicitly what it is to act jointly he tries to make it explicit. We may then compare his account with the one he urged us to develop beforehand, but then our own account will probably be better since it does not rely on a further account.

Kannetzky's critique, however, runs along a slightly different vein. His point is that even if X weren't already presupposed as a joint action, there would nonetheless always be something social about X. For X is a generic action type, and such types depend on common practices of evaluating their instances as such. In *We-Intentions Revisited*, Tuomela admits explicitly that "there is much background knowledge, most of it culture-dependent, that is presupposed." Indeed, since joint intention involves agreement, it is obvious that it depends on further social entities like language use, promise keeping and mutual evaluation (*op. cit.*, section II). Further, Tuomela's "Bulletin Board View" of intention formation makes it clear that the shared intention, e.g. to clean a park, must be given in such a way that it is subject to common evaluation. I cannot suggest that we jointly do X by writing on a bulletin board „Whoever wants to participate in Xing, subscribe here", if X is not an action *form*. Since one cannot participate in an action that is unrepeatable and has already been performed, X must refer to something that can be anticipated 'in intention'.

Tuomela seems to assume that this does not lead to any circularity in his account. The reason may be that he does not regard the shared background capacities and practices as cases of joint intentional action.¹² But as has already been emphasized, Kannezky has only made a serious point when he can show that Tuomela is trying to explain collective action by presupposing an understanding of the very notion of collective action. There is no circularity in explaining one social phenomenon in terms of other social phenomena, just as there is nothing wrong with explaining events by reference to further events.

I have not yet denied that common practice might itself be a kind of joint action. All I have done is to say that it need not be so for the reason that joint actions are constitutive of a common practice. Thus Tuomela's analysis might still prove circular if we can show that the presupposed common practice is a case of collective action of the kind he wants to explain. Then he would be guilty of trying to reduce joint action to something else which cannot be understood except by presupposing the very phenomenon he wanted to explain.

Kannezky is cautious, however, when it comes to making such a claim. He does not say that collective action always presupposes collective action of the same kind, but that both individual and collective actions are possible only for members of what he calls an „impersonal we-group”. I am not sure what he means by this, but presumably he wants to suggest that we do not have to belong to any particular group of agents in order to participate in the common practice of evaluating actions and expressions of intention according to public criteria. There need be no definite or fixed collective of individual evaluators that actually does the evaluating. It is rather, Kan-

¹² Margaret Gilbert writes: “Human interactions and specifically interpersonal communication appear to be needed in order to bring human collectivities into being. It may then be assumed that collectivities are secondary social phenomena: they must share the field with social interaction, especially with communicative acts, which are distinctive kinds of social things, *not themselves presupposing the existence of societies or collectivities*” Gilbert (1992: 214).

netzky claims, some Heideggerian *Man*.¹³ But *das Man* is impersonal to a degree that it does not have participants at all. It is not really a collective. Therefore, it is possible that impersonal being does not presuppose any kind of joint action. Whether this is so will be my next main question. In search of an answer, it is worthwhile to follow Kannezky's reference to Heidegger.

7. Heidegger on *das Man*

That human beings can be alone is a central feature of their being what they are. Stones or flies cannot be alone in this sense. For Heidegger, this means that it belongs to the kind of being that is instantiated by humans that they are related to other beings of their kind. Obviously, this is not always a relation to actually present humans. A human being would be related to others even if all other humans were wiped away. Then it would be 'with others' in the privative mode of being alone. Being with others (*Mitsein*) is essential for being human, but it is not identical with being a member of any particular collective of individuals.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger seems to begin his analysis by describing the way in which *Dasein*¹⁴ is related to its world, and then to add that this world is always shared with other beings that have a *Dasein*. Seen in this way, his insistence that the world in which we live is essentially social does not appear to be much more than a verbal denial of Cartesian solipsism. He does not *show*, one might object, that *Dasein* is only possible in a social context; he merely claims it. What seems to be missing here is a deduction of the following kind: *Dasein* could not have feature X in the absence of other beings of the same kind, but it must have feature X; therefore *Dasein* cannot occur in radical isolation.¹⁵ However, the move Hei-

¹³ "*Das Man*" can be translated as 'one', as in 'one does not do things like that'. I prefer to leave it untranslated in order to indicate that Heidegger uses it as a technical term.

¹⁴ For the present purposes, the reader may translate *Dasein* as '(being an) agent'.

¹⁵ This conclusion would be false, anyway. Of course, *Dasein* can occur in radical isolation from other humans. It cannot occur in radical isolation *without being alone*; and probably, it cannot *develop* in permanent isolation.

degger makes is slightly different. He does not want to claim that *Dasein* requires some kind of *intersubjectivity* in order to be what it is. His point is not that individual human beings could not exist in the complete absence of other individual human beings, however true that may turn out to be. His point is rather that *das Man* is more fundamental than individual *Dasein*.

Of course, human beings do not first understand their own being and then ask themselves if there are other humans around. But the mere reversal of this claim, Heidegger says, is not any more promising. We do not first encounter other individual human beings and then learn what we ourselves are. Rather, ‘being oneself’ and ‘recognizing someone else’ are both modes of *Dasein* that develop simultaneously out of an original impersonal mode of being, which is *das Man*. Both are only discovered by virtue of being opposed to the impersonal mode of being.¹⁶ To be sure, Heidegger only emphasizes the emancipation of the self. “Authentic self-being”, he claims, is nothing but “an existential modification of *das Man*”.¹⁷ But we can apply this as well to the recognition of other ‘authentic’ agents as such. Unless I am able to conceive of myself as an ‘authentic’ individual agent, I will not recognize other humans as such and vice versa. But that means that before coming to be individual agents who can cooperate with other individual agents, we find ourselves in an impersonal common world. This common world cannot be understood as the result of cooperative activity, but only as its presupposition. Although the public domain with its standards and criteria „depends on the existence of human beings, it does not depend on the existence of any particular human being but rather produces particular human beings”.¹⁸

This is why Heidegger claims that „one may neither decree prematurely that *das Man* is ‘properly speaking’ nothing, nor profess the opinion that one can interpret this phenomenon by somehow ‘explaining’ it as the result of taking the occurrence of several subjects and then fitting them to-

¹⁶ Heidegger (1953: 176).

¹⁷ Heidegger (1953: 130). Heidegger’s ‘Authentic’ or ‘*eigentlich*’ means being the explicit ‘owner’ of one’s acts.

¹⁸ Dreyfus (1997: 162).

gether".¹⁹ *Das Man* is not a plural subject in the sense that it comes into being by an agreement of individuals to 'join forces'.

Consequently, what *das Man* 'does' is not a kind of joint action. Heidegger thus draws a clear distinction between shared common practice or *Mitsein*, and cooperative activity. In order to cooperate, I need to understand myself and my partners as individual agents. For this reason, joint action cannot be constitutive for our sharing a common world. If individuality develops in contrast to an impersonal mode of being, and explicit sociality is then possible in a further step, then individuality is possible without any cooperation of individuals. Therefore Heidegger does *not* say "that normally 'other minds' are directly accessible to us in our shared transparent activity".²⁰ He does not make such a claim since there need no *other* mind be present when we take part in the shared social life. It is not *another* mind which is present, but *one's own* mind. One is *das Man* oneself.

What does it mean to be *das Man*? The following main points can be gathered from Heidegger's treatment. *Das Man* seems to be a kind of subject in the sense that it is said to do, say and think things. Indeed, Heidegger writes, it is „the 'most real' subject of everydayness".²¹ Nonetheless, it is not a plural subject or collective agent. It is not realized by a collective.²² Since *Dasein* is not an entity, but a way of being, there is not even a plural form like '*Daseins*'.²³ Accordingly, *das Man* is neither singular nor plural. One is tempted to say: It is a *generic* subject. However, Heidegger stresses the point that it should not be understood as a *genus* under which individual ways of being fall. It is not generic in the way in which terms like 'vertebrate' or 'mammal' are generic. Nor, of course, is it another individual subject in addition to the known human subjects. Instead of being a collective or a separate individual, it is a *way* of being an agent. For *Dasein* is not a subject of doings and attributes, not a *hypokeimenon*. Rather, the 'sub-

19 Heidegger (1953: 128).

20 Dreyfus 1997: 150).

21 Heidegger (1953: 128).

22 Heidegger (1946: 318 and 350).

23 Note, however the following rather curious passage: "*Dasein*, we ourselves, *are* never present at hand, rather *Dasein* exists" Heidegger (1927: 37).

stance' of *Dasein* is its 'existence'. It is a way of doing, seeing and having things. Likewise, *das Man* is not really a subject, but a way of being. In this sense, Heidegger claims, every one of us may act like 'one does'. When this is the case, we instantiate *das Man*, it is then *our* way of being. "One *is*' what one does".²⁴ Impersonality is a way of being an agent, and it is a way of being in which the known human subjects are now and then, indeed most of the time.

8. Generic Judgments

Having come this far in reading Heidegger, I propose to return to the distinctions I introduced in the first section of this paper. The interesting point is that when we say that 'one does X', 'one' is not the subject of any particular ongoing activity. 'One' is not, properly speaking, *doing* anything; the imperfective aspect does not apply. But neither does the perfective aspect: 'One' *has not done* anything, either. Of course, what 'one' does may be said to be relative to time in some sense. In former times, 'one' did different things. But this is a completely different use of the past tense. It does not imply that 'one' has completed those different things. *Das Man* is not a particular agent, but a generic one. The sentence 'one does X' does not refer to an action, but articulates an action *form*. I have conceded in the beginning, that in order to intend to perform an action, one needs to know how it is done, that is, how *one* does it. The two terrorists can participate in a joint action before this joint action exists because they know how 'one' kills a politician. It transpires now that such knowledge does not require representing a community of agents. The 'one' in 'how one does it' is not a particular agent, neither individual nor collective.

There are indeed things that 'one' may be said to do, but that no particular agent ever did. This may seem absurd, but it is possible because a generic judgment like 'one does X' articulates a standard that is not necessarily reached by anyone. This is true for the Heideggerian *Man*: "*We* or *Anyone* might try to cheat the Internal Revenue System, but still *one* pays *one's*

²⁴ Heidegger (1953: 238).

taxes”.²⁵ Thus we may say that ‘one knows that p’, for every sentence p that should be known by an adult member of our community. Hopefully, for every such sentence there will be someone who actually knows it. But if it is true that ‘one knows that p’ and ‘one knows that q’ then it is also true that ‘one knows p and q’. And then it is highly probable that the conjunction of all sentences that express our everyday knowledge is not known by any particular human being.

Therefore, that *das Man* does X does not in general imply that anyone is doing or has done X. “*Das Man* ‘did’ it in any case, and still we can say that ‘no one’ has done it”.²⁶ Although Heidegger, in this quote, actually uses the past tense to refer to the doings of *das Man*, he seems to be quite aware that this is not appropriate; hence the quotation marks. *Das Man* is not the kind of thing that can be said to be doing something or to have done something. It is not acting, saying or thinking, and it has not acted, said or thought. It acts, says and thinks. It is a subject of generic actions, sayings and thoughts.

In his *Naive Action Theory*, Michael Thompson stresses the importance of the possibility of referring to processes in the imperfective and perfective aspect. On this basis, we can already see that impersonal practice is not a case of joint action. For joint action is a process, admitting of a discrepancy between the perfective and the imperfective grammatical aspect. This does not hold for what ‘one does’. The doings of *das Man* are not comprised of aimings and achievements.

As a consequence, interruption, failures and mistakes do not figure on the impersonal, generic level. It may be true that all of us sometimes fail to do what we intend to do, but ‘one does what one intends to do’. Sentences like ‘one commits mistakes’ do not express proper generic judgments.²⁷ The reason is that mistakes, failures and interruptions are only possible where a

25 Dreyfus (1997:152).

26 Heidegger (1953: 127).

27 Cf. Lavine (2004, section VIII).

discrepancy between aiming and completion is possible. Imperfection, so to speak, is tied to the imperfective aspect.²⁸

Joint actions differ from impersonal practices in exactly this point: *they can fail*. This has all sorts of interesting consequences. Joint actions appear on the scene only together with the possibility of failure, that is, only when cooperation becomes problematic. They are located in the realm of the imperfective. The occupants of this realm are such that they can fail to satisfy criteria. They are the things that are evaluated by common standards. The standards and criteria themselves, however, are located on a generic level. As long as they are used as standards and criteria, they are not themselves problematic. If this is correct, *we do not evaluate standards at all*. We always evaluate actions, possibly collective or joint ones, according to standards. The standard by which we evaluate actions is articulated in judgments like ‘one does X’; an evaluated collective or joint action is referred to in sentences like ‘they do X together’ or ‘we used to do X’.

As has been said, I can intend to do X only if I know how to do X. This knowledge is expressed by a generic judgment: ‘one does X in this way’. In order to evaluate a particular happening as a successful or failed attempt to execute my intention, I need to be able to relate the generic judgments that articulate action forms to particular actions that can be described using imperfective and perfective aspect. The generic judgments do not and cannot refer directly to any particular action. That is, what ‘one does’ cannot be reduced to a set of particular doings or joint activities. We can now see why this is so: by that very move it would lose its character of being a standard. A judgment that refers to a particular joint action or a set of such actions would not be generic. It would lose its atemporality.

²⁸ This does not mean that the perfective aspect expresses genericity. Action ascriptions in perfective aspect refer to particular action tokens: ‘the train *has left* at five past six’ is about one particular incident. ‘The train *was leaving* at five past six’ rather means that for some time, the train was scheduled to leave at five past six, regardless whether it ever left at that time. This is not a particular, but a generic statement. The phenomenon of aspect is a bit more complicated than suggested above: we could as well say that ‘imperfection is tied to the perfective aspect’. Cf. Hedin (2000).

I do not want to claim that standards of evaluation exist independently of any joint action. This would indeed be a strange consequence, but it need not be drawn. Of course, there would be no standards without us applying them now and then. But the notion of a standard cannot be reduced to a set of actions in which it is applied. On the contrary, we could not say what it is to apply a standard without first knowing what a standard is. If anything dissolved into a finite set of applications, it could not be a standard. It seems, after all, that there must be further standards for applying standards correctly.

Common practices involve systems of standards by which particular actions can be evaluated according to general forms. One can only act according to a common practice if one knows how *one* acts accordingly. The generic judgments by which the relevant standards are articulated thereby enter the origination of the actions that they are about. This can happen in two ways. First, one may do something because ‘one does it’. Then the practice is not associated with any particular community of practitioners. Since ‘one’ does not refer to a particular collective agent, there is no visible contrast to other practices. Second, one may do something because ‘we do it’ or because ‘we agreed upon doing it’. These generic judgments reflect the relation of a practice to a particular group of bearers. If generic judgments of this kind enter the origination of our actions, we do not only reflect the common practice in its instances, but we also reflect its contingency or particularity. We do not only know how ‘one’ does X, but more specifically, how *we* do X.

After all that has been said about particularity and imperfection, a particular practice must seem a rather strange kind of thing. That a practice is particular seems to entail the possibility that it is mistaken. It may be that ‘we do not do’ what ‘one does or should do’. There are further standards for evaluating particular practices. Where ‘we do not do’ what ‘they do’, our doing becomes subject to such evaluation; at least if we allow for the possibility that *they* are not just uncivilized, or crazy. Simultaneously, the bearer of a particular practice ceases to be an impersonal *das Man*. Where practices can be wrong, they can no longer be expressed by atemporal generic judgments. The impersonal generic subject dissolves and leaves room for a collective, plural subject. Only when we can conceive of our practice

as possibly being mistaken, we are able to see our common practice as the solution to a coordination problem, or as based on agreements, or mere contingency. But mistakes, as has been said, belong to the ‘imperfective realm’. As soon as we admit that ‘what we do could be wrong’, we are beginning to talk about sets of particular actions. Judgments of defect are not generic.

9. Conclusion

The general upshot of this essay is, then, that an analysis of sociality in terms of joint activity is available and motivated only when social practices possibly *fail*.²⁹ Only in the case of failure do the cooperating individuals appear as members of a group of individuals. As long as everything is ‘as usual’, there is no joint action. *Das Man* is acting, but it is not a collective agent. Until sociality and cooperation are distorted, they remain impersonal and implicit. „Only when there is some problem with the norms do I realize that I have all along been doing what one normally does”.³⁰ This is because I do not realize any difference between me and anyone (*das Man*) until I do not do what ‘one’ does. What ‘one does’ does not appear *as* what one does; it is just what I do. For the distinction between *das Man* and other possible agents like me, another person or a certain group of individuals is not at all thematic.

The intentionalist programme, the attempt to ‘explain’ the basic ingredients of sociality by analyzing explicit co-ordinations of actions, thus amounts to explaining the sociality of human life by analyzing the result of a *distortion* of this social life. This is a rather familiar pattern. Psychologists often use knowledge about defects in order to explain the normal case, as do neuroscientists. Likewise, the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief can be seen as following this pattern: In order to define knowledge,

²⁹ Heidegger introduces the notion of moral conscience (*Gewissen*) in order to show how *Dasein* is urged to recognize its deeds as its own actions, not only as ‘what one does’. This is rather significant, for moral conscience is mostly concerned with failed actions *post hoc*. *Dasein*, one might say, becomes ‘authentic’ only when what ‘one has done’ becomes problematic.

³⁰ Dreyfus (1997: 153).

one tries to list all the things, the absence of which would constitute ignorance. It is far from clear, however, whether this procedure makes sense in general. For example, if one removes the subthalamic nucleus from a person's brain, that person will start making movements as if she were throwing balls. This, of course, indicates that the subthalamic nucleus is not just superfluous. It seems to be good for something. But no one would conclude that its job is 'to unthrow balls' or that it is concerned with ball throwing movements in any other particular way.

Likewise, we cannot be sure to have uncovered the essence of sociality when we start by investigating cases of unsuccessful or distorted common practices. Only in such cases do the different participating subjects appear on the scene: *I* do not do what '*one* does'; *you* do not do what *we* used to do, etc. The 'mixed case' of failed collective action is such a case: Only when I realize that you do not participate in our 'joint' action, you and I first become thematic as an individual. This does not mean that before, individual or generic subjects have taken part in unreflected successful coordination. There was no need for coordination.

Collectives may eventually fall apart and dissolve into individuals. They need not be, in the same sense, composed of individual subjects. That is, we may be able to predict into which individuals a collective would dissolve in the case of failed co-operation, but that does not mean that the collective action was based on an agreement of these individuals.³¹

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