Public Reason 12 (2): 49-54

Book Review

The Architecture of Collective Action

Ludwig, Kirk. 2016. *From Individual to Plural Agency: Collective Action*. Volume 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. xi+ 315, ISBN 978-0-19-875562-2

Kirk Ludwig's (2016) *From Individual to Plural Agency: Collective Action* discusses the problem of collective intentional behavior. This is the first of the two-volume work in which Ludwig aims to account for both plural (collective) and institutional action. The architecture of the whole project is the following: plural agency and plural action are explained via individual agency and individual action, while the account of institutional agency and institutional action is built upon an account of plural agency and action. Here I will focus on Ludwig's considerations in volume I, where he provides a bottom-up analysis of action sentences containing plural terms. His analysis starts from the simple case of actions sentences containing singular terms in subject position. Ludwig is not interested in providing an ontology of collective action, but in revealing the ontological assumptions contained by our ordinary discourse about collective action. His central idea is that any reference of such a discourse to collective agency, collective action or group intentionality can be explained away. This offers a double win for the reader and a double virtue for the book. First, the reader is introduced in the fundamentals of the philosophy of action and also in the logical analysis of action sentences. Second, Ludwig develops a very comprehensive argument for a reduction schema that eliminates any ontological commitment to a group agent endowed with intentionality.

In ordinary life, there are different activities that we perform either as an individual agent or as part of a collective. For instance we raise our hand at a conference in order to express that we want to ask a question. We also act as part of a group and describe such activities. For instance, we talk about different activities we had with our friends: "We went together to the movie theater;" or "I helped my friend move her heaviest suitcase." As Ludwig puts is: "Collective intentionality is the most fundamental form of social reality […] A fundamental understanding of the social requires an understanding of the nature of collective agency and how the various aspects of the social world are grounded in it." (2016, 2) Yet a discussion about the social world is not possible without an analysis of collective action. Moreover, Ludwig argues that our understanding of collective action is grounded in our understanding of individual action.

The big philosophical picture in which Ludwig's endeavor is set is of the following kind. One way to understand individual action and collective action is by means of an equivalence structure. If individual action requires an individual agent, collective action must also suppose a collective agent. If we accept there is a collective agent, we must also accept collective intentionality as well. What does it mean that there is a collective agent with intentional states? The idea rejected by Ludwig is not that two friends singing a carrying a piano cannot have the same cognitive or conative state, but rather that there is no further agent besides the two friends, namely the pair constituted by the two. The main idea is that we have to reject the thesis that groups are agents and have

a mind of their own[1]. What seems to compel an assumption about the existence of a group agent is the surface grammar of plural action sentences. Ludwig's aim is to show that the logical structure of such sentences does not ontologically commit to group agents since they are reducible to a logical analysis of singular action sentences. This kind of aim determines a two-part partitioning of the book.

The first part of the book is concerned with sentences about individual action that we use in our discourse, and the second is concerned with the analysis of *plural action sentences* that we use in our discourse. The first part spans over seven chapters, while the second consists in nine chapters. Each part begins with a map of the development of the discussion across the chapters and ends with a summary of the discussion. These resources turn out to be extremely useful every time the reader needs to remind herself of the big picture of the argument.

The introduction consists in the general presentation of the problem of collective agency and collective action, of the importance of the topic and how it should be placed in the general framework of social ontology, of the methodology and the central assumptions, both methodological and philosophical. For instance, a central working assumption is that a logical analysis reveals the ontological assumptions we work with. This motivates the account of the logical structure of both singular action sentences and plural action sentences that is developed later on in the book.

Part I is dedicated to the general conceptual framework in which the logical analysis is construed and to the logical analysis of the singular action sentences *per se*.

Chapters 2 and 4 are concerned with the central concepts of action theory: event, agency, intention and other conative states. The concept of agency is more systematically developed in Chapter 6, together with what 'action' means. The emphasis is on the problem of agency, and not on that of action. The reason is that Ludwig considers 'agency' a more fundamental concept than that of 'action', and that our understanding of action derives from the understanding we have with respect to agency: "First it is the fundamental notion of action theory. Second, it is crucial to understanding the structure of action and the logical form of action sentences to distinguish between events and states of which we are primitive agents and those we bring about by what we bring about primitively." (Ludwig 2016, 15) The notions of primitive agency and primitive action turn out to be the key concepts in Ludwig's account. A primitive action (a term borrowed from Davidson (2001a)) is one an agent performs without performing something else in order to bring it about (Ludwig 2016, 67). For instance, the movement of our hand when we want to grab a glass of water is an example of primitive action. He further explains what it is to be an agent of an event. One is an agent of an event if the event is her primitive action, or if the event is a consequence of her primitive action. The movement of my hand is my primitive action and I am the primitive agent of it, while indicating that I would like to raise a question at a conference is another action that is the consequence of my primitive action. I am the agent of both the moving of my arm and the sign that I have a question. The conceptual framework is completed with his account of the notion of intention. He distinguishes between prior intention and intention-in-action. One criterion used by Ludwig to distinguish between the two is the temporal projection of the intention. We have prior intentions when we make future plans. For instance, when we plan to take the plane in October 2020 (this is a version

1] One of the references Ludwig invokes is (List and Petit 2011). See (Ludwig 2016, 170).

of Ludwig's example (2016, 42)). A prior intention is not directed to a specific action or at an action-token, but to an action-type. An intention-in-action is directed towards a specific action at the time we perform the action. This type of intention is directed towards an action-token, and, because of this, it is a *de re* intention (Ludwig 2016, 43). For instance, my intention-in-action is directed towards the movement of my arm when I want to grab a glass of water.

The second layer of the argument the reader should follow is the logical analysis of singular action sentences. Ludwig begins with *singular action sentences* like "I sang the national anthem," and completes this technical tool in order to provide an analysis of sentences in which an agent expresses her intention to perform an action, "I intend to sing the national anthem," and those sentences which contain qualifications regarding the intentional type of the action, namely, sentences that contain the adverb 'intentionally'.

The logical analysis is inaugurated in Chapter 3. Chapters 7 and 8 extend the analysis to sentences expressing intention and intentional action performed by an agent. The theoretical framework Ludwig adopts is the Causal Theory of Agency and the technical resources are adapted and extended from Davidson's (2001b) logical analysis of action sentences. The main idea adopted from Davidson is that action sentences should be represented in their logical form as comprising a quantification over events. Ludwig further develops the analysis in Chapter 6 to integrate the agency relation between the agent and the event. For instance, consider the sentence "I signaled the chairman that I have a question." The sentence should be understood in the following way: there is an event of signaling to the chair that I have a question of which I am the agent at a certain instance of time if there is a primitive action that I performed that constitutes the event of signaling that I have a question. It should be noted that the type of agency relation between an agent and an event depends upon the relation between the primitive action and the event. This relation is not restricted to constitution. For instance, it can also be a relation of causation. The discussion regarding different types of agency can be found in section 6.3 and in the list of abbreviations in section 6.5.

The last point of analysis regards the content of I-intentions such as the content of the intention expressed by "I intend to sing the national anthem." Here he adopts the distinction Tuomela and Miller (1998) use between I-intentions and we-intentions. Intuitively, an individual agent I-intends to perform an individual action. For instance, "I intend to eat a chocolate" expresses my I-intention to perform a certain action, namely eating the chocolate. We-intentions, on the other hand, are intentions an individual has when she is part of a collective action. If we carry together the piano, I (as part of the pair) we-intend to perform this action as part of a collective action. Chapter 7 is restricted to the analysis of I-intentions as expressed in sentences like "I intend to eat a chocolate." For the evaluation of the sentences expressing intentions, Ludwig applies the Satisfaction Principle used for the evaluation of different kinds of propositional attitudes. Here comes at play the notion of intention-in-action. The sentence "I intend to eat a chocolate" receives a positive evaluation if there is a correspondence between a plan of action directed toward the event type "eating a chocolate" and my intention-in-action directed towards the particular action of eating the chocolate. The intentional character of the action explained in Chapter 8 is given by the success of an agent performing an action in accordance with her intention.

Part II is dedicated to the analysis of plural action sentences. Here is where the reader should seek the philosophical aim of the book. The analysis in Part I sets the

ground for showing that our discourse about collective action should be understood in a reductive manner. In order to show that our discourse about collective action does not imply any commitment to a group agent, Ludwig shows that action sentences with plural terms in subject position should not be understood as isomorphic to action sentences with singular terms in subject position. If we understand sentences like "I sang the national anthem" and "We sang the national anthem" symmetrically, then it seems that if "I" has a referent to which we are ontologically committed, then, in the same way, we are committed to the referent of "we" (Ludwig 2016, 134).

Chapter 9 begins with a short presentation of the reasons plural action sentences seem to be committed to a collective agent and collective intentionality. Here Ludwig discusses the ambiguity between reading plural action sentences with a distributive meaning, or with a collective meaning which seems to motivate a commitment to a group agent in the collective case. "We sang the national anthem" read distributively means that each of us sang individually the national anthem. When read collectively, it implies that each of us participated at a common event of singing the national anthem. Ludwig rejects the idea that this ambiguity is a case for collective agency or group agent. The ambiguity is not related to how we understand predication to the subject, that in the distributive case we predicate (we can think of the event of singing the national anthem as a predicate) something about each member of the collection, in the second case we predicate something about the group. What Ludwig wants to show is that this ambiguity rests in a scope ambiguity between an event-quantifier and the members of the group quantifier. Thus, in the distributive reading we should understand that for each of us who belong to the collection referred to by "we" there is an event, "the singing of the national anthem," such that each of us stays in the agency relation with an instance of the singing of the national anthem. For the collective reading we reverse the order of the quantifiers (the quantifier for the members of the group and the quantifier for the event), and we get that there is an event, the singing of the national anthem, such that each of us participates at this common event. The technical resources developed in the Part I came into play in order to develop the analysis for plural action sentences and to bring to surface the reason of the ambiguity between the two readings. In the following chapter Ludwig extends the analysis for plural actions sentences to other expressions for plural subject.

Chapter 11 is especially important because here you can see the philosophical product of the technicalities of the preceding two chapters. Ludwig presents the consequences of his account: nothing in our language structure compels us to assume there is an agent over and above the members of a collective. Another related consequence is that collective action is not to be understood as action in the primary sense: "*In this sense*, the *primary sense*, then, *there are no collective actions at all*, only individual actions, whether we choose the events of which we are primitive agents as our actions and any events of which we are agents." (Ludwig 2016, 173). Thus, collective action need not be understood as forcing us to assume any kind of group agent or group intentionality, and since groups are not agents, and collective action is not brought about by a primitive action, then collective action is not action in the primary sense.

The following chapters create a symmetry with the analysis of singular action sentences provided in Part I. Chapters 12 and 13 complete the analysis with the necessary tools for plural subject sentences in which the intention to perform a certain action is expressed, as in "We intend to sing the national anthem," and plural action sentences

containing the adverb "intentionally," as in "We sang the national anthem intentionally." The first step is to reject the idea that groups have intentions, in the sense in which the group agent intentionally brings about a certain action. Groups *per se* do not intend to do something, but it is rather that every member of the group has a certain intention with a specific meaning. Here Ludwig brings into play again the distinction between I-intentions and we-intentions, and this time the focus is on we-intentions. The distinction borrowed from Tuomela and Miller (1988) is considerably revised in order to fit into Ludwig's framework of analysis and the requirement of belief present in Tuomela and Miller's account is eliminated. What Ludwig argues in Chapter 12 is that the distinction lies in the content of I-intentions and we-intentions. In Chapter 13 he goes on with the analysis in order to show what it means that a member of a group performing an action we-intends to act as a part of the collective action. In the account for 'we-intentions' the central idea is that of a shared plan. A member of a group who participates in an intentional collective action we-intends that the group performs a certain action as part of the shared plan the members of the group have. The 'accordance with a shared plan' requirement comes to secure the account from cases in which the members perform a collective action, some performing it as a result of being deceived by others. Chapter 15 continues the analysis of intentional collective action expressed in sentences like "We sang the national anthem intentionally." Some concepts that are introduced are those of coordination and cooperation, both being necessary to describe collective intentional action.

Chapters 14, 16, and 17 are dedicated to the objections such a reductive account of collective action may encounter, and to its place in the general philosophical literature concerning collective action, collective agency or collective intentionality. The authors he engages with are Tuomela, Searle, Bratman, Velleman, and Gilbert. Chapter 16 is dedicated to a comparison between the accounts the mentioned authors provided and his own concerning collective intentionality.

Some of the ideas presented in this book gave rise to some debates concerning collective action. The reader who wants to deepen the philosophical discussion concerning collective action can further go to a debate started by Olle Blomberg (2019). The observations Blomberg had were followed by an answer from Ludwig (2019). The debate started from Blomberg's critique against the idea that collective actions are not actions in the primary sense. Let's rehearse the argument Ludwig (2016) has that collective action is not action in the primary sense. The thesis is that only singular actions are actions in the primary sense. First, every action is either a consequence of a primitive action or it is a primitive action. Only an individual agent can perform primitive action since only a single individual can have an intention-in-action directed towards a certain action. In this sense, collective actions are not actions *per se* since they are not a consequence of a primitive action. The ideas presented in this argument can be found in Chapter 11 in Ludwig's book. Blomberg challenges the idea that collective actions are not actions *per se* in the following way: he challenges that a sole agent (sole agency requirement) can have an intention-in-action-directed towards a specific action. In this way he challenges that a primitive action can be the result of the manifestation of a sole agent. In this way, the members of a group can perform a collective primitive action, which in turn brings about a collective action. Blomberg's article was followed by Ludwig's (2019) answer. Here, the author maintains that collective actions are not actions *per se*, the sole agency requirement, but he acknowledges one category of action

that Blomberg brings into light, namely composite actions, actions composed by two or more primitive actions. The way the dispute is developed in the two articles can be of great help for the reader to grasp many of the distinctions and technical terms that build up Ludwig's (2016) book.

The book is both philosophically and technically challenging. Ludwig embarks in a great philosophical project supported by many conceptual distinctions and refinements. The reader should expect a book not intended for the lay. There are many parts which become very difficult from a formal point of view. However, they are important for the philosophical argument of the book. The conceptual construction is also meticulously developed and every part of it is essential for the philosophical core. Nonetheless, since it covers many of the philosophical discussions concerning the philosophy of action, this book can be a great support for introducing the reader in these matters, and can also offer the reader a deeper dive in the challenging discussion on action, collective agency and collective action. Both the experienced researcher and the undergrad student can benefit from the systematic and vast picture Ludwig offers for the intricacies of the problems of collective agency and collective action.

Acknowledgments

This paper was supported by the research project PATCULT#RO ("Complex multidisciplinary platform for integrative and systematic research of identities and tangible and non-tangible cultural heritage in Romania"), PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0686, 52/PCCDI-2018, funded by UEFISCDI.

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