

Collective Intentions and Collective Intentionality

By L. A. ZAIBERT*

ABSTRACT. John Searle believes that collective intentions are crucial to his philosophy, but he is yet to present a coherent account of these entities. No account whatsoever of collective intentions is presented in the book where Searle needs them the most (*The Construction of Social Reality*), or, for that matter, in any other of Searle's major books. The only account, and a defective one at that (so I argue), is found in a short, somewhat obscure article entitled "Collective Intentions and Actions," but in fact what Searle presents there is, at best, an account of collective *actions*, not of collective intentions. In light of Searle own ground-breaking work in the philosophy of mind, and in particular in light of his far-reaching analyses showing how intentions differ from related mental states, I argue that collective intentions are not consistent with Searle's philosophy of mind.

The Construction of Social Reality is a very important book. It is important both in itself, and (perhaps even more) in relation to the rest of Searle's previous work. The new phase of Searle's work that this book inaugurates attempts to extend to the analysis of social reality Searle's early views on intentionality, on the naturalistic fallacy, and on a host of other subjects. In the "Introduction" Searle apologizes for a "certain amount of repetition" in the original chapters of the book, that is, in those chapters where he seeks to develop "a general ontology of social facts and social institutions"(Searle 1995: xii).¹ I shall ignore here the repetitions that Searle mentions. Rather than focusing on what Searle addresses in excess, I shall focus upon what Searle fails to address.

*The author teaches philosophy at the University of Wisconsin–Parkside. He holds both a law degree from Universidad Santa María (1989) in Caracas, Venezuela, and a Ph.D. in philosophy from SUNY, Buffalo (1997). His research focuses on the intersections between the philosophy of mind/action and moral, political, and legal theory. E-mail: Zaibert@uwp.edu; Phone: (262) 595-3236.

American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January, 2003).
© 2003 American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Inc.

Accounting “for our social reality within our overall scientific ontology,” Searle tells us, “requires exactly three elements. The assignment of function, collective intentionality, and constitutive rules” (*CSR*: 13). Moreover, among these three crucial elements of social reality, collective intentionality seems to play a protagonist role, for Searle also tells us that “the central span on the bridge from physics to society is collective intentionality” (*CSR*: 41). Yet, Searle says little of substance about collective intentionality in *The Construction of Social Reality*. His scanty remarks are limited to generalities. To tell us that “the capacity for collective intentionality is biologically innate, and [that] the forms of collective intentionality cannot be eliminated or reduced to something else” (*CSR*: 37), or that one could defend the notion of collective intentionality without being “committed to the idea that there exists some Hegelian world spirit, a collective consciousness, or something equally implausible” (*CSR*: 25), is, even if true, of not much help. Of course, Searle’s views on intentionality as expressed in his classic and sophisticated *Intentionality*, and the views on collective intentionality put forth in his less-felicitous “Collective Intentions and Actions” of 1990 can be thought of as carrying the theoretical freight missing in *The Construction of Social Reality*.² But they do not carry this freight, or so I shall argue.

There are two clusters of reasons explaining why Searle’s notion of collective intentionality is inadequate to do the job for which it was designed. The first has to do with problems inherent in the theory of individual intentionality even before the attempt to extend it into a “general theory” (*CIA*: 401) is made. The second relates to the problems that arise precisely when we attempt to move from individual intentionality toward collective intentionality. Yet, the problems that I wish to point out in both cases have to do with certain characteristics of one specific intentional state: intentions.

To be sure, Searle clearly establishes that there is no special connection between intentions and intentionality: “the obvious pun on ‘Intentionality’ and ‘intention’ suggests that intentions in the ordinary have some special role in the theory of intentionality” (*I*: 3). But although intentions play no special role, Searle does believe that they have a special structure.

I

The Uniqueness of Intentions

SEARLE HAS DONE A GREAT SERVICE TO contemporary philosophy of mind by distinguishing intentions from other mental states and by emphasizing, more eloquently than other contemporary authors, their uniqueness. It is therefore surprising to witness the turn that he has taken in *The Construction of Social Reality*. For in focusing on collective intentionality, Searle now lumps together those very same mental states that in the past he had tried so very hard, and with much reason, to differentiate. When examining the limitations of attempts to analyze all intentional states in terms of “beliefs and desires,” Searle once liked to point out that “perhaps the hardest case of all is intention” (I: 34); appropriately, he devoted a special chapter to the intentionality of intentions in *Intentionality*. The enterprise of reducing intentions to beliefs and desires is not just difficult; it is, Searle correctly concluded a few years ago, an enterprise that is doomed to fail.

The conditions of satisfaction of beliefs and desires alike are *states of affairs*, but the conditions of satisfaction of intentions are *actions*. The condition of satisfaction of a desire or a wish *could* be an action, but it need not be. And although actions might bring about changes in states of affairs, and although they might themselves constitute states of affairs, it is obvious that states of affairs are not in every case actions. Intentions are linked to actions in ways that differ from those in which beliefs or desires could be related to actions. People can desire whatever they please, including things that are beyond their control, such as a beautiful day, but they cannot intend things beyond their control; it makes no sense to say that someone intends that there be a beautiful day.

In *Intentionality*, Searle presented a provisional account of the relation between intentions and actions: “an intentional action is simply the conditions of satisfaction of an intention” (I: 80). Searle admits that this account is inadequate but he still believed that it was “on the right track” (I: 81). What does Searle think is wrong with this

account? He thinks that it admits too much. In other words, he thinks that this account renders “intentional” many actions that are not intentional. His example is a good one: “If I intend to weigh 160 pounds by Christmas and I succeed, it won’t do to say I performed the intentional action of weighing 160 pounds” (*I*: 80). In order for an intentional action to be the condition of satisfaction of an intention it must bring about the state of affairs that coincides with the representational contents of that intention in a “special way.”

Part of this special way in which intentions must cause their conditions of satisfaction has to do with the fact that intentions are “self-referential.” Unlike beliefs and desires (broadly construed), the conditions of satisfaction of intentions are not mere states of affairs that coincide with the representational contents of the intentional state. These states of affairs must in addition be appropriately caused by the intentional state of intending, and agents who intend them must also wish that their intentional state of intending causes the appropriate state of affairs in the appropriate ways. The condition of satisfaction of an intention refers back to the representational contents of the intention. And the representational content of the intention is linked in a special way with the action that constitutes its condition of satisfaction.

This special way of connecting the representational content of the intentional state with its condition of satisfaction in the case of intentions requires some form of identity between the action represented and the action performed that goes beyond that which is involved in the satisfaction of other mental states. For example, if I wish that my house be painted, it does not matter who paints it, or how it gets painted. If it gets painted, the conditions of satisfaction of my desire are met. If I believe I can travel to New York City, merely traveling to New York City, regardless of how I make this journey, is the condition of satisfaction of my belief. “If I raise my arm,” Searle tells us as he tinkers with the Wittgensteinian example, “then my intention in action has as its condition of satisfaction that that very intention must cause my arm to go up” (*I*: 122).

Searle discusses examples by Chisholm and by Davidson that clearly show that having the intention to do *X* and actually doing *X* do not add up to doing *X* intentionally (*I*: 82–83). These are exam-

ples in which an agent accidentally causes the death of someone who the agent also intended to kill. There are, moreover, examples in which the agent intends to do *X*, has the intention to bring *X* about, and brings about *X* non-accidentally, and yet we would hesitate in claiming that the agent brought *X* about intentionally. Consider Robert, who while flying from New York to Seattle in a small airplane comes up with the following plan: Since Lisa lives in Chicago, he calculates that the plane will be flying over Chicago 90 minutes after take-off, and he plots to open one door and drop a heavy stone that he brought on board just for this purpose. Assume that Robert succeeds in this senseless plan (a plan that is admittedly unlikely; but that someone could make up such a plan, and that such a plan could succeed are perfectly possible scenarios). Clearly, Robert has formed the intention of killing Lisa, he has carried out his intention, he has tried to kill Lisa, he has caused Lisa's death, and he has succeeded in killing Lisa. Yet, it is not at all clear that killing Lisa is Robert's intentional action. (Neither is it clear that killing Lisa is accidental. One of the great lessons that can be gleaned from criminal law theory is that while "intentional" and "accidental" are mutually exclusive, they are not jointly exhaustive. You could, for example, bring something about recklessly, which is a form of unintentional and non-accidental behavior. Though the pair *intentional/unintentional* is exhaustive, the pair *intentional/accidental* is not exhaustive. Accidental conduct is just one type of unintentional conduct.³)

Another way of observing the close relation between intentions and actions is to say that an agent can only intend those things that she thinks it is possible for her to accomplish. Laura cannot, for example, intend that tomorrow will be a rainy day; she can, in contrast, intend to go to the movies tomorrow. Laura could, again, desire to go to the movies—but she could also desire that tomorrow be a rainy day. The distinction between intentions and other conative states is not that only intentions (among all mental states) have actions as their conditions of satisfaction. Rather, it is that intentions (among all mental states) are unique in that they only have actions as their conditions of satisfaction.

Intentions, then, are clearly and in important ways different from all other mental states. And thus Searle is right in staving off the super-

ficial view that etymology connects intentions with intentionality in any special way. But he is also right in pointing out the special way in which intentions relate to their conditions of satisfaction. Sadly, however, Searle's ontology of social reality is at odds with the definition of intention defended in his own earlier work.

II

The Tension between Normativity and Description

I HAVE, OF COURSE, NO OBJECTIONS TO THE EXAMPLES Searle and others present, or to the view that they seek to support, that the relation between (intentional) actions and intentions is a complex one. I agree with Searle and others that "intending to *X*" (even if accompanied by "actually bringing *X* about") is not a sufficient condition for "doing *X* intentionally." Intending to *X* is not even a necessary condition for doing *X* intentionally. Searle's account of intentional action admits too little. And if his account admits both too much and too little, that is, if it counts as intentional actions those that are not intentional and does not count as intentional actions those that are intentional, it is hard to see how it could be a good account and how it could be "on the right track" (*I*: 81). One reason why intending to *X* is not only not sufficient for doing *X* intentionally but also not necessary for doing *X* intentionally has something to do with the distinction between descriptive and ascriptive expressions (evaluative, normative—I shall use these last three terms interchangeably).

Searle's attitude toward the distinction between descriptive and ascriptive expressions is extremely peculiar. Famously, he stirred up a small revolution of his own in contemporary ethics with the publication of "How to Derive 'Ought' from 'Is'."⁴ His attempt in this paper was to set forth the derivation of evaluative conclusions from purely descriptive premises. An important element of this derivation was the focus upon the act of promising. Whenever one promises something to someone, one *eo ipso* puts oneself under an obligation, and thus one ought to do whatever one has promised. Searle discusses many objections to his view. One of the objections is that he equivocates between two meanings of *promise*. "Words like 'promise' . . . have

both an evaluative and a descriptive sense" (IOQ: 265). The objection continues: Searle, having proved *promise* in one sense, equivocates and uses the term as if it had been proved in the other sense. Searle's reply to this objection is baldly (and boldly) to deny that there is a purely descriptive sense of *promise* (IOQ: 266).

Aside from the elegance and the persuasion with which Searle "derived" an evaluative statement from a purely descriptive statement, the paper is important because even though Searle used only one example (that of promises), the powerful suggestion he made is that there is a whole class of examples that would undermine the distinction between descriptive and normative expressions. "It is not of course to be supposed," Searle admits, "that a single counter-example can refute a philosophical thesis" (IOQ: 120). Promises are but one instance of a virtually infinite reservoir of examples: the entire class of institutional facts.

But, merely to show that one of the examples is not ambiguous as to whether it is descriptive or evaluative is insufficient, since this says nothing about other examples of institutional facts. It is as insufficient as Searle admits it would be if he had appealed to an isolated example of deriving a normative statement from purely descriptive premises in order to dispel all doubts regarding the naturalistic fallacy. The power of Searle's point flows from his suggestion that the case of promises is but the tip of the iceberg; in other words, that there are many institutional facts that, like promises, would allow us to derive normative statements from purely descriptive statements. Searle might be right about the specific case of promises; that is, it might be true that this term only has a normative sense. Since it is not of interest for me here to elucidate the nature of promising, I shall sidestep this issue. (It seems to me, at any event, that many of the stock concepts of social and institutional reality—including promises—have descriptive as well as normative senses. Owner, ruler, guarantor, spouse, debtor, and so on all seem to be susceptible both to normative and to descriptive uses.) There exists, however, an ambiguity between description and normativity in at least one crucial concept in Searle's ontology of social and institutional reality, namely, in the concept of intentional action. This concept is ambiguous in many ways, one of which is precisely along the lines that the objection that holds that

Searle equivocates between two senses of *promise* develops, that is, along the lines of the normative/descriptive distinction.

III

Intentional Alliterations

THERE IS PLENTY OF AMBIGUITY REGARDING THE TERM “INTENTIONAL” that must be resolved before we can discuss the normative/descriptive ambiguity that also affects this term. There is one sense of “intentionality” and of “intentional” that Franz Brentano made famous in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.⁵ Searle has devoted much attention to this sense and he has defined it as follows: “intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world” (*I*: 1). Let us refer to this sense of “intentional” or “intentionality” as “intentional_{mental}” or “intentionality_{mental}.” (This is the technical sense of “intentionality” that Searle indicates by using uppercase [see *I*: 3]. Since I shall argue that there are more than two senses of intentionality, I shall abandon the binary uppercase-lowercase method Searle favors.) There is another sense of “intentionality” that is related, not to mental states and events, but rather to actions. In this sense, “intentional” is a property of actions and not of mental states. Let us refer to this sense as “intentional_{action}” and “intentionality_{action}.”⁶

Intentional_{action} can be divided into three further senses, two of the ensuing three senses corresponding to the distinction between description and normativity. We could use the adjective “intentional” or the adverb “intentionally” merely to describe how an action is carried out, as in, say, “I raise my arm intentionally.” Let us refer to this sense as “intentional_{action/descriptive}” or “intentionally_{action/descriptive}.” We could also use the adjective “intentional” or the adverb “intentionally” to suggest reprobation (or, less frequently, admiration), to bestow blame (or praise), as when we say “she killed him intentionally.” Let us refer to this sense as “intentional_{action/normative}” or “intentionally_{action/normative}.”⁷ The third sense of “intentionality₂” is just a loose way of saying that the action is accompanied by intentional states (be they intentions or not). Let us refer to this sense as “intentional_{action/loose}.”

Unlike “promise,” then, the term “intentional,” at least when used to designate a property of actions, is ambiguous between a descriptive sense and a normative sense (and a loose sense). And this is part of what Searle’s account of intentional action misses. For Searle’s definition of intentional action ignores the possibility of certain actions being intentional in spite of not being the condition of satisfaction of any intention. And actions are intentional in spite of their not being the condition of satisfaction of any intention in light of the fact that the adjective “intentional” can be used in the normative sense. Let me illustrate this point.

A few years ago, the journal *Analysis* asked its readers to suggest solutions to what seemed to be a very complex problem.⁸ The problem is the following: “If Brown in an ordinary game of dice hopes to throw a six and does so, we do not say that he threw the six intentionally. On the other hand if Brown puts one live cartridge into a six-chambered revolver, spins the chamber as he aims at Smith and pulls the trigger hoping to kill Smith, we would say if he succeeded that he killed Smith intentionally. How can this be so, since in both cases the probability of the desired result is the same.”⁹

In spite of the very interesting answers that noted philosophers have given to this puzzle, none, I think, hit the mark. The answer is much simpler than it has been taken to be. Brown kills Smith intentionally_{action/normative}, but he rolls a six unintentionally_{action/descriptive}. Taking into account the different senses of “intentionally” helps to explain away the difficulties the puzzle seems to raise. Of course, it is not at all easy to explain exactly what the conditions are that an action must meet in order to be considered intentional_{action/normative}. However, the solution to the puzzle stands nonetheless.

One attempt to explain the nature of the normative ascriptions of “intentionally” can be gleaned from Jeremy Bentham’s famous distinction between direct and oblique intentions.¹⁰ An action is directly intentional when the state of affairs brought about coincides more or less exactly with what the agent who brought it about expected and wanted to bring about. An action is obliquely intentional when the state of affairs brought about was (1) foreseen but not wanted and (2) closely connected with what the agent wanted. Bentham presents the following example: “William II, king of England, being out a stag-

hunting, received from Sir Walter Tyrrel a wound, of which he died.” Now, if Tyrrel “intended neither more nor less than to kill the king,” Bentham concludes that Tyrrel’s action was “exclusively as well as directly intentional.” On the other hand, if Tyrrel “saw a stag running that way, and he saw the king riding that way at the same time: what he aimed at was to kill the stag: he did not wish to kill the king: at the same time he saw, that if he shot, it was as likely he should kill the king as the stag: yet for all that he shot, and killed the king accordingly,” Bentham concludes: “the killing of the king was intentional, but obliquely so.”¹¹

The Benthamite intuition informs criminal codes around the world, and this is a good indication that it is part and parcel of institutional reality. In criminal law, the sense of intentional_{action/normative} has great importance. The central distinction in culpability (or *mens rea*, as culpability is also known in Anglo-American legal systems), in other words, in that branch of the criminal law concerned with the apportioning of blame, is marked by the distinction between intentional_{action/normative} and unintentional_{action/normative}. *Ceteris paribus*, more blame is attached to intentional actions than to unintentional actions, and more blame is attached to directly intentional actions than to obliquely intentional actions.

In the criminal law, then, many actions are called intentional without being the condition of satisfaction of any intention. The discrepancies between intentions and intentional action that arise from considerations regarding the normative aspect of intentionality_{action} are fruitful yet somewhat unexplored issues in contemporary philosophy of mind and theory of action. Those contemporary authors, such as Michael Bratman or Alfred Mele and Paul K. Moser, who believe that having an intention to *X* is not a necessary condition for doing *X* intentionally fail to mention that the distinction between intentional_{action/descriptive} and intentional_{action/normative} affords many good examples that support their view. Michael Bratman, for example, has aptly dubbed the view that intending to do *X* is a necessary condition for doing *X* intentionally as “the simple view.”¹² And while some of his analyses show that it is possible to do *X* intentionally without having the intention to *X*, Bratman, like Searle and many others, seems to be unaware of the way in which the tension between normativity and description cuts across the concept of intentional action.

The realm of social reality is filled with examples of intentional behavior that could be “intentional” both in the normative and in the descriptive sense. Crimes, offenses, insults, lies, instances of cheating, but also agreements, deals, assurances, guarantees, and many other important phenomena in the realm of human institutions are examples of this. (Notoriously, the very term “action” can itself be seen as having two senses stemming from the distinction between normativity and description.¹³)

When Searle defends his intuition that “collective intentional behavior is a primitive phenomenon,” when he claims that “it is obvious that . . . collective intentional behavior [is] distinct from individual intentional behavior” (CIA: 401), he is using “intentional behavior” ambiguously. First, it is not clear if he means something close to “intentional_{action/loose},” or “intentional_{action/description},” or “intentional_{action/normative}.” This ambiguity might explain why he thinks that animals behave intentionally. Searle states, “Suppose my dog is running around the garden chasing a ball; he is performing the intentional action of chasing the ball, and the unintentional action of tearing up the lobelias” (*I*: 101). A recent re-statement of Searle’s view that animals can behave intentionally has it that a good example of the “primitiveness” of collective intentionality is given “when hyenas move in a pack to kill an isolated lion” (*CSR*: 27–28). It seems to me that the most charitable reading of Searle’s point in these passages is to see him as simply being ambiguous as to the sense of “intentional” in each case. I do not wish to deny that hyenas or dogs have mental states or that they can engage in cooperative behavior, but I think that animals can hardly intend anything, and so should Searle think in light of his analyses of the uniqueness of intendings.

Animals can hardly grasp the relation of self-referentiality between the representational content and the condition of satisfaction necessary for an intention. They probably lack the rationality to understand the sorts of issues regarding the “special way” in which the condition of satisfaction of the mental state must be brought about in order for it to be an intention. They probably lack a sophisticated notion of causality. And they probably lack the capacity for reflecting about modality, a necessary reflection in order to distinguish those states of affairs that it might be possible for an agent to bring about through her own action and those that cannot be brought about through just

this fashion. Searle's dog no doubt wishes to catch the ball, just as hyenas hunting together wish to kill the lonely lion, but these desires would be satisfied whenever the ball is caught or the lion is killed, regardless of how that comes about. That is, in the case of dogs, hyenas, and other animals, it is hard to see how one can claim that they have any mental state beyond (sensations and) beliefs and desires (broadly constructed). That is, animals have intentional states, and perhaps collective intentional states, but none of these states could possibly be intentions. I think, then, that when Searle calls the dog's or the hyenas' behavior "intentional," he means "intentional_{action/loose}," or perhaps even "intentional_{action/normative}," but not "intentional_{action/descriptive}," since animals cannot form intentions.¹⁴

The multiplicity of senses of "intentional" and "intentionality" casts a large shadow over the ontology of social and institutional reality. Searle's ambiguous use of "intentional" is the first step in his path of destruction of his own rather illuminating views regarding the uniqueness of intentions. Just as animals cannot form intentions, groups cannot form we-intentions that are themselves not analyzable in terms of individual intentions. I think that, just as animals cannot form intentions (although they can have beliefs and desires), groups cannot form we-intentions (although they can perhaps form we-desires or we-beliefs), and so should Searle think, given what he has said about the uniqueness of intentions. Yet Searle clearly states that there are we-intentions (CSR: 23–26), and he allegedly even demonstrates their existence (CIA: *passim*). In what remains of this paper, I will show that Searle has not shown the existence of we-intentions at all. First, however, I shall take a brief look at a conspicuous difference in the *tone* with which Searle presents his views on collective intentionality in different places.

IV

A Tale of Two Searles

THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM FACING SEARLE'S ANALYSIS of social reality has to do not so much with the problems inherent in his classical views on intentionality but with the transition from individual intentionality to collective intentionality. As noted at the beginning of this essay,

Searle tells us very little about collective intentionality in *The Construction of Social Reality*. In addition, he seems in this work rather confident as to the coherence of his notions regarding collective intentionality and of we-intentions—so much so that no substantial explanation is attempted. This presents a stark contrast with the essay in which Searle allegedly presents concrete analyses of collective intentionality and of we-intentions, his “Collective Intentions and Actions.”¹⁵ In that piece, Searle is uncharacteristically tentative and humble. What he wants to *explore* is “how far can the theory of intentional action in *Intentionality* (Searle 1983) be extended to become a general theory” (CIA: 401).

It should be clear that by “general” Searle means something along the lines of “applicable to collectives.” He begins by referring to the possibility of collective intentionality as an *intuition*, a word that might suggest some modesty, and a word that he rarely uses in *The Construction of Social Reality*. The intuition has two parts: “collective intentional behavior is a primitive phenomenon” and “collective intentions expressed in the form of ‘we intend to do such and such’ or ‘we are doing such and such’ are also primitive phenomena” (CIA: 401). And it is only regarding the first part that Searle claims that “it seems obvious.” The second part of the intuition Searle characterizes as “problematic” (CIA: 402). When he discusses the view according to which collective intentions can be reduced to individual intentions, Searle humbly admits: “I have not demonstrated that no such analysis could ever succeed” (CIA: 406); his arguments merely “suggest that our intuition is right” (CIA: 401).

Searle wants to deny that collective intentions are analyzable in terms of singular intentions, but he also wants (and in my view with better reasons) to deny that there are collective spirits or other mysterious creations. But he then admits that his “claim that there is a form of collective intentionality which is not the product of some mysterious group mind and at the same time is not reducible to individual intentions has *plenty* of problems of its own, and we must set about solving *some* of them” (CIA: 406, emphasis added). As he discusses one of the steps in the analysis of we-intentions (which I will discuss below), Searle asks himself, “but how exactly does it work where the means is individual and the goal is collective?” He follows

this with: “the answer to that question is not at all obvious” (CIA: 411). Finally, by way of conclusion to his analysis of collective intentions, Searle further tells us, “I am not sure this is the right analysis, but it does seem better than the three others we considered” (CIA: 412).

I think that Searle’s prudent tone in “Collective Intentions and Actions” is justified, and that the overconfident tone of *The Construction of Social Reality* regarding the obviousness of the new doctrine of collective intentionality, and particularly of we-intentions, is unjustified. In what remains I wish to show that Searle’s analysis of we-intentions is defective, and thus that his ontology of social and institutional reality is defective as well.

V

The Emperor’s New Clothes

LET US TURN, THEN, TO SEARLE’S ANALYSIS OF WE-INTENTIONS. Throughout “Collective Intentions and Actions” Searle postpones the analysis of we-intentions. Early on, when discussing some examples of collective behavior, he tells us that the “individual I-intend’s are in a way we will need to explain, derivative from the we-intend’s” (CIA: 403). A bit later, Searle asks himself, “What exactly is the structure of we-intentions?” And he answers thus: “we will not be in a position to answer that question until we answer a prior question about [the relationship between individual minds and collective intentionality]” (CIA: 406). So it is with great expectation that one finally reaches the section in “Collective Intentions and Actions” where Searle allegedly puts forth his thesis about the nature of we-intentions. Yet the question with which Searle begins this section can begin to give us the clue of what will go wrong with Searle’s analysis of we-intentions: “What exactly is the formal structure of collective intentionality?” (CIA: 408). This, it should be clear by now, is not exactly the question we were waiting for: we wanted to hear specifically about collective intentions, not merely about collective intentionality in general. Here as elsewhere Searle shifts from talk of intentions to talk of intentional states in general. And I shall show that, in the end, he presents no analysis of we-intentions whatsoever.

Searle presents the following notation to represent the simple case of raising one arm:

i.a. (this i.a. causes: my arm goes up)
CAUSES: MY ARM GOES UP

The expression *i.a.* means “intention-in-action.” In *Intentionality*, Searle distinguishes intentions in action from prior intentions. “All intentional actions have intentions in action but not all intentional actions have prior intentions” (*I*: 85); the “intention in action just is the Intentional content of the action” (*I*: 84). The colon means “it to be the case that.” It is thus quite correct for Searle to focus on intentions-in-action, since these are, given his scheme, the types of intention more closely connected to action. The “expressions in lowercase letters represent the mental component [of the action]” (CIA: 408); that is, when one intentionally, intentionally_{action/description} that is, raises one’s arm, the mental component of the action includes the representation of the arm moving up and the desire that the arm goes up as a result of having the representation of it going up. Finally, the expressions in capital letters “represent the actual physical events in the world” (CIA: 409).

Searle uses this notation to explain more complicated cases, such as the case of firing a gun:

i.a. (this i.a. causes: trigger pulls, causes: gun fires)
CAUSES: TRIGGER PULLS, CAUSES: GUN FIRES

The only element in this formulation not found in the previous formulation is the comma, which means “which.” After having introduced this notation Searle decides to drop the upper case expressions, since in all the examples he discusses he assumes that the intention-in-action is “successful” and thus “the contents of the mind can be read off directly onto the world” (CIA: 409). With this notation settled, Searle turns to the analysis of the case of Jones and Smith’s cooperative behavior as they prepare hollandaise sauce. Jones is stirring while Smith slowly pours in the ingredients. “Each [of them] has a form of collective intentionality that he could express as ‘We are preparing hollandaise sauce’” (CIA: 410). Searle declares this to be a collective intention-in-action and to have the following form:

i.a. (this i.a. causes: sauce is mixed)

But, obviously, there is nothing in the notation that would indicate the allegedly collective nature of this intention-in-action. For, if we add the upper-case expressions that Searle has chosen to ignore, we can see that this case is formally identical to the case of raising one's arm transcribed above:

i.a. (this i.a. causes: sauce is mixed) CAUSES: SAUCE IS MIXED

Jones intends to stir and Smith intends to pour. They might as well "collectively" *wish* to mix the sauce, but Searle has so far not shown that they are collectively *intending* anything—unless, of course, collective intentions are just individual intentions, which is exactly what Searle wants to deny.

Searle summarizes Raimo Tuomela and Kaarlo Miller's account of we-intentions and rejects it on the basis that "it attempts to reduce collective intentions to individual intentions plus beliefs" (CIA: 404). He claims that "no such reduction will work" (CIA: 404).¹⁶ Searle suggests that "one of the keys for understanding collective intentionality" is the "by and by-means-of relations" (CIA: 410). So, "Jones stirring is the means to making the sauce in the same sense that pulling the trigger is the means to firing the gun" (CIA: 410). Moreover, Searle tells us that the representational content of Jones' intentional_{mental} state can be expressed as "we are making the sauce by means of me stirring." Of course, the representational content of Smith's intentional_{mental} state is expressed as "we are making the sauce by means of me pouring" (CIA: 410). But since these two representational contents are different, they cannot have the same condition of satisfaction. Searle, moreover, has failed to demonstrate that the "we are making the sauce" part of these representational contents corresponds to the conditions of satisfaction of an intention. It could very well refer to the conditions of satisfaction of a desire or of a belief. Searle simply has not shown that a collective intention has to play a part in this scheme (other than the garden-variety role played by the individual intention to mix or to pour).

For example, let us suppose that while Smith pours intentionally, Jones fails to stir. Yet everything still comes out all right (think of a

freakish but possible scenario: the table was wobbly and strong gusts of wind enter through the kitchen window, and somehow these factors combine together to mix the sauce). Smith will probably be satisfied with what he did and with the ensuing sauce—despite the fact that it was not brought about in the special way that a we-intention to prepare the sauce would require.

Searle considers four possible analyses of the intentional contents of Jones as he cooperates in the mixing of the sauce.

- (I) collective i.a. (this collective i.a. causes: ingredients are stirred, causes: sauce is mixed) (CIA: 411)

Searle rejects this option. He dubs it “collectivist or socialist” (CIA: 411). And he claims that it “can’t be right because it leaves out the fact that Jones is making an individual contribution to a collective goal” (CIA: 411). I agree with Searle’s rejection of this option. But I do not see how this can be different from what Searle elsewhere claims is an obvious and primitive fact. In other words, in criticizing this view, terming it “collectivist or socialist,” Searle is criticizing his own general view about we-intentions. That is, if an analysis of a we-intention leaves out the individual contribution, then it is not an accurate analysis. The individual contribution could be the condition of satisfaction of a desire or a belief, and also of an intention, but the collective goal cannot be the condition of satisfaction of an intention, at least not until an explanation of how the peculiarities of intentions might play out for collectives.

Up until now, Searle has, if anything, cast even more doubt as to the possibility of collective intentions. We mentioned at the outset that Searle has two main fears regarding the analysis of collective intentions: first, that they might after all be reducible to individual intentions, and second, that they might suggest the existence of spooky and mysterious collective minds. Now, he has effectively added a third fear: that in defining collective intention we might unwittingly make the individual intentions involved in the action in question disappear.

- (II) singular i.a. (this singular i.a. causes: stirred, causes: mixed)

First of all, it must be noted that the addition of the term “singular” in (II) is, I take it, a mere pedagogical move designed to distinguish collective from individual intentions. There is no difference between a singular intention-in-action and an intention-in-action (singular i.a. \equiv i.a.). Searle calls this strategy “capitalist or individualist” (CIA: 411). The reason why Searle thinks this strategy fails, although by now probably to be expected, does not cease to be perplexing, and it does not cease to be defective. Searle tells us that “[t]his [view] is unsatisfactory because it is consistent with there being no collective intentionality at all” (CIA: 411). But this is not a good reason to reject that view, for Searle has not really shown that the attempt to reduce collective intentions to individual intentions is flawed.

As pointed out above, Searle admits, “I have not demonstrated that such analysis [the one that explains collective intentions by means of individual intentions] could ever succeed” (CIA: 406). He merely claims that the infelicities that he has shown to inhere in such analyses *suggest* that “we-intentions are a primitive phenomenon” (CIA: 406). It seems as if Searle begs the question here. For, after all, what is at stake is the question of whether we-intentions can be reduced to individual intentions or not.

What are, at any event, the infelicities that Searle has shown to inhere in the attempt to explain we-intentions in terms of individual intentions? Well, he has just attacked one version of this strategy: the Tuomela-Miller account of we-intentions. The reason for focusing on this account is that Searle admits it is “the best he has seen” (CIA: 404). Fair enough; but all Searle does in trying to show the inadequacy of the Tuomela-Miller thesis is to present *one* counter-example. The example is, in my opinion, of dubious efficacy, as I have indicated above.¹⁷ Even if the example Searle presents were efficacious, Searle has himself been forthcoming in condemning this very maneuver: “It is not of course to be supposed that a single counter-example can refute a philosophical thesis” (IOQ: 120). But this is exactly what Searle has done here—he has presented a single counter-example without offering a theory to back it up, and without explaining why and how it is a counter-example. Thus, Searle’s rejection of this view seems too facile and possibly question-begging.

- (III) collective i.a. (this collective i.a. causes: singular i.a.,
causes: stirred, causes: mixed)

Searle's rejection of this analysis is convincing. "The fact that a separate [singular, individual] i.a. is in the scope of the collective i.a." (CIA: 411) worries Searle, and for good reasons. Collectively preparing hollandaise sauce is not a case in which I have a collective intention (causing me) to have an individual intention, as this solution suggests. Rather, Searle suggests, the individual intention stands in a relation of means-to-end with regards to the collective intention. Keep in mind, however, that we are still in the dark as to the definition of a collective intention. Searle suggests that considering the case of pulling a trigger in order to fire a gun is helpful. In this case, "my intention to fire the gun by means by [*sic*] pulling the trigger consists in only one complex intention, not two intentions where one causes the other as part of its conditions of satisfaction" (CIA: 411–12). And so Searle thinks that this analysis is wrong in having one intention as a condition of satisfaction of another intention, and I think he is correct.

But before we turn to the fourth and last analysis, let us summarize the results so far. Of the three analyses Searle has presented, only two (II) and (III) are really analyses of collective intentions (or of collective intentionality in general). Both of those analyses Searle rejects. The remaining analysis (I) is not an analysis of collective intentions (or of collective intentionality in general), and Searle's rejection of it is not convincing. The bottom line is that so far there is absolutely no analysis of we-intentions. Let us see the fourth analysis, which Searle half-heartedly favors, and try to see if it explains we-intentions, that crucial component of the ontology of social reality.

- (IV) i.a. collective B by means of singular A
(this i.a. causes: A stirred, causes: B mixed)

Some clarification of Searle's notation in this case is in order. *A* and *B* are "free variables" (CIA: 412). *A* and *B* are names of states of affairs (actions or otherwise), not of intentional states. So, for example, Searle describes the case of firing a gun, making use of these variables and of the relation "by means of" in the following way:

(IV_{modified}) i.a. B by means of A (this i.a. causes:
 A trigger pulls, causes: B gun fires)

It is obvious that (IV) and (IV_{modified}) have a lot in common. Too much in common if one keeps in mind that (IV_{modified}) is supposed to be an analysis of an individual intention (firing a gun) and (IV) is supposed to be the analysis of a collective intention (preparing hollandaise sauce). The only difference between (IV) and (IV_{modified}) is that in (IV) one of the states of affairs is a collective action and the other is an individual action, whereas in (IV_{modified}) both are individual actions. But this says absolutely nothing about intentionality_{mental}. The issue is not whether there are collective actions. This much seems unproblematic. The problem is whether or not there can be collective intentions. And Searle has done nothing to suggest that there can be collective intentions.

Regarding the intentional_{mental} aspect, (IV) and (IV_{modified}) are identical: in both cases we have an *individual* “by-means-of” intention. Nowhere do collective intentions enter into the picture. Searle has altogether abandoned the project of defining a we-intention, and he has even abandoned the project of defining collective intentionality. All we get here is an analysis of complex individual intentions. But that an intention is complex (along the lines of the by-means-of relation) in no way entails that the intention is collective, and that there are collective intentions is what Searle’s ontology of social and institutional reality requires.

Searle is explicit about the fact that there is only one intention at play here. He begins the fourth analysis, the one he favors, by stating, “we are intentionally making the sauce and if I am Jones, my share is that I am intentionally stirring the ingredients” (CIA: 412). Searle then asks, “but what exactly is the relation between the collective and the individual intention?” His answer is: “it seems to me it is exactly like the relation of the intention to pull the trigger and the intention to fire the gun” (CIA: 412). And surely “me and the gun collectively intending to fire by me pulling the trigger” makes no sense. What is alike in the two examples is the structure of a complex intention. But “complex” does not mean, or entail, “collective.”

VI

Conclusion

I HAVE SHOWN THAT THERE ARE PROBLEMS regarding Searle's views as they relate to the ontology of social and institutional reality. First, many of his illuminating remarks concerning the nature and uniqueness of intentions are frequently betrayed when intentions are assimilated to other mental states. Second, and closely related to the first problem, is that Searle unequivocally states in *The Construction of Social Reality* that there are collective intentions, we-intentions (CSR: 23–26), but he aims merely to show that there exists collective intentionality. And, obviously, intentions are but one type of intentional state. Finally, Searle has neither shown that the attempt to explain we-intentions in terms of individual intentions is doomed nor presented a positive account of we-intentions. All Searle has shown is that for some collective actions, one of the intentional states of the agents involved is a complex intention, a complexity that arises from considering the by-means-of relation. But, interesting and true as this might be, it falls short of being a demonstration of the existence of collective intentions.

There is, then, a gap that needs to be filled in Searle's ontology of social and institutional reality. Two general strategies suggest themselves in trying to remedy this theoretical deficiency. First, one might wish to pursue, in earnest, the attempt to define collective intentions, whether by accepting that they exist but are analyzable in terms of individual intentions, or by presenting a comprehensive analysis that shows them to be non-reducible. Second, one might simply decide in favor of the second of the two alternatives Searle intermittently focuses on. Searle sometimes talks about collective intentions as being crucial for his ontology, and on other occasions talks about collective intentionality_{mental} as being the crucial element in his ontology. Given what Searle and other contemporary philosophers have said about intentions and other mental states, it might be promising to investigate whether desires (broadly construed) could carry the theoretical freight that Searle's ontology currently lacks. A definition of

a collective desire (broadly construed) seems, after all, a more plausible suggestion than a collective intention.

Notes

1. John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: Free Press, 1995, p. xii. Further references to this work will be indicated in the text by “CSR” followed by the page number(s). Other works by John R. Searle will be indicated in the text as follows. References to John R. Searle, “How to Derive ‘Ought’ from ‘Is,’” in *The Is/Ought Question: A Collection of Papers on the Central Problem in Moral Philosophy* (W. D. Hudson, ed.), London: MacMillan Press, 1969, by “IOQ” followed by the page number(s). References to John R. Searle, *Intentionality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, by “I” followed by the page number(s). References to John R. Searle, “Collective Intentions and Actions,” in *Intentions in Communication* (Philip R. Cohen, Jerry Morgan, and Martha E. Pollock, eds.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, by “CIA” followed by the page(s) numbers.

2. See note 1, above.

3. See L. A. Zaibert, “Intentionality, Voluntariness and Criminal Liability: A Historical-Philosophical Analysis,” *Buffalo Criminal Law Review* 1(2) 1998, 340–82. (Special Issue: *New Voices in Criminal Law Theory*, George P. Fletcher, ed.)

4. Originally published in *The Philosophical Review* LXXIII (1964), and then partially reprinted in his *Speech Acts*, cited in note 1 above. I shall refer to the version mentioned in note 1 above.

5. Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, London: Routledge, 1995.

6. This is Searle’s non-technical sense (I: 3).

7. I believe that the same ambiguity between descriptive and evaluative senses can affect “intentional_{mental},” but I don’t think the cases are too interesting.

8. Ronald J. Butler, “Report on Analysis’ Problem No. 16,” *Analysis* 38: 113–18.

9. Butler *ibid.*: 113.

10. Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York: Haffner Press, 1980.

11. Bentham 1980: 85–86.

12. Michael Bratman, *Intentions, Plans and Practical Reason*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987 (see especially Chapter 8). In a more recent collection of essays, Bratman addresses issues relating to collective behavior and collective intentionality. See Chapters 5–8 of Michael Bratman, *Faces of Intention: Selected Essays on Intention and Agency*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. For Mele and Moser’s views, see generally their

contribution to Alfred Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, and the references therein.

13. H. L. A. Hart, "The Ascriptions of Responsibility and Rights," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1948/49, reprinted in several places, among others in Antony Flew (ed.), *Logic and Language* (First Series), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963. The view that "actions" were no more than ascriptions of rights and duties was once the view that H. L. A. Hart believed to be correct (though he later rejected it).

14. I object to the view that animals can form intentions, but since I hold that having an intention to *X* is not a necessary condition for doing *X* intentionally, it is conceivable that an animal could behave intentionally in spite of the fact that it cannot form an intention.

15. See note 1 above.

16. Incidentally, Searle appeals to the example of ethical egoists who individually act on self-interest but with the belief that everyone else behaves like they do, but do so for the collective goal of humanity's welfare. This would be a case in which a person has the individual intention of acting selfishly, the individual belief that the members of the group (everyone else) will do their part (behave selfishly), and the individual belief that there are mutual beliefs as to the nature of the previous belief. These, Searle claims, are Tuomela and Miller's conditions for something being a we-intention. Searle further suggests that this is a case in which, although all the Tuomela-Miller conditions are met, we are not in the presence of a we-intention. In order for this to be a we-intention, Searle claims, there must have been a pact or agreement of some sort. But this is not a convincing argument against the Tuomela-Miller view. The tension to which Searle alludes is a classical objection to some formulations of ethical egoism: some formulations of ethical egoism recommend egoism on non-egoist grounds. But the objection could be answered, formally at least, by stipulating that the goal should not be non-egoist, in other words, to tell Tom that he should behave egoistically because it is the best thing for him to do, that Sue should behave egoistically because it is the best thing for her to do, etc. If it turns out that once we apply this individualistic scheme to everyone that everyone, the collective, will be better off, then this could be seen as an unintended and irrelevant side effect. Thus, the example would only work against the Tuomela-Miller thesis if it were true that all situations in which collectives are benefited or harmed this benefit or harm is necessarily the result of collective goals. But Searle has not proven this. For an in-depth discussion of the Tuomela-Miller thesis, see Raimo Tuomela, *The Importance of Us: A Philosophical Study of Basic Social Notions*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

17. See note 16 above.

References

- Bentham, Jeremy. *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, New York: Haffner Press, 1980.
- Bratman, Michael. *Faces of Intention: Selected Essays on Intention and Agency*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- . *Intentions, Plans and Practical Reason*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Brentano, Franz. *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint*, London: Routledge, 1995.
- Butler, Ronald J. "Report on Analysis' Problem No. 16," *Analysis* 38: 113–18.
- Flew, Anthony (ed.). *Logic and Language* (First Series), Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963.
- Hart, H. L. A. "The Ascriptions of Responsibility and Rights," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1948–49.
- Mele, Alfred (ed.). *The Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Searle, John R. "Collective Intentions and Actions," in *Intentions in Communication* (Philip R. Cohen, Jerry Morgan, and Martha E. Pollock, eds.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.
- . How to Derive "Ought" from "Is," in *The Is/Ought Question: A Collection of Papers on the Central Problem in Moral Philosophy* (W. D. Hudson, ed.), London: MacMillan Press, 1969.
- . *Intentionality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- . *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: Free Press, 1995.
- . *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Tuomela, Raimo. *The Importance of Us: A Philosophical Study of Basic Social Notions*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Zaibert, L.A. "Intentionality, Voluntariness and Criminal Liability: A Historical-Philosophical Analysis," *Buffalo Criminal Law Review* 1(2) 1998, 340–82. (Special Issue: *New Voices in Criminal Law Theory*, edited by George P. Fletcher.)