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Group Action and Social Ontology

Abstract: In recent years there has been an interesting turn in the philosophical literature to groups and collective action. At the same time there has been a renewed interest in various forms of methodological individualism. This paper attempts to show the diversity of group action that is overlooked by much of the literature, to clarify some of the ambiguities that plague our language about groups and collectives, and to support the view that social entities are genuine. Some important arguments against social entities being genuine are rebutted. The existence of social entities gives some substance to the debate about methodological individualism, but the resolution of the debate has depended too much on empirical results in the distant future. The article ends with some suggestions on how the debate matters in looking for biases in the directions of current social theorizing.

I.

Groups have identity problems. Some because of them and some because of us. They are too rarely recognized and when they are they are too little understood. This affects their development as well as the development of our describing and explaining them. There is now a growing literature in analytical philosophy on social action and social entities, but I think that literature is still too partial to individuals. In the past and even to this day, most of the literature in action theory has been quite explicitly about the actions of individuals (cf. Thalberg 1985), and of the literature on social action much has been too individualistic, as I try to argue below. Recently there has also been philosophical work on social explanation which is explicitly methodologically individualist (for example, MacDonald/Pettit 1981 and Elster 1982 and 1985). I see a danger of individualism when sociologists turn to the theory of action (as in Coleman 1986b) unless they are very careful about its individualistic biases.

Individualism takes many different forms in many different areas, whether it concerns theory, policy, ethics, or whatever. My emphasis here will be on theory, although what is said there clearly has ramifications for policy as well as other areas. Within the area of theory there are many different

positions that can be taken. Karl Popper expressed the view of many early methodological individualists in claiming "that all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives' (states, nations, races, etc.)". (Popper 1945, 91; the early debate is usefully anthologized in O'Neill 1973.) This is a position about the best or ultimate understanding or explanation. It is often put in terms of an opposition between explaining in terms of individuals or explaining in terms of the whole society, although there are groups and collectives of varying sizes in between. This opposition of extremes has recently been encouraged by an undeveloped contrast between micro-theory (usually of rational individual choice) and macro-theory (of the structures of the whole society).

Others seem to have in mind ontological views about what kinds of things there really are, where the individualist's position is that social entities or collectives are nothing more than an aggregate of individuals in relation to each other. This often involves an acknowledgment of collectives and groups but not as genuine things such as individuals. This ontological individualism looks to the composition of social entities in terms that some think fit our commonsense perception or understanding. It is usually not said why the decomposition should stop at this level rather than a more fine-grained micro-foundation of cells or sub-atomic particles. There are many alternatives, including the families, groups, and classes of society, but the individualists prefer individuals. There also are varying positions about whether groups are non-entities, useful fictions, hypothetical, theoretical, or reduced.

It is common among philosophers now to sort out the ontological positions in terms of the explanatory positions. Following Quine's famous essay On What There Is (1953), they say that we look to a person's theory as it is best formulated to see what objects are required for her comments to be about. If we do not want to be committed to witches or phlogiston then we must not talk about them when we theorize about the world. The dispute about entities then becomes a competition of theories. This still allows the reduction of a theory like chemistry to a more basic theory like physics while retaining one's commitments to chemicals. (Reduction does not mean elimination.) A difficulty is that it is hard to find theories about society, especially any that are developed enough to determine the ontological commitments. In the meantime our daily understanding and frequent interactions are rich and diverse. We can speculate about what theories we might end up with as well as get guidance about how our present understanding will develop. Ordinary perceptions and a lot of commonsense can also tell us much about what there is. Part of my argument below is that

these speak strongly for there being groups and other social entities of many kinds.

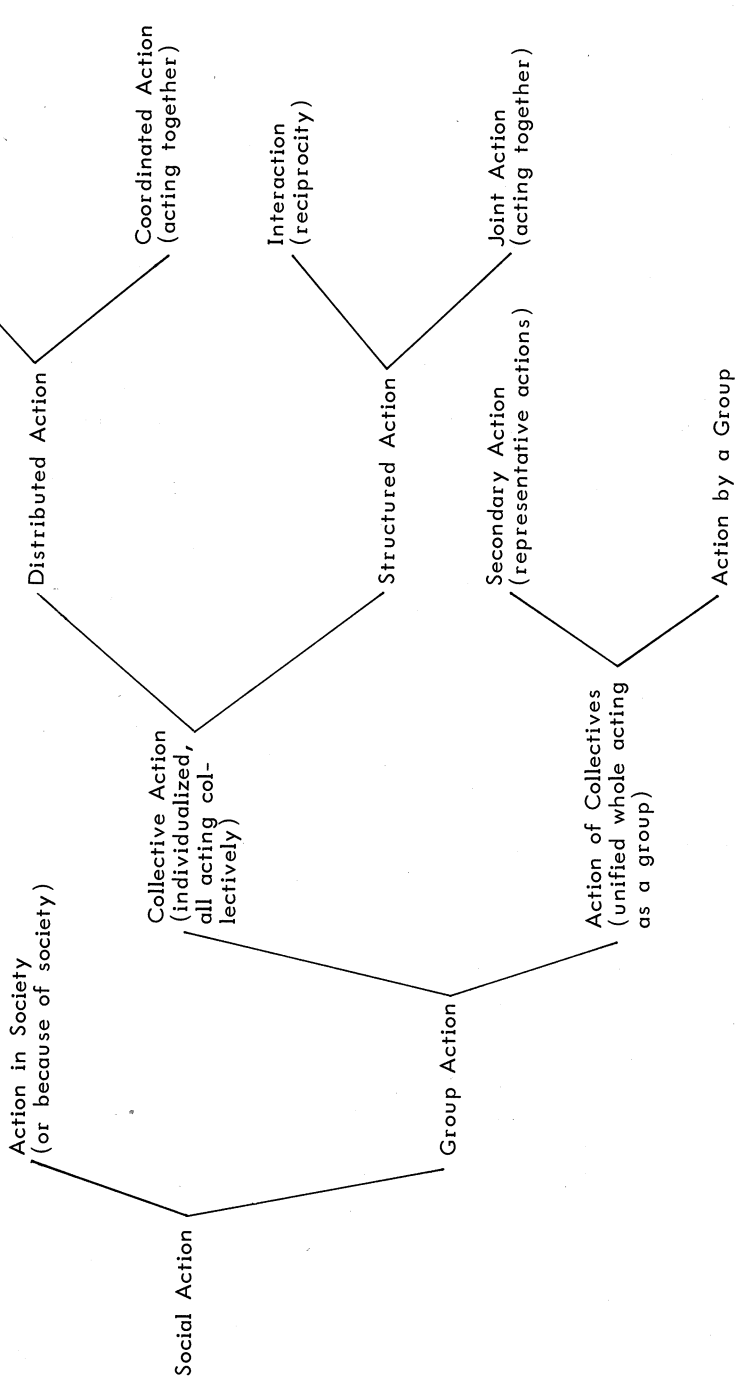
In the meantime there is much reason to leave our options open and let the developing theories compete for satisfactory explanations with their own appeal to entities, whether individual or social or, more plausibly, both. A reductionist can propose ways in which future social theories in terms of social entities can be reduced to individualistic theories, but this still allows a recognition of social phenomena with social entities. It is a much stronger claim to say that we will end up eliminating all theorizing about social entities. In the meantime it is unreasonable to try to theorize without social entities and premature to so restrict theorizing about society. (For some interesting arguments along this line, see Levine, et al. 1987, see also Lash/Cleary 1984 and Kincaid 1986. Some interesting arguments by Burge 1986a and 1986b, against individualism in psychology have important implications for social theorizing as well.) At the end of this paper I indicate some of the ways in which I think forms of individualism not only restrict but also bias our thinking and theorizing.

II.

Before going any further about social entities, I need to say something about kinds of social action since I think many of our troubles come from a paucity of examples and a lack of clear differentiation of the kinds of social action. The discussion of social action is troubled by ambiguity and vagueness. There is a major distinction between actions in (or because of) society and group actions. (See Figure 1 for a diagram of my classification of social action.) Social actions can be very individual if they are done in society, because of society, or for society. Acting and putting on airs are social acts, they are done in the presence of others. Speaking, criticizing, and even dining are social actions because only in society are these actions developed. They are socialized actions. Picking up litter is a social action - for the good of society. These are things that individuals do; they are individual social actions. Speaking a language is often taken as a paradigm case of a social action, although a speech is a paradigm case of an individual action. People use language in solitary confinement, and there have been sole surviving speakers of languages. Even the common use of language, which is a very social thing, involves people talking to each other one at a time. Of course it is important to study our relations to others and our dependence on others for their lessons, laws, or recognition, but these features are characteristic of most of our individual actions.

I will concentrate on non-individual social actions, which necessarily involve more than an individual agent and which I shall call "group actions". (This will not include actions of individual agents which involve

Figure 1
CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL ACTION



someone or something else as a patient such as kicking someone or helping.) There are many distinctions to make here, giving a variety of relations to the actions of individuals. Some of these relations are difficult or even impossible to state in a way that would allow explanations of social phenomena without appeal to social entities. In much of the literature the central examples of social actions are those that have the most direct relation to individual actions.

I distinguish between collective actions and actions of collectives, where the former covers actions involving (virtually) all of the individual members and the latter does not. It is common to treat only collective action where everyone is doing the same thing, i.e. in a distributed way. The group does what each of the individuals do. Hunters are those who hunt, people from a certain region are noted for speaking with an accent, people from the same class are said to believe an ideology, and theists pray to a god. Such cases of distributed action where everyone does something without leadership, organization, or rules I call "homogeneous action". Where the collective action is arranged so that people act together as in a choir singing or the people of a chorus line dancing together I will speak of "coordinated action". When a team plays hard and an orchestra plays in time it is because of distributed action. All the individual members do the same thing.

Even when we act collectively much of what we do varies from person to person with a variety of different contributions. Many who emphasize social structures look to such structured action, and some see such structured action as a model for a good society. Emphasis on structured collective action does emphasize participation and sometimes the recognition of the contributions of each. When we play ping pong against each other or greet each other by bowing we interact reciprocally. Reciprocity has its limitations as an account of collective action since it is generally an interrelation of individual actions, which can be quite separate, for example when we reciprocate by shovelling our walks. The golden rule as a rule of reciprocity is a rule about individual action, and reciprocity can characterize the individual actions of bitter opponents. (There is a lot to be said for reciprocation in society as can be seen in Becker's 1986 account of reciprocity as a fundamental virtue and Axelrod's 1984 account of the development of cooperation in terms of game theory.) Gould's attempt (1978) to base a good society on reciprocity suffers from the limitations. She emphasizes self-development and self-realization (68 and 120), which are clearly desiderata and perhaps central, but she neglects social productivity and collective needs like protection. Reciprocity tends to be face-to-face, and even interaction quickly becomes minimal (if it can exist at all) beyond our community or work group. Individuals cannot (pace Gould) relate to everyone "immediately in personal interaction" (55) or be in mutual relations with everyone (166). If interaction is collective

action (rather than just interrelated individual actions), it is only one kind and is unlikely to apply to large-scale social and historical action.

Often action is structured so that the participating agents jointly perform the action. I think this brings us closer to acting collectively with groups as agents. An example that has come quickly to mind in the literature is that of people jointly moving a heavy object like a piano. Each makes her contribution without doing it alone or even the same thing as others. In such cases, people act together but not in parallel, as it were, in distributed coordinated action. Often such joint action requires a lot of organization or leadership to structure the way the contributions are combined. In turn, the action of the group has at best a very complex relation to the individual actions of its members. It becomes more difficult, if possible at all, to generalize about the social action of the group on the basis of the individual actions. It is often wrong to try to account for joint action in terms of the individual contributions. Participants do not do so. They do not even concentrate on their individual actions (or those of other individuals), for example in an acrobatic team or a team of jugglers, and it is not the way for us to explain joint action. Granted, each participant does something, but the same must also be granted for each arm or leg or even atom involved. We sometimes learn or explain no more about collective action by looking at individual people than we do by looking at individual arms or atoms. (I return to this issue at the end of this paper.)

So far, I have been talking about group actions involving all the members of the group, but most group actions, especially those that are relevant to social explanation, are done with very few members participating. Here I will speak of actions of collectives (or teams, associations, etc.) where there is an action attributed to the whole group but without the participation of everyone. One kind of action of collectives is called "secondary action" where the action of a representative or leader constitutes the action of the whole. Someone speaks, bids, or signs treaties for a group or a nation (or it can be for another individual). When we cannot all speak at once or are otherwise engaged, it is convenient to have someone (although not necessarily just one) represent us. These are interesting cases and have got some good attention from Copp (1979 and 1980) on secondary actions and May (1983) on vicarious actions. The complexity in the cases is that of establishing the representation and the criteria for attribution to the whole. A danger is to overgeneralize from this kind of action to the view that all group action without full participation must be understood in terms of leaders, directors, and generals.

There are many cases of actions of collectives without full participation and without actions of individual representatives. Even couples living together

usually divide up the labor. Team members do only some of the things that the team does, for example getting a goal in the first period. And there are many reasons why it is important to have nonplaying team members who then are not even participants. Nonparticipation predominates wherever there are organizations that are well-established and/or formally structured. We can think of parliamentary investigations or church appeals. Extensive work has been done on corporate action and corporate responsibility (for example Donaldson 1982 and French 1984). Corporate action is very difficult to put in individualistic terms and even though it involves highly structured organizations and activity. Actions of collectives with nonparticipation often involves very non-hierarchical groups and informal activity, although this still allows for structures of activity. The attribution of action to the whole group can be very complex and unclear. Nevertheless, I think this is the kind of social action that is most important in understanding and explaining social phenomena. It applies to groups of all kinds, although probably least of all to whole societies. It also makes it very plausible to explain social phenomena in terms of social entities since it is least likely that actions by a group can be accounted for by generalizing over actions of individuals. The relations are too complicated to sustain generalizations about social effects. (I discuss this further below.)

This completes my classification of social action. I doubt that it is exhaustive, and I am pretty sure that the classifications are not exclusive. My goal has simply been to raise doubts about using a single model to explain social action, and I have suggested some ways in which some individualistic models are inadequate. It is important to note that the way in which actions will be best classified depends very much on how we specify the actions. A tennis team will play another team when there are singles matches on different courts (homogeneous action) and they will win the tournament when enough of them win their matches (action by a group). A doubles team can take the net together (coordinated action) as they help each other (interaction). Carrying chairs can be a coordinated action while carrying fifty chairs is a joint action. Different classifications will be important to different explanations.

It should also be mentioned that my classification of group actions strongly suggests that it is about groups of individual people acting, but it can also be about the actions of individual groups in relation to each other. Theories of interaction are applied to nations in accounting for deterrence in rational choice theory and families are treated as units of consumption. I think that this is as it should be. One last point is that if there are social entities that are other than groups of people then social action will be still more complicated. This will be true if Ruben (1985) is right that social entities, including nations, are not composed of people or if corporations are also composed of factories or if things such as fashions,

social practices, or the Renaissance explain social phenomena. It should certainly be clear that I do not think social action is best understood in holistic terms of the whole society, which in my view is probably the least interesting and the least active of collective agents. My contention is that there are many kinds of social groups, large and small.

III.

We learn a lot about agents through what they do. I have indicated a variety of social actions, some of which can most plausibly be attributed to social, collective agents. An important factor is whether the specific action depends upon collective properties of the group such as its structure or complexity. An unorganized group of people can fill a square and frighten the traffic controller even though it is a simple aggregation of people. An established organization of people has many collective properties due to its structures and procedures and will act accordingly, but it will also have simple aggregated properties of weight and size. There are many forms of complexity and of organization that determine the properties and actions that can be attributed to the group. There are many different ways in which the whole can be more than the sum of its parts. (For a good discussion of these issues, see Wimsatt 1986). A second important factor is whether there are levels of explanation that strongly depend upon many collective properties of groups with complex structures. This, I contend, is where we will find collectives and other social entities. Here, there are a lot of issues of levels of theory and emergent properties that need further investigation. (Wimsatt 1976 is an important discussion of many of these issues.) What I want to do here is to consider what social entities might be like if there are any. My main interest is whether they can be genuine entities that do things in society, and I shall consider several arguments against social entities as agents. First, however, something needs to be said about difficulties in the language of social ontology, i.e. about social entities. In this section I explore some of those difficulties.

There is a vast array of groups, teams, organizations, societies, institutions, etc. that might be contemplated. No doubt there is reason to say that a president, a judge, and an exploiter are each social entities, but I will restrict my attention to the normally multi-agent things like councils, corporations, and classes - recognizing, of course, that occasionally there are one-person committees and other collectives. Still the diversity is great and the terminology is vague and ill-defined.

Discussions of social ontology suffer from using terms that are ambiguous and vague. The broad term "society" is a good example. All sorts of things are called societies: clubs recognized within a jurisdiction, professional associations, more or less unified groups of people (or insects), social systems (like feudal or capitalist societies). And for each way of

disambiguating "society" the application of the term is unclear. There are questions about the determination of membership, the cohesiveness that is necessary, the structure required, and other aspects. There are different notions that need to be described and analyzed differently. Small societies such as clubs tend to be active but unimportant for social change, while monolithic societies such as the aggregation of people in a country may be structured but seem not to be active. Attempts to talk in terms of groups also suffer from vagueness on the one hand or the development of a variety of specific technical notions on the other hand. There are too many kinds of groups that get confused with each other because of unclarity in the first place.

Some refer to institutions, but this is another term with sloppy identity. (See Macdonald/Pettit 1981, chapter 3 and DeGeorge 1984). I think the notion of an institution is too vague to be useful in investigating social entities. Institutions are a mixture of all sorts of things that get established in a society: marriage, the family, law, the courts, universities, hospitals, social welfare, etc. It usually complicates and confuses the task to use such a broad and ambiguous term. If the term is to be used it certainly has to be disambiguated and made more precise.

There is ambiguity in the term "France", which Ruben discusses in arguing for the existence of social entities (Ruben 1985). In his defence of social entities, much of which I endorse, he points out that "France" can refer to the geographical area which we visit but that it also refers to a social entity which is a member of the United Nations (13-15). I think it is the country that is represented at the UN, while there is also a nation to which Mitterand might speak. Ruben has begun an interesting study which needs to be pursued. He makes some useful distinctions between being a member of, being a part of, and being part of. His goal is to show that social entities (wholes) have members but not parts and eventually to show (contrary to the view of many including myself) that social entities do not have material properties. I disagree with the result that crowds and mobs are material and thus not social entities (80) and that two people jointly lifting a stone are exhibiting a material rather than a social property (106). He takes away the many material things that social entities do and the material bases for the many social things they do.

An important aspect of Ruben's study is the caution against using an unstudied or inappropriate notion of part. There are many notions of parts, and at least some of them are ill-adapted to analyzing social entities. (Some of the difficulties were surveyed by Schlick 1979, 388-399 and Nagel 1961, 380-397. A recent important study is Simons 1982.) Contrary to Ruben, I think being a member is too narrow (for corporations and even France) and that social entities (not only crowds but also casts, families, and many other social entities) have parts, although I find the terminology vague

and unstable. Nevertheless, Ruben uses the terminology more carefully than most. (Another good discussion of parts of collectives is in Copp 1984, 265-267.)

Another locus of threatening ambiguity and vagueness is the term "aggregate", which of course is a technical term. Many theorists of collective action make some sort of distinction between aggregates and organized groups. Ruben (65ff.) distinguishes aggregates from social wholes on the basis of a developed calculus of individuals, which gives a precise but restricted notion of an aggregate. French (1984, reviewed in Ware 1987) includes aggregates among collectives (social entities) and distinguishes them from organizations. The distinction depends on whether or not there is an established structure for decisions, but both notions are too narrow in disallowing any change of members in aggregates (including crowds) or any radical policy change in the case of organizations. (Both restrictions are criticized in Copp 1984.) Copp (1984) uses a distinction between aggregates and organizations but only as a matter of degree of being organized and the degree of formality of its organization. (As opposed to Ruben, his aggregates and organizations are very material because of the membership relation he uses.) Too often the structures and other collective properties of informally established aggregates of people are ignored. So-called aggregates have many collective properties the relevance of which depends on our explanatory interests. I quite agree with Copp when he says (1984, 265): "The taxonomy of collectives for purposes of social science, for purposes of biological science, for purposes of law, and for our more prosaic purposes, might differ, and, correspondingly, the unity relation for collectives which are superficially of one kind might differ."

An important feature of social entities in social theory is that they have a variety of collective properties that play a role in our explanatory and prescriptive projects. I think even Copp narrows the variety too much in focussing on internal organization and member recognition for distinguishing aggregates and organizations. Sometimes things are aggregated for quite unnatural and even bizarre reasons (see Simons 1982, 169). But always there are a variety of properties that give the history, context, structure, and the significance in various ways of an aggregate of things, properties that are more often recognized in formally organized groups. But organized groups can also have aggregate properties. A quartet plays on stage, plays music, plays a quartet, and plays beautifully. As Wimsatt (1986, 260) points out: "Both paradigm aggregates and paradigm wholes are aggregates for some of their properties and not for others." Social entities are varied and have a full variety of properties.

IV.

But do social entities 'really' exist? Many contend that they are only fictional, derivative of real individual entities, or in some other way secondary. In this section I consider three common arguments against the reality of social entities: that they do not have bodies, that they cannot be observed, and that they do not act.

It is widely held that collectives and other social entities do not have the appropriate embodiment. Whatever material composition they have is discontinuous and dispersed (see Gruner 1976, 443 and Copp 1979, 178 and criticisms in Ware, forthcoming). Tuomela (1984) voices this concern, although ontology is not the focus of his attention. As he puts it (145): "Persons have (biological) bodies and perform bodily actions in contrast to collectives." Earlier (28) he claims that concept formation in social science should go together with an underlying individualistic ontology and "should conform to one's tendency to think individualistically of ontological matters, especially causation, so that causation due to holistic entities is regarded as merely derivative". Or as he also says (456), the "causal impact" of a social entity "must be exerted and come about due to some concrete individual persons". I dispute these claims (particularly about bodily action) that social entities can be causes only derivatively because they do not have a proper physical body. To the extent that the argument depends on the point of view of a middlesized object, I think it begs the question. After all, people's bodies are clouds of molecules made up of distant sub-atomic particles.

We have many occasions to think of things that are discontinuous from closer observation or a more detailed view. The proverbial forest made up of its trees protects swarms of bees and flocks of birds within it and hides our land, which may itself be an array of discontinuous fields, beside it. We have so many occasions for thinking about archipelagoes; the fronts, fleets, and formations of the armed forces; and the letters in dot matrices and the words in print. Their aggregate properties give these things the impact and weight that they have, and the way they are structured make them effective in interaction. They do things because of their material embodiment.

Social sciences must appeal to both micro- and macro-structures just as the natural sciences have. Many of the descriptions and explanations that are appropriate at one level will not apply at another level. The micro-entities in molecular biology are just as real as the macro-entities, but the entities are recognized through different sets of descriptions and explanations. Similarly psychology applies only to individuals as the micro-entities in social theory which includes studies of crowds, movements, and organizations. Crowds are amongst the most aggregated of collectives, but

it is their embodiment in the mass of people that makes them threatening, disruptive, effective, or comforting. The size and denseness are also collective properties which require little more than the mass of people.

Of course, the embodiment of social entities involves more than the mass of the people. The people are related to each other in definite and significant ways, whether or not the resulting structure is formally recognized. In formally and legally recognized organizations, there are elected officers and recognized leaders with widely acknowledged functions and roles. There are also informal groups such as philosophical discussion groups (discussed by Copp 1984) and even larger political organizations, which have unplanned structures that are barely recognized by any of the participants. Social collectives do not have to be people in intended relationships.

Social entities are also given material basis or embodiment in ways other than through the mass of people in interrelation. Some clubs are mainly a bank account and a name in the books of the students' union. On the other end of the scale there are organizations such as corporations that are legally incorporated with boardrooms and workshops, smokestacks and technology. The employees and factories are probably not part of the company in the same sense but the company is known by what they do. Companies produce in their workshops and pollute through their smokestacks. Corporations are built up in the city and can go up in flames. They have a physical presence through this embodiment. Some will insist that companies are their people with their relations and their structures of decision-making, while the factories are their property. (Then are the employees merely the company's hired workers?) Of course, the factories are owned and occupied and claimed through legal recognition. But the corporation remains in the valley even when all the people withdraw from it.

One thing I do not want to say is that corporate doings and actions are only actions of people. Many of the actions of corporations can be seen as actions of an individual or more often groups of people. This is not the case when a corporation pollutes a valley with emissions from automatic machinery through the smokestack. The pollution may well be the result of human misjudgment or neglect by architects and engineers, but their earlier actions do not constitute the corporate polluting. Copp (1979, 184) gives an example of a computer designed with a randomizer automatically billing some but not all customers with small debts. (Mellor 1982 has a similar example of a telephone system becoming an automatic network and draws the different conclusion that the network would then be a machine rather than a group.) I agree with Copp that given the circumstances the company employees (perhaps with contracted programmers) acted in a way that was sufficient (given the offices and equipment) for the people being billed, but I disagree that this is a case of their action constituting the

company's action of billing a customer. My intuitions are that it would not even be the case when the billing is the result of an omission on the part of someone with the duty of directly overseeing the automatic charges to customers' accounts. (Tuomela, forthcoming, like Copp claims that collective actions are necessarily constituted by member actions.)

Various other social entities can also remain with the loss of the people because of the complexity of social embodiment. An academic department can survive and offer courses with the loss of all of its teachers. Perhaps nations are lost in a plague, but I think countries remain, to be taken over or populated. With differences of structure and institutionalism there are differences of formation, stability, and deterioration, although this is an area that needs further investigation. Nevertheless, collectives and other social entities are embodied and have some of their effects because of their physical nature. Even if it is only the bodies of its members, which I doubt, the social entity has a dispersed body. The unity comes from its acting collectively or as a collective.

The second argument to which I object is that social entities are not observable. It will not be surprising that since I regard social entities as embodied I also regard them as observable. Some, for example Quinton (1975), think that social entities are too dispersed or just not the right kind of thing to be observed. (Quinton's views are discussed in Ruben 1985, 12.) This is a case of not seeing the forest for the trees, and it is allied with the view that we tend "to think individualistically" (Tuomela 1984, 28). In our normal daily lives we tend to think individualistically as we interact with each other (although the tendency can be exaggerated or moderated), so also we tend to see individualistically. Still we can see even crowds and demos at the end of a street or from a helicopter above without seeing one face in the crowd or even individual bodies.

Pettit also has argued against the observability of social entities (Macdonald/Pettit 1981, 129), although his discussion is marred by his use of the ambiguous and vague notion of institutions. Anyway, he has since stated his view in terms of there not being "lines of causal force" back to social entities like England (Pettit 1984, 85-87). The idea is that our views about England depend upon a background of beliefs and not upon England as an individual causal force. I think we usually depend upon both. The question of observation is often not clear, and I do not know whether we see England or the EEC even from a satellite. But we certainly see quartets and relay teams, and there is no reason why we cannot see larger and more dispersed things just as we see constellations or skyscrapers from their entrances. This is important because observation is not the only thing that depends on "lines of causal force". Social entities do have causal powers both in aggregated and structured ways. This, of course, is

a claim based on the direction that social description and explanation is going.

This naturally brings me to the third argument that a social entity is not the kind of thing that acts. One idea seems to be that only persons with an active mental life can be agents and perform actions. To suppose otherwise is to attribute a group mind, *à la* Hegel or Durkheim, to a society or another social entity. Levine/Sober/Wright (1987) express their opposition to collective agency when they object to the use of expressions for social entities in a non-elliptical way "to imply a belief in collective consciousness and collective agency, where a class or even humanity as such thinks, chooses and acts" (74). There is much to this worry, but it will not do as a sweeping attack on all social entities as collective agents. After all, we do attribute 'mental' predicates to groups of various kinds in various ways, and not only in a way that distributes across members as in saying that the team was happy. There are simple cases of groups making decisions ranging from formal votes to informal cases where I accept a decision but do not myself decide. (Any decision of mine is at most about how I will make my contribution.) The group decision is not distributed in the same terms anyway. More difficult are the cases of thinking and probably impossible are cases of feeling except for clearly metaphorical attributions. But groups and even societies can literally choose and act even if they cannot literally think. Can they not also be collective agents?

In the midst of Tuomela's claim that collectives do not have bodies, he says: "Persons have a full blown mental life while collectives do not ... Groups can also be said to intend to act", but only in a "somewhat metaphorical" sense (Tuomela 1984, 145). Tuomela/Miller (1985) attribute more of a mental life to groups than do most people but the attributions are always said to be metaphorical and they are constituted by all the participants in the action each having a "we-intention" (also a central part of Tuomela 1984), which involves intending the action of the whole group and the performance of one's own part in the action. So the crucial mental life is distributed amongst the participants. (In Tuomela 1984, 147-150, this requirement is briefly relaxed in an interesting suggestion that there might be degrees of intentionality with partial distribution of individual intentionality.)

My contention is that there are examples of (undistributed) collective choices and decisions and that these lead to collective action. I am not sure about collective intentions, but I am pretty sure that I do not want to talk about collective consciousness. An obvious conclusion is that groups are not like us in every way, but the variety and complexity of these issues is only beginning to be studied. Fortunately, the issues are easier to study now that we do not have to think of a literal group soul since we have rid ourselves of literal individual souls. It does not hurt

our research that it is also less clear now what a mind is and what properties should be included amongst mental properties. At least we can think of some of these properties being attributed to groups without committing ourselves to some mysterious mental stuff.

I have been arguing for collective agency, but there is a way that much of the difficulty can be finessed. Whether collectives actually perform actions or not, they do literally do things, and that is centrally relevant to a social theory about what happens. Much that happens in society (even between individuals) is non-rational and non-intentional. We should go beyond the Weberian attachment to rational and intentional action to see what effects social entities have and to see what causes them to form and develop in the way that they do. Even if collectives do not rationally act, what they do should be studied. I predict that we will find some social entities to be more cognizant and decisive than we usually allow and that we will find other theoretical social entities that act with brute force or gentle guidance. Their effects can be studied whether they act or just do things.

V.

My strategy so far has been to clarify the variety of social actions which need to be understood and explained in social theorizing. In determining what is done, we also determine what does it. We do not have developed theories which would tell decisively what there is, but we do have a lot of commonsense and the beginnings of theory that indicate that there are social entities that do things. Some consider this suggestion ontologically disreputable. So I have considered the more important arguments directed against social entities, and I have found them lacking.

In the end (if it were ever to come) our ultimate sciences should tell us what there is. If there are quarks then the ultimate physics will have something to say about them. If there are acids, ultimate chemistry will tell us. If there are volitions, ultimate psychology will tell us. Similarly, if there are classes (or states or institutions or whatever other social entities), ultimate social theory will tell us about them. This is not all of the story - commonsense and social practice will also lead us to refer to social things. But it is plausible to think that ultimate theories give the most important part of the story. So are we left to speculate while some opt for a millennial individualism?

Although there are many directions that social theory can take, there are attempts to understand where it will end up and how it will get there. Some claim that social theory will reduce to theory about individuals (e.g. Elster), but it should be clear that this still leaves at least two options open. A reducing theory can either preserve or eliminate. When it pre-

serves it tells us how we can say everything about social entities in terms of individuals while still recognizing that the things can also be said in terms of social entities. This, I take it, is the sort of thing that would be said about a reduction of chemistry to physics. There would still be water and acid even if all the chemical phenomena could be explained in terms of atoms or sub-atomic particles. When a reducing theory eliminates we discover that there are reasons against or no reasons for talking about the things in the reduced theory. There are reasons against talking about phlogiston and no reason for talking about bushes or stellar constellations in our theories. Maybe we can and should get along without any claims about social entities, and maybe not.

In recent years there have been some important attacks on various forms of methodological individualism. Some have argued that the methodological individualists have produced bad explanations or none at all where explanations are needed (Garfinkel 1981 and Miller 1978). More recently it has been claimed that methodological individualism is implausible when it is compared to analogous theses in biology and especially psychophysiology (Kincaid 1986 and Levine/Sober/Wright 1987). The issues here are complex and will deservedly get more attention. I side with those who regard reduction, eliminative or otherwise, as unlikely. The situation in social theory does not seem to me any better than that in the psychology of individuals. A few philosophers of psychology continue to think that it is best to ignore cognitive psychology (in terms of beliefs, desires, etc.) and instead do neurophysiology. Most, however, think that psychology will develop on its own with the recognition that it and neurophysiology must at most be compatible. The brain is the physical basis but not the locus of the basic explanation. Theories at both levels are important but independent. Of course this debate will continue with different hunches about where the sciences are going.

In social theorizing people have different expectations with different assessments about where social theorizing is and should be going. The methodological individualists are looking for in which that proposed social explanations can be reduced to individualistic explanations, while the methodological collectivists (or anti-reductionists) are looking for challenges that make reductions seem implausible. This is what I have tried to do by showing the variety of social actions and social entities to which we are likely to refer. Commonsense tells us that we interact with collectives in many ways. We establish and disperse them. We feel part of some and fear others. More importantly, they interact with each other. Many good studies make central use of reference to social entities such as crowds, classes, movements, societies, etc. (see especially Rudé 1981 and Tilly 1978 and 1984). My suggestion is that the variety of social actions and entities is too great to expect that we can state in individualistic terms the generalizations that we want to state in our theorizing. Even

more serious is the problem of stating the relevant variety of collective properties in terms of the enormous and changing variety of underlying parts.

On the other side there are studies of the advances that can be made with individualistic explanations (for example, Axelrod 1984, Hardin 1982 and Coleman 1986a, but also literature cited above). Important to this are the foundations in action theory developed by Tuomela for explaining social action with a conceptual individualism. However, I think Tuomela's project reveals the difficulty that we are in. Tuomela very briefly gives a programmatic sketch of how the whole panoply of social explanation can be derived from earlier accounts using individualistic predicates (see Tuomela 1984, 266-268). The problem is that these issues, which separate the individualists and the collectivists are extremely programmatic and dependent on the ultimate development of science, as Tuomela acknowledges (Tuomela 1986, 234). There seems to be so little that we can do to resolve the differences. We are left to wait for the ultimate sciences. In the meantime, each side follows its inclinations. The bulk of what I have said in this paper is to incline us all to the commitment to social entities as well as ordinary individuals. That we should also be committed to individuals is not in question. But then until there is an ultimate theory to the contrary the commitment to collectives as entities required by our theorizing should also be considered. At least the burden of the argument seems to be on the individualist or reductionist to show the need for any restrictions on our social ontology. The proposed constraints need to be justified.

VI.

The debate about the possibility of reduction will certainly continue, but left as a debate about the reduction of ultimate theories it seems so ethereal and unrewarding. It is left too much to hunches and to hopes for results in the distant future. So why does it matter? I think this is the question we should be asking, and to which we should shift our focus of attention. It does matter how we proceed in theorizing. It affects the direction, the development, and the results of our current theorizing. Our heuristics for theoretical discoveries bias us in certain directions, and I think these should be more clearly delineated. The shift of attention in the philosophy of science to scientific discovery has been salutary, and I think social science would also benefit from attending to methodological heuristics. A good example for a discussion of this is Wimsatt's study of individualistic biases of heuristics in biology where groups of organisms are treated as "collections of individuals, rather than as unitary entities" (Wimsatt 1980, 249). Among other things, he claims that the reductionist "will tend not to monitor environmental variables, and thus will often tend not to record data necessary to detect interactional or larger scale

patterns" (Wimsatt 1980, 233). This is one of many tendencies that Wimsatt considers.

There are surely many tendencies in the social sciences that are either favorable or unfavorable to developing good theory as well as good policy. In my discussion of kinds of social action I have tried to indicate a few of the individualistic tendencies that I think are unfortunate. There is a tendency to analyze social action in terms of aggregates of people acting in ways that are easiest to combine theoretically, for example through distribution or interaction. Such accounts apply badly to large groups, to collectives with important structures, and to divisions of complex activity. So also there is a tendency to talk about homogeneity and similarity rather than unity and solidarity for example in a class or race, but I would contend that the latter collective properties are more relevant to explaining social change. In any case they should not be neglected.

In the majority of social actions where people cannot or do not all participate there is a tendency to talk about leaders for explaining organization and unity with a lack of attention to collective properties of groups such as being assembled or having decision-making procedures. For example, Elster thinks that it is obvious that "leaders are always necessary ... to coordinate collective action" and gives a strange example of developing trust amongst one hundred people by the leader talking to each of them (two hundred transactions) rather than each talking to each other (about five thousand transactions) (Elster 1985, 366f.). He does not consider the possibility of a meeting or the conditions that prompt a spontaneous work stoppage. I would contend that leaders are not as necessary as is usually thought. In any case there are many properties of the group to be attended to.

Even where there are cases of clear joint action there is a tendency to look at the action too individualistically. We think about the participant's attention to his or her own contribution, but I think this requires more than is practical for much of joint action. It could hardly apply to each acrobat or juggler in a team where each has to look at the patterns of the group action as a whole. Such joint action seems parallel to tying a bow tie where we focus on finger movements at first and then become skilled by taking the whole operation as basic. Similarly, I suggest that good piano movers jointly and smoothly coordinate the piano through its twists and turns by watching what is done as a whole. It is the group and its action that are observed. Actions by large groups, including joint actions, will involve other collective features. Large groups can intimidate or enthuse. Structures and procedures will account for decisions. I contend that such collective properties should play a more prominent role in our social theorizing. Not enough attention is given to what large social entities do.

Those are ways the tendencies can matter to theoretical discovery. They also matter to moral theory and social policy. Obviously, our assessments and practices depend upon the development of our social theorizing. McDonald (1986 and 1987) has noted differences in tendencies between Canada and the US on the recognition of group rights such as those for national minorities and for religious groups. It is plausible that those tendencies are affected by parallel tendencies in social theory (see also May 1987). The issue of unfavorable tendencies in moral theory is dealt with directly by O'Neill (1986a). She argues that moral theory should address some of its claims to collective entities and institutions with their capacities to deliberate and act if we are to solve problems of global justice and economic development (see 27-51). For example, she claims that "retrospective judgments ... of individual responsibility, open a weak and indirect route to changing the action of powerful institutions and collectivities. What is to the point is to change the normal activities and boundaries of certain institutions and collectivities" (44f.). The point is that we fail to solve many kinds of problems if we attend only to individual agents.

Such thinking about collective agency can also be applied to nuclear disarmament. It is plausible to say that "[c]onsequentialist reasoning is only practical when based on a determinate and accurate view of the agents and agencies whom it addresses and their specific categories of understanding and powers of action" (O'Neill 1986b, 49). Agencies and organizations are especially able in gathering, processing, and applying information. They also have powers to act quickly and effectively in cases where human agents could not dream of changing the events (O'Neill 1986b, esp. 61-67). There are indeed actions of participating agents and of separate individual agents, some of which deserve to be put along side those of organizations for their significance and our appeals. The point, however, is that we ignore much of the collective action if we try to understand it in terms of individual deeds of members of congresses, cabinets, and committees. We tend to be blind to the collective properties, including structures and environments.

This is true of attempts to get governmental organizations to act, but similar plausible claims are made about the rise of movements to get those organizations to act. "To say that a single person cannot make a difference may be true. But to say that a large number of single persons cannot is obviously false." (Govier 1983, 490) The issues lie in focussing on what a large movement can do, which is part of getting the moral arithmetic right (Parfit 1984, chapter 3). Our focus is wrong and cooperation is hindered if we focus on what a person can do even within a movement or organization, for example calling for disarmament. Suggestive support is given for this position by Baier's discussion of trust in one's community. She says, "if everyone insisted on knowing in advance that any sacrifice

of independent advantage which they personally make, in joining or supporting a moral order, will be made up for by the returns they will get from membership in that moral order, that order could never be created nor, if miraculously brought about, sustained" (Baier 1980, 134; quoted in Govier 1983, 491). This applies to a whole moral order, but I think the point applies even more strongly to a group or movement. Notice how different this is from Elster's discussion of assurance with his focus on a leader.

I think we can see the tendencies and the reasons for not neglecting the whole by thinking about the difference between helping a group and being a part of a group in action. There is a significant difference in focus and motivation. In considering whether to help a group, one naturally considers what one can do and whether the help is needed. It also leads to considerations of the costs and rewards. There are rather different questions about the prospect of being part of a group. Then the focus is on what the group can do, as well as collective properties such as its interests in solidarity, use of communication networks, and need for an assembly hall and meetings. There are lots of collective properties that come quickly to attention. And the individual concerns are different if it is a matter of feeling a part of the group. These, I contend, are tendencies in practice that derive from observing collective organizations in practice. Whether I am right about the details, the important point is about the need to look at the tendencies in social and moral policy as they are affected by the way we think about groups.

More important to the paper as a whole, however, is the contention that we should be looking at the ways in which the terms of our research direct the development of our social theorizing. It is interesting to speculate about what social theories will ultimately look like, but in the meantime it matters a lot how our current theorizing affects the problems we consider and the possible solutions we notice. These issues of heuristics of discovery are unclear, understudied, but extremely important.

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