

The Philosophy of Sociality

INTRODUCTION

1 The We-Perspective

Human beings are social beings living and adapted to living in groups. They can think and act as group members and as “private” persons. In modern societies people tend to belong to several groups, and the basic or constitutive goals, values, standards, beliefs, practices, and so on (using one term “ethoses”) of these groups may sometimes be in conflict with each other.

In a broad sense, this book is about the group’s point of view, namely, the group members’ shared *we-perspective*. To use a topical term, we can say that the book concentrates on *collective intentionality* (“aboutness”) expressing a *we-perspective*. The *we-perspective* will be understood to contain at least the ethos of the group, collective commitment, affective elements (e.g., “we-feeling”), and action based on these components. A *we-perspective* may be involved both in the case of one’s functioning *as a group member* for the group and in the case of one’s functioning *as a private person* in a group context. The term *we-mode* (or, equivalently, *group mode*) is in this book applied to the former case and the term *progroup I-mode* to the latter case. The plain *I-mode* (or private mode) need not involve collective intentionality, but when it does, the mentioned qualifier “progroup” is used. The *we-mode* level can be spoken of as the proper group level, while the *I-mode* level gives the private (or purely personal) level of social life.

My technical explicate for the *full we-perspective* (group perspective) is the *we-mode*. Roughly speaking, the *we-mode* is concerned with group-involving states and processes that the group itself has at least partly conceptually and ontologically constructed for itself (e.g., the group may simply take as its goal—“our” goal, for the members—to build a bridge). Acting as a group member in the *we-mode* sense *constitutively* involves acting for a *collectively constructed group reason*—the group gives a group member reasons to think, “emote,” and act in certain ways. For instance, the group’s constitutive goals, values, and beliefs

4 INTRODUCTION

provide such group reasons. In contrast, the I-mode is concerned *only* with “private” personal and interpersonal reasons and relations, as well as with groups involving such ingredients. Group reasons in a weaker sense may contingently be involved.

For instance, social institutions require special thickly collectively constructed contents (e.g., “Euros are *our* money”), and, arguably, this seems clearly to fall beyond the conceptual resources of the I-mode (see chapter 8). The important divide here is between a group thinking and acting as one agent versus some agents acting and interacting, perhaps in concert, in pursuit of their (possibly shared) private goals. Group reasons (qua we-mode reasons) and I-mode reasons (private reasons) for acting and having attitudes thus are clearly of a different kind. Accordingly, only the we-mode can properly account for the generality that the group level involves with respect to group members (change of membership, future members, etc.) and the kind of (partial) depersonalization that group life involves.

We-mode thinking, feeling, and acting presuppose collective acceptance of the group’s ethos (or of some element entailed by the ethos) or of some other, *nonconstitutive* content as the object of the group’s “attitudes.” The collectively accepted contents must be taken to be for group use, namely, collectively available and in force for the group members, and, when broadly conceived, for the benefit of the group’s goals and interests.

It is often useful to view a group as an agent capable of acting as a unit. Thus it can be taken to accept views, form intentions, act, and be responsible. However, it is not an extra agent over and above the group members. When a group acts, its members must act as group members. In a sense, one can thus redescribe the group’s functioning and acting at the group member level in terms of the group members’ functioning in appropriate ways as group members. This is basically we-mode activity. It follows from the idea of a group acting or functioning as one agent that the members ought to function appropriately. They can be said to be necessarily “in the same boat,” “stand or fall together,” or share a “common fate.” In the technical terminology of this book, they satisfy the “Collectivity Condition.” Formulated for the special case of goal satisfaction, it necessarily connects the members as follows. Necessarily (as based on group construction of a goal as the group’s goal), the goal is satisfied for a member if and only if it is satisfied for all members. The Collectivity Condition is a central constitutive element of the we-mode.

This book focuses on the we-mode, thus we-mode collective intentionality, and on its conceptual and functional relation to the I-mode. As mentioned, the I-mode we-perspective and I-mode collective intentionality also exist, but the we-mode we-perspective is holistic and richer—for example, in that it involves the Collectivity Condition and the group reason requirement, both of which are based on collective construction in the group. We-mode collective intentionality (equaling the we-mode we-perspective) basically amounts to thinking and acting fully as group member. The I-mode case is partly different, for there is also I-mode collective intentionality that does not involve the I-mode we-perspective. Notice, too, that people often, if not typically, act both for we-mode and I-mode reasons, even on the same occasion.

The central distinction from which my theorizing starts is the generally accepted distinction between thinking and acting as a group member (reflecting

the group level) versus as a private person. My analysis of thinking and acting as a group member will assume that we are dealing with normal human beings to whom propositional attitudes, other mental states, and actions can meaningfully be attributed. In general, such agents must understand what group membership means and must also know to which groups they belong. In my technical developments, this will require that they understand what the group ethos is, that is to say, what its central or constitutive goals, values, beliefs, norms, and standards are and what it is to take it, or its ingredients, as one's reason for action. Note that even in simple cases of joint action such as two persons doing something together (e.g., lifting a table), the participants form a group with the ethos content of lifting the table: They have collectively accepted lifting the table jointly as their joint goal, hence they jointly intend to achieve this goal.

The second element that is conceptually involved in the we-mode, over and above thinking and acting as a group member, is collective commitment. In order for a group member to act as a group member, it must thus be required that she be committed (bound) to performing actions that further the group's ethos and other matters that the group is pursuing. Indeed, the members should be collectively committed, namely, committed as group members, to participating in group activities. Their collective commitment involves them also being "socially" committed (that is, directedly committed to other group members) to each other to act in the right group ways. Collective commitment has two basic, intertwined roles here. First, it "glues" the members together around an ethos. This gives the foundation for the unity and identity of the group. Second, collective commitment serves to give *joint* authority to the group members to pursue ethos-related action. They can and must, in their own thinking and acting, take into account that the group members are collectively committed to the group ethos and to the group members and that they are jointly responsible for promoting the ethos. Every group member is accountable not only to himself for his participatory action but also to the other members. All this shows how group unity, as formed by collective commitment to the ethos, relates to action as a group member.

In view of the above, it can be said that the we-mode is constituted of two elements, a content element and a "practical" (action-related) element, namely, collective commitment. To illustrate, we consider a two-person case in which a goal (or intention, belief, etc.) is collectively accepted (constructed) and held by two persons, you and me. The case involves two elements:

- (i) G is *our* goal, where "our goal" satisfies the Collectivity Condition.
- (ii) We (you and I together) are collectively committed to goal G as our goal.

I claim that (i) and (ii) give the intuitive "rock bottom" of the we-mode. Actually, (ii) is part and parcel of (i) and can be regarded as entailed by it. The participants' being collectively committed to goal G involves that they are committed to doing their parts of their joint action concerned with their achieving G. The joint goal that they here have constructed for their group serves as their reason for their performing their parts. The notion of a joint goal satisfies the Collectivity Condition. Due to its being satisfied, the notion of "we" is not reducible to the conjunction "you and I," although it entails it.¹

6 INTRODUCTION

The we-mode elements (i) and (ii) can intuitively be viewed as partial translations of group-level descriptions of the following kinds.

(i') Group *g*'s goal is *G* (where *g* has you and me as its sole members).

(ii') Group *g* is committed to goal *G*.

Descriptions (i') and (ii') can be regarded as equivalent. Hence also (i) and (ii) are seen to be equivalent from our present group-level perspective. This point also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to intentions, beliefs, and other voluntary attitudes.

While the notions of collective commitment and acting as group member are intimately connected, they can still analytically be kept apart. So conceptually we start with a full notion of a human being as person and the notions of group and group ethos and promoting the group ethos (acting for the group), and we proceed to analyze thinking and acting as a group member on this basis. Adding collective commitment to thinking and acting as a group member gives the notion of the we-mode, which explicates the thick (or full) we-perspective. The fullest notion of the we-mode requires in addition that the group members not only accept the group's ethos and other goals and beliefs, and so on, in their action but also are at least disposed to accept them in the reflective and reflexive sense that the specific constellation of goals, values, beliefs, and so on indeed is the group's ethos and that those other elements indeed are the group's nonconstitutive goals and beliefs, all this being publicly available knowledge in the group. This account applies to normal democratic groups, and it also applies to fleeting groups such as the group formed by some persons carrying jointly a heavy object. Here the group's specific ethos can consist merely of a joint goal and a relevant mutual belief that qualifies as a group ethos.

This book relies on the conception of human beings as persons in the sense of the "framework of agency" that assumes that (normal) persons are thinking, experiencing, feeling, and acting beings capable of communication, cooperation, and following rules and norms. There are important evolutionary considerations related to this. One is the phylogenetic fact that the human species has had at least the general capacity for both we-mode and I-mode attitudes and action for at least hundreds of thousands of years, although not refined by linguistic skills until perhaps one or two hundred thousand years ago. The other is the fact or at least claim that children acquire a rudimentary capacity for shared intentionality toward the end of their first year of life and for we-mode collective intentionality starting as early as in their second year of life.² In this process the child learns to make believe and pretend. This capacity is central, for example, for a person's understanding of the notion of institutional status. The disposition to have collectively intentional (we-mode) thoughts and to act in the we-mode seems to be a coevolutionary adaptation (that is, based on a genetic and cultural evolutionary mechanism and history). The precise content of the collectively intentional mental state is nevertheless culturally and socially determined. It has been argued on the basis of experimental results that the most basic feature that distinguishes human beings as a species from higher animals such as chimpanzees is humans' capacity and motivation to have, and act on, collectively intentional states that probably coevolved long ago, perhaps in connection to the emergence of *Homo sapiens*.³ (See chapter 9.)

In a nutshell, this book accordingly argues that conceptualizing social life and theorizing about it requires the use of group concepts, indeed the we-perspective and, especially, the we-mode. To think (e.g., believe, intend) or act in the we-mode is to think or act as a group member in a full sense, thus for a group reason. Thinking and acting in the we-mode expresses collective intentionality in its full sense. In contrast, to think or act in the I-mode is to think or act as a private person—even if a group reason might contingently be at play. To what extent and in what contexts group concepts are needed or useful is discussed in detail in the book. An example of where the we-mode (the adoption of the full we-perspective) can do better is the prisoner’s dilemma. It simply does not exist—at least on the group-member level—if the group members really act fully as a group. For here the group would rationally choose the cooperative strategy (C) over defection (D) because the C strategy or action yields a joint outcome that is Pareto-preferable to the joint outcome resulting from defection, while, in contrast, the pure I-mode recommends mutual defection, at least for single-shot cases, and the progroup I-mode at best recommends changing the situation into a coordination game.

As to some connections to political philosophy, the kind of collective acceptance account to be constructed in this book to partly explicate the we-perspective shares some features with the “republican” version of democratic theory that communitarianism also represents. Briefly, the ethos in my account represents “common good” (a central element in republicanism) and other joint constitutive elements, while collective acceptance (coming to hold and holding relevant we-attitudes and acting on them) represents the democratic process wherein people, qua group members, express their shared choice of what the common good (etc.) in their group will amount to.⁴

2 Preview and the Basic Theses

Chapter 1 clarifies the central notion, or actually notions, of acting and functioning as a group member. One can function and act as a group member either in the we-mode or in the I-mode. In the latter case, one adopts the group ethos ideas in a private sense. Accordingly, we-mode reasons for actions and mental states are group-based and collectively constructed, while I-mode reasons are private. We-mode acting as a group member will be called the “standard” sense and the latter the “weak” sense of acting as a group member. The notion of collective commitment—viewed as a conceptual entailment of we-mode collective acceptance—is clarified, and its functions in central group contexts are discussed in this chapter. A distinction between we-mode groups and I-mode groups is made and clarified. We-mode groups, in contrast to I-mode groups, are social constructions based on collective acceptance, whereas I-mode groups are not.

Chapter 2 analyzes the notions of the I-mode and the we-mode, or actually several versions of these notions. It also clarifies the central Collectivity Condition (recall section 1) that underlies the full we-perspective (the full shared point of view). The chapter also contains arguments for the importance of the we-mode, and it surveys most of the reasons for either the necessity or the desirability of we-mode thinking and acting that are discussed in more detail later in the book.

8 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 is concerned with I-mode we-attitudes and develops several varieties of them, most of which will be used in later chapters. Indeed, shared we-attitudes are central in all of the remaining chapters. There is also a discussion of a circularity problem that arises in some contexts involving coordination of attitudes and actions.

Chapter 4 gives an account of we-mode we-intentions and joint intentions and their irreducibility. Joint intentions in the we-mode are taken to consist of shared we-intentions in the we-mode. A detailed account of we-intentions is given, and an alleged circularity problem concerning we-intentions is discussed and dissolved. This chapter also presents the “bulletin board view” of collective acceptance of collective attitudes and discusses its applicability.

Chapter 5 gives a detailed account of joint action as a group and a brief survey of other available accounts of joint action. While it concentrates on acting jointly as a group (we-mode joint action), weaker kinds of joint action are also briefly considered, for example, I-mode joint action and collective action based on shared we-attitudes.

Chapter 6 analyzes collective acceptance from a semantic-linguistic point of view. The results are used to give an account of group actions and beliefs. Furthermore, a generalized account of group attitudes is given. This central model is based on group authority in the sense of some authorized members’ forming attitudes and/or acting for the group, as well as possibly giving orders to group members. In this connection also the central notion of having an attitude as a group member based on a group reason is clarified. The appendix to chapter 6 discusses social groups, I-mode and we-mode groups, mainly from an ontological point of view, and contrasts the entity view with the nonentity view.

Chapter 7 contains an extensive discussion of cooperation, including accounts of both I-mode and we-mode cooperation. These two modes are compared and illustrated in terms of a simple game-theoretical public good acquisition model. It is shown that in some situations we-mode cooperation is preferable to I-mode cooperation even on grounds of instrumental rationality. Cooperation in a group context, thus basically in an institutional context, is also considered, in both its I-mode and we-mode versions.

Chapter 8 presents a detailed account of social institutions in force. Social institutions are regarded as special collectively constructed social practices (recurrent actions as a group member) that are normatively governed—in part by constitutive norms. At bottom, institutions are group-level phenomena accountable in terms of the we-mode. However, in actual life, institutional activities normally also include lots of I-mode activities that accordingly can be said to have colonized the realm of we-mode institutional action. The special institutional status (including a conceptual, social, normative component) is central to a social institution.

Chapter 9 contains a discussion of the evolutionary aspects of acting as a group member and cooperation. It is argued that the disposition to act as a group member (and, accordingly, to cooperate) is a coevolutionary adaptation, a stable feature involving probably both biological and cultural elements. This chapter sketches an account of the dynamics and change of social practices and discusses group change and evolution. The main change mechanism is taken to be social

learning (e.g., imitation) based on conformism, thus we-attitudes. This theoretical account squares well with other, empirically supported work in the field.⁵

Chapter 10 presents an account of group responsibility. The main idea it defends is that we-mode groups, namely, groups in which a substantial number of the members are collectively committed to the group (its “ethos” and to each other to promote the ethos), are normatively responsible for their actions and for what their members, also violators and dissidents, do. In contrast, I-mode groups, namely, groups relying only on private commitments to some shared goals or beliefs, and so on, are not responsible as groups for any actions or outcomes, although their members may be jointly responsible for what they jointly (although not as a group) cause.

Chapters 1–6 create the basic theory of the book, and the rest of the chapters make creative use of the theory to give an account of cooperation, social institutions, group evolution, and group responsibility.

The most central theses defended in the book are as follows.

(1) The we-mode is central both for (a) conceptualizing the social world and (b) accounting for the functionality of several kinds of social activities and relationships. As to (a), for example, the concept of social institution is a group concept collectively constructed in the group and thus clearly seems to involve the we-mode. The we-mode is also functionally required (at least to an extent). Thus, in comparison with the I-mode, thinking and acting in the we-mode (thus for a group reason satisfying the Collectivity Condition) will in many cases make joint action, cooperation, and social practices instrumentally more functional. Aspects of the centrality of the we-mode are discussed in all chapters of the book. The shared we-mode (or group) perspective is the basis of the theory created in this book. As the disposition to we-mode thinking and acting arguably is a stable feature based on culture-gene coevolution (an adaptation), this theory connects to our ancestral history and has a naturalistic basis.

(2) A group member thinks or acts in the we-mode if and only if he is (i) “we-committed” (participates in the collective commitment) to a thought (the mental state and its content) or, respectively, to an action that is (ii) collectively accepted in the group as the group’s thought or action and that is (iii) for the group’s “use” and accordingly gives the group members a group reason for their thinking and acting. We-mode states and actions presuppose for their truth the satisfaction of the Collectivity Condition (involving the members’ necessarily “standing or falling together”; see thesis (4)). All of these features are assumed to be mentally represented in the group members’ minds in one way or another. Thus we can speak of a group member having we-mode states such as intentions and beliefs. As an empirical claim, it can be argued that we-mode mental states and actions are natural, coevolved capacities of human beings. This fact, if it is one, is also philosophically important, for—although collective intentional attitudes may make things observer-dependent—these attitudes themselves do not depend on any underlying intentional or “preintentional” attitudes. (See chapters 1, 2, and 9.)

(3) In the I-mode case, a social mental attitude (e.g., intention, belief) often involves a conformist element. Such a conformist attitude can be explicated as a we-attitude. Such an attitude is a we-attitude in its grounded sense if and only if its holder (an individual agent) has it and has it in part because he believes that the

10 INTRODUCTION

others (or the majority of them) have it and because he believes that all this is mutually believed in the group.⁶ Here “because” can express either a reason or a cause. The connection of we-attitudes to conformism is discussed in chapters 3 and 9.

One can refine the notion of the I-mode and work with the “plain” or “pure” I-mode, the “progroup” I-mode, the pure private mode (chapter 2), and even the antigroup I-mode. We-attitudes can also be had in the we-mode, as especially chapters 4–6 make clear. In the we-mode case, the because-relation expresses a presupposition (or a “presuppositional reason”) rather than a reason in the standard sense. I-mode we-attitudes can also be called “thin” or “weak” we-attitudes, while we-mode we-attitudes are “thick.”

(4) Intuitively, genuine group attitudes and actions are based on the Collectivity Condition, which is discussed in detail in chapters 1, 2, and 8. Applied to the satisfaction of a collective goal, this condition says: Necessarily—due to collective acceptance of the goal as the group’s goal (note the reflexivity)—a collective goal is satisfied for a participant if and only if it is satisfied for any other participant. Collective acceptance here is in the we-mode if and only if it satisfies (a version of) the Collectivity Condition. Furthermore, it is argued in chapter 8 that the we-mode and the Collectivity Condition also amount to institutionality in a broad sense and, equivalently, to collectively constructed sociality. (The precise treatment and the required qualifications for these four equivalences are discussed in chapter 8.)

The Collectivity Condition gives a reason to say that the depersonalization that occurs in social groups is part of the basic structure of group life (in its we-mode content) and thus is not a mere contingent feature of groups.

(5) The we-mode is not reducible to the I-mode, although progroup I-mode (requiring acting for the group in a private sense) comes functionally (although not conceptually) close to the we-mode. For instance, a person may have a goal to work for the benefit of his group but still do this privately and be only privately committed, although this goal still does not amount to a we-mode goal that the group “reasons.” (See chapter 5 for progroup I-mode joint action versus we-mode joint action.) In general, arguments concerning the aspects of the irreducibility of the we-mode to the I-mode are discussed in several chapters, especially in chapters 2 and 4–8.)

(6) Social groups are not agents in an ontological sense, but they can often usefully be treated as agents and persons, and therefore, for example, beliefs, goals, intentions, and actions can be attributed to them. The “positional” account of a group’s attitude, discussed in chapter 6, is based on the group members relevantly collectively accepting the attitude as the group’s attitude, although a group cannot literally have an attitude, but a group of persons can collectively share an attitude as group members. (See chapter 6.)

(7) While human beings are capable of thinking and acting both in the I-mode and the we-mode, it is a basic problem in which situations which mode is exemplified. We-mode mental states and actions typically are joint states and actions in a strong sense involving an irreducible, thick “we” (that is, a “we-together”), and this makes the ontic “jointness” level central for the construction of the social world. In this connection, the “primacy” problem and the “switch”

problem arise. Primacy concerns the conceptual versus ontological primacy of one mode over the other, and the switch problem has to do with how a person can or does switch from one mode to the other. (These matters are discussed in chapters 4–8.)

(8) Central parts of the social world are socially constructed in terms of collective acceptance. Thus, medieval Finns collectively created money out of squirrel pelt by collectively accepting squirrel pelt to be money. Collective acceptance here amounts to coming to hold and holding, with collective commitment, a relevant “performative” we-attitude, broadly speaking, one in either the intention family or in the belief family. In chapter 6, group actions and attitudes are shown to be based on collective acceptance, and in chapter 8, social institutions are discussed as collectively constructed artifacts. The account of group attitudes and actions involves the idea of there being authorized group members (“operative” members, e.g., leaders) for various group functions. They typically not only form goals and views but also have the power to act for the group and to give orders to members. Note that groups often involve a normatively codified division of tasks and rights, thus constituting power-related positions.

In addition, a group’s constitution, its ethos, is based on collective acceptance that satisfies the Collectivity Condition. The goals, values, standards, and so on involved in the ethos (and all other items fully constituted in the we-mode) have the world-to-mind direction of fit of (semantic) satisfaction and function as (we-mode) group reasons for the members’ thinking and acting.

(9) There are two centrally different kinds of cooperation, I-mode cooperation and we-mode cooperation. In I-mode cooperation, the participants try to satisfy their own “private” goals by adjusting them and their (private) means actions toward the others’ corresponding goals and means actions, purporting that the participants will gain from cooperation, as compared with a situation where cooperation does not take place. We-mode cooperation in turn basically amounts to we-mode joint action. (See chapter 7.)

(10) Social institutions in their core sense are norm systems obeyed in accordance with relevant social practices, often highly routine practices accountable in terms of “collective pattern-governed behaviors.” The norm system will include constitutive norms (such as “Squirrel pelt counts as money”) that serve to confer a special institutional status on the social practices or some of their element(s). The *institutional status* consists of (i) a *conceptual* (or “symbolizing”) component (e.g., squirrel pelt constitutively is money); (ii) a *normative* component ((a) the predicate “money” may be applied to squirrel pelts, and (b) the owner of squirrel pelts has certain *powers* concerning exchange of goods); and (iii) a *social* component (the money institution is a group phenomenon valid in a group context). The concept of social institution is a we-mode concept, and in actual practice, at least some we-mode thinking and acting is required for institutions to function adequately. This book argues that collective sociality and institutionality go together and are in fact truth-equivalent with both the we-mode and the collectivity involved in the Collectivity Condition. (See chapter 8.)

(11) The development and cultural evolution of social institutions toward equilibria is investigated partly in terms of new application of a mathematical model of change that I have developed elsewhere and is only informally explained

12 INTRODUCTION

in this book.⁷ The case of the evolution of institutions requires the addition of suitable assumptions about conformism of various kinds, for example, conformity based on majority (e.g., shared we-attitudes), leaders' opinions, or the plain attractiveness of ideas. (See chapter 9.)

(12) Under a wide variety of conditions, we-mode groups are normatively responsible for their actions and outcomes of their actions, and they are also responsible (to some degree at least) for their members' actions in group contexts, and this also includes violations of the group's ethos (its "constitution").

In the case of I-mode groups, there is only "aggregated," although possibly conditional, private responsibility for what a member does (either alone or in conjunction with the others' I-mode actions). (See chapter 10.)