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## **The Idiocy of Strategic Reasoning. Towards an Account of Consensual Action**

*Abstract:* Practical reasoning is an agent's capacity to determine her course of behavior on the base of some evaluation of available alternatives. Reasoning is instrumental insofar as an agent decides over available alternatives by aiming to choose the best means to realize her own goals. Reasoning is strategic if the agent assumes that what the best means to realize her own goals is depends on what other agents will do. Strategic reasoning still plays a central role in influential accounts of social action. This paper first argues for the view that purely strategic reasoners are unable to achieve even the most basic and unproblematic forms of mutually beneficent coordination, and then gathers some elements of a richer account of relevant forms of practical reasoning.

### **1. Introduction**

In his recent book on the *Origins of Human Communication*, the primatologist, linguist and developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello (2008) suggests that the basic difference between humans and other primates is in the *kind of goals* they pursue rather than in the specifically human capacity for linguistic communication. Whereas other primates have *individual* goals only, the ability to pursue *joint* goals is uniquely human. Joint goals are different from individual goals in that they are aimed at collectively by a plurality of agents. The case in which agents pursue a goal *collectively* has to be carefully distinguished from the case in which agents pursue the *same* goal *individually*, as the latter often leads to conflict, whereas the former commits the participants to joint action (Schmid 2009). The term Tomasello uses for the pursuit of joint goals is shared intentionality. He argues that the lack of shared intentionality among other primates explains the lack of linguistic communicative practices, as linguistic communication involves shared intentionality. Since communication by linguistic means is an especially *complex* form of cooperation, however, it cannot be, according to Tomasello, *the first instance* of shared intentionality in human development. Thus Tomasello argues that the analysis of the *basic* structure of cooperation has to dig deeper than to the structures of fully developed linguistic interaction, and explore forms of shared intentionality that are, in principle, available to pre-linguistic beings.

Already in his famous earlier book on the *Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (1998), Tomasello points out that the decisive moment at which a baby primate's development departs from a human baby's comes quite some time before full linguistic competence is achieved. At the age of about nine months, Tomasello observes, human babies start to follow other people's gaze; shortly after, they start to attempt to direct other people's attention actively by pointing at things, and engage in complex forms of spontaneous cooperation. Tomasello calls this the *Nine Months Revolution*, and he takes *joint attention* to be the first instance of a joint intentional attitude in child development. In the ten years that have passed since his first book, Tomasello's thinking has continued to revolve around the role of shared intentionality in human cognitive development, and how exactly shared intentionality makes human cognition and action differ from that of our closest relatives in the animal kingdom.

There is a remarkable development, however, between the views Tomasello expressed in his first book ten years ago, and the new picture that emerges from Tomasello's recent book (Rakoczy/Tomasello 2008). In the earlier book, Tomasello seemed to think that shared intentional attitudes (especially joint attention) somehow result from the capacity for *social cognition*. Social cognition is the capacity to recognize other agents or cognizers *as agents* or cognizers, that is, to conceive of them as the subjects of intentional attitudes, capable of perception, belief formation, and action, as distinct from objects that do not have intentional attitudes and whose behavior does not constitute action. As Tomasello originally conceived of the basic distinction between other primates and humans, the former are, so to speak, 'autistic' (my expression) and do not recognize other agents as anything else than just another kind of objects in their surrounding world. This is not to say that Tomasello denied our relatives the capacity of *reasoning*, if reasoning is understood as the capacity to decide on how to act on the base of a (however primitive) deliberative evaluation of one's available alternatives. Non-human primates are capable of choosing suitable means (courses of actions, sometimes involving the use of tools) for the pursuit of their goals. Where this is not simply conditioned behavior, such action instantiates a special sort *practical reasoning*, namely *instrumental reasoning*. According to the image that emerges from Tomasello's first book, he seemed to think that some non-human primates are rather apt instrumental reasoners.<sup>1</sup> Reasoning is a precondition of action, since any behavior of which it is not possible to make sense in terms of some sort of reasoning does not instantiate an action (in routine action, the way from reasoning to action might be considerably longer than in the paradigmatic cases). Non-human primates do act, according to Tomasello's

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<sup>1</sup> Philosophical worries concerning the conceptual possibility of pre-linguistic thought are increasingly under pressure from evidence provided by empirical research. In a video Hannes Rakoczy presented in a talk, a primate could be seen thinking about how to reach a nut that was placed at the bottom of a test-tube shaped glass which was fixed at a bar of his cage and too narrow and deep to be reached by hand. After a reflective moment, the animal left the screen, came back with his cup of water, filled the glass with its content, and happily took the nut that was coming up floating on the rising water. It seems plausible that such behavior isn't just random, but the product of reasoned choice of means based on mental imagery and internal test action.

first view, but for lack of social cognition, they are incapable of what following Max Weber one might call *social action*. Social action is action in which the agent somehow relates to another agent's behavior *as action* (Weber 1980[1921], §1; Schmid 2009, 215–244).

The big change in Tomasello's views is that in his recent book, Tomasello now presents impressive evidence that non-human primates are rather able social cognizers, and therefore capable of social action. Let me just quote what is perhaps the most impressive experimental evidence. A chimpanzee is given the choice between two bananas, one lying in plain view of a higher-ranking individual (who can see but not reach it), the other covered from the higher-ranking individual's view, and visible only to the chooser. The result is that the latter banana is chosen. This can plausibly be interpreted as an impressive display of social cognition. Here is the reasoning that seems to be involved in the behavior. First, the chooser knows what the higher-ranking individual can and cannot see, that is, it perceives the other as having a visual perspective that differs from its own. Second, it ascribes to that other intentional subject some behavioral dispositions, such as the desire to have a banana, and to react aggressively on having a banana snatched right from under its nose by a lower-ranking individual. Third, it has the desire to avoid getting into trouble with the higher-ranking individual. Therefore, it reasons that it is best to choose the banana of which it knows that it cannot be seen by the higher ranking individual. So contrary to Tomasello's earlier views, non-human primates are, to some degree at least, proper social cognizers and social agents. If they are granted their capacity for social cognition and action, however, the question of what it is that makes them different from human animals rises anew.

In his new book on the *Origins of Human Communication*, Tomasello once again puts great emphasis on the role of pointing behavior. This behavior, he argues, is no less than the origin of cooperative communication, that is, a type of communication that is different from the pre-cooperative stages of signaling behavior (Tomasello 2008, chs. 3–4). After the nine months revolution, human babies point towards things either in order to get them for themselves, or in the purely *declarative* (and apparently altruistic) aim to point the other's intention towards something that seems to be relevant for the other's project, or simply in order to share attention. Non-human primates, by contrast, do not show any spontaneous pointing behavior at all. When raised among humans and taught to do so, they do acquire the capacity for pointing, but they use it only in situations in which they would like to get the object of their attention, that is, for selfish reasons. They do not use it in the declarative or the sharing mode (Tomasello 2008, ch. 4.1).

One could summarize the change in Tomasello's view about the difference between humans and other primates as follows. In his earlier work, he seemed to think that the difference is between human social cognition and animal autism; now he assumes that—to put it in a word Tomasello again does not use himself—non-human primates are *idiotic* rather than *autistic*. Our relatives do have the capacity of social cognition and action, but they use it in a different, more 'competitive' and less 'cooperative' way than humans (Tomasello 2008, ch. 5). I

do not use term ‘idiot’ in the demeaning vernacular sense of the word, but rather in something like the etymological sense. Remember that the greek ‘idiotes’ is the person who lives his life as his own individual project only, and does not engage in the communal practices which constitute the public sphere. In Tomasello’s new view, non-human primates are something like idiots in that etymological sense, because even though they share with humans the capacity for social cognition, they use it within purely individualistic, instrumental reasoning for the pursuit of their individual goals only, and do not enter into the domain of communal practices. Their interest in other beings (whom they do recognize as such) is limited to acting directly upon them, or on finding out how they might interfere with their own projects. They simply seem to lack any sense of the others as potential cooperators within a joint project. Just another way of putting Tomasello’s conjecture is that the non-human primate’s use of social cognition within their practical reasoning is limited to *strategic* action, while humans show more cooperative, non-strategic, collectively intentional forms of social action. An agent reasons strategically if he uses social cognition for the purpose of his individual instrumental reasoning only, that is, if he chooses the best available alternative for the attainment of his own goals, given what he expects other agents to do.

The central claim I would like to defend in this paper is that Tomasello is right on target: he is right in assuming that reasoning of the strategic form differs fundamentally from the forms of reasoning at play even in the most fundamental forms of human cooperation. Collectively intentional action cannot be described as a result of strategic reasoning from the side of the participants. *Collective intentionality involves a different form of reasoning.* As sound reasoning results in rational action (the concepts of practical reasoning and rational action define each other), this is to say that we need a concept of rationality in action that goes beyond strategic rationality in order to understand how cooperation is possible.

Why should the findings and theoretical considerations of a primatologist and anthropologist such as Michael Tomasello be relevant to the debate about the basic structure of cooperation in economic theory? In spite of the rapid development the discussion about the economic model of human behavior has taken over the last decades, the idea of strategic rationality is still very much at the core of many economic accounts. To put it bluntly, economic theory still largely relies on the model of the rational idiot, and it is assumed that human forms of cooperation can be explained with this model, so that there is no need to assume another way of reasoning. The view is still that agents tend to choose among alternatives according to what they believe is necessary to optimize their desires, given their expectations about the other agent’s choices. This idea of strategic rationality is part and parcel of game theory, that is, of the theory of how rational agents choose in situations in which they know their utilities to be dependent on other agent’s choices. To put it bluntly: human cooperation is explained in terms of primate rationality. If Tomasello is right (and I submit that he is), this conception is fundamentally mistaken, as it cannot explain even the most basic forms of human cooperation.

The paper starts out with some remarks on how Tomasello conceives of the non-strategic element of human cooperative-mindedness. I will then make a philosophical case for the view that the most basic forms of rational human cooperation cannot be explained in terms of strategic reasoning. Also, I will introduce and criticize the theory of team reasoning, which is the most influential non-reductive account of the reasoning involved in shared intention in the received literature. Then I shall turn to Max Weber's conception of the basic structure of social action, especially to his conceptions of consensual, communal and associational action. In his sparse remarks on these categories, Weber addresses the problem of the limits of strategic reasoning. I argue that at the sound core of his view is the assumption that the participants in all forms of cooperative actions are related by *normative* rather than in a purely cognitive attitudes. A number of ways in which this claim has been cashed out in received social theory (most influentially by Jürgen Habermas) will be discussed, and my own reading of Weber's claim will be proposed. The concluding section summarizes the view developed in this paper in a taxonomy of action types, which also places these types in the development of social action.

## 2. Beyond Strategic Reasoning

Tomasello's claim that non-human primates do not have the capacity for genuine cooperation is by no means uncontested. Frans de Waal (1996) has repeatedly emphasized the capacity of apes to cooperate. Perhaps most notably, Christophe and Hedwig Boesch present an influential account of cooperation and even of fair dealing among our closest relatives in the animal kingdom in their work on *Hunting behavior of Wild Chimpanzees in the Tai National Park* (1989). The Boesch's observed their objects of study in their natural habitat, where chimpanzees can be seen gathering in small groups to hunt little animals such as monkeys. These actions seem to display an astonishing capacity for coordinated planning and division of roles. At the beginning of the act, one animal (the beater), initiates the joint action by flushing the prey and chasing it in a certain direction, where other members of the group place themselves so as to block its escape and steer it to the spot where another chimpanzee slyly waits in hiding, ready to finally slaughter the prey. Just as impressive as Boesch's account of the complexity of the cooperative structure of the act is their account of how the result of this cooperative venture is divided among the participants. Each participant gets his share, and participants receive more than non-participants in what the Boesch's call a genuine act of sharing.

As far as I can see, Tomasello does not dispute any single behavioral fact about this story. Rather, he gives the data an entirely different reading, claiming that the behavior in question does not instantiate genuine cooperation (2008, ch. 5.1). According to his view, there is no *genuine* cooperation going on here. When the beater starts the chase, he does not do so on the base of an understanding of the kind of action which his behavior, together with that of the others', will instantiate, so there is no joint goal. He simply chases up the prey and does so

selectively in a situation where other members of his group are around. These others then become aware of the initiative, and simply occupy the places where they are most likely to catch the prey, given the other members' position (that is, as a matter of purely strategic reasoning), which leads the 'group' to surround the prey (this happens by means of the 'invisible hand', as it were, that is, without any one of the participant intending the group jointly to surround the prey, or to do his individual part in the group's jointly surrounding the prey). The puzzling fact that a hidden member of the group ends up catching the prey does not seem to require much cooperative planning from the part of the respective members either. Rather, this simply results from the fact that the prey will most likely choose the direction of the least visible hunter as an escape route because it cannot see that it is blocked. Along the same lines, Tomasello thoroughly demystifies the apparent act of fair 'sharing' of the prey among the hunters. The fact that those who have participated in the hunt get the most of the prey, in his view, is simply a consequence of the fact that they are likely to be there earlier than the non-participants, and can grab a piece of the prey before the others arrive there and try to lay their hands on the food, too. The fact that most of the group seem to end up with some food eventually is explained by the fact that for those who already have food, fighting the beggars and robbers surrounding them may well cause them to lose all the food they have, so that it is simply more efficient for them to gobble up all they can as fast as possible, while tolerating the other's grabbing their piece. In reality, the apparent act of 'sharing' is nothing but 'tolerated theft'. What looks like a clear-cut case of genuine cooperation is, in Tomasello's view, a simple aggregate of individual actions performed by uncooperatively minded but strategically rather sly agents.

As I am not a primatologist, my aim cannot be to settle the dispute between Tomasello and his opponents; the *philosophically* interesting question is about the *conceptual* difference between the two cases rather than the question concerning the actual facts. What is the difference that makes the difference here? What does it take for a goal to be *genuinely* shared and cooperatively pursued (Boesch's view), rather than being the effect of a strategically interlinked aggregate of individual actions (Tomasello's view)?

In his book, Tomasello seems to give two different (but not mutually exclusive) answers to this question. First, Tomasello claims that the *structure of intentionality* involved in the two cases is different. For a complex of action to be genuinely cooperative, it has to be controlled by a shared intention. Tomasello appeals to the works of Margaret Gilbert, John Searle, and, in some footnotes, Michael Bratman, in order to explain this notion. Unfortunately, however, these accounts of shared intentionality differ widely from each other, and are indeed incompatible. Second, Tomasello argues that the pursuit of joint goals presupposes a special kind of *motivation*, that is, the motivation for altruistic action, the motivation to *identify* with a team, and the desire to pursue joint ventures. The problem with this latter claim is that it does not seem to be of any help to clarify the concept of cooperation, as any explanation of the concept of cooperation with the desire to cooperate is circular. These issues are important for Tomasello's claim, as the difference between human cooperation and other

primates' social actions hinges on a clear understanding of the concepts involved. How can the claim that human cooperation differs in kind from strategic action among other primates in that it is directed towards cooperative goals be maintained, if the question of how exactly the pursuit of cooperative goals is different from strategic action is not made clear on a conceptual level?

The following is aimed at showing that the difference that makes the difference here is basically one of the *kind of reasoning* involved in each case. This becomes apparent where 'invisible hand'-effects are excluded, that is, when the kind of action performed determines the aggregated effects of the respective complex of behavior (this is not the case in Boesch's example, as it can be interpreted either way). Rational strategic reasoners, I shall argue, cannot cooperate even in cases in which cooperation is obviously the only rational choice; in these cases, rational social action requires a kind of reasoning which is not of the strategic kind.

Let me start with a fictitious example.<sup>2</sup> One sunny afternoon, the police are called to the site of an accident. On a straight two-ways road, a car has crossed the line between the lanes and has come into an oncoming car's way, resulting in a head-on collision. Luckily, no one was hurt; but both cars are seriously wrecked. The police officer in charge confronts the culpable driver. Why, she asks him, did he come into the other car's way? Had he been going too fast, or had he lost control of his car for some technical failure? Was he blinded by the sun, was he inattentive and distracted by something else? The driver answers all of these questions in the negative. He had been going slowly, he claims, in full control of his vehicle at all times, and aware of the oncoming traffic. Why, then, the officer asks, did he steer his car into the other's way? Did he want to kill himself, or the other, or had the other driver given any sign of being about to swerve into his lane, forcing him to swerve in turn in an attempt to avoid a collision? Once more, the driver's answer is in the negative. With a stern expression, he claims that the reason why he decided to swerve was that he just couldn't see why this shouldn't be the rational choice to avoid a collision. Now the police officer loses his straight face, and a disparaging remark concerning the driver's rational capacities slips his mouth; after all, swerving is obviously the suitable means to provoke a collision, not to avoid it. This in turn makes the driver lose his calm. He says that he knows the traffic rules perfectly well, and that he will accept all charges in terms of legal accountability with no complaint, but that he decidedly rejects any accusation of *irrationality*. He knows very well *now*, he says, that he had better chosen to keep straight rather than swerving, but where practical rationality is concerned, it is unfair judge in hindsight, as only the information available when the decision is made can be taken into account. From *this* perspective, he claims, his decision to swerve was not in any way more irrational than keeping straight on would have been. The other driver, he says, may be *innocent* in terms of the law, but his behavior was not any more rational than his own. After all, *he* could have avoided the collision as well by deciding to swerve, too.

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<sup>2</sup> A previous version of the example is in Schmid 2003.

The police officer feels clearly that there is something deeply wrong about this whole line of reasoning. She takes a moment to think and replies to the driver: “If it is common knowledge that both drivers are in control of their cars, know the traffic rules, and that neither has suicidal or destructive preferences, it is simply *irrational* to go against the rules.” With a dismissive gesture and a condescending smile, the driver opens his laptop computer, points his browser to gametheory.net, opens a 2 x 2 cell matrix in a normal form game solving applet, and starts to fill it with numbers. The rows, he explains to the officer, are his own options, the columns the other’s. The cells are the possible outcomes. Each had to choose between the options either to ‘keep straight’ or to ‘swerve’. If both had decided to keep straight, neither would have incurred any damage. Had both decided to swerve, there would have been a little extra-effort involved in the matter (after all, swerving is somewhat more cumbersome than keeping straight), and there would have been a slight risk of both getting fined for a traffic rule violation, resulting in an expected utility of -1 for both drivers. His choice to swerve, in combination with the other’s choice to keep straight, resulted in his totaling both cars and his getting fined for his traffic rule violation: he gets -1500. But as the angry and distressed face of the other driver clearly shows, he has incurred some damage, too; the driver accounts for it with -100. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same effect would have resulted, had both choices be inverted.

With all four cells in the matrix finally filled, the driver now hits the ‘resolve game’-button in the applet, and with mathematical precision, game theory provides an answer to the question of what the rational thing to do in this situation really is. The writing on the screen says:

“The pure strategy equilibria are: {‘keep straight’/‘keep straight’} and {‘swerve’/‘swerve’}. Strictly dominated strategy: none. Weakly dominated strategy: none. Mixed strategy equilibrium:  $\text{Pr}(\text{‘keep straight’})$  for both drivers = 0,0619.”

The driver explains the gist of this to the police officer. “In this situation, you really just can’t embrace ‘keeping straight’ as rational and dismiss ‘swerve’ as irrational. The best thing you can do in terms of true rationality is to take a coin, assign one side to ‘keep straight’ and the other to ‘swerve’, load it in such a way that only in about 6 of 100 toss-ups it will show ‘keep straight’, flip it, and act accordingly. The result will probably be ‘swerve’, which is exactly what I did. So please do not bother me with accusations of irrationality, and take the issue up with the other driver instead.”

Now the police officer starts to feel uneasy about the whole matter. For on the one hand, she has learned in her training that game theory is very important in social science. On the other hand, however, she has retained a healthy sense of what is rational and irrational, and therefore simply *knows* that whatever the math behind this may be, the answer is utter, unspeakable *nonsense* as far as proper rationality is concerned. In this situation, ‘keep straight’ is the rational choice, full stop. You don’t have to toss a coin. And if you are as irrational as to think you have to do so, you certainly load it the other way round, so that it recommends ‘keep straight’ more often than ‘swerve’.

Behind this silly story is a serious problem, and it is of genuine philosophical interest. It is serious because it concerns no less than the basic structure of the social world. Many if not all social facts are ultimately based on the human capacity to achieve coordination and realize the mutually optimal outcome at least under those circumstances where there is either one obvious best solution for all participants, or a convention. Furthermore, such coordination also underlies most competitive forms of human behavior. The problem raised by the example is philosophically interesting because the driver is absolutely right from the standpoint of a widely shared theory, which conceives of rationality in terms of strategic reasoning. The story illustrates that it is not possible to conceive of even the most simple, mutually beneficial form of human coordination as based in strategic reasoning. It has taken game theorists a while to accept that this really is the case; after all, it is a strong pre-theoretic intuition that such basic forms of coordinated behavior *are* in fact rational, which means that game theory basically flies in the face of a well established pre-theoretic notion of rationality. Also, the reluctance to recognize the problem may also be due to the fact that the discussion on the problem of interaction has long been focused on the problem of *cooperation* rather than of coordination, that is, on Prisoners' Dilemmas instead of such situations as Stag Hunts and Hi-Lo-games. In the meantime, however, the work of such philosophers and game theorists as Michael Bacharach (1998; 2006), Martin Hollis (1998) and Robert Sugden (1993; 1996; 2000) has made clear even to some of the harder-nosed rational choice theorists that they will either have to modify their conception, or bite the bullet. Biting the bullet would mean to assume that in pure coordination games, where there is one equilibrium which is best for all participants, the choice of the according strategy really cannot be called rational within this framework of rationality in action (the driver's claim). If efficient strategic reasoning is all there is to rational social action, agents cannot coordinate even in the simplest unproblematic situations. The deeper reason for this is the phenomenon of *strategic interdependence of expectations*: in situations where what one should do depends on what one expects the other to do, and where it is known that the other faces the same situation, strategic straightforward reasoning simply collapses: an infinite circle of interdependent expectations opens up. In situations where choices are strategically interdependent, no external expectations can be formed on which one's choice can be based. The participants cannot derive from the obvious fact that a given strategy would lead to optimal results for both (if the other were to act accordingly) that this is rational for them to choose, since there is another strategy which would be rational for them to choose instead, were they to expect another choice from the other's part. In other words, both choices are—and remain—*hypothetically* rational. No assertoric judgment can be derived from a hypothetical one without settling the truth of the hypothesis.

Theoretically minded authors of the rank of Talcott Parsons (1959; Parsons/Shils 1968) and Niklas Luhman (1984) have long recognized the fact that this problem touches at the conceptual heart of social theory. The term they use to describe strategic interdependence is 'double contingency' (Parsons/Shils 1968; Luhmann 1981, ch. 3). Since social facts cannot be understood as com-

plexes of rational (strategic) actions, they argue that they have to be analyzed as systemic features presupposed by (Parsons) or emerging from (Luhmann) strategic interdependence. Thus Parsons and Luhmann jumped from the insight that rationalizing coordination is impossible in terms of strategic action to the quick conclusion that action theory is simply unsuited as a framework of social theory, moving on to systems theoretical approaches to the social world (Schmid 2005, §14).

Other theorists who discussed the problem have arrived to less radical conclusions, arguing that an action theoretic framework (with intentional explanations) can be maintained, but that in order for such an account to be adequate, it should rely on other cognitive capacities such as intuition and imagination rather than on pure rationality (Schelling 1960, 57). In other words, the claim is that coordination is achieved by means of acting on non-rational psychological propensities rather than by means of reasoning (e.g., by choosing ‘blindly’ [Gilbert 1989] or simply acting on ‘impulses’ [Thalos 1999]). Such behavior, those authors seem to argue, is simply beyond the ‘bounds’ of rationality (Simon 1972), it is a matter of following habits and routines rather than of evaluating options. In fact, we do not *think* about whether to keep straight or to swerve in situations such as the driver’s in the above example, because we do not perceive such situations as requiring any reasoning. Likewise, in an experimental Hi-Lo game, the participants will not even start to ponder about the Lo option, and about what reason the other may have to expect oneself to expect him to choose Lo rather than Hi, and so on. If rationality in social action requires agents to think about what to expect from the others, and how this affects them, and if such reasoning is simply *superfluous* in such situations, it seems that the action in question does not qualify as *rational* social action. This is the *a-rationalist* position in the theory of coordination.

It seems to me, however, that it is a simple *non sequitur* to conclude from the limits of actual strategic thought that coordination is achieved by other means than rational reasoning. If in our everyday interactions, we rely with our lives on other people’s sticking to the traffic rules, it is true that we do so knowing that conventions are followed *unthinkingly*, on the base of routines or habits. But we would hardly bet our lives on this were we to think that these routines are ultimately simply some ‘blind’, ‘imaginative’, ‘impulsive’, or some other *non-rational* feature of agency. Rather, we rely on the force of routines precisely because we believe that we have good reason to think that this is *the rational thing to do*. The role of habits and unthinking propensities is not in conflict with, but rather *presupposes* the rationality of the optimal coordinative choice. Our assumption is that in cases in which coordination is not achieved *automatically*, in which we have to *think* about how to act (imagine an inexperienced driver, or someone from the continent driving in the UK), we have *reason* to choose the optimal coordinative option. Thinking *rationally* about the options we face does not *undermine* our routines or pre-rational impulses, but rather *backs them up*. The fact that habits are enforced by rational thought is the reason why they are so reliable; we follow the rules of traffic unthinkingly because we think this is the obviously rational thing to do, not the other way around. Therefore,

I argue for the *rationalist* position, according to which in situations of pure coordination, where there is one equilibrium that is best for all participants, and where the utilities and the rationality of the participants is common knowledge, it is *rational* to choose the according strategy.

This is exactly what David Gauthier, in his 1975 paper on coordination, called the “Principle of Coordination”. I suggest that we should accept this principle as valid. If we do so, however, we are faced with the task of giving an account of what ‘rational’ means, and what the kind of reasoning at work here is, if it cannot be strategically rational choice. Gauthier himself mistakenly believed that the Principle of Coordination could be derived from strategic rationality. He argued that the fact that there is an optimal equilibrium makes the according strategy *salient*, and that this *transforms* the original situation into a new game in which the choice is between choosing the salient strategy and ignoring salience. It has been shown very early on in the debate, however, that the transformation argument does not work.<sup>3</sup> John Harsanyi and Reinhard Selten, in their *Theory of Equilibrium Selection in Games*, have bitten the bullet and granted that the Principle of Coordination is not rational in the sense of what they call “individual rationality”. But they are clear-headed enough not to embrace the a-rationalist position either. Instead, they resort to assuming another form of rationality especially for that case, which they call “payoff dominance” (1986, 365). This is certainly more plausible than the a-rationalist position, but it remains somewhat dissatisfying simply to make the *ad hoc* assumption of an altogether different kind of rationality in order to solve the problem. Even if this is accepted, the philosophical question remains: by virtue of *which common property* are individual rationality and the rationality of payoff dominance cases of rationality? If we accept the Principle of Coordination, we do not mean that there is a special sort of rationality designed for these cases. Rather, we claim that cooperating in what is best for both is *rational*, period. We need an overarching account of rationality in action that implies the Principle of Coordination. What is the structure of reasoning at work in coordination, if not strategic thinking?

In his paper on coordination, David Gauthier makes the remark that in situations of pure coordination, the participants may treat their choice “as if it were a common decision” (Gauthier 1975). In the view developed by Bacharach, Hollis, and Sugden, this is exactly right, except for the ‘as if’-part. The answer given by these authors is that if we call the Principle of Coordination rational, we do so based on a conception of rationality, according to which not only single individuals, but teams can act, too. The reasoning at work in these situations is not of the strategic kind; rather, it is ‘Team-Reasoning’ or ‘We-Reasoning’ (cf., e.g., Sugden/Gold 2007). Team-reasoning works roughly as follows: participating individuals can see that in a Hi-Lo situation, ‘Hi/Hi’ is better for *them*,

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<sup>3</sup> The reason why Gauthier’s transformation argument does not work is that the choice in a transformed coordination game is not only between ‘choosing salience’ and ‘ignoring salience’, as Gauthier thought (which would be a game with only one equilibrium); there is a third option: ‘choosing the non-salient’, and this is again a strategy with a coordination equilibrium (Provis 1977).

taken as a team, than ‘Lo/Lo’, and that therefore choosing ‘Hi’ is the suitable individual contribution which, together with the other’s, constitutes the rational choice. But why should they care about what’s better for them from the team-perspective? The idea is that in the first step, the agents constitute a collective subject by identifying with the team consisting of themselves and the others. This may involve what social identity theorists call ‘self-categorization’, that is, the conception of oneself, with the others, as a unit (Abrams/Hogg 1990). Only once their identity is thus settled, it becomes immediately obvious why ‘Hi’ is rational. From this perspective, the problem with orthodox rational choice theory is that it has tacitly assumed that the participants’ identity can only be their own individual, isolated self. This assumption concerning the agent’s identity, these authors argue, has to be relaxed. Individuals so sometimes conceive of themselves just as individuals; in other cases, however, they see themselves as members of a group, and they perceive their situation from a ‘we’-perspective. In these cases, the question about rationality is ‘what should *we* do’ rather than ‘what should *I* do’. This is closely related to what Elizabeth Anderson (2001) in her comments on Amartya Sen’s critique of rational choice theory has called the “Priority of Identity to Rational Principle”: before any answer can be given to the question of what is rational to do for an agent, the question of the agent’s identity has to be settled.

It might be objected, however, that this simply begs the question. After all, we now seem to be faced with the question of *with whom* we should identify, of *what* team-perspective we should take. Sugden answers to this objection rather coldly, saying that even though his account does indeed fail to address the question of which identity to adopt, this is no serious flaw, since the orthodox model does not answer the question of the identity of the chooser either and simply assumes it always to be limited to the individual self (Sugden 2000). Michael Bacharach, in turn, seemed to think that the identification is not a matter of choice at all, but simply a matter of ‘subliminal priming’. As impressed as I am with the idea of team reasoning, I find this answer thoroughly dissatisfying. As Christine Korsgaard has shown within her account of ‘practical identities’, settling our identities is part and parcel of our practical reasoning. As Korsgaard puts it, the first thing we do when we act, is to constitute ourselves as an agent. Thus the constitution of our identity is not a presupposition of our agency, but at the rational core of action (Korsgaard 2008). We do not just ‘find’ ourselves in some or another we-perspective. Rather, we *create* that perspective.

We should not forget, however, that our basic concern is with very simple and basic cases here. The question is not about the kind of reasoning involved in cases where an agent has to decide whether to act, as a member of his family, as a citizen of his state, or rather as an inhabitant of the universal kingdom of ends. The question is still what makes the Principle of Coordination a rational principle, and in situations where this applies, there are not many alternatives concerning how the agent should ‘constitute’ himself. If team reasoning is the answer to the question about the Principle of Rationality, the further question is: how can we avoid the assumption that the players in a simple Hi-Lo game, or the drivers in our initial example, have to ‘constitute themselves as a team’ by means

of identification, complex self-constitution, or self-categorization, before being able to reason rationally? Our paradigm—the driver’s example—is perhaps the cooperatively least loaded imaginable, and I simply do not find it plausible at all to assume that such agents have to form some sort of social identity, or undertake some self-categorization, before being able to act rationally, and get by each other collision-free. The answer to the question of how the transition from strategic reasoning to we-reasoning is made has to be much simpler than an elaborate conception of the constitution of some identity.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Consensual Reasoning

In my view, Max Weber is still one of the most instructive authors when it comes to questions of rationality in social action. How does he deal with the problem of coordination? He first touches upon the issue when he addresses the question of rational forms of what he calls ‘communal action’. Action of this kind is marked by interdependent expectations, as the agent bases his choice of action on his expectation (prediction) concerning the other’s choice of action, and he knows that this attitude is reciprocal. Weber argues that under such conditions, the participants cannot form stable expectations (Weber 1922, 422). Weber does not go into this any further, but a plausible elaboration of his view could be that the agents cannot base their action on external expectations concerning the other’s prospective behavior, because given that the other is in the same situation, an infinite regress is set off. So how is communal action possible? How can an agent form expectations that are stable enough to warrant rational decisions?

Weber writes of the agent: “His expectations may be based on an ‘understanding’ with another or with others; he then believes that he has reason to expect compliance with the ‘agreement,’ according to the meaning which he himself attributes to it. This alone is enough to give communal action a specific qualitative particularity, for this significantly enlarges the area of expectations toward which the actor believes he can rationally orient his actions” (Weber 1981, 159–160).<sup>5</sup>

Weber’s claim here is that it is possible for agents to act rationally in situations of strategic interdependence, and that reasoning in these cases does not set off an infinite regress of expectations, *because the expectations involved in it are of a special kind*. They are of the *normative* rather than of the cognitive kind. Normative expectations, like their cognitive cognates, are mental attitudes; but they differ in at least three respects: their *direction of fit*, their *resistance to disconfirmation*, and their *range of possible objects*. Assume, by means of illus-

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<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned in passing that an analysis of what it means to conceive of oneself and others as—or to identify with—a team leads to the same result: some communality is already presupposed in self-categorization or identification. The participants assume that their self-categorization is correct because they really *are* part of the team, and not the other way around.

<sup>5</sup> In the following, Weber distinguishes a special form of communal action, which he calls ‘associational action’ (*Gesellschaftshandeln*), which is marked by the existence of an explicit agreement and means-end-rationality of the assumed behavior.

tration, a person booking his holidays in a first class hotel in the Mediterranean. He expects, first, that the weather will be fine, and second, that he will be treated courteously at the hotel. Assuming that he knows the basic facts about meteorology, and that his relation to hotel personnel is not an especially cold one, the first expectation is of the cognitive, the second of the normative sort. The expectation concerning the weather is a *prediction*, the expectation concerning the personnel a *normative attitude*. Imagine now that our hero finds out that the weather is bad and that the people at the hotel are unfriendly. He will have to blame *himself* for his naïve expectations concerning the weather, but he will hardly do so concerning the disconfirmation of his second expectation: for this, the personnel rather than his own attitude is to blame. This is to say: the *direction of fit* is *mind-to-world* where expectations are cognitive, but *world-to-mind* where expectations are of the normative kind.<sup>6</sup> Related to this is the second difference between the two attitudes: confronted with the bad weather, our poor traveler will have to *revise* his beliefs concerning the weather in the south: he has to *learn*. But he will hardly drop his expectations concerning good behavior, simply because some people have chosen not to live up to them; if the conflict between his attitude and the matters of fact is *their* fault rather than his, he will hold on to his attitude. To use Luhmann's term, normative expectations are "counterfactually stabilized" (Luhmann 1968, 36), that is, immune to disconfirmation by the facts. One last difference concerns the extensions of the respective attitudes. Only beings whose behavior is understood as capable of understanding what they *should* do can be the objects of normative expectations, whereas the set of possible objects of cognitive expectations includes all of reality.<sup>7</sup>

I take it that Weber is right: normative attitudes are the key to understand the basic structure of cooperation. To use the driver's example, we rely on other people sticking to the norms of conduct simply because we take it that this is what they *should* do. The phenomenon of normative interpersonal attitudes is a basic social phenomenon, and it is the phenomenon that is missing in rational choice theory. Rational choosers, conventionally conceived, *calculate* each other's behavior (they form cognitive expectations); they do not, however, *count on each other* (in terms of normative attitudes). The central obstacle in the way of an adequate understanding of human cooperation is to see how normative attitudes fit into an account of rational practical reasoning. How, the question is, can it be *rational* to have normative expectations concerning other agents, instead

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the idea of a direction of fit cf. Humbertstone 1992.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to deny that everyday life is full of examples of normative expectations held concerning inanimate objects; after all, who would be so bold as to claim never to have been furious at the bad weather, or never to have addressed his anger to his computer? Such feelings are *normative judgments* (Solomon 2003), so that in having this feeling, the object of the feeling is judged to have *misbehaved*. When such attitudes are taken, the object is understood as suitably constituted (that is: as capable of having done something *wrong*). Obviously, it is possible to judge at the emotional level that something has *misbehaved*, while at the same time *knowing* that the nature of the object is such that its behavior is not governed by norms. It is tempting to see such cases as a case of *recalcitrant emotion*, where the affective evaluation is in conflict with the cognitive assessment.

of treating other agents merely as variables or restrictions within one's own practical reasoning?

Let us have a closer look at how Weber deals with this question. Weber's above claim seems to follow roughly *contractualist* lines; the claim is that some special sort of agreement or 'understanding' is a presupposition for agents to have normative expectations concerning each other's behavior. But Weber is much too thorough and realistic a thinker to leave matters at that. The two big questions facing a contractualist view of the constitution of social normativity are, of course, the following: first, the question the radicalized version of Hobbes' famous 'foole' raises concerning the *rational force of normative commitments* (why should the fact that there is an agreement, and that promises have been made, change anything about one's view about what's rational to do?); second—and perhaps more interestingly—the circularity of the conception as a general theory of cooperation. It is impossible to explain the conceptual structure of cooperation with some act of agreement (Weber's word is "Vereinbarung", which has to be *made* and does not just happen) and mutual understanding, as both acts—agreements as well as states of mutual understanding—can only be achieved by means of communication, which are already forms of cooperation (and especially complex ones at that).

Weber must have sensed that something is lacking between his conceptions of social action on the one hand, and communal action, on the other, when he introduced the terms 'consensus' and 'consensual action' (*Einverständnis* and *Einverständnis handeln*):

“[‘Consensus’ is] the fact that an action oriented on expectations concerning the behavior of others has an empirically realistic chance of seeing these expectations fulfilled because of the objective probability that these others will, in reality, treat those expectations as meaningful and ‘valid’ for their behavior, despite the absence of an explicit agreement. It is conceptually immaterial which motives underlie these expectations about this behavior of others. Communal action insofar as it is oriented on such probabilities of ‘consensus’ shall be called ‘consensual action’” (Weber 1981, 186; cf. also 1922, 432).

Thus the concept of consensual action provides the missing link between 'social action' in terms of strategically rational action and communal action. Consensual action is action where agents have normative expectations concerning each other's behavior, without any previous explicit agreement between them. Now, however, the question is: what could it possibly make *rational* for agents to have a normative expectation concerning other agents, when there is no explicit agreement?

The second conception of the rationality of normative expectations can be called the *discourse-theoretic* view. Most famously, it has been developed by Jürgen Habermas in his reading of Weber's view in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). Habermas claims that agents can normatively expect other agents to behave in a certain way, because there are implicit agreements embodied in

the life-world. Action is *communicative* ('communal' in Weber's terminology) insofar as it is guided by the assumption that it is in accordance with these agreements, the *validity* of which derives from the assumption that wherever a discord opens up, the participants may enter into a discourse, and reach an explicit agreement concerning the issue at stake. So the basic assumption is that people do not simply pursue their goals given what they expect the others' to do, but they aim to act in a way they assume would be *acceptable* to the relevant other agents. Communicative action is based on the assumption that agents may coordinate their actions within a procedure of linguistic communication, so that it cannot exist without the capacity for linguistic communication.

The problem with this is very similar as the one with the contractualist position. It is unhelpful to presume that only agents who can communicate linguistically with each other can cooperate. To believe that the structure of cooperation could be explained with reference to linguistic capacities is at odds with the fact that linguistic practices are forms of cooperation themselves, and especially complex ones at that. It is as if we were to explain the human capacity to build houses with their capacity to erect skyscrapers. Habermas simply avoids this issue by assuming that social theory has to be "linguistically founded" (Habermas 2001) in an "a priori of communication", that is, "always already" has to assume agents which are capable of linguistic communication. Tomasello, in contrast, reminds us that if we proceed like this, we simply *presuppose* what we should explain. The explanandum is how beings with social cognition and the ability of strategic reasoning come to develop practices of linguistic communication. Tomasello rightly points out that our capacity for cooperation explains our capacity for communication, not the other way around. So cooperation does not imply communication.

If cooperation implies normative expectations but not communication, the question is: how can agents normatively expect another agent's behavior, if they cannot assume some prior agreement, or even just the possibility of linguistic communication? What sense does it make to assume of another agent, who has not entered in an agreement, and who cannot even communicate, that he 'ought' to behave in a certain way? What is, in other words, the source of social normativity? How do we get from a type of rationality in which agents calculate each other's behavior in order to make strategically rational choices to a type of rationality in which agents can *count on each other* in their pursuit of cooperatively rational goals, even though they have no agreement, and cannot communicate with each other?

It is generally assumed that orthodox rational choice theory's neglect of normativity is due to its obsession with goals, and that a 'normativist' account of practical reason has to depart from a 'goal-oriented' view of action to a 'norm-oriented' conception (cf. Habermas' view). I do not think this is true. There is a great deal of normativity involved in the orthodox view. Orthodox rational choosers may have purely cognitive attitudes towards all agents, with one important exception. Whoever has a goal, stands in a normative relation to *him- or herself*. To have a goal, and to decide to act on that goal, means to *normatively* expect of oneself to choose, in the future, the appropriate means.

Imagine a person who does not think that he can make any individual *commitments*, because he believes with certainty that whatever decision he makes now will not be treated as valid by himself anymore in the next moment. Such an agent cannot rationally make *any* plans, he cannot have any intentions, and thus cannot have any goals to speak of, because to have set one's mind on a goal entails committing oneself for a however short period in the future. So it is true that even the most hard-nosed rational chooser, who sees other agents as mere restrictions of his own choices cannot but entertain a normative relation to one agent, namely himself. My suggestion is that the social case of our driver in the above example, who fails to see the rational option in a Hi-Lo game because he treats the other's choice only as a restriction on his own and does not have any *normative* attitudes towards himself, is closely related to the individual case, where an agent very much *wishes* that a state of affair be realized, but cannot form the *intention* to realize that state of affair, and act, because he assumes that whatever plans he might form now will have no influence whatsoever on what he is going to do in the next moment. The difference is not between goal-directed reasoning and some form of non-goal oriented rationality, but between action that is in pursuit of *individual* goals (which involves a normative attitude of the agent towards himself), and action which is in pursuit of *joint* goals (which involves reciprocal attitudes between the agents). Just as an agent who fails to see the normative relation that ties himself transtemporally to a future goal cannot have an intention, the driver of our example fails to see the normative relation that ties himself intersubjectively, together with the other driver, to their joint goal, which is to coordinate their actions in the best possible way. Just as the individual chooser has to expect normatively his choice of suitable means for the realization of his goals, the drivers have to expect normatively of each other a behavior that is suited to realizing what they both want and pursue *together*: to coordinate as easily as possible.

The normativity involved here is probably beneath the dignity of elaborated Kantian accounts of the sources of normativity. It is *instrumental* normativity (that is, normativity of the sort that relates the means to the end), or perhaps simply of the sort of *normative requirements*. This may ruffle the feathers of Kantians, because it may seem that this means that the participants view each other as means for the pursuit of their own goals only. But this worry is misplaced; mutual instrumentalization is no more the case there than is self-instrumentalization in the individual case. One does not make one's own future self the mere instrument for the pursuit of one's goal if one decides to do something in the future, because the goal is assumed to be the *executing self's goal*, too, not just the deciding self's. Similarly in the cooperative case: remember that the goal is *shared*. In situations of coordination, it is not the case that each participant has his or her *own* goal; rather, their goal is the *same*, and the participants in cooperation recognize each other as subjects and 'bearers' of their shared intention instead of seeing each other as mere instruments. If we share a goal, my assumption is not that *you* should choose means appropriate for the pursuit of *my* goals, but that *both* of us should act in a way that, in combination,

realizes *our* goal. Having a goal jointly with another person means seeing oneself and the other as subjects of the goal and instruments for its attainment alike.

#### 4. A Taxonomy of Social Actions

Michael Tomasello's work raises an interesting question concerning the relation between strategic action and jointly intentional action. In this paper, I have argued that Tomasello is right in assuming that the difference is a fundamental one, and I have examined how the reasoning involved in the two types of action differs. It is now time to place the results of this examination within an overview of the various forms of social action we have discussed, and the mental capacities required for these forms, together with a conjecture concerning the line of development (forms of social action can only be conceptually dependent on *earlier* forms, so that a basic guideline of the development can be read off the conceptual structure).

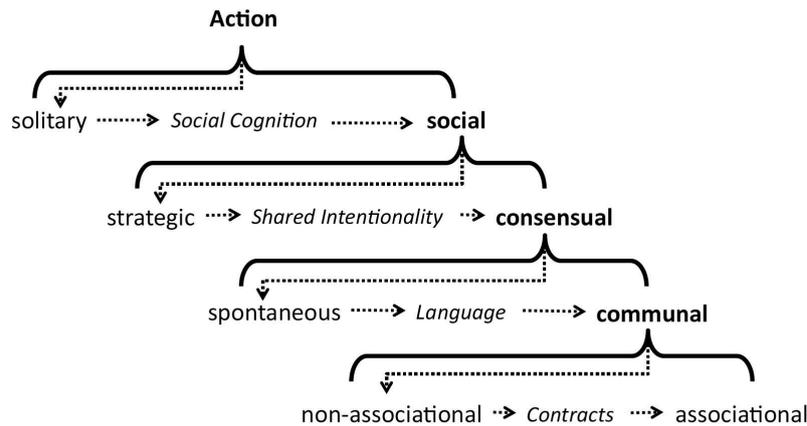


Figure 1: A taxonomy of action types with the development of agency (dotted lines) and the mental capacities/social institutions involved (in italics)

Action can either be solitary or social. Solitary action is constituted by an agent's choosing, among alternatives, the appropriate course of action for the realization of her goal, without any reference to other agents. Social action is action in which agents, in their reasoning, do make reference to other agents; the capacity that enables them to do so is social cognition.

Social action can either be strategic or consensual, and the distinction between the two types of reasoning involved in these cases have been at the center of the above considerations. The idiocy of strategic reasoning consists of the fact that strategic reasoners are incapable of sharing their intentionality. All of their

action is in pursuit of their *own* goals only. This makes it impossible for strategic reasoners to embrace such measures as the Principle of Coordination. The capacity that enables social agents to go beyond the idiocy of strategic reasoning and engage in consensual reasoning is shared intentionality.

It is typical of recent critique of rational choice theory that it is usually assumed that the step from strategic reasoning to consensual reasoning is a big and fundamental one, and some authors have even tended to think that there is something wrong about strategic reasoning altogether, and that *only* consensual reasoning is truly reasonable. Remember Jürgen Habermas' claim that 'strategic action' is goal-oriented action, whereas communicative action is oriented towards the assumption that agents can coordinate their actions consensually.<sup>8</sup> I think that at the heart of the matter, if we avoid Habermas' lingualist preconceptions as criticized above, the difference really boils down to the one between pursuing individual goals and pursuing shared goals. This becomes clearer if we trace Habermas' distinction between 'genuine' and 'deficient' forms of rationality back to Max Weber's work. In his *opus magnum*, Max Weber claims that for an agent's behavior to be fully rational, an agent's choice of action has to be "determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings" which are "used as 'conditions' or 'means' for the attainment of the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends" (Weber 1980, §1). As Weber's reflections on the structure of communal and associational action show, Weber has struggled a great deal to show how social norms enter into this picture. Obviously, the concept of *consensual* action, as sketched by Weber, plays a crucial role here. If my reading is right, there is very little to change in Weber's basic conception of rationality in action to accommodate this notion. All that has to be added is that the expectations which Weber mentions can be *either cognitive* (in the strategic case) or *normative* (in the consensual case), and that the goals which the agent pursues rationally and calculatedly need not always be just *his own*, but may also be goals which he *shares with others*.

*The Idiocy of Strategic Reasoning* is that it is limited to individual goals. The limitation to individual goals is obviously idiotic when it comes to Hi-Lo like situations. Here, rationality requires consensual reasoning. Of course, my title pays homage to Amartya Sen, who started his critique of rational choice theory with his famous *Rational Fools* (1977). In his later work, Sen has argued that the central mistake of rational choice theory is that it assumes that people always act in pursuit of their own goals (cf. Sen 1985). Most commentators have questioned the soundness of this line of critique (e.g., Pettit 2007), but I interpret it as a version of the claim developed above, that is, the claim that in

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas puts this conceptual distinction as follows: "We call an action [...] strategic if we consider it under the aspect of compliance to the rules of rational choice and if we assess the degree of efficacy of the influence on the decision of a rational opponent. By contrast, I speak of communicative actions, if the plans for action of the participating agents are coordinated via acts of communication rather than via egocentric calculations of success. In communicative actions, the participants are not primarily oriented towards their own success; they pursue their individual goal under the condition that they can tune in their plans for action on each other on the base of shared definitions of the situation." (Habermas 1984, 385)

order to be capable of sane and sound reasoning in situations of coordination, agents have to have an understanding of what it means to *share* a goal rather than just to have a goal of one's own (cf. Schmid 2005b).<sup>9</sup>

Consensual action is something very basic: it involves normative interpersonal attitudes, but it does not per se require language. Pre-linguistic consensual action, however, differs from consensual action which involves language. The latter is *communal action* in Weber's sense. This is where self-categorization and identification comes into play (full *we-reasoning*). Communal action greatly changes its structure when it is based on the agent's capacity explicitly to refer to themselves and to others as a 'we'. The decisive element that distinguishes pre-discursive and discursive forms of consensual action (that is: spontaneous consensual action from communal action) is the element of *agreement* and *mutual understanding*. For this stage, Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action offers a convincing account.

I follow Weber by adding a further distinction within the class of communal actions, which is between non-associational and associational forms. The decisive difference here concerns the form of the agreement involved in these cases. In the case of non-associational action, the agreement is implicit, in the case of associational action, it is a contract.

Let me conclude with a short and rather tentative remark on the bearings of the line of argument as developed in this paper on the question of fairness in cooperation. I have argued that the step from strategic reasoning to consensual reasoning involves the establishment of normative attitudes, in which the others are not seen as objects of control or instruments for the pursuit of the agent's own goals, but rather as something like mutual stakeholders in each other's behavior within a joint venture. This is no empirical assumption, but a matter of the conceptual analysis of shared intentionality. Classical social theory and large parts of social science tends to be blind for the distinction between consensual action and complexes of strategic actions, as it mistakenly assumes that all forms of cooperation are based on strategic choices (perhaps on 'boundedly rational' or somehow 'framed' ones). Ignoring this difference is a fatal mistake, because the case in which agents cooperate with each other is different from the case where agents merely *seem* to cooperate, but really see each other's behavior as restrictions (or a means) for the pursuit of their own goals. The difference is a conceptual one and thus concerns the ontological commitments of a theory. As such, it matters even in cases where the question of which concepts apply is not settled by the observable behavior. Remember the different ways in which the Boesch and Tomasello construe the hunting behavior of wild chimpanzees in Tai National Park. It makes a great difference if this complex of behavior is seen as a genuine case of joint action with divided role and fair distribution of the prey (as the Boesch have it), or as an aggregate of strategically rational individual action, in which the division of the prey is 'tolerated theft' (Tomasello's view) rather than an act of distribution. It is not surprising that a social science

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<sup>9</sup> The distinction between singular and plural action as proposed in Schmid 2009, ch. 1, is identical with the above distinction between strategic and consensual action. I have avoided the terminology I proposed elsewhere to follow Weber's terminology where possible.

that ignores this *conceptual* distinction is often taken to be an advocate for a society of idiots (in the etymological sense of the word mentioned above). If such a society really exists, it is the society of Tomasello's primates: a society in which no cooperation and therefore no communication is possible. For even the simplest form of trade and exchange, where this is performed *intentionally* and is not a feature of an in-built behavioral program, requires some minimal form of consensual reasoning.

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