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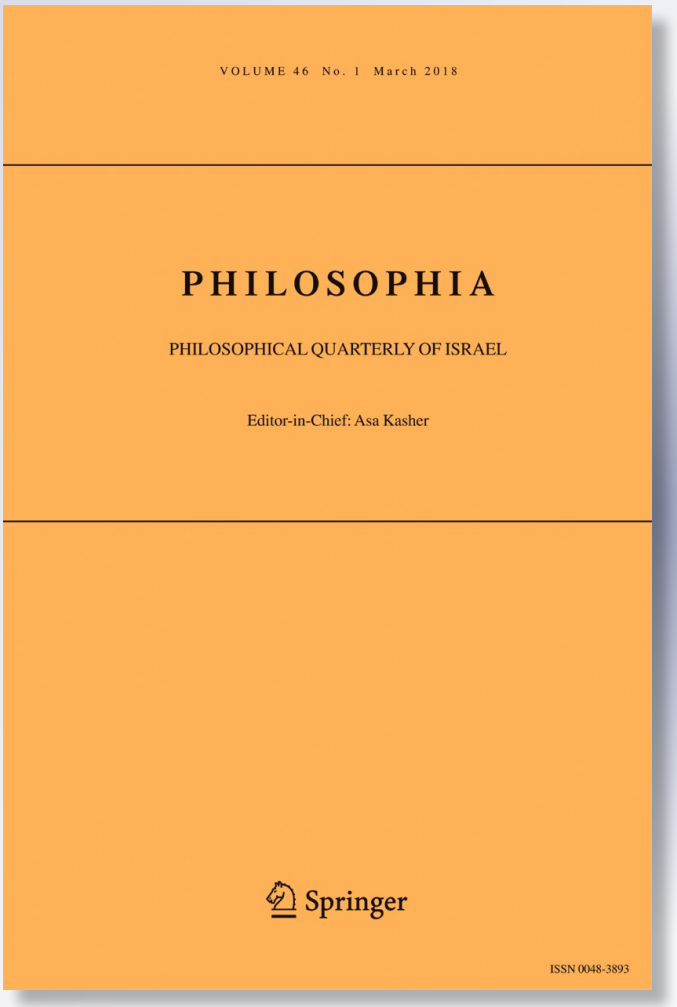
Philosophia
Philosophical Quarterly of Israel

ISSN 0048-3893
Volume 46
Number 1

Philosophia (2018) 46:183-192
DOI 10.1007/s11406-017-9902-4



Springer

Philosophia (2018) 46:183–192
DOI 10.1007/s11406-017-9902-4

Davidson and Sellars on "Two Images"

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Received: 1 October 2016 / Accepted: 5 September 2017 /
Published online: 16 September 2017

Abstract Davidson's *anomalous monism* is based on the assumption that a human being can be described or accounted for in two very different ways, using two very different and indeed incommensurable conceptual frameworks, namely the physicalistic vocabulary of science and the mentalistic vocabulary employed by the 'theories' we make about each other when we interact and communicate. Also Sellars maintains that we have two alternative pictures of the world and especially of us humans as its parts, namely *the scientific image* and *the manifest image*. At first sight, the views of the two philosophers may seem quite similar; however, the true extent of this apparent similarity is worth exploring. To that end, in this paper we tackle the following questions: Are Sellars' reasons for claiming the irreducibility of his manifest image to the scientific image the same or similar to those that Davidson has for asserting the irreducibility of his mentalistic idiom to the scientific one? Is the normativity informing Sellars' manifest image of the same kind as that informing Davidson's mentalistic idiom? Do the notions of rationality considered by Sellars and Davidson coincide?

Keywords Sellars · Davidson · Normativity · Rationality · Anomalous monism · Manifest image · Scientific image

1 Anomalous Monism and the Stereoscopic Vision

Donald Davidson's *anomalous monism* (Davidson 1970) is based on the assumption that a human being can be described or accounted for in two very different ways, using two very different and indeed incommensurable conceptual frameworks. First, there is the physicalistic vocabulary of science, which is suited to underlie descriptions informed by exceptionless, determinate causal laws. Such laws give us a specific kind of

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understanding, the kind of understanding that finds its highest expression within our most advanced scientific theories. Second, there is the mentalistic vocabulary employed by what can be called folk psychology (not Davidson's term), not suited for theories of the scientific ilk, but appropriate for the 'theories' we make about each other when we interact and communicate. This kind of understanding differs radically from the scientific kind: understanding other people does not normally strive for the ideal of predicting exactly what they will do or say in the future – for although understanding another person involves knowing what is to be expected from her, such expectations are in no way the determinate and exact predictions which is the ideal of science.[1]

Wilfrid Sellars also maintains that we have two alternative pictures of the world and especially of us humans as its parts; he calls them *the scientific image* and *the manifest image* (Sellars 1962). Just like Davidson, Sellars thinks that these two accounts are incommensurable and are based on categorically disparate concepts. The irreducibility of the mentalistic idiom to the physicalistic one is also explicitly addressed by Sellars (Sellars 1953). These similarities prompted McDowell (1998) to conclude that here the agendas of Davidson and Sellars are quite parallel, if not identical; they both distinguish between the physical space governed by the network of causal laws, and an alternative space the constitution of which is governed by the "ideal of rationality":

> The separation of logical spaces or constitutive ideals that underwrites the irreducibility thesis reflects a distinction between two ways of finding things intelligible. Both involve placing things in a pattern. But in one case the pattern is constituted by regularities according to which phenomena of the relevant kind unfold; in the other it is the pattern of a life led by an agent who can shape her action and thought in the light of an ideal of rationality.

Likewise, Tietz (1980), observing that both Davidson and Sellars equate our need for an alternative to the scientific picture of the world with our need to account for human beings as *persons* (over and above mere *organisms*) sees an essential affinity between the two thinkers:

> Despite considerable divergence between them in their semantic theories and general approaches to metaphysical issues, Davidson's and Sellars' analyses of personhood are in some ways remarkably similar. They ask the same questions: How far does scientific analysis go toward explaining the nature of man? To what extent is our concept of a person intractable to scientific, physicalistic explanation? Can science give us a total picture of reality?

In general, however, literature on this interesting topic seems to be rather scarce. Hence the questions we will tackle in this paper are the following: Are Sellars' reasons for claiming the irreducibility of his manifest image to the scientific image the same or

[1] This differentiation between the two kinds of understanding may be reminiscent of the discussions of the nature of the difference between "Naturwissenschaften" and "Geisteswissenschaften" in 18th and 19th century Germany, which adopted the term *hermeneutics* for the understanding in humanities. In fact, Davidson considered contemporary exponents of hermeneutics, especially Gadamer, as kindred spirits.

similar to those that Davidson has for asserting the irreducibility of his mentalistic idiom to the scientific one? Is the normativity informing Sellars' manifest image of the same kind as that informing Davidson's mentalistic idiom? Do the notions of rationality considered by Sellars and Davidson coincide?

2 The Manifest Image and Its Normative Dimension

I think that McDowell's assimilation of Sellars's theory of the two images to Davidson's anomalous monism raises some doubts. While it is clear that for Davidson, the mentalistic picture is indeed specific in that it is governed by the ideal of rationality, Sellars describes the specificum of his manifest image in rather different terms. This is not yet to say that McDowell is wrong on this point; but it is to say that closer scrutiny is warranted.

Therefore, let us look at Sellars in greater detail. According to what he says explicitly (Sellars 1962), the main difference for him is that the concepts underlying the manifest image, unlike those underlying the scientific image, have a certain *normative dimension*. He claims that "there is an important sense in which the primary objects of the manifest image are persons" (p. 9) and later he continues: "To think of a featherless biped as a person is to think of it as a being with which one is bound up in a network of rights and duties. From this point of view, the irreducibility of the personal is the irreducibility of the 'ought' to the 'is'." (p. 39).

Hence the fundamental reason for his manifest image not being mergeable with the scientific one is that it is not a description, or at least not a *pure* description. Whereas when we present the scientific image, we are proclaiming what there *is*, when we present the manifest one, there is a sense in which we are proclaiming what there *should be*. Thus the sentences of which the manifest image consists are not purely indicative: they are, instead, what can be called *normatives* (Peregrin 2014).

This picture is instructively complemented by what Sellars has to say explicitly about the mind-body problem (Sellars 1953).[2] Here Sellars distinguishes between what he calls "logical" and "causal" reducibility/irreducibility and maintains that though the mentalistic idiom is not "logically" reducible to the physicalistic one, it may be "causally" reducible to it. Oversimplifying somewhat, we can say that while "logical" reduction is just a matter of translation (hence this kind of reduction of the mental to the physical, were it possible, would involve translating mentalistic theories into physicalistic ones), "causal" reduction is a matter of using physicalistic vocabulary to describe and explain how the mentalistic idiom functions, what its point is, and perhaps also including how the mentalistic vocabulary may have come to emerge.

Hence, for Sellars, the irreducibility of the manifest image to the scientific image, and of the mental to the physical, has to do with the irreducibility of the *ought* to the *is*. Is this the same thing as being governed by the "ideal of rationality", which guides Davidson's considerations on the matter? Though rationality, certainly, does induce a normativity and hence an *ought*, which means that Davidson's motif could perhaps also be considered in terms of the irreducibility of an *ought* to *is*, the details of this view must be worked out. And, moreover, it is not clear how much the *ought* of Davidson's

[2] Sellars' argumentation in this paper is discussed in detail by Christias (2015).

rationality coincides with that which is relevant for Sellars's view. Hence let us have a closer look at the phenomenon of rationality.

3 Rationality

There is no generally accepted definition of rationality. What seems to be uncontroversial is that rationality concerns self-sustaining entities (typically organisms) and that it has to do with the effectivity with which the entities promote their *sustaining*, i.e. do things that we deem effective in this respect. Moreover, the entities it concerns are supposed to *represent* their environment (thus allowing for a slack between how the environment really is and how the entity represents it) and the effectivity amounting to rationality is supposed to concern the environment as represented by the entity (its rationality is judged according to whether it carries out the actions that we would deem efficient *if the circumstances were as the entity represents them*).

What appears to be essential for a rational being is that its efficient coping with the environment consists in acting on the basis of *reasons*. The most straightforward way of implementation of this is an entity at least some of whose representations are belief-like and are thus suitable to be employed within *reasoning*, and which combine with desire-like representations to result, ultimately, into actions. Thus we can perhaps say that an entity is rational iff it has desires and beliefs and acts so that if it desires a state S and if it believes that doing D will bring about S, it will do D. Moreover, it is often assumed that a rational entity in addition to being able to carry out "practical syllogisms" of this kind, can also carry out "theoretical syllogisms", i.e. deduce beliefs from other beliefs.

Something like this is generally taken to be a necessary condition of rationality, though it is not always taken to be a sufficient condition. (Though it would be taken as sufficient for what is called *instrumental* rationality.[3]) Some thinkers maintain that genuine rationality requires some further ingredients, aside of the belief-desire machinery producing efficient actions via reasoning, but there is no general agreement concerning what these ingredients precisely are.[4]

Davidson (1982) appears to agree that the essence of rationality is a matter of beliefs and desires, but, somewhat surprisingly, appears to reduce rationality to the mere *having* of such propositional attitudes, not to reasoning with them. The difference, he claims, between a rational creature and one that is not rational "consists in having propositional attitudes such as belief, desire, intenti, and shame" (p. 95); and again that "to be a rational animal is just to have propositional attitudes, no matter how confused, contradictory, absurd, unjustified, or erroneous those attitudes may be" (*ibid*.).

Is Davidson intending to say that it is sufficient for a creature to *have* beliefs, desires etc., and that it is not necessary that it be able to *employ* them in the syllogistic manner, i.e. to use them for what we call *reasoning*? This would be hard to believe; a much more plausible explanation for his not mentioning this explicitly is that Davidson is

[3] See Kolodny and Brunero (2015). (It is characteristic that the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* does have the entry "Instrumental rationality" but no entry for "Rationality".)

[4] Max Weber, for example, did famously propose other categories of rationality besides the instrumental one (Kalberg 1980).

convinced that the processes of reasoning are so deeply involved in *constituting* propositions that it is not possible to have propositions without reasoning with them.

Now Davidson is quite explicit that his reason for rejecting the reducibility of the mentalistic idiom to the physicalistic one has to do with the involvement of the former, but not the latter, with the assumption of rationality. "It is a feature of the mental," Davidson (1970) claims, "that the attribution of mental phenomena must be responsible to the background of reasons, beliefs, and intentions of the individual." (p. 222) And "when we use the concepts of belief, desire, and the rest, we must stand prepared, as the evidence accumulates, to adjust our theory in the light of considerations of overall cogency: the constitutive ideal of rationality partly controls each phase in the evolution of what must be an evolving theory." (p. 223).

This means that whereas when applying physicalistic vocabulary the only thing to which we must pay attention is empirical adequacy, when applying mentalistic vocabulary, there is a further concern: we must respect "the constitutive ideal of rationality". When our theory turns out to be empirically inadequate, it is simply wrong; but when it fails to comply with the ideal of rationality, this may only show that its subject matter, as a matter of fact, is not rational.

4 Rationality and Normativity

Hence Davidson is convinced that the reason for the mentalistic idiom not being translatable into the physicalistic idiom is that its application is underlain by the presupposition of rationality. There is a sense in which the observations we form by means of this idiom express not what an organism will do, but rather what it *ought to* do - given its alleged beliefs and desires and *given its rationality*. Thus if the creature in question really *is* rational (and if our account of the entity is empirically adequate), then the thesis yields us a sort of prediction of its behavior.

As Spohn (2002) puts it:

> ... we must ask, still with metatheoretical intentions, what sort of theory the theory of rationality is. Of which kind are its claims? The answer is not clear. But the first and best answer is that they are normative claims within a normative theory. I am criticized for my past irrationalities. When I permanently speak and act irrationally, people stop listening and taking me serious. And the question "what shall I do now?" is – if it is not a moral question – tantamount to "what is best to do?" or "what shall I rationally do?". The theory of rationality is created in normative discourse.

Causal laws tell us, in the ideal case, what will happen given the current state of affairs. Thus they tell us that a billiard ball moving in a certain way will hit another billiard ball, that a cube of sugar put into water will melt, or that a dose of antibiotics will kill certain microorganisms in an organism and cure its inflammation. As we are never able to take into account all aspects of the current state of affairs, there is always the possibility that our prediction will fail, that the billiard ball will swerve due to an unexpected gust of wind and consequently miss the second ball, or that the antibiotics will not be powerful enough to curb the inflammation. In contrast to this, the laws of rationality tell us what

an organism ought to do. They tell us that if somebody is hungry and she has a piece of bread, she ought to eat it, or that if she is confronting an angry lion, she ought to flee. The same kind of uncertainty as in the previous case, stemming from our imperfect grasp of the current state of affairs is also present here; but here, in addition, there is a *further* possibility why our prediction may potentially fail. And this is simply that she may fail to do what she ought to do.

It follows from Davidson's account that the very point of the *ought* which is yielded by our accounts of our fellow humans underlain by the assumption of rationality ('as she is hungry, she ought to grab the bread and eat it') are to indicate what would happen if the assumption of rationality were ideally satisfied. Of course, we are not predicting particular movements or other physicalistically characterized changes but something much more loosely individuated. But nevertheless, the point of the mentalistic account appears to be to learn 'what to expect'.

The situation has much to do with what Dennett (1987) calls the *intentional stance*: there is a specific attitude, Dennett claims, that we assume toward certain kinds of entities, to understand and predict their behavior. While as concerns the most basic items of our surroundings, like rocks or trees, we can use what Dennett calls the *physical stance*, and while as concerns complex artifacts we can use the *design stance*, people and perhaps some other very complex entities necessitate the *intentional stance*, *viz*. explanation in terms of ascription of desires and beliefs and predicting future actions as the results of their interactions.

As Dennett stresses, it is not so that we somehow detect the beliefs and desires inside of the person to be explained; we just "know" that this kind of account "works", that it lets us reasonably well understand other people and get clues with respect to what to expect of them. As Davidson (1970) formulated it, propositions are like measuring units that we use to assess other people[5]:

> There is no assigning beliefs to a person one by one on the basis of his verbal behaviour, his choices, or other local signs no matter how plain and evident, for we make sense of particular beliefs only as they cohere with other beliefs, with preferences, with intentions, hopes, fears, expectations, and the rest. It is not merely, as with the measurement of length, that each case tests a theory and depends upon it, but that the content of a propositional attitude derives from its place in the pattern.

However, this set of measuring units has the peculiar property that it works only in specific cases, namely in the cases when the entity we measure is *rational*.

Hence, according to Davidson, the mentalistic stance, governed by "the ideal of rationality" is needed for the specific kind of understanding we need for other human beings and for the ability to grasp what to expect of them. There are norms necessarily involved; not only because we follow norms whenever we work towards an understanding of anything, but because, over and above this, understanding others inevitably involves construing them as rational beings, which in turn involves construing them as norm-following beings. As Davidson (1995) himself puts it, "norms are being employed as the standard of norms" (p. 130).

[5] See Hofmann (1995) for a detailed discussion of this aspect of Davidson's teaching.

In any case, it is clear that the normativity that informs Davidsonian mentalistic stance and that makes it irreducible to the physicalistic stance is the kind which is involved in our making sense of each other. It is the kind that is necessitated by our making 'theories' of thinking, rational beings - in contrast to our theories of the rest of the world. Hence it is a kind of rationality that is still in a certain sense instrumental – it concerns the adequacy and the effectiveness of our making sense of our conspecifics.

5 Rights, Duties, and Rules

Sellars, we saw, characterizes the peculiar nature of his manifest image also in terms of *ought*s, though in contrast to Davidson he associates them with "rights and duties", i.e. with the ways we hold each other responsible, rather than with our making sense of each other in terms of beliefs and desires. Hence, to throw light on the relationship between the theories of Davidson and Sellars, we should scrutinize the difference between the kind of *ought* yielded by the Davidsonian considerations of making sense of each other and the *ought* that has to do with Sellarsian considerations of making each other responsible. At first sight there seems to be quite a substantial difference, but we should see whether this first impression is not misleading.

How does an individual come to have a right or a duty? Typically, there is some kind of rule or law which bestows it on one. One has the right to vote because there is a law that guarantees this; and one has a duty to pay taxes as there is another law prescribing this. However, by far not all rights and duties must be a matter of a *codified* law: in many cases one has a right simply because members of one's society take something for correct and consequently they take one to have those rights and duties. For example, members of a tribe without a codified law may take it for correct to take care of one's children, so one may be taken to have a duty to care for them and also to have a right to be given some aid if this is beyond her power. Thus, a written or formal form of a law is not necessary, but what is ultimately fundamental are the *normative attitudes* of the members of the relevant community.

Why are "rights and duties", according to Sellars, so important? Because they characterize the peculiar human mode of existence, the mode we acquired when we developed our peculiar kind of sociality. Our linguistic-cum-mental practices involve not only declarative judgments or statements that serve us to review what there is, but rather also other kinds of statements which help us *enhance* what there is by establishing our inter-individual institutions. It is because we hold each other responsible, because we see each other as having our rights and duties, that we can become persons (rather than mere organisms) acting in certain ways (rather than merely displaying certain behaviors), thereby achieving our social reality that finds its expression in the manifest image.

Thus, in contrast to Davidson, the normative dimension that makes Sellars see the manifest image as irreducible to the scientific image has to do not only with our making sense of each other, but also with the way our societies hold together and the way we form organic parts of them. Our coordination is not a matter of merely interlocking habitual reactions to each other's behavior (as, we can imagine, is the case for social

animals such as ants), but rather of the "rights and duties" which we confer on each other and which thus exist exclusively as our joint achievements.

This also indicates that the concept of rationality Sellars employs might indeed differ from the one employed by Davidson. While Davidson's concept is closer to an instrumental concept, particularly as it is interwoven with belief-desire psychology, Sellars's concept appears to be closer to the broad, Kantian concept, according to which rationality and rules (which constitute the "rights and duties") are two sides of the same coin. As Sellars (1949) himself puts it, "to say that man is a rational animal is to say that man is a creature not of habits, but of rules" (p. 298). Sellars (1962) then puts the matter in the distinctively Kantian idiom:

> [T]o think of a featherless biped as a person is to construe its behaviour in terms of actual or potential membership in an embracing group each member of which thinks of itself as a member of the group. Let us call such a group a 'community'. Once the primitive tribe, it is currently (almost) the 'brotherhood' of man, and is potentially the 'republic' of rational beings (cf. Kant's 'Kingdom of Ends').

Sellars stresses the importance of *intentions* as uniquely human attitudes. (His term *intention* is not the technical term of Husserl or Searle, viz. a directedness of a mental concept towards an object, but rather the much more down-to-earth expression of determination upon an action.) An expression of an intention, which Sellars proposes to disambiguate by using the wording *I shall* ..., is something different from a statement describing a future happening - it is a different kind of speech act (also governed by a different logic): "to think thoughts of this kind is not to *classify* or *explain*, but to *rehearse an intention*". Moreover, Sellars maintains that aside of the ordinary, individual intentions, there are always what can be called *we-intentions*, intentions not merely of an individual, but rather of a community.

Let me point out that, though Sellars does not spell this out quite explicitly, such an intention, obviously, can be 'successful' – i.e. be really a we-intention in the sense that there is a 'we' whose intention it is – only if it resonates with the intentions of other members of the community. Its expression, *We shall* ..., is thus merely tentative, until it achieves this kind of resonance. Unlike *I shall* ... which naturally matures into a volition and into an action, the maturation of the *we-intention* is conditional on the existence of the resonance necessary to there really be a we harboring this intention.

Thus a we-intention on the part of an individual does not yet amount to something that *will* be, but rather merely to something that, according to that individual, *ought to* be. If the others concur, thus establishing the kind of interconnection that make up a community, that which ought to be comes into being. Therefore, the normatives – beliefs and statements expressing what ought to be – become an important tool for making up a community. "The fundamental principles of a community," Selllars (*ibid.*) writes, "which define what is 'correct' or 'incorrect', 'right' or 'wrong', 'done' or 'not done', are the most general common *intentions* of that community with respect to the behaviour of members of the group". And rights and duties are the other side of the coin of these ought-to-be's: for me to have a duty is for me to be bound by an ought, whereas for me to have a right is for some others to be bound by some kind of ought concerning me.

6 Sellars and Davidson

According to Davidson, the sociality of us, humans is based on a certain kind of *reciprocal recognition*. I produce certain (especially linguistic) actions in order to be interpreted and my peers do interpret me. At the same time, they expect to be interpreted by me. If this reciprocal intepretational recognition works, it establishes a specific kind of web interconnecting us, a web the nodes of which are formed by specific entities such as beliefs, desires and the like, which makes us truly rational and which make a bunch of people into the "community of minds".

Sellars (1966), on the other hand, does not put stress on this kind of reciprocity, but rather on a kind of *solidarity* that makes our community into a *we*:

> People are not hummingbirds – not even language using featherless bipeds. They are us; or, to come to the point, the moral point of view is not that in which we do good to the language-using featherless bipeds which surround us. It is that in which each of us seeks, as one of us, the common good of all of us.

True, Davidson also thinks that we are more than "language-using featherless bipeds", in that we form the community of minds:

> A community of minds is the basis of knowledge; it provides the measure of all things. It makes no sense to question the adequacy of this measure, or to seek a more ultimate standard.

But unlike Sellars, he is convinced that this community is not forged by the identification of its members with each other that melts them into one all-encompassing "we", but rather by the processes of mutual recognition, interpretation and triangulation.

Thus, though both Sellars' manifest image and Davidson's mentalistic idiom can be seen as having crucial normative dimensions and being irreducible to a scientific theory because of the irreducibility of an *ought* to *is*, the respective *oughts* crucial for the two pictures, and the respective notions of rationality that underlie them, are not quite the same.

In Davidson's case, the *ought* is that which replaces an *is* in the case when we are not merely describing and explaining an animal or an artifact, but a human being whom we perceive – are bound to perceive – through the prism of rationality. Davidson's *ought* is thus bound to the specific kind of reciprocity that becomes operative if I come to interpret my peers and they come to interpret me. (We could perhaps even say that this kind of *ought* has an instrumental flavor: saying, in this sense, that one ought to do something is saying that one *would do it, if one were ideally rational* - that is, on Davidson's account, if one were to carry out one's actions so as to satisfy one's desires in the light of one's beliefs in the optimal way -, i.e. that doing it is the most efficient way of achieving something.)

In Sellars's case the *ought* is bound, first and foremost, to a certain kind of solidairty. The rights and duties we have result from our interplay in our communities, in the interplay which makes us become a *we*. Saying, in this sense, that one *ought to* do something is not saying that one would do it if something were the case – it is rather saying that this is something that is expected of one by one's community, something the doing of which will be praised and/or not doing o which will be shunned.

Acknowledgements Work on this paper was supported by the joint Lead-Agency research grant between the Austrian Science Foundation (FWF) and the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), *Inferentialism and Collective Intentionality*, No. I 3068-G24.

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