

Practice and Sociality*

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In recent years contemporary analytic philosophers have increasingly turned their attention to the significance of *sociality* for various areas of philosophy. While an older body of literature has sought to examine its implications for the plausibility of methodological individualism, and more generally for the priority of various forms of individualism or holism for the explanation of human activities,¹ a more recent body of literature regarding sociality has focused instead on clarifying what it regards as certain core social phenomena such as conventions, collective intentionality, plural subjecthood, and we- or shared intentions.² By contrast, philosophers working at the intersection of analytic and continental philosophy have emphasized the *primacy of practice* as the proper point of departure for how we should understand the nature and significance of sociality.³ Although this common emphasis is articulated in divergent ways, it is

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¹ See, e.g., the essays collected in John O'Neill (ed.), *Modes of Individualism and Collectivism* (London: Heinemann, 1973) and Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre (eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Bradford/MIT Press, 1994), esp. Part VI.

² See David Lewis, *Convention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); *idem.*, *Living Together* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996); *idem.*, *Sociality and Responsibility* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); John Searle, "Collective Intentions and Actions", in P. Cohen, J. Morgan, and M. Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 401-15; *idem.*, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Raimo Tuomela, *The Importance of Us* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995); *idem.*, *The Philosophy of Social Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David J. Velleman, "How to Share an Intention", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), pp. 29-50; Michael Bratman, *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Part Two.

³ For a recent essay collection concerning the primacy of practice in various disciplines, see T. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina, and E. von Savigny (eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). Some important works in contemporary philosophy that have inaugurated and extended this "practice turn" are: Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), esp. Part Three; *idem.*, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); *idem.*, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Hubert Dreyfus, "Holism and Hermeneutics", in *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1980), pp. 3-23; *idem.*, *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*

invariably inspired by the works of the early Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein. This emphasis on the primacy of practice is often framed, especially for those who try to understand and articulate the insights of the later Wittgenstein, in terms of the possibility of *rule-following*. Thus, Peter Winch's and Saul Kripke's influential but provocative readings of the later Wittgenstein focus explicitly on Wittgenstein's view of the nature of rule-following and seek to use it at least to sharpen certain philosophical problems, readings which have generated in turn wide-ranging interest and disagreement in contemporary philosophy about the significance of rule-following for understanding human activities.⁴

In this essay I want to use some of the current literature concerning rule-following as a point of departure for sketching what I argue to be the proper understanding of the connection between practice and sociality. First, I will single out and elaborate briefly one aspect of the views of Philip Pettit and Robert Brandom on the nature of rule-following and its necessary dependence on social practices (putting aside any specific differences between them for this purpose). Because Pettit's and Brandom's conceptual apparatuses are highly systematic and formidable, I can only extract and elaborate those elements of their views that are directly relevant for how to understand the connection between practice and sociality. Second, I will compare Pettit's and Brandom's defense of the necessarily social basis of rule-following with the views of Theodore Schatzki and Joseph Rouse, whose conceptions of the connection between practice and sociality are

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *idem.*, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *idem.*, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988); John Haugeland, *Having Thought* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1998); Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987); *idem.*, *Engaging Science* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), esp. Part II; *idem.*, *How Scientific Practices Matter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Theodore Schatzki, *Social Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *idem.*, *The Site of the Social* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Phillip Pettit, *The Common Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994); *idem.*, *Articulating Reasons* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); *idem.*, *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2002); John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996); *idem.*, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁴ Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Atlantic Highlands, New Jers.: Humanities Press International, 1990); Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

indebted as much to the early Heidegger as the later Wittgenstein. Third and finally, in light of the work of Schatzki and Rouse, I will register a dissatisfaction with Pettit's and Brandom's claim that rule-following is only possible on the basis of our engagement in social practices. But my main complaint is *not* that rule-following should not be understood in terms of engagement in social practices. Rather, it is that Pettit and Brandom have not thought through and hence gone far enough in working out what is *fully* involved in acknowledging the necessarily social basis of rule-following. More precisely, the suggestion is that practices are not only *modes of activity*, as Pettit and Brandom tend to conceive them, but constitute at a more basic level the *concrete context* or *world* on the basis of which practices *qua* modes of activity are intelligible at all.

I. The Significance and Problem of Rule-Following

Why is the issue of rule-following significant in the first place? To begin with, philosophers are especially interested in rule-following because our capacity to follow rules *at all* – i.e., our capacity to deal with the world not only in *causal*, but *normative* terms – is *fundamental* to the way in which we deal with our environment in general. Rule-following in this sense goes far beyond perhaps its ordinary sense as the felt need or burden to conform to social pressure (e.g., the concern with satisfying social conventions, etc.). It pertains rather to the very idea of what is involved in *understanding or thinking anything at all*. Why must understanding or thinking involve rule-following? Intuitively speaking, it is the platitude that whenever we encounter someone whom we treat as exhibiting understanding or thought, we *make sense of* her behavior by ascribing various beliefs, desires and the like to her *and then seeing* the extent to which her behavior can be understood as following or being guided by these beliefs, desires and the like that we have ascribed to her.⁵ To do this is to see in effect the extent to which this individual is acting *in accordance with the same attitudinal and behavioral constraints* to which we

⁵ I mean this to be an intuitive and almost trivial description of how we make sense of ourselves and each other all the time in our daily activities. It is *not* meant to carry any theoretical baggage, though those who are familiar with the works of certain philosophers can see, of course, the resonance of this characterization with their views.

would normally be sensitive and take into account in the circumstances under consideration. (Wittgenstein's toy example concerning the process by which we teach and discern whether a pupil can properly count numbers illustrates this nicely.⁶) This is at least one common way, though by no means the only way, in which we tend to make sense of what people believe and do, and hence who they are, by discerning the extent to which they are sensitive to and follow the same rules that we would in similar circumstances. Rule-following in this sense is inherently connected with our ability to make sense of each other and ourselves in everyday life. It is a *constitutive*, not an optional, aspect of human understanding in general because it underlies and informs the very manner in which we make sense of anything at all.

From a more theoretical angle: Rule-following in the relevant sense has to do with the appropriate criteria by which we should distinguish artificial and merely biological entities that are disposed to respond reliably and discriminately to their environments (e.g., elevators and dogs) from human beings, who as far as we know are the only creatures who respond to their environment in the mode of *understanding* (in a sense to be explicated below). Naturalists, in the sense of those who believe that the methodology of the natural sciences suffices for the understanding of everything, may already find this view to be contentious. But for nonnaturalists like Pettit and Brandom, the issue of rule-following is crucial because they consider it to be a necessary aspect of how we can and should distinguish (in Pettit's terminology) merely "intentional systems" from genuinely "thinking intentional systems", or (in Brandom's terminology) entities or organisms that are merely "sentient" in the sense of being disposed to respond reliably and discriminately to their environment from those that are "sapient" in the sense of being directed at their environment in the mode of understanding. In other words, their claim is that if we are to understand adequately what is distinctive of rational animals like us, philosophical reflection can make a contribution to this project by examining our specific mode of directedness at the world. An important motivation, then, for the philosophical attention to rule-following is *demarcational*: How should we distinguish entities that do not *understand* in the relevant sense from those that do? It must be said immediately that

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen: Werkausgabe, Band I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), §§143ff.

this demarcational concern is not motivated by the (futile and silly) wish to return to a premodern worldview in which the human being was regarded, metaphysically speaking, as the center of the universe. Rather, it is motivated by the attempt to understand in effect what it is to be distinctively human. If one is interested in a project of this sort, the nature of rule-following becomes significant because it helps us get clearer about the distinctiveness of the sort of understanding of the world that human beings achieve. These remarks should suffice hopefully in giving us at least some sense why contemporary analytic philosophers have become interested in understanding the nature of rule-following. To put it simply, rule-following is of interest to them because they regard it as crucial to obtaining the adequate understanding of the conditions of *intentionality* in general, of what it is to be *minded* (to have a *mind*) at all.

Skepticism may exist, however, about whether we can indeed follow rules, i.e., be sensitive to norms and (try to) act in accordance with them in the sense specified above. Thanks in particular to Winch's and Kripke's readings of Wittgenstein, we can characterize the apparent problem about rule-following as follows. Given our *finite* conceptual capacities, it seems mysterious upon reflection how creatures like us can indeed come to act in accordance with norms that are suppose to *govern* over an *infinite* variety of cases or situations. More precisely, rule-following seems puzzling for two closely connected reasons:

(1) The problem of *underdetermination*: Any *finite* sequence of examples of whatever sort can instantiate *infinitely many different* rules (cf. Kripke's Wittgenstein on our inability, e.g., to determine whether someone is following the rule of *addition*, in each case of its application, rather than, say, that of *quaddition*). How, then, can we tell if someone is actually following some determinate rule rather than some other rule(s)? No finite sequence of cases as such enables us to determine what rule someone is actually following because it can be made to accord with any other rule.⁷

(2) The problem of *normativity*: A rule seems incapable of *really determining or guiding*, all on its own, the putative rule-follower such that she can be judged as following the rule *correctly or incorrectly*. As Wittgenstein states, if acting according to a rule can be made to accord with any other rule, it becomes mysterious how *any rule of any sort* can ever come to *govern* any course of action *at all*, let alone future ones?

Although the problem of *underdetermination* may well be prior in the order of *exposition* of what is at issue with regard to rule-following, the problem of *normativity* is more *basic*

⁷ *Ibid.*, §201: "Unser Paradox war dies: eine Regel könnte keine Handlungsweise bestimmen, da jede Handlungsweise mit der Regel in Übereinstimmung zu bringen sei. Die Antwort war: Ist jede mit der Regel in Übereinstimmung zu bringen, dann auch zum Widerspruch. Daher gäbe es hier weder Übereinstimmung noch Widerspruch."

in the order of *explanation*. For if it is unintelligible how any rule or norm can actually determine any past, present, or future course of action *at all*, it becomes a pointless exercise to consider whether the rule or norm in accordance with which someone – and now we must say: *putatively* – acts can be made to accord with other rules or norms. If we cannot see how a rule can indeed govern or constrain us *at all*, there is no point in worrying about whether the rule according to which one acts may also be instantiating other rules. In short, if the problem of rule-following is not satisfactorily resolved, the very idea of *rule-governedness*, of trying to act in accordance with *normative* constraints that determine the *correctness* or *incorrectness* of one’s thoughts and actions in given situations, would *vanish*; normativity would thus be unmasked as *illusory*.

II. Pettit and Brandom on Rule-Following

How do Pettit and Brandom resolve this apparent problem? Their resolutions can be seen as working out, albeit in highly systematic and elaborate ways, Wittgenstein’s reminder that obeying a rule is a *practice*. The understanding of rule-following that Wittgenstein finds objectionable is the *intellectualist* one that construes following a rule as always involving the appeal to some other *explicit* rule or principle (“*Deutung*”).⁸ Rather, he wants to remind us that while normativity bottoms out at the end of our explanations in unreflective action, this bedrock of unreflective action remains nonetheless norm-involving.⁹

⁸ *Ibid.*, §§201f., emphases in the original except where noted: “Daß da ein Mißverständnis ist, zeigt sich schon darin, daß wir in diesem Gedankengang Deutung hinter Deutung setzen; als beruhige uns eine jede wenigstens für einen Augenblick, bis wir an eine Deutung denken, die wieder hinter dieser liegt. Dadurch zeigen wir nämlich, daß es eine Auffassung einer Regel gibt, die *nicht* eine *Deutung* ist; sondern sich, von Fall zu Fall der Anwendung, in dem äußert, was wir >der Regel folgen<, und was wir >ihr entgegenhandeln< nennen. ... Darum ist >der Regel folgen< eine *Praxis* [my emphasis – JJK]. Und der Regel zu folgen *glauben* ist nicht: der Regel folgen.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, esp. §§211, 217-19, 241-42, 289. It must be noted, however, that Wittgenstein himself seems to use the concept of rule in different ways. For an attempt to distinguish the different senses of ‘rule’ in Wittgenstein’s text, see Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-6; for a forceful critique in turn of Brandom’s reading and appropriation of Wittgenstein in general, see John McDowell, “How not to read the *Philosophical Investigations*: Brandom’s Wittgenstein”, in R. Haller and K. Puhl (eds.), *Wittgenstein and the Future of Philosophy: Akten des 24. Internationalen Wittgenstein Symposiums* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 2002), pp. 251-62.

Pettit explicitly calls his resolution an *ethocentric* account of rule-following in order to emphasize its basis and articulation in terms of *habits* of extrapolation and *practices* of negotiation.¹⁰ Specifically, it turns on the satisfaction of three conditions, which he argues to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient for an activity to count as genuine rule-following. They are: (1) independent identifiability, (2) direct readability, and (3) fallible readability. *Independent identifiability* consists simply in the ability of the rule-follower to pick out and act in accordance with the rule on the basis of *exemplifications*, as opposed to *instantiations*, of the rule in question. This consists in the capacity of the rule-follower to be disposed simply to extrapolate from the exemplars and respond in a certain way when she finds herself in a given situation independently of any other similar occasions of extrapolation and response.¹¹ *Direct readability* is our capacity precisely to know how to act without any recourse to some explicit rule or principle of action that allegedly serves as an *intermediary* (*Deutung*) between the situation in which we find ourselves and knowing how to act in accordance with the relevant rule.¹² Pettit thinks that humans share these two specific capacities with many other creatures. In Brandom's terminology, the capacities for independent identifiability and direct readability are more or less what an entity needs to be able to do in order for it to count as having "reliable discriminate responsive dispositions".¹³

These two capacities, however, do not suffice for genuine rule-following. The reason is that it *must be possible* for any candidate rule-follower, for all she knows, to make *mistakes* in her attempt to follow a rule in any particular circumstance. In other words, the rule-follower, in order to count genuinely as one, must be *fallible* in her rule-following activities. The possibility of fallibility is significant for both Pettit and Brandom because it is, in the final analysis, this possibility in our rule-following which makes *objectivity* possible, i.e., the ability on our part to get the world *right* or *wrong*, and

¹⁰ Pettit, *The Common Mind*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93, 177.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 87: "Suppose, as is generally allowed, that the agent forms a disposition or inclination to extrapolate in one direction rather than another from any set of putative exemplars of a rule. Given the inclination supposed, the examples presented will exemplify the corresponding way of going on, the corresponding rule of response, for the agent. They will make that rule salient."

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹³ Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, *op. cit.*, esp. ch. 4, pp. 214-21; *idem.*, "The Centrality of Sellars's Two-Ply Account of Observation to the Arguments of 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'", in *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 349-53.

it is our possibility to be directed at the world from within this *normative* dimension that makes room for the objectivity that distinguishes us rational animals from nonrational ones. Now the rule-follower's capacity to be fallible depends, according to Pettit, on the extent to which the circumstances in which she exercises this capacity are *favorable*. Favorable conditions are, more specifically, the *normal* and *ideal* conditions that *set the standard* by appeal to which other rule-followers, herself included perhaps at some later time, can judge whether her attempt to follow the rule in question is *successful* or not.¹⁴ For it is only once such standards are in place that it becomes intelligible at all to evaluate the extent to which rule-following is successful or not, i.e., *correctly* or *incorrectly* carried out.

The subject takes certain examples to exemplify a particular rule, given the inclination that they generate. The subject reads off that rule in new cases ... letting the inclination speak for how it should go on. But the subject does this without any basis for ruling out the possibility of error, for it allows that *negotiation* with itself across time, or *negotiation* with other subjects, may establish that the circumstances that prevail in any reading are not favourable and that its response under those circumstances is mistaken. However direct, therefore, the subject's reading of the rule is nonetheless fallible. ... The important point is that the subject gives *a certain role to negotiation about discrepancies across time and persons*. It must make appropriate assumptions about intertemporal and interpersonal constancy. ... If the subject does behave in this way, then the theorist will recognize that the rule exemplified for the subject by certain examples, the rule it tries to follow, is not whatever rule corresponds to the inclination engendered by those examples; rather it is the rule that corresponds to the inclination under circumstances that *survive negotiation*: under circumstances that are, in the *ethocentric* sense, normal or ideal.¹⁵

It is thus on the basis of these *practices of negotiation*, both as carried on by the subject with himself and with other subjects, that the fallibility of rule-following, and hence normativity and ultimately objectivity, becomes not only intelligible but really possible. Rule-following is therefore an essentially *interactive* enterprise because one must either interact/negotiate with oneself or with others in order to equip oneself to move within this normative dimension and hence genuinely to think about and understand the world at all. Note also that rule-following need not and primarily and mostly does not take place in an explicit or self-conscious way; the rule-follower (echoing Wittgenstein's reminder) may follow the rule "blindly" in the sense that while he may not be able to give justifications for why he follows the rule in the way that he does, he still engages in his practices as answering to normative constraints.¹⁶

¹⁴ Pettit, *The Common Mind*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5, emphases added.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

The connection between *practice* and *sociality* should be apparent by now in this sketch of Pettit's view. The basic argument is that social interaction is a *constitutive* requirement for, not something *optional* to, what it is to be able in general to follow rules, i.e., to be sensitive to and try to act in accordance with norms. For it is only in virtue of this sort of interaction/negotiation that one can act in such a way that there is a genuine difference between acting *correctly* and *incorrectly*, and hence acting according to rules or norms at all. Although there may still be a hypothetical possibility *in principle* that acting under normative constraints is available for a solitary but merely intertemporally interactive subject,¹⁷ the nature of our rule-following is such that I am *in actual practice* not only concerned with the correctness of my rule-following, but equally with that of yours and the degree to which it converges with mine.

You view a discrepancy in our responses with just the same degree of seriousness as a discrepancy in your own responses over time. You give my responses the same presumptive relevance and authority as you give your own responses, so that I am as intimately involved in your rule-following intentions and project as your other selves.¹⁸

Pettit's outlook here converges strikingly with that of Brandom's, which I shall now outline in the respect that is relevant for our purposes. At the heart of Brandom's ambitious project is the idea that rule-following, and hence normativity and objectivity, is only possible on the basis of our engagement in what he calls *social deontic scorekeeping practices*.¹⁹ First, Brandom, appropriating Wittgenstein's insight, argues that normativity must be conceived in terms of its expression in *practices* in order to dissolve the problem of rule-following. The emphasis on practice avoids the problem that plagues what Brandom calls "regulism", which insists that all rules or norms must derive their normative force from other *explicit* rules or principles. The problem with regulism is that it cannot avoid collapsing into a vicious *infinite regress*, for rules are not self-applying and can ultimately only guide us against a prior background understanding of how to apply them. But this background understanding cannot in turn be rendered perspicuous

¹⁷ Simon Blackburn, "The Individual Strikes Back", in *Synthese* 58 (1984), pp. 281-301.

¹⁸ Pettit, *The Common Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 188. But Pettit must concede that his line of argument cannot be "knock-down" because it is *verificationist* in the sense that it argues that it is a necessary condition of the possibility of rule-following that the latter take place within the medium of practices of negotiation. This *begs the question*, however, that the skeptic (e.g., Blackburn) raises about the necessarily social nature of rule-following.

as explicit rules or principles. The insistence on the practical character of rule-following acknowledges that there must be a way of grasping a rule that is *not itself* a *Deutung* in Wittgenstein's sense. It is only through our engagement in practices that there can be right or wrong concerning our sensitivity to and acknowledgment of norms even though they may not be capable of being made explicit.

Second, these practices must be *social* and understood in terms of *deontic scorekeeping* because what it is to be directed at the world in normative terms, according to Brandom, depends crucially on our capacity to adopt three sorts of *deontic*, i.e., *normative, attitudes* towards a thinker (rule-follower, understander): (1) *attributing a commitment* to her, which Brandom takes to be the most basic deontic attitude; (2) *attributing an entitlement* to her; and finally, (3) *undertaking or acknowledging the commitment oneself* that one has attributed to the thinker in question. Roughly speaking, attributing a commitment to someone amounts to ascribing to her some premise that she assumes or some conclusion that she draws in her reasoning; attributing an entitlement comes to ascribing to her the justifications that she puts forward to support her commitment; and acknowledging or undertaking the commitment oneself amounts to attributing to oneself the commitment that one has attributed to the thinker. Note that adoption of these deontic attitudes are primarily and mostly *implicit*: Neither the individual attributing them nor the person to whom they are attributed need be *self-conscious* or become *explicitly* aware that they are keeping score of one another's deontic attitudes and hence deontic statuses. These attitudes are *deontic* because they concern what one *ought* to hold or adopt as a premise or conclusion, as attributed or endorsed, in one's reasoning in the game of giving and asking for reasons. When individuals treat each other in terms of these deontic attitudes, they *keep score practically* on each other in the sense that there is a mutual *monitoring, assessment*, and, if appropriate, *endorsement or rejection* of the correctness of one another's reasons for belief and action. And these attitudes are articulated through *practices*, as far as adopting them constitutes *performing actions or engaging in activities* of a certain (discursively structured) sort.

¹⁹ Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, *op. cit.*, esp. ch. 1-4 and 8. For a more elaborate sketch of Brandom's project than the one I offer here, see, e.g., David Lauer, "Pragmatics Corporealized: Zu Robert Brandoms Begriff sprachlicher Praxis", in this essay collection.

Now Brandom, adapting Davidson's line of thought²⁰ for his purposes and putting it in term of his vocabulary, characterizes the *sociality* engendered through deontic scorekeeping as what he calls *I-thou* rather than *I-we* sociality in order to distinguish his particular conception of the significance of the social from other superficially similar communal assessment accounts of normativity.²¹ These latter accounts consider the assessments of the community as the ultimate arbiter of what counts as correct and incorrect as far as the rule-following of an individual is concerned. According to them, the standard of assessment of the community *itself* can never be in turn questioned, since it is the ultimate set of normative constraints on the basis to which the rule-following of any individual is to be evaluated. Brandom construes and criticizes this conception of the putatively infallible role of the community in assessment as an *I-we* conception. *I-we* sociality is flawed because: (1) its conception of the relation between the individual and the community is a *fiction*; and (2) it illegitimately *personifies* the community by taking it to act *as if* it were an *individual* engaging in the activity of assessment. And (3), most egregiously, the *I-we* sociality that characterizes these communal assessment accounts of normativity *forfeits its right* to claim to provide an account of *objectivity*, for by taking the authority of the community as *infallible*, it thereby forfeits its capacity to distinguish what is *correct* from what merely *seems* or is *believed* by the community to be correct.²² For this reason Brandom rejects the *I-we* sociality that underlies these communal assessment conceptions of rule-following. Rather, the sociality of deontic scorekeeping practices must be of an *I-thou* character because such practices can only take place in the first instance among *individuals*, not between an individual and the community of which he or she is a member. Furthermore, since Brandom's ultimate ambition is to show how his social practice account of normativity and hence intentionality in terms of social deontic scorekeeping practices makes objectivity possible, the sort of sociality expressed through scorekeeping practices must consist all the more of *I-thou* interactions because it is only by way of the *different perspectives* of each scorekeeper that the *form* of

²⁰ Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), esp. essays 9-11, 18; *idem.*, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in E. LePore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 433-46.

²¹ Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* (London: Duckworth, 1980); Kripke's reading of the later Wittgenstein in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, *op. cit.*, ch. 3.

conceptual norms, i.e., the *very idea* of their normativity and objectivity *überhaupt* as opposed to their *determinate content*, can attain the deontic status of being *objective*.²³ In any case, whatever one may think of Brandom's provocative thesis regarding what can be characterized as his transcendental conception of objectivity as social institution, keeping score on one another's discursive and hence attitudinal commitments and entitlements is conceived as the primary way in which we are social.

In summary, both Pettit and Brandom conceive *social practices* to be central to grounding the necessarily normative and objective character of rule-following. Moreover, they both argue that the particular sort of *sociality* involved in rule-following must be of *I-thou* rather than *I-we* character. For Pettit, the necessity of the social basis of rule-following is to be articulated in terms of the *ethocentric* account of rule-following as expressed through habits of extrapolation and practices of negotiation regarding what should count as the favorable (i.e., normal and ideal) conditions under which rules or norms in turn count as correctly or incorrectly applied. The ethocentric account certainly seems at least to imply an *I-thou* sociality insofar as the relevant practices of negotiations take place among individuals, not directly between the individual and some community of which she is a member. For Brandom, the necessarily social basis of rule-following is to be understood in terms of *social deontic scorekeeping practices*. And the sort of sociality in play must be of *I-thou* rather than *I-we* character because the latter sort of sociality, apart from its fictional quality and illegitimate personification of the community, loses the very idea of objectivity that is constitutive of normativity as such by treating it as an infallible source of authority in assessment. What comes to the foreground on the Pettit-Brandom construal of the nature of rule-following is its necessarily social and practical character.²⁴

²² Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-42.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 584-613, esp. 593-601.

²⁴ It should be noted, however, that Pettit and Brandom would disagree about the possibility of a solitary, though intertemporally interactive rule-follower. Pettit, *pace* Blackburn, concedes that there is no way of ruling out this in principle possibility. But if I understand Brandom correctly, he would seriously challenge the intelligibility of this possibility. Because this issue is not directly relevant for my purposes in this essay, I need not settle it here. I thank Julie Zahle for pointing out this divergence between Pettit and Brandom.

III. The Necessarily Worldly Character of Practice and Sociality

But must the sociality of practice be essentially of an *I-thou* mode, one articulated foremost in terms of practices of negotiation or deontic scorekeeping? More specifically, is *I-thou* sociality the *most basic* way in which human beings engage in *social practices*? Appropriating the line of thought of the early Heidegger and those inspired by him, such as Theodore Schatzki and Joseph Rouse, I submit that the answer to these questions should be in the negative. More precisely, I want to suggest that practices are not just *modes of activity*, as Pettit and Brandom conceive them, but constitute at a more basic level the *concrete context* or *world* within which practices *qua* modes of activity are intelligible (*verständlich*) at all.²⁵

According to the conception of *I-thou* sociality that has been attributed to Pettit and Brandom, what is *prior* in the order of explanation is the *activities of agents*, whether as practices of negotiation (Pettit) or as scorekeeping *qua* the attributing of deontic attitudes (Brandom). For it is the activities of agents above all that *institute and sustain* the normativity that governs rule-following and hence our way of being directed at the world in the distinctive mode of understanding. What lies at the core of *I-thou* sociality is the idea of individual subjects who keep deontic score on each other's commitments and entitlements from different perspectives and engage in negotiation about the correctness of attributing and undertaking these normative attitudes.

But if there is a significant way in which the activities of agents institute and thus constitute human *sociality*, there is also a significant way in which that sociality in turn *structures* and thus *makes intelligible/possible* the activities of agents. The relation of dependence between *agents' activities* and the *complex of intelligibility* within which they live and act does not only run in one direction, with agents' activities as the more basic element. Rather, as we might say in adopting Heidegger's terminology, both agents' activities and the complex of intelligibility are *equiprimordial* or *equioriginary* (*gleichursprünglich*). That is, neither is intelligible nor realizable absent its ultimate

²⁵ Given the constraints on space in this essay, I can at best only make some suggestive critical remarks below about why I believe that the Pettit-Brandom conception of sociality is one-sided or deficient. Greater elaboration and argumentation would no doubt be required in order to entitle myself adequately to these remarks.

interdependence and hence *unity* with the other; they are “two side of one coin”, the “metal” of which constitutes the whole of human sociality.

How does such a complex of intelligibility structure and thus make possible the activities of agents? Here the thought of the early Heidegger about the constitutive existential structure of Dasein (human being) as being-in-the-world is significant.²⁶ For Heidegger, the *world* is never only or even primarily the totality of entities that are “merely there”, i.e., merely intraworldly occurrent (*innerweltlich vorhanden*) in his terminology. Rather, the world is primarily and mostly “that ‘wherein’ a factual Dasein as such ‘lives’”, a *complex of intelligibility* within which entities *always already make sense to (and of)* Dasein, who in turn embodies and actualizes determinately possible ways of dealing with them.²⁷ The world in this sense is the most basic *complex or context on the basis of which or in terms of which (Grundzusammenhang woraufhin)* Dasein understands itself and its surroundings in engaging in its average everyday activities; it is the necessary condition of the possibility of Dasein’s ability to make sense of and deal with anything whatsoever. The *worldliness (Weltlichkeit)* of the world is the ontological-existential *structure* that makes possible Dasein’s preontological-existentielle understanding of the unitary character of itself and the world. The important point here is that Dasein necessarily *has a world* (in this sense) and is always already *familiar with the world* in which it lives and acts on account of its *worldly* way of being, i.e., on account of its antecedent understanding that *discloses (erschließt)* how everything hangs together intelligibly in the world.²⁸ Thus, Dasein as being-in-the-world always already exists in a *meaningfully configured complex (Verweisungszusammenhang der Bedeutsamkeit)* of (i) entities and (ii) people (iii) as situated in a determinate field of possibilities. And in this meaningfully configured complex, i.e., the world wherein Dasein lives, Dasein has always already understood in some way or other the manner in which it *exists with others (Mitsein unter Anderen)*:

Im Mitsein als dem existenzialen Umwillen Anderer sind diese in ihrem Dasein schon erschlossen. Diese mit dem Mitsein vorgängig konstituierte Erschlossenheit der Anderen *macht demnach auch die Bedeutsamkeit, d. h., die Weltlichkeit mit aus*, als welche sie im existenzialen Worum-Willen festgemacht

²⁶ Since this is not the place to explicate Heidegger’s admittedly difficult conceptual apparatus, readers unfamiliar with it may wish to skim this paragraph.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 17th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), §14, pp. 64-5. This is ‘world’ in the third, preontological-existentielle sense in Heidegger’s elaboration of the concept of world.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §18, pp. 86-8.

ist. Daher läßt die so konstituierte Weltlichkeit der Welt, in der das Dasein wesenhaft je schon ist, das umsichtig Zuhandene so begegnen, daß *in eins mit ihm als umsichtig Besorgtem das Mitdasein Anderer begegnet*.²⁹

Both Schatzki and Rouse in their elaboration of the nature of social practices take up this Heideggerian conception of what is involved for agents to be in the world *qua* the meaningfully configured complex in terms of which entities and people always already hang together in a concrete intelligible arrangement. Insofar as human agents are directed at all at the world, their intentionality *must already practically take into account* (among other things) how other agents' activities and the entities they deal with *mesh or hang together* with their own. Engagement in a particular set of social practices *presupposes* an understanding of the concomitantly meaningfully configured settings in terms of which those practices make sense as possible ways of acting at all. For it is this complex of intelligibility that *both enables and constrains* the determinate field of possibilities on the basis of which concrete agents make sense of themselves and what they are doing. This complex *enables* agents to act by equipping them with an understanding of how the various interrelated social practices and the entities caught up in them hang together. It also *constrains* agents, however, precisely by initiating them into the rules and norms involved in those social practices whenever they engage in them. For example, someone who understands what it is to give a talk at a colloquium has a practical understanding of his role and how it relates to other people's roles in such a setting, of how to use the equipment that belongs to and makes sense within this setting, of its aims and associated goals, and more generally of the rules and norms that both enable and constrain the actions and activities of agents who find themselves situated in this setting. As Schatzki writes:

When a practice, as is usually the case, is carried out in specific settings, the settings are set up to facilitate the efficient and coordinated performance of its constituent actions. The layouts of the settings, as a result, reflect the interwoven meanings that the entities used in these actions possess by virtue of being so used (and talked about). ... The disclosure and layout of equipment within practices also, consequently, exhibits normativity, meaning that things are usually so arranged that they can be easily used in the correct and acceptable ways. ... Practices thus "constitute worlds" in the sense of articulating the intelligibility of nexuses of entities (objects, people, and events), specifying their normativized interrelated meanings. Constituting worlds through meaning does not, of course, bring entities into existence. Instead, practices, by conferring upon entities interrelated meanings coordinate with the actions taken toward them, organize entities into the integrated nexuses that are what reality is and can be for us.³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, §26, p. 123, emphases added.

³⁰ Theodore Schatzki, *Social Practices, op. cit.*, p. 114f.; see also *idem.*, *The Site of the Social, op. cit.*, esp. ch. 1-2.

Similarly, Rouse writes:

Practices are ... not just what agents do but the relational complex within which their doings are intelligible. The agents who engage in practices thus belong to the practice [sic], rather than the reverse.³¹

The central claim is that the meaningfulness of agents' situation is not bestowed by either individual compartment or by social norms in abstraction from their material realization; instead, it emerges from the ongoing interaction of agents with their material surroundings and with one another. The situation in which agents find themselves is already meaningful, not because meaning is grounded in natural causality but because agents are always responding to the specific configuration of meaningful possibilities for action which emerges from past practice.³²

I am now in the position to register my moderate criticism of the Pettit-Brandom conception of the connection between practice and sociality as essentially of an *I-thou* character. On the Pettit-Brandom picture, the order of explanation moves from the activities of agents to what their activities institute and hence constitute. But on the picture of the connection between practice and sociality that Schatzki and Rouse work out, social practices refer not only to the activities of agents, but encompass the *meaningfully configured complex* that is *equioriginary* (*gleichursprünglich*) to the intelligibility of agents' activities. In order to understand the delicate nature of this equioriginarity, the distinction needed is that between *availability* (*potentiality*) and *actuality*. As argued above, social practices must presuppose the *prior availability* of the background understanding that renders intelligible the activities of agents and the entities caught up in them. But in order for social practices to be *actual* (*actualized*) and not merely possible *qua* intelligible ways of being in the world, agents must engage in them by *actually* dealing with the entities and the other agents that are implicated in those practices. Thus, the activities of agents and the complex of intelligibility are *interdependent* (they are two sides of one coin) in the sense that they determine each other *modally*. In order for social practices to be intelligible as possible ways of acting at all, their complex of intelligibility must be *antecedently available*. But in order for this complex to become something actual (actualized), agents must *actually* engage in the

³¹ Rouse, *Engaging Science*, *op. cit.*, p. 143. The inference in this context that agents who engage in practices "thus belong to the practice" is in my view too strong and hence unwarranted. Agents and practices belong to each other, albeit in different modes of belongingness, with neither having priority over the other (see below in the text). Rouse's "posthumanist" commitments blind him perhaps to this delicate point. For a sympathetic critique of Rouse's anti- or posthumanism, see Schatzki, *The Site of the Social*, pp. 105-22.

³² Rouse, *Engaging Science*, *op. cit.*, p. 152; see also *idem.*, *Knowledge and Power*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-68.

relevant social practices. The equioriginarity of the activities of agents and the complex of intelligibility of those activities is connected with their respective modality.

There is a place, then, in the practice-centered account of sociality for practices of negotiation or deontic scorekeeping, for engaging in them is indeed necessary for actualizing the way in which we coexist with each other. But the question is whether the sort of sociality that these activities express can fully account for the sort of practice-centered sociality that the early Heidegger, and following him Schatzki and Rouse, are concerned to emphasize and elaborate. If this latter conception of the connection between practice and sociality is correct, practices of negotiation or deontic scorekeeping can only make sense at all if the complex of intelligibility within which they take place is *already disclosed* (*erschlossen*) and *available* to be appropriated. That is, such practices or scorekeeping make sense as possible ways for agents to be and act at all only against the background of a meaningfully configured complex – a *world* – that is already familiar to them. Practices of negotiation or scorekeeping cannot *fully* institute or constitute this background complex of intelligibility, since this complex is what *conditions* (enables and constrains) the former. Sociality already figures in the constitution of this background complex of intelligibility, not only then when human beings begin to keep deontic score on one another or negotiate about the correctness of the score.³³

I conclude, therefore, that *I-thou* sociality as Brandom and Pettit conceive it cannot be the *most basic*, but is at best just *one important aspect* of the sort of sociality that characterizes human beings, if we think through fully the significance of sociality and its connection to practice. Practice-centered sociality, I submit, is more basic than *I-thou* sociality and constitutes the most fundamental way in which practice and sociality are interconnected.

³³ John McDowell expresses sympathy for this criticism in “Gadamer and Davidson on Understanding and Relativism”, in J. Malpas, U. Arnsward, and J. Kertscher (eds.), *Gadamer’s Century* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 173-93, esp. pp. 187-90.