

Not Doings as Resistance

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Abstract

What does it mean to intentionally not perform an action? Is it possible to not perform an action out of resistant intention? Is there sufficient language for talking about this kind of behavior in the social sciences? In this article, a nonnormative vocabulary of not doings including resistant intentional omissions is developed. Unlike concepts that describe official, overt, and public resistance, James Scott's everyday resistance and Albert Hirschman's exit have made it possible to talk about the resistant inactions of agents in the social sciences. But in order to grasp the ordinariness of this kind of oppositional behavior, philosophy of intentional omissions is used.

Keywords

resistance, intentional omission, omission, exit, everyday resistance

1. Introduction

What does it mean when we intentionally do not perform an action? Can we not perform an action out of resistant intention? Or is resistance necessarily a matter of performing an action? In the social sciences, it seems to be assumed that we can resist things by our intentional not doings. An agent can boycott a company in intentionally not buying its products, resist institutional arrangements in not answering a questionnaire or resist parliamentary democracy in intentionally not voting. Some intentional omissions of agents

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seem to include resistance to things such as capitalism, government, the meat industry, or the army. What kind of conceptual resources do we have for talking about this kind of behavior in the social sciences?

The aim of this article is to investigate how not doings that arise out of resistance are conceptualized. Building on the work of James Scott's everyday resistance and Albert Hirschman's exit mechanism, a general notion of resistant intentional omission is developed. A conceptual framework for the analysis of not doings in the social sciences is provided and the general notion of resistant intentional omission is set in relation to other concepts of not doings. This is because the intentional omissions, failings, passivities, and withdrawals of agents are unobservables. They can easily be mapped under the scope of, for instance, distrust, so it is important to pay attention to the differences between not doings. According to Daniel Little (2016, 26), a theoretical concept is useful if it helps in formulating hypotheses about the unobservable mechanisms that underlie a phenomenon or if it helps in providing empirical order to the phenomenon. The conceptual means of philosophy of intentional omissions can provide clarification for both. Important mechanisms can go unnoticed if social scientists are forced to use opaque language of the variety of phenomena belonging to the agent's omissions. The objective is to map out different intentional omissions of agents so that the social scientist would have a better picture of their variety.

This approach is based on the philosophy of intentional omissions.¹ In an intentional omission, it is not by accident that an action is not performed by an agent. The necessary conditions of an intentional omission are that an agent does not perform an action and this not performing is somehow intentional (Clarke 2010, 2014). The action that is not performed can be simple or complex. An agent can intentionally omit to participate in decision making or intentionally omit to answer a specific question. In philosophy of action not doings of agents have also been called refrainings, forbearings, failings, not doings, negative actions, and negative acts (e.g., Bennett 1995; Brand 1971; Danto 1973; Ginet 1990, 2004; Kleinig 1986; Mossell 2009; Ryle 1979; Vermazen 1985; von Wright 1963). In the following, the term intentional omission is used to refer to intentional not doings of agents.

The vocabulary proposed of not doings is nonnormative: the objective is to clarify nonnormative concepts of omissions so that we could perceive what kind of not doings there are before jumping to conclusions about their

¹Philosophy of action has lately been used to conceptualize the building blocks of social mechanisms (e.g., Hedström 2005). Here it is assumed that philosophy of intentional omissions can also be used to conceptualize social phenomena, such as boycotts and strikes, and demarcate between the active omissions and the passivities of agents.

normative status. When *omission* is used in a normative sense, it refers to what the agent *should* have done and did not do. When *omission* is used in a nonnormative sense it simply refers to what the agent does not do. In the normative sense, an omission can be defined by someone other than the agent but when it comes to the agent's intentions in not doing something, she has special knowledge of them. Only the agent herself can know whether she did not do something intentionally or by accident. In the following, a nonnormative vocabulary of not doings is developed because if we only have conceptual means of talking about what the agent should have done but did not, we have trouble conceptualizing different kinds of not doings. If we only have the language of failings, for instance, it can be problematic to talk about successful not doings. If we only have concepts for laziness, conscientious not doings cannot be talked about. According to Myles Brand (1971, 45), normative notdoing locutions can be defined by adding a normative factor to value-neutral locutions. Following Brand, it is assumed that the normative treatment of omissions can also benefit from the use of nonnormative vocabulary.

It must be noted that sometimes we speak of intentionally omitting to do something when we are actually talking about intentional actions or activities. Intentionally omitting to stop whispering is not an intentional omission because whispering is intentional activity. The agent's intention concerning an action *not* done is necessary for an intentional omission. Although intentional omissions can happen at the same time as intentional actions or activities of an agent, they are not reducible to the sum of the intentional movements of the agent. At least some intentional omissions seem to happen at the basic level of action description: an agent can intentionally omit to raise her hand without succeeding in it *by* doing something else. The difference in intentionally omitting the raising of a hand and just not raising a hand is that in the latter case there is no internal activity related to hand-raising.

Not all intentional omissions have anything to do with resistant intentions. An agent can, for instance, intentionally omit to answer the phone because of another discussion although he has nothing against answering the phone. Some intentional omissions, however, seem to be of a kind in which an agent not only intentionally does not perform the action in question but is actively against performing it. For instance,

1. An agent can resist the army in intentionally omitting to take part in the drafting.
2. An agent can resist the government in intentionally omitting to eat in a hunger strike.
3. An agent can resist a social system in intentionally omitting to vote.
4. An agent can resist an alcohol policy in not drinking alcohol.

What kind of conceptual means do we have for talking about these kinds of phenomena? In philosophy of action, resistant intentions in intentional omission have not been of much interest. Instead, descriptions of positive intentions causing intentional actions have dominated the discussion. Although there has been no systematic treatment of resistant not doings, intentional omissions that are about resisting intention² have come up regularly in the literature of not doings. Randolph Clarke (2010, 158) mentions abstaining, boycotting, and fasting as examples of intentional omissions. According to Carl Ginet (1990, 1), intentional omissions can designate phenomena such as not voting, not locking the door, leaving salt out of the batter, and staying still. John Kleinig (1986, 3) has grouped within the domain of omission, what he calls “nondoings” including neglecting, refraining, forbearing, abstaining, declining, refusing, evading, ignoring, postponing, shirking, allowing, permitting, and letting happen. Gilbert Ryle (1979, 105) mentions a teetotaler and a vegetarian regularly and deliberately abstaining from drinking alcohol and eating meat. It seems that in some cases agents commit intentional omissions that arise out of oppositional attitudes toward certain kinds of actions.

In the following, ways to talk about this kind of phenomena in social sciences are investigated. The concept of resistant intentional omission is developed and distinguished from other neighboring concepts of not doings. Philosophy of intentional omissions is used as a means to gain conceptual clarity to this field in general. This is because in philosophy and the social sciences, the vocabulary of intentional omissions has so far been somewhat underdeveloped compared with the vocabulary of intentional action. The vocabulary chosen can lead sociological inquiry to different directions and representations of the social world (Little 2016, 30, 41). For instance, whereas “process” emphasizes change, “structure” emphasizes permanence (Little 2016, 29). Concentrating on the actions of agents emphasizes the overt, obvious, and active part of societal agency, whereas focusing on the intentional omissions of agents emphasizes the restrained, passive, and hidden parts of agency only the agents themselves are fully aware of.³

²An agent can also resist an intention to do an action but here resisting intention is used in a restricted sense referring to an agent intentionally resisting performing an action.

³The lack of attention to withdrawals, silences, and passivities might be explained by what Soran Reader (2007) has called an agential bias peculiar to Western culture. According to this bias, people matter when they are agents (Reader 2007, 580). But when a person is passive, incapable, constrained, or dependent, she is considered as less of a person. Reader argues that we should have more understanding of the passive aspect of personhood because passivity, contingency, and dependency are just as constitutive of personhood as action, capability, choice, and independence (Reader 2007, 592).

The article is structured as follows. First, a minimal notion of resistance is proposed based on the sociological uses of the term analyzed by Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner (2004). Then, two ways of conceptualizing resistant not doings are discussed, namely, James Scott's notion of everyday resistance and Albert Hirschman's notion of exit. The section demonstrates that in social sciences, this kind of phenomena can be considered as part of the agency of actors, although they have not been systematically studied in philosophy of action. Once a better idea of the phenomena in question is gained, the concept of resistant intentional omission is clarified and set into the typology of other not doings. Finally, the conclusion articulates a call for collaboration between philosophers of mind and action and philosophers of social science in order to further develop a cognitively realist, comprehensive theory of agency that includes the passivities and activities of agents.

2. Minimal Notion of Resistance

Resistance is a central concept of the social sciences. According to Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (2016, 417), it is a deeply sociological concept that has also been used widely in feminist, cultural, queer, peasant and poststructural studies. Although it is a concept that is used in most disciplines of the social sciences (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013, 11), there seems to be considerable disagreement and ambiguity on what exactly it denotes (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 549). In sociology, it has been used in diverse, imprecise, and contradictory ways (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 534). Some basic components, however, seem to be present in nearly all uses of the term (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 538). In the following, a minimal notion of resistance is proposed to clarify what is fundamental for resistance in the social sciences. This minimal notion is further used in introducing resistant intentional omissions to the vocabulary of not doings.

This minimal notion of resistance is based on the empirical summary of the sociological uses of the concept by Hollander and Einwohner (2004). They found two core elements of resistance that were present in nearly all definitions of resistance in articles published in sociology journals (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 538). The first element was a sense of action, broadly conceived. In sociological literature, resistance was not perceived as a quality of the agent or as a mere state of being but it necessarily included some active behavior. The second core element of resistance they identified was a sense of opposition. In different definitions, it was denoted with expressions such as "counter," "reject," and "challenge." According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004, 539), in sociological definitions of resistance "included activity, and that activity occurs in opposition to someone or something else."

In the following, “resistance” is used to mean behavior that arises out of the agent’s oppositional attitude toward something. It is assumed that, in resistance, an oppositional attitude is transformed into behavior of the agent. To include resistant intentional omissions, intentional omissions are seen as belonging to the agent’s behavior as well as her intentional actions. In this wide conception of behavior, it is acknowledged that our agency consists not only of what we intentionally do but what we do not do as well. Without this wide notion of behavior, resistant withdrawals, silences, not votings and non-participations of agents are, by definition, ruled out of resistance.⁴

In the minimal notion, it is necessary that the agent’s behavior arises from an oppositional attitude toward something. This “something,” however, is deliberately left without further elucidation. Hollander and Einwohner (2004, 536) point out that an agent can resist a rapist, an employer, a state power as well as a gender expectation. So it is assumed that opposition can be used against various targets such as the government, an institution, a specific policy, social norm, or a wider social system such as capitalism.⁵

This minimal notion is not aimed at challenging more limited uses of the term. Instead, the objective is to talk about resistance in a way that is not limited to specific situations or discourses but is able to grasp phenomena talked about as resistance as widely as possible. It is intended to include all oppositional behavior, not just the kind that, for instance, has the potential to affect social change. It is assumed that resistant behaviors are not just a privilege of agents in ideal conditions: minimal notion of resistance accepts resistant withdrawals of relatively powerless agents in circumstances in which there is little possibility for actual change. From the agent’s perspective resistance can be defined solely based on the intentions and behavior of the agent but when it comes to interactions, the analysis of resistance is obviously more complex. A need for understanding better how the powerholders react to resistance has been articulated (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014, 108) as well as for the everyday uses of power (Sivaramakrishnan 2005, 351). An interaction between resisters, resistance targets, and outside observers is needed to fully understand resistance (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, 548). But in developing the basic vocabulary of not doings so that it would include resistances, the agent’s perspective is a good starting point.

⁴Hollander and Einwohner (2004, 545) point out that acts of withdrawal, avoidance and exile belong to the scope of behavior used in the core elements of resistance, so this addition is not superfluous.

⁵It is also assumed that resistance does not need to be detected by its targets. Hollander and Einwohner (2004, 545) maintain that resistance can be meant to be noticed or intentionally hidden.

3. Conceptualizing Resistant Intentional Omissions

What kind of ways of talking about resistant intentional omissions are there in the social sciences? Do we already have sufficient conceptual means for talking about them? In the following, I will discuss two ways of talking about not doing something out of resistant intentions in the social sciences: James Scott's notion of everyday resistance and Albert Hirschman's distinction between exit and voice.

3.1. Official versus Everyday Resistance

James Scott originally argued in *Weapons of the Weak* (Scott 1985) and *Everyday Forms of Resistance* (Scott 1989) that subaltern groups' everyday behavior—such as foot-dragging, false compliance, feigned ignorance, smuggling, poaching, slander, sabotage, and anonymous threats—could also be considered resistance (Scott 1989, 34). According to Scott (1989, 34), these hidden forms of resistance are an integral part of the behavior of the relatively powerless groups.

Scott (1989, 36) defined everyday resistance as lower class resistance among peasants that is intended either to mitigate or to deny claims, such as rents or taxes made on that class by superior classes, such as landlords or the state, or that is intended to advance its own claims, such as to work, land or respect vis-à-vis these subordinate classes. Although Scott talks about everyday resistance as behavior of relatively powerless *groups*, it is not collective by definition. It nevertheless often involves some kind of cooperation. Everyday resistance is necessarily intentional and it can include symbolic or ideological resistance (Scott 1989, 37). Although it might be hidden, it can have effects, especially when small events add up to a large event. Scott (1989, 35) mentions an army too short of conscripts to fight, the foot-dragging of a workforce bankrupting an entire enterprise, and a tax claim of the state that is gradually transformed into a dead letter by evasion.

According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004, 539), Scott was the first to recognize that powerless people rarely have the resources and opportunities to resist openly. Scott (1989, 34) sees that everyday resistance can be the chosen method of resistance in situations where open defiance is impossible or entails danger. It is a safer, small-scale option of resistance for these groups which does not require formal coordination (Scott 1989, 35). One advantage of the notion of everyday resistance is that it can include behavior in constrained circumstances.

Scott (1989, 34) suggests that the kinds of resistances that are not recognized as such should also be studied in the social sciences alongside the more

official, recognized forms of resistance. The notion of everyday resistance implies that openly defiant resistance concepts such as civil disobedience overlook resistances of subordinate groups. According to Scott, concepts that refer to public, official means of resistance only grasp the most obvious part of resistant behaviors. Resistant intentional omissions can be like everyday resistance in this sense, because they do not necessarily entail articulation of the opposition.

The benefit of the concept of everyday resistance is that it allows resistant intentional omissions. An agent intentionally not performing an action out of resistant intention is included in everyday resistance in the cases of tax evasion and refusal to get drafted. But is intentional nonperformance of an action out of resistant intention necessarily limited to behavior of a certain class? These kind of hidden resistances are perhaps often a feature of the behavior of subaltern groups but it seems that any agent can intentionally not perform an action out of resistant intention. An agent can boycott a company, for instance, without belonging to a subordinate class. In global capitalism, the targets of resistance can be so complex and distant from the agent that an overt way of resisting might not be available. This does not necessarily entail that the agent belongs to a subordinate class, only that the targets of resistance are detached from the day-to-day life of the agent. Resistance to capitalism can include cases like this. According to Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello (2005, 373), in capitalism, exploitation passes through a series of detours and has a systemic character. Different actors operate from a distance, often in ignorance of each other (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 373). This so-called capitalist displacement has created a situation in which the world is difficult to interpret and the injustices are difficult to oppose with the tools of previous oppositional movements (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 324). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 210-11) have argued that identifying the targets of resistance can be difficult because exploitation no longer has a specific place and the system of power is complex: "We suffer exploitation, alienation, and command as enemies, but we do not know where to locate the production of oppression. And yet, we still resist and struggle." It seems that resistant intentional omission belongs to the repertoire of not only relatively powerless groups but to that of most agents. At least global capitalism appears to be a target of resistance that can be resisted by the everyday not doings of agents regardless of their class.

Scott's notion of everyday resistance widened the scope of how resistance was previously perceived in the social sciences. Scott demonstrated how hidden, unarticulated and unofficial forms of resistance could also have ethical and societal importance along with more overt forms of resistance such as civil disobedience. Moreover, intentional omissions such as not attending the

army were seen as having resistant intentions and having causes and reasons in the agent's life. Hidden resistance was also seen as having societal effects in Scott's theory. Another important feature of Scott's theory is that everyday resistance cannot be solely defined by an outside observer—the powerless groups themselves are specialists when it comes to the interpretation of their own behavior and intentions. Yet, does hidden resistance only arise in the constrained circumstances of relatively powerless groups? If intentionally not performing an action out of resistance belongs to the agency of all agents regardless of their social status, a more general notion of resistant behavior would need to be developed.

3.2. *Voice versus Exit*

Another way to conceptualize resistant intentional omissions in social sciences has been through Albert Hirschman's conceptual distinction between exit and voice. In *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Hirschman's (1970) aim was to determine the conditions in which people resort to an open articulation of dissatisfaction, that is, *voice*, and when they choose the covert resistance of voting with one's feet, that is, *exit*. The premise of Hirschman's (1970, 1) dichotomy is that all economic, social, and political systems occasionally suffer from dysfunctional behavior, that is, behavior that is not efficient, rational, law-abiding, virtuous, or otherwise functional. All organizations are subject to this decline (Hirschman 1970, 15), which is usually reflected in the quality of the product or service (4). Exit and voice are the results of this decline (Hirschman 1970, 1).

Hirschman (1970, 4) defined exit as a result of deterioration after which "some customers stop buying the firm's products or some members leave the organization." The result of exit is that revenues drop or membership declines (Hirschman 1970, 4), which is how management can find out about this deterioration. Contrary to exit, voice is an actual attempt to change the policies or practices of the organization the member or customer is displeased with (Hirschman 1970, 30). It is an attempt to change rather than escape from the objectionable state of affairs (Hirschman 1970, 30). This attempt at change can take many forms, such as individual or collective petitions to the management, appeals to higher authority or various kinds of protests that mobilize public opinion (Hirschman 1970, 30). Whereas exit can be private, anonymous, roundabout and secret, voice is, according to Hirschman (1970, 16), direct and straightforward. This is why he calls it "political action par excellence" (Hirschman 1970, 16).

Hirschman (1970, 17) argued that whereas economists have had a bias in favor of exit, social scientists have recognized voice better than exit. In the political realm, exit has even been branded as criminal and labeled as

desertion, defection, and treason (Hirschman 1970, 17). Hirschman (1970, 15) proposed that economists and social scientists should better recognize both mechanisms. In *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, the purpose of a theory of these mechanisms was to demonstrate the usefulness of economic concepts to political science and the usefulness of political concepts to economics (Hirschman 1970, 18). Although Hirschman's point of view was that of an economist, the concepts of exit and voice were meant to be used, and have been used, in other social sciences as well.

Exit allows for resistant not doings and what Hirschman calls exit predominantly consists of intentional omissions. Intentionally not buying a product due to an oppositional attitude toward a firm fits Hirschman's description of the exit mechanism. The dissatisfaction these not doings arise from is similar to the experience of opposition in resistance. But is dissatisfaction necessarily resistance? A mere lack of satisfaction with a product does not seem to be sufficient for resistance because resistance would need to include the oppositional attitude of the agent toward something. Opposition seems to imply a stronger form of disapproval than dissatisfaction.

Another difference between a resistant intentional omission and exit is that in resistant intentional omission prior activity that is stopped is not needed. One has to actually exit from some behavior, membership or customership. Being on strike necessarily entails that the agent has ceased working. But resistant intentional omissions are not necessarily like this—intentionally not working out of resistance toward the government does not necessarily entail working that is intentionally stopped. Exit, however, is always exit from some activity, action, or relation, such as membership or customership.

Another difference between exit and resistant intentional omission is that not performing an action out of resistance is not necessarily reducible to preferring another course of action. Intentionally not buying a product out of resistance does not necessarily amount to buying another. Exit is often described by Hirschman (1970, 15) as a situation in which the customer is dissatisfied with a product of one firm and shifts to that of another. He does admit, however, that exit from an organization might just be a passage from a set of members to a set of nonmembers (Hirschman 1970, 89).

There seems to be a difference between a mere preference for action *a* over action *b* and an active resistance to action *b*. In exit, the dissatisfaction with *b* causes an agent to prefer, for instance, buying another product. But is it possible to conceptualize resistant intentional omissions entirely with preferences? Daniel Hausman (2011, 6, 10) has maintained that preferences are “overall comparative evaluations” or “total subjective comparative evaluations.” Hausman distinguished preferences from mere likings in that whereas likings are cognitively undemanding feelings, preferences are judgments that

require more than consulting one's gut. Obviously, preferences perceived as overall evaluative judgments are a better alternative to grasping resistant not doings than likings because they also allow negative evaluations of actions. But overall comparative evaluations are more complex than resistant not doings. According to Hausman (2011, 9), preferences are necessarily comparative and they are cognitively more complex than desires. An agent can want to eat some chocolate ice cream without thinking about what else she might eat. But to prefer eating some chocolate ice cream one has to consider what else one might have done instead. Many intentional omissions are evaluated without comparing them to any action. Consider a situation in which an agent is resisting an action and is therefore not performing it. At the same time she is committing other positive actions. Does she merely prefer the action done over the one intentionally not done out of resistance? Not necessarily, because when an agent is, for instance, resisting a government by not voting, the action not done is not necessarily compared with anything. The agent does not necessarily prefer to wash the dishes instead of voting but the deliberations between the positive actions and the intentional omissions of the agent committed at the same time might be completely separate cognitive processes. The problem with conceptualizing resistant not doings with the notion of preference is that the attitude in opposing something is not necessarily comparative between actions. Resistant attitudes themselves seem to be incomplete preferences because they can be monadic as in "it is wrong for me smoke." So even if resistant attitudes were included in an overall comparative evaluation of the agent, resistant intentional omissions are not necessarily complete preferences by themselves.

Could resistant intentional omissions then be modeled entirely with rational choice framework? Revealed preference theory does not take into account the difference between omissions and intentional omissions because the actual behavior of the agent might not be different in not doings something by accident and by intention. But I see no reason why resistant attitudes themselves could not be described by a utility function, provided that the scale of valuations contains negative valuations, not just positive valuations and indifference. The benefit of rational choice theory is that it takes decisions not to do something similarly existent as decisions to do something. But intentional omissions cannot be completely modeled by rational choice models because they do not necessarily involve decisions.⁶

⁶Intentional omissions can contain decisions not to do something but they might not. According to Clarke (2014, 14), a decision resolves uncertainty about what to do, but there need not be such uncertainty for an agent to intend to not do something. Intentional omissions without a decision are cases in which it is obvious what not to

The distinction between exit and voice is not an action-theoretical analysis: Hirschman was looking for the behavioral mechanisms arising out of organizational decline, not a general theory of human intention and action. Hirschman's concepts, however, are more general than those belonging to a specific discipline of the social sciences. Exit was able to show that resistant not doings exist and have meaningful effects on companies and organizations. More importantly, the notion of exit was capable of bringing into focus not doings due to dissatisfaction instead of the overt, official means of resistance typical to voice. It has been argued, that it can become a problem for the social sciences if only public, direct, and confrontational resistance is recognized as such (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013, 38). Yet, to include cases in which the agent has a stronger negative evaluation than dissatisfaction, the notion of resistance would also be needed. Furthermore, in order to include cases in which no prior activity was stopped, a more general notion of resistant intentional omissions would be needed.

3.3. General Notion of Resistant Intentional Omission

Scott's work on forms of everyday resistances and Hirschman's conceptual work on exit mechanism have provided a recognition of the existence of resistant intentional omissions in the social world. What they have not provided is, however, a vocabulary diverse enough to account for the differences between the not doings of agents. Even with the addition of everyday resistance and exit, the general understanding of the not doings of agents would still be deficient. Scott and Hirschman were not action theorists and did not deal with the same level of abstraction as action theory. Exit only refers to cases in which a prior activity is stopped. Agents can, however, resist unethical companies by their intentional omissions of buying certain products without having been their customers before. Everyday resistance, on the other hand, refers to the hidden resistance of subordinate classes. Higher class agents can, however, resist capitalism with boycotts. This is why, in the following, a general concept of resistant intentional omission is defined and set in relation with other not doings of agents.

do and cases in which the agent acts on a whim or by habit. Clarke (2014, 14, 63) uses an example of an agent seeing a sign on a wall that says "Wet Paint / Do Not Touch" and without settling an uncertainty about the wall he comes to intend not to touch it. Intentional omissions can also have mental parts other than decisions or choices. Also the temporal parts of an intentional omission are other than those of a decision concerning an action. Intentional omissions are not just instigated by the agent but sustained by her throughout the omission so their ontology is different from that of decisions to not do something.

4. The Vocabulary of Not Doings

How do resistant inactions relate to other action theoretical concepts of not doings? Scott and Hirschman's work provides reasons for taking resistant intentional omissions seriously in philosophy but a more general notion of resistant intentional omission would be needed to set the phenomena to the same level philosophy of action is interested in. In this section, I propose a vocabulary of the not doings of agents based on the philosophy of intentional omissions that includes the resistant not doings of agents. Although there seems to be a need for recognizing resistant intentional omissions better, they are not all there is to an agent's not doings. We also commit to failures, withdrawals, inhibitings, and other not doings that have nothing to do with resistance. So in order to have interaction between social scientific notions of resistance and action theoretical notions of not doings, clarification is needed on both fronts.

The following is a conceptual scheme,⁷ but it is not intended to be comprehensive. Some phenomena that are clearly neither passivities nor activities of agents are omitted. An example of such would be a self-betraying agent believing she intentionally omitted to vote instead of recognizing her unintentional omission and the subconsciously resistant intentional omission of an agent who does not become aware of her hidden resistant intention in not following a firm policy.

The vocabulary is intended to clarify the often-confusing discussion of omissions and provide conceptual resources for talking coherently about them in the social sciences. It is assumed that omissions are the general category to which intentional omissions and failings belong to.⁸ The starting point of this vocabulary is the intention of the agent instead of the consequences of not performing an action. Therefore letting happen is omitted.

⁷According to Daniel Little (2016, 27), a conceptual scheme is an interrelated set of high-level, abstract concepts that can provide the mental resources needed to represent, describe, and explain empirical reality. A comprehensive conceptual scheme would contain all the phenomena in a certain domain (Little 2016, 27).

⁸In Milanich's (1984, 58) taxonomy, on one hand, allowing is the general category of not doings, and it can happen by doing something else or by not doing something. The latter is assumed to happen necessarily by failing to do something (Milanich 1984, 58). Failing to do something, is then divided into failing a duty (or reasonable expectation) and failing by refraining to do something (Milanich 1984, 58). Failing, however, is used in a weak sense referring to either not fulfilling an expectation or refraining—consciously omitting (Milanich 1984, 64). The problem with this scheme is that it introduces the normative element and the nonnormative element to the same

4.1. Preliminary Issue: Unintentional Omissions and Intentional Omissions

Everything an agent does not do is an omission of his in the nonnormative sense of the term. The difference between an omission and an intentional omission is the difference between passive and the active omissions of an agent. It must be noted that although intentional omissions have obvious social relevance, unintentional omissions can have meaning and they might have causes. Withholding information about an election could, at least in theory, cause a widespread omission of citizens in voting, for instance. But the focus of this typology is in those omissions that are intentional.

4.2. Intentional Omissions

Intentional omission is an omission in which the agent's omission is intentional. A mere trying not to perform the action is not enough to account for an intentional omission—the trying must also be successful. In a nonnormative sense, we commit an infinite amount of omissions every moment but only a finite part of them are intentional. Whereas intentional actions necessarily consist of intentional movement,⁹ intentional omissions do not. The agent's perspective is needed in determining whether what she did not do was intentional or not. It must be noted that at least some not doings are inherently vague. There seems to be vagueness in how we speak of intentionally not doing something, at least when it comes to the temporality of omissions. When exactly does, for instance, a withdrawal cease? Some of the following concepts thus might have fuzzy boundaries, but this does not mean that a vocabulary of different kinds of not doings could not be developed in the first place.

level of analysis. Here it is assumed that we can develop a fully nonnormative action language of omissions first and that a better way to develop ways to talk about them in the social sciences is to introduce the normative element to the nonnormative concepts. In Bach's (2010) typology, on the other hand, failing is seen as the general category of not doings. The problem with this typology is that it is implied that there is something wrong with intentionally not doing something. Brand defines an omission as "a failure to do, or even attempt to do, something that in one way or another one is 'supposed to do,' for instance leaving out a step in a procedure or not fulfilling a responsibility" (Bach 2010, 51). A nonnormative typology of not doings, however, cannot take failing to do something as the starting point of all not doings.

⁹In the so-called standard account of action it is defined as the intentional bodily movement of an agent (e.g., Davidson 1980, 50).

Many intentional omissions are situations in which the agent *prefers* performing an action and intentionally omits performing another.¹⁰ In this kind of a situation, an agent makes an overall comparative evaluation between the options perceived to be available to her. An agent choosing a shirt from a closet eventually prefers the action of wearing one shirt instead of another. Not wearing one of the shirts is not accidental nor does it necessarily consist of resistance to any of the shirts. But in order to be an intentional omission, the wearing of a shirt must have at least crossed the agent's mind (Mossell 2009, 312). Not picking a shirt that has not even crossed the agent's mind is not an intentional omission, although it is voluntary, because an intention not to wear it is not present in the agent's mind at any point.

When *postponing* an action an agent is intentionally not performing it now but intends to perform it later. When *ceasing* an activity, an agent is intentionally not continuing the performance of an action.

In *inhibiting*, an agent is intentionally refraining from performing an action she feels an urge to perform. The impulse to perform the action not performed is a necessary condition of inhibiting. In inhibiting, an agent is taking a controlling stance to her own behavior that would otherwise lead to action. For instance, an agent can inhibit an urge to run away from a barking dog. *Abstaining* can belong to this group of intentional omissions but whereas an agent can also inhibit coughing at a single meeting, at least some abstainings are a matter of a longer commitment to not performing a certain kind of action.¹¹

In a *resistant intentional omission*, an agent is not performing an action out of resistant intention. An agent is somehow against the action, and can even be strongly against, even repulsed by it. The oppositional attitude of the agent can be targeted toward the action in question or to something else such as an institution, a policy, an abstract entity, or a system of power. The agent has a negative attitude toward the action not done even if the resistance was targeted toward something else.¹²

¹⁰One can also prefer not voting to voting, but here preference is restricted to this sense of preferring an action over another action.

¹¹Abstaining is also vague when it comes to its intentionality because it is unclear when abstaining turns from an intentional omission to an unintentional habit.

¹²Perhaps because pro-attitudes causing intentional actions have been analyzed with more detail, philosophy of action has tended to overlook that reasons function also as disfavorings of an action (Ruben 2009, 63). Resistant intentions contain con-attitudes in a sense that they weigh against the action not done but they cannot be described as pro-attitudes toward another action because they might not include any elements that are targeted toward the action not done. In resistance, the agent is opposed to something, not necessarily in favor of anything. For instance, the agent's consideration of

Resistant intentional omissions can be distinguished from inhibiting in that an urge to perform the action is not necessarily present. It must be noted that in a resistant intentional omission a norm or an expectation is not necessarily breached. An agent can resist flying due to environmental reasons in intentionally not flying without anyone expecting her to fly. An agent can resist an organizational change in not answering a questionnaire in the absence of a norm or an expectation to answer it. Supererogatory resistant intentional omissions are also conceivable.

4.3. *Debatable Cases*

In *preventing* an action, an agent is making it difficult or impossible for her to perform an action. An alcoholic pouring out whiskey down the toilet is intentionally omitting to drink with the means of this positive action. Preventing necessarily involves positive actions so it cannot be considered an intentional omission at the basic level of action description. Some cases of shirking or *evading an action* also seem to belong to this category. The status of preventings is unclear when it comes to intentional omissions because it can be debated whether intentional omissions that are done by positive actions can be considered intentional omissions.

Withdrawing from an activity is not necessarily an intentional omission in that an agent can withdraw from directing a board with multiple more or less intentional omissions. Intentional omissions are usually perceived as intentional not doings of specifiable actions (e.g., Ryle 1979, 105). Withdrawals are very holistic inactivities in which it can be unclear what exactly is intentionally not done by the agent.

Ceasing of all action is another case of which it can be debated whether it belongs to the class of intentional omissions. For instance, major depression has been described as the total shutdown of behavior (Hagen 2003, 109).¹³ If intentional omissions are defined as including cases in which what the agent intends to not perform is actions altogether, then major cessation of action could be perceived as a special kind of intentional omission.

flying as unethical can cause the agent to prefer taking a train or canceling the trip altogether. Agent's avoidance of speaking during the speech of others can be a matter of preferring to stay silent but it can also be a matter of simply resisting speaking without positive attitudes of the agent toward being silent. Resisting can include full-blown rational reasons but in the case of intentional omissions a negative attitude toward the action not done seems to be sufficient. Further work, however, would be needed to fully understand the role of this kind of resistant con-attitudes in practical decision making.

¹³According to Hagen (2003), this shutdown in depression is largely unintentional.

4.4. Failings

In *failing*, an agent tries to perform an action but fails. By failing I do not refer to something the agent should have done and did not, but something the agent actually tries but fails to do. Failings are not intentional omissions because the agent does not intend not to perform the action but tries to perform it. They are a distinct group of omissions, however, because they belong to the scope of what the agent does not do.

One kind of failing is an *akratic omission*, an omission that is due to weakness of will, in which the agent intends to perform the action, wants to perform it, but does not even try to do it. Akratic omission can be a nonnormative concept because it does not depend on outside valuations on what the agent should have done. Laziness, however, is more often used as a normative concept because it also implies that the weakness of will is morally suspect.

4.5. Objections and Further Clarifications

One can object to the addition of resistant intentional omissions to the category of intentional omissions by arguing that resistance is necessarily a higher order phenomenon. Resistance can be seen as a higher level description not integral to the basic level of action or omission. But it seems that at least some resistant intentional omissions can be described as resistance also on the basic level of description. In boycotting, for instance, the agent may have a resisting intention toward buying a product.

Resisting an action on the basic level has been discussed in action theory in the case of an agent resisting an outside force pulling the agent's movements in certain directions (Vermazen 1985, 95). An example of such would be an agent staying still against a strong wind. However, this notion of resistance is too limited for the uses of social science. In not doing something, one can resist abstract things such as capitalism. Resisting intentions can involve a symbolic relation to the target of resistance. Resistance can also be detached from actual targets or irrational. If resistance is minimally defined as behavior that arises out of the oppositional attitude of the agent toward something, following the sociological uses of the term, an agent can resist the action without there being an outside force trying to bring about the action of the agent.

It can also be objected that resistance should not be considered as a collection of merely cognitive phenomena. But the minimal notion of resistance does not reduce resistant intentional omissions to mere cognitive attitudes. What is essential to the minimal notion of resistance is that it is *behavior* of a kind. Resistant intentional omission is not an attitude, but in it the oppositional attitude of the agent is transformed into behavior, the agent actually not doing the action in question.

There are limitations to this kind of an agent-centered model, however. As such it does not include relations and interactions. According to Julie Zahle (2003, 79), a theory is social or holist insofar as it contains social predicates that refer to social entities or phenomena such as bureaucracies, revolutions, nations, and organizations. A theory is individualist when it refers solely to individuals and their properties (Zahle 2003, 79). Philosophy of intentional omissions is individualist because it only refers to individuals and their properties. The interaction between resistance and its targets requires further development but as such, defining resistant action and inaction based on the agent's attitudes and actual behavior does not exclude interactions.

There is disagreement in sociology on whether the concept of resistance is necessarily attached to the concept of power. If the starting point of a vocabulary of not doing is the agent's perspective, the level of power is not necessary in the vocabulary itself. Action theoretical concepts are uninformative when it comes to relations, interactions, and powers. When analyzing resistance to power, a theory of power and resistance is needed. The vocabulary of resistant behaviors, contributes to the theory of resistance, however. Power relations, however, are obviously involved in resistance and the interplay between the two is vital for understanding agency in society so in the further analysis of resistant action and omission the level of power would need to be addressed. When it comes to power relations, the complex interaction between force or power of the target of resistance and the agent would need to be added.

Methodological issues in recognizing the variety of not doings in society cannot be fully addressed here. It must be noted that there is one methodological commitment the analysis of intentional omissions requires, which is the empirical interest in the attitudes and intentions of the agent. To fully explain intentional omissions, the social scientist needs to hear the agents themselves in demarcating resistant not doings from mere attitudes and states of quiescence. When it comes to public and articulated forms of resistance, it is obviously easier to evaluate them from the outside perspective. Yet, the views of agents themselves cannot be overlooked when the social scientist is trying to decipher their hidden resistances. One problem in conceptualizing intentional omissions is that, from the outside perspective, they look like passivities. The benefit of committing to a nonnormative action language of omissions is that the intention in not doing an action is left for empirical inquiry to answer.¹⁴

¹⁴A similar problem has been encountered in medical ethics when analyzing the intentional omissions of medical personnel with the concept of conscientious refusal. According to Michael Hickson (2010, 174), concentrating on conscientious refusals has led the discussion astray because of the need to define conscience before discussing the ethics of the refusals. Conscientious refusals have been defined as instances

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have proposed a basic vocabulary of not doings. To develop this vocabulary, I have drawn from the philosophy of intentional omissions. It was argued that a nonnormative action language of intentional omissions can include the basic elements of the sociological notion of resistance in the case of resistant intentional omissions. Interaction between conceptualizations of resistance in the social sciences and conceptualizations of intentional omissions in philosophy was sought. The background attitude of this attempt is that of unification—it is assumed that interplay between social scientific findings and action theoretical concepts is needed in order to create a useful framework of the intentional omissions of agents. In action theory, a more comprehensive theory of agency has already been called for (Clarke 2014). Adding the analysis of resistant intentional omissions answers this plea in part: overlooking resistant agency in theory can also lead to excluding sociological findings on the resistant behavior of agents if the behavior is hidden.

A good vocabulary of resistance should be able to grasp hidden resistances and a good vocabulary of agency should be able to grasp resistant intentional omissions of agents. Scott's everyday resistance and Hirschman's exit show that to not perform an action out of resistance is not necessarily a public, organized event of an agent in ideal conditions. Nor are resistant intentional omissions necessarily targeted against a specific law, rule or even an expectation, which is why they cannot be fully deciphered from an outside perspective. Intentionally not performing an action out of resistance toward something seems to be a normal part of the everyday life of agents, not just that of subordinate classes. A nonnormative action language and an empirical commitment to hearing out the agents themselves are needed to understand and explain this kind of behavior in the social sciences. A nonnormative vocabulary of not doings was developed because if we only have a normative language of not doings and concepts for official, articulated, and public resistance, important social phenomena belonging to the everyday agency of agents can go unnoticed by the social scientist. To further develop a cognitively realist theory of resistant agency, the collaborative effort of sociologists, cognitive psychologists, and philosophers of mind and action would be needed.

in which the agent is more concerned with protecting their conscience than trying to bring about change (Childress 1997, 409). But if conscientious refusals are read as situations in which the agent is primarily preserving her sense of wholeness and integrity, that is, her good conscience, conscientious refusals appear self-interested by definition (Hickson 2010, 174). Instead, as Hickson (2010, 128) argues, the motives of refusals in medicine should be empirically studied instead of deciding them beforehand by choosing to talk about them with a normative concept.

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