

Michael Schmitz

# Limits of Intention and the Representational Mind<sup>1</sup>

## 1 The Role of Philosophy in the Cooperative Study of Intention

What can philosophy contribute to the study of intention? A fairly neutral, non-contentious description of philosophy that most practitioners and observers of philosophy will be able to agree on is that philosophy is concerned with our basic framework for understanding the world and finding our way in it. The basic idea is that, while individuals and groups in science and numerous other traditions and contexts such as the law and politics apply certain frameworks such as the framework of material bodies or of moral agents, philosophy is concerned with these frameworks ‘as such’, for their own sake. Traditionally, this idea has often taken the form that philosophy is concerned with a priori knowledge, and this notion in turn has more recently often been cashed out as the idea that philosophy deals with meaning and concepts. However, this conception of philosophy has been under attack for a long time. Can we make a separation between conceptual and empirical, a priori and a posteriori elements of knowledge at all? And what does it mean to study concepts in the first place? Philosophers often talk as if there is a certain determinate and right way that a concept is – the true nature of the concept, as it were – but it is hard to make sense of this if we want to avoid the platonist idea that concepts have an existence independently of thinkers and speakers. If on the other hand the significance of concepts is entirely determined by how individuals or groups think and speak, it is very questionable why the way that these concepts are used – by this individual or group at this point in time – should have any special authority, should in any sense be the correct way; why philosophers should have any special authority in investigating this; and why this investigation should be a priori.

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I believe it is for reasons of this kind that the move away from the conception of philosophy as being concerned with a priori investigations of concepts has recently accelerated. Within this general trend I believe we can broadly distinguish three different strands that respectively embody different conceptions of philosophy. First, there is the rapidly growing movement of Experimental Philosophy (Knobe and Nichols 2008) that seeks to put the philosophical study of concepts on a sound empirical footing. Second, there are those who remain in the armchair, but resolutely turn their back on conceptual analysis and embrace metaphysics as a substantive mode of enquiry into the structure of reality distinct from science (e.g. Williamson 2007). Third, there has been a trend in the philosophy of mind, already embodied in the very notion of Cognitive Science, to study mental phenomena in much closer cooperation with empirical science than has been customary for the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The approach I have followed in my work in the context of the interdisciplinary research group “Limits of Intentionality” has been most strongly influenced by the third trend. But I think there is something right about the other approaches, too. I agree with proponents of the second approach that philosophy should not merely be the study of concepts. Philosophy should, for example, be able to investigate intentions, not merely their concepts. Nor should the philosophy of mind be reduced to a philosophy of psychology or of other sciences concerned with the mind. However, there is a difference here with regard to how such an investigation is conceived that is important, though it can be fairly subtle. A picture according to which there are two distinct subject matters here, say the psychological and the metaphysical nature of intention, with the latter being the sole province of philosophy, does not strike me as very plausible. I suggest to rather think of the study of intention as a cooperative effort. The role of philosophy would be to develop conceptual frameworks for this study, but these frameworks should be geared towards being useful for the empirical study of intentions and other mental phenomena. Their adequacy and success should be judged by whether they are able to synthesize empirical results from various disciplines and pave the ground for and inspire new scientific findings, not by whether they adequately capture a metaphysical nature of phenomena supposedly distinct from their psychological (or biological etc.) nature.

On this conception of the role of philosophy, the philosopher is not seen as an expert for a specific subject matter, but for a specific stage or aspect of inquiry. As Thomas Kuhn (1962) has shown, there are philosophical stages in the development of even the most hard-nosed sciences, namely in scientific revolutions, when paradigms change. During these periods, there is widespread discussion of philosophical aspects of scientific frameworks among scientists, whereas usually these are just taken for granted. Philosophers are simply the experts for these

kinds of framework questions. Of course, this cannot mean that philosophers can simply prescribe which framework scientists should use – even if they could agree about that amongst themselves. Science must set its own agenda. But it does mean that scientists should be open to what the experts have to say on these matters, just like philosophers need to be open to empirical findings.

Finally, what I am saying here is not meant to imply that philosophers should not be interested in the ordinary understanding of concepts, nor that they should not study this understanding empirically as advocated by proponents of Experimental Philosophy. The argument is just that an understanding of ordinary concepts is a starting point rather than an endpoint of philosophical inquiry. It is useful to get clear about the ordinary concept because, after all, it embodies the accumulated collective wisdom of a speech community. It may also be a valuable source of inspiration because the ordinary understanding may preserve certain aspects of a phenomenon neglected at a specific historic point of its scientific investigation, for example, because of methodological constraints. But at the same time we should expect that the ordinary concept, which is itself only a stage in the development of thought, needs to be modified further to improve our understanding of the phenomenon.

## 2 A Representationalist Framework for Intentions and their Limits

In the spirit just described, I have developed a framework for understanding intentions and their limits, which was the special focus of our research group. I have interpreted this talk of “limits” in three senses. The first sense refers to delimiting the concept of intention and thus also of related concepts like goal, action, desire, and practical knowledge, the second to limits of the control intentions have over actions. The tasks of investigating the limits of intentionality in both these senses are intimately related because of course depending on how one defines the concepts of action and intention, one will get different answers to the question of the efficacy of intentions. For example, on most traditional philosophical accounts of these concepts and their relation, a behavior would need to be caused by an intention in order to count as an action, or at least as an intentional action. Otherwise it would be mere behavior. One main focus of my investigations has been to delimit actions more strictly from intentions, to develop a view of action that sees it as more independent of intentions than traditional theories. A third interpretation of the phrase “limits of intention” refers to the possible subjects of intentions. Are these limited to individuals, or can they

include groups and even institutional actors such as governments, corporations, and so on?

The main claim I want to make plausible in this paper is that these questions can be better answered in the context of a general theory of the representational mind. However, to properly place intentions in such a context, I shall argue, we need to revise our conception of the representationality of intentions and other so-called propositional attitudes. Then we can, for example, explain limits of the behavioral control exerted by intentions through the difference in representational format between intentions and the nonpropositional, nonconceptual, sensory-motor representations immediately guiding actions. And we will also be able to clear up some philosophical confusions about groups and institutions and will have a better framework for understanding what they are and how they are able to form and pursue intentions. Before I begin this task, however, it will be useful to sketch a preliminary understanding of what intentions are in the first place and to insert a terminological note.

The terminological note is that philosophers generally use the term “intentionality” in two quite different senses, which is a perennial source of confusion. In the broad sense “intentionality” means aboutness or representationality, the property of mental states to be about objects or states of affairs or to be directed at them. In the narrow sense “intentionality” just refers to intentions and acting intentionally. Intentionality in the latter sense is a special case of intentionality in the former sense. To avoid confusion, however, I will only use “intentionality” in the narrow sense in this paper and employ “representationality” for the wider sense.

### 3 Delimiting Intentions

A good starting point for our discussion of intention is Elizabeth Anscombe’s (1957: §1) distinction between acting intentionally, acting with an intention, and having an intention. For example, I may open the window intentionally, I may open it with the intention of letting in fresh air, or I may have the intention to open it. We can think of these as three levels of the proximity of intentionality to action. Intentionality can refer to the way that the action is performed, to an intention that accompanies the action and defines a goal that goes beyond the immediate execution of the action, and to an intention one may have before initiating the intended action. Later John Searle (1983: ch. 3) introduced a related two-way

distinction between “intentions in action” and “prior intentions.”<sup>2</sup> On a popular view, sometimes called the “Simple View” (Bratman 1987: ch. 8), all these phenomena can be explained in the same way, namely through the presence of an intention. In particular, when we act intentionally, this is to be explained through the presence of an intention. However, it is important to realize that it is not a matter of course that the state that makes my opening of the window intentional is the same kind of state that I have when I decide to open the window. I will in fact soon argue that it is a different kind of state.

For now, we are focusing on the state that can occur independently of the execution of an action. This state can be roughly characterized through at least the following properties:

- 1) *Conceptual articulation of content.* An intention has a content, a conceptually articulated representation of a state of affairs, which is the intended goal. (This content is usually called “propositional”, but I reject this notion, at least as usually understood for reasons spelled out below.)
- 2) *Admissible contents / intended state of affairs.* This state of affairs is an action of its subject or at least the (partial) result of such an action. That is, while some languages, notably English, allow constructions like “I intend for my kids to get a good education”, it is understood in such cases that the subject plans on undertaking actions to bring about the intended state of affairs.
- 3) *Possibility and control.* A closely related point is that in order for a subject to intend something, it must take it to be possible for her or him to bring about the intended state of affairs. Even more, the subject must have a sense of control over the intended state of affairs.
- 4) *Satisfaction condition.* An intention is satisfied if it is executed and that also means that it causes the completion of the intended action (see below).
- 5) *Direction of causation and of fit between mind and world.* So for intentions the direction of causation between mind and world is mind-to-world. The direction of fit is world-to-mind: fit is achieved by adapting the world to the representational content of the mind rather than the other way around as in belief.<sup>3</sup>
- 6) *Result of decisions.* Intentions are at least typically the outcomes of reasoning processes, however brief, that terminate in decisions. The subject ends the deliberation process by settling on a course of action and thus enters a new

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive account see sect. 3 of the introduction to this volume.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the notion of direction of fit, see the introduction, sect. 3.

action phase: it has crossed the Rubicon and is now in the postdecisional phase.<sup>4</sup>

- 7) *Commitment and practical responsibility.* By deciding on a course of action, a subject commits to its execution and takes responsibility for it – practical responsibility for its reality as opposed to the theoretical responsibility a subject takes for the reality of a state of affairs by adopting the corresponding belief.
- 8) *Subjectivity.* Intentions are subjective, internal mental states of their subjects. At least typically, intentions are also states of consciousness. (These points might be too obvious to mention were it not for the behaviorist and functionalist tradition in philosophy and psychology; the relation between intentionality and consciousness will be further discussed below.)

With the help of these criteria, let us briefly review the relation between intention and other relevant entities such as goals, plans, desires, wishes, willings, value judgments and states of practical knowledge.

“Goal”, which is the preferred term in most areas of psychology, is systematically ambiguous between intentions as mental states and their objects or satisfaction conditions in the world. One speaks of forming and setting goals, which suggests the subjective interpretation, but also of reaching them, which appears to imply the objective one. This ambiguity is parallel to the ambiguity regarding “facts” in the theoretical domain, where we speak of facts both as conditions in the world and as truthful, successful representations of such conditions, for example, when we say that a book contains many facts. These ambiguities are generally harmless and can even be useful, but since they may sometimes foster confusion, I will here use “goal” unambiguously to refer to an objective condition in the world rather than to the relevant mental state. Another question here is whether this state always needs to be an intention. This question is closely related to the question whether acting intentionally always requires an intention. I will argue later that neither acting intentionally nor simple goal-directed behavior require intentions, at least not in the ordinary sense of that term. “Means” and “ends” refer to two species of goals that are distinguished through their position in the practical causal order. Something is a means relative to some end if it is chosen to bring about that end. The distinction between means and ends in the practical domain parallels that between causes and effects in the theoretical domain in that there is a mode of practical reasoning in which we are seeking a

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<sup>4</sup> I am here of course inspired by the psychological rubicon model of action phases. See Gollwitzer 1990 and Wieber et al. (this volume).

means to achieve a given end that is analogous to the mode of theoretical reasoning where we are looking for the cause of a given effect.

Plans are closely related to intentions. Indeed, in many cases plans just seem to be intentions, like when we ask somebody what her plan for today is. Plans can also be intentions that are subordinated to overarching intentions, that is, that represent means to an end, like when we are looking for a plan to reduce the deficit. Or they can be intentions subordinated to certain events such as when we have if-then plans for dealing with certain eventualities like floods or hurricanes of the kind often called “contingency plans.” Or they can be “implementation intentions” (see Wieber et al., this volume) that specify how, when, and where an intention is to be executed. Finally, and this is perhaps the most characteristic use of “plan”, it can be used to refer to whole systems of intentions. A plan to improve the economy or fight global warming will comprise a host of systematically related intentions. Plans in this sense are analogous to theories, which are systems of beliefs.

Intentions differ from desires, wishes, wantings, willings, value judgments and similar states in terms of the features listed above, specifically in terms of admissible contents, the control the subject has over their satisfaction and its commitment to it, and their position in the reasoning process. Let me mention just some of these differences here. Intentions are unique in being restricted to one’s own actions. Anything can be valued in some way or another, whereas desires, wishes, willings and wants are restricted to future state of affairs, but not to one’s own actions. Indeed, at least desires and wishes can rather only be directed at one’s own actions in special circumstances. For example, ordinarily it does not make sense to say that one wishes or desires to raise one’s arm. This makes only sense in circumstances where one, for example, desires permission to raise the arm, or wishes for conditions favorable to raising one’s arm, which in some cases might include appropriate physical or mental strength. But crucially, in those cases where the subject has complete control over whether to raise the arm or perform any action, it is clearly a matter of deciding and intending to perform the action rather than of wishing or desiring it. Willings are close to intentions in so far as one can be said to will one’s own action, but they differ from intentions at least in that one can also will that others perform actions.

Whereas one sometimes reasons about what one should desire, wish, or want, these states are still typically part of the starting point for practical reasoning rather than its result. Or at least we demand that intentions be informed and determined through the reasoning process in a way in which we do not demand this of desires or wishes. For example, suppose Peter desires to be married to Linda, but at the same time also to Paula. Given that he knows that it is impossible in his society to be legally married to both at the same time, he would rightly

be accused of irrationality should he still intend to marry both. He would be expected to give up this plan right away (and have his head examined). By contrast, whereas he might also be criticized for nursing both simultaneously unfulfillable desires, he would not be considered irrational just in virtue of having them, nor would he necessarily be expected to give them up right away. That is because we do not and cannot expect desires to be fixed through reasoning in the way that intentions are. Intentions are subject to much stronger coherence constraints than desires (Bratman 1987; see also Introduction, sect. 3).

Value judgments differ from intentions not only in terms of their admissible contents but also, even when they are directed at future actions of one's own, in terms of the feature of decision-making. An evaluation of a certain course of action as the best, it seems to me, still falls short of a decision to act in this way and thus of an intention. I may already have arrived at different evaluations of this course of action in the course of my deliberation and this might happen again. I still need to finalize the reasoning process by committing to a course of action. This means, among other things, that the burden of proof has shifted: now novel reasons are needed to question the decision and reopen the deliberation process, whereas no additional reasons are required to execute the intention. The matter is settled. Commitment and taking practical responsibility also distinguish intentions from the other states under consideration here. By wishing or desiring a state of affairs, or evaluating it as the best among a set of alternatives, I do not yet take practical responsibility and commit myself to bringing it about. Consequently, I will usually be held much more responsible for my failure to execute my intentions than I might be blamed for the failure of my wishes and desires to come true.

States of practical knowledge are closely related to intentions. Indeed in many cases such states can simply be regarded as instances of intention in the way that states of theoretical knowledge are usually regarded as instances of belief. When I know what to do and how to do it, I can be said to have a plan and it seems hard to deny that I have the corresponding intentions. "I know what to do, but I don't intend to do it" does not make sense in much the same way that "I know that it is the case, but I don't believe that it is the case" does not make sense. But "I know what to do: I will close the window", where "I will close the window" expresses an intention, does and is perfectly normal. When practical knowledge is a form of intending, it is a particularly well-justified and successful form of intending just like theoretical knowledge is a particularly well-justified and successful form of belief. That is, action guided by practical knowledge must be successful if this knowledge is applied correctly and skillfully. I cannot be said to know how to do



something if it can't be done the way I claim I know how to do it.<sup>5</sup> This account of practical knowledge as a species of intention needs to be qualified in an important respect though. Practical knowledge can also guide the action of others. One can also say: "I know what to do: open the window!". Unlike intention, practical knowledge can be self- and other-directive and its instances can thus only be considered a species of intention when they are self-directive.

## 4 Obstacles to Understanding Intentionality in a Representationalist Framework

As I said initially, the project I am presenting here is to sketch a framework for understanding the representational mind adequate for understanding intentionality – in the sense of both intentions and intentional action – and its limits. Now one might wonder why our understanding of the representational mind would need to be especially tailored for the task of understanding intentionality. The answer to this question, which also explains the philosophical significance of the project, is that the contemporary intellectual scene in philosophy as well as in cognitive science, psychology and other related disciplines is still dominated by three fundamental biases. To achieve an appropriate understanding of intentionality, they need to be addressed:

- 1) *Theory bias*. A bias for the theoretical mind over the practical mind in the sense of a bias for the mind of perception, belief and theoretical knowledge over the mind of action, intention and practical knowledge. This bias is evident, for example, in attempts to reduce action to perceptual experience (e.g. Bayne 2011), intentions to beliefs (e.g. Velleman 1989) and practical knowledge to theoretical knowledge (e.g. Stanley and Williamson 2001).
- 2) *Individualism*. A bias for the individual over the collective mind. This bias is evident in numerous attempts to reduce the "we" to the "I" (e.g. Bratman 1992) and thus collective to individual intentionality.
- 3) *Conceptualism*. A bias for the reflective, abstract, disembodied, rational, and conceptual mind over the unreflective, concrete, embodied, and non-conceptual mind. This bias is ubiquitous, but its most important manifestation for present purposes is the tendency to reduce all mental representation constitutive of action to intentions in the sense of conceptual level states. A

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<sup>5</sup> See Schmitz "Practical Knowledge" (in press) for more on this and practical knowledge in general.

further important manifestation of this bias is the tendency to think of consciousness solely as a reflective conceptual level form of awareness.

These biases are epitomized in the “Cartesian”<sup>6</sup> image of the solitary mind that tries to determine what is the case purely through rational thought, in isolation from others, the world, and its body. Much intellectual history has been shaped by this image and various responses to and rebellions against it. In particular, most recent intellectual history has been dominated by very strong anti-Cartesian tendencies. Many philosophers and scientists nowadays challenge our three biases, though they are usually concerned with the second and the third rather than the first. For example, those who often use such buzzwords as “embodiment”, “enactivism”, or “interactionism” question the sole focus on the reflective, rational, and propositional mind of conceptual thought. With this I am entirely in agreement. However, many take for granted that to move away from the rational, reflective mind in this sense also means to move away from the conscious and representational mind, that to emphasize the importance of the body, of action and interaction as opposed to thought and reflection, is tantamount to an approach that is anti-representationalist and downplays the importance of consciousness.

In contrast, the framework I am presenting here, while emphasizing bodily action, embodiment and interaction, still gives center stage to representation and consciousness. Indeed this framework is consistent both with “representationism” – according to which the mind is representational throughout – and the view that it consists entirely of states of consciousness and dispositions to be in such states<sup>7</sup> – though it does not require the truth of either of these views. I believe that those who assume that the move away from an intellectualist view of the mind is tantamount to a move away from consciousness and representation thereby only reveal an intellectualist view of consciousness and representation. Consciousness and representation is much more than conscious and representational thought and reflection. Consciousness comprises our entire waking and dreaming life and thus contains feelings of all kinds, emotions, moods, actional and perceptual experiences, and more. And while it is not obvious that all these

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<sup>6</sup> It is questionable though whether the historical Descartes, especially the Descartes of the “Passions” (1989) is actually guilty of the theory bias in the sense of 1). Thanks to Gottfried Seebaß for guiding me towards more historical accuracy here.

<sup>7</sup> I elaborate a version of this view in Schmitz 2012, based on Searle’s (e.g. 1992: ch. 7) defense of what he calls the “connection principle.”

states are entirely representational – in particular it is not obvious for moods and emotions – it does seem clear that actional experience has at least a representational, or, more precisely, presentational aspect. The actional experience of walking around or raising a cup presents certain states of affairs – the agent moving and moving things and thus the agent as the source or cause of these movements.

This should be obvious from the fact that such experiences can misrepresent. For example, the experience of raising the arm might be illusory because in fact the arm does not move because it has been anesthetized. And bodily, motor, actional experiences are always present at least in normal action, perhaps even in all cases of what can really be called bodily action, as opposed to mere behavior. This is hidden from us by the fact that we normally only say that we do something consciously when we do it deliberately and reflectively, with special care and attention. But it is a mistake to infer from this that unreflective, ‘automatic’ action does not involve consciousness at all (Schmitz 2011). In fact there is quite a characteristic phenomenology of ‘automatic’, routine action. The experience of the skilled typer is certainly much different from that of the novice. He does not have to search for keys laboriously. He does not need to think about where to put his fingers. They just flow smoothly over the keyboard. But he still experiences these movements. He experiences them even though they may be at the periphery of his consciousness because he is focused on what to write rather than how to write it, taking his skill for granted. He experiences his fingers pushing down on the keys, the flow of his movement and he experiences the letters appearing on the screen and the sound the keys give off as something he has done or made.

I will now first present an account of acting intentionally that overcomes the third, conceptualist bias, which in this context takes the form of supposing that acting intentionally requires a conceptual level intention. I will then turn to a critique of the received notion of so-called propositional attitudes. This notion embodies both the theory bias (1) and the bias towards individualism (2). I will develop an alternative account designed to overcome both biases.

## 5 Action without Intentions

What does it mean to perform an action intentionally? It has sometimes been argued that one can only say that an action was performed intentionally if there was a deviation from some pattern (Austin 1956). On this view, one could only say, for example, that I brushed my teeth intentionally this morning if this was a departure from my usual habit. A rejoinder to this is that it confuses the condi-

tions under which it makes sense to make certain statements with the conditions under which those statements are true (Searle 1967). If we take this line, it seems we act intentionally all the time. Acting intentionally is the normal case, unintentional action a deviation from this normality. Consider a real life example: pacing up and down my room, deep in thought, I brush against a tennis ball lying on a table, accidentally sending it to the ground. This seems to be a paradigm case of an unintentional action. Another time I might brush the ball off the table intentionally in the same kind of situation, on a sudden whim, when passing the table in thought. What's the difference? Well, in the second case, I will have perceived the ball (unless I have memorized its position), it will in fact be in the center of my perceptual attention, at least briefly (though my attention thought may remain focused on whatever I am thinking about, at least if am good as a multi-tasker), and this perceptual consciousness will guide the movement of my hand, which will be experienced as an active movement, something done by me. This mindset will also dispose me to have a negative emotional reaction should I fail to grasp the ball.

Now, this certainly by far is not an exhaustive account of what is going on here. Indeed, it can easily seem that the most important question has been left unanswered. What made grasping the ball my aim or goal in the first place? I suspect that at the *level of the conscious representational mind* we can only say here what we usually say – things like that it caught my eye, struck my fancy or that I experienced an urge or impulse to grasp it – though of course we will get or already have more fine-grained accounts of this at the level of cognitive neuroscience. We may also be able to develop a more fine-grained phenomenology of urges and impulses, but that would not mean that we leave behind these kinds of concepts completely. The crucial point for present purposes is that there is nothing in these kinds of cases and many other kinds of everyday actions that compels the idea that an intention in any ordinary sense must have been involved. There need not have been any intention *with* which I grasped the ball, no further goal that I pursued by means of grasping it, nor need I have formed an intention to grasp the ball *prior* to grasping it. And while I may be said to have had a desire to grasp it, a desire of this kind is not what philosophers have in mind when they talk about propositional attitudes, it rather belongs to the same class as urges and impulses. It does not belong to the level of conceptually articulated practical or theoretical thought, but to a preconceptual, sensory-motor and emotional level.

Further evidence for this kind of view comes from many everyday and some pathological cases, where people act counter to their intentions. People suffering from Anarchic Hand Syndrome (Della Sala et al. 1991) perform actions like taking food from somebody's plate that they are mortified about, and that, in a sense, they feel they didn't do because they were against their intentions ("My hand

did it!"). But the actions disavowed by their rational, reflective selves, may be attributed to the urges and impulses of a more animalistic level of the self. And while the degree to which these patients are unable to inhibit certain impulses is pathological, less dramatic examples of such limits of the rational, intentional control over action will be familiar to everybody. Sheer habit is responsible for many similar everyday phenomena. I may intend to turn right this morning at a familiar junction, where I usually turn left every day on my way to work, but still end up turning left, and not because I changed my plan, but simply out of habit. Still, there is a sense in which people act intentionally in these everyday cases and even in the pathological cases. Certainly, their actions are not unintentional in the sense in which brushing the ball off the table was unintentional; nor are we talking about reflexes here. We are talking about actions that are guided through perception, and experienced as being caused by their subject, that are coordinated, purposive and goal-directed. Such actions can be called "intentional" even in the absence of intentions. However, if one finds it too awkward terminologically to refer to actions as intentional or as having been performed intentionally even in the absence of a corresponding intention, one can also reserve these terms for cases, where the relevant kind of behavior is the object of a full-blown intention. Nothing hangs on this terminological decision. The crucial point is that we are certainly dealing with actions here, not with 'mere behavior'.

I suggest then that we can think of behavior as being an action, even in the absence of intentions, if it is guided by perceptual and actional, motor representations, notably those manifest in perceptual and actional experience. However, some authors still use the term "intention" in this context. For example, as was mentioned already, Searle refers to the representational aspect of the experience of acting as the "intention in action." The neuroscientist Marc Jeannerod (2006) has called the relevant motor representations "motor intentions." Doesn't this mean that the action character of behavior is explained by intentions after all? But it seems clear that these authors and those who follow them use "intention" in a technical sense here, while I have been concerned to make the point that actional experience and motor representations are not intentions in the ordinary sense of that term. They differ from intentions in a number of ways, some of the most important ones of which are as follows:

- 1) Actional experience, like perceptual experience, is *presentational* rather than re-presentational.<sup>8</sup> It presents a bodily movement as being caused by its subject *now*, in the present. This also means that it is not repeatable

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<sup>8</sup> I here follow Searle (1983: ch. 1) in treating presentations as a species of representation, while sometimes also opposing the two, like we also do with human / animal. To avoid confusion, I

(Schmitz 2012). While there can be several occurrences of the same intention (or belief), with the same conditions of satisfaction, like, say, the intention to finish this article, numerically different actional experiences of typing necessarily have different conditions of satisfaction, as they are directed at different moments in time.

- 2) *Continuous character* of actional (and perceptual) experience. Actional experience occurs in a continuous sensorimotor flow. In contrast, thought is more discretely structured, it comes in propositional, sentential units.
- 3) *Lack of differentiation of representational roles*. A closely related point is that within sentential units there is a structure of representational roles, of singular terms, relational expressions, and so on, that is absent in actional and perceptual experience.

This list of features that differentiates the nonconceptual content of sensory-motor states from the conceptual content of intentions could be continued for some time (see Schmitz 2012). Because of the fundamental differences between the two types of states, I prefer not to call actional experiences and motor representations a species of intention. There is another related reason for this terminological decision. I have been emphasizing the close relation and the parallel between action and perception, and, more generally and throughout this essay, parallels between the theoretical and the practical domain. In the philosophy of perception, the belief theory of perception (Armstrong 1968, Pitcher 1970) used to be quite popular. But it has been increasingly realized that perception is essentially different from belief, and accordingly the belief theory and terminology has been largely abandoned in favor of talk of perceptual states, experiences, and relations. To preserve the parallel with action, I suggest to adopt a corresponding terminology of actional states, experiences and relations when talking about action, and to reserve the term “intention” for the conceptual level attitudes described above (section 3).

This is not to say that intentions could not be relevant to the *identity* of actions at all. Quite on the contrary: the bodily movement could, for example, be an arm raising because its subject experiences itself as raising it, but it could be a voting in an election because of the subject’s intentions and the broader institutional context. But there need not be any such intentions for the movement to be an action. It is an action because its subject experiences itself as controlling the movement and does actually control it. That it is an action is determined

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use the hyphenated version “re-presentation” to mark the narrow sense opposed to presentations.

at a bodily, motor level of representation and consciousness that is phylo- and ontogenetically more basic than that of thought and reflection.

Now, to extend this representationalist picture of action to intention and institution at least the following things need to be done. First, we need to address what I have called the “theory bias,” because the theory bias stands in the way of a proper acknowledgement of the practical domain and the parallels between the theoretical and the practical that I have pointed to repeatedly. It rather makes us think that the practical should be subordinated to the theoretical or even reduced to it as, for example, in the proposed reduction of intention to belief. Second, intentions themselves need to be integrated into this representationalist framework. How can they be understood as representational states? Third, how can collective subjects like groups and even institutional subjects like the state and corporations be integrated into this account?

All these questions lead us to the notion of a proposition and the attendant notion of a propositional attitude that has been central to the philosophical understanding of intentionality both in the broad and in the narrow sense. We therefore need to take a closer critical look at this notion, and I will do so in the next section of this paper. I will there argue for a view of intentional states according to which they are not attitudes towards propositions, but towards state of affairs, and according to which the representational content of these attitudes is not identical to that of a proposition representing that state of affairs, but also contains a representation of the relevant subject and its *position* vis-à-vis that state of affairs. For our understanding of intention this means that somebody who has an intention also needs to represent the position relative to the intended action characteristic of intention. He or she needs to have some understanding how that position is different, for example, from that of a person who believes that state of affairs to obtain. The next step will be to argue that this representationalist understanding of intention is also the right approach to understand collective and institutional action: we can understand the intentions and actions of groups in terms of their members employing conceptually irreducible we-representations, and the actions and intentions of institutions in terms of people representing their roles in these institutions. Finally, I will conclude the paper with some thoughts about how the different layers of individual and collective intentionality, the layers of action, intention, and institution, can be distinguished in terms of the representational format of the representations involved.

## 6 The Received Notion of a Propositional Attitude

There is no notion that embodies the biases mentioned above as much as the notion of a proposition – as commonly understood in the philosophical tradition – and the attendant framework of ‘propositional attitudes’. Even though naturally this framework has been interpreted in rather different ways during its long history, the following features, which are important for the argument of this paper, appear to be accepted by most of those who use it:

- 1) The proposition is the *object* of attitudes such as beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on. That is what it means that they are propositional attitudes: they are attitudes *towards* propositions.
- 2) The proposition is the object of theoretical attitudes such as belief as well as of practical attitudes like intention. At the same time it is a truth value bearer, indeed it is the constant, underived, fundamental truth value bearer.
- 3) While propositional attitudes have subjects and psychological modes – the attitude types constituting the difference between, for example, belief and hope – these do not contribute to the representational or intentional content of attitudes. That content is identical to that of the embedded proposition.

All these claims should be abandoned. First, intentional states are not attitudes towards propositions except in special cases, for example, when I am disappointed that Proposition 8 passed in California. They are rather attitudes towards states of affairs in the world, which are their objects or satisfaction conditions (Searle 1983: ch. 1). For example, our intention to go swimming is not directed towards the proposition that we are swimming but towards the state of affairs of us swimming. However, a representation of that state affairs is part of the content – as opposed to the object – of this attitude. This simple and rather straightforward distinction between the content and the object of intentional states already gets us out of a lot of trouble. It is necessary because false beliefs, unexecuted intentions, and other states whose conditions of satisfaction are not satisfied and which thus lack objects in the world still have content. Content is what determines on the subjective side which condition in the world would satisfy the state, even if this condition does not obtain/is not realized. There must still be an answer to the question *what* the person believed or intended.

Second, the received view oscillates between two mutually incompatible ways of understanding the representational role of the proposition. On the one hand, the proposition is treated as a non-autonomous part of a satisfaction value bearer such as a belief or intention and thus as something that is neutral between practical and theoretical attitudes and can be equally embedded in both. On the other, it is treated as a bearer of the satisfaction value of truth and thus implicitly



as being in a theoretical mode, since truth values are only ascribed to entities with theoretical psychological modes or illocutionary forces such as beliefs or statements. The idea that all intentional attitudes contain (or are attitudes towards) a theoretical, truth value bearing entity, is the most striking expression of the theory bias in our thinking about the representational mind. If this construal of propositional attitudes were correct, we should ascribe truth values to intentions, orders, desires and so on just as much as we do to beliefs and statements. But obviously we don't, and I don't know how proponents of this view could make sense of this fact. Again, it seems to me that this construal of propositions is in fact inconsistent. To be the common content of practical and theoretical attitudes the proposition needs to be neutral between the two and thus *lack* a mode/force component and a truth value. But construed as a freestanding, autonomous, truth-value bearing entity, the proposition seems to be the same thing as a statement and thus must contain a theoretical mode/force – that of a statement. A mere representation of a state of affairs – a rough linguistic equivalent of which might be something like “that it is raining” – is not a statement, but something mode/force-free and essentially incomplete.<sup>9</sup> If somebody just uttered this expression, we would want to ask him what he meant. Did he want to state or assert that it rains, did he intend to make it happen that it is raining, did he want us to make it happen? As long as we have no answer to this, we don't really know what has been said.

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<sup>9</sup> Could one get out of this by denying that truth entails the presence of a theoretical mode and holding that both theoretical and practical attitudes somehow make reference to truth, paraphrasing, for example, the optative mode or mood as “Let it be the case that p is true” (Kennedy 1975, Seebaß 1993), or an intention or order as, respectively, intending or ordering “that p be made true” or something along these lines? The crucial question here is again what “p” is supposed to represent. Is it a statement or just a modeless representation of a state of affairs towards which attitudes like wishing, intending, or ordering are taken up? I'm assuming here that proponents of this kind of analysis will not want to make the claim that wishes, intentions and orders *contain* statements, which is both implausible and would immediately undermine the claim that theoretical and practical postures equally make reference to truth. (We have already rejected the view that the ps are the objects rather than the contents of these attitudes.) But if p is supposed to be modeless and thus neutral with regard to the theoretical/practical distinction, the problem is again that in other contexts, notably when doing propositional logic, p is commonly used to symbolize statements like “It is raining.” If the suggestion now is that the concept of truth should be equally applied to statements and modeless representations, it seems to me that “truth” has now also become ambiguous and that its original meaning of representational success in the theoretical domain has been changed with unclear results. Lack of space prevents me from saying more about this and in particular from giving a more thorough analysis of the traditional notion of a proposition and its context. Thanks to Gottfried Seebaß for pressing me on this point.

Third, even though the ascription of truth values to the proposition and to theoretical attitudes imply theoretical positions vis-à-vis the relevant state of affairs, and accordingly practical attitudes imply practical positions towards their objects, on the received view these positions and their bearers are represented neither by propositions nor by attitudes. They would only be represented in *reports* of such attitudes. On this view then, various individual or collective, practical or theoretical, attitudes towards the state of affairs of us going swimming today – for example, me or us intending to go or believing that we will – would not differ in terms of representational content at all.

On the alternative view to be defended in this paper, we never just represent a state of affairs – from nowhere as it were – but we represent it as standing in certain relations to us, and this also means that we represent ourselves, because a relation cannot be represented without representing the relata. These relations include those that obtain in virtue of the theoretical or practical, cognitive or volitional, positions we take up vis-à-vis those state of affairs. The subjects of these positions can be both individual and collective, they can be I's and We's. These I's and We's can also be further determined through certain roles they play in certain contexts. For example, we may have certain plans as members of a club that we do not have as private people, and I may have certain rights and obligations as its treasurer that I do not have as a private person. Before we can come to these kinds of cases though, we need to go through some general arguments philosophical arguments for the suggested revision of our understanding of intentional attitudes.

## 7 Attitude Mode as Representational

If the position of the subject vis-à-vis the relevant state of affairs is represented in each intentional attitude, the subject must also be represented. I will therefore first briefly argue for the representationality of attitude mode. The second step then will be to argue that the relevant subjects include plural, collective subjects. Before advancing more specific and more technical arguments for this claim, it will be useful to put it in a broader context, namely that of general theories of self-consciousness. Let me distinguish two basic kinds of approaches to self-consciousness here. Many thinkers treat self-consciousness and world-directed intentionality as entirely independent. For example, Descartes in his *Meditations* treated knowledge of one's own mental states as entirely independent of any knowledge of the external world. While this represents the subjectivist version of the independence thesis, an objectivist version claims that a complete epistemi-

cally objective representation of the world is possible independently of any reference to its subject, so that all indexical expressions should and can be eliminated from it.<sup>10</sup> But there are also several distinguished thinkers that have treated self- and object-directed representations as interdependent and essentially related. I am thinking here of Kant, P. F. Strawson, Gareth Evans, and, in psychology, Jean Piaget. On this kind of perspective, self- and world-consciousness are two sides of the same coin: self and world can only be known as part of a broader picture that includes both and their relation, the self's position in that world.

“Position” is here taken in the widest, most inclusive sense, in both the individual and the collective case. The literal, spatial, and the temporal position of the – individual or collective – subject is of course important, but so are the theoretical and practical positions towards the world taken up in conjecture and desire, belief and intention, theoretical and practical knowledge. In cognition, we are receptive towards a world that acts causally on us; in volition, we are poised to act on it. This causal aspect of at least certain practical and theoretical positions is also the point of departure for a more specific argument for the representationality of attitude mode.

John Searle has argued in a number of writings (1983, 2004) for the thesis of the causal self-referentiality or self-reflexivity of some intentional states, for example, those involved in acting, perceiving, and intending. I will focus on (prior) intentions here.<sup>11</sup> The starting point of the argument is the observation that an intention only counts as satisfied, that is, executed, if it is the cause of the relevant action. If I form an intention, but then forget about it and perform the action spontaneously or for a different reason, we would not say I executed the original intention. An analogous argument applies to the execution of orders. But how are those conditions of satisfaction determined? Searle assumes that they are determined through representation, and I will follow him in making that assumption. But this still leaves open the question of how exactly the representational content of the intention determines that it needs to cause the intended action in order to be satisfied. Operating within the traditional framework of propositional attitudes described above, Searle further assumes that the causal relation between intention and action must be represented in the propositional content of the intention. He thus arrives at the following analysis of an intention to raise one's arm:

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Thomas Nagel's classic discussion in *The View from Nowhere* (1986: ch. 4).

<sup>11</sup> For Searle's distinction between prior intentions and intentions in action and the self-referentiality of the latter, also compare sect. 3 of the introduction to this volume.

I intend (I perform the action of raising my arm by way of carrying out this intention)  
(adapted from Searle 1983: 92.)

“Carrying out” here obviously refers to a causal notion. However, this analysis is problematic in at least the following two related respects. First, self-reference tends to be problematic, and there is a strong suspicion that it is problematic here, too, because of a lurking infinite regress: since the content refers back to the intention itself, it seems that we can never complete the specification of the intention. I will not develop this argument here though and focus instead on the second problem. This problem can be brought out by pointing to a counterintuitive consequence of Searle’s analysis, which is that if it is correct, it seems that what a subject intends could never be the same what the same or a different subject believes. For example, if we both intend to go to the opera and believe that we will, or if we intend to go and you believe or do not believe that we will, what we intend could not be the same what we believe, or what you believe or do not believe. This is because the content of the belief would not make reference to the intention causing the action as the content of the intention does according to Searle. (We certainly would not want to require that a belief needs to cause what is believed.) But it certainly seems that it should be possible for the states of intention and belief to have the same content and be directed at the same states of affairs. Another way of making essentially the same point is to say that it is the mode component of the intention rather than its content in the sense of *what* is intended that determines the causal relation necessary for its satisfaction. If therefore we want to stick to the assumptions that the satisfaction of intentions requires that they cause their execution, and that these conditions of satisfaction must be determined through the representational content of the attitude – and it seems to me that these assumptions are still plausible – I suggest that the best way to do so, indeed the only way I can think of, is to accept the thesis of the representationality of attitude mode.

The suggestion is that the intending subject must represent its position vis-à-vis the intended action or state of affairs, its goal, and that this position is such that it can only be satisfied if it guides or at least initiates the intended action. It seems to me that this suggestion also has plausibility independently of satisfying the mentioned assumptions and avoiding the counterintuitive consequences of Searle’s analysis. It seems plausible that we would only ascribe an intention to a subject that has at least some understanding of the position relative to the intended action that it has taken. For example, in order that we can be said to have decided and thus to intend to go on a road trip together, we’d have to have some understanding of things like the following: that we chose one course of action among others; that we took on some kind of responsibility for the execu-

tion of the intention such that, unless there was a good reason to abandon our plan, we open ourselves to criticism, by ourselves or others, for failing to execute it; that we therefore in some sense need to actively pursue our plan; that this might include forming further intentions regarding appropriate means for achieving our ends; that we might be praised or blamed for executing the intention; that we would be praised or blamed in different ways when we are executing a plan rather than just acting spontaneously (compare the list of features defining intentions sec. 3 above).

## 8 The Representationality of Subject Mode: I- and We-Mode

We are now in a position to address point 3) from our list above (p. 15 f.): jointness, sharedness, or collectivity – to use the terms most common in the literature – is another feature of intentions and other mental attitudes that is nonrepresentational on the traditional notion of propositional attitudes. The difference between an individual or I-intention, and a collective or We-intention is not taken to be representational per se. Of course it still has important consequences for the representational content of these attitudes because a subject can arguably only intend its own actions. A group can only intend its own actions, not those of other groups or individuals, not even those of its individual members – though it can want that individuals do certain things and decide that they do them as group members. Likewise, an individual can only intend his or her actions, not those of groups, not even those of which she is a member – though she may want her group to do certain things and may intend to influence the group accordingly. If this is correct, individual and collective intentions will always differ in their representational content because what individuals and collectives intend will always be different. However, parallel to the case for the representationality of attitude-mode, I will argue that We-Intentions and I-intentions are also representational in a sense that goes beyond the representationality of their contents. Episodes of intending also always involve a self-awareness of their subjects, however backgrounded and peripheral. The basic argument for this is very straightforward and has been stated already: if the subject represents its relation or position vis-à-vis a state of affairs, it must also represent itself. In principle, this argument applies regardless whether the subject is an “I” or a “we”, but since the “we” is more in need of clarification I will focus on it in what follows. I will refer to all these modes of representation – I-mode and we-mode and role-mode, which I will discuss later – as varieties of “subject mode.”

It seems to me that the view that subject mode is representational is natural and intuitively plausible. The group must represent itself in order to plan and coordinate its actions. It could not intend anything if it did not have a sense of itself as the subject of these actions. Analogously, the individual could not plan and coordinate its actions and could not intend anything if it did not have a sense of itself as the subject of these actions. Moreover, the assumption that we-mode is representational can solve certain puzzles in the theory of collective intentionality. Perhaps the most important one of these is constituted by the general sense of mystery often surrounding group entities and the mental states ascribed to them. What can it mean that a group exists other than that certain individuals exist, and what it can mean that this group has mental states such as intentions other than that certain individuals have these mental states? Progress on these questions can be made once it is seen that representation is constitutive for groups in a certain sense to be explained. A “we”, a group, is essentially something that is capable of representing itself as such a “we” – just like an “I”, an individual, is essentially something capable of representing itself as such an “I”. This is not to say though that there is no prior basis for we-representations (or I-representations for that matter) – that the “we” is created out of thin air – much less that we-representations cannot misrepresent, cannot fail to represent successfully.

Consider a couple, who, on the basis of certain feelings – say feelings of physical attraction, of affection, of belonging to one another, and so on – and of certain established skills and patterns of doing things jointly – say dancing, cooking or even simply walking down the street together – first starts saying “we” in the characteristically loaded sense that we are interested in here. These collective feelings, patterns and skills – often tied together in what can be called “sensory-motor-emotional schemata” (Schmitz 2013) – are the prelinguistic and preconceptual basis for applying the concept of “we.” By applying the concept, collectivity is taken to the next, conceptual level. But the concept can be misapplied. Either (potential) partner may be wrong that the feelings are mutual, or may just refuse to go along, for whatever reason, with taking it to the next level by conceptualizing him- or herself and the other as forming a “we”, or, even more contentiously, as a “we” of a certain, determinate kind, as the “we”, say, of a friendship, an affair, or a more serious relationship. But if both accept the relevant conceptualization, if they mutually represent each other as being part of the relevant “we”, there is, given the nature of groups and collective entities, no further question of whether that “we” really exists. And in accepting the conceptualization, the members of the couple or other group go beyond the preconceptual, prelinguistic basis to create something new, a subject that is now also the subject of joint theoretical and practical attitudes, of beliefs and intentions. The main function of this new subject of conceptual level attitudes is to regulate

the preconceptual relations and build something more durable on their basis. The concept of being together and of having joint plans, values and beliefs, is designed to help through crises on the preconceptual level – in the case of the couple, crises affecting the emotional relations and the ability to engage in joint activities. At the same time, the efficacy of joint plans is limited through the recalcitrance of the preconceptual relations and patterns. Despite the best intentions and far reaching plans for a common future, the couple, for example, may end up repeating patterns of mutual emotional abuse. This ‘dialectical’ relationship between different levels of jointness can be further explained through the notion of different representational formats of representations at these levels. But before we come to this let me first introduce the notion of role mode.

## 9 From We-Mode to Role-Mode

The representationalist view of we-mode can be extended to also account for institutional reality through the notion of role-mode. The existence of institutional collective subjects like, say, corporations and governments and their mental states – for example, the intentions of the German government or the Coca-Cola company – can appear to be even more mysterious than that of simpler we’s. The idea behind the notion of role-mode is that institutional reality, including the existence through time of subjects like governments and corporations, can be understood in terms of roles that people take up and represent themselves as occupying. For example, corporations exist mainly in virtue of people occupying a diverse set of roles ranging from factory worker to chairman, and they can only occupy these roles, can only function and act in these roles, because they represent themselves as standing in various relations to other people and to various states of affairs. However, merely representing oneself as occupying a role of course is not sufficient for actually occupying it. I may represent myself as being chancellor of Germany, but that is not sufficient to make me chancellor of Germany. It is required that the other members of the relevant group, or at least a significant number of them, also represent – recognize – me as chancellor of Germany.

Note the structural parallel with we-mode representation: that I represent myself as occupying a role is just as insufficient for me actually occupying that role as representing myself as a member of a group is for actually being a member, but if there is *mutual* representation as group member or role occupant, the group or role actually does exist. Note further that this dependence of groups and roles on representation does not mean that groups and roles are mere representations.

Just like an I is not merely a representation, though it is essential that it be able to represent itself as “I”, the we and the corporation and the role bearer are not mere representations even though they must be able to represent themselves as such in order to exist. And the way the group and the corporation represent themselves is of course through its members and functionaries representing themselves and others as members and functionaries. Finally, even though the representation of the group or institution is not mysteriously free-floating with regard to its members, it is still conceptually irreducible. This is because just like group members will act and think differently in the we-mode, the functionaries of an institution will act and think differently in these roles.

For example, somebody who becomes chairperson of the Coca-Cola company will adopt a mode of thinking and corresponding practical and theoretical positions that are different from any she would have taken up as a merely private person. This is because as chairperson of the Coca-Cola company one is subject to consistency requirements that derive from commitments undertaken by earlier chairpersons and other functionaries of the company. This of course does not mean that one cannot change the policies of the Coca-Cola company. But they need to be changed in such a way that they make sense as policies of the Coca-Cola company and are recognizable as such. For example, one may change the logos of the company and the image it projects in advertising, but the logos must still be recognizable as Coca-Cola logos and the image as an image of the Coca-Cola company. This thinking in terms of the identity of the Coca-Cola corporation and brand – a collective effort across and within different temporal phases of its existence – is not reducible to any other kind of thinking. And given the kind of entity the Coca-Cola company is – a kind constituted through self-representation – the Coca-Cola company and other organizations and institutions are not reducible to other entities either.

## 10 Layers of Representation and their Formats

If the representationalist approach to mode both in the sense of attitude mode and of subject mode like we-mode and role mode is accepted, different layers of intentionality can be distinguished in terms of their representational format. Like many philosophers, cognitive scientists and psychologists nowadays, I am here assuming a layered account of the mind. The idea behind the metaphor of layers or levels is that the structure of the mind at least to some extent reflects how it developed. Phylo- and ontogenetically newer forms of representation build on older ones and function against their background. The point is not that



the layers are necessarily very discrete and sharply delineated. It is rather that there are certain general parameters by means of which representations – and this includes mental representational states as well as linguistic and other forms of external representations – on different levels can be distinguished. I believe that these parameters include the degree of decontextualization, abstraction, differentiation, explicitness, externalization and standardization of the relevant representations. It will still be useful to roughly categorize the relevant representations into three groups which have already been mentioned: the nonconceptual, the conceptual, and the institutional or documental level. To get a feel for these levels, consider the following example. Suppose some children start playing around with a ball, evolving certain distinct patterns in their game and responding emotionally to deviations from these patterns (nonconceptual). They then start formulating and negotiating rules for their game and start using concepts like “football”, “goal”, “offside” etc. (conceptual). Finally they start writing down the rules and taking on roles such as being a referee or functionary – and in no time we have a body like FIFA (documental / institutional).

At the nonconceptual level we find perceptual and actional representational states as well as emotional states, tied together in sensory-motor-emotional schemata. As we saw earlier, a characteristic feature of nonconceptual states is a certain degree of independence from conceptual level states like belief and intention, which in the latter case helps to explain certain limits of the intentional control of action, as in cases of everyday habitual action and certain pathologies such as Anarchic Hand Syndrome. For an example from the social domain think of collective patterns recalcitrant to collective intention like those displayed by a football team that keeps getting careless after taking a lead, or the already mentioned one of a couple that keeps getting into fights over trivial matters.

The conceptual level is closely associated with (spoken) language, though this relation is complex and requires more discussion than it can be given here. Language comes with a greater degree of decontextualization, explicitness, externalization and standardization relative to the nonconceptual level, and through their grammatical structure, linguistic representations also display the greater differentiation into representational roles – e.g. subject, predicate – mentioned earlier. To mention just one more feature, the conceptual level is also characterized through the introduction of logical connectives and the corresponding logical operations, which cannot be found on the actional and perceptual level (see Schmitz 2012, 2013 for more discussion).

The word “institution” can be interpreted in a wider and a more narrow sense. In the wider sense, language already counts as an institution – a point emphasized by institutional accounts of language such as those of Austin, Searle, and Wittgenstein. These theories emphasize that language is a tradition involving

temporally extended communal practices of speaking in certain ways – *Gebräuche* and *Gepflogenheiten* in Wittgenstein’s (1984) German. Without disagreeing with these accounts, I will use “institution” in a narrower sense – which is also closer to its ordinary meaning – according to which the paradigm institutions are, for example, government organizations, corporations and things like money and marriage. These paradigm institutions require not only language, but more specifically written language, or at least some form of *documentation*. Documentation may also involve other forms of external symbolization which are partly or entirely nonlinguistic, like, for example, money, wedding rings and passports. I thus agree with those who stress the importance of “documentality” (e.g. Ferraris 2007), while insisting that they go too far when claiming that all social relations require documentation. Documentation is essential to institutionalization because institutionalization is essentially about making things more stable, permanent, and independent of certain contexts like those of personal acquaintance, and documents are crucial for that – think of how a passport is a lasting indicator of community membership independent of the context of personal acquaintance. But institutionalization usually operates on previously existing social relationships rather than creating them out of thin air. This is because the higher levels can only exist and can only have application against the background of lower levels. So just like the conceptual level of thought and meaning can only have application and determine definite satisfaction conditions against a background of know-how and skills (Searle 1983: ch. 5, 1992: ch. 8) which are manifest in actional and perceptual experiences with nonconceptual intentional content (Schmitz 2012, 2013), the documented, institutionalized collective intentions, plans, duties, rights and so on, can only have application and determine conditions of satisfaction against a background of collective thought and meaning. For example, a written constitution can only function against the background of a common language. The importance of such a shared background is evident in the way that shifts in this background can bring about shifts in the interpretation of the constitution. For example, shifts in public opinion and public mood during the War on Terror arguably brought about a change in the interpretation of the constitution through the Supreme Court of the US (Binder 2013).

## 11 Conclusion

I have tried to show how philosophy can make a worthwhile contribution to the study of intentions and their limits by providing a framework for understanding intentions in the context of a general theory of a layered representational mind.

On the lowest level we find sensorimotor skills and the nonconceptual representations of actional experience. These can control behavior independently of intentions which are located on the higher, conceptual level and can therefore explain both the action character of this behavior and limits of the control of behavior through intentions. To properly understand intentions as representational states it is necessary to revise the received conception of propositional attitudes, including the notion of the proposition itself. The standard understanding oscillates between the common content of both theoretical attitudes like belief and practical attitudes like intention, and a construal as an autonomous truth value-bearer. Moreover, the representational content of propositional attitudes is commonly equated with that of the proposition. Against this orthodoxy, I have argued that a subject of belief or intention does not merely represent the state of affairs that it believes to obtain or intends to bring about, but its own theoretical or practical position vis-à-vis that state of affairs and thus also itself. For example, to intend one needs to have at least some understanding of the intending position as distinct from the belief position. So an intentional attitude in addition to its state of affair content also has two types of mode content, namely attitude mode and subject mode content. The subject mode can be I-mode, we-mode or role-mode. If we properly understand the representationality of we-mode, we can dissolve certain puzzles about collective intentionality, and by understanding role-mode, the mode in which people function in certain roles in organizations, we can better understand the functioning of institutions. Finally, I have argued that the representational states at the different layers of the human mind can be distinguished in terms of their representational format, through such criteria as their degree of role differentiation, context-dependence and standardization and that higher level states can only be applied and can only determine conditions of satisfaction against the background of lower level states and dispositions.

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