

FROM COOPERATION TO LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS

From the outset, Guido Seddone's new book, *Collective Intentionality, Norms and Institutions*, aims to understand human cooperation. This is no easy task and the theme has been at the forefront of social ontological discussion. Though Seddone draws material from the classics of the field, he aims to present a novel theory of the foundational meaning of cooperation for the human life-form and how that enables us to understand and evaluate better the institutional world.

The accounts of cooperation that are based only on we-intentionality (Tuomela, Searle) are rejected as groups amount to more than the intentions of individuals'. Similarly, Seddone also rejects Gilbert's idea of a plural subject as groups are better understood as historical networks of individuals. His intention is «to describe social practices and institutions neither as being entirely dependent on individual commitments nor as being externally independent of the members who hold deontic states». While the former accounts of 'we' are interested in explaining the accomplishment of shared goals, Seddone's analysis is aimed at understanding enduring groups and institutions that are interested in the conservation of their identities and practices.

In the first chapter, Seddone introduces the key concept of *belongingness*. That is, human embeddedness in certain social practices, linked with an understanding of social groups like «organisms with a final structure of self-preservation». Belongingness is continuity between group and persons in a manner where individuals are integrated in a group and engaged in preserving the social collaborative activities and the social organization of that group. Belonging to a group also requires practical competences, many of which are learned in early childhood.

With the concept of belongingness Seddone tries to avoid the problems of mistrust that plague the contract-based theories of groups. Belongingness is seen as something more basic than just a contract that can be always broken. While the concept does highlight the interdependence of individuals and group, it might also be that it tackles a different problem than the contract-based theories. The danger in here is that even if Seddone claims to provide a larger and more contextual view, his theory might not be able to elaborate the internal motivations for setting up a particular corporation or purpose-group and their internal reasoning. One may worry that belongingness is in danger of becoming a claim of individuals' social constitution and not a claim about the nature of groups as such.

After explicating the interdependence of individuals and groups in the first part of the book, Seddone turns to the analysis of norms and institutions. One of the key claims is that being institutionalized is the only way a group can be recognized. That is, to become «a social entity whose social commitments, roles and behavior can be controlled and possibly legally prosecuted». This claim seems to be too strong because, as Tuomela has shown, institutions come in varied forms and the broad norm-governed systems like language might not have the commitments, roles and behavior in the sense that corporations with more rigid systems of personal tasks and rights might have.

Seddone is, however, aware that it is not wise to map all kinds of institutions under the same concept. His own central distinction is that of between autonomous and internal institutions. Internal institutions are set within a wider cooperative framework and the duties and interaction within them are contract-centered. Autonomous institutions, in turn, are characterized by self-determination and their members have a deeper and more fundamental relationship between each other and the group. The difference can be described as that of between «citizenship as belongingness to a lineage-based-organization» and «membership as belongingness to a contract and competencies-based-group».

Nations and states are prime examples of autonomous institutions as lineage, belongingness and preservation – the central ideas of the whole book – are combined within them. Seddone makes an interesting claim that without sovereignty nations only have their identity and the identity is at a risk of disappearing due to lack of organization. Firstly, this implies that a state is an organized form of a nation. This, perhaps inadvertently, associates states with nation states, which is clearly problematic in the era when real states are more and more multicultural or multinational. We might also have various other – economy, personal safety, etc. – interests to join a state than just the preservation of an institution into which we have been born. Secondly, though some institutional identities are surely dependent on the level of organization, this might not be the case with broader and looser cultural or national identities. Sovereignty on a region is a thing that was definitely not needed for the preservation of nomadic tribal identities.

With the introduction of institutions and organizations, we run into the problem of collective and individual responsibility and this is what Seddone tackles in the next section of his book. He sees hierarchies as a necessary part of institutions, resulting from «unequal repartition of tasks». However, he is against rigid hierarchies and argues for openness and «self-aware cooperative mode» of action where the cooperative

context is understood and evaluated. This in turn fosters self-determination and moral responsibility within these institutions. Thus, hierarchies and institutional power are necessary but they need not to be coercive. Instead, in a free society they rely on reflective acceptance by members.

Seddone finishes his book with an exploration of the idea of intersubjective freedom – «the possibility of enjoying autonomy within an institutionalized and cooperative enterprise». He agrees with the Hobbes's idea that individuals need to be shielded from arbitrary coercion but at the same time he wants to combine this with the Hegel's insight that individuals need the intersubjective context to be free. Here the reflective acceptance of law and lawfulness is the key. Law protects us from coercion by others but at the same time it needs to be accepted itself as there is potential for the institutions themselves to become coercive. Ultimately, the ideals of social freedom ought to be embodied by various institutions like the market economy or education. This leads Seddone to argue for liberalism that is concerned with the individual satisfaction of needs and in which solidarity is a social obligation towards those who participate in the cooperative system.

Seddone's book is difficult but rewarding. It is difficult in the sense that the themes that are analyzed are complicated and there are places in

which the reader is left with a desire for more detailed explanations. There are places where the book is repetitive and could have benefited from more pedantic editing. For example, the page numbers for references were occasionally marked as '??'. Despite this, the book was also enlightening. It manages to combine the Hegelian tradition with the analytical social ontology in an interesting fashion and presents a theory that progresses from the analysis of social cooperation as human condition into a defense of liberal theory. Even if I do not personally endorse all the specific claims made in the book, I agree with the overall approach of the research. Namely, the use of philosophical anthropology – a line of research prevalent in the Hegelian tradition – to back up the claims one makes about the institutional world. I can warmly recommend Seddone's book for all who are interested in the social nature of human beings and the interplay of institutions and individuals.

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