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HIGHER ORDER PERSONS: AN ONTOLOGICAL CHALLENGE?

abstract

The concepts of superindividual mind and superindividual person represent a double ontological challenge: in formal ontology, as higher order objects; in regional ontology, as minds and persons. I will discuss Stein's (1922) phenomenological description of common intentionality and her accounts of individual and superindividual personality and personhood in Social Ontology. Her argumentation is first to be proved within other phenomenological accounts, particularly in comparison with Husserl's concept of higher order person (Personalität höherer Ordnung), Scheler's total person (Gesamtperson) and Gallagher and Zahavi's philosophy of mind (2008). Finally I will try to compare it with Pettit's concept of group mind, stressing Stein's distinction between stream of consciousness and stream of experience and the way the latter is founded on the former.

keywords

Person; group mind; collective intentionality; social ontology; formal ontology; early phenomenology

In English we sometimes say that a group that acts as a whole does something *as one mind*: is this a way of speaking that is only *analogical* or is it also *ontological* justified? Can we speak phenomenologically about group minds, i.e. about groups *with their own minds*? Do groups have their own phenomenological mind, i.e. can we find, as members of a group, invariant structures of experience that are not reducible to the collection of our individual experiences? Can we further speak about superindividual persons as ontological persons, too?

Pettit argues that we can speak about group minds as “entities that are psychologically autonomous and that constitute institutional persons” in a way that “is consistent with a denial that our minds are subsumed in a higher form of *Geist* or in any variety of collective consciousness” (Pettit 2003). If we don’t accept any higher form of *Geist*, if we fear that any form of *Phänomenologie des Geistes* necessarily denies individual values, we risk to overlook an interesting issue of phenomenology of the ‘20s. Therefore I will try to compare Stein’s account with Pettit’s one.

1. **Stein’s phenomenological description of common intentionality** *Stein defines Geist* as a structure of intentional acts: *Geist* relates in its broader sense to every intentional subject and to every intentional object. Acts are connected through nexes of motivation that can be implicit or explicit. These connections can be rational or irrational: one can be rationally or irrationally motivated to do, to think or to evaluate something. The concrete structures of these intentional connections are *ex parte subjecti* minds and *ex parte objecti* intentional objects. Stein describes the intentional structure of communal lived experience within Husserl’s transcendental concept of intentionality, which is marked by four moments:
- Constituted* intentional unity of experience:
1. lived content (Noema)
 2. lived experience (Noesis)
- Constituting* consciousness:
3. stream of consciousness (temporalizing)
 4. reflection

We do live in everyday common experience with other people, we do have experiences with other persons: we do something with friends, we make decisions together, we have parties, we play something together and so on. Do these experiences have a particular intentional structure that simply overlaps with individual ones or do they have new properties which don’t coincide either with simple individual experiences nor with their sum? Stein argues that

common intentionality is marked only by two moments:

Constituted intentional unity of experience:

1. lived content of group experience (Noema)
2. lived experience of the group (Noesis),

whereas *constituting* consciousness is essentially individual: we can say that a community has grades of consciousness, but doing so we are speaking about properties of her members, not of the community as such (Stein 1922, p. 126). As we see, Stein agrees with Pettit who denies that group intentionality presupposes any variety of collective consciousness.

Stein points out the peculiar way that common intentionality is expressed in the formula *my intentionality as member of this group*. To be a member of a group and to act as a member of it doesn't need to feel like being a member of an *us*. I can act in an institution, I can follow its rules as a member of it without referring to any kind of *us*. To be bound to an *us* requires an emotional identification with the group that is not the key to understand every form of social group, only a very few of them. But what does it mean to live *as a member of a group*?

Stein defines the relation between communally lived experience and an individually lived one as a relation of *constitution*, not of *summation*. Individual contributions to community life are locked together in a unity of meaning and motivation that represents an experience structure of a higher order: no sum, but a new founded structure (Stein 1922, p. 130). We have to distinguish between the original *constituting* stream of consciousness and the *constituted* stream of experience. The former is essentially individual. Within individual mental life the stream of consciousness and the stream of experience are inseparable. Only through difficult transcendental reflection can one distinguish in one's mental life constituting and constituted streams of consciousness. This distinction is of primary importance when we reach the level of community experience: here we see how a new stream of experience arises out of individual streams of consciousness. This new stream is marked by the fact that it is constituted by a plurality of individual subjects: it is constituted by individual lived experiences both in its contents and in its way of being experienced. What "the individual as member of the community experiences, constitutes the material upon which community experiences are built up. They belong to a higher constitution level than the individual ones" (Stein 1922, pp. 126-127).

The same experience can be lived in its meaning both as an individual and as a communal one: I can experience a political event as member of a party or as me as such, a familiar one as member of my family or as me as such, and so on. On the other hand, every community experience in its being lived experience is at the same time an individual one: it is me *as member* of this or that community, my experience *as member* of a community. Of course as one can be member of a plurality of communities one can live the same experience in very different

perspectives: as an individual, as a friend, as a husband, as a member of a family, of a sport club and so on. Everyone can see what is meant, since everyday life is full of such partly discordant experiences: often our practical decisions depend on the importance that we give to these different levels of experience.

To live *as member* of a group means of course that every lived experience of the group is an individual perspective of the whole stream of experience: this perspectival quality can't be given up. One cannot have a total community experience, one can have only a fulfilled individual perspective as member of a community. Scheler calls this essential character of social unities their nature of *not concludable totality* (Scheler 1966, p. 510).

Summarizing, Stein describes the way in which individual community experiences do fill in a superindividual stream of experience as follows: "To this stream belong all experiences that are constituted through individual ones, whose correlate are superindividual objects, matter of facts or matter of values, empirical or ideal objects, further all community statement on its world of objects and all pure inner experiences (i.e. not related to an external object), that are common to a plurality of subjects" (Stein 1922, p. 149).

2.
Stein's ontological
description.
Higher order
personhood or
higher order
personality?

To be a member of a community involves experiences and decisions that are lived within a community point of view: we can say that a community has a *proper rational point of view*. Has a community as such a mind too? If we intend mind as both constituting and constituted consciousness we are not allowed to speak about group minds. If we accept the idea of mind distinguished from its stream of consciousness we could maybe speak about mind as Pettit does. But in order to make such a distinction we have to accept the idea that the field of embodied mind doesn't exhaust the whole personal life. Personal mind and life transcends the shape of bodily boundaries. The person has a new power upon her body, she can be the author of her life, she can mind it personally and can take responsibility. Gallagher and Zahavi distinguish between *sense of ownership* and *sense of agency* (Gallagher, Zahavi 2008, p. 161). I would like to distinguish a third sense of the self, the sense of authorship (De Monticelli 2008, p. 307): the experience or sense that I am the author of my actions and of my life.

Can we speak about a sense of authorship for communities? And what about responsibility? Stein is very clear: "The community as such is not a 'free' subject and it is therefore not 'responsible' in the way individuals are. Individuals have to take the last responsibility for the actions that they do in the name of the community" (Stein 1922, p. 174). The members of a community of free persons are co-responsible for each other, without exonerating each other from their individual responsibility: co-responsibility presupposes responsibility. Being a person means to be free: we can have a community of free persons, but not a free superperson. As constituting stream of consciousness, as individual

reflection, freedom is essentially individual (i.e. personal), too: we can say that *spontaneity* as such belong essentially to the individual person.

It seems as if we should abdicate the aim of this paper: there seems to be no reason to speak about persons of higher order, since there are no subjects of higher order that are free: as Stein and De Monticelli point out personhood requires capability for freedom. But in phenomenology we find descriptions of superindividual subjects, personal communities and conceptualisations about kinds of superindividual persons: we can find, for example, Scheler's term *Gesamtperson*, Stein's *überindividuelle Persönlichkeit*, and Husserl's *Personalität höherer Ordnung*.

Scheler's concept of *Gesamtperson* is presented as being opposed to the one of *Einzelperson*: both have *individuality*, both total and individual persons have *personality*. In Scheler's ontology, individual and total persons are put as persons *on the same ontological level*: they are both constituted centers of acts who are constituted by a "psychophysically indifferent" person. Individual and total persons are both intentional individualities as such. On the other hand, not every social unity is a total person: Scheler distinguishes four types of social unity: mass, life-community, society and total person. A mass has not an intentional structure: formally it is a connex (its connection can have both a causal nature – such as the ormons who lead social insects lives – and a collective intentional nature – such as masses of minded beings who are joined in attention to something that is capable of influencing every individual behaviour in the same way). A society has an intentional structure which is constituted through conscious social acts that are able to institute social entities (such as promise, law etc). Every society subscribes to an abstract rational point of view, which its members should obey. Both mass and society are formally not independent social unity, because they are founded on independent beings. Life-community and total persons are on the contrary independent social unities because they both have an autonomous intentional center of essential different acts (Scheler 1966, p. 516). On the other hand, total personhood means to be a "*unity of independent, rational individual persons 'in' an independent, rational total person*" (Scheler 1966, p. 533): Total persons are the highest form of social unities. These are the outlines of Scheler's social ontology upon which Stein works out her community ontology. She profits from three distinctions that Husserl sketches in his formal ontology: the concept of objects of higher order, the conceptualisation of whole and part as pregnancy and emergence, and the distinction between independent and non-independent objects (Husserl 1984). First of all, she makes a distinction between typical properties of the members of a community and their typical properties as members of that community as such: it is a very simple distinction that can be clarified with an example. We usually refer in our serious or trivial speeches to typical national characters,

such as the typical French one, the typical Italian and so on. These types of national member characters differ from what the same national members do as members of a nation as such: we could, for example, notice that typical members of a group do not usually act *as members* of it, but according to other reasons. It is only what the members of a community do *as members* of it that founds an intentional subject of higher order, i.e. an object of the same genus of the founding one that is founded in it and that cannot be imagined without this foundational relation. Such an object is an emergent object. Emergent objects do individuate their parts in a very peculiar way: these parts are called *pregnant proper parts*, because they are related and concretely connected to each other and individuated from the emergent whole. A member of a community has therefore some typical properties that members of that community usually have – proper part – and some founded and founding properties as members of that community as such – *pregnant proper part* (Conni 2005).

Within this formal ontological frame, Stein prepares a typology of communities that differs a little from Scheler's one. She notices that in everyday German language one usually speaks about the *Geist einer Gemeinschaft*: what does this words refers to? She claims that ascribing a *Geist* to a community "means more than leading an intentional life, i.e. to be open to an object-world, to face it in meaningful acts. Moreover it means that this life shows a qualitative unity, it is formed out from a center into a cohesive one. To ascribe a [Geist] to a community means something analogous to ascribe personal character to an individual" (Stein 1922, p. 248). To ascribe a *Geist* to an individual or to a community means to recognize in their life a qualitative unity that informs their acts: I tend to call this kind of qualitative unity *personality*.

Stein claims further that there are *independent* and *non-independent* personalities. To be an independent object means formally that we can imagine it in its peculiar properties without helping us with other external objects that provide it with properties it wouldn't have without them. Stein claims that there are personalities that are independent, i.e. that we couldn't face without finding other persons who are authors of their life. She claims that to have a personality one doesn't necessarily need to have sense of authorship: to be independent means to own a proper center of gravity, i.e. to live within one's own point of view. Stein also calls this center of gravity the *core* of the person. She claims that "it is principally possible that an individual lives completely within the rational point of view of a community or that a community lives within the rational point of view of another one. Yet we do have a cohesive whole with a unified quality, though it doesn't bear its own center of gravity, but is rather held up by something else" (Stein 1922, p. 248).

It is therefore possible to find personalities without core selves. How is it possible? Personhood means to be independent and capable of freedom and

since personality is founded on it every person has personality (De Monticelli 2008, p. 308). Stein claims that this founding relation is unilateral and not bilateral. That means that we can find personalities that are necessarily founded in personhoods but that can be founded outside themselves since they have to be founded in personhood. We are now able to follow better these distinctions: every intentional unity that hasn't its own core needs to be founded on an independent one. We can have objective and subjective intentional unities. An example of an objective one is that of a landscape, which can be ascribed a kind of non-independent personality. On this objective non-independent personality (the landscape) can be founded subjective non-independent personalities, such as mythological spirits who relate to particular landscapes. Examples of non-independent personality can be found in every good novel character: these personalities are not authors of themselves but are conceived in the imaginations of their authors.

We do have superindividual personalities that we ascribe to communities. Do they also have personhood? Stein claims that communities can lay claim to be *recognized* if they are founded in the core-self of individual persons. But although these superindividual personalities show a unified form they have no simple formation-root (*Bildungswurzel*) because their personal existence is grounded on the core of their members. We can only speak of personhood of *higher* order as a superindividual person who is founded by personal acts of its members as members of it.

3. Conclusion The concept of *higher order person* represents a double ontological challenge: in formal ontology, as higher order object; in regional ontology, as person. We can now try to answer to the original questions posed in this paper: we can speak ontologically about group minds if we face independent communities with own lived center of acts. We can call this lived center of acts *mind* if we accept that this mind has no stream of consciousness itself but only a stream of experience. It can exist as *plural mind* because as group mind it is founded on a plurality of embodied minds. Groups have their own phenomenological *plural mind* if they are independent entities.

We can speak ontologically about superindividual persons if we refer to personalities and if we accept the concept of personhood of higher order. This kind of personhood lives through the free persons who live as members of it. The persons who are essential for the superindividual personhood (and therefore for its personality) form its essential pregnant part that coincide with the totality of its members only in the supremum limit of the *idea* of community. These persons who are the essential pregnant part of the community are at the same time bearers of its personality and the persons who are more responsible for it. Through them as particular representative members of the community the community is itself responsible.

Finally we can say that group minds are “entities that are psychologically autonomous” only because of the fact that a superindividual psychological reality is only possible if its founding individuals are minded beings (Stein 1922, p. 267).

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In his M.A. Thesis (2008, *Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele*, Milan) Emanuele Caminada developed the concept of *relevance* within a theory of common sense, founding pre- and predicative *sensus communis* on embodied *koine aisthesis*. He is working at the Husserl Archive of Cologne on Husserl’s concept of *habitus* in order to provide a critic of common sense within the frame of genetic phenomenology referring also to phenomenological and contemporary accounts on Social Ontology. His systematical field of research is Phenomenological Philosophy, Collective Intentionality, Persons Ontology. He edited (2011) Max Scheler, *Modelli e capi*, Milano.

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