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## Review of Kirk Ludwig, From Individual to Plural Agency, Collective Action: Volume 1

Blomberg, Olle

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

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Olle Blomberg ([olle.blomberg@gmail.com](mailto:olle.blomberg@gmail.com))  
Lund University

Review of Kirk Ludwig, *From Individual to Plural Agency, Collective Action: Volume 1*. OUP, 2016.

This book is the first of a two-volume work on human action. The present volume deals with individual and joint agency, and the second volume will deal with institutional agency. Ludwig's accounts of these social phenomena are reductive: they only draw on resources that are already available within the reductive event-causal account of individual action that is presented in the first part of this book.

Ludwig's main focus is the ontology and psychology of action embedded in the logical form of the sentences used to talk about action. To illustrate, the logical form of the sentence "I sang the national anthem" is, in informal terms: "There is an event  $e$  and a time  $t$  before now such that at  $t$  I was a primitive agent of an event  $f$  [that is, I performed  $f$  as a primitive/basic action] that directly causes  $e$  and only I am an agent of  $e$  in that way and  $e$  is a singing of the national anthem." (p. 84)

This type of analysis is the starting point of analyses of sentences that attribute an intention to an individual ("I intend to sing the national anthem") and sentences about intentional actions ("I sang the national anthem intentionally"). An innovation in Ludwig's analysis is the requirement that "only I am an agent of  $e$ ". This means that singular action sentences and collective action sentences that concern the same event  $e$  are mutually exclusive on Ludwig's analysis: if I sang the national anthem, then we did not sing it together (although you might have been an agent of the event in an indirect way, say by bringing the score sheet), and vice versa. This unique agent requirement also figures in the content of an "I-intention". This is not because of some deep feature of the nature of intention, but simply because, "[i]n English, 'it was done by  $x$ ' implies that  $x$  was the sole agent of it." (p. 25) When I intend "to sing the national anthem", it is part of the content of my intention that I—and no one else—bring about the event. It is also part of the content that I do it in accordance with a plan I have.

In the book's second part, Ludwig provides analyses of sentences such as "We sang the national anthem", "We intend to sing the national anthem", and "We sang the national anthem intentionally". On a collective reading, the sentence "We sang the national anthem" expresses the thought, roughly, that there is a singing of the national anthem of which each of us—and no one else—is an agent (each by performing a contributing primitive action). In projecting his account of the content of I-intentions to We-intentions, Ludwig then argues that an agent has a We-intention if and only if she intends to bring it about that the members of her group (and no one else) all be agents of an event of a certain type that they bring about in accordance with a shared plan (a plan that each of them has). When all members have such a We-intention, they have a "shared intention". If and only if they act on We-intentions that are satisfied, then they have jointly intentionally brought about the intended event.

Ludwig demonstrates how this account rules out various cases in which an event has multiple agents, but where they intuitively fall short of performing a joint intentional action. One of these is a deception case that Ludwig suggests is a counterexample to Michael Bratman's

account of shared intention (see p. 251, n. 10). If you and I have a shared intention, on Bratman's account, then each intends that we bring something about in accordance with our own and the other's intention that we bring it about, and in accordance with co-realizable subplans. As Ludwig shows, this leaves it open for each of us to rationally intend that the other be deceived about our own intent. Suppose it is common knowledge that you and I intend that we build a block tower in accordance with our own and the other's intention that we do so and in accordance with co-realizable subplans. But I believe that you are a teaser who won't continue to so intend if you think that this is what I also intend. So, I form the intention that you come to falsely believe that I only intend to cover the top face of each of your blocks. Intuitively, we would not have a shared intention in this case, since I am not properly treating you as a partner. This kind of case can be ruled out negatively, by requiring an absence of deceptive intent (see Blomberg 2016a, 322-323), but Ludwig's account rules it out more elegantly: In a deception case of this kind, the deceiver intends that they themselves and the others bring about the intended event according to a plan that cannot be shared with the others: If the plan were shared, then the deception would be unsuccessful. Ludwig's account also correctly implies that I cannot believe that my We-intention has been satisfied without believing that my intended end was such that it was intended by each of us (it is unclear whether this is also implied by Bratman's account: see Blomberg 2016b, sect. 5).

Besides the critical discussion of Bratman's account, Ludwig provides insightful critical discussion of the work of Raimo Tuomela, John Searle, David Velleman and Margaret Gilbert. At various places, he also more generally argues against views that take joint intentional action to be equivalent to a group agent performing an intentional action. He also briefly argues against the actual existence of group agency, considered as a phenomenon distinct from joint agency. However, these latter arguments are in my view too quick and dismissive to be enlightening.

While Ludwig builds a powerful account of joint intentional action with his logical form analyses as a starting point, I doubt that these analyses are as unequivocal as he seems to think. It would on Ludwig's view have to be false to say that "We jointly built a block tower intentionally" about a case where one or both of us didn't intend that we build the tower according to a shared plan, even if neither acted on any coercive or deceptive intent. To me, this suggests that Ludwig doesn't leave enough room for indeterminacy in his analysis of our discourse about joint action.

I am also sceptical of the claim that the unique agent requirement is part of the logical form of individual action sentences rather than that it merely is a typical pragmatic implicature. When discussing the use of the adverbial 'with others', as in "I built the block tower with Björn", Ludwig argues that it is just a pragmatic implicature that the event does not have any additional agents beyond the ones mentioned (p. 163, n. 24). But isn't this also plausible when it comes to singular action sentences? It seems that I could truthfully but misleadingly say, "I built the block tower", even if I built it together with Björn. Furthermore, individual agents arguably sometimes intend to do things in ways that are neutral with respect to whether or not others will contribute in the same way to bringing about an event.

This book is without doubt an impressive achievement, and there is much to learn from the author's meticulous approach. I suspect few readers will be drawn in by Ludwig's focus on the logical form of action sentences, but much of the book can be appreciated independently of this. The explanatory aim of his overall reductive project is refreshingly ambitious and wide in scope. The arguments by which he pursues it are illuminating and mostly convincing. I

wholeheartedly recommend this book to those interested in action theory in general, and to those focused on joint agency in particular. I am looking forward to reading volume 2.

## **References**

Blomberg, O. (2016a). Common Knowledge and Reductionism about Shared Agency. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 94(2), 315–326.

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