

Con-reasons against an action

In intentionally not eating meat, not voting, refusing to bear arms or refraining from buying products of an unethical company agents seem to *resist* actions. Intentionally not performing certain kind of actions seems to include negative attitudes towards these actions in some cases. These negative attitudes explain why we do *not* do something. This paper investigates the nature of con-reasons that are about resisting an action. As resistant not doings can arise especially in constrained circumstances, accounts by sociologists researching the resistant behavior of relatively powerless agents are used when looking into the nature of con-reasons against an action.

In the standard account of action, actions have been analysed with the help of desire-belief pairs and pro-attitudes toward intentional bodily movements. But what does it mean to resist an action? How does a resisting attitude toward an action influence an agent's intentional omission to not perform an action? Are pro-attitudes and reasons for a preferred action enough to explain resistant inaction? Or do they challenge current theories of action explanation?

Intentional omissions are a class of the agent's omissions that are intentional, deliberate, or involve other mental actions related to what is *not* done by the agent (Clarke 2010, 2014). Whereas intentional bodily movement is often considered as necessary for intentional action, in intentional omission no bodily movement is needed. Instead, what is not done by the agent is intentional. In philosophical discussions "omission" can be used in normative sense denoting an action the agent should have done. But following Brand (1971), in this paper it is assumed that when it comes to omissions, non-normative concepts are needed so that the concept themselves would not include an assumption on whether the behavior is wrong, expected of the agent, dignified or morally suspect by definition.

According to David-Hillel Rubin, action theory has tended to overlook that reasons function also as disfavourings of an action (2009, 63). Rubin assumes that these con-reasons work necessarily as pro-reasons for another course of action (2009, 64). This paper focusses especially on con-reasons against certain kind of actions. They are reasons, according to which the agent is somehow *against* the action in question, not merely reasons that are in favour of another action. A preliminary framework for analysing resistances as reasons for not acting is developed.

Not doings and resistances can be tricky to conceptualize by a theory that is all about the doings of agents arising out of pro-attitudes toward action. Furthermore, resistant not doings might arise in situations in which overt action is not necessarily a viable option for the agent. A citizen might not have the means to explicitly protest war but can nevertheless delay getting drafted. A prisoner can refuse to eat and a soldier can refuse to shoot even when deprived of active means of influencing the situation. According to Margaret Urban Walker, there is plenty of moral and political importance to the way people act when they are deprived of choice (1998).

Resistance is a central concept in sociology. To develop the coherent view of con-reasons and resistant agency I draw from the work of sociologists who have conceptualized the behavior of subordinate and powerless people. For instance, Barrington Moore focused on people at the bottom of social order, those of little or no property, income, education, power, authority or prestige (1978, xiii). According to Moore, what explains the origins of dissidence is a sense of injustice. For James Scott, hidden, everyday resistance is an integral part of the behavior of relatively powerless groups (1989, 34). This hidden resistance can take the form of footdragging, delays, desertion, false compliance, feigned ignorance, etc. (1989, 34-36).

In this paper, the notion of resistance is taken seriously in action explanation. It is argued, that desire-belief accounts combined with pro-attitudes might not be sufficient to grasp resistant not doings because an agent can resist actions even when they cannot do positive actions. Including forms of resistant agency could make action theory more useful for non-ideal circumstances. Lately in analytical sociology, the perceived opportunities of an agent have been included in the desire-belief model in order to make it more applicable to constrained circumstances (Hedström 2005). A coherent view of con-reasons against actions would benefit these combinatory efforts between action theory and social sciences.

It is assumed that sociological findings can elaborate the notion of con-reasons in constrained circumstances and vice versa—a coherent account of con-reasons can inform how action theory is used in social scientific explanation. Soran Reader has called for the philosophical understanding of the truths of the "passive, weak, needy, helpless, confused, entangled, and overwhelmed" (2007, 604). A theory of agency that takes into account, according to Reader, the othered, constrained aspect of personhood consisting of passivity, deprivation, contingency and inability is a better theory of agency than the one that does not. So that agency would not be "presented like a student on graduation day" (Reader 2007, 604), emphasis on constrained, resistant inaction might be needed. In general, the kind of an action theory that allows for resistant inaction in constrained

circumstances should be of interest for feminist philosophers and others working on understanding phenomena on the outskirts of agency.

References

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