COLLECTIVE ACCEPTANCE AND ITS LOGIC

Raimo Tuomela

University of Helsinki

University of Munich

1. The Collective Acceptance Thesis and Its Logical Features

Social groups capable of functioning in an agent-like way are capable of constructing new social things (such as social institutions) by performative acceptance. As groups can function only via their members, we can say that it in the last analysis is the members' collective acceptance qua members of a group that creates new items into the social world and maintains previously constructed items. By acceptance here is meant acceptance as true or correctly assertable of something—acceptance thus need not be acceptance of something as good or as pragmatically useful, to mention a couple of other senses of acceptance.

This paper argues that group-based collective acceptance of something as true basically is some members' coming to hold and holding, with collective commitment, a relevant "we-attitude", based either on the intention-family of attitudes (having the world-to-mind direction of fit) or on the belief-family of attitudes (with either the mind-to-world direction of fit or the world-to-mind direction of fit—the latter when the belief is constitutive institutional one). I will concentrate on the kind of constitutive collective acceptance that constitutes the content of what is accepted rather than some other aspects of collective acceptance. Collective acceptance (CA) here is for the use of the group and is thus based at least in part on a group reason derived from or at least compatible with the group's constitutive ideas and principles. Collective acceptance is intentional and, logically speaking, intensional. It serves to create unity among the participants by bringing about that they will be "in the same boat" and thus to satisfy a central collectivity principle. (For the above notions, see e.g. Tuomela, 2007.) What is more, the kind of acceptance that is needed in this context must be reflexive. This paper will clarify in detail the kind of reflexivity involved here.

While I will state the central logical properties for collective acceptance below, I will not give a formal semantics for the stated axiomatic principles. The recent paper by Lorini et al. (2009) gives a full-blown logical account of collective acceptance in terms of acceptance as a member of an institution that as to its basic ideas is very close to those expressed in this paper—to the extent that their logical axioms and semantics are compatible with my account.

The we-mode approach to sociality developed in Tuomela (2007) takes the group and the group perspective, indeed "we-perspective", to be conceptually central for sociality. A group need not, however, be ontologically viewed as a collective agent in a sense involving group consciousness. Briefly, the group gives a group reason for the members to function in certain ways qua group members and to be "in the same boat". The members ought to be collectively committed to what they collectively accept for the group in order to be able to function as a group. Accordingly, the primary constitutive markers of the full we-perspective, the "we-mode", are the mentioned features of a *group reason*, a specific *collectivity condition*, and *collective commitment*. These are all present in collective acceptance as characterized here.

Let us consider the collective acceptance of something (e.g. a certain kind of piece of metal or even things like squirrel pelt) as money: For that item to be money it must reflexively be collectively accepted to be money, and conversely. This idea of collective sociality and institutionality has been argued in Tuomela and Balzer (1999), Tuomela (2002, 2007) to be theoretically analyzable in terms of the following Collective Acceptance Thesis:

Collective acceptance thesis (CAT): A fact-expressing sentence s is *collectively social* (or *group-social*) and expresses a collectively social or institutional state of affair in a primary sense in a group g if and only if (a) the members of group g collectively accept s for the group, and (b) necessarily, they collectively accept s for g if and only if s is true or correctly assertable for the members of g functioning as group members.

According to clause (a), we have collective acceptance of fact-expressing proposition s that involves "forgroupness" (thus group reason and collectivity). Assuming also collective commitment for collective acceptance, it is in the we-mode in virtue of satisfying the central criteria of being in the we-mode. This kind of constitutive collective acceptance, according to (b), entails "premisibility" and correct assertability of s for the group members when they act as group members; the necessary equivalence "if and only if" expresses both conceptual and metaphysical necessity. It is conceptual as we are speaking of collectively constructed and

constituted parts of reality, and it is metaphysical in a group-relative sense because the construction is basically "self-validating" if obeyed. What is thus constituted necessarily exists as a practice-involving fact for the group.

Clause (b) entails that a collectively social s is reflexive: for example, squirrel pelt is not money unless it is collectively accepted as money (the converse also holds). Thus collective sociality is intrinsically based on collective acceptance, which rationally entails common belief in the acceptance.

Here I will in a preliminary and stylized way characterize the logical properties of collective acceptance and the features involved in (CAT). The Collective Acceptance model (CA model) of sociality concerns the collective acceptance of propositions for the use (and, typically, the well-being) of the group. It says that the very acceptance of a proposition creates its truth (or correct assertability) for the group in question. If a social proposition s in group g is collectively accepted by the members of g, I write $CA(g,s)$. As argued, collective acceptance must in the present context be acceptance for the group in question, so that also objectively false sentences (such as 'Stars determine our fate') can be allowed to be correctly assertable in the group. (See Tuomela, 2002, Chapter 6, and 2007, Chapter 8.)

The intensionality of the operator CA relates to its expressing the group's view of social matters—which basically amounts to expressing the members' (qua members) shared view, part of their intentional we-perspective. The group members collectively accept (joint) intentions and other attitudes with the world-to-mind direction of fit and (joint) beliefs and other attitudes with the mind-to-world direction of fit for the group. In virtue of their collective acceptance the group members collectively commit themselves to regarding the accepted propositions as true for the group—thus they accept them for a group reason.

I mark the fact that a sentence has been thus accepted for the group by attaching the intensional FG-operator to that accepted sentence to express forgroupness. Collective acceptance is assumed to entail forgroupness and collective commitment to the accepted sentence. The accepted sentence needs to be in the group's "acceptance box", so to speak, and this is expressed by $FG(g,s)$. Due to the reason of functioning qua group members for the group, the members are collectively committed to regarding the propositions in the acceptance box as true (or correctly assertable). All the elements in the group's acceptance box can be used by the group members qua group members in their relevant reasoning and in all the "moves" related to truth that the members make within the intentional perspective

of the group (within the scope of FG). We can speak of perspectival (indeed "we-perspectival") truth here.

Following to an extent the treatment in Tuomela and Balzer (1999) and Tuomela (2002), I will emphasize the performative aspect of collective acceptance, i.e. that by collective acceptance a proposition gains a certain epistemic status entitling the group members in their reasoning to use this proposition as a categorical assumption, as something being or counting as "true for the group".

I assume that FG distributes over implication ->, viz.:

(1) FG(g,s -> s´) implies FG(g,s) -> FG(g,s´)

Here the implication -> is a "quasi-conceptually" necessary implication. By this is meant that the implication holds in virtue of the group's performative acceptance and construction. The necessity is g-relative and can be said to be conceptual a posteriori for g. (The logical properties of this implication need not be further characterized here.

Formally, we start with the following central assumption expressed informally in (CAT):

(2) FG(g,CA(g,s) <-> s)

Assuming (1) and (2) we get

(3) FG(g,CA(g,s)) <-> FG(g,s),

which our informal discussion also has employed and which is incorporated in (CAT). FG is also assumed to distribute over conjunction, i.e. FG(g, s and s´) <-> (FG(g,s) and FG(g,s´)).

The set of all propositions s such that FG(g,CA(g,s)) can be taken to represent at least a part of the intentional we-perspective of group g. There is thus an obvious connection between group g's accepting a proposition s in the performative sense and the fact that s is in g's intentional perspective. In the spirit of the CA model we could say that by this acceptance the members of g have made it available for their group-specific deductions and practical inferences. They may use it in their local system of inference (deduction, practical inference, and what have you) which is obtained from the standard logical system of inference by adding precisely those propositions that the members have accepted plus (at least a "perspicuous" subset of) their deductive and "practical" consequences. Indeed, qua group members, they are collectively committed to so using them, and only them, in appropriate circumstances (e.g. when a view concerning a certain matter is required), and are committed to refraining from using sentences incompatible with the accepted ones.

To discuss and justify the present approach in more detail, we consider the left-to-right implication in our central formula (2):

(PERF) FG(CA(g,s) -> s).

Verbally, it is true for the group g that if they collectively accept s, then s (for the group). (PERF) is true simply on the basis of the notion of collective acceptance, which is an *achievement* notion relative to the group's perspective. From an outsider's perspective only FG(g,s) is true.

The converse implication in (2) can be said to express reflexivity. Generally speaking, social concepts and sentences are reflexive in the following sense. A collective-social sentence using a putatively social predicate (e.g. 'money', 'leader', or 'marriage') does not apply to real things (such as certain pieces of paper or squirrel pelts in the case of "money") unless collectively accepted and, so to speak, validated for that task by the attachability of the FG-operator to it. Let us consider money as an example. The predicate 'money' does not refer to itself, but rather to coins, dollar notes, squirrel pelts, and so on. The reference here means that 'money' correctly applies to those things. The loose talk about reflexivity in this context therefore should be understood as being about presupposition-stating or constitutive sentences, such as in the colloquial expression 'Money is not money unless collectively accepted to be money'.(See below Section 2 for more on the kind of attitudinal reflexivity at stake here.) The concept of money is expressed by what a user of the predicate 'money' in English is entitled to say and, especially, extralinguistically do (and what he may be obligated to do). The concept of money thus also connects with some deontic powers and obligations collectively bestowed upon those who use the predicate 'money' and who belong to the collective in question. E.g. the owner of a note of money has the right to use it to pay for his purchase while the seller is obligated to accept it as valid payment. The discussed presupposition that money is not money unless collectively accepted to be money is central precisely because of the following assumed fact: It is basically up to group to bestow those extralinguistic deontic powers upon its members. This contrasts with sentences involving only physical predicates like 'tree'. In their case it is not up to the members of the collective to do more than stipulate how to use certain linguistic phrases and, e.g. what word to use for trees.

For a group-social sentence, s, it holds that CA(g,s) is a necessary condition for s or, in this sense, a presupposition of s. As indicated, this expresses that the social sentence s is

reflexive, and we say formally that s satisfies the condition of reflexivity relative to the collective acceptance if and only if

(REFL) FG(s -> CA(g,s)).

This principle gives a central "mark of the social" that I will clarify somewhat more in Section 2.

That a social sentence satisfies a collectivity condition with respect to truth (or correct assertability) in a group entails that necessarily, in virtue of collective acceptance, whenever a member of the group finds this sentence to be true then the same holds for any other member in the group, provided that the group has collectively accepted s. Using the abbreviations CA(g,s) as above and ASC(i,s) for 's is correctly ascribable to and assertable for person I', I formulate the matter technically and say that CA satisfies the Collective Ascribability Condition if and only if on "quasi-conceptual" grounds it is true for g that

(COLASC) FG(CA(g,s) -> (i) (ASC(i,s)).

This condition can be taken to be entailed by the full notion of collective acceptance for a group, viz. the Collective Acceptance model. It represents the "individualization" of group acceptance for all group members and it also makes them to be in the same boat with respect to ascribability.

Combining (PERF) and (REFL) and assuming actual collective acceptance we arrive at the following formal representation of (CAT):

(CAT*) A sentence s is collective-social in a primary constructivist sense for group g if and only if (i) FG(g,CA(g,s)) and (ii) FG(CA(g,s) <-> s).

2. Collective Acceptance, Institutions, and Reflexivity

Social institutions (such as money, marriage, property, university) can be elucidated in terms of collective acceptance and specifically (CAT) (and (CAT*)). Institutions are basically systems constituted by norms and social practices satisfying (or meant to satisfy) these norms. The norms must contain at least one constitutive norm amounting to saying what ought to be the case on quasi-conceptual grounds specifically in the institution in question (e.g. 'It ought to be the case in group g that squirrel pelt is money in g', g being the group of medieval Finns).

I will below mainly consider in more detail the reflexivity feature that social institution concepts essentially have—e.g. when people cease to collectively accept and use squirrel pelt as money that institution of money disappears. Standard examples of social institutions in addition to money are marriage, property, university, church, and even language (thus of course the constitutive and regulative norms and practices related to them). These institutional social "objects" can be represented by (meaningful) predicates, viz. predicates with established uses. Such predicates can be taken to express concepts. Assume now that S is such a predicate. S can be 'money', 'marriage', 'ownership', etc. These predicates, or their appropriate linguistic modifications, occur in institution-expressing or institution-entailing sentences. Here are some invented examples of such sentences which all are preceded by a conceptual-metaphysical necessity operator (based on collective acceptance): (a) 'For all x, if x is a squirrel pelt, then x is money' (institution-expressing sentence), 'For all x and y, if x is an item of money and y is a member of g, then y is entitled to use x as money in his commercial affairs' (entailed sentence); (b) 'For all persons x and y in collective g, if x and y are married to each other, then x and y are committed to fidelity towards each other' (entailed by the marriage institution), or (c) 'For all persons x in g, if for some y, x owns y, then no person z can legally use y without x's permission' (entailed by the property institution).

From here on will now use money as my prime example (my discussion improves on and largely replaces that in Tuomela, 2002, Chapter 6). According to reflexivity, the fact that money is assumed to be a group-social entity means that it is collectively constructed and accepted. Thus we have (omitting for simplicity FG in front of the next formula):

(1) CA(g, s),

where s is an institution-expressing sentence or proposition, e.g. s = Squirrel pelt is money, or more precisely, s = For all x, if x is a squirrel pelt, then x is money. Given (1), we can say that according to s, squirrel pelts express or symbolize money.

As to reflexivity, in a fuller analysis I would take as a starting point meaning as (possible) use and emphasize the inferential use of concepts. However, I will here simplify things and focus on referential use. Consider thus the following simple analysis of reference, in analogy with a possible worlds analysis of the meaning of predicates, that accounts for what underlies referential use. We let f_S be a possible "meaning function" for a predicate S and define it as follows for g:

(2) $f_S: W \rightarrow E$.

Here W is a set of contexts to which the concept or predicate S can be potentially applied. S is a function which maps W into E, a set of sets, E_i, of entities falling into the extension of the predicate in each possible context W_i. Such a context consists (at least) of a set of (actual or possible) objects, and the meaning function simply specifies how to classify them into those to which the predicate S correctly applies and those to which it does not. We may call the sets E_i the reference sets of S. In our example, reference set E_i is a set (possibly a singleton set) of squirrel pelts. I give a referential use reading to (2) and say that it shows how S is correctly applied to (or is true of) the members of the subsets of E in various contexts. According to (2), for every context W_i in W there exists a set E_i such that $S(W_i) = E_i$. We may allow that the meaning function (2) is gappy either in the sense that for some contexts it is not associated with any reference set (viz. E_i) at all. As our meaning function serves to define correct use, it is (implicitly) normative.

The users of predicates such as S in (2) are of course the group members. We may accordingly suggest that the pragmatic use reading of (2) be cashed out in terms of collective acceptance, which involves the group members' dispositions to use the linguistic expressions in various circumstances.

To make the above more precise, we write '$f_{S*}: W \rightarrow E$' for the semantically correct meaning function for S in group g. Keeping in mind that the meaning function is quasi-conceptually necessary in the sense of conceptual construction and creation by the group members, we arrive at this (omitting for simplicity relativization to group g and using the earlier notation in an unorthodox way but now adding FG explicitly):

(3) $FG((f_{S*}: W \rightarrow E) <-> (CA(g, f_{S*}: W \rightarrow E)))$

(3) directly mirrors the second part of the analysans of (CAT*) of Section 1 and instantiates the social sentence s in it by a (metalinguistic) sentence saying what the correct referential use of a predicate S in g is.

As before, CA means performative collective acceptance by the members of g, where performative acceptance is creative in the sense linguistic performatives in general are, although collective acceptance itself need not be linguistic in this context.

Corresponding to (3) we have rules of language, for instance *ought-to-be* and *ought-to-do* rules of the following kind (here stated in plain English):

(4) It ought to be the case that any full-fledged member of group g uses predicate S non-accidentally in accordance with (3).

(5) Every full-fledged member of community g ought to obey (3) when using S.

We must allow that a full-fledged member of g, even in ideal circumstances, fails to apply S fully in accordance with f_{S*} and (3) as well as (4) and (5). This is in part because of "meaning finitism": As each member of g must necessarily learn his concepts on the basis of a finite number of examples and because the context set W should ultimately be taken to be an open, indefinitely large set, f_{S*} will in general be only a partial function. Such a partial function codifies the referential use of a predicate in a group g, and it represents what is being taught to children and other novices. So characterized, S could be regarded as a kind of socially shared standard which is needed for successful communication and for a "commonable" language.

Returning to the case of social institutions and institutional social objects, the claim that they are reflexive can in virtue of what has been said be summarily analyzed by saying this: (6) A predicate (concept) S is reflexive if and only if (3) is true of it in g.

Because of the attitudes involved in collective acceptance CA we can also speak of *attitudinal, viz. attitude-dependent, reflexivity* here (recall my earlier elucidation of CA in terms of attitudes). What the claim of the reflexivity of social concepts involves is precisely attitudinal reflexivity. In our institutional example we thus can say in relation to reflexivity that if squirrel pelt is money, then it must be (collectively) accepted in g to be money (and conversely). Philosophers who have written about social institutions typically argue that money and similar examples satisfy what at best is a special case of (6). Thus, instead of collective acceptance they typically speak of belief only (see e.g. Bloor, 1997, p. 35). But belief as such is not the right notion, for belief at least in its standard sense is a passive state that does not create anything. The only notion of belief that qualifies is an acceptance notion of belief—one that entails acceptance. But acceptance does all the work here and other features of belief are irrelevant, and, furthermore, not all acceptance as true involves belief (see Tuomela, 2000, for discussion). Mere (mutual) belief may be needed for monetary activities, but that is a different story. Only collective acceptance can create the special institutional status that money, marriage, private property have and that, e.g. a president and a professor enjoy. Such institutional notions are in principle arbitrary in the sense that it is fully up to the group members to choose what they take to be their money etc. Institutions are thus dependent upon a group but are yet epistemically objective and last as long as collective acceptance lasts.

References

Bloor, D., 1997, *Wittgenstein, Rules and Institutions,* Routledge, London and New York

Lorini, E., Longin, D., Gaudou, B., and Herzig, A. 2009. "The Logic of Acceptance: Grounding Institutions on Agents' Attitudes". *Journal of Logic and Computation*, forthcoming

Tuomela, R., and Balzer, W. 1999. "Collective Acceptance and Collective Social Notions". *Synthese 117*, 175–205.

Tuomela, R. 2000. "Belief versus Acceptance". *Philosophical Explorations* 2, 122–37.

Tuomela, R. 2002. *The Philosophy of Social Practices: A Collective Acceptance View.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tuomela, R. 2007. *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View*. New York: Oxford University Press.