

〈Research Article〉

The Subconscious Complementarily Binary Acts of Foregrounding and Backgrounding: Toward an Ethic on the Basis of the View of Human Act as an Interlocking-Network

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Abstract

Toward an ethic on the basis of a new analysis of human act, I focus on the agent's subconscious complementarily binary acts, foregrounding and backgrounding, analyze their functions in acts more extensively than is conducted according to an oversimplified model of act such as a single-agented, single-purposed, simple bodily locomotive act, and finally, from this analysis, propose the entailments purporting that people who take the foregrounded aspect for the whole of the world are distracted from the backgrounded aspect by their desire, will, and determination in the oversimplified foregrounded acts and, therefore, that a new ethic should be explored by seeking for goodness through, and in, the complementarily binary acts as a whole and ultimately their possible preconditioning act.

Key Words: a theory of act, foregrounding, backgrounding, self-consciousness,
an interlocking-network worldview

1. Introduction

Approaches to human act vary in humanities and sciences. Behaviorists may translate human act into the externally observable characteristics which human observers' describe or observatory instruments can mechanically record. Anthropologists or human biologists may describe the agent's static or dynamic anatomical structures or physiological mechanisms. Both of them have been exploring extrinsic conditions of human act. Some theorists, however, have been interested in exploring its intrinsic conditions by analyzing the agent's self-conscious description of his or her act.¹⁾ My interest here is in this analysis and the preconditions of its results.

When I do something, I am not always describing what it is and/or what it is like. Without describing, either self-reflectively or to someone else, what I am doing I can do that. When I do

something, if I had to describe what I am doing, I would further have to describe this coincident act of describing. This requirement, if valid, would self-referentially continue *ad infinitum* and is therefore ultimately unable to be fulfilled.

However, in the course of my daily life, I may be expected to answer ---- if asked ---- what I am doing. Sometimes my answer might be ambiguous or even evasive. I might say, for example, “Nothing special.” Even so I could ---- on reflection ---- describe what I was doing if I were honest to myself. Hence when I am doing something I am able to be ready to describe it honestly if asked what it is. In this sense then we are conscious what we are doing.²⁾ My theoretical concern here is with this self-consciousness in our act and its preconditions.

Let me take an ordinary conversation as an example. Asked by my acquaintance what I am doing, I might say, “I am going to work” and if on the phone, “I am walking to the station on my way to work.” Descriptions here will vary but they suggest some hints about the nature of our self-consciousness. I may very well be simultaneously performing a number of activities in a multitude of social and temporal contexts, but my reply ---- issued without much deliberation ---- will tend to pick up, and focus on, those acts to which my present sense of purpose is currently focused on. Of course, if any given agent replies in this manner, it does not necessarily mirror their self-consciousness perfectly but yet it does seem to suggest that some parts of any given wider set of events occurring to an agent will often occupy the agent’s self-consciousness. In other words then it seems that some aspects of this whole ---- the wider set of events ---- is in the foreground and others retreat in the background. In effect, when I walk on the familiar route to the station as my daily business of commuting, I am inadvertently passing through the familiar landscape continuously appearing in front of me. What appears to me at that time is structured, both statically and dynamically, by the foreground and the background. Likewise, and concomitantly, what the agent is doing appears to his or her self-consciousness with these two structures. In the above-mentioned case, my going to the station to go to work is in the foreground of the self-consciousness of my acts and their other aspects are in the background. Our ordinary acts may appear in a single aspect when the agent is doing something with its direct purpose in view but on reflection the agent will be able to understand what he or she is consciously choosing to do and at the same time what he or she is subconsciously not choosing to do, even if he or she cannot completely enumerate those left to be unchosen.

In what follows I will explore the agent’s subconscious descriptions of his or her act in those two structures. For this purpose I will rather focus on those acts peripherally appearing to the agent such as non-agent-centered, half-intentional, non-locomotive, non-acquisitive, omissive, inactive, commissive, admmissive, or tolerative acts, that is, those which would hardly register at all in the memory of the agent, or, more positively put, those subconsciously intended consequences; which might often then, as a consequence, result in the agent refusing to accept under his or her responsibility depending on the social context.

2. A Criticism of a Theoretical Oversimplification of Acts

One often takes as an example of an act a single-agented, agent-centered, active, bodily, non-reciprocal, and non-omissive act in a socially isolated situation. A standard example would go, “When I wake up, I get out, go to the bathroom, wash my face” Even such a description under closer observation will be a socially multi-factored act in some specific historical context. Nevertheless, such a less interactive act in an isolated situation tends to be chosen as a starting point of theorizing on human act or the self-consciousness of our act.

Surely, if a theorist focuses on the act of getting out of the bed in that situation, he or she may describe that the agent is choosing for the purpose of getting out every other act the agent can choose. Every other act may be described by the agent as structurally subjugated to the act of getting out. There may be nobody else where the agent is getting out. Nor may there be any social disturbance against the act. The agent, just after waking up, may have nothing in view other than the act of getting out of bed. In contrast with a multiple-factored act, for example, joining a conference on the mobile phone while walking through a scramble crossing, the isolated and neurologically low-activated agent in a least social context could hardly be aware of what he or she is committed to doing positively other than the act of getting out. However, the agent would be able to understand on reflection that there is at least one act he or she is committed to omitting to do, leaving unchosen, or letting others do --- even if he or she cannot specify what it is.

Furthermore, a theory starting with a self-conscious description of a least social act by an isolated agent is misleading.

First, a theorist would hypothesize that the sentence type “I p(x)”, a type with a verb in the first person singular active, is a normal type of an act or an element of the complex reality. On reflection, however, the situation where someone is isolated from the others with few social relationships or contexts is an irregular type of an act. An agent’s physical simple motion is not necessarily an element of our act. The sentence type “I p(x) with persons X, Y, Z, ... in the interest of persons a, b, c, ... in social contexts t, u, v, ...” or “I p(x), p(y) and p(z) ... and at the same time omit doing q, r, s, ...” is perhaps normal. These seemingly complex type with multi-variables might not justifiably be broken down into a simple elementary type with a single variable. I can surely do the deed of standing aright or some other simple single-move bodily motion for its own sake. I also instruct a primer to do each simple form of bodily motion in order to be master of a complex and sophisticated array of acts. However, these two cases seem to me to suggest that we can focus on an aspect of the whole and practice it repeatedly without taking each and every one of its constituent parts into direct consideration.

Secondly, a theorist might advance the hypothesis that one could theoretically detach oneself from all the social relationships and contexts. We are, it seems, often faced with psychological conflict,

trying to isolate ourselves from others in order to determine by ourselves what to do. However, such isolation happens in the ordinary flow of time of our lives, say, some mid-night in some week, but not beyond or completely outside our lives. One could theoretically look upon oneself as an agent directly connected to the goal without considering anything else. However such view would arise from the agent's abstraction.

3. Omissive or Inactive Acts

Sometimes we intend to leave some act undone. For example, when a friend does not appear at the appointed time, we may sometimes choose not to leave but to wait. Also we sometimes intend to refuse to do something. For example, we may sometimes refuse to sign the contract. In those cases we will be able to describe what we are choosing not to do.³⁾

However, there are some other cases I would like to discuss with reference to our self-consciousness. First, when one is doing something, there are a set of acts that one physically or technically cannot do at the same time. One cannot stand and sit at the same time. We understand well in part, perhaps not fully, what we can physically or technically do and what we cannot. In this sense the agent has an idea what he or she is not choosing when he or she is doing something.

However it is dubious whether the agent has an idea what he or she is socially not choosing when he or she is doing something. An observer may describe what the agent is not doing under his or her social obligations but the here agent is not necessarily well aware what he or she is choosing not to do. Usually the agent's self-consciousness focuses primarily on what is being done, not what is being chosen not to do. Hence the agent could hardly enumerate or even describe what he or she is not doing other than what he cannot bodily do at the same time. Therefore the agent would not be ready to say that he or she is intending any of what he or she cannot describe. Surely the agent may admit that there are a number of acts he or she is not choosing for the purpose of what he or she chooses to do but he or she would not necessarily admit that he or she is choosing not to do what others describe he or she is not doing.

Out of choice, out of mind. The agent, notwithstanding, will be able to understand on reflection that there are a number of acts that he or she can choose to do which he or she is not choosing when he or she is doing something. The agent may not admit that he or she is not responsible for the acts but he or she is responsible for backgrounding them.

4. Admissive Acts

In general, we can hardly describe in the detail what we let others do. Even for a particular person with whom we are familiar we can hardly describe, unless in immediately close contact, those things ---- be they physical or social ---- which are in progress for that person at that time. Whatever someone else is doing something in some remote place, it is dubious whether we let him or her do it or not. We may say that we have nothing to do with whatever someone else is doing, unless we can specify who he or she is or what he or she is doing. Surely, if you are situated in a scramble crossing or if you are driving a car on a congested road, you are letting many anonymous others do something specific for the purpose of passing through. However in a usual unmarked situation we usually do not consider specifically what we let some unacquainted person in a remote place do and if you try, you will very likely find yourself unable to answer.

Despite our usual inattentiveness, how could we deny any social relation to any one either existent in time and place or ideally existent? Even in an isolated cell a prisoner, who can do nothing social in particular, surely lets a jailor do something related to him or her. Hence the agent will be able to understand on reflection that there are number of acts of letting someone else do something even if what the affected person or act is not readily identifiable. The crucial point here is that while the agent is not responsible for such an imaginable act in our legal system, he or she is responsible for backgrounding it.

5. Tolerative Acts

I think it unthinkable that I do something actively when an apple chances to hit me on the head. However if I repeatedly go to and fro under the tree in order to will apples falling on my head, I may mistakenly suppose that I was intending to lessen the slim chances of being struck by one. However if someone continues to have his or her partner beat him or her, is it mistakenly supposed that it is his or her passive act?⁴⁾

As in the acts discussed in the previous section, unless who does what to the agent can be specified, it may be ridiculous to allege that the agent has someone else do something to him or her when he or she is doing something. However, if the previous argument from a possible social relation were valid, I would propose that the agent will be able to understand on reflection that there are a number of acts of having someone else do something to him or her when he or she is doing something and that the agent is responsible for backgrounding those acts.

6. Reflexive Acts

We can see reflexivity in our mental acts such as restricting or disinhibiting ourselves as well as in our bodily acts such as bending our knee and raising our hand. Furthermore we will be well aware of reflexivity when we take a variety of social roles. As an actor plays the role of MacBeth, so we play the role of parent, child, leader, follower, superior, subordinate, etc and often a number of roles at the same time.

However, I would propose the following sentence type and its possible meaningfulness.

“x lets x (let x (let x ... ”

I could hardly imagine a specific example of a more than triply reflexive act I do but if there were an actor playing the role of actor, there could be an actor playing the role of the actor playing the role of actor. Hence I would not deny that I am backgrounding an array of multiply reflexive acts.

7. Multiple-layered Acts

We can ordinarily do a variety of prescriptive acts such as commandment, commission and instigation. As argued in the previous section, it is not easy to imagine of our own plural-layered prescriptive acts in our daily life. However, in a highly hierarchical organization one can find that a superior p_1 commits a subordinate p_2 to committing a subordinate p_3 to committing a subordinate p_4 ... And in that case the members of such an organization will act under some clearly documented stipulation. Hence, even if under no stipulation, the agent will be able to understand on reflection that there can be some concatenation of least commissive acts when he or she is doing something. *ut rex ita etiam humilissimus.*

8. Reciprocal and Collective Acts

There are a good number of well-known reciprocal acts such as sharing, loving, and exchanging, not least, speaking and hearing, selling and buying, and teaching and learning. Also good examples of collective acts can be found in sports and drills. However I would propose here reciprocal or collective acts of those acts discussed above, such as omissive, inactive, admissive and tolerative ones. If those arguments above were to some extent effective, they could be applied to the cases under the interactivity between two agents or among a number of agents. If the resultant picture of human act were to some extent imaginable, I would conclude that when we are doing something we are backgrounding most of our own omissive, inactive, admissive or tolerative acts whether they are done single-agentedly, reciprocally or collectively.

9. Foregrounding and Backgrounding

Foregrounding and backgrounding in representation are skills well-known to specialists in the field of visual arts but ordinary people would not name their acts by those words. However, the agent will be able to understand their one-tier abstracted acts as such if he or she comes to be aware of what I have argued the agent will be able to understand on reflection with relation to those omissive, inactive, admmissive and tolerative acts. In other words, one conclusion from the proposals I have made above is that the agent is foregrounding some, and backgrounding the others, of their acts when he or she is doing something and that he or she will be able to understand on reflection that he or she is doing so.

10. Preconditioning the Subconscious Binary Acts of Foregrounding and Backgrounding

It is still possible to question whether and to what extent an agent would in some sense be able to understand that he or she is doing the act another tier abstracted from the subconscious complementarily binary acts, foregrounding and backgrounding. I could still less imagine whether the agent is aware of his or her own agency in preconditioning those binary acts. However this act of preconditioning, a logical postulation from the argument above, is a great concern to some past practitioners in contemplating over one's own act; and, to a few of them, a problem to practically resolve.

11. Some Consequences of My Picture of Human Act: Temporality in Agency, an Interlocking–Network Worldview and a New Ethic

(1) Apropos of temporality in agency it is to be concluded from the proposals above that (i) the subconscious act of foregrounding coincides with that of backgrounding since they are complementary; (ii) the foregrounded acts do not necessarily continue for the same time duration as the backgrounded acts do; (iii) neither of them necessarily continues for the same time duration as the agent's self-consciousness does; (iv) one's involvement in another's foregrounded or backgrounded act does not necessarily continue for the same time duration as the former's self-consciousness does.

(2) We are not merely an actor of a single-agented, single-purposed locomotive act but rather an interactor of a multiple-agented, multiple-purposed, physical and social interaction. We are at most one of the nodes interlocking the whole of the interactive network. In the previous arguments readers would probably have taken the agent and the patient all to be human but the distinction in agency between human and non-human is no absolute boundary.

(3) To be a good person, or to acquire goods and prevent bads, through and in the foregrounded acts is a serious matter for people who take the foregrounded aspect for the whole of the world. However they are distracted from the backgrounded aspect by their desire, will, and determination in the oversimplified foregrounded acts. Therefore a new ethic should be explored by seeking for goodness through and in the complementarily binary acts as a whole and ultimately their possible preconditioning act.

Corollary 1: Monism is an illusion.

Corollary 2: An all-to-all, all-by-all self-rule, not monarchy or oligarchy, well corresponds in structure to an actual totality of people's foregrounded and backgrounded acts.

Corollary 3: Happiness realises itself only in that totality.

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【Notes】

- 1) Most ethicists have been interested not in acts in themselves but in the mental events, such as will and motivation, which precedes them or only in their logical preconditions (e.g. MacIntyre (1967); Frankena (1973); Singer (ed.) (1991)). Some have suggested cracks in those mainstream approaches (Sidgwick (1907) 201-4; Moore (1903) 142-182; Ross (1939) 192-5;) but others have argued against their presuppositions (Prichard (1945); Ryle (1949) 61-80; 86-7; 106-111; Austin (1956-7); Anscombe (1958; 1963); Hampshire (1959) esp. 92-96; Hart (1960); D'Arcy (1963)); and especially, Hiromatsu pointed to a new approach (1992a; 1992b, esp. 353-4) with sociological and psychological predecessors (Parsons et al. (1951) ; Berger and Luckman (1966) 33-61; 65-70; Gilligan (1982)).
- 2) Hampshire (1959) 92-96; 169-170.
- 3) D'Arcy (1963) 40-57.
- 4) Here I am not committed to the justifiability of violence or slavery but rather I would add some other factors such as the patient's internalization of further sanction and the perpetrator's mobilization of the patient's forbearance.

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前景化と後景化という相補的対下意識行為 — 一人間行為を糾合網状態と見る考えに基づく倫理に向けて —

瀧 章 次

【要旨】

行為者の下意識において遂行される相補的対下行為、前景化と後景化という行為、これに焦点を当て、通常の方法論において提出される過度に単純化されたモデルとしての、単一行為者による単一目的の単純な身体的、移動運動行為とは異なる諸行為における上記下意識下の行為の働きを分析し、その分析結果から考察し得る含意を提示し、拠って、人間行為の新しい分析に基づく倫理への展望を示す。具体的には、前景化されている行為のみを自己の世界像とする錯誤を指摘し、自己、他己相互に前景化、後景化された行為の総体を対象とする倫理を要請する。

キーワード：行為論、前景化（行為）、後景化（行為）、自己意識、糾合網状の世界観