

## **Collective intentionality and the constitution view. An essay on acting together**

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### **Abstract**

One of the currently most discussed themes in the philosophy of action is whether there is some kind of collective intention that explains what groups do independent of what the individuals who make up the group intend and do. One of the main obstacles to solve this problem is that on the one hand collective intentionality is no simple summation, aggregate, or distributive pattern of individual intentionality (the Irreducibility Claim), while on the other hand collective intentionality is in the heads of the participating individuals, so to speak, and so it is owned by each of the separate individuals who make up the group (the Individual Ownership Claim). The claims are contradictory and until now no satisfactory solution how to reconcile them has been found. In this article I argue that the constitution view, like the one developed by Lynne R. Baker, can provide a way to sidestep the contradiction. Just as a statue as such is constituted by the marble it is made of but has characteristics that are different from the marble (a statue has a head and legs, while the marble hasn't; while the marble is stony and the statue as such isn't), I argue that a group is constituted by its members and that a group on the one hand and its members on the other hand have different characteristics. This is possible because group and members are on different levels. Then there is no longer a contradiction between the Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim, for the former claim concerns the group level and the latter claim concerns the level of the group members. This explains that a group can have intentions that are no simple summation, aggregate, or distributive patterns of the intentions of its members and that group intentions can be different from if not contradictory to what the individual members taken together intend.

### **Keywords**

collective intention, collective intentionality, collective action, shared agency, shared action, shared intention, joint action, joint commitment, joint intention, plural subject, group intention, we-intention, we-mode, interpretivism, constitution view, Baker, Bratman, Gilbert, Searle, Tollefsen, Tuomela.

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### *0. Introduction*

One of the currently most discussed themes in the philosophy of action is whether there is some kind of group intention, collective intention, shared intention or how you would call it, and, if there is, how to explain such a common intention. If an individual plans an action like going to run this afternoon, we say that she *intends* to do so or has such an *intention*. But what if several persons plan to do something together like playing tennis or performing Verdi's opera *Rigoletto*? Since you cannot do this alone, can we say then that there is a kind of common intention and, if so, what is it then? Several answers to this question have been proposed. Especially those by Michael Bratman, Margaret Gilbert, John Searle and Raimo Tuomela are considered important.

In what follows, I'll use the label "collective intentionality" for referring to the phenomenon of common intentionality, in line with the practice that has come into use since Searle introduced it in his 1990 paper "Collective Intentions and Actions". Actually, the label is a bit confusing, since it can refer both to the phenomenon of common intentionality in general and to Searle's version. In this essay I'll use "collective intentionality" in the general sense, unless I explicitly refer to Searle's interpretation of the concept.

In section 1 of this essay, I present the main views on collective intentionality and I show that they don't reconcile the two contradictory claims that are at the heart of the debate on collective intentionality: The Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim. In section 2, I introduce the constitution view developed by Lynne R. Baker as a way to sidestep the contradiction between the two claims. In section 3, I argue that groups are entities of their own independent of the individuals who make up these groups. In section 4, I explain with the help of Baker's constitution view how this is possible and how groups are constituted by their members and how the Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim can be reconciled. In section 5 I discuss how the views on collective intentionality developed by Bratman, Gilbert, Searle and Tuomela fit into my approach. In section 6 I add yet some concluding remarks.

### *1. The main views on collective intentionality*

1.1 In Bratman's approach to collective intentionality, a typical case is that several individuals have agreed to do a task or another activity together and each individual has the intention to do his part to reach the shared goal and knows that the others will do their parts as well. Moreover the individual action plans mesh. Then we can say that these individuals have a *shared intention*, so Bratman. This must be contrasted with the situation that each of these individuals performs a task without consulting the others and without appointing together how to coordinate their actions. Even if they happen to do the same thing, then they don't share an intention, but they have the same intention at most. So we can say – my interpretation – that in Bratman's view a shared intention is a conglomeration of coordinated individual intentions. (Bratman, 1999; 2014; see for more details my 2016).

Gilbert argues that we need something more than a shared goal, pursued by co-ordinated individual actions, when we want to explain a group activity. According to her, if two or more individuals plan to do a task or another activity together, and act accordingly, they participate "in an activity of a special kind, one whose goal is the goal of a *plural subject*, as opposed to the shared personal goal of the participants." Acting together "involves an 'our goal' as opposed to two or more 'my goals'." (Gilbert, 1996, p. 187; italics mine). The agents concerned have a *joint commitment*, so an obligation to contribute honestly to the activity they have (implicitly or explicitly) agreed upon to perform. Each individual can cancel the obligation to contribute to the common task only with the consent of all other participants. (Gilbert 1996; 2014; again see for more details my 2016).

According to Searle, *collective intention* – so what for Bratman was "shared intention" and for Gilbert "joint commitment" – transcends the individual minds. "[C]ollective intentions expressed in the form 'we intend to do such-and-such', and, 'we are doing such-and-such' are ... primitive phenomena and cannot be analyzed in terms of individual intentions ..." Approaches like those by Bratman and Gilbert, so Searle, or the one by Tuomela (see below) have an important defect: For them collective intention and with it group action is a kind of summation of individual intentions or behaviour. In Searle's view, group intention, and with it group action, is a phenomenon of its own, although it is performed by the actions of individual agents. The existence of the group is present in the individual contributions to a collective intention that is not present in the individual action *as such*, although the individual action does contribute to it. Group intentions are ideas that exist in the minds of the individual

agents, but they are performed by means of what the agents individually do. (Searle 1990; my 2016)

Tuomela then, to complete this master quartet, contends that agents can have different types of intention. In the case of individuals working together, what is important is what he calls *we-intentions*. Tuomela's approach is quite technical and difficult to characterize in a few words, but for this article it is enough to say that a we-intention is a kind of mental state or "mode" an agent has when co-operating with others or intending to do so. When acting alone an individual agent is in an I-mode (mental state), but when deciding for some reason or another to pursue a common goal together with others, agents switch to the we-mode and they have then a kind of we-intention or joint intention to perform the planned joint action together. (Tuomela 2007)

1.2 So far my summary of the four major approaches to collective intentionality. There are more such approaches and, like the four just discussed, they are all different in relevant respects. Nevertheless, they all start, implicitly or explicitly from two claims. These are, following Schweikard and Schmid (2020):

- Collective intentionality is no simple summation, aggregate, or distributive pattern of individual intentionality (the *Irreducibility Claim*).
- Collective intentionality is had by the participating individuals, and all the intentionality an individual has is their own (the *Individual Ownership Claim*).

This is what most approaches to collective intentionality have in common and what they use as often implicit starting points for their discussions. However, as can be seen in the four approaches just mentioned, the answers to the question what the collectiveness of collective intentionality involves can be very different, despite these shared starting points. Again following Schweikard and Schmid (2020), some, like Bratman, see the collectiveness in the *content* of the intention: individual agents strive to do the same together. Others see the collectiveness in the *mode* of the intention: In Tuomela's approach the agent switches from an individual action mode to a we-mode, when planning to perform an action together with other agents. Again others see the collectiveness in the acting *subject*, like Gilbert does: for her a group is a plural subject with its own collective intentional state called joint commitment. Searle's approach is a kind of mix between the mode-approach and the subject-approach: we-intentions are not individual intentions put together (mode-switch), but together with the mode-switch also the bearer (=subject) of the intention switches from the individual to the group.

1.3 A quite different approach is the one proposed by Deborah Perron Tollefsen: Ascribing collective intentionality is a stance in Dennett's sense and one doesn't need to suppose an intentional acting subject. It's a way we interpret what happens, and so this approach is called interpretivism.

According to Tollefsen (2015) we don't ascribe intentions to the brain, even though the thinking process takes place there. No, we ascribe intentions to the whole person, and that's what we do when we try to interpret, understand or explain the actions and/or behaviour performed by individuals. When we want to understand why an individual acts in a certain way, we don't look in the brain in order to know what his or her intentions are but we derive them from the actions and the situation in which the individual acts. Knowing what a person does is "attributing intentional states" to her. We ask "What are the constitutive features of our practice that account for its explanatory power? That is, what assumptions do we need to make about an agent in order to interpret her behavior successfully? If interpretation is successful, then the assumptions we make about an agent in the process of interpreting her are justified." In order

to know why someone acts, we don't examine a person's brain states, so the body, but we consider the person that has been constituted by this body and see whether we can ascribe relevant intentions to this person.

Following Dennett, this approach can also be applied to groups, so Tollefsen. Dennett developed the "intentional stance". "When we adopt the intentional stance toward an entity, we attempt to explain and predict its behavior by treating it as if it were a rational agent whose actions are governed by its beliefs, intentions, and desires", so Tollefsen, interpreting Dennett. But if this is correct, then we can apply the intentional stance also to groups. Groups are constituted by the individuals that make up a group. Moreover, when we ascribe an intention to an agent, we don't look for the way it is formed in his or her brain, as said, but we ascribe the intention to the person as a whole. In the same way, even though a group hasn't a kind of brain (and mind) as an equivalent to a person's brain (or mind), nonetheless we can ascribe intentions to a group and treat it *as if* it has. We simply must consider the group as an entity formed by its members and treat it as a whole, and consider this entity as a rationally acting agent, so Tollefsen. By doing so, we can ascribe intentions and actions to groups. (Tollefsen 2015, pp. 97-99)

## 2. *The constitution view*

2.1 Before I'll assess Tollefsen's approach to the problem of collective intentionality, let me first go back to the two Claims and the four main approaches presented above. In essence the problem of collective intentionality is the question what it involves: What does it mean for us to intend as a group or in general as a collective unity? But if the answers to this question are founded on the Irreducibility Claim and on the Individual Ownership Claim then basically the problem is insoluble, since the claims are contradictory, as also Schweikard and Schmid say. The Irreducibility Claim says that collective intentionality is a collective (for instance group) phenomenon that cannot be reduced to individual intentionality (or actually to what kind of individual phenomenon ever). The Individual Ownership Claim says, however, that collective intentionality is a kind of individual intentionality. Bratman's content approach, Tuomela's mode approach and Gilbert's subject approach consider that collective intentionality can be derived from what individuals intend and then do, but this doesn't yet make collective intentionality a phenomenon of its own, as the Irreducibility Claim states. Searle's approach, on the other hand, considers collective intentionality as a phenomenon of its own, but he doesn't make clear how a mode-switch to collective intentionality relates to what individuals do. So in order to get a grip on the problem of collective intentionality we must either delete one of the claims, and then the Irreducibility Claim is the first choice, or we must show how the claims can be reconciled with each other. Since I think that collective intentionality is a phenomenon of its own, indeed, and that it is not a simple summation, aggregate, or distributive pattern of individual intentionality, in this essay I'll make a proposal how both claims can be reconciled.

One option to deal with the incompatibility of the claims is Tollefsen's approach to the problem of collective intentionality. Actually, Tollefsen simply avoids the question whether collective intentionality is a phenomenon of its own or whether it can be reduced in some way to individual actions. In my words, I would formulate Tollefsen's approach this way: In order to solve the methodological question how to investigate collective intentionality we don't need to solve the metaphysical question what kind of phenomenon collective intentionality is. As I have made clear in my 1996 (chapter V), methodological questions are on a different level than metaphysical questions. They cannot be used to solve metaphysical questions. However, for solving methodological questions it is enough to *ascribe* certain characteristics to the phenomenon one wants to investigate, and as long as this ascription is reasonable and as long as it works, it's okay, at least for a start if one doesn't know yet enough about the

characteristics of the phenomenon one wants to study, and afterwards, the justification of the ascription is in the result. As Tollefsen says (see above): “If interpretation is successful, then the assumptions we make about an agent in the process of interpreting her are justified.” On these grounds Tollefsen can ascribe collective intentionality to groups, without assuming that groups are actually acting subjects. And that’s what she does in her approach. Ascribing collective intentionality to groups is for her a stance in Dennett’s sense. In this way she doesn’t need to solve the metaphysical question what collective intentions fundamentally are and she avoids the incompatibility of the Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim, while at the same time she can successfully make sense of the idea of collective intentionality and so investigate problems in this field.

In this way, the question whether to see the collectiveness of collective intentionality in the content, in the mode or in the subject of the intention becomes irrelevant in Tollefsen’s approach. This question makes only sense if the collective object of study is seen as made up of individuals. Then one has to deal with the Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim and one has to reconcile these claims. But by simply *assuming* that a collectivity is a subject of its own with its own characteristics, basically independent of the characteristics of the individuals that make up the group, Tollefsen circumvents these claims and so she circumvents the need to reconcile them.

As for the latter, I think that this is one of the main advantages of Tollefsen’s approach: avoiding the conflict between the two irreconcilable claims that seem to be fundamental to the collective intentionality problem. In this sense it’s a step forward compared with the different types of approaches discussed here before. Nevertheless, I think that we can get a step further by not just *assuming* that a collectivity is a subject of its own but by *showing* that it is. By doing so we give Tollefsen’s interpretivism an objective foundation. Then we avoid the incompatibility of both claims and at the same time solve the metaphysical question what kind of phenomenon collective intentionality is and treat it as a subject of its own with characteristics independent of the individuals that make up the collectivity. To my mind, the ground that a group is really a phenomenon of its own and no simple summation, aggregate, or distributive pattern of individuals is provided by the so-called constitution view. There are several versions of the constitution view. In order to illustrate my point, I’ll use the version developed by Lynne Rudder Baker (2000). Baker used the constitution view in order to solve the question what the relationship is between my being a person and my being a body. However, we can also use it for answering the question what the relation is between a group and its members and for demonstrating that groups (and generally collectivities as well) are subjects of their own.

2.2 I’ll first explain how according to Baker a human person is constituted by the human body, although the person is not identical to the body that constitutes her. Then I’ll show how we can apply this approach to our problem. Baker uses the constitution view for making clear what makes a *human* person different from her body, and for this, so Baker, we must know *both* what makes a person as a person different from the body she is *and* what makes a person a *human* person. In the present context in which we want to know what makes a group different from its members only Baker’s answer to the first question is relevant.

To answer this question, let’s look at Michelangelo’s famous statue of David. Actually, it is not more than a piece of marble, which Baker calls Piece. (Baker 2000, ch.2) Moreover, this piece of marble is not simply a lump of stone but it is also a work of art, representing the Jewish King David. However, so Baker, Piece and David are not identical. In a world without art, for instance in a dog world, Piece would exist as a piece of marble but not as David. In such a world Piece would exist but David wouldn’t. On the other hand, David cannot exist without Piece. If Michelangelo would have died after he had bought Piece but before he had made

David, Piece would have existed but David hadn't. But once David exists, he has properties that Piece has not. David, so Baker, "could not exist without being a statue. So, David has a property ... that Piece lacks" (2000, 30). And David has a head and arms, which Piece hasn't. It's David (the person we see in the marble) not Piece that represents the Jewish king. And it's not David that has the property "stony" but Piece has. So David and Piece are not identical, but because David cannot exist without Piece (while Piece can exist without David), we say that Piece *constitutes* David, so Baker. In the same way we must think the relationship between my body and me as a person. I as a person cannot exist without my body, but my body and I are not identical: My body constitutes the person I am. As a person I have properties which my body hasn't. As a person I can be a father, a philosopher, I can hope that something happens, I can help others, and so on, which are properties which my body cannot have. On the other hand, my body can have properties which we usually don't ascribe to the person. If we say that "she is a dark-skinned person" we mean a person *with* a dark skin, in the sense that her body has a dark skin, although this can have consequences for the person she is, of course. In the same way the body can break a leg, although the person cannot, even if it has serious consequences for the person she is. The body can have one kidney and this need not to have any consequence for the person she is (she can even have been born with one kidney and never know it). So a person and her body are different things. However, obviously, there is a relationship, for a person cannot exist without her body.

After having described with words what constitution is, Baker elaborates a quite technical definition of constitution in logical terms. In order to avoid here a detailed and complicated exposition, I want to summarize her idea of constitution in this way (see Baker 2000, 39-44): *y* is constituted by *x* at time *t* (or during a certain period T) if

- a) *x* and *y* exist at the same time *t*.
- b) *x* and *y* are spatially coincident at *t*.
- c) *y* is constituted by *x* in virtue of certain circumstances C. For example, David exists because Michelangelo carved David from Piece. A piece of paper constitutes a marriage license in virtue of certain legal conventions. It is in virtue of its evolutionary history that a particular conglomerate of cells constitutes a human heart.
- d) The relevant background circumstances B are present. So David is only a work of art, if there is an art world. Three persons are not an advisory committee of a government, when they happen to play in a football team against a team that consists of several cabinet ministers and other players.
- e) If B and C are present, it's necessary that *y* is constituted by *x*.
- f) It is possible that *x* exists at *t* while *y* doesn't exist at *t*.
- g) If *y* is immaterial, then *x* is also immaterial.

Although Baker is more detailed in her explanation of what constitution is, I think that this is enough for understanding what constitution is about.

What does this mean for the idea of collective intentionality? This becomes clear if we apply Baker's idea of constitution to collectivities. When applying a-g here by way of illustration, I think of groups, so of not too big collectivities, in the first place, but basically we can see any collectivity as constituted by its members (which I'll not further discuss here). Then, if we take a group, say a committee, a sports team, a group of workers constructing a road by order of their employer, etc., such a group is made up of several individuals who constitute the group in the sense just indicated, for:

- a) and b) The group members make up the group during a certain time. For example, the team exists during the match and some short time before and after; the group of road workers consists during the working hours.

- c) There is a rule that says who belongs to the group. For example, the coach determines who belongs to the team. The law says who belongs to the advisory committee of the government. The employer has hired the road workers.
- d) The team belongs to a club, the club is a member of the national football association, sport belongs to the culture of the country. Or for the government committee: There is a state, there are laws, there is a government, a parliament, etc.
- e) If the players accept the rules of the club and the league and the other way round, as a consequence they are an official team that can take part in the league's competition.
- f) It's not necessary that John or Marie play in the team. They could have decided to choose other hobbies. The road construction workers could have chosen other jobs (as individuals). A person asked for the government committee can decline the appointment.
- g) Not relevant here.

Once a group has been established, it becomes an entity of its own that has characteristics independent of the individual characteristics of the group members put together. One consequence is that it is not necessary that a group consists of the same individual members during its existence. New members can be added (if the group rules allow) and old members can leave and nevertheless it remains the same group. On the other hand it is possible that exactly the same individuals constitute different groups that are independent of each other. So John, Pete, Anna and Marie can make up a government advisory team and at the same time be members of an athletics club and form there a mixed 4x400 meters relay team that keeps its activities strictly separated from what the government advisory committee does.

### *3. Groups as entities of their own*

As said, a group can have characteristics independent of the individual characteristics of the group members put together. A trivial example is that a group can be big or small, but this doesn't mean that its members are big or small. Many groups have a kind of structure with positions and roles held by the members, but this doesn't say anything about the members itself. A certain member can hold a certain position in a group, like being the secretary, but then she *holds* a position, and it *isn't so that she is* the position. The position remains when this member gives up her task as secretary and leaves the group, or when she just becomes its president. I think this point is clear and doesn't need further explanation. More interesting are cases like that someone can be a member of a group without agreeing with the goals of the group, or that a group can take a decision that is against the view of the majority of its members. An example of the former is the case of someone who joins a group because it is good for his career, or because she likes or loves a member of the group, or just because she needs company, etc., but in fact doesn't care about the goal of the group or even hates it. These things happen, more often than you may think. However, the case that a group can take a decision that is against the view of the majority of its members goes to the heart of the problem I am discussing in this essay, and therefore I want to give it a bit more attention.

Take this case, discussed by List and Pettit (2013, pp. 45-46). They call it the "discursive dilemma": "[I]magine an expert panel that has to give advice on global warning. ... The panel seeks to form judgments on the following propositions (and their negations):

- Global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels are above 6500 million metric tons of carbon per annum (proposition 'p').
- If global carbon dioxide emissions are above this threshold, then the global temperature will increase by at least 1.5 degrees Celsius over the next three decades (proposition 'if p then q').
- The global temperature will increase by at least 1.5 degrees Celsius over the next three decades (proposition 'q').

The three propositions are complex factual propositions on which the experts may reasonably disagree. Suppose the experts' judgments are shown in Table 1, all individually consistent. ...

**Table 1. A discursive dilemma**

	Emissions above threshold? (p?)	If p then temperature increase? (if p then q?)	Temperature increase? (q?)
Individual 1	True	True	True
Individual 2	True	False	False
Individual 3	False	True	False
Majority	<b>True</b>	<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>

Given the judgments in Table 1, a majority of experts judges that emissions are above the relevant threshold ('p'), a majority judges that, if they are above this threshold, then the temperature will increase by 1.5 degrees Celsius ('if p then q'), and yet a majority judges that there will be no temperature increase (not 'q')." (List and Pettit, 2013, pp. 45-46; the table has been slightly adapted) List and Pettit conclude then that "a majority voting on interconnected propositions may lead to inconsistent group judgments even when individual judgments are fully consistent ..." (p. 46). Although this is true, in my context I want to give the example a wider interpretation. To my mind the case shows that what groups do and what individuals do are different things and are on a different level. Groups are not simple aggregates of individuals. That's what we see when we explicitly ask group members to vote on what to do. I'll make this clear with an example that I have adapted from a blog that I have written a few years ago on this issue.

Tom, Dick and Harry take a walk together through the countryside and have to cross a pasture with cows. Then Tom says: "I think that we can better walk round the pasture for I see a bull over there." Dick agrees, but then he says: "I cannot see it well, but I think that the bull is tied to a pole, so let's cross the pasture. I am tired and want to be home as soon as possible." "You are wrong", Tom replies, "and even if the bull is tied up, I don't want to take the risk. What do you think, Harry?" Harry, a farmer, says: "As far as I can see, the bull runs free, but if we keep our distance, we don't need to be afraid. Maybe the bull will look at us, but he will keep away. So, let's take the shortest path and cross the pasture." However, since Tom, Dick and Harry don't come to an agreement what to do, they decide to vote on the issue. You find the views of the walkers and what they want to do in Table 2.

**Table 2. A group dilemma**

	afraid of bulls wants to avoid the bull (1)	bull is tied to a pole (2)	wants to walk through the pasture (3)
Tom	yes	no	no
Dick	yes	yes	yes
Harry	no	no	yes
Majority	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>yes</b>



As we see in Table 2, a majority wants to avoid the bull, because they are afraid of bulls (column 1). Moreover, a different majority thinks that the bull is not tied to a pole, which means that it is not safe to cross the pasture. Therefore, one would expect that the group decides to walk round the pasture. Nevertheless, a majority decides to cross the pasture, just because Harry, being a farmer, thinks that they can avoid the bull even when they cross the pasture. The cases just discussed are instances of a general case, made famous by Lewis A. Kornhauser and Lawrence G. Sager (1993). In order to be complete and because it gives a little different view of the problem under discussion (see List and Pettit, 2013, pp. 43-47), I'll describe also this case. For practical reason, I'll follow the description by List and Pettit (2013, p. 44):

“Suppose a three-member court has to make a decision in a breach-of-contract case. The court seeks to make judgments on the following propositions:

- The defendant was contractually obliged not to do a certain action (the first premise).
- The defendant did that action (the second premise).
- The defendant is liable for breach of contraction (the conclusion).

According to legal doctrine, obligation and action are jointly necessary and sufficient for liability; that is, the conclusion is true if and only if both premises are true. Suppose, as shown in Table 3, judge 1 believes both premises to be true; judge 2 believes the first but not the second premise to be true; and judge three believes the second but not the first to be true. Then each premise is accepted by majority of judges, yet only a minority, that is, judge 1, individually considers the defendant liable.”

	Obligation?	Action?	Liable?
Judge 1	True	True	True
Judge 2	True	False	False
Judge 3	False	True	False
Majority	<b>True</b>	<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>

(From List and Pettit (2013), p. 44)

So far List and Pettit, following Kornhauser and Sager. In Table 3 the defendant is considered not liable. This is so, because the general conclusion is made up by adding the individual conclusion of the judges (1x “True” against 2x “False”). However, if the judges vote first on the separate premises and then use the results of these votes for their conclusion, they'll judge that the defendant is guilty (see third row: Obligation=True + Action=True, which makes Liable=True).

*4. Groups are constituted by their members*

I have yet described a somewhat difference case in my blog “Government dilemmas” (2015), but let's go on and ask what these examples bring to us. To my mind, what these cases exemplify is not only that what a group does and what the individuals who make up the group do are basically different things. A group is an entity of its own. A group is constituted by its members, as we have seen, and by this and because of this it has characteristics, which are not a simple summation, aggregate, or distributive pattern of the characteristics of the members that constitute the group (see the Irreducibility Claim). A group and its members are on

different *levels*. Each level has its own characteristics and in a way each level can act independently of what the other level does. I want to explain how this can happen with a very different example, namely the current of a river. A river is an element in a landscape consisting of a bed filled with water that streams through the bed: the stream or current. The current as such consists of individual water molecules that on the average move into one direction. However, it doesn't need to be so that all molecules at each moment move into the main direction. Individual molecules can even move into the opposite direction, for example because they are in a whirl. But on the average the molecules follow the direction of the main stream (that's just why this stream exists). If we now want to explain why the river streams this way or that way, why it meanders in this direction or another direction, why the rivers streams fast or slowly, or whatever a river scientist wants to know about how a river streams, he doesn't study the behaviour or the separate water molecules that constitute the river, but he takes the stream of the river as an entity of its own with its own characteristics. It's not the water molecules that stream but the current that does, and there is a difference between the behaviour (movements) of the water molecules that make up the current and the current itself. Attraction, bumping etc. are activities ascribed to molecules and not to currents and altogether this makes that a river streams, but in no way, anyhow, the streaming of the river can be ascribed to the individual molecules, which can move in opposite directions, as said. On the other hand, drop, speed, discharge, etc. are ascribed to river currents. So we must distinguish the level of the river current, which is studied by river scientists, and the level of the water molecules, which is studied by physicists and chemists. In the same way, we can distinguish the group (upper level) from the individuals that constitute the group (lower level). Once we understand this, we can see that the individuals that constitute a group can have their own intentions and other ideas of how the group should function and what the group must do, but that nevertheless the group, which is constituted by the individual intentions of its member, can have an intentionality of its own. Seen this way, the Irreducibility Claim and Individual Ownership Claim are no longer contradictory for they refer to different levels. The Irreducibility Claim applies to the upper level (group level), while the Individual Ownership Claim applies to the lower level (level of the individual group members). But as we see have seen, the group level is not independent from the lower level of the group members, but it is constituted by it. *This makes, for instance, that the group intentions, desires, etc. on the upper level are constituted by what the group members on the lower level intend, desire, etc.* In this way, for example, in the case of the judges, the court's decision is or can be different from what the majority of the individual judges decide, but the court's decision cannot exist independently from the individual decisions of the judges that make up the group.

Groups are constituted by their members, and likewise group intentionality is constituted by the intentions of the members that constitute the group. Above we have seen that for Tollefsen ascribing intentionality to a group actually is a matter of taking a methodological stance towards a group in Dennett's sense. It's a way to interpret what a group does and a means for explaining its actions without reducing the group actions to the individual actions of its members. However, by showing that a group is *constituted* by its members in Baker's sense, I have made clear that ascribing intentionality to a group is not merely a stance but that it has a metaphysical foundation. So, Tollefsen's approach is based on what really is the case. In the sense just explained groups exist. They are real, for they are the consequence of purposeful, intentional individual actions. How else could it be? If groups weren't real social phenomena, we couldn't explain, for instance, how a sports team can become champion, if the members that make up the team at the beginning of the season are not the same members that make up the team at the end of the season (or for a part). For each time a team member would have been replaced by a new member, we would have a different team. But just as we don't get a new car, when its tyres are replaced, we don't get a new team if a member is replaced. A car is

constituted by its parts and so is the team. That a team becomes champion is the consequence of purposeful and intentional actions by the team members but as such these individual actions aren't group actions. A team can play a match because its actions are constituted by the individual actions of its players, but these don't need to be the same players all the time.

##### *5. How other views on collective intentionality fit into my approach*

We have seen so far that collective intentions are constituted by what the individual agents who constitute the collectivity concerned intend. This seems to suggest that I reject the approaches by Bratman, Gilbert, Searle and Tuomela discussed above. However, although a collective intention is constituted by individual intentions, the fact remains that we must fill in the idea of collective intentionality in a certain way and for this we need approaches like those developed by Bratman, Gilbert, Searle or Tuomela, or which other approach you prefer.

Above, I summarized Searle's approach in this way: "Group intentions are ideas that exist in the minds of the individual agents, but they are performed by means of what the agents individually do." In a sense it's also what Bratman, Gilbert and Tuomela maintain, each in his or her own way. We can link this with my constitution approach in this way: Although collective intentionality exists on a higher level – say level 1 – there is a basic level – level 0 – that constitutes the higher level. Just as David, the statue, does not exist without Piece, the marble, collective intentionality does not exist without the group-oriented intentions of the individual agents. It's here that the approaches developed by Bratman, Gilbert and Tuomela, but also the one developed by Searle, come into play. They can be seen as approaches at level 0.

However, as it happens, usually it is assumed – at least implicitly – that there is only one way to fill in the idea of collective intentionality and that the question is to find out what it is like. But why should there be only one type of collective intention? Why cannot there exist different kinds of collective intentionality next to each other at the same time? Groups are structured in many ways. Some groups are loosely structured entities that hardly can be called groups, like a few passers-by who cooperate in order to rescue a person from drowning. Other groups, are organised for a longer time in order to execute a task. Again other groups have a permanent, maybe hierarchical structure and when a member leaves he or she is replaced by someone else. Some groups have an open membership, other ones have a fixed number of members. And so on. I don't need to explain. If so, why wouldn't it be possible that there are different types of collective relations characterised by different kinds of collective intentionality for different types of cooperation? So, Bratman's idea of shared intention describes better a kind of relatively loose cooperation between people, while Gilbert's joint commitment, and maybe more so collective intention in Searle's sense, fits more structured kinds of cooperation better. Seen this way it's not the question which approach of collective intentionality is the right one, be it the one proposed by Bratman, Gilbert, Tuomela or Searle, or who else has come with an idea what it is like. In some cases collective behaviour can best be explained by Bratman's approach, in other cases Gilbert's approach is better and in again other cases Searle's answer is best or a type of collective intention developed by Tuomela. Seen this way the question is which type of collective intentionality fits the situation to be described or explained best. My view is that collective intentionality can have different expressions and can take different shapes.

##### *6. Concluding remarks*

Schweikard and Schmid (2020) state that the debate on collective intentionality is characterized by the presence of two contradictory claims, the Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim, and that the problem is how to bring these claims into line with each other. In this essay I have shown how these claims can be reconciled, namely with the help of the constitution theory as developed by Lynne Rudder Baker. However, if the relationship

between group and members is a matter of constitution, actually then the possibility of collective intentionality is not exceptional at all, but it is an instance of a general phenomenon. In fact, constitution is something perfectly normal. Statues are constituted by the material they are made of (of course, under certain conditions like those I have discussed above); in a natural way rivers are constituted by water molecules; and so on. And in the same way groups are constituted by its members. By this process of constitution, what is “higher”, on level 1, gets other properties and characteristics than what is “lower”, on level 0. Once this has become clear, we can move our attention from the problem how to reconcile the Irreducibility Claim and the Individual Ownership Claim to the problem what kinds of collective intentionality there are and which kinds of collective intentionality apply to which kinds of human cooperation.

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