DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN SCIENZE FILOLOGICO-LETTERARIE,
STORICO-FILOSOFICHE E ARTISTICHE

CICLO XXX

Dimensions of shared agency

In search of a Group Level Account in Social Ontology

Coordinatrice:
Chiar.ma Prof.ssa Beatrice Centi

Tutor:
Chiar.mo Prof. Italo Testa

Dottoranda:
Giulia Lasagni

2014/2017

Le dimensioni della *shared agency*. Una sintesi

La ricerca, dal titolo *Dimensions of shared agency. In search of a group level account in Social Ontology*, indaga il tema dell'azione condivisa nel dibattito dell'Ontologia Sociale contemporanea, concentrandosi sulla teoria dell'azione e sulle implicazioni ontologiche dei diversi modelli esplicativi. L'indagine ricostruisce (Capitolo 1) le principali posizioni che animano il dibattito cercando di ordinare le tante idee proposte e distinguere due paradigmi dominanti per la spiegazione della *shared agency*. Da una parte è possibile delineare un *members-level account* (MLA), che studia la nozione in questione concentrandosi sull'agire dei singoli individui in quanto membri di un gruppo. Dall'altra si prospetta un *group-level account* (GLA), volto a cogliere i fenomeni di gruppi nello loro complessità e interezza, senza ridurre la spiegazione a quella proposta dal MLA. La ricostruzione del dibattito – e la sua ridefinizione entro queste categorie – ha permesso di mettere in luce come entrambi i paradigmi siano presenti in Ontologia Sociale e come il secondo sia stato costruito sulla descrizione del primo. A questo proposito, il dibattito offre due distinti modelli interpretativi. Il primo sostiene che le azioni di gruppo siano manifestazioni complesse dello stesso *pattern* ontologico ed esplicativo istanziato dalle azioni individuali. Il secondo nega tale continuità e difende la peculiarità dell'agire insieme. La spiegazione della *shared agency* come fenomeno di gruppo si è infatti radicata nello studio delle attitudini individuali, nella relazione tra soggetti e nell'organizzazione dei diversi contributi. È in particolare la posizione dell'individualismo olistico a incarnare tale derivazione (Capitolo 2). Le contraddizioni nascono nel momento in cui l'ontologica individualista si accompagna a descrizioni olistiche, volte a cogliere i gruppi come diretti soggetti di *agency* ontologicamente riducibili. A fronte di tali problemi, il lavoro sviluppa una parte costruttiva e incentrata sulla definizione di agente (Capitolo 3). L'idea è quella di assumere un significato funzionalistico della nozione adatto a spiegare sia l'agire dei singoli che quello dei gruppi indipendentemente dalla natura del sistema razionale a cui l'evento è attribuito. L'equivalenza del GLA e della spiegazione dell'agire individuale si differenzia dalla complessità colta dal MLA, il quale studia i comportamenti intenzionali dei membri del gruppo quando, come individui, partecipano ad azioni collettive. Questo livello esplicativo non è da considerarsi la base su cui il GLA sopravviene ma come un discorso interessato alla psicologia dei soggetti e alle forme di intenzionalità in essa coinvolte.

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Introduction

1 Introducing shared agency

The notion of shared agency is at the core of many philosophical debates, such as Social Philosophy, Philosophy of Mind, Action Theory and Social Ontology. In particular, Social Ontology, a cross-cutting area of research, is interested in agency due to the double relation it has with the social environment. On the one hand, shared agency is important for how "we make the social world": our doing things together has the power of establishing rules and patterns of behavior, shaping the social context. In this sense, the creation of social institutions is one of the most fundamental issues investigated. On the other hand, shared agency helps to understand to what extent the social world might affect the way in which us, as human beings, act together. The question is about the influence that both institutional and habitual regulation have on agency, be it individual or collective. Assuming the notion of "agency" described as an intentional behavior, rationally oriented towards action, "shared agency" refers to all phenomena where two or more individuals act together intentionally.

There is a variety of occasions in which our intuition makes us think that two or more individuals do something together. Here are just some of many possible examples: looking out the window one can see people walking and chatting with one another, friends grabbing a coffee together, children crossing the street in line by pairs and so forth. But one can also think about more complex contexts of agency happening in private life and at work. In those circumstances, it is common to experience situations where obtaining a goal is a difficult challenge that can be easily overcome through a concert of individual contributions rather than by a single effort. Meeting strict deadlines, moving heavy

obstacles and preparing amazing shows are just some targets better reached with the help of others.

Sometimes it may also happen that people act together moved by altruistic motives, feelings of solidarity or empathy. On the contrary, one might do something with others instrumentally, aiming for a particular target.

Other times people share an action just obeying pre-existent rules or customs, unaware that the act implies collective efforts. For instance, standing in line at the supermarket is not a matter of deliberation, we stand together and wait for our turn because we are used to, as well as expected to. It is a custom and respecting that custom can be seen as a way of acting together, although no joint action was voluntarily started.

Shared agency may also arise from peculiar relationships bounding individuals together as in case of individuals getting married, becoming friends or business partners. Another interesting phenomenon concerns worshippers, people who do something together by praying the same God in which everyone believes.

Setting differences aside, all these examples share a common feature: each describes a performance in which individuals' contributions are conducive to the same task. But the scenario may be different and concern «cases of joint action with an inbuilt element of conflict»[1]. In the case of a tennis match, the activity requires two or more players, rules, the referee, a suitable court and the right equipment; moreover, the common end of playing together is based on each personal aim to defeat the opponent(s) and win the match. As a consequence, shared agency sometimes involves competition.

The list is long and could even be longer. By allowing our imagination to run wild and find examples of shared agency without restraints, we might end up with a plentiful variety of situations where two or more people do something together. But the diversification offered by empirical descriptions is not the only source of complexity. To the variety of ways in which people act with others, we should add the perspective from

[1] Tuomela 2000, p.7.

which the observer considers the matter and fixes the standard defining the concept. If we focus our research on a single token of acting together, such as the one in which a common goal is pursued, the entire reflection may disregard cases not involving a shared aim, and the expression "shared agency" will be used to identify only events of that specific sort, finding different labels for other occurrences of the concept.

It is a cornerstone of this work to investigate philosophical concepts without overlooking the observer's standpoint and the focus assumed by that explanation. Thus, in the next paragraph I delineate the philosophical perspective from which the concept of shared agency is defined, analyzed and criticized in the present research. The approach is the one proposed by the contemporary debate in Social Ontology, considered in its analytical branch.

2 Introducing Social Ontology

Social Ontology is an applied ontology, which attempts «to put to use the rigorous tools of philosophical ontology in the development of category systems which can be of use in the formalization and systematization of knowledge of a given domain»[2]. Broadly speaking, the domain of Social Ontology can be identified with the social world, a realm formed by the totality of individuals, relationships, groups of people, institutions and all other *patterns of behavior*[3] that are part of society.[4] To better specify the object we need some preliminary clarifications about the specific concerns associated with the discipline. As a matter of fact, there are many different branches, variously characterized by peculiar methodological choices, tasks and background references.

First, there is Social Ontology of Phenomenology, which finds its roots in the Münich and Göttingen Circles, especially in the doctrine of E. Husserl (Husserl 1973, 1975, 1984), M. Scheler (Scheler 1954) and A. Reinach (Reinach, 1989). These theorists studied the experience of the subject and the nature of the object referring to the notions of

[2] L. Zaibert and B. Smith 2007, p.1.
[3] Elder-Vass 2014, p.55.
[4] An introduction to ontological theories in Social Ontology is offered by Andina (Andina 2016).

consciousness and intentionality, two constitutive moments of the relationship between the social world and the subject.[5] Secondly and strictly intertwined with the phenomenological approach, there is the Social Ontology close to Philosophy of Law. This branch is related to philosophers such as A. Reinach, (Reinach 1989), W. Schapp (Schapp 1930, 1932) C. Znamierowski (Znamierowski 1912), who devoted their own researches to the study of social entities – such as laws, codes, norms and institutions – characterized by normative aspects. Thirdly, agency and social entities/structures have been studied in connection with one another by theorists of Critical Realism (R. Bhaskar 1998a, 1998b; M. Archer 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2010; D. Elder-Vass 2007, 2010, 2014), a line of thought in contemporary Sociology intertwined with Social Philosophy and Action Theory.[6]

In addition, Social Ontology can be associated with Critical Theory. For example, Lukács' ontology of social reality (Lukács 1984) proposed an ontology concerning the reality established through human labor and the modifications it operates on the natural and causally-determined world.[7] Critical theory has also showcased another line of thought – especially among the exponents of the second Frankfurt School generation – which is related to the development of analytical Social Ontology. The approach is the one drawn on J.L. Austin's speech acts theory (Austin 1962) and embraced in Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas 1981). The guideline is that, apart from being true or false, some statements can represent a proper way of acting due to three main features: locutory, illucutory and performative power. The first aspect concerns the production of a meaningful linguistic expression, the second regards the action performed by the speaker in uttering that phrase, while the third is related to the speech act's power to cause effects on the audience and change the way things are. All these features are typical of utterances expressed by performative verbs such as promising, asserting, claiming, forgiving and suchlike verbs, which are not associated with true or false values. Take for example the statement: "I assert that the race is on". This assertion communicates a meaning (locutory

[5] About phenomenological Social Ontology: Salice 2013, Salice and Smith 2016.
[6] On Critical Realism: Bhaskar and Archer 1998.
[7] To go deeper in the study of the relation between analytical Social Ontology and Critical Theory see Testa 2015, 2016.

act), i.e. the beginning of the race, it expresses the intention to start the game (illocutory act) and makes the race begin (performative act). Speaking out the statement consists in doing something and creating consequences on the social world.

Speech acts theory was important to introduce the analytical perspective in Social Ontology, which has found its starting point precisely in the study of language and the peculiar human capacity to make things with words. In particular, J.R. Searle's contribution (Searle 1995) initiated the debate on the construction, composition and nature of social reality, influencing philosophers of mind, epistemologists and researchers interested in decision and game theory (Smith 2003). Briefly, Searle's philosophy of language maintains that «speaking in a language is a matter of performing illocutionary acts with certain intentions, according to constitutive rules. These constitutive rules typically have the form "X counts as Y", or "X counts as Y in C"»[8]. To speak in a language means doing things that one intends to do and that are framed in the form of *constitutive rules*[9], having the performative power to generate a new state of affairs, which is then represented in the mental attitude by Y. While the X of constitutive rules represents a physical object (e.g. a piece of paper), Y indicates a new mind-dependent function assumed by X (e.g. money) in context C (e.g. this piece of paper now counts as money in the context). The power of language is to add a new function to a slice of world that did not have that meaning before the intention to implement it (Searle 2014). Therefore, the object of Social Ontology is the mind-dependent world, considered as the portion of reality populated by functions, norms and institutions constructed by human language and interaction.[10]

At the core of Searle's theory is the fact that the act of making something with language is an intrinsically collective performance, which gains the power it has by being shared by many individuals in context C.[11] In this sense, shared agency is involved in the

[8] Searle 2002, p.4.

[9] For the sake of simplicity, we employ the expression "constitutive rule" as used in the quote (Searle 1995, 2002). It has been modified by the author (Searle 2010) and replaced with the broader concept "declaration", embracing a richer variety of forms of accepting status functions (Searle 2010, pp.19-24).

[10] An introduction to social objects is offered by Gallotti and Michael (Gallotti and Michael 2014). In particular: Gallotti 2014, Guala 2014.

[11] Sharing an intention has a weak meaning on Searle's view and it regards the belief that other individuals in C may participate in the effort planned by the intention. The collective nature of the action is fixed by the

creation, maintenance and modification of objects generated by declarations and classified as mind-dependent entities, (Searle 2003).[12]

Shared agency is not only a structuring element of the social world, it is also structured by it and regulated by established practices, costumes and institutions (Hodgson 2007b). Accordingly, shared agency refers to performances carried out by two or more individuals together and through the mediation of social facts (Descombes 2011). The presence of a normative regulation may determine some sort of organization in the context, which allows complex ways of doing things together; everyone plays a role and participates in the action bearing a function, that is fixed by the system of rules and realizable by anyone who is suitable (Tuomela *task-right systems* 2007, 2013; List & Pettit 2011).

3 The task

Introducing Social Ontology starting from its connection with speech acts theory has outlined a concept of shared agency focused on the faculty of doing something together based on the performative usage of language. Accordingly, acting together derives from shared mental attitudes with propositional/conceptual contents, directed to individual or collective actions. This model of agency is based on intentionality and it refers to human behavior structured on intentional states of mind, attitudes with a content representing the goal of the action pursued by the subject. Shared agency denotes intentional behaviors where the task is common to many individuals who are the subjects somehow expected to realize it in practice.

Taking all this into consideration, in this project I investigate shared agency and the ways of its explanation. My main concern is understanding how the discipline has described the event of individuals sharing mental states located in each mind and somehow common to everyone in the context. The task would be to grasp features peculiar to shared agency and to show how the philosophical debate has accounted for them. The approach is

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form of the attitude, "we-intention", in the individual's psychology and not through the actual cooperation with others, (Searle 1990, 1995, 2007, 2010). Searle's perspective will be explored in 1.2.2.

[12] On collective intentionality and the creation of the social world: Seddone 2014. For an analysis and critique of the (exaggerated) attention given to collective intentionality: Ylikoski and Mäkelä 2002.

at the same time critical and methodological. Its critical side aims at outlining the main positions, revisiting interpretations and suggesting alternative readings. Its methodological side calls into question the theoretical premises and explicative objectives of Social Ontology rather than its particular contents. The investigation regards fundamental assumptions, methodological choices, epistemological perspectives and explicative targets.

Regarded as a concept suitable for behaviors involving rational guidance and more than a single individual effort, shared agency denotes complex phenomena that can be approached either focusing on individual attitudes and contributions or adopting a higher-level perspective. The former implies studying shared agency assuming that its specificity (if any) belongs to individual psychology and conduct. This approach refuses to admit the explanation should focus on social events as if they were relevant features affecting individuals' thinking and acting. The latter assumes shared agency as a complex event, different from cases of individual agency. When people act together something new arises and it cannot be understood through concepts and descriptions suitable for explaining individual agency. Different interpretations emphasize this peculiar aspect as concerning mental attitudes, the design of actions or the subject pursuing the scope. What stays the same is the necessity of treating shared agency as a single event, different from the one obtained aggregating a number of individual efforts. What is needed is an account capable of grasping shared agency straightforwardly as a phenomenon concerning the group of individuals as one and not considering individuals as a group. In other words, the case needs a group-level account (GLA), opposed to a members-level account (MLA).

The issue of high-level social explanations is not a new topic in Philosophy and the present research does not claim to illustrate all positions exhaustively.[13] The focus of this project regards the variety of attempts proposed in analytical Social Ontology and the concept of shared agency as a specific matter of concern. My position is that the debate has not managed to find a stable GLA for shared agency. Setting differences aside, each approach has derived the group-level account from what happens at the members' level: this reveals ties to a deep individualistic mindset, which fixes the priority of individual

[13] An overview of the debate is offered by Zahle and Collin (Zahle and Collin 2014).

agents over groups. This premise will be named “normative individualism” and the conclusion is that constructing a stable high-level account means breaking the bond with it.

4 Survey of the chapters

The research is organized into three chapters respectively devoted to presenting, criticizing and revising the debate. Each chapter is divided into three parts, and each part is made up of four paragraphs.

Chapter one introduces the intentionalistic account of individual agency. The reconstruction considers the relation between mental state and action as a multi-layered connection with constitutive, structural, normative and causal features. Then, the analysis takes into consideration shared agency, showing how the doctrine of intentionality has been adopted to describe actions done by two or more individuals together.

The chapter develops the point presenting a double alternative: *continuity* and *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. The former (Bratman, List, Pettit) interprets shared agency with concepts and laws taken from the explanation of individual intentional action. The latter (Gilbert, Searle, Tuomela) introduces specific notions and principles suitable for grasping facts with an intrinsic collective nature. Despite these differences, the debate is committed to notions – such as “group” and “collectivity” – that make the description of shared agency a different issue if compared with individual action. The point is maintained based on the analysis of the four relations between intending and acting (constitutive, structural, normative and causal).

Chapter two questions whether the debate has managed to provide an interpretation of shared agency that goes beyond the members-level account (MLA) proposing a non redundant group-level account (GLA). Here I argue that, although most authors (including Gilbert, List, Pettit, Tuomela and, in some sense, Bratman) claims to grasp shared agency by means of high-level concepts and descriptions, the explanation they provide is still bond to ontological individualism. Assuming that all intentionality happens in the individuals’ mind, the debate takes individual agents as the ultimate components of the social world. As

a consequence, notions such as group agent, shared action and collective attitude have acquired meaning only as a way of understanding and speaking of what happens in society. However, no ontological commitment has been endorsed. The position takes the name of holistic individualism and it attempts to combine methodological/epistemological holism and ontological individualism.

The chapter outlines the GLA of holistic individualism and determines whether the association between holistic methodology and individualistic ontology would lay stable foundations to reach the proposed goal.

Chapter three begins with a survey of the four dimensions characterizing the relation between intentions and actions showing the flaws hidden in the GLA of holistic individualism. The main problem is that, given ontological individualism, analyzing shared agency through concepts directly referred to groups cannot avoid contradictions. As it is, the claim of describing shared agency with a holistic lexicon is not strong enough to avoid bringing the discussion back to the members. Such a reductive force finds its source in a deep normative individualism that assumes that individual agents have a peculiar rational and normative stance. This premise generates ontological individualism and exerts its side effects on constitutive, structural, normative and causal dimensions of shared agency. As a consequence, holistic individualism hardly supports stable high-level descriptions.

However, solving the contradictions is possible as long as one refuses the priority of individual agents and considers any rational system of agency an agent *per se*. Adopting a functionalist notion of agent can be feasible once the priority of individual agents is abandoned and both individual and group agents are considered as rational systems, equally established over time and through the interaction with the social environment. The capacity to act intentionally is the result of an identity-giving process, constituting the rational stability and peculiarity of any system working as an agent. Consequently, the notion of group agent and the GLA concerned with it can be stable and not reducible to the MLA when individuals' priority is left aside and the diachronic essence of agency is considered.

Chapter 1

Shared agency

1.1 Shared Intentionality: the *continuity thesis*

To specify the way in which Social Ontology has dealt with the notion of shared agency, the present section is devoted to the introduction of the model of agency adopted by the discipline. Thus, the first two paragraphs are a brief introduction of the doctrine of (individual) intentionality and of the relation(s) that the faculty entertains with the capacity of acting. Then, the notion of intentionality is considered in connection with actions performed by two or more individuals together. Two main theoretical options are profiled: the *continuity* and the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality.[14] The former accounts for shared activities questioning only those features deducible from the individual capacity to have intentions towards the action, while the latter refers to original collective attitudes in the individuals' minds that are at the base of shared phenomena of agency. Postponing the reflection upon collective intentionality to the second section, paragraphs three and four develop the study of the *continuity thesis* proposed in Michael Bratman's theory, which represents the main reference point of the perspective.

[14] The expressions *continuity thesis* and *discontinuity thesis* are both from Bratman's vocabulary (Bratman 2014, p.8-9).

1.1.1 Intentional actions

The doctrine of intentionality as a philosophical model in approaching the study of human behavior has acquired its full dignity in the contemporary debate especially after the diffusion of the innovative works proposed by E. Anscombe (Anscombe 1957) and D. Davidson (Davidson 1963, 1970).[15] According to Anscombe an intention is the reason for someone to do something – her reason for the action – which, as a consequence, makes an intentional action an action «to which a certain sense of the question "why?" has application»[16]. This means that intentional actions are those events of human behavior for which the agent can account: having been done for a reason permits us to ask why the agent has acted that way and makes plausible to hold the agent responsible for the things she has done. Similarly, Davidson maintains that an action is intentional if and only if the event (i.e. the action or the activity of doing it) can be thought and described as something done for a reason. For Davidson «a reason rationalizes the action only if it leads us to see something the agent saw, or thought he saw, in the action – some feature, consequence or aspect of the action the agent wanted, desired, prized […]»[17]. What matters is that the action falls into a description acknowledged as an event in which the agent is accountable for the act because moved by a rational motive that she wants to realize.[18]

In line with this, for what concerns Social Ontology, the perspective offered by the intentional framework has been endorsed based on the intersection between the speech acts theory and the importance of language for the making of the social world. Considering Searle's introduction to the debate, the peculiar way in which humans communicate and give a structure to their life represents a basic feature in establishing what is social on what is physical. In fact, the elements considered socially created are set through a performative usage of language, that is the act people realize attributing a certain function (e.g. money)

[15] For a brief introduction to intentional agency: M. De Caro 2008, pp.111-134.
[16] Anscombe 1957, p.11.
[17] Davidson 1963, p. 685.
[18] The reference to accountability explains why intentional actions have been considered so important to become almost the exclusive focus of action theory. The fact that we can describe an action attributing to the agent some kind of willingness to do so – some sort of rational guidance – is the aspect that makes the action a relevant matter for research – especially if connected with reflections on moral and ethical issues, where it is decisive who is responsible for the happening (De Caro 2008).

to a "neutral" object (a piece of paper becomes a bill). In this sense, people by recognizing the existence of the new object in the context are acting together and their action consists in the performance they realize by sharing and uttering their common intention. Thus the intention is interpreted as a mental attitude expressed by the speech act and that is connected with the willingness to do what the speech act effectively says and does. In other words, the intention can be described as a mental state representing (in a proposition) the task the agent wants to obtain through the action, whether a verbal or physical performance.

Following this line of thought, Searle assumes that «an intentional action is simply the condition of satisfaction of an intention»[19]. Apart from offering a different formulation of the issue, this statement focuses on at least three main aspects characterizing the intentionalistic model of the agency: the action, the mental state and its conditions of satisfaction.[20] Let's start with the mental state, i.e. the intention. According to Searle an intention for the action is a kind of attitude, which together with desires, beliefs and other mental states shows a propositional form: "I intend to do *x*" or "I intend x". This means that an intention for the action requires a subject having the attitude in mind, an external object towards which the mental state is directed, and a content that is the mental representation of the object. Moreover, the intentional attitude has a form, which indicates the specific way in which the subject is relating herself to the object (the *x* term) when she is intentionally approaching it (Crane 2014). In this sense, an intention for the action has the form of a mental state planning for the action. This kind of reference makes the intentional case a very specific one; in fact, if we consider many other attitudes, for instance beliefs and desires, the way of approaching the *x* term and its nature would present a pretty different situation. Take the case of a belief. Here the subject sustains the mental state "I believe that *x*" or "I believe x", where *x* represents the object of the word with which the subject has a relation of believing it. For a belief to be satisfied it is necessary that the content of the mental state corresponds with the object it wants to represent. Thus, if the mental state is "I believe that it is raining", such a mental state will be satisfied, it will be true, only if the

[19] Searle 1983, p.80.

[20] It is important to note that Searle rejects Davidson's idea that an action is intentional when describable in terms of intentionality. Searle thinks that what is relevant is not the way of describing something but the nature of that something, i.e. the mental attitude, (Searle 1980, pp.47-70).

state of affairs in the world confirms the content of the attitude. This considered, it is easy to observe that intentions for the action work otherwise. As told by L.A. Zeibert (Zeibert 2003):

> Unlike beliefs and desires (broadly construed), the conditions of satisfaction of intentions are not mere states of affairs that coincide with the representational contents of the intentional state. These states of affairs must in addition be appropriately caused by the intentional state of intending, and agents who intend them must also wish that their intentional state of intending causes the appropriate state of affairs in the appropriate ways. The condition of satisfaction of an intention refers back to the representational contents of the intention.[21]

This means that an intention for the action is satisfied when the intention itself makes the agent do what the content represents as the intended action (performative power). If the action is realized by someone else or by the subject herself only by chance, the mental state won't be satisfied. In fact, in order for the intention to be fulfilled, it is necessary for it to play a causal role in the performance of the action.[22] As stated by Anscombe, the intention is the reason why a certain activity has been performed and, according to Searle, such an activity is what makes the intention realized.[23]

But the notion of intentionality can be related with agency in many different ways so to generate, as Searle suggests, various kinds of intentional attitudes. First of all, there is the prior-intention, «that is the intention that one forms prior to the performance of an intentional action»[24]; otherwise called the plan for the action and considered the outcome of the process of deliberation that leads the agent to the formation of the attitude in question. In addition, there is the occurrence that Searle has named intention-in-action, which indicates an actual component of the action: «it is the psychological event that accompanies

[21] Zeibert 2003, p.212

[22] In this sense «a given human behavior counts as an action, if and only if an agent having the intention to perform the action in question has caused it», (Schulte-Ostermann 2008, p.191).

[23] According to Batman there should be something more than conditions of satisfaction making intentions peculiar mental states. The author makes a distinction between intention and other volitional attitudes (belief and desire) and connects intentions with a specific function that is planning the action. The plan is conceived as a background framework on which the agent can weigh her beliefs and desires for and against the action. While beliefs and desires provide reasons connected with the action and can trigger acting in a certain way, intentions have the power to move the agent, to control her conduct and to have an influence on it. Intentions create expectations that other attitudes do not, (Bratman 1987, 1990).

[24] Searle 2010, p.33.

the bodily movement when I successfully perform an intentional action involving a bodily movement»[25]. While prior-intentions come before the action, intentions-in-action happen with the performance itself.[26] Moreover, for an intentional action to be realized a condition where (one or more) intentions-in-action are present is always necessary; whereas prior-intentions can be missing (as in the case of extemporary behaviors). The point is that one can do something without having planned it before – the intentional character of the action will be anyway guaranteed by the presence of intentions-in-action that occur even in the absence of an overall rational guidance. In addition, by comparing and contrasting the two intentional phenomena, it is possible to observe that they require different conditions of satisfaction. An example is, if I have the plan of eating an apple, my prior-intention will be satisfied by my eating the piece of fruit. Differently, connected intentions-in-action require my moving my hand to grasp the apple and then moving it again to lift it to my lips: these conditions of satisfaction will be encountered only when I effectively do the gestures they prescribe.[27]

1.1.2 Four dimensions of agency

In order to better delineate the model of intentional agency, four dimensions of the concept can be identified. Each aspect characterizes the relation between the two components of intentional action, intending and acting, profiling different perspectives about it. The investigation points out to what extent the intentional faculty is involved in the definition of agency as an intentional behavior, and how strict the connection between intending and

[25] *Ibidem*.
[26] On the notion of intention-in-action: McDowell 2011.
[27] A remark is necessary regarding both intentional kinds: it is not necessary for the agent to be aware of the mental phenomenon involved in the action. Due to the rational nature of intentionality, it is always possible to bring the attention towards the content of the mental state but such an acknowledgment is not required by the happening of the event. Unaware intentions are more frequent in case of intentions-in-action, while intentional plans for the action – as the results of deliberation – are generally present to the "consciousness" of the agent, (Searle 2010, Crane 2014).

acting may be. Each relation has been introduced in the debate but not all dimensions are part of every single account.[28]

a. *Constitutive relation*[29]. Intentions and actions are constitutive parts of agency. «Actions and intentions, in other words, are interlocking components of a system of practical activity»[30], within which the mental attitude is an essential constituent of the agency and not just a matter of description, as Davidson would say. The intention – especially in the case of intention-in-action – is associated with the bodily movement and together with it contributes to the realization of the entire performance. In this sense, intentional attitudes are defined as psychological counterparts of physical acts and as constitutive elements of the whole activity that is the agency, (Searle 2007, 2010, Tuomela 2007);
b. *structural relation*. Intentions do not only occur with and within the action, especially as prior intentions they also have a role in giving a structure to the event by representing the plan that the action (gesture + intentions-in-action) is going to realize. Intentions for the action are plan states: «they are embedded in forms of planning central to our intentionally organized temporally extended agency and to our associated abilities to achieve complex goals across time»[31]. According to this, intending and acting are connected by a structural relation in which the mental state provides the framework for the phenomenon of agency by drawing the direction towards which the activity is oriented;[32]
c. *normative relation*. The content of the intention, apart from representing the scope of the performance, can also be considered as the aim to which the agent commits herself when she formulates in her mind the willingness to act on that basis. The

[28] It is a task of next paragraphs showing differences among the approaches. Attention will be given to dimensions of shared agency.
[29] On constitution: Stahl 2013.
[30] Epstein 2015, p.218.
[31] Bratman 2014, p.15.
[32] It is important to underline that this kind of guidance provided by the intentional faculty is a form of rational control that does not excludes from the picture other sources of structuring forces. Instincts and behavioral dispositions might be seen as alternative elements that might give to human capacity for the action some sort of direction. However, the kind of behavior here in question, the agency, is the one defined by its inner connection with the intentional sphere and the attention is focused on it.

intention for the action creates some sort of normative bond between the agent and the content of the attitude in the sense that, having it in mind, the agent commits herself to its fulfillment, namely with the action realizing the goal (performative feature). The intention represents in its content a task that, to be obtained, requires the effective performance of the activity;[33]

d. *causal relation*. An intention is the effective cause of the action when it has the power to trigger and start the performance planned by the mental state. To be more precise a distinction needs to be made: while prior intentions exert a causal power on the formation of intentions-in-action, these attitudes – at least in Searle's perspective – have a causal influence on bodily movements, with which they occur, directly. As a consequence, prior intentions do not trigger the act straightforwardly.

In line with these considerations, it could be reasonable to assume that, according to the intentionalistic model of agency, the connection between intentional states of mind and actions is a inner, multifold relation which shows, at least, four different connotations: constitutive, structural, normative and causally effective. Thus, the challenge is to understand how it could be possible to couple the idea of intentions for the action with that of shared agency. In particular, the difficult question is to identify the way in which a mental state in the individuals' mind might have a relevant (constitutive, structural, causal and normative) influence on the performance of an entire group of people, (Velleman 1997).

But how is it possible to relate the mental attitude of each participant with the movements performed by a group of subjects? How should we interpret the assumption for which a group of individuals has the capacity to act following a shared intention for the action and be moved by a shared intention-in-action? On this point the debate is divided: there are theorists who believe that intentional shared activities are based on the same

[33] Even in case one has some doubts about the normative cogency of intentionality, it would be troublesome to reject the normative implications connected with the intentional stance. In fact, in the case in which the agent expresses the willingness verbally or somehow makes it public, such a declaration would create expectations in the observers so that the normative bond to the fulfillment of the intentional state would emerge in its strength, bounding the agent to respect and obtain the goal of the intention, (Schmid 2009).

faculty at the base of individual intentional behaviors; on the other side there are the supporters of the so called *collective intentionality*, the human faculty to have collective intentions for the action. Bratman, the reference point of the former position, has proposed a way to classify the diatribe by distinguishing between *continuity thesis* and *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. The former indicates the perspective that «the theory of individual planning agency puts us in a position to provide a model of modest sociality (in our terms, a model of shared agency) without the introduction of fundamentally new practical elements»[34] that go beyond the theoretical apparatus required to explain individual behavior. With *discontinuity thesis* Bratman refers to those – especially Searle and Gilbert – who «see the step from individual to shared agency as involving a new basic practical resource»[35].

By following Bratman's distinction, we will consider the first side of the debate and analyze what has been called the *continuity thesis* of intentionality.

1.1.3 Agency according to Bratman

Some authors have approached intentional shared actions with the idea that the issue should be studied taking advantage of the theoretical sources provided by researches on individual intentionality. According to this, there is no relevant discrepancy between individual and collective agency, neither metaphysical nor descriptive. On the one hand, the same structure that regulates individual conduct is assumed to regulate activities done by many agents together and, on the other hand, the same theoretical tools one employs to describe one's own or others' personal behavior should suffice for explaining shared agency.

This line of thought has been scrupulously developed by M. Bratman (Bratman 1987, 1999, 2007, 2009d, 2014, 2014b, 2015) who has theorized a reductive and multifaceted model of shared agency. The perspective he has promoted is reductive in the sense of considering shared agency as a phenomenon constructed and explained by aspects

[34] Bratman 2014, p.9.
[35] *Ibidem*.

of individual intentional agency. Moreover, his approach conceives a multifaceted idea of shared agency because it assumes that individual intentions for the action can coordinate themselves in various ways and generates different kinds of social activities. Consequently, according to the author, the rejection of new concepts for explaining group phenomena does not imply a homogeneous interpretation of the agency. What is relevant is that, from a methodological viewpoint, Bratman elaborates a form of individualism[36] that he calls augmented individualism, which distinguishes itself from a merely reductive approach, because it includes the possibility to enrich the explanation of what happens at the individual level with a network of interlocking attitudes. Even if it is true that the attitudes of which the author speaks are always individual states of mind, the complex interconnection and influence that such a snarl may have on individual intentions generates a situation that is different from the one in which a single person acts on the basis of her intentions for the action. Despite this, shared agency is still comparable to individual intentional activity, especially when the latter is considered in relation to its unfolding over time. In Bratman's proposal, the study of different states of mind held by the same agent over time is considered analogous to that of different states of mind belonging to various agents at a time. This is why the augmented individualism he proposes is considered a thesis of continuity and a good tool to investigate both the issues – the interconnection of intentions over time and the interconnection of intentions among persons:

> The shared-ness or jointness of shared intention consists of relevant contents of the plan states of each and relevant interconnections and interdependencies between the planning psychologies of each, all in relevant contexts. This augmented individualism depends then on a rich model of individual agent as a planning agent whose agency is temporally extended.[37]

On the basis of these considerations, if the target is to understand what shared agency is and how to approach it, we need to define a theory of individual intentional agency. Bratman's aim is to find a way to relate individual intentionality at a specific time (synchronic level)

[36] By "individualism", we mean the doctrine that studies social events/entities/properties as reducible to the level of individual events/entities/properties. It is matter of discussion in Chapter 2, (2.2).
[37] Bratman 2014, p.12.

with individual intentionality over time (diachronic dimension).[38] The main thesis underlining the entire research is that the theory of individual agency as a temporally structured phenomenon should provide all the conceptual tools we need to reflect upon shared agency. The tools have been suggestively called the building blocks of shared agency (Bratman 2014).

Comprehending what the building blocks are as constitutive parts of the notion of (and of the approach to) shared agency, giving a brief introduction of Bratman's individual intentional agency is an unavoidable step. To start, it is important to mention two general considerations on intentionality that the author has often remarked. The first is that an intention for the action is a state of mind, a rational aspect that the agent formulates in planning her action. In this sense and in opposition to Davidson's proposal, intentions are not just descriptive features; on the contrary, they have a metaphysical cogency, which means that they exist in the individual minds. Due to this fact, speaking of intentionality, for Bratman, is always a matter of metaphysics and description – concerning what happens in the mind and what is told about it. The second assumption is that intentions are plan states, are attitudes planning for the action and are characterized by a structuring function over the action. In this sense, we might say that the intentions to which the author is committed are the same mental phenomena that Searle called "prior intentions". In addition to this notion of plan states, Bratman assumes that actions are complex phenomena, composed of many different aspects and, in some sense, composed of many "lower" intentions held by the agent over time or in connection with various facets of the same action.[39] In this respect, intentions are characterized as partial plans that need to be filled in as time goes by. An example of this is, my intention today is to go swimming tomorrow, that will be completed by further deliberations and intentions about how to go there, when and with whom. Thus, the plan of swimming tomorrow is just a single part of the story. But

[38] On the comparison between synchronic and diachronic reason (or better, self-governance) see Bratman 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010, 2012.

[39] The structure of intentions is formulated by Bratman in accordance with what G. Harman has sustained: «In a typical intentional action, you have an end E which you intend to achieve by means M, possibly foreseeing side effects S of M and consequences C of E: ACT -> M -> E -> C -> S. Normally we would suppose that although M and E are intended, S and C need not be intended but might be merely foreseen», (Harman 1983).

such a partiality is in addition to another typical character confirming the complexity inbuilt in the agency, that is the hierarchical structure of intentions. An intention for the action generally involves other components that are definable as sub-plans. In the case of my plan to go swimming, possible sub-plans can be having fun, driving the car or wearing a swimsuit. I can maintain certain aspects of the activity, while deciding to leave aside other components without losing the original plan of swimming tomorrow.

By defining intentions as plans for the action, Bratman affirms that «plans […] are mental states involving an appropriate sort of commitment to action: I have a plan to A only if it is true of me that I plan to A»[40]. Thus, besides the characters of partiality and hierarchy, intentions as plan states also have a normative salience. As a matter of fact, intentional attitudes for the action have the power to guide what the agent does by generating some sort of commitment, that is a bundle of expectations about the action[41]. In this sense, Bratman identifies plans as norms: a plan for the action endows the agent with a rational standpoint, that is a stronghold from which one can exert a rational control on the action and guide further deliberations about its realization. This normative feature connects the capacity of having plans with self-governance. Having a plan confers a rational self-control on one's performances, which is guaranteed by two fundamental principles related to intentionality: *consistency* and *means-end coherence*. According to the former, intentions need to be consistent in a double sense: on the one hand, a plan has to be composed of sub-plans that do not prevent the fulfillment of the other parts concerned and of the plan as a whole – this is *internal consistency*; on the other hand, intentions must be *consistent with beliefs*. This last observation implies that, for a plan state to be effective it is important that it is compatible with the network of beliefs of the agent. Bratman writes:

[40] Bratman 1990, p.19.
[41] The normative feature is what distinguishes intentions from beliefs and desires (Bratman 1990, 2009d, 2013, 2014).

> […] a good coordinating plan is a plan for the world I find myself in. So, assuming my beliefs are consistent, such a plan should be consistent with my beliefs, other things equal. Roughly, it should be possible for my entire plan to be successfully executed given that my beliefs are true. This is a demand that my plans be *strongly consistent, relative to my beliefs*.[42]

This principle represents a first way to connect intentions with reflection and self-governance. Moreover, the idea of self-control is based on the *means-end coherence principle* of intentionality, which implies a balance between the end of the plan and the means one chooses to employ in pursuing it. If one has the plan to go to the library and needs to use the car to get there, the intention to drive the car should be coherent with that of getting to the library. Such a case could be further complicated especially by considering intentions fulfilled over time. In those occasions the construction of an entire plan for the action may require various sub-plans related to activities that are the means to finally realize the end, and the agent needs to make coherent deliberations over time (Bratman 1984, 1987).

This brief survey on Bratman's theory of individual intentional agency has shown the following four main assumptions:

- Intentions are plan states;
- Plan states are partial;
- Plans have a hierarchical structure;
- There are two normative principles: consistency and means-end coherence.

Moreover, being consistent with beliefs and coherent with the means is related to the capacity of exerting self-governance, which means that intentions to be successfully fulfilled need the agent to reflect on her plans and give them a stable structure. A stable structure is an important aspect because it helps to open the path towards shared agency. In particular, it introduces the possibility of the diachronic dimension of individual agency, providing a framework for a cross temporally organized activity that, in Bratman's theory, represents the analogous of shared activity. Behind an individual temporal organization of

[42] Bratman 1987, p.31.

the agency (based upon the coherence and consistency of plans over time) there is a planning capacity common to the social organization of the action: the common core consists in the control people have upon their own action through the exercise of the planning faculty.

1.1.4 The building blocks of shared agency

Given the fact that the capacity for planning represents the core of Bratman's proposal about intentional agency, it is time to enrich such assumption by individuating the building blocks of shared agency. As already mentioned, these structural elements are taken from the theoretical apparatus involved in the explanation of individual agency and then used to formulate the explanation of shared intentional phenomena. The result is the emergence of shared agency defined in a normative and metaphysical continuum, depicted by the theory of individual intentional agency and its unfolding over time.

The first brick pinpointed by Bratman is assuming that shared intentions have the form "intending that we J", meaning that the intention is conceived as a mental attitude in which "we" appears in the content. In particular, "intending that we" is different from "we-intending", used to identify a mental capacity peculiar to phenomena of shared agency – *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality – or a capacity shown by a plural subject coinciding with the "we". On the contrary, in accordance with the expression "intending that we" there is the idea that a shared intention is held in the mind of each individual involved in the context. Such a mental state contains in its content the representation of a performance realized by all the individuals bearing the plan state. This discrepancy between the subject of the mental state (a single agent) and the actor (the "we") makes it necessary to use the form "intending that we J" rather than "intending to J"; in fact, in case of the latter expression we would not know who performs the action. Even though this aspect does not represent a problem for individual agency, where the intention is held by the same individual who performs the act, in the case of a shared intention the issue becomes

problematic, because the intention is born by each individual but realized by many persons together.[43]

According to the fact that a shared action is a plan realized by many individuals together, the second building block underlines the importance of each contribution and of each plan state composing the entire plan. In this sense, the meaning of "I intend that we J" is not to be interpreted as if I had an all-embracing intention that supplants others' plan; instead, Bratman's idea is that, when I have a shared intention, I include in its content the reference to the shared intention of the other participants. Through an example the author explains the case that our shared intention to go to NYC implies we each intend the following: that we go to NYC *by way of* the intentions of each that we go to NYC, (Bratman 1992). Thus, the mental state of each individual represents in its content also the intention borne by the other agents. This aspect leads us to the third construction element that is the mutual responsiveness of the agents concerning the intentions and actions of the others. The idea is that each individual tracks what the others do or plan to do in order to better deliberate about what to intend and how to behave in view of the final aim. Thus, intending that we J by way of others' intention that we J is possible only if it is out in the open that everybody in the context has the shared intention in question and is aware of the others' attitude towards the action. This is what Bratman calls the building block of publicity, which can be formulated also in terms of common knowledge. As he says:

[43] Bratman has reflected upon the so called own-action condition proposed by F. Stoutland (Stoutland 2002) and partially criticized in *Shared Agency* (Bratman 2014, p.60-64). The problem Bratman has found is that if we assume – as Stoutland does – that an intention for the action is fulfilled when the subject bearing the mental state is also its executor, how can we guarantee for this condition in shared agency? and how could we explain cases in which an agent intends that another person does a certain thing? In fact, the fulfillment of the intention – in both cases – is not completely up to the individual having the intention but rather it is realized when everyone in the context (or the other person concerned) does her job. The solution proposed by the author is precisely using the form "intending that we J" instead of "intending to J". In this way it is specified which agent(s) is expected to realize the intention and the own-action condition decays consequently.

> To fix ideas, however, we can here think of common knowledge as consisting in a hierarchy of cognitive aspects of the relevant individuals: it is common knowledge among A and B that p just when (a) A knows that p, (b) B knows that p, (c) A knows that B knows that p, (d) B knows that A knows that p, (e} A is in an epistemic position to know that (d), (f) B is in an epistemic position to know that (c), and so on. And what we want is that a constituent of our shared intention to j is a form of such common knowledge of that very intention.[44]

What emerges from the quote is that the condition of common knowledge makes reference to the presence in shared intentional agency of many components and contributions, that are interlocked. In fact, for one's intention to be part of the content of the intention of a partner is a way to be included in her plan (connection condition) and be considered a co-participant in the action.[45]

Moreover, as it was for individual state plans, shared intentions must show consistency and coherence. According to the first requirement, a co-participant in order to be seen as such needs to think – and this should be out in the open – that the intention she has in mind is conducive to the shared intention pursued by every individual in the context. The means-end coherence principle regulates the context claiming that each individual plan must be a step towards the realization of the entire plan, each individual plan represents a sub-plan functional to the realization of the end.[46]

Within this organizational structure each individual plan is a sub-plan of the shared intention that meshes with the others, enhancing the effort towards the shared end. Despite this shared-ness about the final aim of the plan state, for Bratman, meshing sub-plans are not necessary matching intentions: even though every individual contribution has the structure of a shared intention and is conducive to the end, this does not require that each individual has the same intentional content. One can participate in a shared activity moved

[44] Bratman 2014, p.57.
[45] Bratman 2014, pp.48-52.
[46] These two principles work in the same way as in individual temporally extended action, where each sub-plan at a time is coherent and consistent with the more general plan realized in the course of time and with all other sub-plans held by the subject. In the case of a social performance the interconnection is not among different attitudes at different times but it is among different attitudes held by different subjects. The common core is the capacity for planning which guarantees – in accordance with the two normative principles – a consistent and means-end coherent organization of the entire intentional plan.

by a reason compatible with the shared intention but divergent from that of the other agents in the context. If we think about cases of shared activity such as the one in which we intend that we paint the house, having different sub-plans is not only possible but even necessary: regarding various plans it makes sense to speak of meshing sub-plans for the action.

All this considered, the theory of shared intentional action proposed by Bratman requires for its construction – in addition to the fulfillment of consistency and means-end coherence principles – the following five building blocks:

(i) Each intends that we do J;
(ii) Each intends that we do J by way of the intention of each that we do J;
(iii) Mutual responsiveness and satisfaction of the connection condition;
(iv) Publicity/common knowledge;
(v) Intention on the part of each in favor of the shared intention for the action by way of meshing sub-plans of the intention of each.

To conclude, it is important to integrate the list with another feature that is the interdependence among the intentions of each participant. What this adds to the previous characterization is the idea of persistence connected with a stable relation among the parts. Persistence interdependence is described by Bratman as a mutual rational support that we can formulate as follows:

(vi) the intention of each that we J persists, until the intention of the others that we J persists. And vice versa.[47]

[47] Bratman identifies three kinds of interdependence: desirable, feasible and obligated. In case of desirability-based interdependence the persistence between intentions is based on that each agent keeps holding the intention in question so long as each participant keeps doing the same because he or she judges such an intending a desirable activity. Then, for what concerns the feasibility-based interdependence, Bratman explains that it is a kind of opportunistic attitude, which occurs when each agent judges the joint activity as a possible task to obtain only if each participant keeps holding the intention that we J as a possible task to pursue jointly. Finally, the obligation-based interdependence is about joint intentions held on the basis of mutual obligations behind the attitude.
The introduction of these three persistence interdependences represents the reason why in Bratman's last formulation (Bratman 2014) we can find eight building blocks instead of a list of five, (Bratman 2014, pp.70-78).

1.2 The *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality

The present section concerns the perspective identified by Bratman as *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. After a brief survey on the debate and its fundamental concepts (first paragraph), the reflection outlines the proposals offered by three of the main exponents of Social Ontology, who have introduced we-attitudes for the action as fundamental aspects of the explanation. In particular, the second paragraph is devoted to Searle's proposal, the third to that adopted by Tuomela, while the last focuses on Gilbert's theory of shared agency.

1.2.1 A distributive interpretation

With the aim of explaining contexts of shared agency we have introduced the *continuity thesis* of intentionality as a position that wants to understand phenomena of the kind by applying nothing more than those concepts and descriptions involved in the study of individual intentional agency. In this sense, a plurality of agents can be described as acting together (in the relevant sense) because each participant has her own intention that the group does something by way of each sharing the same intention. What makes the attitude a shared mental state is the content of the intention, which refers to the "we", i.e. the plurality of individuals sharing the plan state. According to Bratman's theory, the continuity sustained depends upon the fact that, if compared with the case of individual intentional action, no further concept is needed and the sharedness expressed in the content held by each is implemented by the network of all individual attitudes meshing towards the final aim. Due to this interlocking, Bratman's proposal might come under the heading of "distributive conception of shared agency" generally associated with those approaches maintaining that the jointness of the mental state is based on the fact that each individual has her own intention for the action and that no intentional state is shared by the participants as if they had a common mind (Schmid 2009). The fact of being shared by many individuals is, rather, a matter of content and organization among the plans (Ludwig 2007). Similarly, D.P. Tollefsen (Tollefsen 2002, 2015) has defined this way of dealing

with the issue as a non-summative approach: the shared intention, though located in the individuals' mind, is, indeed, something more than the mere aggregation of all the individual attitudes for the action involved in the context. Shared intentions, Tollefsen claims, differ from mere individual intentions either in kind or content.[48] Bratman's theory is a case of difference between individual and shared intentionality due to the content of the attitudes, which, in the case of collective performance, show the connection with the "we" in the mental representation of the task.

Bratman himself has opposed his non-summative conception and the non-summative one (based on a divergence about the kind) [49] maintained by the theorists of the *discontinuity thesis*, asserting that philosophers such as Searle, Tuomela and Gilbert have committed themselves with the introduction of new theoretical tools peculiar to cases of shared agency and not reducible to any premise regarding individual agency. The idea of a division of the two explanations (concerning individual and group intentional actions) lies in the assumption of genuine we-attitudes for the action that are radically different from the attitudes involved in the theorization of individual intentional agency. As a consequence, accounting for group phenomena implies concepts that were not required in the reflection concerning individual performances. Even though the new shared aspect has been variously conceived by different authors, it is possible to find a common way of approaching intentional shared actions. Tuomela has expressed the point in a way that makes the contrast with Bratman's perspective emerge straightforwardly:

[48] On the contrary, a summative explanation would involve only "intentions that I" held by different individuals and eventually oriented towards a common end as a matter of belief. The convergence on the final task is not enough to establish shared intentions; in fact, anyone in the context may be pursuing the same goal of the others with the wrong belief about their intention to cooperate. Even the addition of true mutual beliefs would not correspond to Bratman's shared agency, because also in this case the individual plans would not refer to the group action. To know that other persons are trying to get the same result one is trying to get, and to know that this knowledge is common among all the agents, does not mean that such a "group" of individuals follows a shared intention for the action

[49] On shared agency as a non-summative phenomenon see Searle 1990.

> The social world can be adequately understood and rationally explained only with the help of we-mode concepts expressing the full-blown collective intentionality and sociality in addition to I-mode concepts. We-mode reasoning is not conceptually reducible to I-mode reasoning.[50]

By bracketing for the moment the variations in conceiving *we-mode* concepts, it is important to underline that all those concepts are meant to be originally collective in the sense that they do not derive from a combination or organization of the concepts employed in the study of individual agency. Similarly, *we-mode* notions pinpoint attitudes that are not at stake until the action is not a shared one. The we-intention represents an element of discontinuity between individual and shared agency and – as Tuomela said – implies a thesis of irreducibility (epistemic and descriptive), which does not allow the construction of shared intentional phenomena through a puzzle of building blocks gathered from the description of the individual agency. On the contrary, for group intentional phenomena, the addition of new bricks is required.

In line with this, Bratman's categorization offers a perspective from which one can approach the debate in Social Ontology and find a rift between two diverse ways of theorizing the agency: "reductive", in the case of continuity position, and "non reductive", in the case of discontinuity claim.[51]

Even if this interpretation represents a fruitful way to organize the debate, it is also possible to bridge the differences between the two positions by analyzing how the notion of we-attitude has been generally (even though variously) conceived. The assumption that individuals when acting together are moved by mental states of a particular nature, genuinely collective, is not necessarily in conflict with the distributive and non-summative perspective associated with Bratman's proposal. As Tollefsen pointed out shared intentions, if compared with personal plans, *differ either in kind or content*, meaning that group performance can be guided both by intentions in the individuals' mind recalling the "we" in

[50] Tuomela 2013a, p.15.
[51] It will be a task of the second chapter determining the meaning of this reductive/non reductive character of shared-action theory in Social Ontology. We may anticipate that if the characterization consistently fits the epistemological dimension of the theory, extending the observation to further aspects is difficult. The ontological and methodological reducibility/non reducibility will be an issue to explore.

the content (Bratman) and by intentions held by individuals and otherwise connected to the "we". As far as the latter is concerned, the different way of having shared intentions creates a discontinuity due to the introduction of a diverse kind of attitudes in the explanation of shared activities but, in the end, such an attitude is always a mental state located in each participant's mind.

On the issue, Schmid suggests an understanding of we-intentions capable of placing Bratman's view closer to the one he ascribes to theorists of the *discontinuity thesis*:

> According to authors such as Raimo Tuomela […], John Searle himself, and Michael Bratman, there is no single (token) shared intentional state that is behind the joint intentional activity, but many intentional states instead, individual intentional states that are marked out from those involved in the case of solitary or singular agency in that they are either of a special *form* (Searle), *mode* (Tuomela), or *content* (Bratman), providing the "glue" for collective intentionality. In other words, the existing accounts of collective intentionality tend to be of a *distributive* kind.[52]

Thus, all approaches connected to individual and collective intentionality seem to be, in some sense, compatible with a distributive interpretation of shared intentionality.

What follows is an analysis of three versions of the *discontinuity thesis* starting from Searle's proposal.

1.2.2 Searle's collective intentionality

In the essay *Collective Intentions and Actions* (Searle 1990) Searle asserts that shared agency relies on the fundamental principle that group intentional performances are primitive phenomena in the sense that «there really is such a thing as collective intentional behavior that is not the same as the summation of individual intentional behavior»[53]. In particular, shared agency acquires its specificity from the kind of intentionality exerted by the individuals and oriented towards a group performance. This approach brings together two seemingly divergent assumptions that the author wants to conciliate: (1) all

[52] Schmid 2009, p.23.
[53] Searle 1990, p.402.

intentionality is in the individuals' mind; (2) shared agency involves collective intentionality and collective intentionality is a primitive phenomenon. To defend this connection, Searle sustains that «there is no reason why you could not have intentionality in individual heads that took the form of the first person plural»[54]. Even thought all intentionality is ascribable to individuals, an intention can however present both a singular and a plural form, which gives rise to I-intentions and we-intentions for the action respectively.[55]

From these few considerations, it should be clear that a collective intention for the action is an attitude belonging to individual's psychology that, at the same time, is referred to a "we" as the subject to which the shared effort is attributed. The "we" gives the form to the state of mind thought by each participant. So, while Bratman shared intentionality has been associated with events represented by "I intend that we", Searle's proposal introduces the concept of we-attitudes designed on the basis of expressions such as "we intend that…", "we have the collective intention to…" and so forth. While in Bratman's interpretation the shared phenomenon presents a continuity of the form with the individual-oriented usage of the intentional faculty, Searle's proposal, on the contrary, marks a formal discontinuity and introduces we-attitudes for the action besides individual intentions.

Despite the *discontinuity thesis* about the form of the intention, the model of collective intentionality proposed by Searle to explain cases of shared agency can be considered a linear development of his notion of individual intentional agency. In this sense, both individual and collective intentionality have the same structure, which (as alluded in 1.1.1) involves two phases: prior intentions and intentions-in-action. The former

[54] Searle 2007, p.12.

[55] Searle holds that the double form can be associated with many other attitudes and, in particular, with all mental states with propositional structure. Examples are beliefs (I-belief/we-belief), desires (I-desire/we-desire), claims (I-claim/we-claim) and so forth, (Searle 2007). What changes in the nature of the attitude is always the grammatical form with which the agent formulates it in her mind. In the event of a collective intention, "we have the intention that…", the state of mind is held by each individual and each singular attitude is «independent of the fact that he is getting things right»[55]. One could have a collective intention for the action even though such a plan does not match what really happens outside of the mind, because the nature of the intention is only based on the individual thinking. For this reason, Searle defines the collective feature as an *essential* character of intentionality, meaning that it does not depend on (or derive from) empirical circumstances (Searle 2007).

attitude can be considered as a general plan that may be held by the agent as an overall guideline for the action. Instead, the latter has been described as a necessary aspect of any intentional behavior and the psychological counterpart of the bodily movement intended by the plan state. Searle explains:

> Using obvious abbreviations, "p.i." for prior intention, "i.a." for intention-in-action, "b.m." for bodily movement, and "a" for action, we can say that the general form of these relations is given by the following schemata.
> p.i. (this p.i. causes a)
> i.a. (this i.a. causes b.m.)
> a = i.a.+b.m., where i.a. causes b.m.[56]

To better delineate Searle's description of agency, it is necessary to mention the not unusual case in which an action is accomplished by the individual's doing something else. For example, in case in which someone intends to turn the light on, the task is generally fulfilled *by means of* pressing the finger on the switch, where the second part of the relation (that is not the main action meant by the intention to turn the light on) is assumed to be what causes the action represented in the first. Another chance is the circumstance in which one does something that, for the gesture it represents, contributes to constituting some further action. An example might be a person who shows her appreciation after a performance *by way of* clapping her hands.
In events of this sort the phrasing would be:

> i.a. B by means of A (this i.a. causes A, which causes it to be the case that B)
> i.a. B by way of A (this i.a. causes A, which constitutes B).[57]

In view of this account of individual intentionality, it is reasonable to assume that the structure will be at stake also in the event of collective intentionality. In fact, the only thing that has changed in the contexts of shared agency is the grammatical form of the attitude and not its framework.[58] Thus, we can keep the formula and reflect on how to adjust it in

[56] Searle 2007, p.18.
[57] *Ibidem*.
[58] Despite some divergences, the sameness of the structure is a feature that Searle's and Bratman's approach have in common. In particular, they both maintain that the study of a complex individual action (over time for Bratman and made of parts for Searle) provides tools for investigating actions done by many participants.

case the intentions have a plural form as, for instance, “we intend to prepare the sauce together”. For this purpose, it makes sense to imagine that the collective intention (namely, to prepare the sauce) contains something similar to Bratman’s sub-plans, intentions regarding the specific contribution given by each participant. In the case of the sauce preparation the contributions may be (1) to weight the ingredients and (2) stir them homogeneously. According to Searle, shared intentions are attitudes referring to the particular act to which any single agent is committed and which, depending on the situation, represents a cause or component of the entire collective performance. For Bratman the intention connected with the specific contribution of each participant is not part of the intentional content of the others. To represent it in a phrase: i.a. collective B *by means of/by way of* singular A (this i.a. causes A, causes/constitutes B), (Searle 2010, pp.52-55) [59].

In keeping with this, a fundamental feature has to be highlighted: although the phrasing shows both the collective aim and individual task, Searle maintains that the only intention causally effective on the individual action consists in the singular attitude, A. This means that each participant’s body is moved by the mental state connected with A, which is part of a wider plan that has no direct influence on the action. It only represents an assumption and complex horizon in which each contribution acquires a meaning.

Moreover, the formula does not involve any assumption about what the other partners intend to do in view of B. In other words, each agent is only informed about her own A, while ignoring the A' (if any) pursued by the others. On the contrary, the reference to the others’ intending can be found in the content of beliefs parallel to intentions, which are about the context of the action though not directly connected to it. These mental states are not part of the intentional event and, consequently, the content they represent has no causal role in determining the action. It follows that each individual does not know what the others are doing so she could not possibly formulate the intention on the basis of the others’

[59] The intentions relative to the individual contributions is identified with A, while the collective action is represented by B, that is the complex aim caused or constituted by all As.

intention. Instead, each participant acts on the assumption that everybody is disposed to do her part to reach the shared aim with the belief that also the others are doing the same.

In addition to this characterization of Searle's position, it might be important to mention that the idea that there are in reality some others with whom one might believe to cooperate (and actually cooperate) is considered an aspect not grasped through intentional capacity. Rather, the presence of the other has to do with a *background* understanding of the context, which represents an acquired/embedded set of knowledge, prior to the intentional attitude.[60] Searle speaks about «a background sense of the others as possible agents»[61] that has its roots in basic human skills, enabling and enabling the exercise of both individual and collective intentional agency.[62] The idea that some other agents are taken to be part of the same effort one is intentionally pursuing constitutes, at most, the content of a belief associated with one's collective intention for the action. This reference is external to the collective intention itself and, according to Searle's perspective, it represents the only actual connection between the we-attitude of the individual and the others' we-intending. Recalling what was stated at the beginning of the brief introduction to Searle's thought, the "we" is just a formal aspect of the intentional event and is more an epistemic feature of the explanation rather than a term with an actual counterpart in the world.

1.2.3 We-mode we-attitudes: Tuomela's proposal

As far as collective intentionality is a model for analyzing shared agency, Tuomela's proposal[63] represents another benchmark for the debate in Social Ontology. In line with Searle, Tuomela thinks we-attitudes for the action that occur in the individuals' mind as mental states originally oriented towards a group phenomenon.[64] Despite the analogy,

[60] On the notion of background and the conscious/unconscious, conceptual/non conceptual attitudes that it may involve see Schmitz 2013.
[61] Searle 1990, p.415.
[62] The notion of background, as conceived by Searle in the development of his researches (Searle 1990, 1992, 1995, 2010), represents an interesting and problematic topic that we do not pretend to explore in these pages.
[63] Main references: Tuomela 1984, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2013a.
[64] The association of the claims confirms the thesis connected with the distributive approach of shared intentionality if taken in Schmid's version (Schmid 2009). In contrast with this interpretation, Laitinen

Tuomela's perspective deviates from Searle's due to the fact that the author has enriched the explanation of intentional agency suggesting that, besides the content and the form, we-attitudes can be associated with another feature. This feature is the mode of the attitude and it can be held in the mind of the individual either as an I-mode or as a we-mode mental state, (Tuomela 2003). Assuming that the attitudes under investigation are we-intentions for the action, it is thus possible to distinguish between I-mode we-intentions and we-mode we-intentions: for an intention to be connected with one of the labels is a consequence of the way in which the agent approached the object represented by the content as a reason for the action. In particular, in the context of shared agency, the specific point of the I-mode is represented by the fact that each of the agents involved has committed herself to the goal in a *private* way[65], meaning that the main reason for pursuing it has been an individual one. This individual reason for the action might be associated with the belief of other agents cooperating with the same aim in mind so to make the task a common objective among the participants and not merely a private goal. By using the example of people painting the house together, Tuomela says that

> In the I-mode case, there can be a shared plan, roughly in the sense of each of the participants forming the intention to paint the house ''together'' with the other agent, in the sense that each is going to do a certain part such that the aggregation of the parts results in the full action.[66]

Such a sense of "together" can be considered a weak usage of the term. In fact, it requires the participation of the agents in a collective endeavor mainly for their own interest, whereas the stronger approach of the we-mode would require that the agents act as group members and pursue group reasons. The we-mode implies people function fully as group

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(Laitinen 2015) has defined Tuomela's approach as a non distributive one due to the fact that the author has assumed that in contexts of shared agency a certain group perspective is at stake. Schmid contrasts this reading of Tuomela's position with an ontological argument by saying that: «Raimo Tuomela virtually treats groups as ontological non-entities because in his view, "groupness" is, as he puts it, "in the last analysis attributed to individuals" (Tuomela 1995, p.199). It seems that in his account, the basic structure of we-intentionality does not per se presuppose collective entities such as 'groups' or 'communities». (Schmid 2009, p.31).

[65] The expressions "private" and "privately" in Tuomela's theory are technical, they refer to the attitudes held in the I-mode (Tuomela 2007, p.14).

[66] Tuomela 2007, p.71.

members and seek to obtain, instead of their personal success, a collective task in view of the group benefit (*forgroupness*). Tuomela explains:

> Agents A1, . . . , Am forming a group, g, share the intention to satisfy a content p […] in the we-mode if and only if p is collectively accepted by them qua group members as the content of their collective intention and they are collectively committed to satisfying p for g.[67]

Considering the quote and assuming content p as the representation of the task, it results that all agents seeking to realize a group reason act in the we-mode if and only if two further attitudes are in place: collective acceptance and commitment. The former focuses the attention on the idea that for an attitude to be properly collective, it is necessary that the content of that mental state has been accepted by the group members as a reason «true or correctly assertable»[68] for the group. A collective intention is thus realized in the we-mode only in the case in which its content has been the object of an act of collective acceptance exerted by the participants all together. Actually, the acceptance in question represents an activity done in the we-mode too, namely through an act of collective commitment.[69] Such a commitment can be viewed as another kind of we-attitude: each individual collectively commits herself to the common purpose if and only if this engagement is fulfilled in view of the group benefit. More precisely, the collective commitment associated with the we-mode can be described as an attitude with a double direction: on the one hand, collective commitment has as its object the content of the we-intention; on the other hand, it consists in the act of committing oneself being a member of the group. While the former alternative is characterized as an *intention-relative and non-normative* sense of the attitude (Tuomela 2005, p.332), the latter creates the basis for a normative bond among the agents. In fact, the

[67] Tuomela 2005, p.332. The definition should be implemented with another fundamental feature of we-mode we-intentional agency that is *collectivity condition*. According to this assumption it is necessarily true that p is satisfied for a member of g if and only if it is satisfied for every other member of g. (Tuomela 2013a, pp. 40-42)

[68] Tuomela 2013a, p.128.

[69] It is important to say that, in Tuomela's approach, all intentional contents collectively accepted by the agents as group members form a shared cognitive background that the author calls *ethos*. The *ethos* contains all values, goals, reasons and concepts that the members of the group have found the right contents to embrace. To put it otherwise, the *ethos* represents the "common good" of the group (Tuomela 2007), because it is a selection of motives for the action suitable for promoting the benefit of the community. Despite the essential cognitive nature of the *ethos* as a set of contents, it should be added that all the elements in it also have moral value: they coincide with what has been considered good for the group.

idea of a commitment directed toward a reason does only create a connection between the agents and the content of the shared intention without establishing further ties among the participants. This first connection works as far as the intention is concerned. On the contrary, when considering its second meaning, «collective commitment also involves that the members have group-based normative rights and obligations towards one another, which glue them together more strongly»[70]. Such a connection is relative to being part of the group no matter if any intention for the action has been formulated.[71]

1.2.4 Gilbert on joint actions

Another author who has approached the notion of shared agency by adopting the concept of group is Margaret Gilbert: it is a fundamental assumption of her thought that, in order to understand shared agency, one needs to resort to the idea of people acting together as a group or as a body, (Gilbert 1989, 1997, 2003, 2007a, 2009, 2011). In particular, according to Gilbert the most fundamental feature of collective action is the notion of joint commitment which represents the condition *sine qua non* the agents can form a group and have collective attitudes for the action. It is by virtue of the normative bond created through the act of commitment that a number of individuals gives rise to a group and acts as if they were one. The main implication of this interpretation is that in the organization of a group

[70] Tuomela 2013a, p.43.

[71] Since agents are kept together by virtue of their membership, none of them can leave the group as she pleases. In fact, the group can be dissolved only through a we-mode we-attitude of disruption and the same can be said about the break-up of a collective intention. Only the entire group can change something about the intending and the agency of the "we".
As a matter of fact, the way in which Tuomela presents the notion of shared agency in the full-blown sense, in the we-mode, depicts an image of the group that is particularly robust. Even thought the subject of we-intentions can still be found in each singular individual, the concept of "group" acquires a significant role in structuring the performance. In fact, the agents can act in the we-mode if and only if they collectively accept a group reason, collectively commit themselves with that reason (*ethos*) and with their status of group members. This considered, the approach shows some sort of circularity, in the sense that shared agency is presented in a way that the formation of a group attitude requires the reference to the group *ethos* and membership. Shared agency necessitates that the agents are already part of the group to which the action is ascribed. Truly, the author avoids such a risk of circularity and holds that the pattern, based on collective acceptance and commitment, works only for cases in which the group perspective (we-mode) has been already established. When a group scenario is lacking the pro-group reason for the action can be assumed by the participants making an agreement, «there need to be not a joint intention to make the agreement», (Tuomela 2013a, p.129).

action shared intentions for the action, though important, are considered secondary to the role played by commitment, which enables the shift from an individual perspective to a collective one.[72] As the fundamental character of shared agency, joint commitment can be described as the act through which each agent forms a group with others and acts with them jointly.

Given the above, joint commitment turns out to be the most fundamental aspect of the notion of shared agency in Gilbert's approach, but, although fundamental, that feature has been further described as being a conditional attitude. Indeed, it is assumed to happen if and only if, among the agents involved in the context, there is common knowledge concerning the fact that the other participants are co-present and ready to commit themselves to the common purpose, too.[73] Since each participant has this kind of belief, the conditions for joint commitment are met and the agents can form a group by expressing (either with words or gestures) their willingness to be part of the "we".[74]

Once individuals have mutually recognized themselves as part of the same group, they are in a position to engage themselves as one in an action and collectively pursue a common task. In this sense, «people may jointly commit to accepting, as a body, a certain goal»[75], where accepting an end on the basis of joint commitment has relevant consequences for the perspective from which the agents are holding the intention to obtain it. According to Gilbert's theory of shared intentions, when the attitude is assumed by the individuals as members of a group, the attitude will be held by those individuals from a group perspective. Since an agent can have collective attitudes for the action in case of a joint commitment to act as a body with others, it might be reasonable to infer that collective intentions are located on a psychological level concerned with the individual acting as part of a group and separated from the one to which individual intentions belong as personal

[72] This kind of engagement is similar to agreement and it is prior to the establishment of any shared goal; in fact, it only needs the presence of other individuals and their willingness to be part of the group. To find more about Gilbert's critique to we-intentions as fundamental features of shared agency: Gilbert 2010, Gilbert 2007b.
[73] Gilbert 2013, pp.47-48.
[74] Gilbert 1989, pp.167-203.
[75] Gilbert 2006, p. 136.

attitudes. In line with this, Gilbert postulates the existence of two intentional levels in the individual's mind both generated by the kind of commitment and perspective (personal or joint) by which the attitude has been formulated. While in planning individual activities an agent has intentions on a personal level, in collective contexts the intention is posited at another intentional domain. Such a division between the individual and the group's psychological sphere creates a discontinuity that is the core of Gilbert's version of the *discontinuity thesis*, which does not pertain to the intentional faculty straightforwardly (as it was for Searle and Tuomela)[76] but is rather defined by the commitment at the basis of two diverse standpoints in the mind.

By focusing the attention exclusively on group perspective it is possible to think of shared intentions for the action as reasons to which the agents are jointly committed as one due to their being part of the same collective. In order to go deeper into the analysis of this kind of attitudes, Gilbert has identified three principles as the main features of collective agency. The principles in question are the *disjunction*, *concurrence* and *obligation criteria*, (Gilbert 2006, 2009, 2013).

The *disjunction criterion* concerns the relation between shared and personal attitudes of the participants. Since collective and individual intentionality rest on two different levels, mental states related to the former domain have no direct influence on the attitudes belonging to the latter, and *vice versa*. Consequently, the two intentional stances can be treated in a separate way – i.e. can be disjointed – so it is possible to imagine a situation in which personal attitudes could even be in contrast with the collective aim without representing a relevant obstacle for the satisfaction of the group goal. More concretely, we could consider the situation in which *a*, *b*, *c* and *d* intend as a body to go to work by car-sharing. In addition to this shared plan, *a* would like to be more autonomous, while *b* would prefer to leave later in the morning. Even though two members have

[76] In contrast with this opposition between Gilbert's and Tuomela's perspective, the two positions will be aligned due to the fundamental role that in both perspectives the notion of commitment has. In particular, it will be underlined that both theories have conceived the notion of commitment as the keystone of the difference between the individual perspective (at the base of I-mode attitudes, in Tuomela's terms) and the group perspective (from which we-mode attitudes are thought), (2.3.4).

divergent individual inclinations characterizing the personal level of intentionality, the group keeps going to work sharing the ride and this happens because collective and individual intentions run on different tracks. By virtue of this disjunction, it is possible to ascribe shared intentions also in cases where some individual attitudes are not in accordance with the collective aim.[77]

Apart from being conceived as separable from personal attitudes, shared intentions are characterized by *concurrence criterion*, which states that those attitudes require the engagement of all the parties in the action. This assumption has, at least, two meanings. First of all, it implies that shared intentions are properly formulated and realized only when each member of the group plays her role in the fulfillment of the entire performance. According to this, car-sharing is possible only in case *a*, *b*, *c* and *d* dividing the costs, are disposed to drive taking turns and adjusting their own schedule to the needs of the others. Furthermore, the *concurrence criterion* has another sense, related to the fact that shared intentions can be changed or rescinded only in a collective way, i.e. when the parties change or rescind the plan together. This means that nobody is in the position to break the shared intention unilaterally: at most, one might violate the collective intention acting in opposition to the common effort, without suspending the shared intention in question. The outcome would just be the transgression of the collective attitude, which might be rebuked by the other members of the group as a betrayal. For instance, driver *a* cannot make her choice and decide that the group of commuters will not share the car anymore. He is not in the right position to attempt this solution because the intention from which she is trying to disassociate herself is not an individual attitude. It has been taken by *a*, *b*, *c* and *d* together, *as a body*, and, as a consequence, can be changed or stopped only by a decision taken by the group who created it. Otherwise, the other members would have the right to condemn the conduct of *a* as an unfair performance.[78]

[77] Gilbert 2009, pp.171-173.
[78] In Gilbert's proposal, *a* has the possibility to interrupt her participation to the joint activity only through a collective decision regarding her exit. In view of this, the author has introduced a *concurrence condition on exit*, (Gilbert 2009, pp.173-175).

The fact that the agents who share the intention are entitled to rebuke the wrong doing of another member of the group is also connected with the third principle identified by Gilbert, which is the *obligation criterion*. The idea is that «each participant has obligations towards the other participants to behave in a way appropriate to the activity in question» and such obligations are «grounded in the joint activity itself»[79]. Every commuter joining in carpooling cannot abstain herself from paying part of the costs, neither might she decide not to drive the day in which she was supposed to. The point is that all of these behaviors are not appropriate ways to act related to the shared intention to go to work by sharing the ride, that is a goal imposing duties and rights on the participants. One is bound by certain duties because being part of a collective intention (and action) requires to behave in the appropriate way through which one can fulfill her part – a part constitutive of the whole shared intention. On the other hand, the activity is a joint interplay among different players giving each member the standing to demand from the others the same fairness claimed from her by them. Indeed, bearing a shared intention means being collectively committed to the same common goal, which has nothing to do with the individual commitment shown by agents personally, (Gilbert 2009).

To recap, according to Gilbert's interpretation of joint activities, what is peculiar to shared agency is the joint commitment that turns a set of individuals into a group agent. On this basis, shared actions are characterized by three main principles: *disjunction*, *concurrence* and *obligation criteria*. While the *disjunction criterion* secures the genuine collective nature of shared attitudes, the requirement of concurrence establishes the interdependence of roles and functions realized by each individual and, thirdly, the presence of obligations among the agents strengthens and improves the normative bonds firstly grounded on the basic principle of joint commitment. Gilbert writes:

[79] Gilbert 2006, p.106.

> Persons A and B are collectively doing A if and only if they collectively intend to do A and each is effectively acting, in light of the associated joint commitment, so as to bring about the fulfillment of this intention.[80]

1.3 Intentional shared agency (beyond details)

The range of concepts and definitions provided up till now might make it hard to think of a comprehensive perspective for establishing an univocal characterization of shared agency. Indeed, the attempt could be doomed to failure or could come up with a flattering proposal, not suitable for grasping the sharpness and rich variety of viewpoints animating the debate in Social Ontology. Not expecting to overcome the peculiarities that are part of each approach, it could be however helpful to think of a common starting ground of shared agency in general terms. Thus, with the aim of preserving the heterogeneity characterizing the reflection, a strategy to put all the elements into order might be (1) considering Bratman's, Searle's, Tuomela's and Gilbert's perspective as different versions of the intentional pattern, and then, following Schmid's hint, (2) taking each standpoint as an example of the distributive approach of intentionality (Schmid 2014).

With this characterization in mind, the first two paragraphs investigate how the relation between intention and action appears in its four facets in the context of shared agency (constitutive and structural in paragraph 1, normative and causal in paragraph 2).[81] Then, paragraph 3 presents an alternative (minimalist) interpretation of shared agency that does not consider shared agency as a different topic of research from the one about individual agents coordinating themselves towards a common objective. According to this view, that we will call participatory-intention account (PIA), individuals would just hold in their mind individual intentions to participate in the action. The relevance of group

[80] Gilbert 2013, p.89.

[81] Even though there are different interpretations, the assumption on which the concept of shared agency has been grounded consists in the fact that any phenomenon of agency refers to intentionality. And all intentionality happens in the individuals' mind. Thus, the main idea is limiting the domain of "agency" to the field enclosed in the boundaries of intentional faculty, excluding from it all human behaviors that are not occasioned by proper mental states (e.g. instincts, unreflective responses, basic habitual conducts). Accordingly, the inner relation between intending and acting has been introduced as a multifold connection with constitutive, structural, normative and causal aspects.

dimension in the explanation and design of the phenomenon will be defended in the last paragraph.

1.3.1 The MLA: constitutive and structural relation

The following four steps of the reflection attempt to broadly delineate the relation between intentionality and behavior extending the investigation on the kinds of connection (constitutive, structural, normative and causal) regarding individual agency (2.2) to events of shared agency.[82] The analysis assumes that "shared/collective intending" is used to pinpoint the human faculty to have intentional mental states in the individuals' mind – we-intentions in case of the *discontinuity thesis*, intentions-that-we in the *continuity thesis* – while "shared/collective acting" is related to the action performed by each participant as a group member in accordance with the shared plan state. In this sense, the account that we are going to profile might be designated as a members-level account (MLA), a perspective which looks at shared agency from the participants' point of view. The MLA explains shared agency as an event concerning the individuals' thinking and acting as group members.

a. Constitutive relation

According to the definition provided in 1.1.2, intentions are components of agency, happening together with the physical movement and representing its psychological counterpart. Especially in Searle's proposal it is possible to find an explicit reflection on the constitutive role of the intention in its plural form concerning the realization of shared performance. In fact, the author suggests that the action is the outcome of the intention-in-action added to the bodily movement: «a = i.a.+b.m.»[83], where the distinction between intention-in-action and prior intention is a fundamental feature to remark. The entire plan represented in the content of the prior intention is not an essential or constitutive feature of

[82] In order to avoid the flattering effect of the explanation, a relevant feature to be considered is that each author of those introduced in the previous sections has treated the intentionality-shared agency connection focusing just on some aspects of the link and not on others.
[83] Searle 2007, p.18.

the activity: it may be a rational guidance but what is built in the performance is the attitude directly connected with the gesture. Thus, in case of a shared intention, the attitude that is effectively part of the action performed by each individual as a group member is the intention-in-action, which coincides with the mental state representing in its content the task that the individual contribution should realize in order for the entire collective plan to be fulfilled. For instance, it is the intention-in-action to buy the paint that can be considered as part of the activity played by an agent in view of the collective plan of painting the house. The reference to the collective dimension in which (and by virtue of which) the contribution takes place enters the picture only as a background assumption that, though relevant, is not considered to be a constitutive element of the performance. As a consequence, it seems plausible to infer that the constitutive relation is a feature that concerns the intention-in-action relative to the individual contribution rather than the mental state planning for the entire endeavor.

Apart from Searle, none of the authors here considered seems to give the same deep attention to the distinction between the two intentional attitudes, neither in the individual nor in the collective form of intentionality (the second case, obviously, does not pertain to Bratman's). Instead, Bratman, Gilbert and Tuomela generally speak of intentions considering them as plans for the action, namely as prior intentions, which, according to Searle, are not reckoned actual parts of the activity. [84] In spite of this, it is reasonable to infer that if a constitutive relation between intentionality and agency can be assumed, it would refer to the intention planning the individual contribution rather than the general plan regarding the whole group. In fact, if we take in consideration Bratman's explanation, the structure of shared agency depicted by the building blocks approach is, to a certain extent, similar to Searle's formulation: differences left aside, the shared intention is described as an

[84] To be more precise it should be said that Tuomela (Tuomela 2007) has proposed something similar to Searle's distinction between intention-in-action and prior intention. The author has discriminated between action-intention and aim-intention: the former kind of intentions is the one corresponding to Searle's intentions-in-action, mental states relative to gestures and satisfied by them. Aim-intentions do not require that «the agent believes that he with nonzero probability can alone bring about or see to it that the action or its result event comes about. Rather the agent is assumed by his actions to contribute to the aimed result», (Tuomela 2007, p.84).This means that aim-intentions represents complex plans that can be composed by many action-intentions held by the same individual in time or by different subjects. Thus, we-intentions refers to aim-intentions.

attitude realized by way of the intention of each that *x* (second building block) and by way of meshing sub-plans of the intention of each (fifth building block). Which means that the feature involved in the performance of each in favor of the shared intention (in the sense of prior intention) is the attitude (intention-in-action) related to the individual contribution rather than the plan concerning the entire activity. Also in Gilbert's and Tuomela's versions of we-attitudes, it could be assumed that for the agent to act as a group member it is the intention pertaining to the particular activity – and not regarding the entire task – that can be considered as part of the action.[85]

b. Structural relation

As is for individual agency, shared performance adds up to a behavior framed on the ground of an intentional plan for the action, which fixes the objective towards which the activity is oriented. This kind of relation is easy to find in every explanation of agency based on the intentional pattern and for this reason it pertains to the totality of the approaches just sketched. In particular, if we analyze Searle's formulation, shared intention contains the reference to the final task that is expected to be realized *by way/by means* of all individual actions conducive to it. In this sense the collective intention to do something provides a double rational guidance: on one hand, it makes clear the specific goal of the performance attempted by each participant; on the other, it pinpoints the final end of the collective activity. Thus, the intention gives a structure to the individual contribution in

[85] The point is difficult because, despite some differences, these authors has enriched Searle's approach by the introduction of a specific mode through which the agent formulates the intention. The we-mode thought by Tuomela and the joint intention introduced by Gilbert are two kinds of attitudes referring to the individual contribution in the group endeavor, as it was for Searle and Bratman, and assuming that such an individual contribution is embraced by the agent as a group member through an act of collective/joint commitment. This means that the intention-in-action composing the activity, although relative to the individual participation, is not simply related with the group dimension, rather, it is committed to it. This fact makes the constitutive role of the intention, strictly intertwined with the normative connection between agency and intentionality, in a deeper way than the one introduced by Searle and Bratman, who does not introduce a form of commitment relative to the mode through which one has the mental state. The separation between the I-mode and the we-mode as much as that between the individual and the collective psychological level draws a picture in which the intention relative to the individual contribution is assumed from a perspective framed on the fact that the individual is a member of the group and as a member thinks (and is committed to do so) as part of it: the plan state regulating the individual action is formulated in a collective mode (Tuomela) or from a collective perspective (Gilbert). In brief, what makes the case more complicated is the normative cogency of the intentional stance – a point that will be better developed in the third chapter when the discourse about normativity will be explicitly addressed.

view of the shared task and to the system of contributions by arranging some sort of coordination among the parts. Such a control has been clearly spelled out by Bratman with the introduction of the *means-end coherence principle*, which requires a balance between the end of the entire shared plan and the means, namely the individual sub-plans, employed in obtaining it. According to this claim, the intention planning for the activity gives a rational control on the entire performance securing that all the contributions involved are coherent with the final shared aim and consistent with one another.[86] In the spirit of the building-blocks perspective, what the tenet regulates is the coherence between the plan for the individual contribution and the activity done to perform it; then, the coordination among the various sub-plans held by different individuals will be established.[87]

1.3.2 The MLA: normative and causal relation

c. Normative relation

The presence of a normative feature built in the characterization of shared agency addresses the question whether the explanation of the phenomenon had better approach the issue from a normativistic prospective, which would imply the identification of the normative aspect as an essential element of the concept. In this line, the intention of the participants to act as group members and their performance would be grounded on normative constraints making the collective event feasible by virtue of this type of connection between the terms, intending and acting. The issue is to discover if in Bratman's, Searle's, Tuomela's and Gilbert's perspective the normative relation has been endorsed as an inner aspect of shared agency they theorize. Actually, only Gilbert (Gilbert 1989, 1990, 2007b, 2013) has openly accepted the normativistic stance but some clues might be discovered also in other formulations.

[86] The normative relation, once again, appears as a very fundamental aspect. In fact, the coherence principle has been introduced as a normative constraint (Bratman 2014).

[87] This kind of sequence that goes from individual to shared phenomena follows a logical and conceptual order. It has been argued in the analyzes of Bratman's perspective that the explanation and the metaphysical status of events happening in time or among individuals are based on the explanation and on the metaphysics of phenomena concerning individual agency (Bratman 2014). In this sense, the relation between the two levels – individual and collective/diachronic – does not consist in a temporal order. It is but a kind of logical dependence.

In Gilbert's thought the intrinsic normative connection bounding the shared action with the intention planning for it has been introduced referring to the principle of joint commitment as the condition *sine qua non* an intentional attitude can occur. Joint commitment is a kind of commitment – opposed to the personal one – through which the agents engage themselves in an action, first of all, by taking on the status of partner and, secondly, by embracing the content of the attitude as a task that each of them as a group member is willing to realize. The core of the approach is that the normative bond does not derive from the endorsement of the attitude. It is the intentional attitude that is grounded on the commitment. The agents adopt a group perspective and make it that the acceptance of the intentional content could become the object of a further commitment jointly exerted in relation with the goal. To say it otherwise, the intention has a normative force on the performance because having a shared intention requires the subjects to be committed to the status of partner and to bear the mental state as if they were one. On this ground, it is possible to recognize another facet of the normative relation that is bounding the agents to the realization of the task contained in the content of the attitude, under the condition that the first normative tie – the one that serves to attribute the status of partner to all the participants – is respected. This second kind of normativity finds its source in the mental attitude and it is based on the normativity that emanates from having assumed the status of member in the group. Considering one of the main principles characterizing events of shared agency, namely the obligation criterion, Gilbert maintains that each must fulfill her role in the entire performance because of her being committed with the status of group member and, secondly, because of her engagement towards the common end.[88] The shared intention and joint commitment bound the agent to carry out the action – in particular, the individual contribution conducive to it – and to do so from a group perspective. No one can rescind this double link personally.

There is a difference between the way in which Gilbert conceives the normative component of shared agency and the viewpoint embraced by the others. While she locates

[88] Gilbert offers an account of shared intentions as agreements, grounded on more basic agreements (explicit or tacit) that are conducive to the formation of the group perspective. Without basic agreements establishing the group level, no further attitude can arise, because no group viewpoint would be fixed, (Gilbert 1989, 1997, 2009, 2013).

the shard-ness of the intentional attitude in the normative connection among participants as partners, the other theorists are inclined to consider the intention itself as the source of the normativity that keeps the agents together in the performance. In this sense, it is the plan state – and the acceptance of its content – that provides the bond which guarantees the realization of the performance and that such an activity happens as a group event. According to this, Bratman has connected the normativity of the intentional stance with the *consistency* it shows with the system of beliefs held by the agents, and with the *coherence* it has with reference to the means adopted in obtaining the task (Bratman 2014). Such a kind of normativity expressed by the two principles (consistency and means-end coherence) finds its source in the cognitive nature of the intention: it is by reckoning a certain content as a suitable and pertinent reason that the intention can be considered as the guidance of the activity. Similarly, only in the case in which the strategies adopted for the realization of the plan are conceived as valid means towards the end, the performance can be described as a coherent event carried out under rational control. The normative connection between intending and acting – more than the background relationship among the participants – seems to involve beliefs, reasons and cognitive features that occur in association with and in support of the agents' shared plan state.

The cognitive aspect is noteworthy also for what concerns Searle's point of view on the issue: the author underlined that the shard-ness of the performance is occasioned by the realization of a collective intention that, though having a plural grammatical form (we-intentionality), contains the reference to the group and to the contribution given by the other fellows only as an assumption. Meaning that the relation with the others and considering them partners in the action is just a matter of belief and, as such, could lead the agent to a failure without implying the vanishing of the collective intention she holds in mind.[89]

[89] Searle postulates a condition of adequacy, saying that anything we assume about collective intentionality «must be consistent with the fact that the structure of any individual's intentionality has to be independent of the fact of whether or not he is getting things right, whether or not he is radically mistaken about what is actually occurring. And this constraint applies as much to collective intentionality as it does to individual intentionality. One way to put this constraint is to say that the account must be consistent with the fact that all intentionality, whether collective or individual, could be had by a brain in a vat or by a set of brains in vats»,

Special reference also needs to be made to Tuomela's interpretation, which presents the normative relation connecting intending and acting as a problematic issue. Considering the intentional phenomenon as an event of cognition, the author investigates the conditions in which it happens referring to the normativity generated by the collective commitment and related to the we-mode (Tuomela 2002, 2007, 2013). Even if it is true that a we-attitude generally occurs in the assumption (i.e. in the belief) that the other individuals in the context are doing something conducive to the aim of the collective intention – as Searle maintains – the we-mode also adds something new to the case. The we-mode pinpoints a way of bearing we-attitudes that goes beyond the cognitive assumption of the others' presence and cooperation: it requires a collective commitment to the fact of being partners in the action and of pursuing goals in favor of the group. Thus, we-mode we-attitudes show a normative relation with the shared performance that, on the side of the attitude, comes from the collective commitment to the task, while, on the side of the mode, derives from the collective commitment assumed to the membership to the group. The normativity generated by the intentional state of mind is what Tuomela calls instrumental normativity, whereas the normative bond generated by being a member of the group is what falls under the label of social normativity (Tuomela 2003). All this considered and with reference to such a notion of social normativity, it could be meaningful to reckon Tuomela's position to be pretty close to the normativism adopted by Gilbert, who effectively distinguishes, as Tuomela does, between (1) a normative relation, regarding the participants as partners, which is prior to the establishment of both the shared intention and the shared action, and (2) a normative relation arising from the intention itself.

d. *Causal relation*

The attention given to the chance for shared intentions of having a causal power on group performance has shown it is inversely proportional to the normative relation between the mental state and the action. Given that the notion of commitment involved in the establishment of the normative bond has been described as having a double meaning, the

(Searle 1990, pp.406-7). Such a remark does not want to affirm that collective intentionality is not a shared phenomenon; it simply underlines that cooperation is present in the mental state just as an apparent phenomenon, something that is taken to be but that is neither real (not necessarily) nor normatively fixed.

study of normative relation might be distinguished from the causal issue in two different ways. On the one hand, when the normative feature is considered in relation with the mutual commitment among the agents as partners, the causal power of the intentional state has taken second place. The causal feature might be seen as a power based on the establishment of the group perspective through an act of commitment rather than an original intentional phenomenon. In fact, the normative source, depending on the relationship among the participants, has been introduced as coming before and grounding the possibility of having shared intentions for the action, which could exert a causal power on the agency only under the condition that a group intentional stance has already been set. On the other hand, when the performance has acquired a normative characterization due to the fact that the agency has been framed on the constraints fixed by the attitudes, focus is brought to the plan for the action, that is the prior intention/aim-intention that may come before the activity and provides the general task through which each individual contribution is supposed to be directed. Such a way of approaching the issue implies an investigation chiefly interested in the constraints arising from the shared mental state rather than in the direct impact of the intentional stance on the individuals' conduct.[90]

Given the above, and far from the normativistic characterization of the agency, it is Searle who has proposed a clear formulation of collective intentions in relation with causality. The author describes a kind of causal influence that goes from the intention-in-action to the activity defining the relation between the psychological and the physical component of the agency in terms of causality. The intention-in-action is the effective cause of the act, which – in case of a collective performance – can be found in the realization of each individual contribution. A way to put it formally is: i.a. (this i.a. causes b.m.), which means that the intention-in-action causes the bodily movement done by the subject. In the

[90] These remarks are not to say that, when normativity is assumed as a fundamental feature, the causal relation between intending and acting is completely overlooked; instead, the point is that privileging a certain kind of relation has entailed focusing either on prior intentions or on intentions-in-action. Indeed, those who have studied deeper the normative side of intentionality have generally devoted the attention to the prior intention for the action by leaving aside the investigation of intentions-in-action that are the attitudes directly connected with the actual activity and, for this reason, specifically involved in the study of the causal issue. If one maintains that to be causally effective an intention should be directly related with the phenomena on which it exerts its power, the case of prior intentions would not satisfy such a condition: it might be conducive to the action but not the cause of its happening.

case of a collective intention the phrasing becomes more complex because the intention-in-action, although making reference to the collective dimension of the endeavor (the B term), contains in its content only the representation of the task concerning the individual contribution (the A term). As a consequence, the intention-in-action bears a causal power only in relation to the action performed in order to fulfill the individual part. Searle puts the issue as follows: i.a. B by means of/by way of A (this i.a. causes A), (Searle 2007).

While the relation between the collective intention and the action is causal just by reference to A – that is the content representing the individual part and composing the individual participatory agency – the relation between the B term, i.e. the collective goal, and the performance is an instrumental (*by means of*) or constitutive (*by way of*) one. The final task is the outcome of the action done by each individual, under the assumption that also the others are giving their contribution. Nonetheless, this cognitive endorsement does not play a causal role in determining the agents' performance.

Some sort of casual power might be generated also by the prior intention for the action (when present), which is described by Searle to be causally effective not on the action (individual contribution) but on the agency, namely on the entire phenomenon involving both the intention-in-action and the action itself. In this sense the prior intention might be described as having a causal impact on the intentional agency causing the realization of the plan which consists in the formulation of proper intentions-in-action and in the happening of the respective physical counterpart of those attitudes. What is important to underline is that the plan state does not directly move the bodies. Instead, it makes the individuals engage in the activity by formulating sub-plans conducive to the shared goal, but the influence on the performance is mediated by the intention-in-action considered the real effect of the cause (Searle 2010).

1.3.3 Participatory intentions account

The analysis of the four facets of the relation between the mental state and performance in group contexts has provided a complex picture in which the different aspects under

investigation have been charged with a diverse significance depending on the theory. Such a variety of interpretations, even though relevant for the issue, has been introduced in the discussion under the assumption that each reading of the concept of shared agency is established upon two main principles that are common to all approaches and compatible with the distributive conception of shared intentionality[91]:

1. All intentionality happens in individuals' mind;
2. Individual intentions refer to individual actions while shared intentions concern group performances.

The apparent inconsistency of these claims is due to the fact that an attitude in the individuals' mind might be fulfilled by an action concerning an entire group, without losing the intentional nature of the phenomenon. The challenge is relating a state of mind located in the individuals' head – as fixed by the former assumption – with a group performance that may count as the condition of satisfaction of that attitude. Accordingly, the problem has been worked out by conceiving the collective activity from the individuals' side and assuming that what the shared intention is about consists in the contribution each one is ready to make to obtain the final end. Hence, the relation between shared intending and acting has been characterized as a bond between the state of mind of each group member and the contribution she wants to provide towards the common goal.

A way to re-describe this approach might be of reducing shared agency to meshing and overlapping individual intentions to participate in the action. In this sense, shared intentions would be participatory or contributory intentions for the action, where the collective general plan is embraced as an assumption and not as an intentional attitude: participatory intentions are individual intentions and the relation between them and the

[91] All the approaches that do not endorse one of (or both) these requirements have been left aside so to develop our investigation just about the action theory assuming only the existence of the mind of the individuals, on the ontological level, and endorsing at the same time the explicative relevance of the concept of shared agency and attitudes related to it. According to this, all the approaches that do not recognize the explicative significance of high-level concepts and descriptions, although interesting perspectives on the agency, do not find a place for discussion in the context of the present work. Similarly, our reflection does not take into account the side of the debate in Social Ontology that is inclined to accept the existence of social facts beside individual minds and properties (e.g. Elder-Vass 2010, Archer 1995).

action is a connection bounding the mental state to the performance of the individual subject. The shared feature would be a matter of belief, entering the content of the intentional state as the representation of the collective endeavor in which the agent locates her contribution. As clearly explained by C. Kutz:

> A participatory intention has two representational components, or sets of conditions of satisfaction: individual role and collective end. By "individual role" I mean the act an individual performs in order to foster a collective end; and "by collective end" I mean the object of a description that is constituted by or is a causal product of different individual's act. This is to say that individual participatory actions aims at two goals: accomplishment of a primary individual task that contributes to a secondary collective achievement, be it an activity or an outcome.[92]

The individual participatory intention is connected to two different stages of the shared action: on the one hand, it has a direct impact on the realization of the individual act, on the other hand, it provides the general plan fulfilled through the satisfaction of the individual sub-plan in connection with that of the others. The individual intention is related to the collective act only in a mediated way and contains the reference to the final end just as a descriptive assumption, which is the perspective from which the agent conceives of her own agency in group contexts. Kutz claims: «what makes my behavior participatory is nothing more (and nothing less) than my conception of what I do as related to the group act»[93]. Despite the introduction of these two representational items, the participatory-intentions approach (PIA) seems to explain shared intentions by reducing the issue to individual contributory intentions where the only irreducible aspect might be identified in the conception through which the agent can view her conduct. The group dimension appears as the result of a set of beliefs held by the individual on the basis of the environment in which she lives, but it does not pertain to the intentional nature of the act that, in the end, is considered an individual event. This way of conceiving the collective characterization of agency is not enough to go beyond a summative interpretation of the case; in fact, the contributory stance does not differ from the individual intentions neither in kind nor in content (Tollefsen 2002). The shared end, rather than as the object of

[92] Kutz 2000, p.10.
[93] *Ivi*, p. 11.

intentionality, has been described as a theoretical perspective, a lens through which the agent views her own intentional behavior.

In light of these considerations, it could be interesting to recall the distinction between plans and sub-plans, prior intentions and intentions-in-action, aim-intentions and action-intentions. In all these versions of the couple the first term regards the mental state concerning the entire shared performance, whereas the second expression has been employed in the identification of the attitude constituting, planning, regulating and having a causal effect upon the individual partaking. The fact that also the others in the context are doing something conducive to the same aim has been effectively described as a matter of belief (Searle, Tuomela and Bratman) or as the result of a normative constraint (Gilbert and, maybe, Tuomela). Such a way to sketch the matter might lead us to think of shared agency as a composition of contributory intentional acts on the part of the individuals – as the PIA suggests. As a consequence, the collective moment would be reduced to a way of approaching the phenomenon, that does not have any (constitutive, structural, normative and causal) salience on it. If one is disposed to accept the redundancy of collective terms and descriptions, the distributive approach could be compatible with a minimalist account, for which shared agency is completely reduced to individuals attitudes related to one another.

1.3.4 The irreducibility of the MLA to the PIA

The hypothesis of interpreting shared agency on the basis of the participatory-intentions account (PIA) could appear attractive but shared intentions, both in the intention-that-we and in the we-intention form, are not summative issues, meaning – according to Tollefsen's definition – they differ from individual intentions due to the kind of attitudes they are or to the content they represent. The model of shared agency proposed by Bratman and consistent with the *continuity thesis* of intentionality might allow the comparison with the participatory-intentions pattern because, for what concerns the attitude, the only salient divergence between individual and shared phenomena seems to be located in the content of

the mental state, which – in group events – contains the reference to the "we" as the subject who performs the plan. Despite the fact that both the minimalist approach and Bratman's theory depict group dimension as a feature present in the individuals' mind only as a representational content, the role played by the "we" could be described in a slightly different way. As far as the minimalist approach sustained by Kutz is concerned, the mental representation of the group is a functional/cognitive element that makes it possible for the agent to conceive of her own contribution as part of a wider effort; nevertheless, no group is properly introduced. On the contrary, Bratman maintains that the "we" enters the attitude only as a part of the representational content referred to the sub-plan pursued the agent by allowing the description to speak of a group as the one who actually realizes the whole task. For Bratman, it is plausible to affirm that the "we" far from being the subject of the intentional state of mind might be considered a functional notion, connected with the idea of a complex system realizing the plan thought by all participants through meshing sub-plans. The author concedes that «being the agent of the shared action can come apart from being the subject of the shared intention, even given that shared action is organized by the shared intention»[94]. The main idea behind this assumption is that intention planning for group performance is considered the outcome of a network of individual sub-plans, beliefs, expectations, commitment and mutual responsiveness not reducible to the attitude held in the mind of each participant. Consequently, to deny that shared agency requires more than interlocking individual attitudes towards the action does not coincide with the rejection of a wider perspective which attributes the action to the group as one, (Bratman 2017). In fact, the group, as a system, would be seen as the by-product of individual agency – something that the contributory approach is not inclined to accept. Bratman writes:

> if a group has a shared intention to bring about an untoward effect and succeeds in doing that, we may want in some sense to hold that group accountable. But then what we need is an interpretation of such accountability that does not require a group subject (though it may require a group agent in the weak sense we have been discussing).[95]

From this short quote it appears clear that although the introduction of a plural subject of agency is profiled, the move is restricted only to the interpretation of the action not

[94] Bratman 2014, p.127.
[95] *Ivi*, p.128.

extended to the subject of shared intentionality. It could make sense to sustain that the author describes the realization of the action by a group of individuals without assuming a holistic explanation of the agency, considered as the entirety of intentionality and behavior. In fact, the intentional stance keeps pertaining to single individuals. If one thinks of the group as the actor obtaining the goal, it is because the position sustained by Bratman, augmented individualism, is based on the fact that, similarly to the case of individual action over time, agency in shared contexts is regulated by a network of intentions brought together in a consistent and coherent way by two normative principles (respectively the consistency and the means-end coherence tenet) that guarantee the realization of the entire plan under a strict and shared rational control of the participants. Each sub-plan is connected with that of the others and acquires its function only under condition of publicity and common knowledge among the parties. Even thought all these elements do not exceed members' psychology, obtaining the final end would require an effort that, apart from satisfying every single contributory intention, might be the fulfillment of the entire planning activity. This is the reason why speaking of a group as the actor realizing shared intentions might have, at least, an explanatory meaning.

The *continuity thesis* of intentionality offers a different picture than the one proposed by the contributory approach to shared agency, especially because the "we" refers to a group dimension that is not just a matter of cognition. The representation of the "we" alludes to a system of meshing plans, expectations and norms locating the individual mental state in a wider activity that can be satisfied only through a complex and shared effort. An effort that can be ascribed to the entire collective.

But shared agency might be considered also by the *discontinuity thesis* and for its divergence from individual agency. Differences concern the peculiar kind of attitudes introduced, i.e. we-attitudes. Searle, Tuomela and Gilbert provided different versions of this position introducing collective/we-mode/group intentions for the action without violating the distributive principle, locating all intentionality in the individuals' mind. It is quite easy to argue against an association of PIA and *discontinuity thesis* because we-attitudes are

originally collective and cannot be explained starting from individual intentionality. The divergence is a categorical one.

Both approaches, *continuity* and *discontinuity thesis*, offer reasons to reject the participatory-intentions account of shared agency. Nonetheless, a question is still open. The members-level account has been established on the basis of two assumptions:

1. All intentionality happens in individuals' mind;
2. Individual intentions refer to individual actions while shared intentions concern group performances.

Assuming that only individuals exist – as stated by the former – how should we conceive the concept of group mentioned in the latter? How can shared agency differ from individual agency if only individuals exist?

Chapter 2

From the members-level to the group-level account

2.1 Beyond the MLA

The present section starts with a brief recap (first paragraph) of the main guidelines profiled in Chapter One, questioning whether the notion of shared agency, interpreted in the MLA, might be related and ascribed to the group of participants as a whole. To develop the issue, two strategies of identification of groups as agents are profiled: the *intrinsic* and the *extrinsic* account. The second paragraph focuses on the chance of identifying the group as intrinsically related to the intentional faculty to have plans for the action. The third paragraph illustrates the extrinsic account explaining how a group might be recognized as such on the basis of features that are not directly intentional but derive from intentionality. In conclusion, the fourth paragraph argues that both ways of conceiving the agent in group contexts might provide *a posteriori* characterization of the notion, according to which it is the model of shared agency that determines the subject bound to it. This kind of interpretation will be finally connected with the *status* account of groups, that is strictly intertwined with the identification of the agent through processes of recognition and attribution of a status.

2.1.1 Resuming Chapter one

The study of shared agency, as a form of intentional behavior exerted by two or more individuals together, was presented in Chapter One in relation to the various proposals

animating the debate in Social Ontology. Briefly, it has been suggested that, in order to classify diverse theoretical positions, one might follow a double track: on one hand, the various viewpoints could be brought under the same label by underlining the distributive claim they all embrace; on the other hand, each of them might be associated with the *continuity* or *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. In line with the first strategy, every approach would represent an instance of the assumption for which, independently from the fact of being satisfied by a single individual or group of people, any intention planning for the action is to be considered an event happening in the individuals' mind. Accordingly, the entire performance can be traced back to the attitudes held by each participant. In addition to this and in line with the second view, each approach might be reckoned to adopt a continuous or discontinuous model of the explanation, depending on the kind of attitudes characterizing shared agency. Given that an attitude is a feature belonging to individual psychology, one might assume that (*continuity thesis*) doing things together requires the same kind of mental state that the individual agency requires, i.e. individual intentions for the action, or, on the contrary, one might be inclined to sustain that shared agency involves attitudes of another sort (*discontinuity thesis*). In any case, the intentional event occurring in the individual's mind and planning for the activity realized in a group context – is it an intention-that-we or a proper we-intention – could be described, we suggest, as a mental state with a multifold relation with the action performed by each individual as a group member. Hence, the connection has been spelled out as a constitutive, structural, normative and causal bond.

This way of approaching shared agency has been identified with the acronym MLA (members-level account). Broadly speaking, MLA has addressed the comparison with the doctrine of participatory (or contributory) intentions for the action, which considers shared agency a phenomenon reducible to individual mental states in the participants' mind. According to the participatory-intentions account (PIA) – that is a minimalist approach – reference to the group dimension can be reduced to the way in which each single agent looks at her own performance as an effort conducive to a wider end, which the individual act contributes to realize. In keeping with the PIA, each individual is meant to conceive

herself as a participant, and her act as a specific contribution towards a broader end, pursued also by the others. In this sense, the perspective from which a shared intention is supposed to be formulated would contain the reference to the "we", namely to the group of people participating (or supposed to participate) in the action, only as an individual mental representation. That representational feature consists in a belief, in addition to the intention for the action, and making the individual think that the action she intends to perform is an effort conducive to an objective, pursued in association with the contribution of other persons. But apart from providing this wider perspective on personal agency, the contributory approach does not ascribe any salience, neither explicative nor metaphysical, to the group represented by the "we", (Tuomela 2013a, Risjord 2014). As a matter of fact, each individual thinks she is acting with others without being actually bound or joined to them, because the "we", as an additional representation, is not an inner part of the intentional attitude planning for the action. Due to this lack of connection, the minimalist account has been distinguished from the MLA by assuming that the latter is not reducible to the former. The main reason has been identified in the actual explicative role that certain "collective" concepts, such as that of shared attitudes/intentions, have shown in the description of shared agency. According to this, the "we" has been described as a salient feature in the MLA that enables the description to characterize individuals' psychology when they act as group members.

Moreover, the theoretical and explicative role of the "we" has advanced the claim of describing shared agency by considering the group as the direct source of the agency. The outcome would be passing from the MLA to the GLA, namely from an explanation based on facts about the members (or seen from the members' perspective) to an explanation straightforwardly concerned with groups (or experienced from a group view point).

All this considered, the challenge is how to find a way to conceive the "we" and to profile a group-level account, capable of grasping it as a social fact, not reducible to its individual components. The issue has to be developed in view of the fact that the MLA – in both its versions – has been formulated on the basis of two main assumptions, related to the intentionalistic model of the agency:

3. all intentionality happens in the individuals' mind;
4. shared intentions are referred to group performances.

Far from denying the soundness of these two claims about the nature and location of the intentional event, the hardest point will be considering the "we" of shared agency as a feature that could be endorsed without getting tied up in knots and accepting social, high-level concepts that would not contradict those requirements. At the same time, the explanation of facts concerning the "we" through the GLA, in order to represent an original and non redundant perspective, should present itself as being irreducible to the members-level account. Otherwise, there would be no point in proposing high-level concepts and descriptions, as the debate has instead suggested.

2.1.2 Intrinsic account

Illustrating events of people doing things together intentionally has questioned the chance of grasping those facts through high-level concepts, directly referred to groups. Thus, with the aim of profiling a group-level account focused on that level of the description, the notion of shared agency should be better investigated being that it is an event bound up with the intentional faculty, and made up of a (representational) mental state, held by a subject and oriented towards an object (the action). Intuitively, in the case of shared agency, *the subject of "we intend"*[96] is to be the group of participants, whereas the mental state should consist in the entire plan for the action. On this basis, it would be noteworthy to dwell a little further upon the first feature, namely the notion of group as agent, and better delineate the kind of issues it addresses.

As a matter of fact, the MLA has already gone beyond the theoretical interpretation provided by the PIA, by tracing two different options when speaking of the group: on the one hand, the group might be described as the subject to which the action is attributed while, on the other hand, the "we" might be presented as the subject to whom intentionality

[96] The expression alludes to Schmid 2017a.

refers. Now, that distinction could be helpful in further characterizing the "we" straightforwardly: it could be that two or more individuals are defined as a group because the members conceive themselves as such and think as if they were part of a group, or it could be that a group agent is identified as such due to features that are not strictly intentional or psychological. In this sense, taking the intentional faculty as a parameter, a group might be *intrinsically* or *extrinsically* determined, (Tuomela 2013b, Hindriks 2008).

As far as the former account is concerned, a certain number of individuals form a group, when their sharing an intentional standpoint is what makes them (and the observer) see the set of participants as a collective agent. In this sense, the shared attitude is considered the feature that grounds the chance of recognizing and treating the collective as such. More precisely, the kind of reference bounding the shared attitude to the group can be interpreted, we suggest, in two different ways: (1) the intention can be a *we-mode* attitude, as claimed by the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality, or (2) the plan for the action can be the result of an agreement-making procedure, which combines individual intentions for the action into a complex, autonomous group attitude. In line with this the *intrinsic* account consequently says (1a) that the group arises directly from the plural states of mind occurring in the head of each individual, or (2b) that the collective is the byproduct of the members' intentional plans joined together. Regarding the first option, Searle's proposal represents a suitable example: it is the form, the original collective one, of the attitude (thought by the individual) that allows the introduction of the "we" as the term to which ascribing the intentional mental state. Searle claims: «the collective arises from the fact that collective intentionality is in the individual heads of individual organisms»[97]. In support of the intrinsic approach, also H.B. Schmid's claim is interesting, presenting the plural subject as a feature deriving directly from the intentional event, (Schmid 2009, 2017a, 2017b). In particular, Schmid assumes that perceiving the agency related to the group is what turns the collective into an agent, or better, into the subject of shared agency. Focusing on the mode of the attitude allows the philosopher to direct the attention to the "we", that is the *mode* (as

[97] Searle 1997, p.449.

instance, Tuomela's *we-mode*)[98] through which each individual perceives the attitude in the phenomenological sense, namely as part of her own experience. The author sustains that this approach to the collective dimension does not threaten the fundamental assumption in Social Ontology for which only individuals really exist; indeed, behind the conception he endorses there is no metaphysics, because the subject is considered not as a substance but as a term to which a certain phenomenon is referred. Accordingly, the plural subject, as a mode of the experiential phenomenon, is considered an intrinsic part of the way in which each (single) agent feels or lives the intention and not an essence or a substance existing as a premise. [99] Thus, the point made by Schmid is that considering the group the subject of intentionality is not a problematic choice because it does not imply characterizing it as a substance: the "we" is related with the intentional pattern in the sense that it is the intention itself that requires to postulate a term to which being referred. As a consequence, the group enters into the picture as a representation of the subject of the attitude, which is inbuilt in the intentional act itself.

With reference to the second *intrinsic* view, the group might be identified as the subject of intentionality for its holding attitudes that are the outcome of an agreement-making procedure. Concerning this point, F. Hindriks clearly affirms that, in line with this *intrinsic* account version, it could be that «establishing a way of making decisions together or of forming joint intentions is the mark of collective agency as characterized from the internal perspective»[100]. This means that the group can be identified as such based on the process through which the members establish a shared and unique plan state.

In this respect, the theory proposed by List and Pettit (List and Pettit 2011) illustrates the point properly. The authors maintain that the formation of group attitudes needs a method which ensures that individual attitudes will merge into a proper group perspective, functioning as the point of view of a singular individual agent. Such a result can be obtained in various ways: the group perspective can be the outcome of an organizational structure imposed on the members to arrange the contributions of the

[98] On the possibility of considering Tuomela's *we-mode* as a suitable *mode* in Schmid's sense: Schmid 2017b.
[99] Schmid 2017b, p.12.
[100] Hindriks 2008, p.126.

individuals into a comprehensive system; it might be the by-product of a long-lasting, flattering, cultural evolution; it could be the consequence of the members' intentionally joining in the action. No matter how the group rational perspective is acquired, it will consist in an autonomous action-guiding system, which interacts with the environment thanks to the inputs provided by the individual members and their capacity to have preferences and form motivations for the action, as the *continuity thesis* of intentionality requires it to be the case. It is the method through which the group processes and elaborates the individuals' (representational and motivational) inputs that makes the group perspective different from the attitudes held by its components, (Pettit and Schweikard 2006). To make a long story short, the procedure that turns the group of agents into a group agent consists in the aggregation of the individual states of mind into a single group-level attitude. The operation requires an 'aggregation function' that assigns to each input, i.e. to each configuration of attitudes occurring at the members-level, a collective attitude as its output.[101] It is by means of that mechanism that the group formulates its own autonomous reasons, which is the aspect that – for the *intrinsic* account – allows the description to treat the set of individuals as a group agent.[102]

2.1.3 Extrinsic account

As an alternative to the *intrinsi*c account, the process of identification followed by the *extrinsic* account considers the assumption of intentional states of mind as a feature that, although fundamental for the model of the agency, does not represent the main character of the concept of "group". Following this line of thought, the group would rather be individuated on the basis of further, not psychological, elements – such as norms and functional roles – that make the shared attitude realized in concrete through the *realization of a structure* (Ritchie 2013). Such a process of organizing the efforts into a structure,

[101] List & Pettit 2011, pp.42-58.

[102] Interesting insights regarding the notion of agent as rational/computational system can be found in Huebner's (Huebner 2014) *Macrocognition*, proposing a version of collective mentality. The author maintains that having a mind is a property coming in stages and that some groups can be held epistemically and morally responsible for things they carry out. Collective attitudes are the result of mechanisms that process the inputs of the components.

capable of realizing agential tasks, represents the distinctive character of an agent, without denying the intentional nature of agency. In fact, it is the organization of the participatory efforts (i.e. the structure) that, for the *extrinsic* account, does make it reasonable to identify a group as an agent, no matter what kind of intentions (we-intentions, intentions-that-we or even I-mode pro-group attitudes) were motivating each singular action.[103] As things stand, the capacity at the basis of each process of agency still remains the intentional faculty. In this regard, Tuomela explains the point by observing that, in the case of group agents as extrinsically intentional, «the group members form the group mind collective attitudes (wants, intentions, beliefs), by their collective acceptance (construction) or some related group-intentional process or mechanism»[104]. Thus, a group might be considered an agent due to its capacity as a whole to accomplish shared goals by means of underlying intentional processes, mechanisms and patterns of behavior that make the members act as one. In this sense, a group is defined as an agent by appealing to its power of enacting what has been fixed by the members on the intentional level. In compliance with this, group agents as systems are not intrinsically intentional but, instead, they are intentionally constructed.

It should be clear that, the *extrinsic* account is not necessarily in contrast with the *intrinsic* approach. In fact, although some theories could not represent suitable examples of both perspectives, there are, instead, approaches for which the two ways of identifying the group are right. For instance, on the side of the *continuity thesis* of intentionality, Bratman's approach adopts an intentionally *extrinsic* notion of group agent. In fact, his theory does not fit in with the *intrinsic* account, because the group is just recognized for the organizational structure putting the individual contributions together. Similarly, from the point of view of the *discontinuity thesis*, also Tuomela states that the perspective he

[103] As Bratman suggests, the group can be defined a proper subject of shared agency in the sense that it is the executor of the plan set by meshing sub-plans of all the contributors by, at the same time, rejecting the jump allowed by supporters of the *intrinsic* account. The intrinsic account implies introducing group intentions. The separation of the group as the subject of intentionality from the group as its actor is addressed by thinking of the "we" as a subject that is not intentional, in the *intrinsic* sense, but related to intentionality. In this case, the network of functions required to obtain the task is generated through the exercise of the individual intentional faculty, (Bratman 2017).
[104] Tuomela 2013b, p.14.

proposes represents an *extrinsic* account of groups as intentional agents; in fact, he claims, «group agents are intentional only in a *derived*, *extrinsic* sense in virtue of their members' collective construction of the group as intentional entity they identify with»[105]. In this sense, the intentional properties of group agents are the properties of a system, which consists of «interrelated individuals such that this system is, through them, capable of producing uniform actions and outcomes»[106]. With a difference, but still among the supporters of *discontinuity thesis*, Searle's perspective would be a good example of *intrinsic* account, but not a proper case of *extrinsic* approach: the collective nature of share behaviors is, indeed, identified by the philosopher due to the plural form of mental states. In addition to this, no organizational structure among the participants seems to have a decisive role for the scope. Otherwise, approaches such as List and Pettit's theory of group agency might be presented as an example of both models of identification. As far as the *extrinsic* strategy is concerned, the authors hold that the group attitude, in the case of complex behaviors, might instantiate, in practice, an 'organizational structure', that is the set of roles, rules and positions covered and followed by the individuals, and arranged so to make the group properly functioning as an agent.[107] List and Pettit explain that, the members

> may relate to one another in a more or less coordinate manner, with each playing a similar role. Alternatively, they may be divided up into different subgroups, each with its distinctive tasks. In either case their relations with one another may involve a hierarchy or a more or less egalitarian arrangement.[108]

It is due to that arrangement that individuals are capable of operating together and being recognized as one. At the same time, from an intentional point of view, the authors maintain that the group is intrinsically determined by the fact of being an autonomous source of rational agency. In particular, the authors ground the intentional autonomy of the group upon the outcome produced by the aggregative function, which associates a group attitude to a network of individual attitudes. The process of decision/agreement-making has been described as a complex mechanism, which provides outcomes that, they sustain,

[105] Tuomela 2013a, p. 23.
[106] Tuomela 2013a, p.21.
[107] On the notion of "organizational structure": List and Pettit 2011, pp.60-64.
[108] *Ibidem*, p.32.

cannot be traced back to individual intentions anymore. In this sense, and by virtue of this (claimed) rational autonomy, the group is considered to be *intrinsically* intentional.

To conclude, a fundamental observation underlining both the accounts needs to be specified. No matter how one wants to identify groups as the subjects of shared agency, either through the *intrinsic* or through the *extrinsic* account, it is important to notice that the notion of group, or of the "we", has been here limited to, and identified with, the concept of group agent. Which means that among the great variety of meanings that "group" might assume in philosophy[109], the study of shared agency requires us to consider the concept in strict relation with the intentional faculty and with the capacity to be the center of intentional agency. In keeping with this, from here on, the concept of group would be considered as being co-extensive to that of group agent, so to signify the subject to which the intentional action is ascribed, either in line with the *intrinsic* or with the *extrinsic* interpretation of the issue. This doesn't imply that further meanings of the notions are disregarded and reckoned useless for the explanation of shared agency. On the contrary, we think that a wider and more careful reflection upon the notion of group would benefit

[109] The fact of considering groups subjects of agency is not the only way in which the notion could be used in philosophy. K. Ritchie (Ritchie 2013) shows that there are many ways of interpreting and defining the notion, but only when intentionality and organizational structures are at stake those interpretations can be suitable for a theory of agency – at least in the way in which the doctrine of intentionality considers "agency". Thus, a part from being a structural organization committed with intentional tasks (Ritchie adopts a version of Searle's collective intentionality, a distributive and discontinuous model of attitudes) the author defines groups as: (1) non-singular pluralities, heaps of individuals taken together but not joint together; (2) fusions, that are wholes in which the personal character of the members dissolves itself or is not relevant as far as the group is concerned; (3) aggregates in which the individuals are components of the whole, distinct from one another; (4) sets, special groups in which the members could not change across times and worlds. More schematically, Ritchie proposes (Ritchie 2015) to divide all kinds of groups into two types: type 1, which contains groups such as teams, committees, clubs, and courts; type 2 that embraces groups as, for example, racial groups, gender groups, ethnic groups, and sexual orientation groups. According to the author, type 1 represents the domain of groups considered as agents, whereas type 2 can be associated with many other connotations of the concept such as cultural minority, religious community, ethnical population. (Comments on Ritchie's proposal are offered by Epstein (Epstein 2017)).
To go deeper in the definition of group agents, see also Gilbert (Gilbert 2006, 2014) and Bratman (Bratman 2014), who similarly present their own idea of the notion based on the chance of having group values and ethical perspectives. According to Bratman's theory, what is needed is a network of meshing sub-plans, whereas for Gilbert the main feature is participants' joint commitment. These features missing, a group can be a community or a social group formed by people with values in common but not the subject of agency.
The issue is presented as an urgent issue in political philosophy also by I.M. Young (Young 1990, p. 44). The point is that, since a theoretical clarification on the meaning of "group" is needed, the risk of misinterpreting that notion is always around the corner. Without a clear distinction about what can be considered as an agent and what cannot, faulty interpretations arise and inappropriate (theoretical or practical) expectations concerning group agency and responsibility derive.

Social Ontology, but our claim here is not that of being exhaustive. Anyway, focusing on the center of the debate might represent a starting point towards further investigations on the topic, leading to a more comprehensive concept of what could be denoted by "group".

2.1.4 Status account

The previous paragraphs have shown through which lens – depending on the theory – a group might be individuated as an agent. It could turn out to be the subject to whom intentionality is referred (*intrinsic approach*) or it could be determined on the basis of structural features that are somehow connected with the intentional faculty (*extrinsic approach*). Conforming to this, it seems that the issue concerning the definition of a group as the subject of shred agency could be reduced to the question about the identification of the notion of agent implied by the theory. As a matter of fact, the group agent has been individuated, rather than being defined directly, on the basis of the main features that make a collective of individuals the subject of the event. This assumption is the equivalent of saying that the definition of the group as an agent has come after the definition of shared agency as a behavioral intentional phenomenon. In this sense, we suggest, it could be maintained that the agent has been generally described by establishing, in the first place, the kind of attitudes, relationships and organization required by the proper unfolding of the intentional activity, and then, the agent has been consequently pinpointed as its bearer. In line with this consideration, it seems reasonable to assume that the subject of shared agency has been individuated by means of *a posteriori* definitions, namely by providing descriptions that have derived from the kind of phenomenon to which the theory wants to assign a subject. In particular, in the case of shared agency, the group has been individuated as the agent due to its representing (and being recognized as) that ensemble of intentional attitudes, individuals, organizations or functions that puts the event in place. Once again, it

is the definition of shared agency that has delineated the conception of the agent connected to it.[110]

On the assumption of *a posteriori* definition of the agent, it could be observed that the strategy might be found both behind the *extrinsic* and the *intrinsic* account of the notion. In the case of the *intrinsic* approach, it is by defining shared agency as a phenomenon taking place under condition of individuals having we-attitudes in mind, or producing autonomous group attitudes, that the group can be identified as such. Differently, in the case of the *extrinsic* account, the group could be described *a posteriori* due to the fact, that it is after having individuated the network of attitudes, norms and functions, that are part of the idea of acting in a shared way, that the agent can be identified as the structure realizing it.

Furthermore, it seems that *a posteriori* definitions might be intertwined with some process of attribution, according to which something acquires the role of agent only after being recognized as such. In line with this, it could be interesting to add to the *intrinsic* and the *extrinsic* account a further interpretation proposed by Hindriks: the *status account*, (Hindriks 2008). According to this view, «a collective agent can come into existence by outsiders granting a collection of individuals some kind of status»[111]. Thus, a group is an agent since some observer recognizes it as such.

Regarding this matter at least four aspects deserve attention. First of all, Hindriks' proposal sheds light on the idea that the chance of considering a set of individuals as a group requires some form of recognition: it is by the acknowledgment of the collective as a group agent that it becomes reasonable to treat a pool of persons as a subject. Without the recognition of the existence (and the function) of the group, the "collective" agent would not exist. Secondly, the concept of recognition recalls the notion of

[110] Another way of formulating the point is considering the approach a normative one. In this sense, the definition of agent could be described as the issue answering the question: given a certain model of shared agency, which should be the agent connected to it? The agent represents what the action theory requires the subject of the phenomenon to be.
[111] Hindriks 2008, p119.

recognition/acceptance[112] introduced by Searle in his theory of institutional facts considered as status functions. According to Searle, recognizing something as something else, means recognizing that X counts as Y in context C, which is the same as saying that X acquires the status of Y, (Searle 1995, 2007, 2010). As is in the case of status functions, we might assume that the idea of granting groups with a certain status is a process involving the ascription of deontic powers to the X term. As a matter of fact, recognizing X working as Y, attributes to the X term tasks and duties associated with Y. Thus, as a piece of paper is attributed the tasks and duties connected with money, similarly, if a group is entitled the status of agent, this can be considered as the acquisition of a normative status by the group. In particular, the group will come to bear the duties (and being subject to the expectations) usually ascribed to the individual agents. In the absence of this recognitive process, the group agent – at least, in the *status* account – would be unburdened from the normative implications of the status by losing its power to work (and be seen) as such. The third aspect is connected with this idea of normative status gained by groups through the acquisition of the role of agents. In particular, the point is about the chance, grounded upon such a normative character, of considering group agents as performative persons, a notion connected with the capacity to establish meaningful relationships with other persons through the mediation of normative expectations and obligations, (Hirvonen 2017). The notion, proposed in the debate by List and Pettit, has been spelled out assuming that to be a performative person is to have the capacity to perform as a person,

> [A]nd to perform as a person is to be party to a system of accepted conventions, such as a system of law, under which one contracts obligations to others and, to add a point not explicit in Hobbes, derives entitlements from the reciprocal obligations of others. In particular, it is to be a knowledgeable and competent party to such a system of obligations. […]In short, a person is an agent who can perform effectively in the space of obligations.[113]

In this sense, group agents could be compared to, and treated as, individual agents. Finally, as a fourth aspect, it might be observed that the *status* account has something in common with what has been pinpointed by Tuomela when he said that a group agent, in the *extrinsic*

[112] On the meanings of "recognition" in Social Ontology see Ikäheimo and Laitinen 2011, Laitinen 2013, Testa 2011, Stahl 2011.
[113] List and Pettit 2011, p.173. The idea of performative person will be further developed in Chapter Three.

sense, depends on acceptance or construction. Despite the akin process of attribution underlined by both authors, Hindriks' formulation is particularly focused on the fact that the ascription creating the "we" should come from the outside. Thus, while Tuomela's phrase might be read as sustaining that the (extrinsically intentional) group is the product of the acceptance that the members exert with regard to the totality to which they belong, Hindriks' version is rather inclined to attributing the status of agent as an act exerted by people that are not part of the collective, namely by "outsiders", (Laitinen 2014a).[114]

Taken into consideration the introduction of the *status* account, the reflection leads us to re-consider the *extrinsic* account and take it not, at least not necessarily, to represent an external perspective: a group might be established through the recognition of structural or intentional-related features in the *extrinsic* sense both in the case in which the acknowledgment is ascribable to the group members and in the event in which it comes from the outside. On the contrary, the *status* account – in Hindriks' version – is connected with an external viewpoint but not with an *extrinsic* approach. As a matter of fact, that an observer would grant the status of group to a set of individuals does not exclude that the ascription might have happened on the basis of the acknowledgment of a shared intentional standpoint. In this line, the *status* account might be compatible with, and come in addition to, the *intrinsic* perspective, which sets the identification of the group agent on the ground of its being the subject to whom the intentional occurrences are attributed.

2.2 Holistic Individualism

Given the *a posteriori* definition of the agent, the present section is devoted to investigating in depth a particular perspective from which the debate has claimed to explain shared agency, as a phenomenon ascribed to a non substantial group agent. The position in

[114] Note that assuming Tuomela's attention as giving more importance to the acceptance exerted by the members does not coincides with denying the role of recognition coming from the outside. Rather, the point is that, in order for the group to construct itself as a whole, the most important feature consists in the members having accepted the ethos through an act of collective acceptance and commitment. This is what secures the possibility of group agents. Then, the group could work as an agent for (and treated as an agent by) an observer only in case the collective has been recognized as such.

question is defined "holistic individualism", where the former term explains the phenomenon and the latter concerns its ontological status. The section develops the following points: (1) shedding light on the distinction between explanatory issues in Social Ontology and the ontological question concerning the reality of groups and other social facts; (2-3) relating the terms "holism" and "individualism" with the main assumptions characterizing traditional positions in social sciences, and (4) making sense of the reconciliation proposed by holistic individualism in view of the GLA regarding shared agency.

2.2.1 The (apparent?) paradox

The task of the GLA is to grasp shared agency straightforwardly, by looking at the group agent either as the subject of the intentional stance or as the actor responsible for realizing the (individuals') intentional plan. The troublesome part of the story is that, to describe such a social phenomenon, we are given a notion, that of "group", which – for the sake of argument – has no actual reference in the world. As it is, the intentionalistic theory of shared agency supported in Social Ontology includes among its staple assumptions the individualistic claim that nothing exists apart from individuals and their properties.[115]

In order to face the (just?) apparent paradox inbuilt in the possibility of conceiving non-substantial groups as sources of agency, it should be observed that the way in which the "we" has been defined is not in conflict – at least, not in principle – with the rejection of group agents populating the social world. In fact, the "we" involved in shared agency has been denoted without calling into question its reality. The group, as said, is assumed according to the standard fixing how a system could be the agent accountable for the performance. On the matter, Tuomela states that although groups «exist relative to the framework of agency, yet these do not really exist»[116], that is to say the expression does not have an objective connotation but, rather, it has the meaning it has just within the theory

[115] The assumption is true only about the portion of the debate here considered. Social Ontology of Critical Realism, for example, assumes social facts being ontologically real.
[116] Tuomela 1984, p.3.

concerned. The reference of "group" is an object defined *a posteriori*, and not a metaphysical premise. Hence, the notion is well-founded only within the description provided by the theory. In this sense,

> […] our concepts of agent, social action, group, and so on are functional. This means that they are specified in terms of their roles in our theories and in the uses to which we put our theories.[117]

As a matter of fact, the chance of taking a group as an agent seems to rely on a functionalist theory of the agency, in which an agent is what functions as such for the theory, (List & Pettit 2011, p. 75). But, it could be meaningful to say that, if the concept of group agent may have a functional role within a certain approach (even without having an ontological equivalent in the realm the theory wants to describe) it is because some sort of division between the explanation and the ontological concern has been set. In particular, theorists such as Tuomela, Pettit, List and Gilbert, among others, have traced a line, which separates clearly the explanation from the metaphysical reflection. Accordingly, the authors maintain that, on the one hand, the explanatory issue represents an epistemological and methodological stance, concerning to what extent social explanations should focus on individuals and social phenomena respectively. On the other hand, the ontological perspective regards what there is and, in particular, which is the status of social phenomena in relation with individuals, (J. Zahle & F. Collin, 2014). The idea behind this discernment has been that of considering the two issues separately and assuming that the notion of group, although useful in the account of social phenomena, is not present among the elements composing the world in which we live. The widespread tendency resulting from this analytical strategy has been the embracement of an individualistic stance regarding the ontological issue and a rejection of that perspective for the explanation. In fact, to grasp the complexity of shared agency concepts referred to social phenomena – both in the MLA and in the GLA – are necessary. If social concepts had been abandoned, the case of people acting together would be reduced to the story told by the minimalist account of participatory intentions for the action (PIA); but, as established by the MLA already, reflecting upon group performances from the side of the members (or from the side of the

[117] Tuomela 1984, p.4.

group as the GLA attempts to do) is an aim that requires higher-level descriptions and concepts such as collective intentionality, joint commitment or, at least, the representation of the network forming the "we".

As far as the necessity to introduce social or high-level concepts is concerned, the main hurdle appears to be conciliating the explicative claim with the individualistic assumption at the base of the intentionalistic approach, which prevents from going beyond the existence of the individuals' mind and its properties. Given the glitch, the distinction between the explanatory and ontological issue could provide a solution by making it feasible to speak of the "we" and, at the same time, keeping the premise that only individuals exist as a valid standpoint. In this sense, while the individualistic supposition would be a claim about what exists, the introduction of groups could be considered an explicative move, aimed at accounting for a phenomenon, that of shared agency, that has relevance only within the theoretical framework one is constructing. From this perspective no group can be reasonably assumed to be there, so that «we can be ontological individualists, and still debate explanatory individualism»[118].

It is noteworthy to underline that, if for the MLA the ontological nature of the "we" does not represent an urgent issue, because the features under investigation are the members in their being singular individuals (ontologically speaking), the point becomes a pressing problem in the case of the GLA. In fact, the group-level account describes shared agency as ascribable to the collective as a whole. But, at the same time, the ontological thesis underpinning the entire reflection keeps being an individualistic position:

> the basic social ontology consists solely of the activities and properties (including mental activities and properties) and interactions (including mental interactions and relations) between individuals and it may contain groups and group properties that are reducible to the individualistic (and possibly other nonsocial) basis […].[119]

Given this ontological assumption, the establishment of a group-level account can be done in a double way. On the one hand, the account can associate the ontological individualistic

[118] Epstein 2015, p.22.
[119] Tuomela 2013, p.10.

claim with an individualistic explanation of social facts, which «has as its explanatory basis the individual's own attitudes and motivating reasons»[120]. In this case, the result would be the reducibility of social explanations to descriptions focused at the lower-level, and the consequent redundancy of the high-level account. Alternatively, the explanation can (and actually does) take a holistic perspective and – without discarding what has been fixed at the ontological level – assume that the description of social phenomena must employ non individualistic terms (List & Spiekermann, 2013).[121] As it is, the explanatory (or methodological[122]) holism «does not imply any more radical form of holism that gives some kind of metaphysical priority to social structures over and above the individuals living in them»[123]. Rather, the aim of methodological holism consists in understanding the behavior of a system by deducing its explanation from (1) macroscopic laws which apply to the system as a whole, and (2) descriptions of the functions of the components within the whole.[124]

2.2.2 Traditional positions

The disjunction between the ontology of groups and their explanation has highlighted two different senses in which one might be an individualist in Social Ontology. On one hand one might be an ontological individualist and think that all elements composing the social world are actually reducible to individual subjects and facts related to them; while, on the other hand, one could be a methodological individualist and try to explain social phenomena on the basis of concepts, laws and descriptions by employing principles that should be deduced from «principles governing the behavior of participating individuals and from analyses of their situations»[125]. In order to make it plausible to speak of shared agency in terms of a GLA, the kind of individualism that pertains to the explanation has been rejected, whereas the ontological assumption preserved. The outcome has been the

[120] *Ibidem*.
[121] On explanatory issues: Lukes 1968, Sawyer 2002, 2003.
[122] On the meaning(s) of methodological individualism: Hodgson 2007.
[123] List and Spekermann 2013, p.629.
[124] Watkins 1952.
[125] Watkins 1952, p.186.

perspective called "holistic individualism", where the first term "holistic" refers to the methodological claim and "individualism" pertains to ontology. Conforming to this, shared agency as an intentional phenomenon has been described as a proper group event, referred to through concepts such as collective intentionality, joint efforts and shared norms, that are not meant to contradict the claim that society is made up of nothing more than individuals, (Gilbert 1989). With a difference, the notion of group agent, although still valid in terms of description, has been considered in dependence to its members, as the ultimate ontological components of the whole. In this sense, reductionism has not implied eliminativism: although groups have been (ontologically) reducible to their components or to the network of attitudes, norms and commitments in place at the members' level, the explanation of group phenomena has still required a holistic lexicon.[126]

But, to those who are familiar with the history of political philosophy and social theory the label "holistic individualism" might still suggest a paradoxical association, bringing together two terms that have been traditionally located at opposite poles of the question. The issue, at the core of the current discussion in Social Ontology, finds its roots in the social sciences of the nineteenth century with significant contributions by, among others, E. Durkheim and M. Weber. The original dispute consisted in whether it could be meaningful to admit the existence of social facts as *sui generis* phenomena, not reducible to events concerning individual agents and not predictable on the basis of psychological principles. On the matter, Durkheim's position was in favor of the holistic claim that social facts do exist *sui generis* as new phenomena:

> A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; or: which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own.[127]

Furthermore,

[126] On the notion of reductionism about collective agency see Schweikard 2008.
[127] Durkheim 1982, p.59.

> Sociological method as we practice it rests wholly on the basic principle that social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual. There is no principle for which we have received more criticism; but none is more fundamental. Indubitably for sociology to be possible, it must above all have an object all its own. It must take cognizance of a reality which is not in the domain of other sciences. But if no reality exists outside of individual consciousness, it wholly lacks any material of its own.[128]

If compared with the distinction between ontology and explanation – which was not an explicit acquisition at the time – the former quotation would put Durkheim's theory on the side of ontological holism, due to the fact that it postulates the existence of facts that are not reducible to the laws governing their individual basis, whereas the latter could be taken as a claim about the method of social sciences.[129] The sociologist thus assumed that, in order to study the social world, it would be necessary to make use of concepts and descriptions that understand social facts as such, namely as regularities happening in the world and having the power to modify what the individuals do in concrete (Greenwood 2003). But, as he himself pointed out, «men's dignity is diminished whenever he is made to feel that he is not completely self-determinant»[130], so the idea that social regularities might affect individual behavior could represent a bitter pill to swallow.

In line with that perplexity, Weber insisted on the individualistic thesis that the main forces operating in the social world are those of individual rationality and psychology. The theorist suggested a rational actor foundation for social sciences, claiming that the only way to grasp social phenomena is by studying events related to the individual intentional action.

[128] Durkheim 1951, Preface, p. XXXVi.
[129] The kind of ontological holism held by the sociologist does not necessarily imply the assumption of social entities as *sui generis* objects. As it is, Durkheim's claim is about the existence of social facts – such as tendencies and rules – that exist independently of the individuals' behavior. He does not mention groups as social facts but just phenomena concerning groups, among which the rate of suicide is the best known example, (Durkheim 1951). According to this, it might be reasonable to interpret Durkheim's ontological perspective as a form of holism about properties, which assumes that «a society can have properties that are irreducible to the properties of individuals», (List and Spiekermann 2013, p.631).
[130] Durkheim 1982, p.4.

> […] collectives must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action.[131]

Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that Weber embraces a form of individualism that holds both a methodological and an ontological thesis. In fact, the claim that all events happening in the social world should be explained based on individual psychological laws is a suggestion that fully grasp the core of methodological individualism. Similarly, concerning ontology, the idea that only individuals can be considered as agents is a remark that seems to exclude group agents from the list of what there is.

On this basis, the debate between individualists and holists has developed over time and during the 1950s the defense of the individualistic perspective, especially in its methodological aspect, was greatly diffused. In particular, the debate has rehashed focusing on methodological issues after Watkins' definition of methodological individualism as opposed to methodological holism (Watkins 1952, 1955); the classification was later adopted and sustained employing individualistic arguments by theorists such as F. Hayek (Hayek 1942), K. Popper (Popper 1944, 1945) and S. Lukes (Lukes 1968), among others. More recently, the holistic side of the diatribe has been reconsidered, and increasing interest in Social Ontology has effectively covered a role in this re-evaluation (Zahle 2014). Even though most theorists have accepted that social facts and events should be explained only by making reference to individuals and their attitudes and actions, there are many philosophers who have taken seriously the idea that, to account for what happens in society, it is necessary to adopt holistic terms and descriptions. For instance, as already said, shared agency is not reducible to the agency of each single participant in connection with others: the "we" involved in the phenomenon makes the difference. Such a gap created by the "we" might be interpreted in two ways, both concerning the methodological side of the discipline. Thus, the two divergences generated by the embracement of holistic concepts are (1) theoretical and (2) explicative. As a theoretical position, the assumption of a we-perspective allows the interpretation of group phenomena as something that the individuals involved in the performance do see as a matter of group, as something they do as part of a

[131] Weber 1978, p.13.

whole (Schmitz 2017, Schmid 2017, List and Pettit 2011, Tuomela 2013b). As an explicative thesis, the holistic account aims at grasping events of shared agency by using non-individualistic terms and principles (Bratman 1999, 2014; Gilbert 1989, 2006; List & Pettit 2011; Jackson and Pettit 1992; Pettit 1996, 2014; Tuomela 2007, 2010, 2013b). Instead, concerning the metaphysical issue, social and group events still represent a problem, upon which theorists of Social Ontology are still dwelling (Bach 2016, Epstein 2014a, 2014b, 2017, Hauswald 2016, Hindriks 2012, 2013, 2017, Laitinen 2017, Ludwig 2003, 2007b, 2014, Ritchie 2015, Ruben 1985, Stoutland 2008, Thomasson 2002).

2.2.3 Pettit's interpretation

Since its origins the holism-individualism debate has established conflicting positions based on the radical opposition of the two terms.

Pettit is the one that has recently brought the dichotomy on focus and interpreted it in an alternative manner: the author, a supporter of holistic individualism, has tried to avoid the paradox apparently shown by the connection, by disaffirming the opposing character of the terms, (Düber et al. 2016). According to Pettit, opting for an individualistic ontology and – at the same time – for a holistic methodology is feasible and consistent not just because the questions (i.e. explanation and ontology) are assumed to be separated. Indeed, the position – he claims – is valid also because it puts together two perspectives that are not the two sides of the same coin; in fact, individualistic and holistic stances represent two different issues in the social sciences, which regard diverse levels and subjects of interaction. Pettit explains:

> The first issue in social ontology has to do with how far individuals are compromised from on high, by aggregate or structural factors. It is a vertical issue, as we may put it. The second issue, by contrast, is of a horizontal character. It is the issue between what I call atomism and holism. The question bears, not on the relation between high-level factors and individual human beings, but on the relation between the individuals themselves. It is the

> question as to how far people's social relationships with one another are of significance in their constitution as subjects and agents.[132]

According to this, the point of the author is to consider the relation between individuals and society, the members and the group, as a double question, concerning (1) the vertical relation between each single individual and the group to which she belongs and (2) the horizontal interaction among the members. Thus, it pertains to the vertical issue to discuss to what extent individual agency is affected or compromised by external non-psychological influences, while it is a matter of horizontal relationships whether or not a subject might develop her skills and become an agent outside of society. Each side of the debate can be assumed from – at least – two radical points of view: individualistic and collectivistic for what concerns the vertical stance, atomistic and holistic as for the horizontal one. Briefly, supporters of individualism assume that individual agents, as the ultimate ontological components of the social world, are autonomous and free from (causal) forces deriving from the environment, whereas collectivists say that social facts exist and exert an influence on individual psychology. Similarly, while an atomist assumes that the individuals' skills might flourish in absence of any social interaction, the holistic position argues in favor of the necessity for human beings to grow up and live with other individuals in order to develop their rational faculties (Pettit 1996, 2014).[133]

In addition to this classification, Pettit states that each stance could be combined with both proposals at the other level of the reflection.

[132] Pettit 1996, p.111.

[133] Pettit's definition of "atomism" is the same that Gilbert (Gilbert 1989) gives to the label "singularism" in opposition to "holism". It is important to remark that "singularism" has been recently introduced also in Pettit's framework (Pettit 2014) with a diverse meaning:«the singularism issue, as I understand it, is whether there are only singular human agents or whether certain groups can also perform in an agent role», (Pettit 2014, p.90). The contrary of this claim, the anti-singularist perspective, holds that «any agent that is organized to simulate agency in the manner of a corporate body must be organized in a manner that rules out mechanical responsiveness and in a way, therefore, that gives it a title to be regarded as an agent proper», (*Ivi*, p.92).

	Individualism	Collectivism
Atomism	**1**	**2**
Holism	**3**	**4**

[134]

The table shows the four possible combinations, of which (1) and (4) represent the opposite traditional ways of interpreting the matter, by taking the agent's psychological autonomy as strictly connected with her self-sufficiency in terms of developing full-blown skills. As a consequence, atomistic individualism accepts affirmatively the conjunction of the two claims, while holistic collectivism refuses both. More problematic are the cases of (3) holistic individualism and (2) atomistic holism, which are based on the independence of the psychological question from the inter-relational one. As far as the latter is concerned, i.e. atomistic holism, Pettit says that the position could be identified in Hobbes' account who treated «the idea of solitary individual as a suitably coherent notion: the solitary individual never interacts socially with others, even if there are others around»; despite this, «human being can display all distinctively human capacities»[135]. Independently of the mutual interaction among the subjects, on the psychological sides, Hobbes maintained that individuals are indeed subjected to the causal and normative power of the whole, even though – for the sake of argument – such a social unity is not the outcome of the interplay among the parts, (Hobbes 1651). This considered, the option of holistic individualism can be spelled out as the contrary of Hobbes' thesis affirming the psychological autonomy and rejecting the hypothesis of self-sufficiency:

> Imagine that someone is a holist, believing that as things are, human beings depend on their relations with one another for the realization of the capacity to think: with human beings the capacity to think, like the possession of power or status, involves the enjoyment of relations with other people. There is no reason why such a person cannot be an individualist, no reason why he cannot think that aggregate regularities that characterize social life leave the

[134] The table is taken from Pettit 1996, p.172. Arguments of the kind can be found also in Gilbert 1989, pp.427-36.
[135] Pettit 1996, p.173.

> individual uncompromised in her autarchical status. The endorsement of holism is entirely consistent with accepting the intentional-psychological picture of human beings; […].[136]

Thus the point proposed by Pettit assumes that holistic individualism does not represent an association between contrasting terms, but rather a reconciliation between two positions concerning different aspects of the relationship between individuals and society.

2.2.4 Holistic individualism and shared agency

The interpretation proposed by Pettit regarding the terms "holism" and "individualism" in social sciences represents an important remark for better understanding the general debate and apropos of the association between the two poles. Given that holistic individualism in Social Ontology has adopted the former perspective with reference to the explanatory issue and the latter in accounting for the ontology of the social world, such a dichotomy could acquire a further meaning if compared with Pettit's suggestion. In fact, the author suggests that, while individualism is concerned with vertical relationships, holism regards horizontal interplay among individuals. According to this, the ontological stance held by individualists would imply a claim about the agency and the role played in it by the intentional faculty of the subjects: saying that only individuals exist also means that individuals in society are autonomous in the sense that they have the power to decide and determine their intentions and actions. In opposition to the collectivist approach, the individualistic view does not admit any external (causal) influence or determination of individual psychology from the outside; each singular agent, both in personal and in shared contexts of agency, is free to decide about her attitudes and thoughts.

> According to individualism about the mind, the mental natures of all a person's or animal's states (and events) are such that there is no necessary or deep individuative relation between the individual's being in states of those kinds and the nature of the individual's physical or social environment.[137]

This does not mean that an individual acting in a social context would not be subject to any restriction or normative regulation; the point is that, for what concerns her mental states, the

[136] *Ibidem.*
[137] Burge 1986, pp.3-4.

subject is always accountable for the attitudes she bears. The social environment or the group to which one belongs do not determine the individual's mind. Moreover, under the condition that only individuals exist and that only individual psychology is responsible for the attitudes moving the action, it might be deduced that no collective mind could be postulated. In fact, the idea of a whole emerging from the parts and having its own will and intentional stand point would be in contrast with the ontological claim that nothing beyond individual minds can be considered to be part of our world. Thus, the ontological thesis somehow implies a psychological autarchy of singular agents – at least as Pettit puts it.[138] At the same time, observing that the issue related to holism is that of horizontal relationships among agents, it points out an interesting aspect of the methodological question to which the holistic view is associated. In fact, by maintaining the worth of the individualistic ontological (and psychological) supposition, the holistic concern finds that,

> living in our society is a necessary condition of the development of rationality, in some sense of this property, or becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, or becoming fully a responsible, autonomous being. […] the view (is) that outside society, or in some variants outside certain kinds of society, our distinctively human capacities could not develop.[139]

Thus, the development of rationality as a faculty that the individual exercises autonomously – with no causal determination from the social – requires the presence of other persons and formative (and affective) relationships with them. In this sense, our being intentional agents strictly depends upon our being grown up socially: interaction with others is at the base of our autarchic attitudes and actions. This considered, the explicative claim coming with the holistic position becomes noteworthy; indeed, through holistic explanations it would be possible to spell out the development of the individuals' mind. In other words, even if social concepts are ontologically reducible to their individual basis, they seem to be indispensable in order to grasp some facts belonging to that individualistic foundation.

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[138] This interpretation might sound quite radical. In fact, Pettit himself has associated his ontological individualism with a form of realism about groups (Pettit 2007, List and Pettit 2011). Even though that kind of realism is not an ontological position but just an epistemological assumption, considering groups as proper centers of rationality and intentional agency might address some doubts about the intentional autonomy of the individuals that is connected with the ontological individualism embraced in the theory. The point will be re-considered later in the present work, when critique to ontological individualism is further developed (chapter 3).

[139] Taylor 1985, p.191.

In keeping that the ontological individualistic claim has some implications on the kind of psychological autarchy embraced by the theory and that the holistic explanation tells something about the relational nature of our capacities as human beings, it appears quite clearly that the two levels (individual and social) should be kept separate. Mixing things up would lead to confuse the issues making it difficult to defend a complex and quasi-paradoxical position as the one held by holistic individualism. However, alongside this caution, it is also necessary to re-consider the ontological and the methodological question together, in order to discover which kind of connection might be established between the two levels in view of the re-conciliation proposed by holistic individualism in the GLA. Even if it is true – according to the position in question – that social facts do not really exist, their being useful in explaining what happens in society actually tells us that there should be something in the world that allows our usage of certain high-level concepts such as groups, shared agency and collective commitment. Saying that groups are not ontological primitive is not the same as affirming an eliminativist stance about social phenomena. Moreover, describing social facts as items that ontologically depend on individuals questions the presence of some sort of relation between the extremes. Taking this into consideration, the point would be that of clarifying the meaning of dependency at stake.

But, assuming that social (here, group) phenomena can be better grasped through the adoption of a holistic point of view is not the equivalent of denying the salience and effectiveness of explanations based on individual behavioral and psychological laws. In fact, one might assume the necessary character of holistic explanations without being a reductionist and, at the same time, without standing for the dispensability of individualistic accounts.[140] All in all, for the type of perspective it aims to defend, holistic individualism,

[140] The issue concerning holistic explanations in social sciences is part of the dispensability debate, which might be approached from three different perspectives:
«*Methodological individualism*: Individualist explanations should be advanced. Holist explanations may, and should, be dispensed with.
Strong methodological holism: Holists explanations should be offered. Individualist explanations may, and should, be dispensed with.
Weak methodological holism: Not only individualist but also holist explanations should be put forward. Neither individualist nor holist explanations may, and should be, dispensed with», (Zahle and Collin 2014,

and the GLA it tries to formulate, needs to find a link between the individual level and the social level, both in terms of ontology and methods.

2.3 The supervenience of groups

The aim of the present section is to present how holistic individualism has accounted for shared agency (and other social phenomena in general) in relation with the individual basis from which they (ontologically) depend. In particular, the first paragraph introduces the notion of supervenience as an ontological relation between individual basis and social domain. The second paragraph contains a reflection of a wider scope on the relation between ontology and methodology, establishing that the connection might run on a double track, where none of the two extremes comes first. We suggest that starting from ontology is only a matter of analysis. This considered, paragraphs 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 are devoted to the methodological side of the issue and contain the analysis of the implications that the ontological individualistic position has had on the explanation of shared agency. The reflection considers the four different connections (constitutive, structural, normative, causal) established among intentions and actions, and relates them to group intentions and actions in the GLA of holistic individualism.

2.3.1 Supervenience relation

The relation between the individual level and social horizon could be spelled out variously conforming to the perspective from which one is considering the matter. The standpoint held by this paragraph is concerned with the ontological question by asking how to think of

p.5). The view proposed by holistic individualism aims at the third option, assuming that holistic explanations are necessary even though the reference to the individual level can always be considered. As it is, different levels of explanation describe diverse kinds of phenomena, not reducible to one another – at least from a methodological perspective.

groups given that they are taken to depend upon the lower individual level of reality, that is the level of the members. By the way, individualistic ontology embraced by holistic individualism has been said to be grounded on the assumption that no group really exists as an ontological primitive: groups are determined by their individual basis. Now, the question is: which is the sense of determination at stake here?

Before providing an answer, it should be pointed out that such an ontological problem cannot be treated as an univocal issue, because dwelling upon the status of groups (and upon any other social item in general) could lead to several different tasks. In particular, the question might be referred to groups by interpreting the concept as signifying respectively objects (i.e. entities, events or processes) or properties. In this sense, an ontological position could be that of accepting the existence of properties (and agency) related to groups without assuming groups as proper objects.[141] Otherwise, one could admit the proper existence of groups, while refusing their capability to have attitudes for the action, that is to say that one can embrace their objective ontological status but not considering them as bearers of the property of being subjects of agency.[142] Of course, a position could also be denying that the notion of group is referred to any social object or property at all, by affirming the reducibility of both (Ludwig 2014). On the contrary, considering groups as objects endowed with properties, in particular with the property of being the source of agency, would imply the underpinning of a (ontological) realist perspective, according to which the term "group" (and "social phenomenon" in general) might be employed to denote both objects and properties. This considered, for the sake of simplicity, the present reflection will take an alternative and less committing view by focusing on groups intended as facts, namely as anything concerning groups that can be represented by propositions. In this sense, questioning the ontological relation between individuals and groups may be read as a question regarding the kind of determination that can be established between facts of a lower (individual) level and facts about the higher (social) level, no matter if they instantiate properties or objects (List & Spiekermann

[141] Ruben (Ruben 1985) has proposed the label "e-individualism". The perspective is also identified with "token individualism".
[142] This case represents an issue of "p-individualism" or "type individualism", according to which no high-level property exists as an irreducible feature (Ruben 1985).

2013).[143] The only requirement is that those facts would be suitable objects of linguistic expressions, such as «Hannah and Martin want to visit Bucharest», as a phrase concerning individual facts, and «an increasing number of tourists has been visiting Bucharest», as a proposition representing a social phenomenon. By following this interpretation, the ontological commitment required by the notion of "fact" does not necessarily lead to the assumption of groups being ontologically objective.

Given that the aim of the analysis oriented towards the establishment of a proper GLA is to find the relation among individual and group facts, it is time to account for the kind of determination theorized in Social Ontology. The connection in question has been defined as a supervenience relation, which states that «one set of facts, say B, 'supervenes' on another, say A, if and only if fixing the A-facts also fixes the B-facts»[144]. Thus, with supervenience the debate has identified an interconnection among levels that postulates the derivative character of the supervenient level and the original ontological status of its basis.[145] In this sense, given a certain configuration of individual facts, a specific social arrangement supervenes and every time something changes at the lower level, a modification occurs also at the higher one. In addition and in contrast with the relation of emergence, the case of supervenience requires an ongoing relation between the lower and the higher order of facts, so that the latter does not need to acquire complete independency from the former – as it is for emergence (Kim 1999). Social facts, once arisen, do not cut the ties with the individual phenomena involved in their foundation; in this sense high-level features are not emergent in the strict meaning of the term (Ludwig 2003, Zahle 2007). But the same consideration cannot be made about the other way of the connection: modifications at the social level do not imply any corresponding variation on the individual side. As it is, supervenience is an asymmetric relation (Sawyer 2002, p. 543).

[143] The choice of this terminology and conceptual framework is justified by the heterogeneous way in which theorists in the debate has dealt with the issue. Tuomela speaks of *I-mode* and *we-mode* attitudes (Tuomela 2013a, pp.72-73, 2011), Epstein talks about sets of entities (Epstein 2014b, p.21), whereas Sawyer refers to properties of different kinds (Sawyer 2002, p. 543). In this panorama, List and Pettit adopt the general notion of facts (List and Pettit 2011, pp.63-72) – further justified in List and Spiekermann 2013 – which is also the way in which Searle (Searle 2010, 1995) describes elements populating the social world: "social facts".
[144] List and Pettit 2011, p.65. See also List and Pettit 2006.
[145] On various meanings of supervenience, Kim 1984.

The assumption that a fact or network of facts at the lower level can produce a specific configuration at the supervenient level does not mean that that specific social fact could not be produced by another or many other arrangements at the individual level. In fact, the only necessary determination is the one between the design that is in place among the individuals and the holistic phenomenon it generates, whereas the contrary is not true, because a social fact can be associated with an open-ended number of arrangements at the lower level (Risjord 2014, Sawyer 2002, Kim 1992, Ludwig 2003, Epstein 2014a, List & Spiekermann 2013, Currie 1984). Such a characteristic of the supervenience relation has been called multiple realizability, for which List and Spiekermann have provided a pretty clear definition:

> **Multiple realizability of high-level properties:** The system's higher-level properties are determined by its lower-level properties, but can be realized by numerous different configurations of them and hence cannot feasibly be re-described in terms of lower-level properties.[146]

Thus, according to multiple realizability a social fact, produced by a particular arrangement of individual facts, could have just supervened on many different, alternative configurations at the lower level, so it would be a mistake to trace that phenomenon back to a single basis. In fact, different individual sets can generate the same social fact and, as a consequence, different individual bases, not identical to one another, can generate social facts that are instead identical. For example, the social fact "being a family" can originate from various arrangements depending on the cultural and social environment on which we focus the attention: «Claire and Matthew are married and have two children», «Sonia and Laura have been living together for 10 years», «Thomas and Steven are married in law». All these propositions represent individual facts, different from one another, that give rise to a supervenient fact, namely the social fact of being a family, that has – or should have – the same meaning despite the substantial dissimilitude among its foundations.

Moreover, multiple realizability can be broadened by introducing another property, the wild disjunction:

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[146] List and Spiekermann 2013, p.639.
The notion of multiple realizability has been introduced in the philosophy of mind and then expanded to the debate concerning the relation between individuals and society by H. Putnam (Putnam 1967).

> The basic idea is that for any social property, there is in principle an endless sequence of nomologically possible individual-level states such that although each of them "realize" or "implement" the social property, none of them is coextensive with it.[147]

As stated in the quotation, wild disjunction of the social level from the individual is based on the fact that, even though the former derives from the latter, it would not be satisfactory to reduce the supervenient level to its ontological foundation, because that basis – apart from being just one among many – represents only a limited sequence of factors that could be modified or enriched with further features and still produce the same outcome. In this sense, the social fact should be kept separate from the arrangement(s) from which it supervenes, and the reason for this disjunction is that none of the combinations of individual facts would ever cover all possible networks.

A last remark about the nature of supervenience concerns its relation with time: «(s)upervenience is a synchronic claim: the individual events and properties at a time determine everything that happens at that time»[148]. Thus, supervenience represents a relation that can be grasped in a snapshot.

To summarize, the main features of supervenience as a logical and ontological relation between the lower and the higher level(s) of the social world are:

1. the assumption of multiple levels;
2. asymmetry;
3. multiple realizability;
4. wild disjunction;
5. synchronic nature.

2.3.2 Ontology and explanation

The last paragraph presented supervenience as the ontological relation adopted by holistic individualism to account for the way in which facts about individuals are connected with the social facts they determine. The task now is to show how the ontological framework

[147] Sawyer 2002, p.546.
[148] Sawyer 2003, p.10.

based on supervenience might underpin the holistic methodological perspective characterizing the GLA. The point is to explain how, according to the theorists of holistic individualism, the supervenience relation could enable us to postulate (at least) two irreducible levels of the description, in a way that speaking of phenomena concerning groups in their entirety would not represent a contrasting feature if compared with individualistic ontology on which the thesis of supervenience relies. At the same time, the explanation of social facts should maintain its irreducible nature without representing a redundant re-description of facts concerning individuals, as the individualistic position in metaphysics might, at first, suggest. Thus, although the methodological and ontological questions have been presented as separate issues, a re-conciliation between the diverse perspectives with respect to ontology and methodology could be sketched anyway. In particular, the outlook provided on the ontological side should enable us to conceive a methodology for social sciences which relies on arguments and acquisitions gained from the reflection upon ontology. In this sense, the relation is:

Ontology ⟶ Methodology/explanation

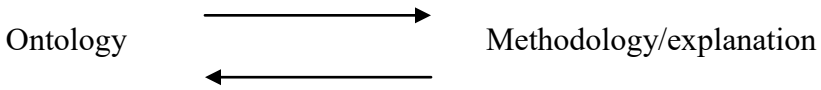
In particular, it has been argued that supervenience outlines a picture of the social world organized on the base of a hierarchical ontological scale with multiple stages, each of which presents specific and increasingly complex social facts. On the lower level there are individual agents and their relations, whereas on the higher level(s) there are those social facts instantiated by peculiar networks of relations, norms and organizational structures among the individual parts, (Elder-Vass 2014). The claim that only the elements belonging to the most basic stage bear an objective ontological status does not undermine the consistency of this multi-layered structure, because the social facts supervene on their individual basis without being co-extensive with it. As the thesis of multiple realizability states, the same holistic arrangement could be produced by an open number of lower configurations, (Sawyer 2002). Thus, it follows that – from an explicative point of view – the social world can be the object of various descriptions, depending on the level on which each perspective purports to be focused. In this sense, the supervenient relation (apparently) establishes a suitable ontological pattern for the formulation of holistic explanations of the

social world, which are indeed in need of a multi-layered metaphysical conception. In addition to this, supervenience provides arguments to argue against the descriptive reducibility of the higher level(s) to the lower, as the GLA would require. As it is, multiple realizability and wild disjunction postulate the failure of any equivalence that would univocally translate a social fact in terms of its individualistic foundation: according to the former statement, a certain high-level phenomenon can be instantiated by many different arrangements at the individual basis and, according to the latter, none among those combinations is coextensive with the social fact it generates. It is in keeping with these considerations that explanatory holism has generally derived from the ontology endorsed by holistic individualism.

Given the above, we could also take a step forward (or backward, it depends on the perspective) and affirm that the ontological picture drawn up to now has provided useful and consistent reasons to justify a certain methodological choice that was already given in the theory. In this sense, the holistic explicative claim would be considered as the original term, from which the other (i.e. the ontological pattern) has derived. According to this, by starting from methodological assumptions one could establish an ontological framework, to outline what there is in the social world. Hence, the relation between ontology and methodology can be turned upside down and what was meant to be a starting point for the analysis would now become a consequent feature:

Ontology ⟵ Methodology/explanation

The possibility of seeing the relation in a double way suggests that no priority should be attributed, neither to the methodological nor to the ontological domain. Instead, the connection seems to be running on a double track, so that any assumption or modification belonging to one of the two perspectives could be studied in view of the implications that such a theoretical move could show on the other field. A specific methodological approach requires an ontological framework as well as an ontological structure that allows a certain number of methodological principles while preventing others.



In light of this, it is easy to see to what extent holistic individualism might represent a challenge that traditional positions, such as atomistic individualism and holistic collectivism, have not brought to our attention. In fact, finding a re-conciliation between apparently contrasting ontological and descriptive claims has made it particularly urgent to investigate the side-effects the two approaches would have upon one another.

Nonetheless, if it is true that the double direction of the ontology-methodology/methodology-ontology link should not be forgotten, at the same time, the analytical reflection still requires to proceed step by step and to bring the focus on ontology and methodology one at a time. The introduction of supervenience as the ontological relation between individual and social facts has opened a path that goes from the description of how the world is to the way in which it should be explained. Thus, it is the scope of these pages to investigate the explicative pattern prepared by the ontological ground; in the next chapter, the task will be to challenge individualistic ontology keeping with holistic methodology embraced by the theory. In the case in which both the directions of the analysis turn out to be consistent and coherent accounts of shared agency, without showing any fallacy both in the ontological and in the explicative apparatus, holistic individualism will be accepted as a valid philosophical perspective for the development of the GLA; otherwise, some revisions should be (and will be) provided.

2.3.3 Framing the GLA

Let's start investigating the explicative pattern to which the ontological supervenience relation gives rise. Although the analysis could be applied to any social fact, the following reflection will be developed within the limits of shared agency as a notion connected with intentional phenomena of behavior realized by a group agent. As the first chapter has already proposed to explain shared agency as the result of shared intentions planning for (non summative) individual contributions towards a common aim (1.3.1, 1.3.2), the present

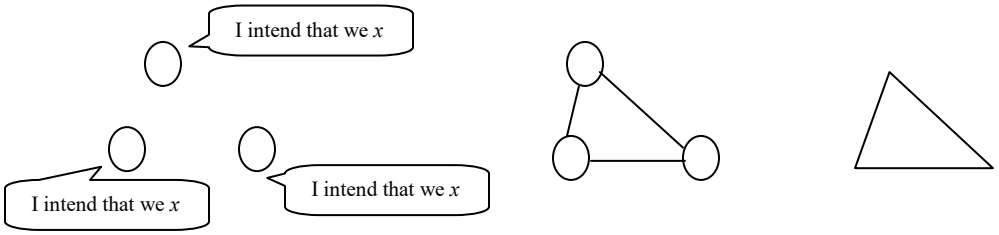
reflection goes beyond the members-level account (MLA) offered by that description. Now the claim is to formulate a group-level account (GLA) of shared agency consistent with holistic individualism, which explains it as a group event straightforwardly, considering the relation between shared intentions and actions from the group perspective as if it was a single agent. Concerning the mental side of the issue, the intentional event under investigation within the GLA will be the *we-mode* attitude – in the case of the approaches embracing the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality[149] – or the network among the various attitudes-that-we – in the case of the *continuity thesis*[150]. Regarding the performative moment, the action to which the mental state will be related is the performance realized by the group as an agent or as a system functioning as an agent. The issue of the agent is not going to be addressed here: the identification of the group agent will be based on the considerations provided by the investigation of the *intrinsic*, *extrinsic* and *status* account as *a posteriori* definitions of the notion.[151] The problem is to better understand the premise on which those accounts are based: the model of intentional shared agency.

We would like to suggest that, according to the double chance of interpreting the nature of the plan state, there could be two different ways in which a GLA could intend (and, consequently, relate with one another) the mental and the behavioral components of shared agency:

1. *Continuity thesis of intentionality*[152]: the group, as an agent, supervenes on the network of individual attitudes and interpersonal relationships conducive to the action. Behind and beyond each individual intention there is a common aim shared by the participants, mutual expectations among the parties and mutual beliefs about the others' attitudes. In the case of a complex group, there might be an organizational structure regulating the effectiveness of each contribution and

[149] On the authors adopting the *discontinuity thesis*: 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4 of the present.
[150] The *continuity thesis* was introduced in 1.1.3, 1.1.4.
[151] About the *intrinsic*, *extrinsic* and *status* account: 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4 of the present.
[152] The point does not include List and Pettit's theory of group agency (List and Pettit 2011), because, even if the authors hold a continuous doctrine of intentionality, their proposal is to assume groups as proper subject of autonomous reasons and intentions for the action. As a consequence, the model that could be attributed to the approach, rather than extrinsic (or just extrinsic), as it is in the case of the other approaches framed upon the continuity thesis of intentionality, represents an example of intrinsic account.

controlling the consistency and coherence of each action with respect to the common task, (Bratman 2007, 2014). This kind of system allows the network of individual agents to work as an agent in the *extrinsic* sense of the notion, namely by realizing the complex goal through the meshing sub-plans of all the participants involved, (Bratman 2017). Each individual intention to join in the effort has the form: "attitude-that-we", where the group enters the mental state only as a representational content.



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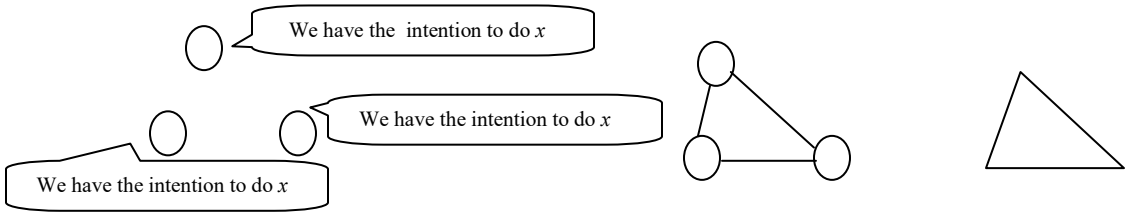
According to this picture, the relation between shared intentions and actions seems to be that between a network of states of mind, each belonging to the members' psychology, and a performance done by the agents in concert with one another. Consequently, the embracement of the GLA might have a double function: (1) understanding the intentional plan at the basis of the intentional group action as a network of attitudes rather than as the sum of the members' intending (as it was in the MLA); (2) ascribing the action to the system which displays that network. In line with this – and in accordance with the ontological supervenience relation – the group is introduced as a functional explicative notion, without any relevant commitment to its ontological status.

[153] The illustration below is a simple representation of a group of individuals, who – for what concerns their intentions for the action – do not form a group in an irreducible/intrinsic sense of the notion. The intentional states are, however, involved in the creation of a network which (1) relates the members to one another and (2) provides the basis for the supervenience of a whole that is not intrinsically intentional but, at least, functions as an agent. This means that if the first triangle from the left represents single intentional subjects, the second figure illustrates the network constructed through the members' attitudes (implemented or regulated by the normative apparatus associated with that system – see letter *d*). As third, there is the functional entity working as a single one.

2. *Discontinuity thesis of intentionality*: group performances are planned by the members' collective/*we-mode* intentions to do something together. In this case, group dimension is already part of the members' psychological status determining the form or mode of the attitudes for the action. Nonetheless, the fact that the participants are disposed to think of their own action in terms of "we" – «we intend to do such and such», «we have the collective intention to do x», «we, as a group, are ready to do x», and so forth – does not imply the group exists as a whole. In fact, on the ontological side, the group consists in a supervenient fact. Since ontological individualism is accepted, the introduction of group dimension in the explanation of intentional phenomenon seems to have no concrete consequence outside of the individuals' mind. All in all, the *discontinuity thesis* does not diverge so much from the supervenient picture drawn by the theorists of the *continuity thesis*. Concerning the actor/action aspect there is no salient difference to be underlined between the approaches: in group contexts the one who realizes the intention is the group considered as a supervenient system, (Tuomela 2013b). On the contrary, on the side of the mental attitude, the group perspective is part of the way (mode or form) in which the members formulate their thoughts. High-level concepts are already at play in the explanation of the mental event.



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All this considered, the relation between shared intention and group performance will be studied stressing the particular features of the two models only with respect to the intentional issue, whereas the action will be considered through the same functional/supervenient pattern. Recalling the analytical framework adopted in the first

[154] The only difference between this picture and the previous one is the content of mental attitudes.

chapter, the shared intention will be associated to the group action by studying the constitutive, the structural, the normative and the causal relation between the two poles. Despite the risk of sounding repetitive, it is however important to specify that the jump from what happens at the level of the individual members (MLA) to that of the group as a whole (GLA) has been already attempted by holistic individualism (here on focus), which provides an individualistic ontology that claims to be consistent with different descriptive levels of reality. In this sense, the explanation of group agency, though ontologically reducible, should delineate itself as a non-redundant description if compared with the MLA.

2.3.4 The GLA and the four dimensions of agency

The question is: which is the relation between the intention and the action once we adopt the GLA? Or better: given what holistic individualism has affirmed about the group-level account, how could we interpret the four relations between intending and acting?

a. Constitutive relation

The constitutive relation between the act of intending and that of acting describes a connection in which the intentional moment is literally part of the action, where "action" amounts to the sum of the two moments, the mental state and the act realizing it. As far as the constitutive relation is concerned, shared intentions are components of the activity happening together with the physical movement representing its psychological counterpart. This description has been formulated on the basis of Searle's proposal, which represents the main explicit attempt of investigating the issue (Searle 1995, 2007, 2010). In particular, as far as the MLA was concerned (1.3.1, 1.3.2), it has been maintained that the author recognizes the intention that is meant to be the psychological counterpart of the action in the intention-in-action/action-intention, which corresponds to the mental state planning and happening with the gesture. Differently, the prior (or aim)[155] intention is not considered a necessary component of the agency and, when present, works by providing the cognitive background in which each intention-in-action acquires a further meaning. While the content

[155] Tuomela 2007.

of the aim intention is the shared goal, the action-intention rather represents the task fulfilled by every group member in view of the final objective, which does not enter the content of the particular intention-in-action at all.

Now that the performance to be related with the intention has been identified with the group action, the role of the prior intention might change, because excluding the MLA puts out of discussion the explanation of shared agency in terms of individual contributions. If the group is the actor, the intention concerning all the members as a group might be consequently interpreted as the intention-in-action happening with the performance. To say it with Searle's formula: «a = i.a.+ b.m.»[156]. The agency is the result of the intention-in-action in addition to the bodily movement; similarly, shared agency could be the sum of the collective intention-in-action (that is the prior intention of the individual contributions) and the activity produced by the group as a system. The formula could be:

$a_g = i.a._g + b.m._g$

Where "a_g" represents the event of shared agency, collective action in its entirety, "$i.a._g$" stands for the intention-in-action relative to the group act and corresponding to what in the explanation of the individual contributions was the prior intention for the action, and "$b.m._g$" is the bodily movement of the group, i.e. the group performance. Truly, this kind of hypothesis could be a feasible path to follow if it were not for the fact that (1) Searle has not spoken of group agents and, for this reason, has had no need to relate prior intentions to group intentional behaviors; (2) the majority of authors in Social Ontology have not focused on, or not even introduced, the notion of intention-in-action at all.[157]

b. Structural relation

The shared intention held by the members of the group – «I intend that we do x», in the case of the *continuity thesis*, «we intend to do x», in the case of the *discontinuity thesis* – contains as its content the representation of the task of the entire group activity. As it was

[156] Searle 2007, p.18.
[157] Due to this second reason, in chapter one the notion of constitutive relation has been connected explicitly to Searle and Tuomela (who has the analogous concept of action intention) but not with Gilbert and Bratman – List and Pettit can be added to this second group.

spelled out in the context of the MLA, the shared plan state has a double structuring function on the action: on the one hand, it draws the horizon within which the contribution of each participant is formulated; on the other hand, it provides the motive around which all the efforts are organized, (Bratman 2014). As a consequence, a shared intention can be seen both as an attitude structuring individual behavior in view of group performance (MLA) and as the reason regulating the whole activity (GLA).

Accordingly, the structural relation between the intention and the action in group contexts seems to be less problematic than constitutive one. The very notion of intentionality contains in itself the idea of a project, which easily applies to various levels of complexity. The fact of being oriented towards an object is an essential character of any intentional event, which, in the case of intentions for the action, coincides with the goal of the group activity, that is the content represented by the prior intention for the action. Thus, with the *continuity thesis* of intentionality, it is the network of sub-plans that fixes the shared objective and is considered to be structurally related with the whole activity of the group. With a difference, regarding the *discontinuity thesis*, the intentional event structuring the performance might be the prior we-intention for the action, that is the intentional plan referred to group behavior as such and held by each participant as a group member.

c. Normative relation

The normative relation between intending and acting represents a difficult step for analysis. As has been pointed out by the members-level account (1.3.2), the idea that shared agency is based upon a normative bond among the agents has been explicitly accepted only in Gilbert's theory (Gilbert 1989, 1990, 2007b, 2013), in which two different kinds of normative relation have been identified in the case of group agency. The first normative bond finds its source in accepting the status of partner, through which their being participants acquires a normative character. This character consists in the fact of recognizing participants as partners, entitled with that status, i.e. partner, by virtue of the expectations and duties they have acquired through the mutual attribution of that status, (Gilbert 1990, 1997, 2007a). Because of this stable normative relation, according to Gilbert, the members are able to act as if they were a single body on the basis of shared intentions

for the action. Then, such a capacity to act jointly in an intentional way generates the second type of normativity conceived by the author: sharing an intention commits the agents to the effort aimed at realizing the goal they have in common. In this sense, Gilbert's view is normativistic in spirit, because what gives ground to the possibility of acting together intentionally is the prior normative relation between the parties.

As has already been explained, the only approach that can be associated with Gilbert's is the one proposed by Tuomela, who has constructed a similar multi-layered normative foundation of shared agency, articulated on two levels (Tuomela 2002, 2007, 2013a). On the one hand, there is the instrumental normativity, on the other, the author locates the social, more basic, normative bond, (Tuomela 2003). The former constraints the members of the group to the realization of the common task represented by the intentional content, while the latter consists in a commitment that bounds the individuals to one another as group members.[158]

Theoretical discrepancies left aside, both approaches suggest two levels of normativity, i.e. two kinds of normative relations, that were already at play within the MLA and that should now be seen through the filter of the group perspective. As a matter of fact, the modification of our account, that is the embracement of the GLA, has been already arranged by the MLA, because it is due to the most fundamental normative bond, related to the status of partner, that the group perspective becomes a feasible alternative. As it is, both authors have based the possibility to have shared intentions for the action normatively bound to the performance (we-mode intentions, for Tuomela, and intending as a group, in the case of Gilbert) on the acquisition of a status that, on the cognitive side, adds up to a new perspective. That further, disjoint psychological level, separate from the one to which individual intentions for the action belong, is straightforwardly committed with intentional plans involving the individual agents as group members. In this sense, what allows the

[158] The main difference between the two approaches is that, in Tuomela's theory, social commitment has a cognitive foundation, according to which an individual assumes the status of group member when there are mutual beliefs in the context. This cognitive requirement missing, no normative constraint can be established. On the contrary, Gilbert assumes the establishment of the normative connection as a practical phenomenon that does not necessarily require belief or conscious awareness about the others' intending.

introduction of intentional phenomena planning for group performances is the kind of (horizontal) normative relation between the agents, which makes the members act not as individuals but as part of a collective. This step is important in view of the GLA because it explains on what basis it is possible to jump from the members' to the group's perspective, without assuming the existence of any entity beyond the individual minds. In fact, according to the authors, once the members have acquired a group perspective, they can formulate intentions for the action directly from that viewpoint. Moreover, those plan states can be realizable (and rescindable) only through a group performance, as the GLA requires.

In order to better understand the explicative gap, it could be useful to recall Tuomela's way of speaking of group phenomena in opposition to facts about the members. Let's take the case of accepting new contents or reasons for the action.[159] According to the MLA, individuals collectively accept something in the *we-mode* when they engage in a process of agreement making, oriented towards an amalgam of attitudes.[160] The amalgam of attitudes represents the group attitude of acceptance, which could not be seen since individuals are thinking and acting as members. What is required is the embracement of the group's viewpoint. As Tuomela explains, «a group accept a content through its members' acceptance, but the two notions are different»[161], because the former needs the latter as a premise, without being co-extensive with it. In particular, the collective acceptance that happens at the members-level allows individuals to have something to recognize as a group. Then, from that group level, the member can accept the reason in question as a reason for the group as a whole. To be precise, the embracement of a group perspective is made possible by the collective acceptance that the members exert towards the ethos, that is the shared (cognitive and moral) horizon they have as parts of the same collective. Without a group dimension of contents and meanings established by means of collective acceptance and commitment[162] (at the members' level) no reason could have been in principle accepted

[159] On acceptance: Tuomela 2002, 2003, 2007, 2013a.
[160] Group attitudes can be the result of processes of decision making either when the individual attitudes agree with the group perspective or when there is disagreement between the positions. Concerning the latter case: Schweikard 2017b.
[161] Tuomela 2013a, p.126.
[162] Tuomela maintains that in group contexts the association between collective acceptance and commitment has two roles: «First, it binds the members together around an ethos, serving to ground the unity and identity

as suitable for the group, because the consistency and coherence of that reason with the group ethos would have been reduced – as it is in Bratman's approach – to the individuals' rational guidance. As a matter of fact, the GLA is not the same as the MLA because the latter has created the conditions for the identification of a holistic dimension, that goes beyond what is explicable in terms of individual facts and laws.[163]

In line with all these considerations we can assume that the normative relation inbuilt in the notion of shared agency from the perspective of the GLA is a relevant characteristic especially with respect to those theoretical models that are disposed to admit that the embracement of a group point of view generates – through an act of commitment – a normative relation between the shared intention and action, that is not the same as the connection at the individual level. In fact, the most fundamental kind of commitment, by turning the participants into partners, opens the possibility to think of a process of acceptance of intentions for the action that involves the group as a whole straightforwardly. It is on the basis of the identification of the members with the group as a body (Gilbert 1989), or with the group ethos (Tuomela 2013a), that the mediation of the members could be considered as a premise, different from the resulting amalgam.

All in all, in order to pass from the MLA to the GLA, the double normative relation is required «for the group to function as an agent, because without it the members could not coordinate their activities or perform together effectively to achieve group goals»[164]. Moreover, «the members are assumed to view and construct their (we-mode) group as an entity partially guiding their lives when their group membership is salient, and also

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of the group. Second, collective commitment provides the group with the authority to decide about its members' activities in a practically efficient way», (Tuomela 2013a, p.45)

[163] Concerning authors, the normative character of shared agency seems not to play such a fundamental role. In particular, for Searle, normativity derives from intentionality (namely, from the collective recognition of status functions with a normative characterization) without representing a constitutive dimension of agency, (Searle 1995, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010). On a different vein, Bratman (Bratman 1984, 1987, 2007, 2009c, 2014a) presents normative relation in a strict connection with two principles (*consistency* and *means-end coherence*). These principles are grounded on the system of beliefs held by each agent, which provides the network within which to locate and evaluate the new state plan. As far as the building-block explanation is concerned, the GLA cannot add something new to the MLA.

[164] Tuomela 2013a, p. 45.

requiring them to function as collectively committed ethos-obeying and ethos-furthering group members»[165].

d. Causal relation

The causal relation, according to the MLA (1.3.2), acquires a relevant part in the explanation of shared agency as the normative relation loses its bearing. In fact, when the attention is brought to the normative constraints, the causality that directly connects the two components of the agency weakens.[166]

In line with that assumption, in the first chapter, the issue of a causal relation between intentions and actions has been mainly associated with Searle's thought, in which the normative dimension of shared agency appears mainly as a consequence of the intentional event, deriving from the recognition of a status function. According to Searle, the causal relation can be formulated in two different senses. First, a causal bond can be found between the intention-in-action and the bodily movement realizing the mental event, (i.a. causes b.m., Searle 2007).[167] Second, the causal relation occurs in association with the prior intention moving the individual agency (taken as i.a + b.m.), which is causally responsible for the individuals' making and realizing a fitting intention-in-action in view of the common plan. Such a shared goal does not enter the individual intentional content and has no direct causal power on the action performed by the participants: the collective intention, due to its structure, operates on the activity through the mediation of intentions regulating the individual contributions. Due to this sort of mediation, it would be hard to maintain that the GLA could embrace a notion of causal relation that is not reducible to the causality grasped by the MLA, because the causality exerted by the group reason for the action only operates through the participatory intentions of the agents.

Far from Searle's approach, the idea of supervenient causation has been embraced by those theorists, such as Gilbert and Tuomela, who constructed a stronger normative foundation of shared agency. In opposition to what has been stated with regards to the

[165] *Ivi*, pp.45-46.
[166] See footnote 90.
[167] In the case of a collective intention for the action, the intention-in-action only pertains to the contribution provided by the individual agent.

MLA, it seems reasonable to affirm that the chance of considering the causal relation from a holistic perspective has found its grounding especially upon the normative relation among the members. The point is that the normative bond among the agents allows a change of perspective that makes it feasible and meaningful to discuss about groups as entities causally effective, because the normative relation makes the way to (1) the embracement of a group viewpoint on the side of the members, and (2) the creation of a network from which the group dimension supervenes as a system. In this double sense, the commitment to the status of group member and the identification with a certain group allows the members to think of themselves as a group. At the same time, the fact that the members are acting following a set of roles and functional positions within the system (task-right system in Tuomela's formulation)[168] sets a higher domain of social facts which enables the holistic explanation of the group as an agent as such. On this (normative) basis, fitting with the supervenient ontology, the explanation can focus on the group dimension and think of a causality that directly emanates from the collective, as a supervenient social fact, without going through the mediation of members' intentionality. Sawyer explains:

> Although social properties are supervenient on individual properties, the causal force of social properties does not have to be mediated through a conscious awareness of them on the part of individuals.[169]

To better understand the point, recalling the distinction between the ontological and explicative issue might be of help. Concerning the former, groups are reducible to individuals and in this sense individuals are the first motors of any causal chain; as for the latter, due to the group perspective and to the agential system created through the double normative relation, groups might have consequences on the world that one could not describe without postulating a holistic, higher-level realm of concern. Moreover, as Tuomela spells out, a group «exists causally objectively as a social system capable of causal production of outcomes in the world in virtue of its we-thinking and "we-acting" members»[170]. This means that a group can be held accountable for a certain causal effect in the world considered as a system made up of underpinning intentional mechanisms at the

[168] Tuomela 2007.
[169] Sawyer 2003, p.218.
[170] Tuomela 2013a, p.47.

members-level. Accordingly, the influence that the group seems to have as a system (and that can be explained only through a high-level perspective) pertains to the group as extrinsically intentional, due to its being a structure, a system of agency, related to intentionality, rather than an (intrinsically) intentional agent. To say it in Tuomela's term: groups have causal powers because they have been collectively accepted by the members, and because – given that collective acceptance – they are capable of acting and having effects on the world as they were one (Tuomela 2013a).

Therefore, the causal relation within the group-level account could be understood as a connection established between the group as an extrinsically intentional system and the effects that that system produces on the environment. Instead of being a link bounding the intention and the action, holistic causality seems to have been better introduced as a (explicative) relation between a system and its effect on the social world in which it is located, (Tuomela 2011).

Chapter 3

Why holistic individualism has failed

3.1 Holistic individualism and flaws in the GLA

Further to summarizing the content of the second chapter, the present section reconsiders the four relations (constitutive, structural, normative and causal) underlying the notion of shared agency in Social Ontology and according to the view of holistic individualism. It focuses on the flaws that the theory presents when the GLA faces the contradictions with the ontological individualism behind it. In particular, the first paragraph contains a summing-up of the main aspects investigated in the previous chapter, while the three following paragraphs analyze the problems inbuilt in the constitutive, structural, normative and causal relation respectively. The task is to underline the great limits of high-level explanations assuming the individualistic pattern as an ontological position.

3.1.1 Restarting from Chapter two

The main attempt, advanced in the second chapter, has been of shifting the perspective of the analysis of shared agency from a members-level account to a group-level account. The objective was to seriously consider the notion of shared agency as group agency and to investigate how the debate has dealt with the issue. The position supported by holistic individualism has been profiled as a way to study groups as proper sources of agency. The perspective has to deal with, at least, two different issues: on the one hand, groups might be examined for their being or not being existing features of the social world; whereas, on the

other hand, groups might be considered as explicative terms, functional to grasp high-level phenomena, that could or could not be spelled out by means of low-level concepts and rules. Hence, the main claim underpinning the GLA has been found in the firm separation between ontology and methodology as two different issues. The thesis has been further intensified by the assumption that it could be possible to inquire into the ontological and methodological issues even by assuming two (apparently?) contrasting positions. Indeed, groups (as social facts) could be approached as:

1. objective/irreducible features with respect to both explanation and ontology;
2. subjective/reducible features with respect to both explanation and ontology;
3. subjective/reducible facts for what concerns ontology but objective aspects of the explanation;
4. objective/irreducible ontological facts that are subjective/reducible as far as the explanation is concerned.

In brief, among the alternatives, holistic individualism corresponds to the third, according to which groups might be considered nothing more than the individual basis on which they depend and, at the same time, irreducible terms of the analysis. More precisely, the re-conciliation between these two paradoxical stances has been connected to the distinction between ontology and explanation: the fact that groups are reducible is a position regarding the former, whereas their being indispensible features regards the latter.

No matter which perspective one adopts, it is inevitable that the notion of group will start an issue about the relation between groups as higher-level phenomena (either in ontological or in descriptive terms) and the individuals on whom they depend. Such a dependence has been interpreted by holistic individualism as a supervenience relation that is a logical, synchronic connection between levels. Supervenience has been described as a dependence that relates an arrangement at the lower-level with a particular high-level configuration. Changing something at the basis would imply a modification of the supervenient feature. But, the reverse is not true: a high-level fact could be the result of many different arrangements at the lower-level and any change at the higher-level would

not alter the base, (Currie 1984, Epstein 2014a, Kim 1992, List & Spiekermann 2013, Ludwig 2003, Risjord 2014, Sawyer 2002, Zahle 2007).

Thus, groups, as supervenient phenomena, depend on specific configurations at the members' level, are ontologically the same as those networks and represent staple notions of the theory. In this sense, the study of shared agency as a phenomenon regarding groups has been a problematic question to investigate. In order to determine whether holistic individualism has succeeded in dealing with the matter, the chapter studied the group-level account by referring to Pettit's interpretation of the puzzle (Pettit 1996, 2014). According to the author, the association of holism and individualism is a feasible path to follow not just because the two positions have been assumed with respect to different concerns (methodological and ontological); in fact, the distinct perspectives should also be considered as pertaining to specific and separate issues. In particular, as far as the individualistic stance is concerned – Pettit claims – it regards the vertical relation between individuals and society as well as the psychological autonomy of the formers from the latter. Differently, holism concerns horizontal relationships of the members with one another and represents a thesis regarding the social nature of human skills. According to the holistic view, to unfold themselves, human faculties need interaction.

Taking all of this into consideration, the study of shared agency as a proper group phenomenon has been advanced, starting from the definition of the group as an agent. In keeping with the fact that the group is considered a supervenient whole, three different strategies have been outlined:

a. *intrinsic account*: a group is defined as a group agent by its being the term to which the intentional phenomenon of agency is referred, (List and Pettit 2011, Schmid 2009);
b. *extrinsic account*: a group is an agent due to its being a structure realizing the task that intentional mechanisms at the members-level have fixed, (Bratman 2017, Ritchie 2013, Tuomela 2013a);

c. *status account*: a group agent is what has been recognized as such, (Hindriks 2008).

In connection with each of these alternatives the claim of *a posteriori* definition of the agent has been taken on. In particular, the suggestion has been that of considering the notion of the agent as a concept deriving from the model of the attitude proposed by the theory: once the definition of what it means to do something (together) in the relevant/intentional sense has been provided, then, the (group) agent has been consequently defined as such, *a posteriori*. Being the intrinsic reference of the intention, being the system realizing it or being entitled with the status of agent all represent ways to individuate the subject to which to ascribe the phenomenon, rather than framing the event on the basis of a certain notion of the agent given as a premise.

On the basis of all these considerations, the concluding section tried to shape the notion of shared agency through the GLA, namely through the high-level account resulting from what the debate has assumed with respect to groups. Accordingly, the constitutive, structural, normative and causal relation between intending and acting have been explored. The attempt has been of outlining the four issues in compliance with what has been proposed by the main theorists committed to the question.

Now the challenge is to critically re-propose the various relations showing the weak points and contradictions they may hide. Indeed, the final objective of this third chapter is to argue against the suitability of holistic individualism as a stable group-level account in Social Ontology.

3.1.2 Problems of the constitutive and structural relation

Let us now examine the problems hidden behind the description of the constitutive and structural relations provided by the GLA. Even though in chapter two the two aspects have been properly presented in accordance with the ontological and explicative assumptions of holistic individualism, some defects could be still detected.

a. constitutive relation

Intentions-in-action are constitutive elements of agency. If «actions and intentions, in other words, are interlocking components of a system of practical activity»[171], a theory that upholds this principle should present arguments in favor of this relation between the two poles both in individual and social contexts.

Concerning the MLA, the first chapter (1.3.1) showed that this kind of relation has been formulated only in Searle's proposal, with some possibilities of attributing the point also to Tuomela's perspective (Tuomela 2007). Indeed, the connection is particularly fitting for theoretical models that introduce the distinction between intention-in-action/action intention and prior/aim intention, which allows the identification of intentions (i.e. intentions-in-action/action intentions) that are part of agency.

The attempt advanced in 2.3.4 was to question how the constitutive relation was valid even for the holistic explanation provided by the GLA, which meant to consider both the intentional and the practical component as facts related to groups as wholes. In order to prevent the redundancy of the GLA, the task was to locate the constitutive relation at the higher level of the description avoiding concepts belonging to the members-level approach. To accomplish this, Searle's proposal has proved to be difficult, because his being faithful to the metaphysical principle that all intentionality happens in the individuals' mind has brought the author to discard groups as proper centers of agency. Instead, Searle's theory regarding the metaphysical choice has imposed strict limits to the methods and had to stop at the point in which the ontological assumptions could lead to contradictions. Thus, if on the ontological side individuals are the only starting points of any intentional phenomenon, the explanation – although open to holistic terms and concepts, such as collective intentionality, acceptance and social facts – should respect that principle by limiting itself within the boundaries fixed by the ontological premise. This means that, whereas we-

[171] Epstein 2014a, p.218.

attitudes are defined as not reducible to I-attitudes, groups are rather reducible to the attitudes of their members.[172]

If in Searle's perspective the collective character is meant to be an original trait of intentionality (when it assumes a plural form), in Tuomela's explanation of shared agency the collective intention is held from a group perspective based on a previous act of acceptance and commitment, through which the members have acquired a proper collective standpoint. In other words, if the collective mental state is irreducible to the mental state that the individuals have as group members, it is because of a prior normative relation. The relation in question – denoted by Tuomela as "social commitment"[173] – derives from the mutual recognition through which individuals ascribe to one another the status of being partners and parts of the same collective. In this sense, the constitutive relation theorized by the GLA is irreducible to the MLA only if the normative relation on which it is established, and which enables the possibility of disjoint collective intentions for the action, is non reducible, in the first place.

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[172] Such a consequence opens a question in Searle's position because, it leads us to distinguish, in addition to the ontological perspective, between the epistemological and methodological issue. Given that social facts, as mind-dependent items, are ontologically reducible to individuals, they are described as epistemically objective. It is a matter of knowledge among the members that statements, representing social facts, are true within the network of beliefs shared in that particular social context. Thus, recognizing the existence of a social fact represents an objective belief as long as it is an accepted assumption among the members that such a social fact has some function in society. Consequently, the epistemic objectivity regards the status of claims about social facts and not their existence.

The epistemic viewpoint, in Searle's, is not the same as the methodological concern, because, if it was, the entire position would be contradictory. The objectivity that the author ascribes to social facts is limited to the epistemic context in which the social fact is accepted. At the same time, within that domain, social facts are explained as reducible features. Hence, since we do not distinguish between epistemology and methods, the reducibility of groups to the level of the members would threaten the objectivity fixed by epistemology. To put it easily:

1. Social facts are «ontologically subjective», «observer-relative», «intentionality-relative», (Searle 2010, p.17);
2. Social facts are «epistemically objective», (Searle 2010, pp.17-18);
3. We argue that, in Searle's proposal, the holistic explanation of social facts is reducible to the explanation based on what happens at the individual level;
4. It follows that social facts are not objective.

This considered, the objectivity mentioned in the conclusion may (a) contrast with the objectivity claimed by the second assumption or (b) represent another kind of objectivity. Our suggestion is that point 4 concerns methodology and argues against the irreducibility of the GLA to the MLA, while point 2 upholds the epistemological objectivity of knowledge in social context. This considered, the interpretation of Searle's position would be a bit of stretch if it tried to argue in favor of the methodological non-redundancy of the GLA to the MLA.

[173] Tuomela 2002.

b. structural relation

The assumption for which intentional mental states and, in this specific case, shared mental states, have the structural power to generate a certain kind of performance, oriented towards an end, does not necessarily imply that the framing role exerted upon the group activity is not reducible to that played with respect to the members' contribution. As a matter of fact, what is at stake with the GLA is the non redundancy of the holistic explanation, that seems to be threatened by the double structuring relation already grasped by the MLA, (2.3.4). To be more specific, the difficult question here is that the two influences that the intentional content has on the action – the former upon the individual participatory act and the latter upon the group performance – were part of the picture also when the group perspective had not been endorsed yet. In fact, it has been assumed that the intention to fulfill a common task might regulate the actions of the group of agents as the result of the mediation operated by the members. The mediation consists in securing the consistency of their plan with the actual behavior they show in view of the goal. For example, Bratman's *means-end coherence principle* (Bratman 2014, 1990), although suitable also for the holistic explanation of group performance, has been introduced to evaluate the action of the single subject with respect to the intention behind it. Then, the principle has been extended to actions that happen over time and among subjects, providing a rational guidance along and among the various stages/components of the performance (Bratman 2017). But, first of all, the principle is related to the individual level of the description. As far as the building-blocks approach is concerned, what comes next derives from that basic discourse and the GLA can be said methodologically dependent on the MLA.

A similar discourse could be further developed in relation to the exponents of the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality (Tuomela's and Gilbert's versions, specifically), who apply the structural meaning of the relation between intending and acting to we-attitudes for the action. In particular, the remark that we might advance regards the fact that the collective intention has a regulative role on the action thanks to the collective nature of the attitude. As it was in the case of the constitutive relation, also structural relation could be

properly grasped through the GLA as an irreducible high-level feature only when the normative relation can be described as an irreducible group-level attitude in the first place.

A similar obstacle to the non reducibility of the GLA to the MLA in the case of structural connection can be found, on entirely different premises, also in List and Pettit's account of shared agency, (List and Pettit 2011). By assuming the *intrinsic* intentional nature of group agents (2.1.2), the authors consider the intentions held by the group as a rational system autonomous from the attitudes at the individual level. Hence, the structuring role of the attitude is to be attributed, as *Group Agency* seems to suggest, to group's plan-states directly. But, in compliance with the spirit of holistic individualism, the authors have proposed to establish a group-level account aside from an individualistic ontology, connected to an individualistic normative assumption. Such an assumption concerns the fact that individuals, as the ultimate ontological components of the social world, are also the primary sources of normative judgments and preferences. Groups, as systems, acquire their own perspective on what might be good or blameworthy by processing the inputs provided by the individuals through an 'aggregative function'[174], and considering that «something is good only if it is good for individual human or, more generally, sentient beings»[175]. Therefore, the attitude that a group agent pursues, rather than being originally collective (about its origin and moral value), seems to be an intention deriving from (and defending) individual agents' preferences. The autonomy of the plan state, and of shared agency in general, appears to be something supervening upon the original normativity in place at the individuals' level, which is why it might be hard to maintain the irreducible, high-level structural role of the shared intention – an aspect that the authors rather affirm.[176]

All this considered, and before assuming the failure of the GLA regarding the structural relation of shared agency of holistic individualism, it is important to investigate the normative issue and determine whether or not it has given to the shared intention for the

[174] List and Pettit 2011, pp.42-58.
[175] *Ibidem*, p.182.
[176] In defense of groups' (moral) autonomy see also Copp 2006, 2007; Haji 2006; Hindriks 2014; Rovane 2014.

action a stable, high-level foundation, as some authors seem to suggest (Gilbert 2013, List and Pettit 2011, Tuomela 2013a).

3.1.3 The normative issue

c. normative relation

The normative relation between the intentional and practical moment in group contexts requires different considerations depending on the source of normativity one wants to investigate (Zeibert and Smith 2007). In particular, according to what has been established up to now, the normative force connected with shared agency can be seen (1) as a form of basic normativity committing the participants to the status of group member and (2) as a normative bond generated by sharing a plan for the action.

The first kind of normativity, characteristic of Gilbert's and Tuomela's theory, is generated by individuals assuming a status (being partners) that cannot be acquired or discarded by anyone (personally), since the entire group has not agreed to the entrance or exit of the individual(s) claiming to do so (Gilbert1990). The only requirement needed for a joint/social commitment of this sort is the common awareness among the participants about the readiness of the others to take part in doing something as a body. Gilbert writes:

> Just as the readiness of each is required to bring the joint commitment into being so the concurrence of each is required in order to rescind the commitment. No one party can rescind it unilaterally. Nor can any one party rescind any part of it unilaterally, since it does not have parts. Each of the parties to a joint commitment is indeed committed in the sense that each one is subject to a commitment. It is tempting then to refer to the parties' "individual commitments" when there is a joint commitment. If one does this, one must bear in mind that these individual commitments have important special features: they depend for their existence on the joint commitment; and the person who has a given individual commitment of this sort is not in a position unilaterally to rescind it. [177]

In line with this, the normative relation established by the joint commitment of the members is not an attitude that could be distributed among the members as it was the sum of all personal commitments brought together. Instead, the only way to grasp and explain

[177] Gilbert 2013, p.32.

joint commitment is by looking at the group as a whole, considering that such a collective represents an ontological fictitious fact, which has just acquired a normative salience. In fact, individuals, by means of an act of commitment, have become partners, or group members, and have consequently lost their personal autonomy to decide and acting as a group. In line with this, the moment an agent engages in full-blown we-attitudes, namely with states of mind held from the group-perspective, her thinking (as a we-thinking) could only happen as part of a wider group-thinking. The individual, as a group member, has intentions for the action formulated from the group's point of view, that is an independent epistemological perspective, separated from the individual's mindset when she acts as an individual agent (Gilbert 2009). According to the disjunction criterion, we could imagine two different psychological levels of thinking in the individuals' mind: one concerned with individual attitudes and the other with collective mental states.

All this considered, the GLA could provide a holistic perspective, focused on the group-level explanation and not reducible to the description given by the MLA, by grasping the normativity in place at the level of the group directly (that is the second kind of normativity examined here). In this sense, facts related to individuals as group members could be accounted for in the GLA, by virtue of their occurring in the individuals' mind with a collective form and in the group psychological domain. Thus, being committed to a group dimension would turn out to be the condition for which an individual is capable of acting as a partner and holding intentions in name of the group. One might even say that, as a psychological dimension, the GLA appears to be more fundamental than the MLA, because the former provides the horizon within which any individual ceases acting as a single agent and starts thinking and acting in the we-mode, as a group member.

But this non redundancy (and priority) of the holistic explanation seems to be threatened by two aspects, at least regarding the approaches here concerned, namely Tuomela's and Gilbert's accounts. In fact, in order to have the group dimension, where the members' efforts could be located, there should have been a process of agreement making or of collective acceptance at the members' level (Tuomela 2002, 2003, 2007, 2013a, Gilbert 1989, 2009, 2013), through which the group perspective might have been

established.[178] Thus, even though the group perspective can be understood only by looking at the entire collectivity and its shared ethos/reasons for the action, the way in which the normative source exerts its power on individuals requires the use of concepts that are referred and reducible to the members-level of the explanation. In fact, the *we-mode*/group-perspective enables the group members to act as a single body as far as the process of acquisition of the shared viewpoint intervenes at the members' level by opening that theoretical possibility. In line with this, in order to be grasped (both by an external observer and by the agents themselves), a *discontinuous* account needs the mediation operated by the MLA.

Given the above, it is possible to take into consideration the second kind of normativity in Tuomela's and Gilbert's views, that emanates from the shared intention for the action. Once the joint/social commitment to the group dimension has been fixed, the members act due to reasons they endorse as part of a group. Their intentional state of mind is something established and required by the group as such and not an attitude representing an individual objective, pursued with individual/personal commitment. Tuomela writes:

> The members are, so to speak, assumed to have at least temporarily given up or delegated to the group a relevant part of their authority and autonomy to act, and this entails that they are normatively bound to comply with the group's directives. The most central group reasons are those relating to the group's ethos, which the group members have collectively accepted for the group and are publicly available to the group members. On the basis of their membership in a we-mode group the members in general ought to act as proper group members and to put aside their countervailing private desire and interests.[179]

Thus, individuals, as group members, are supposed to have intentions for the action representing contents that are gathered from that set of values, reasons and motives for the action, that is the ethos. The fact of having accepted the elements composing the ethos in a collective way enables the group to assume a reason selected from that common horizon in the name of all the participants, without violating their rational autonomy. In fact, by becoming part of a group, individuals go through a leveling process where they accept to

[178] The only author –among those considered here – assuming the original character of we-attitudes is Searle. Nonetheless it would be a mistake to consider Searle a proponent of holistic individualism, in fact his account is limited to considerations concerning the epistemic status of social facts without addressing any methodological claim of realism.
[179] Tuomela 2013a, p.115.

set aside their personal inclinations – since they act as group members – and to embrace as a suitable reason for the action what is part of the ethos, shared by the entire collectivity. Further to the establishment of this group perspective, the group might make its decisions following, at least, two different strategies: on one side, if it is a hierarchical group, namely a group in which the members cover positions with different degrees of responsibility, there can be «operative members (leaders) authorized to make decisions for the rest of the group»[180]; on the other side, «in egalitarian groups all the members are operatives with an equal say about the views that the group will adopt»[181]. In brief, a group can commit itself to a rational plan for the action by (1) a decision taken by the operatives or (2) through some sort of agreement among the parties. Indeed, this assumption seems to reduce the GLA to the MLA, because the intention for the action fixed for the entire group requires the intervention of the evaluation of the context processed by the members.

If this consideration could represent an objection especially to Tuomela's holism, the author might reply sustaining that the members were acting in the *we-mode*, not as individuals, but as a group. This means that the operatives (be them a few or the totality of the members) are allowed to speak in name of the group and to decide which tasks should be pursued, which rejected, and which reasons might benefit the group and which would contrast the common good. Presenting the group as one is made possible by the more basic form of commitment, through which individuals commit themselves to the status of group members by the collective acceptance of the common ethos: «the main point of collective acceptance is to amalgamate member attitudes into a group attitude collectively binding the group members»[182]. Thus, the assumption of the *we-mode* entails the individuals becoming part of a whole, by losing part of their autonomy. Actually, in Tuomela's and Gilbert's proposals, the separation of psychological domains (concerning the members' perspective and the group's point of view respectively) is useful to protect the individual personality from the intrusion of the collective and consequently preserve some kind of individualism in the theory. Nonetheless, the assumption that the group can exert an influence on

[180] Tuomela 2013a, p.126.
[181] *Ibidem.*
[182] Tuomela 2013a, p.125.

individuals' psychology, creating a homogeneous intentional viewpoint, could be difficult to conciliate with the individualism endorsed in the approach. In fact, the ultimate reason for the action held by the members would be the one determined by the normative commitment assumed with respect to the ethos, which – when working properly – may overstep individuals' inclinations and preferences; an assumption that would undermine the distinction fixed by the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality and the two psychological levels.[183]

In conclusion, it could be interesting to present the case of normative relation also in connection with List and Pettit's conception (List and Pettit 2011), which – as seen in the case of structural relation – presents some problems connected with the normative issue in the GLA. In fact, the authors have rejected the idea of collective intentionality and considered shared agency as based upon a network of individual attitudes. This framework allows the perspective to maintain a metaphysical individualism that is neither committed with any collective attitude in the individuals' mind nor with the idea of an "influence" exerted by the collective dimension upon the individual psychology. Otherwise, they claim, the theory would run the risk of threatening the psychological autonomy of the individual agents.

[183] To better understand the members' normative priority, it could be helpful to mention another issue investigated by Tuomela: group responsibility. The point is difficult because it shows a methodological ambiguity that the distinction between MLA and GLA could help to underline. On the one hand, the author affirms that the group is straightforwardly responsible for the dissident actions of its members, because a disobedient act means a lack of control or a weak influence of the group on the individuals' mind. On the other hand, the group is only indirectly responsible for the action that it brings about through the members' contribution: it is possible to ascribe a performance to the entire collective retrospectively. The group can be identified as the final agent only when the fact is re-considered. Firstly, each action is realized by an individual; then, the individual can be recognized as a group member; then, the action can be ascribed to the group, (Tuomela 2007, pp. 233-253). According to this, Tuomela seems to be disposed to assume that the group has direct responsibility concerning the homologation of individuals' psychology to the group intentional horizon, but he does not admit a direct/prospective responsibility of the group with respect to the members' action. Yet, the group is indirectly responsible for what the members do.
This way of introducing indirect responsibility seems to be reasonable considering that the author does not accept the ontological existence and the normative priority of groups. At the same time, the individualism he embraces would require the members' psychological autonomy, who are rather subject to the leveling process for which the group is held responsible in a direct way. The tension generated by the expectations that the explanation has regarding groups and the normative individualism behind the theory will be brought into focus later in the third part of this chapter as a salient contradiction of holistic individualism and its GLA.

Apparently, this way of approaching the matter might be a fair solution and, even though it would not leave room for an irreducible GLA, no contradiction seems to arise. But problems arise when the authors claim to be realistic and treat groups as proper intentional agents, responsible for their actions. As a matter of fact, groups have been described as agents, as systems that respect all the requirements that being an agent needs as a premise.[184] Moreover, group agents are held responsible for the decisions they make and the intentions they bear as rational systems, the same way in which any individual agent would be.[185] But, such a form of realism about group agency is just an epistemological assumption, which has neither metaphysical nor normative counterparts in the theory. In fact, the authors maintain that group agents are made up of individuals who are the ultimate ontological components and original sources of all attitudes held by the group. Individuals provide the inputs (namely, descriptive and normative judgments) that the system requires, in order to produce its own reasons and normative judgments, which, as the outcomes of the agreement-making procedure, are considered irreducible to the single individual attitudes from which the group attitude supervenes. The agreement-making procedure, as an aggregative function, makes it hard to reduce the group attitude to the individual perspective, because the mechanism is too complex to process the reductive claim. Nonetheless, individual attitudes preserve a rational and normative priority over the attitudes obtained through the aggregative function and are considered the standard to decide if something, e.g. a group action, is good or blameworthy. In this sense, the group-level account, even though described as a realistic approach, seems to be constructed on the assumption that individuals still remain the ultimate source of rationality and normativity of the system – an aspect that makes it quite puzzling to understand the irreducible and non redundancy of the GLA proposed and claimed in *Group Agency*.[186]

[184] List and Pettit 2011, p.20.
[185] The requirements that a group agent needs to satisfy in order to be held responsible can be found in List and Pettit 2011, p.158.
[186] Concerning the claim of being realistic see also, List 2006, List and Pettit 2012, Pettit 2003.

3.1.4 Troubles with causality

d. causal relation

The issue of the psychological autonomy of the group members, addressed by the normative issue, is of the upmost importance when we begin examining the case of causal relation. In fact, as far as the GLA is concerned, causal relation is supposed to be the influence that the group plan for the action has on the agential system composed by the members joined together. From this perspective, one of the main problems with causation is determining whether the shared intention (be it a collective intention or a network of interrelated I-attitudes) could have a causal impact on the activity performed by the group agent and, at the same time, preserving the psychological autonomy of the members. Indeed, if the plan state of the group is the cause of the activity, the issue concerning the individuals' psychology might be subject to a double interpretation. On the one hand, the intentionality of the members could be determined by a fact belonging to the group level (downwards causation)[187]: the participants would act in compliance with the group's claim due to the fact that their individual contribution has been necessitated by a higher-level event. On the other hand, the intentional stance of the members could be overridden and the group might act, and have effects on the world, independently from what happens among its members. According to the former alternative, the individualistic claim regarding the members' psychological autonomy would be broken and the collectivistic assertion of groups being causally effective on the individual agency would be confirmed. In fact, under these circumstances, the group's impact would alter individual thinking and acting. Instead, regarding the latter, the individuation of a causal force located at the group level could be effective without violating and altering the intentional processes operating at the members' level. In this case, the hurdle would be the possibility to hold the group as the bearer of a causal power even though, as a social fact, it is ontologically reducible to the individual basis. Thus, what must be determined is whether a collective «exists causally objectively as

[187] On downwards causation in Social Ontology: Elder-Vass 2012.

a social system capable of causal production of outcomes in the world in virtue of its we-thinking and "we-acting" members»[188].

All this considered, in order to deal with causation, the GLA should fix whether or not the supervenient, ontologically reducible, group dimension could have any kind of causal impact on the world and/or on the members. Ultimately, the causal relation is a two-folded issue: on the one hand, there is the issue concerning the possibility of attributing a causal power to social facts that, in compliance with the individualistic position, are not ontologically objective; on the other hand, in case of assuming the objective causal power of social facts, the problem consists in establishing the domain upon which social facts could exert their influence. In particular, it may be that:

a. a social fact C is the cause of another social fact E that is the effect;
b. a social fact C is the cause of a fact E, at the individual level, that is the effect.

If social facts are considered causally effective on other social facts, the individuals' psychology will be safe (at least from a direct causal influence); if instead they are considered to exert a downwards causation, individuals will be compromised in their being autonomous. Moreover, it should be considered that in the case of a *top-down* causation (option b):

c. the social fact C, at the higher level, may have a causal impact on any fact E, at the individual level;
d. the social fact C may have a causal impact on its own individual basis.

For what concerns the first issue (a), the problem consists in considering a group, as any other social fact, as the starting point of a causal chain. What is puzzling here is the ontological status of the elements populating the social sphere defined as ontologically dependent on, and reducible to, the individual basis. Indeed, holistic individualism holds that social facts are supervenient features. According to this, two strategies could be adopted: (1) rejecting the possibility of a causal force owned by social facts; (2) postulating

[188] Tuomela 2013a, p.47.

a causal power exerted by supervenient facts on other supervenient facts. Whereas the former option seems easier to uphold, theorists engaged in holistic individualism have chosen to follow the latter, by ascribing a causal power to the elements belonging to the social domain (Pettit 1996, 2003, Tuomela 2011, 2013a, List and Pettit 2011, Sawyer 2003). This position, defined *supervenient causation* (SC)[189], defends the causal power of groups as supervenient features. Supervenient causation requires considering the causal power of social facts dependent on the individual basis from which the social fact arises:

> SC. Social properties do not have autonomous causal force, because their causal consequences obtain in virtue of their realizing individual supervenience base.[190]

Thus, even though explicable in terms of the GLA, the causal force would still be reducible to the MLA, as a phenomenon that should be traced back to the members-level of the description. The causal relation ascribed to social facts in the holistic explanation is dependent on what happens at the lower-level realty.

Taking all this into consideration, Sawyer has proposed to improve the holistic account (keeping the ontological individualism associated with it) by introducing an interesting variation in the traditional approach held in Social Ontology. The point regards the issue of time and its relation with supervenience: as long as supervenience is the only foundation on focus, groups might be accounted for by virtue of their being supervenient facts, namely social facts occurring when the lower-level arrangement occurs (Sawyer 2003, pp. 207-208). But causation is a relation that happens as time goes by and, for this reason, it is quite challenging to study that relation based on the synchronic temporal dimension that supervenience has set. An alternative way to approach the issue, Sawyer observes, is to consider the matter from a diachronic perspective, according to which the social fact is investigated not for its being a supervenient fact, but for the consequences it generates over time. The idea is that, given the explicative non redundancy of groups, (fixed by the criteria of multiple realizability and wild disjunction), considering group phenomena as causally effective over time could be meaningful, in methodological terms,

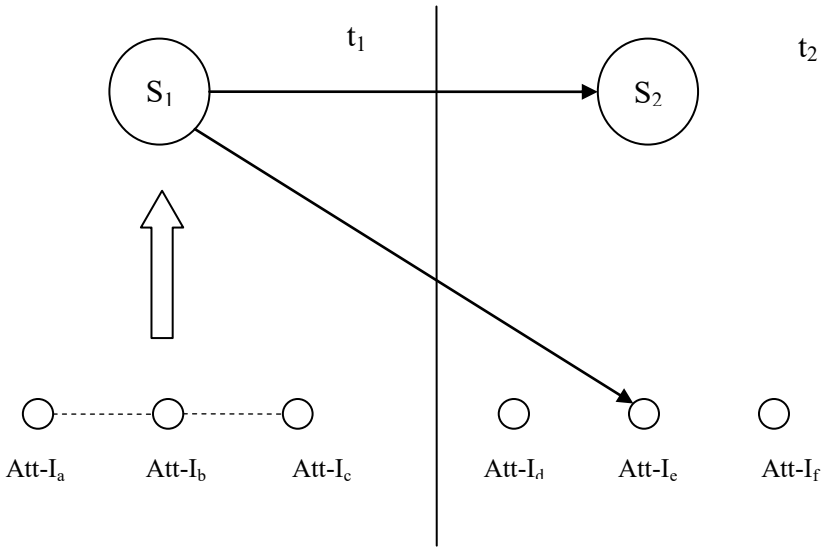
[189] A first definition can be found in Kim 1979. Developments of the concept are proposed by Sawyer 2003.
[190] Sawyer 2003, p.207.

because understanding those phenomena could influence what happens next, both at the individual and social level. The author maintains that

> a social property S, with supervenience base I at time $t_{1,}$ can lawfully be identified as the cause of social property S^* and individual property I^* at time $t_{2,}$ even though I cannot be lawfully identified as the cause of I^*.[191]

Assuming that groups are causally effective in Sawyer's terms, the problem of causation is determining the dimension upon which a social fact would show its influence. Social facts could have the causal power to produce outcomes on the social world, by having an impact on other social facts. But social facts, Sawyer says, could also be associated with a top-down causal power, directed towards individual facts. Top-down causation could be directed towards (1) lower facts in general or (2) facts belonging to the individual basis of the group. In Sawyer's pictures, the latter form of top-down causation should be rejected because the basis from which the group supervenes is to be kept, in principle, safe from any causal impact from the higher level. The reason for this is the synchronicity of the two levels, which does not legitimate the individuation of an effect happening over time. The other top-down option, even though feasible, would threaten the individualistic claim according to which group events could not interfere and causally determine individuals' intentional agency. In fact, being capable of intervening on intentional agency would imply the power to modify individual's psychology. Assuming some form of downwards causation means affirming a psychological collectivistic principle that has been, instead, rejected by the debate (Pettit 1996, 2014).

[191] Sawyer 2003, p.207.



[192]

With a difference, regarding the causal relation between two social facts, S-S causation, the puzzling issue concerns the ontological position held by holistic individualism: the fact of defining social facts as sources (or effects) of causality challenges the fundamental thesis that only facts about individuals exist.[193]

[192] The picture represents supervenience and causal relation over time. On the left side, a social fact S_1 supervenes on a network of individual attitudes. The upwards arrows draws the connection happening at a certain time (t_1). The right side of the figure represents a social fact S_2 and other facts about individuals, all happening at a later stage (t_2). Elements on the right are effects of the causal power ascribed to S_1, denoted in the picture by the thin arrow going from S_1 to S_2 (S-S causation) and from S_1 to Att-$I_{d,e,f}$ (downwards causation). What is excluded from the context is the top-down causation relating S_1 to Att-$I_{a,b,c}$. The connection would be between elements occurring at the same time (t_1), whereas causation needs the unfolding of time. As a matter of fact, cause and effect should happen at different stages.
An alternative version of the picture can be found in Sawyer 2003, p. 208, and in List & Spiekermann 2013, p.637.

[193] Ontological individualism is not just a controversial assumption regarding the identification of the source of causation, it concerns also the individuation of the effect. More precisely, the hurdle regards the kind of causality happening between facts of the same level and not touching the case of downwards causation. As it is, (1) a causal bond might start from a social fact and produce a low-level individual fact as its outcome (S-I), or (2) it could be a relation that has a social fact as is source and another social fact as its effect (S-S). But, if our individualistic ontology denies the existence of any social fact, the troublesome identification of the source immediately turns itself into the difficult identification of the effect.

3.2 The normative premise behind holistic individualism

Much has been already said on the problems presented by the GLA. The objective now is to move on with the investigation of the specific contradictions risen by holistic individualism and propose wider observations concerning the theoretical foundations of the approach. The objective is to show that contradictions encountered in the re-construction of the GLA might be signs of deeper problems and flaws in the theory, connected with a normative premise underlining the position. Accordingly, this section aims at unmasking that normative premise and identifying it as a form of individualism.

In detail: the first paragraph regards the normative foundation of shared agency, whereas the second aims at showing to what extent that normative feature could have silently represented a necessary condition for the description of all four relations between

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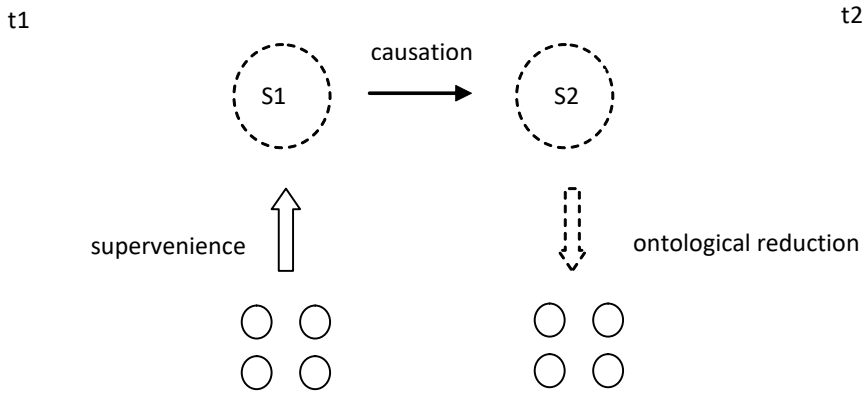


Considering that a social fact is ontologically reducible to its individual basis, how should we interpret the social fact generated through a process of high-level causation? How should we adjust our ontological framework so to make it fit with the explicative goals of the theory?
The riddle might be approached in two ways. First, keeping the affection to the individualistic mindset, the answer might be dissolving the GLA and build the explanation of causality in the social world through the MLA. In this sense, keeping refusing the ontological consistency of groups, and high-level facts in general, would lead the GLA to describe the S-I or the S-S causality in reductive terms. This means that, sooner or later, the group-level account would collapse downwards on the description provided by the MLA, and social causes/effects would be described in terms of individual or set of individual causes and effects. As second, the solution of the dilemma might be in support of the holistic ambition of the explanation. According to this, the challenge would be assuming social/group facts in our ontology, so to make our ontological framework compatible with the story told by the explanation. Otherwise, social causation would keep representing an instable aspect of high-level descriptions.

intending and acting. The third paragraph states that the form of normativism at the basis of various approaches in Social Ontology might be a kind of individualism. Finally, normative and ontological individualisms are re-considered in connection with the explanation of shared agency attempted by the GLA; the normative issue is identified as the fundamental premise of the theory and the deepest source of contradictions.

3.2.1 The normative foundation of shared agency

The most urgent issue to underline is the salience that the normative feature has acquired on the other three kinds of relations, that are the constitutive, structural and causal connection between intending and acting. The impression one might get of shared agency in the GLA is that the notion, in addition to showing a normative side among others, seems to have a deep normative foundation. Although the debate in Social Ontology does not present itself as a normativistic theory of the agency, it might be argued that the intentionalistic/rationalistic pattern of agency it upholds requires a normative principle in order to ground the case of shared agency safely. Far from being just one of the ways to relate intending and acting in group contexts, the normative relation might be a fundamental condition for the happening and the description of group agency, together with the other connections characterizing it.

The priority of normativity on the other dimensions is based on the two layers identified in the relation (1.3.2). As mentioned in Tuomela's and Gilbert's accounts, there could be two different interpretations of normativity in the description of group intentional behavior. On the one hand, there is the normative bond arising from the mutual recognition and joint/social commitment of the members to the status of being partners/parts of the collective and to act in its name, as if they were one. On the other hand, the normative force can be associated with sharing an intention for the action: in this case, the joint/collective commitment is relative to the pursuit of the goal intended by the members. The aspect that the analysis of the GLA has pinpointed is that the second kind of normativity, concerned with meeting the we-attitudes target, can be considered a second level normativity,

established on the basis of the normative bond set up by the prior form of commitment. This basic attitude is the commitment that the agents mutually assume to the status of being group members, a condition that enables the participants to have collective intentions for the action and realize them jointly, as the second kind of normativity binds them to do. From this perspective, and in compliance with the *disjoint criterion*[194] characterizing the *discontinuity thesis*, individual agents are in the position to think and perform in a way that is not the one adopted (when they do what they intend to do) as singular individuals.

Obviously, this kind of separation within the domain of the normative relation can be maintained just in reference to authors, such as Tuomela and Gilbert, engaged with the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. The two disjoint theoretical levels can be introduced only under condition of a psychological gap between the individual and collective intentional domain.[195]

However, the idea that the normative relation, especially in its basic form, might be a fundamental requirement of shared agency in the group-level account of the *discontinuity thesis* (Searle excluded), can be maintained also by approaches framed on the *continuity*

[194] For a definition see Gilbert 2009, pp.171-173.

[195] Among the theorists of the *discontinuity thesis* Searle's proposal might be considered an exception, because it maintains that «collective intentionality is a fundamental and irreducible fact of human and some animal psychology», (Searle 2007, p.13). According to this, we-intentions for the action are described by the author as attitudes that come to the individual agent's the same way – but with a difference in form – as I-intentions for the action. Assuming the original and irreducible character of both intentional forms, collective intentionality does not require any "prior attitude" paving the way for the happening of we-intentions. The plural form of we-intentionality as an essential, constitutive feature of the attitude does not necessitate any foundation, neither theoretical nor normative, because – and this a trait peculiar to Searle's proposal – social facts are not meant to supervene on individual facts. Instead, the possibility to have shared attitudes oriented towards cooperative actions is presented by Searle as something that happens in the individual's mind without necessarily referring to the participation (or willingness to participate) of others. The only element mentioned by the author (and that might recall the content of the basic form of commitment introduced by Tuomela and Gilbert) is the *background sense of the others*, (Searle 1990, p.415). Such a feature, in Searle's theory, represents a belief about the presence of other participants and, as a belief, it is part of the cognitive background of the individual agent, who might also be wrong in assuming the cooperative character of the performance. On the matter, Searle holds that the presence of the other as an agent willing to cooperate in the action is just an assumption, that the individual might have even if she herself were a brain in a vat. Therefore, the background sense of the other seems to be not an essential character, necessary for the logical possibility of we-intentionality; instead, that belief might be a contextual feature, locating the collective attitude in the actual context of agency even if no actual relationship with others is set.
According to this interpretation, it might be said that Searle's theory is far from the normativistic approach to shared agency and from holistic individualism, too.

thesis of intentionality. The assumption that shared agency is the result of attitudes and networks of attitudes occurring at the individual level might be associated with the need of a normative bond securing the aggregation of individual intentions for the action. Regarding Bratman's account, the building blocks of shared agency are the bricks taken from the model adopted for explaining individual agency, and re-arranged to explain group events as phenomena of the same kind. The foundational role of normativity might be identified, as Bratman suggests, in the application of two normative principles, the *means-end-coherence* and *consistency* principles, responsible for the suitability of each single, individual sub-plan in view of the realization of the common task. More precisely, the appropriateness of individual efforts to that of the others, and with respect to what should be done for obtaining the goal, secures the rational character of agency by providing a rational guidance over the entire event. Even thought the control, in Bratman's individualistic approach, is considered a duty of individual rationality and not a task pursued by the group as such, the function it fulfills represents a necessary condition for the happening of shared agency as a proper event of intentional agency.[196]

A further consideration about the normativism snaking behind the reflection in Social Ontology touches List and Pettit's proposal. As has been observed, the authors develop an approach in line with the *continuity thesis* of intentionality and deny the methodological necessity of "collective" concepts, such as collective intentionality, in the explanation of shared agency. At the same time, the individualism embraced in the methods does not prevent the theory from assuming the epistemological salience of group agents, as proper rational systems capable of planning, controlling and realizing intentional behavior. Group agents are agents in the *intrinsic* sense, having autonomous intentions for the action the same as individual agents. To say it otherwise, group attitudes might be described as

[196] Moreover, the network of common beliefs held by the participants, and regarding the intentions of the other fellows, might be considered as creating (even if not necessarily) a kind of normative ground, close to that proposed by Gilbert and Tuomela, upon which constructing shared agency (Bratman 2014, pp.110-120). As it is, the mutual awareness of the others' willingness to participate creates expectations among the agents, who, as a consequence, act for the benefit of the collective also under the pressure of others. In some sense, Bratman suggests that being considered as an agent entitles the individual with a status, that can be defined as a normative status and that is connected with the «obligations of each to each», (Bratman 2014, p.119) that doing things together generates among the parties.

intentions that are ascribed to the system and that can be grasped through the same concepts and principles employed in the explanation of individual agency: both individuals and groups, when respectful of the conditions that being an agent requires, are systems of agency, accountable for by the same methodological individualism, (List and Pettit, 2011). The normative foundation of shared agency might be found in the fact that the authors establish the decision-making procedure, through which the group deliberates, on the individuals' commitment to the acceptance of (and participation to) the procedure and the organizational structure it may generate. In this sense, it can be observed that the decision-making procedure occurs with and thanks to normative attitudes held by individuals as participants mutually committed to act in view of the group's benefit.

3.2.2 Normativity as constitutive dimension

The GLA sketched by holistic individualism looks like an approach hiding a normative foundation of shared agency. To support the argument, the objective is to see to what extent that normative feature might have represented a necessary condition for all relations between intending and acting.

First, it should be observed that, instead of being a premise for the instantiation of the **constitutive relation**, the normative connection works as a kind of constitutive relation. In particular, the normative aspect to which we attribute such a fundamental role is not concerned with the intentional phenomenon and commitment towards its pursuit, rather, it regards the obligations that assuming/ascribing the role of partner/group member has addressed. This means that the aspect that covers a constitutive role in the explanation of shared agency, offered by holistic individualism, is the basic form of commitment, that is the attitude oriented towards the assumption/ascription of a status, which generates a new theoretical (collective or group oriented) perspective in the individuals' mind or a decision-making mechanism bringing the individual attitudes together. The basic normativity associated with the mutual recognition of the status of partner/group member at the members-level might be considered a constitutive feature of shared agency in the GLA, due to its role in proving the conditions upon which the group viewpoint can be established.

Then, the supervenience of the group perspective might be seen, depending on the theory, either as an autonomous rational point of view, in the case of List and Pettit's proposal, or as a mode (i.e. we-mode) of intentionality.

A second consideration might be advanced with respect to **structural relation**. According to the critique against the actual irreducibility of the GLA, it appears that the capacity of the shared intention to give a structure to the behavior of the entire group can be grasped only through the mediation of the MLA and the normative bond fixed at that level. There are lots of reasons to sustain such a foundation. For instance, if we consider Bratman's perspective, the common goal has been considered, in the first place, for its regulative function exerted on the individual contributions, (1.1.3); then, the shared plan has been re-considered as the target framing the rational control on group agency as a whole, (1.1.4). As it is, an intention shapes the action thanks to the normative principles securing the means-end-coherence and consistency of the attitude, pertaining to individual intentional agency and touching the suitability of the individual contribution in view of the wider group plan.

Different, but with something in common, is the case of structural relation presented by Tuomela and Gilbert, who in their approaches introduce group attitudes establishing a group perspective in the individuals' mind. In the absence of joint/social commitment to the mutual assumption/ascription of that status, the collective way of thinking and acting could not be occasioned. In addition to this, another example has been provided by List and Pettit's theory of group agency, which maintains that the formation of autonomous group attitudes, exerting control over (and structuring) the performance, depends on the inputs given by the participants. They claim, what the group is not able to do is the assumption of a moral position and consequent formulation of normative judgments about what is right and what wrong. Moreover, moral standards are fixed by what is good or blameworthy concerning the individuals.[197] The only way to grasp the structural role of the group intention is to explain the role covered by the individuals framing and carrying out the process conducive to the group attitude.

[197] List and Pettit 2011, pp.42-58.

Keeping the same normative foundation of structural feature in the GLA, **causal relation** might be interpreted similarly, as hiding a normativistic core. The causality of social facts explained by the GLA might be seen as a high-level phenomenon, which can be grasped if and only if the social domain has been rightly set up by the description of facts belonging to the members' level. What is necessary is that the social event of agency might have supervened upon (and established by) a certain set of attitudes among the members, which allows the introduction of such a social dimension. In this sense, mutual obligations between members, bounding them to one another as part of the same collective, consists in the condition *sine qua non* the individuals could function as a group and, eventually, exert a causal power as a system. But the capacity to exert such a causal influence, be it a downwards or a S-S causation, might be discovered just once the group agent has been established and recognized as a system. No matter if the system represents *intrinsic* an or an *extrinsic* intentional system of agency (2.1.2, 2.1.3), what the causal relation requires is a social fact to treat in the GLA as the source of the power it aims at describing. Thus, as was in the structural relation, even the GLA of the causal bond might be tied to the explicative gap generated by individuals having acquired the status of group members/partners: without the network of mutual obligations connected with the status, it would be hard to conceive a group plan for the action (and of a group act as well) with a causal power not reducible to that of the members.

Given that the **normative relation**, hidden inside all connections, coincides with just one of the two sides of the normative issue concerning shared agency (namely, the basic form of normativity generated by social/joint commitment), the same range of considerations regarding the structural and causal relations could be applied also to second-order normativity. Basic normativity might be, as the other two relations showcase, the premise upon which the members of the group form a group perspective, from which they hold, and commit themselves to, collective intentions for the action (in the case of the Tuomela and Gilbert)[198], common plan states (as it is for Bratman)[199], or autonomous group attitudes (List and Pettit, 2011). In this sense, second-order normativity is similar to the

[198] References can be found in 1.2.3, 1.2.4.
[199] See 1.1.3, 1.1.4.

account relative to structural and causal relations, where the basic normativity might be considered a constitutive trait of the other, high-level relations.

3.2.3 Normative individualism

There is, or seems to be, a normative relation inbuilt in the concept of shared agency held by holistic individualism, having to do with mutual relationships occurring at the level of the members and entitling individuals with the status of group members. It might be reasonable to infer that this normative feature is constitutive of all relations characterizing the notion of shared agency and the explanation of that phenomenon through the GLA, then the stability of the GLA might be seriously undermined by this (low-level) foundation. The basic normativity might be grasped just through the MLA, because being committed to the status of partner/group member is a feature belonging to the range of the members-level account. In line with this, we can observe that the individualism embraced in Social Ontology not only pertains to the ontological issue; on the contrary, the individualistic perspective might be extended also to the normative discourse.

In addition, it is important to consider that the attempt of outlining a GLA in Social Ontology might be characterized by another (meta-theoretical) kind of normative individualism, regarding the priority attributed to individual agent over group agent. In particular, we want to identify and define this normative individualism as the position assuming that individuals, as human beings, have a peculiar normative standing, due to their being naturally endowed with rationality and "sensitivity", (List and Pettit 2011, p.182, Hindriks 2014).

The issue is puzzling especially if the claim pursued in Social Ontology aims at explaining group agency without providing a substantial definition of the agent. Such a claim has been supported by the assumption that both terms, namely "individual agent" and "group agent", refer to notions ("individual" and "group") fulfilling the status of agent for

their conformance to the definition of what it means to be an agent for the theory.[200] Thus, both individuals and groups have been considered by the explanation centers of intentional behavior because both terms function as agent *a posteriori*, i.e. how the concept defines it. On the matter, an interesting remark has been made by List and Pettit (List & Pettit, 2011), when in *Group Agency*, they define the system, functioning as an agent, a person. This notion of personhood is performative in character and connected with the capacity to establish meaningful relationships with others through the mediation of normative expectations and obligations that correspond to the basic normativity underlined in the previous paragraph.[201] The notion of performative person – as that of agent – is a functional concept, according to which a person is whatever functions as such: «to be a person is to have the capacity to perform as a person»[202].

As far as the functionalist notion of the agent is concerned, no difference between individuals and collectives seems profiled. Differences emerge, instead, when the authors introduce another meaning of "person", which refers to the original status of individuals and not ascribable to groups. The notion in question is the one of natural person, which denotes the individuals' capacity to bear a rational point of view and have moral preferences and inclinations by nature. On the contrary, group agents do not have a rational stand point originally, because they are not "natural"; instead, group agents, as social facts, acquire their status through practice and by means of the agreement making procedure leading to the formation of the group perspective over time.[203] In this sense, the rational stance of group agents (defined as corporate persons) is not an independent, natural feature but it requires basic normative relationships among the members in order to originate. Then, the explanation might consider group agents as relevant aspects due to their capacity to act on the basis of attitudes endorsed through the decision-making procedure, which –

[200] As said, the agent can be identified through *intrinsic*, *extrinsic* and *status* accounts. The first one considers shared attitudes the features that open the chance of recognizing and treating the collective as a group agent, (2.1.2); the second individuates group agents on the basis of not psychological elements – such as norms and functional roles – that make the shared attitude realized in concrete through the realization of a structure, (2.1.3). Finally, according to the *status* account, a group is an agent since some observer recognizes it as such, (2.1.4).
[201] On personhood: List and Pettit 2011, pp.170-174.
[202] *Ibidem*, p.173.
[203] On groups as persons: List and Pettit 2011, pp.174-178.

because of its complexity – produces outcomes not "reducible" to the inputs provided by the individuals.

This form of normative individualism is associated with ontological individualism because both issues express the widespread tendency of considering the individual mind as a peculiar aspect, that needs to be kept safe from the influence exerted from above and that owns inviolable interests and rights.

> Whether or not a group person should exist, and whether it should function within this or that regime of obligation, ought to be settled by reference to the rights or benefits of the individuals affected, members and non-members alike. And it is extremely unlikely that giving group persons equal status with individuals could be in the interest of individuals.[204]

As Pettit pointed out (Pettit 1996, 2014), the individualistic mindset in social sciences has upheld the ontological priority of individual mental properties, facts and events over social properties, facts and events in compliance with the peculiar stand ascribed to individuals as rational beings. Actually, no high-level fact has been taken as an objective, original component of the social world, capable of exerting a downwards influence on the individual thinking. The ontological position can be seen in connection with a psychological concern, which has come with a metaphysical/normative assumption.[205] In particular, the assumption consists in considering individual agents as special components of the (social) world, endowed by nature with the capacity to have preferences and to act intentionally on that basis (Hindriks 2014). With a difference, groups (and group attitudes) are considered (ontologically) derivative features, supervening on the rational network and normative relations among individuals (Bratman 2014, 2017, Gilbert 1989, 2014, Tuomela 2013). In this sense, contradictions generated by the ontological position have been reinforced by the normative premise associated with the view. As suggested by C. Rovane, normative individualism, as a *corollary* of ontological

[204] List and Pettit 2011, p.182.

[205] List and Pettit explain: «No approach we know would accord natural rights to group persons – unsurprisingly, since we can create an unlimited number of them. And no approach we know suggests that group persons have morally commanding interests such that a corporate good or benefit would determine what should be done, independently of the good or benefit to individuals. Almost all approaches defend some variant of 'normative individualism' (Kukathas and Pettit 1990): the view that something is good only if it is good for individual human or, more generally, sentient beings», (List and Pettit 2011, p.182).

individualism[206], might be an implication of the ontological position, representing an obstacle for the non redundancy of the GLA claimed by holistic individualism.[207]

3.2.4 Grounding and anchoring levels

In light of the ontological and normative individualistic position, the solution better suited to the description of shared agency in Social Ontology can be abandoning the claim of explaining shared agency through a group level account and adopting the MLA. In this sense, the GLA would be just a functionalist perspective, ultimately deriving from (and re-describable by) the MLA, focused on the individuals' psychology and behavior. Ontological individualism represents an obstacle that the explicative claim of being realistic about groups and group agency has not managed to face successfully. In particular, we find that, the normative facet of the ontological premise has created difficulties at the high-level account: framing a holistic account, which could be a realistic interpretation of the social dimension, has been seriously endangered by the normative priority of the individual agents, as natural agents, compared to the corporate units that are group agents. Such social constructions have been described as the outcomes of processes of recognition, acceptance, commitment and decision-making procedures that relegate the group agent to the realm of supervenient phenomena, and its explanation to the one of useful but reducible descriptions. The priority fixed by the normative feature makes the intentionality of the group dependent on that of the individuals and the functional notion of the agent subordinated to that of natural agent.

It might be reasonable to assume that the normativistic core of the theory, here defined – following Rovane's interpretation – as a *corollary* of ontological individualism,

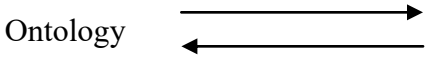
[206] The author states that normative individualism «recommends that group agents be expressly organized so that they do not dominate their human members, and moreover, so that they safeguard the individual rights and interests of their human members», (Rovane 2014, p. 1664).

[207] In what follows, and especially in the third part of this chapter, it is maintained that the relation between the ontological and the normative level of the theory entertain the opposite relation. In brief, the idea is that the normative position might be considered a premise of the ontological choices of holistic individualism and Social Ontology in general. It is worth recalling that the debate concerned here only refers to the party embracing, as an ontological perspective, the individualistic point of view. As a consequence, all positions accepting ontological realism have been purposely set aside.

might be considered otherwise and located on a deeper level in comparison with the ontological question. The normative issue might be considered a deeper observation than the one we could make about ontological individualism and the supervenient nature of social facts. In this sense, we want to suggest that normative individualism is not an implication of the ontological position but rather, it is the normative peculiarity of the individual and of its rational stance that has bound the theory to a certain concept (and ontological status) of the human being as a special agent. As a consequence, the ontological position has followed accordingly, constructing the explanation of the social world based on «what is held to exist»[208] in compliance with that normative/metaphysical foundation. It would be a wrong move to change some features in the ontological survey without having prepared the modification within the normative claim. If one opts for keeping the "liberal" metaphysical and anthropological picture of human nature, rationality and agency, one will also be bound to a (individualistic) thesis about the ontological issue and to the MLA as its most suitable explanation. Actually, the attempt of proposing a GLA in Social Ontology has failed partially because of this underlining implicit perspective about the peculiarity of the human kind, which is not a consequence of the ontological choice but a transcendental premise of the entire research plan.

This conclusion might seem at odds with what the second chapter (2.3.2) presented as a double relation between the ontological and explicative issue in social sciences. In that context, we suggested that the ontological framework, rather than representing a starting point to construct our description, could be seen as just one side of a connection that goes in a double direction. As claimed, both poles of the relation might be subject to changes whenever the re-conciliation between the perspectives assumed require modifications. In this sense, no priority has been ascribed, neither to the ontological nor to the explicative task.

[208] Archer 1995, p.16.



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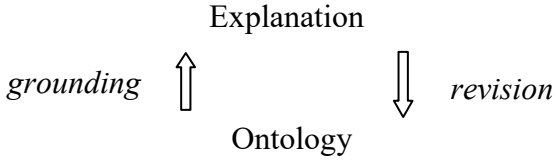
Now, we are suggesting that the ontological framework might function as a *grounding*[210] condition, which establishes what kind of explanation might be compatible with the picture outlined about the ontological components of the social world. Such a consideration might be in contradiction with the previous remark in the sense of being in favor of the priority of the ontological issue over the explanation. This could be true, if it were not for the fact that the grounding role attributed to the ontological sphere is not meant to coincide with its immunity to changes. In fact the ontological apparatus has been framed by the normative view of the theory, and whenever it appears unsatisfactory if compared with the *desideratum* of the explanation, it could be modified accordingly. In this sense, there is no term between ontology and explanation that bears a priority over the other, because there is no term that cannot be criticized based on assumptions concerning the other one. However, once an ontological framework is established or re-established, it counts as a (new) grounding condition for the explanation, which can address further revisions.

[209] The picture replicates the one proposed in the second chapter. The only modification is about the use of explanation instead of description. Actually, the two tasks have been considered here to be about the same concern, that is how to understand and speak of shared agency, as opposed to the ontological issue that is about what the theory takes to be part of the world it studies.

[210] The term "grounding" is here considered in Epstein's definition, according to which «social kinds can be instantiated across the universe of different situations, contexts, or worlds. When we set up the conditions for some social fact to obtain, we set up the grounding conditions for that universe», (Epstein 2015, p.78). Grounding conditions are conditions for a social fact to obtain and when grounding conditions are considered in general as conditions valid across worlds, we can call them framing principles. «A frame principle gives the grounding conditions not just for the actual world, but for all possibilities». (Epstein 2015, p.78). We are making use of the notion in a meta-theoretical way, adopting "grounding" to understand the relation between ontology and explanation. Accordingly, ontology grounds explanation, because it fixes the conditions enabling certain descriptions. Making assumptions at the ontological level has explicative implications, meaning that it grounds the possibility of certain explanations while it excludes others. Thus, assuming the only existence of individuals' mind in our ontology is a form of individualism about the grounding conditions of the explanation that, we suggest, could not claim to be realistic about social facts. Grounding conditions of high-level realistic explanations should include principles not limited to individuals.



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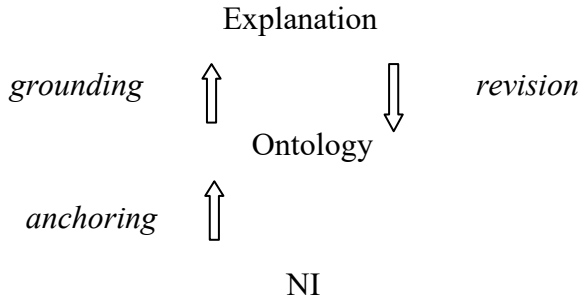
Taking this into consideration, the proposal consists in assuming the actual priority that the normative foundation of the theory might have had with respect to both ontology and explanation of group facts and agency. In accordance with Epstein's insight (Epstein 2014b, 2015), we want to refer this deeper grounding feature to the term *anchoring*, meaning a principle setting a certain kind of ontology and explanation, being the latter grounded by the former.[212]

[211] The picture represents another version of the previous one. The modification and distribution of "explanation" and "ontology" at different levels is functional to the representation of the modified way of interpreting the double connection between the poles. If the horizontal orientation assigned an equal status to both terms, the vertical order tends to suggest another way of reading the link. The new order goes, on one side, from ontology to explanation, as a grounded dimension; on the other side, the downwards arrow pinpoints the direction of the revising project.

[212] "Anchoring" is here a kind of grounding which works at another level. As said about "grounding", we employ "anchoring" in a meta-theoretical way. "Grounding" is about ontological conditions framing explicative possibilities, "anchoring" concerns conditions fixing what can be assumed as a grounding condition. Thus, normative individualism is assumed as a set of principles grounding ontological individualism, which – in turn – establishes the grounding conditions of the explanation. Holistic explanations are not consistent because they conflict with grounding and anchoring conditions. To say it otherwise, holistic explanations in holistic individualism are neither grounded nor anchored safely. Epstein explains: « For a set of facts to anchor a frame principle is for those facts to be the metaphysical reason that the frame principle is the case. In this sense, anchoring is very much like grounding. For a set of facts g_1, …, g_m to ground fact f is for g_1, …, g_m to be the metaphysical reason that f obtains in a world. For a set of facts a_1, …, a_n to anchor a frame principle R is for a_1, …, a_n to be the metaphysical reason that R holds for the frame. Both are "metaphysical reason" relations. But they do different work, and stand between different sorts of relata», (Epstein 2015, p.82). In this context, the relatum of "grounding" refers to f, where f is a kind of description. "Anchoring" instead refers to R, which is the framing principle fixing ontological individualism. Thus, NI anchors ontological individualism that grounds the MLA and functionalistic (ephemeral) GLA.



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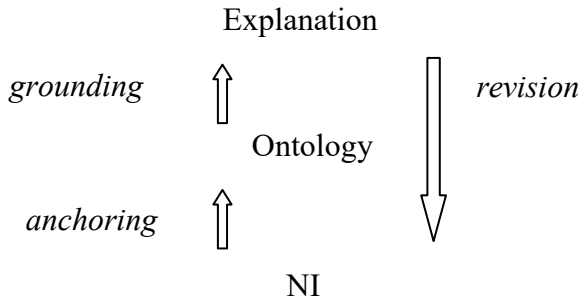
All this considered, one might ask what may happen with the GLA in the context of the proposed critique. If the chance of defending the irreducibility of the high-level approach has failed due to reasons that are not part of the double connection between explanation and ontology, but are instead located at the normative foundation of that association, a hypothesis for revision could not be attempted since that anchoring premise is kept. If one aims at adjusting the balance and providing a stable GLA, working on the ontological picture – on the basis of the problems highlighted by the explanation – would not be enough, because the entire theory would still rely on the same (individualistic) normative premise. Thus, what we could instead consider is a revision that would involve the anchoring level, intended as a meta-theoretical range of assumptions, grounding the construction of the theory as such.[214]

[213] The picture adds to the previous representation a further and deeper meta-theoretical level, which consists in normative individualism considered as a premise of the entire theory.

[214] Being the ontological level grounded by grounding conditions located at the NI level, that is the anchoring, changing the ontological *frame* is possible only when the grounding conditions of its establishment change. The individuals' peculiar stance fixed by NI sets the conditions according to which individual agents are considered the ontological minimum of social reality. Changing the framing principles provided by the ontological level to the explanation requires modifications of the anchoring level. Otherwise, the ontological arrangement would be misframed.



[215]

In this sense, the scope of creating some kind of stability in the approach to shred agency, and social facts in general, might be focusing the attention on the anchoring dimension, where we have found the deepest form of normativity. Otherwise, keeping grounding our ontological framework on the basis of a fixed normative individualism would compromise beyond repair the chance of designing a GLA.

3.3 Hypothesis for a revision

The aim of this last section is to suggest how to revise the GLA of holistic individualism (and abandon the position) to avoid contradictions associated with the connection of different methodological and ontological perspectives, based on the individualistic normative premise. The first paragraph profiles two alternative ways of dealing with normative individualism: (a) isolating the premise and limiting its implications on the theory, (b) rejecting NI. Preference is given to the latter alternative. The second paragraph works on normative individualism straightforwardly trying to re-frame the notion of individual agent, and compare it to group agent by discarding normative individualism. As a result, a functionalist account of agency is delineated as a high-level account suitable for both group and individual agency. The last two paragraphs present the implications that the endorsement of a functionalist approach decoupled from NI can have on the four dimensions of shared agency.

[215] The picture extends the vector of revision down to the anchoring level of the theory.

3.3.1 Alternative solutions

The most fundamental suggestion of this chapter is that pursuing the explicative objective and treating groups as real parts of our social world makes it necessary for the concept of group agent to acquire an objective ontological counterpart in the theory, which could function as a source of stability for the explanation. Otherwise, the risk of redundancy would be unavoidable. An obstacle consists in the fact that the ontological dimension is not the deepest foundation of the approach to the extent that making adjustments at that level requires a preliminary revision of its grounding. This aspect is represented by a model of the human kind and its normative priority. According to this widely accepted anthropological view, the individual is endowed by nature with a rational and normative peculiar stance according to which the individual is held as a good candidate for being the subject of intentional agency and the ultimate source of complex, shared agency and moral judgments, (List and Pettit 2011, Hindriks 2014). Considering groups as agents depends on how much one is disposed to modify such a kind of normativism and anthropocentrism inbuilt in the perspective and consider groups centers of agency in the same way in which individuals are.

Actually, if the *desideratum* is to search the condition for a stable GLA in Social Ontology, the attempt could be pursued by following one of the alternative strategies:

(1) isolating the premise of normative individualism to make the theory work anyway;

(2) abandoning that premise.

Both options represent feasible paths to follow but in this context preference will be given to the latter. To better understand the reasons for this choice, it can be noteworthy to say something about the discarding of the former option. According to that strategy, the normative priority of the individual is maintained but its endorsement should be confined as a background assumption, in order to construct a theory that would not collapse under the anchoring force of that premise. The project might sound promising if it was not that a research plan of this kind has already been attempted without finding a satisfactory result. The failure of the project can be found in the misleading way of considering normative

individualism as a *corollary* of ontological individualism and not as its grounding condition. To be more precise, the attempt of conceiving a holistic explanation alongside an individualistic viewpoint about the ontological issue has represented a way to conciliate the normative premise, grounding ontological individualism, with divergent explicative objectives. A functionalistic notion of agent, according to which an agent is what functions as the definition fixes, has somehow allowed such a kind of *epoché* about the anchoring individualistic feature and pursuing the holistic explicative task undisturbed. Both individuals and groups have been described as proper agents since their organization, decision-making procedure and commitment to the scope are preserved. Nonetheless, this solution – at least in the way attempted by holistic individualism – has not succeeded because the theory was subjected to the reduction required not just by ontological individualism, but also by the peculiar nature of individual attitudes. Revisiting the strategy of isolating the normative premise might be fruitful but problems would still be found. In fact, working on the ontological level does not change that, even though inclined to the acceptance of group-level facts, concepts and descriptions, one might still ascribe a special status to the individual agent, as required by normative individualism. If the functionalistic notion of agent – aimed at taking individual, collective and even artificial agents on a par – has failed, it is because that comparison has been conceived on the basis of a priority of individual agency and agent over the respective high-level instantiations. The weak point has been missing out the anchoring function of NI.

Thus, if we consider the latter solution, namely abandoning the premise, it could be observed that the main radical implication of this move is refusing, together with the most fundamental hypothesis of the approach, also the image of the human being and the model of rationality embraced by the debate. The intentionalistic pattern of the action might be seen as a perspective embraced in compliance with a concept of rationality and rational being, which underlines the peculiar nature of the human being as the original bearer of that faculty. The view endorsed implies that rationality and all the capacities connected to it are typical traits of the human kind, which is endowed with such "special gifts" by nature. Although feasible, this radical alternative might be seen as the outcome we are oriented to

obtain and not a good beginning for adjusting the account. The solution of abandoning normative individualism (and holistic individualism) might be analyzed in view of two different approaches: (a) rejecting that premise as such; (b) finding a way to modify it from the inside, by developing insights provided by the debate. Even though the outcome of the latter solution would probably lead to the same conclusion claimed by the former, that strategy can be more suitable for re-thinking the study of shared agency on the basis of the assumptions inbuilt in the intentionalistic model of the action.

To do this, the idea is to reflect upon a trait of the theory that is strictly intertwined with the ontological and normative individualistic matrix of the debate, (2.2.4). The aspect consists in the form of holism connected not with the objective of the explanation but with the premises of both explicative and ontological issues. The holism meant here is not the one about the claim of grasping social facts through the adoption of high-level concepts and descriptions. On the contrary, the holistic feature regards the concept of rationality and rational attitudes ascribed to the individual as the normative and ontological primitive. Such a holistic premise is the one that Pettit (Pettit 1996, 2014) associated with the image of individual agent, endowed by nature with rational faculties, who magnifies and improves her skills progressively. The ability to reason, Pettit affirms, «presupposes interaction with others; it is not something that we could enjoy out of society»[216]. As opposed to what is upheld by the supporters of the *singularist* or *atomist* perspective[217], the (ontological) individualism associated with (explanatory) holism in holistic individualism is also meant to sustain a holistic assumption about the development of individual skills happening step by step, through the interaction with other individuals and by learning how to deal with empirical circumstances in significant ways. The idea is that the human being matures her rationality and capacity to act intentionally and meaningfully in the social world as a result of formative relationships entertained with others over time. The peculiar rational and normative stance that anchoring individualism assigns to the individuals' mental properties,

[216] Pettit 2014, p.89.
[217] "Singularist" is the term used by Gilbert to identify the position opposed to holism (Gilbert 1989). Pettit prefers to use "atomism", instead, and adopt the expression "singularism" for the position assuming that only the individuals might function as systems of agency, (Pettit 2014).

as the ultimate *metaphysical reason*[218] of the social world, seems to be not all that matters regarding the range of premises endorsed by the theory. On the contrary, holistic individualism has associated with the peculiar value of the individual mental faculty also the idea that the full flourishing of those faculties requires a *horizontal* interaction with others of their own kind, within a social context of rules and practices, (2.2.3).

The rational point of view and intentional agency that the individual exercises as an agent does not only depend on her own natural capacities but is the result of an effort conducive to the rational position from which the individual agent operates. This diachronic and social formation of rationality might be the key of a hypothesis of revision which aims at transforming the gravitational pull of normative individualism in a normative force suitable for underpinning the notions of agency and agent in all their occurrences. If individual rationality requires (as a necessary condition) a diachronic process of formation in order to become a center of intentional agency, there should be no reason for assigning any priority to individual agent over groups. The idea is that of creating the suitable conditions for comparing individuals to groups on the basis of their having become centers of rational agency, i.e. agents, over time and through some kind of rational effort. [219]

To anticipate it briefly,

> Our strategy for understanding group intention is no different than the strategy for understanding individual intention. We take both individual and group action to be functionally anchored kinds, and take them to play the same functions in their respective systems of practical activity.[220]

This revision of the normative premise might lead to change the game on the ontological level because a progressive constitution of the agent both with respect to the individual and group agent would lay the foundation for an equivalent interpretation of the two

[218] Epstein 2015, p.82.
[219] The comparison of individual agents and group agents as systems equally formed over time and through interaction can be set if we consider interaction as a phenomenon involving not just individuals as human beings but also material components of the environments, rules, costumes and, of course, individual, group and artificial agents. In this sense, individuals and groups can both interact with other agents, with other components of the environments and with other systems becoming, but not yet, agents. Accordingly, the notion of interaction assumed by holistic individualism should be re-considered and disassociated from normative individualism, which implies an anthropocentric view of agency.
[220] Epstein 2014, p.248.

instantiations of the concept. Both rational systems would be considered anchored on a similar process of constitution so they might be seen as rational systems of agency with a constructed, diachronic, social foundation (anchoring). In this sense, individual and group agents, as subjects of shared agency, represent objects of the same kind (arguably, with the same ontological status) despite different degrees of complexity.

3.3.2 Abandoning NI

To modify the approach to the notion of agency, attention should be given to the diachronic dimension of the concept, accepted in principle by the model of rationality and intentionality endorsed in Social Ontology. The task is to see which might be the effects of this strategy on the notion of shared agency, decoupling the functionalist concept of the agent from the priority of the individual over the other kind (corporate or artificial) of rational systems. If the *a posteriori* notion of agent – established on the basis of the model of the agency – has not led to produce a stable account with respect to complex systems, it was because individuals were entitled with an indispensable rational priority that required establishing group rational autonomy relying on individuals' rationality. This is the reason why the GLA has been conceived as ultimately reducible to the MLA. Once the notion of agent has been fixed and applied both to individuals and groups, the two occurrences of the concept have not been treated in the same way. The statement that has undermined the functionalist perspective and the construction of a GLA is the one according to which the notion of performative person (agent) finds its rational source on – it is anchored on – that of natural person (individual human being). The insight has been implied by the *framing* assumption that «[A]t the base of both singular agents and plural subjects lies the human being, with his or her acts of will and conceptions of the situation»[221].

In order to re-frame the perspective abandoning that normative/metaphysical premise, it might be useful to dwell upon the notion of performative person engendered by the definition of agency and questioning the reason referring to the natural person and its

[221] Gilbert 1989, pp.432-433.

priority. If we better look at the notion of performative person in the case of groups, it might be observed that groups can function as intentional agents, when fulfilling all the conditions that the notion implies. In line with this, a group comes to be an agent and covers the status of agent, with all the tasks and duties connected with the concept, through a process of agreement-making, acceptance and commitment accomplished by the individual members so to generate a common/shared attitude/plan/ethos to pursue as if they were one.

It can be possible to argue against normative individualism by assuming – as the holistic premise does – that also the rational point of view of the individual agent defines itself over time and through a formative interaction with the social environment (involving not just individual human beings). On this basis, there is no reason why we should sustain the derivative character of group intentional agency.

The establishment of an autonomous GLA can be acquired through deeper investigations on the notion of individual agent rather than through further considerations about the difference of shared agency if compared with the individual one. By calling into question the holistic premise (Pettit 1996, 2014) no actual discrepancy should be fixed between the notion of individual agent and group agent.

In a different context, Rovane has maintained a similar perspective by proposing to treat group agents as equivalent to individual agents, (Rovane 2014). The author affirms that,

> [W]hat human beings are born with is a capacity to deliberate, which cannot be exercised at all until fairly late in its cognitive development; and insofar as human beings are born with a capacity to deliberate, they are also born with a potential to form a deliberative point of view by coming to recognize different deliberative considerations as things to be taken into account together.[222]

Hence,

[222] Rovane 2014, p.1680.

> […] once the process of deliberation begins, there arises within the human being a temporally extended deliberative point of view that encompasses more than 'current' thoughts.[223]

Moreover, following Rovane's view (Rovane 1998, 2004, 2014), it becomes also important to observe that the constitution of the rational point of view might necessitate that the agent assumes a normative commitment towards the realization of that plan. In order to be a coherent and rationally guided process, the temporal development needs the individual to commit herself to the rational perspective she is endorsing. Thus, the rational *desideratum* is associated to a normative constraint: being a rational agent with a rational view point «gives rise to a certain normative commitment, namely, the commitment to achieve overall rational unity»[224]. The construction of a rational unity requires an ongoing normative commitment by the agent which guarantees her willingness to fulfill the project:

> […] all that is meant here by "normative commitment" is that the agents who have the goal of achieving overall rational unity think of the goal in this way, as having this prescriptive force of "ought"; in other words, they think that overall rational unity is something that they ought to achieve, and in that sense, they have a normative commitment to achieve such unity.[225]

The notion of individual agent conceived by the revised normative and metaphysical foundation consists in a rational unity and normative capacity of evaluation and deliberation happening over time. This means that the biological given (that is the human being) acquires its status of agent through a process of decision-making, rational control and commitment that makes the individual agent close to the procedure characterizing the formation of a group agent. This group procedure requires – at least – that the members collectively accept, through an act of (normative) commitment, a mechanism processing the attitudes given by the members and transforming them into a single group attitude (Hindriks 2008, 2014).

[223] *Ivi*, p.1681.
[224] Rovane 1998, p.23.
[225] *Ibidem.*

3.3.3 A functionalist approach 1

Once the functionalist notion of the agent is disassociated from the individualistic normative premise, it should be possible to compare the notion of individual and shared agency based on the equal status they gain. Each case consists in an event of agency, ascribable to an agent and intentionally directed towards the fulfillment of a task represented in the content of the intentional attitude. This comparison does not imply that individual and shared agency are the same, in fact differences are drawn by the complexity of the task and the number of personal efforts needed for realizing the objective – as the MLA showcased. While in the case of individual agency the task coincides with the object represented in the intention of a single individual agent, who can carried it out through her own action, shared agency aims at obtaining a goal intended by a group autonomously or by the members' we-mode thinking. If the goal is represented in the content of an individual intention planning for an individual intentional behavior, the agent to which the phenomenon is ascribed amounts to the individual subject. On the other side, when the task is (intentionally) pursued by a group of individuals together, the subject of agency can be variously identified in the group to which the individuals belong as members[226]. The fact that the group agent can be considered the same as the individual agent depends on individual and group subjects defined as agents due to their rational commitment and decision-making procedure arranging the intention, and not because of their coinciding with one (or a set of) natural person(s). The aspect that generates the gap between this functionalist view and the general approach in Social Ontology is discarding the normative/metaphysical priority of the individual agent as a natural person.

Taking all this into consideration, one might ask which are the implications of abandoning normative individualism in designing the GLA of shared agency and the four dimensions belonging to it.

[226] The subject of shared agency can be identified through *intrinsic*, *extrinsic*, *status* accounts.

a. constitutive relation

A first way to explain the constitutive relation says that intentional attitudes and actions are constitutive parts of agency (Epstein 2015). This definition is not a challenging aspect if compared with the GLA of holistic individualism, because the approach does not adopt this meaning of the relation. With a different perspective, Searle has considered the combination of intending and acting as the essence of agency, (Searle 2007, 2010), both in case of individual intentions and of collective intentions for the action. Taking the latter into consideration, the intention and the action analyzed by the author as collective phenomena correspond to occurrences of intending and acting performed by the individuals from a collective perspective. This point of view is characterized by the plural grammatical form of the attitudes (we-attitudes) and by the belief that also other individual agents are cooperating towards the task. Nonetheless, the "we", or the group, remains an epistemological original stand point in the individuals' mind as «a psychological primitive in the individual heads of individual agents»[227]. This means that, «the fact that I have a we-intention does not by itself imply that other people share my we-intention, or even that there is a "we" that my we-intentions refer to»[228]. The structure of collective intentional behavior is compatible with methodological individualism[229], and is preserved by treating individuals as members, having collectivity-oriented attitudes in mind. Consequently, there is in Searle's account no need for introducing a group perspective or a GLA irreducible to the members' perspective, i.e. to the MLA.

In addition to the meaning of constitution adopted in Searle's account, theorists of holistic individualism have associated that dimension to another facet of constitution specifically concerned with shared agency. The idea was made explicit in the second section of this chapter and it regards the chance of considering normative relation as a constitutive feature of shared agency (and all its dimensions). The possibility of talking of shared agency has been based on the fact that pursuing a common task jointly means, in the first place, intending and acting as a group. It has been stated that the normative bond

[227] Searle 1997, p.449.
[228] *Ivi*, pp. 449-50.
[229] Methodological individualism is different from the epistemological one. See footnote 172.

connecting individuals to one another as partners constitutes shared agency to the extent that without that normative constraint no shared agency could occur.

In line with this reading of constitutive relation, shared agency was different from individual agency, because the latter did not need the normative bond bringing the members together in a group. This process of constitution requires normative attitudes that individual agency had not necessitated thanks to the peculiar stance attributed, as a premise, to the individual agent(s). Since the individual is capable of acting intentionally by nature, shared agency cannot be a phenomenon of the same kind. But, if one is disposed to abandon such an individualistic assumption, the constitution of agency becomes an indispensable process both in case of group and individual agency. Assuming that any rational point of view is the result of an ongoing rational effort, involving commitment to the process, the intentional perspective is obtained over time through normative commitment, deliberation and interaction with the social environment both in individual and group contexts. As group intentions are constituted by different rational steps brought together by an act of commitment, the same should be said regarding individual attitudes in a way that the constitutive relation in the GLA does not need the explanation of the members' attitudes in order to acquire stability. The GLA of the constitutive relation is not reducible to the MLA because neither of the two perspectives are prior to the other one. The GLA is focused on the system, whereas the MLA concerns individuals' psychology.

In line with this functionalist view, group and individual agency are two instantiations of the same notion, namely the one of agency, and can be considered original and complex in the same way.[230] On one hand, each one is original because each concerns a rational system of agency that is the subject of intentional behaviors; on the other hand, each is complex because each case of intentional agency can occur just in case of a

[230] This comparison has brought theorists of the *continuity thesis* (Bratman, List, Pettit and Hindriks among others) to say that the GLA is compatible with methodological individualism. Here we would like to affirm the contrary: if both groups and individuals function as agents it is not because groups function as individuals. Rather, the comparison aims at understanding both rational systems as complex and diachronically anchored facts, bearing attitudes from a point of view that is not given as such.

diachronic process of constitution of the rational perspective from which any intentional attitude and action can derive.

b. structural relation

It is reasonable to assume with Bratman that the intentionalistic model of the action «sees the intentions of individuals as plan states»[231], giving a structure to individual behavior and fixing its target. Aside from representing the goal of every single action, the intentional character of agency also secures the consistency of actions if compared with other activities performed by the individual over time or with the contribution of other agents, and the coherence of the action with the scope it aims at realizing. The organizational role of the intention regards the structure of individual agency and the structure of shared agency as a derivative. In fact, the approach «takes the intentions of individuals seriously as basic and distinctive elements of individual human agency»[232]. Hence, the individuals' intentions might be (1) individual intentions for the action directed to individual performances (individual agency), (1) individual intentions for contributing in shared performances (*continuity thesis* of intentionality), (3) we-intentions located in the individuals' mind and oriented towards a common goal (*discontinuity thesis*). No matter what interpretation one wants to adopt, due to the fact of being the attitude establishing the task of the individual contribution as participant/group member, the members' intention represents the first step towards the organization of shared agency as a group intentional performance. Thus, both in case of original collective attitudes and meshing individual sub-plans, to speak of group planning attitudes requires the mediation of the MLA, which operates at the members-level by grasping the structure of individual (group-oriented) agency as a fundamental component of the whole.

But, what if individuals' intentions are no longer considered *basic and distinctive elements*? What if the steps towards the formation of a group intention are seen as steps conducive to the individual intention for the action? Would the GLA still need the mediation of the MLA? In some sense, it would. In fact, if structural relation is a relation

[231] Bratman 2014, p.18.
[232] *Ivi*, p.11

that, by definition, happens over time and through further intentions arranging actions leading to the wider general task, referring to those steps represents an unavoidable theoretical move implied by the structural dimension as such, (1.1.2). However, being the outcome of a process composed by several stages is not equal to being reducible to those components, especially when there is no priority attributed to the segments. The GLA can refer to the MLA the same way in which the explanation of individual we-mode/group-oriented agency refers to the diachronic formation of the attitude concerned, but both do not imply reduction. If the lower level of the description is not granted metaphysical/normative priority over the higher-level one, individual and shared agency may just represent two different forms of agency in which the structural relation intervenes both at the higher and lower level of reality and description.

In line with all these considerations, the structural relation between intending and acting can keep its double layers without the GLA being reducible to the MLA. According to the idea that to the former dimension of the structural relation pertains the role exerted by each intention in guiding and securing the consistency/coherence of each single action, the latter refers to the organization of all contributions towards the same goal intended by each particular effort. If these efforts are sub-plans of the same individual agent occurring at different moments over time or if they are intentions belonging to different subjects, the structural relation keeps working in the same way. Such a continuity, maintained also in Bratman's view, is not – as the author suggests – based on the fact that diachronic and shared agency can be treated equally, (Bratman 2014); on the contrary, the comparison finds its roots in the equal status one can ascribe to individual and group agency and agent. The difference if compared with Bratman's perspective consists in questioning the peculiar position allocated to the individual, according to which the individual rational stand point is considered a primitive from which both the construction of diachronic and social agency starts. In contrast, the notion of individual agent (and agency) needs the diachronic and social dimension as transcendental conditions necessary for turning the individual into an

individual agent capable of intentional agency.[233] In this sense, the development in the course of time and interaction with the social environment are brought into the core of the notion of agent as its constitutive and structural features, either in its individual or collective version.

3.3.4 A functionalist approach 2

c. normative relation

Apart from the normative premise that anchores holistic individualism, two other dimensions of normativity are involved in the GLA. The former relation regards the constraint that individuals establish as members of the group, whereas the latter concerns the obligation they have (as members) to the pursuit of the collective task.[234] The point that makes the GLA collapsing downwards on the MLA consists in the fact that the collective commitment to realize the common task can be endorsed only when the individuals mutually recognize themselves as part of the same whole. The notion of joint/social commitment has been introduced, especially regarding Tuomela's and Gilbert's approaches (1.2.3, 1.2.4), as a notion that characterizes shared agency as a high level phenomenon occasioned by a change of perspective occurring in the individuals' mind, (2.3.4). In the absence of a commitment to the status of partner/group member no collective attitude and agency can happen. Similarly, also in case of List and Pettit's group agency, shared performance takes place if and only if a network of individual attitudes occurs. Being the group sphere the outcome of the aggregation of the members' effort, no group event can be conceived if this foundation is missing. The aspect that threatens the GLA mostly is the naturally given rational stance of the individual members and not the fact that the group perspective represents the outcome of aggregation and commitment happening inter-subjectively and diachronically. Once the normative premise is abandoned, the issue

[233] We could also say with Epstein's vocabulary that diachronic and social foundations represent anchoring conditions of agency. As anchoring aspects they ground a model of agency with its dimensions, which – in turn – function as framing principles of intentional attitudes and behaviors, (Epstein 2014b, 2015).
[234] Those forms of normativity might be considered as grounding conditions of agency.

addressed by the comparison of the notion of group agent to the one of individual agent can be seen as the question about how it can be possible to conceive both kinds of normativity also in the case of individual agency. As a matter of fact, if group and individual agency are particular instantiations of the same concept of intentional agency, it should be possible to describe them through the same explicative pattern and leave concrete discrepancies out of discussion. The idea is to follow the line of thought suggested about constitutive and structural relation and understand the normative dimensions involved in the definition of agency as such.

Given that two dimensions of normativity have been identified, it is useful to start with the most basic one and introduce the second-order normativity thereafter. Basic normativity has to do with mutual expectations and obligations that individuals acquire once they commit themselves to the status of group member/partner (Schweikard 2017a). Such a social/joint commitment makes the individuals change perspective from an individual to a collective one, in a way that all what they intend from that gained point of view is related to the group and is intended not personally but on behalf of the whole. As is for the case of the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. With a difference, in assuming an approach in line with the *continuity thesis*, no discrepancy is identified between individual and collective intentionality, and the basic normative bond helps to tie the members in stable relationships and establishing networks of attitudes and decision-making mechanism capable of producing original (in List and Pettit's approach) or coordinated (regarding Bratman's view) group intentions.

All this considered, the case of basic normativity can be applied to the analysis of individual agency thanks to the endorsement of the diachronic and social constitution of the agent.[235] A way to understand the commitment to a status similar to the one of being partner can be found in the commitment assumed in confirming the endorsement of the rational stance held by the individual as an agent.[236] The rational perspective characterizing the agent does not coincide with the point of view of the individual as a human being:

[235] Since this assumption is missing, «it is argued that joint actions are inherently normative phenomenon and that individualists deny this», (Miller 2007, p.74).
[236] On rational commitment in individual agency: Rovane 1998, 2004.

agency is a capacity that requires the subject (be it individual or plural) to construct a perspective through a rational effort, directed to the establishment of a control over forthcoming decisions and intentional actions. The attitude that in shared agency was denoted as social or joint commitment can be defined in an individual context as a commitment to the rational project one is pursuing as an agent. As a normative attitude, this form of commitment exerts a role seen as a form of "self-governance", where the term "self" refers to the rational system that is the agent.

When the rational perspective is secured, the agent can commit herself to a particular end, represented in the content of the intentional attitude and held by the point of view or by the rational system fixed through the first-order normativity. In this sense, if one accepts the role of basic normativity both in case of individual and group agency, the commitment regarding the goal of the action can be understood as the obligation one has to the realization of a task.

c. causal relation

The causal dimension defined as a relation between intending and acting was excluded from the GLA because the causal influence going from the mind to the body of individuals was included only in Searle's explanation, who does not attempt to construct a GLA, (2.3.4). Another level of causation, questioned by theorists of holistic individualism, has been the causal power exerted by high-level facts on (1) other high-level facts or (2) individual facts, that can be either (2a) facts belonging to the foundation of the social event or (2b) individual facts in general (3.1.4). No matter how one interprets the issue, the causal chain grasped through the GLA presents problems related to the assumption that high-level facts have no objective ontological counterpart in the theory.[237] Since ontological individualism is kept, holistic explanations can be introduced just as functionalist considerations, and the realistic claim of the group-level account cannot contrast redundancy. In this sense a group agent «*exists causally objectively as a social system*

[237] Case 2a presents also the problem that groups as supervenient phenomena cannot have a causal influence upon the basis because: (1) supervenience is synchronic, (2) ontological individualism implies the individuals' psychological autonomy from social influences, (Sawyer 2003).

capable of causal production of outcomes in the world in virtue of its we-thinking and "we-acting" members»[238]. The comparison between group and individual agency is compromised on the ontological side by the fact that individual agents operating as group members are considered non-fictitious and coinciding with human beings who, existing by nature, are endowed with an objective ontological status and with a peculiar rational stance. As a consequence, group members have an original causal power that is not attributed to groups. As Sawyer remarks, social facts are high-level supervenient facts and can be motors of causal chains when their causal power derives from the one of the members, (Sawyer 2003). Following the same line of thought, Tuomela observed that, «individuals are ultimately the only causal "motors" in the social realm»[239]:

> individual agents are "in the last analysis" the sole causal initiators or ultimate sources of causation in the social world. There is derivative causation, e.g. the fact of people spending "too" much money on goods can be the cause of increase in inflation, etc.[240]

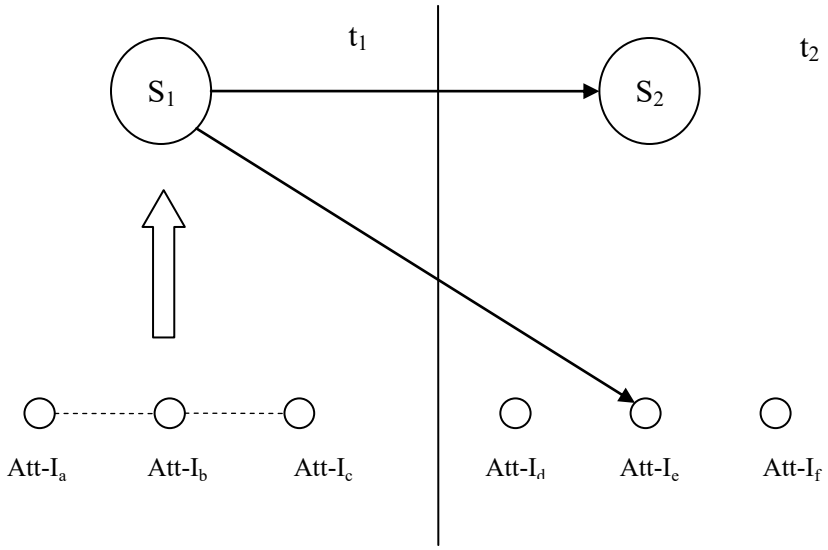
Group agents and high-level facts in general have derivative causal powers. The point leaves no room for a non redundant GLA regarding causation. Nonetheless, questioning normative individualism and the non-fictitious status of individual agents might ground the attempt of contrasting this conclusion by underlining the similarity of individuals and groups as systems of agency. If one considers the notion of individual agent as overlapping neither with the one of human being nor with a rational viewpoint, the issue of causal power may become a problem also concerning individual agency. Indeed, recognizing the first *causal motor* in the human being or in individual rationality would not mean recognizing the first *causal motor* in the individual agent. If due to their ontological derivative status causal powers should be rejected in the case of group agency, the power should be discarded also regarding individual agency, because no causality would have been associated with the functionalist concept straightforwardly.

Nonetheless, excluding causation from the account of agency might be in contrast with the tendency in Social Ontology of accepting mental and high-level causation as

[238] Tuomela 2013a, p.47, (italic font in the original).
[239] Tuomela 2013a, p.50.
[240] Tuomela 2011, p.309.

legitimate explicative tools. Abandoning normative individualism can help questioning the peculiar status of individual agents as first causal motors and considering them as systems structured over time and through interaction. This assumption allows seeing individuals as agents and in comparison to groups, without embracing the fictitious nature of both. In particular, the idea of rational, diachronically constructed, systems of agency suggests finding the non-fictitious nature of the notion precisely in the formation of the rational point of view over time.

Concerning causation, the diachronic dimension of agency develops Sawyer's intuition (Sawyer 2003) of conceiving causality at different moments in time. The author affirms that if high-level facts cannot exert an influence on the individual basis from which they supervene, they can however have a power on other high/low level facts happening ahead over time (3.1.4).



[241]

Even though introducing the diachronic unfolding of causal relation allows the establishment of a causal dependence that is not in conflict with the supervenience of social facts on individual facts – and without violating the immunity of the individual basis from the influence of derivative phenomena – the perspective is still difficult. In fact, although it

[241] The picture replicates the one offered in 3.1.4.

enables the establishment of causal relation according to the MLA, it keeps being a redundant approach compared to the GLA. S_1 supervenes on individual attitudes in the same way in which S_2 represents an ontologically reducible element.

Taking all this into consideration, it seems that groups' causal power can only be understood assuming their objective status in our ontology.[242] The task is challenging but a first step can be considering the diachronic dimension of agency and interpreting it as a transcendental/anchoring condition of intentional agency and not a time line along which the faculty is exercised as a given (as a grounding condition). Thinking about agency as a rational capacity that needs to be constituted over time, through rational effort and commitment, helps conceive the center of intentional agency as a system made up of steps all involved in the design of the agent and in the performance of the action. In this sense, groups as high-level facts do not just derive from individual members at their basis but they are formed by all the attitudes, rules, reasons and obligations that are part of the process of constitution of the rational system as a stable rational perspective. The members' attitudes are just part of a process of rational identity formation, establishing in the course of time an original perspective that does not need to be traced back to individuals' intentionality. The process as an open system involves the contribution of the members but no priority over other components is ascribed to the inputs they provide. Similarly, individual agents are rational systems because their perspective is the (open) outcome of processes of decision-making, commitment and interaction with the world, and since their status of performative person (List and Pettit 2011, Rovane 2014) is constructed rather than «naturalistically grounded»[243]. In this sense, both individual and group rational perspectives come to be centers of agency thanks to a giving-identity process, fixing the consistency and autonomy of the viewpoint based on diachronic continuity created by the rational effort and the commitment to the plan (Rovane 1998, 2004).

If it is reasonable to attribute mental causation to non-fictitious systems of intentional agency, capable of having effects on the environment, group agents should represent first causal motors in the same way in which individuals do. Assuming that both

[242] The ontological objectivity of high-level facts has been endorsed in Social Ontology by theorists of critical realism, (Archer 1995, 1998a, 1998b, Baskhar 1998a, 1998b , Elder-Vass 2010, 2012, 2014).
[243] Tuomela 2013a, p.49.

systems are not naturally given, but acquire a rational stability diachronically, both systems intervene in the social world due to the same rational stance. Differences concern the level of complexity associated with each particular case but, formally, if intentional agency has causal effects on the world, this must be true no matter which instantiation of the concept is on focus.

Conclusion

This research has addressed the GLA problem in Social Ontology, questioning whether the debate has proposed a stable group-level account of shared agency capable of regarding groups as (proper) subjects of agency. I outlined the main positions and distinguished between two ways of approaching shared agency. On the one hand, the group-level account (GLA) has been defined as the attempt of conceiving groups as centers of agency. On the other hand, shared agency has been explored investigating members' mental attitudes, relationships and behaviors (MLA). The former approach has been found reducible to the latter due to the widespread tendency of studying shared agency (when conceived as a group-level phenomenon) based on holistic individualism, which maintains that high-level explanations are objective as long as ontological issues are left aside.

The main thesis claims that as long as holistic individualism is held, GLA is reducible to MLA. This is because holistic individualism upholds ontological individualism based on an individualistic normative premise, fixing the special status of individuals as human beings, naturally endowed with rationality and intentionality. The premise generates contradictions between reductive ontology and holistic explanations that cannot be solved working on the two issues directly. As a consequence, holistic individualism can propose a MLA, where the group is seen as the outcome of members' intentions and actions, but it cannot offer a stable GLA taking group agency as such. I conclude that we should revise the approach and abandon the normative priority of individuals and holistic individualism as such. This allows for the construction of a functionalist notion of agent, suitable for grasping any rational system that fulfils the conditions required by intentional agency.

The hypothesis for revision started by considering and criticizing the same assumptions framing holistic individualism. In particular, it questioned the ontological and normative priority of individuals' mind, securing its immunity from the influence of high-level social tendencies. This assumption has been called into question considering a further premise of holistic individualism, which takes individuals' mind as constituted through the interaction with other agents. The rational faculty that individuals have by nature can thus be seen as a (potential) skill one develops interacting with others and learning how to live in a shared social environment:

> Individuality – identification as an individual person – emerges out of a certain kind of social order. Such an order is defined by multiple, distinct spheres of social life, none of which comprehensively defines anyone's agency, individual freedom of mobility among those spheres, and individual membership in multiple spheres. Only when these social conditions are in place can people become individuals, understood as agents authorized to set their own priorities, on their own, according to an autonomously defined self-conception.[244]

In this sense, the individual rational perspective loses its priority over group's intentionality due to the identity-giving process through which both rational perspectives are formed.

Conceiving individual rationality as the outcome of a process of constitution has allowed us to compare individual and group agents as rational systems developing their rational point of view in the course of time. This conclusion defends a functionalist notion of agent but it does not imply a homogeneous interpretation of different instantiations of the concept. The homogeneity claimed by the proposal concerns the model of the explanation. If the theoretical *desideratum* is to describe intentional agency, and if intentional agency is a phenomenon ascribed *a posteriori* to a subject fulfilling its definition, then any system satisfying these conditions should count as an agent, no matter its degree of complexity and how it comes to realize it. The notion is functional and explaining its functioning should work in the same manner across cases. Understanding complex events should be possible based on the same framework needed to understand the simplest tokens. Hence, the GLA can be defined as a high-level account analogous to the one focused on individual agency, where agency is attributed to a group rather than being ascribed to single individuals. Both

[244] Anderson 2001, p.36.

are rational systems constituted through rational efforts, commitments and decision-making procedures developed over time. Neither of them has a peculiar status and neither of them is naturally endowed with an original rational view point that the other does not hold.

Taking all this into consideration, the GLA should not be defined by analogy to the explanation of individual agency, because the direction of the comparison going from individuals to groups would keep alluding to the derivative nature of the latter as complex phenomena. On the contrary, our point is treating different instantiations of the same functionalist concept on a par, without proposing accounts redundant in their concepts and principles. Simplicity is the target.

Yet, simplicity does not necessarily mean homogeneity and the MLA is proof of that. Illustrating different approaches to the study of shared agency from the individuals' perspective, the members-level account has shown to what extent the case of two or more individuals acting together represents a complex topic of research. The issue has been studied choosing one of the alternative positions between *continuity thesis* and *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. The former considers group agency analogous to individual agency in the sense of being a phenomenon that can be accounted for by the same theoretical tools required to explain individual agency. Both cases involve individual intentionality in the individuals' mind plus interaction among the parties, either over time or across agents. This account might seem similar to the one proposed in this research. Indeed, the idea of comparing individual and group agency and employing the same explicative framework for both has been one of the tasks of this project.

While the task is similar, methodology and conclusions differ. In fact, if the *continuity thesis* of intentionality explains shared agency endorsing methodological individualism and avoiding the introduction of concepts and principles peculiar to individual psychology, our point is to regard shared agency as a particular event in the individuals' mind that needs specific concepts and principles. While the *continuity thesis* relates the continuity to the explanation of individual's psychology, the approach defended in this study concerns the analogy between tokens of "agent". Individual and shared agency

are equal in that they are both rational systems capable of intentional agency. At the same time, to understand how individual components are committed to the rational individual/collective plan of the individual/group agent we need concepts suitable for grasping the specificity of attitudes. In fact, attitudes can occur with singular or plural mode based on the context (whether individual or collective) and it can refer to other attitudes in the individuals' mind, to others' attitudes or to attitudes happened in the past. All these degrees of complexity belong to psychology and phenomenological experience (Schmid 2014, 2013).

The approach proposed here is in line with the latter part of the debate embracing the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality, which describes shared agency through concepts such as collective intentionality and commitment that are not part of the explanation of individual agency. The aspect that separates my proposal from the one sustained by theorists of the *discontinuity thesis* is the fact that in those approaches group agency is studied based on what happens at the members' level, whereas I maintain that individuals' efforts do not define the group as an agent. The group is an agent due to its fulfilling the notion of rational system of agency. The members' intentions and actions are important to grasp the complexity of the event in the same way in which a study of individual's psychology can be relevant to understand the constitution of individual agency in depth.

The GLA of holistic individualism has been considered reducible to the MLA because it aims at explaining shared agency deriving group agency from the description of intentionality and agency of group members. This happened because the normative individualistic premise assuming individuals as peculiar subjects has compromised the functionalist notion of agent, preventing us from considering the group an agent as such. The mediation of the members-level and the ontological thesis that only individuals exist have made necessary framing the GLA based on the MLA without allowing the former to go beyond the latter (Ludwig 2017).

The present research suggests abandoning normative individualism and treating the GLA as a high-level account of agency, structured like the account of individual agency.

The MLA can help to further study how individuals engage themselves in individual and collective contexts of agency, and these can be approached either from the *continuity thesis* or the *discontinuity thesis* of intentionality. The members-level account concerns the *mode* of intentionality, which belongs to the individuals' mind. The group-level account regards the group as a rational system of agency, considered in its entirety an in analogy to other performative persons as individual agents are.

Open questions

The conclusion has suggested a revision of methodological assumptions and premises in Social Ontology but it has not tackled all the questions raised by the rejection of normative individualism (and holistic individualism) exhaustively. Here is a sketch of some issues that have been addressed but are still in need of being explored.

First, discarding normative individualism can have consequences on the ontological perspective and it can imply changing the individualistic position. Since the rational stability of agents is acquired over time, it can be that the process of rational constitution corresponds to hardware components similarly constructed and enriched over time. Accordingly, rational systems do not have to coincide with single biological bodies, in case of individual agency, or with networks of individuals, in the case of group agency. On the contrary, a group as a system of agency can be more than participants' bodies just as an individual agent can be more than her individual body.[245] Systems should include in their constitution facts incorporated over time and gathered from the environment, such as artificial parts of the body, mechanical tools, computers, physical and social objects (Elder-Vass 2017). This remark crosscuts the increasing sociological interest in *socio-materiality studies*[246], focused on forms of intentional agency equally including human (socio) and

[245] Pacherie has allowed for the separation of shared agency from the individual body. This separation has been considered an element of discontinuity of individual and group agency rather than a characteristic of both, (Pacherie 2015).
[246] Leonardi 2012 is an introduction and a conceptual clarification of the debate.

artificial (material) components, and philosophical concerns about identifying the only foundation of group agency in facts about individuals. Epstein makes the point clear:

> On a typical day at Starbucks, pots of coffee are being brewed, baristas are preparing frappuccinos, cash registers are ringing, customers are lining up, credit cards are being processed, banks are being debited and credited, accountants are tallying up expenses, ownership stakes are changing in value, and so on. At least on the face of it, some of these facts about Starbucks fail to supervene on facts about the people and their interrelations. To be sure, the employees are critical to the operation of Starbucks. But facts about Starbucks seem also to depend on facts about the coffee, the espresso machines, the business license, and the accounting ledgers. Groups can also be mode of rules and material parts even when individual members are lacking.[247]

All this considered, assuming that the GLA is reducible to the MLA would be a mistake, because group agency involves more than its individual members and attitudes.

Second, assuming agential systems in our ontology and abandoning ontological individualism makes the approach close to the Social Ontology of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, Archer, Elder-Vass), which considers social structures real components of the social world. If group agents can be seen as ontologically objective entities, they must have causal powers. But theorists of Critical Realism ground their notion of causation on an image of the world (either natural or social) structured on layers, where each layer has causal powers as emergent properties (Elder-Vass 2015, 2012, 2004). To fully relate analytical Social Ontology to these sociological studies we would need to go deeper in the diachronic structure of agency and determine whether it is consistent with a multi-layered reality. The issue needs discussing emergence in comparison to the notion of supervenience adopted by holistic individualism. If we maintain the diachronic constitution of agents as ontologically objective entities, supervenience creates problems because (1) it is a synchronic relation, (2) it produces high-level facts ontologically derived from the basis, (3) it only includes individuals' attitudes at the lower level. Emergence may avoid those problems because it is defined as (1) establishing itself diachronically, (2) producing ontologically objective high-level domains, (3) involving more than individual members, (Kim 1999). This path can be fruitful especially to explore causation and to investigate the ontological objectification of social systems over time. Moreover, studying Critical

[247] Epstein 2015, p.46.

Realism can help developing the relation between intentionality, social structures and time as the morphogenetic approach has attempted to do (Archer 1995, 2010). [248] The open question is considering emergence and morphogenesis in order to replace supervenience and establish their suitability for explaining the formation of social facts as a process given over time and through interaction.

Third, if group agents and individual agents are two instantiations of the notion of agent, at least two questions should be addressed. On the one hand, the comparison makes necessary to re-think the identification of the agent based on three accounts of holistic individualism (*intrinsic*, *extrinsic* and *status* account)[249], and to ask whether all these strategies can work also in the GLA and concerning individual agents. On the other hand, it implies considering both notions as systems constituted over time and through interaction with others. Assuming others as other agents/performative persons, it derives that both individual and group agents constitute themselves via the interaction with other agents, be them individual or plural. Hence, the constitution of the agent could be seen as a process of co-constitution, where individual agents participate in the formation of group agents and group agents are involved in identifying individual agents.[250]

[248] In this project, I have not considered approaches from critical realism on purpose. The reason for this is that the goal of the investigation was studying the perspective of a clear-cut debate, namely analytical Social Ontology, characterized by ontological individualism and holistic ambitions concerning either epistemology or methods. The investigation has focused on the premises of that debate and to consider an approach embracing different starting points would have been more comprehensive but also potentially misleading. Nonetheless, the connection is fruitful and deserves further consideration.

[249] See 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3.

[250] Regarding mutual relationships and constitution of agents, it might be interesting to consider Renault's processual Social Ontology, according to which « the idea of process denotes the fact that the mutual activity has the power to modify the properties of the elements as well as the form of relation that shapes this mutual activity», (Renault 2016, p.21).

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