

# CAN BRAINS IN VATS THINK AS A TEAM?

Hans Bernhard Schmid\*

University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

## *Abstract*

*The current debate on collective intentionality is marked by an individualistic bias. In almost all accounts, the intentionality of the participating individuals is, in one or another way, taken to be prior to (or even independent of) the actual existence of a collective. Collectivity is thus not admitted to – or driven out of – the basic conceptual level of collective intentionality.*

*It seems that the specter of the ‘group mind’ or ‘collective subject’ plays a crucial and fateful role in this. Fear of the ‘group mind’ is one important reason why philosophers of collective intentionality resort to individualism. It is argued here that these measures taken against the ‘group mind’ are as unnecessary as they are detrimental to our understanding of what it means to share an intention. Letting actual collectivity enter our picture of collective intentionality is not tantamount to ending up in a collectivist conception of some super-agent. Rather, the specter of the group mind arises from a deep-seated ‘Cartesian’ preconception concerning intentionality, which we should try to overcome.*

## *1. Collective Intentionality Without Collectivity*

On his way towards a “general theory”<sup>1</sup>, John R. Searle has recently ventured into what he likes to see as a new field: ‘Philosophy of Society’. In some of his papers surrounding his *Construction of Social Reality*, Searle envisages this discipline to be centered on how the individual and society relate to each other.<sup>2</sup> Of course, this is hardly a new question. It has been the topic of many a philosophical debate and controversy at least since it became common practice to refer to single human beings as ‘individuals’. It seems that in the second half of the last century, one specific view of the basic structure of this relation has risen to predominance: Individualism. In much of social science, it is now generally held that explanations of social phenomena have ultimately to be given in terms of individual actions.<sup>3</sup>

---

\* A revised version of this paper appeared in *Philosophical Explorations* 6/3 (2003), p. 201-218. I am greatly indebted to Raimo Tuomela for his comments. Also, I wish to thank Michael Bratman, Fabienne Peter, Richard Raatzsch and Katrin Meyer.

In this ‘orthodox’ view, the social is nothing but an aggregate of individuals who decide over the alternatives they believe to be available to them in the light of whatever preferences they have. Thus the social is secondary as compared to the intentionality of the single individuals. It appears that we do not have to presuppose collectivity concepts such as ‘group’ or ‘community’ in order to analyze what it means for an individual to optimize his or her expected utility. Collectivity concepts enter orthodox explanations of social phenomena only insofar as they are either the direct *object of individual intentions*<sup>4</sup> or among the *unintended consequences of individual actions*.<sup>5</sup> In both cases, individual intentions and actions – and *not* collectives – are what social science is about. For in this view, the social does not reach down to the form and structure of intentionality and action itself.

By contrast to this individualistic account, some ‘heterodox’ strands persist in opposing this allegedly ‘atomistic’ picture of human agency and intentionality. Heterodox philosophers of society emphasize that in many respects, individual intentionality is more deeply imbued with sociality than the ‘orthodox’ view has it.<sup>6</sup> At first glance, it might appear that the heterodox view receives support from one of the most exciting recent developments in analytic philosophy of intentionality and action. The work of, among others, Raimo Tuomela, Margaret Gilbert, and Michael Bratman, together with John Searles’ own contributions, has substantially broadened our understanding of intentionality and action. After the traditional concentration on the individual intentionality of single agents, the focus of attention has now shifted to an analysis of what it means to intend and act *together*, a phenomenon which, by and large, had received only marginal notice in the earlier philosophy of intentionality and action.<sup>7</sup> It is by now a well-established fact that intentionality is not exclusively a matter of the personal beliefs, desires and expectations of individuals. What makes our intentionality and our actions *social* is not just that from time to time, we make each other the object of our individual intentions or expectations. Rather, intentionality is *in itself* something human beings can *share*.

Upon a closer look, however, it appears that heterodox philosophers of society should not put their hopes for support from the theory of collective intentionality up too high. The main protagonists of this movement do not seem to think that their novel approach to the structure of intentionality and action should open a new perspective on the basic structure of the relation between the social and the individual. By and large, the orthodox account is left intact. 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”.<sup>8</sup> It seems that in his account, the basic structure of we-intentionality does not *per se* presuppose collective

entities such as ‘groups’ or ‘communities’. For an individual to we-intend it is, following Tuomela, not necessary that other agents actually exist, much less that there is an actual we-group.<sup>9</sup> Margaret Gilbert, meanwhile, has repeatedly claimed to go “beyond individualism”<sup>10</sup>. Yet in her book *On Social Facts*, she explicitly bases her analysis on a concept of the individual that “does not require for its analysis a concept of a collectivity”.<sup>11</sup> The conceptual basis of her account of “joint commitment” consists of nothing but conditional personal commitments.<sup>12</sup> Michael Bratman, in turn, calls his own theory “reductive in spirit” because he takes shared intentionality to be analyzable “in terms of attitudes and actions of the individuals involved”.<sup>13</sup> Finally Searle not only hastens to declare that his account of collective intentionality is fully consistent with methodological individualism.<sup>14</sup> He also stresses the ontological primacy of what goes on in the individual mind over the existence of the group by pointing out that “ontologically speaking, collective intentionality gives rise to the collective, and not the other way around”.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout this debate, actual collectivity is, as it seems, held to be methodologically and ontologically secondary to the mental activity of the single individuals involved in collective intending. The actual existence of a we-group is seen as a more or less contingent by-product of the we-intentionality individuals have. From a heterodox point of view, this debate projects the image of an attempt to account for the structure of collective intentionality without letting any genuine collectivity enter the scene. “We-ness” is the topic, yet at the same time it is stressed that it is a feature of individuals – and not of an actual ‘we’. Annette Baier expresses the dissatisfaction heterodox philosophers of society might feel rather drastically when she takes the current debate on collective intentionality to prove that Descartes has thoroughly brainwashed us.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. *Who’s Afraid of the ‘Group Mind’?*

Before taking a closer look at this sweeping diagnosis, I would like to highlight a rather somber figure that is haunting this debate, and that seems to have played a crucial role in the formation of its individualistic setting. It is the specter of the *collective subject*, or *group mind*. Its importance in this debate seems to stem from a rather innocent-looking assumption. Where there is intentionality, it is said, there has to be somebody who ‘has’ it – the good old subject. Now if it is claimed that there is such a thing as *collective* intentionality, and that collective intentionality is to be distinguished from *individual* intentionality, the conclusion seems to force itself on us that it has to be not the single individuals, but the collectives

themselves that 'have it'. And for collectives to have intentions, some sort of a 'collective mind', some 'group mind' seems to be required, something hovering over and above the mind of the individuals involved. This apparent implication of the very concept of collective intentionality does not look very appealing. It is widely agreed that there is no mind over and above the minds of individuals. Might the question of whether or not (and if so, in what sense) collectives can act remain to some degree controversial, it seems obvious that it is unacceptable to treat collectives as 'subjects' of intentions and actions in the ordinary sense in which individuals are the bearers of their intentionality.<sup>17</sup> Even if the notion of the collective subject is stripped of its mentalistic content, it still does not quite appeal to us because it is vaguely associated with collectivistic<sup>18</sup> (or even totalitarian<sup>19</sup>) notions of the social. If the collective has intentionality, the individual seems to be no more than an organ, i.e. merely an instrument, which contradicts our idea of individual intentional autonomy.

Thus it seems quite understandable that the above-mentioned philosophers of collective intentionality set themselves the task to show that collective intentionality is possible without there being a group mind involved. The specter of the group mind (or collective subject) has to be exorcised, and one can identify two different ways in which this is done. The softer way – it might look more like psychotherapy than like hard-core exorcism – is chosen by Margaret Gilbert, Raimo Tuomela, and, perhaps, Robert Sugden. Some sort of collective subject is admitted to the theory, but it is domesticated as to be consistent with an otherwise thoroughly individualistic conceptual framework. Here, either some rather strong sense of 'membership' to a collective (Sugden<sup>20</sup>) or some softened and modernized version of the 'collective subject' itself (Gilbert<sup>21</sup>, Tuomela<sup>22</sup>) is made part of the theory. At the same time however, the collective subject is solidly founded in the intentional autonomy of individuals by reducing the collective subject either to sets of individual intentions<sup>23</sup> or to the reflective self-understanding of the single participating individuals as members of the team.<sup>24</sup> The tougher way of dealing with the specter of the group mind is simply to treat it as an abominable collectivist idea that has to be banished from the theory of collective intentionality straight away. On this line, the group mind is exorcised either by stating that all intentionality involved in collective intending is exclusively the intentionality in the minds of the participating individuals, or by making the somewhat different point that the intentionality individuals "have" when participating in collective intentionality is basically a form of their personal intentionality. These are the strategies chosen by Searle and Bratman, respectively. Looking from afar at how the group mind is dealt with it might appear that the theory of collective intentionality is caught in a dilemma, or rather, stuck in some kind of double-bind.

On the one hand, the aim is to break with individualism in the sense of the orthodox concentration on purely individual intentionality. On the other hand, individualism (in the broad sense of an emphasis on the role of the individual) seems to be the only effective means against the group mind. In a sense, the theory of collective intentionality both rejects and endorses individualism. How is this apparent tension handled? In further exploring this question, I shall concentrate on those choosing the hard line against the group mind.

Picking up Baier's remark concerning the 'Cartesian brainwash', I shall start with a short remark on Descartes. In his *meditationes*, Descartes contemplates his own mind in "lonely withdrawal"<sup>25</sup> from society. It is thus not surprising that Descartes comes up with a rather under-socialized account of the mind. Firstly, the mental comes exclusively in the form *ego cogito* – and not, as already Charles Horton Cooley would have liked to have it, in the form *nos cogitamus*.<sup>26</sup> Descartes' account is individualistic in that it restricts intentionality to the form "I intend", "I think". It does not seem to have crossed Descartes' mind that there could be intentionality in the first person *plural* form, too. I shall refer to this version of individualism with the term *formal individualism*, for what is at stake here is the *form* of intentionality.<sup>27</sup> In a second and quite different sense of the term 'individualism', Descartes' account is individualistic in that it portrays the individual mind as a solitary place of representations. What the contemplating self has in mind is, following the view that was first articulated by Descartes, structurally independent of any relation to anything outside the individual mind. There is no telling whether a belief does or does not represent a real state of affairs just by reflecting on that belief qua mental state. Even the existence of some *genius malignus* who has the power of making me being mistaken in my beliefs could not thereby bring about the slightest structural change in my intentionality. "Being in a state with specific cognitive content does not essentially involve standing in any real relation to anything external".<sup>28</sup> In the current debate, this view usually goes under the label 'internalism', but since internalism is usually taken to include a non-cartesian account of the relation between the features of our physical brain and our mind, I shall use the term *subjective individualism* instead.<sup>29</sup> As opposed to formal individualism, subjective individualism does not limit intentionality to the singular *form*, but restricts the class of possible *subjects* or 'bearers' of intentions to single individuals.

What is the role of this distinction between two versions of 'Cartesian' individualism in the current debate? As mentioned, Bratman and Searle both reject individualism in breaking away from the orthodox standard model of intentionality and, at the same time, resort to

individualism when they see themselves confronted with the ugly face of the group mind. In this apparently paradoxical venture, the distinction between the two versions of individualism comes in handy: both Bratman and Searle choose to depart from one version of individualism in setting apart their respective concept of collective intentionality from the standard model and resort to the remaining version of individualism in order to banish the group mind. Interestingly, however, they do not seem to agree on which version of individualism to throw out and which one to keep. Bratman's conception of shared intentionality seems to go beyond subjective individualism in some respects and to hold on to formal individualism, whereas Searle makes the opposite move.

Bratman argues that what he calls "shared intention" or "group intention" is not anything single individuals can 'have', but an "interrelation"<sup>30</sup> or an "interlocking web"<sup>31</sup> of what goes on in the minds of individuals. Thus it seems that in this account, "shared intentionality" is not structurally independent of external relations, since apparently, we have to stand in actual relations for our intentionality to be shared. What makes our intentionality *shared* intentionality goes beyond the minds of single individuals. Thus Bratman seems to reject subjective individualism. At the same time, however, Bratman thinks it necessary to endorse formal individualism in order not to get stuck with the group mind. He hastens to say that the relations presupposed in shared intentions are not tantamount to some "fusion" of individual agents to a "superagent".<sup>32</sup> In this respect, Bratman stresses that his account is "reductive in spirit".<sup>33</sup> He rejects the idea that individuals literally *share* what they have in mind when intending together by emphasizing that the element of "we-ness" involved in what individuals intend when engaging in shared intentionality is reducible to a special form of I-intentionality: intentions of the form "I intend that we J" on the part of the individuals involved, together with 'mutual knowledge' of this intentionality and some 'matching relation' between what the individuals intend, make up shared intentionality.<sup>34</sup>

Significantly, it seems not to be the interrelationistic move beyond individualism that has been most criticized in the debate of Bratman's account, but his reduction of we-intentions to sets of I-intentions (i.e. the move Bratman makes to avert the group mind). The upshot of a long discussion<sup>35</sup> is that I have to take myself to be in a rather influential position within the we-group in order to form intentions that include the actions of others in the specific way intentions of the form "I intend that we J" do.<sup>36</sup> My own impression (which I cannot argue for at length here) is that this "influence-condition"<sup>37</sup> shows that Bratman's account presupposes what it tries to explain. If we intend to meet for lunch today, it does not seem necessary –

indeed it is redundant – for me to form an intention of the form “I intend that we meet for lunch today” (rather, I will typically form some *we-derivative*<sup>38</sup> or *participatory*<sup>39</sup> intention of the kind “I intend to call you before noon to arrange for a meeting place”). If and only if I take myself to be in a position to have a say in that matter, I might form an *additional* intention that specifies the content of our *we-intention*, and this additional intention might be of the form “I intend that we J” (e.g., “I intend that we go to the Japanese restaurant this time”). But intentions of this sort *presuppose* shared intentions instead of being their building blocks. It is only because *we intend J* that I can have intentions of the form “I intend that we J”. Thus it seems that Bratman’s “reductive” account of shared intentionality “in terms of attitudes and actions of the individuals involved”<sup>40</sup> simply fails to give an account of the crucial element of collectiveness that is presupposed in its very base.

In this respect, it seems to be Searle who gets things right. For Searle stoutly opposes formal individualism. In his view, collective intentionality is a “primitive phenomenon” which is not to be reduced to any set of individual “I intends” plus mutual knowledge.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Searle, too, sees himself confronted with the group mind, and he, too, resorts to individualism in order to banish it. Only that in his conception, it is subjective individualism that plays that latter role. Searle argues that methodological solipsism is the only way to navigate between the two unacceptable alternatives, i.e. the *Skylla* of reductive formal individualism on the one hand and the *Charybdis* of the group mind on the other (the latter Searle finds „a perfectly dreadful metaphysical excrescence“<sup>42</sup>). Thus he claims, in a modern version of Descartes’ *genius malignus*-argument, that our collective intentionality is entirely in the individual heads and structurally independent of anything beyond the mind of the single individuals.<sup>43</sup> Even a solitary brain in a vat that is somehow fed with stimulus or just lost in its dreams, and that is thus deluded about its real circumstances can have intentions of the form “we intend”. In Searle’s view, the “we intend” (that is not reducible to individual “I intends”) is something single individuals have in their minds, and it is structurally independent of whether or not these minds stand in actual relations to the world – or to each other, for that matter.

Many of Searle’s critics think that this is wrong<sup>44</sup> – with good reason, I think. Of course it is true that the actual nonexistence of a group or the inexistence of co-members does not necessarily prevent individuals from intending *as if* they were members of that group. Just imagine the case of a dream about being one of the dancers in the group on the first version of Henri Matisse’s ‘Dance’.<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that single individuals that do not stand in actual relations to others, or brains in vats for that matter, may well *take themselves* to be members of a team. The decisive question, however, is: should we take such intentionality to be

*collective intentionality* that just happens to be *mistaken* in some way, or shouldn't we rather say that this intentionality does not qualify as collective intentionality in the first place?

Searle seems to advocate the first alternative. In Searle's view, "the existence of collective intentionality does not imply the existence of collectives actually satisfying the content of that intentionality".<sup>46</sup> In some cases "my presupposition that my intentionality is collective may be mistaken."<sup>47</sup> Searle admits that the case of a solitary brain in a vat having we-intentions constitutes a mistake of a very special kind<sup>48</sup> "which violates the Cartesian assumption that we cannot be mistaken about our intentions".<sup>49</sup> But this "price to pay"<sup>50</sup> seems all the more moderate since in Searle's view, already in the case of individual intentionality the Cartesian idea about the transparency of our intentionality proves to be worthless. Contrary to what Descartes thought, we can be mistaken about our intentionality anyway<sup>51</sup> – why should this not be true for collective intentionality? In other words, the fact that there might be no actual collectivity involved in our collective intentionality boils down to just another way of how intentions can be mistaken – nothing that touches the very *structure of our intentionality* itself.

Together with Searle's critics, I would like to put forward a different view. It seems to me that by conceptually restricting collective intentionality to what is in individual minds, Searle misses a crucial element in the makeup of collective intentionality (which is the very element that Bratman emphasizes in his departure from solipsism and his move towards an interrelationalistic account of collective intentionality). For the sake of the argument, let us accept the *general* possibility of envatted brains<sup>52</sup> in order to take a closer look on Searle's claim that collective intentionality "could be had by a brain in a vat or by a set of brains in vats".<sup>53</sup> Imagine Ann and Beth visiting the Museum of Modern Art together; they happen to be the only visitors at the time. On the first floor, they get lost in the sight of the first version of Henri Matisse's 'Dance'. Now an evil scientist creeps up behind them, and while Beth runs away screaming for help, he anesthetizes Ann for a minute, puts her brain in a vat and connects it to a computer that provides it with the appropriate input so that Ann has the impression of simply continuing to contemplate Matisse's 'Dance' together with Beth, just as if nothing had happened. Now it seems that in her vat, Ann still has intentionality that conforms to Searle's concept of collective intentionality. All the intentionality Ann has in her mind seems to remain unchanged in subject, intentional mode, and content. It is still Ann's intentionality, and she still intends to contemplate Matisse's 'Dance' together with Beth (or, for that matter: she still intends her contemplating Matisse's 'Dance' as her 'we-derivative' individual contribution to her and Beth's shared intentional activity). Thus Ann may still have

intentionality that is collective in *form* and that has ‘collectivity’ or ‘sharedness’ in its *content*. However, it is clear from the semantics of the verb “to share” alone that in her vat, whatever she might *believe* to intend, Ann does not *in fact* share the intention to contemplate Matisse’s ‘Dance’ together with Beth any more. It is obvious (and trivially true) that the sharedness of intentionality is not a matter of the form or content of one single individual’s intentionality alone. The question that turns out to be non-trivial is: what is it that has to be added to the picture for there to be proper shared intentionality?

In spite of its importance to the theory of collective intentionality, Searle seems to be strangely disinterested in this question.<sup>54</sup> It seems clear however, that within his internalist framework, the following answer imposes itself: When Ann and Beth were in fact *sharing* their intention to contemplate Matisse’s dance together, they *both* (we-)intended to contemplate Matisse’s dance (or to contemplate Matisse’s ‘Dance’ individually as their contribution to their shared intentional activity). After the evil scientist’s intervention, however, *only Ann* (we-)intends to contemplate Matisse’s ‘Dance’ together with Beth. Beth, on her part, has no such intentionality any more, for she now intends to do something quite different, i.e. to run to the information desk of the Museum of Modern Art as quickly as she can to call for help. Thus it might seem that the answer to the question of what the intentionality Ann has in her vat lacks in order to qualify as *shared* intentionality can be found in Beth’s head. In order for (we-) intentionality to be shared, *all* participants have to have the appropriate (we-)intentions, which is not the case anymore in the given situation.

This answer, however, is deficient. Imagine the story of Ann, Beth, and the evil scientist to continue as follows. After the evil scientist has finished his business with Ann, he goes after Beth. On the ground floor, halfway to the exit, he catches up with her, anesthetizes her and puts her brain in a separate vat, connecting it to a second computer. Beth forgets all that has happened since the evil scientist appeared on the scene, and she is provided with the appropriate input so that the intentionality she has is “We contemplate Matisse’s ‘Dance’” or “I contemplate Matisse’s ‘Dance’ as my part of our contemplating”. Now let us get back to Ann, who is still in her vat on the upper floor. In accordance with the internalist view of the sharedness of intentionality, Ann’s intentionality has become *shared intentionality* again in the very moment when the evil scientist switched on Beth’s computer. For now, just like before the evil scientist’s intervention, *both* Ann and Beth have intentionality of the form “we are contemplating Matisse’s ‘Dance’ together” or “I am contemplating Matisse’s ‘Dance’ as my part of our shared contemplating”. This conclusion is implausible; intentionality does not become shared intentionality just because completely independently of each other, two brains

just happen to have appropriately ‘matching’ illusions. If shared intentionality is not a matter of an individual mind *alone*, it is not a matter of what goes on in *different* minds either. In order to find out about the sharedness of Ann’s and Beth’s intentionality, it is not enough to check only what is in the minds of the two individuals. As Anthonie W. M. Meijers has pointed out most forcefully, sharedness is a matter of the *relations* between minds, it is something that “transcend[s] the boundaries of [...] the ‘brain in a vat’”.<sup>55</sup>

What *kind* of relation is required for intentionality to be shared? What sort of ‘connection’ do we have to add to the Searlean picture of isolated minds for there to be proper sharedness? I cannot aspire to giving a straightforward answer here, but restrict myself to contrasting my ideas with Meijers’s, whose critical discussion of Searle’s account of collective intentionality I believe to be the most important one in the existing literature.

Meijers opposes Searle’s theory of collective intentionality in at least two ways. Firstly he argues that Searle’s internalism has to be given up in favor of a relational account. Secondly, Meijers criticizes Searle’s view that collective intentionality does not involve social normativity such as commitments, obligations, and entitlements.<sup>56</sup> On this line, Meijers argues that we have to give up Searle’s *cognitivism* in favor of a *normativist* stance.<sup>57</sup> It seems that in Meijers’s view, these two moves are internally connected, so that the “radical relational approach” to collective intentionality he advocates *has* to be a normativist one. “Cognitive attitudes are not sufficient to explain the *sharing* of intentionality. Normative attitudes have to be part of the analysis.” In his view, collective intentionality “arises [...] out of the act of agreeing”<sup>58</sup>, and it is within an analysis of this aspect of collective intentionality that we have to go beyond Searle’s internalism and move towards a relational account.<sup>59</sup> Applying this view to the above example, it is essential for the very sharedness of Ann and Beth’s intention to contemplate Matisse’s ‘Dance’ together that there is some kind of (implicit) *agreement* between them, some shared *commitment* to do so, which to some degree *obliges* Ann and Beth to do their part and at the same time *entitles* both of them to rebuke the other if she does not perform her part.<sup>60</sup> Meijers argues that Searle’s internalist theory of collective intentionality cannot account for these normative aspects. It seems clear that in her vat, Ann still might *believe* there to be an (implicit) agreement between herself and Beth to contemplate the paintings on the exhibit together; however, as Meijers points out, there is a difference between *agreeing* and *seeming to agree*,<sup>61</sup> and it is this difference the Searlean approach to collective intentionality cannot account for because of its internalist limitations. Just looking at what goes on in the individual mind of Ann there is no telling whether she is in

an *actual* agreement with Beth or just *believes* to be in an agreement. In the latter case, however, there is no agreement and thus no shared intentionality between Ann and Beth. I believe that this argument is sound in itself, but I do not see why the difference it hinges on – the difference between “x” and “seeming to x” – should be specific to the normative aspects or forms of shared intentionality. It seems to me that the same point can be made within a purely cognitivist view. Just imagine Ann and Beth to be dyed-in-the-wool Searleans. For them, their visit to the museum does not involve any kind of commitment, obligation, or entitlement whatsoever. However strange this might seem, it happens to conform to their usual practice that any of them may walk away from the common enterprise at any time, without owing the other an explanation. There is no agreement whatsoever between them; they are both just regular visitors to the museum on Sunday afternoons who over the time have come to see their individual visit to the museum as a part of a common enterprise. The first to come usually waits at the entrance for the other; if, as it sometimes happens, the other does not show up, she does not feel that the missing party has wronged her. At the face of it at least, the intentionality involved is thus strictly limited to cognitive aspects. Even though there are no agreements, entitlements and obligations around, it still makes a difference if Ann just *believes to share* the intention to visit the museum together or if she *actually shares* this intention. If Searle cannot account for the normative aspects of shared intentionality within his internalist framework, he cannot account for the purely cognitive aspects either.<sup>62</sup> Thus it does not seem necessary to connect the two issues Meijers raises against Searle. One does not *have* to take a normativist stance on collective intentionality in order to follow Meijers’s advice to give up Searle’s internalism in favor of a “radical relational approach”.<sup>63</sup>

### *3. Beyond the ‘Cartesian Brainwash’: Towards a Non-Reductive and Relational Account of Collective Intentionality*

The comparison between Bratman’s and Searle’s account reveals complementary strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, Searle is right in renouncing formal individualism which seems to be the weakness of Bratman’s account. Shared intentionality is not reducible to sets of I-intentions, because the I-intentions individuals *have* when taking part in a shared activity presuppose shared intentionality. On the other hand, Bratman is right in departing from subjective individualism. In conformity with his account (and contrary to what seems to be a consequence of Searle’s approach), it is only *in relations* that individuals share intentions. Thus it seems that Bratman and Searle, in their respective departures from the Cartesian

model of intentionality, both get stuck half-way in that they let go only one version of individualism while holding on to the other. An adequate account of collective intentionality, however, has to depart from the Cartesian individualistic picture of intentionality not just in renouncing *either* formal *or* subjective individualism. It has to be *both* non-reductive *and* relational.

By way of giving a rough outline of my ideas of such an account, I should like to propose two tentative theses, concerning the relational (1) and irreducible (2) character of shared intentionality, respectively.

1) *Social normativity arises out of shared intentionality (and not the other way around).*

Agreement-based accounts of shared intentionality are begging the question because any sort of agreement *presupposes* shared intentionality. The act of agreeing itself is a move *within* a shared intentional activity (whereas not every kind of shared intentional activity includes an agreement). Shared intentions which are based on agreements exist; these are shared intentions of a special (and especially complex) kind. Therefore, it seems that they should not be chosen as the ‘paradigm case’ of an analysis of shared intentionality. Thus I agree with Searle (as well as with Raimo and Maj Tuomela<sup>64</sup>) that collective intentions do not *by themselves* involve social normativity such as obligations and entitlements. At the same time, however, I find the Searlean picture of completely normativity-free collective intentional activities (such as the one depicted above) rather askew. If the sharedness of intentionality is not necessarily *in itself* socially normative, it has *socially normative consequences*. As was pointed out repeatedly in sociological theory, proper social norms arise out of merely habitual social practices such as customs.<sup>65</sup> It seems to be almost inconceivable to engage in shared intentional activities over an extended period of time without our *cognitive* expectations concerning the actions of others gradually turning into *normative* expectations. I conjecture that these socially normative *consequences* of shared intentions stem from a pre-socially normative (or, in Tuomela’s words, from an “instrumentally ‘normative’”) *implication* of any kind of shared intention: To the individuals involved, a shared intention provides a *reason* to form an appropriate personal intention (i.e. the intention to perform one’s part). In a pre-socially normative sense, I *ought* to do my part in what we intend. This *normative* rapport between shared intention and individual we-intention, however, does not exclude the possibility of overriding contrary reasons or simple weakness of will. Thus it seems possible that *we intend x* without me *intending to do my individual part* (even without me having a pro-attitude towards our shared aim). If this perspective on the relation between shared intentions and personal ‘contributive intentions’ is correct, it has far-reaching consequences:

the analysis of shared intentionality cannot be based on an analysis of what individuals personally intend when sharing an intention, but the analysis of what individuals intend when taking part in a shared intentional activity has to be based on an analysis of the structure of shared intentionality.<sup>66</sup> Or, to use Husserl's concept of *foundation*<sup>67</sup>:

2) *Shared intentionality is the foundation of individual (we-)intentionality (and not the other way around).*

Gerda Walther, thinking on shared intentionality in the early 20ies of the last century, and struggling against her own individualistic preconceptions which she had taken over from Husserlian Phenomenology, used a striking metaphor for what seems to be at stake in the move towards a non-reductive and relational account: a “Copernican Turn”<sup>68</sup> from an analysis of sharedness that is derived from an analysis of the intentionality of the participating individuals to an understanding of the intentionality of the participating individuals that is based on a solid concept of sharedness. But how should this be possible without just replacing the individual with the collective as the source and bearer of intentionality? As seen above, fear of the group mind plays an important role in driving some of the most important accounts of shared intentionality back into the seemingly safe harbor of individualism. Thus it seems important to address the question: is this fear justified? Will an account that neither embraces formal individualism nor subjective individualism end up getting stuck with the group mind? I believe that any such reservations against a non-reductive and relational account of collective intentionality are mistaken. As seen, the whole trouble with the group mind arises from the attempt to give some acceptable answer to the question: who is it that *has* collective intentions? And this question, innocent as it might look, is heavily loaded with historical ballast that we should, I think, simply jettison and leave behind.

Only in the last decades, we have successfully managed to get rid of Descartes' quest for absolute certainty in philosophy.<sup>69</sup> However, the Cartesian preoccupation with the “subject” still persists. It is still a deeply rooted idea that where there is intentionality, there has to be one somebody who “has” it as its owner, source or bearer.<sup>70</sup> It is the fact that most philosophers of collective intentionality hold on to this assumption that gives rise to the fear that by moving too far away from individualism, we are running the risk of getting stuck with the group mind. Yet there is a simple way out of the individualistic dilemma: it consists in overcoming the “Cartesian Brainwash” by stopping to address to the “who has it”-question. Collective intentions are not intentions of the kind anybody *has* – not single individuals, and not some super-agent. For collective intentionality is not subjective. It is relational.

In conclusion, I should like to get back to the initial ontological question concerning the relation between the individual and society. I think that with the illusion of the group mind the urge to drive actual collectivity out of the concept of collective intentionality vanishes, too. A theory of collective intentionality that is both non-reductive *and* relational does not require any logical or ontological primacy of the aims, attitudes and emotions of the individuals over the actual existence of the group. This does not mean, however, that conversely, it requires a logical or ontological primacy of the group over the individuals. Searle seems to think that we have to make our choice between these two versions of Philosophy of Society: either we put the we-intentionality of individuals or the collective itself first (qua “ontological primitive”<sup>71</sup> that somehow precedes our we-intending). His choice is the first alternative: “Collective intentionality gives rise to the collective and not the other way around”<sup>72</sup>. It seems to me that conceived of like this, the whole question about the relation between the individual and society is wrongly put. It implies what I should like to contest: that collective intentionality and actual collectivity are two different things. Only the fact that in the current debate, collectivity was driven out of the concept of collective intentionality in the first place gives rise to the question about how one is related to the other. If collective intentionality is not subjective, but relational, there is no need to postulate any ontological order of hierarchy between the analysis of collective intentionality and the ontology of groups. Because in a relational sense, collective intentionality is what the ontology of groups is all about.

What is the bearing of this result to Philosophy of Society? It seems that overcoming the ‘Cartesian Brainwash’ means to break away from the individualistic approach to Philosophy of Society and to move towards a more heterodox view. In the light of a post-Cartesian concept of collective intentionality, it appears that the orthodox slogan that “there is no society, only individuals who interact with each other”<sup>73</sup> is not outright wrong, but simply meaningless. Most forms of interaction involve collective intentionality, and collective intentionality is what society in the most basic meaning of the word *is*.

## References

- Baier, Annette C. (1971), “Act and Intent“, *Journal of Philosophy* **67**, pp. 648-658.
- Baier, Annette C. (1997), “Doing Things With Others: The Mental Commons”, in *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics*, L. Alanen, S. Heinämaa, T. Wallgren, (eds.), London, 15-44.

- Bratman, Michael E. (1999), *Faces of Intention. Selected Essays on Intention and Agency*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Celano, Bruno (1999), "Collective Intentionality, Self-Referentiality, and False Beliefs: Some Issues Concerning Institutional Facts", *Analyse und Kritik* **21**, 237-250.
- Cooley, Charles Horton ([1902/1905] 1956), *Social Organization/Human Nature and the Social Order*, Glencoe, Ill.
- Dennett, Daniel C. (1991), *Consciousness explained*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. (1993), "Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality", *Social Research* **60**, 17-38.
- Durkheim, Emile ([1898] 1994), "On Social Facts", in *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*. M. Martin, L. McIntyre, (eds.), Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 433-440.
- Elster, Jon (1989), *The Cement of Society. A Study of Social Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geiger, Theodor (1987), *Vorstudien zu einer Soziologie des Rechts*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot.
- Gilbert, Margaret (1989), *On Social Facts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gilbert, Margaret (1996), *Living Together: Rationality, Sociality, and Obligation*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Gilbert, Margaret (2000), *Sociality and Responsibility, New Essays in Plural Subject Theory*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Gilbert, Margaret (2002), "Acting together", in *Social Facts and Collective Intentionality* G. Meggle (ed.): Frankfurt am Main: Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 53-71.
- Hartshorne, Charles (1942), "Elements of Truth in the Group-Mind Concept", *Social Research* **9**, 248-265.
- Heidegger, Martin ([1928/29] 1996), *Einleitung in die Philosophie, Gesamtausgabe vol. 27*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- Hindriks, Frank (2002), "Social Ontology, Collective Intentionality, and Ockhamian Skepticism", in *Social Facts and Collective Intentionality*, G. Meggle (ed.), Frankfurt am Main: Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 125-149.
- Hornsby, Jennifer (1997), "Collectives and Intentionality", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **57**, 429-434.

- Johansson, Ingvar (2003), "Searle's Monadological Construction of Social Reality", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* **62**, 233-255.
- Kutz, Christopher (2000), "Acting Together", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **61**, 1-31.
- Mathiesen, Kay (2002), "Searle, Collective Intentions, and Individualism", in *Social Facts and Collective Intentionality*, G. Meggle (ed.), Frankfurt am Main: Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 185-204.
- Meijers, Anthonie W. M. (1994), *Speech Acts, Communication, and Collective Intentionality. Beyond Searle's Individualism*. Utrecht.
- Meijers, Anthonie W. M. (2002), "Dialogue, Understanding and Collective Intentionality", in *Social Facts and Collective Intentionality*, G. Meggle (ed.), Frankfurt am Main: Hänsel-Hohenhausen, 225-254.
- Meijers, Anthonie W. M. (2003), "Can Collective Intentionality be Individualized?", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* **62**, 167-183.
- Popper, Karl-Raimund (1962), *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, Hilary (1981), *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rota, Gian-Carlo (1989), „'Fundierung' as a Logical Concept“, *The Monist* **72**, 70–77.
- Sandel, Michael J. (1982), *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul ([1943] 1991), *L'être et le néant, Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Schmid, Hans Bernhard (2000), *Subjekt, System, Diskurs, Edmund Husserls Begriff transzendentaler Subjektivität in sozialtheoretischen Bezügen* (Phaenomenologica vol. 158), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Schmid, Hans Bernhard (2003), "Rationality-in-Relations", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* **62**, 67-101.
- Searle, John R. (1990), "Collective Intentions and Actions", in *Intentions in Communication*, P. Cohen, M. Morgan, M. Pollack (eds.), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 401-415.
- Searle, John R (1997a), "Replies to Critics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **57**, 449-451.

- Searle, John R. (1997b), "Replies to Critics of the Construction of Social Reality", *History of the Human Sciences* **10**, 103-110.
- Searle, John R. (1998a), *Mind, Language and Society, Philosophy in the Real World*, New York: Basic Books.
- Searle, John R. (1998b), "Social Ontology and the Philosophy of Society", *Analyse und Kritik* **20**, 143-158.
- Searle, John R. (2001a), *Rationality in Action*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Searle, John R. (2001b), "Meaning, Mind and Reality", *Revue internationale de philosophie* **55**, 173-179.
- Segal, Gabriel M. A. (2000), *A Slim Book about Narrow Content*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.
- Sellars, Wilfrid (1980), "On Reasoning About Values", *American Philosophical Quarterly* **17**, 81-101.
- Stein, Edith (1922), *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, vol. V, E. Husserl (ed.), Halle: Niemeyer, 1-283.
- Stoutland, Frederick (1997), "Why are Philosophers of Action so Anti-Social?", in: *Commonality and Particularity in Ethics*, L. Alanen, S. Heinämaa, T. Wallgren, T. (eds.), London, 45-74.
- Stoutland, Frederick (2002), Review of Bratman, Faces of Intention, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **65**, 238-241.
- Sugden, Robert (1993), "Thinking as a Team", *Social Philosophy and Policy* **10**, 69-89.
- Sugden, Robert (2000), "Team Preferences", *Economics and Philosophy* **16**, 175-204.
- Tuomela, Raimo (1991), "We Will Do It: An Analysis of Group-Intentions", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **51**, 249-277.
- Tuomela, Raimo (1995), *The Importance of Us, A Philosophical Study of Basic Social Notions*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Tuomela, Raimo (2003), *We-Intentions* (unpubl. manuscr.).
- Tuomela, Raimo/Tuomela, Maj (forthcoming), Acting as a Groupmember, *Protosociology* **18**.
- Turner, Stephen P. (1999), "Searle's Social Reality" *History and Theory* **38**, 216-228.
- Velleman, J. David (1997), "How to Share an Intention", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **57**, 29-51.

Waldenfels, Bernhard (1996), "Sozialontologie auf sozialbiologischer Basis", *Philosophische Rundschau* **45**, 97-112.

Walther, Gerda (1923), "Zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften", in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, vol. VI, E. Husserl (ed.), Halle: Niemeyer, 1-158.

Weber, Max ([1921] 1985), *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck.

---

<sup>1</sup> Searle (1998a), p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Searle (1997b), p. 103; see also Searle (1998b), p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Popper (1962), p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> For a classical expression of this view see Weber ([1921] 1985), p. 7. For Weber, collectivities can be 'real' only in the sense that they are *believed to be real* by the individuals.

<sup>5</sup> For this view see Elster (1989).

<sup>6</sup> The most commonly known 'heterodox' strand in social ontology is Communitarianism; cf. Sandel (1982).

<sup>7</sup> Early exceptions to the rule can be found in Phenomenological Philosophy (see, e.g., Walther (1923); for a more "holistic" view see Stein (1922), pp. 116-267; Heidegger ([1928/29] 1996), pp. 83ff.; Sartre ([1943] 1991), p. 464ff.).

<sup>8</sup> Tuomela, (1995), p. 199.

<sup>9</sup> Tuomela (1991), p. 254. See also Hindriks (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert (2000), p. 3

<sup>11</sup> Gilbert (1989), p. 435f.

<sup>12</sup> See Gilbert (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Searle (1990), p. 406.

<sup>15</sup> Searle (1997a), p. 449.

<sup>16</sup> Baier (1997), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Edmund Husserl's theory of "higher order-persons" gives an illustrative example of the difficulties that any attempt to apply the model of the individual subject to collectives will face (cf. Schmid (2000), pp. 17-27).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Emile Durkheim's concept of the "collective consciousness" ([1898] 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hartshorne (1942).

<sup>20</sup> Sugden favors a concept of membership "in something like the old sense in which arms and legs are members of the body" (1993, p. 86). This reminds of the Aristotelian view of the relation between society and the single human beings (see Aristoteles, *Politics* 1253a), a view that – at least at first glance – appears to be inconsistent with our modern view of the single human beings as *individuals*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gilbert's concept of the "plural subject" (1989).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Tuomela (1995), p. 231.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Tuomela (1995).

<sup>24</sup> See Gilbert's "Simmelian" account in Gilbert 1989, chap. 4. In Sugden's view, "a team exists to the extent that its members take themselves to be members of it"; Sugden (2000), p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Descartes, René: *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, 1st Meditation, §3.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Cooley ([1902/05] 1956), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> There are other terms in use for this kind of individualism. Kay Mathiesen (2002) proposes the term "phenomenological individualism" as opposed to ontological individualism.

<sup>28</sup> Segal (2000), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Another term that is in use for this view is „methodological solipsism“ (see Searle 1990). In the given context, I find this term misleading, for the question at stake here is clearly not simply a question concerning methodology, but an *ontological* question concerning the subject or bearer of intentionality.

<sup>30</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 114.

<sup>31</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 111; see also *ibid.* p. 122f.

<sup>33</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Bratman's conceptual analysis in Bratman (1999), p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> See Baier (1997); Stoutland (1997, 2002); Velleman (1997); Bratman (1999), pp. 149-156; Kutz (2000).

<sup>36</sup> At first glance, it might appear that intentions of the form „I intend that we J“ are simply impossible. It is widely recognized that one cannot intend what one believes oneself to be incapable to do (cf. Baier (1971), p. 658), and it seems clear that one cannot perform the actions of others (even though one can, of course, act on their behalf). Thus it seems to be impossible to include the actions of others in one's own intentions in the way it would be required in order to form intentions of the form „I intend that we J“. Upon closer consideration, however, it seems that in these cases, one does not have to intend the actions of others in a straightforward sense, but that one simply has to take one's own intending to be of so much *influence* on the other participants as to bring about their respective intention to perform their part (Bratman 1999, p. 116).

<sup>37</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 116.

<sup>38</sup> Sellars (1980), p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Kutz (2000).

<sup>40</sup> Bratman (1999), p. 108.

<sup>41</sup> As far as I can see, Searle puts forward two arguments against reductionism, the first (and probably the more important) one being that common knowledge does not amount to the "sense of collectivity" involved in collective intending (1990), the other being that our mind is too limited for infinite iterations of knowledge such as implied in the "common knowledge"-approach: "I think my poor brain will not carry that many beliefs"; Searle (1998b), p. 15).

<sup>42</sup> Searle (1998b), p. 150; see also Searle (1990), p. 404; Searle (1998a), p. 118.

<sup>43</sup> "Anything we say about collective intentionality must meet the following conditions of adequacy:

*Constraint 1*

---

It must be consistent with the fact that society consists of nothing but individuals. Since society consists entirely of individuals, there cannot be a group mind or group consciousness. All consciousness is in individual minds, in individual brains.

*Constraint 2*

It 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"; Searle (1990), p. 406f..

<sup>44</sup> Most forcefully, Anthonie W. M. Meijers has argued against the endorsement of methodological solipsism in the theory of collective intentionality; cf. Meijers (1994, 2002, 2003). See also Johansson (2003); Hornsby (1997); Waldenfels (1996); Celano (1999), esp. p. 239ff.; Turner (1999), p. 216 (Fn. 20).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the reproduction on the cover of Searle's "Construction of Social Reality".

<sup>46</sup> Searle (1997a), p. 450.

<sup>47</sup> Searle (1990), p. 407.

<sup>48</sup> What is in question here "is not simply a failure to achieve the conditions of satisfaction of an intentional state and is not simply a breakdown in the background"; cf. Searle (1990), p. 407.

<sup>49</sup> Searle (1998b), p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> Searle (1998b), p. 150.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Searle (1998a), p. 69ff. Here, Searle distinguishes four ways in which we can be mistaken about our consciousness in general and our intentions in specific, among these self-deception (e.g. in the case of suppression of our dark sides) and misinterpretation (as in the case of somebody who takes his temporary infatuation to be real love).

<sup>52</sup> The possibility of 'envatted brains' is highly controversial (I wish to thank Raimo Tuomela for pointing this out). Putnam (1981) argues that it can be ruled out a priori; Dennett (1991) argues that the computational performance required in order to provide the 'envatted brain' with the appropriate input would be "computationally intractable on even the fastest computer". The question to be addressed here, however, is not whether or not 'envatted brains' are possible at all, but whether or not those brains, *if they were possible*, could be said to share intentions.

<sup>53</sup> Searle (1990), p. 407.

<sup>54</sup> See Bratman (1999), p. 116; 145.

<sup>55</sup> Meijers (1994), p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> In Searle's view, any such normative phenomena come into play only with the use of language, which is logically posterior to collective intentionality (see Searle [2001a], chaps. 5 and 6).

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed normativist account of shared intentionality see Gilbert (1996).

<sup>58</sup> Meijers (1994), p. 89; cf. *ibid.* p. 104ff.; 143.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Meijers (2003), p. 176; 167.

<sup>60</sup> For a normativist account of shared intentionality see Gilbert (1996).

<sup>61</sup> Meijers (2003), p. 179.

---

<sup>62</sup> Indeed it seems that there is a great deal of purely cognitive components involved in shared intentionality. Take the case of Anne and Beth in their respective vats. What sort of connection has to be installed between them in order for them to share intentions? It seems that a great deal of delusion is compatible with shared intentionality, indeed there is even a sense in which the two brains in vats might said to be share their intentions, if their respective sources of input are appropriately connected (so as to make Anne believe that Beth does what Beth believes she does, and conversely). “The Matrix” provides a vivid illustration of shared cooperative activity by appropriately interconnected “brains in vats”.

<sup>63</sup> Meijers (2003), p. 167.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Tuomela/Tuomela (forthcoming).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Geiger (1987).

<sup>66</sup> See Tuomela (2003).

<sup>67</sup> For a logical analysis of Husserl’s concept of *foundation* see Rota (1989).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Walther (1923), p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> Even Searle, who is by some accused of sticking to the Cartesian “epistemological” paradigm in philosophy (cf., e.g., Dreyfus 1993), says explicitly that he is not “a part of the Cartesian tradition of trying to overcome skepticism and provide a secure foundation for knowledge”; Searle (2001b), p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> The preoccupation with the subject or “bearer” of intentionality seems to stem from what is perhaps Descartes’ most durable insight. I myself have a privileged position among all the things I might be acquainted with. However deluded I am about the world – and, we can add, about my intentions – there seems to be something incorrigible or infallible involved in my self-awareness. Even if I live in complete delusion in all my beliefs, there is still something that I simply cannot get wrong: it is in fact *myself* whom I am aware of if reflecting on my beliefs and desires. Even if some madness has me in its tightest grip, misleading me into thinking that I am Henri Matisse, it is still infallibly *me myself* whom I take to be Henri Matisse – it is not, for example, the actual Henri Matisse whom I take to be Henri Matisse. This insight seems to be at the base of Descartes’ claim that what is really certain and indubitable about my thinking is the subject, the bearer of intentionality, i.e. the thinking “I”. Now it seems obvious that however right this might be concerning the “I” of individual intentions, it does not apply to the “we” of collective intentions, for I might easily mistaken in any collective belief or intention.

<sup>71</sup> Searle (1997a), p. 449.

<sup>72</sup> Searle (1997a), p. 449.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Elster (1989), p. 259.