

Collective Intentionality and Individual Action

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Abstract

People often do things together and form groups in order to get things done that they cannot do alone. In short they form a collectivity of some kind or a group, for short. But if we consider a group on the one hand and the persons that constitute the group on the other hand, how does it happen that these persons work together and finish a common task with a common goal? In the philosophy of action this problem is often solved by saying that there is a kind of collective intention that the group members have in mind and that guides their actions. Does such a collective intention really exist? In this article I'll show that the answer is "no". In order to substantiate my view I'll discuss the approaches of Bratman, Gilbert and Searle on collective intention. I'll put forward four kinds of criticism that undermine the idea of collective intention. They apply mainly to Bratman and Gilbert. First, it is basically difficult to mark off smaller groups from bigger unities. Second, most groups change in membership composition over time. Third, as a rule, on the one hand groups are internally structured and on the other hand they belong to a larger structure. It makes that generally it cannot be a collective intention that moves the actions of the members of a group. Fourth, conversely, most individual actions cannot be performed without the existence of a wider context of agents who support these actions and make them possible.

My critique on Searle mainly involves that in his approach his idea of collective intention is superfluous and that he is not radical enough in his idea that collective action is based on coordinated individual intentions and actions. However, it is a good starting point for showing how collective action actually functions, especially when combined with Giddens's structuration theory. Every agent in a group executes his or her own individual intentions, relying on what the group offers to this agent and asks from him or her. In this way individual actions of the members of a group are coordinated and it makes that the group can function and that its goals can be performed. And in this way the group is produced and reproduced by fitting individual actions together. An individual agent who belongs to a group only needs to know what s/he wants and what s/he has to do in the group, even if s/he has no knowledge of the intentions and commitments of the other members. Then he or she can do things together with others in a group without supposing that there is something like a collective intention.

Keywords:

collective intention, collective intentionality, collective action, we-intention, shared agency, shared action, joint action, joint commitment, joint intention, group intention, individual action, action, structuration, structuration theory, Bratman, Gilbert, Searle, Giddens.

0. Introduction

People often do things together. They cooperate in order to perform a common task or to get things done that they cannot do alone. And once the task has been finished, they often say "We have done it", in which "it" refers to the common goal. So far so good, and all this seems obvious. However, at a closer look things appear to be not so simple as they seemed at first. A bundle of people working together on a common goal is usually seen as a group or as another kind of collectivity, like a team, a company, a class, or how we want to call it. But if we take a group – a term that I'll often use in this article in order to indicate any collectivity – on the one hand and the persons that constitute the group on the other hand, how does it happen then that these persons work together and finish a common task with a common goal? In the philosophy of action this problem is often solved by saying that there is a kind of collective intention (Searle, 1990), shared intention (Bratman, 1990a), joint commitment (Gilbert, 1993) or something like that.¹ It is then by means of such a collective intentionality that the behaviour of the group and the individual actions of its members – or collectivity etc. – are explained.

¹ Like group intention (Chant and Ernst, 2005); we-intention (Tuomela, 2007); or joint intention (List and Pettit 2013).

The number of contributions to this rather new branch of the philosophy of action is gradually increasing.² Although each of them presents an interesting and valuable contribution to the debate on the explanation of group behaviour from the analytical perspective and especially from the intentional stand, I think that most of them contain some basic flaws. It's my aim to discuss here some of these flaws and to give my view on the issue, which I have developed in line with the structuration theory that has been developed by Anthony Giddens. For this purpose I want to analyze the views of three of the most influential authors in the field: Michael E. Bratman, Margaret Gilbert and John R. Searle. Each of them represents a different standpoint. Actually I wanted to discuss also Raimo Tuomela's contribution to the debate, but in the end I decided to refrain from it, since it would have made this paper too comprehensive and probably it would not lead to the addition of substantial new insights.

In this article, often I'll be a bit careless in the specification of my terms and wordings where it is clear what I mean and where a specification does not add to the understanding of what I want to say and only expands the text and makes it less readable. Above I said already that "group" can mean any other collectivity; of course only then when it is not relevant to be more precise and when it is not confusing in the context. Also often I'll write simply "intention" or "action" instead of "intention and the action that follows from it" or "action and the intention on which it is based". Of course, also in this case I'll do it only when it is clear from the context that I mean one of the longer phrases.

I'll start in section 1 with an overview of the relevant points of the approaches by Bratman and Gilbert on the issue of collective intentionality. Then in section 2 I'll present four points of critique on these approaches. Taking these four points of critique as a guide, in section 3 I'll discuss Searle's view. In section 4 I'll provide my alternative, which is mainly based on Giddens's structuration theory, as said. The paper ends in section 5 with a kind of short evaluation and a personal remark.

1. Bratman's shared intention and Gilbert's joint commitment

1.1 I want to paint my house, but it is too much work for me to do it alone. Happily, a friend³ wants to help me. So together we paint my house. It's not just that we are painting each of us on his own, but we coordinate our painting. My friend scrapes the old paint, and I paint what he has scraped. He buys the brushes and I buy the paint. We check what the other has promised to do; and so on. If this is the case, so Michael E. Bratman, we have a shared intention, namely in the sense that each participating agent has the appropriate attitude and that these attitudes and the way they are put into practice are interrelated. We can compare this with the way an individual coordinates what she does over time: "Thus does our shared intention help to organize and to unify our intentional agency in ways to some extent analogous to the ways in which the intentions of an individual organize and unify her individual agency over time." (Bratman, 1999a, pp. 110-112; quotation on p. 112). Elsewhere Bratman says it this way: "... shared intention ... involves intentions of the individuals whose contents appeal to the group activity" (2014, p. 12). We can compare this sharing an intention with the case that my neighbour – we have two semi-detached houses – is painting his house, too, but we haven't consulted on the matter. Then, in my words, my neighbour and I have the *same* intention but we don't have a *shared* intention.

² Besides the contributions just mentioned in the text and in footnote 1 I want to mention Blomberg, 2011; List and Pettit, 2013; Miller, 1992; Roth, 2004; Velleman, 1997; Vromen, 2003; Wilby, 2012.

³ Note that Bratman doesn't specify who is painting the house together with me. See for instance 1999b, p. 98. where he begins his example with "Suppose you and I each intend that we paint the house together". In 2.3.2 we'll see that this omission plays an important part in my criticism of Bratman.

Margaret Gilbert argues that we need something more than a shared (though coordinated) personal goal when we want to explain a group activity. Taking walking together as a model case she says: “[G]oing for a walk together with another person involves participating in an activity of a special kind, one whose goal is the goal of a *plural subject*, as opposed to the shared personal goal of the participants. Alternatively, going for a walk involves an ‘our goal’ as opposed to two or more ‘my goals’.” (Gilbert, 1996, p. 187; italics mine) Walking together is more than simply walking next to each other in the same direction, even when both (or how many there are) are talking with each other, for maybe at the next corner each walker will go his or her own way. “[I]n order to go for a walk together”, so Gilbert, “each of the parties must express willingness to constitute with the other a *plural subject of the goal* that they walk along in one another’s company” (*id.*, p. 184; italics MG). The individual wills must be put together to “a pool of wills that is dedicated, as one, to that goal. ... The individual wills are bound *simultaneously and interdependently*” (*id.*, p. 185; italics MG). It is not that each individual promises to follow the group goal, but there is a mutual, or as Gilbert says it, joint commitment that I follow the group goal if you do: “[E]ach person expresses a special form of *conditional commitment* such that (as is understood) only when *everyone* has done similarly is *anyone* committed.” (*ibid.*; italics MG) Only with the permission of the others one can be released of the obligation. “Each is obligated to all *qua* member of the whole; each is entitled to certain actions *qua* member of the whole.” (*id.*, p. 186; italics MG) In this sense there is a “we”, which refers to a plural subject of a goal and in this way to a pool of wills dedicated as one to that goal (*ibid.*). It is this plural subject that is constitutive for human social groups, so Gilbert: “[I]n order to constitute a social group people must constitute a plural subject *of some kind*. And *any* plural subject is a social group.” This implies that she doesn’t talk only of “social group” if such a unity has a goal to be realized in a shared action but also if it has a shared or collective belief or a shared or collective principle, like, for example, a family. (*id.*, p. 188; italics MG)

The concept of “joint commitment” that is mentioned just in passing in Gilbert’s article “Walking together”⁴ (although its underlying idea is already clearly present), is pushed forward in her later articles as the core of her approach of the plural subject (*id.*, p. 349). “The key concept in my account of plural subjects is the concept of *joint commitment*” (*ibid.*; italics MG), so Gilbert. Or: “[S]ocial groups are plural subjects; plural subjects are constituted by joint commitments, which immediately generate obligations.” (*id.*, p. 368) But basically nothing changes: Group activity is not based on an aggregate of independent personal commitments but on a commitment of all together that obliges and constraints all group members. Individual group members can only be released from this obligation by mutual accord. (*cf. id.*, pp. 347-352; 364-368)⁵

1.2 What I have presented here are two different views of the idea of collective intention and group behaviour. They represent two main approaches of these phenomena. In fact, though Bratman doesn’t say so, his approach denies the existence of groups. His agents are tuned to each other but there is nothing supposed beyond that level. For instance, in his (1999a) Bratman says that: “we should not appeal to an attitude in the mind of some superagent. ... My

⁴ Reprinted in Gilbert 1996.

⁵ In her *On Social Facts* (1989) Gilbert didn’t yet use the concept of “joint commitment” although the idea was already present: “[T]he label ‘plural subject’ seems appropriate to all cases of *joint action* so far considered” and “*to become the member of a plural subject of some kind one must openly express one’s willingness to do so with certain others*” (pp. 199-200; italics MG). On the other hand, in her *A Theory of Political Obligation* (2006) Gilbert calls the concept of joint commitment even “a fundamental everyday concept ... a basic part of the conceptual equipment of human beings functioning in social contexts” (p. 125).

conjecture is that we should ... understand shared intention ... as a state of affairs consisting primarily of appropriate attitudes of each individual participant and their interrelations.” (p. 111) In Gilbert’s approach basically groups are also face-to-face unities, but they can get a life of their own. So Gilbert sees group action and group intention as a shared or concerted (“joint”) agreement on what to do, which tends then, however, as a kind of emergent phenomenon to prescribe the participating agents what to do. Group action and group intention are kinds of phenomena emerging from individual agreements and then recoiling on these agreements and the individual actions. We can also express this, quoting Wilby, this way: “According to Bratman ..., the collectivity aspect comes in with the *content* of the propositional attitude. According to Gilbert ..., the collectivity comes in with the *subject* of the propositional attitude.” (Wilby, 2012, pp. 94) A third possibility is that the collectivity aspect comes in with the mode of the propositional attitude, so the way an action contributes to the common action. This is Searle’s approach, which will be discussed in section 3.

Although Bratman’s approach and Gilbert’s approach have their virtues, I think that they are not convincing. The problem is this. On the one hand a group is made up of individual agents and it is they who act. On the other hand a group is a really existing social phenomenon and what a group does cannot be explained by referring to individual agents and simply put them together. For if we see groups only as an aggregate of individual agents, we get something like this: Agents have individual intentions and when they act together they have put their intentions together and they have developed a common understanding. On basis of this common understanding a group intention is formed that guides the actions of the individual members and that so can be used to explain the behaviour of a group. But how can we say that a group does something and so how can we explain group behaviour if nevertheless in the end there are only individuals who perform actions? That is the problem that the authors discussed try to solve by looking for a direct relationship between group intentions – how ever they may be defined – and the intentions of the individual members (and their accompanying actions). But is that the way we can explain group agency? Maybe we can do so in some special cases but not in general, I think. And what Bratman and Gilbert analyze are nothing but such special cases. The *direct* relations between the individual intentions and the group intentions (and actions) remain fundamental in their approaches and just that this must be so is what I want to challenge here, not as a possibility but as an idea that is fundamental for understanding group behaviour. Such direct relations do exist but it is not the common way that individuals are connected to the groups they belong to. Such direct relations are rather special instances of a more general phenomenon.

2. *Objections to Bratman’s and Gilbert’s approaches of collective intentionality*

In this section I want to raise a number of objections to the analyses of group intention and group behaviour by Bratman and Gilbert.

2.1 The first question I want to discuss is the problem of group size. Bratman and Gilbert take cases of two-person groups in order to expose their theories. Does this mean that these theories are only valid for two-person groups or for small groups at most? Bratman is most explicit on this question. In his 2014, p. 7 he says: “... my focus will be primarily on the shared intentional activities of small, adult groups in the absence of asymmetric authority relations within those groups, and in which the individuals who are participants remain constant over time. Further, I will bracket complexities introduced by the inclusion of the group within a specific legal institution such as marriage, or incorporation. My interest will be primarily with duets and quartets rather than symphony orchestras with conductors, with small teams of builders rather than large and hierarchical construction companies, with small and informal

neighborhood groups rather than county governments, with small group discussion rather than deliberations in the US Senate, and with friendship and love rather than legally constituted marriage. And I will assume that these small groups have a stable membership.”

Gilbert doesn't set limits to the group size. Even more, she says that her case of going for a walk together, which she uses and mentions many times in her articles and books, “may be considered a paradigm of social phenomena in general” in the sense that “analysis of [the] concepts of ‘shared action’ discovers a structure that is constitutive of social groups as such.” (1996, p. 178). Moreover, Gilbert doesn't mention other restrictions like the inner structure of a group, as Bratman does.

What is striking in the analyses by Bratman and Gilbert is that they use the smallest group possible as a model for explaining group actions, so two-person groups. But why should it be so that what is true for two-person groups is also true for bigger groups? Neither Bratman nor Gilbert justify their choice. Maybe not much will change when we add a member to their model groups and consider a three-person house painting group or a three-person walking group. Also then the members can share an intention, or they can have a joint commitment or a collective intention, and not much or nothing needs to be changed in the explanations given by the two authors. I think it will be the same so when we consider a four-person group. But when we continue adding persons at a certain moment we must have reached a point that things have changed and that the ideas of shared intention and joint commitment have become too simple for explaining the actions of the agents in the group. For Bratman one of the conditions for his theory of shared intention is the absence of asymmetric relations in the group. I think that this is problematic. When groups become bigger the tendency to get asymmetric authority relations grows. What was first a group of friends with a functional division of tasks or a group of people who cooperate because of a common interest can *gradually* grow into a group with unequal asymmetric relations. Let's suppose that a group of four friends leaves the technical school and decides to start a painting business. One represents the group to new customers, does the books and such things. One buys the paint and everything more that is necessary and the two other school-leavers are the painters. Then it often happens that what once were symmetric relations between friends having the same shared purpose soon develops into a group of cooperating people with different responsibilities in which some have more to say than others. In the end we get a group with asymmetric relations.⁶ It is likely that this will happen in some four-person groups that started as symmetric groups. It's even the more likely that this will happen if the original group is a bit bigger. But at which moment do we still have a symmetric group in the sense of Bratman and at which moment has the group become asymmetric in case of such gradual developments?

Moreover, Bratman doesn't allow that group members that share an intention are replaced, since the individuals in the group have to participate constantly over time in his approach (see the quotation above in this section). But let's suppose that four members of a symphony orchestra have decided to form a string quartet. Sometimes it happens, however, that one of the members of the string quartet is ill and is replaced by one of the other members of the orchestra for a few performances. Must we say then that we have a different string quartet in such cases, even though the name and the shared intention of the ensemble doesn't change? Here, too, we have the problem that the application conditions of Bratman's theory are too strict. For Gilbert's approach a similar kind of criticism applies: As soon as a group grows or as soon as we consider bigger groups, it's likely that such a group gets a more or less complicated structure. Groups become layered, when they get a board, an executive committee, an administration or a management, or how we want to call it. They can get subgroups, depart-

⁶ As also George Orwell described so well in his *Animal Farm*.

ments and so on, too, and often such developments are gradual. Or structured groups, groupings and organisations come into being that way from the start. But what is the *fundamental* difference between structured groups and simple groups? And can we still say then that *in some way* there is a joint commitment or collective intention present in the minds of the members of these structured collectivities – explicitly or implicitly? Or is it maybe so that in structured groups, groupings or organisations some members, or most of them, pursue only their private intentions or that they pursue only the joint or collective intentions of their subgroups or departments at most?

To sum up, the essence of my first comment is that it is basically difficult to mark off simple groups in the sense of Bratman and Gilbert from bigger unities. The changeover from groups to other kinds of collectivities is gradual. This makes the application of the idea of a common intention (shared intention, joint commitment, collective intention) problematical.

2.2 In my comment on Bratman under 2.1 I discussed the case of a temporary replacement of a group member by another person. Take now the case that the substitution is permanent, so not just for temporarily replacing an ill group member, or something like that. In many groups it's normal that members are substituted, regularly or now and then, or even after a fixed period. Then I am thinking of sports teams, the board of an organisation, debating clubs and so on. Members come and go and often after some time the group has got a completely different composition; or, less far-reaching, only one or two members of the group are replaced, while the others stay for years.

Bratman doesn't allow that group members are replaced, but must we say then in the case of the permanent replacement of, say, one of the members of the string quartet in my example in 2.1 by another member of the orchestra that we have got a new string quartet? Or – I don't know what for Bratman the upper limit for a small group is – in case one of the musicians of an octet has been replaced? I have my doubts about this view and in practice it is so that a group is considered the same as long as there is a clear continuation with the past, especially if the changes are gradual and if the group keeps the same name and the same rules and regulations through the years, despite the change of some or even all group members.

However, let me direct my attention to Gilbert's view. Many groups are not stable over time in the sense that members come and members go, temporarily or permanently. Nevertheless, as I just brought forward against Bratman, we often say that it is still the same team that is playing; that it's the same octet; or that it is the same debating club. This is usually expressed that way that groups keeps the same name over time and, if a group has written statutes, maybe these statutes don't change for years. This makes that we behave as if the group concerned is still the same one as years ago. "After fifteen years the team won the cup again", although none of the players had remained the same. "After twenty years at last the octet gave again a performance in New York" (but with eight different musicians). And so I can go on. Everybody says so and nobody sees a problem in it. But how about philosophically?

Let me take the example of the first team of a football club. Sometimes a team keeps the same core of players for years, but there are always changes from match to match, and from year to year. After fifteen or maybe twenty years in exceptional cases none of the old guard that once won the national cup has remained. Nevertheless it is normal to say "Finally, after fifteen years, the First Team has won the cup again". One can say, of course, that in fact another team has won the cup and that it is not right to say that after fifteen years it was the First Team (FT) that has won the cup again. But then we have the problem to decide when the old guard (FTold) is no longer the new guard (FTnew) that wins the cup fifteen years later. Let's say for

simplicity reasons that every year a player of FTold leaves the team and is replaced⁷, so that after eleven years FTold has become FTnew, which wins the cup again at last. Then two views are possible. One says that FTnew is the same team as FTold, because it belongs to the same club⁸, has a continuity in time with FTold, etc. The alternative view is that FTold and FTnew are different teams. But, as supposed, the change from FTold to FTnew is gradual, so when do we no longer have FTold and can we say that we have got FTnew instead? The case looks like the famous case of the Ship of Theseus, which is repaired continuously by taking out old planks and putting in new. When after all all planks have been changed, do we still have then the same ship or do we have a new one? (see Wiggins 2001: 92ff). Or, taking my example, one of the players of FTold leaves the team and a new player is added instead. Do we then still have the same team? If we say no, we have a problem, for everybody treats FTold still as the First Team of our club. Moreover, say that the leaving player is injured and comes back after a few months. But after again a few months he leaves the team once and for all. Is it so then that we have two different teams during this period? Or is there a difference when a player leaves a team temporarily because of an injury and when he leaves it definitively, because he is no longer good enough or because he has moved to another town? However, if we say yes, so if we say that FTold remains the same after only one player has been replaced, then we can ask the same question, when a second player is replaced. If we say “yes” again, etc., then we have eleven new players that wins the cup after fifteen years and still we have the same team. Or must we say that we have a new team if at least half of the FTold players has been substituted? And why then just when six players have been substituted and not five or seven?

I can go on discussing this case of the First Team of our football club. I can consider all kinds of variations of the case. However, I think that there is no answer to the question whether FTnew is the same team as FTold or whether it isn't, and the same so for any other group where members are replaced. I think that from one respect we can say that it's still the same group and from another respect that the group with substitutes is a new group, but the question cannot be answered in a satisfactory way.

But if we cannot clearly define groups qua membership in the way just discussed, what is left then of Gilbert's idea of “joint commitment” or “plural subject”? Maybe a lot, maybe less. The main point I want to bring against Gilbert's approach is that the idea of group intention or joint commitment, as she calls it, is too explicit or too conscious. The way Gilbert explains the idea of joint commitment⁹ is that people explicitly and consciously decide to form a group (see my quotations in 1.1). Although this often happens, I think that it's in fact a borderline case. The normal case is that a new member joins an existing group and accepts the joint commitment, rules and regulations of that group without discussion, even if the new member doesn't fully agree with them. Usually joining a group is a question of take it or leave it. A new member has to accept the joint commitment, rules and regulations as they are. Once being a member of the group, the newcomer can try to change the regulations and appointments from within, but often the margins to do so are small, if not very small. Usually it is not the case that some people *constitute* a group by “constituting a joint commitment of some kind”, but someone *joins* a group. And joining a group is usually not a matter of expressing “willingness to constitute with the other a plural subject of the goal”, as Gilbert sees it but it's a matter of fitting in and adapting to what already exists. (see again section 1 for the quotations) But when groups don't have a stable membership and when members come and go, the idea of

⁷ I ignore the substitutes from match to match or even during a match.

⁸ Although also here the questions arises whether the *club* to which the team belongs is still the same after fifteen years.

⁹ And plural subject, but I leave that implicit here.

joint commitment becomes fuzzy and we get questions like: Who are the bearers of the joint commitment? How about potential members who are not yet full members or are on a waiting list? How about former members who have left the group? These questions and other ones that I haven't asked here have to be answered in order to give the idea of joint commitment (or plural subject) more substance and actually it requires another approach than seeing a joint commitment as a kind of conscious agreement.

We can conclude this second point by saying that both Bratman's approach and Gilbert's approach have no answer to the question of changes in group membership over time. But such changes are rather the rule and group stability is rather the exception. Bratman can reply that he wanted to study only small stable groups but this makes his approach hardly realistic for even groups that are supposed to be small and stable in Bratman's sense sometimes have to cope with changing membership, as I have shown, even if it may be that this change of membership is only temporarily.

2.3 Both Bratman and Gilbert assume – at least implicitly – that groups are independently existing unities, as I did as well until now. However, often groups are directly linked to a wider context: they are connected to a higher level or in some way to other groups of the same kind. A group can belong to an organisation or an association, or maybe it is a department or team of such an organisation or association; etc. In short, groups are often not independent, even in case they are rather free in their decisions. This usually makes that the purposes of such a dependent group, and with that their group intentions, are not determined by the individual members who have decided to share an intention, but the group intention is imposed by a higher level and taken up and executed by the group. However, often it is not so that some or even all group members accept the group intention because they have decided to share it but they have their own hidden or open agendas. Acting on the group intention is then a means to perform the private intentions of the group members, like earning money, wanting to practice a certain sport, and so on, although it doesn't need to be so, of course, that there is a practical conflict between the private intentions of the group members and the intention or intentions of the group they belong to. Often this is not the case and acting on a private intention goes well together with participating in a group and supporting the group intentions. Even more, after some time it can be so that the group intentions converge with the individual intentions of the group members (or of most of them). The members of the group have the feeling that the group intentions are really shared and maybe we get even something like a team spirit.

2.3.1 Let me take a simple example of an independent group that is in line with Bratman's examples. Suppose that I want to move my piano upstairs but I can't do it alone. So I hire a hand in order to help me. Now we have a temporary group like Bratman's painting group in section 1.1, but have we also a group intention now? I think we haven't. On the face of it the shared intention is moving the piano upstairs and, indeed, what I do can be understood in this way:

- (1) I have the intention to move the piano upstairs.
- (2) I think that I can move the piano upstairs only, if I hire a hand to help me.
- (3) Therefore I hire a hand who helps me bring the piano upstairs.
- (4) Together we move the piano upstairs.

But does the hand share my intention to move the piano upstairs in the sense of Bratman's shared intention? I think that what he does can be best understood in this way:

- (1) The hand has the intention to earn money [since to hire himself out as a hand is his work].

- (2) The hand thinks that he can earn money by helping me move the piano upstairs.
- (3) Therefore the hand hires himself out to me in order to move the piano upstairs.
- (4) Together we move the piano upstairs.

What this example shows is that for me the supposed shared intention is what I want to bring about but for the hand it is a *means* for another intention, namely earning money. In a certain sense we can call a means also an intention (at least often we can), and in this case we could say that hiring himself out contains the intention to move the piano upstairs, but even if we accept this, we must admit that for the hand the intention “to move the piano upstairs” is on another explanatory level than it is for me. Therefore I think that my example is a case of a group of two people who cooperate and act together but who do not share an intention in the way conceived by Bratman.

I think that this counterexample against Bratman’s view is also a counterexample against the approach by Gilbert. Gilbert supposes that, as I have quoted her above (see 1.1) “in order to constitute a social group people must constitute a plural subject of some kind. And any plural subject is a social group.” But do we really have here a plural subject of the group of two cooperating persons that perform a task? I think that it is too far-reaching to say that the two people have a goal that they realize in a shared action or something like that. Each of the persons, namely I and the hand, has his own goal that he can realize by cooperating with the other. That’s why we form a group. In this sense we have taken commitments towards each other (which may have been written down in a formal contract). However, it is too extreme to call it a *joint* commitment, for, as I have just shown, for each of us the goal we are committed to realize is on a different level: For me it’s my ultimate intention but for the hand it is a means. I think that this case is not exceptional but that it is an instance of the normal way in groups and that the cases discussed by Bratman and Gilbert are marginal cases: People often cooperate in groups and they do things together in groups. However, what can be described as group task or group intention in some way often functions on different levels for different group members. In that sense there is no shared intention, plural subject or joint commitment. People have their own agendas and if the agendas of some fit well together they form a group or, alternatively, they join a group that fits them.

2.3.2 With my example discussed under 2.3.1 and its conclusion in mind I want to go back to the problem that groups are often not independent but belong to a wider context and that they are, for instance, linked to organisations. Nevertheless I think that my case shows in a nutshell what is problematic about Bratman’s and Gilbert’s ideas of group intention (so shared intention or joint commitment) when people form groups or join groups. Whether these groups are independent or whether they are related to and dependent on other unities doesn’t make much difference here, I think, but generally groups are not formed but joined and people joining a group have more or less different interests and therefore different intentions. In fact this is also so in Bratman’s example. Bratman’s description of his case begins this way: “Suppose then that you and I are painting a house together” (2014, p. 9). However, for understanding the case it is very important to know what the relationship between you and me is. Are we the owners of the house? Then Bratman’s analysis is correct. But when the “you” is a friend of mine? Then Bratman’s case can also be interpreted that way that you help me because of our friendship and this may be seen as the main intention why you are helping me while the practical activities are ways of maintaining this friendship; my main intention in this common activity is painting the house. Or is the “you” a painter I have hired in order to help me? Then the analysis of my example just given in 2.3.1 applies. In both cases the primary reason that I am being

helped is not a shared intention but something else, like friendship or a need for money, and the shared intention is a means to it.

Such an objection can also be raised to Gilbert's model case of walking together. Here we can ask: Is it really the joint commitment that motivates what the group members do? For in the end the group members are those who act, even if there is a common goal in the form of a joint commitment. I think that it can be defended that it is not the goal or the joint commitment that explains the group behaviour but the motivations for joining the group do, so the intentions of the individual members who support the joint commitment as a way to realize their personal intentions. In this way the joint commitment is not what the group members intend but it is a *means* for realizing their intentions: An agent has an intention and he or she can realize it by cooperating with other agents and agree with them on a joint commitment. Or the agent joins a group and subscribes to the joint commitment of this group since it helps to reach his or her own goals (I want to play football, so I join a club; I want to stop violence in the world, so I join a peace group; I want to have a political career, so I join a political party). So although the joint commitment is what the group stands for, so to speak, it isn't what makes the group member follow the commitment and what makes the group function. I.e. the group members follow the joint commitment because they consider supporting the commitment as a way to realize their own intentions.

In the introduction to this section 2.3 I have stated that groups are often not independent but belong to a wider context and that they are, for instance, linked to organisations. With these criticisms of Bratman and Gilbert in mind, we can see how this works: Dependent groups are related by their assumed particular joint commitments to the higher organisation or association they belong to, but this doesn't imply that the *actual* goal of the group is this joint commitment. Just as that it can be – and often it is the case so – that the individual group members have their own intentions, it also often happens that the goal of the group is different from the joint commitment that connects it with the higher organisation and that this joint commitment is simply a means of fulfilling the group goal. For instance, a local track and field's club joins the national athletics association for the simple reason that it gives its members more and better possibilities to compete. Even if the group or department had been set up by a higher or coordinating organisation, this doesn't need to involve that the group or department (or whatever it is) has not or will not get a goal of its own. A department or branch of a company often has its own specific task that can be seen as the specific joint commitment of this department or branch (recruitment department, research department, production department, which have each their own limited goals and so their own specific commitments). Moreover, it is very likely that the individuals working there have their own intentions, like earning money, following a career, applying what they have learned during their studies, avoiding unemployment, and so on (cf. 2.3.1). The situation becomes even more complicated, if one realizes that there are levels of dependency, and that there can be and often are both vertical and horizontal relations within an organisation.

I'll stop here my analysis of what the existence of dependency relations means for the presence of a shared intention or a joint commitment in a group. I think that it has become clear so far that it is difficult to consider a group on its own. A group exists always in a context of a structured reality with horizontal and vertical connections. Most groups have an internal structure and/or they exist within an external structure of relations of dependence. One can also say it this way: a group can be structured internally or externally. This makes it difficult to ascribe a common goal to a group that is at the same time the intention of its individual members (shared intention; joint commitment). Groups and organisations are based on a mesh of intentions. Linked together this makes that a group can act and that a common goal can be *ascribed*

to it but this common goal (shared intention; joint commitment) is often not the reason why groups really act. This is determined by the individual intentions of its members.

2.4 Bratman's and Gilbert's approaches of the idea of group intention – whether we call it “shared intention” or “joint commitment” – imply that there is a clear distinction between a group intention and an individual intention. In 2.3 I have shown, however, that a group intention is – to put it in other words – the result of a field of individual intentional forces functioning in a context of a structured reality. But how about the individual intentions? Are they simply independent basic motives for actions that, when linked together in the right way in the right structured context, produce a group intention? I think that there is also a dependency in the other direction and that many so-called individual intentions are difficult to realize without the intentions of others and without the presence of a structure that relates them to these other intentions. Most individual actions are socially more complicated than spading your garden. Let's say that I want to take the train to Utrecht in order to go to a concert there. So I take my coat, walk to the railway station, buy a ticket and get in the train, after it has arrived. In Utrecht I get off the train, leave the railway station and walk to the concert hall. This complicated action of going to a concert can be divided in a series of subactions with their own separate intentions that can also be considered on their own, depending on the perspective you take. In order to substantiate my point, I want to consider the action “taking the train to Utrecht”. When I want to spade my garden, I walk to the shed behind my house, take a scoop, go to my garden and start to turn the soil over. There is no other person involved than myself. How different it is when I want to take a train. Taking a train is not possible without the presence of a whole man-made and man-maintained infrastructure. In order to be able to go in the railway station, or at least legally take the train, first I have to buy a ticket. Depending on where you live, you buy it at the window, from a ticket machine or you check in with a digital card at a check-in pole. Even such a simple action supposes many intentions of other persons in order to make it possible! Let's say you buy your ticket at the ticket machine. Someone (or several people) must have thought out this system, some must have constructed the machine, someone must have put the ticket machine on the platform, maintain the ticket machine and take care that there is enough paper and ink for tickets to be printed, and so on. For being able to buy a simple railway ticket a whole structure of intentions (and actions) is involved and without such a structure buying a ticket is simply not possible. No one can make his own train ticket, or it would be seen as a falsification.

The same applies for getting in the train and going with it to your destination. This is only possible when there is an infrastructure intentionally built up by many people who cooperated together in making it, with their own individual reasons and intentions for doing their tasks and, last but not least, the personnel (engine driver, guard) on the train and others that make that the train can safely ride on the railways. Each of them had and have their own intentions in doing their tasks.

So what looks like an individual action with an individual intention at first sight, turns out to be possible only if there are other people who each for their own reasons have the intention to help you to perform your action in some way. The individual action described – taking the train to Utrecht – can be performed only within the presence of an intentionally built up structure intentionally run by cooperating people. And so it is for executing many individual intentions and performing the individual actions implied as well, if not for most of them: they are based on a structure of individual intentions (and the relevant actions) geared to one another in order to make realizing them possible. It is as in a group: We need a shared intention or a joint commitment of a kind in order to make the structure run. In the case of my example, we could call it “railway system” or “maintaining a railway system”. Moreover, it works in two direc-

tions: No train, no customs; but also no customs no train. One implies the other. But also as in a group, as I have discussed above: Although maybe every participant endorses the shared intention or the joint commitment in some way, every participant makes his or her own contribution proceeding from and realizing his or her own individual intention.

The upshot is that most individual intentions are difficult to distinguish from shared intentions in the sense of Bratman or from joint commitments in the sense of Gilbert. The difference is rather gradual than absolute. Most individual intentions can only be realized by participating in a shared intention or joint commitment, as it is the other way round.

2.5 In this section 2 I have formulated my criticism of Bratman and Gilbert who say that small groups or groups in general are guided by a shared intention or joint commitment respectively. I brought forward four points against their views. First, it is basically difficult to mark off groups from bigger unities. Second, most groups – also small groups in the sense of Bratman – change in membership over time, for a short period or permanently. Bratman and Gilbert don't tell how to handle this problem. Third, as a rule, on the one hand groups are internally structured and on the other hand they belong to a larger structure. It implies that generally it is not the shared intention or the joint commitment of the members of the group that moves the actions of these members. Fourth, most individual actions cannot be performed without the existence of a wider context of agents who support such individual actions and make them possible.

In the next section 3 I want to examine how John R. Searle approaches the idea of group intention. We'll see there how Searle meets my objections to Bratman and Searle in several ways. However, I also think that Searle's approach is not radical enough and that it is only a first step to meet the criticism of Bratman and Gilbert that I have developed here.

3. Collective intentionality and individual action: Searle

How can we say that a group does something and how can we explain group behaviour if there are only individuals who perform actions? Bratman answered this question by supposing that the members of a group have a shared intention and Gilbert introduced the idea of a joint commitment (or plural subject) among the group members. As we have seen, their approaches are not convincing. In this section I want to examine Searle's view. According to Searle, collective intentional behaviour is a primitive phenomenon. Nevertheless we have to explain collective intentional behaviour on the basis of the intentional actions of individual agents: The collective action is done by means of what the individual agents intentionally do in their individual actions (see Searle 1990). Let's see what Searle himself says about it in detail.

3.1 According to Searle, approaches like those by Bratman and Gilbert, or, for example, the one by Tuomela (which I'll not examine in this article¹⁰) have an important defect: They see group intention – or “collective intention”, as Searle calls it – and with it group action – “collective intentional behaviour” in Searle's terminology – as a kind of summation of individual intentions or behaviour. In his view, group intention and as a consequence group action as well is a phenomenon of its own, but it is performed by the actions of individual agents. To make clear that “collective intentional behaviour” is *sui generis* Searle takes the case of a class of business school graduates who were taught and believed Adam Smith's theory of the invisible hand. After having left the school each of these graduates tries to be as selfish as possible etc. and each graduate knows that the others behave in the same way, although there is no cooperation. Then there is a common end and a common knowledge but nevertheless

¹⁰ See for instance Tuomela 2007.

there is no collective intentionality in Searle's sense. On the other hand, it is also possible that on the graduation day the graduates make a common pledge that they'll help humanity by being as selfish as possible etc. In that case there is a genuine cooperation and a genuine collective intentionality, so Searle, even though it is a cooperation not to cooperate on a lower level. Each graduate is bound by the common pact (Searle 2010, pp. 47-48; see also Searle 1990, pp. 6-7).

But how is a collective intention realized if it is individuals who act? Suppose, so Searle, that Jones and Smith want to make a hollandaise sauce by mixing certain ingredients. Jones is stirring while Smith slowly pours in the ingredients. They have to coordinate their efforts because if Jones stops stirring or Smith stops pouring, the sauce will be ruined. Each has a kind of collective intentionality which he could express as "We are preparing hollandaise sauce", so Searle (1990, p. 14), or simply, as I would say it, the group intention is mixing the ingredients until the sauce is ready. Then, so Searle "The intention to stir is part of the intention to mix by means of stirring in the same way that in the [case of firing a gun] the intention to pull [the trigger] is part of the intention to fire by means of pulling." (*id.*, p. 19) For although Jones is not making the sauce simply when stirring, he makes the sauce while doing his part *by means of* stirring (and so does Smith in his way *by means of* pouring), just as actually on the shooting range he doesn't just fire but he fires *by means of* pulling the trigger. Mixing may be the collective intention of Jones and Smith but stirring and pouring is what they actually do and what causes the collective intention of making the hollandaise sauce to be realized. (*cf id.*, p.15) To add yet an explanation by Searle: "From the point of view of each agent there are not two actions with two intentions that he is performing. Rather, just as in the gun case there is only one intention and one action – to fire the gun by means of pulling the trigger – so in the collective case each agent has only one intention which represents his contribution to the single collective action." (*ibid.*) Although Jones (and Smith, too, as we may suppose) has a collective intention in his mind ("we want to prepare a hollandaise sauce"), Jones does not simply perform a collective action of making the sauce when stirring the ingredients. It's only his own action (stirring) that he performs but this personal action has a causal relation ("by means of") towards the collective action of mixing.¹¹

Briefly, in Searle's approach the existence of the group is present in the individual contributions to a "higher goal" (group intention or "collective intention") that is not present in the individual action *as such*, although the individual action does contribute to it. Group intentions and actions are ideas that exist in the minds of the individual agents, but they are performed by means of what the agents individually do.¹²

3.2 According to Bratman and Gilbert, a group intention is formed on the basis of a common understanding between the members of a group. The common intention guides the actions of the individual members and that's why it can be used to explain the behaviour of a group (*Cf* 1.2). But how can we say that a group does something and so how can we explain group behaviour if nevertheless in the end there are only individuals who perform actions? That is the problem that Bratman and Gilbert try to solve by looking for a direct relationship between

¹¹ In his 2010 Searle analyses that, beside the "by means of"-relation, there is also another relation possible between the agent's intention and action on the one hand and the collective intention and action on the other hand: the "by way of"-relation. For instance, I and you are performing a duet: I play the piano part and you play the violin part. Then our playing does not *cause* the duet to be performed but it *constitutes* the performance of the duet. What happens here, so Searle, is "that we play the duet *by way of* me playing the piano, in a context where I take it for granted that you are playing the violin" (2010, p. 52; I have changed the italics). In his earlier work this "by way of"-relation is absent. I'll ignore it in the present article.

¹² Or, as the case may be, they are constituted by these individual actions. See note 11.

group intentions in one way or another and the intentions of the individual members (and the accompanying actions). However, for their solutions they need to suppose the existence of a kind of group intention plus a mutual belief among the group members that everybody does his or her part (*cf* Searle 2010: 46). For Searle the idea that we need to suppose a mutual belief when explaining group behaviour is quite unsatisfactory so he deletes it. Although Searle still supposes the presence of a group intention, according to him there is a *direct* relation between the *individual* intentions of the group members and their actions on the one hand and what the group does on the other hand. The *individual* action is a means for performing the group action. This is an improvement on the approaches of Bratman and Gilbert, for in this way Searle succeeds to show how a group action is the consequence of the individual actions of its members without assuming a kind of mutual belief, which need not to be present. Moreover, the idea of a group plays no significant part in Searle's approach, if we want to understand and explain why groups act, even though Searle presupposes that "collective intentional behaviour is a primitive phenomenon that cannot be analyzed as just the summation of individual intentional behavior" (Searle 1990: 1). Searle avoids that a group gets metaphysical properties if we should attribute to it an intention or consider it as a plural subject or a commitment. Even if it was not the intention of Bratman and Gilbert to ascribe metaphysical properties to groups, their approaches allow such an interpretation and that is just what Searle clearly avoids. So far I agree with Searle, but let us examine now whether he meets the criticisms of Bratman and Gilbert I have brought forward.

3.2.1 The first question is the problem of group size. Like Bratman and Gilbert, also Searle uses the smallest group possible as a model for explaining group actions. In his case it's a two-person group making a hollandaise sauce. Although Searle allows bigger groups (without saying how big they are; he mentions for instance the case of a business class that makes a solemn pact), he doesn't develop these cases in detail in the same way as he develops the case of the two people making the sauce. He just mentions them. Moreover, it's not clear how his analysis of the case of two people making the sauce can be applied for bigger groups if not for much bigger groups. Therefore, here, too, I want to raise the question, like in section 2.1: Why should it be so that what is true for two-person groups is also true for bigger groups? Searle doesn't give an answer to this question. As we have seen in 2.1 it is not obvious that we can apply an analysis for a two-person group to much bigger groups, not counting the fact that it is difficult to mark off smaller groups from bigger unities. I refer to section 2.1 for the details of my objection. Although it doesn't refute Searle's approach, at least it is a weak point.

3.2.2 When we want to explain group behaviour, or "collective intentional behaviour" in Searle's sense, we have to meet the problem that group members are sometimes replaced, temporarily or permanently. Like Bratman and Gilbert Searle seems to assume that groups function because some people come together and that together they agree on a common purpose. In this way a shared or collective intention, joint comment or how we call it is formed that guides the behaviour of the group and its members. For example, two people decide to make a sauce together or a group of students makes a common pledge. Maybe the decision to pursue a collective intention is often the way a group starts (but not always), but probably it will soon happen that some members leave the group and that new members join. Other members stop their participation temporarily but later they come back (see 2.2.). Let's say that Jones and Smith are preparing a hollandaise sauce together in the way described by Searle. So Jones is stirring while Smith slowly pours in the ingredients. While they are busy doing this together, Baker calls Jones and tells him that he is wanted on the telephone. Since the sauce will be ruined if Jones stops stirring, Baker takes his place. Does it make any difference that

the sauce will already be ready before Jones returns or that he is called away for an urgent case and doesn't return? I think that in both cases it is no longer simply so that a collective intention determines what Baker and Smith do. The case looks like the case of the house owner and the hand that I have discussed above in 2.3.1. What Baker does is not preparing the hollandaise sauce but helping Smith and Jones. Maybe he is the switchboard operator in the restaurant and maybe he doesn't even know what a hollandaise sauce is. Smith tells him what he has to do and so the sauce is prepared but actually Baker doesn't know what he is doing but he simply follows Smith's instructions. Baker is only making physical moves and his intention is helping Smith and Jones. In Searle's terms: By means of making the moves that Smith says he has to perform, Baker is helping Smith and Jones. Helping is Baker's intention. Just as in section 2.2 we can also ask here whether the group Smith-Baker is still the same group as the group Smith-Jones. However, what is more important for our discussion is that Searle's by-means-of relation¹³ does not explain what a group does in a satisfactory way; or rather it doesn't need to do so. If Searle's approach is correct – which I'll not examine here – it applies only to a limited kind of cases, namely groups with a stable membership, so to groups in which no members are replaced, temporarily or permanently. For a more general use, we have to adapt Searle's analysis or to make a better one instead.

3.2.3 In Searle's examples the individual intentions by means of which the collective intention is executed and so by means of which the collective action is performed are still related to a common collective intention that applies to all members of the group concerned. The individual actions are still a means for reaching this collective intention. However, just as I argued against Bratman and Gilbert in section 2.3 that it doesn't need to be so that an individual performs his or her action in view of a shared intention or joint commitment as soon as a group becomes layered or structured, also in Searle's approach this doesn't need to be so. In a two-person group making a hollandaise sauce it could hardly be otherwise: Stirring and pouring are actions in view of making the sauce and by means of which the sauce is made and as a rule these are such means *for the agents*. Even so, as my case in which Baker replaces Jones shows, also this is not as obvious as we tend to think. I'll ignore this simple case, though (but compare my case of the friend who helps Bratman's house owner painting his house for an analysis of such simple cases). But is this model also useful for understanding collective intentional behaviour?

As we have seen at the end of section 2.1, as soon as groups grow or as soon as they are larger, it's likely that they'll have a more or less complicated structure. Groups become layered because of a division of tasks or when they get a board, an executive committee, an administration or a management. They can get subgroups, departments and so on, too. Once "flat" groups can become gradually layered during the years, or they come into being as such from the start. Then, the more complicated a group structure is the less likely it is that the individual actions of its members can be explained and understood by a collective intention common to the whole structured entity. Although the end effect may be that the group (grouping, company, etc.) "behaves" in a certain way, it is to be wondered how and how far this can be ascribed to the individual actions of the group members, *in the same way* as we can ascribe the rifle shot to the pulling of the trigger by the rifleman. Moreover some organisations are such loose agglomerations of departments that it is difficult to determine which entity it is that acts and what the collective intention is. Actually there are often different collective intentions within an organisation etc. and often these intentions aren't even layered since sometimes the departments (or some) are allowed to follow their own policies. An instance of such an or-

¹³ And, as I assume without discussion, also his by-way-of relation.

organisation is a university. Moreover within such organisations the members or a part of them are relatively free to follow their own goals. It can happen, of course, that the freedom to act of separate departments is limited, but even then they may have a lot of elbow room. In addition, the space of freedom of action an individual member in an organisation has depends also on his or her function. Usually a bookkeeper has by far less freedom to determine what to do than a researcher or a manager. In other words, the by-means-of relation as introduced by Searle in his examples is by far as unequivocal as Searle seems to suggest, when it is not clear what the limits of a group are and what the collective intention of a group involves. But what is left then of the idea – as a general approach, not in some specific cases, which are actually marginal cases in my view – that by means of his or her actions a member of the organisation contributes to the *collective* intention (in the same way as pulling the trigger is related to the shot), assuming that he or she gives a meaningful contribution to the organisation? Moreover, organisational goals and group goals (collective intentions) are often vague, so that the best an individual agent can do is concentrating on his or her individual task and making the best of it. That's what usually happens.

And then I haven't mentioned yet my of Bratman and Gilbert in this context, which applies to Searle as well: usually groups (organisations etc.) have not been founded by the present members of the group but usually people join groups that already exist (see 2.3 and especially 2.3.2). This implies, for instance as we have seen, that individual intentions are not considered as contributions to the collective intention of the group, organisation and so on, but that the collective intention is considered as a means for realizing their individual intentions by the agents (group members). However, I'll not develop this criticism for Searle's approach in detail and I'll take for granted that it applies to Searle's approach as well (*cf* also my Jones, Smith and Baker case in section 3.2.2).

Now, it is so that Searle doesn't deny that such a complexity of intentions exists and that individual agents in a group, organisation, etc. follow their own ways. Even more, Searle says that "[i]n collective intentionality, it cannot be required of each individual's intentionality that he know what the intentionality on the part of others is. In complex forms of teamwork or collective behaviour, one typically does not know what the others are doing in detail. *All one needs to believe is that they share one's collective goal and intend to do their part in achieving that goal.*" (Searle 2010, p. 45; italics mine). However, there is a difference between my approach and Searle's approach of collective intention, and the italicized sentence in the quotation points to that. Searle admits that the situation the agent is in can be complex and that he or she may not have a good view of what he or she is doing in relation to other agents. It is also not necessary that an agent knows the intentions of the co-agents. Nevertheless according to Searle, agents still suppose that they act in order to perform a collective goal or intention, even if they don't know what it is. I, however, think that we don't need to suppose the presence of a collective intention in order to explain why an agent acts in a group (and why a group acts because of the actions of its members). Moreover, if there is a collective intention and if the agent knows about it, this doesn't imply that the agent "needs to believe that [the other group members] share [the] collective goal and intend to do their part in achieving that goal" (see the passage just quoted). *The only thing that is required is that the agent has a reason to act in the group, but for this the agent needs only to find a place for his or her contribution to the group activity in his or her motivational structure.* It is not necessary that the collective intention, if known, is seen as a kind of higher goal for the agent. It can also function as a means for reaching other private goals, as we have seen.

In view of the present discussion, we have to ask whether it still has sense to suppose that there is a joint commitment or a collective intention present in the minds of the members of a collectivity *in some way* – explicitly or implicitly – if a collectivity is layered or structured. Or

is it maybe so that in structured groups, groupings or organisations some members, or most of them, pursue only their private intentions or that they pursue only the joint or collective intentions of the subgroups or departments at most? Until now the answer suggested on this question is “yes”. How this works will be developed in section 4. However, before I take the step to present my own approach, I want to put forward yet one point in my criticism of Searle.

3.2.4 Both in his 1995 and in his 2010 Searle discusses his, what he calls, a “general theory of institutions and institutional facts”, a theory with which I fundamentally agree. It says that many social facts and institutions like money, laws, schools, shops, family, books, religion, theatres, etc. etc. cannot be understood without understanding the meanings given to them by other people. In both books, Searle presents this theory *after* the presentation of his view on collective intention and collective intentional behaviour that I have discussed above. It is striking that Searle doesn’t tell us what this general institutional theory means for the explanation of collective intentional behaviour and the agent’s actions as a member of a group. This is even more striking since many actions, both “purely” individual actions and actions as a member of a group, take place in an institutional setting and suppose institutional meanings given by other agents that make such actions possible. It is as if firing the gun by pulling the trigger is the basic model of any action anyhow (or spading your garden, which I took as an example in 2.4). However, as I have put forward against Bratman and Gilbert and have expounded in section 2.4 by discussing the case of me taking the train to Utrecht, many actions, including the most simple ones and actions as a member of a group, are not possible without supposing the actual or reified presence of the intentions of other persons and their related actions. A railway ticket machine is an example that I have treated there. Such a machine is not only a reification of the actions of the makers of the machine, it is also full of institutional meanings. For someone who doesn’t know what buying a railway ticket means; what the difference is between a valid ticket and a forgery; what the ascribed function of a ticket machine is; etc. the action of buying a ticket (from a machine) would be impossible, or at least that person would not understand what he or she is doing – and it is the same so for taking the train to Utrecht. Most actions in this society, including actions as a member of a group, are simply impossible without the presence of an institutional setting. If this is so, an explanation of collective intentional behaviour should also treat the meaning of institutional facts for the possibility of such actions, for what looks like an individual action with an individual intention at first sight – for which firing the gun by pulling the trigger functions as a model for Searle – most of the time turns out to be possible only if we take account of the meanings given by other agents. Most individual intentions and actions are difficult to separate and distinguish from what other agents intend and do and have intended and have done, although some individual actions will contain more of the intentions and actions of other agents – actual or reified – than other ones.

3.3 The points I have put forward against Searle’s approach of “collective intentional behaviour” until now are not very unlike those I raised against Bratman and Gilbert. Nevertheless, in some respects Searle’s approach is fundamentally different. Searle supposes that groups exist, indeed, just like Bratman and Gilbert do. Nevertheless the group plays hardly any part in the way he explains the contribution of the individual agent to its collective intentional behaviour. It’s true that Searle says that “[c]ollective intentionality presupposes a background sense of the other as a candidate for cooperative agency, i.e. it presupposes a sense of others as more than mere conscious agents, but as actual or potential members of a cooperative activity” (1990, p. 21), but in the actual explanations of what happens it plays no part. For, as Searle has said a few pages before: “[M]y collective intention isn’t an intention to make it be the case

that I have a singular intention, it is the intention to achieve some collective goal for which my singular intention stands as means to end.” (*id.*, p. 17). In other words, a collective intention is for the agent simply a kind of (individual) intention with special content, while what Searle calls the singular intention is actually the means to realize the collective intention (insofar it depends on the agent’s contribution, of course).

Let me take the example of Jones making a hollandaise sauce together with Smith in order to make my argumentation against Searle less abstract. The collective intention is making the sauce together and Jones’s singular intention is to stir. Then we can construct this practical syllogism (PS):

PS 1

Jones wants to make a hollandaise sauce with Smith

Jones thinks that this can best be done if he stirs the ingredients

So Jones stirs the ingredients

Basically this PS 1 is not different from the PS that we get when we describe my action of me wanting to go to the concert in Utrecht, which I discussed above (see 2.4):

PS 2

I want to attend the concert in Utrecht this evening

I think that this can only happen if I take now the train and go to Utrecht

So I go to the railway station and take the train to Utrecht

As we have seen in 2.4, this action by me is not as singular as it appears at first sight. A concert supposes a lot of other people who make music together, just as taking the train supposes a whole infrastructure and many people who make the train ride. We could formulate the first premise also this way: I want to be present at the performance of Mahler’s fourth symphony by the musicians of the Budapest Festival Orchestra in Utrecht. This supposes not only that I’ll go to the concert hall in Utrecht and take my seat but also that the Budapest Festival Orchestra will be there and will play Mahler’s symphony for the concertgoers: There will be no concert if there is nothing to be listened to, *just as* there will be no hollandaise sauce if Smith doesn’t pour the ingredients. Actually, the group is external to the explanation of what the individual agents do in Searle’s approach.

How different is this from, for example, Bratman’s approach, where the group is internal to the action explanation. I’ll not go into the details here, but the next schema from Bratman 1999a (p. 121) is a typical example of the way he deals with the problem of collective intention (in which *J* refers to the joint activity that is to be explained and the subplans refer to the ways each participant thinks to contribute to the group activity):

Schema for Shared Intention (Bratman) (=Schema B)

“We intend to *J* if and only if

1. (a) I intend that we *J* and (b) you intend that we *J*.
2. I intend that we *J* in accordance with and because of 1a, 1b, and meshing subplans of 1a and 1b; you intend that we *J* in accordance with and because of 1a, 1b, and meshing subplans of 1a and 1b.
3. 1 and 2 are common knowledge between us.”

We can add yet a few premises, for example saying that the participants don’t coerce each other’s intentions and that the participants at least minimally cooperate, but schema B con-

tains the essence of Bratman's approach, in so far as it is relevant for us: that the group (for instance a group of two people who want to paint a house) is internal in the way we have to explain collective behaviour. By the way, this schema B makes also clear why Bratman has to limit his analysis to stable small groups, which is not very realistic as I have explained above. For instance, the bigger a group is the more complicated schema B will be. Say, we have a group of eight persons. Then each person is supposed to know about the subplans of all other group members. Or take the case discussed above that Smith and Jones are making a hollandaise sauce together and then Jones is replaced for a moment by Baker, because he is called on the phone. Usually it will be enough that Jones gives some simple instructions to Baker how to stir and that's it. Baker doesn't need to know why he is stirring and that he is making a hollandaise sauce. It's enough that he follows the instructions and the sauce will be prepared (if also Smith does his task). And if the call lasts short, Jones can take over his task again and finishes the job with Smith. Does this mean then that there was no group as long as Baker was stirring? Also if we would use Schema B for analyzing my other objections to Bratman's approach – which I'll not do – they would be simply confirmed.

In Gilbert's approach the group is internal to the action explanation as well, as we have seen: Her idea of walking together (so in a group) relies on a mutual and interdependent relation and obligation between the walkers that can be dissolved only with mutual consent. Shared action rests on a shared belief. The difficulties such approaches as Bratman's and Gilbert's lead to can only be avoided, if we keep the group outside the action explanation in the way Searle does.

Although I think, just like Searle, that the idea of a group has an important theoretical function and that it has also a kind of reality, I think, also just as Searle does, that we don't need it for explaining collective intentional behaviour, shared cooperative action, group action or how we call it, since in the end only individuals perform actions. The individual agents need only to concentrate on their own individual intentions and actions. Of course, the individual intentions and actions must be entangled in some way, but the actual group behaviour takes place behind the agent's back¹⁴, so to speak, or at least in a certain sense. How this works will be developed in the next section. Here, I want to dedicate yet a few words to Searle's approach.

It's so that Searle says all this, too, but in some respects he is not radical enough. For is Searle's approach really the way we can explain group agency? Maybe we can in some special cases but not in general, I think. The models that Searle analyzes – and it is the same so for Bratman's and Gilbert's – are nothing but such special cases, even though Searle tries (and partly succeeds) – more than Bratman and Gilbert do – to disconnect common intentions and individual intentions. *Nevertheless also in Searle's approach the relation between individual and group intention (and action) remain fundamental.* In his view collective intentional behaviour is voluntaristic, for based on intentional cooperative and coordinated actions: Groups are intentionally made by agreement by its current members (*cf.* the example of the business class in section 3.1 but also the Smith-and-Jones group making a hollandaise sauce together). But most groups – not to speak of collectivities like organisations – that a person joins are not voluntaristic in this sense, so formed in cooperation and by agreement by the present members. Generally, so in most cases, agents have intentions and want to act but they cannot perform their intended actions alone, so they look for existing groups that fits their intended purposes, then they apply for membership (if necessary) and if admitted they join them and adapt to the group as it is. Or whatever the “admittance procedure” is, if there is (maybe any agent

¹⁴ The expression “behind the back” is from Giddens. See for example his 1979, pp. 2 and, 71. However, Giddens uses it in a somewhat different context, saying that “[e]very competent member of every society *knows* a great deal about the institution of that society” (*id.*, p. 71; italics mine) so that *in this sense* society does *not* evolve behind the backs of the agents.

can simply join). Alternatively, an agent doesn't join the group by his or her own volition but is forced to do so or is under pressure to do so. Be it as it may, what is important here is that most groups are not formed by their members by an explicit agreement to pursue some aim, but most groups an agent joins are already there; they do already exist; and if the purpose or purposes of the group fit the intentions of the agent, he or she joins (or the agent joins because he or she is made to do so). The agent jumps on a moving train. The agent brings along his or her individual intentions when joining the group. But these individual intentions don't need to be completely in line with the group intentions and there needn't be – although there can be – explicit agreements between a new member and the group (or its leading members) as long as the new member does what he or she is expected to do as a member (or at least doesn't act against the group). Groups explicitly formed by its members do exist but they are marginal cases. *They are special instances of a more general phenomenon*, namely the phenomenon of group formation. Just the voluntaristic idea is what I want to challenge here, not as a possibility but as the basic way to understand group intention and behaviour. There is no reason to limit ourselves to such special instances when we explain group behaviour. We can see voluntaristic groups in this sense simply as special cases.

It's not difficult to find examples of groups that already exist at the moment a member joins them. The family is the first group in life one comes across. It's true that the married couple is a voluntaristic group, but for the children born the family is already there with its rules and habits when they appear on this world. Of course, once they are there, they help develop and shape the family. A sports club is also a typical kind of group that already exists when one joins it. Many sports clubs are so big that they have become more like organisations. Then we can see the training group (the people with whom one does the workouts together) see as the group one joins. The team then is a kind of selection from the training group. Often a member of the training group doesn't join the team at choice, but the member of the training group is asked to join and to play the next match of the team (in case we are talking about a team sport). Of course, the potential team member can say yes or no, when asked. Maybe he or she prefers only to train there and not to have the load and stress (but also the joy) of belonging to a team.

Here are some other examples of groups. I only mention them without further analysis: the department of the company where you work; a research group; a music ensemble; a task force; a study group; a committee; a board of governors or directors; a drama group; and so on. Most of these groups can be set up by the members themselves but usually it is so that one joins such a group that already exists. Group members come and go but many groups remain to exist. New members ask to be admitted; groups recruit new members themselves; often the number of members is not pre-determined. Much is possible but usually it is so that members change but that the group exists for a longer time.

But how is it then that we have to explain what an agent does *as* a member of a group and what does it mean that a group behaves? This will be the subject of the next section.

4. Collective behaviour as structured individual actions

4.1 Let us now see what my analysis and my criticism of Bratman's and Gilbert's approaches has brought us thus far.

1) Every effort to restrict group size is arbitrary and pointless. It has no sense to say that a theory is valid only for a group of a limited number of people, for add one person more and basically nothing changes. Add then another person ... I don't want to say that there are no differences between small groups and big groups, but we cannot convincingly say when a group is small and when it is big. The differences are gradual.

2) Many groups are not stable over time in the sense that usually members come and members go, temporarily or permanently. Nevertheless we don't say that we get a new group when a member leaves or when a new member enters. The group is still considered basically the same group, although it has got a different composition. Especially this is so, when it has more than two or three members. This is also the case if after some time all first members have left. In this sense a group is a dynamic entity over time. One of the practical consequences is that most groups are not established but joined.

3) As a rule, groups are both internally structured and they belong to a larger structure. It makes that generally it is not a shared intention or joint commitment of the members of the group that moves their actions:

– Groups are formed around a common goal (shared intention; joint commitment), but often it is not so that someone joins a group because he or she wants to promote the group intention (the goal of the group, like painting a house) but because s/he sees it as a means to perform his or her own individual intentions. Then there can be a practical conflict between the private intentions of the group member and the common goal of the group s/he belongs to.

– What I just said is also found on the group level. Many groups are not independently existing unities. They are linked to or part of a wider context, like a wider association, organisation, company etc. But it doesn't need to be so that the goal of a group (team, working group, research department, etc.) corresponds with the goal on the next level or top level. Maybe the relation to the higher level is seen only as a means.

4) Individual intentions and group intentions cannot be clearly distinguished but they are interlocked. Individual and group intentions are related in two directions. Group intentions are the result of a field of individual intentional forces functioning in a context of a structured reality, as I have formulated it in 2.4. This is a dependency from down upwards. But there is also a dependency in the other direction, from up downwards: Many individual actions are only possible because of the presence of a structure of realized intentions of others that give them meaning. Individual actions are not free-floating events independent of a surrounding world. In order to be able to be realized they are dependent on the cooperation of other people. Most individual intentions can only be realized by participating in a common intention (as it is the other way round) and acting individually is in many respects like acting in a group.

4.2 Searle avoids the pitfall of seeing group action as a kind of summation of individual actions taking place together according to a plan. Instead he sees group action rather as the consequence of coordinated individual actions in which the individual simply does his or her part as if he or she was acting alone and pursuing his or her own individual intentions. This implies that a group doesn't live a life apart from its members but, as we have seen, it's also the case that most of the time people cannot act without assuming – explicitly or implicitly – that the group they belong to or otherwise a wider social field that gives their actions a meaning is present. At first sight it seems that in this way Searle meets the objections I have raised to Bratman and Gilbert and that the issues of group size, variable group membership, acting in a structured group and proceeding from individual – not shared – intentions, and the distinction between individual and group action in a world shaped by the intentions of other persons have been solved. However, if we take a closer look at Searle's approach, it becomes clear that he doesn't solve these problems but that he avoids them. I think that Searle's approach of group action cannot be seen as an alternative to the approaches of Bratman, Gilbert and others as long as we haven't come to grips with the problems as I have put forward here.

So Searle doesn't discuss the question of group size. It seems that he doesn't find it relevant. However, he elaborates his approach with the help of an example of a small group (making a hollandaise sauce) and on the face of it is not obvious that this approach is also valid for, for

instance, organisations. Also the question what it means for his approach when group members are replaced by persons from the outside – temporarily or permanently – is ignored by Searle, although it is common practice. Next Searle seems to suppose – despite his idea that group behaviour goes back to the behaviour of individual agents – that the individual agent still has a group intention in his or her mind when acting in a group and that the agent sees his or her individual action as a contribution to this group intention. As we have seen, this doesn't need to be so and it can also be so that contributing to the group intention is seen as a means to performing the agent's own intention. Searle has no eye for this problem. And last, Searle ignores the problem that the distinction between a pure individual action and an individual action that is actually part of a group action is rather vague. As long as these issues haven't been clarified, Searle's approach is a good and first step to solving the problem of group intention at most.

Actually Searle is not radical enough in answering the question whether there is a kind of collective intention and if so, how it is effective. As, for instance, every sociologist can tell, groups, organisations and other kinds of collectivities do exist, but when they investigate collective entities and try to explain what they do and how, sociologists do a lot of things and they bring forward many factors and facts that may be relevant for explaining collective behaviour but a kind of collective intention is not among them. Also psychologists do not refer to group intentions when studying behaviour in groups. A collectivity like a group may have a goal or a mission but collectivities do not have intentions. In this respect it is striking that the sociologist Max Weber has written much about social action and social behaviour but he doesn't define the concept of group. It is as if he doesn't need it in order to explain group behaviour or social behaviour or social action in general. However, Weber does define "social action", a concept that is interesting enough in this context to quote it here: An action is social if the agent's behaviour is meaningfully orientated towards the behaviour of another agent or agents.¹⁵

There are also other arguments against the idea that there is such a thing as a collective intention. For example, it is quite well possible that the members of a group disagree about what the collective intention (goal) is. Even more, it is also possible that one or more group members don't know that some or all members of the group think differently about what the group strives for. Nevertheless, it's possible that the group functions in a smooth way. How can we say then that there is a group intention, collective intention, or how we want to call it?

Anscombe and Davidson made clear that actions can have different descriptions and that we can ascribe different intentions to the same intentional body movement, depending on the perspective we take.¹⁶ Which intention we ascribe to an action makes how we describe that action and with that also what we do, even if the body movements are the same. I may flip the switch simply with the intention to turn on the light, when I come home in the evening, and we say that my action is that I turn the light on. However, I can also have the intention to alarm the thief I had seen in the house, hoping that he will escape through the window, since I am afraid that he will shoot me down, if he would see me unexpectedly. Then my action is chasing away the thief. A spectator cannot conclude from my body movements which the intention in my action was. He must ask me if he wants to know, for maybe I didn't know that there was a thief in the house, when I turned the light on. But if there is a relation between the way we describe an action and the intention that moves the action on the individual level, why wouldn't this also be so on the group – or collective – level? Uncertainty or a difference of opinion about what a collective intention is is far from exceptional. I go for a walk with a

¹⁵ "... ein sinnhaft am Verhalten des anderen orientiertes eignes Verhalten". See Weber 1972, p. 11.

¹⁶ Anscombe, 1957; Davidson, 1980, esp. pp. 4ff.

friend. I think that we'll walk with a quick pace for training the body. But my friend has taken his camera with him and wants to take photos, when we have arrived in the wood. Then we must slow down our pace once we are there and we have to stop again and again. Only when we are there, we discover that we had a different idea about our walk. Until then for my friend the walk was a photo walk and for me it was a training and the walk went without problems, although we had different intentions in our heads about our joint activity. If a thunder shower would have forced us to run home before we had been halfway, we wouldn't even have noticed that we had different "group" intentions.

Or, another example, in the setting of a psychological research, people are often misled about what they have to do. For example, test subjects are told that they have to do a cooperation task, while actually the researcher may want to know more about group pressure. This kind of deceiving is innocent but deceiving, both on the group level and on the individual level, is an important aspect of social life. Some political regimes have been built on it.

Also misunderstandings undermine the idea of collective intention. The idea that there is a group performing an intention is only apparent. To take a simple example, I buy a cupboard in a shop. The shop assistant helps me bringing it to my car, thinking that he'll get a tip for it, although I could also have done it alone with some effort. Without a tip, he wouldn't have done it. I think that his help belongs to the service of the shop, or that the shop assistant is just a kind person. I don't give a tip. Can we call it a collective action? I have my doubts (compare for instance the case of the hand that I had hired in order to bring my piano upstairs in 2.3.1). I think that it is better to see this case as an instance of two coordinated individual actions based on different intentions, even though it can be *described* as an instance of a collective action based on a shared intention (carrying the cupboard together). Under the latter description we cannot explain why the action took place, because the shared intention was false since based on a misunderstanding. Maybe the action was collective from the point of view of an observer, but not from the point of view of at least one of the agents. A misunderstanding can have a rather long life and as long as it doesn't come to light, the group activity may go on for a long time.

It is also possible that I participate in a group because I have to, although I don't want to. In totalitarian states people are often forced to participate in state organisations or to take part in certain group activities. Then they may fulfil their tasks more or less perfunctorily, but only in order not to be punished or in order to avoid to attract the attention and to be considered as a person loyal to the regime. It is even possible that in a certain group most if not all members simply act for such "negative" reasons and feign loyalty. Should we say then that these group members share the intention of the group or have a joint commitment or another kind of collective intention, although the group as such performs what is seen as its intention and although all individual participants execute their tasks as they are supposed to do? Also in this case I think that such a thing as a collective intention doesn't exist.

What does this bring to us? I think that such cases show – and there are many more of them – that an individual can act in a group and function well in a group, in the sense that he or she does what s/he is supposed to do, without it being the case that there is something like a shared intention, joined commitment or other kind of collective intentionlike phenomenon that guides his or her actions. From the individual perspective we don't need a collective intention in order to explain collective behaviour. But also from a collective perspective we don't need it. As we have seen, a group can function, and it can function well, without it being the case that there is a kind of collective intention present. This is not only sustained by cases of the type just discussed but also by the cases discussed in the sections 2 and 3 like the one of the hand I have hired for helping me to bring the piano upstairs (2.3), the case of the switchboard operator who helps to make the hollandaise sauce (3.2.2), or the case of me going

to attend a concert in Utrecht (2.4). All this undermines the idea of a collective intention. For how is it possible to share an intention and to act on behalf of it when the group members – whether they know it of each other or whether they don't – don't know what the shared intention involves or disagree about the meaning and interpretation of the shared intention (collective intention, etc.), i.e. about what they are going to do? The latter happens a lot and maybe it is even the rule. It can only be understood if we don't suppose in some way the presence of collective intentions.

In order to substantiate the claim that there is a difference between individual actions and collective actions and that the latter are *sui generis*, Searle discusses the case of a class of business school graduates. There is a difference, so Searle, between the way the business school graduates act after having left the school and trying to behave selfishly simply according to the theory of Adam Smith and a group of such graduates who made a common pledge on the graduation day that they'll help humanity by being as selfish as possible. Only in the latter case, so Searle, there is a genuine cooperation and a genuine collective intentionality, even though it is a cooperation not to cooperate on a lower level, since each graduate is bound by the common pact (see 3.1). But do we really have here a case of collective intentionality? Is the case of the business class that made a pledge really different from the case of the class that didn't?

The problem here is the relationship between the so-called "collective intentionality" and the actions by those who made the pledge. For although these newly graduated businessmen – businessmen for short – follow a common pledge, the actions that are based on this pledge have no relation with what the other businessmen do and as such don't make them different from actions by the selfish businessmen that haven't made such a pledge. The two people who constitute Bratman's painting group, after having made the appointment to paint the house together, act together in the sense that the individual acts are related to each other in some way, for instance that they spread their tasks. The walkers of Gilbert's walking group walk (and talk, as we may suppose) together and agree on where to go. But Searle's businessmen do not do such a common activity as a result of their pledge. On the contrary, a consequence of the pledge is that they'll not cooperate, as Searle explicitly says (maybe sometimes with the exception of doing so in a selfish way). The actions insofar they are based on the pledge are *not* related to each other. The actions as such follow other intentions like selling certain products with a maximum gain. The collective intentionality is not a reason for these actions; at most it is a reason for the way these actions are performed, so for the choice of the means. Maybe under another description we could call the businessmen's actions fulfilling the common pledge of the business school graduates, but could we call it *performing* the common pledge? So how much collectivity is there present in the actions as such of these selfish businessmen (also if we consider it under the description of fulfilling the pledge)? Especially if we compare it with what Bratman's painters do or Gilbert's walkers do? If the businessmen don't make contact with each other after they have left school or only casually but still act according to the common pledge, how can we say then that there is a kind of *collective* intentionality in what they do or that there is even a kind of *collective* intentional behaviour, if what an individual businessman does has no relation to what the other businessmen do? Maybe Searle will object that each action performed by an individual businessman is collective since – following Weber; see above – *in a certain sense* the action is meaningfully orientated towards the pledge – so towards the behaviour – of other agents, namely the other graduates. But is that enough to say that this collective intentionality is in the action, let alone that we have here a case of collective intentional behaviour based on the pledge?

In order to answer this question, let me compare Searle's businessmen case with a case I discussed above: The case that I bought a ticket and took the train in order to go to a concert (see

2.4). As we have seen, my action of taking the train and visiting the concert is highly related to what others do, even in that sense that there is a kind of implicit agreement between me and the train company and the organisers of the concert. We call such an agreement, for example, timetable and the program of the concert hall. If the train doesn't run on time, I can complain; if the concert is cancelled, I can get my money back. If I had bought my concert ticket in advance and if the concert hall hadn't published on its website that the concert has been cancelled, I can complain, too. As my conclusion was in 2.4: What looks like an individual action with an individual intention is possible only if there are other people who each for their own reasons have the intention to help you to perform your action in some way. Taking the train to Utrecht and going to the concert can be performed only within the presence of an intentionally built up structure intentionally run by cooperating people. So it is for executing many other individual intentions and performing the individual actions involved as well, if not for most of them: they are based on a structure of individual intentions (and the relevant actions) geared to one another in order to make realizing them possible. The upshot is – and now I adapt it to the case of Searle – that most individual actions are difficult to distinguish from collective intentional behaviour since most individual actions can only be realized by participating in a collective intentional structure.

Compare this with another example of mine: spading my garden, or rather, gardening. I always do it alone so it's an individual action.¹⁷ Moreover, I garden always in a biological way. At a certain moment I and a group of other people sign a pledge in an advertisement – published in all major newspapers – saying that we'll always garden in a biological way and that we ask others to do the same. This is a kind of pledge in Searle's way. Makes this signing the advertisement from now on the way I garden different in any respect because from now on it is based on a collective intentionality in Searle's sense? Has my gardening become now a kind of collective intentional behaviour, which it wasn't before I signed the advertisement? I think that the answer is negative. And is Searle's case of the businessmen basically different from this case that I sign the advertisement?

It may be so that the actions of the businessmen are founded on a collective intention, but actually my action based on my decision to go to the concert by train is more collective so to speak than what the businessmen do – in view of their collective intention – if we wish to call the businessmen's actions collective anyway (which might be doubted). If we look at Weber's definition of social action, it becomes clear why this is so: The orientation towards the behaviour of the other businessmen is absent *in* the individual actions of the businessmen. It is merely a background factor of these actions. This becomes clear if we compare the actions of the businessmen who did and who didn't participate in the pledge ceremony: The actions with and without the background of the pledge cannot be distinguished with respect to their content, such as intention and means. As regards content they are copies of each other. On the other hand, I cannot perform my intention to visit the concert by train without assuming that others will do their parts and perform their actions. My actions related to going to the concert are orientated to what the railway employees do, what the personnel of the concert hall does and what the members of the orchestra do, *and* the other way round in the sense that their actions are orientated towards what the train passengers and the concert goers do. This becomes clear in extreme cases, for example like showing a counterfeited ticket (for the train or the concert hall) or if I am a fare dodger. In such cases I can be fined and refused entrance to the train (or the concert hall as the case may be). Or, seen from the other side, when railway

¹⁷ Okay, I have to buy my tools and some seed, too, when I start, which are produced by others. However, I can make my own tools from wood found in nature and collect the first flower seeds in nature, if you prefer.

workers strike, I cannot reach the concert hall. Just this shows that my action is meaningfully orientated towards what others do.

I think that *we can draw an important lesson from all this*. If we try to study and to explain or understand some kind of collective behaviour we must not look for some sort of collective intention, shared intention, joint commitment or how we want to call it, for collective intentions etc. that explain or help understand collective behaviour do not exist. Collective behaviour is founded on the interaction of individual actions orientated towards what others do: Collective behaviour consists of structured individual actions orientated towards individual actions performed by others. It is – what is the same – individual actions geared to the actions of others. A second lesson is that there is no strict distinction between individual intentional actions and “collective behaviour” in the sense that nearly all individual actions suppose related individual actions by others. Your actions are related to what others do; the actions performed by the others are related to what you do. Rather pure individual actions are exceptional. Most actions are collective to a small or large extent in the sense just explained: Most individual actions are more or less social.

4.3 One of the consequences of my analysis is that the concept of intention doesn't apply to collective entities and to what these entities do but that it is only applicable to *individual* agents and to *individual* actions. Whether we call it collective intention, shared intention, joint commitment or plural subject or whatever we like, if we think that a sort of intentionlike phenomenon steers a group, organisation or other collective entity, we make what Ryle called a “category-mistake”: We use a concept for a category to which it doesn't belong. (Ryle 1949: pp. 15-18) There is not such a thing like a collective *intention* and collective *intentional* behaviour. Let me be clear: I don't deny that it makes sense to investigate something like, for example, groups and collective behaviour, and that they are useful categories. However, we cannot explain or describe groups and collective behaviour using a concept of collective intention that is comparable with an individual intention but then on another level. By saying this, I don't want to state that it's not useful, let alone not possible to study groups and collectivities from the intentional perspective, but then we get a different question. Then it's not that we ask how we can explain *collective* intentional behaviour, but we ask what it means for the *individual* to function in a group or collectivity and to be a group member or participant in a collectivity. Asking about the meaning or intention for collective behaviour and how it works is a legitimate question but it implies that we consider the collective entity from the individual perspective and that we ask how collectivities function and behave from the perspective of the individual participants and how the individuals constitute collective entities and make them work. If we need to use the concept “intention” for that, it will always be an individual intention, not a collective intention.

I also don't want to deny that groups and other collectivities can have goals, purposes, or how we want to call them. However, goals etc. are not a kind of collective intentions that guide collective intentional behaviour but they are reasons for individuals to *form* individual intentions to act at most. Collective goals can be very useful for they allow us to do together and to attain together what we cannot achieve if we would act individually. And there is a lot that we cannot reach by acting alone. Maybe most of what we do cannot be reached by acting alone (*cf* my analysis of the case of taking a train and going to a concert). Therefore collectivities are indispensable social phenomena. They are genuine and they are *sui generis*. However, they cannot be understood like a kind of collective individuals with collective intentions and performing collective intentional behaviour.

Despite my criticism, actually my approach is not really different from Searle's. As said above, Searle's approach is simply not radical enough. When he wants to explain why what he

calls “collective intentional behaviour” is relevant and how it is effective, he starts to tell us that it is a genuine phenomenon that cannot be reduced to individual intentional action. But this view has no implications for the way collective behaviour actually is performed, for this is explained in his case of Smith and Jones preparing a hollandaise sauce (discussed by me in 3.1). However, in his analysis of the Smith-Jones case, so his analysis of the structure of collective intentionality, or stated otherwise his analysis of how collective intentional behaviour is performed, Searle does not refer to the idea of collective intentionality, for Searle doesn’t need this idea in order to explain how collective behaviour is structured and how it is performed. What Searle does show is how Smith does his part of making the hollandaise sauce and how Jones does his part, based on their respective *individual* intentions in the actions they perform. Taken together these individual actions constitute a piece of collective behaviour, in this case making a hollandaise sauce, but for explaining how this collective behaviour is performed Searle doesn’t need the concept of collective intentionality. In other words, the idea of collective intentionality can simple be left out in Searle’s approach, and nevertheless we get a sound explanation of collective behaviour. In view of my analysis till now in this section 4 and my criticism of Searle and the idea of collective intention, this was to be expected, of course, since, as I have made clear, there is not such a thing like collective intention. Therefore we can say that the reason that Searle isn’t radical enough is that he doesn’t dare to drop the idea of collective intentionality in his fundamentally correct analysis of how collective behaviour is performed.

If we drop the idea of collective intentionality, we can take Searle’s approach as exemplified in his analysis of the two-persons-group that makes a hollandaise sauce as a starting point for explaining how collective behaviour works and avoid the flaws in the approaches of Bratman and Gilbert. Bratman and Gilbert appear to suppose that each time some people cooperate and form a group together or another kind of collectivity they have to agree on their intentions that make them cooperate. What they forget – just as others do, like Tuomela – is that usually when we cooperate with other people, we don’t think out what we do anew, but we take other forms of cooperation as a model, or we join an already existing group or collectivity and we adapt ourselves to the existing (given) rules and forms of behaviour. Usually we don’t think out what we do anew. Most of the time we don’t build original collectivities, but we join what already exists.

So, an agent’s intentions and the ways they are put together do not come out of the blue. Most of the time they are derived from the possibilities and forms of behaviour an agent finds in the world around. They are based on the possibilities, rules, associations etc. that s/he happens to find already present when s/he “decides” to act or develops intentions. It is this what is already there that generally determines and structures what an agent wants to want and what this agent factually can do and will do (within a certain latitude; it’s true). These existencies or availabilities, which are usually called structure and culture, are the foundations of our cooperation with others via our individual intentions in the way Searle explains. This view of mine how collective intentions come about and how they function is based on Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory. Of course, an agent doesn’t need to accept the present structure and culture exactly in the way he or she finds them. An agent is not a cultural dope who can fit only in what is present. Every agent has a certain latitude whether, when and how s/he is going to act in a certain situation. Every situation in which an agent wants or needs to act has both to be interpreted (“what am I supposed to do?”; “what can I do?”; etc.) and it leaves room for choices: our latitude or elbow room. Sometimes our elbow room is limited; sometimes it is very large. On the other hand, existing structures and cultures are usually flexible and give little or much room to the agent to fill in his or her intentions and actions in his or her own way. But our freedom to choose and to cooperate with others and to take on commitments is always within

the limits of the situation in which we happen to be and depends in the first place on what the situation offers us. Only given this we can say: we can leave it or we can take it. Only given this we can jointly put our individual intentions together so that we can act together, for instance for painting our house together or making a walk together.

Anthony Giddens has developed this idea in his structuration theory.¹⁸ We can see it as a theory that shows how social action in the sense of Weber works, especially in more complicated situations. Just like Weber¹⁹, Giddens doesn't need a concept of collective intention. This is not surprising, since with a few exceptions actually all action is more or less social action and it refers to and involves the actions of others, as we have seen above. This is also Giddens' view²⁰. However, here I shall not give a description of Giddens' approach and illustrate my explanation how collective intentional action functions with quotations and references to passages in his work. Instead, I'll give here my interpretation of his ideas in my own words and apply them directly to my subject.²¹

As said, people usually fit in in existing structures or they follow existing models. This makes that cases like two people who are painting a house together or two people who go for a walk together are in fact borderline cases. They cannot serve as a model for collective intentional action. Of course, I don't want to deny that groups are sometimes formed in this way, but a better model is a violist who joins a string quartet and replaces one of its members who has left. Or someone who joins a football team or an employee who gets another job or task in another department: As a rule people fit in in what already exists, either because it's their own choice to do so, or because they are transferred to another place or asked to join a group, and the like. People consider what they want and join then the group that best fits their wishes; or in what other way it happens that they join another collectivity. They join the existing structures with their existing rules and resources. People jump on a running train, so to speak. Of course, joining what already is there implies that people must adapt their intentions and actions to what the group joined offers them, but once they have joined they have their own say in how the group they joined will go on and what this group will do, depending on the goal of the group and the position in the group the new member has. In this sense newly joined members help to reproduce the group, to continue its existence and to fulfil its task, and to adapt it to the changing circumstances, based on their individual intentions in the manner described by Searle. In this way, the individual group members perform both their own intentions and actions and cooperate with the other members of the group and contribute to the goal of the group. Moreover, in this way they don't need to know what all other members intend to do and what they do, as long as they know their own tasks and how these are related to what the other members in the group do. In this way it is also possible that a subgroup develops its own tasks and goals and drifts away from the umbrella group or organization. For my explanation how a group functions and how the members of a group function does not apply only to groups in the strict sense but to any collectivity and setting in which people cooperate. In this way, people perform their own intentions and actions and reproduce the circumstances – in-

¹⁸ When considering Giddens' approach one must always keep in mind that for him "Intentions are only constituted within the reflexive monitoring of action" (Giddens 1979, pp. 41-42). Acting is a stream of doings and intentions that become only explicit when explicit questions are asked like "what did I do and why?", "what did they do and why?", etc., or when I am *consciously* thinking out what I am going to do and why. I fully agree with this view (see my 1996), but that's not the point here. Here I want to discuss how acting in a group works from the intentional point of view, whether the intentions in the actions are explicitly developed and put forward or whether they remain implicit and unconscious.

¹⁹ It is striking that Giddens doesn't refer to Weber in *this* context.

²⁰ I don't know whether Giddens says this somewhere explicitly, but anyway it is implicit in his approach.

²¹ The most important works by Giddens where he explains his structuration theory are his 1979 and 1984. See especially 1979, pp. 49-130, and 1984, pp. 1-40.

cluding the collectivities in which they function – that make these actions possible and in this way they make the collectivities they belong to function. Groups (collectivities) don't live a life apart from their members but it is also so that people cannot act without considering that the groups (collectivities) they belong to are present and steer their actions.

One reason that Bratman and Gilbert cannot see this is that they have separated their cases from the contexts. For instance, what does it mean that two people are painting a house together? This depends on how the painting group is constituted. Once we take this into consideration, it becomes clear that it's too simple to say that the two members of the group have a shared intention. For the painting group can exist of (*cf.* 2.3.2):

- (1) the two owners of the house to be painted, for instance a married couple
- (2) the owner of the house and a friend who has been asked by the owner to help him
- (3) two friends who paint the house for a handicapped person
- (4) the owner of the house and a hand hired by the owner to help him
- (5) a craftsman-painter and a hand hired by him painting the house together by order of the owner of the house
- (6) two partners who have established a painting business and paint the house together by order of the owner of the house
- (7) etc.

I think that only the first case fully satisfies Bratman's description of a the painting group in the sense that there is a pure "shared intention" and that the individual intentions of the painters are nothing but a kind of subintentions of the shared intention with the only purpose to fulfil the shared intention. In all other cases the "shared intention" is possibly or likely a means for fulfilling the individual intention of at least one of the painters in the way I have explained in section 2.3.1 for the case that I hire a hand to help me painting the house or in 2.3.2 for the case that you help me because of our friendship. Pure shared intentions in the sense that there are no other reasons present why the two people paint the house together are exceptional and the normal case is that the goal of the group is not a shared intention but a means for the individual intentions of the members of the group, or at least for some. But for knowing what the actual relations between the cooperating persons and their intentions in a group are, we should know why they entered the group and what they eventually want to reach with their participation. If you are a professional painter, painting the house together with the owner of the house is a means for earning money. Since you agreed with the owner of the house to paint the house together with him, it is also a reason why you do your job in a certain way, for instance that the owner scrapes the old paint and that you paint what he has scraped. And that he provides the brushes and you supply the paint. (see 1.1) Only when we know the relationship between the group members, we know whether the so-called shared intention, so the goal of the group, is a "real" kind of higher intention of each member or whether it is a means for reaching his/her own individual intention and a reason to fulfil his contribution to the goal of the group in a certain way. Every agent in a group (or collectivity in general) executes his or her own intention in the way described by Searle. The intentions and actions of the other members of the group and the structure of the group and its rules and resources are the conditions that make the individual actions possible. By his or her individual actions that are coordinated with the actions of the other group members the agent makes that the group can function and that its goals can be performed. By his/her actions the agent makes that the group or larger collectivity is produced and reproduced – in cooperation with the other members of the group or collectivity. For this we don't need a shared intention or a joint commitment or how we want to call it. We only need that the agent who belongs to a group or collectivity knows what s/he wants and what s/he has to do in the group or collectivity, even if s/he has no knowledge of the intentions and commitments of the other members.

In this way we can do things together in a group without supposing that there is something like a group intention. However, what a group does as a group cannot simply be reduced to what individuals individually do. Even if a certain football player scored the winning goal, it's not he who has won the match but the team did. A football player cannot play alone; we need eleven (or at least seven) players in a team.

List and Pettit (2013: 43-47) give an interesting analysis that shows how it is possible that what we want to do as a group not always corresponds to what we want to do as individuals, or at least to what the majority of the group members prefers. This can be very relevant when, for example, a group of judges has to take a decision (Kornhauser and Sager 1993). However, in order to explain how such a paradoxical situation is possible, I'll not make use of the analysis of List and Pettit, but I'll discuss an example that I have published before on my blog website (bij de Weg, 2015). I'll quote from my blog:

“Tom, Dick and Harry are making a walk through the countryside and have to cross a pasture with cows. Then Tom says: ‘I think that we can better walk round the pasture for I see a bull over there.’ Dick agrees, but then he says: ‘I cannot see it well, but I think that the bull is tied to a pole, so let's cross the pasture anyway. I am tired and want to be home as soon as possible.’ ‘You are wrong’, Tom replies, ‘and even if the bull is tied up, I don't want to take the risk. What do you think, Harry?’ Harry, a farmer, says: ‘As far as I can see, the bull runs free, but if we keep our distance, we don't need to be afraid. Maybe the bull will look at us, but he will keep away. So, let's take the shortest path and cross the pasture.’ And so they do but is it really what they want to do? In order to find it out, let me present the conversation in a schematic way:

	afraid for bulls wants to avoid the bull	bull is tied to a pole	wants to walk through the pasture
Tom	yes	no	no
Dick	yes	yes	yes
Harry	no	no	yes
Majority	yes	no	yes

In the case presented here, Tom and Dick have been reassured by Harry that nothing will happen, anyway. We can say then that they have changed their opinions and, even though they are still afraid of bulls, they see no need to avoid the bull in the pasture (as long as they don't come too near to it). But what would Tom, Dick and Harry have decided if Tom and Dick hadn't believed Harry that the bull would keep away from them? Of course, Harry could have said: If you are scared, we can better walk round the pasture. But suppose he hadn't said that and he couldn't convince the others that the bull wasn't dangerous. In that case we see that the majority of this group of walkers thought that the bull was not tied to a pole *and* that the majority of the walkers wanted to avoid the bull in that case, so they did *not want* to walk through the pasture. Nevertheless the group as such did want to walk through the pasture, and so they would have decided if they had voted about the question ...” (see the last column for these votes, the first and second columns give the votes or opinions on the separate questions). For two walkers out of three were afraid for bulls, and also two walkers out of three thought that the bull was not tied to the pole, so seen that way it was to be expected that the walkers would not go through the pasture. However, the votes on the separate questions had been di-

vided that way that the decision was: We go through the pasture. Therefore, my conclusion of this blog was: “that it can happen ... that ‘the group’ intends and so decides what its individual members certainly do not want to do.” I think – but it should have to be examined in order to be sure of it – that such a situation is more the rule than the exception. In this sense it is so that, although groups and collectivities are made by its members, on balance they often act behind the backs of the individual agents who make them up and maybe against the wishes of these agents or the majority of them, even when every single agent intentionally does what he or she does and knows quite well what he or she does.

5. Concluding remarks

In the previous sections I have extensively criticized the idea of collective intentionality, shared intention, joint commitment or how we want to call it otherwise by discussing the approaches of Michael E. Bratman, Margaret Gilbert and John R. Searle to the theme. My conclusion was that there is not such a thing as collective intentionality that can explain collective behaviour or make it understood. Instead I came with an alternative approach for accounting for group behaviour and the way individuals act in collectivities and coordinate their actions with those of other members. This alternative approach was based on the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens.

In this last section I want to limit myself to a few short remarks about what my approach means for the four main points of criticism that I have put forward against Bratman and Gilbert in Section 2. Then I’ll finish with a personal remark.

As for my four main points of criticism, individuals enter into relationships with other people in view of their individual intentions. Realizing their intentions via a group or a bigger collectivity and by cooperating with other people can be a goal of the individual intentions or it can be a means. We can see the group (collectivity) as a kind of resource or means that helps realizing the individual goals as formulated in his or her intentions. In performing these intentions the group size plays no fundamental role (in the philosophical sense), although it can be so that it plays a practical role in view of the agent’s intentions or preferences. How could it be otherwise, since there is no fundamental criterion for marking off small groups from big groups, for why should we call a group with five members small and with six members big? Or in the same way six against seven; nine against ten; etc.? Calling a group small or big is arbitrary.

Once a group runs, or maybe even already in its founding stage, group members are replaced by other group members, temporarily or permanently. This can happen for many reasons. People become ill; or it becomes clear to them that they don’t like their tasks or the group as such; or unexpectedly they have to move to another town; and so on. But what a group keeps functioning well is not that the same puppets remain tied to the same strings but that the functions in the group are performed as they should be. This is a matter of gearing the tasks and activities and the group well to one another and a matter of having the right persons at the right places and of having persons who are prepared to do what they have to do. Actually this is independent of who fulfils the tasks as long as the tasks are well done – and that the members of the group go well along together. So why not replacing then a member of the group by another one who is prepared to fit his or her intentions to the group goal or by someone whose intentions fits the group goal? And the other way round: Why wouldn’t someone try to perform his or her intentions by joining a group if there is an open place in this group? That’s what we often see happen.

Some groups are very egalitarian and they remain so for a long time, but it happens often that sooner or later they become structured and get one or more layers, and that there will be a division of tasks. One buys the brushes and another one the paint, as Bratman explains. At first,

maybe the group divides its tasks only horizontally but when it grows it is not unlikely that the structure becomes also vertical (but some groups are structured vertically already from the start). Nevertheless, what the individual members do from the intentionally point of view doesn't change: They keep performing their tasks in view of their own individual intentions and possibilities – as before–, although now it can happen that the individual agents no longer have any idea what the goal of the group is and that they have only an understanding of what they must do in order to perform their own individual tasks, even if these tasks couldn't be performed or wouldn't have sense if the structure (organisation) within which they are performed didn't exist.

This brings me to my last point. Groups belong often to a wider context and to a larger or smaller extent they are related it. Therefore, what individuals do when they join a group can much better be understood by describing them as jumping on a running train that is passing by – to repeat the metaphor that I have used above – than by seeing them as functioning in a relatively isolated unity with a collective intention that the joining agent takes up or even helps to form.

In my PhD thesis, which I finished twenty years ago, I developed a method for understanding (“Verstehen”) individual actions as an alternative to the method of explanation (“Erklären”), which was then and still is the main-stream way of investigating what agents do. My approach was based on the idea that we can examine an agent's doings both from the point of view the investigator and from the point of view of the agent. The method of explanation takes the standpoint of the investigator; the method of Verstehen that I developed in my dissertation was meant for capturing the view of the agent. Then I got the idea to develop also a method for understanding (“Verstehen”) what groups do, so for understanding collective actions. However, for several reasons I decided to skip the chapter of my dissertation that should become a short introduction to such a method. Although I had the intention to develop the method of collective “Verstehen” later, it never happened.

When I started writing the present article and did the investigations on which it is based, I didn't have the plan to develop a kind of method for understanding groups. I just had seen some flaws in the ways Bratman, Gilbert, Searle, Tuomela and others dealt with the idea of collective intention and I wanted to develop my view on the matter by criticizing the existing approaches. However, while working on this paper, it gradually became clear to me that I was doing the groundwork for developing a method of understanding collective actions, also because initially I still had the idea that there is such a thing as collective intentionality. In my paper I simply wanted to present a better view on the latter. But gradually it became home to me that collective intentions do not exist, although this didn't mean that I rejected the view that collective behaviour is a real social phenomenon. Actually this result comes a bit as a surprise to me. However, because there is no collective intentionality, the upshot is that there can also be no method of understanding what groups do – in the sense of “Verstehen”.

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