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# COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY VS. INTERSUBJECTIVE AND SOCIAL INTENTIONALITY. AN ACCOUNT OF COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY AS SHARED INTENTIONALITY

*abstract*

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*I will shed light on the phenomenon of collective intentionality, which, in the philosophical, cognitive sciences and neurosciences debate, is often confused with similar yet diverse phenomena, i.e. with intersubjective intentionality, also called social cognition, and with social intentionality. In order to elucidate the phenomenon of collective intentionality, I shall present a taxonomy of collective, intersubjective and social intentionality, and consider a thesis about shared intentionality. The taxonomy intends to show that although collective, intersubjective and social intentionality are very close phenomena, nonetheless they are different types of intentionality, and that, like individual intentionality, collective and intersubjective intentionality involve different kinds of intentionality – practical, affective and cognitive – which have to be distinguished. The sharing thesis, I will argue for, maintains that collective intentionality is a shared intentionality in a very strong sense of the term “sharing”, a sense that implies some essential conditions, which are not required in the cases of intersubjective and social intentionality. Finally I shall point out that intersubjective intentionality is the basis and the necessary condition for collective and social intentionality.*

*keywords*

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*Collective intentionality; intersubjective intentionality; social intentionality; social cognition; cognitive, practical and affective intentionality; shared intentionality*

## Introduction

In order to shed light on the nature and on the structure of collective intentionality, I will present a *taxonomy*, which distinguishes *collective intentionality* from *social* and *intersubjective intentionality*. The aim of this taxonomy is to clarify the philosophical debate about collective intentionality and social cognition with regard to some basic confusions concerning the different phenomena and the correlated meanings of “collective intentionality”, “social intentionality” and “intersubjective intentionality”. I maintain that although intersubjective, social and collective intentionality are very close phenomena, nonetheless, they represent different types of intentionality. I will also state that, like individual intentionality, collective and intersubjective intentionality involve different kinds of intentionality: practical, affective and cognitive.

The taxonomy I present here is based on early phenomenological contributions on collective, intersubjective and social intentionality and on social ontology<sup>1</sup>. The taxonomy also refers to some of the recent accounts of collective intentionality and social cognition<sup>2</sup>.

I am going to develop my taxonomy discussing eight conceptual distinctions:

- (i) Collective intentionality vs. Intersubjective intentionality;
- (ii) Collective intentionality vs. Social intentionality;
- (iii) Intersubjective intentionality vs. Social intentionality;
- (iv) Cognitive vs. Practical vs. Affective collective intentionality;
- (v) Cognitive vs. Affective vs. Practical Intersubjective intentionality;
- (vi) Affective collective intentionality vs. Affective intersubjective intentionality;
- (vii) Practical collective intentionality vs. Practical intersubjective intentionality;
- (viii) Social entities created by social intentionality vs. social entities created by collective intentionality vs. social entities created by intersubjective intentionality.

Secondly, I am going to argue for a thesis on shared intentionality: I will maintain that, differently from social and intersubjective intentionality,

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<sup>1</sup> See: Husserl (1905-1920, 1912-1928), Reinach (1911, 1913), Stein (1917, 1922, 1925), Scheler (1926) Hildebrand (1930), Walther (1923); about the early phenomenological accounts, see Mulligan (1987), Smith (1990), De Vecchi (2008, 2009, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> See: Searle (1990, 1995, 2010), Bratman (1992), Tuomela-Miller (1988), Gilbert (1989, 2002), Ferraris (2009), Gallagher-Zavahi (2008), Gallese (2005), Goldman (2005).

*collective intentionality is a shared intentionality* in a very strong sense of the term “sharing”, a sense that implies some essential conditions, which are not required in the cases of intersubjective and social intentionality.

1. A taxonomy of collective, intersubjective and social intentionality

1. First of all, I will focus on three basic levels of phenomenological distinctions. I maintain that intersubjective, social and collective intentionality are different types of intentionality:

(i) Collective intentionality vs. Intersubjective intentionality;

For instance: *we* intend to go to the movies together vs. *I* see that *you* intend to go to the movies.

(ii) Collective intentionality vs. Social intentionality;

For instance: *we* intend to go to the movies together vs. *I* promise *you* to go to the movies with *you*.

(iii) Intersubjective intentionality vs. Social intentionality.

For instance: *I* see that *you* intend to go to the movies vs. *I* promise *you* to go to the movies with *you*.

These first distinctions are grounded in some basic notions and phenomenological data concerning collective, intersubjective and social intentionality. I will now deal with these basic notions and phenomenological data, and introduce further distinctions.

1.1. Collective intentionality

Collective intentionality is constituted by *mental states* or *acts* shared by two or more persons. The mental states or acts may be *practical*, *cognitive* or *affective*: hence, *intentions* (or *volitions* or *desires*), *beliefs* (or *perceptions*) or *feelings* (including all the variety of feelings: moods, emotions, passions etc.) respectively. Thus, I will also focus on a fourth level of distinctions:

(iv) Cognitive vs. Practical vs. Affective collective intentionality<sup>3</sup>.

For instance: *We* believe that *Hereafter* by Clint Eastwood is a beautiful movie vs. *we* intend to go to see *Hereafter* vs. *we* both are moved by *Hereafter* and *we* share the same enthusiasm for this movie.

We may already see that, among these different kinds of collective intentionality, the more problematic phenomenon to grasp and to define is affective collective intentionality: what exactly does it mean that *we share*

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction between practical collective intentionality and cognitive collective intentionality is now quite accepted (Gilbert 1989, Gilbert 2002, Bratman 1999, Searle 2010, Zaibert 2003, Tollefsen 2005, Schmid 2009). The individuation of affective collective intentionality as a third kind of intentionality, internal to the type of collective intentionality, on the other hand, is much more recent (see Schmid 2009), and not widely adopted. Michael Tomasello seems still to give a priority to cognitive states: he talks about «cognitive representations» for both collective intentions and collective beliefs, without paying particular attention to affective states (Tomasello 2009).

the same feeling, that we feel it together or collectively<sup>4</sup>? In which specific sense are “we both moved by *Hereafter*”? Which are the necessary and sufficient conditions for collective affective intentionality? In this paper, I will deal with these questions and attempt to provide an answer to them. Moreover, I will focus on a very relevant phenomenological issue. I have said that collective intentionality is constituted by mental states or acts. Considering the above mentioned examples of cognitive, practical and affective collective intentionality, it is maybe already manifest why I spoke of both mental states and acts. In fact, our *collective belief* that *Hereafter* is a beautiful movie is a collective mental state; instead, our *collective intention* to go to see *Hereafter* together is a collective act. Thus, what is an act and why is it different from a state? In philosophy, and also in common language, the meaning of “act” is ambiguous. Analytic philosophers tend to call mental acts mental states and tend to identify acts with actions. Phenomenologists, on the contrary, distinguish among states, acts and actions, and hold this distinction to be very important. I agree with this distinction, and in this paper I will always adopt it and I will refer to states, acts and actions as very different intentional phenomena.

Hence, what are acts and what are actions? Differently from mental states, *acts* are characterised by *positionality*: acts involve or presuppose taking a position (yes-no) relative to an object or to a state-of-affairs. *Actions* are goal-directed intentional movements: they are intended bodily movements which aim to satisfy the content of the intention. Let us consider just the case of *intention*: different from beliefs or from perceptions, which are mental states, intentions are acts in that they involve taking a position. A bodily movement which satisfies an intention is an action.

It is worth noting that among analytical philosophers, John Searle’s account of intention presents a very interesting intermediary position between phenomenology and analytical philosophy: although Searle does not speak of “mental acts” but only of “mental states” and “actions” (and also of “speech acts”), he distinguishes between “prior intention” and “intention-in-action”: “prior intentions begin prior to the onset of an action and intentions-in-action are the intentional components of actions” (Searle 2010, p. 51). Thus, the prior intentions Searle speaks about are exactly what in phenomenology are referred to as intentions, i.e. acts. In my paper I will speak much more about collective intentions, i.e. collective practical acts, and less about collective actions<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Bernhard Schmid has dealt with this problem in depth (see Schmid 2009).

<sup>5</sup> About the phenomenological theory of acts, see Reinach (1911a) and De Monticelli (2007, 2007a and 2009).

## 1.2. Intersubjective intentionality

Intersubjective intentionality is constituted by mental states or acts of one or more persons directed to the understanding of experiences of others. Intersubjective intentionality may be *affective* or *cognitive*. Affective and cognitive intersubjective intentionality are respectively directed to the *understanding of affective and cognitive experiences of other persons*. For instance: I see that you are thinking about your next lecture; I see that you are feeling joy. Moreover, we may also identify a third kind of intersubjective intentionality: *practical intersubjective intentionality*. This may be, for example, the case in which I see your intention to do something. The distinction among affective intersubjective intentionality, cognitive intersubjective intentionality and practical intersubjective intentionality has not yet been really adopted in philosophy: philosophers, but also and especially psychologists, cognitive scientists and neuroscientists tend to speak generically of *social cognition* which may indistinctly concern the understanding of cognitive, affective and practical experiences of other subjects. In other terms, “social cognition” means intersubjectivity, without distinguishing among cognitive, practical and affective intersubjectivity. Consistent with the phenomenological tradition, I distinguish, rather, among cognitive, affective and practical intersubjective intentionality: they are three different phenomena indeed.

Thus, I will focus on a fifth level of distinctions:

(v) Cognitive vs. Affective vs. Practical Intersubjective intentionality.

For instance: I see that you are thinking about *Hereafter* vs. I see that you are still moved by and enthusiastic about *Hereafter* vs. I see that you intend to go to see *Hereafter* again.

### 1.2.1. Intersubjective intentionality vs. collective intentionality

One of the aims of my taxonomy is to show that *affective intersubjective intentionality* is not to be confused with *affective collective intentionality*, and that *practical intersubjective intentionality* is not to be confused with *practical collective intentionality*. The possibility of this confusion is directly connected with the *criteria of characterisation* of intersubjective intentionality.

Firstly, we may characterise the kind of intersubjective intentionality through the *content* of mental states or acts: I see your intention, I see your belief, I see your feeling. Now, according to this characterisation, if I see your intention, this is a case of practical intersubjective intentionality; if I see your belief, this is a case of cognitive intersubjective intentionality; if I see your feeling, this is a case of affective intersubjective intentionality. Secondly, we may also characterise the kind of intersubjective intentionality in a stronger way, not only through the content but also through the *quality* of the mental states or acts: I intend your intention, I

feel your feeling, I believe your belief<sup>6</sup>. According to this second criterion of characterisation, I may see your intention, your belief, your feeling only if I personally have the same experience you have: only if I intend your intention, I believe your belief, I feel your feeling<sup>7</sup>.

These different criteria of characterisation depend on which account of intersubjective intentionality (social cognition) we adopt<sup>8</sup>. In any case, it is clear that if we adopt the second and stronger criterion of characterisation of intersubjective intentionality, then it is more difficult to distinguish between intersubjective affective intentionality on the one hand, and collective affective intentionality on the other, and between intersubjective practical intentionality on the one hand, and collective practical intentionality on the other.

Nonetheless, I think that, even if we adopt the stronger criterion of characterisation, we can distinguish among these different types and kinds of intentionality.

Just consider these examples: if I feel your joy (I share your joy), it does not mean that you share my joy, too. In the same way, if I intend your intention, and so share your intention, it does not imply that you share my intention, too. My point is the following: these are not cases of collective intentionality because we do not intend together and we do not feel together. The content of the intentions and feelings are certainly the same in both of the subjects involved, you and me: you intend x, I intend

<sup>6</sup> The distinction between content and quality of intentional experiences is a classic phenomenological distinction: we find it already in the early Husserl (1901). This is also a classic analytical distinction: in Searle we find the intentional content versus intentional mode distinction (Searle 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Particularly in the case of intersubjective affective intentionality it makes sense to adopt the stronger criterion: it really could be difficult to see that you are feeling joy or pain without feeling it. This is also the position of phenomenologists like Scheler and Stein: according to them, empathy (called *Nachfühlung* by Scheler and, more traditionally, *Einfühlung* by Stein), the act by which I see the feeling of the other, is characterised by the affective *nuance* of knowing. Scheler speaks properly of a «*verstehen fühlend*» (see Scheler 1926<sup>3</sup> and Stein 1917).

<sup>8</sup> There are different accounts which try to describe or explain the phenomenon of intersubjective intentionality or social cognition. The crucial problem is: how do I understand the experiences of others? Do I understand them by *inferences* (the inference which I can make from the expressions or bodily appearance of the other and from my own experience)? Do I understand them by *simulating* them? Do I understand them by feeling them, if they are feeling, by intending them, if they are intentions etc.? Can I understand the experiences of the others without engaging myself in such experiences? Neurosciences maintain that mirror neurons are the heroes of social cognition. But the neurobiological data are interpreted in many ways according to the different accounts (Simulation theory, Theory of Mind, called also Theory-theory etc.). About this debate, see Gallese (2005, 2011), Goldman (2005), Rizzolati-Sinigaglia (2007), Gallagher-Zahavi (2008).

x; you feel joy, I feel joy. But the *direction of the intentionality* in the case of intersubjective intentionality is always and only an *I-you direction*, i.e. a direction from I to you: by seeing your intention or feeling, I intend the same intention you intend, I feel the same joy you feel. Instead, in the case of collective intentionality, the direction of the intentionality is always a *we-shared object direction*: a direction from *we* (I and you) to a common, shared object (see *infra* § 2.1., 2.2.).

Moreover – and strictly connected with the direction of intentionality issue – the *role of the subjects* involved is different. The subjects of collective intentionality are always agent-partners: we all intend or feel together. Instead, the subjects involved in intersubjective intentionality are not agent-partners: I am the only agent; you are not another agent. Only I intend, only I feel – your intention, your feeling.

I would also mention another possible borderline case between intersubjective affective intentionality and collective affective intentionality. I refer here to the case of *emotional contagion* in which I am affected by your emotion: I feel joy because I am swayed by your joy, I have absorbed it without being aware of it; in other terms, I do not feel joy at a personal level, I do not have a first personal perspective towards the joy I feel (see *infra* § 2.3). Also in this case, it is manifest that we (I and you) *de facto* feel the same feeling, but also in this case the direction of intentionality remains an intersubjective direction from *I* to *you* and the role of the subjects involved is not an agent-partners' role.

Thus, with respect to the question I have posed – what exactly does it mean to say that we share the same feeling, that we feel it together or collectively? – I can firstly state that it means that in the case of collective or shared intentionality: (i) the intentionality direction of the subjects involved is towards a common object (and not, as in the case of intersubjective intentionality, directed from one subject to the other subject); (ii) all of the subjects involved perform an agent-partner role. Moreover, we will see that collective intentionality, and particularly collective affective intentionality, must satisfy further conditions in order to exist (see *infra* § 2.2.).

The conclusion of this argument is that I can focus on a sixth and seventh level of distinctions:

(vi) Affective collective intentionality vs. Affective intersubjective intentionality.

For instance: we are both moved by *Hereafter* and we share the same enthusiasm for this movie vs. I see (I feel) your emotion and enthusiasm for *Hereafter* .

(vii) Practical collective intentionality vs. Practical intersubjective intentionality.

For instance: we intend to go to see *Hereafter* together vs. I see (I intend) your intention to go to see *Hereafter*.

### 1.3. Social intentionality

Social intentionality is constituted by *social acts* performed by one or more persons in the very act of speaking, addressed to one or more persons and grasped by them. Social acts are promising, commanding, informing, demanding, promulgating etc<sup>9</sup>. As acts, they are experiences which involve and presuppose taking a position, thus they are characterised by *authorship* or *agency*<sup>10</sup>. Differently from collective and intersubjective mental states and acts, social acts need to be communicated to their addressees and grasped by them. Social acts are *speech acts* – most of them are *declarations*, as Searle affirms<sup>11</sup>. Hence, the nature of social intentionality is essentially *communicative* and *linguistic*: social intentionality can be performed only if it is linguistically addressed to the addressees and grasped by them.

I will here make some remarks on a point concerning Searle's conception of social intentionality, social acts and speech acts. According to Searle, social intentionality, social acts and speech acts can be subsumed under collective intentionality (Searle 1995, 2010 pp. 48-50). Thus, Searle would not probably agree with the distinction between collective and social intentionality I make. Why? What does Searle mean? And why – on the contrary – do I think that his perspective is not completely adequate for elucidating the phenomenon of social acts?

<sup>9</sup> Social acts were discovered and defined by Adolf Reinach, a phenomenologist and philosopher of law who was a student of Edmund Husserl at the beginning of XX century (Reinach 1911, 1913). Before Reinach, Thomas Reid had already spoken of «social operations» (Reid 1788). Reinach's social acts anticipate by some fifty years the discovery of Austin's speech acts (Austin, 1969). About a history of social and speech acts, see Smith (1990), Mulligan (1987), Shuhmann-Smith (1990), De Vecchi (2010).

<sup>10</sup> More precisely, social acts are «spontaneous» and free acts, and have a second order positionality: their taking a position presupposes a previous taking of a position. Consider these examples: promising presupposes a will, informing presupposes a conviction, asking a question presupposes an uncertainty etc. In all these cases, social acts are manifestly second order position-takings because they presuppose first order position-takings such as, accordingly with the examples mentioned, the will, conviction and uncertainty. In other terms, in social acts, we take a position with respect to positions which we have already taken, and we turn these previous position-takings into the ground of an act. For instance, you told me a story, and I did not understand exactly how it ended; now, I can take a position about it: I can endorse or ignore my state of uncertainty and curiosity about it. If I endorse it, this state of uncertainty may be the basis for another position-taking, a higher order position; I may turn this state of uncertainty into the ground of asking you about the end of the story (see Reinach 1911a, 1913: § 3; Stein 1922; Husserl 1912-1928: § 61; De Monticelli 2007a).

<sup>11</sup> See Searle (1969, 1995, 2010), Mulligan (1987), Smith (1990), De Vecchi (2010).



According to Searle, the intentionality of language, and thus the intentionality of social and speech acts, derives from the intentionality of the mind. Now, in order to perform a social act, i.e. linguistically address another individual (the addressee) who grasps the act, the individual, agent of the act, must have a preceding representation of the act itself, representation which is already collective. In fact, according to Searle, the content of the representation involves the other individual; thus it is collective before the agent of the act communicates it to the addressee and before the addressee exists and grasps the act. In this sense, the social and linguistic moment of the act ontologically depends on the collective moment – the capability to refer to other subjects – belonging to the intentionality of every individual<sup>12</sup>. This is a very significant point characterising Searle's individualism and internalism: it implies that, in order to perform a social act, a collective moment must already be present in the individual mind, and that the individual's capacity for collective intentionality grounds the sociality of social acts. This perspective keeps Searle apart from other philosophers like Antonie Meijers and Hans-Bernhard Schmid, who state that a concrete and real relational moment is ontologically necessary in order for a collective intentionality to exist (Meijers 1994, Schmid 2009)<sup>13</sup>.

Now, why do I think that Searle's perspective does not adequately account for the phenomenon of social acts? Because it does not show that social acts and collective acts have different existential conditions and different essential structure. Phenomenologically, the essential character of social acts is their need to be communicated to and grasped by their addressees; on the contrary it is not an essential character of collective intentionality and of intersubjective intentionality. Thus, on the basis of this essential difference, I state that social acts are not reducible to collective states or acts.

A very specific characteristic of *social intentionality* is that it creates *social ontology*, and precisely *normative* and *institutional entities* belonging to social ontology. For instance, if I promise you to do something, my promise produces an *obligation* and a *claim*.

Social ontology is also produced by collective intentionality and in some cases also by intersubjective intentionality. The taxonomy also focuses on the different roles and contributions of social, intersubjective and collective intentionality in the construction of social reality.

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<sup>12</sup> See Searle (2010: 48-50): "There is a ground-floor form of collective intentionality, one that exists prior to the exercise of language and which makes the use of language possible at all (50)".

<sup>13</sup> For a very clear presentation of the salient issues of the internalism versus externalism collective intentionality debate and also a defence of Searle's internalism, see Gallotti (2010, Third Chapter).

Thus, I will lastly focus on an eighth level of distinctions:

(viii) Social entities created by social intentionality vs. social entities created by collective intentionality vs. social entities created by intersubjective intentionality.

For instance: promising creates obligations and claims vs. collective beliefs create philosophical societies, political parties etc. vs. intersubjective feelings create groups of friends, families, communities etc.

## 2. The sharing thesis: collective intentionality is a shared intentionality

I state that, differently from social and intersubjective intentionality, *collective intentionality is a shared intentionality* in a very strong sense of the term «sharing», a sense that implies three essential conditions in the case of practical and cognitive collective intentionality and four essential conditions in the case of affective collective intentionality. Singularly, these conditions are necessary conditions, and jointly they are also sufficient conditions.

This thesis would also try to give an answer to the previously mentioned question regarding collective affective intentionality: what exactly does it mean that we share the same feeling, that we feel it together or collectively? (see *supra* § 1.1)?

This thesis develops what I have stated previously concerning the distinction between affective intersubjective intentionality on the one hand, and affective collective intentionality on the other, and about the distinction between practical collective intentionality on the one hand, and practical intersubjective intentionality on the other (see *supra* § 1.2). This thesis also develops the previously mentioned point regarding the role of the subjects in collective intentionality (see *supra* § 1.2).

### 2.1. Collective intentions and collective beliefs are shared intentions and beliefs

Collective intentions and collective beliefs are a shared intentionality which requires three conditions:

- (i) *Intentional quality and intentional content condition*;
- (ii) *Mutual belief condition*;
- (iii) *Agent-partners role condition*.

These conditions are jointly *essential conditions for collective intentions* and also collective beliefs as *shared intentionality*. In other terms, these conditions specify the sense – a very strong one – in which collective intentions (volitions or desires) and collective beliefs are indeed *shared intentions* and *shared beliefs*.

Consider the following *collective intentions* (i.e. a case of practical collective intentionality) *state-of-affairs* (the case of collective beliefs may be built symmetrically):

(i) We intend to go to the movies together<sup>14</sup>.

Firstly, state-of-affairs (i) implies trivially an *intentional quality and intentional content condition*. It implies that:

(ii) We have an intentional act of the *same quality*: an intention;

(iii) My intention and your intention have the *same content*: to go to the movies together.

It is important to stress this condition, because we could have intentional acts of the same type (practical intentionality) and with the same content (to go to the movies together) but of different quality: I could have the *intention* to go to the movies together and you could have only the *desire* to go to the movies together. Thus, in this case, there would of course not be collective intentions<sup>15</sup>.

Secondly, state-of-affairs (i) also presupposes a *mutual belief condition*. It presupposes that:

(iv) I believe that you intend for us to go to the movies together;

(v) You believe that I intend for us to go to the movies together<sup>16</sup>.

Hence,

(vi) We believe that we intend the same goal<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, state-of-affairs (i) entails an *agent-partner role condition*:

(vii) We (you and I) are both agents of the intention to go to the movies together.

The *agent-partner role condition* concerns the role of agent-partners that all of the subjects involved necessarily have with respect to the common goal to go to the movies together: we are all agents of this collective intention.

This condition, of course, does not require that the content of our shared intention necessarily be the same with respect to the part I have to perform in order to carry out our intended goal: in order to do x together, I may have to do x1 (my part) and you may have to do x2 (your part)<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup>I assume here Searle's account of collective intentions which does not reduce collective intentions to individual intentions plus mutual beliefs (1990, 1995, 2010).

<sup>15</sup>Moreover, I have to remember that intentions and desires have different conditions of satisfaction (see Searle 2010, Zaibert 2003, Zaibert-Smith 2006).

<sup>16</sup>According to Searle, the belief about the intention of the other (i.e. about the fact that the other – like me – intends x, too), and viceversa, cannot be a content of the intention, because intentions are self-referential mental states, and hence cannot concern the intention of other persons than myself. This mutual belief about the intention of others is present aside from the intention and is presupposed by the intention (see Searle 2010, chapter III). On this point, I agree with Searle.

<sup>17</sup>The mutual belief condition (expressed in (i), (iv)-(vi), in case of «intention-in-action») does not require that each of us exactly know what the other does (see Searle 2010). This condition requires only that I believe that you intend and cooperate towards the same goal and that you believe that I intend and cooperate towards the same goal. In the case of collective intentionality of high complexity (for example, the collective intentionality of a corporation, of a state's government, or more simply of a theater company), it is rare that each member knows the part-intention (and the part-action) of every other member.

<sup>18</sup>See Searle (1990, 1995, 2010).

I claim that these three conditions jointly characterise collective intentions and collective beliefs as such, i.e. as shared intentionality (I have not created a specific example for collective beliefs, but the reader can proceed to the substitution of the intentions and their intentional contents with beliefs: for instance, “we believe that we will go to the movies together”). To summarize, we intend together and we believe together, only under the conditions that each of us:

- (i) has the same intentional act (intention) or state (belief) and the same intentional content;
- (ii) is reciprocally aware that we share the same intended goal, the same belief;
- (iii) jointly has the agent-partner’s role with respect to the common intended goal and the common belief.

I also state that these conditions are not essential conditions either for social intentionality or for intersubjective intentionality, and also maintain that neither social intentionality nor intersubjective intentionality are shared intentionality.

2.2.  
 Collective  
 feeling is a  
 shared feeling

Collective feeling is a shared intentionality, which requires four conditions:

- (i) *Intentional quality, intensity and content condition;*
- (ii) *Mutual belief condition;*
- (iii) *Agent-partner role condition;*
- (iv) *Subjects’ relation towards the object condition.*

These conditions are jointly essential *conditions for collective affective intentionality as shared intentionality*. Consider the following *collective feeling state-of-affairs*:

- (i) We both feel enthusiasm for *Hereafter*.

Firstly, state-of-affairs (i) trivially implies an *intentional quality and intentional content condition*. It implies that:

- (ii) We have the *same quality* of intentional act: a feeling, and precisely, a feeling of enthusiasm;
- (iii) My feeling and your feeling have the *same content*: enthusiasm with respect to *Hereafter*.

As we have previously remarked for collective intentions, it is important to focus our attention on this condition because we could have intentional acts of the same type (affective intentionality) and with the same content (*Hereafter*) but of different quality: I could feel enthusiasm for *Hereafter*, and you could simply feel joy for *Hereafter*. Thus, in this case, there would of course not be collective feelings. Moreover, besides the same intentional quality and content, state-of-affairs (i) also implies that the *intensity of the feeling* is the same. Feelings have

degrees, and in order to share the same feeling we have to share a feeling of the same *degree*, and not only of the same quality and content. Thus, state-of-affairs (i) implies that:

(iv) We both feel the same degree of enthusiasm.

The degree of feeling also depends on the character of the person (there are persons who feel an emotion much more intensely vs. persons who feel an emotion less intensely) and on the life energy we have in the moment we experience a certain feeling<sup>19</sup>.

Secondly, state-of-affairs (i) also implicitly presupposes a *mutual belief condition*. It presupposes that:

(v) I believe that you feel enthusiasm for *Hereafter*;

(vi) You believe that I feel enthusiasm for *Hereafter*.

Hence,

(vii) We believe that we feel enthusiasm for *Hereafter*.

Thirdly, state-of-affairs (i) also entails an *agent-partner role condition*:

(viii) We (you and I) are both agents of the feeling (enthusiasm for *Hereafter*).

Finally, state-of-affairs (i) implies another condition concerning the *subjects' relation towards the object*. All of the subjects involved must have the same relation towards the object which they feel a certain emotion for:

(ix) We (you and I) have the same relation towards *Hereafter*: we are both spectators of the movie.

If you were Clint Eastwood, the director of the movie, and I were simply a spectator of the movie, then we could not share the same feeling of enthusiasm.

In this regard, I would like now to mention Scheler's famous case of *feeling-together* (*Mit-einanderfühlen*): a father and mother feel the same pain standing by the dead body of their beloved child. In this case, we properly have an example of "emotional sharing"<sup>20</sup>, which satisfies all the essential conditions for collective feeling that we have individuated. Moreover, Scheler's example is very clear with respect to the subjects' relation condition. As Scheler remarks, the friend of the family, who also feels pain for the dead child, does not share the same pain as that shared by the parents. He may only experience compassion or a fellow-feeling (*Mit-gefühl*) with respect to the parents' pain. Why? Because he does not have the same relation that the parents have with the dead child.

It is manifest that this condition does not make sense with respect to collective intentions or collective beliefs: we could share the same intention

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<sup>19</sup> See on this point the remarks of Edith Stein (Stein 1922).

<sup>20</sup> See Scheler (1926<sup>3</sup>), and in this regard see: Schmid (2009, § 15 "Phenomenological Fusion"), Krebs (2010), Zahavi (2008).

or the same belief, even if my relation with the object towards which I have the intention or belief were different from yours.

**2.3.**  
**Intersubjective**  
**intentionality**  
**is not a shared**  
**intentionality**

Consider the following *cognitive intersubjective intentionality state-of-affairs*:

- (i) I intend to go to the movies;
- (ii) You understand that I intend to go to the movies;
- (i) and (ii) are essential moments of the intersubjective state-of-affairs.

There is a subject (I) that intends to go to the movies, and there is another subject (You) who understands the mental act of the first subject (I). In this situation, can we properly speak of a *shared* intentionality implying the three above mentioned conditions: (i) Intentional quality and intentional content condition; (ii) Mutual belief condition; (iii) Agent-partners' role condition?

No, we cannot. There is here only a *one-sided knowledge condition*. Certainly, it may happen that:

- (iii) You intend to go to the movies, too;
- (iv) You and I (We) intend to go to the movies.

But, even in this case, where we share the same intentional quality and the same intentional content, and thus satisfy one of the three conditions, we cannot describe (iii) saying that *you share my intention* in the same strong sense of sharing implied by collective intentionality. Because, in case (iii), we only have a one-sided sharing and not a mutual sharing: *you share my intention, but I do not share your intention*. In other terms, this is a case of *practical intersubjective intentionality and not a case of practical collective intentionality*.

To sum up, in this situation (i)-(iv) we do not have a proper shared or collective intentionality, but only an intersubjective intentionality: first, you know (understand) that I intend to go to the movies (cognitive intersubjective intentionality); second, you intend to go to the movies (the same intention I have), too (practical intersubjective intentionality). Apparently, we both intend to go to the movies, but we do not intend to go to the movies together. The I-intention and you-intention do not produce here a "we-intention".

What about the *agent-partners' role condition* in this case? Neither does this condition hold: you and I are both agents, but *we are not agent-partners relative to the same-shared goal*. My intention and your intention may have the same content (I intend to go to the movies and you intend to go to the movies) but we are not jointly the agents of the same intention: you have just the same intention I have, and you know that I have this intention.

2.3.1.  
 Affective  
 intersubjective  
 intentionality  
 vs. affective  
 collective  
 intentionality

It is important to return now to the distinction between affective intersubjective intentionality on the one hand, and affective collective intentionality on the other, and to stress a very significant difference with regard to it. Affective intersubjective intentionality satisfies only the *intentional quality and intentional content condition*, and may also satisfy the claim about *intensity*, but it does not satisfy either the mutual belief condition or the agent-partners' role conditions. On the contrary, as we have seen, affective collective intentionality entails all these conditions. Consider the following *affective intersubjective intentionality states-of-affairs*:

- (i) I feel joy
- (ii) You understand that I feel joy;

And maybe,

- (iii) You feel joy, too
- (iv) You and I feel joy.

In this case, differently from the affective collective intentionality case, we do not properly share the same feeling. You understand my feeling and, possibly, understanding it, you feel it, but a common feeling does not really exist. Each of us feels her/his feeling: my feeling and yours have the same quality and the same content and they could also have the same intensity, but we do not feel it together. This is the case of empathy (*Einfühlung*) and sympathy (*Mitfühung*) (or of forms of "social cognition" which are affectively marked)<sup>21</sup>. But this is not the case of collective affective intentionality: collective affective intentionality is realized only if the subjects share the feeling, only if their feeling is a "feeling-together".

2.3.2.  
 Intersubjective  
 intentionality  
 grounds both  
 collective and  
 social inten-  
 tionality

I maintain that intersubjective intentionality is in many cases the basis of collective and social intentionality. For instance, in the case of *collective intentions and collective actions*, in order to cooperate towards a common goal, a relation among the subjects, which is the basis of the agreement and the commitment towards the shared goal, is needed. This relation is created through intersubjective intentionality, particularly intersubjective affective intentionality, at the personal level (empathy and sympathy). This type of intentionality allows us to understand the others with whom we share intentions, beliefs etc. and with whom we perform social acts (promising, informing, asking, commanding etc.).

Phenomenologists like Husserl claim that the intersubjective relation is a necessary condition for social acts, for collective experiences and for the constitution of the social world. In intersubjective intentionality, and precisely in a mutual intersubjective intentionality where the role of

<sup>21</sup> See Lipps (1913), Stein (1917), Scheler (1926<sup>3</sup>), Gallese (2005).

agent is played by both the subjects (I see what you intend, believe or feel, and you see what I intend, believe or feel), even if probably in different temporal moments, Husserl identifies the situation which normally characterises interpersonal relations: we know each other and mostly we understand what the other intends, believes and feels. Thus, on the basis of this mutual understanding, which is proper of interpersonal relations, we may also perform social acts, have collective intentions, beliefs, feelings and generally have forms of collective experiences<sup>22</sup>.

Hence, also in this case, phenomenology sees all the richness of the reality, and “save the phenomena”. In fact, I perform the social act to invite you to the movies with me, since there is an affective interpersonal relation between us (love, trust, esteem, respect etc.). Likewise, we have the collective intention to walk on the hills together, since we have feelings of trust, mutual sympathy and pleasure: I feel and believe that you are trustworthy and tomorrow you will come to the trip, and we like each other’s company.

I agree with Husserl, and I maintain that affective intersubjective intentionality, conceived as a basic inter-personal relation, is a necessary condition – even if obviously not a sufficient condition – for collective intentionality and for the constitution of social entities like associations, groups, communities (rock bands, basket teams, orchestras, philosophical societies, families, marriages etc.).

On the contrary, philosophers like Searle say that collective intentions could also be intentions of an extremely solitary brain in a vat. Most philosophers and cognitive scientists – with rare exceptions – pay very little attention to the inter-personal relation, and in particular the affective one, and do not claim that it is a necessary condition of each collective experience<sup>23</sup>.

**2.4.**  
**Social**  
**intentionality**  
**is not a shared**  
**intentionality**

Now, let us consider the following *social intentionality state-of-affairs*:

(i) I promise you to do x.

In order to be performed, a promise, as do all social acts, requires that the addressee grasps the act. So, (i) requires that:

(ii) You (the addressee) grasp my act of promising.

<sup>22</sup> See Husserl (1910), “Die für Sozialität konstitutiven Akte, die *kommunikativen*” and “Soziale Ontologie und deskriptive Soziologie”, in Husserl (1905-1920, p. 98, Beilage XVIII, p. 102-104, Beilage XVIII), and see Husserl (1912-1928, § 51 *Die Personen in der Kollektivität der Personen*).

<sup>23</sup> See Searle (1990), Against Searlian individualism in collective intentionality and *pro* a collective intentionality based on relational intentionality, see Meijers (1994, p. 7), Bratman (1999), Schmid (2009, p. 37).



(i) and (ii) imply a mutual knowledge condition:

(iii) You know that I promise you to do x.

(iv) I know that you have grasped my promise.

Hence, in the case of social intentionality, a *knowledge condition is necessary*: the promisee knows that the promisor promised something to her/him; and the promisor knows that the promisee grasped her/his promise. Thus, the content of the knowledge of the agent (the promisor) is different from the content of the knowledge of the addressee (the promisee).

Moreover, in social intentionality *the agent-partner role condition fails*.

For my act of promising to be performed, it is necessary that you be aware of my promise. But your being aware does not at all imply that you share my act of promising, i.e. that you also are promising me the same thing. It only implies that you are aware of my act: you are the addressee of the act, while I am the agent of the act.

Thus, this situation clearly does not entail the agent-partner role condition.

The two subjects play a different role: one subject is properly the agent who is the source of the act; the other is the addressee. The two subjects are complementary: they constitute a partnership, but the addressee is the *counter partner* of the agent, while in the case of collective intentionality all the subjects are agent-partners in the same way.

In conclusion, social intentionality does not coincide with collective intentionality for at least two reasons: because it entails a knowledge condition, and because of the lack of the agent-partner role in all the subjects involved.

**3. Conclusions** In order to elucidate the phenomenon of collective intentionality and to show its family resemblances and diversities with the phenomena of intersubjective and social intentionality, I have developed a taxonomy of collective, intersubjective and social intentionality, and I have argued a thesis on collective intentionality as shared intentionality.

My taxonomy has presented eight distinctions:

The (i)-(iii) distinctions stated that collective, intersubjective and social intentionality are different types of intentionality.

The (iv)-(v) distinctions claimed that, as in individual intentionality, there are different kinds of intentionality also in collective and intersubjective intentionality: practical, affective and cognitive.

The (vi)-(vii) distinctions focused on two kinds of collective and intersubjective intentionality which are often confused: practical collective intentionality vs. practical intersubjective intentionality; affective collective intentionality vs. affective intersubjective intentionality.

The (viii) distinction has remarked on the fact that all these types of

intentionality – collective, intersubjective and social intentionality – create social entities, but that each produces social entities of different kinds belonging to different levels of social ontology.

Secondly, I have argued a thesis on collective intentionality as shared intentionality: only collective intentionality – and not intersubjective and social intentionality – is a shared intentionality *stricto sensu*. This thesis aims to answer to the question: what exactly does it mean that we share the same feeling, the same intention, the same belief? The thesis identifies essential conditions for collective intentionality, precisely three essential conditions for collective intentions and collective beliefs, and four essential conditions for collective feelings.

*We intend together* and *we believe together*, only on the *conditions* that each of us:

- (i) has the same intentional quality (the same act, i.e. intention, or the same state, i.e. belief) and the same intentional content;
- (ii) is reciprocally aware that we share the same intended goal, the same belief;
- (iii) jointly has the agent-partner's role with respect to the common intended goal and the common belief.

*We feel together* only on the *conditions* that each of us:

- (i) has the same intentional quality (the same feeling), the same intensity of feeling and the same content of feeling;
- (ii) is mutually aware that we share the same feeling;
- (iii) jointly has the agent-partner role condition with respect to the common feeling;
- (iv) has the same subjects' relation towards the object which we feel a certain emotion for.

I state that these conditions are not essential conditions either for intersubjective intentionality or for social intentionality.

Finally, I have also identified a foundation relation among collective, intersubjective and social intentionality: intersubjective intentionality is the basis and the necessary condition for collective and social intentionality.

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