Thinking (About) Groups
Conference on Collective Intentionality and Social Ontology
08-10.10.2014

Center for Subjectivity Research
University of Copenhagen
Organizers: Alessandro Salice, John Michael

<u>Speakers' abstracts</u>

1) Dominic Abrams (University of Kent)

<u>Title</u>: The Group as a Subjective Entity - Development and Implications.

<u>Abstract</u>: Although groups have a physical existence, they also exist as psychological entities. A great deal of theory and research has asked how and why it is that people behave as if they personally embodied large scale social categories, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, but also team memberships and transitory or temporary memberships. This work has largely focussed on the mechanisms that create 'social identity', and the associated motivations. A different stream of psychological research has concentrated on dynamics within small groups, such as those that create conditions for cooperation, for cohesiveness, conformity and social influence. This paper considers how these two sets of processes may work together to provide an integrated psychological engagement with both the intergroup and intragroup levels. This has roots in sociological approaches to social order and deviance as well as in psychological work on small group dynamics and is captured by subjective group dynamics theory. However, a further question is how these subjective group dynamics actually operate and emerge. This invites a developmental analysis of group processes which helps to explain the mechanisms by which people learn and apply their tacit understanding of groups and group identity ('group nous'). The paper will describe the underlying theory and a body of research that contributes to the distinctive problems and questions it raises.

2) Trine Bilde (University of Aarhus)

<u>Title</u>: Group Living and Cooperation in Animals

<u>Abstract</u>: The evolution of cooperative group living is puzzling, because helping behaviour is costly to the actor. Selfish behaviour favoured by natural selection is therefore a threat to cooperation as an evolutionarily stable strategy (ESS). I will discuss ESS models of cooperation, and present empirical work testing some of these models in social spiders.

3) Michael E. Bratman (Stanford University)

<u>Title</u>: From Shared Intention to Shared Policies of Governance and the Intentions of a Group

Abstract: I begin with the model of shared intention presented in my <u>Shared Agency: A Planning Theory of Acting Together</u> (OUP 2014). I try to use these philosophical resources to develop models of important forms of shared policy, where policies are intentions that are relevantly general. These include shared policies concerning weights for our shared deliberation, shared policies of acceptance, shared social norms, shared policies of procedure and shared policies of authorization. I conjecture that the functioning of such shared policies is characteristic of an important form of shared governance, and that this is normally a good reason to support and to conform to such shared policies, once they are in place. This leads to a model of the intentions of a group. On this model the intentions of a group are anchored in plan-like attitudes of the participants. Nevertheless, not all group intentions are shared intentions.

4) Felix C. Brodbeck (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Title: The 'Group' as a Psychological Construct Made Subject to Scientific Investigation and Empiric Enquiry

Abstract: What is a group? Psychologists, who traditionally study human experience, thinking, emotion, motivation, and behavior in various contexts, define a group in at least two ways, a) as "two or more people who interact with one another, and share <…> " [<attributes a, b, c, … >], which comes close to an ontological perspective, or b) as "those individuals who identify themselves as members of a group", which appears to be an epistemological perspective. Here we are right in the middle of our conference theme "Thinking (about) groups.". Psychologists think about groups and about individuals who think about groups.

In my talk I shall exemplify some phenomena, theorizing, and empirical data about the psychological construct of a 'group', for example: How does a (social) group come into existence (psychologically)? Does a (social) group sustain beyond its original selection of members? If so, in what sense can that occur? What exactly does remain after the founding group members vanished? Are individual level phenomena (e.g., individual performance, decision, learning, and memory) to be differentiated from similarly labeled group level phenomena (e.g., group performance, group decision, group learning, and group memory)? And if so, how is that accomplished? And what follows from the respective empirical results obtained in experimental laboratories and real world settings?

Let me stimulate the debate with a provocative quote from Richard Dawkins who wrote that genes "like diamonds, are forever" while "individuals and groups are like clouds in the sky or dust storms in the desert." (1989, "The Selfish Gene", p. 34).

5) Brian Epstein (Tufts University)

Title: Two Theories of Groups: Social Integrate vs. Status Models

Abstract: In this paper, I present and criticize the two prevailing models of groups. The "social integrate" model, put forward by Gilbert, Bratman, and Pettit, takes sociality to be a

matter of the integration of attitudes and commitments of group members. The "status" model, put forward by Searle and Hindriks, takes at least one kind of social group to be the product of external status assignments onto collections of people. I describe these views, as well as Tuomela's hybrid view. I argue that the social integrate model is inadequate to account for most social groups, but that the status model is a misguided solution. Instead, I propose a new approach to social groups.

6) Margaret Gilbert (University of California Irvine)

Title: Groups, Rights, and Obligations

Abstract: Those acting together constitute a central type of social group. While some theorists maintain that those who act together have associated rights and obligations, others have argued that they do not. In order to evaluate the position of the former, one needs to be clear about the kind of right and the kind of obligation supposed to be at issue. One also needs to be clear as to how, quite generally, such rights and obligations are possible. This talk addresses these questions.

7) Marion Godman (TINT, Helsinki; Cambridge University)

Title: How Do Social Groups and Social Institutions Underpin the Social Sciences?

Abstract: In this talk I approach social ontology from the point of view of being the basis for learning and knowledge in the social sciences. I want to ask questions like: how come we can learn about social institutions and groups, or why is it that we can make some generalizations about stay at home Moms (if we can) and some predictions about the behaviour of British Broadcasting Corporation (if we can)? In answering these questions, I draw on some work in cultural evolution theory and Ruth Millikan's notion of historical kinds (1999) that I have found instructive. Such work has stressed the importance of social learning as an alternative to genes in explaining how traits and behavior can be reproduced and retained across generations of cultural species. I argue that this work also show us how generalizations amongst members of social groups can be made possible. To address the question of social institutions in particular, I draw some morals from a different domain in the philosophy of biology: the debate over nature of species. I argue that from the perspective of being objects of knowledge, social institutions behave much like other biological individuals: organisms and, perhaps, species.

8) Arto Laitinen (University of Tampere) and Onni Hirvonen (University of Jyväskylä)

Title: Self-Interpreting Groups: Group Agency and Collective Identity

Abstract: The idea is to examine groups capable of forming an idea of themselves, to study whether this is a preconception of group agency (as a group needs purposes, goals, etc. to distinguish itself from other groups with possibly the same members) or vice versa (as a group can hardly form conceptions unless it can act and think), and to study the concept of

collective identity; to distinguish various senses of "identity" [numerical sameness; qualitative similarity; and various forms (practical, evaluative, narrative) of what Ricoeur calls ipse-identity] and discuss how the ipse-identity is formed dialogically or in relations of recognition from others; and especially to focus on the dynamics of external stereotypes and labels and their contestation by the group, with one notable alternative being that the members of the group would like the grouping to cease to exist as a special social difference that makes a difference.

9) John Michael (CEU, Budapest; University of Copenhagen)

Title: (How) Can Groups Make Commitments?

Abstract: Many social interactions and agreements within contemporary society involve group agents (e.g. institutions, political parties, corporations). It is therefore not uncommon for people to have to assess (i) to what extent they can trust that groups will honor (implicit or explicit) commitments, and (ii) to what extent they themselves are bound by commitments made to groups. The former – i.e. (i) – is important because people are more willing to rely on commitments that are credible, so it would be valuable to understand how, and in what circumstances, what kinds of groups can make credible commitments. The latter – i.e. (ii) – is important because groups frequently rely on commitments from individuals, and it would be useful to know under what conditions people are motivated to honor those commitments. In order to shed light on both (i) and (ii), I will adapt the minimal approach to commitment laid out in Michael, Knoblich & Sebanz (Under Review). The minimal approach characterizes a broad category of phenomena of which commitment in the strict sense is a special case, and introduces the term 'minimal commitment' to designate this category. The minimal approach also specifies several factors that modulate the level of minimal commitment. In the talk, I will show how these factors can be implemented in the case of commitments involving group.

10) Josef Parnas (University of Copenhagen)

Title: Approaching Problems of 'We-Intentionality' in Schizophrenia: A Challenge for Empirical Research

Abstract: TBA

11) Carol Rovane (Columbia University)

Title: Collective Agency vs. Group Agency

Abstract: In most philosophical discussions, the phrase "group agency" is taken to refer to a form of collective agency -- that is, a form of agency in which many individuals act together for the sake of a collective end. While there is nothing wrong with that way of understanding the phrase, we should not overlook that there are two quite different senses in which a group of human beings may act together: the human beings who constitute the

group may continue to function as individual agents in their own rights, so that when they act together they are still all acting from their own separate points of view; or, the human beings may realize, at the level of the whole group, the conditions of individual rationality, where this involves acting from a single, group point of view. I propose to use the phrase "collective agency" to refers to the former, and "group agency" to refer to the latter. Armed with the distinction between group agency and collective, I go on to argue that the possibility of group agency holds general significance for a philosophical understanding of *all* cases of rational agency. I also clarify how the possibility of group agency goes together with the possibility of multiple agents within a single human being. Time permitting, I will say a bit about the moral significance of the distinction between group and collective agency.

12) Alessandro Salice (University of Copenhagen) and Mads Gram Henriksen (University of Copenhagen)

<u>Title</u>: The Disrupted We: Schizophrenia and Collective Intentionality

<u>Abstract</u>: Recent empirical studies on early, non-psychotic anomalous self-experiences in schizophrenia have demonstrated that the majority of first-admission patients complain about profound feelings of dissimilarity *vis á vis* other human beings ('I feel like an alien'), excessive self-monitoring tendencies (e.g., observing one's own mental states rather than being spontaneously engaged and immersed in worldly activities), difficulties in establishing and maintaining emotional relationships with others, and lack of ability to grasp or disinterest towards societal norms and tacit rules of social interaction (i.e., perplexity).

In various ways, schizophrenia seems to involve an anomalous form of we-intentionality— e.g., deluded patients may firmly believe that the nurses in the ward are trying to poison them but nonetheless happily eat the food the nurses' serve them, or they may believe that others are robots but still interact with them as if they were real humans (this peculiar phenomenon is called 'double bookkeeping'). In short, in psychosis patients with schizophrenia may be absorbed in their delusional world but at the same remain inconspicuously adapted to the shared social world. Moreover, many patients report that they have major problems with basic everyday social interactions like 'small talk' (there may be many reasons for this, including experiences of perplexity, anxiety, transitivism or solipsistic grandiosity), whereas they often function much better socially in situations where there are explicit and codified rules (e.g., playing games).

The aim of this talk is to shed light on schizophrenia, collective intentionality, and their relation. Our main hypothesis is that collective intentionality comes in different forms and that especially two of them play a particularly relevant role in schizophrenia. The first is a goal-oriented form of intentionality that is made distinctive by the presence of coordination and by 'rules of the game' that are explicitly formulated. The second is characterized as the intentionality of a *we* where the *we* is conceived of as the result of group-identification: there is a *we* if individuals think of themselves as being members of a *we* and frame their mental states and actions as contributions to the mental states and actions of a group. In order to characterize these two forms of we-intentionality, we will rely on works done in social identity theory and in phenomenology.

Based on this hypothesis, the socially instable behavior that is so typical of patients with schizophrenia, and usually is an unfailing source of loneliness and isolation, could be interpreted by arguing that patients often are impeded to activate one of these two forms, but not the other. Patients with schizophrenia do not seem to fall short when it comes to the goal-oriented form of collective intentionality—and this is especially so if the coordination that it requires relies on a set of explicitly formulated rules. However, they often appear to display notable difficulties with the establishment of social identities. Indeed, we will argue that the very process of group-identification seems to be unstable and fragile in their case: not only is group-identification impeded by their profound feelings of being radically different from others, the "depersonalization-enhancing" factor important for group formation is often counteracted by the patients' frequent inability to be spontaneously engaged with others and by the recurrent and related tendencies to hyper-reflect and self-observe.

13) Axel Seemann (Bentley University)

Title: Pluralism About Groups

Abstract: What is a group? That is the question with which I will begin my talk. As a first step, I will be suggesting that groups are, in Searle's terminology, ontologically subjective but epistemologically objective. That is, there are no mind-independent facts about social groups. At the same time, we can get things wrong about them. Judgements about groups are not like judgements of taste; they are not expressions of subjective preference.

Objects that are ontologically subjective but epistemologically objective raise an interesting question: why are there such things? One promising answer is, because having them is useful. Money, another social object, enables us to do things we could not do without it; it allows us to allocate certain powers. What, you might thus ask, is the use of groups? Put like this, the question seems on the wrong track. Groups are not the kind of thing you may or may not usefully have or employ. The *concept* of a group is, though. Having this concept is useful because it enables us to respond to certain 'Why'-questions that arise in the social sphere. So we should not be concerned with groups but with group concepts. That is an important difference.

As is familiar from the philosophy of social science, there are two distinct ways in which we can respond to social 'Why'-questions. We can either *explain* the occurrence of the phenomenon at issue, classically by subsuming it under general laws. Explanations in the social sciences that work with group concepts abound, beginning with Durkheim. Contemporary social philosophy also explains some social phenomena by means of group concepts. For instance, you can interpret Margaret Gilbert's Plural Subject Theory as an explanation of why members of particular kinds of groups incur certain obligations towards one another. Or you can interpret Peter French's view that certain groups are persons as an explanation of why some groups are responsible for their actions.

Alternatively, we can respond to 'Why'-questions about the social sphere by attempting to understand the event or phenomenon 'from within'. Then we describe the phenomenon at

issue from the perspective of the participants in order to make sense of it. You may be tempted to think that this kind of sense-making is of little use for thinking about the purpose of group concepts. Such concepts seem to be the core unit of sociology, of social science. And *Verstehen* has, on some views, no place in social science. However, such a view would be at odds with the intuition, articulated e.g. by Searle, that what defines a group is a sense of doing or being in it *together*. If this is right, the first-person plural perspective matters for thinking about groups.

I want to show that this is indeed right: we can make sense of some social events by attributing actions to social groups that are individuated by their sense of collectivity. I am going to illustrate this claim by looking at a particular historical event, the fall of the Berlin Wall. Events of this kind, I suggest, can only be fully understood if you describe what happened from the collective perspective of the participants. Collective phenomenology, I argue, has an important part to play in historical sense-making. If that is right, then group concepts are important in a *Verstehen*-based approach to social sense-making.

The conclusion thus is that there may not be a very good answer to the question of what a group *is*. However, there is an excellent answer to the question of how to use the *concept* of a group. We should use it in any way that helps us make sense of social events and phenomena. I thus advocate a cheerful pluralism about group theorising – all sorts of ways to divide people into groups are legitimate, just as long as we thereby gain a better understanding of the social world.

14) John Sutton (Macquarie University)

Title: Dimensions of Group Cognition

Abstract: Empirical work shows us how both group problem-solving and collaborative recall are influenced by the nature of the group (its size, history, and functions), and the nature of the task and its materials. But psychologists increasingly also study group processes, both explicit or higher-order strategies and more implicit mechanisms of alignment and interaction. How do these variables and dimensions relate to each other, and should any of them be privileged in social ontology? This talk develops a multidimensional framework for assessing forms of emergence in small group cognition, focussing on the cases of memory and decision-making.

15) Andras Szigeti (University of Tromsø)

Title: Why Change the Subject? On Collective Epistemic Agency

Abstract: I argue that group attitudes can be assessed in terms of standards of rationality and that group-level rationality need not be due to individual-level rationality. But I will also argue that groups cannot be collective epistemic agents and are not collectively responsible for collective irrationality. I show that we do not need the concept of collective epistemic agency to explain how group-level irrationality can arise. Group-level irrationality arises because even rational individuals can fail to reason about how their attitudes will combine

with those of others. In some cases they are morally responsible for this failure, in others they are not. Moreover, the argument for collective epistemic agency is incoherent because reasons-for-groups are *ipso facto* reasons-for-individual(s). Instead of talking about reasons-for-groups, we should therefore distinguish between self-regarding reasons and group-regarding reasons. Both kinds of reasons are reasons-for-individuals. These conceptual considerations in favour of moderate individualism are strengthened by an analysis of our moral practice of responding to collective shortfalls of rationality and by the unpalatable moral implications of collectivism about epistemic agency. There is no need to change the subject. Groups can be rational or irrational, but they do not reason.

16) Deborah Perron Tollefsen (University of Memphis)

Title: Groups with Attitudes

Abstract: In everyday contexts and in the context of social scientific research we often attribute attitudes such as intention and belief to groups. What are we to make of this practice? Do groups *really* have such attitudes? Recent attempts to answer this question (e.g. List and Pettit, 2013 and Huebner, 2014) in the affirmative adopt a coarse-grained functionalist approach. In this paper I argue that these approaches fall short in a variety of different ways. I conclude that any attempt to extend a representational theory of mental states to groups will ultimately fail. The only plausible way to understand how groups can have mental states is to see such states as dispositional states. I argue that understanding group mental states as dispositional states of the group provides us with (1) an explanation of our practice of attributing attitudes to groups and why it is explanatorily powerful, (2) a way to acknowledge the difference between the mental states of individuals and the mental states of groups, and (3) a moderate realism about group mental states.

17) Dan Zahavi (University of Copenhagen)

Title: Perspective Taking and Group Identification

Abstract: What does it take to experience oneself as part of a we-group? In my talk, I will discuss the difference between objective group membership and we-membership and argue that the latter requires second person perspective taking.