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Indispensability, the discursive dilemma, and groups with minds of their own

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There is a way of talking that would appear to involve ascriptions of purpose, goal directed activity, and intentional states to groups. Cases are familiar enough: classmates intend to vacation in Switzerland, the department is searching for a metaphysician, the Democrats want to minimize losses in the upcoming elections, and the US intends to improve relations with such and such country. But is this talk to be understood just in terms of the attitudes and actions of the individuals involved? Is the talk, to take an overly simple proposal as an example, a mere summary of familiar individual attitudes of the group members? Or is the ascription of attitudes and actions to groups to be taken more literally, as suggesting that the group for example believes that P, or intends to A, over and above what the members individually think and do? In short, are there groups with minds of their own? Philip Pettit has deployed the “discursive dilemma” to defend the thesis that there are such group minds.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I explore the relationship between the group allegedly with a mind of its own and the individuals it comprises, and I consider just how this relationship must be understood in order to give Pettit’s argument for group minds its best chance for success.

As I understand it, the discursive dilemma has to be used in conjunction with what might be called an indispensability argument for group minds. It is useful to distinguish two forms of this argument. The *explanatory* version of the indispensability argument is, very schematically, as follows: there is a compelling explanatory theory T concerning the social,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, “Groups with Minds of Their Own”, in *Socializing Metaphysics*, edited by Frederick F. Schmitt. All page references unless otherwise noted are to this paper. This view is developed in a number of papers, and in a book coauthored with Christian List (List and Pettit (2011)).

certain indispensable elements of T entail the group mind thesis, so the group mind thesis is true. Several questions immediately arise: What sort of theory is T? In what sense is it indispensable? Are there other forms of indispensability? I don't have definitive answers to these questions. But how we settle them will have implications for the interaction and support the discursive dilemma provides the indispensability argument. In particular, using the discursive dilemma to defend what I characterize below as a *practical* version of the indispensability argument commits us to the rationality of individual participants in a way that the *explanatory* version of the indispensability argument does not. My point in the first part of the paper is that if Pettit wants to avoid the weaknesses of the explanatory indispensability argument and pursue the practical version, then he owes us a story about the *rationality* of individual participation in groups.

Pettit also owes us a story about the *agency* an individual exercises as part of a group. If it takes the actions of individuals to execute the intentions of the group, how are we to understand those actions in order for the group to count as having a mind of its own? How must group intentions figure in the practical or deliberative perspective of individuals who execute those intentions? I will argue that the proponent of the group mind thesis must proceed with some care here, because some natural ways of answering these questions will undermine the thesis. But in the end, I think that these questions are interesting independently of whether Pettit is right to think that groups do have minds of their own. That's because investigating Pettit's arguments might lead to new ideas about how the rationality and agency of individuals can be exercised, and suggests new ways of understanding how individuals can act together, irrespective of whether the groups they compose ever have minds of their own.

### 6.1 Explanatory indispensability

A semantic investigation into discourse about social groups might articulate the concepts involved and consider, for example, whether it follows from our concept of a purposive group – that is, a collection of individuals who coordinate their actions in pursuit of a common goal<sup>3</sup> –

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<sup>3</sup> To paraphrase Pettit, 176.

that such a thing could have a mind of its own.<sup>4</sup> This project might be pursued while one remains non-committal as to whether anything exists that answers to these concepts. Pettit, in contrast, wants to make claims in ontology. Thus, he says in his contribution to a collection appropriately titled *Socializing Metaphysics*<sup>5</sup>,

There is a type of organization found in certain collectivities that makes them into subjects in their own right, giving them a way of being minded that is starkly discontinuous with the mentality of their members. This claim in social ontology is strong enough to ground talk of such collectivities as entities that are psychologically autonomous and that constitute institutional persons. (Pettit, 167)

Why rehearse an elementary point distinguishing semantics from metaphysics? Well, if Pettit is doing the latter – that is, if his claim is about the existence of certain entities – then he cannot just start with the relevant concepts. He needs to show that they have application. The indispensability argument is supposed to do just that. *How* this is done will have implications for Pettit's use of the discursive dilemma.<sup>6</sup>

One strategy for demonstrating the metaphysical traction so to speak of the relevant concepts (e.g. purpose, social group) points to their significance in explanation.<sup>7</sup> Suppose, for example, that in seeking to understand or predict some presumably social phenomenon, we think of it as the result of the exercise of a kind of rational agency that cannot be identified with any individual. That is, we think of the explanandum as intelligible from the point of view of some supra-individual subject/agent that brings it about (Wendt 2004). Another explanatory strategy might think of the social phenomenon to be explained as the causal upshot of a functionally characterized state of some multi-person system.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the explanatory

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<sup>4</sup> Relatedly, one might explore the existence conditions for minds or intentional systems, and consider whether it's possible for such things to be realized in groups of individuals.

<sup>5</sup> Schmitt, ed. (2003).

<sup>6</sup> What I'm calling the indispensability argument is gestured at in List and Pettit (2011, 4-5). Unfortunately, they do not clearly distinguish it from the discursive dilemma component of their argument. See below.

<sup>7</sup> Tollefsen (2002) argues in this fashion.

<sup>8</sup> Bratman characterizes shared intention as a functional state of a multi-person system, but it's not entirely clear to me that he sees it as playing an *explanatory* role. He seems to think it plays some role, however, because he says that shared intention coordinates our action, planning, and bargaining, and that it organizes and unifies our

strategy, if the group-theoretic concepts find their home as indispensable elements of the explanatory or predictive theory T, then we have reason to believe the group mind thesis.<sup>9</sup>

What's important for the purposes of this indispensability argument is that T be *compelling*. If we're to engage in some abductive inference to the best explanation, and take up ontological commitments to certain indispensable elements of the explanatory theory in question, the explanatory theory must be better than its rivals and, moreover, good enough to ground those commitments.

A limitation with the indispensability argument, then, is that there might not be a very compelling predictive/explanatory theory T in the offing – at least not compelling enough to overcome recalcitrant metaphysical intuitions. Many, after all, find the group mind thesis very counterintuitive. Perhaps they hold, with Searle (1990), that intentionality can only be realized in individual brains. Whatever the reason, there is great temptation to argue by *modus tollens* to question the premise about indispensability. Indeed, the implausibility of attributing certain psychological attitudes to groups has been used as a premise in arguing against functionalism (Block, 1980). And it's not as if there are no alternatives. One might instead regard the phenomena to be explained by the group mind hypothesis as more amenable to completely non-intentional explanation, or else to be addressed in terms of the interplay of individual rational agents pursuing ends that need have no rational connection, from the point of view of the individual agent, to the larger social phenomenon to be explained.<sup>10</sup> Thus, an

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agency much in the way that ordinary intention does for an individual over time. See Bratman 1993 reprinted in 1999, especially at 112. See also Bratman 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Barring instrumental interpretations of T, which would carry no ontological import. See, for example, Dennett (1987). Given Dennett's instrumentalism, it's somewhat awkward that List and Pettit (2011) invoke Dennett's notion of the intentional stance in order to defend a robust realism about group agents and minds.

The strategy of invoking the indispensability of attitude and agency ascriptions to groups in order to defend ontological commitments to group minds and agents also seems to be in tension with a view such as Quinton's (1975-6), who thinks of the ascription of an attitude to a group merely as a summary of ascriptions to all or most of the individual members (for discussion see Pettit, 179).

<sup>10</sup> Watkins (1957, 104-17) defends a "methodological individualism" along these lines on the grounds that it generates more fruitful theories (especially 113-4). For his rejection of explanations in terms of super-human agents, see 106. We don't need to posit a mind for a puppet that appears to engage in intelligent behavior, so long as there is a puppeteer manipulating it. Likewise, for a group led by a charismatic leader, there is no need to posit some special group mind over and above the individual members and the leader in particular. Given the control they exercise, the minds of the charismatic leader or puppeteer suffice for the explanation of the group action or pseudo-behavior (in the case of the puppet). For Watkins' rejection of the claim that all large-scale social

indispensability argument that starts from social science is weaker than one that starts from, say, some very well established theory in physics for which there is no serious alternative.<sup>11</sup>

In any case, it's not entirely clear that Pettit ought to be construed as defending an *explanatory* indispensability argument. Pettit doesn't say much in defense of the relevant social theory – indeed, he doesn't even say what exactly the theory is.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps talk of group minds is so endemic in social theorizing that it goes without saying. But that's not very likely given the presence of a great deal of reductive/individualistic theory. So perhaps something else is going on.

## 6.2 Practical indispensability

I will now suggest an alternative understanding of what indispensability might consist in. Pettit argues that certain kinds of groups are defined by a purpose or function – some goal held in

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phenomena are to be explained as deliberately brought about by individual agency (as opposed to the collateral effects of individual responses to situations), see 114-5. For his rejection of an overly narrow “conspiracy theory” version of methodological individualism, where social phenomena are explained by the doings of a small group or cabal, see 112.

<sup>11</sup> But what if T is something like a folk sociology or folk theory of groups? Wouldn't this be compelling much in the way that folk psychology has proven recalcitrant to the efforts of eliminative materialists? But the elimination of a folk sociology that posits group minds is hardly as extreme as the elimination of folk psychology altogether.

<sup>12</sup> As we'll see, Pettit must think that such theories involve the notion of a *purposive group*. And he does believe that such groups exist. See 175, also Pettit (2001, 249). This is implicit in Pettit (2007; 496, 504). But Pettit doesn't have much to say beyond this. Thus, “I said and say nothing on what it is for a collectivity to form and have a shared purpose, or to form and have certain judgments and intentions. Presumably that can be analyzed on something like the lines explored in the mutual-awareness approach.” (181) Be that as it may, if Pettit is making use of the explanatory version of indispensability, then he ought to give a reason for thinking that there *are* such groups. Perhaps the most suggestive remarks come when he explains what follows from thinking of the collective as a rational unity: “within feasible limits and under favorable conditions, we can expect it to live up to the constraints of rationality; we can expect it to enter and exit states of belief and desire, judgment and intention, in a way that makes rational sense and we can expect it to perform in action as those states require.” 181t. So if there are phenomena that can be interpreted as the result of group action, that is, if they can be explained and predicted in terms of hypotheses involving groups as rational unities, then we have reason (Pettit thinks) to believe that group minds exist.

In more recent work, List and Pettit (2011) claim that once we recognize an organism as an agent, “we achieve a new understanding over and above the neurobiological one” (12), which allows for “explanations that direct us to the contextually most useful ways of predicting and intervening...” (13). List and Pettit think that this sort of explanatory strategy occurs in the study of individuals in cognitive psychology, social science, and behavioral ecology (12). And they immediately go on to note that on their view, commercial firms, as opposed to markets, do count as group agents. The implication seems to be that there is a well-established scientific theory of firms that is committed to this sort of explanatory strategy. But instead of citing that literature, List and Pettit seem to think of it in more philosophical and practical terms: by thinking of a firm as an agent, we can resent it, protest it, or threaten it – in general, deal with it as if it were a person.

common by its members. He contends that these purposive groups, or integrated collectivities as he sometimes calls them, will be highly motivated to “collectivize reason”, i.e. maintain consistency and coherence in group judgments, decisions, policies, intentions, and actions. Otherwise, they will not be able efficiently to fulfill their functions and realize goals (176-7).

The crucial claim here is that there are purposive groups and that they are “bound to collectivize reason.”<sup>13</sup> How should we understand this claim if we are looking for an alternative to interpreting it as a part of some well-established and indispensable explanatory theory? I think that a number of Pettit’s remarks suggest that the way we are supposed to think about this claim is from the practical perspective of an agent. Pettit’s examples range from a court trying to make a decision to cases of laborers or office staff deciding some matter in the workplace (170), to a political party trying to settle on and pursue some policy (173), as well as smaller scale scenarios like colleagues collaborating, or friends arranging a trip (175). In all these cases, agents face a practical or deliberative problem: they need to figure out what to do, what strategy to adopt given their ends. And the answer involves imposing rationality at the level of the group. This offers a natural way of understanding the sense in which a group is ‘bound to collectivize reason’ (177; see also 167) or ‘under enormous pressure’ (176) ‘to impose the discipline of reason at the collective level’ (176). This is not a matter of explanation, prediction, or observation from the vantage of the social scientist removed from the action. It is, rather, a matter of decision or commitment from the point of view of the agent or deliberator.<sup>14</sup>

In the example of the political party, Pettit is quite clear that there is the practical issue of whether the party should maintain a sort of consistency with its prior decisions or policies, or

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<sup>13</sup> “...every group is bound to try to collectivize reason, achieving and acting on collective judgments that pass reason-related tests like consistency” (177).

<sup>14</sup> List and Pettit (2011, Ch. 2) don’t explicitly invoke a practical as opposed to theoretical perspective. However, the language they use to describe possible ways in which individual judgments might be aggregated so as to establish rational agency at the group level certainly has a practical quality to it. Thus, they point “towards ways in which a multi-member group can successfully come to hold rational intentional attitudes” (42). Elsewhere, they characterize themselves as offering strategies (an “escape route”) for showing how individuals might aggregate judgments and establish agency and rationality at the group level in the face of certain formal results that would otherwise prevent them from doing so (58). The possible forms of judgment aggregation are offered for someone interested in implementing them.

whether to be more responsive to the current judgments of its members: “the party will face the hard choice between being responsive to the views of its individual members and ensuring the collective rationality of the views it endorses.” (177) And the suggestion would seem to be that the decision should be – and often is – for collective rationality. Now, I’m not sure that collective rationality is always a matter of decision; it might instead already be implicit in the relevant practical perspective. But the important point is that the indispensability of collective rationality is still a matter of practical commitment, even if not resulting from explicit choice or decision.

Thus, on this version of the argument, the indispensability of collective rationality (from which Pettit hopes to derive the group mind thesis) derives not from the perspective of a theorist seeking to explain some social phenomenon, but from a practical perspective of some participant. Given the goals, it’s indispensable – a practical necessity – that the discipline of reason be enforced at the collective level.<sup>15</sup> This form of indispensability argument is not held hostage to the explanatory strengths or weaknesses of some social theory. Rather, it relies on an agent’s practical conception of what she is doing and what she wants to achieve. Of course, this might raise other sorts of worries: delusions or self-deception concerning what it is that one is up to, self-conceptions based on false presuppositions, etc. There’s no guarantee that one’s self-understanding as an agent is immune to any of these worries, and no assurance that the practical indispensability argument would be problem-free. But if one harbors some reservations about the status of social science and thinks that it lacks the cachet of for example well-established theory in physics, then the practical form of the indispensability argument might be an attractive alternative to the explanatory version.

### 6.3 The role of the discursive dilemma

We’ve considered two possible foundations – the theoretical and the practical – for the claim that rationality at the collective level is indispensable. But how is the argument for group minds

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<sup>15</sup> As Korsgaard (2009, 1) puts it in a different context, it’s “a necessity you are faced with,” rather than one that works on or through you.

supposed to proceed? Pettit claims that once it is conceded that the group displays a kind of rationality, it must be a genuine subject of intentional attitudes.<sup>16</sup> He says,

The basis for this claim [that group minds exist] is that the integrated collectivity, as characterized, is going to display all the functional marks of an intentional subject, and that there is no reason to discount those marks as mere appearances. Within relevant domains it will generally act in a manner that is rationalized by independently discernible representations and goals; and within relevant domains it will generally form and unform those representations in a manner that is rationalized by the evidence we take to be at its disposal. In particular, it will manifest this sort of functional organization, not just at a time, but over time; it will display the degree of constancy as well as the degree of coherence that we expect in any intentional subject. (182)

This inference from collective rationality to group minds is, of course, subject to challenge. Suppose that there were a very tight fit or continuity between the intentionality at the individual level and that at the collective level. For example, one version of this Continuity View holds that the ascription of some attitude to the collective is merely a way of summarizing the attitudes of the individuals. This would prompt the concern that treating the collective as a genuine intentional subject in its own right would involve illegitimate double counting.<sup>17</sup> Another way in which there might be a tight fit or continuity between individual and collective level intentionality would be by reduction, for example, if the rationality displayed by the group can be entirely explained in terms of the individual actions of its members. (Think of why there's no need to ascribe intentional states to a puppet.) The collective intentional subject would be, if not eliminated, epiphenomenal at best.

So the inference from collective rationality to group minds is challenged by the Continuity View. Pettit responds by deploying the discursive dilemma to resist the alleged

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<sup>16</sup>At this point, the line of thought is similar to that of Rovane (1998, e.g. 131).

<sup>17</sup> See Pettit (2003, 183). The way Pettit formulates the worry, it's just the claim that we would be counting the individual members as intentional subjects, and then counting the collective. No explanation is given as to why this is a problematic double counting. I take it that the presumption is that collective subject is not real and distinct from the individual subject, being only a summation of the latter. This understanding of Pettit's formulation would explain why the discursive dilemma is meant to address the problem: the discontinuity exhibited by the discursive dilemma refutes the summation view.



continuity between individual and group level intentionality. What, then, is the discursive dilemma?

I start with a legal example from Pettit (168), who in turn follows Kornhauser and Sager.<sup>18</sup> A three-judge panel must decide (by majority vote) whether a defendant is liable in a tort case. We're to assume liability in this case if and only if (i) the defendant had a duty of care, and (ii) the defendant's negligence caused the harm. The three judges decide as follows:

	Negligence a cause?	Duty to care?	Liable?
Judge A	Yes	No	No
Judge B	No	Yes	No
Judge C	Yes	Yes	Yes
Panel	Yes	Yes	No
			Yes

The first three rows represent the individual conclusions of each judge. For each judge, the first two decisions rationally determine that judge's overall decision concerning liability, the last box on each judge's row. The question is how to aggregate the decisions of the overall panel. On the **conclusion**-based approach, one tallies up the final judgment of each judge – the one concerning liability. This way, the court's decision is *No* - the defendant is not found liable. This is one of the entries in the lower right of the table. On the **premise**-based approach, one tallies up each judge's decision for each premise, arriving at a panel decision for each premise. These in turn determine the final panel decision concerning liability (without any vote being taken on that final question). On this alternative, the panel decides that the defendant was the cause, and also had a duty, and the overall judgment of liability simply follows from these other judgments (see the other entry in the lower right of the table). The "doctrinal paradox" is that the conclusion- and premise-based procedures are both sensible, and yet lead to different outcomes.

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<sup>18</sup> Kornhauser, L & Sager, L.G. (1993). More formal presentations and generalizations are to be found in List and Pettit (2006), and List (forthcoming).

Pettit generalizes the example in several ways. First, to deliberations of groups outside of legal contexts, and then to diachronic cases, which, given the use to which these examples are put, is of particular interest for us. Here, the group reaches decisions at different times on a number of matters. At some point, the group might confront some issue on which it is to decide, and its past decisions might as a matter of coherence or consistency constrain or perhaps even determine what to judge or do on this occasion. This enforces a “discipline of reason” at the collective level, and corresponds to the premise based approach in the legal example. On the other hand, the group might come to a very different conclusion by taking a vote on it then and there, the earlier collective decisions be damned. This is more responsive to current judgments of individual members, and corresponds to the conclusion-based approach described earlier. As the previous case illustrates, these outcomes may be quite different. To paraphrase Pettit, so long as the majorities on the previous decisions were constituted differently, and the overlap of the majorities in the different decisions is a minority, then it’s possible for a vote on the current matter to yield a decision at odds with that entailed by earlier collective judgments (169). The “discursive dilemma” is the problem faced by the group that must choose between these different ways of aggregating their judgments over time.

Return to the worry about the inference from collective rationality to group minds. This worry is premised on there being a tight fit or continuity between intentionality at individual and group levels, for example in the view that talk of a collective subject is merely a useful way of summarizing talk of individual subjects. The reply favored by Pettit appeals to the discursive dilemma to illustrate an important sort of discontinuity between the individual and group levels as loci of attitude formation (183). He points to one example where, if the discipline of reason is enforced, the final decision would be the *opposite* of what would have been a *unanimous* vote. Here’s a version of the sort of case Pettit has in mind: several colleagues (A, B, and C) are heading to the APA convention in Chicago, and have to decide whether to take the EI (train) from the airport. An affirmative judgment regarding each of the following considerations is necessary for the decision to get on board: whether the train is safe enough, whether it’s quick

enough, and whether it's scenic enough (e.g. whether it's okay that they'll miss out on a view of Lake Michigan).

	Safe enough?	Quick enough?	Scenic enough?	Get on board?
A	Yes	No	Yes	No
B	No	Yes	Yes	No
C	Yes	Yes	No	No
Group	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Yes

If the group arrives at the decision by the way of reason (the premise driven approach), then there would be between individual and group levels a discontinuity in *intention*: the group presumably now intends to take the EI, but none of the individuals (yet) has the intention. Presumably individuals will subsequently have the appropriate intentions – for otherwise, how would the group get anything done? I'll have more to say about this shortly. For the moment, Pettit's point is that the group's intention is not constituted by the fact that the individuals intend; none of them has the appropriate intention (184).

Summing up, Pettit says,

These discontinuities between collective judgments and intentions, on the one hand, and the judgments and intentions of members, on the other, make vivid the sense in which a social integrate is an intentional subject that is distinct from its members. (184)

To review: this part of the indispensability argument seeks to derive the conclusion about group minds from rationality at the collective level. The worry was that the inference is illegitimate if the collective level can be fully accounted for in terms of individual level intentionality and rationality. But if the discursive dilemma establishes a radical discontinuity between individual and group level intentionality, then the hope is that the worry is deflected and the inference to group minds secured.

#### 6.4 Indispensability and the discursive dilemma

I want to emphasize that the significant discontinuity between individual and collective level intentionality that Pettit says is a "lesson of the discursive dilemma" (183) would seem to

involve a **trade-off** in the rationality exhibited at the two levels. Pettit says that the discontinuity “represents the cost that must be paid if a collectivity is to achieve that rational unity we expect in any rational subject” (184). He seems to have in mind that although a final vote, if it were taken, would result in each individual voting one way, the group will nevertheless act otherwise (assuming *it* satisfies the normative requirements of rationality). But a further aspect of the cost is also suggested by the tables illustrating the discursive dilemma: when a discipline of reason is enforced at the group level, it seems that individuals will act in ways that *fail* to maintain norms of rationality to which they as individuals are subject.<sup>19</sup> For example, in the last table, A would get on the train even though his own judgments require that he not. And C for example *intends* to get a view of the lake coming into the city, and would not be living up to that intention when she gets on the train with the others. The strength of the discursive dilemma in demonstrating that the group attitude is more than the sum of the individual attitudes (and that the collective is an intentional subject in its own right) derives from this trade-off between individual and collective rationality.<sup>20</sup> If it makes perfect sense from the individual point of view to act in a way that contributes to collective rationality, then we lose the discontinuity between the individual and collective level, and the hypothesis of group minds is no longer indispensable.

If rationality at the collective level is indeed at some expense for individual rationality, does this pose a problem for the indispensability argument? I think it depends on which version one has in mind. On the version that appeals to explanatory indispensability, irrationality at the individual level is of no great or immediate consequence. It’s not at all clear that the social scientist must be committed to extensive rationality being exhibited on the part of individual subjects. If some phenomenon S is convincingly explained as the outcome or

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<sup>19</sup> See also 189, quoted below, p. 18. In an earlier defense of the group mind thesis, Rovane (1998, 196) recognizes that the possibility of a group mind (or multiple person, as she calls it) can come at some cost to the rational unity of the individual. See also List and Pettit (2011) at 64, and their discussion of the incentive-compatibility desideratum, especially at 127.

<sup>20</sup>It might be suggested that the individual might *desire* not to get on the train, indeed *judge* that one has most reason to take a cab, and yet not form the corresponding *intention*. Thus, when in acting collectively he intends to get on the train and does so with the others, there is no violation of a rational norm requiring consistency of intentions. There is, however, a violation of another principle that requires one to intend to A when one judges it best to A. (Thanks to Frank Hindriks for correspondence here.)

activity of a rational integrated collectivity, what does it matter that members of that collectivity might be individually irrational? Individuals often fall short of being ideally rational. Why can't social science take advantage of this as part of an explanation of other social phenomena? Indeed, wouldn't it make for a more realistic theory to appeal to individual agents that are not ideally rational?

The interpretive and functionalist explanatory strategies mentioned near the outset seem particularly suitable in this regard. As applied to individual subjects, these approaches typically proceed with less concern for the constitution, material or otherwise, of the subject of rational interpretation or functional analysis.<sup>21</sup> It doesn't matter how the system is realized – and for all we know systems of this sort could be multiply realized – so long as the constituting basis can allow for adequate satisfaction of the crucial functional or rational norms. The interpretive or functional treatments of *groups* might likewise proceed without any special concern with the nature of the realizing substrate. In particular, if we think of this substrate in terms of constituent individuals and their attitudes, then it might be possible for there to be intentionality and rationality at the group level even if this is not reflected in any rationality at the individual level; the former imposes no rational or intelligible constraint on the latter according to functionalist or interpretivist views.<sup>22</sup> The explanatory project does not require that it be individually rational to play the sorts of roles required for maintaining collective rationality.<sup>23</sup> So long as rationality at the group level is part of a satisfactory explanatory theory, then it's neither here nor there that the individual members display a great deal of

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<sup>21</sup> Dennett 1987a, Putnam 1960 & 1967, reprinted in 1975.

<sup>22</sup> As noted above, Bratman applies the functionalist conception of the mental to groups. He points to the possibility of multiple realizability of such a state, and notes that his proposed realization (in terms of the appropriate, interlocking intentions of the individuals) needn't be the only possible realization. He doesn't explore the possibility of a realization in terms of individual attitudes that are radically disconnected with the contents of the group level functional states. Pettit himself does consider this possibility, but is unsympathetic. He opts for a realization where the individuals as a joint endeavor undertake to establish rationality at the collective level. See Pettit and Schweikard (2006, 18-39). I suggest below that this proposal saps some of the strength from his argument for group minds.

<sup>23</sup> There might be some level of rationality in the individual that is presupposed simply in ascribing intentional attitudes to him or her. The discursive dilemma doesn't have to say that the individual is completely irrational. The discontinuity involved with the discursive dilemma entails merely that the individual is on this occasion acting in a way that is not rationally compatible with his or her intentions, judgments, etc. That's entirely compatible with the minimal rationality presupposed in treating the individual as a subject of intentional attitudes.

inconsistency in their beliefs and judgments, irresoluteness in their personal intentions, and are susceptible to peer-pressure and group think.<sup>24</sup> I conclude that the explanatory version of indispensability is not adversely affected by the trade-off between individual and collective rationality implicit in the discursive dilemma.

Turn now to the practical form of the indispensability argument. How does the discursive dilemma trade-off between individual and collective rationality affect indispensability in this case? To answer this question, the argument for practical indispensability requires some clarification. The idea was that the indispensability or necessity of collective rationality – of instituting the discipline of reason at the collective level – is evident from the practical or deliberative perspective of the agent. But who or what is this agent?

One thought is that the agent is the group as a whole. Thus, when discussing the case of the political party, Pettit says,

...the party cannot tolerate collective inconsistency, because that would make it a laughing-stock among its followers and in the electorate at large; it could no longer claim to be seriously committed to its alleged purpose. And so...it has to ensure that [the discipline of reason] is imposed at the collective level. (Pettit, 178)

On the practical strategy, the indispensability is established from the perspective of an agent. If the agent in question is the integrated collectivity or group, then the argument begs the question. The whole point of the argument was to establish the existence of the group as a genuine subject of intentional attitudes. So if this argument is to work, the practical perspective cannot literally be that of the group or integrated collective.<sup>25</sup>

It seems, then, that the practical perspective in question would have to be that of an individual participant.<sup>26</sup> There's evidence for this given what Pettit goes on to say about the

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<sup>24</sup> There may be alternative and better strategies for explaining some phenomenon *S*, ones that portray individual actors as more rational. But that's just to challenge the explanatory strength of the theory that entails group minds. Presumably, the advocate of the indispensability argument thinks that this is not in fact the case.

<sup>25</sup> If appealing to the perspective of the group doesn't strike one as circular, perhaps this is because one has the explanatory version of indispensability in mind. It's not problematically circular for a theorist to hold the sort of view about political parties described in the passage on the basis of its explanatory power. But our concern now is the practical form of indispensability.

<sup>26</sup> Other commentators seem to read Pettit this way. See e.g., Schmid, "Plural Action", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 38, no. 1, March 2008, 25-54, at p.36. If it's neither the perspective of the group, nor that of an individual

primacy of the individual. Pettit says, “I hold that natural persons have an inescapable priority and that in this kind of case it will be up to the natural person to decide whether or not to cede place to the institutional, acting in furtherance of the collective goal and in neglect of his or her own priorities” (190). So, according to the practical version of the indispensability argument, the natural person, i.e. an individual and not an integrated collective, confronts the deliberative problem. The person Pettit’s argument is addressed to is supposed to discern or appreciate the indispensability of collectivizing reason by taking on the agential or deliberative perspective of an individual participant.

But a problem emerges in using the discursive dilemma to support the practical version of the indispensability argument. The discursive dilemma insists on a discontinuity and hence trade-off between individual and collective level intentionality. And I’ve suggested that this entails the rationality of the integrated collective comes at some cost to individual rationality. But if indispensability is comprehended from the practical perspective of the individual agent, the rational status of the perspective of the individual on this matter is non-negotiable. The perspective that is supposed to establish the indispensability of collective reason cannot be inconsistent, incoherent, or otherwise rationally compromised *on this very matter*. On the practical version of the indispensability, then, it seems that there cannot be any sort of trade-off of the sort implicit in the discursive dilemma.

Perhaps there is a way to defend the rationality of the individual practical perspective from which we establish indispensability. For example, suppose the individual has the aim of establishing the discipline of reason at the collective level. Perhaps he has a personal incentive (he will be richly rewarded) to do what he can to make sure the group will have consistent views or follow through on earlier decisions, etc.<sup>27</sup> A problem with Pettit appealing to this is that it undermines the discontinuity that the discursive dilemma was meant to establish. Take the last example of the El ride: no one personally thinks that the group should take the El. Nevertheless, given that the discipline of reason is enforced at the group level, the collective

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participant, then the advocate of the practical version of indispensability must provide some other plausible alternative. Perhaps it must be some collective perspective distinct from the group. But what is this? Some story is owed.

<sup>27</sup> Pettit (2007, 516) mentions the possibility of the group disciplining its members, and ‘institutional incentives’.

decision is to take the EI. Suppose we try to preserve the rationality of the individual perspective by insisting that the discipline of reason is enforced at the group level *because each individual has an intention to that effect*. Then, although each acts against his own judgment contra the EI, he does act in accord with his own intention to enforce the rationality of the group and to act in accord with the group decision. But then the alleged discontinuity between group and individual levels is an artifact of our restricted focus, one that ignores the individual aim or intention in favor of collectivizing reason. Whether or not the group has any explicit intention of the latter sort, if the individual members are acting on individual intentions to do as the group intends, there would no longer be such a radical discontinuity between individual and group.<sup>28</sup> The upshot, then, is that we would have less reason to think that the group has a mind of its own, for what it is doing can be explained fully in terms of the actions of individuals.<sup>29</sup>

Pettit doesn't seem to defend the rationality of individual members in enforcing rationality at the collective level, and indeed suggests that recalcitrant individuals could be quite reasonable acting in ways that undermine the collective discipline of reason. He is concerned that if members remain "encapsulated in their [individual] personal identities", this will undermine the ability of the group to be responsive to rational requirements that hold for it. Members must be "willing to put aside their own views and identify with the group as a whole...They must be ready to reason and act from the perspective of that common centre."<sup>30</sup> But no clear argument is given for the *rationality* of an individual member doing so, apart from the very brief mention of incentives – which, as I've just noted, is problematic given Pettit's

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<sup>28</sup> The discontinuity between individual and group levels is not simply a matter of having intentions of distinct contents at the two levels. It's not obvious exactly what sort of intention at the group level would have the content that would correspond to the intention of a participant to act on the group intention. Would it be the intentions that the group act on its own intention? Or the intention that individuals act on its intention? In any case, I submit that the fact that individual participants have and act on intentions to act in accord with the group intention significantly reduces the discontinuity between group and individual level intentionality, to the detriment of Pettit's argument for group minds.

<sup>29</sup> It seems, then, that if the argument for group minds is not to be compromised, the discipline of reason at the level of the group cannot be sustained by the intentions of the individuals (though it may have been established by individuals). Thus, it seems that if the argument is to work, we cannot maintain individual rationality by positing that there is an individual intention to enforce the discipline of reason.

<sup>30</sup> "Rationality, Reasoning, and Group Agency", 516



dialectical purposes. Indeed, I think that Pettit's reluctance here to offer any sustained remarks reflects an awareness of the tension here.<sup>31</sup>

I conclude that a practical version of the indispensability argument requires some conception of the rationality of the individual agential perspective. But if the discursive dilemma is to do any work, then however this notion of individual participant rationality is developed, there must also be preserved some sense of the discontinuity between individual and collective rationality and intentionality. The discussion of the second part of the paper will yield some suggestions in this regard.

### 6.5 Acting on collective intentions

In this part of the paper, I will address a restricted version of Pettit's group mind thesis, focusing on the question of whether a group has a mind of its own *insofar as it genuinely intends*. I don't think that this so narrows the scope of discussion that we lose interest in the original question because (i) intention is a central and fundamental attitude of mind, (ii) I think that at least some of the considerations that I raise about intentions have analogues for other mental states, such as belief and judgment, and (iii) what is in any case really intriguing about the idea of a group with a mind of its own is the *agency* it would exercise and the influence it would have over individuals – and this agency and influence is a matter of intention.

The argument from the discursive dilemma is supposed to derive its force from the possibility that the group will have an intention had by few or none of its individual members.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In a sympathetic discussion of Pettit, Tollefsen (2002) is more explicit in suggesting that it would not be irrational for individuals to opt for collective rationality. She says,

Each individual will recognize that the group has certain goals and that to achieve those goals it must sustain a certain level of consistency in its judgments across time. Therefore, each individual will have a reason to accept the conclusion that is arrived at through the premise-driven approach....these reasons become reasons for an individual only after one recognizes that the *group* has reasons to adopt a certain conclusion. Thus whatever reasons an individual might have to accept a decision that goes against his or her personal opinion on the matter is parasitic on the group's reasons."

But no explanation is given for why the individual is concerned with the goals of the group, so it's not at all obvious why some consideration becomes the individual's reason after she recognizes that the consideration is a reason for the group. Perhaps the individual is personally interested in the group achieving its goals; but, again, then it is not as clear that there is a discontinuity between the individual and the group.

<sup>32</sup> It is less clear in recent discussion (Pettit and Schweikard 2006; see also Pettit 2007) that members lack individual intentions corresponding to the group's intention. That's because in this recent work, group agents are

But if the group is going to get anything done, its intentions must be acted upon. It comes down to individuals to do this. If these individuals do not themselves have the relevant intending attitude (as the discursive dilemma suggests), how is the group's intention to be executed? Without some account of how it is that the group intention is acted upon, it's unclear how the group genuinely intends.

Pettit agrees that "the group can only act through the actions of its members" (183). Once the group has decided to A, the relevant members must have the appropriate individual intentions, such as the individual intention that the group A's, or the intention to do one's part in the group's A-ing. But Pettit thinks these individual intentions *follow upon and are effects of* the group intention or decision (183-4). The thought here seems to be to preserve the distinctiveness of collective intentions and avoid a reduction: collective intentions cannot be understood simply in terms of the individual intentions of the members if they precede and cause those individual intentions. This is just what one would expect if the discursive dilemma demonstrates that there is radical discontinuity between individual and collective level intentionality.<sup>33</sup>

But how exactly should we understand the claim that individual intentions follow upon and are effects of the group intention? Some exploration of the possibilities is in order.

**(i) Individual agency exercised on behalf of the group.** On this very natural proposal, once the group has settled on an intention, relevant individuals *decide* to act in accord with or on behalf of the group intention. Pettit endorses such a view, saying that he's inclined to the view that

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viewed as established through joint action of the members, and the model of joint action invoked is largely reductive, where each individual has an individual intention pertaining to the joint activity, such as I intend that we J (to use Bratman's suggestion). It seems to me that this appeal to a reductive account of joint action is hard to reconcile with the group mind hypothesis, precisely because a reduction would make us less inclined to think that the group has a mind of its own independent of its members.

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that Pettit also endorses the idea that group level intentional states supervene on judgments and actions of individual members. (List & Pettit, "Group Agency and Supervenience", 89). This supervenience is held to be compatible with a group being a rational agent, with it being a person (86). (But I would think that the rationality at the group level will nevertheless be at some cost to the rationality of the individual level.)

...the natural person [as opposed to the institutional person, i.e., the group with the mind of its own] is always primary and has the task of deciding whether to act in their own name – in their own interests, perhaps, or according to their own values – or in the name of the collective.... [N]atural persons have an inescapable priority and that in this kind of case it will be up to the natural person to decide whether or not to cede place to the institutional, acting in furtherance of the collective goal and in neglect of his or her own priorities. (189; see also List at Pettit (2011, 199))

To see what's troubling about this suggestion, consider intentions in individuals. If on Tuesday you decide and correspondingly intend to go for a bike ride on Saturday, then the question of whether you will bike on Saturday is settled. The intention involves a commitment to the corresponding action.<sup>34</sup> Of course, the commitment might be cancelled; the intention may be overridden if circumstances change. For example, the intention is defeated if you break your leg on Friday, or there are reports Saturday morning of wolves or wild dogs with a taste for spandex on the bike path. But let us suppose that now it's Saturday and time to go for the ride, and that circumstances have *not* changed. What do you do? The matter is settled, and you go for your ride. No need to rethink it. You might deliberate about whether to pump the tires, which path to take, or where to stop and get a drink. But one thing you don't do (at least not normally) is to consider whether to go for the ride. That would be to treat as an open question something that should have been settled, given that you've already decided and intended. If no defeaters have emerged, and if you do treat it as an open question (and this is typical behavior on your part), then it seems that you didn't really intend in the first place.

Now consider a *group* that has made a decision and formed an intention to perform some action A. Then, given that the intention to A involves the commitment to A-ing, the matter of whether to A should be settled. Suppose that it comes down to some particular individual, say Andre, to act on behalf of the group. If, as Pettit suggests, it is up to Andre whether or not to act on behalf of the group, then it appears to be an open question whether

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<sup>34</sup> Bratman 1987, Harman 1976, 1986.

or not the group will A. But we supposed that the group has formed the intention and that the matter was settled; so it should not be an open question whether Andre will act on the intention. The worry, then, is that a group's acting on an intention cannot be a matter of some individual exercising her own agency to settle whether or not to act on the group's intention.<sup>35</sup>

One of the morals we would have to draw from the discursive dilemma if it is to support the group mind thesis is that there is a trade-off between the rationality of the group and that of the individual. Here we seem to have a *further* trade-off between what we might call the *agency* of the group and that of the individuals acting on behalf of the group. The agency that Pettit would ascribe to the individuals on his picture of how group intentions are executed turns out to undermine the status of the group as an intending agent; it puts into question whether the group has any intentions.

**(ii) Fungible human resources.** A group intention is supposed to settle the matter of whether to A, and I've been arguing that this is incompatible with it being up to the relevant individual whether or not to act on behalf of the group. But it might be objected that these *are* compatible, so long as there is generally someone available to act on the group intention. It is an open question whether *this particular* guy (or any other particular person) will act on behalf of the group – it is, after all, up to him whether he does so or pursues his own interests instead. But if *he* doesn't act on the group intention; *she* or someone else will. So if human resources are fungible in this sense, so that *someone* can be counted on to act on behalf of the group as a result of the intention, then it seems that the group intention *does* settle the matter of whether to A or not, and it won't be an open issue whether it gets done. To put the point in somewhat different terms: the group's intention does settle the case that there will be someone that will act so as to realize the group intention.<sup>36</sup> A *de dicto* settling attitude on the part of the group is suggested as being compatible with someone settling *de re*, of himself, that he act so as to realize the group intention. And the thought is that such a *de dicto* settling is enough for satisfying the settling condition on intentions, so that the group can genuinely intend.

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<sup>35</sup> This issue is distinct from the sort of incentive compatibility issue raised by List and Pettit in their 2011, Ch. 5.

<sup>36</sup> At least, the intention cannot be formed unless it could reasonably be expected that someone would act on it.

Two things to say about this. First, many of the cases of interest to us are those where human resources are not fungible, where few if any alternative executors are available, and particular individuals must therefore be counted on to act on the group's intention. Pettit wants to argue that in these cases too the group can have a mind of its own. Second, the strategy of appealing to fungible human resources seems only to put off a problem that must eventually be addressed. Even if someone would act on a group intention, it's not clear the group can take this for granted. Shouldn't the group at some point ensure that its intention will be acted on? But this would seem to require that the group *act* in order to secure the relevant human resources in the first place, deploying them when and where necessary, and telling them what to do. Who is going to do the securing, the deploying, and the telling? If not the group, how is it to be done on behalf of the group? This is the problem we started with.<sup>37</sup>

**(iii) Prediction.** At this point, it might be objected that the sense in which the group's intention settles some practical matter doesn't require that the group itself act in *any* way (be it to bring about what is intended, or to ensure that someone will act on the intention). So long as the group can reasonably predict that its intention will cause or bring it about that someone will act in the requisite manner, the group counts as settled or committed in such a way that it may legitimately be said to intend.

Michael Bratman has argued that an individual may form intentions the satisfaction of which requires the voluntary actions of others, for example when as part of our J-ing I intend that we J. This sort of "other agent conditional mediation" is compatible with one intending and thus settling the matter, so long as one can *predict* that the other agents will do what is necessary for one's intention to be realized.<sup>38</sup> The proposal under consideration is an extension of Bratman's strategy, where the intention in question not only requires voluntary actions of others, but also involves *no* action on the part of the original intender – in this case, the group subject. An appropriate prediction, it is thought, can capture the sense in which a collective intention can settle some practical issue even though the group itself doesn't act to fulfill it – so

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<sup>37</sup> In effect, I'm claiming that indexical reference to the action itself is essential for intention, at least when it comes time to act on it. See Wilson 1989.

<sup>38</sup> Bratman, "I intend that we J".

long as the group reasonably expects that someone will, as a result of the intention, act accordingly.<sup>39</sup>

Since the current proposal eliminates altogether execution by the subject of the intention, there is no need to reconcile the exercise of agency by the group with the exercise of agency by an individual who is executing the group intention. Instead, the intention-based commitment and settling on the part of the group is understood completely in terms of the reasonable prediction that its intention will bring about the appropriate actions by some individual(s) or other(s). But does this capture the sense in which the group, in intending to A, settles the matter and is appropriately committed?

I think that there is a dimension of the commitment essential to intention that is missing from this picture. Normally, part of being committed in a way that is associated with intention is the disposition to execute or act on that intention. The current proposal substitutes prediction (and causation) for execution. To see what might be problematic with this, let's think about cases where intentions fail to be satisfied. Consider ordinary individual intentions first. An intention might not be satisfied because an instrumental belief turns out to be false. For example, the child intends to annoy the parents by breaking dishes, but they are not annoyed. Perhaps they are impressed by his strength, or delighted now to have an excuse to buy a new set of china that they had been eyeing. This case may count as a failure in the execution of the intention to annoy, and it certainly involves a failure of prediction – regarding what sort of thing would annoy the parents. But notice that the child would presumably make adjustments in what he's doing if he realizes that his instrumental belief is mistaken. It's not clear why this would be so on the view that understands commitment simply in terms of prediction. If the child sees that his prediction is wrong (because it's based on a false instrumental belief), why, on this view, would the child do anything else besides just revising the prediction?<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The individual executing the intention may see themselves as acting in order to realize the group intention. But that is neither here nor there for this proposed explanation of why the group attitude counts as an intention.

<sup>40</sup> Of course, the child might *want* to annoy his parents and so do something else to achieve that end. But the point is that he doesn't seem committed to this end in the way we would expect had he intended it. See note 41 below.

This suggests that there are other cases of intentions going unsatisfied that are not fundamentally failures of prediction. When it comes time to act, one finds that one cannot. One lacks motivation and procrastinates. Or, one might fail to live up to the commitment involved in intending because one is not adequately attentive, determined, focused, or organized.

This additional dimension of commitment is missing on predictive accounts. The group decides on some matter, perhaps that the department chair should reconsider a hiring decision. They choose a particular individual to inform the chair, or perhaps they just rely on the fact that someone will inform the chair. But no one actually does; the designated individual forgets, and no one else gets around to telling the chair. There was a failure of resolve, of follow-through. The intention is not satisfied. Is this a failure of execution? Intuitively, it would seem so. However, on the current proposal, the failure is really just one of prediction: the group was simply mistaken in its belief that the intention would lead someone to act on it and there is nothing more to be said about it.<sup>41</sup>

Relatedly, prediction doesn't capture the element of counterfactual robustness ensuring the follow-through that we expect from intention. If I intend to A, but see that efforts don't seem to be working, I make adjustments in what I'm doing. Whereas, my prediction that I will A is not related to the circumstances in such a way as to ensure that A-ing will occur; I just revise the prediction.<sup>42</sup>

Here we are tempted to suggest that the *individual who decides*<sup>43</sup> to execute the group intention would make the adjustments necessary to count as ensuring that the act is carried out. Likewise, that individual might lack focus, or be akratic, etc., in which case there really is a failure of execution, over and above a failure of prediction. But it is not clear that the failure of the individual to act on his intention (to act on behalf of the group) redounds to the group, as a failure of the group to execute *its* intention. All that can be said about the latter was that it

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<sup>41</sup> This is not meant to be a conclusive discussion. For some sophisticated defense of an individual analogue of the targeted view, see Harman (1976).

<sup>42</sup> The point is related to Anscombe's notion of direction of fit, but hers involves a normative dimension.

<sup>43</sup> In the end, I do think that an individual must act on or execute the intention. But he cannot do so by deciding, as it is normally understood. See below.

involved a failure of prediction. And as an exercise of individual agency (the individual decided and took it upon himself to carry out the group's intention), the counterfactual robustness ensuring follow-through reflects commitment on the part of the individual agent, and not that of the collective.

In sum, on this predictive conception of commitment, any failure to act on the intention would only amount to a failure of prediction, not of execution. And the counterfactual robustness characteristic of follow-through associated with intending is also absent. I think that this illustrates that there is a dimension of the commitment associated with intending that threatens<sup>44</sup> to go missing if we don't avail ourselves of the idea of executing the intention. However, given how we've set up the problem – that only *individuals* act on or execute the group's intention – we are back to our original problem. This problem, recall, was that of understanding how an individual agent is to act on behalf of the group without compromising the commitment to action that is fundamental for the group attitude to count as a genuine intention. That is, how can an individual act on the group intention without it being *her* intention, and not the group's, that settles what to do?

## 6.6 Acting directly on a collective intention

It is undeniable that it takes individuals doing this or that for the group's intentions to be implemented. The graduate students in a philosophy department might agree that the DGS or Chair should be informed of some problematic policy or personnel issue. But someone has to step up and implement the collective decision by addressing the DGS. How can this not be the exercise of individual agency? So how could the group's intention possibly settle what will be done?

The solution, I think, is to re-conceive the agency of the individuals executing the collective intention. There are a couple of ways to think about what's going on here. *Prima facie*, it might be as Pettit describes: the individual must *make a decision* as to whether to act

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<sup>44</sup> I am not suggesting that there are no other ways to capture this commitment besides the intender executing the intention. But *prima facie*, if the intender is not going to execute it, we lose the sense of commitment/settling. *Unless*, that is, we have some special story about the nature of the commitment/settling. My point here is that the predictive story won't do. See below for a suggestion that I think fares better.



on behalf of the group intention. This, I hope to have shown, is not compatible with the group genuinely intending, because it's not compatible with the collective intention settling the matter.

Alternatively, it might be that the individual takes his informing the DGS to be a matter settled by the group, and he *acts directly* on that group decision. Think of how an individual normally regards his own prior intention as settling some practical matter. Yesterday I decided that I would go shopping after work today. As a result I now intend to shop after work. Upon leaving work (and assuming I'm not forgetful), I act directly on the intention and go shopping. I don't deliberate now as to whether to go shopping, unless of course something comes up that should prompt me to reconsider (e.g. the tornado sirens start wailing, I'm informed that childcare has fallen through and the kids need to be picked up, etc.). The concept of acting directly on the prior intention is necessary for understanding how it is that that intention counts as settling the practical matter of what to do now that I have left work, and indeed, for understanding my having been able yesterday to *decide* (rather than merely hope or want) what I will be doing today.<sup>45</sup>

The thought, then, is that an individual executing the collective intention takes the latter as settling what it is that she does, much in the way that one's prior intentions settle what one does down the road. Something like this has to be the case if the collective is genuinely to intend.

But what about cases where there is a conflict between individual and collective intentions? The individual presumably must be under some rational pressure to reconsider the intentions in order to resolve the conflict. And this might require giving up at least one of them. It's not clear in this situation that either of the intentions will directly settle what the individual will do. But, there's nothing in this case that undermines the idea that intentions settle deliberative matters. The situation is similar to what happens when you realize that two of your own intentions are incompatible; the mere possibility of conflicts of individual

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<sup>45</sup> See Roth (2004, and forthcoming).

intentions does not undermine the commitment constitutive of intentions within an individual.<sup>46</sup>

So the suggestion is that Pettit's argument for thinking that the group has a mind of its own requires that in some sense individuals can act directly on collective intentions. I submit that this would address the worry about the group intention not exhibiting the commitment necessary for counting as a genuine intention. The individual's intention can settle an issue and commit the agent to act so long as the agent at the time of action takes the issue as settled. Likewise, the group intention can settle an issue and commit the group to action so long as individuals acting on the intentions take the issue as settled and act directly on it.

I should like to emphasize, however, that I have only sketched what it is to act directly on a group's intention, and have done nothing to defend the idea. I do think that if it's possible to act directly on a collective intention, the collective must have some *authority* to settle what it is that the individual will do. Correspondingly, the individual must have some *entitlement* to the practical reasoning and justification underlying the collective intention upon which she is directly acting. I say nothing here to defend these claims about authority and entitlement, except to point out that similar issues arise for ordinary individual intentions: underlying an individual's capacity to form intentions and settle deliberative matters for herself in the future is the authority one has now to settle what one will do in the future, and a corresponding entitlement, when one acts directly on an intention, to the practical reasoning or justification that earlier had led to the formation of the intention.

A final remark brings us back to the practical perspective from which we discern the indispensability of collectivizing reason – at least according to the proponent of the practical version of the indispensability argument. We saw that this perspective cannot be the individual

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the fact that intentions are subject to consistency constraints (and thus one can find oneself in problematic conflicts of intention) figures in accounts of the commitment distinctive of intention. My intention to A is supposed to rule out forming intentions that are incompatible, thus contributing to ensuring that A is brought about. Contrast desires, which are not thought to involve a similar commitment, and which are not subject to consistency constraints the way intentions are. That's not to say that being subject to consistency constraints fully account for the rationality of commitment. Consider what Pettit calls the *modus tollens generalization* (174). This is where the current majority view of a group holds sway, but previous judgments of the group are not ignored but revised to be consistent with the conclusion. If this strategy is practiced with any regularity, it would amount to a violation of the commitment associated with the earlier attitudes.

practical perspective the rationality of which is compromised in favor collective rationality. The compromising of this individual perspective contributes to the sense of a trade-off, and thus the force behind the discursive dilemma. But I've suggested that because it is rationally compromised, this perspective cannot provide a basis for ontological commitment; it cannot serve as the practical perspective from which indispensability is discerned. Having also ruled out the perspective of the group itself (on pain of circularity), what is left to reveal the indispensability? *Whose* perspective, for example, is being discussed in the passage about political parties?

...the party cannot tolerate collective inconsistency, because that would make it a laughing-stock among its followers and in the electorate at large; it could no longer claim to be seriously committed to its alleged purpose. And so it must not allow its judgments to be made in such a way that the discipline of reason is imposed only at the individual level; it has to ensure that that discipline is imposed at the collective level.

(178)

My suggestion is that this is the participatory perspective of an individual involved in collective action. This is a member of a group, someone who takes the collective intentions (and other attitudes) as authoritative for himself in the way that his own prior intentions are. But isn't this the rationally compromised individual? Well, no. That individual's judgments and intentions are abstracted from participation in the group (and it is because his actual behavior in conformity with the group judgment is not compatible with those judgments and intentions that he's rationally compromised). The suggestion is that the perspective required for the practical version of the indispensability argument is the perspective of the individual, but *not* abstracted from participation in the group, a perspective wherein one recognizes collective intentions and judgments as having an immediate or direct rational relevance on one's attitudes and actions. It is only if one finds this perspective familiar and gripping that the practical version of the indispensability argument will have any chance of success.

I do not try to settle whether these claims about acting directly on collective intentions and the rationality thereof will be sufficient for the purposes of establishing whether groups

have minds of their own. Frankly, I am not yet convinced of the group mind thesis. But I think that Pettit's argument and the questions that it raises are interesting independently of whether in the end he is right to think that groups do have minds of their own, precisely because they prompt us to think in new and useful ways about the practical rationality and agency of individuals in social contexts.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Useful, for example, in accounts of acting together or sharing intentions.

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