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What is wrong with Rejectionists?

One of the leading questions in contemporary philosophy of social science is: how do we analyze ascriptions to groups or group-predicates (*G*-predicates)? Is our talk of such attitudes only metaphorical or do these attributions have a literal meaning? If our talk is literal, in what respect is it so? Examples are utterances like “The editorial board believes that blind reviewing improves the quality of the journal”, “Microsoft believes that it should settle the antitrust case”, “The cabinet believes that genetically modified food is safe and should not be forbidden” and so on. The analysis of group belief is of particular significance for locating the social in the natural world, but also for the explanation of collective behaviour (on the classical debate on methodological individualism and holism, see Preyer 2002; on an overview of the forms of methodological individualism also see R. Bhargava 1992: 33, 19-52¹).

Margaret Gilbert (2002) has recently challenged what she calls the rejectionists` position. The rejectionists, of whom Anthonie Meijers is an example, claim to show that collective beliefs are not purely epistemic in nature and involve practical considerations in principle. The distinction between believing and accepting is fundamental for Meijers “agreement-based account” of collective beliefs (2002). There are different proposals on beliefs and acceptance like, for example those of K. Lehrer, R. Stalnaker, M. Bartman, P. Engel. I will discuss only Meijers` analysis here, he follows Bartman and Engel in particular. Acceptance means having a certain policy and we evaluate the policy by its coherence. He refers also to R. Tuomela`s account of acceptance (Tuomela defends the view that collective beliefs are not to reduce to individual beliefs; but Meijers` and Tuomela`s account are not the same). According to the rejectionists beliefs are not

1 I have become acquainted with his book in 2002 only. I agree with his critique on methodological individualism and his characterization of the social. Many sociologists share his non individualistic concept of the social in principle. Yet I do not go along with him in this particular version of contextualism and his conceptualizing of the role of praxis as the foundation of social phenomena. But on these differences I could communicate with him. On my version of contextualism see Preyer 2002a: 341-362.

voluntary, but acceptance is. Meijers claims to answer the question of what collective beliefs are by telling us that they are a function of each individual of a group accepting a certain proposition. But for him there is nothing like a group mind or consciousness. His agreement-based account is a version of methodological individualism in social science. He does not hesitate to extend the individual agreement-based account (acceptance) to the social in principle. Yet, for characterizing social groups he takes into account also procures, regulations and so on. Gilbert offers an alternative proposal, the *plural subject account* of collective beliefs. I will call this view the Gilbert-account.

In the following I will focus on several questions that are central to the debate between the rejectionists and Gilbert; in doing this, I slightly modify the Gilbert-account: 1. What theory of propositional attitudes do we apply to the analysis of collective *belief* statements? 2. Are individuals the ultimate components (*Letztelemente*) of groups or social systems in general? 3. Are groups themselves believers? Or, in other words: are individuals the natural instances of beliefs? From that the fundamental problems follow: 4. What are the components of the universe (U) that we presuppose when we ascribe G -predicates? 5. What is the role of commitments in an analysis of G -predicates? That is, what is the function of commitments in social systems? This leads me to discussing the problem: is there something like a group mind (collectives mental states)?

1. The Gilbert-account

(a) *Collective belief**

It is obvious that the fundamental issue in analyzing collective beliefs and the ascription of G -predicates is the theory of propositional attitudes. Rejectionists make a basic distinction between beliefs and acceptance. For them, collective beliefs are characterized by an individual decision to agree with others. We evaluate beliefs – all propositional attitudes – by their logical consistence. In contrast to that, collective beliefs are context bound and voluntary. Ordinary beliefs are not a matter of any decision or control we have. But collective beliefs are necessarily willed, therefore they are no beliefs per se, they are just collective acceptance. Gilbert calls this „involuntarism.“ The rejectionists

also point to the fact that beliefs are based on evidence and in contrast to that acceptance is guided by prudence. However, rejectionists are in agreement with the Gilbert-account in so far as the acceptance of collective attitudes is caused by a “collectivity involving.” The property of a group is given by both the collective involving and the collective attitudes. In sum, for the Gilbert-account group belief is a real belief whereas the rejectionist thinks that group belief is merely a form of acceptance, that is, individuals accept a certain proposition p as the view of the group.

The Gilbert-account (plural subject account of collective belief) is:

The members of population P collectively believe that p if and only if they are jointly committed to believe that p as a body.

The general form of joint commitment is:

Persons $x_1, x_2 \dots x_n$ are jointly committed to @ as a body

@ indicates that the account has already been stated. The key element of the Gilbert-account is that collective statements refer to joint commitments.

² For @ we can substitute “belief that p ”, “feel grief over x ”, “accept goal G ” and so on. We are free to use expressions like “person”, “a body”, “entity” for “body”. These are the technical meanings of talking on a collective subject, but Gilbert thinks that we intuitively know what it means to believe as a body. Therefore a speaker who utters a collective belief-statement, for example, “the campus team believes that a café will be highly beneficial for the campus”, refers to belief of a plural subject. This account claims to explain how plural subjects are formed in terms of joint commitments.

² In this respect, the Gilbert-account is familiar to R. Tuomela’s proposal. For him only acceptance *beliefs* can be attributed to groups. What he calls “acceptance” beliefs is not different to joint commitments as jointly committed to believe that p as a body @. For him there is no complete disjunction between beliefs and acceptance because in real life beliefs both the acceptance and experiential aspects are present so we have always mixed, non-pure cases. R. Tuomela, M. Tuomela (2002) argue that the beliefs of groups are constituted by their members and call the beliefs of the “operative” members “we-beliefs”. They make a distinction between two different cases in principle: in the case of normatively binding group beliefs the we-beliefs must be acceptance beliefs, that is, acceptance as true of the content p , but there may be experiential elements present (although that is not required), and group beliefs as shared we-beliefs (non-normative case). This last case is different from the first because we-beliefs need not be acceptance beliefs but may well be merely experiential beliefs. This leads us to the holism of propositional attitudes.

(b) *Aggregate of individuals versus social groups*

In contrast to ascriptions like “We will both go to the cinema tonight” we refer in collective statements like, for example, “the union believes that p ” with the grammatical subject “the union” to a collective and we ascribe with the predicate “believes that p ” a belief to this entity. In the first case, say “John and Fred will go ...”, we re-interpret “we” with reference to the two individuals. Therefore there is no further believer. In the case of “The union believes ...” it is neither necessary nor sufficient that all or most members have the belief in question. In other words, the distributive condition of ascription is neither sufficient nor necessary. On that I see no difference to the agreement-based account (there may be cases where a belief is ascribed to a group where no member actually has the belief ascribed to the group.)

Meijers makes the distinction between a weak and a stronger conception of collective beliefs. The *weak* conception is “we believe that p ” = “we, the individuals in the group *as individuals* believe that p ”. This so-called “opinion-poll conception” claims that the distribution of the beliefs of the individuals in the group may be different, for example “80 % of the British people believe that the Euro will eventually be introduced in Great Britain”. Yet in some cases the opinion-poll conception must be expanded by adding common knowledge (belief) in a group (every member of the group knows that every other member has the belief in question). Both the opinion-poll conception and the common knowledge clause are, for Meijers, successful in many cases to ascribe collective beliefs.

What account explains the ascription of collective belief statements without presupposing the distributive condition?

Meijers makes the distinction between an aggregate of individuals and a social group. The decision of some people, for example, to travel to Rome, changes any aggregate of individuals into a group. They have a collective intention to reach a particular goal. Meijers has made a distinction between the “opinion-poll conception” and the “agreement-based conception” of collective beliefs. The first is summative, like the reference of the statement “The British believe that the Euro will eventually be introduced in Great Britain”, the second refers to a majority. He reasons the difference

between both conceptions thereby:

1. collective beliefs create a commitment, 2. such commitments are conditional, and 3. we ascribe collective beliefs to groups also in case that no individual member believes them.

Therefore, for the agreement-based conception the difference between belief and acceptance claims to show that collective beliefs are not epistemical in nature.

(c) Joint-commitments

The Gilbert-account does not introduce the joint-commitment as a personal commitment, like “John is committed because he has decide to do x ” or “I am committed to my friend Paul because he has helped me”. A joint-commitment is, in fact, a matter between persons or parties but *both* of them (or the group) are committed and the participants are not *free* to annul it in a *unilateral* way. Individuals (members) are jointly committed to @ as a body or plural subject, that is, they “believe that p ”, “feel grief over x ”, “accept goal G ”. The mutual commitment to a single body of belief fixes what they are committed to doing as individuals (members) as a belief, that is, the joint commitment is propositional. Rejectionists argue that we ascribe beliefs only to individuals and collective *belief* statements themselves are only a metaphorical speech. The literal meaning of collective belief statements is, for rejectionists, bound up with the notion of accepting a proposition and agreeing with a certain policy.

How can we take collective belief statements serious?

For the rejectionists, collective beliefs principally depend *on* contexts (context simply means: under given circumstances). Slightly misleading, Meijers calls that a pragmatic view. Gilbert rejects that. The Campus promotion team, for example, believes* that the Campus will benefit from a café. We would simply say: the “team” believes* that p , and nothing else. Therefore it is unproblematic to assume that the team believes* explicitly or implicitly that p in a given situation. In contrast to that, Meijers thinks that collective beliefs are non-epistemic and hence no beliefs at all.

The joint-commitment of the team is to believe that p as a body. Gilbert starts out from

a parallel between the situation of the team that believes* that p and an individual belief. The beliefs of the members may change in a later situation, but the belief that p as a body is parallel to individual beliefs. Therefore, from the Gilbert-account is to conclude that a collective belief* is not always dependent on a particular situation like Meijers has argued. Collective belief* have as extension a group whose members act in different situations. Yet this is not contradictory to the assumption that the particular *content* of collective beliefs (local content) is dependent on a particular situation; for example, we believe that John, the member of the campus promotion team, has insulted the team leader.

(d) Mouth piece of belief as a body

I think that many philosophers of social science have problems understanding the idea that *we*, as individuals, are sometimes a *mouth piece* of a body of beliefs. Gilbert introduces the instantiation of such a body to populations in general and to social groups. It seems reasonable to read this notion of belief as a body *not* atomistical, but in such a way that individuals are members of a social group. How can we handle this problem? I assume that we do not ascribe G -predicates to individuals, but to membership conditions. Groups have individuals and their particular properties as fulfillment conditions, but we instantiate G -predicates not to P -predicates (person-predicates), for example, “he is a member of the football team Frankfurter Eintracht” is not semantically equivalent to any P -predicate. It is not possible to give a reduction by definition of such predicates to individual persons and their attitudes (on the *mixed extension* of the ascription of P - and G -predicates, see IV 13., in this book). Entities like social systems and organizations do not have the status of individualistic entities to which we attribute certain properties or deny them. Therefore no social group is an aggregate of individuals. But we can describe them this way from the particular point of view of an observer. In other words, social groups as aggregates are a projection of the observer. D. Tollefsen argues in his comment, and I agree, that the individuals themselves are a projection of the observer as well. For example, our personal identity also is not to be explained by reference to some feature of the individual but is a function

of the way observers perceive us. In general it is to mention that in contemporary sociology the concept of the individual and the concept on individualization is not as clear as it seems. Humans as individuals are black boxes and not a part of social systems. But communications require ascriptions of attitudes to continue with their operations. The unit of individual and person is an evolutionary achievement as instances of ascription, for example, to ascribe responsibility. It is a fiction for ascriptions and the continuing of communicative operations. This unit has no foundation. Personality is a symbol of the capacity to participate in communications or to be a possible member of a social system; that is, someone has an address whereby we can ascribe something to him. From my point of view, the mouth piece of belief as a body is forced by membership and membership conditions are the extension of such bodies. Therefore we make the distinctions among individuals as fulfillment conditions of membership, members, and positions of membership. Membership conditions as extensions of belief as a body are the ultimate component of the social universe, collective statements refer to membership conditions and therefore to beliefs the members have. Groups are believers, not in the sense that individuals are believers, but as members they take part in a body of belief: collective beliefs are logically independent of individual beliefs (Gilbert's neo-Durkheim view). Or in other words: if we ascribe a collective belief to "John", for example, "John believes (as a member of the campus promotion team) that the campus café is highly beneficial" the ascription of the belief is logically or conceptually determined by the collective belief*. Therefore the distinction between believing and accepting as a group, as Meijers argues against the Gilbert-account, is not right. Yet we need further considerations that this distinction is principally not necessary.

2. Propositional attitudes

(a) A rejectionists' theory of propositional attitudes

Contemporary philosophy is somewhat dominated by the problem of ascription of propositional attitudes. There is no doubt that such attitudes play a role in epistemology, the theory of language, and the philosophy of mental. Philosophers of the theory of action, theorists of language, and social scientists are interested in a general solution of the ascription of attitudes because a solution of the ascription from one case to the next

is not successful. We need a solution of ascribing attitudes to all possible utterances of natural speakers.

Rejectionists argue that beliefs have the following distinctive features:

1. Beliefs are *not* voluntary, acceptance *is*.
2. Beliefs are *true* or *false*, acceptance is a matter of *benefit* and *success*.³
3. Beliefs are reasoned by *evidence* (epistemic view), acceptance is *not* of this nature (pragmatic view).

For rejectionists, collective beliefs are best analyzed by a pragmatic view, that is, we as a group believe that *p*, for example in particular situations, for playing roles or for considerations to decide on goals.

4. Beliefs are *ideally* integrated by *consistency*, acceptance is to be evaluated by the *coherence* of a policy.
5. Beliefs are not context *dependent*, acceptance *is*.
6. Beliefs are *gradual* (quantitative) and have subjective probabilities, acceptance is a matter of *quality*, that is, there is an agreement of beliefs in a given community. They have a feature of “all or nothing”.

Rejectionists like, for example, Meijers, have an individualistic account of propositional attitudes and expand attitude individualism to an agreement-based account of collective beliefs that consequently are no belief then (we can also call such an account semantic individualism, it is not an ontological individualism in principle). What Meijers calls the strong conception of collective beliefs “‘we believe that *p*’ = ‘*we*, the group as a whole, believe that *p*’” is found from an agreement among members of the group as individuals formed by practical considerations. For them, the policy of the members of groups is

3 K. Brad Wray has commented on this point: first, the rejectionist denies that epistemic factors are the only facts that determine what a collective believes. Second, the rejectionist grants that if you acquire evidence that makes a collective belief look bad, then the belief is apt to be relinquished or given up. However, the relevant sort of evidence would not show that the belief is false, but that the belief is not an effective means to realize the goals of the group. There is something else that Brad brings into play: if we discover that some view we are holding and that we thought was prudent does not advance our goals, then learning this will cause us to give up that view. In this sense, collective “beliefs” are responsive to evidential as well as prudential concerns. This is in harmony with the Gilbert-account.

ultimately one of individuals, not of members themselves, they participate in the social intercourse of a particular social unit (this is my interpretation of Meijers' account). Rejectionists must furthermore assume that differences in the social universe take effect in the mental content of attitudes. As a consequence, in their presupposed theory of meaning they have to assume that word meaning is not socially distributed. I will make some considerations of the strategical route of a theory and methodology of propositional attitudes to examine the rejectionists' account. But I will not carry out a theoretical analysis in detail (see on that Preyer 2002).

(b) The holism of attitudes

From the Davidson-view we saddle up the methodology of the theory of propositional attitudes from their holistic feature. We do not ascribe attitudes step by step and all attitudes are connected in nature, that is, "no beliefs without many related beliefs, no belief without desires, no desires without beliefs, no intentions without both beliefs and desires." (Davidson 2001: 126, on the relations on beliefs and evaluative attitudes see also: 125), that is, propositional attitudes conspire in general. A holism of attitudes implies that there are no purely single attitudes. Following the Davidson-view, the theories of interpretation, communication and decision work together to solve the task of interpretation; and we systemize the relation among beliefs, desires and action by a total theory, that is, a composite theory of linguistic and other behavior (Davidson 1984: 163). By attitude-theorists it is not disputed that attitudes may change by the time, but they are dispositions that cause judgments and actions under certain conditions.

The feature of attitude-connections implies that we apply generalized fulfillment conditions to utterances if we ascribe single attitudes. There are certain connections between attitudes and truth and other fulfillment conditions if we relate these conditions to the world we share or to the social universe in which we participate in particular positions (social status). An interpreter can only cope with the interdependence between propositional attitudes and meaning if he has an independent evidence not bound by individual cases to the ascription of attitudes and he does not research what is happening empirically in the mind of the speaker. For the Davidson-view the interpreter assumes a degree of rationality (coherence and truth) to assign propositional contents of speech, beliefs, desires, or intentions. The leading problem that emerged from the theory of

language and action is that the ascription of attitudes has to take the social frame of reference into account, and social concepts are not to reduce to mental concepts: the social frame of reference of speakers also partly individuates the content of attitudes and not only the physical surroundings we are aware of. Collective belief* is a social concept that is in harmony with social externalism. Therefore doubts emerge whether the ascription of individual attitudes and collective attitudes (beliefs) are parallel in principle. This is concluded from Burge's thought-experiments⁴, that is, from the counterfactual situation of the ascription of attitudes. For the method of analyzing propositional attitudes it is useful to make this distinction, but the individuation of the attitudinal content is partly governed by the social frame of reference. This may be called the semantical re-interpretation of the ascription of attitudes. From the Gilbert-account the ascription of attitudes is social because the ascription is not to explain by individual decisions or agreements. Therefore they cannot be merely mental states of an individual and therefore collective belief* as a social concept is a form of belief. The fundamental question is whether we accept a social frame of attitude ascription or if we do not. If we accept such frames, we also accept that collective belief* is a belief as well.

(c) The individuation of attitudes

It is essential for the ascription of attitudes and for learning to ascribe them (also for the learning of word meaning) that a re-interpretation of linguistic behavior links the attitudes we have to the linguistic community and that means being a member of it.

⁴ On Davidson, Burge and Putnam, see L. Röska-Hardy (1994), pp. 255-97, on Burge 266-71, Burge's account is to characterize as follows: firstly, his perceptual externalism does not argue for a metaphysical foundation of the causal explanation of reference; secondly, he applies externalism not only to natural kind terms like Putnam, but also to terms like 'arthritis', 'contract' and so on, that is, all terms we could make a mistake about – this is no difference to Davidson's version of externalism; thirdly, his thought experiments deal with the individuation of contents of attitudes (mental states); from his point of view de dicto attitudes are also to individuate externalistically; fourthly, propositional attitudes and also other mental states are to individuate partly by or within a social frame of reference. From my point of view, and as I have argued in another context, Burge's social externalism is to modify by the epistemic differentiation within the social frame of reference. Putnam's conception of the division of linguistic labor and stereotypes is comparable with Burge's social externalism. It was Putnam's approach that reference is not a relation between a mental state as an internal component and entities as an external component. He limits the inscrutability of reference (Quine), but reference is intensionally inscrutable. To show this, Putnam goes along with Kripke's rigid designation, that is, reference is not to fix by a set of descriptions of the reference-object of an expression in a qualitative way. It is a rigid relation of expression as names to entities, that is, reference is global and not to modify by redescrptions of entities. Natural kind terms, for example, are such names. Yet Kripke's rigid designation is overstrained with a metaphysical essentialism and Putnam's account is found on scientific realism.

Meaning may differ from individual attitudes but the successful use of terms is bound by the fact that the speaker is a member of a linguistic and social community or, from the Gilbert-account, that he takes part in a body of belief as a non-individualistic entity that defines the property of group or a particular social system.

It is often argued that fixing the content of attitudes is partly determined by the participation in a particular praxis of a linguistic community and we interpret the success of our praxis realistically (externalistically) (Burge, Putnam and others). To share a certain praxis as member of a group or of a social system is a skill and not a mental state. Mental state is to understand in the sense of Putnam. For him, mental states presuppose only the subject to whom the states are attributed (see also on the analysis of skills and communication of D. Simpson 1998). Yet many philosophers of social science also agree on this: making behavior intelligible presupposes a background (- knowledge, - theory) of the agent or the group under study. Propositional attitudes cannot be ascribed case by case from one individual speaker to another and we do not pick out what a speaker means without interpreting his verbal behavior. An independent evidence is required for interpretation of linguistic behavior and the ascription of attitudes. If attitudes conspire we break into the circle of belief and meaning by the ascription of a fulfillment condition to utterances as independent evidence. This “condition” is not to fix individually but by ordinary causal relations and, moreover, to the extension of the components of the social universe (their relations and the epistemic differentiation within this universe). This shows that the ascription of attitudes results in a total theory. We interpret sentences, assign the network of attitudes to a speaker and to groups and thereby explain behavior from a linguistic perspective.

To sum up, attitudes are to individuate partly by their linguistic content within the social frame of reference and causal relations but not by any mental fabrication. The content of attitudes does not exist (only) as a mental representation. Such linguistic content is fixed by a relationship to the social and the rest of nature. Attitudes and the social are not to reduce to either or both. I do not argue that attitudes do not exist. They are propositional in nature, and we ascribe and individuate them. Attitudes are no fictions. The causal relations explains to us their occurrence in behavior and the social frame makes the meaning of the utterance content that we ascribe intelligible. If we deleted one part of that, the meaning of linguistic behavior and the redescriptions of it would not be intelligible. Therefore propositional attitudes are to redescribe as objective. From the

Davidson-view perceptual beliefs could not be wrong because they are directly caused by the external world. We individuate them by triangulation. They could be shattered, but they cannot be compared with reasonable opinions (this is also emphasized by J. Nida-Rümelin 2002: 16-19). From there it follows that there is no principal distinction between believing and accepting of a propositional like content p . The qualification of such beliefs by acceptance is redundant. Furthermore, the social frame of reference as a background is not anything like acceptance or what we accept or do not accept in general. This is, from my point of view; what Gilbert calls a body of belief which the individual members of any group could not dispose of or members are committed to the body of belief. We can also call that “the social frame of reference”. We participate in fixing and interpreting words and attitudes of the members of the social units. This is the task of a semantical re-interpretation of behavior of members of groups, not of individual utterances of propositional attitudes. The body of belief can also be called social belief; that is a verbal difference only.

3. Gilbert’s objection

(a) Epistemic and practical considerations

Rejectionists argue that beliefs are epistemic, that is, their qualification is given by evidence and subjective probability, but collective beliefs are a matter of prudence. Yet what Gilbert calls collective belief* can also be changed by true beliefs and our practical thinking is supported by epistemical knowledge, for example, the allied forces give up the belief that by the Christmas bombing the intended goal will be reached. Therefore it is a matter of truth whether certain means are successful to reach their goals. Meijers might reply that epistemic and practical reasons play together for the choice of means for goals and interests gains the upper hand against epistemic belief in many cases. But other cases may also occur, for example, I immunize myself by prudential reasons against evidence; I know my wife is unfaithful, but this would confuse me and therefore I ignore the facts. Here we can see that the parallel between individual and collective beliefs does not show that collective beliefs cannot be modified. They do not lose their status *as* collective beliefs by falsification.

(b) Collective belief and truth*

Meijers has argued: if collective beliefs are true or not true, then it is incomprehensible *why* a joint commitment is included in such beliefs. Gilbert answers that it is an open question whether individual motivation plays a role in collective belief* at all. It is not disputed that joint commitments are in fact “commitments”. Essentially such beliefs are epistemical and are not caused by individual motives. But she does not exclude that not only truth but also individual goals play a role in the body of beliefs. The goal orientation is a standard of evaluation to select collective beliefs.

Another argument against the truth-feature of collective beliefs of Meijers is that a group may have a collective belief without the individuals in the group sharing it. The campus-team, for example, changes its belief about the benefit of the campus-café during a discussion. But the members know that the dean wants to have it and their goal is to avoid a conflict with him. Therefore they opt in favor of the café. The answer to the question

How do we tax that the situation is of no benefit?

gives us a hint to object individualism in social science. If the theory of propositional attitudes is individualistic, we come to the result that the belief about this benefit is not true. But this is not at all significant for the attitude of the group, that is, for the team itself. It is therefore a fault to argue with a theory of attitudes having individuals as ultimate instances. For the Gilbert-account it is to take into play that the utterances of the member are to interpret in respect to a joint-commitment. Such commitments have as extension to believe that *x as a body*. From the inside of the group the members act as a mouth piece of these beliefs as far as possible. The same is valid for individual beliefs.

4. Involuntarism

Rejectionists argue that beliefs are not caused by will. And since collective beliefs are necessarily voluntary they are *not* beliefs. Gilbert calls that *involuntarism*. From the Gilbert-account it follows that a collectivity may be constituted by a collective will, but one must be distinguished from the other. The same is valid for a joint-commitment. It is possible that this commitment is constituted by a collective will, but *how* a collective belief* includes a collective will does not mean that a collective belief* necessarily exists from the will of the relevant collectivity.

For Meijers, collective beliefs are formed by a voluntary assent, that is, an agreement and a decision of individuals about the beliefs in question: thereby they express their commitment about beliefs as an orientation of their doings (praxis): collective beliefs as an agreement of *individuals* who build a group as individuals, not as members. The ascription of collective beliefs is instantiated by the acceptance of beliefs. For rejectionists that is the instance to ascribe collective beliefs with a literal meaning and not with a metaphorical one. Yet this is a wrong location of the social.

Let us return to our campus promotion team. Tom, a member of the team, agrees with the others that the campus café is of no benefit. But he was academically trained by the dean and has a friendly relationship to him. Tom knows that the dean wants to have the café, and he feels from communication with him that the dean likes the idea of a café on the campus. Tom is unhappy about this situation. On the other hand, Tom agrees with the other members that the café is not beneficial, that is, he is jointly committed to them (belief as a body). If we ascribe the belief* to the team that the café is of no benefit, we make the assumption that the team has a common knowledge about that (every member knows from the others that they know that the café has no benefit). Following the Gilbert-account, the will or decision of the members of the group as individuals participates in the fabrication of the collective belief*. But in contrast to involuntarism it is *not* shown that the collective belief* is willed by the group in question or even that the collective belief* is supported by any decision.

The difference of the Gilbert-account to the rejectionists' point of view is as follows:

1. Decisions are not necessary to fabricate collective belief*, 2. the Gilbert-account

agrees with the rejectionists that acceptance in difference to belief is voluntary, that is to say, I accept that p is a decision that this “ p ” is a premise of my reasoning, 3. but a collective belief* is *no* case of acceptance built this way.

To sum up, decisions of individuals are not necessary for the fabrication of collective belief*. Coping with the functional imperatives of situations causes us to correct the beliefs of a particular body. I mention here that it is not fruitful for social science to assume that agreements among members form the basic process of a social system. All processes of this kind are coupled with organizational structures that we cannot dispose of in general. Social systems are furthermore structured by exclusion. This is valid in particular for formal organizations. I characterize such organizations by formal determinations (regulations) of membership. Membership itself is to interpret as a decision (Preyer 2008c: 45-56). In general social systems are closed by the decision on membership and can only be continued and stabilized thereby. In this respect social systems are autopoietic systems. Therefore it is not the case that a collective belief* is established by acceptance in essential. Within a differentiated societal system we are members in different social systems, like the family, associations, ethnic groups and so on. Yet in all social systems there are performances and actions which we do not decompose and communicate as decisions because it is not worthwhile doing so.

5. The membership-account

(a) Membership as collective subject

Membership conditions, their variation and modification are the ultimate component of social systems (on an outline of a sociology of membership Preyer 2002). My re-interpretation of the Gilbert-account is: membership conditions constitute social groups, and in respect to these conditions we presuppose that the members participate in a body of belief. We ascribe collective beliefs to such conditions and not to individuals themselves. Members are believers and as members we are a mouth piece of belief as far as possible. A distinction between individuals and members must be made. Membership

conditions are the frame of reference that we apply if we ascribe an interlocking set of attitudes to several individuals as members of a group and organizations, they are collectively involved by communications, tasks, procedures, meetings, celebrations and so on. Therefore we make the following presupposition for redescribing their behavior in the social frame of reference: the propositional attitudes we ascribe to a single member presuppose that such attitudes or such a contrast set of attitudes are also held (more or less) by other members. The property *to be a member* entails, as instances, a set of individuals in social positions. Membership conditions constitute social facts, and they do not refer to propositional attitudes as such. Therefore social states are not physical or mental and they cannot be characterized by a consequentialist definition as Popperians argue. Yet the membership account does not dispute that members have a first person authority and apply charity for interpretation.

It is a well-known way to argue that, if beliefs about the social are not to reduce to individual beliefs, it is *not* shown that the social is objective. The agreement-based account is a version of that. We can challenge this because individual beliefs may be idiosyncratic, but they have a relation with the beliefs and actions of others that form the body of belief. The interlocking system of attitudes itself is not to reduce to individuals, but it is to specify by members who participate in the social intercourse of social units on different levels. I will call this the *social frame of reference of the body of belief*.

It is common among sociologists that the term “social” refers to two distinct entities and both the entities are related in some intercourse which is also not specified. Property relations of one entity itself cannot determine the social. Yet a relation is not enough to qualify as a social intercourse. The social is established by purposive behavior that both sides perceive. Therefore the intercourse is guided by beliefs and desire and the social exists only by communication and communicative involving structured by conditions of participation (membership); and being a member means participating in the body of belief. If we re-interpret the ascription of attitudes within this social frame, we can also explain the role of (individual) attitudes and decisions in social groups and their communication. The decision of the allied forces to continue with the bombing, for example, is a collective act but the decision of the members of the allied forces to assent is an individual realization of a (social) co-operation. And this realization is the limit that constitutes whether the collective exists, but the body of belief of the allied forces is logically independent from such individual decisions and attitudes as such.

The body of belief* is a set of attitudes and the extension of such a body is to specify by the membership condition. Members of a group participate in a particular body of belief*. Yet it is not to presuppose that the members have a perfect knowledge about the body. If we assume that the extension of the body of beliefs is fixed by membership conditions of social units, the members themselves dispose of skills, procedure and so on as a background to determine their content. The body of belief* is not a mental state of individuals: to share a body of belief* does not mean having a certain mental state but acting and reacting which is caused by common situations and being involved in communicative situations. It is obvious that an agreement-based account of collective belief* and involuntarism is not the right account.

(b) The role of commitments in social systems

What follows from the membership account for the analysis of joint commitments? Rejectionists and the Gilbert-account agree about the following: collective belief* commits the members to certain decisions and to a behavioral conformity to such beliefs, that is, collective belief* leads to reciprocal commitments. Both agree also that such a belief* can change. The difference between both accounts in principle is Gilbert's Durkheimian point of view, that is, the objectivity and the coercive power and authority of the body of belief* as a social fact. Therefore both *differ* in the status of the joint commitment of members to believe that p as a body. Meijers characterizes collective beliefs as conditional, that is, they are dependent on the willingness to concur with these beliefs. Therefore they are not objective and have no authority. It is not a problem that we ascribe such beliefs to a group also in case that their individual members have given up the beliefs in question. Propositional attitudes are to redescribe as objective because they have a content that is to individuate objectively. This is also valid for conative attitudes (J. Nida-Rümelin 2002:16-20). The utterance of a commitment or being committed is also to re-interpret as a belief and not only as a subjective preference or affection; and we do not make demands on any reasoning of such beliefs.⁵

⁵ With moral utterances I do not express a (subjective) attitude, for example, that I detest something (emotivistic interpretation). Such utterances are not expressions of passion (expressionistic interpretation) and I give no advice with the utterances (recommodation) (prescriptionistic interpretation), see Nida-

This is the feature that explains why commitments take effect. It is possible that beliefs are shattered, but it is an essential feature of them that we have no doubts about them. Yet beliefs and commitments have fulfillment conditions and as such do not stand alone. From experience we know that expectations are disappointed, but there are no commitments without which we project them into the future of the social intercourse. There are no expectations without anticipation of beliefs, beliefs about actions and expectations, and also preferences of members of groups. This is common among sociologists. Beliefs and commitments are not to distinguish in principle, they are connected in the network (system) of propositional attitudes.

Gilbert argues that collective belief requires a joint commitment to believe that p as a body.

Yet, what is the function of commitments in social systems?

To be jointly committed to a body of belief as members restricts our options and eliminates contingency in social systems and thereby establishes a social structure with a higher complexity. Essentially such commitments are neither a good or a bad thing. They may be useful or may bring harm. From a sociological point of view commitments are restrictions that form a social structure by borderlines of membership. Every communication which is an event has a selective effect that reduces possibilities and reveals something. Therefore commitments are a medium that selects the chances of continuation of communication. It is not an essential feature that commitments are reasonable, but their function is to stabilize expectation. Yet, a reasonable evaluation can be handed in later and we explain this by selective formed commitments that are not disputed. It is often the case that from our free choice we conclude the strength of a commitment we have; for example, I have signed a working contract and I am bound to go conform with the commitments and the corporate culture in the company where I work now. Therefore commitments can also couple members with dissent and in spite of intended differences among them. Yet, the communicative medium of commitment can be coupled, to a stronger or a weaker degree, to the conditions of membership, for example, in ethnic groups, in the kinship system, in some subculture group they are coupled in a stronger way than in formal organizations. In the same way the

Rühmelin 2002: 17. If I believe that it is immoral to murder Turkey women and girls in Solingen (Germany) this is an objective belief. Yet without emotions such beliefs cannot take effect. There is no contradiction between the emotiveness of the utterance and its objectivity.

commitments are not at all to identify with acceptance or consent. Commitments are media of membership.

(c) The group mind or feeling

For the Gilbert-account, groups can have beliefs that are logically independent of individual beliefs. It is an interpretative question whether Gilbert also assumes that a group has a mind of itself. For Meijers, there is no group mind or feeling. And yet, is this really the case? I will give a hint why a group mind (feeling) is not only a fiction, but a real problem that is to discuss. But if I bring group mind into play, I do not assert that groups themselves have a single mind that has experiential beliefs.

An example of a study of group mind and feeling is, from psychoanalytical research, the group pattern of the *Balint*group, that is, the group (the analyst) and the supervisor as a reporter re-direct an unconscious pattern that is a result achieved between the supervisor and the clients (E. Balint 1989). Beside the psychoanalytic redescription this is a piece of evidence that we ascribe to a *group* also a mind or a feeling, and not only to individuals. The collective involving of the members of a group transfers mind and feeling among them by communication and by transference and counter-transference. Such mechanisms are, from my point of view, not of a Freudian unconsciousness, but a social mind emerges from the communication of the members of the group. Such mind is reflected in unconscious feelings of “blame”, “delight”, “sorrow” and unconscious motives. This is evident because the members, for example of the Balint group, do not only understand the cognitive content but also the emotive content of utterances. Collective involving means: all members act and react to one another. If, for example, a member utters that it is *sad*, then the pattern of *sadness* is the pattern that is set by the group. All this is a part of the body of belief* the group has. Within this frame the members of the group can also learn and modify their attitudes by social exchange.

Critiques on Durkheim’s concept of the social are well-known. But if the membership condition is the ultimate component of the social universe, the social (social systems) is outside of individuals and our consciousnesses. This is true for all social systems, that is, the social is a reality *sui generis*. It is not the social praxis which has any priority, but membership regulates social praxis. From that it is to conclude that a purely intentional

explanation of collective behavior or an essential connection between intentional explanation and methodological individualism must be given up. I will mention here that this has nothing to do with collectivism. *Both* atomism and collectivism are wrong conceptions of the social. To me, it is not difficult to agree with Gilbert that being a member means being a member of a collective subject as a social entity. Such a subject is not the “ego cogito” of Cartesian epistemology, the “Vernunft” (a Kantian general human rationality) or a Husserlian pure ego, but as a collective subject it is a social system of which we participate as members whatever its structure or organization may be. In this sense and as members of this kind we are a mouth piece of the body of belief, but as individuals we are not identical with that. The social universe is determined thereby. We make up the following picture for ourselves: if we refer to the outside of the individuals and members, then they share a physical world that causes parts of their attitudes, but in order to ascribe attitudes we need an adequate conception of the social. In social science, individualism is an intellectual conception of the social and a residual Cartesianism. It is a projection of an observer. We have grounds to understand individualism, but this conception is not useful when explaining meaning and the necessary relationship between the (linguistic) content of attitudes, their individuation and the social that we share.*

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