

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM
ERASMUS INSTITUTE FOR PHILOSOPHY AND ECONOMICS

MASTER THESIS

AN INSPECTION OF GROUP AGENCY THEORY

ZORAN PANTOULAS

SUPERVISOR

Dr. CONRAD HEILMANN
ERASMUS UNIVERSITY
EIPE

ADVISER

Dr. CONSTANZE BINDER
ERASMUS UNIVERSITY
EIPE

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1.Introduction

Opening today's newspaper you will surely come across phrases such as "The Eurogroup decided.." or "The European Union voted on...", which reflect the idea that these groups hold some kind of agency. Indeed, in such expressions these groups are regarded as a kind of collective agent. How can we understand such collective agency? Despite these widely held intuitions about group agency, the concept of group agency, there is not yet a comprehensive study of the phenomenon in the literature. Rather, there are many competing different ideas about what group agency is or how a group of people may attain it. In this thesis, we are going to discuss a new proposal concerning group agency, which is using the latest results from Social Choice Theory (SCT) and Judgment Aggregation Theory (JA), in order to generate a more firm grasp on group agency: we are going to discuss List and Pettit's (L&P) Group Agency Theory (GAT), as formulated in their 2011 book *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design and Status of Corporate Agents* (List & Pettit, 2011).

There are three questions overarching this thesis project and we are going to tackle each one in turn. Firstly, we ask "What is the purpose of Group Agency Theory?". Here we will discuss how other authors criticized the theory when tried to answer exactly this question. We will also try to find a mutual ground for discussion. Secondly, we ask "By what means is Group Agency Theory formulated?". Here we will present how Social Choice Theory and Judgment Aggregation Theory are used so as to form the building blocks for GAT in L&P . Lastly we ask "What does GAT not achieve?". We will provide constructive criticism for GAT and its results. In addition we will look at what it is missing from its perspective.

Before delving into these questions it will be of great benefit to discuss the idea of group agency, what does it represent and how can we theorize it in order to provide further results for other theories.

Imagine a committee which has to decide on a given issue. Let's say a group of three ministers that need to decide on a policy issue. Only ministers can be part of this committee. Each minister has his or her own opinion on the issue they debate about. Let's also assume that each one's opinion is derived from two distinct propositions, which can be either true or false for them. The interaction of these two propositions leads to their opinion. We also know that the decision of this committee will reflect on all three ministers, despite their diversity of opinions concerning the two propositions. In other words, for citing who is responsible for this decision we will refer to the committee for it, but not its individual members. This effectively means that the status of three individual members is that of a group agent, similar to the examples given above. The question we are to ask ourselves now is how exactly can we make this step of referring to a group agent as decision-maker, and on what occasions can group agency exist?

Developing a group agency theory will have to initiate from ideas one has about groups and individuals. You must first set the ground beliefs about these entities before you can explain how they relate. Let us briefly consider two extreme and one more moderate position.

Some commentators accept that groups are entities of their own (Anne-Marie Slaughter, 2011). They are less interested in how individuals within a group associate to produce uniqueness. Rather, they accept that they have agency in any case and only try to interpret the group's actions. In the case of our minister committee this would entail to immediately referring to their decision, without analysing what the individual members believe, how the individuals' beliefs relate to the groups' beliefs or how the group came to their decision. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the view that groups can be plural entities is rejected by arguing that all intentionality remains in individual brains (see Non-summative accounts in Tollefsen D. 2004). They hold that intentions, and consequently attitudes towards beliefs and desires are always individualistic. Individuals then can never form overarching entities above themselves. Lastly, there are those who accept the existence of groups, but they also accept that they have agency by some interrelation of individual intentional states (see Tollefsen D. 2004, Non-summative accounts, Bratman 1993). In our example this would be interpreted by analysing the group and the interactions of the individual members to explain how group agency arises. Hence, depending on what approach one takes, it is possible that the same group may or may not show agency.

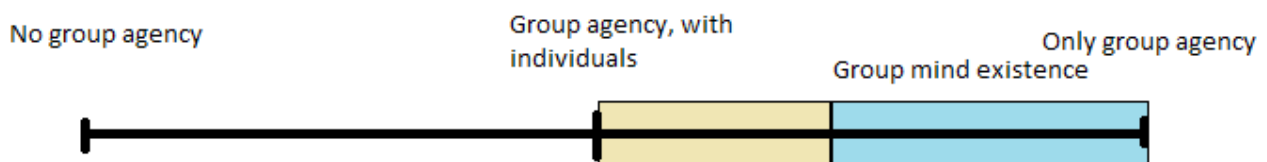


figure 1

The second interpretation does not seem to leave room for us to analyse group agency at all. The first may do so, but yet it offers a very wide interpretation of it. Would it, for instance, imply that a mob holds the same agency as a student society? Put simply, the first position accepts group agents and attempts at identifying proper conditions for group actions. Individual components are not as important to that interpretation as to the group's actions as a whole. In this case the group is an entity that has a mind of its own, without us needed to refer anything about its members. Only the last interpretation of groups and individuals can provide a more elaborate distinction between types of agencies or on what grounds can group agency be founded. In order to make things more tangible, imagine that there is a spectrum of views on group agency which variate by the degree they accept individuals as part of explaining group agency. On the far left you would have those that do not accept group agency exists, while accepting that only individual agents form this world. Then, in the middle we find those theories that accept the least the idea of group agency, while are strict on how it is formed by individuals. On the other end, you would have those who accept group agency without any reference to individual agents. Hence, if we visualized the spectrum we would be interested in theories that can be included in those areas between the center and far right. At some point between the middle and right end there are theories that include group mindedness as an attribute of the group.

There are several ways of providing an explanation of group agency. Social ontologists have referred to the existence of *we-intentions*, which in simple terms are the intentions of individuals of a group that act together. "...this intention somehow derives from and is dependent upon an intention that necessarily adverts to the others, one that might be expressed as "We are running to the shelter"" (see Roth, Abraham Sesshu 2011, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1. *The traditional ontological problem and the Intention Thesis*)

Beyond the social ontology debate, there are other ways to discuss group agency. One of these is through judgment aggregation, a strand of social choice theory. The tack of judgment aggregation theorists lies inside the decision making processes of groups. The point of L&P's research project is to find how individual *beliefs* and *desires* can be aligned with group *beliefs* and *desires*, through voting procedures, whose outcomes produce group action. The main focus of this thesis is to analyse this proposal, which we will call group agency (or GAT) in the following.

Before discussing group agency theory we first need to see what is at stake. Why should we be interested in such an approach about group agency? From many points of view group agency is an accepted term. International relations theories, such as realists for example, hold

that in the so called world political arena, the state is the main actor. While the concept state may refer to an organized political entity, there are many different groups whose actions reflect on the state such as: the government, a ministry council or a state's high court. No matter how these groups decide, the theory accepts their actions as state actions, thus as if the state is a group agent (Slaughter, 2011). In other words, they use the first interpretation of group agency, which accepts group agency. Accepting this term means that using it for explaining group actions does not diminish the power of explanation. Many different theories in fields such as international relations and political science more generally do use this concept when referring to actions of countries or political parties. The problem with simply using this interpretation without providing an account of it is that it doesn't provide a concrete explanation of how does this agency came about and as a result it cannot give us an entirely description about interactions between groups or groups and individuals. Here, GAT comes from a different perspective to give more insight about what makes a group a group agent. Thus it becomes important to see whether it achieves its goals, since it could potentially affect other theories that use group agency by default.

Another important question that arises is how GAT approaches group agency. Those attempting to explain group agency or prove that group agency exists need to discuss about the relationships between individual and group actions. There are a lot of different questions that are implied by such a research project. Why do individuals form certain groups? Is it for psychological or instrumental reasons? How is it possible for an individual to believe that her desires will be facilitated by group action? How can we show that group actions do actually fulfill members' desires? Under which conditions there are groups and under which conditions there aren't? These are few questions that are important in the investigation of the relationships between individuals and the groups they form. Not all questions can be answered simultaneously: each of these questions can be associated with a different traditional discipline, be it sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology or law, for example. Thus group agency can be seen from various angles.

There are many properties through which one can say that different individuals form a group. We can see this clearly in public debates about minorities, where the same person can be associated with different minority groups. Yet, since groups can be diverse, in order to set the grounds for group agency one must set a concrete status about the groups one is investigating. Thus, the discussion about group agency has to go through all those properties with which we would assess a group, and infer that there is a thin line connecting them. That thin line is group agency. That is the essential problem a group agency theorist has to deal with. The group agency theorist has to choose which properties or procedures can show that certain groups show agency, consequently leaving out other aspects.

So, what are these different aspects which give us different view of group agency, then? We

can assess the identity and purpose of the group by assessing the members' specific characteristics like nationality, wealth, beliefs and purposes. We could try to learn how the members interact, such as assessing formal procedures, their meetings, their hierarchy features and their decision making processes. What is more we can include size, networks with social or other institutions. In other words, there can be several elements that can affect our picture of a group and as a result how we conceive group agency.

GAT opens up a distinct perspective on group agency and we need to see which questions it answers in order to assess whether it adequately approaches its subject. Group Agency Theory attempts to provide an account of group agency by analysing the decision making processes of a group. It is in these processes that L&P try to see how individual belief/desires are interacting with group belief/desires; it is within the decision making processes that group agency arises according to them. L&P's group agency theory can be set somewhere in between the middle and right end of the spectrum (figure 1), since they do not accept that all groups are group agents.

L&P take the position that group agents do exist (L&P, 2011,p.4). More specifically, they initially prove that group agency is logically possible (ibid., p.59). Since group agency is possible they need to answer what is there in certain groups that make them group agents. According to L&P a group that exhibits certain features of agency (representational states, motivational states and processing them ibid. p.20) is a group agent (ibid, p.32). The next step they take is to show what types of actual aggregation functions do in fact facilitate the rise of those features of agency(ibid., p.60). L&P explain that decision making processes, i.e “the rules and procedures the group uses to implement, and subsequently to enact an [aggregation] function”(ibid.,p.60) provide to us the aggregation of a group's attitudes. The idea is that decision making processes are the means for a group's actions. Actions are the items one can assess a group with. Thus, decision making processes provide the means through which we could argue that group agency can exist. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean that this is the only item we should assess. Decisions do not necessarily mean actions. Decisions need to be implemented somehow. Thus, L&P include both some designs of decision making process that can give rise to group agency and will implement those decisions (ibid., p.60-64) .

Decision making processes can be a good tool for showing group agency, but they also create cause for concerns. First and foremost, it means that the approach is rather strict and only few groups could potentially satisfy the conditions the authors require. The theory has been criticized on this aspect and we will discuss this in Chapter 2. However, most of the problems are associated with the theoretical tradition GAT follows. This tradition attempts to associate individual beliefs and preferences with aggregated beliefs and preferences. This is the

tradition of social choice theory and more specifically its sub-branch called judgment aggregation theory. GAT sees group agency from the "many as one" perspective or as a result of aggregating individual member beliefs and preferences into one: the group's beliefs and preferences. Social choice theory delivers the necessary instruments to show how we can aggregate individual preferences and beliefs. This is the tool used by the authors in order to show how within these decision making procedures we can find the idea of the group agent. It will be a task of this thesis to find whether it does achieve it.

Now we know what are the basic elements needed to discuss the concept of group agency. L&P have used them in a different than usual way in order to achieve their construction of group agency. Their point of view has been discussed in various ways and at the center of discussion are the means of GAT. In other words critiques have focused on L&P's viewpoint for presenting group agency. It is therefore a crucial next step to review how authors from different perspectives have challenged the purpose of GAT and the use of SCT and JA. The point for us is to give a sense of how well aware is the literature about what GAT achieves. Later on we will be discussing the same points but from a wider and as I believe better position, in order to evaluate the theory properly.

In chapter 2 we take a look at reviews given on L&P's book and theory. We shall discuss the diversified view these authors have about group agency and how their reviews affect Group Agency Theory. In chapter 3 we enter the nuts and bolts of aggregation theories, that form Group Agency Theory's building blocks. In chapter 4 we discuss the construction and results of Group Agency Theory. Lastly, in chapter 5 we provide a critical discussion about these results and how they affect our view on the concept of group agency.

Chapter 2

Reviews and comments on Group Agency Theory: a question of purpose

Group agency theory has gathered a lot of attention since its publication (Pascalev 2011, Gaus 2012, O'Madagain 2012, Cariani 2012, Huebner 2012, Briggs 2012). It has been reviewed by various authors coming from many different disciplines and schools. The theory has both been applauded and criticized, yet none of the objections have completely discredited it. The responses show more than clearly that we are looking at a solid approach, which is modest in the tools it uses, yet sometimes described as ground breaking in the kinds of conclusions it delivers. Before we begin exploring its structure, let us see how it has been viewed and on what point the different commentators have stressed their objections.

As we discussed earlier, we find that opinions circle around the concept of group agency and how GAT uses other theories to show that groups do have agency. Now beginning from the concept we know that it is quite old and has been discussed even by ancient philosophers. Thus it was not a surprise to find reviews and comments from different disciplines, that are also interested in the subject of agency, be it legal, political or social. Thus we can find comments from legal theorists, social ontologists, lawyers, social epistemologists and ethics theorists. Overall we find that the reviews focus on the question of what a proper group agency theory should do and how it should do it.

More specifically, GAT has two main ideas to defend. a) How group agency can be sustained on rationality grounds and b) why does a group agent (as perceived by L&P) have moral responsibilities. Thus, some critiques have attempted to dismantle GAT by pointing the purpose and means questions on each of these two parts. So we can say that critiques and comments on the theory can be divided into three parts.

- a) Critiques on rationality grounds
- b) Critiques on normative grounds
- c) Whole project critiques

The last follow the same idea, but instead of focusing on one part of the book, they judged the whole approach.

a. Rationality critiques

Rationality critiques focus on the use of judgment aggregation theory. While these critiques obviously question the means of the theory, they do ask whether they achieve their own

conception of group agency. Some contest JAT's reliability in providing grounds for collective rationality and as a result grounds for group agency (Madagain 2012, Gaus 2012), while others focus on the epistemic part of aggregation theory (Cariani 2012). Yet others think JA should be avoided (Hess 2012) or that is insufficient for this type of project (Sylvan 2012). In their essence they contest whether Judgment Aggregation Theory has been able to confirm their own conception of group agency. Let us analyze them one by one.

Cariani (2012), while agreeing with the whole project, commented only on the group agent's epistemic grounds for reaching collective rationality. (It is thus a critique of chapter 4 of the book). This has been quite a technical, "positive" critique, which focused on the use and possibilities of aggregation rules. While it doesn't affect the project overall, it provides interesting comments on developing the use of epistemic tools to uncover better organisational structures for group agents. Cariani has been the only author who gave a positive critique on a particular part of the theory. His critique is part of the rationality critiques, yet his is one of the few that do not go into further detail on the concept of group agency.

Hess (2012) both discussed rationality and criticized the whole approach. Hess has a broader view of group agents, which she considers the authors have not been able to cover. Thus firstly she considers that there are not many corporations which can be included in L&P's conception of group agents. While accepting the reality of group agents, she thinks that aggregation theory is too restricted to provide the grounds for group agency as she conceives it. Hess' s review has been within those we consider touching both questions. Hess argues that the authors misrepresent the mechanics of group agency, by misusing the manifestation of member's actions as member's attitudes. This she considers a severe problem of language use, for the important results of the theory remain hidden. In addition, she says that "corporate attitudes derive from member behavior [action] – all *kinds* of member behavior, not just behavior that aims at establishing corporate attitudes – and it does so without any necessary connection to member attitudes" (Hess, p.167). In other words, she thinks that by using JA conditions in order to achieve the member to group level attitude consistency, they miss the view that corporate attitudes can arise from inconsistent member attitudes.

Madagain (2012) makes precise comments concerning the elements used to support the organizational structure of a group agent. He thinks that aggregation theory sheds a partial light on group agency, a kind of "bottom up" view. He thinks that group agency is also "top down", which has been covered by social ontology theories and not GAT. Here we see the same pattern of criticism focused on means-ends relationships. Madagain has a conception of group agency, which has been debated within a different discipline such as social ontology. His criticism attempts to find how the means of JA do not end up providing the social ontological conception of group agency.

Lastly, Gaus (2012) focuses both on rationality and normativity (see Normativity critiques), but from a perspective that undermines the whole project. He advocates in favor of an ecological approach to rationality as opposed to the constructivist that L&P use (an approach where JA is at the center). Gaus points to the pitfalls of a constructivist approach, setting the ground of the ecological view on the opposite side. His critique is focused on the problems of using the means such as the Discursive Dilemma or statistics, to show how a group can be recognized as a group agent.

The single most important result of these critiques is that all authors have a wider perspective on group agency. In their perspective, L&P's methodology is at stake since this is the restricting factor of group agency's perspective. Thus they are rationality critiques.

b. Normativity Critiques

Normativity critiques discuss whether the authors has sufficiently shown that group agents (as they structure them) do in fact have rights and responsibilities. The critiques focus on the grounds for group personhood, grounds for granting rights and grounds for showing division between a group's sphere of control and its respect to individual freedoms and rights.

Pascalev (2012) comments on the normative grounds, but from a political science perspective. Pascalev appreciates the approach, yet poses questions concerning the effects of group-level attitudes towards members, which are not covered by their methodology. Briggs (2012) commented solely on the normative grounds of the theory, bringing in further analysis than critique *per se*. She specifically discusses the normative grounds for granting group agents legal rights. We shall not delve into normative critiques in this thesis.

c. Whole project critiques

Whole project critiques locate the pitfalls to using other methods than what has been customarily used, such as social ontology theories. Some target the theory specifically where it is possible to show a different result with social ontology theories. Again we see the same questions arising. Is L&P's concept of group agency the right one? Do they use the right means to explain it?

Tuomela (2011) and O'Madagain (2012) are concerned about the debt the authors owe to the

Social Ontology literature, which L&P have not discussed in depth. In the same line of social ontology critique, but focusing a lot more on rationality problems, Sylvan (2012) argues about the author's characterization of the theory as non-redundant realist.

In sum, the project has received both positive and negative responses. The negative ones have been quite ineffective in approaching the task at hand properly, being a bit restricted by their own way of theorizing group agency. Thus, it is more important to focus on constructive criticism, which focuses on the structure of the theory and how it has been able (as the authors argue) to show that group agency is possible. This result makes more significant our discussion concerning what SCT and JA are all about (Chapters 3 and 4). Since GAT is criticized through its tools, SCT and JA, we will elaborate on what these theories provide us. As a result we will see more clearly what are the potential pitfalls of GAT, yet with a careful eye.

1. Rationality Critiques

As we discussed before L&P's project is focused on judgment aggregation theory in order to establish the possibility of group agency. JA theory makes claims about how voting procedures can aggregate the judgments of many to a single one. In Group Agency Theory JA is used to affirm that voting procedures in a group satisfy the rationality conditions for a group agent. This is an essential part of the theory, and it was therefore inevitable to be criticized on its various claims and structure. Let us see how the theory has been criticized on the matter of rationality grounds.

The most extensive case of rationality critique came from O'Madagain (2012). He has three rationality concerns. All three concerns of O'Madagain lead to the conclusion that L&P's group rationality cannot be grounded.

The first is about priority voting for premises (ibid, p.276). O' Madagain argues that the problems derived by priority voting cannot be solved *in principle*. L&P require the relaxation of the systematicity condition of group agency (see part 4.2 of this thesis). Relaxing systematicity¹ leads towards making certain premises to be prioritized over others. As a result, some premises may be avoided completely from being voted, making it possible for some group members to exploit group decisions. The authors avoid this problem, by fulfilling an incentive-compatibility desideratum. For O' Madagain avoiding the problem requires that the group sets a principle for prioritizing premises. Although, according to him, if this principle has logically interconnected premises, then the procedure for choosing it has the same strategic pitfalls as any other premise. So, in principle this problem is unsolvable. A

1 Relaxing systematicity means a) to relax the idea that individuals' opinions do not depend on other propositions or/and b) to relax the idea that for every proposition the same pattern of dependence should hold.

rule for weighing premises has to be established somehow, say by tradition or arbitrarily.

The second concern is about the idea that members, when voting, do not reveal the reasons for their vote. Premise-based voting does not require from the members to show their reasons for voting. This, according to O'Madagain, is in conflict with joint action requirements (set by other theories), which is for all members of a group to take into account each others reasons and desires, before taking action. Moreover, it can also be possible to compromise rationality, since the votes could be based on incoherent reasons (say if someone believes that something is true or not, according to what day of the week it is).

The third concern is about the distributed based procedure, which assigns premises to sub groups according to their expertise, when the premises are of high specialization. O'Madagain contests the ability of a group to recognizing expertise, by arguing that either non-experts are bad at recognizing experts or experts are unreliable when judging their peers.

A subtler, yet equally specialized critique came from Hess's review of the book. In her quick response, Hess she makes two points. a) That L&P's GAT captures only a subset of group agents and specifically those who aggregate attitudes through communication. This she considers a really small portion of group agents "out there". b) That it is misleading to show how members are theoretically presenting their beliefs and desires through behavior. She points that corporate attitudes can be established by a variety of behaviors, not just member attitude or behavior that tries to create a corporate attitude. For Hess, group agency exists but it does not have to abide to the rationality rules and restrictions presented by GAT.

A more systematic critique on JA was given by Cariani (2012). Cariani, while accepting most of L&P's argumentation and mechanisms used to support them, focused on how JA can be "stretched" further in order to support group agency better.

His critique comes with six objections:

- a) He contests whether the analysis used by L&P to measure reliability, can give grounds for comparing aggregation rules (3.1). He argues that these evaluating rules are not sensitive enough to evaluate a group's ability to accepting truths and avoiding errors (Cariani, p. 263).
- b) He contests whether incompleteness must be avoided, as L&P require (3.3-3.4). This refers to the problem for a group's present judgment to be in disagreement with similar previous judgments. He argues that the aggregation rules do not *need* to be complete if the group *has* to form complete judgments (Cariani, p.265). Then, he argues that Tracking necessity is not sufficiently backed by the reasons to have high Positive Indicating Reliability (ibid. p. 265-266).
- c) He contests as to whether Global Competence (reliability to be right on conclusion) is a

direct function of individual competence on each premise, which is L&P's argument for generalizing their analysis to complex agendas.

d) The probability for an individual agent to get right answers on each premise is very uncommon

e) Outside observer should be able to also evaluate breakdown of votes.

f) Weighted log-likelihood distribution based on each member's reliability is not a good response to the problem of heterogeneous individual reliability.

Looking at these reviews one immediately sees the kind of pattern that is used to contest GAT. Primarily, authors have focused on establishing the idea that GAT does not cover their own conception of group agency, wherever that may come from. Since L&P use JA to establish a concept of group agency, JA becomes the target of criticism. Yet, JA as any other theory does have limits and L&P do present these. Despite this, some authors misconceive the limits of GAT by assuming that GAT's results may follow to every domain.

O' Madagain, for example does not take into account the scope within which GAT was structured. It was not meant to be an ultimate response to the group agency conundrum, but an elaborate, yet limited beginning. We discuss the limits of GAT in chapter 4. The limits of JA are included inside GAT and should be understood as a novel beginning, than finished work.

Hess is a little more discreet. Her experience in the corporate world and her acceptance of L&P's task to explain corporate agency, produces a critique which pursues to connect the theory with real world groups. While her arguments are brief, the main idea of the critique remains for further consideration.

Last but not least Cariani in his critique affects only a small part of the project, since the epistemic part of L&P's argument is not denied. In other words, there can be organizational designs for group agents, that do make these groups reliable in avoiding mistakes and accepting truths, yet it is still contested as to what epistemic rules we must use to find them. His is the most focused and elaborate critique.

As a conclusion, we immediately see that GAT is being criticized for both purpose and means of achieving it. Thus, as we said before it will be part of this thesis project to purposefully elaborate about what JA and GAT try to accomplish. Additionally, we will discuss missing elements, yet in a constructive than negative way.

2) Normativity critiques

Since L&P's project is an attempt on discussing a new concept of agency, they are bonded to show whether there are any normative constraints on that agency. Hence, some authors found an opportunity to discuss some problems either about the methodology used to provide that normative commitment (Pascalev 2011) or to bring new insights in the project (Briggs 2012).

Pascalev discusses only some normative issues resulting from the methodology of the theory. He applauds the theory and agrees with L&P's analysis for establishing group agency, yet requires more empirical examples to support it. He stresses on the normative results brought by the theory and discusses the issue of the interaction between group agent and of their members. This comes down to two points: (a) the theory shows insufficiently how it will establish protected spheres of control for respecting the rights and freedoms of its members. Their conceptual approach, he contends, does not give any practical guidance. (b) The theory does not resolve the problem, that (while necessary) the group agent will not be always responsive to its members' individual wills. Either collective rationality will be in danger or the group's ability to be responsive to individual wills. In the political sphere, say control over government action, this could be resolved by collectivizing reason, yet for the group agent the authors do not set such a rule.

On the other hand, Briggs discusses the main normative claim of L&P's group agency theory. L&P's normative claim is that there are moral grounds to grant group agents legal rights, yet more limited than individual agents. This is done in two segments, one about the conditions for giving rights to group agents and whether they fulfill them (ibid. p.284-289) and a second about the fulfillment of personhood conditions from the group agent (ibid. 289-291). She supports L&P's framework for the first segment, while she adds comments for a better approach to supporting the control condition, that is whether groups have control over their member's actions, making it more plausible that the group agent can be held responsible for its actions. In the second segment she contrasts L&P personhood approach (performative) with another one (inter-based) only to provide some appeal for consideration. Other than that she supports both parts of L&P's approach to group agency.

The normative nature of the theory has also been discussed in whole project critiques, but under the eye of specific point of view that captures both methodology and normative results.

3) Whole theory critiques

Whole project critiques have been quite adamant about how L&P are missing a certain part of

literature (specifically the Social Ontological), which tries to answer exactly the same questions. One could also see this in philosophy referencing sites where L&P's approach is included within the Social Ontology cycle. I think that critics haven't quite appropriately stressed on the differences between the methods they discuss. While the questions seem the same, they in fact are a bit different and that is because of the way GAT has been structured. Thus, many authors with experience on social ontology felt that L&P did not give Social Ontology the attention it needed. This is true, yet it was not quite important at this first attempt to engineer a way to make group decision making procedures into processes that show group agency. Again JA is at the center of the critique. Hence, certain claims about the nature of the theory were discussed (Sylvan 2012, Gaus 2012). Moreover, Huebner compared his own idea of group agents to the ones discussed in the book.

Sylvan contests L&P's case that their theory renders group agents' realism non-redundant. Non-redundancy requires (A) that facts about group agents -more specifically group beliefs- are not readily reducible to facts about individuals, i.e personal beliefs and (B) that the dependence of group agents on individuals is so holistic, that one cannot predict facts about groups from facts about individuals. In response, while he accepts the reality of group agents ("groups sometimes literally are agents" (Sylvan, 2012, p. 271), by focusing on (A), he also shows how group beliefs can be translated from the beliefs of individual members. Sylvan begins with a summary of L&P's approach on solving their impossibility result, by relaxing systematicity and using premise-based aggregation rules (ibid, p. 274). L&P find that group belief, while based on individual beliefs, it cannot be translated to individual facts. This is what Sylvan argues that is not sufficiently proven. He does this in two parts.

a) By using Gilbert (1987) he considers that there is a difference between personal belief and voicing a view as a member (ibid. p. 276). In such a case it is possible that group beliefs are constituted in patterns of individual beliefs, that is when individuals act as members of the group. In this case we have redundant realism.

With (a) he denies L&P strong non-redundancy.

In (b) he moves to deny L&P claim of opacity, that it is also *practically unknowable* to derive facts about groups from facts about individuals (ibid, p.279). This he shows as either false, if we accept a Weak interpretation of it) or uncontroversial for everyone (Non-redundant or Redundant realists) if we accept it as Strong.

In sum, he denies the non-redundancy characterization of the theory, but not its realism. This he does by using social ontology literature, which L&P have not discussed at all. He tries to show that there is a style of theory to support redundant realism.

Gaus (2012) advocates that L&P is part of the constructivist tradition for modeling rationality. He also advocates in favor of the other tradition, the ecological. A constructivist “blueprints” axioms and with constrained inputs generates consistent outputs. Constructivist rationality is also universal, by trying to be applicable to a wide range of domains. L&P are constructivist by making their group agency ranging over a variety of groups. The ecological approach takes an evolutionary perspective. Ecological rationality is adaptive and context dependent, while also being domain specific (ibid, p.246). But why is L&P constructivist?

- Because their use of judgment aggregation and the discursive dilemma in order to defend the axioms (formal conditions) of rationality, such as universal domain.
- Because their response to solving the impossibility result, via a premise-based aggregation procedures, has only epistemic value. That is, showing that group members will resolve individual rationality and group rationality differences, by relying on statistical analysis to show the truth-tracking abilities of the group, than by substantive evidence.
- Because they equate moral agency, with rational agency, while according to Gaus, they apply to different states. Moral agency cannot be based only on a belief/preference model, because there are associated emotional states that guide judgments, which show to be absent under this analysis.

On the opposite side, he brings the argument for an ecological approach to these problems and specifically to the way the impossibility result can be solved (ibid., p.250).

Huebner (2012, p.608) is appreciative of L&P's theoretical structure. His concerns fit between the theoretical structure of L&P's group agents and real world group agents. He thinks it will be hard to find group agents with those organisational structures that the theory requires (ibid, p.609). He considers whether the author's jump quickly to their claims from the results their tools require to justify them (ibid., p.610). He thinks that the intrinsic messiness of groups makes harder the case of supporting existence of group agents through supervenience. He thinks that we should move away from the simplified, theoretical model and look at how actual collectives work (ibid., p.611). He also argues that member behavior is not clear, even in well organised groups, making the case for genuine group responsibility difficult to accept. Lastly, he advances the case for moving away from normative agency (described in the normative part of the book) to a more holistic point of view about responsibility.

Tuomela brings a summary of the view overall. He compliments the intellectual work, but is critical of its deficiency to discuss it with the social ontology literature. Primarily, (as him being a social ontologist) he points to the fact that the theory does not discuss the social ontological literature on the subject. He finds group responsibility remains ungrounded.

These critiques can be challenged as follows. One can differ with the point whether the theory does explain an idea of group agency, but one cannot differ with the point “that there is only one way at approaching group agency and this is not it”. L&P bring in a different approach to a matter which has been mostly discussed by social ontologists and it should be given a critique as to whether it brings something in. Some critiques, say Huebner and Gaus, did try to see the differences in approaches and views on groups, yet the theory under these critiques still stands, because it was not discussed on the new points it brought. Thus, the authors' responses have been mostly about claims which affect only part of the theory overall.

4) Responses

The authors have given responses to four authors through the Episteme Symposium on Group Agency Theory (List and Pettit, 2012). These include Gaus 2012, Cariani 2012, Briggs 2012 and Sylvan 2012. They have given specific responses to every author, yet here we will only comment on the fact that they have not accepted any theory “shattering” critique. In addition they have accepted misconceptions within their theory and gave some further details.

To give some examples, they disagree with Gaus whether an Ecological approach would suit group agency better. Instead, they argue that the ecological approach can be included in the classical sense under conditional constraints. With Cariani they agree on most points, when interpretation was not an issue, and they regard his methodology related critique to be useful for further research. The same holds with Briggs, who brought a more elaborate point of view of normative matters. Lastly, they did not agree with Sylvan and his contention about the concept of redundant realism. As we saw before, these kinds of critiques do not offer much to the discussion.

Thus, in order to give a little bit more depth to what this project is about, in the following chapters I will discuss the methodological roots of Group Agency Theory, i.e Social Choice Theory and Judgment Aggregation. The reader as soon as he reads the claims these theories make, will immediately understand how they interconnect with GAT's claims. We will later discuss whether the claims have been followed and if there can be other ways to see this theory work.

Chapter 3

Aggregation Theories

3.1. From aggregating preferences to aggregating judgments

As we saw in Chapter 2, various authors criticized the limits of JA as a tool to explain group agency. This was primarily due to their own conception of group agency. These authors seem to take JA as an overly technical approach, which cannot show clearly how individuals can be considered as one agent. Taking this line of argument is not very helpful in achieving an understanding of GAT. If we pause and look back, GAT is a branch of theories which try to find answers to the problem of group agency, employing techniques of aggregating individual judgements. While being technical, they might be able to bring a kind of understanding of collective actions which other approaches do not. So taking a first step to making things more clear about GAT, we need to discuss how aggregation theories works and what do they offer for group agency.

This simply means that in order to make sense of group agency we have to make sense of the basic theory and problems that comprise it. While the problem of group intentionality or joint action has been connected for a long time with the field of social ontology, Pettit and List have instead opted for an epistemological approach. They draw from judgment aggregation theory, which is associated with social choice theory and which evaluates formal aggregation rules (List and Puppe, 2008). So first things first, we need to discuss the question of judgment aggregation theory, before discussing group agency theory.

Judgment aggregation is a process through which we try to compress a group's individual judgments into a single proposition, which in turn can be acknowledged by the whole group (Cariani, 2011, p.22). The theory provides the guidelines for us to make sure that rationality requirements, for a group agent, can be fulfilled at an aggregate level. Judgments are the basic units of analysis in judgment aggregation theory. There are different ways through which this can happen, which are called aggregation rules, as is the majority principle for example.

In majority voting, the group's judgment is the one that the majority of the group's members have voted for. The fact that the rest do not accept the outcome does not affect our acceptance of the majority's judgment. In the recent literature, judgment aggregation theorists showed a crucial problem in the majority rule, called the discursive dilemma (Pettit, 2001). The problem showed that majority voting can lead to inconsistent collective judgments. Later, an impossibility theorem by List and Pettit (2002), showed that it is not possible to find an appropriate aggregation rule for establishing consistent collective judgments at a group level. Since then, a large literature on finding ways out of the impossibility result have been

developed. The literature is based initially on relaxing certain criteria, which aggregation rules should fulfill and in effect authors search for aggregation rules to accommodate them all.

The tradition of Kenneth Arrow (1951/1963) has been succeeded in the interdisciplinary use of Judgment Aggregation theory. While social choice theorists are theorizing what kind of voting systems can best connect individual and group preference orderings (Pettit and Polak, 2010, p.442), judgment aggregation theorists take a more generalized step than that. They attempt to find rules or functions, which could aggregate the individual attitudes towards propositions of members of groups into group level attitudes. There are a lot of similarities between the questions and the results found in both theories, which are not to be discussed here. Judgment aggregation theory didn't initiate in connection to social choice theory but, in extension to legal jurisprudence. The reason was a problem found in court adjudication procedures called the doctrinal paradox. This was later coined by Pettit (2001) as the discursive dilemma.

3.2.The discursive dilemma

Judgment aggregation as we have discussed is the study of how collective judgments arise from individual judgments (Cariani, 2011, p.22). More specifically it is the study of rules that can satisfy certain conditions, which, when fulfilled, would produce a collective judgment from individual judgments. There are two important research questions for the field. The first refers to the nature of group beliefs and asks what ways are there to make sense of the dependence between individual and group beliefs? The second is about analyzing Group testimony and asks how can we aggregate the different, and not associated with each other, opinions of a panel of experts? (Cariani, p.22, 2011) The literature on *judgment* aggregation is quite new as opposed to *preference* aggregation. The reason is that until recently we hadn't noticed a problem of group decision making, called the *discursive dilemma*.

i. What is the discursive dilemma?

The discursive dilemma (DD) is a problem found in decision making procedures within groups of people. The word "dilemma" denotes that there is a divide of opinions or an inconsistency in a deliberative procedure of a group. In a few words, the discursive dilemma shows that when a group of people with at least 3 members, will vote on a issue according to majority rule, it is bound by the possibility of an inconsistency between the member's individual opinions and the group's overall decision. How does this happen?

Most commonly groups vote on conclusions; that is, groups set up a discussion on an issue which requires a specific action. Arguments go back and forth as to why the group should act or not, yet in the end they vote on the concluding premise of action or no action. Now think that instead of voting on a conclusion, the group would vote on each premise that leads to that conclusion. A common example is liability.

Imagine that three judges need to vote on whether a person is liable for something. Liability requires two conditions: a contract and an action that breaches it. In this case one is liable if both are true. Usually the judges vote on the conclusion each judge has reached, after deliberating whether each of these two premises is true or not. Imagine, very reasonably, that instead of this process, the judges would vote not on their conclusion, but on each premise that leads to that conclusion. Then a majority vote would bind the premise of whether there was a contract or not, and also would bind the premise of whether an action was done or not. If this procedure was followed, we find that it is possible that the decision derived for the group would be different from the decision derived by a majority vote on the conclusion.

In other words, it is possible that when groups like, judges, councils, government bodies will vote on a issue only on the conclusion, we can see a divide between what the members want and what the group decides. This result is far stronger when we have to consider the case for group agents. The discursive dilemma is essentially a problem which if not resolved, we are left with an arbitrary aggregation result, since we find different outcomes if we use different voting procedures. Group agency theory requires individual judgments to be aggregated so that a group agent can arise. In order for individual members of a group agent to create a function of their individual judgments they need to deliberate. The discursive dilemma shows that the deliberative procedure they will engage in, so as to produce that function, is essentially problematic. The problem is that they can reach different conclusions according to the voting procedure they will use, which makes us uncertain of which conclusion should be considered the voice of the group agent. If this cannot be resolved then non-arbitrary judgment aggregation cannot be achieved. In effect, if non-arbitrary judgment aggregation cannot be achieved then group agents are not possible.

ii. From the doctrinal paradox to the discursive dilemma.

The discursive dilemma was first presented as an adjudication problem with the term “doctrinal paradox” by legal theorists, Lewis Kornhauser and Lawrence Sager (1986,1992,1993). Kornhauser and Sager encountered a coherence problem in judicial decision making, which was not captured by earlier legal adjudication theories (ibid, 1986). In their 1986 paper they brought to light several problems of judgment aggregation in multi-member

courts. Previous legal adjudication theories assumed that in a court of three or more judges, each judge would vote according to her own judgment of the case. With this assumption majority voting was considered as a judgment aggregation procedure. This means that the independent judgments of each judge can be reliably aggregated to produce an outcome, which incorporated the decision of the whole group. On the contrary, the authors explained that this is not always the case. The reason is that majority voting on case by case basis produces a different outcome from issue-by-issue voting (ibid, p.115). This result is what later became known as the “doctrinal paradox”.

The doctrinal paradox shows effectively how in multi-membered courts the outcome of the group can change according to the voting procedure they accept. There are two voting procedures; case by case voting and issue-by-issue voting (Kornhauser and Sager, 1993, p.11). Case by case refers to the voting procedure enforced on the outcome, while issue-by-issue voting refers to the voting procedure enforced on the view of each judge. We can illustrate this by following the liability example brought in the introduction.

In this case we can see that if the judges voted according to case by case procedure, the majority outcome would not accept liability. On the other hand if the judges voted on each premise, that is, if there is a contract and if the action was done, the majority outcome is the opposite. This is the doctrinal paradox. For legal theorists showing this problem meant that courts encounter additional problems in reaching coherent decisions. In fact, the most serious problem encountered is the inability to render the group of judges consistent to their opinions. In other words, judgment aggregation becomes a more difficult procedure than previously believed. Several arguments have been presented as to how legal adjudication can avoid the paradox. The reasoning follows legal theory, though, and is concerned with finding the proper legal procedure which can best accommodate the development of law and the judges' individual reasoning on each issue. We will not be concerned with such issues here, but we can see how these theories are concerned with the issue of judgment aggregation of groups. Chapman (1998) for example argued, by using the doctrinal paradox, that if judges reason (argue) their opinion on each issue, issue-by-issue voting can provide coherence for the reasoning of the group (p.316-318). What was derived from the doctrinal paradox then, was the problem of establishing judgment aggregation within a group. On the same line, Kornhauser and Sager showed how the same problem follows for preference aggregation, yet established a difference between groups which aggregate judgments and groups which aggregate preferences.

The doctrinal paradox was generalized by Philip Pettit (2001) with the term “discursive dilemma”. What Pettit tried to do in this case was to show that the same problem encountered in courts, can be found in any deliberative procedure within other kinds of groups, such as; committees, associations, trusts, corporations, public bodies (p.279). Pettit

took two special cases of deliberation procedures a group has to decide upon; deliberation on a conjunction premise and deliberation on a disjunction premise.

The conjunction case

In this case a group has to decide whether two premises hold simultaneously, so as to accept their conclusion. The liability example we discussed before is such a case. Let p be the premise "One is contractually obliged not to act in a certain way". Let q be the premise "The defendant acted in such a way". In this case the conclusion c "The defendant has breach his contract" can hold if and only if both premises hold (If p and q then c). This is the conjunction case. Pettit brings an example outside the court paradigm: A simple case where a committee of employees of a company vote on whether to contribute part of their wage so as reduce electrocution dangers in their work environment (p.272). In this case both premises have to hold so that the group to accept such a pay reduction. They need to accept both a) that there is a sufficient danger and b) that the money from their wage will reduce sufficiently that danger.

According to Pettit there are two results for this case. If a group decides to adopt a premise-based voting procedure, the group sacrifices collective rationality (p.274). If the group decides to adopt a conclusion based voting procedure then the group sacrifices responsiveness to individual members (p.274).

The disjunction case

In this case a group has to decide on whether any of the two premises hold, so as to accept their conclusion. The example Pettit brings here is a decision of implementing a clocking-in and clocking-out system in a workplace. The reasoning behind implementing the clocking system could be supported either for increasing productivity or for assuring other workers that everyone is punctual. This example shows that a majority vote on the conclusion can lead to approving the clocking system, while if the group decides to vote on the premises the system would not be implemented. Again the result leads to the problem of group decisions being inconsistent with either responsiveness to individual members or with collective rationality.

	Productivity increase?	Reassurance mechanism?	Implement Clocking system
A	Y	N	Y
B	N	Y	Y
C	N	N	N
	N	N	Y

Figure 2. An impossibility result for judgment aggregation

The discursive dilemma was later taken by List and Pettit (2002,2004) and was compared to Arrow's theorem. The idea behind this was based on the similarity between the discursive dilemma and majority voting paradox. Their difference is that List and Pettit try to aggregate a group's sets of judgments and not their sets of preferences. Aggregating sets of judgments is important for group agency, since judgments reflect on the representation state of the group's beliefs about the world (List and Pettit, 2011, p.20). Accordingly the discursive dilemma shows that majority voting, either on the premises or on the conclusion, cannot lead a group to form beliefs embraced both by the individual members and a majority. In List and Pettit (2002) the authors provide an argument of which conditions would satisfy such a possible outcome. They reach into a theorem which says that under certain assumptions (Universal domain, Anonymity, Systematicity) there cannot be an aggregation function that can generate complete, consistent and deductively closed sets of judgments (List and Pettit 2002, p.100). By relaxing the assumption of systematicity the authors have avoided the impossibility result, which sparked other responses (such as Chapman 2002) concerned with the problem of comparing the criteria of coherence for judgments and preferences.

In conclusion the authors accept that group agency is possible if the discursive dilemma is avoided. In other words, in avoiding the discursive dilemma we can be assured that individual judgments can be aggregated. According to Cariani the discursive dilemma is "*a motivation point for Judgment aggregation theory*" (Cariani 2011, p.24). Ever since the discursive dilemma was understood, judgment aggregation theorists have pursued the search of aggregation functions which can best fit the criteria for judgment aggregation, while avoiding

the discursive dilemma (ibid, p.24). The central structure of the group agent has to fulfill this criteria, thus it remains for us to see these criteria.

3.3. The formal conditions for aggregating judgments

According to List and Polak (2010) there are different ways in investigating judgment aggregation (p.442) as opposed to preference aggregation. There are different kinds of propositions which are evaluated by group decision making and they hold under different rules of evaluating them and summing them to a group level (ibid, p.442). Judgment aggregation theory attempts to solve problems derived in such different settings. There are three constraints affecting aggregation problems: constraints on the individual inputs, constraints on collective outputs and constraints on the relationship between inputs and outputs (ibid, p.442). The constraints are connected to specific criteria which aggregation theorists consider important for aggregation to take hold.

a) **Universal Domain:** The aggregation function admits as input any possible profile of individual attitudes towards the propositions on the agenda, assuming that individual attitudes are consistent and complete.

b) **Collective rationality:** The aggregation function produces as output consistent and complete group attitudes towards the propositions on the agenda.

c) **Anonymity:** All individual's attitudes are given equal weight in determining the group attitudes.

d) **Systematicity:** The group attitude on each proposition depends only on the individuals' attitudes towards it, not on their attitudes towards other propositions, and the pattern of dependence between individual and collective attitudes is the same for all propositions.

Input constraints are connected with universal domain and anonymity; output constraints are connected with collective rationality, while the relationship between inputs and outputs is connected with the systematicity criterion.

3.4 Results for Group Agency Theory

The implications derived from the discursive dilemma have been discussed in the literature. Sparked by the jurisprudence literature and collegial court decisions, it has been used also by

political theorists, social choice theorists and economists. In short, the discursive dilemma is a problem that needs to be solved if group agents are to be considered possible.

On a second level, we can see that this approach by bringing in more technical details and limits, creates a different perspective for approaching group agency. While it has removed a lot of elements about group structure (associations, common ideals, networking, stature, etc) by focusing on an essential part (which is group decision making) we find that group rationality cannot be simply projected to a majority within the group.

Furthermore it makes it more interesting to search for decision making procedures that could avoid these problems. I consider the discursive dilemma as the cornerstone for the inception of GAT. Knowing that only some of the various decision making procedures can fulfill group rationality (and other criteria), we know essentially that not all groups can have the potential of being group agents. We then ask which ones could have that potential and in the future, we can relate our results with real world examples. This also is what in my opinion GAT provides for us. By showing how a simple voting problem, such as the discursive dilemma, can shatter our conception of group agency, it intrigues us to search for a place where it exists. Technical analysis does not necessarily become the only way with which group agency can be discussed, as it was the fear of many authors in Chapter 2. It becomes one of those views which can be in the future helpful for a more complete group agency theory.

Chapter 4

List and Pettit's Group Agency Theory

4.1 The conditions of agency

Up until now we have discussed what are the conditions and the theoretical problems in the task of aggregating judgments. Now we are going to see how the previous discussion is incorporated in the analysis for designing a group agent. As we presented in the introduction, a group in order to be viewed as an agent it needs to show the conditions of agency. Primarily it needs to show rationality and reasoning." A group agent is a group that exhibits the three features of agency[...]However this is achieved, the group has representational states, motivational states, and a capacity to process them and to act on that basis in the manner of an agent." (L&P, p32). This means that the structure through which the individual attitudes are aggregated, it has to fulfill certain conditions for rationality and reasoning , i.e it has to provide the individual agents to question newly voted attitudes if they are inconsistent with previous ones. Before showing how such a structure works, we first need to show that such a structure is possible.

4.2 The formal conditions of group agency

According to List and Pettit, the structure of a group agent is required to comprise of an appropriate aggregation function (p.60). An aggregation function is a "mapping that assigns to each profile of individual attitudes towards the propositions on the agenda (assuming the profile is admissible) the collective attitudes towards these propositions, which are also modeled as an assignment of Yes's and No's to them" (p.48). There are several kinds of aggregation functions, such as majority, supermajority, veto, unanimity, dictatorship and others. In order to find which function we will consider for being used for the organization of a group agent, we need an evaluation method. List and Pettit have used four conditions which an aggregation function needs to satisfy:

a) **Universal Domain:** The aggregation function admits as input any possible profile of individual attitudes towards the propositions on the agenda, assuming that individual attitudes are consistent and complete.

b) **Collective rationality:** The aggregation function produces as output consistent and

complete group attitudes towards the propositions on the agenda.

c) **Anonymity**: All individual's attitudes are given equal weight in determining the group attitudes.

d) **Systematicity**: The group attitude on each proposition depends only on the individuals' attitudes towards it, not on their attitudes towards other propositions, and the pattern of dependence between individual and collective attitudes is the same for all propositions.

In other words, an aggregation function should require to include divergent opinions (universal domain) of members towards propositions, without discrimination (anonymity), influence by their attitudes on other propositions (systematicity) and lastly that the derived attitude towards a proposition is consistent and complete with the individual attitudes towards that proposition (collective rationality). Since the conditions have been established, the question arises: Is it possible for an aggregation function to fulfill them?

The most prominent aggregation function is majority. Other functions are also important, yet they are special cases of aggregation, which for some reasons we cannot use for group agents. Dictatorship for example fulfills all conditions but anonymity, yet it is considered a degenerate case, since rationality is fulfilled because the attitudes of individual members are conditioned on one member's attitudes; namely the dictator. Supermajority on the other hand requires a high level of agreement in order to be used effectively, which would mean that the universal domain would have to be relaxed.

4.2.1 Impossibility of fulfilling formal conditions

In their previous writings (List and Pettit, 2002) the authors arrived at an impossibility theorem, similar to Arrow's theorem, but as a generalized case. The theorem states: *There exists no aggregation function satisfying universal domain, collective rationality, anonymity and systematicity.*

The theorem is specific for attitudes towards propositions for which individuals have certain beliefs or desires. This result shows that in order for a group agent to exist, one of these conditions will have to be relaxed in a way that an aggregation function can produce rational group attitudes. This means that we have to reevaluate the conditions. In other words, we have to evaluate how much important do we think they are for the structure of the group agent. To answer this, the authors take each condition specifically and relax it, and interpret the results both formally and empirically (ibid, p.51-54).

4.2.2 Relaxing the formal conditions

Relaxing *universal domain* means to admit as input individual attitudes that are in unidimensional alignment (ibid., p.51). This is a good way to fulfill all formal requirements. In order to achieve this, though, groups would have to follow deliberation processes. Experimental evidence shows that these processes can help them reach more aligned attitudes in special cases (List, Luskin et al., 2013). The problem with this solution is that it cannot be supported in general. The idea of removing disagreement between judgments is difficult to support, when people do have a plural exposure to the world and their judgments less likely to fall within the same line (List and Pettit 2011, p. 52.) This problem is what makes relaxing universal domain a less compelling strategy.

Relaxing *collective rationality* means relaxing either consistency or completeness. The authors dismiss the idea of relaxing consistency, on the basis that an agent cannot be rational and inconsistent. In the case of completeness, a group would be possible to suspend judgment since it cannot clearly provide a positive or negative attitude towards a proposition. Again empirical evidence shows that such a case while possible, creates also a high possibility of suspending of judgment. This result cannot according to the authors be generalized to many types of groups, they would like to include as group agents, such as courts or committees, where suspending judgment is not an option (ibid, p.52-53).

Relaxing *anonymity* means relaxing a crucial democratic requirement, which is that the opinion of a member is counted more than the opinions of others. An extreme example is a dictatorship, where the opinion of one member is the only one considered. This case is also unattractive, since not only it restricts the democratic appeal of group decision making, but also it restricts the way individual judgments are formed.

Relaxing *systematicity* means a) to relax the idea that individuals' opinions are not dependent on other propositions (*independence* part) or/and b) to relax the idea that for every proposition the same pattern of dependence should hold (*neutrality* part).

According to the authors, these parts are interconnected and thus affect the result (List and Pettit, p.54). Relaxing *neutrality* can lead to unappealing results, since it is unusual to vote for each proposition with different criteria (say veto for one and unanimity for another). Apparently it seems that relaxing both *independence* and *systematicity* leads to the most appealing case for finding the proper set of conditions which can lead to the creation of a group agent (ibid, p.55). Prioritizing propositions requires a sequential priority procedure, which includes choosing for example a premise-based or a conclusion-based decision making process. In such a case, the group can choose whether to vote on premises or conclusions for one thing, or maybe choose whether to vote first on propositions that affect other

propositions, a case of say “p” and “if p then q” for example (ibid, p.56).

Relaxing the systematicity condition becomes more appealing for the structure of group agents. Of course a problem of choosing between premises exists, which in fact means that the procedure is endangered since it is not strategy proof. In other words, the procedure can be affected by practices such as misrepresentation or withholding beliefs, i.e showing vulnerability to manipulation (ibid, p.104). Setting priorities means that one premise becomes more important than others which might conflict with the opinions of some group members. This is the cost that we have to accept for theorizing rational attitude aggregation, i.e the existence of group agents (ibid, p.58).

4.3 The aggregation function and the organizational structure

Accepting the relaxation of the Systematicity condition is a starting point for finding a structure which can be identified as a group agent. So the next step is to identify such organizational structures that can use an aggregation function in a way that produces a group agent (List and Pettit 2011,p.60). In other words, this part is important in understanding what kinds of institutional designs can facilitate the perseverance of both group *rationality* and *reasoning*. Thus, after looking into the theoretical conditions of rationality for groups, the next task is to establish the design that a group agent should implement them.

According to the authors if a group's organizational structure can implement an aggregation function such as majority, mechanically in its decision procedures, it is considered functionally explicit (ibid, p.60). Mechanically means that it accepts one aggregation function for voting on all its propositions. The reason why it is considered explicit, is because it forms in a straightforward way its propositions (ibid, p.60-61). This structure while appealing, is rigid in its decision making process between propositions. As the relaxation of systematicity condition requires this rigidity to be reduced, a functionally inexplicit structure is preferable, since it can use heuristics in order to choose the process of choosing propositions (ibid, p.61).

One case of such a structure is the “straw-vote procedure”. This procedure enables a group to take a majority vote in a sequential or premise-based way , after deciding on the order of the propositions, while assigning members to enact the group's voted attitudes. The procedure, by asking members to assess whether a voted proposition is consistent with already formed group attitudes, implements a feedback procedure. Feedback means that, in the case when a voted proposition creates inconsistency with previous attitudes, then the members have to find a way to solve the inconsistency. Methods proposed include, taking another vote and

deliberating. Here is an exact description of the straw-vote procedure (ibid, p.62):

Step 1 Consider the propositions on the agenda one by one in a sequence, which may reflect either a temporal order or some other order of priority

Step 2 Take a majority vote on each proposition considered

- If the attitude formed is consistent with attitudes already formed, let it stand as the group attitude.
- If the attitude formed is not consistent with these attitudes, consider all the different possible ways in which previously formed attitudes or the new attitude could be revised so as to restore consistency. Take a vote under a suitable procedure, or deliberate, on which of the possible revisions to make.

Step 3 Assign suitable members or deputies to enact the resulting group attitudes.

4.3.1 How does the structure fulfill the conditions of rationality and reasoning

Now we turn to the curious case of the conditions of agency. Again, in order to ascribe agency to the group agent, according to the authors, we need a structure that can fulfill the conditions of rationality and reasoning. While the requirement for rationality is clear, the condition for reasoning is not so. L&P are very clear about rationality.

“To count as an agent, a group must exhibit at least a modicum of rationality. And so its members must find a form of organization that ensures , as far as possible, that the group satisfies attitude-to-fact, attitude-to-action, and attitude-to-attitude standards of rationality” (List and Pettit, 2011, p.36)

While rationality is a necessary condition for agency, we realize that it is not a sufficient condition for group agency. Pettit in a previous work of his, comments that the role of reasoning is to accompany rationality, specifically for human agents, in order to secure its functioning and development.

“Agents have to display a modicum of rationality in the formation and enactment of their attitudes, else they will not pass as agents at all; their performance will be too random or erratic to count as action.[...]The rationality of individual agents is secured for the most part by their make-up or design. Some agents, however – in particular, human beings – rely on the intentional exercise of thinking or reasoning in order to ensure the maintenance of rationality, and to further its improvement” (Pettit 2007, p.495).

While we cannot find clear conditions of reasoning, we can extract the idea from the authors' discussion about the concept of reasoning.

“But taking active steps to form beliefs in metalanguage propositions, so as to check lower-level processing, is an intentional exercise and constitutes reasoning.” (List and Pettit, 2011, p.31)

This idea of reasoning, which means to take active steps in finding errors in the formation process of attitudes, is then included in their statement about their idea of the constitution of group agents.

“Our discussion suggests that we regard a group as a group agent just when we think something is amiss if those attitudes are inconsistent, or otherwise irrational. We assume that only group agents as opposed to mere groups should *acknowledge* that this is a fault that should be rectified.” (List and Pettit, 2011, p.39 italics added)

I think that *acknowledge* here refers to this active process of checking propositions in a metalanguage level, which, as the previous quote stresses, constitutes reasoning.

From the discussion above we understand that the ideal individual *human* agent should fulfill the conditions of rationality and reasoning and so the authors apply the same conditions for group agents, since it is the aggregate of individual agents. Therefore, the structure that aggregates individual attitudes, should be able to produce a rational and reasoning agent. But let us begin with the conditions of rationality and then explain the condition of reasoning.

4.3.2 Conditions of rationality

According to the authors an individual, in order to be ascribed agency, it should be able to follow certain standards of rationality. The standards of rationality (List and Pettit, 2011, p.24 and p.36) are the following three: a) Attitude-to-fact, b) Attitude-to-action and c) Attitude-to-attitude. The first standard requires that the agent forms attitudes towards beliefs about the way the world is. *“Attitude-to-fact standards rule in favor of representations that fit with how things are and rule against those that don’t.”*(ibid, p.24) The second standard requires that the agent acts, upon its attitudes towards its desires about how it wants the world to be. *“Attitude-to-action standards rule in favor of actions that are required-or at least permitted- by the agent’s representations and motivations and rule against those that aren’t.”*(ibid, p.24) The third standard, which is the most important one, requires that the agent does not accept propositions which would make it act inconsistently *“Attitude-to-attitude standards of rationality rule out representations that take propositions to be true that are not co-realizable, or motivations that require such propositions to be true”*(ibid., p.24-25). If the structure of the group agent would not secure consistency between propositions, then we wouldn't be sure whether it would hold consistent

attitudes towards its desires and beliefs. Such an inconsistency would be constituted, for example, if the agent believed *b* about the world, desired *d* to happen, yet due to the discursive dilemma he would end up not acting upon its formed beliefs and desires. The same could happen even in the formation of desires and beliefs themselves. This would happen if the structure made it possible, that the individual members could vote positively for both a belief that *b* does not exist, and that it desires *d* to happen about *b*. Effectively, if the standards are not fulfilled the agent will fail to satisfy its desires (Pettit 2007, p.497).

Does the straw-vote procedure fulfill such standards? It does. It takes case by case votes on propositions in order to form the group's beliefs and desires (step 1). That is enough to avoid the discursive dilemma, though as we discussed creates problems with strategic behavior². This means that at least the initial voting procedure produces a solid aggregation function of individual attitudes. This fulfills the attitude-to-fact standard. The attitude-to-action standard is fulfilled by step 3 where it is required to assign enactment powers to some members. Step 2 fulfills the attitude-to-attitude standard of rationality, since individual members will attempt to question newly formed attitudes in reference to previous ones, in order to reduce inconsistencies. Since the straw-vote procedure fulfills the standards of rationality, it remains to be answered what happens with the criterion about reasoning.

4.3.3 Conditions for reasoning

Reasoning differs as a criterion from rationality, as it secures the fulfillment of rationality. This argument, we can find it in previous writings by Pettit and also within the book.

“To be able to reason, under the model I shall adopt here, is to be able to conduct an intentional activity that is designed – and perhaps explicitly intended – to raise the chance of satisfying such desiderata.”
Pettit (2007, p.499)

“The intentional pursuit of beliefs in metalanguage propositions, so as to impose extra checks on rational processing, is what we call “reasoning.[...]..a reasoning agent can give evidence of agency even in the absence of rationality.” (List and Pettit, 2011, p.30-31)

Reasoning then refers to forming intentional beliefs *about* propositions and their logical relationship, not just objects in the environment (List and Pettit, 2011, p.30). A robot or a non-human animal can show rationality, but they cannot be aware about the consistency of the

² The authors discuss in chapter 5 (List and Pettit 2011) the incentive-compatibility desideratum which would reduce the possibilities of strategic behaviour.

propositions they believe. In other words, they don't doubt about the things they desire and believe in. All in all, they cannot think intentionally about the propositions they believe in. Such thinking can lead to a change in their formed propositions, making them more prone to not satisfying the standards of rationality (Pettit, 2007, p.499) and especially that of consistency (List and Pettit, 2011, p.25). Reasoning, according to the authors, is “the intentional pursuit of beliefs in metalanguage propositions, so as to impose extra checks on rational processing” (ibid, p.30). Metalanguage is a language which uses propositions enriched with quantifiers such as all or some, and modal operators, like necessary. It is also able to express propositions about simple propositions (ibid, p.26). The voting process requires that individual members vote on simple propositions in order to form their attitudes. The feedback process is the process through which the members will question the new propositions in the face of the previous one. It is here where they use a metalanguage to ask questions about simple propositions voted. In other words, the feedback process seems to be the means to enhance reasoning capability of a group.

4.4 Conclusion

From what we've seen until now the theory works hard to establish that the requirements it has set theoretically, are actually fulfilled by our empirical intuitions of real-world examples of group agents. In order to accomplish this L&P focus on the idea of the organizational structure. This is the most important element of the theory, since this is where we are referred to for finding a realization of group agency. a) The organizational structure supports the conditions of rationality and reasoning. And b) The organizational structure reifies the theoretical form of the aggregation function. Seeing the importance of the organizational structure we are inclined to form questions about it and whether it does indeed hold the answers for understanding group agency.

Chapter 5

Questioning Group Agency Theory

The idea of creating a group agency theory is a remarkable attempt. Explaining what makes a group of individuals a group agent is a difficult task, yet it is needed for understanding better the social world, through its actors. Indeed, the theory itself does not encompass *the* social world. Its goal is to find a way to make sense of interactions between individual *agents*, which would result into defining these individuals as a *group agent*, who acts in this world. Yet, not all group interactions do comprise a group agent. Therefore, only a small part of the social world is analyzed here. In addition, the method used requires a rather abstract assessment of the interactions between individual attitudes and group attitudes. These points could initialize the questioning of this theory, yet I think it is more important to inquire the results of their analysis and specifically the importance of the organizational structure.

By inquiring into the results of the theory we find a divergence of requirements. We see that initially L&P set a list of less formal and more open requirements (joint intentions, reasoning ability, a *basis* formed by system that coordinates beliefs, desires and actions) for assessing whether a group is a group agent. Later we find that the requirements for group agency are restricted under formal conditions (impossibility result, functionally inexplicit organizational structures). Conditions which provide the modeling of organizational structures which *could give rise* to group agents. What we see is that the picture of group agents painted initially, and which is more *realistic*, changes after L&P set their formal conditions.

The problem, in my opinion, is found in the structure of decision making processes, i.e. in the organizational structure. L&P need to assess the characteristics of a variety of groups, which could be considered group agents, whose decision making process is their only formal commonality. I think that the initial requirements are preconditions for setting which groups are closer realistically to those that L&P can formally assess with JA theories. As a result I think that while decision making processes are important for looking closer to the idea of group agents, I think that they are complementary to it. A group's past decisions and future decisions (its evolution) and whatever can be included in its *basis*, are not formulated within a decision making process (the organizational structure). I conclude that decision making processes are an important initial building block of our understanding the idea of group agency, even if it remains in the hands of the members to use them appropriately. Further research steps need to be taken in order to accommodate the idea that group agents maybe accounted for without a strict reference to their decision making processes and it seems that GAT is a first step. GAT provides a framework upon which we can evaluate not only which groups can be considered group agents, but also a reflection point, in case we do wish to widen our perspective of group agents and include more groups than they present.

5.1 The difference between individual agency and group agency

When we begin reading *Group Agency* we immediately understand that the project is mostly about showing effectively that a group agent *acts* under the same principles as an individual agent does. An individual agent has, according to L&P, beliefs (representational states), desires (motivational states) and the capacity to process these two states and respond to their changes (p.20). That is the elementary account of what agency entails and of course it becomes more complicated than that. However, a group agent, according to L&P, only has to show these three features of agency. "What, then, is a "group agent"? It is a group that exhibits the three features of agency."(p.32) By using aggregation theories the authors prove that a group can manage to *show* that it follows those features of agency found in individual agents. While their argument seems defensible, one cannot forget that there is an essential difference between assessing agency requirements for an individual and a group of individuals.

According to L&P's assessment of individual agency, beliefs and desires are quite reasonably considered its essential building blocks. We know of course that however a person arrives at their beliefs or forms their desires, it is unquestionable that they do have beliefs and desires. Since we are discussing the question of agency, either for individuals or groups it is assumed that agents have their own beliefs and desires. The difference, though, between a group agent and an individual agent is that, when we are referring to their agency, while we do not need to assess the formulation process of an individual agent's beliefs and desires, we do need to assess it for group agents. Let's discuss this by means of an example.

Let's assume that today is a very hot day and you as an observer know it, but *you* want to see whether *I* am an agent. My body is functioning well and so it can assess correctly the fact that the environmental temperature is high, thereby creating a need for refreshment with cold water. You don't need to know why I crave for cold water or how does the body give that order. What you care about is that a) I believe that the weather is hot, which is true and b) that I desire cold water. *You* the observer set some glasses of water for me (making a good prediction about my future behavior), which have different temperatures and only one is cold. As a proper agent I should search for the cold water and as you see me declining the warmer options for the cold option, *you* agree that *I* am a proper agent. Now imagine that I belong to a group of three people in the same situation (hot day), where all three have to come to a decision about this situation. Your job is to assess if we are a group agent.

As an observer you must see that as a group we believe that the proposition '*Today is a very hot day*' is true. While you don't care how we individually reach our belief, you do have to care about how the group reaches its belief. The group's belief about the weather is an aggregation of our beliefs and *the aggregation process* is what you assess. Secondly, since we

chose beforehand that if the weather is hot, we will all drink cold water (the process of choosing propositions is not of importance), the group has to vote also on that desire. Again, while you don't care how we each individually form our desire for being refreshed with water, you do care how the group reaches its desire. Lastly, according to the aggregated belief and desire, you should see the group enacting someone to bring the desired form of water. No matter what kind of standards you will set in order to assess whether we do in fact form a group agent, you will undeniably assess the process through which the group forms beliefs and desires. This fundamental difference in the formulation process of beliefs and desires between individuals and groups has been an basis for seeing different perspectives of how one is to explain the status of group agency. It is in the tradition of social ontology where we find authors analyzing differently how do individuals that act together, do in fact show a collective mind or not (Roth 2011). For example the view that a group of people acting in coordination to save a person from drowning is a group agent, depends on our standards of agency and how the formulation of a group's beliefs and desires follows those standards.

5.2 Perspectives of group agency

Collective *action* is a concept used when a group of individuals act together as one. This is an important concept when one wants to analyse and categorize the social world, since groups are an essential part of it. Be that as it may, collective action does not entail group agency, because actions derived by group agents are a special type of actions. Since individuals are what form groups, if we want to know how collective action is formed, we have to analyse how do beliefs and desires of individual agents interrelate and create this collective action. The main question of L&P is what type of aggregation function may best show that a group's beliefs and desires result into actions of a group agent. On the other hand, social ontologists have been the main researchers of the concept of collective action through the perspective of intentions. Theorists like Searle, Bratman, Tuomela, Gilbert and others analyze collective action from different perspectives and specifically on the concept of joint intention (see Roth, 2011, 1. The traditional ontological problem and the Intention Thesis). Seeing this fundamental difference in analysing individual agency and group agency, we find a variety of perspectives of how does collective actions come about or is explained.

Imagine being by the beach and you hear a person drowning. Immediately you see people running into the sea to save the person. They have nothing in common with each other beside their belief that someone is drowning and their intention to save them. That is an instance of collective action, which comes from a group that was created only for one time and will dissolve after the saving of the drowning victim. On the other hand imagine a group of lifeguards passing by the beach, but are off duty. They see the same problem and all run together and act to save the drowning victim. In both examples we have the same collective action (saving of a drowning victim), but it remains a question as to which group is or should

be considered a group agent.

Social ontologists focus on how individual intentions create collective action (see Introduction in Tollefsen 2004). From their perspective individual beliefs and desires create intentions for individual action. Opinions about collective action vary because theorists analyze differently how these individual intentions are shared with others, with whom collective action is realised (see 2. Interrelatedness of participatory intentions in Roth, 2011). In the example above, one could question that the second group is a group agent since the intentions of the group are not formed for a small period of time, but are part of the reasoning and identity of the group. Lifeguards practice the saving of drowning victims and as such a group they incorporate an agency for acting in the same manner every time they have to deal with this problem. Others could argue that the group of individuals who run to save the victim are sharing the same intentions and as such this group might be a group agent. The differences are slight but show how varied is the debate between social ontologists.

L&P's approach is different to the social ontological one. Their method focuses on finding a model which shows how beliefs and desires of the members of a group are aggregated in order to produce group action. Aggregation functions are their main tools for providing their account of group agency. Though this is what we find mainly in their argument and structure of their theory, we also find a duplicity of requirements for group agency. Initially L&P present a set of requirements for group agency, along with some real-world examples of groups that accommodate these requirements, yet after entering their formal discussion we find that the requirements for group agency contract to a set of formal conditions for aggregating judgments. We need to expand on how L&P see group agents and how they are using their method to explain their results.

5.3 Duplicity of requirements

a. Initial requirements

Due to their different approach, L&P do not discuss the social ontological debate about what types of intentions merit for their idea of group agents. They do though choose initially to associate their idea of group agents with those that have similar characteristics with social ontology theorists. Here is where we find a duplicity of requirements from L&P. We see that

before presenting their theory and structure of group agents, they present a slightly different case for what are the characteristics of the groups they consider as group agents.

Before delving into the formal requirements for aggregating beliefs and desires, L&P set the grounds of what types of groups can be considered group agents by their standards. In these examples they set groups with joint intentions as the representative type of groups that fall under their analysis (List and Pettit 2011, p.33). To explain joint intention they adopt social ontologist's Bratman (1999) interpretation of the term. This interpretation of joint intention means that a collection of individuals have a shared goal, they contribute with their own intention to achieve that goal, they are interdependent in forming these intentions and are commonly aware that everybody believes that everybody has met these conditions (ibid, p.33). Additionally, while joint intentions are important, the authors leave room for their group agents, by letting *some* not all of its members to act in joint intention. "Generally, all we require for a group agent to count as "jointly intentional" is that the group's performance involve joint intentions on the part of some of its members." (ibid, p.35).

While a group may show joint intention, it does not necessarily mean that it is a group agent (p.34). Some groups may act together to perform one action, but this does not mean that they are agents, since this happens only once, as we saw in the drowning victim example above. These groups are referred to as *mere collections*. Here is how L&P set that mere collections of individuals cannot be group agents (ibid, p.32). "Any multi-member agent must be identifiable *over time* by the way its beliefs and desires *evolve*. So there must be a *basis* for thinking of it as the same entity..." (ibid, p.32) I emphasized the words *over time*, *evolve* and *basis*, because they show that the authors believe that a group agent has a past and future. This is important to our assessment of their analysis later on, because it establishes that group agents have another common characteristic, beyond the rules with which they set their decision making processes. Continuing on mere collections L&P point that "there may be no *basis* for predicting what they will do together in future or for speculating about what they would do under counterfactual possibilities." (ibid, p.34) A group having a *basis* seems to be an important, yet vaguely described requirement by the authors. Apparently only groups with a basis are good for speculating about their future actions and are good for extending the social world beyond individual agents. This reference to *a basis* we find it also in the introduction of the book where the authors state: "The constitution of an individual agent gives us *a basis*, other things being equal, to think about how he or she will behave in the future and to reason counterfactually about how he or she would respond to changed circumstances. There is no generally accepted account of how far groups can themselves constitute agents, allowing us *in the same way* to predict how they will behave in the future and to speculate about how they would respond in various hypothetical conditions." (ibid, p.2) While L&P are not being quite specific, we assume that this *basis* is later constructed by different formal (theoretical) requirements.

We find that groups are required to exhibit a *modicum* (a basis) of rationality (p.36). This means to satisfy attitude-to-fact, attitude-to-action and attitude-to-attitude standards of rationality (p.36). Attitude-to-fact standards are about forming beliefs about what is true about the world. Attitude-to-action standards are about making sure that the group will in fact be able to act as it decides (p.37). Attitude-to-attitude standards are about making sure that a group's beliefs and desires, however they may form, should be coherent (p.37). These more specific requirements create the basis for L&P's answer of group agency.

Besides rationality, though, there is another initial requirement for group agents. This is that they should be able to show reasoning, when forming its attitudes. In other words, a group agent should be able to form beliefs and desires, and act according to them, but when it is unable to fulfill them through action (however that may happen eg. If it cannot enable someone to act for the group or if there was false belief etc.), it should be able to change them or find other ways to fulfill them. "Our discussion suggests that we regard a group as an agent just when we think something is amiss if those attitudes are inconsistent, or otherwise irrational. We assume that only group agents as opposed to mere groups should acknowledge that this is a fault that should be rectified." (p.39)

Finally, after these abstract requirements, L&P provide a few examples of possible group agents, which according to them meet the test for being group agents. The test is the following question : " Which groups prompt us not only to ascribe attitudes to them but also to fault them if these attitudes fail to respect the appropriate standards of rationality?"(p.39). These can be political , civic or commercial groups (p.39). They can be political parties since these kinds of groups do have conformed members, who support ideologically consistent policies. The Green party for example supports policies that protect the environment and its members are "activated" under this premise, when discussing policy. But beyond political parties, even states can be considered group agents. A government can act cohesively when a state's interests are influenced. This fact could be potentially explained by L&P's theory. Examples of commercial entities can be executive boards of corporations, since they do work jointly for a corporation's goals and survival. Lastly, examples of civic groups could be environmental or other non-profit organizations, like UNICEF or WWF who commit to supporting a certain goal for the good of society, such as animal rights, children's rights, forest preservation etc (p.40).

b. Formal requirements

After these representations of group agents, L&P turn to the formalisation of the project. What we find is a change of attitude. From analysing the subscription of group agency to groups that show joint intentions, the project diverts to analysing aggregation functions that

would make possible the aggregation of individual attitudes into group attitudes. Additionally, following this requirement means that group agents can be only groups that can actively use a representation of those proposed modeled aggregation functions (the organizational structure). The problem is that while these models do leave space for groups to choose which one most accommodates their preferences, it still restrains the concept of group agency as a whole to a search of appropriate models of aggregation functions.

After supporting the logical possibility of group agency, by proving that it is possible to aggregate individual attitudes (see chapter 4 of this thesis), they explain how a group can create a system in order to *pursuit agency* (p.59). We saw the details about organizational structures in chapter 4 of this thesis. The organizational structure is the rules and procedures that enact the aggregation function of the group's individual member attitudes (p.60). The rules and procedures are actually the ways through which the members will interact for forming decisions. They are voting procedures and say how the group forms its attitudes towards propositions about believes and desires. The voting procedures can be majority voting, deliberation or other and what is attractive about them is their similarity to theoretical aggregation functions (ibid, p.61). Thus, L&P's logical possibility of group agency can only be supported by a practical *imitation* of those theoretical aggregation functions delivered by Judgment Aggregation theory. This is quite a different view of the one we started with. There is a clear move from presenting groups with joint intentions as group agents, to groups that can incorporate a theoretically appropriate aggregation function in their organizational structure.

The requirements we saw in the beginning (part a) and the types of groups we imagined that this theory could include, become far more distant than the ones we have to imagine that exist if this model should represent a concise reality about group agents. In the beginning we imagined that the groups which would could be group agents have a reference point to their identity (eg political, commercial, social), which is not what we care about in the formal requirements of the theory. Additionally we do see the authors responding to questions about group formation eg. That mere collections do not constitute group agents due to the fact that they are not identifiable over time and because we cannot see how their beliefs and desires evolve (ibid, p.32), which is nowhere relevant in the formal requirements. In other words the theory, in order to fulfill the formal requirements it has set, becomes far more restrictive in terms of scope than we initially saw.

5.4 What does the theory become?

As we saw in part 5.2 (a), the real world examples of group agents included political parties, boards of directors, organisations and other types of committees. It is reasonable that not all these groups decide and act in the same manner. This means that the most central issue for a

group agency theory is to show what do all these groups have in common, which can at the same time explain their being agents.

The initial requirements leave some room about the range of group agents GAT may explain. What we saw in the beginning, was that group agents should have members with joint intentions and be able to show reasoning. " It is methodologically defensible to regard a group as an agent only if it makes sense to ascribe intentional attitudes to it. "(p.37). Moreover, we know that L&P want these groups to have some sort of basis, upon which they evolve and a theorist will be able to explain and predict their actions. Seeing the examples of groups that could pass the group agency test, it seems that these requirements are a good basis upon which to discuss group agency.

On the other hand, when we delve into the practical requirements of this theory of group agency, we find unfortunately that the terms are more strict and specific than the initial ones. What we find is that under certain theoretical principles a group in order to be considered a group agent, should incorporate certain rules and procedures as part of its organizational structure. The organizational structure of a group agent is the core from which decisions come from. With these requirements the range of groups that can be considered group agents is more restricted. This is because most groups do not in fact make decisions in such a complicated manner.

More importantly what we see is that there is a change of group agency requirements. For the sake of illustration let us imagine two groups, which both seem as group agents under the initial requirements, but may not be the same under the formal requirements.

The first is a worker's union general assembly. The members of the assembly are all workers and they all share a goal, which is to defend and expand the rights of workers. So we know by reference to their membership requirements, that all the members of the general assembly jointly intend to act in ways that defend and expand the rights of workers. We can assess their ability to do that by evaluating the effects of their decisions to their rights. This example of a group is an example of a group agent according to L&P's initial requirements. In order to assess this group's agency with the formal requirements, we have to research their decision making processes specifically. Moreover these decision making processes must have a certain structure which involves prioritizing propositions for voting or deliberation. Unless we assess the organizational structure we cannot be certain as to whether this group is actually a group agent. In addition, it may possibly be the case that the group does not have the "appropriate" organisational structure. That is, an organizational structure following L&P's formulation. As a result we see that a retrieval from the more realistic initial conditions to more structured conditions changes one's assessment of group agency overall. Not only we find that only a small number of groups can follow the ideal organizational structure, but also

it changes our perspective of group agency. The initial requirements were more about finding, within a group, those characteristics that connect the members (joint intention and membership requirements for example), while the formal requirements are about how a group is to make decisions in order to show agency. It is a matter of future research to show whether this change in perspective can affect our understanding of group agency overall.

The second example is a group of people in a metro station. These people are waiting for their train, while hearing an announcement about unattended bags. They hear that if they find one they should call the police. A few seconds after the announcement all the members of our group of commuters see an unattended bag. According to the instructions they should call the police. While this intention has been directed to them by a higher authority (the police), they do act accordingly. We also assume that they are able to find ways to call the police even if this becomes harder to do. In other words, they do show reasoning ability. (According to L&P while this type of group does show agency, they should not be considered group agents, because there is no basis upon which they evolve. In other words they can be seen as veiled group agents, which occupy the social world only for a few instances. This theory is targeting those group agents, which can be included within the social world as stable actors.) Under the initial requirements we do find that there can be grounds for this group to be a group agent. They have joint intentions, they show reasoning and can reasonably support rationality. If we look at the formal requirements though, this becomes quite impossible, since it is hard to find an appropriate organizational structure within the few minutes in which they have call the police about the unattended bag. It fair to say that there are no rules or procedures for enacting an aggregation function for this group, (except majority voting maybe) which would lead us to the result that this is a group agent. In other words, it will be hard to find how these people have joint intentions through the organizational structure, when the organizational structure is the least of their concern.

Seeing that there is a difference between the initial requirements and the formal requirements of group agency as illustrated by the two examples given above, we have to assess the authors' possible strategy. A reasonable response is that the initial requirements were good preconditions for supporting L&P's formalized group agency later. Yet, this doesn't mean that the conditions were specified, but changed. Pointing back to the reasons why mere collections cannot be group agents and the reference to time, we cannot see how restricting the time of creation of a group is associated with the formal conditions for the possibility of group agency. Dealing with the grounds of group agency, when the idea of group agency is more or less already established, is a difficult task. Thus by presenting first the idea of group agency as it has been discussed already (groups with joint intentions) provides a helpful introduction to what the approach has to explain. This does not though reduce the fact that there is a change in the results we can expect by the formal requirements and which are more important than the initial ones. Their importance lies in the decision-making processes

(organizational structure), which are essentially the first subject to analyse for understanding group agency. The question that remains though is the following: Is the structure of the decision-making process a necessary condition for a group to show agency?

5.5 Decision-making processes

How important is the role of decision-making processes for L&P's group agency theory?

There is an ambiguity here. While decision-making processes are in the core of group agency theory, it seems that it remains in the ability of individual members to evaluate diversified opinions. This makes us curious about the importance of decision making processes for providing grounds for group agency. Let us see where the ambiguity lies precisely.

Decision-making processes are essentially mechanisms for forming decisions and nothing more. When forming the rules for decision making, a group formalises how different opinions are evaluated by their merit only as opinions and not by their merit as to what kind of opinions they are. If a group of three ministers has to decide on a water sanitation policy, the decision making process will not count how their opinion is formed or whether it is consistent with their opinions on the importance of clean water or other opinions. In order to figure these points out we could for example set a test for the ministers about facts concerning the environment. In no case though can the decision making process alert us about the weight or knowledge or intentions supporting their opinions. Deliberation would be a way to expose the characteristics of opinions, but under L&P's framework deliberation comes along with voting procedures. The decision making process then will only make it possible for changing a vote, but cannot be used for evaluating the opinion that chose the vote. Yet the point about having such decision making processes (functionally inexplicit organizational structures) in the core of group agency theory is about them being able to evaluate *consistency*. It seems really hard to say that the decision making rules can cover the evaluation of different opinions. Opinions do not have the same weight, yet votes do. One can be uninformed about the negative consequences of smoking and have the opinion that one should be able to smoke in a closed space because its not bad for you; and while he can be clearly wrong and nobody in their right mind would listen to him, if we were to vote on that issue his vote would at least count for one.

There is a practical reason why decision making processes do not have that kind of an evaluation role. Evaluation is a process of contrasting different attributes of a subject. In the matter of opinions the attributes are arguments and they can be formed by a variety of premises. Therefore for a decision making process to include evaluation of opinions, would

mean to create a rule-book of possible arguments. This is both very hard and impractical, even if those arguments were based on past decisions of a group. The evaluation of opinions then remains in the ability of the members.

It remains in the ability of the members to assess different opinions (via deliberation for example) and choose whether they should review their vote, if inconsistencies are found with the group's resulting decision. In the words of the authors "A group using a straw-vote procedure, for instance, may form group-level beliefs about the consistency or inconsistency of the propositions towards which attitudes have already been formed, and it may rely on its own rationality -sustained by its members – to ensure that it does not violate the constraints of rationality." (p.64) Thus, what we find is that groups that are group agents for L&P are those groups that their members use decision making processes in a way that makes them group agents.

The picture L&P give about the types of groups (civic, commercial and political) that could be group agents is enough to tell us that there is something different about those groups. They have a past, a *basis* or we could say they have specific goals which are associated with their joint intentions. Having such a *basis* makes it easier for L&P to have such groups as examples of group agents. It is because they are the ones whose members have the organizational ability and consistency to effectively implement these rationality & reasoning checking organizational structures. This point makes it easier for us to accept L&P's point that mere collections cannot *count* as group agents. "Any multi-member agent must be identifiable over time by the way its beliefs and desires evolve. So there must be a basis for thinking of it as the same entity, even as its membership changes[...]" (p.32). Yet, what remains for us is that the organizational structure is just a medium through which the members can achieve group agency and does not answer why a group is a group agent.

We can support this point further, through the authors' own discussion about which organizational structures can achieve group level reasoning (List and Pettit, 2011, p.63-64). Here they present the pros and cons of these structures. For example it is possible that a group which uses feedback, may not be a group agent, if there are members that can predict the result of a vote and strategically present different attitudes than their own (p.64). On the other hand the authors say "we think that organizational structures with feedback often give rise to group-level reasoning (though nothing in our argument depends on this claim). This is because individuals who notice an actual or potential inconsistency in the group's attitudes are likely to draw this to other member's attention rather than adjusting covertly so as to compensate. But if group members address such metalanguage issues together – and in common awareness of doing so- then in effect the group addresses them. And when the group adjusts in order to avoid the inconsistency, this is naturally explained as a case of the group reasoning its way out of the difficulty"(List and Pettit 2011,p.64)

This quote makes our point clearer. What is meant here by *give rise*? Give rise means that while the organisational structure is sound (theoretically) to provide the grounds for group agency, it remains in the use of its members. Thus, while there are conditions for giving rise to agency, group members may misuse the decision making process, creating a less reliable and more erratic decision maker out of the group.

In order to assess this tactic, I believe we need to go back to the difference between group agency assessment and individual agency (5.1 of this thesis). The authors knowing the difficulty that lies in presenting agency for a group in a similar way to individual agency. While it is not their subject of interest to know how an individual makes their beliefs and desires, they do have to assess this process for group agents. Taking into account this difference of analysis, it is reasonable for a researcher in group agency to take decision making processes as their main subject.

From our results, we find that decision-making processes are not the means for showing that group agents exist. They are the means for showing how we can make sense of the idea of group agency. By analysing decision making processes the authors know that the link between group beliefs and desires, and individual beliefs and desires is more visible. What we learn is that a very strictly specified decision making process can *give rise* to those qualities we want in group agents. The problem is that these processes are only rules for voting and not rules on how to assess premises, which is within the personal ability of each member to assess whether there are actually inconsistencies.

On the other hand we can grant the authors some room for response. It is not unreasonable to think that their overall strategy is to present a concrete and non elusive structure of group agency. Up until now we have seen approaches that either do not bother with the formations of group agency (e.g. international relations) or bother in such level that the scope is too wide such as that of categorizing every part of the social world (social ontology). Moreover, using models is not such a wrong way to an attempt at explaining group agency. It is limiting for our common-sense image of group agents (corporate lawyers like Hess engage with such diversity of group agents), but it still is a beginning for its understanding.

5.6 Conclusion

In this last chapter we discussed the reasoning under which group agency is assessed from L&P's perspective. The idea of assessing the methods under which group members decide on acting is essential to a project like Group Agency Theory, yet what we revealed is that it is only a means towards it. The model organizational structure for L&P's group agency theory can only give rise to a group agent if the members do use it in such a manner. The point of

Group Agency though is not to give us a definitive answer to what is group agency. Their goal is to give us a more clear and concrete conception of group agency. The use of models and formal conditions while limiting the scope of the theory, and our initial prospects for settling with a wide range of groups as group agents, it does enhance our understanding of the mechanisms which group agents work with. Decision making processes get the real spot light and it remains to further social research to provide the grounds under which they accompany a wider range of group agents.

Chapter 6

Overall Conclusion

In this thesis we have discussed a new theory of group agency by List and Pettit (2011). We begun by looking into the way other authors have assessed and criticized the theory. (Chapter 2) This gave us a better perspective of this theory and specifically the importance of the several points it makes. Specifically the importance of its methodology, the normative claims it makes and the distance it takes from other perspectives concerning collective action. The points of methodology were considered very important and so it was a task if this thesis to present the methodological elements of Group Agency Theory. We discussed them in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 5 I engaged with the authors and specifically their set up of requirements for group agency. I argued that List and Pettit have different requirements of group agency than the ones they initially begin with. Initially they set the grounds for an idea of group agents close to our common intuitions and gave examples of real-world group agents to illustrate these requirements. Then due to their methodology they searched for a structure (aggregation function) which would satisfy a set of formal requirements, and would support the idea that group agents are logically possible. In turn, they set that real group agents would require a practical form of that aggregation function, which they called the organizational structure. The organizational structure resembles decision making processes which take the real spot light out of Group Agency. I argue that this creates a problematic image about our understanding of their project, but nonetheless is useful to further research and categorize group agents.

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