

## **"Who or What is the Company Man?"**

### **Abstract:**

In several recent articles, Philip Pettit has deployed what he calls the "discursive dilemma" to argue that a group of persons can, under certain conditions, have a mind of its own. If we are to be convinced of this group mind thesis, Pettit's argument will need to be supplemented (at the very least) with premises involving a distinctive, interpersonal, conception of intention. My concern in this paper will be to articulate this notion of intention, and the related assumptions about practical reasoning in a social context. Although I remain neutral about Pettit's conclusion, my proposal is that the required premises concerning intention and practical reasoning can be independently motivated.

The thesis that certain groups have minds of their own can be understood in a number of ways. My discussion will be restricted to a fundamental aspect of the mind – intention and its relation to action. Begin with a conventional or stipulated sense in which a group has an intention: perhaps there was a vote, or a decision on the part of a designated committee or individual. The question is this: How must this intention relate to individuals in the group in order for the group intention in the stipulated or conventional sense to count as a genuine intention, so that the group intends with a mind of its own?

Some more traditional "ineliminability" arguments for group minds do not rely on any strong relationship between group intentions and individual attitudes. On the contrary, they presuppose a radical discontinuity between group and individual level intentionality. There are some elements to Pettit's discussion that fall in line with this aspect of the traditional eliminability arguments. But if his "discursive dilemma" offers something new (and I think it does), then there is an important way in which group and individual intentionality must be related. I will argue that a group intention, if it really is an intention, must have a type of normative or practical authority for the individual members of the group, an authority that is to be understood in terms of distinctive principles and patterns of practical reasoning. That is, Pettit's argument will have to rely on a special type of practical reasoning, where the intention of the group has an immediate effect on or relevance for the practical reasoning of its members, much in the way that an individual's intentions constrain and guide his or her own practical reasoning and action.

I argue that something very close to this distinctive conception of intention and practical reasoning is already required for a satisfactory account of the mutual obligations between participants in a shared activity. To the extent that such a conception of intention and practical reasoning is required for an account of shared activity, we have some independent motivation for the missing premise in Pettit's argument from the "discursive dilemma".