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On Being a 'We': Edith Stein's Contribution to the Intentionalism Debate

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Abstract It is commonplace to speak of social groups as if they were capable of the same sorts of activities as individuals. We say, "Germany won the World Cup"; "The United States invaded Iraq"; and "The world mourned the passing of Nelson Mandela". In so doing, we attribute agency, belief, and emotional states to groups themselves. In recent years, much literature devoted to analyzing such statements and their implications has emerged. Within this literature, the issue of "intentionalism," whether individuals must have a certain self-conception in order to constitute a collectivity, has received surprisingly little attention. While Paul Sheehy has criticized this view, claiming that individuals may be related in such a way as to constitute a collective without their realizing it (Sheehy in J Soc Philos 33(3):377–394, 2002), little other scholarship on the topic exists. The purpose of this article is to contribute to this debate. I will argue, drawing on Edith Stein's phenomenology of social groups, that intentionalism, as Margaret Gilbert defines it, is false. I begin by establishing Gilbert's account, Sheehy's criticism of intentionalism, and what I take to be its shortcomings. I then explicate Stein's phenomenology of collectives and argue that plural subjects who do not meet intentionalist requirements can exist. Given this, intentionalism must be rejected. Because the intentionalism debate presupposes that there are irreducibly social agents, I do not argue for this claim.

Keywords Edith Stein · Intentionalism · Margaret Gilbert · Phenomenology · Phenomenology of sociality · Plural subject theory

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It is commonplace to speak of social groups as if they were capable of the same sorts of activities as individuals. We say, "Germany won the World Cup"; "The United States invaded Iraq"; and "The world mourned the passing of Nelson Mandela". In so doing, we attribute agency, belief, and emotional states to groups themselves. In recent years, much literature devoted to analyzing such statements and their implications has emerged. While some are downright dismissive of the idea of collective agency, others have argued that there are genuine group agents (Stoutland 2008; List and Pettit 2011). Others focus on how commitments, beliefs, or actions must be understood in order to be "shared" (Searle 1990; Bratman 1999; Martell 2010). And, some attention has been paid to what it can mean, assuming that the aforementioned commitments etc. are understood as mental states, for individual minds to share in a mind (Huebner 2014; Szanto 2014).Within this literature, the issue of whether individuals must have a certain self-conception in order to constitute a collectivity, or "intentionalism" (Gilbert 1989) has received surprisingly little attention. While Paul Sheehy has criticized this view, claiming that individuals may be related in such a way as to constitute a collective without their realizing it (2002: 383), little other scholarship on the topic exists.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to this debate. I will argue, drawing on Edith Stein's phenomenology of social groups, that intentionalism, as Gilbert defines it, is false. I will begin by establishing Gilbert's account of the plural subject and identifying her intentionalism. Section two will explicate Stein's phenomenology of collectives and argue that plural subjects who do not meet intentionalist requirements can exist. Given this, intentionalism is false. Because the intentionalism debate presupposes that there are irreducibly social agents, I do not argue for this claim.

Gilbert's Intentionalist Account of the Plural Subject

I begin with a recapitulation of Margaret Gilbert's plural subject theory and her own definition of "intentionalism". In the Introduction to her influential book *On Social Facts*, Gilbert defines intentionalism as the "view that according to our everyday collectivity concepts, individual human beings must see themselves in a particular way in order to constitute a collectivity" (1989: 12). Intentionalism, as regards social groups, is thus the thesis that the individuals who comprise a social group must possess a conception of themselves as comprising said group. Gilbert puts it succinctly when she writes, "[h]uman beings X, Y, and Z constitute a collectivity (social group) if and only if each correctly thinks of himself and the others, taken together, as 'us*' or 'we*'" (1989: 147). On Gilbert's view then, intentionalism thus precludes the existence of collectives formed without the full awareness of their being so constituted by their members.[1]

When pressed on the kinds of conceptions necessary to bind people together into a social group, Gilbert writes, "people must perceive themselves as members of a

[1] More recent statements of Gilbert's plural subject theory retain this intentionalist thesis, even if it she emphasizes it to a lesser extent. See, for example, Gilbert (2014: 114–118, 2006: 62 and 98).

plural subject," which takes them "beyond the conceptual scheme of singular agency" (1989: 13). She later adds, "in order to constitute a social group people must constitute a plural subject *of some kind*. And *any* plural subject is a social group" (1990: 188). For Gilbert, all social groups are social groups just as long as they are plural subjects and vice versa. Thus, the bulk of her analysis of social phenomena revolves around understanding and analyzing social groups *qua* plural subjects.

Gilbert argues that "our concept of a collectivity is the concept of a plural subject of action, belief, attitude, or other such attribute" (1989: 17). Plural subjects exist whenever people agree to do things together. However, that does little to clarify the definition of a plural subject. Indeed, she is quick to indicate that this does not provide a definition of a plural subject; rather, "it gives us a logically necessary condition for the existence of such a subject" (1989: 18).

On Gilbert's account, a plural subject is formed when two or more subjects form a joint commitment. Forming a joint commitment, in the relevant sense, involves a mutual commitment on the part of both subjects to do something together, or as Gilbert prefers to say, "as a body" (1999: 147). She writes:

> Quite generally, if Anne and Ben are jointly committed, they are jointly committed to doing something as a body, or, if you like, as a single unit, or 'person.' Doing something as a body, in the relevant sense, is not a matter of 'all doing it' but rather a matter of 'all acting in such a way as to constitute a body that does it'. (1999: 147)

Each member of the group must form an intention to achieve the desired end in order for the joint commitment to form. Additionally, the joint commitment must be common knowledge. A joint commitment cannot be formed unless all the respective parties are mutually aware of one another's reciprocal commitment. This generally involves some kind of mutual expression to be ready to act in such a way as to realize the common goal. Gilbert understands *doing*, as in the joint commitment to *do* something, in a broad sense. "People may be jointly committed to accepting (and pursuing) a certain goal as a body. They may be jointly committed to believing that such-and-such as a body. And so on" (1999: 147). Plural subjects, therefore, are not just subjects of actions; they may also be subjects of beliefs, desire, etc.

Importantly, a joint commitment is not the result of an aggregation of individual commitments. The kind of commitment at issue is one that is created together by each member, which holds sway over each of them jointly. If you and I have a joint commitment, and if we wish to talk individually about one of our commitments, then "we must bear in mind that these 'individual' commitments cannot exist on their own. This is because both derive from a joint commitment, and a joint commitment always holds sway over more than one person" (Gilbert 1999: 147). For example, if you and I have a joint commitment to cook dinner, this joint commitment is irreducible to your having an individual commitment to cook dinner and my having a similar individual commitment. Joint commitments are, to use Paul Sheehy's way of expressing it, "symmetrical and reciprocal commitments on the part of each individual to act together as a body" to achieve the goal (2002: 379). Thus, our joint commitment to cook dinner would be express as follows: I am

committed to acting in such a way as to cook dinner with you—as one body, and you are committed to acting in such a way as to cook dinner with me—as one body. Gilbert calls joint commitments "simple" (1999: 146). This emphasizes that, in cases where two people share a joint commitment, there is only one commitment.

Furthermore, and unlike individual commitments, neither of us creates the joint commitment on our own; we make it together. Gilbert refers to a joint commitment as an exchange of "conditional commitments of the will" while noting that it is not "of the 'I promise if you promise' form. Nor is it of the form 'I promise to do A if you promise to do B'" (1989: 382). Rather, joint commitments must be conceived of as an agreement-like "device whereby a set of persons can simultaneously and interdependently become bound to act in certain ways" (1989: 382). While joint commitments are agreement-like, they need not arise from any actual, formal agreement.

In summary, Gilbert's account of the formation of a social group involves the following. The creation of a social group constitutes a plural subject through the mutual intending of at least two people to do something together, as a body, or as one—though "plural"—subject. Doing something together must be understood as the creation of a joint commitment that is irreducible to individual personal commitments. It is a way of coming together and combining, or as Gilbert has it, "pooling" the wills of separate individuals into one corporate will. The account is explicitly intentionalist insofar as a Gilbertian joint commitment requires all the subjects of said commitment to have the conception of themselves as constituting a collectivity.

I now turn to Edith Stein's account of social relations. Once we have understood Stein's descriptions of the social world, I will argue that it involves explicit reasons to reject the intentionalist thesis.

Edith Stein and the Phenomenology of Sociality

Edith Stein's phenomenology of sociality differs from her certainly more prominent teacher, Edmund Husserl. The contrast will be of some explanatory advantages for our purposes. Husserl's detailed analyses of sociality tend to begin with the intentional structures of individuals and then proceed to investigate how those structures can become interwoven with the structures of other individuals such that a group is created (see 1973b: 218ff.; 1988: 22; 2001: 543ff.). Stein, on the other hand, begins her analysis of community from the inside, as it were. We are all members of some community, and she assumes we all have experiences *as members* of those communities. Thus, she begins by looking at those experiences. A benefit of this starting point is that she can begin with an experience to which many of her readers can relate and bring the tools of phenomenological analysis to bear on it.

Stein's analysis of community stems from a desire to understand the place of the individual psyche in the nexus of causality. The individual psyche does not exist as a world unto itself. "The lifepower that keeps it in operation undergoes influxes 'from without'," and to understand the way in which the lone psyche fits into the

larger world, one must trace out the sources of those influxes of lifepower. This must involve a clarification of "a determinate form of the living together of individual persons" (Stein 2000: 129). Thus, Stein introduces the second part of her book *The Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities,* entitled "Individual and Community," by examining a distinction between three types of living together before asking "how it's possible to have a community as a higher-level subject and a community life" (2002: 132). In other words, she differentiates the basic forms of social relations before asking if the individuals in these relations ever can or do form a plural subject.

The following section begins with clarification of the distinction she draws between three social relations, viz., community (*Gemeinschaft*), association (*Gesellschaft*), and mass (*Masse*), and the ways in which the individuals relate to one another in them. I then turn to her account of communal experience and what amounts to her theory of the plural subject.

Three Types of "Sociation"

Stein's approach to "sociation" (*Vergesellschaftung*) takes its lead from the sociology of her day. The primary forms of living together that she investigates are community (*Gemeinschaft*) and association (*Gesellschaft*).[2] She adds a third form later in the treatise, the mass (*Masse*).[3] I will begin with a brief discussion of the mass before considering the distinction between community and association.

The mass is the least cohesive social relation. It is merely a grouping of individuals into a shared space. It is temporary, and the modes of interaction between individuals that reign in the mass are contagion and imitation (Stein 2000: 241). Consider, for example, a crowd at a football match. One may attend the match and, even though she has no commitment to either side, become caught up in the fervor of the home team and its fans. She may find herself experiencing the joy of victory or the agony of defeat by simply getting "swept away" in the feelings of the crowd. This is a prime example of sentient contagion. Another example of the formation of a mass could be the crowd that gathers as pedestrians try to get down a street that the police have blocked. The "being together" in this case is purely a spatial one. They share no common goals, no joint commitments, and no communal life. Emotions, such as anger or frustration, and other states may pass through the crowd, but they do so only because of the proximity of the individuals and not on the basis of a shared life. The feelings are simply "taken over" for "no logical reason," by which Stein means without adequate grounding (2000: 244–246). A

[2] She refers to, but does not explicitly cite, the founder of German sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies. She is most likely referring to his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* from 1887 (see Tönnies 2002).

[3] The English word, "mass" can be slightly misleading here. English speakers will occasionally refer to "the masses" when speaking of the vast majority of people, but the term rarely appears in its singular form as Stein intends it in her work. A metaphorical use of "the herd" or a "herd mentality" or simply "crowd" might better convey in the English idiom what Stein means. However, I defer to the standard translation.

mass, then, is simply an aggregate of individuals formed on the basis of spatial and temporal proximity.

A genuine social relation, for Stein, means more than just proximity. It involves the sharing or communication of emotions and mental life. The mass is the most primitive and also the most tenuous form of such sharing. There is a mass any time that individuals are in close proximity with one another, but they are bound by this proximity and it alone. This means that the mass relation is fragile. If the crowd disperses, the mass no longer exists. Also, the sharing between individuals that occurs in it is least guided by any form of rational motivation. That is, an individual is likely to pick up emotions or beliefs that she later discovers are unmotivated. Consider the woman attending the football match from the above example. Her being swept away in the ecstasy of the team's victory is unmotivated. She is not a fan of the team. She has the feelings simply because she is present and open to them as a sentient individual.

The next social relation is that of association. Stein describes the living together of an association as "rational and mechanical" (2000: 130). The unifying principle of association is a shared *telos*. In associations, the members face one another as subject to object because they join together to achieve some purpose that, typically, they cannot achieve alone (Stein 2000: 130 and 255). A highly bureaucratized company could be an example of an association. The individuals are united by the goal of making a profit for the company. In order to achieve this goal, they deal with one another as a means to an end. Each employee does her job and fulfills her function. Associations have their origin in acts of institution, such as the foundation of a club, a university, corporation, or charitable organization and they persevere until they are dissolved, typically by another institutional act.

The life of an association is "the functionality directed toward the purpose that is to be attained, or split into a series of single functions of various kinds that are distributed to single members or to certain groups of members," and it is separate from the lives of its members (Stein 2000: 255). The associational relation is determined exclusively by the *telos* the association is meant to realize. An association has a goal, and it works, almost mechanically, to achieve it. "The association doesn't grow like an organism; rather, it reminds you of a machine that is 'invented' for a certain purpose, 'constructed,' and adapted in progressive improvement through alterations of parts or insertion of new ones" (Stein 2000: 255f.). This highlights the role of individuals in an association. They are like interchangeable parts in a machine. So long as they fit the typical role (worker, administrator, supervisor, head of the party, etc.), they are interchangeable without significant loss. The role the individuals play in the realization of the association's goal is of primary importance, not singularity.

The third form social relation that Stein defines is community. By community, she designates a "natural, organic union of individuals" (2000: 130). As opposed to the subject/object structure of the association, in a community, individuals face one another as subject to subject, and the dominant mode of relation is solidarity (Stein 2000: 130). Community and solidarity are marked by a naïve living together and openness to one another. "This community of life comes online when and as long as the individuals are naïvely given over to one another, 'opened' for one another,

without having any of the disingenuous orientation toward 'association' in which the one regards the other as an object and shuts himself off from him" (Stein 2000: 206f.). In a communal relationship, I live openly and naïvely toward you and allow your life and concerns to determine and influence my own. My orientation toward you is not determined by what you can do for me or what I need from you in order to accomplish an end, as it is in association.

It is crucial to emphasize the importance of the naïve openness that community entails for Stein. It is an essential feature. We must bear in mind that the various modes of social relations come to bear on the ways in which one individual's emotional and spiritual life affect another's. Mass connects people purely on the basis of proximity and a sentient openness to other sentient beings and their feelings. In association, individuals are open to one another on the basis of their mutual agreement and to the extent that they desire the end they pursue together. This openness is complex and moderated by the *telos*. In a strictly associational relationship, individuals are open only those desires of the others that are related to the shared *telos*. Being in community, on the other hand, means living with openness toward the other that is not mediated by a common interest. It means being naïvely open to her life, desires, and concerns and allowing them to become your own.

There are several reasons, on this account, that it is impossible for persons to be in a relationship that is *purely* associational. First, the establishment of a common goal that orients the life of an association presupposes a simple living together in and through which you and the other first come to realize you possess a common desire. A simple example of this would be the creation of a neighborhood watch whose goal is to reduce crime on a given block. The desire to reduce crime in our neighborhood can only become a common goal if you and I live in proximity to one another and if I allow your concern for your safety (and perhaps your concern for my safety) to affect me. Otherwise, were I only concerned for myself, I might build a large wall around my house and stockpile weapon. I would unlikely join a neighborhood watch.

Second, because the members of an association are meant to serve a specific function, Stein claims that "just plain living, living with others, is already presupposed in order to 'probe' oneself and the others, in order to establish through observation the personal competence for this or that *associational* function" (2000: 257). In order for an association to function well, it needs leaders, workers, possibly public relations people, the list grows. Stein's point is that to know which people best fill which roles requires us to know something about the native talents of the individuals. This kind of knowledge *might* be gained in a formal interview, but it is best gained by living together with them and experiencing their talents for myself.

Last but not least, in order for an association to function well, the relations between persons should be something more than objective. This is just to say that people do not enjoy being treated as objects and work better when they are treated with respect. A well-functioning association would be one in which, "the workers work hand in hand with one another," and there were a "weaving of motivations of various kinds that could never play out if one were taking the other purely as an object and not as a subject" (Stein 2000: 259). Associations, as such, presuppose

some more primitive form of communal relation. I leave this point for now, but it will return as a key issue in the criticism of Gilbert.

With this understanding of how Stein distinguishes between the types of living together, I now turn to her treatment of communal experience and the question of whether or not it is accurate to call these social groups subjects of the plural variety. I will conclude the second section by bringing Stein's analyses to bear on the issue of intentionalism.

Stein on Communal Experience

When Stein turns her investigation to the "question of how it's possible to have a community as a higher-level subject of life and a community life," she first focuses on the composition of communal experiences—which are to be understood as the experiences that individuals have *as members* of communities (2000: 132). The stream of conscious life of the individual ego is isolated, in terms of direct access, from every other ego.[4] She writes, "[w]hat flows out of *one* ego belongs to *one* current of consciousness, which is isolated unto itself and walled off from every other, just like the ego is" (2000: 133). She thus affirms her commitment to Husserl's insistence on the a priori separation of egoic life (see Husserl 1973a: 109). However, Stein claims that the individual subject, despite this "inalienable aloneness" can "enter into a *community of life* with other subjects," and in so doing, "the individual subject becomes a member of a super-individual subject, and also … a super-individual current of experience is constituted in the active living of such a community subject" (2000: 133). She makes it clear that she believes individuals are not the only kinds of subjects. Groups of people can constitute communal subjects that have currents of experience and some form of intentional, conscious life.

She considers these subjects by analyzing the structures of "communal experience". As I mentioned above, Stein begins her analysis of communal experience from within. "The material that awaits our dissection is whatever we experience as members of the community" (Stein 2000: 134). Her primary example asks us to compare being a member of an army unit that is grieving over the death of its commander to the loss of a personal friend (Stein 2000: 134). Following this comparison will allow us to understand precisely what communal experience is for Stein. In the following, I explicate the three differences that arise between a communal and an individual experience: (1) "The subject of the experiencing is different," (2) "There's another composition to the experience," and (3) "There's a different kind of experiential current that the experience fits into" (Stein 2000: 134). I will attempt to use Stein's analyses to describe the communal experience and its noetic and noematic correlates. However, Stein's work may only serve as a guide here. As Antonio Calcagno recently observed, Stein goes as far as clarifying the

[4] I say "direct access" because Stein does believe that there is a certain kind of indirect access that one individual can have to the experiences of another. She terms this access empathy (*Einfühlung*). A description of empathy, however, is well beyond the scope of this essay. See Stein (1989), Moran (2004), Zahavi (2010), and the contributions of Jardine, Taipale, and Vendrell Ferran in this Special Issue.

sense (*Sinn*) of communal experiences but never gets as far as marking out their precise intentional, noetic, and noematic structures (2014: 124). I will conclude by utilizing Stein's insights to argue against Gilbert's intentionalist thesis.

The Subject of Communal Experience

I begin with Stein's example of shared grief. I am the member of a military unit who loses its leader. In this case, the grief that I feel over this loss is not *my* grief, as it would be if I were to grieve over the loss of a personal friend. The subject of the grieving is different. In a communal experience, "we've got a subject … that encompasses a plurality of individual egos" (Stein 2000: 134). On first read, this appears to fly in face of the commitment to the "isolation" of individual egos that she affirmed above. In order to understand this claim, we must recall what it means to be an individual subject of experience. When Stein speaks of the individual subject, she distinguishes the "pure ego as the quality-less point of radiation" of experiences from the individual personality as the "constituted unity of personal properties" (2000: 135). This distinction does not carry over unchanged into the discussion of a communal subject. She insists that there is no communal ego (2000: 135). This does not mean that there is no *communal subject*, just that there is no communal pure ego. The communal subject is analogous to the constituted individual personality. There *could be*, she writes, "a collective personality as that whose experiences the communal experiences are to be regarded as" (2000: 135).

Stein's insistence that there is no communal ego reveals a two-fold commitment, first to the ontological separateness of individual egos, and second to the non-independence of the communal subject. We saw above, but it bears repeating, that individual egos are distinct from one another in terms of the inviolable separateness of their conscious lives. Experience is given originarily only to the very subject to whom it belongs, and there is no path by which I may trace my experiences to your ego or to a super-individual ego in which you and I share originary experiences.[5] This speaks to the second point. She clearly insists that there is no ontologically separate communal ego. When we have communal experience, "we feel in the name of the community, and it's the community's experiencing that is carried out in us and through us" (Stein 2000: 139). Only individuals *have* experiences. An individual has a group experiences *in the name* of the group. What, then, is the communal subject?

There is a sense in which all experience refers back to its subject vis-à-vis its mode of givenness. Those experiences are mine which are given *to me* in the first-person perspective. The individual subject is the subjective correlate of the reference implicit in the first-person givenness of originary experience. However, one must also admit that some originarily given experiences do not refer to me as their *only* subject. Some refer to a multiplicity of subjects. Returning to the example of communal grief, Stein writes, "I feel it as *our* grief. The experience is essentially

[5] "Originarily" (*originär*) is a technical term in phenomenology. It refers to the unmediated, direct, first-person access that one has to one's own experiences. Visual perception of an object is the example *par excellence* of something's being given originarily (see. Husserl 1982: 5).

colored by the fact that others are taking part in it, or even more, by the fact that I take part in it only as a member of a community" (2000: 134). In other words, communal experiences possess an essential noetic sense implying ownership by several subjects. In grammatical terms, these experiences are given in the first-person plural, not the first-person singular. As the individual subject is the subjective correlate of first-person singular experiences, the communal subject is the subjective correlate of first-personal plural experiences.

The Content of Communal Experience

We have already discussed one aspect of the composition of communal experience. We saw that on the noetic side of the experience the act structure is modified so as to be in its plural form. To put it more simply, communal experiences are given in the first-person plural. I turn now to the noematic side of those experiences.

I should first note Stein's commitment to the position that the shared, intersubjective world is the most basic level of communal content within experience. If we distinguish the egoic content of experience from extra-egoic content, we realize that all extra-egoic content is, *to some extent*, shared. Think of what it would mean to call an experience "purely subjective". This must mean something like its possessing *only* egoic content. For example, a private hallucination or a dream would count as purely subjective experience in this sense. Stein claims that sensory perception of the surrounding world is already a level of communal experience. In order to call a perception objective, "the flow of sensory data must exhibit a specific arrangement" (Stein 2000: 146). If the transition from purely subjective experience to objective experience is to take place, the experienced content must, in principle, be accessible to others. It cannot be exclusively private and unrepeatable. Objectivity—understood in the very sense of something's "being an object"—is, at its lowest and most basic form, intersubjective verifiability. To constitute an experience as being *of an object* is to say that "[t]he arrangement [of sensations] can impinge upon other subjects, and can bring it about that within the sensory processes that each one has for himself of [*sic*] herself, an object is constituted that is common to them all. With this is established the possibility of an object apprehension as a communal experience" (Stein 2000: 147). Still, this is the lowest form of community. Even though my perceptions of the world bear this trait, not all perception is communal in a robust sense.

Just as communal experience possesses a distinctive noetic sense, i.e., the first-person plural form of givenness, so too, Stein claims, it possesses a distinctive noematic sense. Every experience, *qua* experiencing, is private, but communal experience has a special feature. "It has a *sense*, and by virtue of that sense it claims to count for something lying beyond the private experiencing, something subsisting objectively, through which it is rationally substantiated" (Stein 2000: 135f.). Stein will speak of the "private veneer" that surrounds the shared core of communal experiences (2000: 136). In other words, the noema of communal experience possesses a sense indicating its status as a shared object. Admittedly, the individual experiencing is different from subject to subject, despite the shared object. Stein writes, "the sense-content of each of the individual experiences applying to this

correlate is *idealiter* the same, notwithstanding the private veneer that encloses it at any given time" (2000: 136). For example, I may feel the pain of the loss of our commander more acutely than you do. However, there is a single noematic sense to the experience that is shared between us.

Upon closer investigation, this claim is relatively uncontroversial. Consider the aforementioned example of perception. When we perceive the physical world, we always perceive it from different perspectives by virtue of the fact that our bodies cannot be in the same place at the same time. If you and I are perceiving a cup on a table, there are multiple perceivers, multiple acts of perception, multiple perspectives on the cup, and the contents of each of our acts are diverse. However, the ideal sense (*Sinn*) of the experience, as what is cognitively available to subject, is identical. The phenomenological claim is this; when we perceive and talk about the same thing, the content, or 'sameness,' is the identical *sense* that we intend in each of our diverse acts. To return to communal experience and the example of the loss of the commander, every member of the group grieves; every member's act is distinct from every other member's; however, "they all feel 'the same' grief" insofar as there is one identical sense shared amongst the diverse experiences (Stein 2000: 135).

Stein's contention is that there is an ideal noematic sense that communal experiences possess. This sense marks the content of each experience as part of a shared content. Still, one might ask what further qualifies intentional content as "communal" on her account. What counts for the complete intentional content of a communal experience is an open question, one that Stein's analysis raises but does not fully answer. It will be helpful to make a distinction here. There are two questions we can ask vis-à-vis communal experience. (1) What must individual experiences be like if they are to be considered shared, or communal? (2) How is the object of communal experience constituted? In response to the first question, Stein identifies plural noetic and noematic senses that are ideally the same. Individuals experiences with these senses count as shared. To put it slightly differently, if Tom and Gina each have an individual experience of event *E* and their consciousness of *E* possesses a plural noetic correlate that implicates both Tom and Gina as subjects, and if a plural noematic sense is a part of the composition of the object of *E*, then Tom and Gina may be said to share an experience.

In response to the second question, Stein appears to insist that the full communal content is a constituted unity. Speaking again of the army unit's grief, she writes, "[w]e feel the grief as something belonging to the unit, and in the fact that we're doing that, through this grief we're calling for the grief of the unit to be realized" (2000: 137). The constitution of the communal object, in our case an act of grieving that realizes the community's grief *per se*, is an intersubjective affair. "[A] whole series of currents of consciousness contributes to its coalescence" (Stein 2000: 137). She also insists that the constitution of the communal content is an ongoing processes. "It isn't something instantaneous. It develops in a continuity of experiencing during an interval and shows all sorts of qualitative fluctuations within its unity" (2000: 136). The noematic intentional correlate of the communal experience is a constituted unity. It is constituted out of the individual experiences of the multifarious members, those implied in the subjective correlate, and the

content of the communal content undergoes changes as it receives more and more input. Just as the intentional object of visual perception changes as the experience is deepened, when, for example, I walk around the object and examine it more closely, so too the intentional content of communal experience fluctuates as more and more members contribute to its coalescence.

Throughout this process, some aspect of the experience—viz., the shared *Sinn*—must remain, in principle, potentially available to all of the members of the community. As Stein puts it, "[T]he sense of the grief that applies to the unit's loss can be experienced, in principle, by any member" (2000: 136). However, the *communal content* itself is a constituted unity. In fact, some member of the group may not have the communal experience. A member of the military unit may be imprisoned behind enemy lines and unaware of the leader's death, and thus not experience the communal content. Still, the communal content that coalesces out of the individual experiences is, in principle, accessible to any member of the community. In the case of the prisoner who does not know of the leader's death, we may still say that he belongs to the community because he is implicated in the plural noetic sense of the communal experience even if he never experiences the communal noema and doesn't get to contribute to its constitution.

The picture of communal content that Stein draws is of an object that is motivated by the experiences of members of the group. And yet, we must admit that the motivated object may never come to fulfillment in the experience of any individual. One might then ask how many members of the group must have the experience in order for it to *count* as a communal experience. However, we must realize that communal experience, and its coming to fruition, is not a question of numbers. For Stein, the fulfillment of the rationally motivated communal content in experience is at stake, not its reaching a critical mass of community members. When she writes, "the sense of the grief that applies to the unit's loss can be experienced, in principle, by any member," note that it need not be experienced by every or even most members (2000: 136). In other words, we should not begin with the assumption that the experience must reach a certain percentage of the group in order to qualify as communal experience. Instead, the appropriate question is what must obtain in order for one to say that the communal content of experience reaches fulfillment. Her rather lengthy answer deserves quoting in full:

> If none of the members feels the appropriate grief, then you've got to say that the loss isn't correctly appreciated by the unit. If even *one* member has realized within himself the rationally required sense-content, then that no longer holds: there the one is feeling "in the name of the unit," and in him the unit has satisfied the claim placed upon it. The experiences of the others aren't eliminated by this. They all share in the assembling of the communal experience; but that which was *intended* in all of them came *to fulfillment* in the experience of this one alone. (2000: 136f.)

In Stein's view, just so long as one member of the community realizes the fully motivated communal object within her experience, along with the appropriate noetic and noematic senses, the community has the experience. If, on the other hand, every member of the army unit were to grieve only over what the loss of the commander

means to her as an individual, then we could say that the community fails to have the appropriate experience.[6]

To conclude on the topic of communal content, I would like to clearly distinguish two issues and how Stein does, or does not, deal with them. The first issue is the question of what are shared experiences like? Stein identifies plural senses on the noetic and noematic side, which indicate the experience's being shared. Beyond the senses of these experiences, she indicates that there is one object of a communal experience, which is motivated through the sharing of these experiences. Its constitution is an intersubjective process. However, she is silent on the matter of what intentional structures make shared sense and shared objects possible. However, I contend that, as valuable as having a full account of communal intentional content would be, the preceding analyses, when they accompany her description of the communal current of experience, will be sufficient to ground my criticism of Gilbert. The second issue, which should not be confused with the first, is the question of when it is legitimate to say that a community has indeed had an experience. To this, Stein replies that just so long as one member of the group realizes the "rationally required sense-content" within his experience, the community has the experience (2000: 137). This brings us to the following question: is there a communal stream of experience?

The Communal Current of Experience

Thus far I have discussed how Stein expounds that communal experience differs from private experience with regard to the subject and the content of the experience. The communal subject is the subjective correlate of experiences given in the first-person plural form. Communal experience implicates a plurality of subjects as its owner, not just an individual person. The communal content is marked by an essential noematic sense of the object's belonging to the community in question. The full communal content coalesces into a unity of sense out of the experiences of the members of the group, and it is fulfilled just so long as one member has the rationally motivated communal experience. I have sought to show that, properly understood, these claims are uncontroversial. However, Stein makes a further, more controversial claim, viz., that "we can justifiably talk about one *experiential current of the community*" (2000: 140). There is a communal current of experience into which the communal experiences are integrated. I now turn to this claim.

This assertion is controversial because, on the face of it, the claim that there is one communal current of experience appears to endorse the independence of a super-individual ego whose experiences would be those of the group. And yet, Stein explicitly rejects this claim. "A community-subject, as analog of the pure ego, does not exist," she tells us (2000: 135). She adds further that "this 'communal consciousness' of ours doesn't constitute any super-individual communal consciousness, as private experiencing and its content constitute a super-individual experiencing and a super-individual content" (2000: 139). It is a tenuous balancing

[6] See Szanto's contribution to this volume where he dwells on the issues of normativity and accuracy that this approach to communal experience raises.

act to try and avoid asserting the independence of a communal ego while maintaining that there *is* a single communal current of experience. Stein's gambit is to distinguish between a current *of experience* and a current *of consciousness*.

In her descriptions of the individual ego, both in *On The Problem of Empathy* and up to this point in "Individual and Community," she did not need to distinguish between the current of experience and the current of consciousness. It was unnecessary, she claims, because here "the term consciousness in the usual manner of speaking extended from the moment of the experience" (2000: 140). In the individual, the current, or stream, of consciousness is identical with the current of experiences. The use of the aqueous metaphor to describe *the stream* of consciousness is traceable to its principle of unity. A stream of consciousness is a stream because the experiences it comprises are connected in a continual flowing such that the experiencing subject may trace them back to her experiencing ego. In other words, all the experiences in the stream of consciousness are her experiences, and the pure ego is the principle of unity of that stream. The same cannot be said for the communal current of experience and its unity. Stein writes, "[b]ut with communal experience we have to distinguish strictly: here there's no current of consciousness as an originally constitutive flow" (2000: 140). If she is not placing the communal current of experience within its own stream of consciousness, the only alternative is to locate it within individual streams of consciousness.

This fits with what Stein says about the experiencing of the communal subject. The community has experiences, but it is not self-conscious in the same way that the individual is. "The community becomes conscious of itself only in us" (Stein 2000: 139). Only individuals are self-conscious subjects. The difference between an individual and a communal current of experiences is a constitutional one. The communal differs from the individual "through the fact that, as to its constitution, it refers back to the original conscious life of a plurality of subjects" (Stein 2000: 140). We saw this above with the identification of the communal subject as the subjective correlate of experiences given in the first-person plural. Communal experiences are constituted on their noetic and noematic sides with respect to their being experienced and to their content, and the result of these constitutive functions is a unified current of experiences belonging to the community.

The communal current of experience does not permeate the individual current. If it did, there would be no distinguishing between the two. Rather, "what the individual experiences as a member of the community forms the material out of which the communal experiences coalesce," and the same extends to the coalescence of the communal current in the individual current (Stein 2000: 141). The communal current of experience is a constituted current of experience that has its place *within* individual streams of consciousness.

Now, in terms of Stein's view on the relation between individual and communal currents, the situation is this: there is a stream of consciousness that is the individual's conscious life, and there are many experiential currents in that stream. Each of our streams of consciousness contains individual currents and group currents. The group currents of experience are constituted out of those individual experiences with group significance. Those experiences are marked on both the noetic and noematic sides with an essential communal sense. On the noetic side, this

sense implies the givenness of the experience to a plurality of subjects. The subjective correlate of this noetic sense is the communal subject. On the noematic side, there is an essential sense of the intentional object belonging to the community. The experiences of the community are connected by the sharing of these senses. The communal subject constitutes those experiences with these essential traits into a whole and the ideal correlate of this constituted unity is the communal current of experience.

One important question is what enables the cohesion of the communal current of experience. Though Stein does not give a direct answer to this question, I will attempt one on her behalf. First, the repeated noetic and noematic senses themselves function as a kind of cohesion amongst disparate communal experiences. The identity the plural noetic and noematic references—had in different experiences—unifies these experiences across time. In a manner similar to the way in which the first-person givenness of my experiences unify my current of experience, the first-person plural givenness of communal experiences unifies them. To put this in a more systematic way, if experiences *E1* and *E2* are had at time *t1* and *t2* respectively, provided that *E1* and *E2* possess the same first-person plural correlate, they are united in some sense. There is a we-mode of experiencing, as Raimo Tuomela puts it, that unifies communal experience (2007: 13–45).[7] It is important to bear in mind in the next section that individuals may have we-mode experiences without seeing themselves as belonging to the 'we' in question. Of course, we must admit that some communal currents of experience will be more cohesive than others. Some will be strongly unified, others will likely be weak and fragmentary. Though Stein does not state this, I believe she would be committed to the notion that the more solidarity there is amongst members of the community, the deeper their intersubjective bonds, and the more openly and naively they live together while allowing the concerns of the others to become their own, the more cohesive the communal current of experience will be. A more detailed analysis of the cohesion of communal currents of experience would lead to a closer look at the distinction between mass, association, and community. Such an investigation is worth pursuing, but I take it that it is beyond the scope of this article.

What Can Phenomenology Teach us About Intentionalism?

If we return to Gilbert's account of the formation of plural subjects in light of Stein's phenomenology of sociality, a criticism begins to emerge. Gilbert defines plural subjects in terms of a joint commitment to do something together under conditions of common knowledge. All social groups are plural subjects, and all plural subjects arise out of joint commitments as defined above. In describing the basic phenomenon of the social world in this way, she excludes the existence of social groups that (1) people enter without any intention to do so and (2) have no

[7] I would like to borrow this way of speaking from Tuomela without committing myself to any of the particularities of his social ontology. However, there is a fruitful dialogue to be had here as well. Antonio Calcagno has begun just such a discussion (2014: 127–130).

established goal. To utilize Stein's terminology, all of Gilbert's plural subjects are associations (*Gesellschaften*), and none are communities (*Gemeinschaften*). In this concluding section, I wish to argue that people can and do enter into communities without forming intentions to do so and that communities, thus understood, can be the subjects of experiences. If this is the case, then Gilbert's intentionalist thesis is false.

The first point appears to be relatively uncontroversial. The first communities to which we all belong are communities into which we are born. We are thrown, to use the Heideggerrian turn of phrase, into our families, nations, and ethnic communities without any intention on our parts or conceptions of ourselves as belonging to them. In our earliest years, we belong to these communities before we are capable of forming intentions and before we can conceive of ourselves as belonging to them—which is Gilbert's "intentionalist" criterion. Only when we are older do we have the choice of leaving these communities, to whatever extent that is possible. I may deliberately refuse any communication with my family; I may surrender my passport and denounce my citizenship; I may do nothing to pursue and continue the traditions of my ethnic group and may even choose to identify with the traditions of another. However, these are examples of intentionally leaving communities into which I never entered intentionally, especially not by the creation of a joint commitment under conditions of common knowledge.

This being the case, what is the communal bond? What forms community? Is it mere proximity? An answer lies with Stein's phenomenology of living together. Remember that for Stein "living together" involves some form of sharing and communication of emotional and mental life. When people live together, in Stein's sense, they are open to one another's needs, desires, accomplishments, and attitudes. This primary openness to others is solidarity and is the fundamental glue that holds communities together. Here is Stein:

> First of all it must be said that the solidarity of individuals, which becomes visible in the influence of the attitudes of one upon the life of the others, *is formative of community* in the highest degree. To put it more precisely: Where the individuals are "open" to one another, where the attitudes of one don't bounce off of the other but rather penetrate him and deploy their efficacy, there a communal life *subsists,* there the two are members of one whole; and *without* such a reciprocal relationship community isn't possible. (2000: 214)

Solidarity is the relationship between individuals that permits the kind of openness to others that community requires. If there is no open relationship between individuals, community cannot emerge. Solidarity becomes visible in the interdependence and interaction of attitudes between individuals. If the reciprocal, interpenetrating relationship of solidarity is not present, it "does away with the possibility of any common lifepower or any common surrounding world—in short, of any development of a unitary super-individual personality" (Stein 2000: 214). Furthermore, she writes, "[i]nstead of monadic closure, community demands open and naïve commitment: not separated living but common living, fed from common sources and stirred by common motives" (2000: 215). Communities are constituted out of interactions and relationships between individuals. As such, they require a

certain degree of intersubjective openness. Most importantly for this article, I can see no reason why the openness between individuals that binds them together into communities must be undertaken intentionally.

The second point for which I wish to argue here is that communities to which we belong without any intention to do so on our part can be subjects of experiences. Above we saw Stein develop an account of the communal subject as the plural subjective correlate of experiences. That is, the community is the subject of experiences that are "ours," as opposed to "mine". In such cases, where the noetic reference of an experience refers back to a plurality of individuals, it is incorrect to say, "I had that experience". Rather, it must be admitted that, "[w]e had that experience". Communal subjectivity, understood in this way, extends to the kinds of communities just mentioned, those formed out of a living together based on solidarity.

Imagine a family that has lost a son, and the rest of the family consists of a husband, wife, and two daughters. When this family mourns the loss of the son, there is a collective grieving and a communal subject. The loss of the son will have a subjective correlate that refers to all four members of the family. While the mother and father clearly undertook a joint commitment to be married and to establish their family, the daughters are members of the family, and thus the communal subject, regardless of their intentions.

Gilbert might object that she has said that individual must "see themselves in a particular way in order to constitute a collectivity," and since the daughters in this case "see themselves" as members of the family, they meet the intentionalist requirement of her plural subject theory (1989: 12). However, there are two responses to this: first, the daughters may currently see themselves as members of the family, but their entrance into the family was not the result of a joint commitment under conditions of common knowledge on their part. Therefore, even if they see themselves as members of the communal subject now, the communal subject's creation does not meet Gilbert's requirements. And, if there, nevertheless, *is* a group that does not meet her criteria, the criticism stands.[8] Second, alter the example so that one of the daughters is estranged from the family and no longer sees herself as a member of it. Even then, it is possible—indeed even likely—that the death of her brother will affect her *as a member of the family*. The subjective correlate of the experience includes her whether she likes it or not.[9] It may affect her as an *estranged member* of the family, but I take it that this is a way of belonging to the family. Thus, since communities can and do form without meeting Gilbert's intentionalist requirements, and since these communities can be the plural subjects of experiences, the intentionalist thesis must be rejected.

[8] Thank you to the anonymous reviewer for this poignant phrasing.

[9] Even though this claim has implications for debates regarding collective responsibility and guilt, I do not wish to go into these here. Suffice it to say that I hold the following. If a person intentionally and explicitly removes herself from membership in a group, she absolves herself from collective guilt and responsibility for actions done by the group after she leaves it. However, I take it that it is still possible for an experience—especially an emotional one—to affect her *as a member of the group* even after she leaves it.

Conclusion

Our initial living together as members of communities is marked by the kind of openness that Stein describes in the following passage. "*Mind* (*Geist*) is a going out from yourself, an openness, in a twofold sense: openness for an objective world, which is *experienced;* and openness for someone else's subjectivity, someone else's mind, *along with* which the objective world is *experienced* and *lived* in common" (2000: 295f.). To be a minded individual is to be open to the object-world in which we live and that we mutually constitute as objective, and it is to be open to other individuals. To be a conscious subject or a person is to be open to others and live in a communal relation with them. The openness that is the communal relation is prior to associations that we form to achieve common goals.

A remarkable feature of our naïve openness to other individuals is not just that we may form joint intentions with other naïvely open subjects in order to achieve a common goal. We may also close off this open relation. Community is intentionalist, not in the sense that it requires an intention for its inception, but in the sense that we may intentionally withdraw from it. We may intentionally close ourselves off from the lives, minds, desires, and needs of others by facing them in a mechanical manner. "Whoever locks himself up inside himself, whoever won't let the abundance of his inner life become efficacious outwardly, can't be considered an organ of the community and doesn't open up access for it to the sources from which it can be supplied with propellant powers" (Stein 2000: 222). Openness to others is the relation that is essential to the existence of true communities. The danger of over emphasizing membership in certain social groups is that we reify the associational relation, the relation to others as that of a subject to an object, and in doing so dehumanize those to whom we are related. This is, of course, not a necessary feature of associations, but it is a possibility that we must keep in mind.

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