Interpersonal Responsibilities and Communicative Intentions

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When they interact in everyday situations, people constantly create new fragments of social reality: they do so when they make promises or agreements, but also when they submit requests or answer questions, when they greet each other or express gratitude. This type of social reality 'in the small,' that we call interpersonal reality, is normative in nature as all other kinds of social reality; what makes it somewhat special is that its normativity applies to the very same persons who create it in their interactions. We first show that interpersonal reality can be accounted for in terms of a suitable concept of interpersonal responsibility, which in turn can be understood as a form of second-personal responsibility (in Darwall's sense), intentionally co-constructed by two or more agents for themselves. Then we introduce certain significant subspecies of interpersonal responsibility, namely mutual and joint responsibility, and compare them with Gilbert's notion of joint commitment. Finally we discuss how relationships of interpersonal responsibility can be brought about through communicative acts, understood as actions performed with underlying communicative intentions.

1. Introduction

When they interact in everyday situations, people constantly create new fragments of social reality. They do so when they make promises or agreements, but also when they submit requests or answer questions, when they greet each other or express gratitude. Sometimes pieces of social reality are produced without uttering a word, like for example when one keeps a door open for somebody while smiling to mean "After you, please." As we have argued elsewhere (Carassa & Colombetti 2013), this type of social reality 'in the small,' which we call *interpersonal reality*, is normative in nature and thus, in this respect, does not differ from other kinds of social reality. What makes interpersonal reality somewhat special is that its normativity is, so to speak, contractual, in that it applies to the very same persons who create it in their interactions. This is not the case with other types of social reality, like for example the world of etiquette, whose norms are understood, by those who endorse them, as being binding also for those who do not actively participate in its creation.

Interpersonal reality is so pervasive in our everyday lives that understanding how people actually create and modify it is an important matter. Two main issues concerning interpersonal reality deserve clarification. First, what is the nature of its normativity? And second, how is such normativity actually created in everyday interactions? In our past work (Carassa & Colombetti 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2013) we proposed to understand interpersonal reality in terms of Margaret Gilbert's concept of a *joint commitment to do something as a body* (Gilbert 1989, 1996, 2000, 2006), which appeared to fit our goals for two main reasons: first, because joint commitments entail the kind of normative relationships (like bipolar obligations and rights) that we take to be typical of interpersonal reality; and second, because Gilbert's conditions for the creation of joint commitments (i.e., that the relevant parties mutually express their readiness to be jointly

committed, in conditions of common knowledge) lie in the range of what people engaged in ordinary communicative interactions can do.

In furthering our analysis we partially departed from Gilbert's approach for a number of reasons that we shall clarify later on. To capture the collective normativity of interpersonal reality we have introduced a new concept, to wit, *interpersonal responsibility*, which we understand as a species of Darwall's concept of second-personal responsibility (Darwall 2006). More precisely, we shall argue that interpersonal reality is constituted by relationships of interpersonal responsibility, which in turn can be understood as those relationships of second-personal responsibility that are intentionally co-constructed by two or more agents for themselves.

If interpersonal reality is analysed in terms of relationships of interpersonal responsibility, the second issue we mentioned before now becomes, how do agents concretely create such relationships in their everyday interactions? The answer we shall submit is that agents bring about interpersonal responsibilities through communicative interactions, thanks to the particular intentional structure that is distinctive of communicative acts.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 we define interpersonal reality in terms of relationships of interpersonal responsibility. In Section 3 we analyse certain special configurations of interpersonal responsibility, which we call *mutual* and *joint responsibility*. In Section 4 we compare these concepts with Gilbert's notion of joint commitment. In Section 5 we discuss how relationships of interpersonal responsibility can be actually brought about by communicative acts, understood as actions performed with underlying communicative intentions. Finally, in Section 6 we draw some conclusions and delineate directions for future work.

2. Interpersonal reality

By definition, we consider *interpersonal reality* as the fragment of social reality that two or more agents co-construct for themselves. We follow John Searle (1995, 2010) in understanding social reality, in general, as a matter of collectively accepting or recognising positive and negative "deontic powers," that is, normative relationships of bipolar obligation, right, entitlement, and the like. Searle suggests that the type of acceptance required for the construction of the social world is a form of collective intentionality, which is not reducible to personal intentionality even in conditions of common belief. He has defended this position in many writings, at least since his paper on collective intentions and actions (Searle 1990); in *Making the Social World*, however, he clearly distinguishes between a stronger form of collective intentionality, that he calls *cooperation*, and a weaker form, that he calls *collective recognition* (Searle 2010: 56–57):

> «For example, in an actual transaction when I buy something from somebody and put money in their hands, which they accept, we have full-blown cooperation. But in addition to this intentionality, we have prior to the transaction and continuing after the transaction an attitude toward the pieces of paper of the type that I am placing in the hands of the seller, that we both recognize or accept the pieces of paper as money, and indeed, we accept the general institution of money as well as the institution of commerce. As a general point, institutional structures require *collective recognition* by the participants in the institution in order to function, but particular transactions within the institution require *cooperation* of the sort that I have been describing.»

The point that Searle is making here is that creating a new piece of social reality involves more than what is required to recognise social reality which has been created elsewhere. It is the former type of social reality, which is cooperatively co-constructed by two or more agents, that we call "interpersonal reality." In other words, interpersonal reality is constituted by those normative

relationships that are created by the very same agents who are bound by them; typical examples are the normative relationships resulting from promises, agreements, and the like.

Normative relationships may take different forms, which can be analysed drawing inspiration from Hohfeld's treatment of legal relationships (Hohfeld 1923). In particular we find it useful to distinguish between two levels of normativity. The first level, that we call *deontic* (from the Greek *déon*, duty), concerns what is obligatory, permissible, impermissible, etc., for an agent to do, in view of the normative relationships that currently bind him or her to another agent.[1] The second level, that we call *kratic* (from the Greek *krátos*, power), concerns an agent's capacity to create new normative relationships, which in turn may pertain to the deontic or to the kratic level.

Both deontic and kratic relationships are *bipolar* or *directed*,[2] in the sense that they relate two agents holding complementary positions, which we respectively call the *debtor* and the *creditor* of the relationship. An *obligation*, for example, is a deontic relationship of some agent *A* (the debtor of the obligation) to another agent *B* (the creditor of the obligation), which is satisfied if, and only if, *A* performs an action of a given type. The same deontic relationship, viewed from the creditor's position, can be described as *B*'s *right* against *A*, that *A* performs the action. In Hohfeld's terms, *A*'s obligation and *B*'s right are *correlative*: as such they should not be regarded as two different normative relationships, but rather as the descriptions of the same relationship from two different viewpoints (the debtor's and the creditor's, respectively).[3] Kratic relationship have an analogous structure. For example, *A* may have the stand to order *B* to do *X*, thus creating an obligation of *B* to *A* to do *X*; in such a case we say that *A* has the *power* over *B* to order that *B* does *X*, or that *B* is *liable* to *A* concerning orders to do *X*. Again, the two descriptions are correlative, in the sense that they describe the same relationship from the debtor's and the creditor's point of view.

Human beings can be bound by different types of normative relationships (moral, social, legal, political, and so on), which differ in many respects and in particular in the processes through which they are brought about. By definition, *interpersonal* normative relationships (like the obligations arising from promises and agreements) are created by the same agents that are bound by them. For example, if Ann and Bob agree to go dancing together next Saturday night, the two of them are both the agents who intentionally create the agreement, and those who are bound by it. On the contrary, normative relationships that are not interpersonal are usually purported, by those who collectively create them, to bind a wider set of agents, whether or not these intend to

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[1] For simplicity's sake we limit our treatment to situations involving two agents, but nothing seems to prevent a generalisation to larger groups.

[2] We do not deny that it may make sense to deal with 'unipolar' or 'undirected' obligations, etc. If at all possible, however, these would not count as normative *relationships*.

[3] It is important not to confuse the creditor of an obligation with a possible *beneficiary* of the action that is owed by the debtor to the creditor. For example, if Ann promises to Bob to bring him a bottle of ice wine from Canada, and her promise is accepted, then an obligation is created, with Ann as the debtor and Bob as the creditor, to the effect that Ann will bring to Bob a bottle of ice wine from Canada. In a slightly different example, Ann may promise to Bob to bring a bottle of ice wine to his sister Claire, whom they both know to be fond of sweet wines. In this case Ann will be obligated *to Bob* to the effect that she brings a bottle of ice wine *to Claire*: in other words, Ann is the debtor and Bob is the creditor of an obligation to perform an action that will mainly benefit a third subject, Claire. Being a beneficiary of an action is different from being the creditor of an obligation to perform the action: even if the person who will mainly benefit from Ann's action is Claire, Ann's promise is a promise to Bob, not to Claire; therefore, if Ann fails to keep her promise, then she violates a deontic relationship that binds her to Bob, not to Claire. This distinction can easily be overlooked because it often happens that the creditor of an obligation is also a beneficiary of the action (although not necessarily the only one): this is constitutive, for example, of promissory obligations.

be so bound; this appears to be typical of social, legal, and moral norms,[4] to which people are considered to be liable even if they do not participate in making them.

All normative relationships, whether deontic or kratic, concern the fact that the debtor is *accountable* or *responsible to* the creditor in a way or another. For example, saying that *A* is obligated to *B* to do *X* is equivalent to saying that *A* is responsible to *B* for doing *X*; and saying that *A* has the power to order to *B* to do *X* is equivalent to saying that *B* will be responsible to *A* for doing *X* if *A* so orders. This suggests that we can take a suitable concept of *being responsible to* as a primitive, in terms of which all normative concepts can be defined.

The concept of responsibility has been extensively analysed in the literature (see for example Fischer 1986; Scanlon 1998, Ch. 6; Franken Paul et al. 1999; Cane 2002). A crucial distinction is between *historic* (or backward-looking) and *prospective* (or forward-looking) responsibility. Historic responsibility concerns something that happened in the past; for example, if one says that parents are responsible for the misconduct of their children, what is at stake is historic responsibility. On the contrary, prospective responsibility has to do with future courses of events; for example, saying that parents are responsible for the safeness of their children concerns prospective responsibility. In this paper we are only concerned with prospective responsibility (which, for the sake of brevity, we shall simply call "responsibility").

In our view the concept of responsibility that can best serve as the starting point for the analysis of interpersonal reality is Stephen Darwall's notion of responsibility as a second-personal concept (Darwall 2006). According to Darwall, *responsibility to* (i.e., the relationship between an agent and another agent, to whom the former is answerable for something) is one of four irreducible, logically related concepts which, besides responsibility, include *practical authority*, *valid claim or demand*, and *second-personal reason for acting*. In short, the logical connections between the four concepts can be summarised as follows: an agent, *A*, is responsible to another agent, *B*, for doing *X*, if and only if *B* has the practical authority to address to *A* a valid claim or demand that *A* does *X*; in turn, *B*'s valid claim or demand constitutes a second-personal reason for *A* to do *X* (see for example Darwall 2009: 142-143). In particular, practical authority can be regarded as the correlative of responsibility (Darwall 2009: 141):

> "If one person has practical authority with respect to another, then this would seem to mean, not just that the latter has a reason ... for acting as the former directs, but also that the latter has some responsibility to the former for doing so, that the latter is, in some way or other, answerable to the former."

Darwall's concept of practical authority concerns both the deontic and the kratic level. One of Darwall's favourite examples, namely, the practical authority we all have to demand of anybody that they remove their foot from on top of ours (Darwall 2006: 5ff.) is an instance of a second-personal right concerning the integrity of our body, and therefore pertains to the deontic level. On the contrary our practical authority to partake in transactions like promises of agreements (Darwall 2011) is an instance of second-personal power (i.e., the capacity to create new second-personal relationships) and thus pertains to the kratic level.

Beyond the distinction between the deontic and the kratic level, another important difference can be introduced by borrowing two terms from the legal tradition.[5] Both the rights concerning body

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[4] We understand that the extent to which a certain type of normative relationship can be qualified as "moral" or "non-moral" may be controversial. Our use of the term is coherent with Strawson's remark that qualifying something as "moral" typically involves an impersonal point of view: «What we have here is, as it were, resentment on behalf of another, where one's own interest and dignity are not involved; and it is this impersonal or vicarious character of the attitude, added to its others, which entitle it to the qualification 'moral'.» (Strawson 1962/1993: 84).

integrity and the powers to participate in transactions are *erga omnes*, in the sense that they are rights against and powers over everybody. On the contrary, the normative relationships brought about by a successful transaction are *inter partes*, in the sense that they bind only those agents involved in the transaction.[6]

It follows from what we have said so far that we regard interpersonal reality as constituted by relationships of responsibility, and in particular by those relationships of responsibility that are *inter partes* as clarified above. A normative relationship of this kind we call an *interpersonal responsibility*; in other words, an interpersonal responsibility is a relationship of responsibility that is collectively constructed by those agents who are bound by it. Moreover, by the term *interpersonal authority* we denote the correlative of interpersonal responsibility.

The fact that interpersonal responsibility is a collective construction of its parties has at least two important consequences. The first is that an agent can incur an interpersonal responsibility only intentionally; more precisely, the creation of an interpersonal responsibility (and of its correlative interpersonal authority) requires the intentional contributions of both parties[7]. The second consequence is that a relationship of interpersonal responsibility can be successfully created only if this is common knowledge of its parties. Indeed, *A* can properly regard themself as the debtor of a relationship of interpersonal responsibility to *B* if, and only if, *B* regards themself as the creditor of the same relationship. This is not the case with all types of responsibility: for example, Bob may consider himself as responsible of the well-being of his old father irrespective of the fact that the latter does or does not hold Bob to be so responsible; but responsibilities of this type do not involve a 'contractual' or 'transactional' relationship between a debtor and a creditor—in a word, they are not instances of interpersonal responsibility.

3. Interpersonal, mutual, and joint responsibility

In the previous section we have seen that relationships of interpersonal responsibility are intrinsically collective, in the sense that an agent can regard herself as the debtor of an interpersonal responsibility to another agent if, and only if, the latter regards himself as the creditor of the same relationship. There is a further sense in which interpersonal responsibilities are collective, namely, that creating them requires that the parties carry out a suitable collective activity which, as we shall argue in Section 5, basically consists in performing communicative acts. From this, however, one should not conclude that the *content* of an interpersonal responsibility (i.e., the activity or state of affairs for which the debtor is accountable to the creditor) is itself collective; in fact, this may or may not be the case, depending on the situation. In this section we turn to this issue; in particular we shall analyse certain significant configurations of interpersonal responsibilities, that we call mutual and joint responsibilities, which differ from the point of view of the 'allocation of agency' to the parties.

Let us consider three different examples to be used as paradigmatic scenarios in the following discussion:

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[5] We do not claim that our use of the two terms closely corresponds to current legal practice. It seems to us, however, that we are faithful to their literal meaning.

[6] By this we do not intend to deny that every member of the 'moral community' has the 'representative authority' to recognise the normative relationships brought about by the transaction (see Darwall 2012).

[7] Clearly an agent may accrue a responsibility unintentionally: for example, accidentally causing a damage makes one responsible for compensation; but this would not be a case of *interpersonal* responsibility as we have defined it.

1. After dinner, Bob has the habit of smoking a Cuban cigar sitting on the sofa. One day, while he is puffing a gigantic *maduro*, he says to Ann, "I promise that starting tomorrow I'll go smoking in the garden." To which Ann answers, "Very good idea, Bob!"

2. Ann says to Bob, "If you do the laundry, I'll make dinner," and Bob accepts (see Gilbert 2000: 50).

3. Ann and Bob are spending a few days in Buenos Aires. They enter a dancing hall: "Shall we tango?" asks Bob; "Oh, I'd love to," answers Ann.

These examples have something in common: in all cases Ann and Bob agree on a course of action (at least in some sense of "agreeing"). But there are also differences: in case 1, there is nothing that Ann is required to do or to refrain from doing; in case 2, Ann and Bob are required to carry out two independent courses of action in parallel; and in case 3, there is one collective activity for Ann and Bob to perform, each of them doing their own part. How are we going to make sense of these differences?

In case 1, Bob promises to Ann that from the following day he will go in the garden to smoke his after-dinner cigar, and Ann accepts the promise. We regard an act of promising to do X as an offer, made by the promisor to the promisee, to the effect that the promisor takes responsibility to do X, on condition that the promisee accepts the correlative authority (i.e., the role of the creditor of the responsibility).[8] In case 1 a relationship of interpersonal responsibility of Bob to Ann is successfully created; while this responsibility is irreducibly collective (as we have argued in Section 2), its content involves no collective activity. It is often remarked that even with unilateral promises, like the one of our example, the promisee is not completely 'passive,' but is required to do certain things, or at least to abstain from doing certain things; for example, the promisee is supposed not to sabotage the promisor's attempts to fulfil his promise. But while this is arguably true, it is not sufficient to turn the promisor's unilateral action into an instance of doing something together with the promisee.

Example 2 can be analysed in similar terms. In this case, however, the interaction between Ann and Bob creates two relationships of interpersonal responsibility that are in a sense 'interlocked':

(*i*) the responsibility of Ann to Bob, to the effect that Ann will make dinner, on condition that Bob lives up to (*ii*); and

(*ii*) the responsibility of Bob to Ann, to the effect that Bob will do the laundry, on condition that Ann lives up to (*i*).

We call *mutual responsibilities* two relationships of interpersonal responsibility which are interlocked by conditions of the form (*i*) and (*ii*) above. As the example shows, there can be a situation of mutual responsibility even when there is no collective activity that Ann and Bob are required to do together; in other words there may be no activity X such that Ann and Bob could reasonably describe what they are doing by saying, "*We* are doing X."

Finally, concerning example 3 we say that Ann and Bob are *jointly responsible* for doing something. More precisely,

(*i*) Ann is responsible to Bob, to the effect that Ann and Bob dance tango together, with Ann giving an appropriate contribution, on condition that Bob lives up to (*ii*); and

(*ii*) Bob is responsible to Ann, to the effect that Ann and Bob dance tango together, with Ann giving an appropriate contribution, on condition that Ann lives up to (*i*).

It should be noted that there is a substantial difference between joint responsibilities and non-joint mutual responsibilities, which wholly resides in the structure of their contents (i.e., in the

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8 This implies that a promise succeeds only if the promisee accepts it (see for example Darwall 2011).

structure of the activities that the agents are required to carry out). In example 2 (a case of non-joint mutual responsibilities), Ann is responsible to Bob for achieving success in making dinner, and Bob is responsible to Ann for separately achieving success in doing the laundry. This means that the failure of one of the two agents to carry out their part would not entail a failure of *both* agents. On the contrary in case 3 each agent is responsible to the other one for their joint success in dancing the tango, and this means that the failure of either agent to carry out their part will *eo ipso* constitute a failure of the collective enterprise. We can therefore expect that in the two situations the agents will cope with possible difficulties in different ways. In case 2, for example, if it turns out that there is no laundry powder left, only Bob (and not Ann) is responsible for getting some; of course Ann may have a personal reason to help Bob to do so, but this in not entailed by their agreement. In case 3, on the contrary, if Bob faces a difficulty in doing his part, their joint responsibility is a reason for Ann to help him, because she is responsible (as is Bob) for securing success of the whole joint activity.[9]

There is a point in our definition of joint responsibility that may seem problematic, that is, the idea of "giving an appropriate contribution." How is an agent going to establish, in a specific situation, what contribution is appropriate? We believe that there is no simple answer to this question. In certain situations, the nature and extension of an agent's contribution to a collective activity may be established in details in advance; in other situations, the agent will have to creatively cope with unforeseen circumstances. In any case, understanding what kind of contribution is appropriate in different situations is part of the human competence to cooperate, which constitutes a key concern for the study of joint action at least from Hutchins's seminal book on distributed cognition (Hutchins 1995).

4. Interpersonal responsibility and joint commitment

Our concept of interpersonal responsibility, and the subordinate concepts of mutual and joint responsibility, appear to be closely related to Margaret Gilbert's notion of joint commitment (Gilbert 1989, 1996, 2000, 2006): both interpersonal responsibilities and joint commitments involve normative relationships, are intrinsically collective, and are intentionally created by groups of agents. However, there are a number of significant differences between our position and Gilbert's, which we shall investigate in this section. Such differences concern three main points:

- we believe that interpersonal normativity presupposes some form of pre-existing second-personal authority;
- while joint commitment always involves doing something as a body, the concept of interpersonal responsibility separates the collectiveness of a responsibility relationship from the collectiveness of its content (see the previous section);
- even when its content is a collective activity, interpersonal responsibility does not presuppose a notion of "doing something as a body," which seems to us somewhat problematic.

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[9] The examples discussed in this section do not exhaust all significant patterns of distribution of interpersonal responsibilities among different agents. Another interesting type of situation arises when a group of agents collectively take responsibility for some state of affairs toward a creditor, who in turn may be a single agent or a group. For example, Emily and Farah may agree with George that the two of them will take care of George's garden; then Emily and Farah share the position of debtor in an interpersonal responsibility, whose creditor is George. To analyse how the collective responsibility of Emily-and-Farah to George entails interpersonal responsibilities of Emily to Farah and of Farah to Emily is an interesting issue, that we have to leave for another occasion.

Let us consider the first point. In his book on the second-person standpoint, Darwall (2006: 202) argues that

> «the capacity of individuals to make agreements and form plural subjects depends upon their already presupposing one another's second-personal standing in seriously addressing each other in the first place. … It is the terms of this standing as mutually accountable persons in general that then gives them the authority to obligate themselves especially to one another through the terms of their agreement.»

Rephrasing Darwall's remark in our terminology, agents are capable of producing interpersonal reality at the deontic level (i.e., they can "obligate themselves especially") because they are already related by suitable second-personal powers at the kratic level (i.e., they already stand as "mutually accountable persons in general"). This contrasts with Gilbert's treatment of joint commitments, whose creation does not seem to presuppose any form of second-personal normativity.

As far as the second point is concerned, it is important to remark that in Gilbert's view joint commitment always involves doing something as a body (Gilbert 2000: 54):

> «Quite generally, if [two subjects] 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 of "all acting in a way as to constitute a body that does it."»

Now, it is by no means obvious that all the examples discussed in Section 3 can be viewed as cases of doing something as a body. This formula may sound acceptable when it is applied to Ann and Bob dancing tango together,[10] but what about Bob's unilateral promise to stop smoking cigars on the sofa? In this case it appears that Ann and Bob are not going to do anything together. Indeed, Gilbert suggests that in the case of unilateral promises what the two agents jointly commit to do as a body is not carrying out the promised action (which is obviously not the case), but rather upholding the joint decision which constitutes the promise (Gilbert 2006: 221):

> «There is some reason, therefore, to see a typical promise as a joint decision of the promisor and promisee to the effect that the promisor is to act in a certain way. According to the account of joint decisions just given, promises would then be joint commitments to uphold as a body the decision that one party (the so-called promisor) is to do a certain thing.»

Following this line of thought, example 2 (which like example 1 does not involve a joint activity) would be understood in terms of Ann and Bob's joint commitment to uphold as a body the decision that each party is to do a certain thing.

It seems to us, however, that cases like 1 and 2 are far from the sense of doing something together that is present in joint activities like dancing, playing a duet, or rowing a double kayak. In fact, the only way to view all our examples 1 to 3 as cases of doing something together is to shift focus from what can be considered as the primary responsibility of the agents (changing a smoking habit, doing the laundry, making dinner, dancing together), to the secondary responsibility of upholding the joint decision implied in every type of interpersonal responsibility,

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[10] Even in this case, in fact, we doubt that the "as a body" qualification does justice to what actually happens. True, two good tango dancers may reach an ideal flow of coordination, and this will give an observer the impression that the couple form a unit. But this is a third-person view of what is going on: from the point of view of the two dancers, the experience of being two to dance seems to us at least as crucial as the flow of coordination: from the first-person and second-person perspectives, what the two dancers are doing is not likely to appear as something that is done by a single person or body.

thanks to its transactional nature. This logical shift, however, obscures the fundamental differences between the cases we have compared in the previous section.

Finally, regarding the third point, we doubt that the locution "as a body" does justice to the idea that what is involved is a collective activity. According to Gilbert (2009: 180–181),

«There is doubtless more than one way further to articulate the idea of a joint commitment to intend as a body to do something. One way keeps the word "body" in play: roughly, the parties are jointly committed as far as possible to emulate, by virtue of the actions of each, a single body that intends to do the thing in question. ... More briefly: the parties are jointly committed to emulate a single body with a certain intention.»

But there are many cases of collective activities in which the idea of "emulat[ing] … a single body that intends to do the thing in question" does not seem to be right: think for example of competitive activities, like playing a tennis match or engaging in a duel. It seems to us, however, that our conception of interpersonal reality does not require this idea: indeed, when no collective activity is involved our notion of interpersonal responsibility is sufficient to account for the relevant normativity; and when a genuine collective activity is involved, the species of interpersonal responsibility that we have called joint responsibility will do the job.

To complete our comparison, we now want to show that interpersonal responsibilities have a number of fundamental features that Gilbert considers as characteristic of joint commitments. These features can be described as follows:

1. *Obligations of joint commitment.* Joint commitments entail bipolar obligations of each party towards all other parties.

2. *Lack of unilateral rescindability.* Once a joint commitment is made, it is not possible for one of the parties to unilaterally rescind it without at the same time violating the joint commitment.

3. *Simultaneity.* All obligations of a joint commitment come into force simultaneously, when the joint commitment is created.

4. *Interdependence.* All obligations of a joint commitment are binding until all parties live up to them; if a party violates one of her obligations, then the joint commitment typically becomes voidable by the other parties.

As far as the first point is concerned, there are basically two ways in which a relationship of interpersonal (and, more generally, second-personal) responsibility can be regarded as entailing bipolar obligations. The first has to do with the fact that certain responsibilities are already bipolar obligations. More precisely, a responsibility is an obligation every time that it can be discharged only by performing an action of a certain type; for example, if Bob is responsible to Ann to the effect that he waters the flowers while she is away, then Bob can discharge his responsibility only by watering the flowers, and this is equivalent to saying that Bob is obligated to water the flowers. A second way in which a responsibility can entail an obligation is by practical reasoning. For example, suppose that Bob is babysitting little Diana, and is therefore responsible for the girl's safety; now, if suddenly the house goes on fire, Bob is obligated to catch hold of Diana and leave the house immediately. Of course, obligations of this type are highly situation dependent, and it would be impossible to list them all in advance; as remarked by Richardson (1999: 221), an «essential aspect of taking responsibility for something, prospectively, is undertaking to cope with surprises.» In other words, responsibility brings to the foreground the open-endedness of the future.

The impossibility to rescind an interpersonal responsibility unilaterally is part and parcel of its being interpersonal. It is inherent in being a party of an interpersonal normative relationship that one does not have the second-personal power to alter the normative position of the other party

without their consent (more on this in Section 5): for example, in all the cases described in the previous section neither Ann nor Bob could give up their position unilaterally, because this would imply voiding the position of the other party.

Finally, with one-sided interpersonal responsibility (like in the case of a unilateral promise), both simultaneity and interdependence depend on the fact that all relevant obligations derive from a single relationship of interpersonal responsibility, and therefore hold only as far as this is in force. With mutual and joint responsibilities the situation is slightly more complex, because in such cases the obligations derive from multiple relationships of interpersonal responsibility; however, the interlocked logical form of mutual and joint responsibilities is such that the obligations of each party to the other one either stand or fall together.

5. Interpersonal responsibility and communicative intention

As we have argued in the previous sections, to bring about interpersonal responsibilities agents rely on their respective practical authority; we now want to investigate how they can concretely exercise such authority in everyday interactions. Pretheoretically, it appears that agents do so through acts of communication; an agreement, for example, is typically made by performing a sequence of speech acts: an agent makes an initial proposal, to which the addressee may react by an act of acceptance, rejection, or counterproposal. Indeed, such communicative acts need not be linguistic. Suppose for example that Claire keeps a door open for David while smiling to mean "After you, please," and that David smiles back to mean "Thank you"; then in so doing Claire and David bring about a relationship of interpersonal responsibility of Claire to David, to the effect that Claire will keep the door open until David passes through the doorway. But if this is the case, it is important to understand what features of communication essentially relate to the exercise of this form of practical authority.

As we have already observed, practical authority may come in the deontic form of right or in the kratic form of power, and may be *erga omnes* or *inter partes*. For example, the authority to demand of anybody that they remove their foot from on top of ours is licensed by a right *erga omnes* concerning the intangibility of our body. On the contrary, the authority of the creditor of an interpersonal responsibility toward the debtor is a form of right *inter partes*, because it is especially directed to the debtor. Rights of this type derive from transactions (i.e., promises, agreements, etc.) successfully carried out by individual agents thanks to their respective second-personal powers.

Often agents are endowed with special transactional powers that originate in their social or legal position, role in an organisation, and so on: for instance, in some traditional societies parents hold special transactional powers concerning the marriage of their children; in most legal systems the owner of property has the power to sell or donate it; the CEO of a company has the power to sign contracts that are binding for the company; and so on. In this paper we are interested in the powers to partake in everyday processes of creating interpersonal responsibilities (i.e., in processes of promising, agreeing, requesting, inviting, etc.) that all agents have, and are ready to attribute to all other agents, not in virtue of their holding special positions or playing special roles, but just because they fully regard themselves and the others as persons. In other words, we are interested in a special case of Darwall's concept of equal basic second-personal authority (Darwall 2006), which we shall call *interpersonal powers*; we are interested in analysing what such powers consist in, and how they can actually be exercised in everyday interactions.

To fix ideas, let us suppose that Ann intends to bring about a relationship R of interpersonal responsibility to Bob, to the effect that she takes care of Bob's cat while he is away from home. As we have already observed at the end of Section 2, a relationship like R can only be created intentionally: in other words, it is *necessary* for the creation of R that both Ann and Bob intend to

bring it about. There is also a sense, it seems, in which such intentions may be regarded as *sufficient* to create *R*. Indeed, we take it to be part of the human conception of interpersonal normativity that two agents are empowered to collectively create, modify, or rescind any relationship of interpersonal responsibility if, and only if, both of them so intend (at least as far as they fully recognise each other as persons): this is precisely what interpersonal powers amount to. However, there is also a sense in which, by themselves, Ann's and Bob's intentions to create interpersonal normativity are *insufficient* to do so; for example, if for some reason Ann and Bob ignore each other's intention, the relationship cannot come into being.

This apparent contradiction disappears if we distinguish between what is constitutive of interpersonal powers (i.e., that the two parties hold the relevant intentions) and what is needed for such powers to be effectively exercised. To clarify this point, let us go back to the previous example. To create *R* it is not sufficient that Ann and Bob privately intend to do so; it is also necessary that each of them is aware of the other party's intention, and of such awareness itself: in other words, the intentions of both agents must be common knowledge of them. But this is not enough. Given that creating *R* can only be done intentionally, it is also required that the common knowledge of the two relevant intentions is itself achieved intentionally, and that this intention is in turn common knowledge of the two agents.

Although this situation seems very complex, it can be achieved by performing actions that belong to the everyday repertoire of human agents. Firstly, Ann has to perform some action, *x*, with an underlying intention that can be described as follows: in doing *x*,

(*X*) Ann intends that: (*i*), relationship *R* be brought about; (*ii*), intention *X* become common knowledge of Ann and Bob; and (*iii*), intention *X* becoming common knowledge of Ann and Bob will contribute to bring about *R*.

This reflexive intention corresponds to a particular version of what has come to be known as a *communicative intention*, that is, as the intentional structure underlying communicative acts.[11] In particular, a successful execution of action *x* can be described as an *offer*, made by Ann to Bob, to the effect that the two of them bring about *R*.

After Ann has made her offer, it is up to Bob whether to accept it or not. Suppose that Bob wants to accept it; to do so he has to perform an action, *y*, with the following reflexive intention: in doing *y*,

(*Y*) Bob intends that: (*i*), relationship *R* be brought about; (*ii*), intention *Y* become common knowledge of Ann and Bob; and (*iii*), intention *Y* becoming common knowledge of Ann and Bob, together with Ann's intention *X* already being common knowledge of the two of them, brings about *R*.

Again, in doing *y* Bob performs a communicative act, which can be described as an *acceptance* of Ann's offer.

The previous argument justifies the pretheoretical intuition that agents collectively bring about relationships of interpersonal responsibility through the performance of communicative acts. It is important to remark that, by definition, we understand a communicative act as any action that is performed with an underlying communicative intention. This implies that communicative acts need not be linguistic (i.e., realised by uttering a sentence in a natural or artificial language);

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[11] Intentions of similar form were first introduced by Grice (1957) to characterise what he called *non-natural meaning*, and later interpreted by Strawson (1964), with some amendments, as the intentional structure underlying human communication. The communicative intention we specify here is *reflexive*, in the sense that it includes its own common recognition in its conditions of satisfaction (see Airenti et al. 1993 for a defence of the reflexive view of communicative intention).

indeed, we do not conceive of our work as supporting the normativity of *language* (in the line, e.g., of Searle 2007); what we suggest is that the intentional structure of communicative acts, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, plays a crucial role in creating interpersonal normativity. The reason why this is the case, we believe, is that participating in a relationship of interpersonal responsibility requires that the relevant intentions are intentionally made 'overt,' so that they can be shared by the parties. Indeed, we conjecture that the main function of communicative intentions lies in the crucial role they play in building interpersonal normativity; however, an in-depth examination of this issue has to be deferred to another occasion.

It is interesting to compare our view of how interpersonal responsibilities are made with what Gilbert says about the creation of joint commitments. According to Gilbert, to bring about a joint commitment it is necessary and sufficient that the relevant parties express their readiness to be so committed, in conditions of common knowledge. It seems to us that Gilbert's conditions are very similar to ours, if one is willing to interpret her concept of expressing as a communicative act as previously clarified. Even if, as we have remarked in Section 4, there are differences between the concepts of interpersonal responsibility and joint commitment, this similarity should not come as a surprise. Indeed, what makes communication crucial for the creation of interpersonal normativity is its being essentially collective, and this feature is common to both interpersonal responsibility and joint commitment.

To conclude this section, we would like to stress a difference between the exercise of what we have called interpersonal powers and the exercise of other types of powers, associated to social, organisational, or legal positions. In such cases, the actual exercise of power often requires carrying out conventional actions, like pronouncing predefined formulas, signing documents, making certain texts public, and so on. On the contrary, interpersonal powers are exercised not by carrying out conventional procedures, but by performing actions with particular communicative intentions; the reason why this is the case is grounded in the fact that interpersonal responsibilities are intentional and collective.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we have argued that interpersonal reality (i.e., the part of social reality collectively created by certain agents for themselves) consists of relationships of interpersonal responsibility, understood as a species of second-personal responsibility (in Darwall's sense), with the further condition that relationships of interpersonal responsibility are collectively constructed by the same agents who come to be bound by them. We have then analysed certain significant configurations of interpersonal responsibilities (namely, mutual and joint responsibilities), and compared them to Gilbert's concept of joint commitment. Finally, we have argued that interpersonal reality is set up through communicative acts, understood as actions performed with an underlying communicative intention.

Our proposal owes much to the works of both Darwall and Gilbert. From Darwall we take the general idea of second-personal normativity, of which the normativity of interpersonal reality is a special case. From Gilbert we take the basic intuition of what is actually special in interpersonal normativity, namely, the fact that it is an intrinsically collective construction.

We believe that this paper gives two main contributions. The first concerns the introduction of the concept of interpersonal responsibility as the key normative relationship underlying interpersonal reality. Relationships of interpersonal responsibility share crucial properties with joint commitments, but do not presuppose that the agents who are so related do something together in any strong sense. This allows us to reconcile the fact that interpersonal responsibility is inherently collective from the fact that the content of such responsibility need not be a collective activity.

The second contribution is that we bring to the light an important connection between normativity and communication; more precisely, we suggest that the successful performance of certain communicative acts is essentially related to interpersonal normativity. This view may have an important impact on the study of communicative acts. As of today, in fact, there is a sharp separation between naturalistic theories, which are based on a Gricean approach and tend to neglect the normative side of communicative acts, and normativistic theories, which crucially rely on normative concepts in the analysis of communicative acts, but consider the underlying intentions as irrelevant or at least marginal. If we are right, a new approach becomes possible, that recognises the essential role played by communicative intentions in the creation of interpersonal normativity.

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