

RESEARCH ARTICLE

We Heal as One: Collective Intentionality as a Building Block for the Necessary and Urgent Reformation of Economics in the New Normal

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Abstract: I present an alternative to methodological individualism and the assumption of instrumentally rational individuals that dominates much of mainstream economic theorizing. Following mainly Davis' corpus of work on the socially embedded individual, I argue that methodological individualism no longer works, especially when the alternative view of socially embedded individuals holds even stronger explanatory and prescriptive power. The current Coronavirus pandemic experience is used both as a backdrop to this proposed change and as a live case through which collective intentionality is appreciated to be more superior than instrumental rationality. I discuss collective intentionality as a mediating feature of the socially embedded individual to participate in collective action and provide necessary and sufficient conditions, developing a synthesis of magisterial contributions to the literature of collective intentionality in terms of its structure, content, and mode. I also provide a recommendation on how its normative feature can be used in dispensing the art and craft of economics that is in tune with the demands of changing economic realities triggered by the pandemic.

Keywords: Collective intention, rationality, methodological individualism, economic methodology, philosophy of economics

Although showing some slowing down in September 2020, the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has also slowed down the world economy for several months, mainly due to policy interventions like social distancing and targeted re-opening of sectors dependent upon the ability of countries to contain the spread of the virus. The arrival of a vaccine promises a return to normalcy. Although such a vaccine is still in development, states will likely have to rely on policy

interventions to keep the virus at bay while carefully treading the line to promote the economy. Health and economic interests are so closely intertwined—trade-offs in favor of the former seem to be the preference for policy design at a time when economic well-being is dependent on quite literally being free of the virus first. Still, the losses are tremendous: Covid-19 is likely to reduce global economic output by \$8.5 trillion in the next two years, driving more than 34

million people into extreme poverty (United Nations, 2020). Unsurprisingly, the Philippines registers its lowest gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate since 1981, which means its effects are worse than the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Asian financial crisis of 1997, officially ushering the country into a deep recession (Mapa, 2020). The economic toll of the pandemic cannot be ignored.

Politically charged pronouncements, laws, policies, and other similar declarations along with local, community-based, or market-led initiatives designed to “flatten the curve” seem to reflect an undercurrent in the way society is responding to the pandemic. Once the epicenter of the global pandemic, the New York State has virtually flattened the curve by a collective action led by its government. In Andrew Cuomo’s daily briefing, he emphasized how the virus can be kept at bay if and when New Yorkers conform to remain-in-shelter orders. Upon the eventual loosening up of lockdown orders, Cuomo reminded everyone how one’s actions today can influence the direction of the epidemic curve tomorrow, which ultimately refers to how an individual’s action can cause harm to others. Cuomo always reminded New Yorkers of their shared identity and shared values: “New York. Smart. Loving. United. Tough,” which then calls on a kind of collective action towards a shared intention. In 78 days, New York State has indeed flattened the curve (McKinley & Ferre-Sadurni, 2020).

In the Philippines, the battle cry is “We Heal as One,” the official monicker of a legislative act defining the scope and scale of the government’s response to the pandemic. “We Heal as One” expresses a shared intention among Filipinos, that is, to overcome the pandemic collectively as a people. In fact, two laws have been passed by the Philippines legislature in succession, which forms a sequential narrative from healing as one people to “recovering as one”—both of which are preceded by “*Bayanihan*,” the Filipino sense of community and cooperation. All subsequent government and private and community-based narratives were then based on this architecture, along with its prescriptive content of a communal, first-person plural statement of acting together to beat the pandemic regardless of their affiliation or acceptance of the incumbent administration.

More recently, the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly’s General Debates, led by heads of member states, each took their turn to give

their address on multilateralism. Two polar narratives can be derived from the speeches of Presidents Donald Trump of the United States and Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines. Trump declared, “As president, I have rejected the failed approaches of the past, and I am proudly putting America first, just as you should be putting your countries first. That’s okay. That’s what you should be doing” (The White House, 2020, par.20). In other words, Trump nurtured a narrative around the need for a protectionist and inward-looking stance instead of pushing for international cooperation and mutual understanding to steer the world away from a protracted and persistent war against a common, invisible enemy.

On the other side of the spectrum, Duterte emphasized the need for “coordinated international plans and efforts to pursue a common purpose. COVID-19 knows no border. It knows no nationality. It knows no race. It knows no gender. It knows no age. It knows no creed” (Malacañan Palace, 2020, p. 2). His address to the General Assembly underlines the role of cooperation in the form of shared responsibility among all countries in helping “the most vulnerable—those displaced by conflict, persecution, and political instability” (Malacañan Palace, 2020, p. 4). Furthermore, Duterte called on all member states to “work with seamless unity which demands mutual trust and the conviction that we will win or lose together” as he, on behalf of all Filipinos, “rededicate (ourselves) to multilateralism” (Malacañan Palace, 2020, p. 6). As though drawing a sharp contrast with Trump, he stated that “we need the same collective courage that finally made the United Nations a reality 75 years ago” (Malacañan Palace, 2020, p. 1). Suspending any judgment of whether Duterte’s pronouncements on collective action with shared values (e.g., collective courage) and shared intentions (e.g., to beat Covid-19, to help refugees) have internal consistency with the policies and implementation of such policies within the borders of the Philippines, one sees the dichotomy in the narrative between his and Trump’s. On balance, even on the world stage, the trend shows a politico-economic shift in the focus from one that is nationalistic and inward-looking to one of collective pursuit, cooperation, and collaboration, whether these are just statements made to posture or are genuine expressions or otherwise. Such a collective narrative seems to persist, especially given the nature of the health crisis and how the pandemic is insidiously

social both as a problem and uncontroversially its solution.

Even at the level of individuals, the pandemic experience has shown that other-regarding preferences matter in thinking about social distancing and the wearing of masks as an untargeted countermeasure absent any vaccine or treatment protect not only oneself but also promotes the safety of others. Although these new norms have been politicized, individuals who follow these new norms (part of minimum health standards) view doing so not as a political apparatus to signal affiliation with personalities but as an expression of a shared belief in the importance of safety. They do so for themselves, so they can provide others with the same measure of safety and precaution. In the absence of a vaccine, wearing masks and maintaining a social distance allow the people to participate in some collective action to protect each other and even the ones waiting for them at home. After all, it is a fact that the wearing of masks and keeping a social distance help to slow down the spread of the virus (see Li et al., 2020, for example, among many available studies).

The Need for an Updating of Economic's Philosophical Foundations

Global events of this magnitude have the potential of paving the way for new economic thinking as economic realities evolve: the Keynesian paradigm replaced classical liberalism after the Great Depression in the same way neoliberalism challenged the received Keynesian view after the global financial crisis of 2008 (Bowles & Carlin, 2020b). The history of economic thought reveals that some undercurrents take the mainstream when it responds more clearly to the challenges of the time. The marginalist revolution gave birth to neoclassical economics, effectively shifting the focus from the classical political economy of Smith, Ricardo, and Marx, then turning to marginal analysis and general equilibrium of Jevons, Marshall, and Walras towards the 20th century. These turning points in methodological preference of mainstream economists, especially to that of the neoclassical school's prominence prompted by industrialization and a period of sustained economic growth along with advances in mathematical technologies internalized by economists, established itself as the received view until the 20th century (Blaug, 1996).

There is growing interest among economists (though not yet a consensus) that the current pandemic experience will and must prompt the profession to reflect on how economics is done and how we, ultimately, think and talk about the economy (see Bowles & Carlin, 2020a; Szymborska, 2020; *The Economist*, 2020, among others). Sentiment captured in expressions at various levels of society indicates a turning point in the economic rhetoric supported by the pragmatic need for interdependence, cooperation, coordination, and the consideration of other-regarding preferences in the pursuit of survival in the "new normal." Fundamentally, the pandemic experience has magnified—more than ever in the history of economic thought—methodological individualism or the rationality postulate in which individuals are assumed to be atomistic and instrumentally rational, taken as dogma in mainstream economic theorizing, is outdated and inconsistent with current social phenomena.

Where keeping oneself safe and free from the virus is insufficient so long as others are not; where the well-being of one is only possible when the well-being of others is obtained, as a simple conjecture, can no longer be explained by the same conventions mainstream economics imposes on the assumptions made on economic behaviors. Suppose the understanding of individual behavior is misplaced under some archaic notions of instrumental rationality devoid of any normative content. In that case, empirical modeling of economic behavior is, at best, a successful thought experiment driven by mathematical elegance and not of a deepening understanding of economic behavior.

In this paper, I explore the use of collective intentionality following Davis (2003) in his work on the theory of the individual in economics, which takes the individual as socially embedded rather than solely and exclusively atomistic and instrumentally rational in proposing a departure from methodological individualism currently in use in mainstream economics. I argue that revisiting the philosophical underpinnings of economics is long overdue and necessary. A logical place to begin this exercise is in the conception of the individual within the context of others with whom intentions, desires, ambitions, and even actions are shared so long as this individual is understood to be part of a group or, more broadly speaking, a member of society. In following Davis, I also provide a synthesis of collective intentionality that is immediately relevant in economic theory and

objective analysis (i.e., economics as a science) and the practice of economics as an art and craft through policy advice (i.e., normative content of economics). The separation of objective analysis and policy craft are discussed extensively in Colander's body of work on economic methodology, which I also consider in my discussion (see Colander & Su, 2018).

This paper adopts the following structure: the next section outlines methodological individualism and the rationality postulate adopted in mainstream economics theorizing with applications in game theoretic analyses, asymmetric information, social norms, and institutions, highlighting some analytical weaknesses when put to the task of explaining current social phenomena. The subsequent section makes a point on why mainstream economics needs a refresh and a substantive updating of its conception of the individual. The section following discusses collective intentionality as a mediating feature of the socially embedded individual to participate in collective action, identifying necessary and sufficient conditions for collective intentionality. Consequently, I then provide a discussion of the normative content of collective intentionality, which I argue is essential in determining normative judgments in the exercise of policy advice. The penultimate section addresses the pandemic puzzle and advances the proposal to update economic theory so that it may be able to provide objective analysis and policy advice that is in tune with the demands of changing economic realities triggered by the pandemic. The final section briefly concludes.

Methodological Individualism and the Rationality Postulate in Mainstream Economics

Much of mainstream economics theorizing is founded on the assumption that individuals are atomistic and are instrumentally rational. Grounded on methodological individualism is the shared belief and practice among economists that all economic behavior and subsequent analyses of such behavior can and should be understood at the level of individuals seeking to maximize their utility subject to some constraints (Davis, 2002, 2003; Davis & McMaster, 2007; Blaug, 1992). Taken as the starting point and a premise for theory, it becomes a postulate that is not often examined or debated in the development of theoretical models.

The dogma about the individual under the rationality postulate is that a utility maximizer chooses a bundle of goods based on some ordering of preferences partly driven by self-interest drawn from the classical school. The essential condition through which the optimizing individual calculates all possible options and chooses from an array of options that maximize utility is the assumption of complete information and certainty (Blaug, 1992, among others). Although developments in mainstream economics allow uncertainty and varying degrees of information scarcity, it remained an axiomatic proposition to treat such tension with perfect information about the probability distribution of future prices. Economic theories then proceed to claim the assumption that individuals are assumed to have well-behaved sets of preferences and have perfect information on rational expectations of future states and outcomes of choice.

Blaug (1992, p. 230) noted that the "hold of the rationality postulate [is so strong and pervasive] that some have seriously denied that it is possible to construct any economic theory not based on utility maximisation." This also means that the conception of the individual being self-interested with well-behaved preferences implies, *pace* almost every mainstream economist, that the individual is all-knowing, calculating, and convincingly atomistic in all aspects social and economic. Furthermore, this individual acts according to his consistent preference ordering regardless of whether their choice affects others so long as utility is maximized under well-defined constraints.

Economic theorizing that entertains other approaches not grounded in individual optimization in the formulation of the theory is regarded as an ad hoc adjustment, which often is not the point of debate among economists despite how it fuels the methodological differences even among those who belong to the mainstream. To entertain the "sin of ad hocness" is to depart from the neoclassical program as some form of tacit infidelity to the profession (Hands, 1988, p. 132). This dogmatic approach deeply embedded in mainstream thinking may help to explain why, despite the growth in the diversity of approaches to understanding the individual in economic analysis, the rationality postulate continues to reign supreme. Holding on to the rationality postulate means that most economic theorizing will continue to turn a blind eye to impulsive behaviors, irrational acts, and the scarce availability of information, the limitation in the

computational ability of individuals, and, more clearly, the other-regarding dimension of individuals.

Furthermore, the explanation of individual choice under instrumental rationality freed economics of its normative content, eliminating from its work any subjectivity and psychological basis of choice. Davis (2003, p. 26) noted that “choice became a general, all-purpose logic that could be applied to any sort of agent, single individual, multi-individual, human or otherwise” solving the puzzle of Locke’s dualism and solving the kind of rationality advanced by Smith (1776/1976). This notion signaled a departure from the classical school in which the basic unit of analysis was economic classes to the neoclassical school treatment of rational choice. This foundational conception of the individual as rational, optimizing agents has persisted through present-day mainstream economic thought.

Preferences in the theory of choice were axiomatized further in the work of Samuelson on the revealed preference approach, eliminating almost entirely the subjectivity of individual choice. According to Samuelson (1938), preferences are exogenous, and choices are revealed following their axiomatic ordering. In the attempt to make economics even more scientific, preferences and choices were axiomatized mathematically and formally absent of any real-world, consequential context of the individual. In other words, the Samuelsonian rational individual became a fictional and abstract entity measured against some notion of abstract rationality (Davis, 2003). Thus, we are left with a self-interested, instrumentally rational individual devoid of any psychological content, taken away from the context in which he maintains relations with others, choosing among options based on revealed preferences (where tastes are exogenous) and other stochastic events also treated as exogenous, and absent any subjective (thus normative) content, whose centrality in the explanation of the economy has become virtually nil.

Now the question is whether an instrumentally rational individual can internalize the utility function of others in their objective function and, as such, maximizing their utility obtains the maximization of others. This exercise assumes that preferences and constraints have the same distribution and implies that the same conditions for revealed preferences hold. This approach follows the same axiomatic presentation of the theory of choice of individuals but does not

substantively change the conception of the individual as instrumentally rational.

Finally, there needs further clarification on the atomistic conception of the individual as assumed in mainstream economics. This atomistic conception, according to Davis (2003, p. 32), preserves the subjective self that is “inaccessible and without meaning in the language of science.” Davis outlined that this atomistic individual is autonomous from other individuals and other supra-individual entities. Although individuals may be externally related to other entities, behavior can only be explained based on the known objective function, not on what psychological processes took place to obtain a choice. This approach further removed the normative features of economic analysis of individual behavior, even as far as eliminating the human individual from its formal and highly mathematicized scope.

Mainstream macroeconomic theories build on microfoundations; that to understand the macroeconomy, one must consider the representative individual (or, in some cases, the household) as the brick through which one can understand the totality of the house. The Walrasian general equilibrium project expresses the macroeconomy only in terms of individual preference sets and constraints to explain aggregate behavior. Whereas reductionist, the Walrasian general equilibrium program is defined by global assumptions which are not derived from individual behavior. Davis explained that this, following the Sonnenschein-Mantel-Debreu results refuting the existence of Walrasian general equilibrium, implies that macroeconomics requiring microfoundations also mean that microeconomics require macrofoundations (see also Colander & Su, 2018 for a discussion on macrofoundations). Grandmont (1992) clarified the need for alternatives to the Walrasian general equilibrium program and to “reverse the traditional neoclassical research programme” and “obtain some form of aggregate rationality by relying more on particular features of the distribution of behavioural characteristics among the members of the system under consideration” (p. 33). In other words, methodological individualism and its consequential reductionist approach failed to provide the explanatory power that can explain aggregate behavior when individuals are set in the context of the macroeconomy. Failing that, the rationality postulate considered as dogma and sacrosanct in mainstream economics is constrained in

the way it can explain inherently social phenomena, which require a different kind of analysis where the use of instrumental rationality of atomistic individuals can no longer provide.

The rationality postulate, along with the conception of individuals as atomistic, is carried over in recent advances in economics using game theoretic models to explain strategic behavior, which paves the way for situating the individual in the context of others with whom they compete or cooperate. Davis (2003) asserted that game theory only, to an extent, implies nonexclusive association making it a diversion from understanding human behavior. Moreover, strategic behavior only describes all possible moves given considerations and the rules of the game but still fails to reidentify the human individual engaged in strategic action. It merely expresses a system of individual responses as a system of agent interdependence but does not explain why strategic behavior and choice emerge. As an example, Angeletos and Lian (2016) looked into the strategic complementarity of agents given incomplete information. They found that as the degree of strategic complementarity rises, an agent's attention shifts from private signals to more public signals, strengthening the desire for coordination. Their exposition on the incomplete information and frictions in coordination, although extensive and useful in formal analysis, *pace* Angeletos and Lian, I find that they provide an insufficient explanation for such coordination and the mechanism through which individuals coordinate and engage in social action. Signals and the relative strength of its source merely facilitate a response, but not coordination.

One might argue that individuals coordinate as imposed upon them by social norms and institutions under the banner of instrumental rationality and when there is uncertainty, rational expectations. We are then interested in finding out how social norms and institutions are considered as they are used in mainstream economic theorizing. Acemoglu and Jackson (2015, 2017) provided an attempt to formally model the interaction between social norms and the enforcement of laws and the role of social norms in coordinating future actions of subsequent generations to follow. In their preeminent study on social norms and institutions (expressed or codified by its laws as they are enforced to regulate individual behavior), *pace* Benabou and Tirole (2011) and others, investigated a two-way interaction.

Social norms regulate individual action as a mediating coefficient, whereas laws work as an upper bound on individual actions. Acemoglu and Jackson (2015) also draw from their body of work on the evolution of culture, social norms, and cooperation; similarly, Tabellini, 2008). They found that moral values affect the degree of cooperation in a prisoner's dilemma game and that prevailing values of other economic agents ultimately affect parental decisions. Social norms, in this study, are generated from the distribution of behavior in previous generations, which "designate not only different behaviours but also distinct frames of reference that coordinate agents' expectations and shape their interpretations of information they receive" (Acemoglu & Jackson, 2015, p. 1). Using Hi-Lo games, they model individual behaviors with different endogenized preferences, which result in multiple equilibria. In endogenizing preferences, they allow for agents to take on a level of interest (or care) about future actions of the following generations. In static analysis, they show that it is possible to generate stable patterns of behavior that form a recursive lineage of actions that are consistent with expectations imposed by previous generations.

Although the interpretation is consistent with the methodology of mainstream economics, that even given social interactions and the introduction of social norms (and even laws), individuals remain instrumentally rational by motivation (i.e., larger payoffs are a normative improvement and thus marginally better). This analysis, theoretically tractable and elegant in construction, however, fails to explain the internal motivations of an individual in cooperative games, the reason for multiple generations to coordinate their actions according to the prevailing norms they receive from past generations, and the shared motivation (and preferences) that coordinate collective action. Subjected to a reduction, the theory fails to describe *why* individuals cooperate with others aside from the neoclassical presumption of material gain even when subject to social norms and the expectation of compliance with laws.

Why Mainstream Economics Needs a Substantive Updating

What we have established so far is that the atomistic, instrumentally rational individual taken

as the foundation of economic theorizing is far too limiting in deepening our understanding of economic behavior that entails collective action, whether in the form of cooperation, collaboration, or conformity to social norms and laws. The atomistic conception of the individual does not do well in explaining the mechanism and purpose of an individual's participation in collective action. Neither does instrumental rationality assumed away as the cornerstone of methodological individualism, which the mainstream economic thought espouses. We need an understanding of the individual in which the mechanism for collective action is endogenous and has a certain aboutness—or purpose—of such economic behavior.

The current pandemic experience reveals the weakness of the atomistic conception of the individual and the limitation of instrumental rationality in explaining—or even prescribing—why and how individuals participate in collective action in bending the epidemic curve and consequently spur economic recovery. The atomistic individual is detached from other entities, which lie in contrast with the nature of this pandemic; my action today determines the safety of others and vice-versa. Instrumental rationality, on the other hand, went against the dictum of cooperation based on other-regarding preferences, social norms, and shared values; the epidemic curve cannot be bent by utility maximization and a more-for-less frame but only through purposeful shared intentions and collective action that it could be done. Here we have a case where locating the individual in their social context in terms of the intentions that they share with others as a member of a group (or civil society, as in the case of the pandemic). The collective action they partake can provide a more nuanced approach in re-establishing the role of the individual in economic phenomena and its subsequent theoretical and empirical modeling. Thus, the updating of economic theory, in this manner, is necessarily uncovering first its deeply seated philosophical underpinnings that cannot be simply assumed away by the waving of a hand. The pandemic has paved the way for economics' reckoning with its philosophical foundations.

Collective Intentionality

A simple thought exercise follows. Economics is often regarded as the Queen of the Social Sciences. But

before it is a social science, it is first an application of fundamental philosophical truths about human individuals and groups of various sizes made up of the same human individuals. The assumption—and any discussion—of an individual's rationality immediately anchors economics on mental processes, thus private and inaccessible unless externalized through action and behavior. Economics is then inherently philosophical: what we process in our minds regarding choice, for example, subject to constraints, social norms, and rules, point to the nature of the mind and consciousness of the individual (see Mabaquiao, 2013). Thus, before it is a social science, it is first philosophical. This thought exercise paves the way for a starting point in the pursuit of updating the way economics is done and the way we talk about the economy.

As our mode of inquiry necessarily begins with an understanding of the individual, it is essential to consider the nature of the individual's mind and consciousness concerning their economic behavior. Thus the natural place for updating economics is in the philosophy of the mind. More specifically, we explore collective intentionality and how it can reframe our understanding of the nature of individuals that can be used as the new foundation of economic theorizing.

Collective intentionality is among the recent advances in the philosophy of the mind in which individuals share intentions with others who are part of the same group. There are three ways in which collective intentionality can be analyzed: subject, content, and mode. Following Davis (2002, 2003, 2004), as well as Gilbert (1990), shared intentions are expressed in the first-person plural subject “we” instead of ordinary individual intentions expressed as “I.” Whenever the “we” is used, it represents a collective intention that is shared among individuals that are members of a group as the subject. On the other hand, there is a collective intention in the form of content as in Bratman (1993), where individuals perform an activity, *J*, together as in the structure “we *J* together.” This implies that members unified in action *J* share collective intentionality as members of the group that perform that activity together. Collective intentionality can also be understood in terms of the mode of the action as in Tuomela (2006) where, in the strong sense, “we together will do *J*,” which indicates that individuals of the group are jointly intending and acting together. In other words, collective intentionality and we-intention are thus “explained as a structure

of reciprocal attitudes shared by individuals” (Davis, 2002, p. 13).

In all previously mentioned ways in which collective intentions can be analyzed, the individual is no longer atomistic but is socially embedded, that is, he is located in the context of other individuals in the same group or affiliation. Individuals embedded socially cannot be explained in purely instrumentally rational terms. Still, they can be understood to voluntarily share the motivation of the collective entity without losing their identity as an individual or undermined by some abstract collective identity or the “Hegelian super-mind” (Davis, 2002, 2003). To further explicate this point, I shall, in what follows, first look into the foundation of the socially embedded individual as provided by Davis; after which I shall consolidate this foundation with those provided by Tuomela, Bratman, and Gilbert as can be gleaned from their respective theories of collective intentionality.

The Socially Embedded Individual and Collective Intentionality

The statement “we intend” is an expression of an individual’s group intention that is reciprocated among members of the group. Only individuals possess the ability to have intentions, which means that we-intentions are individual expressions of the group’s intention that preserve the individuality and identity of the person. This provides a mechanism for collective intentions to obtain *contra* methodological holism, which interprets individuals exclusively in terms of supra-individual entities. Davis (2003) asserted that socially embedded individuals engage in self-referent behavior, giving them the ability to influence social structure. Self-reflection allows individuals to behave in a way that cannot be reduced in terms of the social influences they receive. Davis (2002, 2003) presented the conception of the socially embedded individual as individuals jointly embedded in a social relationship while maintaining their identity. For Davis (2003), this means that the individual remains distinguishable from other individuals in a group, and at the same time, maintains their personal identity across the change.

In contrast to the atomistic conception of the individual understood exclusively in instrumentally rational terms, socially embedded individuals no longer act based solely on their objective functions and act based on their preferences. Instead, they now think and act by the rules and norms afforded by

being a member of a group. Membership in a group requires an individual to express a joint intention or a we-intention consistent with Tuomela (2006). Note that this group is not an abstract entity but a functional one. Given that we-intentions are intentions of individuals bound by membership in a group but are not intentions of the group (as a supra-individual entity), the individual’s we-intentions reflect what he chooses to do and not what the individual is limited to doing. Moreover, as in Tuomela’s (2006) collective intentionality, socially embedded individuals are subject to rules and norms where rules serve as the basis for institutions, whereas social norms serve as the basis for social values. Membership in a group provides the individual with a position in a structure. This position in the structure affords tasks, rights, and obligations as being a member of the group, infusing collective intentionality a normative feature. This is the same idea advanced by Gilbert (1990), which allows individuals, socially embedded as they are, deviating from norms or non-compliance with rules to be rebuked by another member.

Socially embedded individuals afforded with tasks, rights, and obligations as a function of their social position ultimately involve an embedded intentional causality or “situated rationality.” More precisely, socially embedded individuals act out of a sense of obligation or expectations of themselves being part of a group. This point cannot be explained in purely instrumentally rational terms but deontologically rational terms consistent with Gilbert’s (1990) right to rebuke in the case of any deviations from norms and rules. Davis (2002) called this as acting in a “principled rational way” (p. 22).

Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Collective Intentionality

Davis (2002) stated that we-intentions are not what individuals think are the intentions of the group or what the group’s intentions ought to be but are expressions of the individual’s understanding of the intentions of individuals in a group generally. Expressed in the first-person plural “we,” this understanding requires a system of mutual belief in the we-intentions of individuals. Such we-intentions are thus the product of an individual’s best guess on what each individual’s we-intentions are and that these are mutually held. A pronouncement following a we-intention then is anchored on a commitment to the we-intention

regardless of the individual agreement with the use of the “we.”

Consistent with the conception of socially embedded individuals engaged in collective action, Bratman (1993, p. 106) clarified the necessary and sufficient conditions for collective intentionality. According to Bratman, the necessary condition for collective intentionality is the shared intention; however, the sufficiency condition is found in subplans that mesh for the collective intention to obtain. However, they make room for incomplete plans, differing preferences (Bratman, 1993, p. 106):

“View 4: We intend to *J* if and only if

1. (a) I intend that we *J* and (b) you intend that we *J*
2. I intend that we *J* in accordance with and because of *1a*, *1b*, and meshing subplans of *1a* and *1b*; you intend that we *J* in accordance with and because of *1a*, *1b*, and meshing subplans of *1a* and *1b*
3. 1 and 2 are common knowledge between us”

This view is useful in establishing the role of bargaining where the individual preferences may run in conflict with each other in carrying out joint action and where plans may not yet be complete or aligned. Individuals can bargain in this process of determining the collective action as it is carried out for as long as these mechanisms are common knowledge to all parties. Relevant bargaining is an exercise in power and authority only recently modeled in economic analysis but can be updated based on collective intentionality analysis.

Bratman’s (1993) conditions can be supplemented by the ones implied in Tuomela’s (2006) main criteria for we-mode joint intentions (referring to the robust sense of collective intentionality), which are likewise useful in explaining how the intentions of the socially embedded individual can be carried out successfully. Thus, for Tuomela (2006), the following conditions must obtain: first, there must be a *group reason* that motivates the joint intention and action (the group reason refers to what the group intends to accomplish as a group through its collective action); second, members of the group should have a sense of oneness of being a collective (called the “collectivity condition” whose meaning is best captured by the expression “we are in the same boat”); and third, there must be a collective

commitment among members of the group to carry out the joint intention for group reasons and not for personal ones. In connection to the last condition, Tuomela (2006) noted that carrying out the joint intention for personal reasons would transform the joint intention into an I-mode—referring to the weak sense of collective intentionality.

What we have established thus far and contributed to the literature on collective intentionality in economic analysis is that the socially embedded individual can no longer be exclusively explained nor understood in instrumentally rational terms, but in deontologically rational terms given his/her social position in a structure of mutual and reciprocal shared intentions with other individuals. This socially embedded individual retains their identity and human agency, although subject to norms and rules as a function of the tasks, rights, and obligations associated with their membership in a group. The conception of a socially embedded individual requires collective intentionality in the sense that they partake in a we-intention that can be subject to adjustment by bargaining for the subplans to mesh. A we-intention carries out if and only if conditions are met for the intention to obtain. Commitment to carrying out what one we-intends and carries the we-intention out jointly so provides a strong sufficiency condition that allows collective intention to manifest in action unmistakably so. That such membership in a group carries with it normative features such as the right to rebuke an individual deviating from the norms or not following the rules of the group supports the idea that collective intentionality has stronger prescriptive power than what instrumental rationality could dispense. Moreover, it advances the position the collective intentionality has a better explanatory power of why people engage in collective action (ranging from cooperation, collaboration, to altruism and sympathy) than the common variant of methodological individualism and instrumentally rational agents used in mainstream economics in which the conception of the individual is reduced or diminished, if at all still present.

The Pandemic Policy Puzzle

If the pandemic requires collective action, as may be gleaned from pronouncements like that of the Philippine government’s battle cry “We Heal As

One,” to bend the epidemic curve to improve economic outcomes by flattening the recession curve, then collective intentionality earns an immediate appeal, especially for policy advice. Bowles and Carlin (2020) proposed adding civil society as a third vertex in the policy space that, by convention, is defined by the polar vertices of government and market. Together, they reframed a policy space in which civil society plays a central role, albeit opposite to government or markets, in dispensing the art and craft of economics. The inclusion of civil society in this policy space recognizes the other equally essential concepts missing in the government-market axis, such as reciprocity, altruism, fairness, sustainability, in-group identity, and different identities implemented through social norms and social values. The mechanism through which this can be carried out and analyzed has departed the conventions of methodological individualism understood in instrumentally rational terms; it is one where the socially embedded individual and collective intentionality must be explicitly recognized.

The discussion of other-regarding preferences cannot be escaped in the analysis of this pandemic, nor can any policy prescription avoid the requirement of collective action to mitigate the persistent effects of the pandemic. But more important than preferences (where in the conventions of mainstream economics, there is no arguing about tastes) is the joint intention that is purposive and compelling for individuals to commit to doing in action as a collective intention in the strong sense.

To keep me safe in this pandemic is to believe that others believe in keeping themselves safe too. Otherwise, I am not safe for as long as my neighbors are not. This system of reciprocal, mutual beliefs in the directedness of our shared intentions would allow policymakers to think in terms of the necessary and sufficient conditions in allowing collective intentionality to obtain: that we have a group reason (i.e., flatten the curve for the well-being of everyone to improve) that we recognize that we are all in the same boat after all (that our collective success or failure is ultimately shared); and finally, intentions are good, but actions are better with a shared commitment to act together.

Wearing a mask, for example, is meaningless without a joint intention to abate the further spread of the virus by following minimum health standards and emerging social norms. The empirical impact

of masks on slowing down and eliminating deaths due to the pandemic can only be obtained through collective intentionality even if there may be some exceptions where some people only follow to achieve their ends (everybody else in the collective intention can be mistaken after all). Nevertheless, collective intentionality (and not instrumental rationality) provides the mechanism and collective purpose required to beat the pandemic. Furthermore, following Davis (2003) and Gilbert (1990), beating the pandemic as one means that this collective action carries with it the roles and obligations associated with an individual’s membership in civil society (as a functional group like that of communities). Some new social norms emerge out of the pandemic as a result of self-referent behavior that is located socially. In this case, we can say that wearing a mask or maintaining social distancing, as an example, is a duty associated with being part of society. This applies to any size and level of aggregation; what is true for the Philippines is true of other countries and jointly so, when countries work together at the international level.

Concluding Remarks

I agree with Davis (2003) in saying that the socially embedded individual is still primarily a conception, a theory. Still, it holds much promise in updating the way economics is done and the way we talk about the economy by making the first move to refresh our philosophical understanding of the individual. Moreover, in considering collective intentionality as a framework through which economics can reform its theoretical undertakings, it would be interesting to see the socially embedded individual adopted in the increasingly widespread use of game theoretic analyses, especially those that are already native to collective intentionalities such as cooperation, collaboration, altruism, social norms, and institutions. Formal modeling of collective intentionality in economics is recommended to work the concept through the received view (or what Colander, 2018 called working through the mainstream instead of against the mainstream). Furthermore, policy crafting needs not to wait for positive economics to gain headway in establishing the empirical basis of collective intentionality. Policymakers need only to consider the human dimensions of economic behavior.

At the same time, science catches up to deliver the newly discovered empirical truths. To do this and to underline the importance of collective intentionality, there needs to be a conversation about what we hold to be common knowledge about our we-intends, fully open to discussion so that we do not commit that mistake of assuming that we know what our collective intentionality is because we can be wrong and not achieve it at all, in the strong sense of we-mode joint intentionality. Finally, I advance the idea that the pandemic has made it explicit that methodological individualism, with its instrumental form of rationality, no longer works, especially when an alternative conception of the individual holds stronger explanatory and prescriptive power than is readily available and used in mainstream economics.

Declaration of ownership:

This report is my original work.

Conflict of interest:

None.

Ethical clearance:

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